



Pages for All Ages:



Two Friends Face the Inquisition

by Shannon Fagen



Some words and phrases to know before you read

- missionaries
- Protestant
- leadings
- Catholic
- bound to find
- priests
- preached
- the Inquisition
- their resolve
- refused to deny
- pressured
- crucifix
- conditions
- horrific
- gnats
- malnourished
- smuggle
- their darkest hours
- spiritual friendship
- released



Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers lived in England during the time when the Religious Society of Friends was first starting there. Evans was born in 1618 and died in 1692. Cheevers lived from 1608 to 1664. Both women were Quaker missionaries.



Katherine Evans’s husband was a Quaker minister, and he shared his wife’s beliefs. Sarah Cheevers’s husband was a Protestant, and their children were raised as Protestants. In the 1600s, women usually had to do what their husbands told them to do. Even though Sarah Cheevers wanted her family to join the Quakers, her husband wouldn’t allow it. But he didn’t stop her from joining the Quakers herself.



In 1658, Evans and Cheevers both felt strong leadings to travel to Egypt and spread the word of God there. At that time in history, it was shocking for women to make a plan like that. It was shocking for them to decide to leave their husbands and children for a journey that might take months. It was shocking that they would risk the dangers of traveling almost four thousand miles by sailing ship, and it was shocking that their husbands allowed it.



But even though it was shocking, the women set out. They hadn’t really known each other before the trip, but they shared the same faith, as well as a hard journey, and quickly became close friends.

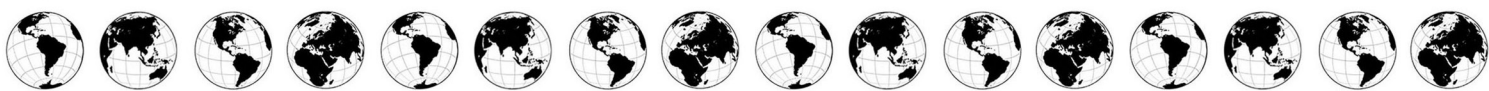


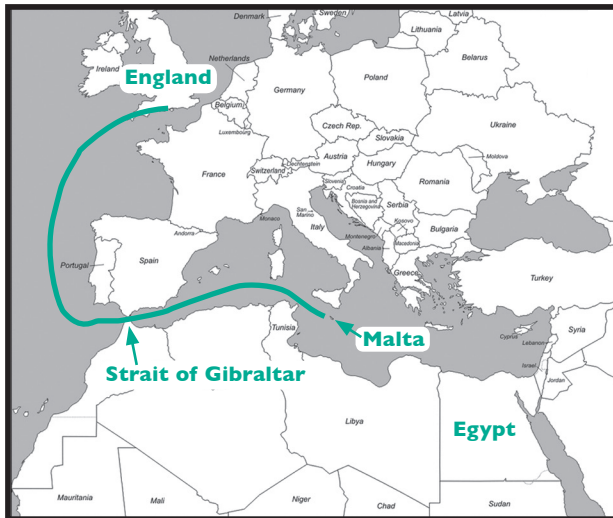
They started by sailing from England around the coasts of France, Portugal, and Spain, then through

the Strait of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea. In the middle of the Mediterranean, they stopped on the island of Malta, which is just south of Italy. At that time, Malta was a land that belonged to the Knights of Saint Thomas, an army of the Catholic Church.

Two Quaker missionaries were bound to find trouble in a land that was ruled by Catholics. After all, the reason that Quakers had started their own religion was because they didn’t want priests telling them what to believe about God. Telling people what to believe about God was exactly what Catholic priests were doing all over the world. Then Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers preached to the people of Malta that the Catholics were wrong.

At that time, something called “the Inquisition” was just coming to an end. For five hundred years, the Inquisition had captured, questioned, tortured, and





killed thousands of people who didn't agree with the Catholic Church. Because Evans and Cheevers were speaking against Catholic beliefs, the soldiers of the Inquisition threw the two women into prison.

United in their resolve, Evans and Cheevers refused to deny their Quaker faith, even when they were pressured by long days of hard questioning by the Inquisition. Finally, the Catholics said the women could go free if they would just kiss a crucifix to honor God, the way Catholics do. For Evans and Cheevers, a kiss like that would be like telling a lie. It would be like treating a statue as if it were God. As Quakers, they could not do that. So they refused to kiss the crucifix, and chose to spend three and a half years in prison instead.

The conditions in the prison were horrific. The women were placed in a cell that was so small and hot it sometimes made them faint. The jail was so full of gnats, and the women were stung so many times, that their faces swelled up and were hard to recognize. The food was so bad that the women became malnourished, and their hair fell out. At one point, Evans almost died from sickness.

One of their hardest trials was being away from their families for so long. The women both wrote letters home, and in those letters, they wrote a lot about their faith. Cheevers was especially worried about her family's relationship with God, because her husband and children did not share her Quaker faith.

Almost as hard as being away from their families was being away from each other. The Catholics locked the two women in separate cells for a year. Living completely alone was torture to each of them. But they managed to smuggle letters to each other, and they supported each other in their darkest hours. They called each other "Sister in Christ Jesus," and they kept their spiritual friendship strong.

Eventually, the Catholics gave up on trying to get the women to agree with Catholic beliefs. George Fox, Gilbert Lately, and other Quaker leaders kept writing the Catholics, asking for the women's freedom. Finally, in 1662, Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers were released from prison. On their journey back to England, they preached about their Quaker faith the whole way home.

- Tell about a time when a friend helped you get through something hard.
- Is there anything you think you would never do, that nobody could make you do?
- How can people use their friendships to make the world better?



The picture of early Quakers in worship was painted by Joseph Walter West in the early 1900s. The picture of Catholic soldiers taking possession of Malta in 1530 was painted by René Théodore Bertion in 1839. Both are in the public domain.

