

1977

## Midwest China Oral History Interviews

Borghild Roe Syrdal

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BORGHILD ROE SYRDAL  
ORAL HISTORY ABSTRACT

EARLY LIFE: family background; education; called by the Mission Board of the United Lutheran Church, 1929.

CHINA EXPERIENCES: description of year spent at Peking Language School; description of 1930 mission conference on Kikungshan; initial impressions of Fancheng; Communist activity in the Fancheng area; brief history of the Chu Hao-jan family; description of the I Kwang Middle School; registering I Kwang with the Nationalist government after 1927; biographical information on Dora Wang; biographical information on Marie Anderson; travelling in China during the 1930s; work on the second edition of White Unto Harvest; excerpts from letters written while living in China.

INTERVIEWER: Sarah Refo Mason

DATES: 1-11-77; 1-18-77

PLACE: Northfield, Minnesota

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## INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Borghild Roe Syrdal in Northfield, Minnesota, on January 11, 1977. She was a missionary for the Lutheran United Mission from 1929 to 1936 in Hupeh and Honan. The interviewer is Sarah Mason and this is an interview conducted under the auspices of the China Oral History and Archives Project.

I: Can we start with your parents coming from Norway?

SYRDAL: My parents both came from the same valley in Norway--Surnadal, near Trondheim. Father, Lars Ingebrigt Rødv, came to the United States in 1880, and three years later sent for his childhood sweetheart, Ellen Krangness. They were married in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and settled in a small lumber town, Porters' Mills, near there. Father had learned to speak some English and was made manager of the lumber company store. A few years later, they moved to Stanley, Wisconsin, where there was a new saw mill and planing mill. Father was a businessman and managed the Northwestern Lumber Company's general store. He also became involved in farming, banking, and manufacturing. He was very active--very civic-minded--and served as mayor of the town and member of the county board of commissioners. He also served on several boards of the United Lutheran Church, the Board of Trustees of St. Olaf College, and boards of Lutheran hospitals in Eau Claire

and Chicago. We had a very happy home! I was the tenth of 11 children.

I: Was it a pretty religious home, then?

SYRDAL: We always said grace at mealtimes and prayers before going to bed. The whole family attended Sunday School and worship services, and we were active in the various church-connected organizations. On special holidays like Easter and Christmas, Father would conduct family devotions at the table. Mother had more to do with our religious training and it was she who saw to it that we learned our lessons for Sunday School and vacation Bible school.

I: Did you have devotions at home, then, regularly?

SYRDAL: No, we didn't. We may have had them privately, but only on special occasions, like at Christmas time and Easter. Then Father would conduct family devotions at the table. We always said grace at the table and learned our evening prayer.

I: I wondered when you mentioned your mother teaching you about religion what she included exactly.

SYRDAL: She knew so many hymns, and poetry. While she was working and while she was running the sewing machine, she would be singing. I remember, for instance, at Christmas-

time, while she was preparing the Christmas dinner, she heard the church bells start ringing at 5:30. She came, stood at the door, and listened. She didn't say anything, but I knew she was praying and thanking the Lord for sending the Saviour.

I: Was she interested in missions, or was your father interested?

SYRDAL: I think they both were. Many missionaries stayed at our home when they came to speak in Stanley, among them Sister Ingeborg Pederson and Pastor Hellestad. Articles about missions were read in the church papers and there were several mission books. I was especially impressed with one book: Sketches from Santalistan.

I: Did you think about being a missionary as a child?

SYRDAL: The idea of becoming a missionary grew upon me in my high school days. I joined the choir in church as soon as I was confirmed, and I remember one of my favorite anthems was Stainer's "Oh Dayspring." "Oh Dayspring! Oh Dayspring! Brightness of the Everlasting Light and Sun of Righteousness! Come and enlighten them that sit in darkness, Come! Come! Come and enlighten them that sit in darkness, Come! Come!" As I sang, the prayer came from my heart. Perhaps the Lord could use me some day to bring this Light to other lands?

Before I left home for college, I told Mother of my hope to become a missionary. One of the first things I did when I came to St. Olaf was to join the Student Volunteers Group.

I: Was that partly stimulated by the visiting missionaries in your home?

SYRDAL: Perhaps. I loved the Lord, and I wanted others to know Him.

I: That was part of your religious life?

SYRDAL: Yes, I think it was.

I: That's very interesting. In your teens you were already committed to this kind of work.

SYRDAL: I just felt that the Lord wanted me to do it. I expected to go to college for a couple of years and then maybe go to the Deaconess Hospital to become a deaconess nurse, but it didn't work out that way.

I: What about your other siblings? What interest, if any, did they have in missions?

SYRDAL: They were not especially interested in foreign or world mission, but none of them tried to discourage me from becoming a missionary. They were all faithful in supporting all branches of our church's work. They wrote to

us, prayed for us, and encouraged us in many ways.

I: So when you went to college, you did join the Student Volunteer Movement, right? Can you describe your involvement in the SVM--the kinds of meetings you had and if there was some special kind of stimulation that came to you?

SYRDAL: We met every Sunday morning at 8:00. We would read letters from missionaries, missionaries would come to speak to us, and we would pray for missionaries.

There was a home in Northfield for missionaries on furlough. It was a privilege to learn to know some of the missionaries who occupied that home while we were at St. Olaf. Among them were the Edward Soviks (Sr.), the Landahls, and the Daniel Nelson (Jr.) families.

I: So it was a very vital part of the community life. And that's where you met your husband-to-be. Is that right?

SYRDAL: We met in a freshman Norwegian class. Ole Rølvaag (the famous author) was our teacher.

I: After St. Olaf, you didn't marry right away, did you?

SYRDAL: No, I taught English and music in the high school in my home town, Stanley, Wisconsin.

I: So, you have always taught music, then, too, in China and in Stanley?

SYRDAL: Yes. I didn't have a music major in college, but I had been the organist and choir director my last two years of high school. Our church had a pipe organ, and nobody then in town played. So I went to Eau Claire to take lessons. That was a good start. At St. Olaf, I had lessons in voice, organ, and piano, and classes in harmony and choir conducting under F. Melius Christiansen. I sang with the St. Olaf Choir for four years.

I: What happened next in your procession towards China?

SYRDAL: I wrote to the mission board of the United Lutheran Church and suggested that since they needed teachers I might go to China while Rolf was finishing his seminary course.

I: This is when you were teaching?

SYRDAL: No. It was my senior year in college. I had an interview with the mission board, but they thought I should wait. I had a letter from Dr. J.R. Birkelund saying they felt it would be wisest if I were to wait until Rolf had completed his seminary work. All four years of college we both planned on going into the mission field. We didn't become engaged, though, before our senior year. When Rolf was a senior at the sem, he received an official call. This was in 1927. He accepted, and we had our physical exams and passed; but then the missionaries had to come



home because of the Nationalist uprising in China. Rolf then accepted a call to Madelia, Minnesota, with the understanding that "when China opened up" and "things were settled," we would leave. The mission board notified us in 1929 that we could go. So Rolf resigned and we left.

I: How was the call worded? Were both of you called to positions in the field?

SYRDAL: The official call was extended only to my husband Rolf. It was simply taken for granted that the wives of the missionaries would do everything they could to help in the work. Perhaps, in most cases, their contribution would be in demonstrating that a Christian home was a happy, hospitable place. Wives who had nurses' training often ministered both to Chinese and to fellow missionaries; teachers taught classes in the elementary, middle, or Bible school and in special courses for older women. With my background, I was asked to teach music (group singing, private piano and organ lessons) and English in the schools in Fancheng, Sinyang, and Hsüchang. I never thought of being paid for these things. There was reward in seeing pupils enjoy their lessons and make progress. Some of the other wives had children who needed them at home; others, like Mrs. Skinsnes (wife of Dr. C.C. Skinsnes) cared for missionaries who were sick or convalescing or having babies. Some patients would be kept in her home for weeks. I spent

hours in editing and proof-reading and typing for my husband who edited Gleanings and White Unto Harvest and wrote articles for the church papers.

I: So then plans did come through in 1929. I wish you could describe your trip out and your first impressions of China. It must have been very exciting.

SYRDAL: We traveled alone, but we met two young, new Lutheran missionaries from the ULC on our boat, the President Harrison. We arrived in Shanghai after a three-week journey and stayed at the missionary home there for a day while we got tickets to go by train to Peking. Things were very unsettled yet and at every station there were troops of soldiers and crowds of people. We wondered whether we would get through to Peking, but had no difficulty.

I: You were on your way to Peking for language school?

SYRDAL: For language school. Our mission had started only 20 years earlier. Those pioneer missionaries came to China--many of them with families--and they had no adequate opportunity for studying the language. They were plunged right into the work. These older missionaries were the ones who insisted that we get two years of language study, one at the excellent language school in Peking, and then one year at the mission station.

I: With a private teacher, then?

SYRDAL: With a private teacher. Of course, that year in Peking was marvelous!

I: Before we get on to Peking, could you explain just a little bit about the political situation in China? What did you know before you arrived in China?

SYRDAL: Very little. We had known of the political unrest through the years: The Boxer Uprising, the overthrow of the Manchus and establishment of the Republic in 1911, the Nationalist uprising in 1927 with the Kuomintang, the disturbances and struggles caused by robber bands and feuding warlords, etc. We had a good introduction to Chinese history and Chinese culture the year we were in language school in Peking.

When we arrived in China, things were still unsettled. The Nationalists had come up from Canton and had taken Hankow and Nanking, and there had been a good deal of plundering and quite a bit of anti-foreign feeling. And there were warlords. One of the speakers at our Student Volunteer group had told us about the robber bands.

I: So there was a lot of disruption and different groups of soldiers wandering around? Things were precarious, I take it?

SYRDAL: We didn't worry about anything.

I: It's always amazing how missionaries survived through all this. You weren't very anxious about it.

SYRDAL: We didn't bring much with us. We were ready to camp, so that we would be ready to flee, if necessary, at any time.

I: That's an interesting thing. How do you account for this? Among all the missionaries there just seemed to be a kind of optimistic view that they would get through. Do you ascribe this to your religious faith or kind of a support of community of missionaries or how do you explain that?

SYRDAL: Both, I think. We both felt so definitely that the Lord wanted us to be in China to tell the story of the gospel and to teach. He would take care of His own. Whatever happened, He would be with us.

I: So your religious faith really held you up in China. So then you got to Peking and I imagine that was an interesting life for a year there in that magnificent city.

SYRDAL: It was. There was a beautiful school--very good system of teaching with excellent Chinese teachers. Peking is a fabulous city. We had some time for sightseeing and shopping, trying out the Chinese that we had learned.

I: Did you live right there at the language school?

SYRDAL: Yes, we had two rooms in a dormitory.

I: So you lived with a lot of other new missionaries?

SYRDAL: Yes, there were students there from many denominations and from several nations and many parts of the United States. In our group, we Lutherans were from Denmark, Norway, Finland and Dr. Viola Fischer and Clara Sullivan from the U.S. Then there were others, too, that went on many of these tours of shopping and sightseeing with us: Dorothy Clauson, a Presbyterian from New York; Pearl McCain, a Methodist from Kentucky; Jean Craig, a Baptist from Georgia. There were students from the consular service, too, among them Claude Russ who had just come to China and lived on the campus of the language school. We were with him and his wife a great deal. And there were students from Scotland, England, Wales, Canada, Australia and Germany. Quite a cosmopolitan group!!

I: The Lutherans congregated from Scandinavia and America, then. Did you feel one group somehow--more than with other Americans of other denominations or did it just happen?

SYRDAL: We usually went to church together with the other Lutherans.

I: Was there a Lutheran service there?

SYRDAL: No, there wasn't, but there was a Union Church,

and we were not satisfied at all with the message that was delivered there. The church was connected with the Peking Union Medical College. The Chinese pastor had just gotten his doctor's degree at Columbia and he spoke of the "obnoxious piety" of those who believed as we did. "Intelligent people no longer believed in good and evil spirits. They knew about beneficial and harmful atoms and molecules!" We attended services in the German Legation quite often. Then there was a couple from Norway living in the Methodist mission compound while he was translating the New Testament into Tibetan. They were a wonderful couple. They would often call me up and say, "Can you bring your group down tomorrow afternoon (Sunday afternoon) and we'll have some coffee and some singing?" We would sing for about two hours. Then there would be refreshments. Pastor and Mrs. Sorenson had been with the China Inland Mission in Tibet.

I: Did quite a few Norwegians belong to the China Inland Mission?

SYRDAL: The Sorensens were the only ones we knew. After we completed language school, we went to Kikungshan, the mountain. Our mission had their conference there that summer of 1930. Ordinarily we would have simply taken the trip on the Peking-Hankow Railway down to our field, but two warlords were fighting. They had broken the railway, so we had to go by boat. We traveled by train to Tientsin, then with a fine German liner (Nord D. Lloyd) down to Shang-

hai; and then a riverboat from Shanghai up the Yangtze to Hankow. It was a roundabout way. It shows how things were not settled.

At the mission conference, it was decided we should be stationed at Fancheng in the West Field--200 miles or so west of the railroad. Because there was a Communized area between the railway and Fancheng, it was very uncertain whether we would be able to get there. We were urged to wait until Rev. and Mrs. Lars Hompland returned from the United States so we could travel with them.

I: During the mission conference, did everyone have an equal voice in deciding mission policy, or was there a hierarchy in this decision-making?

SYRDAL: They had a superintendent of the mission, but it was really the older missionaries who made the decision.

I: So there was a respect for their opinion.

SYRDAL: Yes. There was quite a bit of discussion.

I: What was the contribution of the women missionaries in the decision-making process at these conferences?

SYRDAL: The wives of missionaries attended the mission conference meetings where most decisions were made, but had no vote and very rarely took part in any discussion.

Some of the single lady missionaries (e.g., those who were alone "manning" some of the mission stations those years

we were in China, '29-'36) were quite bold in expressing their opinions and in demanding action on problems in which they were interested--and well-informed. I remember Dr. Skinsnes, who was presiding over a heated argument as to whether I Kwang should be registered with the National government, finally asking, "Miss Marie Anderson, what do you think should be done about this?" She was seldom heard to voice an opinion at a conference meeting, but she was highly respected and loved.

We knew the missionaries along the railroad--the Daniel Nelsons and the Soviks. We didn't know the workers on the West Field. There were single ladies out there and they were "holding the fort" and had opened up things after the uprising. (Some people called it "The Storm.") It was the taking over of this area by the Kuomintang.

One of the single ladies, Olive Hodnefield, had a school for girls. We cooperated with the Swedish Covenant mission in a hospital across the river at Siangyang. Sister Birgitta of our mission was there at the hospital. There had been a boys' school before 1927 that hadn't been reopened before we came.

I: How were you received when you arrived in Fancheng?  
What was the mood at this time?

SYRDAL: We were warmly welcomed when we arrived in Fancheng in the fall of 1930. Two single lady missionaries, Olive Hodnefield and Therese Peterson, had been the only



foreigners since they had returned there a year earlier. (All the foreigners had been forced to leave in 1927 at the time of the Nationalist turnover. The mission buildings had been occupied by soldiers.) These ladies were glad to see us!

The Chinese Christians also were happy to have us come. Many of the evangelists from outlying mission stations had taken refuge and were living in Fancheng because of the unsettled conditions--raids by robbers and/or the Communists on their "Long March" north. These disturbances continued while we were there. Buses were held up and passengers taken for ransom, villages within a few miles of Fancheng were burned, and there was frequent shooting, robbing, raping, and taking people prisoners. The supplies we had shipped from Hankow, up the Han River, the first part of September did not arrive in Fancheng until early December because the river traffic could not pass safely through territory held by the Communists and/or robbers.

I: Did you work with the girls' school, or were you still getting your feet on the ground?

SYRDAL: It was mostly getting settled. Soldiers had lived in the house we moved into. We came to Fancheng after the schools had started. I taught music again. The teachers wanted to learn how to play the piano. Miss Hodnefield had a piano--we didn't. We didn't have much music. There was

a little folding organ that had been left by previous missionaries and after a month or two we could play on that. They had had schools and thriving work before '27.

I: About the music. I am interested to see how western music fit in with the Chinese music. I think from what I have always heard, the Chinese students were usually eager to learn western music. Was that true?

SYRDAL: Yes, it was true.

I: Was there any incorporation of traditional music, or did the students want such incorporation?

SYRDAL: I didn't do as much work with the music in Fancheng as I did later when we moved to Sinyang.

I: But they hadn't done group singing, had they?

SYRDAL: They had sung in church services and in the schools. The first time we went to a Lutheran meeting, we had just come from the Peking Language School. We had our Chinese hymnbooks and we found a hymn that was announced, but we couldn't figure out what the melody was because everybody was singing a different tune.

I: So it was awfully hard for Chinese to sing in western style?

SYRDAL: Yes, it was the "fa", half tone, and "ti", half

tone they had most difficulty with--tones that were missing in their scale, but anybody could learn to sing something with only the five tones of the pentatonic scale. Bliss Wiant, a professor at Yenching, had given a lot of work, traveling through China, selecting native tunes he thought could be used.

I: Oh, that's quite an undertaking.

SYRDAL: At Peking, we were surprised when we heard a group of students from Yenching University walking behind us singing the "Hallelujah Chorus" from The Messiah. We didn't expect anything like that in China. Later in Sinyang the girls' choir at I Kwang at Eastertime wanted to learn the "Hallelujah Chorus." They were willing to practice for hours to learn it.

I: I suppose this was all a part of the new, modern style of living and also they enjoyed it very much--the group singing. That's an interesting aspect, I think, because later the Nationalists and then even the Communists took over this group singing as a way of getting a group together.

SYRDAL: Of course, the Chinese had chants previously. The peddlers in Peking and the boatmen on the rivers and the soldiers had their certain chants. When we were in Hankow, we heard a band in a funeral procession going down the street playing western songs like "Marching Through Georgia."

I: Of course, often in the adaptation of western things, it became ludicrous. That's fairly inevitable, I guess. That's very interesting. I think the Y did an awful lot with singing, too.

How long were you in Fancheng?

SYRDAL: After two years (Sept. '30-Sept. '32) we were stationed in Sinyang. Rolf was to be principal of the Bible school.

I: Before we get to Sinyang, would you comment more on the Communists coming into the Fancheng area?

SYRDAL: Yes. They came just across the Han River and they took some of the missionaries of the Covenant mission captive.

I: Took some of them? Kidnapped them? So then did all of your mission leave?

SYRDAL: We left early. We were going to the mountain for the conference and we left earlier than we had planned because of the conditions.

I: Did they keep the Swedish Covenant missionaries a long time? Or did they get released?

SYRDAL: They were kept for several months and taken along on their Communist march north. This kind of thing had happened before with Bert Nelson. The first summer that we were at Kikungshan (1930) Bert lived with us. We lived in the old Daniel Nelson home, while we were waiting for

the Homplands to come. Bert Nelson lived with us in his old home. He left for his station at Kwangshan, and a week or two later, the Communists took him.

I: And he never returned?

SYRDAL: No. K.N. Tvedt who was captured at the same time was eventually released, but not Bert. The group made continual demands for ransom and medicine that were delivered, but their promises for his release were not kept.

I: So, it was a little safer over at Sinyang, or not much?

SYRDAL: Sinyang was on the railway. But there were rumors there all the time. Our home was outside the city wall. One night, because we heard that there was a band of Communists within three li (one mile), we and the Harold Martinsons went to sleep in the chapel inside the city wall.

I: Were you pretty anxious about all this? Or was it again your faith that helped you to keep going?

SYRDAL: I wasn't worried.

I: You didn't have any children yet at this point.

SYRDAL: No. Only one child, Ellen, was born in China, in 1935.

I: During your time at Sinyang, can you tell a little

about I Kwang Middle School and what was happening there-- what kind of girls came there, where they came from?

SYRDAL: That whole story of I Kwang is thrilling. When we came down from Peking in 1930, Dr. C.C. Skinsnes took us over to the buildings that had been built for the girls' school. They were filled with soldiers. Then two of the Chinese teachers, Wang Hsueh-chen and Chu Kuei-chih, managed, with the help of Dr. Skinsnes and some officials, to take the school buildings back from the soldiers who were occupying it. These two teachers took it over while we were up in Fancheng. So when we came to Sinyang, classes had started and then I was asked to teach English and music.

I: How were these two Chinese teachers able to get the school back from the soldiers?

SYRDAL: Wang Hsueh-chen (Dora Wang) and Chu Kuei-chih, both graduates of the Lutheran School for Girls that Marie Anderson had started in Sinyang, felt that the Lord wanted them to reopen the school after it had been closed during the Nationalist uprising. There were difficulties to overcome, but they trusted in God. They had great support from Dr. C.C. Skinsnes. He was greatly respected. The commander of the troops occupying the buildings was taken seriously ill. He was successfully treated by Dr. Skinsnes, and out of thankfulness for the help he had received, he did all in his power to get the soldiers out. After six weeks the buildings were vacated.

I: The girls that came there--were they from wealthier classes, or mixed?

SYRDAL: Many from congregations in towns nearby were supported by missionaries. Some were pastors' children from the Augustana mission who came from Hsuchang and from Kaifeng. Chu Hsin-sheng, the daughter of Chu Hao-jan, who was president of the Lutheran Church of China, was one of my pupils--for three years. She had gone to school in Shanghai and knew more English than the others in the class. She was a brilliant girl. She is a doctor and she is still in China in Hankow.

I: Could you provide us with some more background on the Chu family?

SYRDAL: Pastor Chu Hao-jan was the first Chinese president of the Lutheran Church in China. He also served as pastor of a Lutheran congregation in Shanghai. He and his wife (sister of Dora Wang) had a large family. Their home had been in Sinyang, when he served the congregation there in the time of Rev. Daniel Nelson, Sr. In the early '30s Mrs. Chu and the younger children returned to Sinyang--and the children attended school at I Kwang. Several in the lower middle school were in my assembly singing class. Only Hsin-sheng was in my English classes in the senior middle school. She had had more opportunity to learn English

(while in Shanghai) than the other girls. She had qualities of leadership, but was not overbearing. She taught at I Kwang at least one year after graduating, but later must have gone to medical school and become a physician and married a doctor. She and the younger children stayed with the parents when the Communists took control of Mainland China. An older sister (a doctor) and several older brothers went to Hong Kong and the United States. Dr. Sheila Chu, who practices in Alabama, and her family came to St. Paul in the early '50s to visit her aunt, Dora Wang, who was in a hospital following a stroke. Rev. Daniel Chu had written to us several times; he is a pastor of the LCA in Washington. He has told us that his sister Hsin-sheng (my former pupil) is now living in Hankow. After many years there was no communication between them and their relatives on the Mainland.

Pastor Chu Hao-jan was an excellent preacher and fine leader. A "big" man in more than one sense of the word. When we were transferred to Hsuchang in the summer of 1935, Pastor Chu Hao-jan came to our home on Kikungshan. After admiring our three-month-old baby, he asked if I would be a member of the I Kwang Middle School Board. When we came through Shanghai on our way home for furlough in 1936, Pastor and Mrs. Chu hosted a farewell feast for us at a restaurant. We thanked them and said goodbye, not expecting to see them again until we returned to China after furlough. But early next morning, when we came to the dock to board



our ship, there they were with a huge basket of flowers for us! They asked us to bring their greetings and thanks to the Mother Church (mu-hui) in America for sending the Gospel to China. They stood on the dock, waving until our boat left.

I: Were quite a large number of them from Christian families?

SYRDAL: Almost all of those I had were from Christian families.

I: So they would pay a small tuition. . .

SYRDAL: Some of the congregations paid the tuition and some of the missionaries paid for the tuition and books and would help girls. Missionaries would sometimes help those girls who showed promise.

I: Was it a low tuition compared to government schools?

SYRDAL: I have no idea about that.

I: Did many of these then become trained to be evangelists?

SYRDAL: The Bible School trained more of them to become evangelists. Many of these girls became teachers in primary schools which the mission conducted. Three of the girls that I had in senior high were teaching before we left China at I Kwang.

I: Did they go somewhere for higher education?

SYRDAL: They hadn't. Dora Wang, the principal, had studied at Yenching University in Peking earlier and had received a master's degree at Shantung Christian University. The purpose of the school was to provide a good education. It was a registered school. By the time we left China there were over 800 students, and it was recognized by the government and respected. It was at first just a girls' school, but after about two years they accepted boys, too. The number of boys increased rapidly so they were transferred to the buildings at West Gate that had been a high school for the boys previous to the trouble in 1927.

I: After 1927, how did the school handle the question of registration?

SYRDAL: The question of government registration was a difficult one. Graduates of non-registered schools could not enter colleges or universities. Government regulations forbade religious instruction in registered schools, except outside the curriculum. After long and heated discussions, both the Chinese Synod and the missionary conference decided to continue to support I Kwang, even though registered, if the government would waive certain requirements that would make it impossible to conduct a Christian school. Miss Wang promised to put religion on the curriculum and to notify the Board of Education at the Honan Provincial

Government that such instruction was being given and that devotional exercises, prayer meetings and similar gatherings would also be promoted.

While I was still teaching there, in the fall of 1934 I Kwang was recognized by the provincial government because of the good showing her students had made in the government exams the previous spring. The school was given \$1000.00. One week in December, students and teachers from all the other middle schools in the city of Sinyang came to visit and observe.

I: What led these two Chinese teachers to undertake the getting rid of the soldiers?

SYRDAL: They thought they were doing the Lord's will. He would undertake for them. And they were doing it for Marie Anderson, who had been so actively involved in the earlier years of the school.

I: She was an outstanding person, wasn't she? So they had been pupils of hers? Was she still around?

SYRDAL: Yes, but she wasn't in school much. She was in evangelistic work. Marie Anderson made quite an impact on people. As I mentioned, at conference sometimes there were differences of opinion, arguments as to whether to register the schools with the government or not. In order

to register with the government, they had to bow in front of Sun Yat-sen's picture and they had to give up the right to have classes in religion and all those things. There would be these heated arguments. Then finally, Dr. Skinsnes would say, "Miss Anderson, what do you think?" She was little and old, but she would give her opinion. I can't remember what she said about registration, but she quieted things down, and the high schools were registered. If the high schools were not registered, the diplomas were not recognized.

I: Could you give us a description of your involvement at I Kwang? What did you teach?

SYRDAL: I taught the two upper classes in English five days a week, in the forenoon. The school had been reopened only the year before we came to Sinyang in 1932. I had the junior and senior middle school pupils in assembly singing.

I Kwang was outside the city wall between East Gate and North Gate. Our home was outside South Gate, so we lived a little over a mile from the school. I didn't have much contact with the students and teachers outside of the class time. The texts we used were those that were there when I came. Not the kind I might have chosen. There was too much grammar--diagramming sentences, all about gerunds, participles, etc. I was not familiar with better texts

for teaching English as a second language, and we moved away from Sinyang in 1935, so I got along with what was there and prepared some supplementary material.

I: Where did you go from Sinyang?

SYRDAL: We moved to Hsuchang in the fall of 1935.

I: What precipitated that change?

SYRDAL: The mission decided to run the men's and the women's Bible schools with those of the Swedish Augustana Mission. The combined women's school was to be at Sinyang and the combined men's was to be at Hsuchang. So we moved there so that Rolf could teach at the Bible School. And I once again taught music in the Bible School and the Middle School there.

We were in Hsuchang one year and then came home on our regular furlough. We had been in China for seven years. It was time for a one-year furlough.

I: And did you expect to go back afterwards?

SYRDAL: Yes, we left everything. We thought we were going home for only one year. However, in the summer of 1936, after we had come home to the U.S., the Conference in China decided that Rolf should be the professor of Old Testament at Luther Theological Seminary in Shekow. While we were on furlough, Rolf began work on his doctorate. He thought he might as well be prepared further because the

Chinese felt it was important for teachers to have degrees.

I: This is the second interview with Mrs. Syrdal on January 19, 1977. We are going to begin by talking more about I Kwang Girls' School in Sinyang. Why don't you describe what you first saw when you came to Sinyang and saw it.

SYRDAL: Dr. Skinsnes took us on a tour of the mission work. We had just been in Peking for language study that first year. When he took us to the East Gate where the Lena Dahl Middle School (I Kwang) buildings were, they were occupied by soldiers. Many of the soldiers were sick or wounded, and many of them were rather ugly and not too happy to see us foreigners. We went to look at the buildings and hoped that someday it could be used again as a mission school. It was difficult to get these soldiers out.

As I mentioned last time, two girl graduates of the school felt the call to reopen that school. Dora Wang and Chu Kuei-chih somehow got the soldiers out and started classes in 1931. Dr. Skinsnes had a great deal of influence with the authorities in Sinyang--everybody respected him--and he was of great help to those teachers.

Dr. Skinsnes was really famous. People came to him from all over. When generals or other officers were sick, they would send their truck or car to get Dr. Skinsnes

out to examine and treat them.

I: After the school was re-opened, then Dora Wang became principal?

SYRDAL: Yes. We went to Sinyang in the fall of '32 and were there until the fall of '35. When I started teaching, there were many students in the grades. In the senior high, the upper middle school, there were only six girls in the second year class and about eight in the first year.

I: Would you provide us with more about Dora Wang?

SYRDAL: Dora Wang was the principal of I Kwang until 1938, when our missions stations in Sinyang fell into Japanese hands. Then many of the teachers and students fled into Free China. Miss Wang and two other teachers went to Shansi Province. The story of their flight is a miracle. They finally came to Chengtu and Chungking. While they were waiting at Chengtu, a telegram came from Madame Chiang Kai-shek asking Miss Wang to come to Chungking as inspector of the secondary school which would be opened to the war refugees. Thus, she reached Chungking at the very time she was needed. She was the principal of a high school, too. When the war was over, it again became possible to return to Sinyang in 1946.

I: And then did she reopen the school?

SYRDAL: Chu Kuei-chih had opened a primary school in the

I Kwang buildings in the spring of 1946. That fall, Dora Wang returned and the high school was opened. The buildings again were almost empty shells--nothing remained except one clock. She received some wonderful offers of teaching in government schools, but she stayed with I Kwang until the Communists took over the school in 1949. That year she came to the U.S. and did post-graduate work at the U of Minnesota, in education, getting her master's degree. The teachers at the U, including Dr. Marcia Edwards, admired her and spoke highly of her. She spoke at the national W.M.F. convention in Minneapolis (although she wasn't too successful as a speaker in English) and received an honorary doctor's degree from Augustana College in Sioux Falls.

She was determined to earn a doctor's degree to be prepared to be a leader in establishing a Lutheran college in China. She went to Columbia U. in New York but after only a couple months of study, she suffered a stroke and was hospitalized. She was brought back to Minnesota where she suffered another stroke and died in the winter of 1954. She is buried in Hillside Cemetery in Minneapolis. As a teacher and administrator, she was exceptionally fine.

I: What was the division of labor between the missionaries and the Chinese pastors? Did the Chinese pastors do most of the preaching then?

SYRDAL: Yes, Wu Ying was our pastor in Sinyang and he



did most of the preaching. Harold Martinson was at the station at that time. He would preach occasionally, but, as a rule, he was out evangelizing in the countryside.

I: But the Chinese pastors then, probably wouldn't go out with evangelism.

SYRDAL: Occasionally, but the congregation had a chapel in the inner city, too. The church was outside South Gate. Pastor Wu and his family lived at the chapel in the central city. He was active in many things. He was president of our Lutheran United Mission, and on the board of I Kwang. He was busy. A very dedicated man!

I: At this time, in the early 1930s, was there a separate Chinese Christian church structure and a missionary structure, or was it all one?

SYRDAL: The missionaries would meet in conference and they would decide what institutions and which branches of the work to support and what not to support. The Chinese Synod had its own officers and organization. Peng Fu was the president of the whole Lutheran Church of China.

I: So there was a Chinese head of the church and then there was a missionary superintendent whom the missionaries would answer to.

SYRDAL: That's right. Rev. Landahl had been superintendent. When he was on furlough, Dr. Skinsnes was elected superintendent.

I: But you weren't so much aware of separate organizations.

SYRDAL: No, the missionary organization was primarily administrative. It facilitated contact between the Home Board and the Chinese Church.

I: What kind of social interaction was there between the missionaries and the Chinese Christians?

SYRDAL: There were pleasant parties--birthdays, welcome and farewell feasts. We had many callers on New Year's Day. Visitors started coming about 8:30 in the morning. Among them were the tinsmith, the milkman, the tailor and some merchants from the town.

I: Were they Christians?

SYRDAL: No, not all of them. But because they had worked for us, they came to call on us. And then the girls and the teachers! When we had our baby, the girls, my former students, would stop on their way to church to see the baby and see how she was progressing.

Of course, at Christmastime, the carolers would come groups of students from the Bible school, from I Kwang and from the orphanage--and the nurses from the hospital--

all of them loved caroling! Carolers would come practically all night long--one group after the other. (One missionary asked us, "And did every group sing 'Silent Night'?")

I: What kind of carols did they sing?

SYRDAL: The same kind that we do, only they were sung in Chinese.

I: I see. And were some of them Norwegian carols, too?

SYRDAL: They had been translated. And they liked them.

I: Can you tell me about your teaching: any problems or some of the satisfying kinds of things that happened?

SYRDAL: Well, I think I could do a better job of teaching English as a second language now than I could then. At the time I was new and the textbooks were really not made to teach a language. But the students did achieve some proficiency. Many people went on to college. There wasn't much Christian literature then. There was more than there was when the mission started. Some of the students later became involved in revising translations for the Lutheran Board of Publication and the Lutheran bookstore. Much of the early translation was not very satisfactory. The first missionaries didn't have the opportunity of language study at good language schools. Even now some of our hymns--the translations from the German and the Norwegian--are not

very excellent.

I: Did they translate, then, the liturgy of the Lutheran service?

SYRDAL: Yes.

I: What was the general policy on trying to adapt Christian services to Chinese? I'm interested in how the Lutherans, as a confessional church, would want to adapt their beliefs to the Chinese culture.

SYRDAL: We had to keep the basic theology and the basic message, but we didn't force our customs on them. Take, for instance, the weddings. They had had their heathen weddings. To get a wedding service, we tried to make it Christian and at the same time keep whatever customs they had that were not anti-Christian. The Chinese women just love to wear a white wedding veil. They wore the Chinese gown, but they wanted the western-type veil. They selected what they wanted of what we offered them. In the music, too.

I: What did the men wear?

SYRDAL: It was usually a Chinese gown. The men often wore a red artificial peony. Some of the bridegrooms wore white gloves and western-type shoes for the occasion.

I: What about Marie Anderson? Can you give a little biographical information about her? So many people have mentioned her.

SYRDAL: Marie Anderson was an exceptional woman. She came to China in 1897. She was born in 1870 in Norway. When she was 18 years old (1888), she came to America, to an aunt in South Dakota. She attended Augustana College for four years and she also studied later at the Moody Bible Institute and the Lutheran Bible Institute.

I: Several people have mentioned training at Moody. But it wasn't a Lutheran school.

SYRDAL: There was no Lutheran Bible school then in the U.S. Our seminaries trained only men students. Moody was considered an acceptable place. I don't know whether the mission board or the church officials recommended or sent anybody there, but people did go there.

When Miss Anderson came to Hankow in 1897, she had to start learning Chinese. In a pamphlet, Mrs. Sovik wrote that "while most modern missionaries have carried their study of the language with expert teachers, Miss Anderson's problem was how best to keep her teacher awake. She tried to pry out of him whatever knowledge she could." Only a little over a year after our pioneer missionaries had come to Hankow, there were 16 baptized. They were adults. The mission conference commissioned Marie Anderson

to start a school for girls in Hankow. But then came the Boxer Uprising. When she first went to China, she went out under the China Mission Society of America.

I: Was that Lutheran?

SYRDAL: Yes. While she was in South Dakota, she had a friend who had some copies of Kina Missioneren, that was a publication of the China Mission Society. There she read that Olivia Hermanson and Olive Hodnefield had been called to go to China and she decided that she would go, too. It was while living with her aunt that she felt definitely that the Lord willed that she go. When she and the Daniel Nelson family came to Sinyang in 1901, after the Boxer Rebellion, there were no Christians there. The missionaries were looked on with suspicion. She started the girls' school and there were all kinds of rumors of what she did to these girls. There was really opposition to begin with.

In the beginning they lacked teachers--there weren't any educated Chinese women. There were few textbooks; there was a lack of money. She had her problems. But the development of the Sinyang Girls' School is a monument to the faith of Marie Anderson. The teachers' great reward was to see lives transformed--lives like that of Dora Wang Hsueh-chang and Chu Kuei-chih.

I: I was wondering whether there must be some direct influence of single missionaries such as Marie Anderson on the single Chinese women such as Dora Wang. There wouldn't be a single woman in the old traditional China unless there was a widow. I remember from my own childhood that there were very outstanding Chinese women who were principals of the girls' school or who were teachers. I suppose that just started with the missionaries. I wondered how they fit in with their own families.

SYRDAL: Many Chinese girls had become quite independent, especially after the Nationalist uprising of 1927.

I: What about our other topic about traveling in China in the 1930s? Do you want to tackle that one?

SYRDAL: When we came to China in 1929, everything was so disrupted. Our first train trip was from Shanghai to Peking.

I: That would be interesting--your first impressions.

SYRDAL: We were extravagant enough to go first class. Going second class, I would have been in a compartment with two Chinese women, and Rolf in another compartment with three men. That would be all right after we knew the language and the people. The train service at that point was so uncertain that we thought we should be together. Shortly after the train started, we heard

someone say, "Ticket." We looked up and saw not one conductor but two conductors and five porters waiting for us to show our tickets. There were three other white men on that trip. I had the distinction of being the only white lady on the train of 15 cars from Shanghai to Peking. It was a 50-hour ride. We discovered how it felt to be strangers in a strange land. Whenever we stopped at stations on the way, everyone would stare at us. Little boys would call their companions to come to look and they would point at us and laugh.

I: What was your reaction when you first came to China? Did it alarm you at all?

SYRDAL: We knew that we were the foreigners. Before we came to our mission station, we had been on the mountain. This is from a letter I wrote in October in 1930. "To get from Kikungshan, where we spent the hottest part of the summer, to Fancheng, where we were stationed, we had to go partly by rail and partly by bus. We made the trip of approximately 220 miles in a little less than three days. When we started out, we didn't know whether it would take us two days or two weeks. Some of our friends had been on the road two weeks due to muddy roads and broken-down buses. We traveled with Rev. and Mrs. Hompland, their two little girls (Ruth and Ragna), and Cho Ssu-fu, our Chinese servant.

"Monday night about 11:00 we started walking down



the mountain by lantern light to the railroad station at Sintien, but the train didn't come until the next afternoon at five! By 9:00 we had covered the 60 miles to Huayuan where we got off and spent our first night in a Chinese inn. We slept well even though the white-washed walls were of mud, and the roof of straw, and though there was some coal, scraps of paper and a good deal of dust in the corners. We had our own camp cots with bedding so we were not molested as we might have been had we used the wooden boards that were there.

"Before dawn we got up and walked a mile or so out to the bus station where we were fortunate enough to charter a small bus for our group. Perhaps I had better explain that the 'bus' was an old half-ton truck with board seats running lengthwise on either side. Most of our baggage was tied on the outside of the truck. Funny-looking baggage, too! No handsome Stanley-made trunks (we left those in Hankow), but rolls of bedding wrapped in heavy oiled cloth, large baskets that held all sorts of awkward things such as wash basins, umbrellas, sun helmets, etc. The weather was glorious and we came right along, so we didn't mind the bumps--very much!

"A few incidents reminded us that we were traveling through bandit-ridden territory. Once when we saw a column of men marching toward us, the driver stopped and didn't go on until he was assured that they were newly-recruited soldiers and not bandits. In one village he

suddenly stepped on the gas and 'tore' through the street, scattering in all directions the people, pigs, and chickens that happened to be in the street. Afterwards we learned that robber bands occupied that village and had held up many busses there, robbing some of the passengers and taking others off for ransom.

"It was good to reach Fancheng, a city of about 70,000 people situated on the Han River about three hundred miles northwest of Hankow. It has cobble-stone streets so it is cleaner than some Chinese cities we have seen. From our upstairs windows, we can look out over the lovely river with its quaint Chinese boats and see the picturesque city wall of the old city of Siangyang on the other side.

"Starting housekeeping was quite a problem because our boxes with kitchen utensils, a bed, groceries and a few other household things shipped by boat from Hankow the first of September did not reach Fancheng until the last of November. There are hundreds of robbers along the river so we were not sure we would ever get our things."

When we first came out, train service was terribly disrupted. By the time we came home, in 1936, we could depend on the express train coming at the regular time; we could know exactly when we were to arrive.

I: How do you account for that difference?

SYRDAL: The government under Chiang Kai-shek has been criticized. We were prejudiced against him, too. During those six years in China, we were amazed at what he and the Nationalists accomplished. He was constantly having to fight the robber bands and the Communist bands. The transportation on the railroad lines where we were was improved just wonderfully. The nurses' program and the school where I taught--they had standards and regulations. By 1936 the schools were improved. The railroads were improved; there was a reforestation program. We marveled at what Chiang Kai-shek's government had accomplished in those years.

I: You mentioned that you were prejudiced against Chiang when you came. Is that what you heard from other missionaries?

SYRDAL: When we went to language school, the city had been called Peking when it was the northern capital. Our Chinese teachers lived there and wanted the capital to remain there. Chiang Kai-shek had moved the capital to Nanking--the southern capital. Our language teachers would somehow get this across to us that it was a pity that Chiang Kai-shek had moved the capital away from Peking, which was then called Peiping.

I: You also mentioned that you had more information on your first journey to Fancheng.

SYRDAL: This is a letter which covers that journey:

"In the fall of 1930, while we waited for the Homplands (seasoned missionaries) to come from America so we could travel with them through the bandit-ridden district west of the Peking-Hankow Railway, nearly 200 miles, to Fancheng, we accepted the invitations of missionaries in Kioshan, Suiping, and Sinyang, along the railway to visit their homes and see the mission work in those places. Suiping is a walled city and the railroad station is out in the country. When we were to leave there for Sinyang, we would put our baggage on a wheelbarrow and start out as soon as the city gate opened (a man pushed the barrow) for the railway station, hoping a train would come through that day. The only 'furniture' in that station was the baggage scale, and that was where we sat when we were tired of walking or standing. When it was nearly time for the city gates to close (near sundown), we went back to the Lee home to sleep. No train came the first day, nor the second, nor the third day. Wonderful to have a place where we could clean up. A flour sack full of pears that we were bringing back to the students and teachers at ASK needed picking over. Quite a few were bruised after the bumpy, daily wheelbarrow rides.

"The fourth day Tom and Esther Lee decided to come with us as far as Kioshan. They brought bedding along so we would not have to return to the city for the night.

We all slept on the floor of the little building at the railway station that night. I had an oilcloth wrapped around my bedding.

"The next day at 5:00 pm. a train finally came. It was a train of open freight cars--coal cars. It stopped and we started to get up and in. When the soldier-passengers told me, 'No more room here,' I started to back down. But Pastor Lee said, 'No, that isn't the way.' We finally found room for all of us to squeeze in. I had a copy of the Northfield News that I spread on the steel floor before I sat down. No benches. We went 15 miles to Chumatien. Then we were sidetracked and the engine was taken away. We stayed there all night--a cold, late September night. In the morning, we still saw no sign of an engine. So we got off and hired a ricksha to take us the other 15 miles to Kioshan."

Then we had another trip across country the following year. We had to flee Fancheng in June of 1931. In the fall only the men went back to the mission stations. There had been a terrible flood that summer and the Communists were marching north. There were so many disturbances. They didn't want wives with little children.

I had been sick and we had lost our baby. Rolf came down to get me in Kuling, where I had been living with Mrs. Herman Bly and Mrs. Tom Lee and their children. We started off for Fancheng in November, hoping to get there in time for Thanksgiving.

I: Conditions were still bad but not as bad as they had been?

SYRDAL: As I mentioned, we had hoped to get to Fancheng in time for Thanksgiving, but when we first tried, soldiers were commandeering all the busses. We spent nearly a week in Huayuan at a Chinese inn. I had had experience with inns twice before under more favorable circumstances. In fact, so favorable that I had begun to think that older missionaries had exaggerated the awfulness of such inns. After spending five days and four nights, including Thanksgiving, in that inn at Huajuan I felt capable of giving a talk like that myself.

On Wednesday we had a bad sandstorm, and the sand sifted through the loose tile in the roof and the walls and settled in drifts on our bed and our table. (It would have fallen on our chairs, too, if we had had any.) Dr. Bart Nelson and his wife Molly were with us, and they shared a 10'x10' room with us. They were from the Covenant Mission. Their older missionaries wanted them to travel across country with "older, experienced missionaries who knew the language." They had written to us and asked if they could go with us. (We had had one year's experience!) They had one board bed and we had another board bed. There was a square table in this 10'x10' room where we were five days and four nights. Smoke from the adjoining kitchen poured into our room when cooking was being done.

First, we had that sandstorm with sand getting into our food. An incident occurred shortly after midnight the second night. Two big rats had been fighting on the rafter just above our bed. All of a sudden, one of them-- we never did ascertain whether it was the victor or the vanquished--fell with a thud right on Rolf's face.

The following night, we were awakened by rain and sleet falling down on us. We had to spread oilcloth over our bed and baggage. That done, we opened up Rolf's big Chinese umbrella over our heads. The rain continued and we realized that the roads would be impassable. It was cold, too. We hadn't prepared for winter weather. We went back to Hankow and waited there and got more warm clothing and a little food. One thing after another blocked the way. If it wasn't rain and mud, it was a band of bandits that blocked the road. When the roads opened again, soldiers commandeered the trucks for several days. But when we got started, we made the trip across country in a day and a half and reached Fancheng just one week before Christmas. We were so thankful to be home again.

There were many such memorable trips those first years. That's why we appreciated so much the regularity of the train scheduled by the end of '35, in Sinyang. The missionaries urged us to go 20 miles or so by train to Kikungshan mountain when the azaleas were in bloom. We really should go. We had a day off with no classes. In the morning, we got on this express train that had

come from Peking and rode to the railroad station at Sintien and walked up the mountain. We picked armloads of beautiful azaleas and got a train back to Sinyang in the late afternoon.

We were stationed in Hsuchang our last year in China. Dora Wang, the principal of I Kwang, wrote a letter and wanted us to stop and visit friends at I Kwang on the way through Sinyang for a day at least. We couldn't, but they knew that that this express train that we were taking from Hsuchang would arrive in Sinyang at the scheduled time. We would be at that station for about 30 minutes. When we came there, students and teachers were at the station. They sang for us, brought gifts for us, and we visited with them for 30 minutes. You see how transportation had improved since 1930.

Chiang Kai-shek had problems. If he hadn't had to cope with Communists, robbers and warlords--if everybody had cooperated--there would have been a chance for greater improvements. (Barbara Walters on the Today program told how "before the Communists took over in '49 the women's feet were bound." Of course, the ban on footbinding had been enforced since 1911.) The time that we were there was a comparatively peaceful time. They were repairing things and getting things restructured, but then the Japanese came.



I: The whole 20th century had been disrupted. What about relations with other synods or other denominations? You had contacts outside your mission, I suppose, with other missionaries.

SYRDAL: Yes, especially in the summer on the mountains where we would have conferences. We would have outstanding speakers from America and England. We would have contacts with them. We had community hymn sings in the CIM compound on Kikung every Sunday night.

Across the river from Fancheng was the twin city of Siangyang, which is one of the older cities in China. It has an interesting history. The Covenant Mission from America had work in Siangyang. We got together with the missionaries from the Covenant Mission every week for a prayer meeting and fellowship and had wonderful times with them. Our two missions cooperated in a union hospital in Siangyang. Sister Bergitha of our mission was a nurse there and Barton Nelson was the foreign doctor. In Fancheng the two missions cooperated in conducting a girls' school and a boys' school.

I: Were there other missions besides the CIM around the area in Honan? Were there Baptists or Alliance missionaries?

SYRDAL: There were several Methodists up around Kaifeng.

They and missionaries from the Covenant mission, Southern Baptist and a faith mission sent their children to our American school on Kikungshan.

I: Did the Lutherans dominate in Honan?

SYRDAL: Yes.

I: Did you have any contacts with other kinds of Americans or western diplomats or businessmen?

SYRDAL: In Peking at the language school, there were students in the consular service and we became very good friends with Mr. and Mrs. C. Buss. They lived in a house on the language school compound. They entertained us several times in their lovely home. They came over and had dinner with us and spent Christmas Eve in our dormitory rooms.

I: Would you say there wasn't any particular feeling between the missionaries and the diplomats at that time? Was their lifestyle very similar?

SYRDAL: They were separate.

I: But there wasn't a feeling of "they're kind of different from us."

SYRDAL: No, I don't think so. We had a good time with them.

I: I think that was much more true in the early '30s.

By the late '30s and '40s their lifestyle was so different because the consular people lived rather high with the country clubs.

SYRDAL: Oh, they did that in Hankow, too. We had the Lutheran Mission Home in Hankow that was really like a hotel. We stayed there when we had to go to Hankow for dental work and shopping or for committee meetings. Whenever there were vacant rooms, the Navy people often stayed there. Many of them were fine people, but they had their private country clubs with recreation facilities.

I: It seems from what I can find out, that there wasn't quite as much of a difference in the way they lived and the missionaries lived in their early period. Many of the consul people were quite religious in the early years, but later there seems to be more of a real difference. I know that in Shanghai after the war, teachers who were hired to come to SAS saw such a marked difference in the homes of the missionaries' children and the homes of the consular service. But there was a difference, then, even in the '30s. Was the difference maybe in the way they acted with the Chinese or their attitude in the Chinese people?

SYRDAL: They vary, too. There were different characters in the consular service, too. Some of them were there to serve and some of them were, perhaps, a little highhanded. I suppose there was some difference in the

missionaries, too.

I: What about the political awareness of the missionaries? Some people have claimed that they were pretty naive, not knowing what was really going on in China. As far as I can see, they were all really aware locally or they looked aware, at least. I wonder if you could comment about where missionaries found out what was happening. Did they read Chinese newspapers?

SYRDAL: We read the English newspapers when they came. Sometimes it took four weeks. Often the mail didn't get through to Fancheng. There were rumors, and we never knew what to believe.

I: Did some of the missionaries read the local newspapers and pass the local information around?

SYRDAL: The Chinese had their announcements on the wall. They didn't have newspapers, as far as I know, wherever we lived. In Peking they did and Hankow. We got the English Hankow paper. We would get regular letters from the superintendent of the mission. He tried to keep us informed and sent out circular letters to the missionaries.

I: Was there ever a sense of frustration about finding out what was happening in other parts of China or were they mainly too busy with their work?

SYRDAL: We just didn't pay too much attention to it. The most important concern was what kind of soldiers were in the city that we were in, or what kind of soldiers were stationed in the city where there was only one single missionary lady. The soldiers in Fancheng were very unreliable. Likely, previous to being taken into the army, they had been members of a robber band.

I: I am interested in the general tone of the missionary community, whether you thought the people, the other missionaries, were fun to be with and whether they were people you really enjoyed besides being people with a common purpose. How did you feel about living in the missionary community? Did you find it stimulating?

SYRDAL: We were in China at a wonderful time. Many of the pioneer missionaries were still living and we admired them. We loved them. They were some of the finest people we've ever met. We marveled at what they had accomplished. We had a great time.

I: Could you give some examples of why you thought that the pioneer missionaries were some of the finest people that you ever met?

SYRDAL: Their insistence on our having the best possible chance for language study. The warmth of their welcome!

Invitations to meals and overnight visits. Letting us use whatever was left of their furniture after "The Storm" of 1927-'29. Making packing easier when we left for furlough--having us for meals, insisting that we use their linens the last few days before we left for furlough. Inviting me (when I was expecting our first baby in October, 1931 and Rolf had to return to Fancheng alone) to live with them--the Soviks in Shekow, the Skinsneses in Sinyang, Mrs. Bly and Mrs. Lee on the mountain Kuling. I could go on and on.

I: You mentioned earlier that you and Dr. Syrdal worked with preparing the second edition of White Unto Harvest. What did this involve?

SYRDAL: The first edition of White Unto Harvest was published in 1919. The book was a survey of the work of the China Mission of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. The articles were written by various missionaries on the field and edited by a committee of three missionaries. Fourteen years later, in the fall of 1933, Rolf was asked to take over the chairmanship of a committee that was to revise, and bring up-to-date, material that had been gathered by missionaries through the intervening years for a new edition of White Unto Harvest. In the meantime (since work on the book had begun) there had been frequent changes in the committee membership. Some who had started the work never returned to China after the

Nationalist uprising. Other members of the committee lived at various cities, and transportation during those years was unpredictable. Mail was the only way to communicate. The mission board asked that the manuscript be sent to Minneapolis within a few months so that the book could be published and for sale before Christmas 1934.

So, cartons and boxes and bags of material were brought to our house! Some of the articles were excellent. Some were in Norwegian. Some were too long. I remember that there were three different histories of the Loshan mission station and there were three different dates for the same event. Which one was correct? It would take some research to find out. There were translations to be made, spelling and grammar to be corrected, pictures to be found for illustrations, discarding, cutting and typing to be done. Much of this was left to me because Rolf had to write several articles including the general history of the mission, and his teaching load was much heavier than mine. Working into the wee small hours of the night was required for both of us.

Finally in January of 1934 the manuscript for White Unto Harvest was mailed to Augsburg Publishing House. A red-letter day for the Syrdals!

I: Do you think you changed when you were in China or your view of China changed?

SYRDAL: Not to any great extent. We were strengthened in our faith and in the conviction that one's happiness does not depend on possessing many material things. The prayers of nieces and nephews, relatives and friends, and congregations buoyed us up. I know in later years I often wished that all the people who had been praying daily that the Lord would bless us and protect us in China would have continued to pray for us. Intercessory prayers of many had something to do with our having the joy and peace and calm that we had those years in China, I think.

I: When you returned to the U.S., what adjustments did you find, if any, in readapting to American lifestyles?

SYRDAL: No difficulties of importance in readapting to American life. It took a period before I drove a car. Even using the phone seemed strange and complicated. Having running water from the faucets that didn't need boiling before being used for drinking took some getting used to.

Then there was finding that my pupils in Sunday school classes didn't rise and show respect as I entered the room to teach--not giving me their rapt attention as the Chinese students had.

We have always regretted that we could not return to China to work. We felt that we could have been better



workers than we had been during the first term when we had so much to learn.

I: Mrs. Syrdal, thank you for your time. We have appreciated including both you and Dr. Syrdal in the collection. At the end of the narrative here, we will include a few of the excerpts from your letters.

#### EXCERPTS

Hankow, Jan. 27, 1933

#### HYMN BOOK COMMITTEE

.....  
 A week ago Wednesday we left Sinyang for Shekow where Rolf was to attend a three-day meeting of the tune-book committee. I decided at the last minute to go along with him. I had expected to do some knitting, reading, and letter-writing during those days, but I was drafted into the committee. At the end of the three days, they weren't nearly ready with the work; and rather than try to get together again, they continued to stay until they could finish. Since Monday our schedule had been 9-12:30 am, 2-4, 5-7:30, 8:30-11 pm with extra copying, etc. in between times. It is quite a job. If we could only discard some of the songs! But we had to find tunes for 450 hymns. The Germans, Finns, Norwegians, and Swedes all have their favorites and their pet forms of some of the old chorales. Many of them are loved by the Chinese, but others are not suitable at all for use in China. Now we are through. It has been interesting.

Tomorrow morning we plan to return home to Sinyang. I am eager to get home. There may be some mail from home waiting for us there. The last letters from you Roes and Syrdals came on Christmas Day.

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Sinyang, Honan Feb. 8, 1933

#### EFFECT OF THE DEPRESSION ON THE MISSION

.....  
 We are much concerned about the future of our mission work here in China. Mother, in a recent letter, quoted Dad as saying that the missionaries in China will be called home

before long. We suppose it is likely that some will be called home. And we wonder: "Who?" I wouldn't care to do the choosing! I do hope it won't be necessary for the older missionaries with families, like the Soviks, Tvedts, Nesses and Daehlins, etc. to go. The longer one is here the more attached one becomes to the work, the people, and the country. And it would be almost impossible for the older men to find work at home now, it seems. I think that everyone would feel disappointed to have to go, but it would be hardest for them. Looking at it (not from this personal viewpoint) in regard to the good of the work, youthful vigor and enthusiasm are needed, but judgment and understanding of the people that come with years of experience are perhaps more essential. "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us." And He will care for His church in China--young and weak though she may be.

#### CHINESE NEW YEAR IN SINYANG

.....  
 We were surprised to see how people celebrated Chinese New Year here in Sinyang. A ban prohibiting any kind of celebration was removed last year, but it was very quiet in Fancheng. But this year here everything is closed down--many people haven't gone back to work yet! There are parades with all sorts of weird paper animals, fish, etc. Every day great crowds gather on the river bank just near here, where there are all sorts of amusements. Letters from fellow missionaries in Juning, Kioshan, and Fancheng, tell that the Chinese New Year has been observed this year just as it was 15 or 20 years ago. We haven't been able to buy "mieh fu" (ground wheat) that we use for porridge and bread. Tough on us, but I'm thankful those patient, blind-folded donkeys that go round and round those millstones day in and day out, have had a rest.....

#### I KWANG

I Kwang (Lena Dahl) Middle School has opened up again after their winter vacation, and I am teaching 16 hours a week. All my classes are in the forenoon, and with a good servant at home, I'm not too busy.

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Sinyang, April 20, 1934

#### WORK AND PLEASURE

Rolf is going to an outstation to preach on Sunday, and he leaves here on the train tomorrow noon (Sat.) Can you guess which outstation it is this time? Kikungshan! I'm all pepped up for the trip--perhaps the pleasure part of it

appeals to me more than it ought to? But it is azalea time on the mountain and we have heard how lovely it is up there then! Rolf will have some work to do with looking after repair of houses, the swimming pool, etc. tomorrow afternoon. Then we think we shall go to Kikungshan T'ou (Rooster Head) for a picnic supper. Come along!

#### HOUSE GUESTS

Dr. Gus Guldseth and Dr. Bart Nelson came here on Wednesday, the day after Rolf left for Chengyang. They were on their way home from a medical convention in Nanking. Got off the train here and couldn't get buses to their stations until the following Tuesday. Poor fellows were so anxious to get back to their work and their families, but tried to make the best of things--read, played table tennis, observed the work at the hospital and schools here. They mentioned several evidences of a growing Nationalistic spirit that they had noticed when in Nanking. For instance, it is no longer "Western medicine" but "Scientific medicine"--a speaker who mentioned "Western medicine" was corrected. We sometimes wonder how long it will be before the spirit of Nationalism in China will bear the fruits that are inevitable with all the propaganda in text books, paper, etc.

#### TRAVEL

Rolf and Nora Rosvold came back from the Chengyang meeting Saturday night. They had started the day with a board meeting at 5:30 am., had been in a springless, open horse-cart on muddy, muddy roads to the railroad station for eight or nine hours, and came here by train a little after 11:00 pm. So they were a little tired. I was glad the next day was Sunday. And we were all glad that the students at the two Bible schools chose the next day, Monday, as the day for their annual picnic.

#### BIBLE SCHOOL PICNIC

I was invited to go along. It was quite a walk--nearly five miles each way--to Ch'a shan (Tea Mountain) where the picnic was held. Some of the boys had brought their flutes, "p'ibas" and "hu-ch'i's" along so we had music. For dinner we each had two boiled eggs, two steamed "mo" (bread) and the Chinese had some sort of pickled vegetable and raw sweet potato. There was a temple at the foot of the hill that we went to see. Quite a temple with many gods that had just recently been repainted and gilded! The old priest who seemed to be in charge, met us at the entrance. Rolf asked him how old he was. "Seventy-seven." "And do you have peace in your heart?" "No, I don't have peace in my heart." "Why! Can't all these gods help you and give you peace?"

"How can they help me? They are all 'chia-ti' (false). The whole bunch of them are false!" "And don't you know the true God?" "I've heard of Him." "He can bless you and give you peace." "But I haven't entered that gate..."

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I Kwang Middle School, June 23, 1934

#### EXAMS

My English students are writing their final exam this morning and I want to use the time writing to you.

There are about 70 Chinese boys and girls in this room. Two Chinese teachers are giving exams in other subjects at the same time. If you were here, you could tell which students were writing the English exam by the way they hold their pens. The pens too are different. The Chinese "pen" is almost like a small paint brush.

#### ROLE OF WIVES

.....  
 The past week at our house has been a busy one. In the fall and spring the homes in Sinyang are like small hotels. We have had guests coming and going. Then last Sunday we had baccalaureate services. Dr. A.W. Edwins from the Shekow Seminary spoke, and he stayed at our house. I played the organ and there was extra practicing with groups that sang special songs, etc. Wednesday we had Bible School graduation and I played then too. Both days we decorated the church. We have ever so many lovely Shasta daisies blooming now. They were fine with a few ferns and gardenia plants. The gardenias are so very fragrant--we didn't dare have too many of them inside the building.

Wednesday evening we had a picnic supper on our lawn with 40 foreigners present, counting the Martinson babies. Ragnhild Matson from Siangyang was here Wednesday till Friday on her way to Kuling. Mrs. Wold was here on her way to Kwangshan for some special meetings. Aagoth Fosmark and Talbert Ronning had come for Bible school graduation.

Oh! there is a lot of sickness and suffering and sorrow and poverty and distress and grief in this world! I have been having a woman sew for me--her husband thought it would be nicer to have a younger, prettier wife, so he divorced this one. No alimony. No home or relatives. Last night a woman

came to see Nora about getting a place to live on the mission compound. She has two babies and expects a third. Her husband, an opium smoker, has left her. She has three dollars. She can live on that for a month, but they have no room.

Blessed are we who, when we are called on to meet difficulties and trials, can hear the Lord say, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am thy God--thy Saviour. (Isaiah 43:1-3)

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Kikungshan, July 13, 1934

.....  
It must be terribly hot on the plains of Honan, because up here, on top of the mountain, in the shade, I am sitting still and perspiring from every pore, it seems.

A German missionary has just come to buy some shares in the community swimming pool, and he and Rolf are discussing the problems of the church in Germany--Karl Barth, etc. It is a temptation to listen to them.

Yesterday I had a letter from dear Mrs. Clow from England. She is the Scotch lady I learned to know (and love) in Peking at Language School. She sent some primroses she had picked for me. I'm sending them on to you, Mother.

A week from Sunday our Conference begins, and that will be a busy week. The Lutheran Choir hasn't begun rehearsals yet. I hope I can sing this summer and have someone else direct. I was in the assembly hall this forenoon playing for an hour. I have arranged to use the piano there an hour each day (\$2.00 Max.--50 cents for the season. That's a bargain!) I'm not apt to practice every day but we feel lost without a piano, especially when we prepare to sing duets, etc. The organ, an Estey, is the best reed organ I have played, so I used that most of the hour even though it was rather hot pumping it.

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Kikungshan, July 30, 1934

#### MISSION CONFERENCE

I have come to the conclusion that it won't do to call this

vacation spot "Sommer-Ro." Our weeks on the mountain aren't much like the lazy ones we had at the lake at home. They are a rest because they are a change, but they are nearly as strenuous, in some ways, as the months on the plains.

Last week we had our mission conference. We met for prayer every morning at 6:45, had business sessions from 9-12, and devotional meetings in the evenings from 7:30-9. Afternoons are left open for committee work. The thing that took most time was the question as to what stand the mission should take toward registered schools. When one reads the written rules and regulations for registration that the government had put out, it seems absolutely clear that it is impossible for the mission to spend church money in operating a registered school. But when one looks at the schools and sees the fine Christian spirit there is there--and realizes that without mission support, they will likely have to close-- and one dreads to think that the mission's children would have to go to government schools for they are awful morally, and anti-foreign and anti-Christian. Inspectors from the Honan Educational Bureau have stated that I Kwang can have classes in religion even though it registers, but we don't know just how dependable the spoken word of a Chinese official is, nor how long said official will remain in office! It was finally decided that our support would be continued in case (and as long as) these verbal promises--exceptions to their written rules--were carried out. Pray for I Kwang, won't you? I was re-elected to their board again.

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(The principals of the Girls' School in Sinyang had been missionaries until 1927. This letter may help to show that there was no difficulty, following the National uprising, in the relationship between the Chinese principal Dora Wang, and the American teachers.)

I Kwang Middle School  
Sinyang, Honan  
April 27 '36

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Syrdal.

Why are you so stone-hearted? Do you remember that you have left us for nearly a year? Do you feel that we hope to see you with eager heart? We are keeping our earnest hope that you may stay here in Sinyang for at least a day or two while you pass here to your dear homeland, but you only let us have a glance at the station! This is to ask your favour to stay with us at your school, I Kwang, with your old friends and students, and see how your school is going on. Pray, do come!

Yes, let the coolie Wang come back this coming fall.

Sincerely yours,  
Dora Wang