

"Told by Those Who Saw These Things"

Oral History and Evangelism in the Archives of the Billy Graham Center

[Talk given by Robert Shuster to Wheaton alumni during Alumni weekend on May 10, 1997]

Archives today collect a mind-boggling quantity of documents. As modern organizations grind out paper and film and tape and computer files and now e-mail messages, archives struggle to preserve the historically significant fragment. And even though that might be only one percent of the documents created, it is still a vast pyramid of documentation. And yet we also struggle with the fact that we can preserve the height, width, and volume of an event, but let the essence of it slip through our fingers. As we were taught in my quantification history class, what counts best does not necessarily count most. And what preserves best is not necessarily the most important thing to preserve.

In the BGC Archives we try to preserve records of how the Gospel was spread. So, we have documents such as contracts showing the terms under which the Billy Graham Association rented stadiums, there are manuals that show how Billy Sunday trained his ushers, we have minutes that indicate how Africa Inland Mission set its priorities in the Belgian Congo in 1955 and operational reports from Jonathan Goforth for his ministries' activities in Manchuria in 1936. And easily a million more statistics and organizational facts. But somehow none of it seems real until we have it supported and supplemented by a human voice telling what it was like: what it was like to preach the word, what it was like to be at a Billy Sunday meeting, what it was like to see another person come to Christ.

Luke begins his gospel with these words: "Dear Theophilus: Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us. They wrote what we had been told by those who saw these things from the beginning and who proclaimed the message." In a similar way, the Archives has for nineteen years been recording oral history interviews with hundreds of people who have seen these things and who have proclaimed the Gospel. The theme of Alumni weekend this year is "Each One Reach One," reflecting the personal way in which the Good News is shared. An oral history interview is also a personal experience, a one-on-one session in which one person talks about his or her life and the other records it for posterity. What I want to do this morning is tell you a little bit about the evangelism interviews in the Archives and share with you a few samples from those interviews, somewhat edited so that they can fit in our time frame here. I will also be showing you slides of images from the Archives that illustrate what the people in the interviews are talking about. When one narrator talks about street corner evangelism, for example, I will be showing you pictures of street corner evangelism done by many different people at many different places and times.



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It all started for us very simply. In 1978, someone told me about Andrew Wyzenbeek, a retired Chicago inventor and businessman. He was an immigrant from Holland, who had been involved as a layman in a variety of evangelistic activities and who dated the beginning of his own conversion back to a 1908 Billy Sunday meeting held in a wooden Tabernacle in Ottumwa, Iowa. He said he didn't have many documents, but he would be willing to talk about his memories. So, talk we did. And despite my inexperience and ineptitude, Mr. Wyzenbeek managed to give me an interview that was chock full of the kind of human detail and insight that can illuminate our understanding of the past. Here is a segment in which he described his reluctant attendance at Sunday's tabernacle. Besides a glimpse of mass evangelism, it gives a picture of an immigrant trying to puzzle out Yankee ways:

[Note: The excerpts used in this printed version of the presentation are in italics and are longer than those used in the spoken presentation on May 10.]

Collection 40. Interview with Andrew Wyzenbeek. Tape T1. (Excerpt)

WYZENBEEK: So, I got a little room somewhere and found a job in Ottumwa. And just about that time (this was in October) Billy Sunday had started his tabernacle. A wooden tabernacle. I remember they use to nail it up so that they could pull the nails again and ...and re-use the lumber later on. Well...I didn't intend to go to Billy Sunday. I saw his write-ups in the newspaper. He made the first...the front page you know, and there were pictures of the crowds.

SHUSTER: When he first arrived.

WYZENBEEK: Yes. But it didn't mean a thing to me. I didn't know why a man should be named Sunday. [Pauses] Could have been Billy Monday.

SHUSTER: Tuesday.

WYZENBEEK: [Chuckles] But it so happened that some of his men came and had shop meetings. They came and sang a solo and gave a testimony in the factories around town.

SHUSTER: That was during the lunch hour or was....

WYZENBEEK: During lunch hour, yes. And that was interesting. To me it sounded like foolishness. But I had some men working under me because they had made me shop superintendent since I could read drawings and make drawings. There were some men under me that were known as the six dirty Swedes. Well ...there were mostly Swedes there in Ottumwa. But these were known as the six dirty Swedes. They worked in a little department where they made a mining lamp. And I had made a part of that mining lamp. I designed a hook for it and made the dies to make it. So, I was in contact with these six men. And they were foul. They chewed snuff. I'm sure it was made to be sniffed, but they chewed it. And they smelled bad. I kept away from them. But one Monday when I came to work, two of those



fellows looked entirely different. They came well dressed. White shirt. They hung up their shirt. They took all their clothes off and put on overalls and dressed up again when they went home. And I said to a friend of mine, "What happened to those Swedes of mine?" I thought they were going to ask me for the day off to go to a funeral. [Laughs]. "No," he said, "Haven't you heard? They walked the sawdust trail at a Billy Sunday meeting." Well...that didn't mean anything to me. Sawdust trail. But to make a long story short in about a week (or less than two weeks) all six of them got the same thing. And I couldn't imagine what had caused that change. Well, I am trained to look for causes. When I see an effect, there must be a cause. So I talked to one of the Swedes. And I said, "Ollie, what happened to you fellows? You're different." He says, "Yeah, Mr. Wyzenbeek. We ...we are different. We are new men. We are born again." I said, "Born again?" "Yes," he said, "we have come to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. And He put a new spirit and a new heart in us. All six of us. "Well," I said, "That's wonderful. You sure are different." "Yes," he says, "We're very sorry for all these sinful things that we have done, and...but Christ has given us forgiveness, and we are now children of God." "Man," I said to myself, "How fanatical can you be!" But I couldn't sleep well that night. It worried me. But I says, "Is there anything to this?" So, the next day I talked to them again. He said, "Mr. Wyzenbeek, why don't you go down there yourself? The wooden tabernacle is back of the jail." I said, "A jail is where I want to keep away from." He says, "Go into the tabernacle. You might come out a Christian yourself." Well, I was so curious. I had no idea what they did there. So, I went in. Sat about halfway on the outside of the seat, so I could get out when I wanted to. And Billy Sunday preached. And I couldn't understand him at all. He spoke rapidly. He used big words. In biblical terms. I couldn't understand him at all. So, I was very much puzzled at the end of the service. But Billy was closing the meeting and he said, "Now before you go...before we leave let's turn around and shake hands with our neighbors and tell them God bless you." Well...so I turned around, and there was an old lady, and I shook hands with her. And she said, "Young man, are you a Christian?" I said, "No, ma'am." She said, "Wouldn't you like to be?" I said, "I should say not." Well, none of it was satisfactory. I was feeling bad.

SHUSTER: Was there music during the service?

WYZENBEEK: Pardon?

SHUSTER: Was there music during the service?

WYZENBEEK: Yes. There was singing invitation hymns. And so, I turned around and stared at the ground you know, and I said to myself, "I treated the old lady bad. I shouldn't have done that." (She was probably forty. I was twenty you know. Twenty-one.) And so, I turned around again, and I said, "I beg your pardon, lady. But I didn't mean what I said. I wish I was a Christian." She said, "You do!" And she grabbed me by the arm and yanked me off the seat because I was on the outside and shoved. She shoved me all the way forward [laughs]. And somebody grabbed my arm and shoved it up. I shook hands with Billy Sunday, who was still standing on the platform. Somebody else took me and led me to a seat, a front seat. And I

sat down. Well, that's all there was to it. And I looked myself over and I said, "Is this what they do here? Doesn't mean a thing." Then the young man came and sat beside me. And he was what we would call today a counselor. So, he said, "May I have your name? I'd like to fill out this card." I said, "Wyzenbeek." He said, "You spell it." I said, "I can't spell it." I didn't know how to spell it...

SHUSTER: In English?

WYZENBEEK: ...because we spell in Holland [pronounced] "ah, bay, say, day"...

SHUSTER: "ay, f, gay"

WYZENBEEK: ...and here it's "a, b, c." So, I said, "You better let me write it." He gave me the card and the pencil. I wrote my name and address. And then it said, "church preference." He said, "What church are you going to join?" I said, "What church! Do you mean I have to join a church?" And he said, "You heard what Billy said about joining a church." I said, "No. I didn't. It went clear over my head. I didn't hear a word." "Well," he said, "you ought to join a church. Billy said that you couldn't go...more go to heaven without joining the church than you could go to England without crossing the ocean." "Well," I said, "I didn't hear it." "Well," I said, "I don't know one church from another." "Well," he said, "What church do your people go to?" "My people don't go to church. They're atheists." He said, "Have you any friends that go to church?" I said, "My friends go to the saloon. They don't go to the church." And he was quite embarrassed. He didn't know what the next question was to be. So, I said, "Well, what church did Billy Sunday belong to?" He said, "He is a Presbyterian." I said, "Fine. How do you spell it?" So, I wrote Presbyterian. And two days later a couple of young men from the Presbyterian Church came to see me.

SHUSTER: They had gotten the card.

WYZENBEEK: They got the card. I had not done anything because I didn't know what had happened. Nothing as far as I was concerned. And they said, "We'd like to take you to the YMCA Saturday there is a famous surgeon speaking there. Would you like to go?" I said, "Sure. As long as it didn't cost anything." I still remember that man's talk. And that's over seventy years ago (or just about seventy years). I have never forgotten it. But after the boys left, I immediately went out and bought a Bible. I went to [the] bookstore, and I said, "I'd like to buy a Bible." And he showed me a beautiful Bible. It was nice and soft and very thin paper. And he was telling me that it was the best he had. I said, "How much does it cost?" He says, "Twenty-two fifty." I said, "Goodness. Are they that expensive? I haven't got that much." "Well," he said, "I showed you one of my best Bible." So, I said, "Well...show me a cheaper one." Here it is. This is the very Bible that he sold me for a dollar and eighty-five cents. [Laughs].

SHUSTER: You had it all those years.



WYZENBEEK: *And I took it back to him a couple of hours later. And I said, "Look. This isn't regular English. I can read a newspaper by this time, but I can't read this." "Oh," he said, "That is sixteenth century diction. And that's a King James version." "Well," I said, "it doesn't mean anything to me." And then he turned around and picked up another smaller book. And he said, "Here is a New Testament." Now, believe or not, I didn't know there was an Old or a New Testament because I had never seen a Bible [pauses] in Dutch. And he said, "This is in modern English." And I said, "How much?" It was a dollar. So, for a dollar, I got a book that I could read, and I found it fascinating. And I read the rest of the day. That night I got on my knees at my bedside. I found out that I was a sinner. And I...for the first time in my life I addressed God. And I said, "Father God." Who taught me to say "God Father"...to call God "Father?" And I asked for forgiveness. And peace came in my heart. It overwhelmed me. That was the time I got converted and I found the Lord Jesus Christ my savior. And I've trusted Him ever since.*

SHUSTER: *Praise the Lord.*

WYZENBEEK: *[Laughs] And so my entire outlook on life changed. Shortly afterward I got married. And we've had a Christian home. And a Bible has become my guide and has the answers for all the problems of life. Well....*

SHUSTER: *Did you go to any of the other Billy Sunday meetings after that one you had been to?*

WYZENBEEK: *I went to the last one.*

SHUSTER: *Oh. You get in just in time.*

WYZENBEEK: *That was the end of the Billy Sunday meetings. [Laughs]. The Lord saved me just in time. I ran into a fellow on the street that I had learned to know in some saloon. I had been playing cards with him. His name was Gene Palmer. And he said, "Andy, I haven't seen you for some time." And I said, "No. I had changed jobs. I got another job. I'm the factory superintendent of another company." And he said, "You're looking wonderful." I said, "Aren't you going to take me for a drink?" He says, "No, Andy, I become a Christian." I said, "Where?" He said, "In the Billy Sunday meeting." I said, "So've I!" [laughs]. So, we had a wonderful feast together telling what the Lord had done for us. In the meantime, Mel Trotter, who was the mission superintendent in Grand Rapids, came to Ottumwa to start a rescue mission. And he and Doctor DeHaan, M. R. DeHaan from Grand Rapids, were there to get the churches to unite and start a city rescue mission. Well ...since DeHaan was a Hollander and he spoke Holland, I got very friendly with that couple of men. And I was so glad that they started that mission where for quite a while I spent about six nights out of the seven in the week.*

So that is where Presbyterians come from. And now a [transcript](#) of that memory of 1908 can be read by browsers on the World Wide Web.

Since then, oral history interviews have been a major part of our program. What we wanted was to acquire a kind of grass roots picture of Protestant evangelism in the twentieth century and build a collective biography of the people who were involved. One major principle that guided us was that we did not want to interview famous people. If they have published or been written about, there probably is adequate documentation of their views and experiences. We wanted to talk with people who had not been written about, whose experiences would not be preserved unless we preserved them. We wanted to capture things like this description by William Drury of doing street corner evangelism in New York City in the late 1940s:

[Collection 492. Interview with William A. Drury. Tape T3.](#) (Excerpt)

SHUSTER: What was the typical street meeting like? How did you grab people? What did you do with them once you grabbed them?

DRURY: Oh! [Chuckles] We did things, you know, if you talked about it in the seminary today, they'd say, "How crude, how crude!" Manhattan, it doesn't take much to get it crowded in Manhattan, you know. We were standing on a corner, had prayer, walk in little doorways somewhere and have prayer. Pray, you know, that we wouldn't get shot or killed or whatever [Both laugh] and no public address system so we'd go over, and we'd look up at a skyscraper and yell, "Don't jump! Don't jump! [Shuster laughs] Whatever you do, DON'T JUMP!" Five minutes, you've got thirty, forty, fifty people and they're saying, "Where, where, where?" And then we would say, you know, "Don't jump into the abyss of hell! Come to God tonight. Come to Jesus Christ. Let me tell you about what Jesus Christ can do for you." Another thing that we did, we took a hat, a fedora hat (We wore fedoras back in those days) took a fedora and put a Bible underneath it on the street corner and then walk around and just look at it, you know, three or four of us walking' around and lookin' at it. This is New York, OK, this is not some rural thing. But people are gullible and they're acceptable and...and you get a few more people and...and..."So what are you lookin' at?" [Chuckles] "That's alive." "What's alive?"

SHUSTER: [Chuckles] And you point at the hat?

DRURY: Yeah! Point at the hat. "That's...that's alive. Really is. That's alive." And you'd see people gathering and then someone would go to pick it up and we said, "DON'T TOUCH IT! [Shuster laughs] Get a couple more people, and then finally somebody would whip up the hat and we'd grab the New Testament or the Bible. (Today that would be an awful thing to lay the Bible on the concrete, you know) And, "The living Word of God, it's alive, you know, and the Lord Jesus Christ lives today," and you'd take off and...and go [with a sermon]. There was no outlines as such. You took a verse, Bob, and you ran with it. John 1:12, John 3:36, I John 5:11,12&13, but you didn't sermonize. You didn't sermonize.... you know,



you...you...you just took very little of application of the Word of God. You...you...we have sermonizers and we have people who have the "three C's" and "three T's," you know, and all of that. But application.... You know, recently we...we...we're on this kick of a building campaign. I'm so sick and fed up with hearing about a building ca...and...and I said, "Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep.'" I said, "Week after week after week, there are hurting, hungry people - somebody on the verge of a divorce, this one just found out a son had leukemia, and Jesus said, 'Feed, feed,' and...and...and try to get inside of people with whatever it is that you think and preach and teach and...but we would just take.... But like I say, I was a novice. You know, what did I know about the Bible? What did I know about anything? But God blessed in the midst of my stupidity. I was available, I was available, and God blessed, blessed in the midst of my stupidity.

SHUSTER: So, you didn't sermonize. You took it and ran with it. But what exactly...what exactly would you say? Would you talk about yourself, or would you....?

DRURY: [Immediately begins giving a sample of a typical street sermon, with some explanatory asides to Shuster] "I want to leave something with you tonight. Listen! Listen! See if you can understand. If you can't understand what I am saying, raise your hand in the crowd. I don't care. Say, 'Hey, I don't understand' [reading] 'For God...' " You'd read the verse, maybe you wouldn't. "Who is God? Look at the stars, the galaxies, the moon. Who do you think made that?" You're on the street corner, in the open. "'For God so loved the w...the whole universe. Jews, Catholics, Protestants." A lot of Jewish people in New York. "He loves everybody. 'For God so loved the whole world!' " And you go on, phrase upon phrase upon phrase. "'So loved the world that He gave His only begotten son.' He only had one, Jesus. You use His name every day in the streets." The cabbies! The cabbies. You know, when they can't blame anybody else, they blame Jesus Christ. "So, you know the name." And just take it apart. "You, here, tonight, you can come to know Jesus Christ? How do I know? I did it! I was a dirty, filthy, vulgar, profane, immoral degenerate! A high school dropout. I flunked everything but lunch and recess! And if God can take a life like this and change it and transform it, He can do it for you! But you have to confess the crud in your life. And you don't want to do that, because you're a pretty nice guy. And there are people out there that do a lot worse thinks than you do. I've heard that a thousand times. But God loves you. He really does. He wants to save you, He wants to cleanse you, He wants to forgive you. He wants to restore you! Restoration. He's in the restoring business. And He wants to give you peace, which you don't find in Manhattan, midtown Manhattan. There is no peace. Listen to the cars, listen to the cabbies, listen to the foul language. But you can know that peace. How do I know? I've accepted Him. He works for me. He works for me." So, that's about it, really, you know....

When we do sit down for an interview, we generally follow a basic format. We ask about family background, childhood interests, education, the interviewee's conversion or "born again" experience, how he or she became involved in his/her ministry and the history of that ministry.



As anyone who has ever done oral history knows, a person during his life plays many parts and is witness to many things. All sorts of interesting flotsam and jetsam can end up on your interview tape, from reminiscences about Ralph Capone and his brother Al to a description of the folk methods of cultivating silkworms in central China, not to mention comments on World War II in the Pacific or nation building in central Africa.

But our main topic is evangelism, how and why the Christian gospel has been spread and its impact. Besides talking with narrators about the events of their lives, we ask questions that require more reflection: why do people accept Christ, how has the missionary enterprise changed in your lifetime, in your opinion what are the strengths and weaknesses of the church in Nigeria or Taiwan or the United States? Here is evangelist Tom Skinner responding to a question on what preaching meant to him:

[Collection 430. Interview With Tom Skinner. Tape T2.](#) (Excerpt)

SHUSTER: What does...what does preaching feel like for you? I mean, what does it feel like to be in front of the group, preaching?

SKINNER: One of the things that growing up in the black church did for you was that you were used to talking to people, so that was not the...that was not the phenomena. The great struggle for me was always being aware of where the people were and what their needs were, what the striking issues of the people were and how the gospel of Jesus Christ would speak to them. And.... [pauses] And the fact of the matter is.... [pauses] I have a.... It is interesting you should ask that. I have an absolute passion about preaching and at the same time it scares me to death. It.... The old folks used to pray a prayer that went like this, when they were praying for the preacher on Sunday morning, the old folks would pray, "Lord, bless the man who is going to stand in John's shoes, the man who is going to stand between the living and the dead and break unto us the bread of life." So, my formative years in preaching were shaped with the idea that every time you stood up to preach the word of God, you were standing between the living and the dead and that the issues of life and death were at stake, and that was the frightening part. The exhilarating part was that you could offer people life, you know. And so, I'm enthralled with preaching. I don't mean the mechanics of preaching. I'm enthralled with the idea that God has chosen through the foolishness of preaching to change people's lives. I mean it's a, it's just a.... You can get drunk off of that, you know what I mean? [chuckles] And yet....

SHUSTER: "Be drunk not with wine but with the Spirit." [Ephesians 5:18]

SKINNER: Yeah, yeah. Yet at the same time, frightened of the responsibility, you know? True preaching is...is a sacred trust to me. It's like I am a different person. And I don't mean in a schizophrenic sense like, you know, I take on another personality or, you know, I am a sinner who suddenly becomes holier than other people. I mean, preaching is serious business to me. You see, I've never been able to understand.... And I guess I have a different...different



view. It was...it was a cultural shock when I discovered that white folks could, after service, have a session where they critiqued the pastor's sermon. For me, that was...you don't critique a sermon! You critique a lecture, you critique a monologue of a play, you critique the opening act of a...a...a theater production, you critique a concert. You do not critique preaching! [chuckles] I mean, it's not that I do not need or do not need.... It's just that preaching, if it's...if it's...if it is legal and right, is the anointing of the Spirit of God on the word of God through a vehicle God chooses to use and you don't critique that. You listen to it, receive it, and obey it. You know. And the thought that people could sit around [laughs] and take it apart was just too much. In spite of the fact that I consider myself a very sophisticated, mature person today, I still find it difficult. Because for me, preaching is.... the preacher allowing himself or herself to be...to become submissive to the Spirit of God and that it is through the Holy Spirit working through the preacher and the preaching of the word of God that attracts people to Jesus Christ. And that to me is what the act is, that's what the whole thing is about. And I guess the second part is that I view it as an evangelist, because of my life, of my Christian ministry has been spent talking to nonbelievers. And so, my mind set is geared toward...toward the person who does not know Christ. How do you continue to find ways to communicate to people who don't know...who don't know the Lord? So, I have to work hard at talking to Christians. You ask, how does it feel to stand in front of a lot of people. What is really hard is to stand in front of a lot of Christians. I really have to work to be at ease. I'm totally at ease and at home with pagans. Totally at home.

Over half the interviews are with missionaries. Others are with pastors, mass evangelists, broadcasters, youth workers, and chaplains. They talk about evangelism as practiced in city wide campaigns, at store front churches through tract distribution and in person-to-person contact. It is a record of, from the human perspective at least, some of the ways the Christian Gospel has been spread by one segment of the church during one small sliver of time. If any of you want further information, we have some literature on our oral history collections here on the stage and you can pick it up after the program. And this October, on Alumni Weekend, my associate will be giving a talk about the special oral history we did to gather information on the 1995 Wheaton revival.

In the book of Matthew, Christ called his gospel a two-edged sword and our interviews reflect how that sword has cut through the lives of the people who have witnessed and those who have responded one way or another: pain and failure as well as achievement, smugness and sacrificial love, struggle and rest.

Some of our tapes describe the atmosphere in great stadiums filled with hundreds of thousands of people. Other paint a more intimate picture. Here is an excerpt from an interview with Wheaton alumna Eileen Kuhn (then Eileen O'Rourke) about her work among the Lisu people in Thailand, where she was in the early 1950s, together with fellow missionary Edna McLaren:



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[Collection 464. Interview with Eileen \(O'Rourke\) Kuhn. Tape T3. \(Excerpt\)](#)

KUHN: And Edna and I had the privilege of going into the Lisu tribe, the very tribe that John and Isobel had worked with in China. And so that was really wonderful.

SHUSTER: Was this like a subclan of the same tribe or...?

KUHN: No, it was the same tribe. But within the tribe there are different dialect groups. But it was the same Lisu tribe. And we, Edna and I, lived up there in Ta-ngo. John and Isobel took us up. Let me tell you about our first night. Is that okay?

SHUSTER: Sure. Absolutely.

KUHN: John and Isobel took us up. And before they left us that night, John had made a bamboo door for our house. Our house was just not any bigger than this room. How big is this room?

SHUSTER: I guess we are in a room now that is sixteen feet by sixteen. Maybe not that larger.

KUHN: I have always said twelve by twelve, but maybe it was a little bigger. But it was divided into four rooms. That twelve by twelve was divided into four rooms. And in our bedroom, Edna and I slept side by side) but I always had to sleep opposite the door, so that my feet could stick out the door, because I was so tall. Just four little rooms. But John had made the door, woven it out of some bamboo. So now we had a door. So, after we said good-bye to them, Edna and I thought, "Well, maybe we ought to lock our door tonight." So, we took a piece of rattan and poked it through the bamboo wall and poked it back through the bamboo door and tied a bow know in it. We were locked in. I don't think I will ever forget that first night in the Lisu village, when we were there alone. We had been there on other, earlier times, but just to come up, stay one night, and go down again. But now we were there to live, to stay. Our walls went up to a certain height and stopped and the roof was on top of that. Right in the middle of the house, I could stand up straight, where the roof came up in a peak. But as the roof came down, I had to get smaller and smaller too. But as we locked our door, we heard way off in the distance a noise, a rather eerie noise that went higher and higher into the night air. And then we heard that same sound being picked up by all the little shanties around us until it seemed like the whole village was alive. What it was...was the demon wail. They were calling upon the demons. And we felt threatened. We felt as if Satan was really contesting the right of the children of light to be in his territory.

SHUSTER: What were they calling on the demons for?

KUHN: Well, they just call on the demons out of fear and placating and sort of, "Don't let this hurt us."

SHUSTER: Was that something that happened every night or...?

KUHN: No, no. It did not happen every night. But it certainly happened that night. And we were frightened, really. And we clung to each other, and we prayed. There is nothing like a situation like that to make you pray. And we prayed that the Lord would not only protect us with this blood, but would cause that one little weak, pinpoint of light to ray out into that darkness. Because if we were to go out of that little higgledy-piggledy house (that's the name we gave it) and look over at the ranges of mountains - range after range after range, there was no one there who knew the Lord. We were right in the middle of the Golden Triangle. You know the opium growing area? Right in the middle of that area. And it was Satan's territory, all right. [Pauses] But you know, it is a wonderful, wonderful thing to be in a situation where the Lord's friends are few and to be able to say to Him, "Lord Jesus, you are welcome in my heart and my home. To be His friend in a place where there are no others. And then too it is another kind of a joy to be with a fellowship of church...like we have here in America. That's joyous too, but it's a different kind of joy. And I am glad I have had both kinds. And then to be able to go out with the Good Shepard when he is seeking and finding His sheep that are lost.

SHUSTER: So, there were no Lisu Christians there whatsoever?

KUHN: None. None. There were...the only reason we were allowed to have a home in their village was because we'd inoculated them for smallpox and that was sort of the agreement. So, we were allowed to come, but it was reluctant. And we had to...it takes a lot of loving living in some of these places before.... You don't go in here a short term for two weeks and then see results. It takes a lot of loving living. Learning the language, sitting where they sit and.... Our first convert there was Father Wood. Dear old man. Rather.... Well, he really wasn't that old in our terminology. He must have been in his fifties. But fifties is old where he was. All crippled up with arthritis. Had taken opium largely because of the pain of his arthritis, but it had gotten to the place where he was dependent upon it. Well, he was the first one whose heart was stirred toward the Lord. And he broke away from his opium, which was really something. Because it was not only the addiction. It was also the pain that he had to bear, without good medicine. And he came to the Lord. None of the rest of his family did. And right now (the day we are talking) we are very near to Christmas. And I always think of Father Wood at Christmas. Because I will never forget the first Christmas we had with him. It was Christmas Eve, and we went up to his shanty. His shanty was just a little dark place, no windows. In the middle of the shanty was a square - his ash pit, on top of which were a few logs that were burning. And we went up on Christmas Eve to have our service. And he had a little stick in his hand, and he went from word to word in his little Lisu Bible. He had just learned to read! And he began to read....

SHUSTER: You had taught him?

KUHN: Yes, we had taught him. "And there were in the same field shepherds abiding...and there were in the same country shepherds abiding in their field, keeping watch by their flocks by night." And the rest of that beautiful story. And he was reading it! And then we told the story, stammering it, because we were just learning to. But strengthened because of flannel graph [laughs] If they couldn't understand our words, they could look and see what we had in our hands. It was very necessary to have pigs in the stable.

SHUSTER: [laughs]

KUHN: We didn't sheep, but we had to have pigs. The Lisu understood pigs. [laughs] they were the mainstay of their lives. And then one of the pigs got mixed up with the heavenly hosts. [laughs]

SHUSTER: Flying pig.

KUHN: Yeah, but it was wonderful. It was the very first celebration of a Lisu Christian in Thailand. The next morning, Edna and I had to leave for another village, another tribe and didn't get back for a week. That's why we celebrated on Christmas Eve. And when we got back, we found that God had gathered Father Wood home to Himself. He'd gone through a little...a few sharp pains. He told the people, "Don't kill a pig. Don't put money in my mouth. When I die, don't wail." All of these were demon related. And he died in peace. And this was such a testimony to them, that he could go like that, peacefully to the Lord.

In Exodus we read about the manna the Lord provided from the sky to feed the children of Israel in the desert. We also read that Moses told Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to kept for generations to come." Now, I do not know how much an omer is in metric measurements. But I think I do know what Moses had in mind in this case. He wanted future generations to have the manna as a reminder of how God had moved in their lives and also as a real link between the generation that traveled in the desert and the generations that would come from them and after them.

That is why we began and continued the oral history program here at the BGC. Even though it has only been a few years, some of those we have interviewed, people such as Andrew Wyzenbeek, Tom Skinner have died now. Their main legacy, as for all of us, was their lives and the impact they had on those around them, but we also have this "omer of manna" which we are helping to preserve. And of course, it not just words we are preserving, but the humor in the voice of Billy Drury or the love and humanity conveyed in the tone of Eileen Kuhn. We preserve it not as a relic or as a pretty picture, any more than the blood and tears and anger of the Exodus make a pretty picture, but as a partial record of how the Gospel was spread in our time. Memory distorts and interviewers have their inadequacies, and we understand in part and communicate in part, seeing as through a glass darkly. But in spite of all that, we want the reflection of the light that is in these records to be there for others to see.

These interviews are available for listening and/or reading in the Archives Reading Room or by inter-library loan or in some case over the World Wide Web. We hope you will have a chance to some sample some of this manna we have preserved for you.

[View and search Buswell Library Archives & Special Collections oral history interviews at <https://archives.wheaton.edu>. Many of the interviews include links to the audio recordings and transcripts through the online collection guide.]



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