

# Her Story Silhouette by Shari House

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## Alberta Skinner

Life Span: 1903 - 1981    Field of Service: Eastern Europe  
Nationality: American    Years in Service: 51



## Silhouette:

Francis Alberta Skinner was born on August 5, 1903, in Nebraska. Her parents were Albert and Francis Skinner, and her father was an ordained Baptist minister. She was number six in a family of girls – Carrie, Alma, Josephine, Grace, and Edna. When Alberta, as she was known to her family, was only three months old, her mother passed away. Her father remarried when she was eight years old, and her 6<sup>th</sup> sister, Mabel, was born the following year. Over the next 15 or so years, Alberta's family moved several times, and her father pastored churches in Indiana, Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska.

Alberta graduated from Moody Bible Institute, and in 1930, when she was in her late twenties, she surrendered to full-time missions work and joined the Bible Christian Union. The BCU was an organization that focused specifically on church planting in Europe using teams of missionaries in urban areas. Over the next decade the missionaries, which numbered over 100, had great success in planting more than 400 churches in 12 countries. With the start of World War II, some of the countries in Eastern Europe suddenly became part of the Soviet Union. Many of the missionaries were forced to flee to Western Europe. Some missionaries were taken prisoners or martyred, and others were cut off from the mission and never heard from again. Alberta was serving in the far eastern part of Czechoslovakia when she was seized by the Russian Communists and told, "You can leave and never come back, or you can stay and never leave." Alberta stayed.

In 1945, the Iron Curtain went up and all communication with Alberta's family, fellow missionaries, and the mission board stopped. All financial support was cut off, and for years friends and loved ones had no idea what had become of her. Years went by one after the other. Alberta's father passed away in 1948, her sister Carrie in 1962, her sister Edna in 1966 along with aunts and uncles and four of her brothers-in-law. Finally, in 1969, after 25 years, the phone rang at the BCU headquarters in Pennsylvania. It was Alberta. She was alive. She spoke of God's goodness and preservation and how, although she had endured ridicule and persecution, she had continued to faithfully serve the Lord. She had met a godly Russian pastor named Eugene Stumpf. They were married and the Lord blessed them with six sons.

During this time the Communists did everything they could to destroy Christianity and erase it from existence. They destroyed church buildings; harassed, incarcerated, and executed religious leaders; and flooded the schools and media with anti-religious teachings. In the midst of all of this, Alberta and her family stayed strong, and although they had faced much persecution and had been forced to live in a small wooden structure with a dirt floor for their home, their ministry had flourished. Souls had been saved and churches were started.

Alberta had been granted permission to return to the States for a brief trip to receive some much needed dental work, but not before being warned by the Communists that harm would come to her husband and her boys if she tried to stay in America. As soon as her medical needs were met, Alberta went back to her husband, her children, her ministry, the persecution, the ridicule, the uncertainty of what the future held not knowing if she would ever return again.

Alberta passed away on September 5, 1981, at the age of 78. Change was coming to Europe. In less than 10 years the Iron Curtain would fall. Annexed countries would be given their liberty. Missionaries would once again be free to minister. Alberta didn't live long enough to see this, but during those long dark years, she held fast to her faith, trusted in her God, and continued to be a light to the people God had called her to who were sunk in darkness while evil abounded. She is truly a woman of whom it could be said, "**She hath done what she could**"!

## Her Story/My Story:

In today's society, when we tend to document every part of our life through pictures, posts, Pinterest and podcasts, it is hard to imagine having your story "lost." In my pursuit of finding out more about Alberta, this amazing woman who wouldn't turn her back on her calling in the face of grave danger and the unknown, I scoured the internet, contacted her old mission board, and sent out emails and messages to those who manage archival and family ancestry websites. Normally when I write a Silhouette my problem is the abundance of information I find and deciding what parts are best for me to include. In Alberta's case, though, the little I was able to find out about her story and her missions work came from a single article written by her mission board back in 1994 and information procured from her family members' obituaries and descriptions on an ancestry website . . . which had some differences themselves. Other than that, there was no other information about all that time, all those years, all that faithful service. All of it unknown to us, but not unknown to God. It might seem that her story is lost, but God knew right where she was at all times. He knew of her faithful service to Him. He knew of her sacrifice she made so that others could know Him. He knew. He knew the chapters of loneliness being separated from her family, and the chapters of love she surely experienced with her husband and children. He knew the chapters of suffering felt by the hands of those who oppressed her. and He knew the chapters of joy as souls were saved and the church grew amidst persecution. He knew. Her story isn't lost. He knew.

It is no surprise to anyone who reads my *Her Story Silhouettes* that I love to know the stories of people's lives. These stories challenge me, they encourage me, they make me smile, and they give me hope. Even as a child I loved to listen to stories. Some of my favorite story tellers were my grandparents. They were the keepers of the past. All throughout my childhood and even adulthood every time I went to visit my Grandma House, she would get out her "albums" filled with pictures, cards, and mementos. We would sit for hours and go through them page by page, and I would listen to her stories . . . stories filled with love for friends and family and the Lord. Those "albums" are now my special treasures that I get to look through whenever I'm back in the States. My Grandpa Meloy was also a fantastic storyteller. He often would regale us with stories from his life as a boy on the farm, his time as a soldier during WWII, and his work at the steel mill. How he could remember names and dates from decades before was always beyond me. Shortly before he passed away, I was able to "interview" him and record his voice telling about his family, his salvation experience, and some of his old stories. That recording is so precious to me. I have been journaling my own story and walk with the Lord for years. I'm not sure who in the world would ever want to read it, but even if someone did read all 75 journals, there are many stories in my life that are not included in the pages of the journals. They are the stories of my life that are known only to God.

# Bible Study: The Great Storykeeper

There are many names used in the Old Testament to refer to God.

He is Adonai - Lord and Master

He is Jehovah Raah - The Lord My Shepherd

He is Jehovah Shalom - The Lord is Peace

He is Jehovah Shammah - The Lord is There

One of my most favorite names for God is El Roi – The God Who Sees Me. We find the name attributed to God in Genesis 16:13 when a handmaid turned concubine finds herself in the wilderness all alone. She has nowhere to go. She has no idea what the future holds for her let alone for her unborn child. God met with her and assured her that He knew where she was. He was watching over her. He knew the stories of her life that were yet to be written. In that moment the comfort His words brought her caused her to call Him El Roi. Hagar was actually brought to this same point several years later in her life, when once again she found herself in the wilderness, with nowhere to go, not knowing what to do, and both she and her son on the brink of death. God once again spoke to her and told her this wasn't the end; it was just the beginning. This part of Hagar's story always reminds me of that adage to be careful to not place a period where God is only using a comma.

When Alberta made the decision to stay behind the Iron Curtain, there is no way she could know what the future held, but she knew who held her future. I'm sure everyone of us have had points of uncertainty in our lives. We have had times when we feel like we are invisible to the world or we feel like we are alone or that no one understands what we are going through or that a story in our life has abruptly come to an end. I want to encourage you today that the Lord sees you. He knows where you are. He knows what your future holds. He knows your story and it is recorded in Heaven.

There are several references in the Bible to the "books" that are kept in Heaven. Whether these books are all literal or figurative is not the point of today's study, but the point is that God is the Great Storykeeper. Some of His books include the Book of Life mentioned in Revelations 20:15 that has the record of those who trust Christ as their Savior. Isaiah 65:6 tells us that the iniquities of the rebellious were written before God. Malachi 4:16 says, "They that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name." There is the book with the seven seals that we read of in Revelations 5 that announces the judgments that will be brought upon the earth by God during the Tribulation. And then there is the book that holds the stories of us before we were born mentioned in Psalm 139:15-16, "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

I want to make three observations from Isaiah 42:16 concerning this matter of the stories of our lives. The Bible says, **"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."**

1. **"And I will bring the blind by the way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known . . ."**

God knows the story He wrote for your life before you were born. He knows the best paths for us to walk. He likens us to a blind person who cannot see the best way to go or who is unaware for some reason of His chosen path for us. If we allow Him to lead us and the stories of our lives, God will bring us by a way and down a path that we did not know about. I could give you example after example of times in my life where I thought I knew the Lord's path, but He had other plans. I can assure you that never once when I left for the field of Nigeria back in 1995 did I think that

25 years later I'd be serving in Thailand. I'm not sure that could even be considered a crook in the road. That is like switching from your current path to a road on a map you never looked at or ever considered buying.

2. **"... I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight ..."**

We love the bright paths God takes us on or the cheerful stories that He writes for us. They are full of joy and richness. But sometimes there will be parts to the "ways" and "paths" God leads us on that are dark and crooked. They are filled with heartache and peril. We don't like those stories. I have experienced more than once in my life a dark patch. Sometimes the Lord illuminates the way and other times He holds my hand through it. At times I have had a crooked path staring me straight in the face, and I wondered how I could ever manage. Sometimes all of a sudden God just clears the way, and other times He walks with me down the crooked path pointing out sharp rocks and things lurking in the corners, giving me instructions on how to navigate through it.

3. **"... These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."**

No matter what, our story is never lost. We are never forsaken. God is always there watching, and He knows. If you feel lost or like your story is at an end, remember God is there and He knows. If you feel like you are working and serving and no one is taking note, remember God is there and He knows. If you feel like your story has taken too many crooked paths to ever be considered a road, remember God is there and He knows. Whether or not anyone else knows what is going on in your life, remember God is there and He knows.

Jesus Himself has thousands of stories from His time on earth that are not recorded anywhere and are unknown to us. John 21:25 tells us, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." How wonderful it will be to get to Heaven and see the evidence that God knew us and knew all our stories. How much more glorious it will be to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to Him tell His stories from His life on earth. But until then, keep serving the Lord, keep pointing others to Christ, keep letting God direct your paths, stay faithful no matter what the unknown future brings, and always remember, that if no one else knows, God is there, He knows, and He is the Keeper of your story.

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