

Denise ([00:03](#)):

Women have been a part of carrying the gospel where it's not for generations. And part of the legacy they've left can be found in the courage their stories inspire in an entirely new generation of women who would go. But that legacy can only be realized if their stories are told. Welcome to the velvet ashes legacy podcast.

Denise ([00:46](#)):

Hey guys, and welcome back to your Velvet Ashes legacy podcast. It feels so good to say welcome back. Um, this is the podcast where we highlight the women who have inspired us to live our lives in pursuit of the lost. I'm Denise Beck, the executive director of Velvet Ashes.

Sarah ([01:03](#)):

I'm Sarah Hilkemann, the program director here at Velvet Ashes and this month, we are so excited to bring you all the story of Isobel Kuhn.

Denise ([01:11](#)):

Before we begin chatting about Isobel this week, we just wanted to say thank you to all of you who shared this podcast with your friends and family, who took time to tell us how much you enjoyed it. To my mom who sent us so many encouraging comments. It's really, it means a lot to us. And it was absolutely a highlight to get to hear from you about how much you enjoyed hearing about Lottie Moon.

Sarah ([01:33](#)):

Yep. And we just want to say again how we are gonna tell the stories each month. So we are going to read and listen and just pull together all of the details that we can find. I am going to share the before, the stories before this woman gets to the field and then Denise is going to take after she gets to the field and just share what happened in those years. And so that's how we're gonna tell the stories each week.

Denise ([02:04](#)):

And we also just want to remind you that as we tell the stories, we are just like you, women who have loved hearing these stories and have been encouraged by them, but we are not authorities about their stories and we're probably gonna leave out valuable information, but we hope if you find yourself wanting to know a little bit more, you use this as a launching point into your further study about these legacy women. So Sarah let's get started. Tell us about Isobel Kuhn.

Sarah ([02:34](#)):

All right. So Isobel was born on December 17th, 1901 in Toronto, Ontario in Canada. So to put this in a perspective a little bit, at the beginning of 1901, Queen Victoria passed away and her son Edward became king, New York in the United States became the first state to require license plates on cars. President, uh, William McKinley of the US was assassinated in 1901 and the first Nobel prizes were awarded. And also Isobel Kuhn was born. Isobel's father was part of pioneering work with x-ray machines, which is super specific and interesting, but he was also a Presbyterian lay preacher at a rescue mission. Um, and so Isobel was raised in a Christian home. She had this really strong Christian heritage, but I think a lot of us can identify, you know, with the doubts and struggles that come when we go off to college or university, and Isobel was confronted with this when she went to study at the university of British Columbia. So Isobel was super popular growing up and she loved to have fun. When she went to

the university, she was part of something called the players club, which was an amateur theater group. And she loved to dance, so much so that in 1922 in her college yearbook, someone wrote by her picture and oh, the tilt of her heels when she dances.

Denise ([04:10](#)):

I, I love that you said that because when I read that, I was just thinking what a descriptive thing. And then I was like, thinking of the tilt of my heel, like what, what does that even look like? But I love that that was a notable characteristic of her <laugh>

Sarah ([04:24](#)):

Well, going to dances was definitely a big part of her life for a long time. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. So at university, she was studying English and literature and wanted to go on, to teach in a university setting. That was her goal. But in one of her English classes, one of her professors called her out because of her faith. And it really made her kind of stop and realize like, although she considered herself a good person, she wasn't sure what she believed about God. Her grandfather had been a preacher. You know, her father, um, was a lay preacher and her mother was a believer. And she said at that time I wouldn't have called myself an atheist, but I called myself an agnostic. I frankly didn't know if there was a God or not. So in the midst of all of this, as she's kind of questioning what she believes about God, Isobel became secretly engaged to this guy named Ben, who was a star rugby and basketball player at the university. He had come back from fighting in world war I, and he was actually several years older than her. So they had gotten engaged. And in the midst of that, she found out that he was seen other girls. And I know when she confronted him about it, he told her, you don't suppose do you that after we are married, I'm not going to take other women out sometimes. So she should essentially expect the same thing after they were, were married.

Denise ([05:58](#)):

Just blows my mind. I mean, I just, you know, I think about the early 19 hundreds and wholesome, like you just assume everything was better. Right. But that they were, they were dealing with, um, these kinds of things back then as well, blows my mind.

Sarah ([06:11](#)):

Well, thankfully she got rid of him, <laugh> she, they broke off the engagement, but it really sent Isobel reeling. She was just at a really hard place with this loss. And at that time she even contemplated ending her life. She was just really at rock bottom. But in that place, she had this moment where she cried out to God and was honest that she wasn't sure she believed in him. But if he would prove to her who he was, she would give him her whole life. She said, I'll do anything you ask me to do, go where you send me, obey you all my days. And so she began this quest to see how God would answer if he would reveal himself to her. And she began to see him do that. And she just became more and more hungry to know God. So after this, she graduated from university and she didn't have enough experience to teach in the university setting, which is what she really wanted to do.

Sarah ([07:17](#)):

So she took a position teaching third grade for a year in Vancouver, and it was awful. She hated it. It was not at all what she expected or hoped for, but it was also part of this time of God, really weaving different connections together in her life and putting different pieces together. So her father had this connection, um, with a couple Mr. and Mrs. Whipple, they were in the state of Washington and they

had started this Bible and missions conference called The Firs, F I R S. Mrs. Whipple, Julia Whipple was a really kind woman. And she had hosted Isobel in her home when Isobel was there for another reason. And Mrs. Whipple just really spoke truth and encouragement into Isobel's life. She prayed for her, the two women kept in touch. And then in 1923, Mrs. Whipple sent money for Isobel to attend The Firs conference.

Sarah ([08:20](#)):

And she wasn't sure if she would be able to get off work, but God threw open the door really for her to be able to attend. At The Firs Isobel's roommate in this, you know, quaint little cabin in this lovely conference area in the woods. Um, her roommate was Edna Whipple Gish, who was Mrs. Whipple, Julia Whipple's sister-in-law and Edna when she was newly married and new to the field, her husband tragically drowned, um, in an accident, uh, it was really sad. He was trying to save someone else and then ended up drowning. And Edna had tried to save her husband and wasn't successful. And, you know, she just had gotten bruised and it had really taken a toll on her body when she was trying to save him. And so her organization had encouraged her to take a short furlough and she spent part of that furlough at this Bible conference. So they asked her to lead the meetings for the young people at the conference, which is just so hard to imagine here. She was grieving. Yeah. Grieving the loss of her husband. She's trying to recover her own health. And she's pouring into the young people at this conference, teaching Bible classes and sessions.

Denise ([09:37](#)):

We definitely have a different idea of member care and mental, um, rest now than maybe they did in the early 19 hundreds. For sure.

Sarah ([09:46](#)):

Right? Yeah. Well, during these sessions, Edna challenged the young people at the conference, including Isobel to live a concentrated life, to really see if God was calling them to overseas work. Now, Isobel didn't even have overseas work on her radar at all. She had not even considered it; travel didn't sound appealing to her at all. There was nothing about it that, um, really appealed to her, but Edna really made an impact on Isobel through her teaching in the sessions, but also because they were roommates and it was just the two of them in this cabin, they had times of prayer and private study. Edna had her husband's Bible with all of his notes in the margins. It was just this really sweet, um, thing that she had of his. And so she would read portions of scripture to Isobel, like at night, um, before they went to sleep.

Sarah ([10:42](#)):

So then at the end of this conference, Edna gave an opportunity to those who felt like God might be calling them overseas. And Isobel said, yes, she remembered back to, you know, when she had surrendered her life to God that night when she had just really hit rock bottom and she had asked him to show himself to her. And at this time she said, I was no longer my own. She was acknowledging, you know, what, what she had said to the Lord at that time. And she wasn't totally sure God was actually calling her overseas, but she was willing, which is just really cool. So after the conference that year, Mrs. Whipple gave Isobel a book, um, the growth of the soul, which was about the life and work of Hudson Taylor. And it just had this profound impact on Isobel. When she finished the book, she knew she wanted to be part of the organization that Hudson Taylor had founded China inland mission, and she wanted to work in China.

Sarah ([11:43](#)):

So this book just really, really impacted her. Then in 1924, she went back to The Firs conference and she had another significant encounter. Uh, James or J O Frasier, the, of China inland mission was the main speaker that year. He was this very unassuming person. She didn't even know it when she first encountered him that he was the main speaker. Most people had no idea that he was really well educated in London, that he was very talented, but he was the one who first shared about the Lisu people in China. And this really got Isobel's attention. That year Isobel's father was also attending the conference with her. And he was actually Mr. Frasier's roommate <laugh>. And so after this, um, her father invited him to visit them in their home in Canada, which made Isobel pretty excited. She wanted to be able to talk to him more about the Lisu people about China inland mission and his work, but in this process, as Isobel was, you know, really discerning what God was calling her to, her mother had been very opposed to Isobel going to serve cross culturally.

Sarah ([12:58](#)):

And she even said, the only way this young Christian would become a missionary was over her mother's dead body. Well, it turned out when, um, Mr. Frasier came to visit them. He was incredibly gifted musically and Isobel's mother also loved music, was very gifted as well. And so these two bonded over music, and it didn't change Isobel's mother's mind about her going to the field, but it did allow Isobel to have some time to talk to Mr. Frasier. So one day, um, he and Isobel had a chance to go for a walk to the beach, and he talked really openly with her about his suffering on the field, his loneliness and his struggles and what it had cost him. And I think this brought up some things that Isobel hadn't really thought about.

Denise ([13:56](#)):

You know, when I was actually reading about this one thing that I, I thought was really significant was when, when she was talking to him about this, he didn't, um, you know, maybe he was quiet and he was contemplative while he was listening to her. And, um, so in the quietness she just said, Hey, um, would you underline a verse in my Bible That's meaningful? I think she's just like, when you leave, I wanna have something that, you know, would encourage me. And so he underlined 1st Peter five, seven through nine, and that verse is give all your worries and cares to God for, he cares about you, stay alert, watch out for your enemy, the devil, he prouds around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him. And he really felt like she was gonna have opposition from Satan in getting there that it was not gonna be an easy thing for her. And what he underlined in the verse, you know, double underlined was the stand firm against him and really ask the Lord is this trial that is coming up against me of you. And you're telling me to not go, or is it of Satan and really encouraging her to stand firm against it if it's Satan

Sarah ([15:08](#)):

Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Yeah, he really talked about in his stories, you know, from the field as well, the power of prayer and the realities of spiritual warfare. And so he knew that Satan might try and distract Isobel because she was on this journey preparing to go to China. And she wanted to study at moody Bible Institute that fall. And so in the midst of this whole conversation, he said to Isobel, this really specific thing, for instance, a telegram might come saying that your mother was very sick and urging you to return home immediately. Now, if that should happen, you cannot leave the moment you get the telegram. And he told her that she should find someone who would be there in Vancouver, where her

family was, who could help provide advice from that end if something happened to her family. And this does seem, you know, like such a specific

Denise ([16:00](#)):

Bizarrely

Sarah ([16:01](#)):

Piece of advice. Yeah. Yeah. And he wasn't saying, I don't think don't care about your family. Right. But he was saying, trust God, and keep your focus on him, be discerning and know that God will direct you in the moment. And like you were saying with those verses stand firm. So, you know, we'll get to Mr. Frasier more in the story because he did have such a profound impact on Isobel's life and was part of her story later on. But this was a very significant conversation for a number of reasons. So Isobel did go to Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, beginning in 1924. And God provided honestly, every step of the way for her, you know, sometimes it was through the generosity of others. So there was this woman, Marjorie Harrison, um, they had actually met at the Firs conference and were friends and Marjorie had planned to go overseas, but wasn't able to because of health issues.

Sarah ([17:06](#)):

And so she ended up giving that money that she had saved up to Isobel to be able to attend school. And Isobel's father wasn't necessarily the best, um, financial manager and kind of had some financial issues through the years. And her mother wasn't supportive at all of her going. So she didn't have that financial support from her family. But God just provided in little ways, you know, through a family friend who gave enough money so that Isobel could buy a winter coat, um, you know, coming from Vancouver to Chicago, she needed warmer clothing. And Isobel also worked really hard, um, to supplement her finances through school, you know, like working as a waitress and she played piano, she did some different things, but it was through that work. Um, and at Moody that one day in the school cafeteria, she met this guy who was working as a dishwasher and his name was John Kuhn.

Denise ([18:08](#)):

Enter John Kuhn.

Sarah ([18:10](#)):

Yes. She tells about in her, um, her book that when their eyes met, it was just like, they both knew, but she had said she wasn't gonna date anyone. When she went to Moody, she was, she wanted to be really focused. So she's like, I'm not even gonna find out his name <laugh> but yeah, he was, John was four years younger than her, but he was ahead of her in school and God just continued to cross their paths throughout their time at Moody. And we'll get to him more, a little bit later as well. But during Isobel's first semester at Moody, uh, towards the end of 1924, she actually received word that her mother had passed away during an operation. You know, her mother had been so opposed to Isobel going to the field, really clinging to her as her only daughter. And just so desperate for Isobel not to go.

Sarah ([19:06](#)):

And in the midst of that, you know, she said some pretty harsh things to Isobel, which was really hard. But later Isobel learned that before her mother had gone into the hospital for this surgery, she had told some friends that Isobel had chosen the right path in pursuing God's will for her life. And it was even a moment for her mother of rededicating her life to the Lord herself before she went into the hospital for

this surgery. And so even in the midst of this grief, God was again just confirming and comforting, I think, well, and then...

Denise ([19:45](#)):

It's so special for that to be able to happen, you know, because that can be something that really causes grief. Like you said, in questioning, you know, Lord did I do the right thing. And so what a special gift to be able to, to reconcile that before she ever went mm-hmm <affirmative> overseas

Sarah ([20:01](#)):

And that she was able to hear that, um, those words from her mother that affirmation, well, the start of the next semester, Isobel received a telegram from her brother Murray, who is at home that her father had been seriously injured. Well, this was obviously very jolting for her and she was trying to figure out how to get home and what to do. But then she remembered this conversation that she had had, um, with Mr. Frasier on the beach and the words that he had spoken to her. And so God just gave her peace and direction to connect with a family friend there in Chicago, as well as someone who is back home to give her an updated report. And her father ended up recovering. Um, he had some, some serious internal injuries that eventually, you know, really affected him. But this moment was a big lesson for Isobel, I think in trusting God for wisdom and discernment. And just seeing how these words that had been spoken to her, um, came to pass and what she needed in her life,

Denise ([21:04](#)):

Especially how specific he was, that that exact thing would come to pass, that was just fascinating to me,

Sarah ([21:10](#)):

But yeah, yeah. What, how he must have been listening to the holy spirit

Denise ([21:15](#)):

And he was such a man of prayer

Sarah ([21:16](#)):

Give her those words

Denise ([21:17](#)):

And that, that was something that the Lord used so specifically to minister and direct Isobel through through him was just, just pretty amazing.

Sarah ([21:29](#)):

Yeah. So Isobel graduated from moody in December, 1926, and she went on to be a candidate with China inland mission, where she had to go and stay in the home of, um, leadership in China inland mission. So after her interviews, she got this response from one of the leaders and they said the council was quite satisfied with your answers today. And we in the home have enjoyed your presence. But the council has asked me to speak to you upon a very serious matter among your referees there was one who did not recommend you. The reason given was that you are proud, disobedient and likely to be a troublemaker. This person has known you for years and the council felt like they could not ignore this

criticism <laugh>, which was, uh, not, I don't think what she was expecting to hear. That was really hard for her to hear.

Sarah ([22:23](#)):

Um, China inland mission asked her for this probationary period to kind of see, like, are these characteristics actually there, are they gonna come to the surface? And so in this waiting time, which was not what she had wanted or hoped for, God just continued to provide. And so she became the superintendent of something called the Vancouver girls corner club, which I just thought was so neat. It was this place for young women who were working and they could come and eat their lunch together. And then they also could gather in the evenings for encouragement and discipleship. And so God just really worked in her heart. And I think, you know, she, she was complaining to some different friends about this criticism that she had received. And one of her friends was like, yeah, yeah. You know, why not acknowledge, um, that we're not perfect and that, um, these things are part of our lives. And so she actually wrote later in her book, um, *By Searching*, that China was later a painful revelation to me of my own heart and frailty. And I think that process started with this, um, criticism that she received.

Denise ([23:40](#)):

You know, and, and actually one of the things that I really appreciate about appreciate about Isobel is from that point on, it seems like she really leaned into this authenticity and when she hears her stories in her books and in her writings, it is not trying to make herself look good. It is absolutely revealing the hardships, the worst part of her character. She just shared it all. And what I like about the Velvet Ashes connection here is that we value that so much as a community of women serving cross culturally is, you know, not this missionary hero status, but this can, we just live our lives authentically and real in, in some of the very earliest blogs with Velvet Ashes were just like, can we say this is hard? Can we, can we share with each other that? And I feel like Isobel was maybe even a pioneer in that authentic sharing of a story of what it's like to be a global worker.

Sarah ([24:40](#)):

Yeah. You know, even the, the struggles and the things, the, the not so great parts of our personalities that can come to the surface, you know, she was vulnerable about that. And so that balance of the amazing things that God is doing and getting a front row seat to that, but then also, you know, just our humanity. Um, and like you said, she was definitely, I feel like a leader in that and also humble at the same time as she shared those struggles. Yeah. Well finally, Isobel was approved to go. Um, they actually came to find out that this reference and the things that they had said, it, it wasn't accurate. And, um, there were some other issues that had led to what was said, but she was able to set sail, um, for China on October 11th, 1928. So by this time she and John Kuhn had, you know, built a relationship.

Sarah ([25:41](#)):

They were actually engaged by this time he had gone to China two years before this. And so she was going to meet up with him. And when she left her ship was set to leave about noon and all of the young women from the corner club where she had worked, came to see her off. there were so many people there and, you know, someone, uh, stranger asked Isobel's brother, who's this girl that is getting the send off. Like it was some, you know, famous person <laugh> and they weren't, they weren't expecting the answer to be that it was a woman heading off to the mission field.

Denise ([26:16](#)):

Oh, I love that.

Sarah (26:18):

Isobel wrote too later that the sendoff was really a special gift for her. It just meant so much to her. Um, and so, yeah, there was just so many incredible experiences and ways that God confirmed and worked in Isobel's life, you know, to this point of her leaving for the field.

Denise (26:38):

And I feel like, um, it's so important because all of these things that lead up to are very shaping in the actual work on the field. And so, um, thank you for sharing that part of her journey as we continue on with her actually then finally setting sail. Um, this was, um, October 11th in 1928. And so she is on that boat. She's just gotten this amazing sendoff from so many people, as you said, you know, almost a famous sendoff. And she receives a telegram actually on the ship that is from her corner girls club that says we will go on. And isn't that almost like at the beginning, just a reminder that we aren't doing this to be dependent on us, but to be reproducible, that what you started will go on and what a great thing to begin her journey with of she is going to start a work that will hopefully go on, even when she leaves the field.

Denise (27:34):

So she's on this ship. And, um, they find that there is this seasoned missionary woman traveling with a bunch of younger women who are going, and her name is Ruth Paxton. And when the girls found out that she was on this journey, you know, returning to the field, they asked her, you know, we're here for so many days, would you just share with us each day? And so they sat with her for an hour each day, but one of the days she shared with them, if she looked each of the girls in the eyes and said, girls, when you get to China, all the scum of your nature will rise to the top. And I mean, these were trained women. They, they, you know, they couldn't actually believe, you know, what is she talking about? We've worked through all of our stuff. We're good, you know?

Denise (28:16):

And so, but that kind of stuck with Isobel as she, um, then eventually arrives and begins her first year of language school in Kunming. It's not Lisu that remember this is so important. Isobel feels specifically drawn to the Lisu people, but she's, you know, gotta learn some language first. And she gets there engaged to John and, you know, recognizes that he is not actually in the city she's in, but he's a short distance away. So they, you know, began corresponding. But cim has this policy that you had to be on the field for two years before you could be engaged. So she's, you know, they're trying to navigate what is this like to continue training, to live separate, to want to be together, to have this passion to reach the Lisu, and as they are working through all of this cm decides to renegotiate their marriage policy and they shorten it to one year.

Denise (29:13):

So all of a sudden what they thought they had so much time to plan gets ramped up because by this time they've almost been there a year. And so they begin planning this wedding and Isobel is like, I just want something small. I just want something little. But what they found out was so many of the missionaries who are serving at this time said, you know, that the only thing we get together for it seems like is to celebrate each other's funeral. And so. If there is a reason we can get together and celebrate a wedding, we can't keep it small, give us a reason to get together and celebrate. And, and so,

I don't know, there's, there's so much surrounded in that, you know, when you get to the field, having all of these policies that you have to navigate through, right.

Denise ([30:04](#)):

I don't know if that's something, um, that other people have to wrestle with, but sometimes we find that we're ready to go. And the organizations or sending churches that we have have these policies around how much time you have to spend either single serving on the field, or when you get married. There's like, mm-hmm, <affirmative>, you need to actually be married for a certain amount of time before you go to the field to kind of set you up well, and, and there's all sorts of different things surrounding that. So I don't know if you know you that are listening, you have experience with that. And I don't know that anybody knows exactly the right thing, but I know that there's so many people who have a heart for let's, let's give this couple, the best chance. Marriage is hard. Cross-cultural work is hard. How do we set them up well?

Denise ([30:48](#)):

But so John and Isobel definitely devoted to each other. They were people of prayer. They were believers. They loved the idea of serving Lisu people. But again, we mentioned this authentic nature of Isobel. And one of the things I love about that is she did not want to paint this picture that she and John were perfect. And she openly shares about the struggles of being married and being married on the field. And there's this, um, an autobiographical sketch called vistas and she openly confesses the many struggles in her marriage. Um, I, I read this one thing about letter writing day. And to me that's maybe like newsletters and, you know, Isobel was a gifted writer and I think it was a way she expressed herself, but she talks about the tension of that day and how John would like call. he's like, no, you're embellishing.

Denise ([31:39](#)):

Do you? I don't know that you remembered that accurately, but she was such a storyteller. And so there was this tension when they would sit down to write that eventually, you know, she just ended up taking it over. And I think later she said, you know, she appreciated him calling her out for things because it really helped her become a better writer and actually be devoted to accurate storytelling and the story of the people that they served and not wanting to just build herself up. So even though that was a tension that she revealed so openly, you know, it helped craft what later would be the many books that we get to enjoy of the time that they were there.

Sarah ([32:18](#)):

Well, I love just how she did kind of open up that window into their marriage and, you know, going in, they knew there would be some, some potential issues with their age difference and some of those types of things. But just to have that vulnerable look at, there are marriage struggles on the field too, like those types of things are not just limited to your passport country.

Denise ([32:38](#)):

And inspiring for those of us that are having Rocky days to know, like, you know what, we are not alone. Those that have gone before us actually. Yeah, this is normal. Yeah. So they get married. Her father, his father actually pays for them to stay in this nice French hotel for a week, kind of like a moment of bliss and then leaving a French hotel. They go to the place that John has prepared for them. It is probably the most opposite from a luxurious French hotel that they could possibly get. He takes her down a crowded

street with dingy shops and barking dogs and rickshaws and quacking ducks to the two room home that he had found for them. And there, there was no, um, windows. In fact, the only thing that they had were the, the walls opened up, I guess they folded back to reveal everything in their home, to the streets below.

Denise ([33:35](#)):

And so it was like either dark and no light, or everybody can see what you're doing. And so they really fought with this like tension between <laugh>, how do we wanna do we wanna live our lives? But Isobel, just like any woman would do it together, uh, began nesting in her home. And so they bought nice wicker furniture with some wedding money and she began to just make these two rooms the best they could possibly be. They bought a nice rug and they put it over the warped floor and she, she situated a trunk in the corner and she put this like pretty green and red traveling rug over the top of it. And then they put John's desk in another corner, you know? So if you guys have ever tried to set up home somewhere, cross culturally, you get what we're saying here. They took everything that they could and tried to just make it feel like home.

Denise ([34:27](#)):

And then they hung up their motto as a couple on the wall that just said, God first. And so when she receives her first guest, she's so excited to show them all. So these are more peasant Chinese women that end up coming to her home and she's, she's excited to welcome them into this beautiful space that she's created. And so she begins talking to them in her limited Chinese about the gospel. And she thinks they're beginning to understand when in the corner, an older woman blew her nose into her hand and then proceeded to wipe it on her beautiful green and red traveling rug that was on the chest. And Isobel is just like stuttering, like continuing to try to talk, but she's recognizing this tension rising in her about like my things, what are they doing to my things? And then at the same moment, a younger woman who had a child with her holds up the baby who begins to urinate all over the rug.

Denise ([35:22](#)):

And, you know, in her mind, she's like, I know that in their homes, it's mud floors. And so to them, that is totally acceptable. Right. And she's just thinking about my rug, you know? And so, so after she left, after they all left, she assessed the damage and she's fighting with this stuff that is rising up within her. And, um, she's remembering what was said to her on the boat about the scum rising up. And she was like revealing to herself. I am actually valuing my things more than the gospel that I was here to share with them. And so she begins to wrestle with that tension having to do with her things, you know?

Sarah ([36:09](#)):

Right. And it, it's just another of these moments that I love getting a peek into of that like honesty about the struggles, you know, and she also reflects about her, um, responses to people. You know, she would have these moments where she's wanting to connect with the women there and, you know, maybe like give them a hug, but her first thought is, well, are there lice, are there bed bugs? You know, like the hygiene and some of those types of things and just feeling like really struggling with that being her first response, not, oh yeah, just this, you know, wanting to love and care for the people. Um, but, but she was honest about that and admitted that like, this is, this is my first response. This is my first thought. And so being kind of aware of, again, like <laugh> what this woman on the boat had said of the scum of our personalities rising to the surface.

Denise ([37:13](#)):

Well, and I think it's just such a revealer. It's a revealer of our, the, the scum to just borrow that word that's within us, that we can't work on it until it's revealed. And so in one way, that was a gift that she could know. I need to begin to work on that. And, and, you know, I think another thing is, you know, they just still felt this call to the Lisu people. And, and it's coming up on a couple of years now that they have been there and they're like, we still aren't with the people. And, and to just be real honest, it's out of their control. They are with an organization, um, cim, who they have a director on the field that just knows where all of their missionaries are and he assigns them different areas. And so they, they want to be with the Lisu people.

Denise ([37:57](#)):

It's actually James Frasier. It's, he's the one who's on the field. He's the superintendent of the province that they're in. And he decides, and they get word that they're they're to move to a different city. And this is actually closer to where they're supposed to be. So they're excited when they're here in this town, it's called Tali. They actually are running the mission station. There they're first child, Katherine is born in 1931. And after she's born, they get word that they're even gonna move closer to Lisu land. So they're slowly inching their way there. But, but I will just tell you that, you know, James Frasier, who sat J O Frasier sat on the beach with her and was telling her about the hardships, he's really concerned that he knows how difficult Lisu land would be. And he's worried that Isobel won't be able to cut it there.

Denise ([38:44](#)):

And I think, you know, he's kind of helping them get closer, but really concerned that she's just gonna have a hard time there. So they're coming up on getting close to when they're, they're taking their first furlough back home and they still haven't made it to Lisu land and they're getting discouraged. And each time she asks Frasier about being assigned there, he just says he doesn't know that she can make it. So she begins to question, okay, did I hear the call right? When I felt like I heard about the Lisu, I felt it was the Lord calling me there. And so, right. I love that. She's like questioning. Maybe, maybe I heard it wrong, but I know what I didn't hear wrong is that the Lord wants someone to go there. So she even just began saying, Lord, if I heard that wrong, can I just pray?

Denise ([39:28](#)):

You would send somebody there. So they're in this town in Yungping and John, you know, begins to travel a lot. And she finds out that she's expecting again. And while she's expecting, John has gone, a flood moves in and you know, their homes, there are, are not sturdy. They're things, they're trunks heavy things that they need to protect and take care of. I'm sure she's thinking about her journals and the writing and the scripture translation work that they're working on. And, and so the flood begins to rise. John's not there. And she has to move all of these heavy trunks to higher ground. And so she's, she's doing that well in, so doing, she overstressed herself and begins to experience the first, um, signs of miscarriage. And so when John finally comes back, you know, she's so hurt, she's angry. He wasn't there to help.

Denise ([40:18](#)):

And, and John, you know, matching her temperament really well. You know, just says, you know, God must have some purpose in this. And we just need to ask him what it is. Not being angry or trying to downplay that it's really hard and challenging, but asking the Lord, please help us understand this. And it was literally the next day that they receive a letter from Frasier who said, you know what? I need you to

help me pray about this. There is a situation in Lisu land. There, there are some issues that have required more missionary presence. And so we don't have very many there. So what has happened is a husband and wife who are serving there have had to separate and live in two separate cities. So that each city and church young church that has been planted can have protection from a missionary presence because there's opium trade and war lords that are really pressuring the churches to grow and sell opium and they needed stronger representation.

Denise ([41:15](#)):

And so he puts out this, this problem, and they knew that if she had been pregnant, there was no way that she could have, you know, pregnant or with a newborn gone into this Lisu territory. And so they knew that the purpose and the answer to at least this season was that they could say yes, they could go. And so in 1934, they began to make their first journey into Lisu land. Um, it was just for a month. It wasn't a permanent thing. It was go help out for a month, relieve this couple. And so they go for a month. And for the first time, she gets to see the fires of Lisu villages in the horizon, after many, many days of travel. And, and I don't know if any of you have felt that specific call to a people or a place, and it took years to get there.

Denise ([42:10](#)):

And when you get to see and set your eyes on it for the first time, that feeling, and this was the verse that sprang into Isobel's mind, it was in Ezekiel. And it says my sheep wandered all over the mountains. And on every hill, they were scattered over the whole earth and no one searched or looked for them. And it was coupled with the verse in John that says, I have other sheep, two that are not in his sheep fold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock with one shepherd. And as she sees the fires of the Lisu villages, she is just reminded that she was called to these people to bring them into the flock. So they arrive at this village. They're greeted by, um, the Cooks, uh, Layla Cook, who is the woman that they are coming to relieve.

Denise ([42:59](#)):

And, you know, she just helps them fall in love with the people. They, she introduces them to her way of life. And yes, it is much more primitive and much more difficult, but she also introduces them to the believers. And as the month comes to an end, they've left Katherine back with younger missionary women. They realize that she needs to return, but the work isn't yet done. And so she decides to travel back home to, to be with Katherine again, while John stays. And, um, as they do that, she has time to think, and she has time to really assess this hardship, this life. And she now knows, I know exactly what we were talking about. I know what James Frasier was saying when he was standing with me on that seashore. That one day when he's talking about the hardships, it's not just something out there now I can put specific things in place, scarce food, dangers of falling off of a mountain, or the mountain actually falling on you because they live on a mountain side, you know?

Denise ([44:06](#)):

But you know, like now I know what you mean. Having known that she knew that she could look at JO Frasier and say, I can do this. And so, um, as in November of 1934, he gave them permission to relocate to Lisu land, but it wasn't a permanent thing. It was just, just until your furlough, you can just go there until you're furlough. And, um, so now what, what had been a dream becomes a reality. So Katherine actually comes along with them and Katherine had been, you know, living in a bit better of situation and circumstances. So when we, when they get there, Isobel says, she remember feeling this

tug, And it's Katherine, her young daughter saying, um, how about we just stay here for a couple of days? And then we leave. <laugh>, she's like, I'm not okay with this.

Denise ([45:00](#)):

Yeah. So then she's like, questioning, what am I asking my daughter to grow up in? And then she looks up on the wall. And even though, you know, the Cooks, Layla moved out up on the wall, they had left this, um, posted up written note and it looked like it was in a child's handwriting. And it said, my God will supply all of my needs. And, and Isobel thinks, you know, that must have been from somebody in their prayer support, somebody in their team that is back in the States that is praying for them. And she was reminded. I also have that. I have all of these people that are praying for my needs and I can do this. And, you know, so she begins thinking about those people who are her prayer supporters and in her writing to them is what keeps them connected to her work.

Denise ([45:49](#)):

And I just wanted to, to read a little excerpt so you can get an idea of, of why she had so many devoted supporters who loved getting the letters from Isobel. So she's kind of explaining a little bit to them about their work, uh, the place where they lived. And so she says our Lisu house has only braided bamboo mats for a floor over the earth. So we live much like kittens in a basket. The roof is formed of wooden stakes, laid on the beams and held down by logs. There are no nails used in the building. Everything here is tied together with bark. It's true. The walls are rather porous. And as a matter of necessity, the weather is a member of our family coming and going out at will. One morning at breakfast, a little white cloud walked in her door. It vanished the next second. I guess we scared it away. The clouds up here are a continual Marvel of beauty. And I just imagine the people in her circles getting these letters and just feeling like they were there, they were the kittens in a basket with the Kuhn family. And, um, so, um, yeah, so they begin to, you know, just integrate their family into life there as the least people try to accept them as part of them.

Sarah ([47:07](#)):

Right. And you know, sometimes those stories are so hard to share with people back home, you know, like how do you actually make people feel like they understand what it's like? Um, and so I love those descriptions that Isobel gave. And you were saying Denise earlier that Isobel, you know, with her like darker hair and dark eyes fit in a little bit better with the people. Um, but her husband, John had blue eyes and this long nose and the, some of the people who were farther out would call him a bird demon, um, thinking like maybe he would eat children <laugh>. Um, and so yeah, you have this, like this tension of trying to connect with these people, but also the challenges of being a foreigner and, you know, not necessarily looking like the people that you're ministering to.

Denise ([48:01](#)):

Well, and as a blonde, blue eyed person myself, I totally get that. I feel very much like I don't fit in, in many places in the world that we travel, but, um, so yeah, so they, they do end up being there and then their furlough time happens upon them and they go away in 1936 on their first furlough. Their, the ship that they sell back on is called the president McKinley. And after eight years had passed, they arrive back on the ship and, um, being on that ship again, I think it just connected those dots with that scum of the earth, as she looks back on the last eight years and almost probably laughs at how naive she was to think that that wouldn't be an issue that she faced and grateful for all the Lord had brought up in her. Um, you know, and they were met in Vancouver when they arrived by her father, her brother, and a

large group of those corner club girls, because the work had gone on without her mm-hmm <affirmative>, um, you know, an interesting thing.

Denise ([49:03](#)):

One of the things that they had learned, uh, while they were gone was that her father had come into some debt. He had began playing in the stock market and he was now in \$500 worth of debt. And that consequently, the opposite had happened. John's father had passed away and he had amassed, quite a fortune and he left them a significant inheritance, but on the boat, on the way back, they had both read the story of CT Studd. And one of the things in his story was he had also received a significant inheritance and had decided to give it away. He didn't keep it as a nest egg for himself, as a safety net to fall back on. He just gave it away. So they decided they wanted to follow in his example. And the first thing, the first check that they wrote was to pay off the debt of her father, knowing that the stress of living under that would just be really hard for him.

Denise ([49:56](#)):

They wrote checks to support other missionaries and knowing how much it had meant to specifically Isobel, to be able to have help, to go to moody Bible. They helped out another woman pay her tuition. And she, this, this woman was so specific that she would only accept the hundred dollars help if she could agree to pay it back at some point. And, you know, they really felt like they were given it as a gift and they wanted to freely give it to her as a gift. But she was very specific on that. They met many people who had prayed for them and many people who had enjoyed the letters, but Isobel's letters were expensive for them to mail to the, by now topping over a thousand people who wanted to hear. And so they found somebody who said, you know what, we'll take that over for you.

Denise ([50:44](#)):

We will copy your letters. We will send them and we will make sure that the word of your stories gets out. And so, and so they, during this time of furlough really met people that wanted to partner with them and continue to get the word out about the work that they were doing. And as the Kuhns furlough draws to an end. So does the first part of our story of Isobel's legacy, there is so much more to share and we invite you to make plans, to press play on episode two, as we get a front row seat to how God provided for Isobel through some of the hardest days of her ministry that were yet to come. Isobel's transparency, as she struggled through separation from family, home safety, and even her health are all to come in episode two, which is out and ready for you now.

Denise ([51:28](#)):

So on behalf of Sarah and myself, we wanna thank you for spending time with us today. If you know of someone who might find encouragement from this story and the future stories, we will be bringing to you each month, go ahead and give this episode a share. Your likes and comments, help others to find this resource. And we are so grateful for that. The music used in this podcast is Daughters and Sons from our dear friends Eine Blume. And remember until next time, you may be living the story that will be the courage for someone else's legacy

Speaker 2 ([52:04](#)):

Pleasure to.