

# COUNTING THE COST

*a memoir*

JILL  
DUGGAR

with  
Derick Dillard  
& Craig Borlase



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**COUNTING  
THE  
COST**



**JILL DUGGAR**

**WITH DERICK DILLARD AND CRAIG BORLASE**

**G**

**GALLERY BOOKS**

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To those who have been harmed in the name of “religion.” To those who have suffered behind closed doors and have yet to find their voice.

To those who have begun to find their voice but may still be living in a season of isolation.

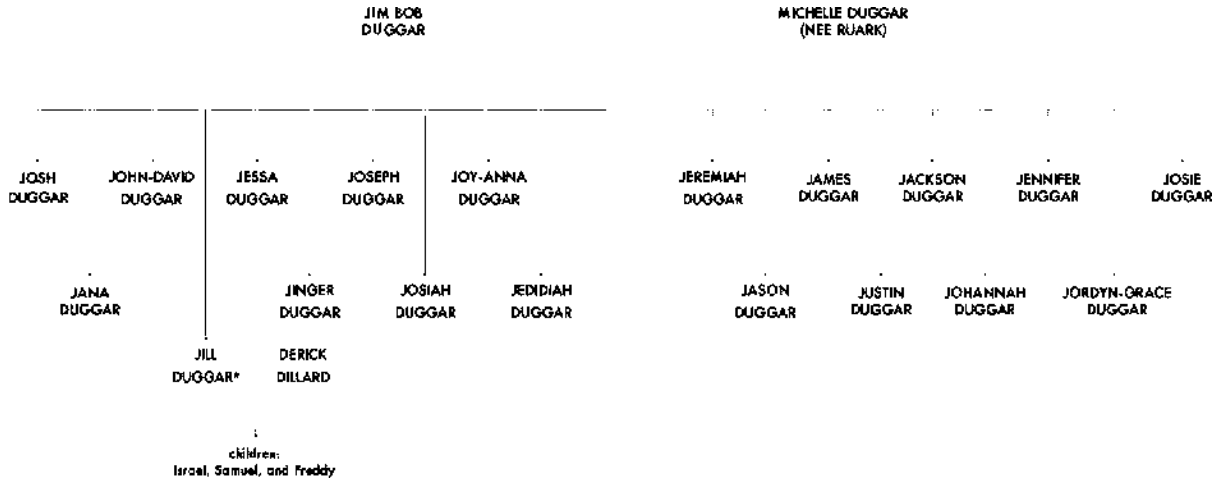
To those who like Esther of the Old Testament Bible story have courageously answered the call for “*such a time as this*” (Esther 4:14), and despite the backlash have now found their voice.

From victims and survivors, to strangers, family, and friends, this book is dedicated to you. May you all know that you are not alone. That your story, your voice, and your mental health matter.

*The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.*

—Psalm 9:9 ESV

# FAMILY TREE



For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

—LUKE 14:28-29

## PROLOGUE

# The Sled

*February 2, 2014—the Big House, Tontitown, Arkansas*

Technically, there was no problem with Derick and I being outside together that way. We weren't on a date or anything, so we didn't need a formal chaperone. Plus, there were easily a half dozen little Duggars running around out there with us, playing in the snow. We were safe. We were following all the courtship rules that my parents had encouraged us to write down—no holding hands, no in person, one-on-one conversations without another adult or mature chaperone present, no putting ourselves in a position where we could fall into temptation. All the same, I knew that people would be watching us. It was to be expected.

In between rides on the sled down the hill that runs away from the house, we were trading stories—Derick talking about the new job he was about to start, me telling him about my week as a student midwife. At some point the conversation was probably going to turn to the different wedding venues we'd been looking at. We were doing nothing unusual, nothing that any other couple of twentysomethings who are weeks away from getting engaged would hesitate to do. I was happy, at peace, and in love.

So I was surprised when I heard Mom call out, “Hey kids!” The snow was soaking up the sound, and it felt like the whole world was listening. When I turned to see her standing on the front porch, my stomach dropped. She was smiling that same smile the world has seen for years—a smile that's pure innocence but protects like a shield—and her voice was full of sweetness and joy. But I knew that voice well. By that point in my life I'd been obeying it for twenty-three years. I knew what was coming next.

“No boys and girls on the same sled!”

“Yes, ma'am,” I said, jumping off the sled immediately.

But Derick didn't move. At least, he didn't back away from the sled—the scene of our crime. Instead, he was looking around. He was trying to figure out who my mom could have been addressing like that. Some of those little Duggars, maybe? A second passed. Then another. Finally, he stopped searching. His face shifted from curiosity to something like bewilderment. He turned back to the Big House, called out, “I'm sorry, Mrs. Duggar,” and got to his feet.

I was grateful that he had gotten off on the other side of the sled from me, making sure it was between us—so that all the eyes that were currently upon us could see that we were not being disobedient.

“I'm sorry,” I said quietly to him. “I should have known better.”

Derick smiled. “It's no big deal, Jill. Really.” But the bewilderment was still there. I could see it in his eyes.

One thing about growing up in the Duggar family, I saw a lot of bewilderment in a lot of different people's eyes. Cameramen, journalists, everyday strangers in a store. There was always someone staring, always someone trying to figure out if we were for real.

For years, I didn't pay it much attention. I either brushed it off or told myself that people's confusion about Duggar family life was just another sign that we had been blessed by God with a wonderful opportunity to show the world how we live. On that day in the snowy front yard with the empty sled between us and all those eyes on Derick and me, I was unable to see things clearly. It was the same a month later, when Derick proposed to me and I made sure that when I said yes, the film crew got the shot just how they wanted it. I couldn't see my life from the outside.

It didn't stay that way.

Soon, the bewilderment would be mine.





## CHAPTER ONE

# Sweet Jilly Muffin

*Click.*

My parents didn't believe in magic. They didn't believe in dancing, either. But they understood the power of music. And like all magicians, they knew exactly when to wield it.

Just the sound of Mom loading a cassette into the tape player was enough to call us all to order. With one press of that button marked play, we would stop. We would listen. We would zip up our mouths, lock our feet on the ground and our eyes on Mom. We would be in her control completely, held by the three-second silence before the music would start, ready for whatever came next.

Sometimes it was a violin and a piano. Other times a rousing chorus of voices. On the rarest occasions we might hear drums, but only if they accompanied a marching band. It would take years before I would have the words to accurately describe and define the narrow genres of music we were allowed to listen to—a cappella hymns, southern gospel, certain classical pieces like Handel's Water Music. I was an adult by the time I could understand the reasons why these, and these alone, were the kinds of music that were allowed to fill the air of the Duggar household. But back then, in that sweaty living room, I didn't have any need for words. The music alone was enough.

I liked it best when Mom played "Ever in Joyful Song!" Almost immediately the violin was marching and spinning and twisting like a kite caught in a storm. All of us Duggar kids would get caught up in it, from my oldest brother, Josh, down to whichever baby would be old enough to rock on all fours, dribbling with delight.

At times, music was a distraction. Mom used it as a tool to break us out of a cranky mood or inject a little joy when it was needed. Other times she'd use it as a motivator to keep us on task as we folded laundry or unloaded groceries.

Whatever the reason for pressing play, she used it wisely. Music had power, and it could be turned off as easily as it was turned on. Especially if someone mentioned the D word.

“Look,” one of my younger siblings would say quietly to another little Duggar. “I’m dancing!”

*Click.*

Silence.

“Hey guys, listen,” Mom would say, her sweetest smile back once more. “We don’t dance. Remember, we want to be careful how we move our bodies, so we don’t draw attention to the wrong areas. It’s okay to jump for joy when we are excited, but we don’t dance.”

Most times the music would go back on, and we’d be allowed to continue. But if someone’s joy jumping got a little too physical, it was either Handel’s Water Music or game over: silence. Most of us Duggar kids knew the rules, but sometimes when friends were over, we had to stop because one of them was sticking their butt out, or—even worse—*shaking* it.

“We need to be very, very careful about the way that we move our bodies,” Mom would say. “If you’re shaking part of it, where do you think people will be drawn to look?”

We’d all chorus the answer together: “The part you’re shaking.”

“That’s right. And you don’t want people looking at your bottom, do you? You don’t want people thinking bad thoughts about you, right?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Remember what happened when King David was dancing in the street after returning with the Ark of the Covenant?”

“His wife despised him.”

“That’s right. He was dancing *and* he was immodestly dressed, and his wife despised him for it. Let’s all remember that. When we are having fun, let’s make sure that we don’t move in a way that draws people’s attention to places it shouldn’t.”

By the end of the talk, there was no more jumping.

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Dancing was off-limits, so I learned from a young age how to be a hunter.

We lived in Springdale, Arkansas, a city of about 70,000 at the foothills of the Ozark Mountains, in a little house set on three quarters of an acre next to a

church. There were cow pastures all around us, and being homeschooled like we were, we spent a lot of our days outside, drinking in that wholesome, northwestern Arkansas air. But I didn't hunt with a gun and I didn't lay traps. Instead of rabbit or quail, it was approval that I was searching for. And by the time I was old enough to balance a baby on my hip while I folded laundry—which I'm guessing was sometime around seven or eight years old—I was hands down the best approval hunter in the whole Duggar family.



OLAN MILLS

*Jim Bob and Michelle, Josh, Jana, John-David, and Jill*

When it came to getting a nod of acknowledgment or appreciation from Mom or Pops at the dinner table, or—best of all—being singled out for direct praise for listening intently while sitting perfectly quiet and perfectly still on one of the mauve-pink living room chairs during family Bible time at the end of the day, I tried my hardest to stand out as the most mature child in the room. Whenever the tape player was turned on and we were jumping for joy, I always made sure that my movements were perfectly modest and that my jumping was perfectly straight. There was no wiggle whatsoever in my butt, no risk at all that the music would be turned off on my account.

“Stop, guys!” Pops might say when it was Bible time and Joy would be doing somersaults on the floor, and the twins—either set—would be wrestling for the best position on the couch. “You look like a can of worms! Look at Jill. She’s got her notebook and Bible out and she’s ready to go.”

I wanted to be the good girl. I tried to be the perfect daughter. And my goal to be good and perfect even earned me a special pet name that only my parents

used. I was *Sweet Jilly Muffin*, the fourth born, second daughter in the family. “Oh yeah,” Pops would say whenever he was asked about his kids and he thought none of us were listening, “Jill’s so sweet, so kind and caring. Out of all my daughters, she’s the most like Michelle.”

For an approval hunter like me, being compared to my mom like that was the greatest prize I could ever wish for. Mom was calm, self-sacrificing, and entirely loving. She seemed nearly incapable of anger or bitterness, and the love she had for her family only ever grew larger. With every new birth and additional sibling welcomed into the Duggar family, my respect and admiration for my mom only ever increased.

And Pops—my dad—Jim Bob Duggar? Well, that story’s not too different either. From a young age I looked up to him. Just before our family reached double digits, he started bringing a few of us older kids with him to work at his car lot to give mom a break and have some quality time with us older ones. He loved spending time with us and told us often that we were his number one hobby. I never tired of being around him, and it was a treat whenever we got to go with him to work. I’d watch him interact with customers—treating them well, being honest about the vehicles he was selling, and going the extra mile to help make things right on the rare occasion he ended up selling a lemon—and I knew that he was a good man. He was the same honest, upstanding, Christian man at work as he was whenever he was talking to us kids at home. He was the head of our household, and that was the way it was supposed to be.



*Jill and Jinger, mid-1990s*

So being Sweet Jilly Muffin was easy for me. The role of perfect daughter didn't feel like a role at all. It was who I was, who I wanted to be. In a family with as many kids as we had—twelve by the time I was nine years old—chaos was never too far away, and the opportunities to help out and be of service to the family were ever present. There was always a younger sibling who needed feeding, dressing or bathing, and when I'd helped all I could, I would play by filling an old medicine dropper bottle with watered-down Kool Aid, put it in my kid-sized apron with a few other items from my nurse playset, and do my rounds.

“Are you okay?” I'd ask each of my siblings in turn. “Do you feel sick at all? Let me give you a little something to help.”

I was delighted when my parents introduced what became known as the buddy system. Each of us older kids would be given a younger sibling to help feed, dress and bathe, as well as to sit next to and buckle up when we went out anywhere in our fifteen-passenger van. I was the first one to sign up and get my own buddy, and I happily looked after my little sister Joy from when she was

around one year old, and then my brother James when he came along. I was a ten-year-old girl whose parents trusted her with their precious babies. I felt like a little mom. I couldn't have been happier.

Mom was the most amazing teacher. Whether it was making flaky pie crusts for Pops' favorite pumpkin pies, or learning how to curl my hair just right, I relished any opportunity to learn from her. Spending time with Mom made me deeply happy, and an invitation to join her for a one-on-one outing to run errands—which often meant staying out way past bedtime—would leave me smiling inside for days.

Mom was a role model too. She always prioritized us kids and would wake up around the clock to care for us if we were sick. Even when she was sick herself she'd be awake all hours, dosing meds, handing out Popsicles, and bringing us wet rags to cool our fevers. In the highs as well as the lows, she taught me what it means to be a mother.

All I had to do to gain my parents' approval was to behave in a way Mom and Pops expected. And in the Duggar household, there were opportunities to remind us kids of those expectations and rules from sunup to sundown. Mom homeschooled us during the day, and Pops rounded off each evening by sitting in the living room or in the hallway between the girls' and boys' bedrooms and reading from the Bible as he talked to us about character and sin and everything else that mattered in life.

As a young child, I never experienced my parents as overbearing or domineering. Instead, in my young eyes, they were about as loving and fun and wonderful as any girl could hope for. At the end of each day they'd write us notes, affirming and encouraging us for whatever we'd done well that day—being kind to a sibling, working hard at our schoolwork, making the extra effort to help out. I never felt the need to push against their rules, and I never found either of my parents restrictive or constraining. If anything, I was grateful for the boundaries they laid down for our family. Even though I knew my parents were powerful and able to protect us, I was aware that there was a world beyond the land we lived on or the used car lot that Pops owned. And that world, as they reminded us over and over, was full of dangers and temptations and traps. Out there, my parents' protection could only go so far.

“Careful, girls! Let's be modest! Keep your dress down or tucked into your pantaloons.”

Pops didn't have to remind us often, but sometimes when we'd be heading out on a bike ride, one of my younger sisters might need to be told. Whenever that happened, I'd check myself as a matter of course. Most of us would. We knew how important modesty was. None of us wanted to be accused of being "revealing."

As girls, Mom made almost all our clothes, and we only ever wore full-length skirts or dresses. All that dress fabric made cycling difficult, so Mom made us all full-length pantaloons to wear underneath. I appreciated my parents' careful eyes as they checked us for modesty. As I grew older, the fear that I might be immodest and cause someone to think bad thoughts would only get stronger.

It was even more difficult to stay modest the first time we went to a beach. We were visiting family in Savannah, Georgia, and took a trip to the beach one day. It was hot, and even though I was eight or nine, it was my first time seeing the ocean, my first time tasting salty air or feeling the sand between my toes. My first steps were cautious, like an astronaut on a new planet, but I loved it instantly.

But I was also troubled.

That trip to the beach was my first time seeing so many people wearing bathing suits in public. Even though my parents had been careful to take us to the quietest corner of the quietest beach, I could still see people in the distance wearing what looked to me like practically nothing—a few couples, lots of families. I didn't want to get any bad thoughts into my head, so I tried not to stare. But it was hard not to, and I worried for Pops and my brothers. Us girls had been told often how much harder it was for boys to keep their thoughts pure. I couldn't imagine the battles they were fighting out there on the sand.

Still, the beach was a new experience for all of us kids, and it brought out a different side of my parents as well. Soon they were caught up in the fun of the moment, cheering the little ones along as they ran and tumbled and played tag with the waves. We were all having fun playing in the shallow water, and like my parents, I got a little lost in the moment too.

The spell broke when I saw someone walking over toward us. It was a girl about my age, and she was heading right for us, riding the small waves on her boogie board.



“Why are you wearing those clothes to swim?” she said when she was close enough to get a good look at us. “Why are you not wearing bathing suits?”

“Uh, well,” I said, caught between the fear of a lie and the awkwardness of talking to someone who was wearing little more than underwear in public. “We didn’t plan on coming here so we didn’t bring anything else with us.”

The girl stared at me for a while. She took in my long dress with its now sandy hem and my blouse with its sleeves that reached almost to my elbows. I tried not to look at her golden skin. I kept my eyes on the waves instead.

I was grateful when the questions stopped and she ran back to the waves.

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That day on the beach wasn’t the first time I talked with someone who was so different from me, but it’s one of the earlier memories that stands out the most. It was one of the first moments that I remember feeling awkward about the difference between the safety of my family and the strange lands beyond it. I tried not to dwell on it too much. I told myself that whenever we were in situations like that where we stood out, it was an opportunity to be a positive example to others just by living life and showing others how true, conservative Christians should live—set apart and unpolluted by the world.



2001

We had a decent amount of friends, but those that we spent the most time with were all people my parents knew from our home church or were people with similar beliefs. On the rare occasions that I was given permission to visit one of their houses for a play date without my parents—though never on my

own, always in the company of one or two of my siblings—I started noticing little things.

Some families listened to music that had drums in it.

Some allowed their girls to wear cycling shorts when it was hot and they were having a water fight outside.

Some homes had a TV.

And some kids even talked to me about having friends who went to public schools.

Instead of needing to keep any of this secret, I was grateful that my parents were happy for me to tell them whatever I had seen or heard when I was away from home. It was clear that they had thought carefully about how they wanted to raise us, and so they always had time for a discussion about the differences between our family and others—even though they took different approaches.

My parents liked to use role-play to prepare us for life.

“Okay,” Mom would say at random, many times each week, usually during family Bible time in the evening. “What if somebody comes up to you and says, *Hey Joseph, why don’t you read this book right here? It’s got a witch in it.* What do you say?”

Joseph would deliver his line, right on cue: “I’m a Christian. I’m not able to do that.”

“That’s good Joseph. And what about you, Jinger? What would you say if someone asked you to watch a movie with them? The kind with people who are immodestly dressed.”

“I would say. *I’m sorry. I’m a Christian. I’m not able to do that.*”

Mom’s smile would turn up extra bright and we’d all get a clap. “That’s right! And remember what we say to ourselves about the choices in front of us?”

This time it would be on all of us to reply, our voices singsonging in unison.

“Others may, we may not.”

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Mom’s way of instructing us was true to who she is—a homemaker and full-time mama who knew how to nurture her babies with patience. Pops joined in the role-play games as well, but his approach was slightly different. He operated like a teacher or preacher, using illustrations to make his point, but mixed in a

little politician and salesman who knows how to work a room. When it was his turn to mold us into the young men and women he envisioned, he was able to capture our imaginations by breaking down the challenges ahead of us into simple, binary choices.

“You’ve got the world over here,” he would say during Bible time, holding his left arm far away from his body. “And then,” thrusting his right hand far out in the other direction, “Christianity is over here. There’s a line between them. Do you want to get as close to that line as you can? Do you want to walk so near to it that you might possibly be pulled into the world? Or do you want to steer as far away from it as you can get?”

“I want you to picture yourself on a table,” he would explain. “It’s much easier for somebody to pull you off the table than for you to pull them up. Now picture yourself with two or three people up there on the table with you. Maybe then it’s a little harder for someone to pull you down, and a little easier for you to pull that person up on the table with you. That’s how it is in life, and it’s why you need to be careful who you spend your time with. Like my mom always told me, show me your friends and I’ll show you your future.”

His lessons made an impact on me. They worked on my siblings as well, because whenever Pops was talking with us like this—his voice a blend of warmth and warning—the whole room was silent. There were lots of mini sermons and stories, but one always stood out more than most.

“I was about twelve or thirteen when I went to a seminar,” Pops told us. “That was when I first heard about the power of music and the dangers of rock and roll. It’s not just the lyrics but the music itself. When the drums get going, that backbeat has so much power over us. It can control us. That night, when I arrived home, I realized that the music I had been listening to was not Christ-honoring, because it was basically rock music with Christian words added on. I felt so convicted that I immediately got my eight tracks and took a hammer and busted them up.”

I didn’t know what an eight track was at first until Pops explained it, and I’d only ever heard rock music when we were out at a parade or a fair. Even my exposure to contemporary Christian music was limited at that time in my life. But I was captivated by the image of Pops being not much older than me, destroying his entire music collection because he wanted to follow God’s lead in his life and live like a Christian should—set apart, with convictions. He had

said that I was like my mom, but there were so many things about my dad that I wanted to emulate too.

The story became a kind of legend in our house, and we heard Pops repeat it often. We liked that it was both practical and inspirational and we could apply it to our own lives. We liked the idea of Dad taking a hammer to the devil like that, and we liked it because it marked the beginning of our family's involvement with a man named Bill Gothard, the man who had delivered the seminar that had made such an impact on Pops. Gothard was the founder and leader of IBLP (the Institute in Basic Life Principles), and eventually, when the film crews and excited whispers and stares from fans became a staple of our lives, the relationship between Pops and Gothard and his organization would become increasingly significant. And increasingly complicated.

But back in the days before we were on TV, things were simpler for us Duggars. We put into practice the lessons that Mom and Dad were teaching us, and we found our own ways of emulating our parents. For a while, all of us older kids and our friends formed different clubs, like the What Would Jesus Do Club, where a bunch of my sisters and a few friends would gather to make WWJD bracelets and talk about handing them out to people. There was another group formed in which us girls all read and discussed a book called *Beautiful Girlhood*. My sister Jana also formed a club that met in the shed and ate ice cream. I went to all of them regularly, especially Jana's.

These clubs were good, but the one I really wanted to join wouldn't let me in. And that bothered me.

One evening during Bible time, Pops told us that the local gas station had started selling pornography. We were all shocked and upset, and my older brothers Josh and John were determined to do something about it. They invited Steffan and Jeremiah, two of their fellow homeschool friends, and formed the Boys Christian Outreach Team—known as the Boycott Club for short. Their mission was clear: they planned to buy a load of Christian tracts—small leaflets explaining how to become a Christian—hand them out in town, and try to persuade everyone they knew to boycott the gas station. And if that wasn't enough, there was even a rumor that every time they met, they were going to eat pickles, *and* that Josh was going to cover them with his own homemade seasoning salt—a legendary recipe that Josh made himself with