Our Struggle to Serve

The Stories of 15
Evangelical Women

Virginia Hearn, Editor

WORD BOOKS
PUBLISHER
WACO, TEXAS

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Preface

CURRER BELL AND George Eliot were seemingly male pseudonyms for two nineteenth-century women now recognized among the world's great novelists. In the late eighteenth century, a powerful writer was described by some who had not read her book, which is still in print in the 1970s, as a "hyena in petticoats." (That was Mary Wollstonecraft.) Commenting on the literary output of women over the centuries, Joan Goulianos says: "They wrote in a world that was controlled by men, a world in which women's revelations, if they were anything but conventional, might not be welcomed, might not be recognized—and they wrote nevertheless."

In 1974 an *Eternity* magazine poll chose the first "evangelical feminist" book, *All We're Meant to Be,* as the year's most significant book. Yes, times are different now.

Or are they? In 1975 a Christian newspaper in Berkeley received the greatest reader response in its history to a short autobiographical article on egalitarian marriage—gentle, nonpolemical—by a young Christian married couple. With one exception, response was all negative, all male.

I am indebted to Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, authors of *All We're Meant to Be,* and to their publisher, Word Books, for thus paving the way for *Our Struggle to Serve: The Stories of 15 Evangelical Women.* One of my husband's students, Ann Hammon, unknowingly gave me, and the rest of my family, our first insights into the "women's movement" when she lived with us and parked her extensive feminist library on our living room mantel. My sister, Kathryn Long, perseveringly encouraged me toward a writing career during

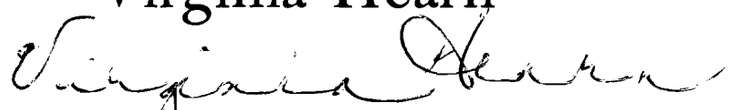
a period in the '50s when I was a discouraged high-school teacher. Anne Eggebroten has been a stalwart friend, giving me the idea for this book and remaining firmly supportive throughout its long gestation. My husband Walter has loved me in spite of everything—and taken time to "edit the editor." My friend and neighbor Bill Colbert typed the manuscript with alertness and patience, and Linda Duddy did hours of proofreading. I am grateful to them all.

VIRGINIA HEARN

Berkeley, California
September 1978

Introduction

Virginia Hearn



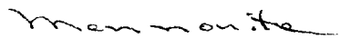
Women's Place in the Evangelical Milieu: Is Progress Possible?

I REMEMBER MY FIRST philosophical discussion. It took place among a group of fifth graders. I don't recall its antecedents, but I have never forgotten the topic: Is it better to be a boy or a girl? To the commendation of my parents—who had three daughters, no sons—*I* was completely satisfied with my lot in life. But I was surprised at the almost total agreement that it was better to be male. A number of girls even said they wished they were boys, but no boys said they would rather be girls. As for me, my reasons were totally superficial: girls have prettier clothes; men have to do harder and dirtier work. Such was my ten-year-old naiveté.

In retrospect, it seems to me that my parents did not lay "feminine" role expectations on my sisters and me in our early years. My mother, for instance, refused to let me join a 4-H club, even though 4-H taught very young girls to cook and sew. (She thought 4-H mothers ended up doing most of the work.) That each of us would get a good education and have a career was taken for granted. Perhaps such goals have frequently characterized the outlook of families where one or

Virginia Hearn has been an editor for twelve years, with HIS *magazine, InterVarsity Press, the Christian Medical Society; most recently as a free-lancer for various Christian publishers and Holt, Rinehart and Winston. She and her husband Walter work as an editorial team in Berkeley, California. Her first book was* What They Did Right: Reflections on Parents by Their Children.

working to bring women in many parts of the country to recognize the importance of full emancipation for Christian women in church and society. The formation of the Evangelical Women's Caucus and its continuing life are testimonies to the blessing of God upon the church in this crucial way. The concerns of feminism and Christianity are inextricably linked in my own life and motivation, and I pray that the Christian church and the women's movement, alienated from each other as they so often appear to be now, may come to know the oneness of full liberation through the perfect Person, Jesus Christ.



Chapter Nine

Anne Eggebroten

IT'S NOT EASY to be a feminist in the church. I clearly remember the first time I hinted anything to other Christians about my new, uncertain ideas. As a senior in college, I was standing on the steps outside the library on a warm spring day, talking with two other Inter-Varsity leaders, both male. I don't remember what I said—perhaps I suggested electing a woman president of our I-V chapter, or perhaps I mentioned that certain verses about women in 1 Corinthians had been bothering me. But suddenly a glass wall fell between me and them. Their embarrassed silence and their loving grins told me, "We are loving your soul, but it's an effort." They no longer heard my words or had anything to say to me. I had become a clown or a fanatic to be observed with mild amusement.

Later I learned to guard my words, to withhold part of who I was until I was sure I would be accepted. Still later I learned that God accepts me. But even today I tremble as I feel that wall slide between me and another Christian.

When I was a sophomore in high school in 1963, I was un-

Anne Eggebroten is presently working on a doctoral dissertation on women in the church in the middle ages, at the University of California (Berkeley). Now living with her husband John Arthur in Concord, California, she was a founding member of the Evangelical Women's Caucus and has served on its national committee.

aware that I would ever become a feminist. I had recently become a Christian, through the ministry of the First Presbyterian Church of Bakersfield, California, where my mother had sent me both to gain some religious training and to develop a social life. We were new to the community, and to my mother's distress I spent more time studying and reading books than making friends. She dropped me off at Sunday night youth group and sent me on retreats, hoping I would form friendships and become normally socialized.

When my socialization at church resulted in an earnest conversion to Jesus Christ, my mother took it in stride: "You'll grow out of it, dear." The ironic thing was that my trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior made me vulnerable to a socialization more profound than my mother expected. I learned, for example, that in Christian marriages the husband rules the wife. I accepted it, though I knew that in our home such a thing would have been impossible. My father watched television, read newspapers, went to work, and drank beer; he was definitely not interested in ruling either Mother or the household.

My mother cooked, cleaned, sewed, baked, and supervised us kids in her spare time from teaching nursing at Bakersfield Junior College. As the oldest child of four, I filled the gaps in her management. If anyone ruled the household, I probably did. At any rate, I had had enough ironing, dishwashing, and child care at an early age to convince me that I didn't want to be a housewife. Some time along in my late high school and early college years I began proclaiming that I would never get married. I would be smarter than my mother. Marriage meant drudgery and, for a Christian, submission to one's husband. That was not the life for me.

Despite my verbal rebellion, no one could have discovered from my behavior that I had any misgivings about marriage. I endured a crush on the most popular boy at church and saved the dime he once lent me to make a phone call. I longed for dates, and I energetically observed all the customs appropriate to my half of humanity. I began wearing eye shadow and mascara and lipstick, and did my hair up on rollers every night. I manicured and painted my fingernails, which persisted in growing flat and soft. I would encourage my mother to wear

nail polish, too, but she would laugh and say that that was for the young and foolish.

After my first couple of dates, the theory of dating puzzled me. I wondered in a letter to my grandparents why boys wasted their money on girls. "I wouldn't if I were a boy," I wrote. "I'd just as soon watch two movies with the amount of money I'd have to spend to watch one with a girl. However, I happen to be on the receiving end of the deal so I'm open to games and movies and the works."

One of my first real dates was to a Valentine's dance with a boy I didn't much like. But the status of going to a formal dance made it worthwhile. That dance was the occasion of one of the most bitter battles I ever had with my mother. She wanted me to buy a new dress for the event. I generally avoided shopping and resisted new clothes, partly because they were so important to my mother and partly because of the Bible passage about the lilies of the field, which made me think that preoccupation with clothes was wrong. At any rate, I didn't like to have my mother and the shop attendants fussing over me. On this occasion Mother hauled me down to the fanciest store in town and had me trying on dresses in utter misery. I was zipped and unzipped, scrutinized, and forced to comment on the dresses I despised. My mother attacked my glum demeanor with sharp remarks out of the hearing of the saleslady: "Now look here. Any other girl would be grateful." "Shape up. You ought to be ashamed of yourself acting like this." Finally I burst out crying. I stood in front of the mirrors in a black velvet jumper and silky white blouse, while the tears rolled down my cheeks. There was a big, floppy white bow at the neck of the blouse, coming down over the top of the jumper. "I don't know what's wrong with her, a daughter who cries when you try to buy her a dress," said my mother. Undaunted, she ordered purchase of the jumper, blouse, black patent leather heels, and a black patent leather purse. I wore them to the Valentine's dance.

Besides my goal of social acceptance at sweet sixteen, my main preoccupation was to get into a good university, earn a graduate degree, and start some career. The contradictions I lived never bothered me. I worked toward a career, but wanted

a boyfriend; I didn't expect marriage, but anticipated wifely submission in marriage. My academic ambition came from my father, who would scrutinize my exams and essays from school and say "What about this *B?*" or "This part here is not very good." He certainly never set lower goals for his daughters than for his sons. He had interrupted his education for World War II and never completed college, and we all knew from him and my mother that we would go to college and have careers of some kind.

My mother had graduated from the University of Colorado and worked as a public health nurse from my earliest memories. When I was in fifth and sixth grades, she earned a master's degree in public health nursing, and after that taught nursing in college. There is a picture of us taken when she graduated: her in mortar board, tassle, and gown, with four children ranging down to age three. I learned stamina and emotional strength from my mother. She held the family together through times when my father was depressed and, for one year, unemployed. We would make it somehow, I knew from her. I was proud that she shared with me family worries, her experiences and problems at work, and even her fear of another pregnancy. She also taught me that you need a master's degree (at least) in order to have more freedom and authority in your work.

One incident disturbed me somewhat during my senior year of high school. A woman replaced my regular physics teacher for the last few months of the year, just after I had learned that I was accepted at Stanford University. With the doors of that glorious temple of knowledge opening to me, God's plan for my life seemed to be an unending stream of achievement and honor. "Oh, how nice," my physics teacher said, upon hearing of my admission. "I went to Stanford, too." "You did?" I asked incredulously. She worked part-time as a substitute science teacher and lived in Bakersfield with her husband, also a Stanford alumnus, and several children. That was definitely not my idea of the lofty future a Stanford graduate should have. I tucked the information away and assured myself that it would not happen to me.

Nevertheless, once at college, I doubled in two weeks the number of dates I had gone on in my life. The "ratio" meant that women were a small minority at Stanford, so I enjoyed

concerts, free dinners, and a standard of living above my poor scholarship status. I also learned that boys expect something in return for their money, at the very least a kiss, but the arrangement still seemed like a bargain to me. Study was squeezed in on the side. I never connected dating to marriage at all. The one time marriage became other than a remote possibility, I ended the relationship. My high school boyfriend, after driving a thousand miles to see me at Christmas of my freshman year, had talked of how his best friend had just gotten married to a nurse who was going to work to put him through college. That was scary. I told him goodbye.

In my junior year of college I first heard about "women's liberation" and met John Arthur. When John first asked me out, I turned him down in order to sit home all night vainly hoping a guy I had liked in my freshman year might call me up. It was six months before my future husband got up enough courage to ask me out again.

There were a lot of jokes in our dorm room that year about the women's liberation movement, which had just surfaced in the media. Everyone thought the bra-burning (which never took place) was pretty funny. In a boisterous way I began saying, "Yes, I'm for 'women's lib' " amid the banter of three roommates and the friends and boyfriends that came and went. I didn't know what I meant, but I instinctively knew my allegiance was with it. When John pointed out to me on a camping trip that he liked me just as well—even better—without eye makeup, I was amazed. I stopped wearing it and thought I was a real "women's libber."

Throughout my senior year, I continued giving lip service to women's liberation and becoming more attached to John. It was apparent, however, that the dichotomies of my life were building toward a crisis. On the one hand, I was planning to go to graduate school and pursue a career. On the other hand, marriage was starting to become an actual possibility. I knew I had to choose between these two options: a career, or marriage with a side-dish of career.

The way my mother combined career and family, her family always came first. She quit her jobs when my father was transferred, she passed up professional meetings, and she squeezed graduate school in on the side. Though she regretted not having

earned a Ph.D., having children was her main goal and joy in life—as she always reminded me. I dimly realized that my parents expected me to put both career first and marriage first. They had sacrificed to send me to a good college, but my mother would say, only half-jokingly, "Well, we're just sending you there to find a husband."

On graduation day I walked around with my diploma in one hand and John in the other. I savored my success in both realms, the academic and the social. Somehow I would be able to have my cake and eat it, too. The bliss of that day was untouched by the following facts: John was about to start a job in Boston. I was going to start graduate school at UC Berkeley in the fall. John was not a Christian. I would never marry a non-Christian.

We seemed to be going our separate ways, until one day in late September John asked Jesus Christ into his life. That was a big surprise to me. Suddenly the bulwark between me and marriage had collapsed.

It was a miserable fall. Though I liked having my own studio apartment in Berkeley, I missed John very much. The three married couples in the building were always trooping in and out by twos to play tennis or go out to dinner, and their cozy private existence grated on me. The women were putting their husbands through seminary, while not planning any careers of their own. Although intelligent and educated, they were content with most of the "female roles" such as cooking, and two of them were eager to have children. Most of all, I despised the dependence the husbands and wives had upon each other.

I began to take being a feminist seriously and decided to join the National Organization for Women, but since I was working my way through graduate school, I had no time to become active in it. Nor did I have time to read the classic feminist texts; instead, I clipped newspaper articles on women's liberation and taped them all over one wall of my kitchen. From them I learned about equalitarian marriage, keeping one's own name, and the oppression of women.

Whether to marry was my constant preoccupation. One part of me longed for the emotional and physical intimacy; another part of me recoiled in horror at becoming a wife. I was convinced that if I married I would go through a complete meta-

morphosis into a nonperson. I was also very skeptical of the chances for two people preserving their love and communication; most marriages I had known were dead relationships preserved for social and economic reasons.

During spring vacation of that first year in graduate school, John visited me and we debated marriage for a week. I named conditions necessary: staying in California, keeping my own name, being equal partners, and writing a marriage contract. John was agreeable to that. With him and with all those guarantees, I thought there might be a reasonable chance for surviving and thriving in spite of marriage.

During the next fifteen months before the wedding, I tried to adjust to giving away my independence, but my frustration level increased. I looked through every book I could find on Christian marriage to discover whether they all held to submission of wives. They did. I worked at *Christianity Today* in Washington, D.C., for the second summer, wrote a review of marital and premarital advice books, and battled *CT*'s policy that had women employees of all ranks cleaning the coffee pot and catering food to men. One day on my lunch break in Lafayette Park, my frustration exploded at a poor, demented man who frequently preached there on the need for men to keep wives obedient. He stood raving on a stool, with sandwich boards over his shoulder, buttons, beanies, and pamphlets. For some reason on that day I could neither ignore him nor be amused by him; suddenly I jumped up, walked over to him, and pushed him off his stool, to the cheers of onlookers.

Another crisis occurred about six months before the wedding when I began reading birth control information. I studied the percentages of success for the various methods and the percentages of women who died each year by each one, and concluded it was all unfair. John didn't have to read any of this; he could just wander in and go through the ceremony, while I had to study, endure a humiliating physical exam, and pick one of several bad alternatives for birth control. Late one night after trying to figure out my choice, I got very angry at the Creator who had set up the whole male-female system. Not only did marriage mean bucking social expectations, defying certain Bible verses, and losing my freedom, it meant signing up for physical pain and danger in either childbirth or the prevention

of childbirth. "It's not fair," I yelled, throwing things around the room, crying, and finally going outside at two in the morning to sit on the little plot of grass in front of the apartment building and fume at the stars and at the God who created them.

As the catastrophic event approached, John and I began working on the contract that we hoped would protect both of us from the oppressive roles forced on wives and husbands. Some of the fifteen points were: sharing housework and cooking 50–50, sharing decisions affecting both partners, sharing child care equally if we had children, taking turns on deciding where to live, taking vacations from each other, retaining our given names, and having separate checking accounts. As we wrote about these things, we discovered where our expectations of marriage differed: two weeks before the wedding we had a crisis over whether the contract should describe children as "possible" or "probable." With some trepidation, I gave in to John's "probable." The contract began to look rather frail to me in the face of mothers, grandmothers, fathers, uncles, and aunts all determined to march us through a traditional wedding and into a proper marriage.

On June 3, 1972, I got married and spent the next year holding my breath to see if I had turned into that monstrous creature, a "wife." I hardly believed we were married, because I was just the same and John was just the same. We kept irregular hours and even more irregular mealtimes. John cooked every other meal and took his turn on all the household chores. He also looked for a job, while I studied for my classes and worked part-time. At church we went to different adult education classes.

My main method of preserving my identity was keeping my own name. There were no legal problems, and every one we knew accepted it—except our immediate families. My mother was strongly opposed to my crazy ideas and embarrassed in front of John's parents that I wouldn't take their name. My father was even more opposed. As he put it, "Why don't you just get divorced? You aren't married as long as you don't take John's name." Five years later, our parents are more accepting of this decision.

Just when I was beginning to discover that I could indeed

exist as a wife and a student, as a Christian and a feminist, I ran head-on into the opposition of the church. As in high school, the strongest attempts at socialization to the normal female role came from Christians. The first were my aunt and uncle who had crossed the country to come to our wedding. Over a beef dinner, my uncle began quoting Genesis about the husband ruling over the wife. I had no answer to that, except that I couldn't go along with it. Later my aunt strongly encouraged me to attend a Basic Youth Conflicts seminar where I would be straightened out, and pressed on me *Fascinating Womanhood* by Helen Andelin. When I looked through the book, I was horrified. My Christian aunt had given me something that was not only non-Christian but actually heretical at many points. It said things like "Your husband is your king; worship him." I can quote the book only loosely, because a couple years ago I decided that that pink and white heresy had been on my shelves too long. I took it down, set a match to a few of the middle pages, watched them burn, and then threw it out.

The second attempt to guide me away from my error came from the associate pastor of my church. I was teaching a series of classes on sexual ethics for the church's college group when he and the seminarian working with the college group asked me to come into the minister's office and get acquainted. I went. I explained about keeping my own name and having a marriage based on an equalitarian rather than a hierarchical model. They both questioned me about how I could do this in light of the Bible's teaching that the husband is the head of the wife, etc. We looked at some passages, and I was unable to defend my actions biblically. All I could say was "I think I'm right and the Bible is wrong," an untenable position for an evangelical. My confidence dwindled to "Well, I don't have the question completely resolved. Right now I think God approves my equalitarian marriage, but maybe he will convince me of my error." I felt miserable just leaving open that possibility. I left feeling very guilty, very rebellious, very shaky.

I grew more defensive. I would either hide my views among Christians or angrily and aggressively argue them. People would shoot Bible verses at me, and I could say only "I don't agree with that, though I do accept the Bible as God's Word."

I was alienated from God and angry at him. If male domination were his will either in the church or in the home, he was a God whom I couldn't wholeheartedly serve. I didn't think it *was* his will, but I could never be sure. I was suspicious of him but still trying to keep up a relationship with him.

Then in September 1974, I bought a copy of *All We're Meant to Be*, just published. I went to my study carrel in the English department and opened to chapters eight and nine on husband-wife relations. I read fearfully, expecting each minute to come across the proviso that the husband should theoretically rule over the wife, however equal their relationship worked out in practice. But no—only sentence after sentence of realistic advice and sensible ways of handling the biblical texts. By the time I came across the quotation, "Each for the other, and both for the Lord," a great burden was lifted off my shoulders. I began crying. I cried for my anger and anxiety in the past. I cried with relief and joy at being reconciled to God again, a God who loved me and whom I could love with my whole heart. It was like a conversion experience. It seemed that God had had the book written for me alone. He cared about me and my struggles, even when I thought I was farthest from him.

Since then, most of my time has been devoted to sharing with others what I have learned, both in my own church and with Christian women in other churches. Because very few men or women in my own church are open to Christian feminism, the most satisfying sharing has been with Christian sisters in other churches who have experienced the same struggle I have. My first taste of that sisterhood occurred when I wrote to Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty soon after reading their book. That fall I went to a meeting of Evangelicals for Social Action in Chicago, where fifteen women decided to found the Evangelical Women's Caucus (see Appendix 4). In the years since that 1974 founding, many women have banded together to change the sexism in our churches and to encourage other evangelical women. I have put much of my time into building a chapter of EWC in the San Francisco Bay area, a network of women and resources. As each new woman discovers us, it is heartwarming to hear the tale repeated: "I thought I

was alone in my discontent with women's roles in the church. . . . "

Other women around the country are organizing chapters of EWC, too. Progress is slow, "total women" abound, and sisterhood is not easy to learn. Yet, with the Holy Spirit working among us, and through shared resources, publicity, and strength in numbers, I believe we will have an impact for good on the evangelical church in North America.