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PUBLISHER'S MEMO

(re)Defining “Cutting Edge” in an Upside-down Kingdom

By Laurie Fortunak Nichols

When we decided on the theme for this issue, “Women on the Cutting Edge of Missions,” we were focusing on “typical” images of influential, wise, creative women who are greatly impacting missions and evangelism today. On a secular level, we would look to the equivalent of Angela Merkel, Ho Ching, or Condoleezza Rice. On the Christian historical level, we would look to Priscilla, Clare, Catherine Booth, or Mother Teresa.

But as you will read in this issue, “cutting edge” has various facets, the least of which is the typical definition. We must continually come back to the reality that we are God’s workers in an upside-down field. As our authors remind us, women who are indeed on the cutting edge of missions are often nameless to most and can easily go faceless in a crowd of those who are perceived to be “the powerful.” They are the hands in J.R.R. Tolkien’s description: “Such is oft the deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere.”

Is it that instead of “cutting edge” being defined by the world’s standards—by measures of quantity and excellence and brilliance—that we, as God’s people, begin defining it as being on the forefront and leading edge of proclaiming God’s love through the power of his Spirit in compassionate ways that impact perhaps just one life at a time?

In an upside-down kingdom, where the first shall be last and the last shall be first, “cutting edge” may look like one Jesus-loving Filipino housekeeper in the Middle East who has found the key to opening the hearts of her employers, friends, and neighbors to the hope of heaven.

Perhaps “cutting edge” in this upside-down kingdom is one West African 22-year-old widowed mother of five giving herself to the task of opening an orphanage for children in her community who have lost both parents. Perhaps “cutting edge” is looking in the eye a neighbor who is in deep pain, and sensing that he or she is open to the gospel, laying aside our standard answers and instead following God’s Spirit to share the gospel in a completely unique and creative way.

In his book, *Sub-Merge: Living Deep in a Shallow World*, John Hayes shares this story of 22-year-old Sopheap who was dying after a short, torturous life of abandonment and abuse which left her deaf and infected with AIDS. One loving community—Sunrise, a home and hospice care for those suffering from

AIDS—led by one faithful woman, Diane Moss, cared for Sopheap as she had never before been cared for and loved on her with all the love they had to give.

They spoke of the hope of heaven, and when Sopheap died three days later, “though her brief, brutal life and tragic passing did not garner headlines...every moment of her last three days was front-page news in God’s upside-down kingdom.”¹

Hayes goes on to charge us:

In fact, [Sopheap’s] last three days with us could have been seen as a loose thread in a clumsily stitched pilgrimage. There was little glamour in Sopheap’s life....This story reminds me that if we, as the people of God, are going to meet the Sopheaps of this world squarely, as Christ did, we are going to have to reach into the deepest pockets of our souls and pull out more than the loose change of the world’s clichés.²

Similarly, Mother Teresa once said that she “did mathematics differently” than most people. Instead of worrying about ministering to a large number of Indian Hindus, she and her colleagues looked at each individual separately. Her mathematics “considered the one she was loving right now as the total of God’s universe at that moment.”³

As you read the articles in this issue of *Lausanne World Pulse*, you will hear from women telling of how God’s Spirit is doing mighty things in an upside-down way around the world. We pray that your soul will be refreshed and encouraged by stories from China, India, West Papua, Argentina, Yemen, and elsewhere.

It is our hope that not only would we, as God’s workers in an upside-down kingdom, begin to see “cutting edge” in a new light marked by one life at a time, but that we might even take the next step of walking on the “bleeding edge” of evangelism and missions, living lives that are sacrificially poured out as an offering to do whatever it takes so that all—from the least to the greatest—may hear and believe in the great name of Jesus.

Endnotes

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3. Adeney, Frances. 2010. *Graceful Evangelism: Christian Witness in a Complex World*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 183.

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NEWS BRIEFS

September News from around the World

AROUND THE WORLD: Bible Agencies Unite to Strengthen Ministry Impact

Two Bible ministries with complementary missions have announced plans to merge. Bible League International (BLI) and the World Bible Translation Center (WBTC) both bring unique strengths: Bible League in Bible distribution and WBTC in Bible translation. The new organization will focus on expanding a literacy program around the world, as well as using digital delivery technology recently developed in a strategic alliance with twelve other ministries. According to BLI CEO Robert T. Frank, "This merger will strengthen operations for both of our ministries, increasing the tools available to reach the three global audiences we share: the poorest of the poor, the persecuted church, and those walking in darkness." (Assist News Service)

NORTH KOREA: Call to End Persecution of Christians

Recent reports by human rights organizations accuse North Korea of putting up to 180,000 people into forced labor. Christians are among the inmates facing torture, starvation, and execution in political prison camps. Persecution watchdog Release International is working to support North Korean Christians who have fled the country by providing safe houses, pastoral support, and health care. An interim petition calling for religious freedom in North Korea has gathered more than twenty thousand signatures from concerned Christians in the U.K. The petition can be signed at www.releaseinternational.org/petition. (Assist News Service)

SOMALIA: Christian Agencies Continue Work despite Security Issues

Christian relief agencies providing aid to millions of people facing drought face security issues in the war-torn country of Somalia, where humanitarian officials say operating is difficult, but not impossible. Nearly 3.7 million people, half of the country's population, are affected by a serious food crisis, which declared famine in two regions of southern Somalia. An estimated 1,500 refugees fleeing the famine were arriving daily in Dadaab camp in northern Kenya. Another 1,700 are arriving in eastern Ethiopia. (Ecumenical News International)

SRI LANKA: Violence against Christians

Violence against Christians in Sri Lanka has been increasing in recent weeks. On 10 July 2011 a pastor was assaulted after attending a meeting convened by a Buddhist monk in Ampara District, Eastern Province. On 19 July, a mob of fifty people attacked the homes of five Christian families in Badulla District in Uva Province. At last report, there were plans to force these families to renounce Christianity or leave the village. (Voice of the Martyrs, Canada)

TANZANIA: Muslim Extremists Torch Churches

According to Compass Direct News, on 30 July 2011 Muslim extremists burned down the Evangelical Assemblies of God-Tanzania church building on Zanzibar Island. This was just three days after another congregation's facility was reduced to ashes. Assailants were apparently shouting, "Away with the church—we do not want infidels to spoil our community, especially our children." Another church building was burned down on 27 July, said Pastor George Frank Dunia of the Free Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Africa. On neighboring Pemba Island, suspected Muslims extremists razed a Seventh-day Adventist Church building. (Assist News Service)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: InterVarsity Inspired after World Assembly

The 2011 International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) World Assembly, held 26 July to 2 August in Krakow, Poland, hosted more than 650 delegates from over 150 nations. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship was just one of dozens of student ministries represented. Staff members were motivated by seeing how students were leading hundreds of others in a single ministry chapter and how staff stepped fearlessly into harm's way when necessary for Christ. InterVarsity personnel are not only motivated to work harder, but are more keenly aware of the Lord's work not just on American campuses, but in universities around the globe. InterVarsity president Alec Hill says he was able to see Jesus as Lord in a broader context. InterVarsity has been building communities on American campuses for decades. (Mission Network News)

THEMED ARTICLES: Women on the Cutting Edge of Missions

Women on the Cutting Edge: Yesterday and Today

By Leanne Dzubinski

When you hear “the cutting edge of missions,” what comes to mind? Perhaps a method for evangelism, missional strategies, church-planting movements, or social justice?

If you think farther back, it was friendship evangelism, theological education by extension, or church planting.

Other ideas may be related to location: unreached people groups, unengaged peoples, the Islamic world, or the 10/40 window.

A century ago, it would have been China, Hawaii, or Burma.

Regardless of whether you think in terms of strategies or locations, most likely you're remembering *men* who've pioneered these mission trends. Hudson Taylor was famous for developing efforts in China *and* emphasizing acculturation. Alan Hirsch is well known today for missional church planting, as is David Garrison for church-planting movements. This list goes on. This leads to the question few are asking: *where are the women?*

It is widely recognized that until recently history has been largely silent when it comes to recording women's contributions.¹ For a variety of reasons, accounts have typically focused on men. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the history of missions is quite similar.²

Only a handful of women appear on the pages of mission history and theory books. Yet that does not mean they are not integrally engaged in the worldwide cause of the kingdom. One beautiful illustration of women working on the cutting edge happened over a century ago, when China was center stage.

The Banishment of Foot Binding in China

In 1871, Maria Brown and Mary Porter sailed for Northern China as Methodist missionaries. On the way, they struggled to find a Christian perspective on the Chinese practice of foot binding, which had been ingrained for a millennium. These women eventually concluded they must oppose the custom. It was clearly harmful to women since it was extremely painful and left them unable to move about freely.

Brown and Porter realized that physically-impaired women were limited in their ability to contribute to society, thus raising the country's poverty level. They also foresaw the implications for evangelism, reasoning that a woman with bound feet could not become an itinerant preacher after her conversion if she could not walk unaided. The two missionaries decided that an admission requirement to their gospel training schools would be unbound feet.

Six years later, during an inter-mission conference in Shanghai, their ideas were presented to the assembly. Some of the men recognized that they had never considered all the implications of foot binding. They joined the women in using moral persuasion to stop it. Gradually, more and more missionaries and Chinese people became convinced that foot binding was a harmful practice.

In 1907, the Chinese government itself outlawed the practice. In just one generation, Brown and Porter were catalysts for transformational change in the whole country of China.³

What enabled these women to be cutting edge in their day? Three points:

- They saw far beyond their own specific time and location.
- They were able to think outside their immediate circumstances to grasp the far-reaching effects for society and the kingdom of what their male colleagues had accepted as "simply culture."
- They demonstrated great trust in God through their willingness to follow what they firmly understood to be his will.

From a human perspective, the likelihood that two single women could successfully oppose such an entrenched practice was non-existent. Yet once they fully understood the physical and spiritual ramifications, they relied on God to change *what was* to *what should be*.

They persevered with passionate obedience while facing opposition from missionaries and Chinese parents who thought their position extreme and foot binding necessary. The end results were astounding. Certainly, part of the spread of the gospel through China can be credited to these two women, whose futuristic thinking proved strategic, as they were willing to insist on what we now see clearly as a holistic gospel that brings healing and transformation.

Women Cutting Deeply into Culture Today

What about women today? Are women just as involved in cutting-edge mission work? The answer is a resounding "yes." Whether "cutting edge" means new locations or new methods, wherever we find today's mission work flourishing, we find faithful women *there*, doing *that*.

From the very beginning of modern missions, women have been an integral part of the movement. Today, women comprise two-thirds of the missionary workforce worldwide. I know two women pioneers (one using marketplace ministry and the other multiplying disciples by equipping women for ministry) who target limited-access countries. Women pioneer as well as participate, and if we look around our agencies and churches, we see women leading in every possible ministry.

Yet when was the last time we promoted a woman's mission work as cutting edge? Why don't we see the women who are mission innovators?

I think part of the answer might lie in our own acculturation. Like the men in China who had accepted the practice of foot binding, we too have acquired previous cultural attitudes that do not consider women as central to the gospel story. Yet it is *culture*, in Bible times and now, that puts men first—not the gospel. It is *culture* that tells men to go it alone—not the Bible. *Culture* defines what is “women’s work” and “women’s sphere”—not Jesus.

A New Testament Perspective of Women in Missions

In the New Testament we see a very different picture of women’s work.

- Jesus had women followers.
- Women were the first to tell others that the Messiah was alive.
- Women were among the disciples in the upper room who received the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, evangelized, and likely baptized new believers.
- Women led house churches—Mary, Nympha, and Chloe each had churches in their homes. The Philippian church met in Lydia’s house. Phoebe was a deacon, Priscilla a teacher.

The New Testament does not present a model of women conforming to cultural standards. Quite the contrary, it gives us a picture of cutting-edge women preaching the gospel and spreading the kingdom, just like faithful missionary women do today around the world.

A Call to Partnership and Full Recognition

From its beginning, the Lausanne Movement has promoted the partnership of men and women for the cause of the gospel. In 2004, they issued this challenge: “We call on the church around the world to work towards full partnership of men and women in the work of world evangelization by maximizing the gifts of all.”⁴

The Cape Town meetings in 2010 again stressed that women’s “contribution may be undervalued, diminished, overlooked, or even prevented.”⁵ I’m convinced that this exhortation is precisely what’s needed for dynamic change in missions of the future: men and women partnering together to take gospel transformation to the whole world.

The trends, methods, and locations on which mission work focuses change over time, and rightly so. The true mark of cutting-edge mission practice is the faithful, passionate obedience to God’s call, by women and men working together around the globe.

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Leanne Dzubinski has twenty years of cross-cultural experience in Europe, including Germany, Austria and Spain. She holds a DMin in effective ministries to women from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a MTheo from Dallas Theological Seminary.

Asian Women on the Cutting Edge of Mission: Past and Present

By Loun-Ling Tan

Traditionally, the role of Asian women was mainly in the home. In church and Christian mission, this has been translated to generally confining Asian women to ministries with children and women, hospitality, and community service. However, they may have been overlooked for their significant impact on the churches and societies in their contexts and of their times.

Historical Role Models

An early example is **Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922)**. One of India's most revolutionary thinkers of her time, she was known as a pioneering social reformer, defying the caste system and overcoming barriers to rescue outcast children, widows, orphans, and destitute women. In fact, a home was established which eventually became the [Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission](#). Under the many services provided at Mukti Mission (orphanages, schools for the illiterate, medical services for the poor, homes for the unwanted, and a church), her vision continues in the lives of many women and young girls who have found hope and new life.

Ramabai expressed [her conviction](#) this way: "People must not only hear about the kingdom of God, but must see it in actual operation, on a small scale perhaps and in imperfect form, but a real demonstration nevertheless."

The *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* recorded a number of Chinese women who by faith promoted new ideas and pioneered new projects. Space allows me to mention only two.

Shi Meiyu (Mary Stone) (1873-1954) was one of the first Asian women to graduate from the University of Michigan in medicine. She returned to work in Jiujiang, China, as a medical missionary of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. For twenty years as the hospital superintendent, Meiya cared for patients, trained nurses, translated training manuals and textbooks for Chinese nurses, and promoted public hygiene. According to the [Dictionary](#), "Grown up with unbound feet, she was enthusiastic in opposing foot binding."

Eventually, she left the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society and established the Shanghai Bethel Mission, which later developed a hospital, schools, and an orphanage. Bethel was well-known for its training program for nurses. Not only were they well-trained in nursing skills, they were also trained in evangelism.

As one of the female pioneers for women's work for the Southern Methodist Mission in Korea from 1897 to 1903, **Yu Lingzhi (Dora Yu) (1873-1931)** was considered "the first cross-cultural Chinese

missionary in modern times.”¹ Her work was multifaceted and involved Bible teaching, medical work among female patients and school children, teaching Korean girls with learning disabilities from poor families, and translating and compiling textbooks.

After her return to China, she established what might be called “the first Chinese faith mission, following the footsteps of Hudson Taylor.”² She played a prominent role in the Chinese holiness movement, which has an “historical significance for the theology of Christian spiritual growth and women’s role in missions.”³

Recognition should also be given to **Korean women in the “minjung” movement**. Writing on Asian women in mission, Sun Ai Lee Park recounts the growth of Christian women’s concerns in Korea for the human rights struggles of the “minjung” (masses of poor, exploited, and marginalised people) in the 1970s. Many women became preachers and workers in the day care centres of the churches to reach the minjung.⁴

As a result, the minjung movement “challenged both the church and society to deal with the problems of socio-economic and political injustice.” This, in turn, “brought democracy to Korea in the late 1980s, and certainly played a ‘prophetic’ role in Korean history.”⁵

Twenty-first Century Innovative Models

Toward the latter part of the last century, and since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been a rediscovery of mission as holistic in nature, centred on the mandate to love God and our neighbour (Matthew 22:34-40). Melba Maggay, founder and president of ISACC (the Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture), argues with biblical undergirding that loving God and loving our neighbour (those who are needy, poor, and marginalised) is a single act. She believes that “ultimately, it is the love of God and neighbour that will make any work endure”⁶ in this century of massive global social needs.

Two women from Asia have been engaging in such enduring work.

Lalita Edwards and Romanna. Lalita Edwards: Medical Doctor; Founder/director of Santvana (meaning “comforter”) Children’s Home for HIV/AIDS Infected/affected Children in Pune, India

According to [one article](#), “Dr. Edwards is no stranger to the red light district of Pune, India. For years, she has regularly journeyed inside—where few dare go—to offer free medical help and advice to women who have been forced or coerced into the sex trade.”

Her heart goes out to the children of these women. In 2005, she started running Santvana Children’s Home, which took in HIV-positive children who were often abandoned and/or orphaned by AIDS, as well as malnourished street kids, commonly the victims of human trafficking and child labour.

Still, many of the children of commercial sex workers stay with their mothers. When Edwards realised how vulnerable the children are between the hours of 5 and 9:30 p.m., she set up a crèche, offering to take care of them with the help of qualified staff. This would protect them from their high-risk environment, even if just for a few hours.

Edwards believes that Bible-based values rooted in faith in Christ are key to HIV/AIDS prevention. According to [one source](#), she has played a vital role in challenging churches to address issues of sex and sexuality and AIDS awareness. For more on Edwards’ work, go to <http://vimeo.com/22070232>.

Romanna: Dentist; Forest Conservationist in East Asia

What has dentistry got to do with forest conservation?

Participants of the CWME (World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism) Working Group on Mission and Spirituality met in March 2010 and made this observation: “In our days, there is a quest for a holistic understanding of mission relevant to the contemporary ecological crisis. God calls us into mission in order to bring healing to creation.”⁷

It was this understanding and calling that led Romanna to use her dental skills to help protect the much depleted rain forest of East Asia from logging.

In the NGO which Romanna co-founded, the objective is twofold: to promote health care of poor villagers and to preserve their natural resources—their precious forest. When patients come to her for dental treatment, they are educated on the importance of preserving their trees. However, they need the incentive to act on this as they rely on the income from logging to feed their families.

Romanna gives them dental treatment at a discounted price if they agree to stop logging. They can also pay in kind with such things as manure, seedlings, and rice husks for use in the reforestation project. Romanna likes new ideas and challenges. Her passion has been to engage with people in remote areas, especially those in the Muslim community. She believes that effective engagement means addressing the needs of the whole being (physical, social, spiritual) in word and action. When approached to be involved in this new NGO—where she could provide quality dental care for those who cannot afford it, while at the same time protecting God’s creation—she felt it was a great opportunity to make God’s presence felt and his love known among the Muslims in East Asia.

Filipino Women Impacting Diaspora Mission

They may not be highly-qualified professionals, and their names may not appear in any mission biographies, but their mission initiatives and impact will be recorded in history. They are the thousands of evangelical Christian women from the Philippines working as housekeepers, nannies, and caregivers in royal courts and average homes around the world. A high percentage are in the Middle East and North Africa, where missionary visas are not granted.⁸

Together with their male counterparts, they belong to a movement—the Filipino International Network—and seize opportunities to reach the nations through themselves being widely dispersed globally. They have become “a powerhouse for the cause of world mission.”⁹

Passion • Compassion • Gifts • Faith

These are the four things the women above had in common. Their passion for God and his creation, coupled with their compassion for the physically and spiritually needy (just as Jesus had for the harassed and helpless multitudes in Matthew 9:36), motivated them to use their gifts (skills, experience, creativity) to push boundaries and spawn fresh approaches to mission.

By their prophetic voices and catalytic actions, they challenged, as well as inspired the Church and society. Their passion, compassion, and gifts were integrated with faith—faith in the God who cares and is able to transform lives and communities for the better, both present and future.

Endnotes

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Developing Self-confidence, Life Skills, and Faith through Football Ministry in West Papua By Heidi Scheunemann

"Aduuuuuh, MAMA!!!" That was all the girls said over and over. With tears in their eyes and big smiles on their faces, they ran across the field and jumped straight into my arms. The match was over and we had just won the Girls' Football Championship of West Papua after scoring three goals against the Indonesian champions from Tolikara. My girls were filled with joy and I, as their coach, mentor, and "mama," was extremely excited for them.

Officials from the other team sat stunned, while the crowd of more than three thousand cheered in awe. How could it be that this team from the highlands, which had never been beaten by a team from the coast, had lost by 3:0? How was it possible that my girls, who are so inexperienced, small, and young, had defeated the "Goliath" from Tolikara?

The girls are only 14 to 18 years old, but have already succeeded in making their families proud, even though few people believed in them—or their ability to win the tournament.

The key for this success lie deep in their hearts. They had listened to advice and encouragement, and had started to believe in their skills. Furthermore, they had worked hard as a team and, most importantly, had put their trust in God.

At Last, Unified and Praising God

After receiving the trophy, we drove to our house, where the players had stayed overnight before the final match. One of the girls immediately picked up the guitar and began singing worship songs. Others soon joined in.

The twenty girls praised the Lord in harmony, and before we knew it, everyone was dancing around the table. It touched my heart to see the girls celebrating their victory and praising God through their songs. Together we play, sing, and pray—all for the glory of our Father in heaven.

Only one year ago, these girls did not even get along. Some had a history of abuse. Each came from a different background and tribe. True and deep friendships between people from different tribes are atypical in the Papuan culture, where murder still happens in tribal conflicts.

But God made fair play and friendship possible. Through continuous coaching, counseling, teaching, and Bible studies, the girls discovered what it meant to use their talents to help, encourage, and even forgive each other. Through regular football practices, they learned discipline and found that success was the result of hard work. Today, they are able to see the fruits of more than a year of practice and character training.

God gave us strength and endurance; he kept the team together when we were facing many challenges. Although we had to deal with bribed referees and corrupt officials, the girls played so well that nobody was able to stop them.

God has shown through these girls that change of character and mindset is possible, and that tribal wars *can* end on the football field.

Football is very important and plays a decisive role in Papua. Success in football can improve the self-esteem of Papuans, who feel inferior to other Indonesians in daily life. Improving self-esteem through success in football directly influences other areas of life. This means that as soon as Papuan children realize they are capable of achieving success by winning football matches—through practice and discipline—then they also become aware of their ability to achieve success in their education, if they listen to the teachers and are disciplined.

Background

Because women's football in Papua is very promising, it is frustrating that few people seem to care about the talents of these girls. We needed to set an example by coaching a girl's team in order to convince the public and the Indonesian National Football Association (PSSI) of the importance of supporting a women's national football team.

Unfortunately, neither the national nor the Papuan Football Association has seen the need for long-term development of women's football. Officials only organize one football event for women each year: the Papuan Championships. The next year, the provincial champions compete in one major event, the National Championship Tournament. The Indonesian Football Association does not give assistance to run regional or national non-professional or professional women's leagues. Therefore, it has been difficult for Indonesia to provide a successful national women's football team.

After being chosen to coach the Indonesian national women's football team for the 2008 Asian Championships in Vietnam, my husband, Rainer (UEFA B-license), and his brother, Timo (DFB A-license), saw the potential of Indonesian women's football. The national players from the province of Papua showed especially solid skills.

Because the Indonesian Football Association did not keep its promise to start a women's football league after the Asian championships, the players were sent home after the tournament. It was obvious we had to give these girls hope. In October 2009, Rainer and I organized a football tournament for high school girls in Jayapura. From the sixteen schools that took part in the tournament, we selected twenty-two girls and started a new team, "Galanita Persipura U-18."

Since then, we have officially played for "Persipura Jayapura," the professional men's football club representing Jayapura. The club management was amazed when we offered to coach the girls for free and to look for private sponsors.

After only a year of coaching, we won the Papuan championships in December 2010; after another few months of additional Futsal (indoor football) coaching, we won the first Papuan Futsal Tournament for girls in May 2011, which was organized by a local pastor. There, we competed against senior teams with experienced Papuan players. Our team scored sixty goals in six matches (18:0; 6:2; 10:1; 6:3; 12:1; 8:3). The final took place in the main sports hall of Jayapura, where around two thousand people watched our victory. Additionally, our young keeper, Fience Pepuho, received the trophy for being the best keeper of the tournament.

Going Forward

In June 2011, we began a new program for the girls. We rented a house, where the girls receive teaching in mathematics, English, and computer skills. The house serves as a shelter for girls who live in difficult family situations or who have been abused. They can stay at the dormitory, where a Papuan Christian woman cares for their daily needs. The girls live, play, work, and cook together. I coach some of them to run small business projects. For example, the girls produce doughnuts and other snacks to sell on the main road. Part of their income helps cover the operational costs of the dorm.

These girls do not have the chance to change their future on their own yet, but we can help them to believe in their strengths and improve their self-confidence through success in football and through better education. They deserve the chance to show the world that they are talented girls; we can help them by providing professional coaching and mentoring, as well as a good education. The system will never change if we cannot give a convincing reason why it should change.

Please support our Papuan girls' football team by:

- Praying
- Providing scholarships for players to receive a better education in a good university in Indonesia
- Sponsoring one of the girls to study and play in a professional club in another country which already has a professional women's football league.

If you would like to help us develop Indonesian women's football, email Heidi_Scheunemann@yahoo.de.

Heidi Scheunemann was born in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1967. She has lived with her family in West Papua since 1996 and is a consultant for small-scale businesses. She teaches, coaches, and mentors Papuan businessmen and women and helps NGOs and churches set up training facilities for economic development programs. Since 1999, she and her husband have been organizing football tournaments in West Papua.

Simple Acts of Faith: My Little World in Argentina

By Ute Paul

When my husband, Frank, and I arrived in the Chaco region of Argentina in 1995, our children were 2, 5, and 8 years old. We had already experienced four years in an urban slum area of Buenos Aires and were quite happy to move to a rather rural area in the north of the country. Resistencia, the province capital, is a dusty, wide-spread city with paved streets around the government building. We decided to move to a poor quarter with unpaved streets and tiny houses.

While in Chaco, we were part of a small international team (the Equipo Menonita), which served the independent, indigenous churches of three different ethnic peoples.

Chaco is a massive plain of thorny bush; small churches are spread throughout the region. Just like the other team members, Frank travelled hundreds of kilometers to visit the churches and their pastors, collaborate in Bible translation, and study the Toba language and culture. Every week, he was away from home for several days.

Entering Holy Ground

I had to learn to get along in the new environment. Many times, I wondered what Jesus wanted me to do besides raise the kids. Since I wanted to get to know my neighbors, I began visiting them. These visits became the door to the hearts around me. I had many profound experiences in the hours sitting in the shade with my neighbors. It was a lot more *being* than *doing*.

It was like entering holy ground. I heard family stories—both joyful and sad. I learned about traditions and pride, shame and illness, suffering and resistance, cooking menus and convictions.

Plus, my neighbors got to know me. I shared life with them—I talked about how I loved Jesus, read the Bible, and longed for justice and peace. I shared not only my successes, but my troubles and frustrations as well.

Much later, when I had developed a deeper friendship with them, some of the women explained that I had seemed strange to them in the beginning. For instance, my three kids and I shared one bicycle to get food for a whole week, and we had no house maid. The women explained that they weren't sure whether their children would be safe at my house because our children did odd things like climb high trees and swing on long swings. Our kids could sleep in the tent in the yard and run in the rain. However, the other children loved to play at our house, so little by little the women gave in. It was giving and receiving.

Since there were many things to learn (e.g., where to buy what vegetable, how to sleep in hot temperatures, what to do when rain turned our street into ankle-high mud, where to send our children to school), I was thankful to have my special teachers, my neighbors.

The Wisdom of Doña Rosa

Across from us lived Doña Rosa. She was dynamic, had work since she was a child, and had raised seven kids. She welcomed us from the first day we arrived. In order to save the expensive tube-gas, she would cook in her iron pot on an open fire. My children loved to drop by just before noon. With a big smile, Doña Rosa opened the lid and let them have a look and a smell into what she was cooking. Occasionally, our kids decided to eat at her house before crossing the street to eat at ours.

Doña Rosa was my informal teacher of life in the neighborhood: who was who, what to do with a flea invasion, what were the dangers for kids, how men and women relate, etc. She gave me one of her best hens and her ten eggs. The hen decided to hatch them, and twenty-one days later I was the proud owner of eleven chicks.

Doña Rosa had a life-rooted wiseness and was able to comfort and council me. Because she would spend hours sitting under the trees in front of her little house, she was aware of everything on the street. This is how she noticed our son, Johannes, escape almost daily to an illegal videogame station a block away. I thought he was playing with other kids. "Did you notice that Juani [his name in Spanish] is at the videogames almost every day?" she asked. "I think he is trying very hard to make friends because he invites the other little boys with his money. Or, might it be your money?" There was no accusation in her voice, just a motherly concern.

The Contentment of Damiana

Then there was Damiana. She lived around the corner in a tiny brick house with five of her nine children. She had grown up in the Chaco bush and had learned how to survive in poverty. Well equipped with pride, she had decided not to depend on social welfare. Every day, she mixed ten kilograms of flour with shortening, salt, and water and started the hard work of kneading. She then made a fire, formed fifty flat bread, and baked them on a grill.

Once they were baked and crunchy, one of her children carried them around the neighborhood. I went to visit Damiana almost every week for many years and was fascinated by her wisdom and patience. One day I visited her, and it was raining. It had been raining for ten days and mud was everywhere. My children's clothes were dirty, and because of the humidity, nothing dried. I was sick of the rain and mud and bored because we could hardly leave home. So I went to visit Damiana.

In her house, the unplastered walls were too thin to keep the water out, so it ran in little streams down to the muddy floor. The small room was filled with beds—the only places one could sit. When I arrived at her house, she put the water kettle on the fire and served hot sweet mate. We sat and watched the rain falling. I sighed and she looked at me. "How can you stand this? When will your things dry again—the pillows, the mattresses....?" She served another mate and smiled at me: "It's simple!" she responded, "When the sun comes out, we carry the things outside and they dry. It has always been like that."

Damiana and I became close friends, although we were from seemingly different planets. With every visit, I sat a time in her little world. We talked about the joys and difficulties of raising kids, what vegetables were growing well in our gardens, and our chickens and their eggs.

One day, I brought leftover bread to feed her hens. It was dry and the hens couldn't peck it, but we sat and watched them try. When I got up and stepped on the bread to break it into smaller pieces, Damiana

was upset. Bread is holy, she said, and you shouldn't step on it. I learned there were many holy things for her.

God was holy, too. But because all the men in her life had treated her poorly or had left her, God too seemed far away and unreliable. I started to share my experiences with the close Jesus I knew—the one who walks with and stays with us. Because reading was difficult for her, she soon asked me to read the Bible to her. So I read the stories of Jesus and his encounters with people.

Holy Moments of Change

During that time, a new family moved into the house in front of Damiana. They were believers and became members of a small, Pentecostal church on our street. The young husband, Ariel, was clever with practical things and offered to help Damiana around the house. The children of both families strengthened their bonds of friendship. Damiana began going to the church's evening services and on my visits she asked me to pray for her sorrows.

One evening, rain and strong winds loosened the electrical cable which led to Damiana's house. For hours, Damiana didn't have electricity. When Ariel got home from work, he offered to fix the cable. It was already dark and still raining, and the cable was hanging from the mast. Ariel got a ladder, climbed up, and did what he could. But in a moment of inattentiveness he touched the current and fell in front of the horror-stricken Damiana. She screamed, and neighbors called an ambulance; however, since the streets were so muddy, it couldn't get to Damiana's house in time. When a taxi driver finally arrived and took Ariel to the hospital, it was too late. He had died in the car.

We all went to the death watch, grieved, unable to say a word, simply mourning alongside the wife and children. In spite of the calamity, Damiana continued visiting the small church and received comfort. She kept walking in faith and kneading her bread.

Meanwhile, our children grew older. I started to work in bilingual training My visits became less and less frequent.

But I had learned a lesson: daily life is holy. It is full of God. When you share it with others, you enter holy ground. That is where faithfulness, care, struggle, joy, and hope occur.

Jesus visited people in their homes. So simple, so meaningful.

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." - John 1:14

Ute Paul, born in 1962 in Germany, is a teacher of religious education, music, and German. With their three children, she and her husband, Frank, served in Argentina from 1990 until 2008, first in a slum area of Buenos Aires, later in the Chaco region as members of the Mennonite Team which is accompanying the indigenous independent churches. The couple lives in Germany and are part of the [Reichelsheim Fellowship](#).

PERSPECTIVES

Revising Good Plans for Yemeni Women

By Audra Grace Shelby

The grip of her hand squeezed into my arm as her brown eyes bore into my blue ones. “Please,” she urged. “*Lazem!*” (you must). She tightened her black *hajib* (hair covering) before it slithered to her shoulders.

I looked from her pleading eyes to the woman frowning beside her. The frowning woman had already asked me to visit her house. She stopped snapping her black *balto* (outer cloak) as both women waited to hear my answer.

I sighed quietly in the doorway. “*Lord, how can I be in two places at one time?*”

My predicament was a blessing, even as I felt pulled between the two women. I thought back to my arrival in Yemen six years earlier when I had prayed for opportunities to get beyond the veils and into the lives of the women.

I had arrived in the Red Sea coast region with my husband, four children, and a well-planned strategy to reach Tihama women with the gospel. I thought I had prepared myself well. I had researched Yemeni culture. I had studied books on Muslim evangelism. I had learned scriptures and Bible stories in Arabic. But I soon discovered my strategy was incomplete and I would need to revise it.

Revision #1: Building a Team

My first revision came in recognizing my husband and I could not do the task alone, nor had we been called to. Tihama was an area of four million unreached people. As missionaries, we saw ourselves as “feet ...who preach the good news” (Romans 10:15), but I realized that as feet, we were only part of the Body of Christ. We needed the involvement of the whole body—the knees, hands, voices, ears—to join with us in a unified effort to successfully reach Yemen. When God’s people joined with us in fervent prayer, desire, support, and action, God began to open closed doors.

Revision #2: Partaking in Common Ground

My second strategic revision was to put aside “them and me” eyes and learn to walk on common ground. Yemen is 99.9% conservative Muslim. I could hardly portray myself as a godly, devout woman if I dressed in a way they considered immodest, even if it was just showing arms and hair.

In the sweltering 120 degree coastal heat, I could have justified wearing clothing that was comfortable by pointing to my freedom in Christ. But I covered my hair and wore a *balto* in public, even as I identified myself as a follower of Jesus Christ. I did not pretend to be Muslim, but I accepted that if local women could dress in black *baltos* and *hajabs* in the overpowering heat, so could I. And it opened doors: women invited me into their homes and husbands thanked me for respecting their culture.

Finding common ground meant I needed to be “real” with the women. They were only interested in my immaculate dress and manicured hands at weddings—the glamour highlights of their lives. In everyday life, Tihama women were more impressed to see my broken nails and scratched arms from cooking, cleaning, or working in the garden. I had house help, which they accepted since I lacked the availability

of their extended family members. But they smiled approval and drew me deeper into their lives when they recognized I did the same chores they did.

Becoming like them, however, did not mean compromising my faith or mixing my faith with theirs. They were unapologetically devout, unhesitant to correct me if I did something contrary to their beliefs.

Revision #3: Being Unapologetic in Matters of Faith

They never seemed to worry whether their comments would offend me. This led me to further revise my strategic thinking, and be as unapologetically devout in my faith as they were with theirs. I needed to worry less about offending and focus more on seizing opportunities to communicate with polite respect, but without hesitation.

One afternoon, I sat among a group of women who scolded me for not saying “*Ma’a sha’allah*” (what God wills) as I talked about my daughter’s upcoming school exams. “You must say *ma’a sha’allah* or the Evil Eye will bring her harm in her exams!” they warned.

I paused. Having heard the phrase used repeatedly like a charm to ward off evil, I explained that I walked with God through the way—Jesus—and that he was all I needed, giving illustrations from my personal life. I told them of my husband’s illness—when doctors had not been enough to save him, but after praying in Jesus’ name, God had spared his life. I explained that through Jesus, I had all I needed.

I soon learned that being unapologetically devout meant I had to revise my natural inclination to argue and debate beliefs that differed from mine. This was no easy task for an outspoken woman. One day in a gold shop, I watched as a group of women bargained with the male shopkeeper over the price of a bridal necklace set. A man waited near them, studying me from his perch against a counter.

“Are you a Protestant or a Catholic?” he asked me. I was startled. Few people in Yemen understood the difference. “Protestant,” I replied.

“Ah,” he said. “So, what do you believe about Jesus? Was he a prophet or was he the Son of God?”

My heart started beating in my throat as all talking ceased and all eyes turned to me. The women waited for my answer as the man challenged me, looking for a debate. I held my breath, knowing an argument would be ineffective and would accomplish nothing in front of women who were taught to lower their eyes to men.

“*Lord, help!*” I breathed. I swallowed and looked evenly at my confronter. “Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me,’” I answered (John 14:6). “This is what I believe about Jesus.”

The man said nothing. He looked at me, looked at the other women (whose eyes were still on me), and walked wordlessly out of the shop.

I exhaled, relieved that he had not argued and grateful that the grace of Christ had kept my own tongue from arguing. In the absence of contention, God had provided an opportunity to publicly share a powerful scripture in a country that forbade evangelism.

Revision #4: Adapting Communication

Another strategic revision came when I recognized the need to adapt my methods of communication. I yearned to effectively communicate the gospel in a way Yemeni women could understand. With illiteracy rates up to ninety-eight percent among women in Tihama villages, I could not communicate in textbook Arabic.

I had to learn the dialect they spoke—their region-specific heart language—or they would not understand my formal speech. I could not give the women printed gospel tracts or Bibles (even if it was legal to do so) since the women could not read them. The meaning would remain locked from their hearts. Reading to them directly from the Bible would not have solved the problem; the women would not have understood the formal Arabic translation.

I needed to tell Bible stories and verses in their words and to utilize audio Bibles recorded in their heart language.

Revision #5: Displaying the Love of Jesus

The most crucial revision to my strategy, however, began when I understood the attraction I seemed to hold for the women. I was an American, one of a handful among four million people, but their interest went beyond my foreign nationality. There was hunger in their eyes, and although most women lived below poverty levels, it wasn't a hunger for food.

I had repeatedly heard, "Islam is *hallee* (sweet)," from hungry-eyed women who claimed the superiority of Islam while they squabbled over whom I should visit next. These devout women had once been fed by dreams. As teenagers, they had fantasized about freedom from their fathers and love from their future husbands.

But they became wives who sat with disillusioned eyes and listened to others' dream. They became mothers at wedding celebrations who called out blessings for many sons, while clapping thin hands and skinny arms above their own worn-out bodies. These women needed health care and education. In villages without running water and electricity, they needed latrines, mosquito nets, and other practical essentials for living, and we planned these as key components of effective ministry.

But as the women pulled and tugged me from diverse directions, I began to realize that their tug of war wasn't for who I was or what I could provide externally; *it was for what I had internally.*

They were hungry for the love in my life—something they couldn't get from their religion or relationships—and they tried to get it from me.

They were bewildered by my love for God and the stories I shared about his love for me. They saw God as terrifying and remote, and they had a profound fear of dying. They were amazed that my husband loved me in more than a sensual way. Like dry sponges, they soaked up the love I tried to pour and squeezed me for more, sometimes leaving me feeling drained and wrung out by the depth of their need.

In my pursuit of the perfect strategy to share the gospel with Muslim women, I nearly overlooked the second most important command Jesus gave us: to simply, but completely, love our neighbor...for it is his love in us that identifies us most as his followers.

It would have been nice had I known at the beginning of our ministry in Yemen what it took me six years to learn. Perhaps I would have arrived with a more workable strategy. But then again, maybe I was the one (not my strategies) who most needed revising.

Audra Grace Shelby served nine years as a Southern Baptist missionary in the Middle East, alongside her husband and four children. The author of *Behind the Veils of Yemen* (Chosen Books, 2011), she remains actively involved in global missions.

The Story of a 21st-century Priscilla

By Rachel Rajagopal

Who are the women on the cutting edge of missions? Are they the ones who are easily recognised due to media exposure? Are they the ones who speak at conferences, write books, and appear on radio talk shows?

Or are they the ones who quietly serve the Lord, making a difference in a person's life, a congregation, or a community? How are these women defined as being "on the cutting edge of missions"?

When I began theological studies thirteen years ago at Singapore Bible College, I was taught by both men and women of God. The college encouraged us to be mission-minded and our professors never failed to bring missions into the classroom. Such influence impacted me greatly.

I became a full-time missionary nine years ago. In that time, I have met many women across Africa, Asia, and America who are not well known, have not pursued formal theological studies, and have not become pastors/leaders in churches. Yet these women make life-changing differences in the lives of others.

They are bold yet humble, firm yet gracious, sometimes task-masters yet passionate for Christ. They are the ones who willingly avail themselves for God for no recognition at all.

Still, their hearts are that of a pastor, missionary, and leader. God has given them the grace to shepherd without an earthly ordination, to envision without the "sending out," and to serve by leading men, women, and children into a greater knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God uses anyone with a willing heart to build his kingdom. In Exodus 35:4, the Lord commands the Israelites through Moses to bring offerings with a willing heart so that the tabernacle may be built. Paul reminds us in Romans 12:1-2 that our lives are to be living sacrifices. Our lives are the offering: we bring ourselves to God and avail ourselves to be used for his kingdom purposes and glory. Women on the cutting edge of missions will never forget to embrace these basics.

The Story of Priscilla*

Priscilla is an Indian based in a Middle East nation. She lives with her husband and two children. When she was hungering for God more than six years ago, she joined a discipleship group that offered systematic Bible training. In four years, she became a facilitator, a first-generation disciple who now disciples both men and women.

Initially, she was focused on discipling among her own culture group, but as she grasped the enormity of God's Great Commission to "disciple the nations," her heart resonated with her husband's heart to disciple beyond their cultural and language groups.

God at Work and Wooing

God is faithful towards a heart with a right motive. He gave Priscilla a group of fourteen Filipinas who were from a Catholic background. As Priscilla disciplined them and informed them about Jesus, all of these Filipinas gave their lives to the only one who could redeem them, the only Lord and Saviour. This incident happened after their fourth lesson in discipleship.

Priscilla was so enthused with what God was doing among her own group in the restricted nation that she envisioned bringing such discipleship training to her homeland. Her desire was to equip believers in her state to grasp the Great Commission and bring the teachings of Christ to others.

Overflow of Transformation

Imagine the changes that needed to happen in Priscilla's family and friends as she studied God's word and was transformed for his glory. Her children had to be taught that she now had a vision to disciple the nations. It was easier with her husband, who had been recognised as a heavenly-ordained (that is, not ordained by denominational requirements) pastor. He began to work alongside her in facilitating groups.

Priscilla's Indian church community needed to embrace the fact that an Indian woman with a family can be raised up by God to serve among the nations. Indian men and women around her began to accept that she was a God-appointed servant-leader. Priscilla's parents and parents-in-law began to support her new endeavours and adventures.

Priscilla is a tutor by profession, and even her students were not left behind. She increasingly began to pray and used every opportunity to "sow the seed." She boldly spoke about Jesus to all believing and unbelieving students, lovingly correcting believers when they defied God's way of living.

The Growing Disciple Becomes a Discipler

As the transformation in Priscilla affected those around her, men and women began to seek her counsel; her prophetic prayers were like soothing balm. She learned to raise up others to become missionaries, and her heart became generous as she gave financially towards the Lord's kingdom work.

Priscilla is no longer a baby Christian. She is mature, with an increasing hunger for God. Her wisdom has increased and her counsel remains welcome. She has become an instrumental co-labourer with God, her husband, and with a mission agency. She is involved in training nearly one hundred men and women to become future disciplers. Through her efforts and by God's grace, second-generation disciples are being born, and soon there will be a third generation.

I once asked Priscilla what her biggest transformation has been as she has studied the word of God. She responded, "Being able to speak my mind during our discipleship classes, and especially among brothers." Priscilla continues to study and is completing her MA in theological studies.

Priscilla is a woman on the cutting edge of missions. She represents the woman who is radical enough to break cultural, national, and gender barriers to be like Jesus and to do as he commands despite

persecution, whether physical or emotional. She is a five-fold minister just like Jesus—apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, and evangelist. She is just one of the many “fruits” of systematic Bible training. Priscilla began in small steps, and, being faithful to God, he honored her.

* Name changed to protect identity.

Rachel Rajagopal is a Singaporean missionary serving as director in the overseas ministry division with Biblical Education by Extension Korea. Based in Seoul, she travels to Africa, America, and Asia to teach and preach God’s word. Rajagopal is a member of Cairnhill Methodist Church in Singapore and is a DMin candidate with Tabor Adelaide. She can be reached at: blazerach@yahoo.com.sg. For more information about Biblical Education by Extension, you may visit www.beekorea.org, www.beeafrika.org, or www.beeamerica.org.

John Stott: Home with the Lord, A Letter from Lausanne Leadership

(Editor’s note: This email was sent out by The Lausanne Movement concerning the passing of John Stott. Additionally, the [Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College](http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/memorial/Stott/johnstott.html) has put up a memorial page with documents, audio clips, and photos that illustrate a few aspects of Rev. Stott’s ministry and personality. It can be found at: <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/memorial/Stott/johnstott.html>.)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

For all of us who were together in Cape Town for the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, we will remember the moving tributes given to the two giants of The Lausanne Movement, Billy Graham and John Stott. They were personal friends who loved and admired one another, and they were the defining figures of global evangelicalism for the last sixty years.

Today (27 July 2011), “Uncle John” went home to be with the Lord. ([Read more here.](#)) He is now with the One who he served all his life and in whom he had total confidence.

John Stott impacted the Church around the world in many ways. Perhaps his greatest contribution was to articulate clearly and to defend robustly the evangelical faith which he always understood to be biblical faith, grounded in the New Testament. Evangelicalism was to Stott an expression of historic, orthodox Christianity.

The cross of Christ was central to the message. Stott preached the cross as the sole means by which men and women could be made right with God.

The resurrection of Christ was the great hope of his life, as it is for all humanity, and the hope for life beyond death. This is the great reality he is now experiencing as the reward and vindication for all he preached and for which he lived during the many years of his ministry in London and around the world.

Perhaps more than any other person in the last century, John Stott restored confidence in the authority of God’s word and in the centrality of biblical preaching and teaching. He inspired many evangelicals around the world to make a robust and clear affirmation of biblical truth while at the same time emphasizing that this must be backed up with a distinctive, godly Christian life.

He was able to hold together, in constructive biblical tension, a passionate commitment to evangelism along with a profound commitment to ministering to the needs of people in the context of suffering and

brokenness. This is best expressed in [The Lausanne Covenant](#), of which he is the chief author, and which is seen as the defining evangelical document of the twentieth century.

Everywhere John Stott traveled to teach, he encouraged “double listening.” This was a listening to the voice of the Spirit of God through his word, and listening to the voice and the needs of our broken world.

Stott was known for his love for the Majority World and for students. He gave himself tirelessly to assisting and encouraging pastors and students in Africa, Latin America, Asia, the South Pacific, and the Middle East. He leaves friends everywhere.

Of course, his friends and his hosts knew that he would also always want to take advantage of bird watching whenever the opportunity presented itself!

The Church in the U.K. and around the world is richer for his great life. His simple lifestyle, his powerful preaching with its precision of thought and expression, his books written with such depth and clarity, have touched thousands and thousands of people around the world.

We are saddened by his departure, but strengthened with the knowledge that his great confidence and his lifelong hope in Christ has now been made real to him, and his life’s work has been vindicated.

Daniel 12:3: *“And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above, and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”*

We were blessed to be impacted by a man we loved so much. Let us seek to honor Christ, and also to honor John Stott, through a life that is lived for the glory of God and for the good of the Church and the world.

Sincerely in Christ,

S. Douglas Birdsall
executive chair

Lindsay Brown
international director
The Lausanne Movement

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Leadership Profile: Jane Crane, Writer, Advocate, United States

Q. Tell us about your family.

A. I have been married to Chris for twenty-eight years, and we have one son, Andrew, age 25.

Q. Give us a brief overview of your work and ministry.

A. I am writing a book about the plight of widows in Africa, many of them young, with young children.

I've interviewed over fifty widows in six countries (Rwanda, Zambia, Uganda, Ghana, South Africa, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and have the privilege of telling their stories. I was also delighted to interview several of the African men who are on The Lausanne Movement's leadership team at the recent leadership team meetings in Boston.

I also chair a Lausanne Special Interest Committee focused on empowering men and women to work together for the gospel, a topic that came out of the 2004 Forum in Pattaya, Thailand. I also served as officer on the Billy Graham Crusade in San Diego in 2003. I hold a MA in peace and justice from the University of San Diego.

Q. What is your favorite quote?

A. "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

Q. Who has been the most influential person in your life/ministry, and why?

A. My father, who was a very fine man. Even though he died when I was just 15, what he sowed in to me in terms of values, integrity, and unconditional love was more than many people receive in a lifetime. And because I was his only child, he gave me both girls' and boys' toys (I had dolls and fun train sets). I never felt limited by him because I was a girl.

Q. What is the best piece of advice you've received?

A. That spending extended time worshipping God brings wonderful direction from him. I have certainly experienced this to be true.

Q. What one issue do you believe is the greatest barrier to evangelism, and why?

A. Women are often treated as "second-class citizens" in Christianity. I know of many women and men who disdain Christianity for this reason.

Q. What book do you most often recommend to others, and why?

A. My book recommendations change with what I am currently reading. Right now, I recommend a couple of riveting books about the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo: *King Leopold's Ghost* and *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*.

Q. What websites, bloggers, and Tweeters do you regularly follow?

A. I follow women's issues internationally, especially as related to Africa. One terrific resource is the [Rwanda Association of University Women](#), which sends out regular emails with information from around the world. There is a modest annual fee.

Q. What would you like to be doing in five years?

A. Speaking to the United Nations and various governments to help change the plight of oppressed women internationally.

Evangelism. On Point.

Q. Describe a time in which you shared your faith in Christ with someone who didn't know him, and then saw God clearly work in that situation.

A. I was able to share Christ with a handyman working at my house who was having marriage troubles. He has since reunited with his wife.

Q. How can people be praying for you?

A. Please pray for the book I'm writing—that it would be what God wants and that many would be helped through it.

INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHING

Jewels from the Dragon Kingdom

By Sookit Chan

A woman once told me what she saw in a prayer: a dragon riding through clouds and thunder. It howled, spewing fumes and smoke, and its' tail pounded hard in the wind, threatening anyone who dared come near. After it had landed on a rocky shore, the dragon laid down to catch its breath. Suddenly, it wheezed and coughed. To the woman's surprise, a baby was expelled from the dragon's mouth. Naked and wet, yet the baby did not cry.

According to Chinese legend, what the dragon spat out should have been a priceless pearl, not a babe. My friend wondered. Was it irritation the dragon felt, or had it painstakingly hidden a treasure which it now took out to admire in secret? She felt the vision was somehow related to my birth.

When I was born, there was no thunder or dragon drama. It was a year of refugees flooding to Hong Kong in the wake of a new regime. My family was on the run, back and forth between our home village in Southern China and the island. My mother, pregnant with me, was taking care of my grandmother, who had been running for a year because of war. Finally, she could run no more because of a terminal disease.

Life in the Guangdong village had always been harsh. Most men sought work by going away, some to the cities and others abroad, leaving behind the weak, the old, and the women in the village. Naturally, women had to take up the responsibility of looking after the families. Being a dutiful daughter-in-law, mom nursed my grandmother to her last days.

The funeral struck mom hard. She also perceived the loss as a failure on her part. In the midst of grief and mourning, she returned to Hong Kong to give birth, hoping a new life would bring her consolation. Moreover, she wished to offer a gift to honour grandmother and our ancestors.

What? A Girl?

"What, a girl?" the old midwife cried. Mom had hoped to hear the gusty roar of a male voice, but she found only a small, wet female creature lying quietly beside her. Not even a whine.

The old women from our village soon flocked to chatter, "Poor thing, she worked so hard for her mother-in-law, but got no reward. What did she do wrong?" It was as if the dead should repay a woman by giving her a son.

A few years later the gossip was even more clamorous when one of my elder brothers and a younger brother died in an epidemic. "Shame! Why should she who is such a weakling survive, and not the boys?" they would exclaim. They speculated on the fortune, the fengshui of our family. A son can bear the family name; a girl would be a bundle of trouble; it is best to marry her off.

Being female was almost like breaking an unspoken rule—you could not bear the family honour and almost had to justify your existence. I was fortunate in that my parents did not conform to the tradition; however, the sense of shame and feeling of insignificance, like a birthmark, had already been stamped on me.

Childhood Memories

Books became a refuge. During my childhood, I was often ill, so I stayed home and read. I spent hours reading library books. I read to cats and pigeons; I read to the sky outside my window. Reading led me into another kingdom where adults would fight for justice and equality, creating a wonderful place for children to live. Reading inspired me to dream.

Being insignificant had its merits, for no one paid much attention to my whereabouts. Both reading and wandering the neighbourhood streets helped to lay the foundations for creative writing.

One memory stands out from my childhood wanderings.

On busy street corners in our neighbourhood, hawkers sold legendary characters made of colourful dough and folk musicians travelled in wagons playing gongs and drums and doing acrobatic movements in Kung Fu. Refugees asked for a few pennies by telling stories of how they escaped wars. Crowds always gathered around each street artist.

Yet when someone at the nearby public bathhouse yelled aloud, the crowds immediately followed the noise. Everybody knew that another “one” had been discarded.

Outside the bathhouse, lying against the wall, a small jelly-like creature could be found on top of a bed of rice papers. Everyone stood staring. I was in awe at the fine features, the translucent skin, and the delicate limbs. It was wet, yet pure as the first snow. To my child’s eye, the strange beauty was amazing—it had life!

Adults mumbled, “Shame! It must be a ‘she.’” Because it was a little girl, she could be disposed of. I was shocked to hear the adults’ verdict. This fetus had no choice. I admired her beauty and life and at the same time, I ached. (Many years later I first heard the word “abortion.”)

The scene haunted me. It was as if, being female, you would always be reminded of your flawed status. Feelings of unworthiness and fear seeped deep within me.

Writing in Secret and in Public

Writing in a diary, I found I could say whatever I liked and describe what I had observed without sanction. I may have been voiceless in life, but I could see my voice on paper.

In junior high school, a newspaper invited students to contribute, and I sent in poems and articles. When I first saw my poem printed with graphics, my heart leapt with joy. The first taste of sharing ignited a spark: it could be done in the open; I need not write in secret. The first remuneration was a delightful reward for which I could treat my friends to ice cream. Reading, writing, and sharing with friends had become a fun pastime which made those dry school years tolerable.

To most Chinese students, pursuing a career means studying to get a job and finding a professional ladder to climb. I understood my parents' concern that I must fulfill expectations before pursuing my writing dream.

After I graduated from university in Canada, my desire to write didn't fade; instead, it grew stronger. I got a job and worked hard to save money. My goal was to find a creative writing teacher. Since most of the authors I admired were in Taiwan, I applied for an internship at Campus Evangelical Fellowship. The experience was rewarding.

Finding a Mentor

One day, I visited a famous Christian writer who did not know me. I knocked at her door and it unlocked the gate of learning.

"Could you please teach me how to write?" I asked with sincerity and total naiveté. She did not immediately respond, but instead courteously invited me in. She talked about the bird in the tree outside her window, her 4-year-old daughter's wish to be married, a drum she had found in an old village—anything except writing. I went back again and again.

From our excursions to places like the pre-dawn fish market, I learned that writing is about venturing into unfamiliar horizons—you write with your body, senses, and your whole person totally submitted in response to the moment.

To write, you need a mentor to inspire you. To publish, you can't take off without an editor. A good editor will guide the writer each step of the way, from ideas to writing, and nurturing to full term, then midwifing the baby into the world.

Good editors are truly God-sent. I didn't realize this until I encountered Josephine So. I first met her when she was starting *Breakthrough Magazine* to reach young people in Hong Kong.

Beginning a Writing Career

Josephine cordially invited me to stay with her for a few days. This turned into a writing camp. I had to submit an audio-visual script before being allowed out of her house. Because I wanted to attend a concert, I completed the assignment as quickly as possible. Little did I know that the script was for a media production that was to be shown at an international conference and, subsequently, on many other occasions.

Those few days were the beginning of a deep relationship which changed my life.

Josephine assigned me many writing projects. For each piece, she gave constructive critique and asked me to rewrite up to five or six drafts until it was ready to be published. No work comes out perfect the first time.

Josephine was also a writer. She wrote many articles, several novels, and some theatrical works. Because she suffered with cancer for twenty years, she could not be both an editor and a prolific writer at the same time. Yet she founded several magazines for youth and deliberately chose the role of nurturing writers and training young editors.

Without her, I would not have had the courage to continue. She initiated the publishing of my short stories and prose. She shared the joy of giving birth to my first book. My best gift to her is to write and nurture other writers and editors.

Accepting—and Celebrating—the Past

I couldn't choose my birth. My writing will forever be interwoven with my upbringing. In retrospect, I grew to appreciate "shame." Without the childhood pains, I would not have written. Without the sense of shame, I wouldn't have struggled to find my voice and make sense of my world. In the process, I discovered I was not alone. I have heard many stories—the contents might be different, but the feelings are similar: pain and torment under the dark shadow of our fears. For those who are Chinese, fear stems mostly from shame. The more I listen, the more I wish to write. How we women wish to be valued and not to be spat out by the dragon!

A greater story I have learned is one of shame turned into glory: an unmarried, young girl, in quietness and serene surrender to the Spirit, gave birth to a baby Redeemer to bring new hope. Pure joy and grace, it is a story full of mystery and wonder.

Similarly, with our writings we are often haunted by shortcomings and shame. Yet in the dark moments, we see the warming light showering to lift us up, affirming our worth as his precious pearls: "In your nakedness, I give you clothes, in your shamefulfulness, I give you my jewels" (Ezekiel 16:8-11).

Postscript

In many places such as China, Christian writers still cannot publish openly. Yet more than a few are persevering despite uncertainties. Most work long hours for meager incomes to support their families; they struggle for time and space to cultivate good writing. Writing for non-believers requires skill and wisdom to identify a language and topic that communicates without being censored. They need to save money or raise funds to buy a book license from a publisher who is willing to take the risk.

One lay pastor was released from detention and continued his research on house churches for over a decade; he then wrote a valuable document. Another composed plays and staged them at Christmas and other festive occasions to attract people to church.

Some writers are so good that they are being recognized openly in the public domain. Others have turned to overseas publishers and sent their products home after publication. *China itself now has over four hundred Christian magazines and journals circulated privately and through churches, providing platforms for writers and training grounds for younger ones. These are truly the precious jewels of the dragon kingdom.*

Every day in Hong Kong I see people from China flocking to buy jewelry and other luxuries. Those who rush to buy the baubles of the world will soon be disillusioned by these counterfeits. I ask myself: *Where can people find the real?* I am determined to tell stories in the spirit of the parable of *the one pearl of great price* (Matthew 13:46).

That Pearl overcomes the dragon and the dark powers of this world, for his kingdom surpasses all and his story is ours to proclaim.

(Portions of this edited article are based on the chapter “Jewels from the Dragon Kingdom,” first published in *An Asian Palette: Personal Journeys of Christian Writers*, edited by Bernice Cheng, and published by Armour Publishing Pte Ltd., Singapore, in 1998.)

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