

Her Story Silhouette by Shari House

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Silhouette:

Katharina von Bora was born in 1499* in Lippendorf*, Germany into a poor but noble family. After her mother passed away, her father sent her to a convent for schooling when she was only five years old. At the age of nine she moved to a different convent where her aunt lived and eventually took her vows to become a nun. She was only 18 years old when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of a Wittenberg church in 1517, sparking the beginning of the Reformation. She came into contact with some of Luther's fiery pamphlets attacking celibacy and monastic orders which solidified the disillusionment she was feeling with the monastic life and the Catholic church. In 1523 Katharina and 11 other nuns in her convent decided they wanted to join Martin Luther and the reformation he was leading. They secretly got a message to him asking for his help. Luther made a daring plan for their escape with the help of a local fish merchant. On Easter Eve night, after the merchant's delivery to the convent, he smuggled the nuns out amongst the empty fish barrels on his cart. Their act of escape broke the law and was a very dangerous undertaking, as anyone found abandoning their monastic vows could be tortured and imprisoned for life. The nuns made it safely out and were taken to Lutherstadt, Wittenberg where Luther was living. Because they violated Roman Catholic canon, many of their families wouldn't allow them to come home, and so Luther worked to find the ladies employment or husbands to marry according to their wishes. He was successful with everyone but Katharina. Although she had a couple suitors, Katharina refused to marry anyone but Luther himself or Nicholas von Amsdorf, one of his university colleagues. Many of Luther's colleagues who had joined him in the Reformation were against him marrying because they feared it would bring scandal and hurt to their cause, but others pushed for it thinking it would be a good thing for the Reformation. After much persuasion by Luther's father, Katharina, and others, Luther decided that "his marriage would please his father, rile the pope, cause the angels to laugh, and the devils to weep." On June 13, 1525, Luther, a former monk aged 42, and Katharina, a former nun aged 26, were married.

They moved into the Black Cloister which was formerly the monastery where Luther had lived as a friar and had been gifted to him. Katharina immediately set out to bring order to the chaos that seemed to be surrounding her husband. This was unusual for a woman to do during this time, but she knew the best way she could help her husband and ultimately the Reformation, was to take care of any and all things household related so that he could focus on writing, teaching, and ministering. To help with the household finances, she turned the 3-story monastery into a guest house/meeting house and cared for the many students, guests, and boarders that came to sit under Luther's teaching. Katharina proved to be a good businesswoman and managed all their finances. She invested the money she received from the guest house into the property which grew to include a large farm, multiple gardens, fish ponds, fruit orchards, and a brewery. She also oversaw the breeding, raising, and butchering of their cattle and pigs which numbered more

than anyone else in their town of several thousand. One of Luther's pet names for Katharina was "Morning Star of Wittenberg" since she rose at 4 a.m. each day in order to perform her many responsibilities.

She and Luther had six children of their own and cared for four orphaned children, as well. Katharina's great medical skills also proved to be very helpful to Luther as he often suffered from illnesses, and during times of widespread sickness, Katharina would operate a hospital right there on their property. Luther came to rely on Katharina, not just for his physical needs, the raising of their children, and the running of their household, but also for her intellect, wisdom, and spiritual understanding as he shaped and led the Reformation. He often consulted with her and affectionately called her "Doctora Lutherin." The Lord had equipped her well to be the helpmeet her husband needed.

After Luther's death in 1546, Katharina went through a series of difficult circumstances. There was loss of income due to his death, and because of the resistance against the Emperor, she was forced to leave her home and take refuge in another city. Upon her return she found her house and property in ruins and all her livestock sold or killed. In 1552 the crops failed, and an outbreak of the plague caused her to have to flee her home again to the city of Torgau. It was there she was involved in a terrible horse and cart accident that ultimately caused her death a few months later.

Before Katharina's death on December 20, 1552, at the age of 53, she was able to see her children attain positions of influence despite the hardships and scandals she and her husband faced during the Reformation. On her deathbed she said, "I will stick to Christ as a burr to cloth," and she did. Throughout her entire life she showed faith, courage, and fortitude . . . three great character traits for any Christian woman to emulate. She is truly a woman of whom it can be said, "**She hath done what she could**"!

Her Story/My Story:

As marriage prospects go, Martin Luther was lacking quite a bit. He was a middle-aged theology professor known to be loud, argumentative, and judgmental. He traveled a lot, was from a common family, and didn't have enough money to even buy his bride a wedding ring. Publicly he had been declared a heretic by the pope who had ordered that all his writings be burned. He had been excommunicated from the Catholic church and declared an outlaw by the Emperor. Even with all of this, Katharina chose him, and their marriage created a scandal across Europe. Luther's enemies attacked Katharina and set out to discredit her. Pamphlets were written that labeled her as money-grubbing, an alcoholic, and a woman of ill-repute. Even some of Luther's allies did not like how much Luther came to depend on her for so many things. They saw Katharina as self-confident, strong-willed, and independent . . . all negative attributes for women at that time . . . but Luther embraced these things about his wife and once said, "God's best gift is a pious, cheerful, God-fearing, home-keeping wife, with whom you may live peacefully, to whom you may entrust your goods, your body, and life." He was not willing to box her into the general thinking of the day that women were to be seen and not heard. His search of the Scriptures for the truths that ultimately led him to challenge the Catholic church, also led him to Biblical truths that permeated his entire life including his marriage with his wife and the raising of their children. Katharina and Luther grew to love each other deeply, and their marriage became a model for German families for centuries and played an extremely important role in the Reformation in defining what Protestant family life should look like. Katharina always called Luther "Sir Doctor"



out of her deep respect for him, and he most often called her "My Lord Katie." He loved her, and she was trusted in ways unheard of for women in those days.



I certainly do not consider myself to be a trailblazer like Katharina was, but I do understand what it feels like when you seem to be doing something out of the norm. At the time I felt the Lord calling me to the mission field, I personally did not know any single lady missionaries. I had heard the many stories from years before of single women like Gladys Aylward, Mary Slessor, and Amy Carmichael, but it seemed to be looked down upon in the "circle" of pastors and churches I was affiliated with. As I made my decision and started out on deputation, I had to deal with pastors, some who knew me and some who didn't, who felt it was their duty to tell me that unmarried ladies had no place on the mission field. I praise the Lord for my father and my pastor, the men the Lord had put in my life, who were willing to pray with me about this matter, sought to give me godly counsel, and encouraged me to follow the Lord's leading in my life and not just discard it because it went against the general consensus. I eventually was able to raise my support by going to pastors outside of my "circle" who could see the potential value I could bring to missionary work as a single lady.

To be honest, I never considered myself to be "single" in the respect that I was "going alone" to work on the mission field. Much like a husband and wife that set off to go to heathen lands, I have always felt the Lord and I were partners in this great endeavor. I have claimed Isaiah 54:5 "For thy Maker is thine husband . . ." Several years ago, in the month of June, I made a comment on Facebook regarding this matter. I always know when it is June because my Facebook feed becomes flooded with all my friends celebrating their wedding anniversaries. I love seeing the myriad of pictures of white dresses and tuxes, bridesmaids and groomsmen, children born and lives lived, all with a pledge of undying love and looking forward to the coming years. Even though I didn't have a picture of me wearing a white dress with huge puffy sleeves walking down a wedding aisle that I could share with my friends, I thought I'd get in on the action and wish my one True Love a happy anniversary as well. It went like this . . .

"Twenty years ago today, on June 28, 1995, I said, "I DO!" to You, the one I loved with all my heart. I promised to follow You wherever You led, and You promised to love and care for me. I hopped on a plane, walked down an aisle, took my seat knowing You were by my side, and never looked back. We've been through ups and downs, sickness and health, several life-changing moves, and so much more. Through it all, You've been by my side leading and guiding me. You've never disappointed me once and have always taken such good care of me. Thanks for all the places You've taken me to over the past 20 years and for giving me such a full life already. I can't wait to see what the next 20 years will hold. I always say, "It's You and me Lord, You and me."

I don't know if the Lord reads Facebook or not, but I do know that He knows my heart, and He knows I still feel that way.

Bible Study: Trailblazing

Trailblazing - (v.) to blaze a trail through (a forest, wilderness, or the like) for others to follow.
(v.) to be a pioneer in (a particular subject, technique, etc.)

The Bible is full of women who were "trailblazers" in their own right.

- **Hulda** was the wife of the clothes keeper at the tabernacle. She had a knowledge of the Scriptures that even the priests of that time recognized, and the Lord used her to speak on His behalf.

- **Miriam** helped her brothers Moses and Aaron lead the children of Israel out of captivity and during their 40 years of wandering.
- **Esther** was brave and used her position as queen to save her people and change the course of her nation.
- **Ruth** was a Moabite, the hated incestuous descendants of Lot and his daughter that God had banished from His temple to the 10th generation. She married a prominent Israelite man and was named in the lineage of Jesus.
- **Mary Magdalene** was one of Jesus' followers at a time when it was completely uncommon for rabbis to have females learning under them. She is often the first one named in a list of ladies, and she is mentioned in the Bible more often than most of Jesus' 12 disciples are. She was present at the crucifixion when many of Jesus' other followers and disciples were not, and she was the first to see Him after He rose from the dead.
- **Martha**, the sister of Lazarus and Mary, was one of the first of Jesus' followers to truly understand who He was with her statement, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou are the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11:27).
- **Lydia** was the first person in Europe listed as becoming a Christian. She was the head of a household, and as such, she invited the disciples to stay in her home. She used her income and resources to help further the Gospel.

And then there is **Deborah** . . . Deborah was the first woman prophetess mentioned in the Bible. She was also the only female judge of Israel, and she led an army to overthrow a Canaanite king that had oppressed Israel for 20 years - both tasks usually left to men. For whatever reason God saw fit to have her not stay at home and weave, prepare food, and run a household. Instead, He directed her to speak on His behalf, settle disputes amongst the people, and help lead her country. She was definitely a trailblazer, and from the story of her life, found in Judges 4 and 5, we can learn four good attributes of a trailblazer.

1. **Deborah was willing to lead when needed.** (4:8,9a) "And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee . . ."
2. **Deborah was sensitive to the Lord's leading in the moment.** (4:14a) "And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee?"
3. **Deborah made sure to give God praise and to not take the glory.** (5:1,2) "Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves."
4. **Deborah gave credit to others when it was due.** (5:24) "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent."

* Since there were relatively no birth certificates at this period in time, we are unsure of her exact birth year, but this is the year traditionally assigned to her birth by historians.

* Some historians list her birthplace as Hirschfeld instead of Lippendorf.

**picture from my first prayer card