

Sister Elizabeth White  
Memorial Mass  
October 22, 2011

Eulogy by Ann Buttrick '53

My name is Ann Buttrick and I am Liz's youngest sister and also one of her students.

First of all, I would like to thank the Newton College Alumni Association, in the name of our whole family, for having organized this memorial mass for Liz here at Newton. She would have loved to be here, as Newton College was the place she really came into her own as a teacher. It was here that she first had the chance to engage with college-age students, and to infect them with her enormous enthusiasm for literature and the arts.

I never knew Liz at home when I was growing up as I was 13 years her junior, but our sister Alida says that she always had her nose in a book, including under the bed-cover with a flashlight. She was an excellent student, no surprise there, and excelled at just about anything she set herself to master. Liz was home-schooled at first, when we lived in New York City, and for years she had a day-a-week in the Metropolitan Museum. Until the day she died, that museum was the only place she really felt at home in, and could navigate her way around without a hitch. She also attended a wonderful after-school program called the King-Coit School for Theater and the Arts (this in the days before heavy homework). A Broadway Theater was hired at the end of every year, and their play-of-the-year had a run. Liz always seemed to get the lead parts, as Auccasan in *Auccassan and Nicolette*, and Ferdinand in *The Tempest*. I have a clipping from the Herald Tribune with a photo of Liz, heroic on a wooden horse, brandishing a sword.

When Liz was 12, we moved to Germany for a couple of years. She was enrolled in a strict convent school, where nobody spoke English. This must have been a real shock to her, as she was probably considered stupid for the first time in her life. However, when I questioned her about why she hated that school, she snorted and said, "The teaching was poor, AND THERE WAS NO LIBRARY!" After a miserable year, she switched to a boys school where her siblings were. This was a big improvement – by then she was fluent in German, and the teaching was excellent, but it was a boys school, and tough. Alida witnessed a scene in that school: an aggressively, nasty something-or-other slapped Liz so hard that she broke her glasses. Liz immediately slapped that teacher right back . . . hard!

Liz was sent to Noroton when we moved back to the states in 1934. It must have been pure heaven after her German adventures. She graduated from there, then went on to four years at Manhattanville, a year at Radcliffe for a masters in classics, and then to novitiate at Kenwood.

I was packed off to Kenwood as a student the year that she entered, and one of my first clear memories of Liz was trying to sort her out from the flock of white-veiled novices. It was not that difficult, as she had a hard time slowing down to a stately, religious pace. Then she became my teacher

occasionally as a novice –practice-teacher at Kenwood, and then later at Eden Hall where she was my class mistress in Third Academic. Finally, when she moved to Newton College, I trailed along after her. My papers came back ablaze with red ink corrections, exclamation marks, and a stern “see me!”

She was allergic to purple prose, inaccuracies, poor organization, grammatical slip-ups and bad spelling. I learned more from her than from any other teacher in my life. Her fiercely high standards are not easy to shake – I feel her right over my shoulder still. For several years after I was married, she was still returning my letters with those red-ink corrections.

I was lucky to get to know her as a friend, after the cloister rules eased. In her Boston College years, she spent many of her holidays with us. After Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner, she would gleefully join our kids at the latest James Bond movie and they would all giggle away together – I have a favorite memory of her, standing next to our living room window, swaying slightly, deep into the book-of-the-day. Books were a passion and I think they had a stronger reality for her than the world around her.

Once we took a 12 year-old grandchild to visit her Great-aunt Liz – Liz’s lunch suggestion turned out to be a bar, where she ordered a beer and then asked the astonished 12 year-old what she was reading. Luckily, it was Jane Austen. They were off to the races, bonded for life, and we never got a word in edgewise.

Students were her joy, and she would have been just delighted to see those of you who have come here today to remember her – back at the Newton School she loved.