

Her Story Silhouette by Shari House

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Silhouette:

Gladys Aylward was born on February 24, 1902 in London, England. Not known for being a scholar, Gladys left school at the age of 14 and entered the work force as a domestic worker in a wealthy home. She aspired to become an actress, but much to her disappointment, her dark black hair and black eyes along with her small stature were not conducive to that job. At the age of 18 she went to an evangelistic meeting somewhat against her will. She had no time for the "fear" tactics that often accompanied these types of meetings and left as soon as she could. As she was leaving someone asked her name and said, "Miss Alyward, I believe God is wanting you." It wasn't enough to make her go back inside, but later on she returned to speak to the preacher and got saved. From that point on, her focus in life changed.

At the age of 26, after reading of the millions in China who had never heard the Gospel, she applied to the China Inland Mission to be a missionary. She knew the Lord was calling her to this work, but she struggled to grasp the Chinese language. After her 3-month probationary course, she received this news: "It is with great regret that I have to recommend to you that we do not accept Miss Aylward. She has a call to serve God – she is sincere and courageous – but we cannot take the responsibility of sending a woman of 26, with such a limited Christian experience and education to China." She was very disappointed and was sent instead to another town to be a housemaid for a retired CIM missionary couple who had served in China. She learned much from them, and it only strengthened her resolve to go to China and fulfill her calling. From there she worked in several ministries including being a "Rescue Sister" who went out to the docks at night in South Wales talking to the homeless women and girls working the streets. With her mind always on how to get herself to China, Gladys decided to return to London where she was able to once again secure a paying job as a parlor maid. With only a few coins to her name, she cried out to God, "Oh God, here's my Bible! Here's my money! Here's me! Use me!" At that moment the mistress of the house came to her room to give her three shillings to reimburse her for her travel to London. She took that as a sign from God that He would provide the rest.

Gladys wasn't sure where in China she was going to go but had heard of an elderly missionary lady named Jeannie Lawson who was looking for someone to help her in her work. Saving for the 90£ it would cost her to go by boat was going to take too long, and so instead she opted to go over land and enter China through Russia. This would be a long and arduous undertaking and even the officers at the railway station tried to dissuade her, especially since China and Russia had been in a state of undeclared war for some time, but she would not be swayed. Each week she took her earnings and put it towards her ticket. On October 15, 1932 at the age of 30, Gladys boarded the first of many trains and was finally on her way. She passed through Holland, Germany, Poland, and finally crossed into Siberia. From this point her trip took perilous turns including being detained by and subsequently escaping from Russians soldiers, hitching a ride on a Japanese ship, riding numerous trains and buses, and finally taking two days to cross three mountain ranges

and ford numerous rivers on the back of a mule. Her trip over thousands of miles long took her a month, but when she arrived in Yangchen, she felt she was finally home.

Gladys found Jeannie Lawson, the 73-year old missionary lady she would be helping, living in an old run-down inn in a poor part of town. Yangchen was a stopping point for the mule caravans that traveled the dusty roads peddling their wares of coal, cotton, pots, and other things. Gladys went immediately to work helping her restore the dilapidated inn, and they named it The Inn of the Eight Happinesses. The hope was that if they could get those travelling on the mule trails that passed right in front of their property to stop in for a bite to eat and a dry place to sleep and lodge their mules, the missionaries might have an opportunity in the evenings after dinner to share the stories of Jesus with them.

Besides the work Gladys and Jeannie did at the inn, the ladies visited villages outside the city each week and brought the people the Gospel and whatever medical help they could offer. It didn't take long for Gladys to adopt the traditional Chinese clothing and noticed that with her dark hair and eyes and short stature, she fit right in. Gladys practiced Chinese for hours a day, and by the end of the year, she was fluent enough to take part in the story-telling after the evening meals. By this time Jeannie had become very frail, and she passed away leaving Gladys to carry on the work by herself.

In 1936 Gladys became a Chinese citizen and was known as an honest, caring person. Once she was called on to stop a large prison riot and was instrumental in instigating prison reforms. She was greatly respected in her town and was asked by the government officials to be a foot-inspector. This job required her to patrol the district and enforce a decree that had been made outlawing footbinding. It gave her untold opportunities to share the Gospel and show love and care to the people as well. Many times she risked her life to help people in need, and the people began to call her "Ai-weh-deh" or "Virtuous One." Gladys adopted her first child, a girl about 5 years old, from a lady using her for begging, and named her "Ninepence" since that is what she paid to obtain her. A year later Ninepence brought a young orphan boy to Gladys, offering to share her food with him. Gladys adopted him, as well, and her family began to grow.

By July of 1937 the official Sino-Japanese War was underway, and Gladys' life became in danger as the Communist were specifically targeting missionaries. One day the Japanese bombed Yangchen, and Gladys found herself buried beneath the rubble. She was rescued and immediately set up an improvised hospital. She would secretly visit villages under Japanese occupation and report any observations on her travels to the Chinese officials. The war left many children orphaned and most were brought to Gladys to care for. She eventually found herself with 100 orphans and had to beg from everyone to provide food for them. She got word that there was an orphanage in Sian, a province many miles away in Free China, that would take the children in if she could get them there. One of her converts was tasked with the job of taking the orphans to the Yellow River which they would cross and then reach Sian by train. After five weeks, Gladys had another 100 orphans, ranging in age from 3 to 16, that she was caring for. She was waiting for the gentleman to return to help her get them to safety when she received word that he had been captured by the Japanese and was presumed dead. She knew she had to get the rest of the children to safety, and so she made preparations for them to travel to the next town over with the Chinese General's wife. Gladys herself insisted on staying behind to care for those still left in Yangchen. By this time the Japanese army had learned of her intelligence work and had put a price on her head. As she prayed for guidance from the Lord, she opened her Bible and read the words, "Flee ye; flee ye into the mountains . . ." She took that as direction from the Lord. The Japanese soldiers arrived that very night and the next morning she narrowly escaped amid flying bullets, one of which grazed her.



Gladys caught up to the children by the next night. She determined she must get them out of the war zone and to safety if she was to save their lives. They had no food and no money, but she knew the Lord would take care of them. Every road was controlled by the Japanese, so they had to make the 100-mile journey through the mountains and down the Yellow River. Their perilous journey lasted 30 days, but Gladys brought them to safety before collapsing in delirium from typhoid fever.

It took Gladys several months to recover from her sickness, but when she was well, she continued to work with the refugees until the war neared its end. In 1944 she moved to the village of Tsingsi in northwestern China and worked there for a time and also spent 4 years in Szechwan in southern China working with missionaries from the China Inland Mission. From there she moved to Chengtu and was appointed Biblewoman at the Chinese Theological Seminary. As the Communists' hold on China continued to get stronger and the dangers for missionaries grew greater, she was persuaded to leave for the first time since her arrival 17 years prior. She arrived in England in the Spring of 1949, and while there, she was used by the Lord to speak to many large audiences about the plight of the Chinese Christians and encourage them to have a part in missions.

It pained Gladys to hear how the Chinese suffered under Communist rule, and she longed to return to help them. In 1957, when Gladys was in her mid-50's, she finally felt free to return to missionary work after her mother passed away. Communist China would not allow her to return, so she opted to work for a time in Hong Kong with the Chinese refugees until in 1958 when she settled on the island of Formosa, currently known as Taiwan. It was here she spent her remaining years running mission halls and an orphanage. She made many trips around the world telling the stories of the need for missionaries and raising funds for her orphanages and the people she loved so dearly.

On January 3, 1970 at the age of 67, Gladys died from a bout of influenza. So famous was she at this point that memorial services were held around the world to mourn her death. This little woman, deemed not suitable for missionary work by man, was used by God to do a great and lasting work for Him. She is truly a woman of whom it could be said, "**She hath done what she could!**"

Her Story/My Story:

Gladys and Jeannie worked hard to prepare the inn at Yangchen which was an overnight stop for the mule caravans that transported goods throughout the area. They knew if they could provide food and a place for people to sleep, it would give them the opportunity to share the Gospel. Because the Chinese people had very little experience with foreigners, they distrusted them greatly and thought they were devils. They often threw clods of dirt at Gladys when she was working in the courtyard of the inn or drug her out of the courtyard to witness a beheading. They tried to scare her off, but they couldn't. Once the inn was ready, Gladys would try to get the muleteers to come into the inn by yelling, "Muyo beatch, muyo goodso, how, how, how, lai, lai, lai." "We have no bugs, we have no fleas, good, good, good, come, come, come." When that didn't work, Gladys would go straight out into the road in front of their inn and grab the reins of the lead mules that were passing by and pull them inside the courtyard. All the other mules would follow, and the muleteers had no other option but to go in as well. Gladys and Jeannie served the men a delicious meal and fed the mules. After dinner, they provided the men with free entertainment – stories they told them from the Bible about a man named Jesus. The ladies knew that the best way to spiritually reach those that the Lord put in their path was to meet them at their point of need. It was slow going, but they started seeing people trust Christ as their Saviour. As the new converts and even those who had not yet trusted Christ traveled along the rest of their journey, at each stop along the trail, they would retell the stories they had heard. Eventually their inn was filled every night as word spread about this great place that would, for a reasonable price, provide a dry bed for you and your mules, free entertainment, and a delicious meal.

Food has always been an interesting aspect of my missionary life. Doors of friendship and many opportunities to witness have come about while I sat at someone's table eating the traditional food they served me. Some of it has been delicious while other times it has been interesting to say the least. I remember when I was on a missions trip to Mexico as a 13-year old girl accidentally taking a bite of a red chili popsicle that I thought was strawberry. It was not yummy. While on a summer missions trip in Kenya during my college days, we went to this restaurant called the Carnivore . . . you can imagine what they sold there. I couldn't handle knowing what I was eating and told them to just bring me a plate of whatever. I know I ate zebra, impala, and wildebeest among other things that day. Then in Nigeria

I was offered everything from goat's head, to street rats, to maggots the size of your thumb. Nigeria was my first experience with people eating raw termites, as well. Anytime it would rain, the termites would hatch. They look like large ants, and they have wings that fall off within the first 24 hours after they hatch. One day, I asked Amos, one of our Bible college students, why he was picking the wings off before he ate the termites. He looked at me like I was crazy and said, "Eat the wings! That is disgusting!" I thought to myself, "Well, to each his own, I guess." With everything I'd been offered since my arrival in Nigeria, I had to laugh when I recently read one of my journal entries from August 15, 1997 where I recorded that I had to pray for grace for the meal that was set before me. I thought to myself, "What in the world could it have been" and quickly read on. The next few sentences made me burst out with laughter. I wrote that I had been invited to dinner at the Akinpeul's house, and that she had served me . . . wait for it . . . a salad with chicken!!! My next sentence said, "I ate it . . . even the tomatoes, green peppers, cucumbers, and everything . . . except the lettuce." I had forgotten that salads used to repulse me, and I guess I just couldn't bring myself to eat the lettuce. I hope my host wasn't too offended.

Bible Study: Whatcha' Need?

I love how the Lord uses things that we can relate to in order to drive home a truth to us. We see in the Bible the Lord use the love shared between spouses to relate to us the love between Christ and the church. There are examples of shepherd and sheep that teach us how much we need to depend on God. Hosea uses the analogy of sowing and reaping and breaking up the fallow ground to show us our need to stir up our heart to seek the Lord, and Matthew likens us to a light to show us the importance of being a strong witness for the Lord to the world. Now most of us can relate at least a little to each of these things even if we've never been married, or raised sheep, or planted a field, but there is one thing that every single person can relate to no matter what your situation is . . . food. God uses food many times in the Bible to emphasize a truth He wants us to really understand. Here are some examples:

John 6:35 – "And Jesus said unto them, I am the **bread** of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

Psalms 119:103 – "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than **honey** to my mouth!"

Matthew 4:4 – ". . . Man shall not live by **bread** alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Matthew 5:13 – "Ye are the **salt** of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? . . ."

Proverbs 16:24 – "Pleasant words are as an **honeycomb**, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones."

1 Corinthians 5:6 – "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little **leaven** leaveneth the whole lump?"

1 Peter 2:2 – "As newborn babes, desire the sincere **milk** of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

Proverbs 15:17 – "Better is a dinner of **herbs** where love is, than a stalled **ox** and hatred therewith."

The point is that God in His infinite wisdom uses everyday things to help us understand deep spiritual truths. In this He gives us the example of meeting people at the point of their need in a way that they can relate to. Gladys' ultimate desire was to see the lost saved, but she knew she had to go about it in a practical way. She had to meet the people at their point of need and wait for the Lord to open the door of opportunity to share spiritual things with them. I have counseled with many women who are frustrated because they don't feel like they have many opportunities to get out and witness on a regular basis whether that is due to work, family, or health restrictions. My counsel is always the same. Meet people at the point of their need, and you will find that many opportunities to witness will come.