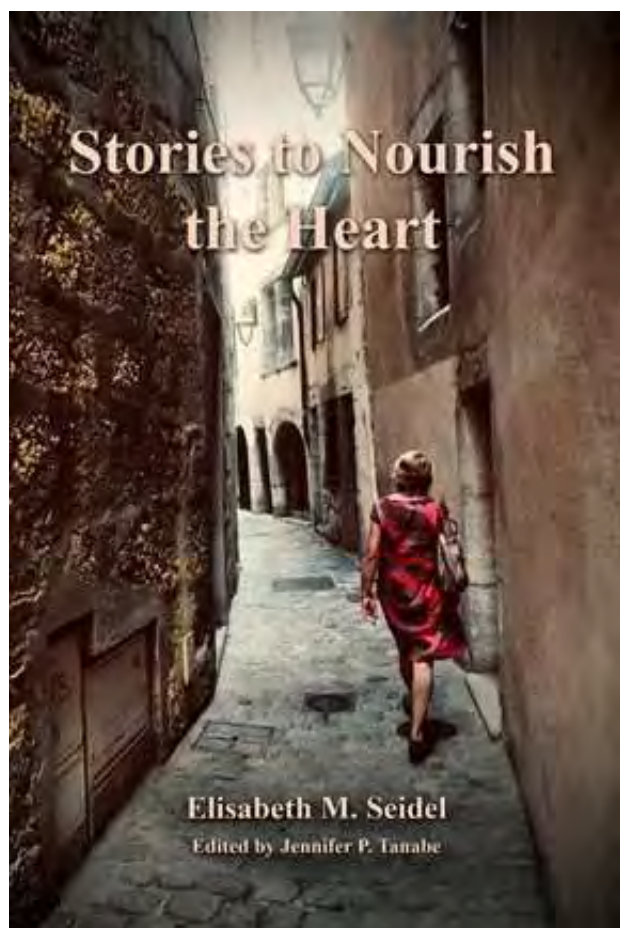


## Elisabeth Seidel's new book: Stories to Nourish the Heart

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Elisabeth Seidel manages to gently convey a sense of the connections between family, society and the higher purposes of God in her new book, *Stories to Nourish the Heart*.

The long-time Red Hook resident shares a series of insights on a life spent learning to grow in love, often by seeming accident or serendipity.

Though it imparts its wisdom via personal reflections, *Stories to Nourish the Heart* is more than a reminiscence. Rather it uses the personal to meditate on questions every person asks at one time or another.

The questions don't seem quite so abstract when considered as part of the fabric of everyday experience. And Elisabeth shows answers are there if we are willing to look, in the eyes of a loved one, the working through of conflict, the sacrifice of duty, and the preservation of faith in the face of the unknown.

### A Great Love

Told in loosely connected sketches, *Stories to Nourish the Heart* is an easy read in one sense. But at the same time, it offers much spiritual food for

thought.

It's quickly apparent that Elisabeth was fortunate indeed in her life to experience a great love. Her relationship with her husband, Dietrich, informs many of the book's passages.

Elisabeth touches on the gift of this life experience early on in the book, in a story concerning her elderly mother-in-law, who at 97, still enjoyed reading romantic novels:

*"But to my surprise she was reading a book from the American author Pearl Buck, and the title was 'Die Große Liebe,' which means 'Le Grand Amour' or 'The Great Love.'*

*"Wow! She is 97 and reading love stories! I realized this ideal of ours never dies. At 100 you can still dream about love, true love, the one and only. This quest never ever ends and reading about it becomes so exciting, interesting and fulfilling."*

Elisabeth firmly conveys that a great love is available to everyone who is willing to see it. The trick is that it may present itself in an unlikely way, and it's important to go beyond personal conceits and barriers in seeking it.

*"We are born this way that love is part of our inner self, and the most interesting topic, even when you reach 97 years of age. To keep a true love is great work. If you did not find it yet, do not despair. One day every one of us will find their true, unique, and forever love. This I believe."*

Many of the posts in *Stories to Nourish the Heart* end up drawing a wider implication from personal experience, and the section on "The Great Love" does so with the admonition:

*"Let's spread more love around us, more loving words, more smiles, more random acts of kindness, and especially if someone attacks you let's give back in kindness. We are changing ourselves so that a world of heart and love will come about."*



Elisabeth and Dietrich met and married in a way most people might find unusual. They were suggested for each other by the head of their church, the well known Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

*"Dietrich never saw me before, and I also never saw him before," Elisabeth recounts. "And when Reverend Moon suggested us as a couple, it was really something, first of all because we came from enemy nations. Dietrich's father was German, his mother Austrian. And I'm French. So those two nations, Germany and Austria, had war with France as part of World War Two, of*

*course. A lot of wounds from the past had to be healed."*

For the couple, it was a pairing that carried a significance beyond the personal. "Our relationship, our life, our love was not only to love each other, but also to love our nations, that our nations could be healed of the past. For example, my parents experienced the war, and when I showed them a picture of my husband, and his father, who worked as a bodyguard of Hitler, they were really shocked. But because they loved my husband so much, we could heal something in our family, and in our ancestry as well. So that's why I feel our marriage was not just for ourselves, but for the sake of healing our nations and the world."

In Elisabeth's latest book, she finds ways to compare her own life's romantic serendipity with touchstones of current pop culture. In one example, she talks about getting hooked on a Korean TV series, "Crash Landing on You." The premise involves a rich South Korean girl, head of a business empire, who manages to land in North Korea while paragliding in bad weather. She becomes trapped there, and during the series, you follow her adventures trying to get back home, and in the meantime falling in love with a young high official.

*"The new handsome superman comes from over there," Elisabeth notes. "The emotions there are strong. Their love is from their bone marrow. The food tastes like heaven. I just loved it. Being transported to another world where I never went before, but someone found true love there."*

### **Open to Change, and Changing the World**

*Stories to Nourish the Heart* illuminates how personal decisions and emotions can impact larger events in sometimes surprising ways.

A section titled "Proclamations, Declarations, Pledges, Vows and Promises," considers how the strong faith of early Americans would extend to perseverance and duty in the birthing of a nation:

*"When our first president George Washington was at Valley Forge, he kneeled in prayer. The task and responsibility were too much to bear for one person alone. He had to make a decision which was unbearable by himself. He searched for answers coming from heaven.*

*"This is why we are moved in our heart and mind and in awe when we see this historical portrait of our famous and beloved president submitting to our Heavenly Parent. It stirs our original mind that we should always include God."*

But for Elisabeth, the personal struggle to grow and be open to change, is never just a metaphor. The daily battles of life leave their marks on both the world and the soul.

The author recounts an instance where her daughter once startled her out of complacency.

*"Mom, be nice to Dad!" My daughter responded, one day after I was using a sharp tongue toward my husband. It came to me as a surprising shock, as I was not even aware of my attitude. Sometimes too critical, or impatiently babbling something too fast or inappropriate. It stopped me in my tracks and I could reflect on my attitude. I was not nice. To my husband. I had a lot of reasons why. I could enumerate all of them. In order of importance.*

*"But in the end, it does not matter the reasons why. What does matter in the end is if we could love anyway. Being always nice and pleasant speaking, and reconciling and agreeable. This is an art. The art of living together."*

In another passage, Elisabeth meditates on the relationship between a parent's love for a child, and God's love:

*"To be a parent, we learn to love unconditionally. This is why all of us should become a parent, to grow and feel God's heart, because He loves us as a parent. Parental heart makes us more complete, more whole. Then we can love others too, as a parent.*

*"If for any reason we cannot have children, then we can adopt, or be a foster parent, or adopt a loving animal with whom we can share our abundant love."*

Ultimately, the love Elisabeth experienced with her husband, begun in a call to faith via an unlikely arranged marriage, and the work they shared in service of their church and in raising a family, opened her to divine grace in her own life.

*"I truly experienced the love of God at the Matching and Blessing ceremony.*

*When introduced to my husband, Dietrich, and looking deeply into his eyes, it was like a spiritual experience going through a tunnel all the way to heaven and sensing God and His profound love. God was looking at me through Dietrich."*

By its series of spare yet thoughtfully contemplated vignettes, *Stories to Nourish the Heart* will gratify anyone who is looking to be more open to the lessons available in life's sometimes perplexing, but more often mundane events.

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