

Prologue

I was born in 1927 off the edge of the known world, in a land so foreign to the rest of the then civilized world that the answer to the call of faith to that place was considered a wonder, a miracle of faith. It was to Tibet, the Forbidden Kingdom, that my parents and the other missionaries went, to the remote high reaches of the snows of the Himalayas. To go there meant to endure hardships impossible to imagine, a life style so different among a people of strange customs and religion, and an isolation from all that was familiar and dear. Yet they went and this is their story, the story of their lives among the Tibetans, the Chinese and the Chinese-Tibetans.

It includes some of the story of the children, the Missionary Kids (MKs). For us, the MKs, it meant lives forever shaped by our beginnings in this beloved land, forever different from our contemporaries in our parents' homeland.

The miracle for us was that we loved the life we had there as children. This was not always true for all MKs. It was not strange for us that the children there were darker-skinned, that their language which we spoke with them was different from the language we spoke with our parents. We loved the snowy mountains, the wide-swept grasslands, the times of visiting our friends and their parents in their mud-walled homes. The manure piles under the ladder leading up to their living quarters were not noxious, but the usual sight.

We loved to go on picnics with a donkey loaded with pots and food, the gardener and cook plodding along with us to make the fire and boil the water for tea. Out to the steppes sweeping up to the high ranges, waiting on a ridge, perhaps the Elephant's Nose, overlooking the river valley below for Daddy to bring back the pheasants and quail. We loved the thrill of stories around the dinner table of the leopards prowling the grassland just beyond our compound wall. We worried with our parents when the postman was late coming over the pass - had a snow storm or robbers caught him?

Such joy when the postman got through with letters and packages, comics from America, tins of food, clothes and toys for us! Even when soldiers came and fighting was going on, we were sheltered by the love and care of the Heavenly Father our parents told us about; sheltered by the love and care naturally given to children by the Orientals, particularly those who had become Christian.

What could children know of the harshness of life or its differences from America when we were surrounded by family and friends? When we were 'home' in America we no longer had both parents at home daily, other people despised our life style as 'church-

mouse' poor, we were not dressed as well as the other children. A mission box received in America was a sign of our poverty one received in Batang a sign of our wealth.

This story is a true love story - not only the love story of those whom for their God carried His Love to this remote edge of the earth. It is also the true love story of these couples for each other, love necessary to carry them to the Tibetans to sustain them in their work and lives to insure that the Good News would thrive.

You, dear readers, also need to know that the TCM was started by members of the first 'church' to be formed solely in the USA. They refused for over a century to be called a denomination and certain of the churches still style themselves, non- or un - denominational. This church is now divided into three separate groups, but at its creation in the early 1800s the church's purpose was to unite all Christians and do away with all the harsh lines of demarcation that marked the universal church.

Other histories have been written of these beginnings and the divisions that gradually occurred. Many have grown up to regret these divisions in our own church. The story of the Tibetan Christian Mission the TCM has to include some of the heartbreak of that division. We called ourselves the 'Christian Church' - not the only Christians, but Christians only. Our title now; Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) refers to that group that believes in cooperative missions. The mission boards that were formed did so to meet the needs of missionaries and indigenous Christians: for financial, educational, and moral support for democratic organizational, cooperative interchange and religious counseling and prayer support.

The original board working with the TCM was the Foreign Christian Missionary Society (FCMS). Reorganization in the 1920s formed several boards into the United Christian Missionary Society (UCMS). Its purpose was to coordinate the work of the many missions over all the world. All this was founded on the enduring call of Jesus Christ to "go into all the world and preach the gospel". This call has never faltered, but, from time to time, was renewed in vision to fit the changing times and meet the new challenges.

That the mission finally closed is not just the fault of the Great Depression nor of the Japanese invasion and World War II. Sun Yat Sen's revolution against the Empress and the corruption of the Manchu bureaucracy was the beginning of the long revolution of the Chinese people, which is not over yet today. This is one search for freedom from oppressive government. World events have signaled the anguish of the other oppressed peoples for the true freedom which the Christian faith wants to bring to them. Its fire yet brightly burns.

These journeys into the past seem to be accompanied by the spirits of our parents. I know my father, as well as Dr. Osgood, wanted to write this story - so, here it is, Dad! The pain you shrunk from inflicting can now be laid to rest. For us, the MKs, the love and courage the little band of missionaries at Batang gave to their work is more important than any of the 'scandal'!

I am a part of that group of MKs of Batang; I have been privileged to have met most of the MKs and the grand-children that are still alive. We are identified together only by the accident of birth or presence in that tiny town of Batang far across China among the Tibetans. Now, for some of us an interest in our inheritance has brought us to make this journey into the past. It has not always been easy, but it has been fascinating! As the weeks, months and years of research and writing go by I wonder if I will get lost in that past so familiar and yet so far away and so long ago.

Some of it is tortuous and heart-breaking, but the recognition of the strength we inherited from our parents we can use to bring ourselves and our descendants courage for the future. Also, recognizing the love which made their humanity compassionate we can build into our futures that Flame they followed.

Their work was begun and carried on during a time of great upheavals of society, both East and West. That these surges have not yet subsided but only changed in form, makes the challenge unending. That this challenge is not only sociological, but also scientific, economic, as well as religious, has changed the face of our society. Like ants in front of a broom it is not surprising that this one little mission was swept into the dustbin - what is surprising is that those ants survived to make an impact on their world!

This story is of that little mission, the Tibetan Christian Mission (TCM), the furthest outpost of the Christian faith on the western edge of China among the Tibetans. This story began officially in 1903 when Susie Rijnhart, a young widowed doctor from Canada returned with Dr. Albert and Flora Shelton of Kansas traveling to the border town of Tachienlu. But this was not the first trip for Dr. Susie, for the story actually started earlier when she had married Petrus Rijnhart a Dutchman, and had gone out with him on his second trip to Tibet.

So, in the beginning was Petrus, one man, in 1891, who caught fire to the challenge of that Flame to go to the uttermost ends of the earth with his faith. That Flame carried him into Inner Tibet and eventually to his death. Because of him others followed and the Flame of that faith burned brightly for almost half a century drawing others into its light and warmth. It was not extinguished by the snows and ice

of the Himalayas, not by the robbers nor the wars, including World Wars I and II, and the Communist invasion can only temporarily dim its light - a light that still flickers. It still flickers in those who followed after. This is their story.