

## CHAPTER ONE

# HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

My name is Liu Zhenying. My Christian friends call me Brother Yun.

One morning in autumn 1999, I awoke in the city of Bergen in western Norway. My heart was stirred and excitement bubbled up inside me. I had been speaking in churches throughout Scandinavia, testifying about the Chinese house churches and inviting Christians to join us as we evangelize all of China and the nations beyond. My hosts had asked me if I would like to visit the grave of Marie Monsen, a great Lutheran missionary to China who had been mightily used by God to revive the church in different parts of my nation from 1901 to 1932. Her ministry was especially effective in the southern part of Henan Province, where I come from.

Miss Monsen was small in stature, yet a giant in God's kingdom. The Chinese church was not only impacted by her words, but also deeply challenged by her sacrificial lifestyle. She was a fully committed, uncompromising follower of Jesus Christ, who showed us an example of how to suffer and endure for the Lord.

God used Marie Monsen in a powerful manner, so that many miracles, signs, and wonders followed her ministry. She returned to Norway in 1932 to take care of her elderly parents, and by then her

work in China was complete. She never returned to China, but her legacy of uncompromising faith, unquenchable zeal, and the necessity of changed hearts fully committed to the cause of Christ lives on in the Chinese church today.

Now I had the great privilege of visiting her grave in her homeland. I wondered if any other Chinese Christian had ever enjoyed the privilege I was about to enjoy. When she came to our part of China there were few Christians and the church was weak. Today there are millions of believers. On their behalf I planned to offer thanks to God for her life.

Our car pulled up at the graveyard, situated on the side of a hill in a narrow valley, with a river flowing through it. We walked around for a few minutes, hoping to see her name on one of the several hundred tombstones. Not being able to locate Monsen's grave immediately, we strolled to the office for help. The administrator was not familiar with her name, so he looked in a book that lists the names of the dead who are buried there. After flicking through the pages he told us some news I found hard to believe: "Marie Monsen was indeed buried here in 1962. But her grave was left untended for many years, so today it is just an empty lot with no headstone."

In Chinese culture the memory of people who did great things is cherished for many generations to come, so I never imagined that such a thing could happen. The local believers explained that Marie Monsen was still held in high regard and that they had honored her memory in different ways, such as by publishing her biography decades after she died. But to me her unmarked grave was an insult that had to be made right.

I was deeply grieved. With a heavy heart I sternly told the Norwegian Christians who were with me, "You must honor this woman of God! I will give you two years to construct a new grave and headstone in memory of Marie Monsen. If you fail to do this, I will personally arrange for some Christian brothers to walk all the way

from China to Norway to build one! Many brothers in China are skilled stonemasons because of their years in prison labor camps for the sake of the gospel. If you don't care enough, they will be more than willing to do it!"



I was born in 1958, during the Chinese leap year—the fourth of five children in our family. I came into the world in an old traditional farming village named Liu Lao Zhuang in Nanyang County, in the southern part of China's Henan Province.

Henan contains almost one hundred million souls—China's most populated province. Despite this fact, there seemed to be many open spaces where I grew up—lots of hills to scale and trees to climb. Although life was difficult, I also remember times of fun when I was a little boy.

All of the six hundred people in our village were farmers, and still are to this day. Not too much has changed. We mostly cultivated potatoes, corn, and wheat. We also grew cabbages and other kinds of root vegetables.

Our home was a simple structure of compacted dried mud. The roof was made of straw. The rain always managed to find the holes in our roof, while in winter the icy winds never failed to blow through the gaps in our walls. When the temperatures dropped to below freezing we burned leftover corn husks to keep warm. We couldn't afford coal.

Often in the summer it was so hot and humid that we couldn't bear to sleep inside our poorly ventilated home. Beds were dragged outside and our whole family joined the rest of the village sleeping in the cooler air.

"Henan" means "south of the river." The mighty Yellow River dissects the northern part of the province. Its frequent floods have brought

centuries of pain to people living along its banks. We knew this as we grew up, but to us northern Henan was a million miles away.

Our village nestled in the hills of the southern part of the province, safe from devastating floods and outside influences. We were only concerned with the next harvest. Our lives completely revolved around the cycle of plowing, planting, watering, and harvesting. My dad always said it was a struggle just to get enough food to eat. All hands were required in the field, so from a young age I was called into action helping with my brothers and sisters. Consequently, I didn't have the opportunity to attend much school.

In other parts of China, Henan natives have a reputation for being as stubborn as donkeys. Perhaps it was that stubbornness that prevented the Henanese from receiving Christianity when Protestant missionaries first brought it to our province in 1884. Many missionaries labored in Henan without much visible success. By 1922, after almost forty years of missionary effort, there were a mere 12,400 Protestant believers in the entire province.

Those who accepted the religion of the "foreign devils" were ridiculed and ostracized by their communities. Often the opposition spilled over into more violent expressions. Christians were beaten. Some were even killed for their faith. The missionaries, too, faced great persecution. Missionaries were considered by many people to be tools of imperialism and colonialism, sent by their nations to gain control over the hearts and minds of the Chinese people while their governments raped the land of its natural resources.

The outrage against foreigners reached its peak in 1900, when a secret society called "The Boxers" instigated a nationwide attack against foreigners. Most were able to flee the carnage, but many missionaries were located in remote rural areas of inland China, far from the safety of the large coastal cities. The Boxers brutally massacred more than 150 missionaries and thousands of their Chinese converts.

Those brave souls who had come to serve our nation sacrificially and bring the love of the Lord Jesus Christ to us were slaughtered. They had come to share Christ and to improve our lives by building hospitals, orphanages, and schools. We repaid them with death.

In the aftermath, some people thought the events of 1900 would be enough to scare missionaries off ever coming back to China.

They were wrong.

On 1 September 1901, a large ship docked in Shanghai Port. A young single lady from Norway walked off the gangplank onto Chinese soil for the first time. Marie Monsen was one of a new wave of missionaries who, inspired by the martyrdoms of the previous year, had dedicated themselves to full-time missionary service in China.

Monsen stayed in China for more than thirty years. For a time she lived in my county, Nanyang, where she encouraged and trained a small group of Chinese believers that had sprung up.

Marie Monsen was different from most other missionaries. She didn't seem to be too concerned with making a good impression on the Chinese church leaders. She often told them, "You are all hypocrites! You confess Jesus Christ with your lips while your hearts are not fully committed to him! Repent before it is too late to escape God's judgment!" She brought fire from the altar of God.

Monsen told the Christians it wasn't enough to study the lives of born-again believers, but that they must themselves be radically born again in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. With such teaching, she took the emphasis off head knowledge and showed each individual that they were personally responsible before God for their own inner spiritual life. Hearts were convicted of sin and fires of revival swept throughout the villages of central China wherever she went.

In the 1940s another Western missionary preached the gospel to my mother, who was twenty years old at the time. Although she didn't

fully understand, she was deeply impressed by what she heard. She especially liked to sing the songs and hear the Bible stories shared by the small teams of evangelists who traveled around the countryside. Soon she started attending church and committed her life to Jesus Christ.

China became a Communist nation in 1949. Within a few years all missionaries were expelled, church buildings were closed, and thousands of Chinese pastors were imprisoned. Many lost their lives. My mother saw the missionaries leave Nanyang in the early 1950s. She never forgot the tears in their eyes as they headed for the coast under armed guard, their ministries for the Lord having abruptly come to an end.

In just one city in China, Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province, forty-nine pastors were sent to prison labor camps near the Russian border in 1950. Many were given sentences of up to twenty years for their “crimes” of preaching the gospel. Of those forty-nine pastors, just one returned home. Forty-eight died in prison.

In my home area of Nanyang, believers were crucified on the walls of their churches for not denying Christ. Others were chained to vehicles and horses and dragged to their death.

One pastor was bound and attached to a long rope. The authorities, enraged that the man of God would not deny his faith, used a makeshift crane to lift him high into the air. Before hundreds of witnesses, who had come to accuse him falsely of being a “counter revolutionary,” the pastor was asked one last time by his persecutors if he would recant. He shouted back, “No! I will never deny the Lord who saved me!” The rope was released and the pastor crashed to the ground below.

Upon inspection, the tormentors discovered the pastor was not fully dead, so they raised him up into the air for a second time, dropping the rope to finish him off for good. In this life the pastor was dead, but he lives on in heaven with the reward of one who was faithful to the end.

Life was not just difficult for Christians. Mao launched an experiment called the “Great Leap Forward,” which led to a massive famine all over China. It was actually a great leap backward for the nation. In my Henan Province it was estimated that eight million people starved to death.

During these difficult times the small fledgling church in my home town of Nanyang was scattered. They were like sheep without shepherds. My mother also left the church. Over the following decades, having been completely starved of all Christian fellowship and without God’s Word, she forgot most of what she had learned as a young woman. Her relationship with the Lord grew cold.



On 1 September 2001—exactly one hundred years to the day since Marie Monsen first arrived in China to start her missionary career—more than three hundred Norwegian Christians gathered in the Bergen graveyard for a special prayer and dedication ceremony. A beautiful new headstone was unveiled in memory of Monsen, paid for by contributions from various churches and individual Christians.

Monsen’s picture and her Chinese name appeared on the headstone, which also stated:

MARIE MONSEN 1878–1962  
MISSIONARY IN CHINA 1901–1932

When I told the believers in China that Marie Monsen’s grave-stone had been rebuilt, they were thankful and relieved.

We must always be careful to remember the sacrifice of those God has used to establish his kingdom. They are worthy of our honor and respect.