

Ruth Graham, an evangelist's wife: Died June 14 at her home

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Ruth Bell Graham, 87, evangelist Billy Graham's independent and strong-willed wife, who had been plagued with ill health in recent years, died June 14 at her home in Montreat, North Carolina. Considered the intellectual of the family, she published several collections of poetry and prose. But she was better known for her determination to stay out of the limelight during her husband's long and celebrated career.

The daughter of Presbyterian missionaries to China, Graham maintained a strong commitment to her faith and found time for prayer and Bible study every day. Those habits influenced her five children, especially Anne Graham Lotz, who has modeled her mother's spiritual discipline in her career as a Bible teacher and evangelist to women.

With Billy Graham gone on average six months of the year, it fell to Ruth to discipline the children. One who gave her trouble was Franklin, who years later would succeed his father as head of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Once on a trip to nearby Asheville, Franklin got into a fight with his older sisters. His mother responded by pulling off to the side of the road, opening the trunk of the car and locking Franklin inside.

Ruth Graham was cautious of her husband's powerful connections to presidents and heads of state. She kicked her husband under the table when President Lyndon B. Johnson asked him who he thought his running mate should be. And when it was rumored that her husband was being asked to run for president, she called to tell him she would sooner divorce him.

Born in northern China, she was sent in 1937 by her family to Wheaton College, where she met her future husband. They wed six years later at Montreat Presbyterian Church.

When Billy Graham became a national celebrity in the late 1940s, Ruth made her peace with her role. In a 2002 interview she said, "God really prepared me as a young girl for a lifetime of saying goodbyes." Later in life, she gave her daughter Anne some advice: "Make the most of all that comes, and the least of all that goes."
-Religion News Service