

Foreign Missions 1975-1985 – The First Ten Years (Part 1)

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Mrs. Nancy Barton (née Neiland) worked with the American foreign missionaries from the time they were in training at Barrytown in 1975. She was the American representative in the World Mission Department and served in several different capacities there.

Note: Nancy compiled this article in 1985 to honor and remember the work of the early pioneer missionaries who devoted (and in some cases risked) their lives to sow the seeds of our movement and nurture them into life. Nancy herself was one who, from the offices in New York, served and loved the missionaries with a deep heart as they met with challenges related to a lonely spiritual life, transcending cultural and language barriers, plus the practical difficulties of staying in their mission country, earning a living and maintaining their health. Although this piece was written more than 30 years ago, it catches and showcases the bright and brave heart and spirit of the early movement.

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one

belonging to him, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."

The Lord replied, "My son, my precious child. I love you and would never leave you. During your rimes of trial and suffering, when you see only one set off footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Author Unknown

And you, foreign missionary, have you had such a dream? Have memorable scenes of your life in the mission field flashed across the sky of your mind? You, too, decided to follow God and our True Parents and had the encouragement that they would be there with you at all times. Recalling these last ten years of your life, did you notice that during your most troubled times you, too, were lifted by your God, your True Parents, held in their arms, and carried?

You had many dreams, before you left for your nation. You dreamed of restoring your mission country, offering it to Heaven through True Parents. Armed with the truth of the Principle, and the love of God and True Parents, you were so full of life and enthusiasm when you went out. It seems your dreams have remained strong within your mind and heart during these years, for many of you are still walking the path of the pioneer missionary, which appears to have now widened into a road....

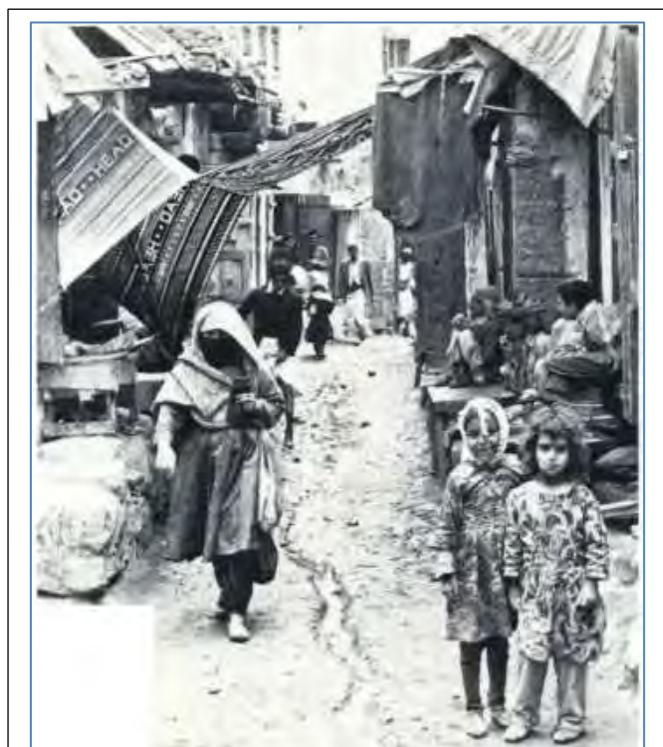
Ten years is a long time. Countless stories and incidents retold from your lives could evoke laughter or tears. Yet what has it meant to wear that glorious title, "foreign missionary"? It is easy to conjure up the rather idealized version of what a missionary does: shouting God's message across the plains and mountains of your country, longing to embrace each man, woman and child and breathe life into their waiting souls. But it wasn't that easy, was it? And there was often no glory attached to your title. Many

members have prayed for you, not realizing the hardships, the indemnity that came across your path, not realizing the depth of suffering you endured to offer the progress made in your nations. Not every story can be told, but in this tribute to the investment made by Heavenly Father, True Parents and each of you, some of the typical and some of the notso-typical events which comprised your daily lives during these first ten years of worldwide activity will be shared.

Spring, 1975. In three different corners of the world, the young men and women of the Unification movement of Japan, Germany, and the United States chosen left from the warmth and security of their spiritual homelands, and the love and comfort of their national leaders, in the largest wave of missionaries sent out by the Unification Church at one time.* God was about to take them on a journey.

Most of them did not turn back. And no matter what happened on the other side of their rain bows -- even if for some reason they had to leave the mission field and are now serving in a different assignment at this time -- they will never be the same.

** Previously, the European nations, Canada, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, India, several Middle East nations, and several South American nations had been pioneered.*



The old markets of Sana'a, Yemen, in April 1977

Digesting a Different Culture and Surviving

Father's vision is so broad. He looked forward to the time when each missionary trinity would make an economic foundation, contact professors and theologians, engage in media work, help develop natural resources, found or manage schools- the list of his plans goes on and on. By sending his representatives to every country possible, he was planting seeds which would eventually help in the building and creation of the Kingdom of God on earth. But initially he kept almost silent. In his wisdom, he did not outline all these plans before they left. He knew that before he could direct them in such activities, they needed to first contend with daily survival. He knew that they needed time to digest the language, the culture, the problems with unity, the hardship of overcoming themselves. And in a sense, he kept all of us guessing about why they were sent.

However, when Father gathered all the foreign missionaries and national and state leaders to hold the first World Conference on the occasion of his 60th birthday, he no longer kept silent about why he sent out the foreign missionaries.

Father said then that if he had not sent out foreign missionaries, he would have been accused by the people in spirit world that their nations on earth never had the chance to hear the Principle.

However, shortly after the missionaries departed, the Unification Church in many established nations -- especially the United States during the Yankee Stadium and Washington Monument campaigns went through incredible persecution. True Father was grateful when news of our movement spread throughout the world and stories and warnings of the impending danger of "Moonies" appeared in the newspapers of all other continents. Father could say with confidence that the government and the people knew of our missionary activity; therefore, there was no way he could be accused of inaction.

He further commented:

"I was hoping that as soon as you reached the mission field you would be faced with enormous persecution and suffering. Then you would have had absolutely no time to worry about internal difficulties. You would simply have had to unite and face the situation.

I was hoping that you could all experience this, and many of you actually did. I knew that 1975 was a very severe year of persecution, and I knew that in 1976 we would hit the peak of persecution. I knew that was the pinnacle we had to pass over. That is why I sent you out in 1975.

You must have had to overcome many cultural barriers: there was one American, one Japanese, and one German, each thinking differently on the basis of his own upbringing and standard. That in itself is already history-making. No one can find at any time in human history that three people coming from such

contrasting cultures as Japan, America, and Germany came together, trying to pursue a common purpose and goal. Why? To save the country and people. It is a virtually impossible task, yet backing you was an organization and a leader who believed it could be done."

True Father knew well the silent suffering that each missionary had experienced. In fact, although all missionaries had dearly longed for some words from True Father, such communications had been few and far between.

"I left you practically all alone for the past five years. I wanted you to be able to come back and write your experiences. I wanted to create an enormous manual of instructive material for future history. You have that text within yourselves. This was one goal of sending you out five years ago."

At that conference, True Father asked each of them to write their testimony of missionary life. He requested them to include how they achieved unity and adapted to the language, culture, and customs of their nations; also to describe all spiritual phenomena experienced by the missionaries themselves and their native spiritual children; and to record what and how much was devoted in prayer, concern, or care for the sake of one person's salvation. He also asked them to express how they viewed the problems and future of their nation from the viewpoint of a spiritual parent. These testimonies, excerpts from which appear in this article, have been called by Father "The Acts of the Apostles" of the Unification Church. When he commissioned these testimonies, he already had some idea of what they would contain.

"Even without hearing your report directly, I can understand it. I know each one of you suffered. Your report will be the record of suffering for the sake of God: You suffered; you may have been imprisoned; you were mistreated; you were persecuted; you shed tears; you may have even had to run away from the eyes of the authorities because you wanted to remain in that mission field. Every one of you has a record of suffering."

The First Shock

Many foreign missionaries later said they were full of anxiety during the plane ride to their new homeland. Romantic adventures perhaps filled their mind, but at the same time, fear threaded itself around their hearts. What would it be like? What would they find? And even more importantly, what would find them? Many later confessed that they were sure someone would cut their throats, that they would be robbed as soon as they stepped out of their hotel, or that they would catch malaria or another dreaded disease simply by breathing the air!

Many countries were much hotter than the missionaries originally anticipated -- the waves of heat hit them as soon they stepped off the plane, virtually drenching them. In some nations, the humidity level matched the temperature. Energy was immediately sapped, and reality began to set in.

Yet stepping off the plane for the first time was a historic moment that each of them, personally shared with Heavenly Father. One sister said that just before she left the plane and stepped on the soil of her country, she felt like Neil Armstrong stepping on the moon for the first time.