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Bruce, Elizabeth Gordon Oral History Interview: Old China Hands Oral History Project

Julie Van Wyk

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OLD CHINA HANDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Miss Elizabeth Gordon Bruce

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This manuscript is authorized as "open"
Hope College Archives Council
Holland, Michigan
1977
Miss Elizabeth G. Bruce
Fig. 1
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Preface

Interviewee: Miss Elizabeth G. Bruce

Interview I: June 28, 1977
Miss Bruce's home in Andes, New York

Interviewer: Miss Julie Van Wyk
B.A. Hope College
Elizabeth Gordon Bruce was born in 1894 in Jersey City, New Jersey as the second daughter of William Patterson Bruce and Elizabeth Esther Gordon. Most of Miss Bruce's early years were spent in Yonkers, New York, where her father was minister of the Park Hill Reformed Church. Upon graduation from high school in Yonkers, Elizabeth Bruce went on for her Teacher's Training in New York City. Although Miss Bruce had ambitions since age seven to serve as a missionary to China, she postponed her service there for three years during which she taught in Annville, Kentucky, in Home Mission Service.

In 1921 Elizabeth G. Bruce arrived in Amoy, China to begin her life's work. Her first year was spent studying the Amoy language in Sio-khe in preparation for her next thirty years of teaching primary and women's schools, leading children's meetings and youth conferences, and doing district work in the Sio-khe and Changchow areas. Three furloughs were spent studying at the Hartford School of Missions in 1927, Biblical New York in 1936, and the Yale School of Languages in 1945.

In 1937 on her return to China from furlough Miss Bruce found herself unexpectedly assigned to a year's work in Palmaner, South India because Amoy had fallen to the Japanese. In 1951 after leaving China for the last time Miss Bruce was again sent to work in India, and later went to Hong Kong for four years to work among the Amoy refugees there.

Miss Bruce retired from the mission service in 1959 and lives
in her grandfather Bruce's old home in Andes, New York, with her sister, Mrs. Mary Linn Pronk. Miss Bruce continues to correspond with a great number of her Chinese friends and has made numerous afghans for her friends and family.

The interview with Miss Bruce must be considered a supplement to her very thorough written account of her China experience, entitled "Such as I Have!", a copy of which may be found in the Hope College Archives. The interview and memoirs not only provide insight into mission life, but also radiate Miss Bruce's vibrant spirit and great love for people.
INTERVIEW I

VAN WYK: Miss Bruce, can you remember some of your first impressions of China?

BRUCE: Well, when I was on the steamer going to Amoy, I wondered what I was getting into. And I'd been given some peanuts, and I thought, I must make them last as long as I can because goodness knows when I'd ever get another peanut. Well, I got to China and found it was a land of peanuts. And then, too, on the ship I thought, well, will I be living in a hut on the hillside? What kind of a house will I have? And I went to the mission house with single ladies, and it was about a hundred years old! and we had roast beef for dinner. So I was changing my impression of what China was like very fast.

VAN WYK: Did the mission not give you any idea about what you were getting into?

BRUCE: Well, I had met Mr. Eckerson, Frank Eckerson, and I'd met the DePrees—they'd visited us in our home in Yonkers. But, oh, they just thought I would love it and I must come. And of course I was brought up on The Mission Gleaner, the Board paper. It came out every month. And of course that was just better than ice cream to me. And I knew the Zwemers personally. And I thought, regardless of what it was going to be, I was going to go to China.

VAN WYK: After you moved to the upcountry, up to Sio-khe, did you have any trouble adjusting to servants, or to the climate, or to health?

BRUCE: No, I went up with Leona Vander Linden, and she was a senior
missionary from Pella, Iowa; and Dr. Bosch and his wife and children were there. I had hard adjustments to make to the language because of the eight tones. And I would try to talk to the Bosch children, and they'd say, "Oh, you should have the second tone there—the fifth tone!" And they didn't know themselves; they'd just heard parents talk about tones. So it was a little bit confusing. No, I loved the people from the beginning, and I loved Chinese food, and I still do.

VAN WYK: Were you working in Sio-khe your first year, or were you only studying language?

BRUCE: No, every morning I studied. And it was hard to get teachers upcountry. Very hard. It's quite different down at the port. There you get nice university, college people. And then an old lady who'd been teaching every missionary for years on end was there. I didn't have any of those advantages. We worked, and then we had a tennis court between the two mission houses, but nobody seemed to play tennis. And then I went out calling with Leona. We'd go to the villages and I got acquainted with the district work and the village work through her.

VAN WYK: Can you tell me how you did district work—what that involved?

BRUCE: Well, we had a large district. I imagine it'd be about a hundred miles square: twelve outstations, well, there were always bandits in some of the stations so that was out at that particular time. And then you'd write and ask about it and you'd hear from people who came to the hospital about conditions here and there. But you'd go and you'd work through the church and the church people would cook, take
you calling, so you'd have access to the homes through the church people. That was true in the city—when you went calling you would always go with someone who knew the area.

VAN WYK: Would you call on church members?

BRUCE: Oh, yes. We'd call on them, yes. We'd always have our little prayer and so on. And then they'd call in their neighbors and of course if you sing, why people come from everywhere. And you can collect a crowd in no time. And then we had these round houses, you know, ancestral houses—enormous, big round houses. And you'd go in one gate and then you'd put up your Sunday School picture or you'd have your Victrola, and you'd have everybody in that whole house come out to hear. It was always easy to talk to the people.

VAN WYK: Did you have to be invited to one of the round houses?

BRUCE: No, you'd go with a village person, and she'd know people there, and they're always happy to hear you, happy to hear the gospel. To get them to come to church is quite different, and to get them to come to school. Now in my article I told how at first it was all—you'd have to deal with bound-footed women. And you'd say, well, the girls would have to unbind their feet or they can't come to the Christian school. And you know how that was a difficult proposition because if they unbind them, then who's going to marry a big-footed woman? But in the later years there wasn't any of that trouble, and infanticide, that disappeared, too. It's terrible how that's come to America, isn't it?

VAN WYK: Were you working very closely with the British missionaries
while you were in China?

BRUCE: Well, in Amoy, Kulanuchsia, the three missions were together down there. But we had a comity of missions: like the Presbyterians were up north, the Baptists were south, the Methodists were in Foochow, and the same way in our area. We had the English Presbyterians and the London Missionary Society, and the Reformed Church in America. The three worked together with their homes, bases—center of their offices—all there on Kulanusaha. But each had their section in Fukien. And each one worked it, and then in the summer we'd have conferences together, we'd have prayer meetings together, and we always had the English church service together. We knew what was going on. And in Changchow we had the London Missionary Society and our Reformed Church working in the hospital. But in Sio-khe it was only the R.C.A.

VAN WYK: When you went out as a young missionary did you find that you had some ideas that were in conflict with the ideas of the older missionaries, or were your ways of doing things similar enough?

BRUCE: We didn't have any gap between the young and the old then. We had the Talmage sisters in the mission house and they'd been born out there and they knew the language so perfectly. Oh, we just adored them, we loved them. The Talmage sisters and Miss Duryee and Miss Morrisson from Changchow. No, there was no gap there.

VAN WYK: Did you have a lot of contact with the American Consulate while you were there?

BRUCE: Yes. The first time we went to him he said, "Spell Nebuchad-
nezzar!" Well, I laughed and I said, "I'm afraid I don't know how." "Well, nobody else knows how either." That was my first contact with an American Consul. (laughter) And on the Fourth of July we'd go and have nice picnics, but in the later years there was too much trouble. They didn't have them. They came to church once in a while, of course they'd always read the scripture like the British do. (laughter)

VAN WYK: Did they tell you when to evacuate, like when you evacuated Changchow in the early thirties?

BRUCE: We didn't even have a consulate. Oh, yes. When the Communists came then. I think they sent up their launch to try and get us, but we never saw it, or we missed it anyway. And then when the Communists were occupying Amoy, of course, the American Consulate was gone.

VAN WYK: Who assigned you to your duties out on the mission field?

BRUCE: Well, we had a mission meeting every year, and we were all divided up into committees and committees and committees, (laughter) and when we had our mission meeting each one was free to speak. It didn't make any difference whether you were a single girl or a doctor. They had the theological seminary and each one had his voice or say. We were kind of a loving group. We were very friendly with each other. We loved mission meetings! A time to get together and just yak it all out.

VAN WYK: What were your relations to the Women's Board of Foreign Missions? Do you know how they supported your work?
BRUCE: Well, yes, I started out being supported by the Park Hill, Yonkers Church. And then as the years went by I guess the money got a little tighter. I don't know whether they increased the amount each church was to pay. That I don't know. We got our stated amount—twelve hundred dollars a year regardless of who paid it. But I think sometimes it was a misunderstanding between the church people and the way it was sent out. I know in my Yonkers Church on one furlough I came home and I met this young man and he was a leading banker in town, and he said, "Well, I write to you every month. How do you enjoy 'em?" "Well," I said, "I didn't know." I was quite flabbergasted. His letter went to the Board, and the money for each missionary was sent out in the one lump sum to the mission. I didn't know how they collected it in New York. And he evidently didn't know how. And perhaps all through the years he was wondering, "Well, why doesn't Bessie Bruce write and thank me?" I don't know. And then another time some church in the west, I think it was Iowa, I don't remember what church, but they wrote in the letter to the mission that they would no longer support a Bible woman because in all these years Bessie Bruce had never written and thanked them for that money. Well, my dear people! I didn't know where the money came from or who was paying it. It came out from the Board, a lump sum. "Bessie Bruce—so much money." Where it came from, I didn't know. How would I know to write to that particular church? I can see that there was grounds for misunderstanding, and I'm sorry if I offended in that way, but I certainly was not intending to.

VAN WYK: Let's talk a little bit about some of the work you did.
In the Board Minutes I read that you were involved in physical education work, and I guess Alma Vander Meer was mentioning some of the problems you ran up against in trying to bring a physical education program in. Can you describe that?

BRUCE: Well, I guess that was in Changchow, and we had no playground. There was ground, but it was mounds high, and there was nothing but a path from the outside gate to the school. And I thought we must clear up the mounds and level that off and have a playground. So I told them my story, and the principal and I went out in the street to the different merchants and the Christian families, and families of our students, and explained. And we told them we wanted to have a playground and playground material. So we got it. And we cleared up that ground, leveled it off. Well, our problem was, they didn't know how to play. They had no idea of calisthenics, so I had to get out and I tried to teach them, you know. Arms bend, and then when you would say knees bend, they would scream with laughter. That evidently had another connotation to it. (laughter) And I had to work over all of that laughter, and finally we got so they did go through their drill everyday. And we had slides and we had swings and we had seesaws, and the girls enjoyed it all.

VAN WYK: Had the boys at the boys's school been used to this kind of activity?

BRUCE: I don't remember any playground material, but they'd get out and rough around, you know.

VAN WYK: But exercise for girls was a new thing?
BRUCE: Oh, my! They'd never heard of such a thing! They were dignified, they were proper. (laughter) And they had long braids.

VAN WYK: When you went to do your district work did you go with Bible women?

BRUCE: Sometimes I went with the Bible woman, or other times we took one of the other missionaries. Once with Jo Hofstra, and usually the Bible woman was with us. And we'd have one sedan chair because you couldn't afford more, and, well, the distances were great. The nearest one, I think, was six miles away. And then we'd walk it. But when we went further distances we'd have one chair and take it around. One time I went with Alma and Mr. Veenschoten. We were touring, oh, perhaps eight or nine churches. That was one of the hardest trips. We had to go twenty miles before we got the sedan chairs to take us into the mountains. And Alma and I were taking turns with the chair and we stopped at noon for lunch. And then it was my turn to ride and I got in the sedan chair, and oh, my, I'd eaten something. Poison of some kind. So then I had to ride the rest of the way and poor Alma had to do all that walking. It was terrible. If only I had been walking first then it would have been different. But those were difficult times. And then another time I remember when we were going from one mountain top to another mountain top the men decided they wouldn't go any further, that their homes were down in the valley there, and they were going to go home. They just ran off and left us up on the top of the mountain with the sedan chair. So we tried to walk down the mountain and we came to a Christian village and
we spent the night there. Finally the chairmen came and repented. But it isn't easy going.

VAN WYK: Were the Bible women supported by the church of a certain area or by the mission itself?

BRUCE: By the mission. Well, and the mission got the money from the churches at home. But it was in one lump sum. We had to divide it.

VAN WYK: But they weren't supported by the Chinese church?

BRUCE: The local church, no. But a pastor means that he is self-supporting, and his church is supporting him. If he is a preacher he is supported by the mission or the church at large, and that's not a self-supporting church. As soon as you hear "pastor", you know it's a self-supporting church.

VAN WYK: What kind of education did the Bible women have? Were you involved in teaching them?

BRUCE: Well, I had a Bible school in Changchow and another one up in Sio-khe. There were higher grade schools down in Amoy. And I imagine they had maybe a fifth grade education and then went there. The ones I had just came in from the village and studied Bible. And if you could see that they were material worth developing and would be valuable to the church, then you put special effort in helping them. The very best Bible woman I had, and she was principal of the woman's school when I went to Sio-khe, was a Hawaiian. She was married to a Chinese in Hawaii and he had money and he brought her back to China. He lived near Tong-an, and then when
she got to the house she found out that she wasn't the first wife. And that made all the trouble. He had his first wife there, and of course, she was the first, and poor C. didn't rate very highly. So Miss Zwemer got her and put her in training. And then she went to the Amoy schools. She was well trained. She was an intelligent woman. A different caliber than some of the others.

VAN WYK: Were most of the Bible women single women?

BRUCE: Well, you don't find single women in the orient. It's only the Christians that are single. Everybody's been married sometime or somewhere. They say the Christian churches started the idea of single women.

VAN WYK: Were the Bible women older women, or would you get young women going into this field?

BRUCE: No, you wouldn't find young women going around. They might help in school in some way, the Bible school, but it wouldn't be right for a young woman to go around.

VAN WYK: You were also involved in children's meetings. How did you bring children together for a meeting and what would you do there?

BRUCE: Well, in Changchow we had what you would call maybe a mission station down in the center of town, a big building with benches inside, and the men would go down and have evening meetings, and then sometimes they'd have a clinic there, and certain days of the week, why I'd go down and I'd have children's meetings. You'd just open the doors and just like the Pied Piper these child-
ren would follow you. And we'd have our meetings and we'd show them the pictures, and the next week there'd be more children, and the next, more. The afghan I'm making now I'm giving to one of those helpers in Changchow, and she's the mother of that wonderful E. out in Seattle, Dr. H.'s wife. One time I had a children's meeting at the West Gate in Changchow—just outside the West Gate—and the old Chinese teacher came to me. He was a Christian, oh, just a typical old Chinese. You can see him just like he was in a picture with his beard, a little stringly, maybe twenty hairs. And he begged me to come. He said, "I'm of the old school, and I have a little school out there at the West Gate, and I wish you'd come and teach Bible." Well, he was a nice Christian old man, so I said, why of course I'd come. So I took out a few hymn books and I knew that his boys and girls would be studying Chinese characters, and as I entered that West Gate, opened that gate to go through, the cry would go up, "Here comes Jesus!" "Please. Oh, no! No, no. We're going to hear about Jesus. You want to hear about Jesus?" Oh, screaming from everybody. You know, he had twenty pupils. I had eighty in that little tiny room. And we got so everybody had these hymnbooks, and did they love to sing the church hymns, you know. Oh, my! I wonder if they still remember me. I'll show you a picture I have up in my room that he painted for me. Beautiful!

VAN WYK: At the women's school you say you taught the Romanized language.

BRUCE: Yes. You know, when I was at India I was aghast. They didn't seem to teach reading. They taught memory work, memory
work, memory work. But in Amoy we emphasized it. The emphasis was on reading. So of course in our school—Well, we had the character hymnbook for those who thought they knew four or five, you know. But then we emphasized the Romanized. And their alphabet was quite similar to ours. They would have an "a", and a "b", and then a "ch", and a "c-double h". But very few different things, you know. The aspirate they had. And it was easy for people to learn. They didn't have quite as many letters as we do in our alphabet, and the difficulty would be the tones, but you see, they come natural to the Chinese. They don't know if you say the first tone or second. They don't know what you're talking about. It's only those who've studied the language that know that. And they learned that. But I just wonder how many could really see the words I was trying to point to. Now that my eyes are bothering me I just wonder. Maybe if they'd had glasses, but who had glasses? You know, nobody wore glasses. They'd say they could see, oh, yes, they could see. But you wonder if some of the difficulty was that. But we had a reading church in Amoy. Everywhere they could read, and everywhere they could sing.

VAN WYK: Were most things printed by the church printed in the Romanized?

BRUCE: Oh, not most. We had our Chinese hymnbook. There are about 350 hymns in there. Miss Talmage translated a great many, and they all read with the do re mi, you know. I suppose they got that from the British. But oh, the Chinese could sing in parts with it. Yes, and they could see that and play the piano, transpose in their own mind, you see.
VAN WYK: But at your women's school you taught the Romanized?

BRUCE: Romanized.

VAN WYK: Was the Romanized language used outside of the church at all?

BRUCE: Well, it's the same language. It's only in the written form.

VAN WYK: Was non-Christian literature written in the Romanized at all?

BRUCE: Oh, no. No, no. And we had the Bible, and story books, and Pilgrim's Progress, and stories like that that would be helpful for the church people to know. And then we had a book on the family, the Christian family, all in the Romanized. And they were very proud that they could read it. Now I understand that in Formosa there's a government rule that they will not print anymore in the Romanized because they want to emphasize the Mandarin.

VAN WYK: Can you tell me something about what you did with youth conferences?

BRUCE: Well, each group, section, like Tong-an and Sio-khe, they'd have these twelve or more churches connected with it. And every year we would have a youth meeting from different churches each year so that the church people could know about them. And then there'd be a second year course and a third year course, and, oh, Ruth Broekema had them in Tong-an area, and I had them in Sio-khe area, Bill Angus was in that area sometimes, and he would go
with us and we would meet in the different churches, and of course they'd have to be fed, and they'd walk miles to get to the place. And then we'd have good meals, well, ordinary meals. And oh, they sat there and they'd have fellowship with them from all that area, and then there were courses on how to be a Bible woman, how to be an elder and deacon, and they were very valuable. I think in my book I told about the one where the DePree's station was. Yes, that was miles from anywhere.

VAN WYK: You worked for a long time in schools in China. Did you notice a big difference when Chiang Kai-shek's government started to regulate the schools? How were your schools affected by that?

BRUCE: Well, the mission could see that it was coming, and I think it was in about 1928 when we put Chinese principals in our schools. Chinese were the head for each department, you know. I can't remember when Chiang Kai-shek came through. Didn't he come through—it was about 1930—I don't remember. But I mean, the mission foresaw that and had it ready when they came in. There was nothing to criticize. And Tena Holkeboer's school was known all over China. It was, I would say, the fine mission school. The finest school for girls in China at the time. Talmage was known, too, but Tena's school was exceptionally fine. It was a feeder for Chingling University, and our upcountry schools were feeders for Tena's school.

VAN WYK: Did you have to get rid of compulsory chapel in your schools at the same time?
BRUCE: We never did.

VAN WYK: You never had to?

BRUCE: Never had to. No. We had our Sunday services, and they would march to school in Sio-khe. The boys were way on the other side of town. They'd march two-by-two and orderly, to the church. Of course, the girls' school was right next door. That was easy. And then down in the ports they didn't have to march to school, but I think Edna Beekman's big girls' school, primary school, they marched all the time. They would have several hundred coming. No, that was no problem. And in China you might go to a big church that would hold, say, two thousand. Well, most of them would be, say, under 25 years of age. They were the wonderful part. The church membership wasn't so large, but it was growing constantly. We were standing pretty when the Communists came. We were so proud of our work, and it was a terrible blow that the government went under.

VAN WYK: Were you still teaching when the Communists did come in?

BRUCE: We had our schools in Sio-khe, yes.

VAN WYK: Did you have greater limitations on your work there?

BRUCE: Oh, we couldn't get out in that district. We couldn't call on that district, and then of course we went down when they were in our hills. And the lights you could see every night. Then you knew you had to . . . In Sio-khe several members of the consistory came to see us and they said, "Now, we've come to tell
you that we feel that you must go for your own safety." Especially for Paul was there. And they said, "Please do not come back unless you have a letter from us. Don't come back because someone else has called you back." And we knew that they loved us, and they respected us and wanted us there, but they wanted to save our lives, too. We hadn't been in Amoy any time when we heard six of our men in Sio-khe had lost their lives.

VAN WYK: To the Communists?

BRUCE: Oh, yes. The Communists did it. A minister, one of our finest ministers, the head of the government high school, a fine Christian man . . .

VAN WYK: Do you know if they were killed because of their Christianity, or was it because of their ties to the Nationalists?

BRUCE: Well, I imagine it would be . . . They were against Communism, and in favor of the church. Down in the port Tena's teachers would say, "Oh, you can be a Christian and a Communist." But that was the greatest mistake. But upcountry they didn't seem to have that same feeling.

VAN WYK: Did you teach in Amoy when you went there?

BRUCE: No.

VAN WYK: You didn't at all.

BRUCE: It was past that time. Yes. I could go to the hospital, and see, we weren't allowed to call, and if we passed a dear friend on the road, your eyes spoke, but otherwise you didn't
show any recognition. And they said if we went to the hospital we could not talk to the patients. So I took my hymnbook, and I'd hold it quite prominently, you know, so everybody could see she was going to church. And I'd step into a ward, and the beds, maybe ten or twelve on a side, they had their Bible on the bed, and they'd hold it up, "Come sing with us!" So, I was invited in to sing. You see, I wasn't going in to preach. I was just invited to sing. So I'd say, "What number do you want?" and I couldn't get the numbers fast enough.

VAN WYK: Now as long as it was done that way it was alright?

BRUCE: It was alright. But I was not to talk, see. But I could tell from the songs they sang what they were thinking. There was one song, "Jesus never changes. Fathers and mothers can change sometimes, and friends can change, but Jesus never changes." How those boys would yell it out. The boys were the singers. Girls didn't have such good voices in China. Maybe it was different in Japan. But oh, the boys, how they loved to sing.

VAN WYK: Did you continue going to church after the Communists came in?

BRUCE: Yes. And churches were crowded. They would pour into the church, but in front of the church you would see several Communist guards or soldiers. I suppose they were saying, "Oh, so and so is going to church, and so and so, and so and so." They probably were taking names, or noting who went in. But the people were very brave in those times. And then did you read in the
end where I told about Mr. Eckerson's funeral? That's the first inkling we had from the Chinese that we should get out. You see, we never could talk to them privately, and that time we were off at the cemetary and we had a good opportunity, and they said, "Oh, please go as fast as you can go. They have no compassion, they have no love. And we can do nothing for you, and you can do nothing for us. Please go." But the problem was, they wouldn't let us go. We'd been trying and trying. But they didn't want us to go and they didn't want us to stay. And I don't know whether I ever told you about the time... None of the others could go over to Amoy to see this head of the Communist group that we had to get permission from. Edna didn't dare go, and the others were in the hospital and they were sick. They couldn't go. Jeannette was working. And so dear Bessie went over time and again and there was this one woman who was the head of this department. She was a college graduate. She was beautiful. She was as pretty as any Dresden China piece you ever saw, just dainty. This last time I went to see her to ask couldn't we please get out now, I was going up the hillside in a rickshaw. Of course you didn't dare walk in the streets. They didn't want you to walk, they didn't want you to ride. They criticized you whichever way you did. Well, down the street came a crowd of people just pouring, and I said to the rickshaw man, "What's going on?" "Oh, they're beheading some young people down there." And there was that Chinese girl, that head Communist, running down with the crowd yelling and screaming, going down the center of the road like a maniac. I got to her, I said, when she came back—they'd watched the beheading—and she gets back to give me permission
to leave, I said, "I thought you had a young son about twenty." "Oh, yes," she said, just as callous. It meant nothing to her to see these other twenty year old kids lose their heads.

VAN WYK: Let's go back a ways, and maybe you can tell me something about the 1920's, if you were aware of any anti-foreign or anti-Christian feelings already back then.

BRUCE: No, I don't remember it. Maybe I was too ignorant. I can't remember.

VAN WYK: When you first got there you didn't feel any of that?

BRUCE: No, we were just loved, and everybody who received you was so kind. No.

VAN WYK: Then when did the change really come about? Was it with the Communists?

BRUCE: With the Communists. That's the first time I noticed any change. And during that time when we couldn't call, I met this young fellow from one of our areas, Tong-an, and he was very closely connected with the church. And I asked him how he was. He said, "Fine." He said, "What are you doing in my country?" I said, "Why, you know what I'm doing here. I'm working with the women upcountry in the women's school." He said, "Oh, you're one of these imperialists!" Oh, I laughed. I said, "Now, you know better. I'm not even on any committee, am I? I haven't any power, I'm not the head of anything. I'm one of the workers in the church. You know better than that, don't you?" And he just turned and walked away. Maybe they have to say it? Maybe
they're told, "Let me see you dare stand up to an American."
You know, you wonder what happened.

And then on the way out we were treated so terribly in Swatow. They called at midnight, and we were in the hotel asleep, and a bang came on the door from the yamen to report immediately. Well, women don't go out at midnight. And they said they would conduct us there. "Come immediately and bring your passports!"

Well, we went, and this head man, must have been 23 or 24, a college fellow, but oh! who had he known, or what had been his earlier life? He had a hatred in his heart for Americans and for Christians. And he sat there and scolded us, and told us to put our passports on the table, and they were confiscated. And we just wondered, what had been his connection between some foreigner, either in business, or in the church, or in school. Had he failed some exam? He's taking it out on us. It was very difficult, and then when they told us to open our suitcases they said, "They're sealed with a government seal. Open them!" And I stood back and I said, No, that I could not do it. "I cannot break a Chinese government seal." Very good. If I had broken it then I would have been under arrest immediately, see. So then they opened and there on the top of the suitcase, put in by their own Communist leaders in Amoy who told us where to put it, "Oh, a hundred dollars!" Yes. Everyone leaving the country was to be given a hundred dollars of their own money that they confiscate. Well, you know, you have no money, you have no passport. You wonder what's going to happen to you. Well, thank God we had prayer. We could believe that He would take care of us. We arrived in Hong Kong without any passport, without any money,
and the British Tommies were so kind. We said to them, "Oh, we're so happy to see you. We'd rather meet you without any money, without any passport, than meet the Communists with everything."

So, God took care of us while we were in China and brought us home.

VAN WYK: Were most of the Communist officials you ran into quite young?

BRUCE: Well, I think everyone I knew. Maybe one was fortyish.

And that night, we had arrived at a halfway place on the way to Canton from Amoy, a five days overland journey, and this was a big temple and there were hundreds and hundreds of soldiers there and we were told to come in and we were to have a certain section to spend the night in. And that night before we got to bed he opened our suitcases. And we weren't afraid of anything because we knew what was in there, there was no contraband of any kind, and the money had been taken. Well now, what is he going to take? And he picked up a little tiny paper book like a cosmetic book where you wipe your face and there'd be a little powder on it or something, but this was for soap leaves. So he wanted to know what that was. I told him you tear out a sheet and you can wash your hands with it. "Oh . . ." (claps her hands) He calls for the soldiers to bring him some water. He used sheet after sheet after sheet and there was no lather. And the little guy that was with me, he said, "Fall back into the crowd! Get out of sight!" I disappeared. So what is going to happen? Well, nothing. We went to bed, and at midnight we felt flashlights come right down on our face, but nothing happened.
VAN WYK: While you were teaching in Changchow were you ever aware of any Communist propaganda in your schools?

BRUCE: Oh, no.

VAN WYK: That never entered in?

BRUCE: No.

VAN WYK: Were girls' schools farther away from that kind of thing than the boys' schools were?

BRUCE: I didn't know the boys' schools had that either. I know one time we had--the boys were kind of, oh, was it wanting to strike or something, and the school issued an ordinance that every head was to be shaved. That was the end of the trouble.

VAN WYK: Do you know what they wanted to strike over?

BRUCE: No. Maybe Alma will remember. We had no trouble. We had no problems of discipline or anything.

VAN WYK: You mentioned that you were in Changchow when Dr. Sung came in 1934. Did you attend any of his revival meetings?

BRUCE: Oh, yes. I went all the time. The house was near, almost next door to the big church. Oh, yes. I went there all the time. Dr. Sung was a very unusual character. Do you know about him?

VAN WYK: Just a little bit.

BRUCE: Well, he was the son of a preacher north of Amoy. His dialect was quite different, but he spoke English beautifully.
And he had just come home from Columbia University with his Ph.D., and he wanted to just preach to his own people, and he held these services. I think we had three services a day. Maybe not at night. I can't remember. But anyway, he did a marvelous work, especially with the young people. He organized these groups to go out into the villages. We had over eighty groups, and each one had his banner. And oh, my, they were alive with it! And they all knew his songs and they went from village to village, but it was, you know, shortly after that, that the Communists came.

VAN WYK: What was so appealing about what Dr. Sung had to say?

BRUCE: Oh, he made it so real, and he had illustrations. I remember he used his handkerchief a great deal, and he was holding that handkerchief up here, and oh, he was very dramatic. And oh, he appealed to them, and he had them laughing, and he had them everything. But he really preached the Word. He knew his Bible. And they respected him. They honored him. Oh, everybody loved Dr. Sung.

VAN WYK: Did the missionaries also feel like he was doing a good job?

BRUCE: I don't think everybody did, but what can you say when God's blessing somebody? If God is blessing them, who are we to criticize them? I remember saying that very thing to one of the missionaries. I said, "If he appeals to our people, what more can we ask? He can teach us a great deal. We can learn from him." Oh, I don't think Dr. Sung was very much interested in foreigners. He just loved his people. They came for hundreds
of miles to hear him.

VAN WYK: The bands that were organized after he came through Changchow, did they continue for a long time afterwards?

BRUCE: Well, the Communists came in. Within about a year the Communists were there.

VAN WYK: But until they came the bands were quite effective?

BRUCE: Oh, yes. They were faithful, yes. They were very faithful.

VAN WYK: What would they do in the villages?

BRUCE: Well, they'd just appear. Maybe a few, five or six people coming out with banners and singing, you've got a crowd immediately. I think the Chinese are very curious, and then they were their own people. There were a few foreigners that could go out with a group, but you couldn't be with every group. The groups went by themselves, and then they were very very faithful in sewing the seed. We had one church in Chioh-be, I went down to the one hundredth anniversary in 1942. I was there when Pearl Harbor fell. Well, that minister's son is a big doctor up there in Rochester, a cancer specialist. So our boys have gone on to bigger things. They're not in Red China, all of them. But there are thousands of them there that are . . . There'll be a book of the martyrs written someday, and now, of course, there's a big group that's run by the Koreans, I guess, and the Japanese and the Filipinos, and the South Sea Islanders. They're sending in books into China today. But they've got them reprinted.
This is no good anymore. (points to her Chinese hymnbook) They're reprinted in the Mao type and that's being used, and they're getting the Word in. And their broadcasting station from the Philippines can get in. But that doesn't mean the people are allowed to hear.

VAN WYK: Were you involved in the five year movement to double church membership?

BRUCE: Yes. Everybody was.

VAN WYK: How was that conducted?

BRUCE: Well, every church was just starting bands to go out and to try and bring in your neighbors and hold meetings in your own house and have your neighbors come, and bring somebody to church with you. Everybody was involved in that.

VAN WYK: I'd be interested to hear about your work up in Sio-khe with Alma Vander Meer when you went out into the villages with six people.

BRUCE: Oh, yes. After the Reds, after Japan, that's what it was. After Japan. We went back in 1946. I went out on the Marine Lynx, and she went out on a freighter with Dr. Shafer and Paul and somebody else from Schenectady, I think. And we met in Shanghai. And as our ship docked I saw Alma down on the pier and she yelled up to me, "We're going to be together in Sio-khe!" And of course it was wonderful. And it was the first time she'd been back alone, and it was the first time I was going to have somebody really to live with me. Sometimes I was alone, most of
the time I had somebody. But, we went up by rickshaw from Changchow. All the bridges were out and every so often in the road, the road was there, but it was cut through so that no cars could get over it or bicycles. So we had to get out and walk down and walk up and get in again. But then half the town of Sio-khe was out there to meet us. They walked out maybe a mile and were just standing there at the side of the road as we came by. Then we got out of the rickshaws and walked in with them, had our prayer together that God had brought us back. Yes, that was a happy time, and everybody was enthusiastic. We were going to build a new China! That was all anybody thought. It was going to be a new day and here we are, and now we can get ready to work. Now that was so hard, just in two years the Communists started down from Peking.

But Alma was the nurse, and of course I was in the schools. But our little town made firecrackers, and if there was an explosion then I had my orders that I was to appear at the hospital immediately. They'd need help. And sometimes the children had been playing with the little bombs that they threw in the river to catch fish, kill fish, and they'd hold the bomb just a second too long and we were always having amputations, either at the wrist or the elbow, or the leg, or something. And when the big explosions in town went off we knew that the firecracker shop had blown up. And then the patients would come in, burnt as black as coal. You didn't know whether they were a man or a woman, their hair was gone—everything. And then they would have to work with those. The less serious cases, when there was just an amputation, I was asked to help, and I was supposed to
be the dirty nurse, the Chinese nurse was the anesthetist, and Alma was the sterile nurse, and Dr. T. was the surgeon. And I was supposed to hold the leg or the arm, or what have you. And if there was a pause I could run out and tell their family, "Everything's going fine. Now don't worry. It's not as bad as you think. He'll be alright." But we worked very closely together. I helped in the hospital and she would help with the schools, not in the building, but as we'd go out into the villages to work. She would hold a clinic in a certain village and it was interesting that thirty different villages asked us to come and work in their village. And so we'd have on Tuesday it was a definite village, and once a month it was here and so forth. Well, while she was holding clinics with a nurse, then I'd gather the crowd—women, men, children. And we'd be singing in little choruses and telling them Bible stories and telling about our church and about our school, and "Come see us. We live right here on the river. And come call on us. We'd like to see you." And that's the way we worked together.

VAN WYK: When you were working at the hospital with Alma Vander Meer were there not enough nurses?

BRUCE: Only one Chinese nurse and Alma.

VAN WYK: Previously had there been more?

BRUCE: No.

VAN WYK: It was always this small?

BRUCE: Yes. Dr. Hofstra was there. Now, when he was there pro-
bably there were more, but I don't remember it. And then, too, we fed the people. You see, we had refugees from the... that had left their homes down in the Swatow area and had come north to us. And now they were just wandering around like beggars. They had no place, nobody wanted them. "Don't stay here for the night. Go on." It was pathetic. They had no place to go. And they were good people, and some of them knew how to make this beautiful Swatow embroidery, you know, the table cloths that we used to buy and love. Well, we got food from the Church World Service and we had it all organized. And they had to have their tickets to come in. Well, it's very difficult to give charity and give out food when you had hundreds of people. But we got so that we knew a great many of them. They'd come day after day, and we'd give them a nice hot milk soup, milk-bean soup. I can't think what kind of beans, but anyway, it was a Chinese thing. And we'd give them a good big roll, and they just loved to come, and they'd tell you their troubles and all. Well then week after week, month after month, now they were going to go home. Conditions were more settled now, and then we would write to the Swatow churches and say, "So and so and her family and his family are going to come back. They fled on account of the Japanese and they did not want to be under them. So now they're coming back and we hope you will welcome them." And then we gave them postal cards that they were to send. I think each one had three postal cards, or each group, and when they got to one place then they were to mail that. "We're alright so far." And then like that. Well, it was very interesting, and they appreciated what we did. Even the Changchow papers praised
Alma and my work there in Slo-khe.

VAN WYK: Was that run or organized completely by you and Alma?

BRUCE: Yes. We had the Chinese help us. And especially when they gave us bales of clothing, that was interesting. The big bales, oh, enormous bales, came by boat up the river. Well, we had enough for each station, so we wrote and asked someone, a delegate, to come in from each station and help us decide how they wanted to divide up this clothing. And so they came and they thought that, well, if they would mark them and know the different numbers of the bales, then we could say, "Well, I'll take number six, you take eight." And I said, "But I don't know what's inside of the bales. Well, you don't know either. Nobody knows what's in them. Do you think we ought to open the bales and find out first?" "No, we want it this way." Alright. Whatever they decided. And this one group, they had to go over terrible mountains, was it eighteen miles. And when they got there it was nothing but white baby clothes for under a year and a half or two year olds. Of course they wouldn't wear white for a child no matter what. But anyway, that was discouraging. But then they didn't blame us because they had made the decision themselves. But the Chinese that helped us give out the things and the milk for the poor, they, too, were in great danger when the Communists came. They had to flee, too, because, see, there would always be somebody who would say it wasn't right, or wasn't happy about it, and anyway, they'd been one of the leaders working with the Americans, you see. "They knew the Americans. They were one of the leaders." They'd point a finger at you.
Yes, so many of them fled, you see.

VAN WYK: Let's go on to some more general questions. One of the things I'm interested in is the great number of single women missionaries in China, and I was wondering if you had any idea about why such a large number of women were attracted to the China mission field.

BRUCE: Well, I can only say for myself. From the time I was seven years old I said I was going to China, and I just thought if the Lord wanted me to get married he'd have somebody in China. That was up to the Lord. He called me to China. That was what I was to obey. Well, then when I was in China I had several opportunities. One was a professor, but he wasn't a member of the Board, of our mission, and I had joined it to do work for Christ, not a university, not anything else, so that put him out. And in India the same way. It was the wrong Board, the wrong church, the wrong mission, the wrong . . . So that was for me. Now what it is for the other girls, I don't know. But then you meet very few people when you're on the foreign field, you know. And every year they get younger and younger. And some are really dedicated to their work, either the school teaching or nursing.

VAN WYK: It just seems that there weren't very many single men who went out to China.

BRUCE: Oh, you don't find single men anywhere. Except nowadays with the gays. Well, we didn't know about that term or those people in those times. But that's what the Chinese and the Indians say. The single girl, that's the creation of the church. Other
places, other religions, you don’t have them. Maybe the Buddhist nuns, maybe they have them sometimes, but you know, so seldom, you never see them or hear much about them.

VAN WYK: What do you feel was the effect on the Chinese of seeing so many women in positions of responsibility? That was rather new in China, wasn't it?

BRUCE: Why, they highly respected us. And of course Leona Vander Linden introduced me to the work, and she told me, "Oh, they respect the single girl very highly. You're not second to anybody." That's the way I was brought up, and I found it to be true. They really loved you. And they know that you're doing it because it's for the Lord. And my term, I was called "Bu Ko-niu". "Ko-niu" means the daughter of a high Mandarin, or something like that which is a very honorary title they gave us.

VAN WYK: Do you think that seeing missionary women in China influenced the Chinese women to go on for more education or to change their way of life?

BRUCE: Oh, yes. Yes, you had that influence. And then a number of them were unmarried, too. Yes, today we have one of our finest Changchow girls. She was principal of the English school in Changchow, and she had to flee because she was voted a member of the, would you say the cabinet of the new China. She was to go up to the capital and be a representative of the government there from our whole area. She had to flee. She went to England and became a nurse. Then she went to Singapore, and now I think she's teaching in the theological seminary in
Singapore today. In our union church school. A very wonderful person.

VAN WYK: If you were to go to China and do it all over again, would you do anything differently, or would you have the mission Board do things differently?

BRUCE: I never thought of that. Oh, I don't know. I guess for the times I lived it was the best for that time. And now if I had to go again it would be different times and it would be hard to live alone, I think, now. When you're young you can do anything, you know. Go around the world alone. As you get older you don't even want to cross the street alone.

VAN WYK: Would you like to see a renewal of the missionary movement in China?

BRUCE: Under the Chinese. I want them to be the heads. And they're the ones that are working on it now. Our Chinese stood up beautifully under persecution and punishment. Oh, G. was one of the finest that graduated from Tena's school, and she married the principal of the Leng-na school, and he was imprisoned time and again because he was a Christian. And they had him working in the coal mine. They'd go out to the hills and dig the coal and have to bring it in I suppose on wheelbarrows or something, and he suffered a lot. And then after he died she kept being imprisoned, and they'd keep her in 'til they thought she was going to die. Then they'd let her free, then they'd put her in prison again. Finally after years—oh, how many years has it been? Twenty years? Twenty-five years?—she's now down in Kulangsu,
and it's her brother who graduated from our Western Seminary who was the big preacher in Manila. He's one of the leading ones in trying to get the gospel into China.

VAN WYK: In retrospect, what kind of an effect do you think missions had on China?

BRUCE: Far greater than anyone knows. I think that we were held in high respect and honor, and the young people wanted to imitate us and go on and study and learn, and learn about the world, not just their little spot. And I think it was far out of proportion to what anyone thought.

VAN WYK: I have no more questions. Would you like to add anything?

BRUCE: Oh, it's been interesting to talk about it and think about it, and I just feel that God has been very good to me. In all these years of danger and trouble and anxiety and sickness, He's brought me out of it safely. He's answered my prayers and He has brought me to my desired haven, and here I am in the little quiet town of Andes, living with a sister I love. I always say she was my father and mother's greatest gift to me, and I thank Him for everyday's care and every care during the night, and we pray that China may someday see the light. I have a banner up in my bedroom, and the way I have translated it is, "The light still shines in China." Well I'm no Chinese scholar, but that's the way I have thought of it all through the years. "The light still shines in China." And I know that He lives in the hearts of thousands and hundreds of thousands of our Christians, and if we pray hard enough, the time will be shortened when they, too, can be free to worship Christ.
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