

*Elizabeth Fedde's Diary, 1888*  
*Translated and Edited by Beulah Folkedahl (Volume 20: Page 170)*

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"If you dare, can, and will undertake this work," read the challenge that Elizabeth Fedde received in Norway on Christmas Day, 1882, in a letter from her brother-in-law, Gabriel Fedde of Brooklyn, New York. It was a call to help the less fortunate Norwegian immigrants in their spiritual and temporal needs. Mrs. Christian Børs, wife of the Norwegian consul, observing the distress of her countrymen, had consulted the pastor of the Norwegian Seamen's Mission Church in Brooklyn, had promised a yearly contribution of \$150 toward the salary of a social worker, and had won the support of her husband, at whose request the letter was sent. {1} Elizabeth Fedde did dare to undertake the work; she played a major role in establishing, in less than ten years, the Norwegian Lutheran Deaconesses' Home and Hospital in Brooklyn. In 1956 this 225-bed institution, a permanent monument to her labors, which had merged the previous year with Lutheran Hospital of Manhattan, was renamed Lutheran Medical Center. It had community clinics, a nursing school, an internship and residency program, and a disaster plan; mental health service, medical records library school, and chaplaincy training were added later.

Elizabeth Fedde was born at Feda, Flekkefjord, Norway, December 25, 1850. When she was considering what was to be her life calling, deaconess work was suggested to her. "What is that? Do you mean those women we see on the streets wearing the peculiar dress? No, thank you, I shall not join them." But she could not forget the suggestion, and in 1873 she entered the deaconess mother house in Christiania, established only five years earlier. In 1878, with a younger [171] Sister, she was sent to Tromsø, where for almost four years she pioneered in a new field under very primitive conditions. {2} It was a region of three-month summers and nine-month winters, where nature was unrelenting in its harshness, disease was rampant, the hospital had scarcely basic equipment, and people were totally unaware of the Christian service of the deaconesses. After almost four years as a pioneer in this field, she returned home, shortly to go to America.

The directors of the mother house in Christiania could not sponsor Sister Elizabeth's going to Brooklyn because the request had been sent directly to her; thus, in accepting the challenge she "ceased to be a Norwegian deaconess" and had no real claims on the institution. {3} Nor was there much help from Sisters in America. Pastor Theodor Flidner, who founded the modern diaconate at Kaiserswerth, Germany, in 1836, had in 1849 brought four Sisters to Pastor W. A. Passavant's Pittsburgh Infirmary, but the deaconess program there did not flourish, and the Philadelphia mother house was not established until later. Sister Elizabeth was to receive more help from the pastors in the Norwegian Seamen's Mission Church and in the local Lutheran church, which served the thousands of sailors who arrived in New York harbor each year and the some two thousand resident Norwegians. And, although later, when the problem arose as to which synod should sponsor Elizabeth's institution, she successfully contended that she had been called to help her countrymen and not any particular synod, her diary indicates a friendly relationship with the pastors and her dependence on them. {4} She was to need assistance badly. New York was unlike Norway in climate, language, and economic life, and [172] many settlers and sailors, in their loneliness, succumbed to the lures of the saloons and dives on Brooklyn's Hamilton Avenue. The challenge called for great powers of organization and administration, limitless capacity for hard work, and a spirit of Christian self-sacrifice.

On April 17, 1883, nine days after Sister Elizabeth's arrival in Brooklyn, she assisted eight pastors and laymen to organize Den frivillige Syge og Fattigpleie blandt de Norske i New York og Brooklyn (The Voluntary Relief Society for the Sick and Poor among the Norwegians in New York and Brooklyn), and under its auspices she operated an outdoor relief program from her three-room headquarters at 109 William Street in Brooklyn. {5}

From the very beginning, however, she had in mind a deaconess home. The board of managers of the society early decided that any surplus from the contributions they received should be reserved for furnishing such a home. When more personnel was needed and the mother house in Christiania declined a request for a deaconess, Sister Elizabeth defended the refusal, saying that God had established the society that it might follow Passavant's advice to train its own deaconesses. {6} And in 1885 she and the board of managers rented quarters for a 9-bed hospital; set up a deaconess training program to carry out more effectively the purpose of the society, "to help poor and suffering countrymen in their spiritual and bodily needs"; and admitted the first student. {7} They had founded the first Norwegian-American deaconess mother house. In 1889 the Norwegian Relief Society, the incorporated successor of the earlier organization, erected its own 30-bed hospital at 4602 Fourth Avenue, Brooklyn. Upon meeting the requirements of the city board of

health, the [173] society was reincorporated in 1892 as a hospital under the name Norwegian Lutheran Deaconesses' Home and Hospital. Its function was stated as that of educating and training deaconesses, whose duty would be to minister spiritually and bodily to the sick and the needy; toward these ends it would own and maintain a home and hospital and other institutions. {8} Very likely, "other institutions" referred to homes for the aged and for the children. But Sister Elizabeth's ambition and desire to serve extended beyond an expanded mother house in Brooklyn. When in 1892 a similar society in Chicago asked for a deaconess to head their institution, she was prepared to send them two Sisters, feeling that the training received at her home and hospital was equal to the demands of the office. Her plan was to make the Chicago home a station of the Brooklyn mother house. However, her hospital board of managers did not approve. {9} In the same year, the first Norwegian-American Lutheran deaconesses were consecrated in her institution.

That Sister Elizabeth succeeded well in training young women for deaconess work is evidenced by the calls she received. Passavant invited her in 1885 to go to Pittsburgh to head his hospital. In 1888 she accepted a call from pastors in Minneapolis to start a deaconess home there, and was away from Brooklyn for a couple of years performing the mission. {10}

During the development of the Brooklyn deaconess home, outdoor relief also expanded because of the increase of Norwegian immigration, the augmented services rendered by the Sisters, and the hard times of the 1890's. Thus, from 1885-91 inclusive, the number of families receiving food increased from 46 to 504; those receiving clothing, from 127 to 184; and house calls made, from 805 to 2,844. {11}

Not only did the deaconess program as such develop, but Sister Elizabeth's position also grew in importance. In an age [174] when there were few opportunities for women outside the home, it was not usual for them to associate with men in public enterprises. Consequently, her board of managers at an early meeting decided to increase its number to include three women who were to protect and guide her in the exercise of her office. It was feared that if she were to be a regular member of the board with the right to vote she might have too much control, not only over the work but also over her own position. Moreover, how would Brooklyn society accept such a role for a woman? It was not strange, therefore, that Sister Elizabeth opposed the move to make her a member of the board. {12} However, her infinite capacity for making fair decisions and creating friendly public relations soon convinced the board that they could rely on her good judgment and devoted interest. She consulted the city board of health about appropriations for the first ambulance system, a service which necessarily included all the people of the district, not just the Norwegians. In 1894 she petitioned the city to give her hospital the same \$4,000 appropriation that they gave to other community hospitals, and then reinforced that petition by presenting her cause in person to the city committee of the state legislature in Albany. The appropriation was granted. {13}

From an outdoor relief program for sick and needy Norwegians sponsored by an organized group, Sister Elizabeth's project developed first into an incorporated benevolent society with a few hospital accommodations and a deaconess training course, and then into an incorporated hospital and mother house of 50 beds with an ambulance system prepared to serve all the people of the community, regardless of national background and economic status. Through all this development, outdoor relief continued as a part of the service.

After thirteen years in America, Sister Elizabeth returned to Norway late in 1896 to marry Ola A. P. Slettebø, the man who had waited for her all this time. In 1915, when she [175] received a silver bowl, a gift from the hospital, she presented it to her husband with these words, "You are the one who shall have this, because you accepted me when I was worn out and gave me a good home." {14} She died in 1921. "A Norwegian pioneer in America . . . she with a greater faith and a willingness to give her savings and herself accepted the challenge." {15}

In 1956 Johnson and Johnson, the pharmaceutical manufacturing company, published a calendar with pictures of famous nurses, including Florence Nightingale, Clara Barton, and Elizabeth Fedde. Sister Elizabeth received this citation, "The Norwegian nurse who organized nursing among the Scandinavian groups throughout America, and established the Norwegian Lutheran Deaconess Home and Hospital in Brooklyn, N. Y., and the Lutheran Deaconess Home and Hospital in Minneapolis, Minn."

Sister Elizabeth's "Diary" is a valuable record of a significant phase of immigrant life. In spite of its routine brevity it reveals much about her work and about conditions among the less fortunate Norwegian immigrants. It portrays very realistically the great heartaches, disappointments, and struggles they met in their transfer from the economy of Norway

to the strange, complex culture of a large American city with its filth, disease, suffering, and degradation. Sister Elizabeth, with her unbounded Christian love, courage, and faith in her calling, emerges from the record a much greater person than the men and women with whom she worked.

The manuscript, ravaged somewhat by time and the elements, was written in Norwegian Gothic script. It is now in the files of Lutheran Medical Center, Brooklyn. About one half has been deleted in the present translation. {16} [176] Sister Elizabeth's 650-word autobiography, written in Norwegian, covers the period of her life previous to her coming to America, and is valuable for its portrayal of her childhood environment.

THE DIARY OF SISTER ELIZABETH  
[Lutheran Medical Center, Brooklyn]

April 8, 1883: {17} I came here to New York and was received by my brother-in-law, with whom I have lived for three weeks. During that time I have gone around to become a bit acquainted and have made some house visits and sick calls (ten in all).

April 27 [?ms. illegible]: Moved today to Mrs. Bamber's in the hope of learning a little English.

April 28: Made three house visits, and in the afternoon to Pastor Everson's school and went around a little with him. {18}

April 30: Read some English, and was at Pastor Mortensen's. {19} From there to 18th Street. Found there a sick man sitting on the edge of the bed glad and at peace with faith in his Saviour. To 15th Street for a longer visit. Then to 1711 to a distressed soul who longs for peace with God.

May 3: Spent some time with a distressed woman who was disturbed about her family's wandering on the broad road away from the Father's house. God grant that she herself may come with a whole heart to Thee so that she can witness about Thee to her own! From there to two families. Two dead.

May 4: At the dentist's and then to three families. {20} Two sick calls; with one quite a long time.

May 6: With an old woman on Hicks Street for a long time.

May 7: Washed clothes, and looked after two children. Read a little English.

May 10: On board a ship with a sick seaman, and afterwards [177] to four families; hunted for a place for a child, five months, but have not secured anyone who will take it.

May 11: Went around from place to place looking for a home for the child; was on two sick calls.

May 13: Today I placed the little boy and am glad and thank God that a door and heart were opened for him. Then to a woman for whom I care each day with dressings.

May 16: With a sick man and a dying child.

May 17: Three house visits; two sick calls. The small child was dead when I came to be night nurse, so I can rest also tonight, if God wills.

May 21: Have begun to arrange for a house.

May 26: Have all week painted, papered, and scrubbed. . . . Furniture arrived from Mrs. Børs.

May 28: Arranged my house, mended blankets and a curtain, and have been on two house visits.

May 29: Ironed; to Mrs. Børs; later made purchases . . . for my house.

May 31: Three house visits. Took care of three children whom I found alone; their mother was at the doctor's, and the oldest is five years old.

June 8: To Pastor Everson, and on two sick calls, one with a Catholic woman . . . with whom I used an interpreter; to two drunken Norwegian women to whom it was no use to talk; then to a man who never hears and never reads God's Word.

June [?]: Three house visits, and then to both pastors to arrange the festival, which will be held on Sunday; a sick call; then to Mrs. Børs. {21}

June [?]: Put things in order for the festival, which is now over, and it has been really a festive, solemn day. The work was started here, and was formally opened in Jesus' name.

June 14: Put things in order after the festival, and was on three house visits.

June 17: Sunday. At the hospital in Jersey City and found there a young man fatally sick, but who is likely ill prepared to die; he has denied his faith in order to avail himself of the security the Catholics offer him.

June 19: Four sick calls, and have had a very gratifying time with Knud Olsen, whom I shall now move to the hospital.

June 20: Cared for two sick persons; then with Pastor Everson to the Emigrant Hospital; later three sick calls. {22}

June 22: Three sick calls; four visits to meet housewives but did not find them all at home; yet God has His hand in everything. I have therefore had the opportunity to talk to beggars; God's love, which today also calls repentant children, touched one of them; she confessed with tears that she had strayed from the Saviour because she had gotten away from hearing God's Word. God help her to return to the Father's house and pray for mercy!

June 26: Went for the first time to the Lutheran Hospital, where Knud Olsen now is a patient [and] . . . was very glad to see me; he cannot understand the devotions held in German.

June 27: First to Mrs. Børs; then to the Emigrant Hospital; met five, to whom I talked, and all had longed so for my coming; a man from Stavanger came there very ill and is still sick; he told me that when his bed was being made . . . they put him down on the bare floor and . . . because of that, he acquired large bed-sores. Yes, it was very pitiable to see him. Now I must write to his parents.

June 28: First to Pastor Andersen for a Danish girl who is in the hospital; then to Jersey City to a sick man; he is nearing death every day but is far away from Jesus; he is not worse than others. {23} God will give life to dead bones!

June 29: To the two women who are always to be found with ale glasses. From there to Maternity Hospital, where I met two unfortunate girls; then on three house visits.

July 4: During a troubled watch night on Smith Street surrounded by flies, bedbugs, lamp smoke, unpleasant odors of all kinds, and very, very warm, I cared for two sick; home; then went to the Emigrant Hospital, where I spent the day with six [179] Scandinavians, mostly with a Stavanger man who likely hasn't a long time left. His face brightened when he saw me, and immediately he told me that his mother had been with him; I said he probably had dreamed that, but he was certain that she had been close to him today. He wanted so much to be saved and had always loved Jesus, but he could not believe that he would receive the forgiveness of sin. Although he said he could not recall a single Scripture passage, when I read, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son," he interrupted me with "that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." And I taught him a couple of Bible verses besides. I recited them for him and he repeated. Then after a while we parted, and he asked me to come again soon. .

July 16: Ten house visits, and have searched for three families whom I did not find; then to a poor widow with three children to whom I gave what I had: 50 cents. .

July 26: With a sick girl on Dykeman Street for a long time, since she is very ill and needs constant care; then four house visits; later, to a girl who lost her child, to go with her to an undertaker and to a pastor to arrange affairs.

August 3: Two house visits; visited a sick woman in Jersey City; there I heard and saw the most appalling conditions over which broods heathendom's most inky darkness; sin, really coarse sins, sins against the sixth commandment committed by children four years and up until they also feel the results of sin. But how can they believe on Him about whom they have not heard? Oh, let the light soon dawn!

August 4: At home, and later went with three patients by boat to Hoboken; then had a charming trip with the dear Floods to Fort Hamilton.

August 10: Today have visited many unfamiliar places; called on two Episcopal Sisters to get some data on children's homes and other rescue institutions; then to Castle Garden; from there to the Emigrant Hospital, where we met ten Scandinavians. {24} A young man from Trondhjem, very downcast and yet brave, discouraged because earthly fortune evades him and brave because he is a freethinker. Poor man, only Christ's love can melt the ice [180] in his cold heart. He had, like most of them [the immigrants], come without money and so, to earn money, hired out to sea even though he is an office worker; the first day he jumped on a plank and got a nail in his foot. There was nothing to do but go to the hospital for care; now he is not strong and has no money; when he has some clothes, he goes to the pawnbrokers to exchange them for money. We stood and talked long together. He stood his ground, but when I said that I prayed God every day that He would send me to those He wanted me to see and that I was sure that God had arranged the meeting with him, tears ran down his cheeks, and they said more than words. When I gave him my address and told him that he must always come to me, no matter what his need, and I would help, great tears ran down that man's cheeks and the handclasp and look he gave me said more than a thousand words. In the next room was a young man from Fredrikshald, but for him both earthly and heavenly matters are clearer, and he acknowledged the necessity of searching for God; he has begun to pray. . . . A woman from Christiania who had a small child with her was very sick. When I had looked after Madam Pedersen's things and cared for the child, I went with her to where she kept her belongings in a gray bag, into which she also put the things she has received here for her small child; and, one carrying the child and the other the bag, we went on our way, and she was received in a friendly manner.

August 13: A sick call. A ladies' aid is beginning to sew for the poor, and fourteen women met. They began with dresses and underwear for children; they plan to meet every Monday.

August 30: Four house visits; secured work for Madam Jensen, and distributed clothes and food to the poor.

August 31: Emigrant Hospital, and a trip to Mrs. Barstensen; she wants to place her two children.

September 7: As I stood ready to leave, a girl came who had just arrived from Norway. To get her placed in a job constituted most of my day's work; five house visits.

September 10: Two house visits; ladies' aid here; have since put a sick man in my own bedroom; now I have a full house.

September 11: Restless night caring for the sick man and [181] having a hard bed; unfit to go out, but, after the doctor had been here, to Pastor Everson to get the man into the hospital.

September 13: Went to the hospital with my patient; then on a house visit; and after that fumigated clothes and rooms.

September 14: Washed and cleaned. Later to 14th Street and washed the body of Mrs. Jensen. . . . My soul was much burdened for her but Jesus won the victory.

October 8: Went with an old woman to get her sent home [Norway] for \$10, but must have \$5 more before I can send her off.

October 11: Testimonial for the old woman, and bought tickets for \$20, and helped a Swedish sick man to secure a ticket for \$20 . . .

November 2: To Emigrant Hospital and found a Norwegian woman had died. Her little daughter was distraught and cried. I wanted to take her out but had to go to the office first, and have come home after a weary and difficult day. .

November 15: Looked for a place for a child; on three house visits, and ladies' aids in New York.

December 31: This whole month I have not written, but I have made forty-one sick and house calls; was at the hospital three times; at several different business offices to ask for contributions for the work and for other projects. . . . If there is joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents, I have reason to be happy. . . .

January 4, 1884: . . . When I arrived home a man sat . . . and waited, hungry, homeless, friendless, without money. After he had eaten the meal I prepared, we went arm-in-arm to find lodging; his amputated leg had been replaced by a wooden leg; besides, it was slippery. After awakening some poor folks, who took him in, I returned home at 9:30, and had just arrived when Ko came to tell of a scandal and after an unpleasant conversation with him, I retired about eleven, tired in body and in soul.

January 8: At several factories to secure work for a man, but all in vain; then to the Thingvalla office but did not accomplish my errand. {25} Must go again tomorrow. . . .

January 9: To the office, and can secure tickets for him the 23rd; then to the superintendent of Castle Garden to see if he would help some, but no!

January 10: A solemn day at Pastor Mortensen's; and then on a sick call; later out to solicit some money for the ticket; received \$2.25. Hard times. . . .

January 11: . . . At five places to solicit money; received \$7.

January 12: My housework; then to a poor sick widow to dress her sore leg, and later to beg for food, some of it for her. And the Lord helped. I received a basketful.

January 14: A pleasant day today. Stayed in this forenoon, and had all the pastors here this afternoon; was very pleased to see them all here together.

January 15: First to Severini to ask for money, and received \$10, but the friendliness with which I was received was worth more. {26} God repay him for it. . . . Tired from the day's work, I sit now and wish I had a thousand mouths and a thousand tongues in each mouth with which to praise God for all goodness to me.

January 24: To Mrs. Børs, and with a sick and very poor family, who now this afternoon have both fuel and food. .

January 29: Three sick calls; to a pastor to get a Swedish couple married, and afterward helped them.

January 31: Five house and sick calls, and one family got the \$10 I received from Severini.

February 11: At the Bowery and found the "House of Peace" in the midst of that terrible district. Yes, God goes after the sinner everywhere with His love.

February 25: Eight house visits, and when I came home, a woman was sitting here with a small child, and I tried to get together something for the night for her.

February 26: It is best to place the child, but found no one who would employ the woman.

February 27: The same today as yesterday; been in all the children's homes and nurseries but all are full, but got a temporary place.



March 4: Went from place to place looking for a job for a [183] woman with a child; finally found one. Then brought her to the place.

March 10: Out to borrow money to help a family who have none with which to bury their dead child. I have tramped around all day and succeeded in getting some to give the man, who then went home much relieved. .

March 20: Read English, and to Mrs. Børs, from whom I received \$5 and much encouragement.

March 21: Should stay in and sew but was taken to a poor family; quite young people who have been without work so long that they had no money. Mrs. Børs's \$5 was a welcome gift, even though it brought tears; I asked the woman to come Monday to get clothes for the baby who will arrive shortly; I have nothing now, but because I need it, I believe something will come.

March 22: Home for housework, and a woman came with a parcel of children's clothes and asked if I had use for them. I knew I would have them in time for Monday. At meeting in the evening to get help for the poor. . . .

March 25: Arranged for the bazaar, and had a meeting.

April 1: Two house visits, and with Mrs. Moller to buy for the bazaar.

April 3: Received a letter yesterday from Sheltering Arms Nursery to come there.

April 7: Worked for the bazaar, and had the ladies' aid.

April 8: Went with a girl to get her a job; and to the doctor for my headache; then to city hall to arrange for sending Saeb. to the hospital; will go with him tomorrow.

April 9: When I came to get Saeb., he was so sick that I had to go to the city hall and request them to take him to the hospital by ambulance. Ironed curtains for Easter.

April 10: Maundy Thursday, and to Mrs. Børs to talk over the bazaar.

April 15: Was ready to go out but then came a mother and her daughter who wanted to talk with me, both to complain; strangely, they met outside the door and the daughter began to complain about her mother, and the mother, about her daughter. . . . And when the quarrel was over and the daughter had gone, the old woman became so ill that she had to remain until the latter part of the afternoon. Not until then did I get out to talk [184] a little with the pastor and buy for the bazaar. It was very inconvenient, but everything is all right now. . . .

April 17: Bazaar. . . .

April 26: Work in forenoon at home; with a sick woman in the afternoon and accompanied her to Cumberland Hospital, and am now very tired.

April 27: Confirmation day in New York church, and had a very pleasant day at Flood's.

May: Much to do in May. . . . Visited five hospitals besides Ward Island, which I do every week; altogether fourteen Norwegians sick and most of them do not understand English. {27} Among them was a dying woman at Flatbush Hospital who sent for me. . . . Poor woman! She remembered not a Bible verse to which she could cling. . . . When I left her, she promised that as long as she could think, she would pray, and I believe she was saved. . . . I have received permission from the Episcopalians to send my patients there. Sent undernourished children to the country this summer. The last day Mrs. Børs and I went to Wartburg to meet Dr. Passavant, who encouraged me greatly. {28}.

June 5: Out on a maternity case, and after having arranged everything there, on four house visits, and back again to care for mother and child.

June 16: First, to Trinity [Episcopal] Hospital to a sick girl. Hoped to send two children to the country but they were ill; and searched for a job for a woman. After dinner to Ward Island, where there are now eight Norwegians, three Swedes, and two Danes. A sick woman said to me: "How good God is to me! He hears my sighs in a strange land and sends one to whom I can talk," and she burst into tears; I stayed a long time with her. Another said, "Oh, how I have waited for you!" A woman was there with her little ones, one of whom was a boy of four who had broken his leg on the ship; she is waiting there now while her husband is in the West. There is much distress, and I see that there is work for me.  
December: Five months since July. . . . Often visited a patient at Bellevue. . . . And many, many things delayed my vacation until from August 10 to August 21. . . . Gather children to Sunday school every Sunday. . . . Some have been in bed here a long time. . . . The weekly meetings for seamen's mission and deaconess group. .

December 5: To Hoboken to make sure of the truth of one person's statement, which was a lie. Then to insane asylum and hospital. . . .

December 9: One sick call; to Severini, Mrs. Børs, and Hansteen. {29} Two sick at home.

December 19: To a sick family in greatest wretchedness; home for medicine, food, clothing, and then to care for them. Then solicited funds for Christmas.

December 20: Saturday; to Livingston Street to get a ton of coal for two families, and then to four places. Later to a poor sick woman with four children. . . . Washed children's clothes there and cared for them. Four poor folk came to the home for money and clothes.

December 23: Shopped for the Sunday-school festival, and had poor sick folk at home for clothes and medicine.

January 1, 1885: Hitherto the Lord has helped and in Jesus' name I will begin this year. . . . Most of this day has been spent on board the "Geiser" and I hope to get cheap passage for the new Sister.

January 9: . . . At consulate, at office of Castle Garden to get a new pass for Ward Island. . . .

January 15: Fearful weather today; to Dr. Gornsy and received \$2 and medicine from him; then to St. John's Guild to see if it is possible to get a little help for my poor. Came home wet and cold from top to toe, and have had a pleasant time with Pastor Hansteen. God be praised because I have him here! . . . .

January 20: First, to Pastor Bass to talk to him about a girl in prison. Then a heated, difficult board meeting, but God judge me! Sick in body and in soul; had to get out. Two sick calls, and am almost distracted, but Your Word, my God, will keep me alive. {30}

January 21: Slept little. Was early this morning encouraged by the dear, dear Mrs. Børs. First, to prison; four sick; to Long Island Hospital to a dying woman. Then to Trinity to admit a patient. Then to order an ambulance for her. Am very tired and weary.

January 28: Wrote two business letters; two sick persons; ladies' aid; out in dreadfully cold weather to a poor family down in a cellar, and after talking to them awhile gave them what I had in my pocket because I thought my purse contained carfare; when I looked, I found nothing and I set out on foot late and in bad weather, but God can soften all hearts. A streetcar driver called and said, "Get on!" I said, "I have no money," and he cried, "Just come!" That sort of thing has never happened to me before.

February 2: Have been sick in bed for three days.

February 9: To Mrs. Børs; yes, she is priceless; God bless her! Then Consul Børs gave me money. . .

February 11: Wrote to Pittsburgh.

February 12: . . . Then with Pastors Hansteen and Seehus to look at houses, and later to Mrs. Børs and Mrs. Flood, and by



invitation to the parsonage.

February 17: Six house visits and sick calls and at Severini's funeral. Later a cozy time at the parsonage.

February 22: A lovely day at the parsonage for dinner and out to hear the Salvation Army: a terrible commotion! . . . .

February 24: . . . And to the consulate to express thanks for the large gift . . . and then to find a young man who needs help to get work. He is coming here tomorrow to get boots and money.

February 25: . . . Cleaned house and prepared for moving. {31}

February 26: Packed for moving and have been at new house to get in coal. . . . Oh, that this time were over!

February 27: After first packing, spent the whole day in the house waiting for my goods, which did not come, and after a long fast day, I went to the drayman and received the answer, "I expected rain today." Slept on the floor. . . . A terrible day!

March 1: Sunday; after a strenuous day yesterday with moving, a trip to Hoboken and to several offices. A great mercy that God has let us have this beautiful day! Oh, God let this house be to Your glory and to the salvation of souls!

March 2: Working people here to provide water. Ladies' aid.

March 3: . . . Walked around in New York to shop for something for the house. . . . Then to Columbia Street to buy curtains and pillow feathers. .

March 4: . . . Out to buy beds and mattresses for the sick. Sewed and hung curtains. .

March 13: First, had a man here to measure out carpet for floors. Thereafter, two sick calls. Then Pastor Mortensen, Dr. Turner, and I successfully interviewed a doctor for the home. {32} . . . God grant I have not gone my own way! . . .

March 14: Saturday; work all day with house. Sewed carpets for floors and laid them. Prepared first room for patients. To bed at twelve. Exceedingly tired.

March 16: Washed clothes. . . . At Myeth [?] Avenue to pay bills. . . . A long time with Pastor Mortensen; letter from Passavant about [my] coming west to take over a deaconess house there.

March 19: Six sick calls. Came home tired, and then saw a poor woman here with a sick child and after talking a long time with her, gave her a ticket for coal. . . .

March 24: . . . Wife was sick and husband not well. Stove was cold and black. Worked at everything and put clothes that I had brought along on child, and doctored and greased it. Nursed the whole night. Then arranged things and cared for the sick. I left them to go to three other sick people, and am exceedingly tired.

March 26: Was called out at six o'clock. . . . After delivering a fine boy I called on five sick, and then to a Norwegian woman to talk about getting her admitted to a hospital. Then knocked on a door for half an hour, but no answer. Then to operation . . . and came home. Mrs. Bernhard sat here. How tired I was!

March 31: Three sick calls, and at two shops to buy, and in a very poor humor. Yet Bible study this afternoon was good. Oh, what a poor Christian I am!

April 1: Four sick calls, and to Mrs. Børs to tell my troubles, and must have tormented her terribly.

April 3: Good Friday. At Flatbush and bought flowers for Easter. . . .

April 5: Easter Day. At Fedde's and had a lovely day; a real rest for my soul, which is tired of everything.

April 7: A terrible day. Board meeting, and I have been left in a powerless position. This is the hardest time I have had in

America, and the appeal for help is in danger. God be merciful! I have the whole board against me and everything is wrong and I wish I were dead. God be merciful to me, a sinner! {33}

April 8: Did not sleep last night. To Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Bull to bake for bazaar, and was on three sick calls, and ordered what we shall have for the bazaar.

April 9: Rearranged things at the church for tomorrow, and was in New York looking for the cheapest ticket to Hull, and back again to church to work; came home at 11 P.M.

April 12: Sunday. Straightened the house after all this commotion [the bazaar] and stayed in bed most of the day.

April 13: Packed together and sent everything out after the bazaar, and paid all bills. . . .

April 15: Rainy weather in Nature, and in my unclean soul darkness and gloom, so I decided to see Barnum's show, which for the last month I have desired to see. Oh, what a wonder of the Creator to produce all this! O, God, how I must thank You for all You have given me beyond that of so many other creatures! . . .

April 19: Two operations, and part of the day with Mrs. Bernhard.

April 23: Worked from seven on to get Mrs. Bernhard on her way. Later at Pastor Everson's. Then out to buy furniture. Then to doctor about a sick person. Then to the sick. Back to the doctor and ambulance man. Took the sick woman in as first patient. [189] Deathly sick. Have had pastor and doctor here and am keeping watch.

April 24: Mrs. Juhl died here at 7 A.M. after a hard night. Then to arrange with undertaker and pastor. Home and washed the body, and am dead tired.

April 25: Out and bought . . . flowers for the casket, and prepared the house. . . .

April 26: Sunday. Put Mrs. Juhl in casket; large funeral. . . .

April 30: Two sick calls at Trinity Hospital, and there richly experienced God's nearness and that God has sent me. Now this month with its struggle has passed and almost everything is forgotten, although not all. . . .

May 16: Today our first Sister came. God bless her coming and going from now until eternity for Your name's sake and make her useful in spirit and truth! The meeting with her on board was happy, and we felt God's nearness. I pressed her to my breast and in Jesus' name bade her welcome and from the bottom of my heart I could thank God for sending her to me. It ended with a very good evening together with both our dear pastors and we really rejoiced in being God's children. {34}

June 1: . . . Three clothed, and admitted one patient for free bed, so now it is opened for patients. God let it be a blessing for all!

June 2: At several places to buy for the home. Sick persons to care for, and much to arrange. A talk with doctor about the home. . . .

June 7: After caring for the patients, we went to Pastor Everson's church and had dinner. Then home, but full of people [waiting for help].

July: June is over and we are in July. . . . Admittance of Sister and dedication of home, and three patients admitted. {35} . . . My time is taken up more at the home. Yet I have had much to do outside the home. . . .

August: Mrs. Hag, with three children, came to the home; had burned herself and the end already near. Brought in while I was out and I kept her children; clothed them. Two younger were sent out and the third stayed here at night and for breakfast. [190] Mrs. Hag died the 19th and was buried from the home on the 21st. . . .

September 26: Overtired and yet worked with the festival the whole day and stayed up the whole night with the sick.

September 30: Festival for Pastor Mortensen. Worked there.

November 13: . . . Today I have seen a mother who is fifteen years old and a father who is ten. Terrible to hear, but true.

November 26: Three sick calls. Family in great need. Later out to solicit clothing and money and received \$2 and some clothing.

November 29: Sunday. At doctor's about a sick person.

December 24: Worked with doctor and sick for Christmas, and now Christmas Eve is over. A real Christmas joy when our tree was decorated and our guests had eaten and the patients were brought down, the lights lit, and the Christmas message proclaimed. Glory to God in the highest! There is nothing else but a "thank you" in my soul for God revealed in the flesh.

December 31: Now this year is over. . . . Disappointed hopes lie blasted, much is quite different from what I had thought. . . . The greater the cross, the greater the longing of the heart for heaven. .

January 2, 1886: First, work here to admit a patient. Then on two sick calls. Then worked to prepare for a Christmas festival at Seamen's Mission Church. Came home late.

January 3: Sunday. Worked at home with the patients until three. Then to church for the festival. Came home late. Sister Ottilie sick. This is the last time I will go to the festival. . . .

January 4: A very uncomfortable day with Sister Ottilie. What a torture that is! God show me what I should do about it. [I am] sick in every way and here I am. God help me to carry my cross with patience.

January 7: After a pleasant evening with all the patients, we were both up until three when our man died, and then I washed the body before we retired for a few hours. After the morning's work and the doctor's visit I went out to arrange for burial, from the one to the other, in very cold weather. Came home late, and many things to do here. . . .

January 9: At home until twelve. Then on six house and sick calls. Came home with a small child whose two sisters and [191] brothers are dead today from scarlet fever. Have taken it [the child] for a few days until they have fumigated.

January 14: Was away to talk to a woman who wants to be a Sister. . . .

January 19: Cared for sick and poor until noon. Then out to see a family who drink and whose housekeeping I found very wretched. Many children, and sin in everything. . . .

January 21: At Ida Gundersen's about a place for Emilie. Then bought some things to take to Flatbush Hospital to Cecelie Halse, who was very happy to see me. There she lay, poor girl, with a big cap on her head, looking as if she were dead. Yet shining with happiness for the things she received. Two house visits.

January 22: . . . Then to some poor children whose father (Mr. Jensen) has left them, and it would be for the best if he never returned. The daughter had been at the city hall. . . .

January 23: . . . And then out with Nilsen's widow to get the insurance paid and burial arranged. . . .

January 26: . . . Later on board a tugboat . . . and there in a small cabin lay a poor woman in the most unbearable pain and no one can help her. . . .

February 7: At communion today. Really happy in my Saviour. . . .

February 13: Worked here. Then to Mrs. Gørensy; got \$20.

February 15: . . . Around to solicit for old clothing but found nothing. . . .

February 16: Twelve house visits, and hunted for Olga for many hours; found her at 70 De Graw Street and had a great struggle with her about the child. Was at Andersen's and talked with the husband awhile and awhile with the wife. Was there four hours. God grant the Word might bear fruit!

February 17: . . . Devotions this evening, and talked with many newly awakened souls. . . . \$6.50 collected for a poor family. . . .

March 8: Two sick, and two doctors visited. Bookkeeping. So God has given us a new Sister, and God bless her to us!

March 9: Board meeting; always opposition. God, it is thus in Your Kingdom. The way is hard and narrow. {36} Two sick calls.

March 31: In bed fourteen days and am up now, but ill. Can't work for a long time. . . . Little is done now but Sister Otilie has left, sick. So now it is to begin again. . . .

April 1: A little better today but cannot work. Sent Sister Bertha to Trinity Hospital with a sick woman. . . .

April 16: . . . On the 13th a board meeting which was like all meetings, with opposition . . . when there should be action. Oh, what a cross this is with Sister Otilie! It is almost too heavy for me, but God has said, "As thy day is so shall thy strength be." God help me to carry it all! {37}

April 22: . . . Now my going away is certain and I have written to Sverdrup. . . .

April 23: Good Friday. Difficult day for me with Sister Otilie. . . April 28: Six house visits. To superintendent of Castle Garden to get a widow, Mrs. Berg, home [Norway] with three children. Long time with Seehus but to no avail. So I have carried it out myself and the result is that I have gotten them home for \$25. Then to all the pastors again. Came home tired. Seven house and sick calls.

May 5: First, to Mrs. Berg. Then to Castle Garden; was there for three hours. . . . Then to Pastor Everson to get a boy, five years old, baptized. Then to ladies' aid; house full.

May 6: Off early in forenoon to a baptism. It was a very solemn moment when the five-year-old Conrad said, "I want to be baptized; I want to be named Conrad!" . . . .

May 7: To Mrs. Moller, who had collected \$25, and later to offices to exchange 50 crowns which was collected for Berg. . . .

June: Left America June 5 and came to Norway the 19th. Have now spent three months in Norway and find myself very well. Am well and strong for the work; returned here the 17th of September. . . .

September 27: . . . Sister Bertha with her sick sister. {38}

October 4: Guliksen has been here to get money for furniture, but if he will not work, he will not get any money either. Then came Palmstad and got a little help for medicine. Later to consulate. Then at three places. After that to a sick woman who lay in the most terrible wretchedness, and God help her soon for Your name's sake. Pastor and Mrs. Hansteen here.

October 6: Restless night. Cared for the patients. Waited for doctor. Ladies' aid. Both [doctors on the staff] have been here and I have been to the other doctor. And have had several here this evening on business about the sick. Cared for the patients this evening.

October 13: Asked for clothing in New York for five sick people. . . . Sister Bertha left the house to go to her friend whose children were sick, which put me in a bad humor, because I have no one to depend on . . . for now it is time to think over what God means with everything. I found a sick person with whom God's spirit works hard and I believe truly that You, Lord, will have the victory. . . .

October 15: . . . Sister Bertha came home and was disciplined for leaving without permission.

October 23: Out at 5 A.M. Delivered twins and made a sick call. Then home to work here, and out again on three calls.

October 29: Was night nurse. Four sick calls. To Mrs. Børs and on a child-placing errand, and have had an adventurous ride on a fish wagon.

November 18: Since I wrote last, there have been many changes. On the 8th, board meeting: Sister Otilie was dismissed, and both Sisters in training have left. Today Otilie went and I can't deny that it was hard, but it was best. Monday, Bertha went and a new girl has come. It has been a big struggle but I am glad for everything. For in my need I called on the Lord and He helped. Only the Lord knows what the period has been for me, and everything will serve me for the best. . . .

December 31: This month is gone and with it the old year full of trouble and suffering. Little accomplished for the Kingdom of God. Sin and shame, blame and guilt. . . . Few patients have [194] been here this year and during this month hardly anyone. Now the house is empty and all the work is outside among the wretched, and here there are enough of them. {39} . . . .

January 1, 1887: I have been at a wedding and am tired and not in a good frame of mind.

January 22: Sick and house calls. Much need, and some ask about the Saviour. . . . God grant that all may be the truth which is said to me, but how difficult it is to believe it! I was at Jans. the other day, and there is the densest heathendom. A child of nine does not know a single letter. . . . Miss Jensen admitted the 18th and I am led to believe she has started in Jesus' name, so, God, let it be to Your glory and the salvation of souls!

February 2: Seven sick and house calls. At one place sat a woman with a small child and cried about her ills. Another was very sick and wept over her child's death.

February 8: A terrible board meeting. We gathered in peace and started with prayer and ended with the most vehement outbreak from all sides. Pastor Everson had to express himself . . . on the bazaar; he aroused the consternation of all and I will say that his strategy was as maliciously laid out as though an enemy had planned it. For myself, I will always remember it, but it should be kept secret. Was out a little in the evening and am in a turmoil. {40}

February 9: Hardly slept. . . . O God, let this soon be ended! . . .

February 10: Six house and sick calls. Often it is good to come to folks. At other times I feel frustrated and can engage only in small talk. Lord, take hold of the family on whom I recently called that they may enter into fellowship with Thee!

February 16: Yesterday, the 15th, a disgusting meeting. It is terrible that a person should become thus and yet talk about love for the work. God, make an end to the whole thing soon! I am tired of many torments and pray for peace.

March 4: To six places, together with Mrs. Hansteen, to arrange for a school.

March 5: With beating heart I went to open a school on Sullivan Street, and, to our joy, there were gathered thirty-six children. And God helped us, so we got started officially in Jesus' name and with a prayer to Him for help. . . . Then we went to buy books. .

March 7: Oh, I am almost beside myself at the thought of the meeting tomorrow! God give comfort and strength to bear

whatever happens, and let me be still!

March 8: Meeting is over and I to bed. We are at the same point still. Not decided what is to be. . . .

March 9: A bad night. To Mrs. Børs and came home. Many women here. Oh, my heart is in a turmoil!

March 14: Two house visits. In bed awhile. In the evening a woman from New York came to see about a widow and some children whom I must help.

March 24: Been in because of illness four days, and Miss Jensen has been out to several sick, eight in all, and it seems to go well with her.

April 16: All these days lie behind me full of difficulties and also joy. I have been sick several days. . . . On the 12th there was a meeting again . . . with a member about to resign, and I fear there must soon be an end to the whole terrible times. . . . Now I shall go up to the patients and read and talk with them about our Saviour.

May 9: Have been sick for fourteen days. . . .

May 22: In most of the time; am now much better. . . .

June 30: . . . Was up to little Marie at the children's home and found her in remarkable condition. . . . School is out now.

July 2: Cared for the sick first, and then went at nine o'clock to Seamen's Mission Church and took care of children, eighty-nine of them, who walked in procession to the church and then to the park, where we have been the whole day, and came home so tired, and with a terrible headache. The trip cost \$21, all of which I have already received.

July 3: Sunday. At home in forenoon. Then to Bath Junction [in Brooklyn] to the dedication of a house of prayer.

September 1: Today came back from vacation; have had a pleasant time with Pastor Saarheim, who is still sick. {41} . . . We walked to Pastor Hansteen's and had a pleasant conversation. . . .

September 6: . . . Been at bank; then to doctor and to Mrs. Harris'. Then we took a trip to my sister. {42} . . . .

September 7: Miss Jensen went to Boston today, and I went with her to the station. Then in the afternoon to ladies' aid at the parsonage; when I came there, there were two poor folks, and then a telegram from Saarheim . . . very ill. . . .

September 8: Telegram from Saarheim that he is better. . . I must be nurse tonight, and then go to the Catskills.

September 14: Home again with the pastor after a long struggle. Yet God be praised! . . . .

September 15: A quiet day. Now we have had supper, and had devotions. . . . We shall have a great meeting today. General meeting of the society. . . . Give us peace! . . . .

September 16: Now it is over. The three are not on the board and we are rid of them. God let us keep peace! {43} Out awhile to call on the sick.

January 6, 1888: . . . School began on Sunday. . . . Several new teachers, and Saarheim leads it now. . . . Full house here. . . . To Staten Island and placed Mrs. Helliessen's three children in a children's home.

May, 1888: Just now I want to put you away, you old book, incomplete as you are. Yet you will remind me of many things that have happened during these months and years. This year the Lord has richly blessed our work. . . . In Your blessed name the work was done.

## Notes



<1> A copy of the letter of call is in the files of Lutheran Medical Center, Brooklyn. Elizabeth Fedde and her brother-in-law had the same name because they had lived on the same farm in Norway, and, as was the custom, the place, not the family, provided the surname.

<2> From Elizabeth Fedde's "Autobiography"; the original manuscript is in the files of the medical center. Women who entered a deaconess mother house for training in nursing, Christian ethics, and social welfare received the title "Sister" from the beginning of the course.

<3> Sister Superior Johanne Lyngø, Oslo, Norway, to the writer, June 10, 1958.

<4> Nordisk tidende (Brooklyn), November 20, 1896; Sister Elizabeth's "Memoirs"; the manuscript of the latter is in the possession of her nephew, Waldemar Reiersen of Brooklyn. A large portion of the memoirs was published in Nordisk tidende February 28-May 16, 1933.

<5> From a formal statement on the organization of the society, April 17, 1883, in the files of the medical center. Outdoor relief included outpatient relief, poor relief, and in Sister Elizabeth's case, at least, pastoral care. The society aimed to offer relief to people in their own homes.

<6> Minutes, board of managers, February 24, 1884, in the files of the medical center.

<7> Minutes, April 7, 1885.

<8> Minutes, October 10, 1892.

<9> Minutes, August 27, 1892.

<10> Fedde, "Memoirs," Nordisk tidende, February 28-May 16, 1933.

<11> Printed table of statistics on outdoor relief, Minutes, 1892.

<12> Minutes, May 12, July 30, 1884, April 7, 1885.

<13> Nordisk tidende, April 20, 1894.

<14> Stavanger aftenblad, December 23, 1948.

<15> Trained Nurse and Hospital Review, 86:64 (January, 1931). It is significant that, thirty-five years after Sister Elizabeth had finished her work in Brooklyn, a magazine with a nation-wide circulation should have included her in a series on nationally famous nurses.

<16> Research for this study was sponsored by the department of charities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. P. J. Hertsgaard, public-relations director at Lutheran Medical Center and instructor in Norwegian in the Brooklyn school system, was helpful in reading half the translation.

<17> Sister Elizabeth sailed from Norway March 25, 1883, arriving in New York April 8.

<18> C. S. Everson was pastor of Our Saviour's Evangelical Lutheran Church, the only such local congregation, and treasurer of the relief society. The church was located in New York until 1885, when, following the migration to Brooklyn, it was set up there.

<19> A. Mortensen was pastor until 1885 of the Norwegian Seamen's Mission Church, and he was president of the relief society.

<20> Sister Elizabeth took lessons in English with Theodor Siqueland, a dentist.

<21> Faint handwriting prevents deciphering the dates. Since Sister Elizabeth's statement that the dedication was to take place on Sunday appears after June 8 and before June 17, it is presumed that the dedication occurred on the Sunday between those dates, namely June 10. The record of the April 27, 1886, meeting of the board of managers, however, speaks of June 11 as the anniversary date.

<22> Emigrant Hospital was on Ward Island in the East River. To it were admitted patients who had been in the United States less than four years.

<23> Although the society was organized to care for Norwegians and denied admittance to the hospital in at least one instance to a Swedish patient, Sister Elizabeth seems to have included all Scandinavians in her service in the outdoor relief program.

<24> Castle Garden was an immigrant station from 1855-90, preceding Ellis Island.

<25> The Thingvalla Steamship Line.

<26> Lorentz Severin Skougaard was a noted Norwegian singer who, with his friends, gave liberally to the hospital. His professional name was L. Skougaard Severini.

<27> Ward Island Hospital was Emigrant Hospital.

<28> Wartburg Orphan Farm School, located on Manhattan, is sponsored by the American Lutheran Church.

<29> Carsten Hansteen was assistant pastor of the Norwegian Seamen's Mission Church.

<30> Minutes, January 20, 1885. The Lutheran Hospital discouraged Sister Elizabeth from visiting her patients at her own convenience, their principle being that pastors and not women should offer spiritual care. Trinity Hospital, an Episcopal institution, granted permission to her to send her patients there. She was criticized for thus exposing them to non-Lutheran doctrines.

<31> She was moving to a 9-bed hospital at 441 Fourth Avenue, Brooklyn, which also was to serve as home for the deaconesses. At first there was only one structure for both purposes; in 1904 a separate building was provided for the hospital at 4602 Fourth Avenue. The institution followed the mother house ideal: it was a permanent residence for deaconesses, where they were trained for service and had the security of a real home, and from which the board and the deaconess in charge could send them into their hospital, to other hospitals, to outdoor relief work, or to mission fields.

<32> Dr. Henry C. Turner was the first head of the medical department of the hospital.

<33> Minutes, April 7, 1885. Criticism for giving Sister Elizabeth the vote in board meetings resulted in her opposing a move to make her a member of the group, as has been stated earlier.

<34> Otilie Olsen had arrived from Arendal, Norway, to enter deaconess work.

<35> The admittance ceremony and dedication took place June 14, 1885.

<36> Minutes, March 9, 1886. Sister Elizabeth requested that she and the doctors he authorized to admit paying patients without having to consult the board. Since the board was really responsible, the request was denied.

<37> Minutes, April 13, 1886; the rule stated that deaconesses who were engaged to be married should leave the work, so Sister Elizabeth wanted Sister Otilie to retire. The board, however, made an exception and retained her during Elizabeth's vacation in Norway. See also "Memoirs." Elizabeth considered the marriage estate the highest calling for women, therefore she had no objection to the Sisters' becoming engaged, but she was discouraged at the first candidate's leaving so soon.

<38> Sister Bertha, whose full name has not been found, entered the deaconess home in March, 1886, the second woman to enroll in the course.

<39> Minutes, April 27, May 5, December 14, 1886. Because of Elizabeth's absence during the summer, no patients were admitted, and acceptance of applicants to training was postponed. Both the rented quarters and the finances were in poor condition.

<40> The sale of lottery tickets at bazaars was an issue from the beginning of the establishment of the hospital. At the February 8, 1887, meeting of the board, Pastor Everson presented his formal protest, written in English, which he requested he inserted in the minutes of the meeting. The protest was directed against the sale of lottery tickets at the bazaar held January 28-29, 1887, as a violation of a state statute.

<41> Kr. K. Saarheim was a pastor in the Norwegian Seamen's Mission Church for a time after 1886. He was a member of the hospital board of managers for a period. Beginning in 1887, he was part-time chaplain in the hospital.

<42> The sister was Mrs. Gabriel Fedde of Brooklyn.

<43> In spite of Sister Elizabeth's wish that conflicts within the board be kept secret, the lottery and consequent issues were discussed during the summer in the Norwegian colony and in the Norwegian press. As a result of the meeting of the society on September 15, Pastor Everson and his two friends ceased to be members of the board. Although there were mild discussions of the issue at subsequent board meetings, bazaars continued to be yearly events. Several were held in the basement of Pastor Everson's church, and lottery tickets on donated merchandise were sold.

Comments, questions and feedback can be directed to [naha@stolaf.edu](mailto:naha@stolaf.edu).  
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