

Table of Contents for Part V

Chapter Thirteen: On Our Way Rejoicing, 1974–1975	159
Chapter Fourteen: Pruning, 1975–1976	169
Chapter Fifteen: Into the Iron Furnace, 1976–1978	178

Chapter Thirteen: On Our Way Rejoicing, 1974–1975

Walking with Giants

During our last year in Chapel Hill, two great men began to influence my life. The first was St. Augustine.¹ I had decided to write a dissertation about his preaching. My advisor, Dr. Kennedy, was doing research for a book on later Roman rhetoric, which mostly consists of sermons by great Christian preachers. Augustine was the greatest Latin-speaking preacher and he had written a book on how to preach. I chose to study how his book on the preparation of sermons compared with his actual sermons. For a doctoral dissertation, you must discuss something no one has studied before (or at least you must treat it from a different perspective). Several scholars had studied Augustine's sermons, but none had written about his sermons on John's Gospel, nor had anyone tried to see whether he followed his own advice about preaching.

I began by reading *On Christian Teaching* (*De Doctrina Christiana*), in which Augustine tells preachers how to understand the Bible and then how to teach it to others. Though some of his principles have been rejected in recent years, most of what he said still holds true. Once again, I found myself examining the way the early Christians tried to relate to their culture, specifically the way Augustine, as a professional rhetorician, used the categories of classical rhetorical theory to construct a Christian approach to public speaking.² He then showed how the Bible is filled with examples of the figures of speech and other rhetorical devices which classical orators sought to employ in their speaking. In the process, he proved that the Bible contains literature just as beautiful and powerful as anything written by non-Christians.

Although I still find the classical framework useful, I now believe that Augustine, like Ambrose in his book on ethics (see the previous chapter), made a mistake. Instead of taking his basic theoretical structure from the Bible, he used pagan categories. In doing so, he left out important biblical principles (though he tried with some success to include the important ones). To use the metaphor of Jesus, he attempted to pour new wine into old wineskins. The old skins burst as a result.

When I turned to his actual sermons, however, I noticed a change. The earlier ones regarding John's Gospel resembled formal rhetorical pieces similar to what Augustine would have delivered in a Roman court. The later sermons, delivered in his old age, though no less beautiful, are even more powerful. They follow the biblical text more closely and contain fewer deliberate attempts to manipulate people through rhetorical brilliance. In short, as Augustine grew more mature as a preacher, he sought to allow God's word to do the persuasion.

¹ This is Augustine of Hippo, the Early Church father, not Augustine of Canterbury, the missionary to England many years later.

² Briefly, the ancient rhetoricians, especially Cicero, taught that there are three styles of speaking – the plain, the middle, and the grand. The first seeks to be clear, in order to teach. The second is filled with elegant language, in order to please. The grand style, with the purpose of persuasion (moving men to action), employs strong language and vivid figures of speech to stir the emotions. These three styles and their three purposes can be summed up in the Greek terms *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. *Logos* refers to the reason which one uses in the plain style, to win the audience's favor. *Ethos* reminds us that the speaker must portray himself and his subject in a manner that pleases the audience. *Pathos* – emotion – comes into use when reason and attractive words are not enough to get the audience members to change their opinions or to agree to difficult action.

The modern preacher could learn from Augustine's growth. Many textbooks on homiletics (the art of preaching) teach non-biblical rules for effective public speaking. These contain much wisdom, but we must be careful to look to the Bible for not only the content, but also the form of our preaching. My own practice in recent years has been to take my outline from the text itself, rather than trying to construct an artificial outline. Further, I try to reproduce the tone and mood of the passage and refrain from telling too many stories, lest I distract from the message of the Bible. I must give credit here to Jim Abrahamson, the pastor of the Chapel Hill Bible Church, whose weekly sermons set me a biblically-based example.

Despite this criticism of Augustine, however, I must emphasize something else: Daily poring over his sermons on John in order to analyze them, I began to catch something of his visions of God and Christ. This great man had virtually memorized the Bible, so his sermons were almost a collection of Scripture passages. He had thought so deeply and had such a genius of verbal expression that I was often profoundly moved by reading his Latin expositions of John's Gospel. I came to love Christ more and more as a result. Sometimes I would rush out of my study and say to Dori, "Listen to this!" Then I would read out some particularly beautiful passage in Latin. She had studied Latin in high school, but not enough to comprehend Augustine's words. I was thus left to relish his Christian eloquence alone. Augustine's sermons on John were translated in the nineteenth century; one of my unfulfilled ambitions has been to revise these into contemporary English for the modern reader. Until then, I may be the only person in the world who has enjoyed all 155 of them in their original beauty – indeed a rare gift to me from God.

By spending hours a day with this great theologian, I found my own knowledge of God and of his word broadening, and I was challenged to a greater devotion to the Lord. I also read several biographies of Augustine. All of the authors agreed that he was, as his close friend of forty years said long ago, one of the holiest men who ever lived. And yet, at the end of his life as he lay on his death bed, Augustine had the penitential Psalms³ copied out in large letters and put up on the walls and ceiling in his room so that he might use them to confess his sins to God. The closer he drew to heaven's gates, the more unworthy of entering he saw himself – a truly great man!

The other giant who left his mark on me was Hudson Taylor. As we applied to OMF, we found that this organization still looked to its founder for guidance and inspiration. We bought one of the abridgments of the first biography of him and began to read it aloud at night before going to sleep. Few books have made a deeper impression upon me. Throughout his life as a Christian, Taylor trusted God's word implicitly and sought to walk by faith in every department of life.

His refusal to ask others for funds came from George Muller's influence and was not a new concept to me. What struck me more was his day-by-day reliance on God for wisdom, provision, and strength. He was not a robust man, but he exercised strict self-discipline and cried out to God for the energy to accomplish God's will. Several times, as we climbed into bed, weary from the day and discouraged by our failures or dismayed by the obstacles in our path, we read some account of how Taylor, confronted with much higher mountains to climb and much heavier burdens to carry, pressed on with supernatural power, which he received as he relied on God's promises.

³ Such as Psalm 32 and Psalm 51

I didn't sense any particular leading to work among the Chinese at this time, but I am sure Taylor's longing to evangelize China influenced my later career. Besides, I had lived in Taiwan as a boy, and we were then considering work in Singapore, which has a Chinese majority.

More important, however, was the way Taylor sought not just to work as a servant of Christ, but also to worship at his feet. He seemed to draw upon deep springs of living water as he meditated upon the love Christ had for him and for others. That is why, I think, the more recent biographer Roger Steer has given his book the subtitle: *A Man in Christ*. His study of Taylor's long and productive career as a missionary pointed him to the source of Taylor's remarkable influence upon others: his own intimate communion with the Risen Jesus.⁴

As I write these words years later, I find myself longing for that same type of close fellowship with the Lord. I sense more and more the meaning of Jesus' words, "Abide in Me . . . for without Me you can do nothing."⁵

Meeting the Overseas Missionary Fellowship

David Adeney had told us we should apply to OMF. We began the process immediately. We were happy to learn that their headquarters in the United States were in Robeson, Pennsylvania, not far from where Dori's parents were living. We could thus visit them on our way to and from the OMF office.

Our first meeting with Personnel Secretary Jack Largent convinced us we would like OMF. His concern for our parents and what they thought touched us. He wanted to make sure they understood why we wanted to serve as overseas missionaries. He also stressed the importance of gaining the support of our siblings for our going out of the country, since the responsibility of caring for our parents would fall upon them. Jack's clear commitment to the Fifth Commandment ("You shall honor your father and mother") assured us that we were joining an organization that sought to please God in all respects.

Other distinctive features of OMF attracted us as well: Its members emphasized prayer and dependence upon God by faith; they did not ask for donations. Having been started by Hudson Taylor, who was English, they were an international body whose members came from all sorts of different Protestant denominations, all united in the same basic beliefs and committed to the unity of the Body of Christ. Like their founder, they tried to live simply in their host countries to reduce the cost of sending them and to avoid being separated from their local neighbors by high walls of wealth.

We did have one question: What was their view of the role of women in ministry? Jack's answer both challenged and comforted us. OMF allowed different views on this subject. Though women were permitted to speak in church meetings, none were in leadership within OMF. Furthermore, OMF would not make a major issue of this controversial subject. We told Jack of our traditional views on this matter, and he assured us we would not be out of place in OMF. He did warn us,

⁴ James Broomhall's seven-volume biography of Taylor contains the same message, along with a massive amount of information about the origins and growth of the missionary movement in China.

⁵ John 15:4, 5

however, that we would encounter others with different ideas and convictions and that we would have to be willing to work with them.

Getting Support from the Church

We returned to Chapel Hill eager to continue the process of being sent out as missionaries. As the Missions Committee chairman, I had circulated Michael Griffiths' book, *Get Your Church Involved in Missions*, to the other elders and Missions Committee members. They saw the biblical basis for his view that the church should send out its leaders and support them as much as possible.⁶ He showed how the other way – letting people volunteer and then run to many churches for support – both made life hard for missionaries and deprived the church of its proper role in foreign missions. Our church leaders all saw the wisdom of this approach and formally adopted it as their policy – a policy which they have maintained to this day.

They apparently gave us high recommendations in response to OMF inquiries, and they pledged to provide a major portion of our financial support. This encouraged us to continue.

Joining OMF

That fall (October 1974), we traveled to Pennsylvania for Candidate School. Here we joined a dozen other membership applicants for a three-week period of testing and training. The test came as we lived in old-fashioned pioneer-era Conestoga wagons – the kind you see in movies about cowboys. Each person or couple had a different task. Dori and I had to get up early and fix breakfast for the others outside in the chilly morning air. One day we were suddenly told we were to lead worship an hour later. That showed whether we would be willing to take orders, move beyond our usual limits (I did not feel comfortable leading singing), and adapt to sudden changes – all requirements for successful missionary work. We were told that “a missionary must be prepared to preach, pray, or die at a moment's notice.”

After a week at this camp, we returned to Robeson, where we lived in the homes of members of the headquarters staff. We stayed with an older couple who had served many years overseas. Their joyful, trusting, and confident attitude towards God greatly impressed us, especially since we could see that the Spirit of God had worked against the natural tendency of their personalities to give them peace. We learned more about OMF as we read books about former missionaries, including excerpts from Hudson Taylor's life. These especially stressed his view of “the exchanged life.” He had discovered that he could not live the Christian life in his own power; he had to give over his sin and weakness to Christ and allow Christ to live out his divine life in him, through faith. The headquarters staff members began each day with prayer and then went to work. They did not seem to be in a hurry, but everyone worked hard and efficiently; not a moment was wasted in idle talk or meaningless entertainment. The entire experience built our faith and kindled our love for God and for these dedicated servants of the gospel.

Towards the end of the training period, they held a picnic outdoors. I remember talking with the USA director, Mr. Heimbach. He had served among the Hmong tribe in Thailand. I was stunned

⁶ See, for example, Acts 13–18 for the role of the church at Antioch in the missionary work of Paul.

when he told me that he had written a dictionary and a grammar of their language, which had never been written down before. This was an amazing achievement and made me realize just how intellectually challenging missionary work would be. Little did I know that I would later be faced with the similar, though lesser, challenge of overseeing the translation of a Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament into Chinese.

After psychological tests and various interviews, we were accepted into the Fellowship along with almost all the other candidates. I thought the psychological assessment was rather shallow, but I was glad we had passed their tests. At the acceptance worship service in a local church, we all sang “This World Is Not My Home.” The hymn was new to me, but it certainly summed up the missionary attitude, which should be the outlook of all believers.

As we drove south the next afternoon, Dori and I thanked God for his clear leading. Then, off to our right, in the west, we saw a huge flock of geese in a vast “V” formation. They were headed south, too. The brilliant glow of the setting sun highlighted these wonderful creatures, whose distant honking sounded like lovely music in our ears. We both felt that God had given us this awe-inspiring sight to confirm that, like those geese, he was with us as we went on our way.

An Encounter with the Living God

Suddenly, all our plans were thrown into confusion by unexpected news from David Adeney in Singapore. The government of Singapore had turned down his request for a visa for me as a teacher at the Discipleship Training Centre. They maintained that DTC could find a qualified person in Singapore and did not need a foreigner. I was devastated, but still thought God wanted us with OMF. I inquired about different seminaries where OMF missionaries could serve, but none of them seemed right for me. The only real possibility was a school in Manila, but I had previously looked into it and had not felt compatible with its theology – they insisted upon a pre-millennial view of Christ’s return, for one thing. I am open to that idea but do not believe it is the only credible point of view.

So, I was in a quandary. God had apparently led us to OMF, but now there seemed to be no place for me to serve.

Naturally, I prayed fervently for guidance. One morning, God answered my prayers in a way unique in my Christian life. I do not see visions, but this day, as I was praying, I “saw” (in my mind) a map of Mainland China and Taiwan and I “heard” a “voice” (in my mind) saying, “I want you in Asia.” The voice and the vision combined seemed to indicate ministry among the Chinese.

With happy memories of a year in Taiwan when I was young, I naturally wanted to return, though it had never before crossed my mind as a possibility.

On the other hand, how could I know this was God speaking? Satan can deceive us, and our own flesh can mislead us. I could not base such an important decision upon one subjective experience.

Thus, I questioned God daily for three days. Each time, I remembered ways in which he had guided me before, and I seemed to hear his voice, “It’s Me again.” In particular, I recalled the time when God had led me to agree to perform the wedding of Fred Hurd (my old friend from Eastern North Carolina). He was getting married in Philadelphia on a Friday morning, but I had already planned to conduct a wedding rehearsal that night in Charlotte, North Carolina. The risk of being late to the rehearsal in Charlotte was great, but friendship with Fred and a sense of God’s leading gave me confidence I should also serve at his wedding. I did so. Though I almost missed the plane from Philadelphia, I didn’t have to worry about being late, because the mother of the groom in Charlotte didn’t show up until almost an hour after we had all assembled in the church!

I had agreed to perform Fred’s wedding on the basis of what I thought was a definite command from God. This time, the “voice” sounded the same.

I knew that ministry among the Chinese would entail language study, which would take several years. During that time, other doors for service could open up. After three days of intense struggle to know God’s pleasure, I decided to accept the vision and the “voice” as from the Lord. Great peace and joy immediately flooded my heart, as Dori noticed as soon as I told her of my struggle and its conclusion.

I called OMF headquarters that day to inform them that we still wanted to go with them to Asia, hoping to work among the Chinese. We would trust God to show us step-by-step what he wanted us to do.

I have never regretted or doubted this decision. I can only thank the Father for so clearly persuading me of his plan for my future ministry. Despite many failures and frustrations, I have always known his presence at my side. The joys of serving with the Chinese have far outweighed the occasional pain. I can truly say with David, “He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”⁷

Completing Doctoral Studies

Before leaving for Asia, I had to finish my dissertation. As I have said earlier, reading Augustine’s sermons on John’s Gospel was one of the most edifying experiences of my life. His insights, marvelous gift of words, and genuine faith constantly spurred me on in my walk with Christ.

The going was not easy, however. I remember many occasions when, after putting a fresh sheet of paper into the typewriter (this was before computers), I would just stare at the blank page without any idea of what to write. Then I would remember to cry out to God for wisdom and strength. He always heard my plea. Words would come, and I would fly through ten pages as he opened my eyes to see how to explain Augustine’s preaching method.

⁷ Psalm 23:3

Just a word about the content of the dissertation: I analyzed ten sermons of St. Augustine, using the classical rhetorical categories which he had summarized and restated in his book on preaching, to see to what degree Augustine applied his own theory to his practice. The result was a document largely in Latin, making it inaccessible to all but the best Latin scholars. In fact, I could not understand it today, much less write it again!

Finally the work was done. I turned it in to my committee and they set a date for the oral defense. I shall never forget that meeting. The five professors were quite friendly. Two of them made diametrically opposed comments: One, a skeptical non-Christian who taught courses on the early church fathers, said, "You seem to think that Augustine actually believed that he was trying to tell the truth when he preached." Familiar with the dissembling tactics of pagan orators and cynical about the intentions of all men, including Christians, he could only smile sardonically when I replied, "Yes, Sir. I think Augustine really meant to speak the truth."

The other comment came from Dr. Reckford, who had directed my senior honors thesis in 1966. Excitedly, he told the room, "I find Augustine's commitment to truth to be utterly compelling! It is so refreshing and attractive!"

They gave approval to the dissertation, and we all headed for a party in my honor at the home of Dr. Kennedy, my advisor. About half an hour after we had met at his house for refreshments, and just as Dr. Reckford was beginning to say why he liked Augustine's integrity so much, Dr. Kennedy told me that he had received a call from one of my classmates. It seems that she insisted that I leave at once and return home. She gave no reason, but Dr. Kennedy said he thought I should obey. With extreme reluctance, I took my leave of my professors and headed home. I found the place empty; not even Dori was there.

I waited in consternation and growing frustration for more than thirty minutes, constantly thinking of Dr. Reckford's desire to talk with me further. I thought that I had missed a golden opportunity to share my faith with him, and I was irritated. After a while, about two dozen friends, classmates, and other acquaintances arrived. They had planned a surprise party in honor of my successful completion of the PhD program. I appreciated their care for me, but harbored a bit of anger that I had had to leave Dr. Kennedy's party.

I should not have worried, however. God had his plan in my sudden departure from the party. A few days later, Dr. Reckford called me and invited Dori and me to dinner. He wanted to discuss further the wonderful concept that there is truth and that we can be committed to expressing it. Thus, we enjoyed a whole evening together in delightful conversation.

Saying Farewell

Word came from Mr. Adeney in Singapore that a faculty member of the Discipleship Training Centre was going to England for a six-month furlough and that the Singapore government would grant a short-term visa to me to replace him. Thus, we prepared to go to Singapore, serve at DTC, and await God's further leading.

The Bible Church allowed me to preach on our last Sunday in Chapel Hill. I had invited both Dr. Kennedy and Dr. Reckford, and I thanked God when I saw them both in the congregation. I have forgotten what I preached on, but I know it must have been about God's command to the church to take the good news about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to all the world. At the beginning, I introduced myself briefly. Then I said, "If you have not met my wife Dori, just read Proverbs 31 and you will know what she is like."⁸ Dori was embarrassed by that remark, but I meant it. I could not have finished graduate school or served well in the church without her constant aid and encouragement.

We held a yard sale to raise money and get rid of unnecessary belongings. I donated more than half of my library, including my commentaries and theological books, to the library of the Chapel Hill Bible Church. This was not as generous as it seems, for I thought I would have access to them in future years, and while I was gone others could use them, too.

I shall never forget the last small group meeting we had with our friends. We had split our larger group into two groups a year earlier. At the time, we made the selections on a purely rational basis – a balance of men and women, younger and older believers, married and single people. As a result, Dori and I had found ourselves in a group without our closest friends, and we had been a bit disappointed. Within a few months, the people in that group became as close to us as the others had been, however.

At that last meeting, I apologized for speaking so bluntly so often, for I feared that I had offended them. One of the men responded with a comment that has remained fresh in my mind ever since: "Wright, we know that that is the way you are, and we love you for it." This group demonstrated God's grace to me. They knew my flaws but loved me despite them.

Storing some of our belongings with friends, we packed a few things into our little blue Volkswagen and headed to Robesonia, where OMF had a guest house for us to use for a few days before our flight to Singapore. We spent several lovely days in the golden fall of October, then drove to Philadelphia, where Dori's sister Jean lived. After a day or two with them, they took us one night to the airport. Dori's parents came along and saw us off. They shed tears as we hugged them and walked towards the plane that would take us 12,000 miles away.

Dori and I settled into our seats with mixed feelings. We were excited about going to serve God in Asia, but we were sad to leave behind the ones we loved so much. Dori told me later that in her heart, she sensed that she would never again see her father.

Yet we knew that God had led us to this point and would not desert us. We were seeking to obey Jesus' command to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."⁹ We were going, intending to help "make disciples of all nations," and believing in Jesus' promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."¹⁰

⁸ Proverbs 31 describes the attributes and activities of an excellent wife.

⁹ Mark 16:15. Some manuscripts do not have this verse, but I believe that the better ones do.

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19, 20

That was October 1975. More than forty years later, we can say with certainty that he has kept his word, even when we have not kept ours. To him be the glory. Amen.



With Dori's parents, her sister and brother-in-law, and their children

Chapter Fourteen: Pruning, 1975–1976

“Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”¹¹

“Have Faith in God”

As our Boeing 747 took off from Philadelphia in October 1975, Dori and I had no idea of what we faced.

We knew, of course, that we were on our way to Singapore, via England, where we would spend a week.

Arriving in the morning, we took a taxi to the English headquarters of Overseas Missionary Fellowship. Hudson Taylor had founded this agency as the China Inland Mission (CIM) in 1865 with virtually no money in the bank but a firm faith in God.¹² In fact, “Have faith in God” – Jesus’ words to the astonished disciples when they saw one of his miracles – was his life motto.¹³

Taylor had those words carved deep into the front of the CIM headquarters building at Newington Green. We noticed them at once as our taxi drove up. Yes, we would have faith in God! We would trust him for all that was to come.

We were met by two ladies in their sixties, who ushered us into our room on the second story. We noticed how clean and how simple our accommodations were. Meals were no different. In fact, the food they gave us barely sufficed to fill our stomachs, made hungrier by the chill in the London air. Other things tested us slightly: The English like their toast crisp and a bit cool, not hot and moist as we do. We longed to snatch a piece as soon as it popped out of the toaster, and we watched with dismay as our hostess calmly placed the bread into a “toast cooler” for a few agonizingly long minutes before passing some to us. I did pick up one good custom, however: Spreading peanut butter on toast.

One room in the old building immediately captured my attention: The bookstore. Stocked with volumes, thick and slim, it opened me up to the wealth of experience and knowledge gained from more than one hundred years of ministry among the Chinese by CIM (now OMF) missionaries.

I bought only one or two small booklets because we had to carry everything on the airplane. I’ll never forget my reaction to one of them, “If I Am to Lead,” by former CIM General Director D. E. Hoste. I don’t remember the good advice which filled its pages, but one statement struck me as odd. Mr. Hoste said that in his youth he had found discerning the will of God to be quite easy, but as he grew older, decisions became harder to make with certainty.

“Here is a man who lost his spiritual insight and passion,” I observed. My reaction should have bothered me, for Mr. Hoste had a well-earned reputation as a godly leader of godly missionaries. In my youthful zeal, I imagined that I would never have any trouble knowing the will of God!

¹¹ John 15:2

¹² Hudson Taylor has been the subject of many books, including *Hudson Taylor, A Man in Christ*, by Roger Steer.

¹³ Mark 11:22

All in all, however, our time at Newington Green left an indelible impression on us. We knew that we were following in the footsteps of giants in the faith and in missionary work. We felt very small, but we would try to remember Hudson Taylor's motto, "Have faith in God."

Heading East

After a delightful week in England, during which we spent time with Admiral Sir Richard and Lady Smeeton (whom you met in Part II), we boarded a British Caledonia flight for Singapore. Only after a few hours on the airplane did we remember that "Caledonian" meant "Scottish." We soon perceived the impact of the Scots' well-known frugality: The seats in front of us seemed to press upon our knees; the food barely staved off our hunger; they even ran out of water! We groaned as we realized that this flight was going to last twenty-one long hours.

The highlight of the trip for me came as we flew over Iran. With soaring mountains below us, we marveled at an incredibly stunning sunrise over the Anatolian highlands. I recalled that Alexander the Great had traversed this territory more than two millennia ago in his ambition to build a vast empire for his own glory. We were on a different mission: To expand the frontiers of the kingdom of God. At least that is what we hoped.

The plane stopped in Karachi, Pakistan, for a couple of hours on a blisteringly hot afternoon. It was our first encounter with the East. We noted the cockroaches scurrying across the floor of the terminal, the guards toting AK-47 machine guns, and the unfamiliar music. I almost expected to see someone fly by on a carpet at any moment!

How relieved we were when we finally landed in Singapore at night. We were met by Doug Anderson, a member of the faculty at the Discipleship Training Centre. He took us to the Centre and kindly showed us to our room. We fell into bed with sighs of relief and gratitude.

Rude Awakening

Then the trials began.

After we had rested only a few hours – which seemed like a few minutes – a piercing sound burst like a bombshell in our ears, rousing us from slumber and plunging us into the first of many tests of faith.

"Mommay! Mommay!" The cry came from the little boy who lived with his parents beneath us. We had not noticed until now that our room had no glass windows. The lack of mosquitoes in Singapore makes them unnecessary, and the oppressive heat makes them useless. Thus, we were exposed to all the noise around us, in this case, the morning cries of a very demanding (and, we thought, spoiled) child.

Morning after weary morning, day after exhausting night, this little boy continued his assault on our sanity. We wondered how his parents could tolerate his shrieking. We privately castigated them for their poor parenting and utter disregard for the needs of others. We struggled with resentment, rage, and despair. Our nerves grew frazzled. Dori cried almost daily, worn out with

fatigue. I questioned whether I had misunderstood the will of God. Would we last the full four months until we moved over to OMF Headquarters for Orientation Course? I doubted it.

God's Sustaining Grace

The Lord had not forsaken us, however. As Paul learned, he gives grace sufficient for each day's difficulties.¹⁴

We found ourselves in the midst of a loving community of people from around the world united with a common purpose: To know Christ and to make him known. They welcomed us immediately and prayed for God to strengthen us.

The community held prayers daily, with a longer prayer meeting on Mondays. Mr. Adeney clearly believed that our God hears the requests of his children, and he encouraged us always to "have faith in God."

We also derived strength from our friends at home, who sent us sermon and music tapes. I remember being deeply moved by one tape in particular, a collection of songs based upon the Bible and sung with conviction and compassion. We knew that our church was praying for us, and that comforted us, too.

Mr. and Mrs. Adeney took us under their wing. On more than one occasion, they invited us for dinner at their small apartment about a mile away. We could relax in the more Western atmosphere of their home, where we poured out our troubles to them and found them to be most sympathetic.

Once, when the pressure had become so great we thought we could not stand it, we spent a delightful night in a hotel. At other times we explored the Singapore Botanic Gardens, the Jurong Bird Park, and the pre-war fortifications. We learned to savor the taste of *satay* from the street sellers at night. The city itself constantly delighted us with its beauty and variety. Do not think that everything was unpleasant or difficult for us in Singapore!

Our church also greatly encouraged us. We were directed to Good Shepherd Anglican Church, where John Wong served as the preacher. This was an English-speaking congregation of mostly younger Chinese participants who met late in the afternoon. Mr. Wong's sermons came straight from Scripture and were simple, direct, and powerful. I don't think I have ever heard better preaching. Time and time again, God spoke to us through his words and through the service, which used the Book of Common Prayer. Though we had left the Episcopal Church, we still loved the ancient liturgy, replete with words and phrases from the Bible.

As time went on, I began to trust in God's providence in allowing us to go to Singapore and to see that he was testing and refining us, not punishing or torturing us. In my case, such refining was necessary to begin the process of delivering me from my overgrown self-confidence.

¹⁴ "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9

Discovering My Ignorance

On our first morning in Singapore, Doug Anderson took me to a government office to process my visa. On the way, he asked, “You’ve heard of the Five F’s, haven’t you?”

“No. What are they?”

“The Five F’s refer to the five things most important to the Chinese: Food, face, finances, family, and fortune. ‘Fortune’ refers to fate, or luck.”

Doug had worked among the Chinese for many years, so I trusted what he said. My experience since then has confirmed the accuracy of his statement, at least for non-Christian Chinese.

I had arrived at DTC bursting with the conviction that I knew more than most people and certainly enough to do my job. I soon found out how offensive that attitude was and how very mistaken I had been.

For example, I was almost completely ignorant of Chinese culture. The Chinese comprise most of the population of Singapore, and that was reflected in our student body. One day, a woman asked me, “Should Christians obey their parents in the area of choosing a mate?”

All too quickly, I said, “Yes.” In my hasty reply I had assumed that Chinese Christian young people were like their American counterparts: Prone to rebellion and in need of submitting more to their parents’ wishes. I was wrong, as her next question made clear.

“My parents want me to marry a Buddhist. Chinese culture says I should obey them, but some Christians think I should insist upon marrying a believer in Christ. What do you think?”

“Oh, that is different!” I said immediately. At once, I knew I had addressed the matter before hearing it fully. I retracted my words about submission and entered into a longer discussion with her about the conflicts she and other Chinese young people face.

Like most Americans, I had heard of the Chinese emphasis upon family. When a very kind Singaporean Chinese couple took us out to dinner one evening, I commented on how strong the Chinese family was. His reply surprised and greatly enlightened me: “Really, there is little love in the Chinese family. It’s mostly obligation.” Subsequent years of observing the Chinese have confirmed the truth of his words in many cases. With some outstanding exceptions, it does seem that duty more than warm affection motivates many Chinese children to obey and serve their parents. Among Christians it will be different, of course.

Chinese culture was not my only area of ignorance. With a PhD in Classics and a concentration upon Early Church History, I confidently accepted an extra assignment to tutor a man who was studying for the London University BD (similar to the MDiv). I was to help him prepare for the examination on early Christian doctrine. As we worked through J. N. D. Kelly’s excellent book on that subject, and as I looked over the topics which London University sent to candidates for the exam, I realized that there were vast regions of knowledge that were foreign to me. In other

words, I was unqualified to help him. I did study hard, however, and learned a great deal in the months we worked together.

In the second term, I taught two courses, one on Augustine and one on the Epistle to the Hebrews. I had written my PhD dissertation on Augustine and had taken a course on Hebrews in seminary, so I thought I had the necessary knowledge to teach others. I was wrong. Preparing my lectures about Augustine showed me just how little I knew about that great man. I found out about my lack of qualifications to instruct others about the letter to the Hebrews in a much more painful way: A student to whom I had given a rather low grade said he hadn't learned much from me because, as he put it, "Perhaps you really don't know much about that part of the Bible."

The worst blow to my self-image came after we had been at DTC for about a month. John Ting, one of the faculty members whom I really liked, confided in me that when they had first received my résumé from Mr. Adeney, all the faculty members thought it reeked of pride. When he quoted a few phrases from my self-description, I blushed with shame.

"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."¹⁵ In his mercy, our Father chose to remove my blinders slowly as he revealed my arrogance to me. The process hurt, but I recognized the love behind it.

I still had a long way to go, however, not only in head knowledge but also in wisdom. Once, a prominent speaker came to Singapore, and Mr. Adeney took us to hear him. I sat up front, and when the time came for questions, I was the first to raise my hand. Only later did I realize that Chinese culture encourages younger people and new arrivals to hold back and keep silent, waiting for their elders to express an opinion.

I saw the contrast between my natural tendencies and Mr. Adeney's experience, wisdom, and love one time when a student from India repeatedly acted inappropriately. In our weekly private conversation, I told Mr. Adeney that he should rebuke this man and command him to change or be expelled. I'll never forget the old saint's reply: "I have found it better to pray a great deal before confronting someone like that." As the weeks went on, his patience, prayers, and gentleness proved to be far more effective than my more direct approach would have been.

Walking with the Wise

One great and lasting benefit of working at DTC was my constant association with Mr. Adeney. Not only did I sit in on many of his classes and enjoy my weekly meeting with him, but I also watched him as he led the DTC community in prayers. My appreciation of him grew as he asked me to drive him to many speaking engagements around the city. Seldom – perhaps never – have I heard such clear and accurate, yet warm and moving, Bible teaching. He could draw upon decades of experience and wide study to illustrate his biblical exposition with countless stories, all of them pertinent to the main lesson of the text. From our private times together, I knew that the passion in his voice was not just a show; he was the same man in public and in private.

¹⁵ James 4:6

Perhaps most challenging of all to me was the fervency of his prayers for students and alumni of DTC. He really carried these people in his heart.

His book *China: Christian Students Face the Revolution* had come out two years earlier. I read and re-read it, then made a digest of its contents for Christians to whom he spoke. I still consider it an important contribution to Chinese church history and a manual for Christian students caught up in any revolutionary situation. I was memorizing 1 Peter at the time, I and saw myself as a Sylvanus, who faithfully communicated Peter's message.¹⁶

Not all went smoothly, however. Inevitably, I noticed some of his weaknesses as an administrator. I apparently commented on these or made them known in some way, for one day he said, "You must be very disappointed in me." I was terribly ashamed of myself for allowing my petty annoyances to come to his attention, for he was a truly great Christian and missionary, and I could not compare with him in any way.¹⁷

His wife Ruth supervised the cook and those who purchased and prepared food. Being much more direct and frank than her husband, she administered a much-deserved rebuke to me after I had expressed criticism for the quantity and type of food served. Once again, I had demonstrated not only my ignorance of Chinese culture (where super-abundant meals are a sign of love and security) and my arrogance.

Others at DTC set us good examples. John Ting, to whom I have already referred, taught ethics. When I saw his class notes, I was struck by how thoroughly he had prepared. The shallowness of my own preparation shamed me. Only later did I learn that Chinese students tend to evaluate their teachers on the basis of the notes they distribute in class, because Chinese education traditionally focused on memorizing the teacher's lectures rather than learning from textbooks. I am afraid that my own handouts disappointed my students, both then and later when I taught in seminary in Taiwan. Like other Westerners, I expected my students to learn more from the homework assignments I gave them.

Dori and I both sat in on Mr. Adeney's inspiring classes, as I have said. Additionally, Dori attended the lectures on Amos given by Valerie Griffiths, wife of OMF General Director Michael (Mike) Griffiths. Mrs. Griffiths' knowledge of the Bible and clear teaching style greatly impressed my wife.

The students, too, reflected God's glory to us. Sanga Miller, from a tribal area in North East India, accepted my ineptness in playing badminton with grace and humor. Shelby, our next-door neighbor from Taiwan, displayed love for her boyfriend (later husband) by heating water for him to use in bathing. (The showers put forth only cold water, which was fine most of the time because of the hot weather.) Her smiling face always cheered us up; how could we be gloomy around such a joyful person?

¹⁶ In later years I was to fulfill that role two more times, as editor of the Chinese translation of Bauer's Greek lexicon of the New Testament and of an abridgment of the Chinese edition of Carl Henry's *God, Revelation, & Authority*.

¹⁷ His stature among the Chinese came to light when he and Dr. James H. Taylor III were the only two non-Chinese people invited to give addresses to the plenary session of the Chinese Congress on World Evangelization in Taiwan in 1986.

We began to get to know other members of OMF when we occasionally visited the headquarters, not too far away. The person I remember most vividly is Martin Symonds, who introduced me to the zeal with which some Englishmen take their tea several times a day. We are still close friends.

All in all, in church, DTC, and OMF, we were introduced to a number of people who loved God and were willing to express that love in sacrificial service for others. We counted ourselves unworthy to be among such a dedicated group of Christians and were challenged to grow in our own faith and love for God and his kingdom.

Orientation Course

When we moved over to OMF Headquarters after four months at DTC, we were much less self-confident and much more aware of our weaknesses and failings. That was good, because God was going to test us further.

We were part of what they called Orientation Course, which was a ten-week introduction to service with OMF. Along with a score of other new workers, we spent the mornings in class, hearing lectures on linguistics, the history of missions in Asia, the life and work of the missionary, cultural anthropology, and even how to cast out demons. In the afternoons and evenings, we played volleyball and read from the assigned textbooks.

Once again, the extent of my ignorance humbled me. I had never studied anthropology or missions or linguistics (which was hard for me). I knew nothing about how to be a missionary. I took notes eagerly and often referred to them during the next two years.

Another blow to my pride came from an entirely unexpected direction: Since OMF was founded by an Englishman (Hudson Taylor), most of its members and leaders came from the British Commonwealth. That was fine with me, since I loved to listen to them speak “correct” English. Like many Americans, I admired the British for their superior culture and for their long history. I did not know, however, that many of the British do not admire Americans. In fact, the British members made enough critical remarks about Americans, and American Christianity in particular, that I became defensive. They offended my national pride. I had to admit that much of their criticism was accurate, but it still hurt.

The one thing that they resented most was our arrogance. As they described ways in which Americans seem to think we know it all and have much to teach others, I could see myself in their portrait of the “ugly American missionary.” On some occasions I had even said, “In America, we [do it this way],” as if that was the only right way to do things! America’s (then) domination of the Free World did not justify our assumption that we should dominate the overseas church as well. In fact, as I learned much later, American missionaries, in addition to bringing the gospel to countless people, have also inflicted upon them American ways of doing things which are unsuitable for the local cultures.

Other missionaries taught us priceless lessons outside the classroom. One evening, as the entire headquarters staff enjoyed a final supper with the soon-to-depart members of Orientation Course,

I asked the wife of one of the directors to share with me one key to long-term, successful missionary service. Her reply surprised me but made immediate sense:

“I have observed that those missionaries who last and succeed are the ones who take good care of their wives.”

We had seen how the wives of businessmen overseas often lived a bored and lonely existence, so I could imagine just how important it was for a missionary wife to be happy if her husband was to serve effectively for any length of time. This principle would come home to me several times in the following decades.

Obeying the Heavenly Vision¹⁸

We had begun to love Singapore. Just before the OMF directors made their decision where the new workers should go, I received an invitation from DTC to stay on and join the faculty. How tempting that was! Singapore was so beautiful and comfortable, and we were becoming familiar with its culture. I valued what DTC was trying to do – train up a few dedicated workers for the churches of East Asia. I had learned from my early mistakes, and they were willing to accept me as a teacher.

But what about my “vision” in Chapel Hill, with its map of China and Taiwan? Did I not clearly sense God’s leading to work among the Chinese, beginning in Taiwan? Furthermore, Mr. Adeney, in his wisdom, told me that before I could teach effectively at DTC, I ought to learn Chinese and gain some experience working in Chinese churches. I struggled with this decision for several days until, one night, I felt that God renewed to me the command to go to Taiwan. When I shared this with Dori, she agreed. Our course was set.

We felt ready. We had gone through initial culture shock. Wise and godly missionaries had given us invaluable instruction to prepare us. We had gotten to know two other couples who would be our classmates in language school. We were eager to begin “real” missionary life.

Little did we know what lay ahead of us.

¹⁸ Acts 26:19



Faculty and students of Discipleship Training Centre, Singapore, 1975. Mr. Adeney is in the center.

Chapter Fifteen: Into the Iron Furnace, 1976–1978

April 1976

We flew into Taipei from Singapore and landed at the same airport from which I had left Taiwan in 1958. George Steed, a veteran OMF missionary, was there to meet us. Our first impression of Taiwan was of crowds of people pushing, shoving, and shouting. Without Mr. Steed we would have been lost.

We spent the first two or three nights in his apartment. He took me to the post office, where we bought those special fold-up letters that were used at that time for overseas letters, and he showed me the green mailboxes (for domestic mail) and the red ones (for international mail). Through him and his wife we were also introduced to the local currency and some of the food.

Soon we were on the train to Taichung, where we would begin language study. I'll never forget that trip. Though the train was called the "Especially Fast," it crept along at a snail's pace much of the time, being the least expensive of all the trains available. The day was hot, so the fans on the ceiling of the car brought welcome relief as they swiveled back and forth. There was no air conditioning, and we kept the windows open for fresh air. We kept ours open too long once, however, and found ourselves breathing soot and smoke as the train passed through a tunnel. The next time, we followed the lead of other passengers and closed the window as the train whistle signaled an approaching tunnel.

Taiwan was still technically at war with China at that time. I noticed with fascination and a sense of familiarity the guards posted at each tunnel entrance and significant crossroads or bridges. It reminded me of my year there as a boy. The magnificent mountain scenery also evoked happy memories from that time. I was glad to be back!

We were thankful that Mrs. Steed had prepared us sandwiches to eat, for the box lunches sold by vendors passing down the aisle smelled awful to us, and the contents, as we observed others eating them, seemed worse. Within a few years, we would come to look forward with eagerness to train rides so we could eat those lunches, but we were still new and everything seemed strange.

We did appreciate one aspect of the service, however: The two glasses with covers sitting in a rack next to the window mystified us until a man with a huge tea kettle came by and poured scalding tea in a long stream over us into the glasses, closing the lid with a swift action when he finished. We admired his skill and accuracy. We didn't drink the tea, though, because it was unsweetened and we wanted something cool on a hot day. Later, I would drink nothing but hot water, even on the warmest day, but as I said, we were still new and everything seemed strange.

OMF Taiwan Director Ben Draper met us at the Taichung railway station after the four-hour trip. A soft-spoken, taciturn New Englander, he took us to our apartment, which stood not far from the language school. He expressed pleasure in this apartment, for it was a spacious, free-standing house (rare in Taiwan), located along with a garden within a high wall's enclosure.

We had heard of the love and care of “OMFers” for each other, but we weren’t prepared for what we saw when we entered our new home: A bowl of fresh strawberries, picked that day by Dr. Pauline Hamilton (“Dr. P.”) and placed on the dining room table. Ben told us that he and other OMFers had spent hours cleaning the place. We didn’t fully appreciate what they had done until we had to do the same for other new workers, for in Taiwan tenants generally leave the place a mess and expect the new inhabitants to clean it up.

As we began to settle in that day, we had no idea that God had plunged us into an iron furnace.

The sun comes up early in Taiwan in April, and the Chinese, as Lin Yu-tang pointed out long ago,¹⁹ are an early-rising people. We found that out the hard way. Just as in Singapore, our first morning’s rest in Taichung was shattered, this time by a terrible crashing sound. Dori awoke, startled and frightened. Only later did we find out that the noise came from raising the metal doors that protect many shops and homes at night.

Then came the hawkers. Selling vegetables, steamed bread, and screen repairs, they rode by on bicycles, calling out with loud voices. Motorcycles roared by with ear-splitting cacophony. The assault on our ears came from both sides, for we lived on a narrow strip of land between two busy lanes.

Soon we discovered the temple behind us. Often deserted, it sprang to action during special festivals, like the birthday of the god or some annual holiday, when they would set up a stage and a sound system designed to reach for several miles. Puppet shows, accompanied by music that I described as a “train wreck,” entertained neighborhood children and their parents until late at night. We sometimes thought we would go crazy.

Then there was the heat. Remember that Dori was from Vermont, which has a dry, cool climate in the summer. Taichung lies on the Tropic of Cancer, at the same latitude as Havana, but no sea breezes bring refreshment on a torrid afternoon. We lived on the top floor of a two-story house. The roof was flat, so it soaked up the sun’s rays all day long. The heat then radiated down into our apartment, turning it into an oven. We bought large Tatung fans, which did little but circulate hot air around the room.

Nor could we find any relief outside. Like other OMF workers in those days, we rode bicycles everywhere. Dori bought a hat to protect herself from the sun, but nothing could ward off the oppressive heat. Sundays were the worst, since we had to ride home from church for half an hour at noon time, with the sun blazing and the pavement reflecting its relentless rays up to our perspiring faces. We would arrive home exhausted.

Dori rode her bike to the nearby market to buy food. The merchants treated her kindly and the produce was fresh and plentiful, but riding home with a full load wore her out and taxed her skill and balance. One day, to my horror, she accidentally rode her bike into one of the open drainage ditches that ran alongside the road. As I helped her out, her tears nearly broke my heart.

¹⁹ In *My country and My People*, a marvelous book about Chinese culture.

In fact, I was really worried about her. The noise and heat kept her from sleeping at night, so her tired body had few resources to face the demanding days. I thought she would break down under the physical and mental strain.

Thank God that he knew her limits. He had his hand on her and would not allow her to be tempted beyond her ability.²⁰

“Just in Time” Mercy

As the summer bore on, fatigue and heat stretched Dori to the limit. Just when I thought she was going to break, I heard that another missionary had an air conditioner to sell. We quickly purchased his unit and installed it in our bedroom. The relief it brought may have saved Dori’s sanity. Now we could sleep at night, for the sound of the air conditioner covered much of the noise outside. The incident reminded me of the way the acquisition of an air conditioner in Murfreesboro preserved Dori from having a nervous breakdown because of the heat.

As the air conditioner gave us physical relief, the weekly prayer meeting with all the OMFers in Taichung brought spiritual and social refreshment. We gathered in the home of the superintendent and his wife, Siegfried and Elisabeth Glaw. This German couple also struggled with ongoing culture adjustment, so they could identify with us. The others included veteran missionaries like Dr. P., but most were other new workers in language school.

We sang hymns in English, heard a teaching from the Bible, listened to prayer requests from OMF fields around Asia, and shared our own needs before joining our hearts in prayer. It was good to see how others were coping with life in Taiwan, and praying for others also took our minds off our own troubles.

OMF would not allow us to live in a missionary compound, so our contact with fellow “foreigners” (as the Chinese called us and we called ourselves) was limited. They did not prevent us from starting another weekly meeting, however: Dori prayed with the wives of the other two men who had come with us from Singapore, while we three husbands studied the beautiful words of Isaiah. More than forty years later, I look back on those precious hours and thank God for providing such wonderful companionship. The other two served God faithfully in Asia for many more years.²¹

Language school took most of our time. We spent three hours a day in class at the Taichung branch of the Taipei Language Institute. Started for missionaries, the school had a highly-trained staff of instructors who did their best to instill in us a love for precise and fluent Chinese. I’ll say more about the actual language learning process later, but for now I want to express thanks to God for the other missionaries whom we met there. In addition to a large contingent of OMF workers, we got to know people from a number of other countries and mission agencies. Almost without exception, they impressed us with their love for God and their commitment to ministry

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:13

²¹ The wife of one later died.

among the Chinese people. Conversations with them between classes would energize us for the next assault on this difficult language.

Going “Home”

We were not allowed to return to our home country during the first term of service, but I experienced a little bit of “home” one weekend when Dori and I took the train to Taipei for a short break. Perhaps our only encounter with an angel took place the night we arrived in the capital city. We were going to stay at the mission home run by TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission) but weren’t sure how to get there. Someone directed us to the right bus, but we didn’t know where to get off. A young woman on the bus asked if she could help, then got off with us and pointed us in the right direction. We turned around to thank her, and she was gone! Had she stepped into a side alley, or was she a special messenger from God?

The next day, I eagerly took Dori up to Yang Ming Shan (formerly called Grass Mountain in English), where I had lived for the happiest year of my youth. The bus brought us up to the lovely park, where we strolled and ate lunch. As a light rain began to fall, we boarded another bus for the “F” Area, the residential district for American military officers. Very hesitantly, I rang the bell at the gate of the first house we had lived in long ago. Imagine my surprise when we were met not by a servant but by the wife of the Army general who lived there!

I quickly explained who I was and she graciously invited us in for tea. The house looked pretty much the same. I then told her that I wanted to take Dori to the larger house we had occupied on the crest of the ridge. She called to see whether the admiral and his wife were home. They were still worshipping at the Catholic chapel but would return shortly, we were told, so we could walk up there right away.

My excitement mounted with each step we took up the hill. We found the house, protected just as it had been then by a Chinese soldier in a guardhouse. I told him I used to live there (I could speak that much Chinese by then), so he allowed me to ring the bell. I wondered how I would explain myself to whoever opened the gate, but my fears evaporated when I saw none other than Ho, the man who had been our “coolie” in 1957. After a few seconds he recognized me and then warmly escorted us into the cool home. I was thrilled to see him, and he was just as happy to see me. He was now the chief Chinese servant in the house.

Admiral and Mrs. Snyder soon came back from Mass. They didn’t know that strangers would be sitting in their living room, but responded with total aplomb and courtesy when they saw us and heard my story. They welcomed us like family.

Ships from the Seventh Fleet were in port at Kaohsiung, so the Snyders were having a party for the officers that night and invited us to stay for dinner. Aside from the height of the mature trees that lined the yard, the only major addition was a lovely swimming pool behind the house. The Snyders found swimsuits for us, and we swam and then ate with the Naval officers who came to the picnic. Like my father, Admiral Snyder grilled the meat himself. When we struck up a conversation with one officer who turned out to be a Christian, we felt doubly at home. We rode

back to the TEAM mission home with him and his shipmates when the fairy-tale evening finally came to an end.

That night remains etched in my memory. Not only had I been able to show Dori the two houses where I had lived as a boy, but we had also been included in a dinner party for American Naval officers. It was like going home for a few hours. Dori finally understood the stories I had been telling her for years. It brought us much closer together.

A Visit from Home

After we had been in Taiwan for six months, my mother wrote me to say that she and my sister Laurie were going to make a trip to Taiwan. OMF usually discouraged such visits by family members, since they could distract new workers from language study and tempt them to want to return home, but there was not much they could do in this case because my mother simply announced she was coming and had already purchased the tickets. They were joining a tour to Hong Kong and would then make a side trip to Taiwan.

Through contacts with old friends, my mother found a room on the front side of the Grand Hotel, facing Taipei. Dori and I met her and Laurie at the airport and took them by cab to the hotel. The next week with them was wonderful. We first stayed a night or two in the older part of the hotel, which was still marvelously comfortable and quiet. Then we all took a plane to Taichung, where my mother and sister stayed with the Glaws.

Their visit with the Glaws tested their endurance and gave them a taste of what we faced daily. In the middle of the night, someone nearby practiced on the trombone and kept them awake, and a rooster awoke them early in the morning. They took it with good humor but realized that missionary life in Taichung was not easy for Americans who were used to comfort and quiet.

Taking a train back to Taipei, we stayed there again for a few more days, relishing the luxury of the Grand Hotel. During that time, my mother used her Navy identification card to go to the Navy Exchange and buy some groceries for us. She purchased things we could not buy or which were too expensive, like cranberry jelly. We took them sightseeing on Yang Ming Shan (Grass Mountain) and then to the house on the mountaintop where we had lived.

When I told Mrs. Snyder that my mother and sister were coming, she kindly invited them to lunch. We all ate together on the porch, overlooking the same scene we had enjoyed each day in 1958. There were two major differences: Ho was now serving the table, and the green rice paddies which had filled the valley before had been largely replaced by homes and factories.

Only one jarring note marred our time with them. Admiral Ni, who was military advisor to the president, invited us all to dinner when he discovered my mother was in town. I sat next to him at a round table in an expensive Chinese restaurant, together with two other high-ranking Naval officers, the admiral's son, and my mother and sister.

At one point, he asked politely, "And why are you now living in Taiwan?"

“My wife and I are studying Chinese as missionaries,” I replied.

He stiffened, his face turned dark, and he said, with an icy tone of voice most uncharacteristic of the usually courteous Chinese, “*You* have come to *us*?”

I was too taken aback to reply, but his words rang in my mind for many years. I’m not sure what he meant. Was he wondering why Americans, with their own social problems, presumed to teach the Chinese how to live? Was he reflecting the view of many Chinese that all religions are equally valid and that the Christian claim to be the only way to salvation is arrogant? Was he wondering how people from a culture so debased and immoral as ours could hope to have any credibility among the Chinese, who at that time were more conservative?

Perhaps I should tell you my original dream when we went to Taiwan: I hoped to take the gospel to the upper classes, the elite leadership who had been my parents’ friends when we lived there before. Admiral Ni’s rebuff shattered that notion and forced me to re-consider God’s purpose for our work in Taiwan.

Turning Up the Heat

The visit with my mother and sister restored our health and our spirits after a trying summer. We enjoyed using the Chinese we had learned so far to navigate the island. Our bodies felt rested after five nights in a world-class hotel. God, who knows just how much his children can endure, had given us a much-needed respite. We were ready to re-enter the fray.

Now the pressure intensified. Without going into all the details, I shall merely give a few illustrations of the ways in which the Lord allowed us to be “burdened [almost] beyond measure, above strength” so that “we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.”²²

The constant noise afflicted Dori’s ears day and night. Unfamiliar sights and sounds tested our patience. New foods offended our palates. For example, we had a very fine woman come to help with cleaning and cooking two days a week. On her first day, after doing housework, she made a large bowl of delicious-looking custard. We eagerly awaited the moment we could dip into it. I took a huge helping, only to find that it was not sweet, but salty, in the Chinese style! Keen disappointment gripped Dori on another occasion when, to cheer her up one gloomy night, I bought an ice-cream bar for her at the local “supermarket.” She loves chocolate and greeted my gift with delight. Her smile changed to an awful grimace when her tongue lapped the cool brown bar and discovered it was not chocolate, but bean paste! We love that flavor now, but the shock brought her to tears.

She did well in learning the language, but other facets of the culture frustrated her. She wasn’t used to the congestion, traffic, and sometimes crude habits of people around us. She had never seen men clear their throats and spit in the street or boys urinating in public. We realized later that we were partly dealing with class differences, for the lack of zoning placed both wealthier

²² 2 Corinthians 1:8, 9

and working-class people in the same neighborhoods. Dori thought all Chinese were like the few she saw in our area. She was wrong, of course, but did not know it.

Seeing her cry and hearing her as she shared her angry feelings took its toll on me. As we analyzed our reactions afterwards, we saw that she responds to stress with anger, but I react with illness. My health began to deteriorate.

I had taken daily walks in Chapel Hill, but the dangerous traffic in Taichung made that impossible. Instead, I tried to take up tennis. I joined a local club and began to take lessons. As in high school, however, I made the mistake of saving money on shoes. Rather than buying the right kind of tennis shoes, I wore old ones. Soon my heel was suffering sharp pains and I had to stop. Since it hurt to put my heel on the hard floors of our apartment, I also ceased from some important abdomen-strengthening exercises I had long performed each day. Nor did I do regular sit-ups.

Without exercise, I had no way of handling the physical and emotional stress that attacked my body and my mind. Over a period of two years, I had one cold after another; I developed a pre-ulcerous condition; I got pink-eye; and a cyst developed underneath my eyelid. The trip by train to the missionary hospital in Changhua for surgery to remove the cyst had a humorous aspect, for I was at the time studying *Picture Stories*, a book in our curriculum that included a long section on going to the hospital!

Like most women, Dori learned the language faster and better than I did. Chinese acquaintances often commented that Dori's Chinese was superior to mine. I had to be courteous to them, but I inwardly burned with shame. To make matters worse, though most of my teachers treated me with great kindness and patience, one of them nearly broke me. She was a beautiful woman who seemed to enjoy inflicting pain on men. She corrected each mistake I made, which was her job, but did it in such a way as to make me feel stupid. I sometimes felt that this cruel, critical woman threatened to strip me of my manhood.

Remember that I had thought I would be able to learn Chinese easily. After all, had I not studied Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, and German? Only later did I reflect that these languages were all very different from Chinese and that I had not learned to speak any of them! Furthermore, I was beginning Chinese at the age of thirty-two, long after the peak age for acquiring new information. My self-confidence was entirely misplaced.

The result? I lost my voice. The laryngitis that had interrupted my preaching in Murfreesboro in 1970 returned with a vengeance. Speaking in a normal voice became terribly painful, so I had to whisper in order to communicate. My superintendent suggested I take a month off, which I did. I even went to the south of the island for a short retreat by myself.

Worse than that, I lost my desire to communicate the gospel. I would engage in ordinary conversation readily enough, for I was learning the language reasonably well, but I would not speak in certain situations. When my pastor asked me to pray at church gatherings – a great compliment and honor to a new language learner – I flatly refused. My rudeness horrified Dori,

but I stubbornly insisted on silence. I feared making mistakes and chose to avoid loss of face by just not talking.

More Grace

Even as I felt the pressure intensifying, God sent reminders of his love and care.

Ross and Christine Paterson befriended us. Dori had met Christine, who had come only recently from England, at a missionary women's retreat. Ross had been on the island for many years, spoke fluent Chinese, and could even make jokes in Chinese. They invited us to their home and shared God's love with us on many occasions. Ross went on to found a major Chinese ministry, Chinese Church Support Ministries. They remain good friends of ours to this day.

Another couple, who came from Australia and whose names I have forgotten, introduced us to some wonderful music. They made copies of tapes they had brought from home and gave them to us. God's Spirit refreshed my soul on many occasions as I listened to these songs, mostly from congregations in Australia.

The Lord also spoke to me through his word during my daily quiet times. I memorized Psalms 34 and 118. The words of the latter became a rallying cry for me during the dark hours of doubt:

The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.

The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;

The right hand of the LORD is exalted;

The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.

I shall not die, but live,

And tell of the works of the LORD.

The LORD has disciplined me severely, but He has not given me over to death.²³

Intellectual Activity

Mentally, I enjoyed Chinese language study. I worked hard in class and at home, studying the textbooks, listening to the tapes, and practicing writing characters. A book analyzing Chinese characters according to their components brought me great pleasure.

I had arrived in Taiwan with almost no knowledge of Chinese history and culture. Realizing this lack, I began to read books about the subject. C. K. Yang's volume on Chinese religion gave me an overview and impressed me with the way that popular Chinese religion – usually called Buddhism – had permeated the culture. If only Christianity could do that! *God's, Ghosts, and Ancestors*²⁴ focused on the folk religion of Taiwan. I learned that “ancestor worship” usually stemmed from a fear that an unhappy ancestor would burn into a “hungry ghost,” who would return to plague disloyal descendants.

²³ Psalm 118:14, 16–18 (NASV)

²⁴ David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: The Folk Religion of a Taiwanese Village* (University of California Press, 1972)

For a brief time, I entertained the dream of publishing scholarly articles in English theological journals. My friend and mentor Philip Hughes, who was editor of the *Westminster Theological Journal*, had the first chapter of my dissertation printed in that prestigious magazine.²⁵ I thought I might follow up that article with more on the Early Church, but soon discovered that I lacked the time because of language study.

Siegfried Glaw, sensing that I would profit from a chance to share what I had learned in graduate school, arranged for me to teach New Testament Greek to some pastors from the Taiwan Presbyterian Church. Since my language ability was still in its infancy, this was a great honor and a major challenge. I worked hard on the first class, preparing a lecture on the Greek work *logos* (“word”) in John 1:1. When the pastors came, they were as courteous as the Chinese can be. Siegfried made the introductions, then left me to teach them. I had foolishly attempted too much. My complicated discussion of the meaning of *logos* was not what they were looking for, and my Chinese was not good enough. They never returned.

A Crucial Decision

As her trials continued unabated, Dori began to fear that she would not be able to cope. She asked me on several occasions whether we could go home if she could not handle the stress. Each time, I rebuffed her question, insisting that she *could* cope.

One oasis in our life was the campus of Morrison Christian School, outside of Taichung. We went there for the OMF Field Conference, discovered its swimming pool and spacious grounds, and then returned occasionally for some relief from our neighborhood. One night, as we paced the terrace of the school building, Dori posed the question once again: If she could not endure the difficulties of life in Taiwan, would I be willing to take her back to America?

Like many men, I struggled mightily with such a choice. I had sensed God’s leading to come to Taiwan. How could I abandon what I considered to be my mission in life?

On the other hand, the Bible is clear that a husband must love his wife as he loves himself, even if he must sacrifice himself to do so.

Reluctantly, but knowing I was right, I said, “Yes, we can go home if you can’t take it here.”

Dori sighed with relief. From that day onward, it seemed that she received new strength to go on. I suppose she needed the security of knowing that I would protect her at any cost.

Into the Valley

Dori was beginning to adjust, but I was falling apart.

I could not deal with the tensions in my own life. I was becoming ever more introspective. My journal contained long passages of anguished confession of sin and earnest prayers for God to

²⁵ “Augustine’s Sermonic Method,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, Volume XXXIX, Number 2, Spring, 1977, pages 213–38

transform me. God's grace, in which I firmly believed, did not seem to grip and energize my thoughts and emotions.

Other factors combined to wear me down. People at home began to say that the prayer letters I wrote were too negative, so I excluded unpleasant news from them; but this cut me off from their intercessions. At one point I thought that even my family members did not understand or sympathize with us. One night, when we felt particularly alone and isolated, something died within me. I could feel it, but I could not fight it.

For weeks, we had looked forward to our upcoming vacation. OMF has a generous and wise policy of requiring its workers to take one month off each year in order to rest and regain strength. We had arranged a two-week excursion to Li Shan (Pear Mountain), several hours by bus from Taichung. That "vacation" had the opposite effect. Our brief stay on that mountain set in motion a chain of events that led to our early departure for the United States.

Our vacation was to begin on Sunday. Dori thought we should go to church before departing, but I said we should take the early bus to avoid the crowds. That turned out to be a big mistake. Our driver seemed to want to die young. At the very least, he was tempting Fate (in which most Chinese believe) as he raced along the treacherous Cross-island Highway. This was the road I had seen under construction when Chiang Ching-kuo gave us a tour in 1957. Completed now, it features hairpin turns and long sections of road cut out of sheer rock. It was a marvel of engineering and a tribute to the hard work and courage of the Chinese veterans who built it, but you should take it slowly.

My stomach tightened and my knuckles whitened as I gripped the rail on the seat in front of us for stability during the long trip. Many times I thought we were going to careen off a cliff into the rocky river valley or crash head-on into an oncoming vehicle. Dori cried when we finally came to a screeching halt in the parking lot of the Li Shan Guest House. I did not realize how tense I was, but I would soon find out.

We enjoyed a lovely first night in the comfortable Guest House (a hotel, really), but the next day, when I took an early morning plunge into the swimming pool before breakfast, my body recoiled in shock at the cold water. We set out on our day's excursion soon after eating. As we walked through pear tree orchards, my back muscles began to tense up. I was developing a pain on the right side of my back, near the hip. I did not want to spoil Dori's enjoyment of the day, however, so I said nothing.

The pain intensified as the day wore on. Finally, just as we approached the Guest House, I somehow stepped the wrong way. My back screamed with excruciating pain, and I came to a halt. I rested a few minutes, and then limped into the hotel with Dori's assistance. I have no memory of the next few days, except that they were not much fun for either of us. My back hurt so much that I could not face the idea of another wrenching journey on a bus, so we decided to take a helicopter back to Taichung.

That ride wound through breathtaking mountain passes and gave us a view of Taiwan we could never see from the ground. I almost thanked God for my back injury.

Unaware of the nature of my condition and ignorant of the principles of back care, I abused my back for the next few weeks. We went on a trip with the language school to a scenic reservoir, then took another bumpy bus into Taipei to see our friend Chen Mei-yu, carrying our heavy suitcases with us. Back in Taichung, I continued to ride my bicycle on uneven roads until we bought a motor scooter. That provided a smoother ride, but strained my back whenever I had to get it off its stand or put it back into place.

Soon I was suffering acute pain for much of the time. Our doctor gave me a muscle relaxant, perhaps Valium, but that only made me drowsy and depressed. Someone told me about a Christian acupuncturist whom I found to be most helpful. He not only performed acupuncture, but also applied other Chinese remedies.

The acupuncture consisted of putting thin needles into my earlobe. He would insert a needle and ask, “Does it hurt?”

If I said, “No,” he would try another location for the needle.

I cried, “Yes!” and then he said, “This is the right place!” Apparently, pain signaled that he had inserted the needle into the correct point for healing my back.²⁶

Did it work? I think it must have helped, for my discomfort decreased. I am not sure about the theory behind acupuncture (more on that later), but it does seem to help with chronic back pain. The doctor also massaged my lower back and used “moxibustion.” Moxibustion is a term for placing a flat piece of cork, about the size of a quarter, on the skin and then putting an herb of some sort on top. The herb is lit on fire, and the heat penetrates the body, bringing a warm, comfortable feeling. In addition, he used suction cups to draw out “qi” from within.

Although all of this brought me some relief, my back was not healed, so I took the train to the Christian hospital in Chia Yi to see an American neurologist. He gave me a thorough neurological exam and then told me to lie on my stomach.

“That will hurt,” I protested.

“Do it anyway.” I obeyed his orders.

“Now lift up your legs, one at a time, as if you were swimming.”

“That will kill me!” I objected.

“No, it won’t! Do as I say.”

I did, and he was right. In fact, this action greatly reduced the pain in my lower back. I have continued the exercise almost daily since then and have found it to be most effective.

²⁶ The obvious spiritual parallel we can draw is that God usually causes us to grow by the application of pain.

He assured me that I had sustained only a minor injury and would recover if I took good care of myself. I returned to Taichung hoping to get well soon. But the other doctors did not give me exercises to do that would restore me to full health, so I did not improve.

Furthermore, my emotional turmoil had not subsided. I kept getting one illness after another and had to withdraw from some activities.

For example, we went on “language break,” which was a two-week visit to another location to practice using the language we had acquired so far. During that time, I suffered from periodic back spasms and had to be helped out of bed more than once. We went home early because of my back.

OMF leaders feared for my mental and physical health. They arranged for me to see a foreign physician for counseling. He was a family doctor from Great Britain. Night after night he probed my past for clues to my deepening depression. We talked about my relationship with my parents, my wife, and God. He took copious notes, and concluded that my physical health would allow me to remain in Taiwan but that my emotional state was precarious.

I had exactly the opposite view. I thought I could recover emotionally but did not think that my back would tolerate life in Taiwan, with its bumpy buses and hard chairs. We had been assigned to Taipei, where I was to join the faculty of China Evangelical Seminary as a member of their Chinese Church History Research Center. I was excited about that appointment, but did not think that I could handle the physical stress.

One day, as I was seeing the old missionary doctor who had taken care of me for the previous two years, he examined my chart carefully. He had covered one and a half long sheets of paper with very small handwriting, detailing each of my many ailments. After perusing this record for a while, he looked up and said, “Have you ever thought of going home for a rest?”

I had resisted this awful prospect for months, but had just in the past two days considered whether it might be a good idea, for the reasons I mentioned above.

“I would recommend it,” he said softly, when I told him this.

Siegfried Glaw came over the next afternoon. His usually sunny expression was cloudy. I could tell he was nervous about something. He brought up the matter of my health and said, “What do you think should be done now?”

I surprised him and replied, “I think I should go home.”

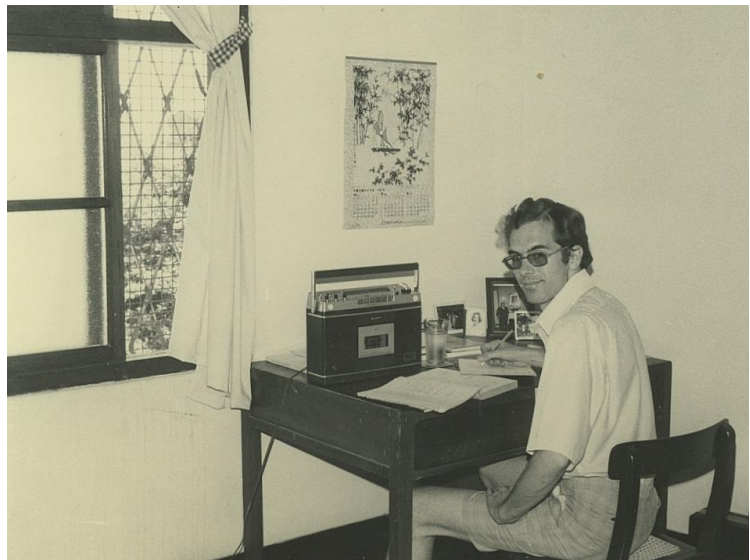
He breathed a sigh of relief and broke into a smile. “That is just what I was going to suggest, but I was afraid of hurting you.”

We agreed to make plans for a speedy departure, and I felt deep peace in my heart for the first time in two years.

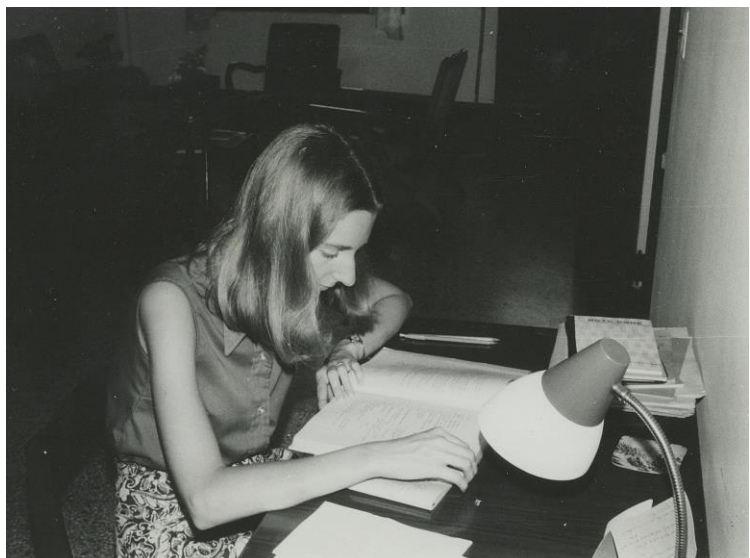


In our kitchen in
Taichung, 1977

Language study, 1977

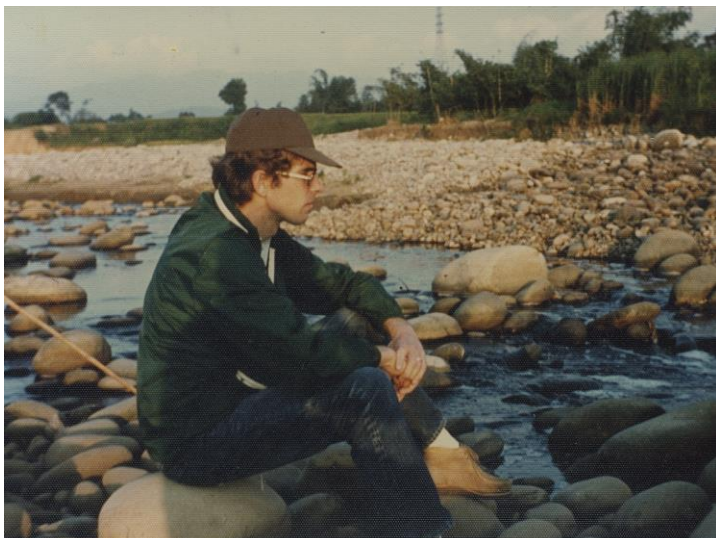


Dori learned Chinese faster than I did.





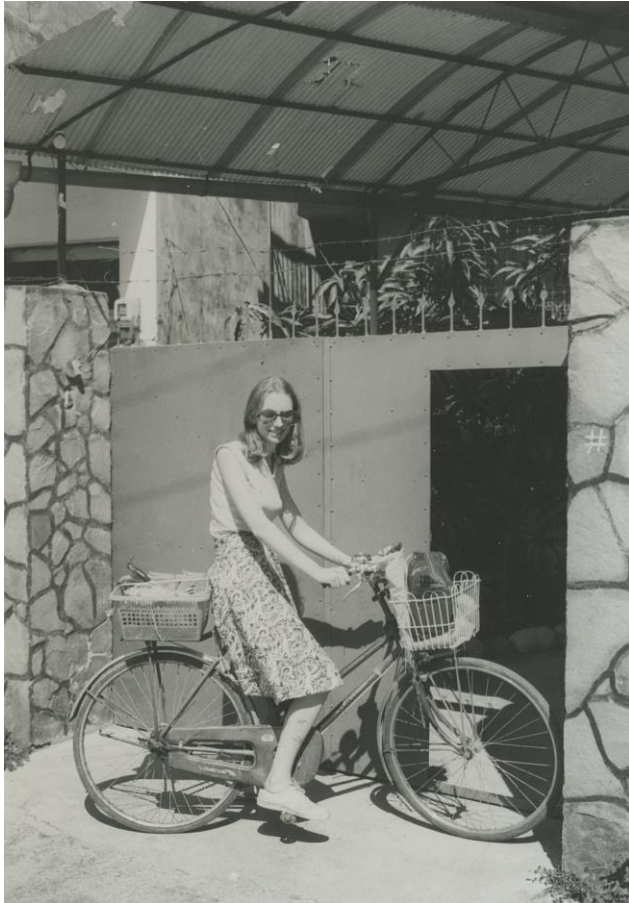
With the bride and groom after a wedding
in the church in Taichung, 1977



On a river in southern Taiwan, 1977



Taiwan OMF annual
conference, 1977



Off to the market



In front of our church in Taichung, 1978



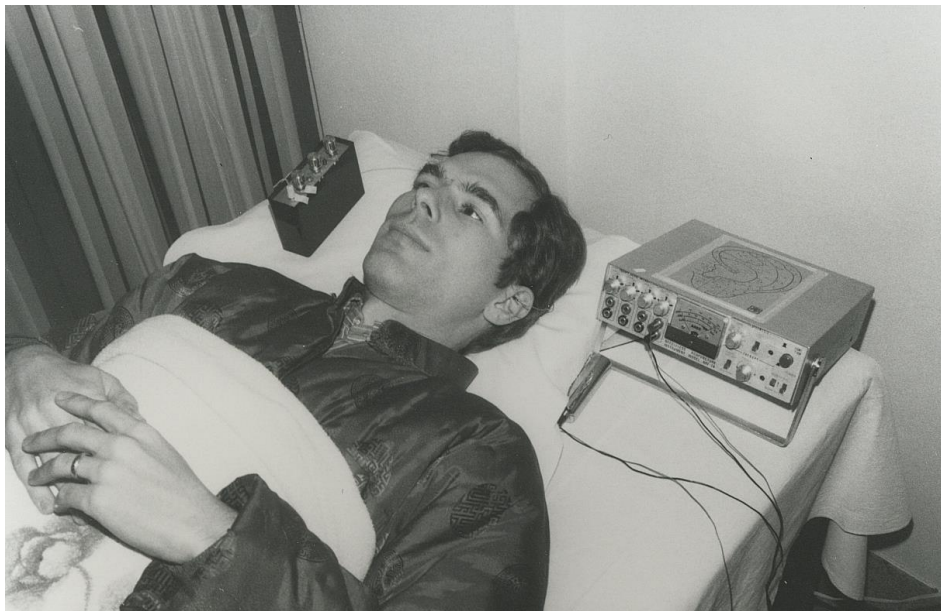
With two other OMF couples, 1978



New OMF workers, 1978



Practicing with the choir, 1978



Receiving acupuncture for back pain, 1978



My two best Chinese friends, 1978. We are still close!



Enjoying hot-pot on a cold winter day, 1978