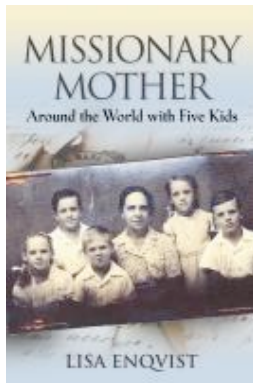


MISSIONARY MOTHER

Around the World with Five Kids



LISA ENQVIST



This book is based on the private letters of a dedicated missionary mother who refused to leave her five children behind, even in dire circumstances. Her adventurous journey took them to China during dangerous war times, and other places around the world. Her youngest daughter shares the secret of her mother's enduring strength and committed purpose. This intriguing personal journey is an inspirational example of courage, faith, and obedience.

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Lisa Enqvist

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PART 1: BORN FOR A PURPOSE

*Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were
written in your book before one of them came to be.*

Psalms 139 (NIV)



Anna Wallenius

Anna's childhood

If we could get a glimpse of what goes on beyond our perception, beyond our time-bound senses and thoughts and understanding, we might see something of God's plan and purpose. Most often, we only see and experience what is happening just here and now. Many times it seems confusing, a chaos with no meaning at all.

Anna Wallenius was born August 27, 1905, as a second daughter to Verner and Sofia Wallenius. Her sister, Ellen Verna, was just twelve months older. Their father had begun work as a switchman on the railway in Helsinki in March 1906. His wife brought both the little girls to join him there a month later. Looking back at Anna's life, it seems as though she was to experience an existence of recurring chaos. Finland was under the rule of Russia. The year she was born Russia was in the turmoil of revolution. It formed her early childhood in a way that affected certain important decisions she made as an adult.

On July 30, 1906, a mutiny among Russian soldiers, called the Sveaborg Rebellion, seemed to threaten the safety of the working class. A general strike had been planned. If the conflict spread among the railway workers, it certainly would affect the tiny family. They worried about the unknown future. Sofia decided it was best to take the girls back home to Gesterby in Sipoo, a parish about twenty miles east of Helsinki.

When the situation was calmer, Sofia returned with only Verna. Anna was left with her grandparents. Some sixty years later Anna asked her mother why she had left her behind. Sofia answered, "It just happened. We never planned to leave you."

God was preparing Anna for a life of turmoil and chaos, a life full of questions. Gradually, she learned to understand that in the midst of all the chaos God's plan was being fulfilled. Maybe she never fully

realized why she had to go through so many dark tunnels in her life, but she learned a crucial lesson: she could trust her Guide.

The Parish of Sipoo had experienced several periods of spiritual revival since 1783. Past generations of Anna's family had built their lives on faith in God and His word. Her grandparents, Anders Gustaf and Johanna Granberg opened their home for visiting preachers and missionaries. Anders was paralyzed by polio when he was 32, but as he said, that stopped him from chasing after earthly treasures. The heavenly treasures became more meaningful.

A river flowed past the village of Gesterby. A tiny bridge crossed over to the neighboring village of Hindsby. That was the only body of water Anna had to pass over as a child. No one could dream at the time that she would travel across the great oceans of the world in the future.

Sipoo was peaceful compared to Helsinki, but life there too was influenced by decisions made in Russia. During the First World War, in 1915-1916, Russia imported workers from Manchuria to fell forests in large areas of southern Finland. The purpose was to have an open space with good visibility in case of enemy attacks on the Russian Naval Fleet. Several hundred of these Manchu-Chinese were sent to Sipoo. Some of them were criminals, exiled to work in Finland. The Chinese created a lot of fear among the people. Everyone else was afraid to go near them, except for a kind preacher's wife who cooked rice porridge for them. They were grateful, as they were ravenous.

Anna, who was ten, heard all the rumors. She also heard missionaries talk about life in China. She did not know then that about twenty years later she would be living as a foreigner in their country.

The idyllic peace of Sipoo was shattered just after Finland's declaration of Independence in 1917. The expression – Reds and

Whites – began to be used in 1918. This term named the opposing ideologies wanting to rule the new independent land. Brother fought against brother. The Reds even sought out Anna's maternal uncle, Anders Granberg. He managed to escape. Anna was twelve years old.

Many years later, in far away China, she experienced the effects of civil war and revolution. There too, the expression, "The Reds are coming closer," became a warning. She had to flee twice with her children.

Joining her family

Anna's unanswered questions followed her throughout her life. Why did she not grow up with her parents and siblings? Now, at the age of sixteen, she suddenly had to adjust to their way of life. Only after her death did I, her daughter, find a tiny bit of paper where the circumstances surrounding her return to Gesterby as a baby were revealed.

Still, these painful questions about being "abandoned" by her family became the motivating force to keep her own family together. She had decided early in life that if ever she had children, she would never leave them in the care of other people.

Her parents did love her. They never actually abandoned her. After leaving Anna with her grandparents in Gesterby, Sofia soon had a new baby. Elna was born in February 1907. She had clubbed feet. It took many operations and many years before she could walk. Perhaps that was part of the reason for Anna's prolonged stay with her grandparents.

Verner was born December 21, 1878. Sofia was born July 20, 1882. They married June 25, 1903. He was able to keep his job as a railway switchman, manually switching the tracks for the passing trains. By the time Elis was born in 1910, Verner had built a two-story house on

land he had leased. He had suffered severe problems with Rheumatic Arthritis since his youth, but he was a fighter. He did not allow the illness to stop him from work.

Anna's older sister, Ellen Verna, was seventeen when Anna moved home. She had studied at a Housewife's school. There are pictures of her confirmation and from her school, but sadly, I have heard only one story about her. When Verna was about four years old, she told her mother, "I will live 'til I am twenty, but not until I'm twenty-one." She died of tuberculosis four months before her twenty-first birthday.

Elna was fourteen. She was teased in school because she looked different and because of the special shoes that she had to wear. She refused to go back to school. When she grew older, she did her share of work at home, as well as outside the home. She was a well-loved extra pair of hands in several families.

Elis was eleven, the only boy in the family. He was still in school. He often went out to play in the forest with his friends, avoiding chores whenever he could. All water for the household had to be brought in from the well. Wood had to be chopped for the stove and heating. Elis grew up and became a ship's engineer and was away from home for months on end. He died at age 44 of tuberculosis.

Little Göta Linnea was eight years old when Anna moved home. Göta became the most faithful letter writer and kept in touch with Anna and her children throughout her life. She lived to the age of 90. None of Anna's siblings ever married or had children.

For sixteen-year-old Anna, there was a great risk of becoming jealous and bitter in comparing her life to that of her siblings. She had to find work immediately and give part of her pay to her parents for food. She did not feel as though she belonged to the family. She did

not yet understand that her father's paycheck was not enough for all the extra expenses added with still another family member.

I Surrender All

Anna heard there were two preachers visiting the Free Mission Church in Helsinki one Sunday. She decided to go and listen to them. That meeting was a turning point in young Anna's life. Frank Mangs and Ragnar Breitholtz held meetings in the Free Mission Church in Helsinki. Breitholtz had been in Gesterby when Anna was nine years old. She had publicly revealed that she wanted to follow Jesus. When she heard the news that the same preacher was in town, she went to hear him. It was 1921. Revival had begun, and Anna wanted to be there. She spent as much of her free time as possible in the church. She had fallen in love with her childhood Friend, Jesus! She was willing to invest everything for her Lord and Savior and joined wholeheartedly in the song when the congregation sang:

*All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.
All to Jesus I surrender,
Make me, Savior, wholly Thine;
Let me feel Thy Holy Spirit,
Truly know that Thou art mine.*

Judson W. Van DeVenter, 1896 Public Domain

She meant every word she sang. As she grew and matured, sometimes she felt she had no more to give Him to show Him her love. She thought she had already given everything she could. She held Sunday school at the home of Rachel and Hannes Gustafsson. During the Great Depression, many people were unemployed. Anna felt sorry for the children who looked hungry. She began to bring a basket of food with her every Sunday. While she taught the Sunday school,

Rachel cooked food for the children. Nobody knew who supplied the food. Her other family members noticed how Anna had everything she needed though she was always giving things away. Her little sister, Göta, once asked her how it worked. Anna replied, *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

Although as a child Anna had felt God's call to be a missionary, she thought that she was unfit for the task. It required greater knowledge and skills for missionary work than she had.

On September 11, 1931, Anna boarded a ship that took her to England. Her trunks were packed for the long journey to China. She was to study English and some Chinese and be tested if she was suitable for work with the China Inland Mission. Her home church, which she had attended since she had moved from Sipoo to Helsinki ten years earlier, had sent warm recommendations ahead of her confirming her suitability. She had also had practical experience, in several places on the West Coast of Finland, in sharing the message of God's forgiving love. Even rowdy drunkards had succumbed to God's call to surrender their lives to Him through Anna's simple message.

Anna was thrilled to be on her way at last. She had learned many lessons in the past years about trusting God for everything, even to the smallest detail. She knew that if she remained faithful and obedient to God's Word, she was sure that He would keep His part of each promise. Or was it the other way? She knew God would always be faithful, but she was not too sure about herself. Would she be able to stand firm in any challenges that she might face in the future?

One of lessons she learned quite early when she had begun to earn her wages was being faithful in giving one tenth of her pay back to God. She learned to use a knitting machine so well she decided to buy one for herself. At first, she thought that God would understand she

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could not give her full tithes when she had to pay for the machine. She soon lost her job. She called that lesson, "God does not bless robbers, but He saves and forgives them."

"Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'

"In tithes and offerings. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

Malachi 3 (NIV)

Before leaving for England, she had received her personal Pentecost, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by the gift of speaking in tongues. Her prayer life was deeper than she ever had experienced before. The language bubbled up in her heart like a spring of water. She experienced joy and love beyond anything she had imagined. She wanted to share all she had received with all she met.

During the months she spent at the China Inland Mission she learned more than just language. She found new friends from several countries; she was taught about trials and difficulties that would lie ahead in very different and unfamiliar surroundings. She could hardly wait to get there and was prepared for just about any kind of challenges, but she never expected the one that faced her right where she was.

On the eve of her journey to China from England, a letter arrived from China to the school. Within the envelope was a list of questions that Anna had to answer. If she answered the questions according to the principles of the Mission Board in China, she could travel. If her answers did not agree with their principles, she would not be accepted. She would have to return home.

Anna studied the questions carefully. The principal of the school explained which questions were crucial. Anna had recently learned the meaning of the word 'crucial'. Its root was in the word crucify. That very morning, as she read her Bible, this verse stood out.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

The crucial questions were, "Do you speak in tongues? If you do, would you teach the Chinese converts about the gift of tongues?" She responded 'yes' to both questions. She added. "I will teach them everything that is in the Bible." Her answers were sent to China. While she waited, God gave her a special promise, "I will send you to China."

The unexpected happened. She had to return to Finland with her China-trunks still unpacked. Her beloved grandmother, Johanna, was very ill. Anna nursed her the last months of her life. She was thankful she had been sent back just for that. There was still some work for her in Finland. A few more drunkards yielded themselves to God; this time in Vålax, a village in the rural community of Porvoo on the South Coast, not very far from Sipoo. She learned many valuable lessons in trusting and obeying God through these experiences.

At last, in October 1933, God opened the way for her to China. She was sent by the Filadelfia Church in Helsinki. She arrived in Shanghai on Christmas day.

The long wait and the disappointments were part of a plan she could not even imagine. She would need the experience from every lesson she had learned through her early trials. Each trial and

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difficulty gave her a deeper need of relying more on God's guidance than on her own understanding.

Something – or someone – quite unexpected was being led into her life.

Toimi Yrjölä

Toimi Yrjölä's father, Edward Yrjölä, was a pilot, guiding ships into the Port of Kotka. Several generations of the family had lived on the tiny island of Haapasaari, far out in the Gulf of Finland. Ships and boats were a normal part of the island folks lives. The sea gave them food, but it also claimed some lives now and again. Many storms had hit the island, but it was rock solid and stood the test of each raging tempest. Toimi's life was shaped by the rugged and often harsh conditions on the island.

His mother, Tekla Sipilä, became a step-mother to four motherless children when she was twenty-two. She gave birth to nine children, of whom Toimi was the fifth.

The winter, when Toimi was nearly 13 years old, was bitterly cold. One Sunday in January and with Sunday school over, the wintry slopes tempted the boys out to ski. Soon, they were covered with perspiration, and their faces were flushed in the sunny but frosty air. The cold wind seemed to blow right through their clothes as they trudged home after their hard racing across the ice-covered sea. The wind was mercilessly cold, and the boys' skis moved more and more slowly due to exhaustion and cold.

Soon, Toimi had a high fever. When his temperature would not go down, they feared he had contracted pneumonia and sent for help. An army officer with medical training was stationed at the Kilpisaari Island coastal battery close by, and there was a nurse in Haapasaari. Even their efforts brought no results for the better. The fever remained high, and the young boy's strength began to fail. After doing all she could, the nurse said in a serious tone: "There is nothing more we can do. Pneumonia seems to have taken control."

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This devastating news was a hard blow to Toimi's mother who, while waiting for his birth, had prayed that her child would become a missionary. All indications up to this time seemed to show that this prayer would be answered. Was it all going to end here, after all? Mother Tekla knew how to pray and trust in God, and now she fell on her knees beside Toimi's bed and poured out her anguish to God.

"Oh God, give Toimi back his health and his life and use him as you will."

As she prayed, she spoke to her feverish son and said, "Listen, Toimi, give your life wholly to Jesus and be prepared to serve Him in any way He wants you to. Whatever it may be."

"Mother," Toimi answered, his cheeks burning with fever. "That is what I also want. I want to give my life completely to God. And if He heals me I will go out even as a missionary."

The boy's voice was weak. It seemed useless to make any promises in this situation. But his mother had learned to trust in God's good will, so she said, "Here is my son, Lord. May his life be wholly yours. Lead him according to your will."

The words came from her heart. She gave her son over to God. Either the Lord would come and take her son home to Him or else He would give him life and health. Even here, she had an attitude of surrender. The next hours were tense, both for Toimi's mother and the whole family. It was not long before the family witnessed a miracle. The high fever that had racked his body began to go down. Toimi's strength returned quickly and soon he was ready to get out of bed.

When the nurse and medical officer came to visit the patient, expecting the worst, they could not believe their eyes. Toimi was walking in the living room, visibly recovered. This miraculous healing was dramatic proof of God's existence to the whole family, but

especially to Toimi. This faith was something he would need countless times in the coming years.

Although his healing was clearly a miracle, it took time for Toimi to recuperate and go back to school. During his convalescence, he had plenty of time to read the books on missions they had acquired. Andrew Murray's "Key to Missions", Würtz-Haahti's "Will I be a Missionary", and Jonathan Goforth's "When The Spirit's Fire Swept Korea" left a lasting impression on the boy's sensitive mind. These books about servants of God who had sacrificed their lives for missionary service became influential in forming Toimi's vision of missionary life.

When he had regained his strength, Toimi joined his friends in school again, yet, he was not quite the same boy as before. While the other boys fooled around noisily, Toimi often went away by himself. He spent time reading his New Testament and absorbed himself in studying the books on missions over and over again.

He also began to love attending the devotional services held on the island. Toimi faithfully attended all of them and did so from the bottom of his heart. When he remembered those significant phases of his childhood, he said, "I felt I was no longer my own; I belonged to Another, whom I wanted to please."

His childhood, close to the free and open sea with the firm rocky ground beneath his feet, gave Toimi the characteristics of independence, freedom, and love of his country.

His early memories of the First World War (1914-1918) and the events of the Finnish civil war of 1918 (also known as the War of Independence) marked his life. He watched with interest as the Russians fortified the island of Kilpisaari and other islands close by when World War I broke out, though not understanding much of what

was happening. Warships steamed on the sea and later, long after the war was over, the floating sea mines were reminders of the dangers of war. When these mines struck the rocks of Toimi's home island, they exploded with such force that the foundations of the Yrjölä cottage shook.

The events of 1918 painted a miserable picture of the fruits of war and hate in Toimi's mind. When the civil war intensified on the mainland, many fled to the islands for safety. Because of these refugees, even Haapasaari became a target for artillery fire. Some of those fleeing from the mainland never reached safety but collapsed on the ice near the Yrjölä's home island. These victims of the civil war were carried across the ice as corpses. The memory of these bodies remained in young Toimi's mind as frightening nightmares of the senselessness of man.

At the age of sixteen, Toimi had an experience which completely changed the course of his life. Instead of studying to be a merchant, like his father Edward had insisted, he gave his life to win others to God. He had seen a vision of Jesus on the cross. He was overwhelmed by the stunning love he saw in that sacrifice. He went to China when he was twenty years old.

Just before he left for China, he had a new vision, one that drove him all his life to do more than most of his colleagues were prepared to do. It was still dark one morning in October 1929 when Toimi woke up refreshed after a good night's sleep. Suddenly, he was filled with that inexplicable presence of God, and a dramatic vision opened up before him. Toimi describes the vision himself.

"I saw a huge black ship rolling and pitching in a raging storm in the dark night. It was filled to overflowing with people of different color and race. The ship was sinking into the dark waves and the poor people on it were swept into the raging sea from the decks. As I

watched this tragedy, I could hear the ear-splitting cries of drowning people from the sea and from the ship. Stretching out their hands and waving in panic, the innumerable multitude of people shouted and begged,

‘Come and help! Come and help! Save us! Save us!’ I felt an unspeakable agony and distress over the fate of the people who were drowning. I did not know what I could do, but I was filled with the distress of the people who were drowning, and I began to run to and fro along the beach and cry out, ‘Help, help! Those people are drowning!’ I saw how people opened their doors and windows of their homes and peeped out indifferently or looked at me scornfully as I ran around and shouted,

‘Look, look there! People are drowning! That huge ship is sinking! Look at that multitude of people! There is no one to save them!’

But to my sorrow I saw those people close their doors and windows, and I was left alone on the shore. I could not understand how they could be so indifferent. I don’t know if they saw what I saw, or if they were indifferent in spite of it. But their behavior made me very sad, and I began to cry.

Just then I noticed a little white boat close by on the shore. I ran headlong towards it and grabbed the bow and pushed it into the water with all my strength. Then I jumped into the boat and grabbed the oars and started to row out as fast as I could to the sinking ship. Now I realized that the ship had run aground on an underwater rock, and it was sinking fast so that only the upper deck and the one below it were above water.

The people still on these decks were waving desperately and shouting, ‘Save us! Save us! Help us! Help us!’

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The sea was full of desperate, hopeless people who were struggling to keep their heads above the water. I saw countless hands stretched out towards me. I pulled the oars into the boat and grabbed the first outstretched hands and pulled him into the boat, then the second, third and fourth... But soon, I realized that my little boat would not hold anymore. It was full. I was afraid that it would sink into the waves. I took up the oars and began to row towards the shore. But the cries of the desperate people rang in my ears, and I saw before my eyes how the big black ship sank lower and lower into the waves. At the same time, I saw this huge sea of faces struggling in the waves and sinking into the black depths of the sea.

I was shaken. I rose from my bed and went down on my knees. 'What does this mean, Lord? Why have you shown this to me?'

'Don't you understand?' I heard the Lord say. 'This is the lost world of the ungodly. They spend all their lives groping hopelessly in the dark. They live without hope and without God in the world, and the devil does everything he can to destroy them and hurl them into eternal darkness. Who will hasten to take the message of salvation to them, to snatch them out of the power of darkness and death?''

Anna and Toimi meet

When Anna went to China in 1933, she had no thoughts of marriage and family. She just wanted to learn the Chinese language as soon as possible so that she could share the message of God's love for the Chinese people. She and her friend, Frida Pellas, were eager to study. At times, it seemed impossible to learn to pronounce the different tones correctly. A wrong tone completely changed the meaning of a word. The simple syllable 'ma' could mean 'mother', 'horse', 'hemp' or 'scold'. It depended on the tone. So, when she heard a Finnish missionary from Salem Church in Helsinki speak Chinese fluently, she was impressed.

She wrote to her family on March 25, 1934. "A Finnish missionary, Brother Yrjölä, is visiting Peiping (Peking) just now. He spoke in church today. He speaks the Chinese language like a Chinese."

Toimi Yrjölä had been in China since December 1929. During the four and a half years, he had become fluent in the language as he was mostly alone with his Chinese co-workers. He had been working at first in Mukden, the capital of Manchuria, together with Norwegian missionary Martin Kvamme. Soon he moved further north, evangelizing in towns along the railroad. He had won the hearts of several Chinese men with the Gospel, and a church was born.

As the congregation grew in the town of Dongfeng, he realized the need for building a church. Together with the local Christians he planned the building. They formed bricks of the clay they found near the intended site. At the same time, he saw the needs in towns and villages all around Dongfeng where he had been preaching. He had written several letters home to Finland, asking them to send new missionaries to China. He never had time to rest; he saw needs everywhere. When the church building was nearly ready, he sent invitations to all the missionary friends he had met in the past few years. Anna and Frida were also invited.

September 11, 1934, Anna wrote home. "We received a letter from Brother Yrjölä in Manchuria yesterday. He hopes to travel to Finland soon and asked if Frida and I could care for his work while he is away and maybe also for longer... We might travel to Manchuria at the end of this month for the dedication of the church he is building there... "

They decided to go to Dongfeng. Nobody met them at the station, so they found a horse carriage driver to take them to Toimi's rented home. He was busy at the church building. There had been problems causing a delay in finishing the work. When they arrived at the address he had given them, they stood speechless for a moment. Then

Frida asked, "Does he really live here?" When they saw his situation, they felt sorry for him. He had no time to look after himself, no time to eat, no time to care for his clothes, nor his home. The 'girls' took on the responsibility of cleaning, washing, and cooking. Toimi had plenty to do to finish all that was to be done before the other guests arrived. He slept in the tiny baptismal dressing room at the back of the church.

One of the guests was missionary Martin Kvamme from Mukden. He was amazed at the size of the church building.

Something very significant happened before Toimi left China for a short visit in Finland. Anna wrote home:

10 January 1935

This time you probably will be really surprised by my letter. It's not the first time I've shocked you. Since Toimi Yrjölä was in Peking last spring, many friends have said that he and I will make a good couple. I've tried my best to push away all thoughts of marriage. I've asked God to help me be free from them. Yet, above all I have prayed that I may be in God's will, whatever may lie ahead.

Now it has gone so far that – well, I'll quote my diary from 6 January. 'I was out in the yard with Toimi. There was a special feeling that evening. Something was about to happen. And so, in a faraway country under a starry sky, two hearts met and decided to love each other and serve God together.

I suppose you need to know more about him. It is impossible to say everything in one letter. He is very active. His name, Toimi, means just that! Action. It seems impossible for him to rest and take it easy. If he can preach two or three times a day, visit the new Christians, pray for the sick or receive visitors in his home, he is elated. Even when he works he also prays. It is obvious

that God is with him. It's impossible to know how often, during the years he has been in China, he has forgotten himself and his own needs when reaching out to win souls for eternity.

24 January 1935

I am waiting in suspense for the answer to my latest letter. The news probably hit you like lightning from a clear sky. You hardly would have thought that your Anna would get caught up in a snare of love. I myself hardly know how it happened, but I'm caught, and I am overjoyed. It is best to live my life pleasing God and to know the joy of God's Holy Spirit in my heart.

For Anna's family, the news had come as a surprise. Her mother, Sofia, was happy for her. She had been worried about her daughter being so far away from home. It would feel a little better if she got married. Her father, Verner, reacted differently. He said that an unmarried woman could do much more for the people she was serving, without having to worry about everything that a home and family involved.

On September 5, 1936, their wedding day, Anna and Toimi gave a promise that they would not allow their marriage to hinder the fulfillment of the will of God in their lives, whatever the cost. Anna hardly knew then what the price would be.

War Years in Finland

When the weather in Dongfeng, Manchuria started getting hot in the spring of 1939, Anna felt that she must get her husband home to Finland if he was to survive. Toimi Yrjölä did not usually understand the need to rest, but now he was weak due to recurrent attacks of malaria. He had acquired the infection on their visit to a missionary conference in Korea the year before.

Her own strength diminished when she had to care for him night and day. Her work only intensified, and she felt guilty when she could not cope with everything. Her firstborn son, Usko, was growing fast and needed supervision at all times. A Chinese girl took care of him for some time, but she left one day without explanation. When it became clear that they had to go home if they were to get any rest, it was almost impossible get visas for the train journey across Siberia. Anna was worried. She was expecting her second child. She was tired of the dirt and all the misery she saw. When the tickets and the visa for travel were ready, Toimi was again very ill with malaria. How would she cope with him and her little boy on the two-week train journey? Usko was lively and wanted to investigate everything.

In her last letter before the trip, she wrote:

You know by now the news from here is not always so good. Toimi has been sick several times this spring. We have packed everything for our journey. We have our visa. Everything is ready, but Toimi is too weak to travel. Please call the pastor and the church, not to worry them, but to ask them to help us in prayer.

Apparently the prayers were answered. When they walked through the white picket gate into the garden of Anna's parent's home, her father, Verner, almost fell from the roof that he was tarring. Her

mother Sofia had just cleaned all the rooms and was about to start baking when she heard the shout, "Anna and Toimi have come home!" No one knew when they would arrive, so no one had met them at the station.

For Anna and Toimi and little Usko, it was like entering paradise. The garden was full of flowers. The lilacs were in bloom. The night never came. It was soon midsummer. The joy was indescribable and mutual. Anna's parents and siblings had lived in constant anxiety when they received letters from her describing illness, economic distress, robbers and broken railway lines. Newspapers reported the build-up of war, but not only in China. The whole world was like a boiling caldron, and it was just a matter of time when it all would boil over. How many times had they prayed to have their dear Anna and Toimi back alive? They also had longed to see little Usko, the firstborn grandchild and nephew.

Usko was immediately at home with Grandma, Grandpa, his aunts Elna and Göta and his uncle, Elis. His mother, Anna, had taught him to pray for them, and Usko already knew their names. He had looked at the tiny black and white photos of them many times, but this was different. Being together with these warm, vibrant people, who received him with open arms felt good. He had so much he wanted to tell them. He was barely two years old but had already picked up a lot of words in China. The problem now was that these relatives did not understand everything. His words came in four different languages: Chinese, English, Finnish and Swedish. He did not know the difference between them. He had heard all those languages almost daily, so he thought that everyone understood them.

He ran everywhere and examined everything. He discovered that Grandma always had candy in a cupboard, and he was there often. The smells from the kitchen when Grandma baked and cooked were tempting. When Grandpa went out into the yard, Usko ran out after

him. Beautiful flowers grew everywhere, and he wanted to pick them. It was such fun to roll in the grass or run and jump to his heart's content without anyone warning of dangers. No one came and stared at him or wanted to touch his skin as they did in China. There, he had drawn everyone's curiosity with his fair complexion, his blond hair, and big blue eyes. Mami had told him about heaven. Was he there already?

Anna enjoyed being able finally to relax. She could hardly remember the last time she had been able to do so. Usko was safe, even if he was lively. Toimi was getting stronger. She felt her own strength return, something she soon would need for her new baby's arrival. Sometimes, she thought she was still dreaming. Soon, she would wake up, and all the undone work in China would scream out at her. If it was a dream, she wanted to dream on. The window was open to the scent of lilacs and the sound of birds in the trees. Otherwise, it was quiet; no sounds from the street, no neighbor's roosters and screaming kids, no temple bells or chanting prayers. How could it be so quiet? Everything around her was clean. However much she had fought the dirt in China, she was never able to get her home this spotless.

The summer was warm. The berries ripened. Usko ate until his stomach hurt. The forest was very near. There he picked blueberries and wild strawberries with Aunt Göta and Aunt Elna.

Life must go on. Now Anna had more comfortable clothes for her new baby than she could get for Usko in China. Autumn was approaching. The apple harvest began to appear on the table; apple cakes, apple desserts, and apple jam. This time she did not have to worry about other patients when her new baby, Toivo, was born on September 12, 1939.

Eleven weeks later, November 30, they heard the rumbling noise of approaching aircraft and then the deafening sound of explosion when the first bombs fell over Helsinki. They ran into the forest. Usko shivered with fear. After a while, it became too unstable to stay so close to Helsinki. The little family had to seek a safer place in the country. Toimi took Anna and the boys to stay in Multia in the heart of Finland. He was able to work in the forest and have meetings in churches nearby. They had come away from the Japanese war in China, but ended up in the middle of the war in Finland.

The twins, Samuel and Mary, were born around midnight on the 19th of July 1941. Usko and Toivo waited at home for the babies. Usko, almost four years old, explained to Toivo, almost two, that the baby who cried was Toivo's baby, and the one that did not cry was his.

About a year and a half earlier Usko had been diagnosed with diabetes. He was not allowed to eat Grandma's candy anymore. Anna found it difficult to give him insulin injections every day. Many prayers were sent up for him, but God had another plan. Usko often asked questions about heaven. A family friend gave them two phonograph records. Usko chose one first.

On his record was a song he learned to love.

There is something prepared for children in heaven, for the children who die in the Lord. They receive crowns of gold, they will play on their harps, and their clothes will be white as the snow.

(Published 1869. Author unknown.)

Sunday, August 17, was beautiful. Anna was outside with Usko and Toivo. The twins were sleeping. Usko ran around as usual and was in a hurry. He stumbled and fell and hurt his knees. He cried all the way home. Anna cleaned his wounds and bandaged them. Still, he

was not comforted. He said, "Mami, you must stay at home with me. You can't go to church tonight."

Anna stayed at home with the children. The boys slept in a small room and the twins with their parents. Suddenly, the sirens wailed out their bomb-warning. Usko took Toivo by his hand and said, "We must go to the babies."

Anna went in there too. Usko asked in a quivering voice, "Will there be sirens in heaven too?" His little body was trembling in fear.

Anna comforted him saying that there is no war, no sickness and no fear in heaven. She added that here on earth we all have a guardian angel. She counted on his fingers how many people were in the room: Usko, Toivo, Samuel, Mary, and Mami. Now that there were five people in the room there were at least five angels there too. Those who were protected by God need not be afraid. Usko asked more about heaven. Anna told him that when Jesus lives in your heart you are sure to get into heaven. Usko knew that Jesus lived in his heart. They prayed their evening prayer together. Outside it was quiet again, and the boys went back to bed and fell asleep.

On Monday, Usko was ill and had to be taken to the hospital. He fell into a coma. He never woke up. On Tuesday, the angels lifted him to the land where God wipes away all tears. Usko's short life, just under four years, had been a blessing to his family and many friends who knew him.

The words on his gravestone were:

*"Our little missionary Usko Leonard Yrjölä
Born in China 26.8.1937 Went to be with Jesus 19.8.1941."*

The twins were a month old. Just one year later, September 9, 1942, another boy, Toimi Emmanuel was born. Anna was sure of his name

before his birth and that this child would be as active as his father. Toivo had his third birthday the same week, and the twins were taking their first steps.

The war made it impossible for Anna to stay with the children in Helsinki. She stayed some months in 1943 in a peaceful village named Kuni, about twenty kilometers north of Vaasa on the West coast of Finland. Years earlier, before she went to China, she had been an evangelist in the area, so she had many friends there. In 1944, she lived with the children in Petalax, forty kilometers south of Vaasa, for about eight months. There she held Sunday school and occasional meetings in four different villages. A young friend, Aili Kaariainen, one of the missionary candidates, helped her care for the children. When the war was over, her youngest child was born.



Yrjölä family 1945

Above the Sound of War

Because of the impossibility of travel during the Second World War, Toimi remained in Finland with his family. The 'holiday' stretched to

almost seven years due to the war. Belief in the possibility of mission work in China was severely tested. Toimi worked tirelessly, despite the war, to increase interest in mission work, and in training new missionaries. His goal was to have a large band of missionaries who would travel with him to China as soon as it was possible to return.

The vision of the work did not leave Toimi, even though the situation looked hopeless. He still could not help but talk about the mission, work for the mission, inspire for the mission and appeal for new workers for the mission. He had confidence that when the war ended, missionary work would begin again. Then the need for new workers would be acute. Others would have to be ready to take the places of those who were isolated on the field due to the war.

Toimi's concern for their missionary colleagues, who remained in China, was intense. He had intended to return there with his family as soon as possible to help them. Nothing could be done when the war raged everywhere. In March 1940, it seemed, for a while, that peace had come to Finland. Toimi tried to arrange for tickets for their return, but it was impossible. Instead, he traveled all over Finland to inspire churches to prepare for a major missionary effort in the future.

Many young people felt the call to the mission field in spite of the war. They wanted to be ready to leave for China as soon as it was possible. War broke out again June 25, 1941, and all communication with China was interrupted for a long time. The only connection that was left was prayer. Toimi and Anna knew the importance of prayer and each day they prayed for their friends far away; that God would protect them and fill the needs. Their prayers were answered. Their friends experienced many miracles in the midst of great danger. Nobody needed to starve.

It was clear that the journey back to the mission field would be postponed into the unknown future. While some asked if it was

proper to encourage people to work for foreign missions with a war straining the home front, Toimi hurried on as he continued with relentless enthusiasm and energy.

He reminded the people:

"Until we finish our task, there will be no hope for the peace and safety of mankind. Nor will the destruction caused by war end. Nor will the law of love emerge and rule the hearts of men. And what is that task? It is the preaching of the gospel to all nations, tribes, and tongues. Only then will Christ appear in His glory.

The war should not frighten anyone. A war at home is not sufficient reason for slackness in mission enthusiasm. There will always be wars. When the Lord Jesus left this earth and was taken up into glory, He left the most binding duty for all time. He said the Good News of God's Kingdom must be preached throughout the whole world so that all nations will hear it, and then, finally, the end will come. (Matthew 24:14 TLB)

Events in the world that has forsaken God, whether there are wars, rebellions, famine or other calamities, must not prevent the preaching of the Gospel of His Kingdom. The disciples of Christ are compelled to preach the gospel to the very end of time."

Toimi Leonard, the product of Haapasaari Island, was used to facing the raging sea and winds against him. He was filled with only one vision. He had submitted his whole life to that one vision. His family had to submit itself to that one vision. And he was challenging others to join him in that one vision.

"The Holy Spirit was sent to call out people whom Christ has redeemed by his own blood. When this becomes clear to God's people in a real and living way, all our actions will receive a new beginning and a clear focus. Only then, we will understand the reality of the

goals of mission work in this crucial time. We will also understand what our calling as Christians compels us during this dispensation of the Grace of God."

The Decision

Anna was struggling with a difficult, almost impossible decision. Should she take her five children along on such a dangerous journey to a country she knew and loved, but which was in a terrible turmoil of war and diseases? Her husband, Toimi, as well as others, had suggested leaving the children with friends or relatives, but Anna was adamant, "Never! If the children stay in Finland, I will stay!"

She did not want her children to feel what she had felt when she was young, nor have to ask the questions she still was asking. *Did my parents not want me?* Though her relationship with her family was healed, the pain of that scar returned time and again. She did not know that it was that nagging pain that gave her the strength and fortitude she needed to be able to face the enormous decision ahead of her.

The Second World War was over at last. Anna was exhausted. The trials of the years had worn her out. Though she had come from China to rest in Finland, the war years had not given her the rest she needed. Suggestions were made that she could send her children to Sweden for safety, as 70,000 other Finnish children had been sent. That was not an alternative for her.

Her four small children had kept her awake at night with whooping cough for months before her youngest child was born. After that birth, her strength was drained. Anna noticed that this child was different. She was unable to suck and started convulsing. A nurse took the baby and ran to another room. Later, the Pediatrician, Arvo Ylppö, told her, "This child will never be normal."

Anna had previously been in China five and a half years; years that had shown her the stark reality of what it cost to follow the way of the Cross. Several missionary colleagues had died; some killed by bandits, some through diseases, and some by stray bullets. She knew families who had lost children, wives who had lost their husbands, and children who had lost their parents.

Her husband, Toimi, had been close to death several times. The first time was when five robbers were ready to shoot him to get his bicycle. They agreed to let him speak before they pulled their triggers. He shared the story of God's love for them and His willingness to forgive their sins through the death of His Son on the Cross. Tears ran down the rough faces of the would-be murderers. Toimi's life was saved.

In the summer of 1937, a very severe attack of sunstroke had endangered Toimi's life. In September of that same year, he was in the hospital dying of typhoid. His sister-in-law, Martta Yrjölä, as well as another Finnish missionary, Aune Läärä, had just died in the same hospital. His first-born son was a few days old, also in the same hospital. The doctors had no hope for Toimi's recovery. Still, in the midst of distress, God gave him a vision for his future. He sat up in bed and asked for a paper and a pen. He drew a ship that was to carry the Message of the Gospel to the coastal areas of many countries.

Finally, malaria drained what was left of his strength. That was when the decision to return to Finland in 1939 was made. Toimi had been in China ten years at the time. A short visit to Finland in 1935 gave him the opportunity to bring ten new missionaries to China in January 1936. Four of them died within the first three years of their arrival in China.

With these experiences in the past, the decision to return to China and risk the lives of any, or maybe all of, her family members was anything but easy. The more acute problems were closer to home at

the time: How could her small baby, convulsing for the slightest disturbance, survive an arduous journey? Where could she get material to make clothes for her growing children when the war had emptied all resources?

Anna read the Bible daily and often found comfort and strength in the words she read. At times, the words seemed to come alive with new meaning for her situation. This was one of those times. The promise to Cyrus in Isaiah became God's promise to her.

I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. Isaiah 45:2-5. (NIV)

'The gates of bronze' in this case was little Anna Lisa's convulsions. 'The bars of iron' was the lack of fabric to make clothes for the children, and for that matter, the lack of funds and all supplies for a very long journey.

The hidden treasures, both material and spiritual, which she was to find in the years to come, were far beyond anything she could imagine at the moment she made her decision to go to China with Toimi together with all of their five children.

Part 4: ARRIVAL IN KUNMING

*He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,*

Psalms 91:4-5 (NIV)



Emmanuel, home from hospital 1948 after a serious liver disease,
together with Lisa and a Chinese friend.

Anna flies to Kunming

30 October 1947

It's amazing how expensive time is! I've been waiting to get time for writing, but now I must buy a little time so that you at least will have some news about us. I mailed a letter from Hankow, along the river, which I hope you received. We have been here in Kunming two weeks now, so it seems like the difficulties and joys of the journey already belong to the distant past.

Toimi is still in Chungking (Chongqing). That is a city that still makes me shudder. My first experience there was trying to keep crowds of curious people at a reasonable distance from the children and our luggage while Toimi was away in town two hours looking for accommodation for us. We were surrounded by inquisitive people, so it was hard to move at all.

The only accommodation Toimi found was a Bible School outside the city. The family members were carried in four bamboo palanquins up the slippery footpath to the school. For Anna, this experience was almost more than she could stand. What if one of the bearers slipped and fell down the ravine with her children? Never again would she agree to go through such agony of fear. It rained all the time they were up on the mountain. It was cold and damp. Their shoes never dried, since the dining room and the room they stayed in were in different buildings. Anna refused to come down the mountain the way they had gone up. They walked.

It was decided that she would fly to Kunming with the children, instead of traveling with their luggage over the mountains on the back

of a lorry. That was a good decision though many people warned her of the dangers of flying. Flight accidents were still quite common. The older missionaries insisted that 'flying is only for birds'. The lorry journey would have taken another two weeks, with uncertain stops in unknown places.

Still, a heart-chilling fear took hold of her again on the way to the Chongqing airport. The only transport available was rickshaws. Again, the family was divided; two children in two different rickshaws and Anna with her youngest in the third. She had ordered the men to keep together, but one of them ran ahead, taking Mary and one of the boys. A noisy funeral procession cut the way for the other two. It had seemed like hours before they caught up with the first rickshaw. How could she provide safety for her children in such tumultuous situations when she allowed fear to grip her heart?

How many times must she still travel alone with her children? She had thought that once she was in China with the children, the family would be together. They had been together on and off. Toimi had made several risky journeys from Mukden to Dongfeng during the past months while she had cared for the children. While digging in the garden, planting vegetables, or picking flowers, her thoughts were at home with her family. There was so much to remind her of home. Even though the war in Finland had caused worry and pain, it was over now. The poverty of her family and many others in Finland was real, but still, they were at peace.

She realized much later that the months in Mukden had been a gift from heaven to her and the children. They had seen her often sitting with her Bible whenever she had a moment to rest her feet. When the evenings got dark, and the house seemed far too big, with frightening shadows lurking in the corners, the children asked, "Mami, read for us also." The comfort that the Word gave her seemed to calm the children

too. Now, facing a new challenge of moving to an unknown future, she truly needed that comfort.

Now we have had to start all again with nothing. It seems to be the normal life for us. God wants to glorify His Name by proving His faithfulness in every situation we encounter. We have never lacked anything. We need to learn the lesson Paul had learned: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4)

We live now temporarily in two rooms at a Chinese hospital. The lady doctor here is a Christian. Several Assemblies of God missionaries have earlier been able to stay here until they have found more permanent accommodation. They helped us find this place. There is a Chinese kindergarten next door and all except Lisa go there every day.

The price of postage stamps is constantly rising. A letter that only recently cost 3,200 is now 24,000. I almost had to pay 42,000 for a letter to pastor Lars-Eric Bergstén. I took it out and cut the edges as far as possible, and was able to post it for 24,000.

We mostly eat rice - which is the cheapest food here. We can buy potatoes. They are not as tasty as those at home. We can get pork and beef. Fruit is fairly cheap. Compared with the North where we came from, all food is cheaper here, but for how long? I have a tiny 'stove', the size of a small bucket. It can be placed anywhere. We use charcoal for cooking. Already in Mukden I learned to cook without a proper stove. It is enough

to have something where I can light a fire and put a kettle on - and so we have food...

Kunming from Samuel's story

Kunming is the capital of the Yunnan Province and the center of commerce for the surrounding towns and villages. We were not the only missionary family seeking refuge from the civil war that was raging in the Northeast of the country. At the same time, there was an opportunity of sharing the Gospel of Peace in the midst of turmoil and distress. New missionaries, as well as some of those who had spent the war years in China under the Japanese, were arriving from Finland. During the following two years, all missionaries were forced to leave their work in every part of China. While it was still possible to work in the Yunnan Province, many of the missionaries tried to find a place there.

Samuel remembers: "When we arrived in Kunming in the middle of October 1947, Mami was able to rent two rooms from a Military Hospital personnel quarters. There was nothing but a table and a few chairs. She washed the floors several times before she could spread two straw mattresses and some blankets on the floor of the back room. A dim electric lamp hung from the ceiling of both rooms.

The first night she had switched off the light when the children had gone to sleep. She was in the next room sewing clothes for the children on her Singer sewing machine.

I called out, "Mami, there are rats here." She came quickly and switched on the light. Great big rats were running over our blankets. She "ordered the rats in Jesus' name" to leave her children alone and not disturb them anymore.

Close to that temporary home there was a Chinese school and Kindergarten. Anna was able to have her children there though it

seemed like it was a school for the richer class Chinese children. Anna's children never had so expensive clothes. All their clothes were homemade or had come in parcels from America. Sometimes she was able to leave Lisa there too when she had to go to the market. Shopping was always an ordeal for her.

Toimi joined the family in Kunming six weeks after they had flown in from Chongqing. He had found opportunities and open doors all over Chongqing and probably would have stayed longer. He was given a ride to Kunming on a truck owned by the China Inland Mission. He soon had to search for new living quarters for the family and for new Finnish missionaries who were on their way.

30 December 1947, Kunming

Why do you wonder how we are managing here? God has to show His faithfulness in keeping the windows of heaven open. (Malachi 3:10) Just let me share an example of what we have experienced. While I was still alone with the children here in Kunming, God spoke to me saying I should send 10 dollars to the Raassinas in Siam. Toimi, who was still in Chungking, heard the same thing. He was unable to send any; I sent from here. A few days later I received a check for 27 dollars from a group of Scandinavian ladies in Seattle. I had spoken in a meeting there only once, last year before Christmas. Then Toimi came home. I spoke to him about it, and we decided to send that sum also to the Raassinas. They have had very severe economical difficulties. Just a couple of days later, we received altogether 85 dollars from various sources, all on the same day.

We cannot compete with other missionaries regarding food, clothes, lodging or furniture. We mostly use other people's old clothes. We eat rice porridge three times a day - poor man's food out here. We do not own any furniture, apart from the

folding bed, made of wood and sacking. Toimi is now preparing the rooms in the house where we are going to live. He is making a table and some benches. Even though we cannot have everything that others have, we are glad that God has blessed us so we can slightly relieve the burden of others who are in a worse situation. We will be moving to a house in town. There is no garden there like we have had here at the hospital.

Just before Christmas, as Emmanuel was looking at the calendar, he turned the page. He saw there was nothing more after the 31st December. He said, "Then we will all go to heaven."

Kunming 1948

27 January 1948, 64 Ching Yun Kai, Kunming, Yunnan.

We moved from the hospital quarters to our new home on the 8th January. The new missionaries arrived here on the 19th. We have only three rooms, so it is a little crowded with twelve people.

3 February

We will be moving again! Here there is no yard where the children can play outside. The place we move to has a large and beautiful garden with plenty of flowers and trees. We can listen to bird's song and enjoy the fresh air instead of the terrible noise we have here and the stink from the open toilets just under our window.

Just a few more lines from here. One evening Samuel and Toivo were discussing what kind of houses they would build when they grow up. They had seen that the hospital had several police and dogs keeping watch at night. They discussed how many watchmen they would need. Emmanuel, who was already in bed in the next room, called out, "Jesus and the angels will watch my house!"

19 February 1948

The Chinese New Year is over now. Toimi was very busy, holding open-air meetings every day. Jukka Rokka played his trumpet, and Toimi, his trombone, to get the people to stop and listen to their message.

I continue daily with my household worries from early morning to late at night. The people seem satisfied with my food though I am not a good cook. The trouble is that food

prices are constantly rising. We don't need to grumble. Our Provider is not tied to price fluctuations. He is constantly faithful to His promises. I am glad that we do not need to be dependent on people, even though God uses people as His channels. No one who trusts in God will be put to shame.

12 March 1948

The price of everything has risen much, but nothing is as expensive as Time! It is almost impossible to buy it anymore. Also, the price of postage is constantly rising. The exchange rate for dollars has doubled – to our benefit.

We live now in this rented house, surrounded by a beautiful garden. The children who are at home can play outside all day, and it is good.

It seems impossible to get any Chinese helper to stay here long. They come and go as they please. If I only had enough strength to do everything myself, it would be no trouble. There is much laundry to wash by hand several times a week; the rooms need to be cleaned; the children need to be taken to and from school, which means hours on the street each day.

Look up at the stars

The darkest nights brought out the brightest stars. The children had been ill. Now Lisa was in the hospital. Anna thought about the time her firstborn, Usko had been very sick and had been taken away. Must her youngest also die now? Was this the price of her calling? Was this end? The doctor did not give much hope. He said it would take weeks – if the medicine helped.

Some medicine was injected with a big needle into Lisa's stomach. Anna cringed. Already the insulin injections Usko had to take had felt

MISSIONARY MOTHER

terrible for her. This looked much worse. Anna went out into the hospital garden. The night was black. She looked up. The sky was full of stars. The words of a song written by Lewi Pethrus, Pentecostal leader in Sweden, came to her:

*Tempests may rage and thunder,
Mountains be rent asunder,
Nations may fear and wonder--
Trust, and be undismayed.*

*As unto Abram was given
God's covenant word of peace,
Counting the stars of the heavens
So shall your faith increase.*

Lewi Pethrus 1913 Translated Thoro Harris 1918

It was impossible to count those stars up there, but just as the words of the song promised, her faith increased. She saw once again the greatness of God. The God, who had made every single star up there had given her his promise to be with her and guide her, to help her and be her healer and her children's healer.

She went back into the sickroom. Lisa woke up and asked for water. Until then, not even a spoonful of water had stayed in her stomach. Now, she began drinking every hour until dawn. When the doctor came in the morning, she was well and could soon go home.

Anna had told stories about Usko many times to her children. Now Lisa was the same age as he had been when he was very ill and died. Lisa asked over and over again, where is he now. Just before she got sick, she had said, "Mami and I are going to heaven." When she came home from the hospital, she wanted to see the stars every evening before falling asleep. She wanted to see her brother Usko's star. She was sure that Usko was up there in heaven among the stars and had

looked down at her and winked, saying, "We will meet here in heaven one day."

30 April 1948

A few days after Lisa came home from the hospital, Samuel got ill with a high fever. He was better the next day but was covered with a rash. Tyyne Hyysalo, who is a nurse, said it was scarlet fever. Her words struck like a sword through me. Guess who was the next one to bloom red like a rose – covered with the rash? It was Lisa. Just after I got her back from the gate of death – was I to lose her anyway?

It is wonderful to have the old, but ever-living Word to turn to in times of fear. This time it was Deuteronomy 33:27 "The eternal God is your refuge, and his everlasting arms are under you" The reality of this verse gave peace. Why should I fear when I know I can rest in the Everlasting arms which are under me?

Tyyne was caring for Irja Rokka at the French hospital. She mentioned to Doctor Perret the rash she had seen on our children. One does not even ask if he can come. When he hears that someone is ill, he gets in his car and soon is at the bedside of the patient. His diagnosis was German measles, which though contagious, was not dangerous. At this moment, we are all well. Praise God!

Toimi rents a theater

In April 1948, Toimi found a theater that he wanted to transform into a church. He had held open-air meetings and tent meetings since his arrival in Kunming. Now, a place was needed for regular meetings and for teaching the new Christians. Until then, the Bank of Finland had not permitted the Mission to send any money abroad. Just after Toimi had signed the lease contract for the theater, the first official support from Finland arrived for the family. Toimi used that for the down-payment for the first months. The dedication of this new church was held on Whitsunday, May 15. The lease was far more than they could afford.

Anna wrote: May 4, 1948.

Renting the theater is very expensive--and what do we have? We are always miserably poor. No, it is good! Now once more God has an opportunity to show that He is in charge and He can do wonders. He does not look for greatness in us; He wants to test to see if we are faithful.

I need great grace to be faithful in small matters. Many times I feel like just leaving all the daily tasks and go and do something else. It is no fun to go shopping these days. Still God has given me grace even for that. I have noticed several times that I have been able to buy food quite a lot cheaper even than the Chinese themselves. One reason is that I buy so much at a time, but most often foreigners have to pay much more than the local people. We have the house quite full of people now. We are expecting Irja Rokka's sister any day now. When she comes, we will be 18 persons sharing the same household. Some of them are looking for another place to live, but it is very difficult to find a house for rent these days.

Arranging living space for so many has had its share of problems. All of them have arrived by air, which means, they hardly had anything with them. We also started out empty-handed. Now I have made nine mattresses, filling them with straw, some for double beds; others for single beds. I have made quilts and pillows. We started out with five plates and a few cups when we arrived here in Kunming. Now there is enough for everyone.

I only wish I had a better stove. The one I have is locally made. It produces more smoke than fire, bringing tears to my eyes and stretching my nerves to their limit. It would not matter if it was just our family, but we constantly have visitors, and there has to be plenty of food several times a day. The stove doesn't care whether I am in a hurry or not.

It would be nice to have our own vegetable garden though that would attract thieves. Poverty forces many people to steal. Many people die of starvation in this town.

Samuel remembers counting dead bodies daily in a canal on the way home from school. Some of them were opium victims. The bodies were collected onto a horse cart and thrown outside the town on a rubbish dump.

The Finnish missionaries gradually spread around to different areas of the Yunnan Province. Toimi helped them to find lodgings and start their work. He also helped missionaries from other countries in the same way as he had been helped during his first years in Manchuria. As some moved out, new missionaries came into Kunming. Anna constantly had more people around her table than just her own family.

14 September 1948

Dear Else, God has blessed the word continually. We had the third baptismal service earlier this month. Do you remember what we talked about a few years ago? You thought that you might be of more use on the mission field while I said that I would be more useful at home in Finland.

I have often wondered what God meant when He told me very clearly to come here. If I had not heard Him clearly, first in Finland before we started on this journey, and then in America, when I was tempted to stay there, I would have fallen into despair many times. It is good to have the word of God to fall back on.

Two masters

Missionaries from several countries who had been involved in WWII did not have a regular income. Apart from many of the Finnish missionaries, several British and German missionaries also were dependent on God's provision in their daily lives.

Donald Gee, the well-known Pentecostal leader from Britain, was the visiting speaker at a conference in Kunming in October 1949. He saw the great needs and was worried about the inability of the churches to send more money, mostly due to bank restrictions. When he rose up to speak, he was inspired by the text from Matthew 6:24-34. "You cannot serve two masters: God and money. Donald Gee added his own words: If you serve God first, money 'Mammon' will run after you saying, "Here I am. Use me for your needs." But, if you serve money first you will find that 'Mammon' is a very hard master. He will make you his slave.

Anna's faith was strengthened by Donald Gee's message. She realized it was just what she had experienced numerous times though

she was unable to express it as well as he did it. *It is better to have Mammon behind you, for those who serve him do not get paid well. It is better to serve God.*

Kunming 1949

13 February 1949, Kunming

The past few days have been quite tense here in the city. Something like the days before the bombings began in 1939 and in February 1944 in Finland. All missionaries have been ordered to leave this month. The order came from a private entrepreneur, so I don't know if anyone will obey it. There have been threats that the situation will be worse than the Boxer revolution. We can feel that something is going to happen, but still we also know that we are the shelter of the living God, and he knows what he permits. It would not be the first time he has stopped the plans of the evil one.

Yesterday we already thought that robbers had filled the town, but it was not as bad as we imagined. There has been a lot of trouble with money. Now a 50 dollar bill was produced – but it was a fake. The bank that had produced it was attacked by an angry mob. More than 20 people were killed. Today the same dollar bill has been accepted as genuine! It would be too great a loss for the people, so the bank is forced to accept even the false dollar bill.

Burma Road

One of the few times had come when Anna was able to join Toimi on a trip. New missionaries, Lea and Tapani Karna, had just arrived from Finland. The Yrjölä children got along well with Lea and Tapani. When they heard that Toimi wanted to take Anna along to the Burma border to bring home the luggage that had come through Rangoon, Lea said they could care for the children. Anna took only Lisa along.

Toimi and Anna were to be away, at the most, two weeks on the journey. Several Chinese people had heard about the car going to Burma, so they decided to go along. The car was far too loaded for the mountain road. By the time they reached Xiakuan, Dali, some repairs had to be made.

A Swedish missionary couple, Evert and Maria Andersson, lived there. They knew the road to the border was bad. They invited Anna to stay with them, together with Lisa.

Toimi continued his journey with eleven Chinese passengers. Just outside Xiakuan he had an accident. Two trucks were parked side by side on the narrow road, just behind a sharp curve. Immediately, Toimi had to choose whether to crash into one truck or to risk all twelve lives by avoiding the crash. That would make his car roll down the ravine, killing them all. He chose to crash. That caused some damage to Toimi's car.

The guilty truck driver took the broken parts for repairs back to Xiakuan and promised to be back soon. It took him five days. Toimi slept in his car in the forest. He was able to share food with some soldiers who were watching a bridge to prevent it being blown up by the Reds who were rumored to be near.

Evert and Maria had been in West China several years already before WWII broke out. The Japanese had invaded Manchuria and much of East China and all the sea ports. The missionaries in Yunnan felt safe. Everyone thought the Japanese would never come so far west. But they did. The Burma Road had been built to transport weapons and goods for the Chinese army. The Japanese plan was to conquer much of Asia, and in 1942 they invaded Western China, coming to the town of Tengyueh (Tengchong), where Evert and Maria lived. Another Swede, Agne Holmberg, lived there too. All three were able to escape from the Japanese under very trying circumstances. A

Swedish family, Hanna and Karl Asp and their daughter Ruth, were caught by the Japanese and held in a prison camp. Karl died when American planes bombed the Japanese camp. Hanna and Ruth were close to starvation when they finally were found and rescued. All these stories brought the seriousness of the present situation very close. There was fighting in the hills around Xiakuan.

Toimi continued his journey to the Burma border. In Baoshan he met the other Swedish missionaries, and in spite of many difficulties he finally was able to return to Kunming with the goods. The trip lasted six weeks instead of two. The children who stayed at home had cried and prayed eagerly each morning and evening that God would bring Mami and Daddy back safely.

Anna returned with Lisa on the back of a lorry and had to sleep overnight on lice-ridden benches on the way. No traveling was permitted at night. Toimi came a day later. Very soon after that, the Burma Road was closed. Many bridges had been destroyed. Anna had not finished writing the letter about that journey before the Anderssons left Xiakuan, and soon left China for Japan.

Evacuation of missionaries

Many missionaries were forced to leave their work in remote areas of Yunnan. The American Embassy had given the first warning to their citizens to leave China. Many had left, and more were preparing to leave. The closing of the American school was imminent.

27 May 1949

I don't know if it wise for us to remain here either, but where shall we go? Every place seems just as restless. We believe God will help and guide us. I'm not yet prepared to come home, but I'd rather do that than subject the children to too much danger. I do think and plan and wonder till my brain gets overheated.

MISSIONARY MOTHER

All my thoughts and worries do not change anything. It is best to leave the future in God's hands. Still, I must admit, it is anything but easy not to worry, even though I am quite calm, compared to many around me. God helps and gives strength for each day. You must pray for us, so we do not make the wrong decisions. It is tempting to take the easiest way out, but we pray that God will help us choose His will and His way.

19 June 1949. The American school has closed now. The teachers are packing and leaving China.

9 July 1949

Now we have moved to the theater-church. There is little living space – just three small rooms. No garden for the children to play in. There is no task on earth that is worse than packing and moving! The children have helped as much as they can. Saga has promised to hold school for them – in Finnish. Toimi is building a school room for them on the theater balcony. If Saga does not find other lodgings, Toimi will build a room up there for her too.

7 August 1949

Dear Else, You asked me two months ago if we are still in Kunming. Yes, here we are still. The weather here is good. We can buy vegetables and fruit all the year round. We don't need to freeze, and it doesn't get too hot.

I was looking for a verse a friend had given me before we left Finland. I wanted to see the exact words. "But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard." Isaiah 52:12.

My Bible fell open at Psalms 105 verse 13: "They wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another."

A prayer rose up in my heart: 'money'. I read further in the Psalm. I received the promise: "They came out with silver and gold." It was not only in the days of the Israelites in the Bible that God did miracles. We have seen Him do miracles before our own eyes numerous times. Even if we do not see clearly now, we know He holds the future and will show us the way.

5 August 1949

The children enjoy school again. Even Lisa wants to be in school though she cannot read or write yet. All are getting on well

Otherwise, rumors abound as before. God has a plan for us, and he has promised to guide us always. It often feels strange to write home, wondering if this will be the last letter home. We feel calm, and we are not afraid.

We don't yet know how long we are here. Don't send any parcels anymore. Toimi wants me to stay on here with the children, but I can't say I am prepared to stay at any cost. If we leave for a foreign country, I want Toimi to come along. There is so much official 'paperwork' involved in traveling, which I feel I can't manage on my own. If I go alone to Finland, I don't worry so much. You must 'ring the prayer bells' out loud now. Prayer can change things, just as before.

By the end of August, almost all the other Finns had left Yunnan. The rest left a little later. The Mission evacuation plane, St. Paul, was flying to and fro to Hong Kong, carrying all the foreign missionaries to safety.

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Hilja Nikkanen had her 50th birthday on July 24. The Finns were all gathered and photographed, for the first and last time together. Soon all would leave for different parts of Asia. (Photo back cover.)

We heard that the Swedes have at last been able to leave Baoshan, and they are on their way to Kunming. Where will they stay? It is not easy to find any room for 16-18 people anywhere in Kunming. Of course, our church benches are not in use at night...

Three Swedish families had been isolated for months in Baoshan soon after Toimi had visited them in March.

Bandits had planned to burn down the house that the Björkenfors family rented from a high-ranking military officer. The officer and his family had fled, telling the Swedes to flee as well before the bandits arrived. Even the Christians in the town told them to flee, but after praying about it, both Arthur and Margit decided not to do so. They had taught the young believers to trust in God. What kind of example would they leave behind if they just fled at the first sign of danger before receiving a clear guidance from God? They put their children to bed as usual, praying for God's protection through the night. Then, they went out and stood on the balcony. There were no sounds in the night. It was unusually quiet. They went to sleep and slept calmly through the night.

Later, they met one of the would-be arsonists who said they could not set fire to the house when they saw that the missionaries were still there.

The Burma Road to Kunming was closed for months. No news, no letters, no telegrams reached them. They could not reach anyone either. When they finally were able to travel to Kunming, there was joy among all their friends. The Swedish consul from Burma sent a news bulletin to Sweden informing that all the Swedes were alive and safe.

Einar and Anna Johansson with their five children, Arthur and Margit Björkenfors with three children, Mrs. Karlsson with two children, as well as their teacher Märta Persson arrived in Kunming. They stayed at the theater on the balcony until they were able to fly out of China.

Last letters from Kunming

14 November 1949

Dear Else, In May there were still 150 missionaries from different countries in Yunnan. Now there are about thirty. The Swedish had about twenty adults plus their children. Now the last one, Einar Karlsson from Baoshan, wrote that he will try to leave via Burma and Ceylon for Sweden. An airplane, St. Paul, flies between Kunming and Hongkong evacuating missionaries who wish to leave.

We don't know where we will be this Christmas. I have been crying to God day and night asking him to show us the way. I am sure he will do that. So many friends around the world are praying for us. Toimi feels that his work is not yet finished here. I have promised to try and take the children home to Finland, but Toimi does not want us to go so far away, even though he is not 100% against it either.

This constant suspense is nerve wracking. It can't be helped. I am just human, with a heart that can fear and tremble. Still, it is wonderful to have the 'under-current' of God's peace and rest deep inside. I don't want to be stubborn or disobedient – whether it means staying here or leaving.

Yesterday I had a real struggle just thinking and praying about this. I was reminded over and over again of God's faithfulness through the words in Psalms 105. "They wandered from

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country to country, from one kingdom to another. But God let no one oppress them." God has always been faithful to his children and is never perplexed or in despair whatever storms they may encounter.

16 November.

I could not finish this letter yesterday as the lights went out. We heard that the capital of the neighboring province had fallen to the Reds. They might be here with weeks. If there was any way out of here other than by plane it would be cheaper, but all roads are closed due to the war. There is not always even room on a plane. We must just take one day, one moment at a time.

*Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,
E'er to take, as from a father's hand,
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
Till with Christ the Lord I stand.*

Karolina W. Sandell-Berg, 1865 Public domain

I just wrote to Else and don't really have time to write more now, but it looks like it won't be long before we are under the Red Flag. We have prayed and asked for God's will and his way, and we believe he will help us also in the days ahead. We hope to be able to keep in contact with you, write to you and receive letters from you. If we cannot leave from here, there still is a way that is open, and that is prayer. We take God at his word, and he has given us so many promises that never fail. I hope to fly to Hong Kong with the children next week or so. Everything is still uncertain. We trust God to help us and guide us. If no letters reach you after this, it means we are trapped in Kunming.

At the Kunming airport

Samuel remembers 5 December 1949.

We left our home in Kunming by car to the airport. Each of us children had a small suitcase. One airplane model DC 3 stood on the tarmac at the terminal. The name St. Paul was written on the side of the plane.

The terminal was so full of people that we children had to wait outside. When we had waited for some time, Samuel went in to see what was going on. Apart from the missionaries who were booked for the flight there were high-ranking military officers in uniform together with their well-dressed wives and children. Those officers tried to seize the airplane for themselves so that they could send their families out of the country. The atmosphere was very tense. The Chinese mothers in their beautiful clothes looked scared, and their children were crying. The American pilots refused to take anyone else than those on the passenger list. Toimi reminded the Chinese officers that they had soldiers and vehicles with which they could take their families to Burma.

The discussions went on for hours. At some stage, a small reconnaissance (scout) plane landed beside the terminal. The Chinese pilot told us children: "If that plane does not leave here at once, soon it won't be going anywhere. The Reds will have their cannons within firing distance, and their plan is to destroy this airport." The pilot went into the terminal to give his report.

Quite soon after that we were able to board the plane. The luggage was put on the floor, and the passengers sat on long benches along the sides of the plane. The sound of the engines was so loud that it was impossible to speak, and no one wanted to speak. I watched mother.

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She had a mask that she only put on when she wanted to hide her anguish from her children.

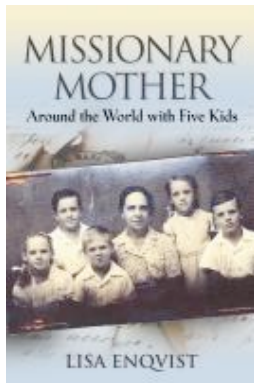
The next morning Toimi phoned to the missionary home where we were staying. That was the last time she heard her husband's voice for many months.

Later, I learned that the army officers were afraid of their soldiers since they had increased their wealth at the expense of the soldiers and the ordinary citizens. The National Army soldiers refused to fight against the Red Army, and so Kunming turned Red on the 10 December 1949.





Toimi used his home-made boat, built out of packing cases, and continued to preach in and around Kunming.



This book is based on the private letters of a dedicated missionary mother who refused to leave her five children behind, even in dire circumstances. Her adventurous journey took them to China during dangerous war times, and other places around the world. Her youngest daughter shares the secret of her mother's enduring strength and committed purpose. This intriguing personal journey is an inspirational example of courage, faith, and obedience.

MISSIONARY MOTHER

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