

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 437

Dearest grandchild,

The Scriptures teach that we are to give honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 13:7). So today's letter will seek to honor a famous missionary named Gladys Aylward. Gladys was born in London on Feb. 24, 1902. She was one of three children born to Thomas John Aylward and Rosina Florence. They were a working class family and in her teen age years Gladys worked as a housemaid. When she first heard the gospel she gave her heart to Christ and promised God that she would do anything He asked. God gave Gladys a passion for the lost. When she realized how many lost people there were in China she spent over a year trying to get someone to go to China and tell them about Jesus. The last person she asked was her brother. He sarcastically said, "Why don't you go yourself?" Then she prayed to God: "If you show me the way I will go myself".

Gladys applied and was accepted for evaluation by the China Inland Mission. After a few months, however, she was having so much difficulty learning the Chinese language that she was rejected as a missionary. She was told that trying to train her to be missionary was a waste of money. Gladys, however didn't give up. When she heard of a 73-year-old missionary in China whose husband had just died she wrote a letter to her in China. Her name was Jeannie Lawson and providentially she was looking for a younger woman to help her carry on the work. Mrs. Lawson invited Gladys to come to China and help. Without the help of anybody but God she began saving her money. Working as a maid, however, didn't pay much money. Finally she saved enough to cross Russia on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Her travel agent warned her that it was a very dangerous way to get to China for at the time China and the Soviet Union were engaged in an undeclared war. It was, however, only half the cost of taking a ship. Gladys set out from London in Oct. 1930. She only had her passport, her Bible, two pounds ninepence, and snacks to keep her from starving. She was so poor that she was wearing two left shoes which she purchased for only 3 pence. When the train was stopped because of a battle she walked a day and a half down the railroad tracks to the nearest town. She was surrounded by wolves, and when she arrived at the town she had her passport stolen, and was arrested. Miraculously she overcame all of the difficulties satan put in her way and made it to Vladivostok. Then she sailed to Japan and then to the city of Tientsin in China. The rest of her epic pilgrimage was by train, bus, and ultimately by riding a mule. At last she arrived at Yangchen where Mrs. Lawson lived.

Yangchen was an overnight stop for mule caravans and these two women set up an inn that provided food and rest for the caravans. It also gave them the opportunity to tell these travelers stories about Jesus. These men remembered the stories and shared them with others as they travelled. Sadly, after only a short time, Mrs. Lawson suffered a severe fall and died a few days later. This left Gladys to run the mission alone. Further, Mrs. Lawson was receiving support as a missionary while Gladys was not. Her need for money, however, was solved when a few weeks later the Mandarin of Yangchen arrived at the inn in a sedan chair, with his impressive entourage. The Chinese government had recently outlawed the practice of "footbinding" and the Mandarin hired Gladys to patrol the district and enforce that decree. She did so with the understanding that she was free to tell everyone about Jesus.

During her second year in Yangchen, Gladys was summoned by the Mandarin to stop a bloody riot at a local prison for men. She did! With only Jesus by her side she went into the prison, took an ax from a man who had murdered several prisoners, and restored peace. Then she explained to the Mandarin that to prevent future riots he must provide more food and a sense of meaning and hope for the prisoners. He heeded her advice and allowed the prisoners to raise rabbits as a source of food. Then he gave them worn out looms with which they could make cloth, and grinding stones to turn grain into flour. After this success they called Gladys "Ai-weh-deh," which means "Virtuous One."

Not long after, Gladys saw a woman offering a child for sale. The little girl was about 5 years old and was badly malnourished and covered by sores. Gladys concluded that this woman was not the mother but had kidnapped the child to make money. She purchased the child for only nine pence. This was the first of some 100 orphans she adopted. In 1936 Gladys became a Chinese citizen and dressed and lived like the Chinese she loved. When the Japanese attacked China in 1938 they offered a reward for anyone who would help them to capture Gladys. Gladys then fled with her 100 orphans to avoid being killed. Before leaving, however, the Mandarin, who had become her friend, became a Christian. With the children in tow, she walked for twelve days to the Yellow River. Some nights they found shelter with friendly hosts, but on other nights they slept outside in the mountains. The Yellow River is huge. It is 3,395 miles long and is China's second longest river. When they had no way to cross the river the children all knelt and prayed. Then they began singing. By the grace of God a friendly Chinese officer heard their song from a distance, and provided them a boat to cross the river. When they arrived safely at Sian Gladys was delirious and near death with typhus fever. Fortunately medicine from America was there that saved her life. As her health improved she started a Christian church in Sian, and also a settlement for lepers in Szechuan near the border of Tibet. In 1947 she returned to England for a badly needed operation.

Gladys stayed in England until the death of her parents and then in 1957 went to Hong Kong to work with Chinese refugees. Later that year she went to Taiwan and started the *Gladys Aylward Orphanage*. Gladys died on January 3, 1970, just a few weeks short of her 68th birthday. She is buried in a small cemetery on the campus of Christ's College in Taiwan.

In 1957, Alan Burgess wrote a book about her, *The Small Woman*. (Gladys was barely 5 feet tall) This book was condensed in *The Reader's Digest*, and made into a movie called *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*.

Yes! It is good to honor Gladys Aylward and her selfless and sacrificial service for Christ! God may not be calling us to China, but He is surely calling us to do something! If a man would be an author he'd expect of course to write. And he couldn't be a soldier if he didn't want to fight. So it doesn't make much sense to me, or have a real true ring, that a man can be a Christian and not do anything!

I love you,
Grandpa Boyce