

Real Life Stories *John and Betty Stam*

His Background

John's father grew up in Holland and as a young man left Holland for the USA, settling in New Jersey. Unbeknownst to him, God had His eye on the young man and used the lack of his knowledge of English to bring him in contact with the gospel. In the providence of God he met a Christian woman who, in giving him a Bible, told him to read it as it would help him learn English. As he read it he learnt the English language, and second but more importantly, he learnt about the love of God. Having read John 3:16 and musing on it he realized, since God loves every human in the world, then He loves me! Reading the passage, and in simple faith believing God, he asked God to forgive him his sins. God says: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17), and so the knowledge of being accepted by God and having eternal salvation transformed his life. While continuing his manual work he became a fervent evangelist. In the grace of God he started a



Mission Hall where several days a week he would preach the gospel. It was the spiritual birth place for many hundreds. It was into this home that John Cornelius Stam was born in the United States on the 18th January, 1907.

His Conversion To God

It was when John was a lad of fifteen he, like pilgrim in Pilgrim's Progress, began to feel the burden of his own sin. Realizing that he was a sinner, incapable of saving himself and that he would have to meet God as Judge, only made the burden of his sin increase. As he sat at his school desk he prayed for the Lord to save him. John was never the same again. Very quickly the seed of salvation began to bear fruit as he began share the gospel with those he came in contact with. At twenty-two years of age John began to do mission work full time, and then decided to get some formal training at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago in 1929.

Betty Stan, Nee Alden

One year previously, in 1928, Elizabeth Alden, whose name was abbreviated to Betty, had begun studying at Moody Bible Institute. Betty was born into a home with believing parents on February 22nd 1906. Being very highly educated, Betty's father taught in many seminaries, but God had a higher purpose for him. God called him to preach the gospel and in time he and his little family left Michigan and sailed to China where they lived in Shantung. In many ways China was the only home Betty ever knew.

The depth of her spirituality as a child is deeply moving, for when just ten years of age she wrote:

I cannot live like Jesus, example though He be
For He was strong and selfless, and I am tied to me.

I cannot live like Jesus, my soul is never free
My will is strong and stubborn, my love is weak and wee.

But I have asked my Jesus, to live His life in me
I cannot look like Jesus, more beautiful is He.

In soul and eye and stature, than sunrise on the sea
Behold His warm, His tangible, His dear humanity.

Behold His white perfection, of purest deity
Yet Jesus Christ has promised, that we like Him shall be.

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I can find no reference to her actual conversion but the evidence of salvation was clearly marked in her life. When she was eighteen at a conference in New Jersey, her life was changed. She completely yielded to God in consecration, and in writing to her parents wrote: "It's as clear as daylight to me that the only worthwhile life is one of unconditional surrender to God's will, and of living in His way, trusting His love and guidance." During those formidable years and little realizing how her earthly sojourn would end, she wrote:

Lord, I give up all my own plans and purposes
All my own desires and hopes
And accept Thy will for my life.
I give myself, my life, my all
Utterly to Thee to be Thine forever.
Fill me and seal me with Thy Holy Spirit
Use me as Thou wilt, send me where Thou wilt
And work out Thy whole will in my life at any cost now and forever.

[The Meeting of John and Betty](#)

While at Moody Bible Institute John and Betty met for the first time. God was working on two levels at once, dealing with them as individuals for each other, and ultimately together to serve Him in China. Hudson Taylor had started the China Inland Mission, and representatives from that Mission would share with the students what God was doing in that far off land. It was at one of these meetings that John and Betty met, and for the next few years their relationship grew. They also knew that God was calling them to China.

[To China and Marriage](#)

In the fall of 1931 Betty left for China while John finished up his schooling. He was chosen as valedictorian and his final words were: "Who would not accept the challenge to Go forward, bearing precious seed?" In 1932 John left the USA to serve the Lord in China.

When John and Betty met again they knew they loved each other and it was agreed to be married. However, things were not that easy for China Inland Missions required a one-year waiting period before a new missionary could marry. Therefore, there was separation again as Betty moved back to her work in Fowyang. There had been much persecution in that area but there was a thriving church which Betty was in fellowship with. Her time was spent preaching and traveling from one village to the next.

In the meanwhile, John spent almost one year learning Chinese before being able to preach. When he was sufficiently fluent he would go out on local mission trips walking hundreds of miles, giving out tracts, selling Bibles and preaching the gospel.

Finally the year of separation was up and in October 1933 John and Betty were married. They began to work together preaching the gospel throughout the villages and encouraging the saints. Those were noble saints, some who would walk a forty mile round trip to get to the closest church! They met those who had been saved by reading the New Testament and longed for further teaching. To great delight, in September 1934 Betty gave birth to a little baby girl whom they called "Helen Priscilla". Shortly after the birth of baby Helen, John and Betty Stam received their posting to the city of Tsingteh.

[The Capture](#)

In the beginning of December 1934 John and Betty were aware of the emphatic communications that the Communists, who hated the Christians soldiers, were drawing near to the city. Approximately one hour later a man came running down the street shouting that the Communists were only a couple of miles away and would be upon the city. This was not a rumor and it was dangerous. Grabbing a few supplies they sought to leave the city, but could not leave for communist soldiers surrounded the city. There was no escape.

Real Life Stories
John and Betty Stam

Since the missionary home was close to the city gate the soldiers were on it very quickly. They demanded to know the names of the people there and where they were from. While they search the home for all the medicine, money, and valuables they could find, John and Betty responded by brewing up some tea and serving each of the soldiers cake. It was a magnificent act.

Being taken captive they were put in prison and a ransom of twenty thousand dollars was demanded for their release. From the prison John wrote to the China Inland Mission:

Dear Brethren, My wife, baby, and myself are today in the hands of the Communists, in the city of Tsingteh. Their demand is twenty thousand dollars for our release. All our possessions and stores are in their hands, but we praise God for peace in our hearts and a meal tonight. God grant you wisdom in what you do, and us fortitude, courage, and peace of heart. He is able and a wonderful Friend in such a time. Things happened so quickly this a.m. They were in the city just a few hours after the ever-present rumors really became alarming, so that we could not prepare to leave in time. We were just too late. The Lord bless and guide you, and as for us, may God be glorified whether by life or by death.

What individuals they were, held captive by communists, and the only concern was for the glory of God.

And now they were in prison, being held for ransom. The soldiers saw baby Helen and thought that this baby would prove to be a problem—she might slow down her parents as they followed the army. In front of John and Betty they talked about killing her, and then a strange thing happened. One of the men who had been tossed into prison by the Communist soldiers protested. He said, “The baby has done nothing worthy of death!” The soldiers told him, “It’s your life or hers.” The man said, “I am willing,” and just like that the soldiers struck him down and killed him, leaving the baby alone and unharmed. No one knows who the man was or why he would do such a brave thing.

Early the next morning the soldiers woke John and Betty and they all left the city, going toward the town of Miaosheo. John and Betty were hauled into a home that would serve as a jail and a guard watched them through the night. Betty was allowed to be free within that room, but John was tied in a standing position so he could not rest or sleep.

It was on Saturday, December 8th 1934, the soldiers came into John and Betty’s room and told them to take off their clothes, to walk out of the house in just their long underwear. With hands tightly tied behind their backs they led them out. John walked barefoot, having given his socks to his wife to protect her feet. Little Helen was left behind. Who can fathom the unspeakable grief of a mother’s heart as she tucked her little two month baby into her little sleeping bag and then nestled her into a big pile of bedding and then turned to leave.

John and Betty were marched through the town and told all the people to come out and to watch them die. They were brought to a little place called Eagle Hill. They ordered John to kneel, and a big knife flashed, and John fell to the ground. Betty was pushed down beside him and she too, was killed. They went from being on their knees on the cold, hard ground, to being on their knees before their Savior.

John and Betty are martyrs, Christians who gave their lives in service to the Lord and who died for His cause. Shortly after the martyrdom of John and Betty, evangelist Lo came to the town since the soldiers had left. Being informed of their deaths He sought their bodies. Upon finding their bodies he purchased a couple of coffins and the folk who lifted the bodies said John’s face was frozen in an expression of joy and that Betty’s was completely serene. Neither had faltered at the point of death.

The question many ask, “What about the baby?” Lo was told about the baby. He went to the mission home where he found the baby crying. She had been alone for 27 hours. Inside her clothes was pinned two five-dollar bills that Betty had hidden away in the hope that someone would help her. Evangelist Lo and his wife carried baby

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Helen to the nearest missionary outpost where they handed the baby over and shared a full account of the deaths of John and Betty Stam. Helen was dubbed “the miracle baby.”

She was raised by her grandparents and lives in the United States, and to my knowledge, died just a few years ago.

The following is a picture of their headstone and the inscriptions on it.



John Cornelius Stam, January 18, 1907
“That Christ may be glorified whether by life or by death.”
Philippians 1:20

Elisabeth Scott Stam, February 22, 1906
“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”
Philippians 1:21