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“A page-turning biography of Elsie Robinson (1883–1956), a prominent 20th-century journalist and cartoonist... This entertaining account delivers.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“*Listen, World!* is the rarest of things — a lively piece of unknown history, a marvelous story of a woman’s triumph, and a tremendous read.”

—*Susan Orlean, New York Times bestselling author of The Library Book*

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# Listen, World!

*How the Intrepid Elsie Robinson Became  
America’s Most-Read Woman*

By Julia Scheeres and Allison Gilbert

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**The first biography of Elsie Robinson, the most influential newspaper columnist you’ve never heard of**

100 years ago, a decade before Gloria Steinem was born and forty years before Betty Friedan identified “the problem that has no name,” American newspaper columnist **Elsie Robinson** pushed readers to rethink gender inequality. “I’m tired of hearing the differences of men and women emphasized and exploited,” she wrote in 1922. “It has built a wicked wall between the sexes and it’s time we knocked it down.”

**A writer who used her national platform to defy social mores, Robinson’s “Listen, World!” column reached more than 20 million readers, making her one of the most famous people in the country. But she’s been largely forgotten.**

Now, *New York Times* best-selling author **Julia Scheeres** and award-winning journalist **Allison Gilbert** have written the **first biography** of this remarkable pioneer. Their cinematic narrative weaves meticulous research with Robinson’s own inspiring words, taken from her columns, interviews, books, and letters—most never digitized or previously available to today’s readers.

Born in the Victorian era to a poor family in Benicia, California, Robinson was **expected to want nothing more than a husband and children**. But she dreamed of a different life—one as a professional writer. At 35, desperately poor following a bitter divorce that made her the sole caretaker of her chronically ill son, she

(Over)

became the lone female mucker in a California gold mine, and spent her evenings typing up short stories and essays as she tried to break into the publishing industry. Her hard work paid off. In 1924, **media powerhouse William Randolph Hearst hired** Robinson and made her the highest-paid woman writer in his company. For more than 30 years, Robinson shared her blistering and unapologetic opinions in support of women's rights and immigrants; deriding capital punishment, racism, and anti-Semitism; and urging women to realize bigger, more fulfilling lives. She made history by being one of the first columnists in the country to also draw her own accompanying editorial cartoons.

In ***LISTEN, WORLD!: How the Intrepid Elsie Robinson Became America's Most-Read Woman*** (Seal Press; **September 27, 2022**), Scheeres and Gilbert seek to rescue this heroine from obscurity, shining a light on her remarkable body of work and the heartbreaking paths she took to become one of the most prominent writers in America.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Julia Scheeres** is the *New York Times*–bestselling author of the memoir *Jesus Land* and *A Thousand Lives: The Untold Story of Jonestown*. She lives in Northern California.

**Allison Gilbert** is an award-winning journalist and author of numerous books including *Passed and Present* and *Parentless Parents*. She lives outside New York City.

#### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

##### **LISTEN, WORLD!**

**How the Intrepid Elsie Robinson Became America's Most-Read Woman**

**By Julia Scheeres and Allison Gilbert**

**Published by Seal Press**

**Publication date: September 27, 2022**

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## Additional praise for *Listen, World!*

“Memoirist Scheeres and journalist Gilbert deliver a page-turning biography of Elsie Robinson (1883–1956), a prominent 20th-century journalist and cartoonist... The account is enlivened with copious excerpts from Robinson’s column and her memoir, all of which bring home her firebrand style. This entertaining account delivers.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“A fascinating topic and solid biography that should please women’s history fans.”

—*Booklist*

“*Listen, World!* is the rarest of things — a lively piece of unknown history, a marvelous story of a woman's triumph, and a tremendous read. Scheeres and Gilbert have managed the trifecta, and we readers are the better for it.”

—*Susan Orlean, New York Times bestselling author of The Library Book*

“If you are a fan of spunky, spitfire heroines in the tradition of Hester Prynne, Elizabeth Bennett and Jo March, you will love the true story of Elsie Robinson. Robinson was a maverick who chased wild dreams of adventure and independence instead of surrendering to her wealthy but soul-crushing husband – and ended up as one of the highest-paid, most-read writers in America. Like Elsie herself, *Listen, World!* is **broadminded, sharp-witted, fast-paced, and funny**. It reads like a breezy novel that lingers long after you’ve read the last page. **I loved every word of it.**”

—*Debbly Applegate, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and author of Madam*

“Open this **well-crafted and entertaining** biography and it will become abundantly clear why Elsie Robinson was once one of this nation’s most celebrated and beloved columnists. Julia Scheeres and Allison Gilbert’s teamwork resurrects the life and work of this dauntless twentieth-century newspaperwoman, from her days toiling deep down in a gold mine to the heights of stardom in the Hearst newspaper galaxy. **For decades, readers by the millions turned to Robinson for a dash of hope and a dose of encouragement. Now thanks to Scheeres and Gilbert, millions of twenty-first century readers can too.**”

—*James McGrath Morris, author of Pulitzer*

“A riveting story about a woman who had nerve.”

—*Jill Abramson, former executive editor of the New York Times and author of Merchants of Truth*

“The long-forgotten ‘most interesting woman in the world’ **comes vividly to life in this captivating new biography**. The multi-talented Elsie Robinson would have been a pioneering and estimable person had she lived today; that she became a revered journalistic and literary voice at a time when women were marginalized is testament to her force of nature. *Listen, World!* is **an important read** particularly as we work to bolster women's overlooked place in history.”

—*Lisa Napoli, author of Susan, Linda, Nina & Cokie*

**A Conversation with Julia Scheeres and Allison Gilbert**  
**Authors of *LISTEN, WORLD!***

(Seal Press | On sale: September 27, 2022 | Hardcover | ISBN: 9781541600775)

**Q: This is the first biography of Elsie Robinson. How did you discover her?**

**A:** After Allison's mother died, she found a folded-up piece of onionskin paper hidden inside a book that had belonged to her. It was a poem, plunked out with an old-fashioned typewriter, attributed to a woman she'd never heard of, Elsie Robinson. The poem was full of tough-love and compassion and Allison found the words comforting and healing. (You can read the poem, PAIN, beginning on Page 263.) Allison has kept this fragile piece of paper for 26 years. It was Allison's curiosity about Elsie Robinson that set the course for writing this biography.

**Q: Elsie was the most well-read woman columnist in America. Why has she been forgotten?**

**A:** There has been a steady erasure of women's histories over time. A study by the National Women's History Museum found that only 24 percent of all the historical figures studied K-12 are women. Education experts say that this sidelining of women is because curriculum standards in public schools are "doggedly masculine." The focus on military, political, and economic history marginalizes the areas where women have been the most active and powerful, including civil rights, labor rights, immigration, the arts, and journalism.

**Q: What were some of the obstacles Elsie faced on the path to achieving her dream?**

**A:** As a woman born in the Victorian era (1883) there were many. Chief among them were societal pressures on women to marry and have children. Being a wife and mother were considered a woman's ultimate life goal, yet Elsie did both and still felt unsatisfied. Her husband had a life outside the home – a career and hobbies – and she wanted the same. It was only after she exploded her domestic life – leaving her husband, facing down poverty and even scraping by for years as a gold miner – that she found success as a writer. She took huge risks in life, but ultimately they paid off.

**Q: Elsie's "Listen, World!" column attracted more than 20 million readers. What was unique about her writing?**

**A:** Elsie had a unique voice – by turns funny, angry or provocative – but always approachable. She wrote smartly and convincingly about the topics of the day, sometimes taking controversial stances. She always advocated for the underdog, including women, people of color, and other marginalized groups. She was also fabulously adept at using various forms of writing – columns, short stories, poetry, essays – to voice her opinions and perspectives.

**Q: Elsie spent her entire career seizing opportunities and defying convention. What can women today learn from her?**

**A:** Her story is incredibly inspirational. Despite not having a college degree, not being an insider, and not being wealthy, she forged ahead with her dream and became a famous columnist and writer through her monumental grit and determination. If she did this in the 1920s, when there were so many more obstacles barring women from professional success, what's holding us back, 100 years later?

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## Events for Listen, World!

<u>National Press Club Journalism Institute</u>	Virtual	9/13/2022
In conversation with <b>Connie Schultz</b> (columnist, <i>USA Today</i> ), <b>Soraya Chemaly</b> (author, <i>Rage Becomes Her</i> ), <b>Dana Rubin</b> (founder, <i>Speaking While Female</i> ), and <b>Deborah Douglas</b> (co-editor in chief, <i>The Emancipator</i> )		
<u>Bronx River Books</u>	Scarsdale, NY	9/28/2022
In conversation with <b>Sharon Dizenhuz</b> , podcast host and former anchor, NY1		
<u>California Historical Society</u>	San Francisco, CA	9/29/2022
In conversation with <b>Heather Knight</b> , columnist, <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>		
<u>San Francisco Public Library</u>	San Francisco, CA	10/1/2022
In conversation with <b>Julia Flynn Siler</b> , author of <i>The White Devil's Daughters</i>		
<u>National Women's History Museum</u>	Virtual	10/2/2022
In conversation with <b>Debbie Millman</b> , host of <i>Design Matters</i>		
<u>Oakland Public Library</u>	Oakland, CA	10/2/2022
In conversation with <b>Liam O'Donoghue</b> , host of <i>East Bay Yesterday</i>		
<u>Benicia Public Library</u>	Benicia, CA	10/3/2022
<u>Politics and Prose</u>	Washington, DC	10/8/2022
In conversation with <b>Kitty Kelley</b> , celebrity biographer		
<u>Greedy Reads</u>	Baltimore, MD	10/9/2022
In conversation with <b>Leslie Gray Streeter</b> , columnist, <i>Baltimore Banner</i>		
<u>Books and Books Key West</u>	Virtual	10/11/2022
In conversation with <b>Christina Baker Kline</b> , author of <i>The Exiles</i>		
<u>Society of Illustrators</u>	Virtual	10/12/2022
In conversation with <b>Liza Donnelly</b> , <i>New Yorker</i> cartoonist		
<u>Kinderhook Library</u>	Kinderhook, NY	10/13/2022
<u>Brattleboro Literary Festival</u>	Brattleboro, VT	10/15/2022
<u>Litquake</u>	San Francisco, CA	10/18/2022

## Events (continued)

<u>Watchung Booksellers</u>	Montclair, NJ	10/20/2022
In conversation with <b>Kate Zernike</b> , national correspondent, <i>New York Times</i>		
<u>Jacob Burns Film Center</u>	Pleasantville, NY	11/2/2022
In conversation with <b>Pamela Paul</b> ( <i>Opinion</i> columnist, <i>New York Times</i> ) and <b>Lisa Belkin</b> (former columnist, <i>New York Times</i> ), with a special screening of the classic movie "His Girl Friday" with Cary Grant		
<u>Hudson Valley Writers Center</u>	Sleepy Hollow, NY	11/6/2022
<u>New York Public Library</u>	New York, NY	11/9/2022
In conversation with <b>Sunny Hostin</b> , co-host of ABC's <i>The View</i>		
<u>Irvington Public Library</u>	Irvington, NY	11/10/2022
<u>New-York Historical Society</u>	New York, NY	11/18/2022
<u>Shames JCC on the Hudson</u>	Tarrytown, NY	12/3/2022
A special evening with <b>Zibby Owens</b> , Host of <i>Moms Don't Have Time to Read Books</i> podcast and author of <i>Bookends: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Literature</i>		
<u>Doylestown Bookshop</u>	Doylestown, PA	12/16/2022

Select editorial cartoons  
by Elsie Robinson



February 8, 1921



May 22, 1926



September 2, 1924



May 18, 1923