

# Still Pursuing God's Will

*HER MINISTRY BEGAN MORE THAN 50 YEARS AGO. TODAY, AT 80, GWEN SHAW SERVES AS THE VISIONARY LEADER OF END-TIME HANDMAIDENS AND SERVANTS, A WORLDWIDE ARMY OF WOMEN.*

She's well past retirement age, walks with a cane, and needs a wheelchair to get through airports, but that hasn't stopped Gwen Shaw from ministering in cities and towns around the world—just as she has for the last 57 years. When interviewed for this article, the 80-year-“young” missionary—affectionately known as “Sister Gwen”—had just returned from a six-week trip to Spain and South Africa.

Sister Gwen's itinerary included Israel in September and lists the Congo in November and Hong Kong in December. In June she hosted the 29th annual world convention for her ministry, End-Time Handmaidens and Servants, a group of prayer intercessors and missionaries she founded in 1970 that is based in Jasper, Arkansas.

Through the years Sister Gwen has ministered in more than 100 countries and has written more than 50 books and many worship songs, printed and distributed through her publishing company, Engeltal Press. She founded the House of Peace in Jerusalem and opened Rainbow House in Niagara Falls, New York, as a ministry outreach into her homeland of Canada.

Gwen never intended to become a missionary, but a “deep, soul-stirring experience” in college changed her plans. “It's almost like God did a heart transplant within me,” she told SpiritLed Woman. “I simply put my hand in His and began to follow Him step by step, day by day and nation by nation.”

**WHO WILL GO TO CHINA?** Born in 1924, Gwen was raised on a farm in Saskatchewan, Canada, in a godly family of strict Mennonites who attended the church Gwen's grandfather founded.

Gwen remembers being able to “memorize Scripture by the yard” as a kindergartner. Childhood was followed by a few rebellious years but by age 17 Gwen had rededicated her life to God and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. She and her family started attending a Pentecostal church.

At 19 Gwen was a newlywed enrolled at a Bible college in Toronto. That same year, 1944, the Azusa Street Revival spread to her campus, and classes were replaced by round-the-clock prayer meetings.

Gwen remembers one night in particular. “Students were praying and weeping before the Lord,” she says. “Oh my, what a soul-searching night that was!” As Gwen sat in her chair and prayed, she heard a classmate travailing for China.

“It was as though God was speaking through her,” says Gwen. “She kept crying out, ‘China! I need you in China. Who will go to China? Souls are dying in China!’”

Gwen tried to ignore the desperate pleas, reasoning that she was now married and still in college. “Finally I said, ‘God, if it’s really You speaking to me, You’ll have to put me on my knees.’” She wasn’t prepared for what happened next.

“God just about threw me out of that chair, with me of course ending up on my knees.” The classmate’s pleas ceased, and Gwen had a vision in which she saw herself preaching before multitudes of Chinese people.

“From that moment on,” she says, “I loved the Chinese. Before that, I didn’t know anything about China; I didn’t even know a Chinese person, but suddenly I was just crazy about China. All I could think was that I had to get there—God wanted me in China!”

Within a week Gwen’s husband, David, received a call to China as well. After graduating, the couple attended the University of Toronto, where they studied the Chinese language.

When they were ready to embark on their mission, they applied for missionary status at full-gospel denominations but were turned down. They were told veteran missionaries would be the first to be returned to the mission field. Other denominations turned them down because they believed in the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Gwen and David decided to rely on God for their support. They sold their car and used the money to buy one airplane ticket to Shanghai. Money for the other ticket came unexpectedly from a church in Minnesota.

With just \$10 left over, one suitcase each, and their Bibles, 23-year-old Gwen arrived with her husband in Shanghai in 1947. "We had no backing, no promise of support, no money in the bank and no rich parents," says Gwen. "What we did have was the Lord God behind us, His call on our lives and tremendous faith."

What the couple didn't know then was that China would fall to the communists within the next two years. "We didn't realize how short the harvest would be, but God knew," she says. "He loves these nations."

**A HIGH PRICE TO PAY** Despite the hardships—including rat-infested housing, illness and loneliness—Gwen fell in love with the Chinese people and their culture. She and David ran a Bible school for Chinese students turned over to them by an Assemblies of God missionary.

When word arrived in 1949 that the communists were advancing toward them, the couple was told they needed to flee for their lives. "I prayed and asked God if He wanted us to stay and die as martyrs," Gwen says, "but God told us to leave."

They returned to Canada for a few years. During this time, Gwen says, she felt like a fish out of water. "I lay on my bed at night," she writes in her autobiography, *Unconditional Surrender*, "crying for the land and the people of my calling

whom I had left behind.”

When she and David heard that thousands of Chinese refugees were flooding into Taiwan and were open to the gospel, the couple rushed off to help. “There’s always an open window at a certain time,” Gwen says, “but it doesn’t stay open for very long.”

After ministering in Taiwan, the couple moved to Hong Kong, where their children—sons David, Danny and Tommy—were born. Gwen enjoyed her role as a missionary wife and mother and helped establish several area schools and churches.

But in 1963—after 16 years on the mission field—Gwen was ready for God to do a new work in her life. “I told God I needed more anointing on my life to do the job He had called me to do,” Gwen says. “I asked Him to give me a fast, and He led me to Daniel 2, where Daniel fasted for 21 days for the deliverance of Judah from the bondage of Babylon.”

After Gwen’s first 21-day fast—she had only fruit juice—God told her He would send her to the nations, she says. Gwen started out preaching close to home. Her oldest son, David, now 9, would bicycle into the marketplace and play his trumpet. After a good-size crowd had gathered he would invite them to come hear his mother preach.

There was a fresh anointing in her preaching, and Gwen was soon receiving ministry invitations from other cities, even other countries. She began making what she called “raids on nations.”

Despite her excitement, Gwen suffered from leaving her children behind. “I was often gone from one to three months at a time,” Gwen says. “I would be so lonely for them that it was like a knife in my heart. It was a great price to pay, to leave my three boys, but we had a servant and their father would be with them.”

Gwen was now preaching in large venues—camp meetings, conventions—and in countries such as India, Nigeria, Germany, Argentina, Russia and Finland. “The Holy Spirit was poured out in such a mighty way that I would just stand back amazed,” she says. “I knew it wasn’t me; it was the Holy Spirit taking over my life.”

**RECKLESS FOR GOD** One night after Gwen had finished ministering powerfully in a large Assemblies of God church in Buenos Aires, Argentina, she lay in her bed in a lonely hotel room, exhausted. The thought struck her: Lord, why do You use me? I’m just a farmer’s daughter from Canada. I’m far from perfect, and yet I have seen Your glory like a trail of fire following me everywhere.

Gwen heard God’s answer: “It’s because you are willing to do anything I ask you to do.”

“Is that all, Lord?” Gwen responded. “Then You could use anyone, any woman like myself?”

“Yes, My child, I could,” He said.

That night in 1966, Gwen prayed for God to raise up 10,000 women who would be totally surrendered to Him. She had no idea what she was praying for, but four years later the answer to her prayer came into fruition.

Gwen found herself back at home with her parents, who now lived in Chicago. She was suffering from typhoid fever, but her greatest anguish came from the fact that her marriage had fallen apart and her children had stayed in Hong Kong with their father.

“My heart was broken,” she says. “You can’t stay on the road and keep a marriage.” She also felt that her husband resented her anointing.

Gwen did the only thing she knew to do: She went on a 21-day

fast and prayed and waited on God. During that time God reminded her of her prayer in Argentina. "This time He told me there was an army of women out there, in the background, 'standing idle in the marketplace, whom no one had hired.' They were waiting to hear the call to go out and serve Him in the harvest fields of the world."

That prompted Gwen to start a group she called End-Time Handmaidens. It began with just her and a friend, Dorothy Buss, but eventually Gwen was preaching again, and she started sharing with audiences her vision for End-Time Handmaidens. Women responded in droves and wanted to join. The only requirement was that they too had to go on a 21-day fast.

"God had given me my anointing when I fasted a 'Daniel fast,' and I felt He would require neither more nor less of anyone else."

In 1973 Gwen married retired Air Force Lt. Col. James Shaw, who works alongside her and is vice president-treasurer of her ministry, which now includes men, teens and children and is called End-Time Handmaidens and Servants. Its Jasper, Arkansas, headquarters features a Bible school, publishing company and housing for workers.

Today Gwen speaks proudly of her sons. The youngest, Tommy, is a missionary in Hong Kong with his wife, Mannah. Danny, wife Robin and their children live in Canada. David, wife Susan, and their children live in Chicago.

"I just have to say, for whoever may be reading this article," Gwen says, "if God's calling is on your life, then God will make a way. When it's God's plan for your life then it's His obligation to support you. But you must be in the center of God's will or it won't work out. You can't move on assumption; you must move on the call and the will of God."