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Bostick Family, Missions

First Baptist Church (Shelby, NC)

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June 1960 -Bostick Family Royal Service

Edith Limer Ledbetter

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The Finest Missionary of

"Three of us Bosticks went to China as missionaries," Mrs. T. J. League was saying, "but my sister Judie was the finest missionary of us all, and she never left the homeland or knew a well day." Mrs. League was my Ridgecrest roommate.

My curiosity was stirred. "Tell me about Judie," I suggested. So Mrs. League who, as Attie Bostick had spent 43 years of her life in China, told me the story of Judie Bostick.

"Her name was written Judith in the long list in our old family Bible, but we called her Judie. There were fifteen of us children," she began, "eleven lived to be grown. The four oldest were boys, then Lou, and next Judie. Our home was near old Floyds Creek Church, in Rutherford County, North Carolina. I was the youngest of the eleven children. All her life Judie was so frail it looked like a feather would knock her down. But her spirit was gay and strong. She had laughing gray eyes, and curly reddish hair. The other children could help in the cotton fields, but Judie stayed at the house and loved and mothered the younger children while Mother washed and cooked and sewed. With eleven children there was always plenty to do!

"Perhaps because Judie was sickly she had a fascination for faraway places. She loved everything about the church and foreign missions was her glory. That was before the days of the Cooperative Program, and missionaries were sent to the churches to stir up the giving. As she looked after us younger children she would talk about foreign countries, and missionaries, and what a wonderful thing it was to be a mis-

sionary, and tell people about Jesus. China was her favorite country.

"My brother, George Pleasant, was the first of us to hear God's call. I can see Judie now, how she rejoiced when Pleasant told us that he had volunteered for service in China. She couldn't have been happier if she had been going herself!"

Mrs. League paused, thinking of those old days on the farm in North Carolina, when the family thought and talked of little else than the brother who would soon be half a world away, perhaps never to return. I waited quietly, watching the life of Ridgecrest throngs from our window. Again my roommate picked up her story.

"We were all so proud of Pleasant," she repeated. "I was just a little girl—let me see, I was about 13 years old. But I would gaze in awe at my big brother, and think of the Chinese girls and boys he soon would be seeing.

"Well, finally the day came when Pleasant left us, and I can remember how we watched for a letter from him. There was no airmail in those days, of course, and it took a long time for a letter to come from China. Sometimes I'd see my mother wiping away the tears on her apron, as she worked. I'd snuggle up to her quietly and kiss her. I knew she was thinking of Pleasant. He had a wife and a baby daughter, and Mother worried about them, too.

"It was a day of rejoicing when there was finally a letter with a Chinese stamp. We almost wore it out reading it, and passing it around. Judie slept with it under her pillow. Of course we all wrote to Pleasant,

Us All

by Edith Limer Ledbetter



Bostick Baptist missionaries to China—Attie, Wade, and George Pleasant



Attie and Judie with Bruno in 1895

but it was always Judie who was the faithful letter-writer of the family. Then she would tell people about the things Pleasant wrote in his letters. We didn't have such wonderful mission literature then as we do now, but Judie was a missionary paper in herself.

"So the weeks and the years went by. The Bostick children were growing up and marrying. China was very near and dear

to us, in our thoughts and prayers. At last Pleasant came home on his first furlough.

"All her life Judie was a great one for flowers. She couldn't do too much work in her garden, but she would coax the rest of us to work her flowers. She always had flowers for the church and for folks who were sick or in trouble. When she knew Pleasant was coming home she robbed her garden of all the finest flowers, and filled every room in the house.

"Much of the time he was home he was traveling around speaking in churches, telling of China's lost millions. When he spoke anywhere near our home we would all ride, in buggies and carriages, to hear him.

"I'll never forget one sermon he preached. He used the text 'She hath done what she could.' That day God spoke to me, and said that I would not be doing all that I could unless I was willing to go to China, too."

"Do you suppose your brother had you in mind when he preached that?" I questioned.

She smiled gently. "I've never known," she answered, "but it seemed to me that the Lord told him to talk right to me. Judie was not there that day, and I could hardly wait to get home and tell her. I had been her pet from the time I was a baby, and I knew she would rejoice with me.

Of course she did! But her cup was not full yet, for the day came when another brother, Wade, was to surrender his life to China's call.

"Well, the years went on. There were letters, and furloughs for all of us. Our parents walked more slowly. One by one the other children married and went to homes of their own. All but Judie.

"One time when I came home on furlough it seemed to me that my parents were failing fast, and Judie was not at all well. I wondered if I should stay at home, and I asked Judie about it.

"'Oh, no!' she said. 'I can't go to China myself, but I can take care of them and let you go. The other children are all good about helping. I'd feel like I was failing God if I let you stay home.' So I went back to China. I tried to write more often. I wrote to Wade and Pleasant, and told them to write as often as they could, for I knew that our letters were Judie's lifeline.

"First our father and then our mother slipped away. When it was all over Judie lived in the old home with Bertha, a niece who had been with them since the year before Father's death.

"About six months later I had a letter from Judie that had such exciting news. She was going to be married! She was 66 years old, and she had fallen gently and happily in love. One of my sisters wrote me, 'J. D. and Judie are so crazy about each other that they are like a pair of teenagers.'

"Two years later, when I came home, I visited them in their home. It was a little heaven of peace and love. Judie had rejoiced unselfishly when romance came to the other brothers and sisters; now she had the complete devotion of a good man of her own. I sailed away from America that time with a light heart.

"Then a water heater exploded just a few feet from where Judie was standing, scalding her terribly, and throwing her against the wall so hard both arms and one of her legs were broken like matchsticks. They sent me a cable, and I came as

quickly as I could."

Mrs. League wiped away the tears, and got up to hunt a handkerchief, then continued. "I had always enjoyed the ocean crossings before, but this time the ship seemed to crawl through the waves. By the time I reached North Carolina gangrene had set in, and Judie's leg had to be amputated. She was overwhelmed with joy to see me; never in my whole life has anyone been as glad to see me as Judie was then. She was suffering terribly, but brave as always. When she couldn't sleep or rest she would say, 'Tell me about China!'

"I was never far from her side as the weeks and months went slowly by. Our brothers and sisters were in and out; Bertha kept the home going. There was a gentle, faithful Negro woman, Mittie, who had helped in the home for years. I couldn't have managed without her. Together we watched Judie gain some measure of health and strength.

"In the meantime I was getting urgent letters from my fellow-workers in China; I was badly needed in the work there. One day I was reading a letter that had just come, and Judie's gray eyes were watching me keenly. 'They need you over there, don't they?' she asked.

"'I can't leave you—ever again,' I told her firmly.

"'You must!' she said very gently. 'I've been thinking about it, and you must go back! You know the language and the people. Remember, you are in China for both of us. While you are there I am a missionary, too. Mittie will stay with me, and the others will all help!'

"A few years later when I came back home, they took me out to the old family graveyard, to a small stone that read 'Judith Bostick Eskridge.' I couldn't see to read what else it said for several moments. It just didn't seem possible that Judie's gay spirit was away.

"Then I smiled through my tears, and said to my brother: 'It ought to read: *A Bostick Missionary*. She was the finest of us all!'"