

Elisabeth Heisenberg 1914-1998

Family, Ancestry and Documents they left behind

Elisabeth was born as fourth child of Hermann Schumacher, Professor of economics, whose family roots can be traced back to the twelfth century in Bremen, and Edith Zitelmann, daughter of Ernst Zitelmann, from a Prussian family with roots in Stettin. She had seven children: Maria, Wolfgang, Jochen, Martin, Barbara, Christine, and Verena, and 22 grandchildren and many great-grandchildren. She published one book: "**Inner Exile - Recollections of a Life with Werner Heisenberg**" (Birkhäuser 1984), translated from the original German. Much of her life and personality can be experienced through her letters published in "*Meine Liebe Li*", *Der Briefwechsel 1937-1946* (Residenz Verlag 2011), translated by Irene Heisenberg and to be published by Yale University Press under the title: **My Dear Li**



Elisabeth as a youngster.

Even though born in Bonn, Elisabeth grew up in Berlin.



Elisabeth and her brother Fritz

After finishing high school she started the studies of Art history in Freiburg. While there, she participated in a choral group and befriended Maria Westphal, a friendship that lasted through the chaotic war times and beyond. She was not happy with her chosen field and was looking for a change. However, the relationship to her father was difficult, and she did not dare to discuss this with her father.

Barbara Wood describes Elisabeth's father and grandfather: [He wanted to play a wider role in the world and went abroad with his wife, two small sons and a baby daughter, first to be German Ambassador in Bogota, Columbia, and then to be German Consul in New York, where two more](#)

daughters were born. Their life in the wilds of the Andes and amongst the skyscrapers of New York was not always conventional. The two boys were more or less left to educate themselves. After a brief and unhappy period of formal schooling in a New York establishment their father was convinced that they would learn more left to their own devices; they were given a printing press and the young “Schumacher Brothers, Printers” set themselves up in business. They learned mathematics by keeping their accounts and literacy through typesetting, their father insisting only that they carried on their printing business with proper professionalism and dedication.

In 1882 Ambassador Schumacher was posted to Lima and the two boys were sent home to Bremen for a more formal education. They felt like orphans away from their parents and sisters. Bremen seemed to be full of critical aunts of all shapes and sizes who peered at ‘the two German shoots grown on American soil’ through curtained windows as they walked down the street on their way to school. Hermann, the elder found it particularly difficult to settle down and recorded many years later in his memoirs that this episode in Bremen

strengthened the north German tendency in my personality, but also tied me to my brother in an unusually close bond. From then on we lived - almost as orphans - in the house of my mother’s older sister ... However friendly our reception was, it could never take the place of our parental home. As Fontane says, home ‘exerts its influence from minute to minute in those formative years of the soul’, where example is more important than teaching. That feeling of natural belonging which one takes for granted could only develop slowly and with more difficulty for the older (brother) than for the younger.

The absence of continuous family bonds, exacerbated by the early death of his father, all helped to make Hermann single-mindedly wrapped up in his own life: dogmatic, authoritarian and dedicated to the pursuit of his career, breaking only for holiday with his brother whenever their busy lives allowed. His career progressed well. He studied first law and then economics. By the age of thirty-one, in 1899, he had already gained the distinction of being appointed to a chair of economics, at Kiel University, without having acquired the usual obligatory academic qualification of a doctorate. Once he was a professor, the world opened out, particularly after he had founded a school of economics in Cologne in 1900, the first to have university status in Germany. As Hermann’s reputation spread to the upper echelons of society he was appointed



Elisabeth and her sister Edith

tutor to the Crown Prince and his brothers. He travelled widely to the Far East and China, collecting economic data, and twice to New York, where on his second visit in 1906 he was the first “Kaiser Wilhelm Exchange Professor” at Columbia University, returning after a year to the chair of economics at Bonn University.

(taken from Excerpts from: ‘**E.F.Schumacher, His Life and Thought**’ by Barbara Wood)

Because of the communication difficulties with her father she turned to her uncle Fritz. Uncle Fritz, an architect, had many connections all over Germany, and together they developed a plan for her to go to Leipzig and become an apprentice in the book publishing field. He promised to discuss this with her parents and help her along with this change. Once in Leipzig, uncle Fritz send Elisabeth a further letter in which he gave her a list of people that he had alerted and where she ought to visit and introduce herself. Thus she was immediately introduced into Leipzig's society of book publishers. Apparently through that connection the proprietor of the book publishing house Mr. Bücking invited her by sending a fancy invitation to her at the house of her parents in Berlin.

This evening invitation on Jan. 28, 1937 also featured some house music with piano trio, where Werner Heisenberg played the piano, Erwin Jacobi the violin and the host played the cello. This was the fateful event where Werner and Elisabeth met. Soon, in March, they were engaged, and they married three months after they met on April 29, 1937.

The period from 1937 to 1946 is reasonably well known through the extensive correspondence between Werner and Elisabeth, to be published in the fall 2016 by Yale

University Press under the title *My Dear Li*, translated from the German by Irene Heisenberg.



Max-Planck-Institute family moved to Munich and so did the family.

From 1946 to 1958 she raised her family in Göttingen, where her husband held the position of director of the Max-Planck-Institute for physics. In 1958 the



After the death of her husband in 1976 she stayed in

Munich and from there she started to give occasional talks on child education at the Ulm community college. However, after a few years she moved back to Göttingen where she shared a house with her daughter Christine.

