



*Photo by Stormi Greener*

## WANDERINGS

*By Marjorie I. Bly*

Moses would have understood about taking the #11 bus as he wandered, on foot, through the wilderness for more than forty years. He learned, as have I, many lessons from the people with whom he lived and from his God (and mine) who talked daily with him. God guided and instructed Moses for before the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, their adopted country, to their current homeland, to go from Egypt to a new land.

Moses asked, "How will I know what to do?"

And God told him, "Just do . . . I am with you!"

God didn't even suggest that the journey would not be easy and it wasn't. Moses sometimes made mistakes ---of hand, of foot, of mouth, of temper.

So it has been for me - God has been - and still is - with me all the way, every day.

Of course I cannot compare myself with Moses, the great leader on that forty years wandering. But I can claim the Presence of God all the way, especially during periods of weakness, willfulness, stubbornness.

Friends asked, "How can you be a missionary? You don't play the piano, you don't sing, you don't speak, you don't ride a bicycle?" God provided Aaron - substitutes "all the way"!

I do not recall the situation of "the call". There was no visible "burning bush". However the goal became increasingly clear.

As the first child (of six) I was not a son but a daughter, born into a Christian family nurtured in the Lutheran faith, enjoying the majesty of hymns, the steadfastness of the liturgy, the festivity of the Church calendar and the encouragement through times of education and training.

The word of God became personal; to be absorbed by and applied to my life.

Both parents came from frugal families learning to enjoy God's nature -- flowers, trees, birds, the stars. Both had received education to be teachers. Each did teach professionally, but as the family increased, my mother assumed the major portion of teaching their children respect, responsibility, orderly routines, regard for health and home, often with repeated adages -- "use your head, save your feet."

Each child had a personality to be dealt with. We were seldom quiet, submissive, sharing. We learned how to plan a project, think through the course of action, and reach the goal.

After the mealtime dishes were washed, the dining table became our school lesson center for preparations. On one occasion my father heard us chattering about “millions”. He provided the three oldest children with paper and pencil and told us each to write numbers from one to one million.

We didn’t finish, but we learned the lesson - and we didn’t talk “millions”.

Each parent answered our questions, provided guidance, assistance, encouragement and helped us recover from disappointments; but neither set a particular goal nor told any one of us what we must strive to become when we “grew up”. The two youngest died in infancy. Of the four oldest one became a newspaper reporter, one became a doctor (cancer research), one became a professional Navy man and I became a nurse. Along with routine education, we each participated in and enjoyed the adventures and altruism of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

As a college professor, my father had occasional opportunity to bring international visiting professors into our home. One, who impressed me most, came from India. Before I finished high school I had read all the school library’s books on India -- biographies, geography, adventure, social problems.

Did this provide direction to overseas service? Among women and children? Inquiries revealed that our Lutheran Synod did not have an established mission field in India.

I was graduated from a for year college course, majoring in biology and in sociology. Then proceeded to a nursing school from which I was graduated after three years.

First I served as College nurse for one school year. During two summers I worked in a camp for underprivileged children and then one year as a pediatrics ward nurse.

During these years I kept in touch with the Mission Division. Military nursing and airline stewardess options were also considered. There still was war in 1944.

A final choice was made for nursing service in China and the church service - of - commissioning was held in the spring of 1946. A shipping strike delayed travel but finally in September 1946, about 40 Lutherans joined 600 other missionaries and several hundred returning Chinese students at the San Francisco City Auditorium for a memorable farewell service with everyone singing “Lead on O King Eternal”. Each of us had been given an orchid by the Japanese Community.

The next day we all boarded the USS Marine Lynx -- a converted army transport ship bound for Shanghai.

The “wandering” continued to Hankow-Wuhan where we had interrupted studies in Chinese language and interrupted service at Kioshan Hospital and at the Sinyang Hospital, refuging in Hankow and Shekow. I was included on one of the St. Paul airplane’s trips to Kunming; and six months later on one of their last flights to Hong Kong. The “wanderings” from November 1946 through May of 1949 were thanks to military maneuvers.

While in Kunming I was a member of a mobile clinic unit that visited “opium” camps. During that time I made my first visits to a small Leprosy hospital.

Again the Communists forced further wandering, especially for the younger less-experienced missionaries.

From Kunming I flew to Hong Kong on the St. Paul plane. From Hong Kong I flew a seaplane to London, changed

planes and arrived at my mother's home in Minnesota at 3:00 AM on June 16, 1949, just in time for my youngest brother's wedding.

The time between June 1949 (departure from Hong Kong) and November 1952 (return to Hong Kong) did not go fast enough. The interlude was not a finish to my "call" but rather a time of prayer to reassess, prepare, persist and to recommit myself.

During those three years I had the privilege of some formal study. But, my greatest benefits came from the two years' experience with Dr. and Mrs. Casper C. Skinsnes in the rural village of Danforth, Illinois, where they had established a private clinic. One cold winter night we had to have the snow-plow clear the road so we could make a home visit. Dr. and Mrs. Skinsnes were at the Lutheran Mission Hospital in Honan, Sinyang for many years including my few months in 1947.

I kept knocking at the door of the Lutheran Mission office; receiving suggestions for one or another of several mission fields -- Africa, South America, etc. Finally the Taiwan door opened, "if I would be willing to do anything." I was told that Taiwan had more than enough nurses and "didn't need a foreign nurse."

Clara Jones and I traveled from San Francisco, October 1952, on the USS President Cleveland. There were daily Bible studies by Dr. James Graham of Christ College. We arrived in Hong Kong November 1952, and were met by Dr. and Mrs. Olaf Skinsnes's son of the Casper Skinsnes's of Honan and Illinois. Dr. Olaf was a professor of pathology at the University of Hong Kong.

He had received a letter from Mrs. Lillian Dickson of Taiwan requesting help in finding a nurse to assist in her

program, which included a weekly mobile clinic visit to the government Leprosy hospital (Lo Sheng) at Hsin Chuang. Of course I accepted Dr. Skinsnes's suggestion; and arrived November 17, 1952 in Keelung.

During the increasing attention given Lo Sheng, and later Lo Shan, we observed the most incapacitated patients came from Peng Hu. If we could reach patients in Peng Hu before their condition became crippling, they could be spared.

A committee -- Hugh MacMillan, James Dickson, Richard Hofstra, and Anne Sovik () was formed to consider a Taiwan mission -- oriented program for out-patient clinic care for leprosy patients and families.

Dr. Hofstra and I made an "exploratory" trip to Peng Hu. We knew there was Leprosy. We needed to learn the receptivity of an outpatient, home visitation program. There was no great enthusiasm, but neither was there obvious opposition. Members of the local Presbyterian Church took us to village homes.

After due consideration, the Taiwan Lutheran Church missionary group granted me permission. In early spring of 1955 I came to Peng Hu on a Civil Air Transport (CAT) plane with a mosquito net, camp-cot and my suitcase for "temporary duty".

CAT had just made, about two weeks earlier, a full load flight of Leprosy-patient passengers from Peng Hu to Taipei; Lo Sheng and Lo Shan Hospitals.

The Lord did not tell me His Peng Hu assignment would be easy -- and it hasn't been! He promised to be with me all the way -- and He has been; He promised me a "family"! And what a wonderful family He has given me! I've been included in the growth of four generations: joys of

weddings and births of children; pleasures of success in school and jobs; the sharing of grief in illness and departure.

For me it has been a time learning, observing, becoming intimately involved with this rural society -- farmers, fishermen, a few merchants and their children.

One of the magistrates chose the “gaillardia” () as the Peng Hu county flower, because of its tenacity; a characteristic of the people. Storms, harsh winters, destruction, illness, loss of houses - boats – lives, like the gaillardia, the people recover, repair, stand up and go forward to continue with family and community, responsibilities.

Now I look back and marvel! Surely God has had occasions to chuckle and laugh at my naiveté.

From the beginning He has provided “angels” to ease every problem. Dr. Yen Chun Hui () of the Provincial, and National, Public Health. It was he, and Dr. Hsu () of JCRR, who encouraged all those early necessary decisions and continued to be a mentor. Other “angels”: Supt. Ch'en Chin-Shu () of the Provincial Peng Hu Hospital. Magistrate Li Yu-Lin (); General Hu Tsung Nan () of the Defense Command and Dr. Yang Wen-Ta (). What a host of “angels” have provided a crutch, a cane, a compass and a smile. A church elder, my land-lord, my several co-workers, especially the two who are still with the clinic program are a special “breed” of “angels”, who have patiently watched with me as our accumulated patients learned to trust us and to accept our out-patient clinic and home-visiting program of care.

Though she has left this earth, I still feel the strength of my mother's faith and prayers.

Thank you Lord, for all your angels who have met our many individual problems as we designed a strategy to meet

the many challenges facing the patients and the caretakers, in this archipelago.

On paper we sketched diagrams. Our goal, our responsibility was to help a rejected people become accepted and actively responsible and contributing citizens in their own homes and the general community.

We were not working for a Boy or Girl Scout merit badge. This was not an ancient Chinese legend nor a mid-day soap opera, though there certainly have been tears!

It has definitely been a step-by-step course . . . just keep going forward! God knows about distractions.

Along with Leprosy our precious people were subject to all other maladies: head colds, infections, asthma, motor accidents. Patients needed to know a reliable source of treatment.

Thus it seemed logical to locate the clinic in the Provincial Peng Hu Hospital along the hall of other outpatient clinics. (Thank you Dr. Yen and Supt. Ch'en) There has been gradual acceptance and mutual understanding between the hospital “angels” and the visiting patients.

The first room in which Dr. Hofstra met pre-invited patients was a small room above the main entrance of the Japanese - style wooden Provincial Hospital, constructed in the shape of “wei” with a “K'o” shaped pool of water in the middle for fire prevention.

Following those early once-a-week visits, maintenance personnel sloshed and swept several pails of Lysol solution through the room and hall, down the steps, through the lobby and out to the street.

There was some behind-the-scene activity. Before long the program was given the use of the x-ray department's

“darkroom”, just off the TB-ward. (Thank you, Supt. Ch'en)  
There was an outside entrance.

Fortunately, the room was small. Still it took time to scrape all the black paper off the walls and windows and install a few items of furniture. Madam Chiang's “prayer group” extends funds to build a small outdoor unit to be used as a waiting room.

It was nice! It was progress -- even flowered curtains on the windows!

The whole hospital compound was put in spick-and-span order when General Hu Tsung-Nan announced he was coming to see our decorated tree on Christmas Day. And he did!

On June 4, 1959, a whole new Provincial Peng Hu Hospital was opened, with an especially constructed unit as the focus of the Peng Hu Leprosy Out-Patient program. Three small rooms, 5 doors, 3 double windows, 2 sinks allowed space for physiotherapy and dressing-of-ulcers; for consultation and preparing of vitamins and specific Leprosy regimen; and for the patients' waitingroom. Thank you Dr. Yen!

At present (1998), this unit is used once a month as a general dermatology clinic by Dr. Sun Chee-Ching of the National Taiwan University.

Including Dr. Ch'en Chin-Shu (1951-1961), who was there to help us get started, there have been thirteen superintendents. It has not always been easy to include Leprosy in the general hospital program. Japanese influence was too recent and old Chinese myths too deeply ingrained.

Those teachings have faded. We no longer hear of the ban inflicted on a family and village, especially, but not only, at the time of the death of a patient; the home's chimney was

stuffed and no cooking of rice could be done, lest the Leprosy spirit follow the “smoke.” Yes, even the exhaust of a motorcycle and a smoking cigarette were noticed. The deceased was buried in the blackest of night in an unmarked grave.

We really are very grateful to all the hospital staff for assistance and intervention in bringing the Leprosy care into the 21st century.

When I attended the 8th International Leprosy Congress in Brazil (1963) Dr. Olaf Skinsnes requested that I tell the group about our program in Peng Hu. I was told, “it's not possible” -- though general integration was listed on the Congress agenda. An American colleague said I was just “politicizing”. I invited him to come and visit our three-room clinic along the hall with other outpatient clinics of this general hospital complex.

At one time there were eleven Leprosy care outpatient clinics within the Taiwan Leprosy Relief Association (TLRA) besides the government hospital Lo Sheng, a small mission hospital, Lo Shan and the scattered public health centers.

Several of the TLRA clinics have now combined and are centralized units. Most of the continuing patients are elderly people with residual handicaps -- hands, feet, eyes.

Three TLRA units continue care -- one in the north, one in the south, and one in Peng Hu.

There have been very few known cases of Leprosy in recent years. We dare not disregard the dangers of complacency. As several generations ago, there are migrant workers coming from other parts of Asia, not because of Leprosy, but because they want to earn money.

The Peng Hu economy is not attractive. It is very difficult to attract medical personnel and their families.

No one is being groomed to take over the TLRA outpatient program. Rather we are encouraging patients to care for themselves.

Every patient has a National Health Insurance card, not because he/she has Leprosy but because he's a citizen. This magnetic card can be used anywhere in Taiwan with stipulated cost -- or not cost -- data, for in -- or outpatient care; not only at general hospitals.

This wonderful card has been a tremendous boon to our patients. They're like everyone else; can identify their own aches and pains and choose their own doctor who writes an appropriate prescription.

Often the patient uses this opportunity to come to the TLRA clinic and give us an up-date on family news.

Just today one of our older patients came to collect her supply of vitamins. She was using a walker; had come by herself from her home village in a commuter-van that would take her home. From the clinic she was going to the appointed stop. Two months ago she had had knee surgery in Taiwan. She goes from here by herself on the plane for her check-up. I was so proud of her. I'm sure she's not forgotten that awful day nearly forty years ago when tradition forced her to wrap the deceased body of her two-year-old to her back as traveled home on a small boat. NO one must know her grief nor her burden. The evil spirits would attack the boat.

Ah yes, Peng Hu has come a long way. We pray for God's continuing watchfulness of the program, of the individuals and of the future.

*Deuteronomy 2:7 For the Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of the hand! He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness; these forty years the Lord the God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing.*