

## LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

# 318

Dearest grandchild,

Many have heard of Oswald Chambers, the famous preacher, but today's letter will feature his wife. Unfortunately, not enough has been said about her. She was born Gertrude Hobbs in England in 1884. As a child she suffered bouts with bronchitis which limited her time in school. She selflessly stayed home to help her mother which allowed her sister and brother to continue their education. At home she studied shorthand in Pittman's Correspondence School. She excelled to the point where she could transcribe 250 words per minute. This is faster than people speak. She not only transcribed the words with skill and accuracy, but learned to listen in such a way that she also preserved the narrative of those words.

Her first job was working for Gen. Sir William Morris, but eventually became secretary to an attorney where she typed legal briefs without mistakes. Her hard work and diligence in transcribing lectures would later make her husband famous. Oswald Chambers most famous book, "*My Utmost for His Highest*" was published by Gertrude 10 years after his death. In fact, all his books were published by her after his death.

Oswald and Gertrude first met in 1905 when he conducted a mission at his brother Arthur's church. Gertrude (22) and her sister Edith (26) were newly baptized believers. Oswald was 31 at the time.

30 months later Gertrude sailed out of Liverpool on the SS Baltic to take a job as a stenographer in N.Y. City. Providentially Oswald was on the same ship. Knowing this, Gertrude's mother sent him a letter asking him to look out for her daughter, especially after they landed in New York. For the 10 day journey he accompanied her to meals and helped her to get acclimated on the ship. Because Oswald had a sister named Gertrude, he called her "Biddy" which evolved from B.D. (Beloved Disciple). By the time they arrived in New York they agreed to correspond with one another.

Thus, when Oswald returned to England they continued to write. She also returned to England in 1908. At this time they became engaged but would not be married until May 25, 1910. On May 24, 1913 Biddy gave birth to their only child, Kathleen.

In 1915, a year after the outbreak of World War I, Chambers was accepted as a YMCA chaplain in Cairo, Egypt. Chambers raised the spiritual tone of this ministry so it was not merely a social alternative to Egyptian brothels. When he announced that he had decided to replace concerts and movies with Bible classes, his friends predicted that he would be abandoned by the soldiers. They were wrong! Soon his wooden-framed "hut" was packed with hundreds of soldiers listening attentively to messages on Christian commitment and prayer. Confronted by a soldier who said, "I can't stand religious people," Chambers replied, "Neither can I". Chambers irritated his YMCA superiors by giving away refreshments that the organization believed should be sold. Chambers refused to ask soldiers to pay for tea and cakes but did put out a contribution box.

On Oct. 17, 1917 Chambers was stricken with appendicitis. He resisted going to a hospital, however, because he felt that the beds would be needed by wounded soldiers. Finally he had emergency surgery on Oct. 29, but died of complications a short time later on Nov. 15, 1917. He was only 43 years old. He was buried in Cairo with full military honors.

As we have said, “Biddy” was an excellent stenographer who carefully recorded her husbands teaching. Ten years after his death, around 1927, she self published this daily devotional of lessons in Oxford. To date, this book known as *My Utmost for His Highest*, has sold over 13 million copies and has been translated into 39 languages. Since the day it was published it has never been out of print.

Today you can purchase a compilation of more than 40 books by Oswald Chambers which includes *My Utmost for His Highest*. It is called *The Complete Works of Oswald Chambers*. Before he died, Chambers had proofread the manuscript of his first book, *Baffled to Fight Better*, a title he had taken from a favorite line by Robert Browning. None of his books, however, were published during his life time. Each book is a tribute to his widow. For the remainder of her life—and at first under very straitened circumstances—she transcribed and published books and articles edited from the copious notes she had taken in shorthand during the years of her marriage to this great preacher.

Just think! We would not know “him” if it had not been for “her”! Her selfless devotion to Christ and her husband should be an inspiration to us all. Fortunately, Jesus keeps accurate records and her work of faith and labor of love will never be forgotten by Him!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce