

- 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.
- Sarah: [00:45](#) Hi everyone. Welcome to the velvet ashes legacy podcast. I'm Sarah Hilkemann, the program director for velvet ashes, along with Denise Beck, the executive director. This is part two of the story of Isobel Kuhn. So if you haven't already, we encourage you to go back and listen to part one where we share about Isobel's background, how she got to the field and her initial years there. All right, Denise, let's pick up where we left off. Isobel and her husband have gone back to Canada for their first furlough in 1936.
- Denise: [01:18](#) Okay. Yes. And it was a really great furlough for them. And as 1937 draws in, they're looking at returning to the field. Katherine, their daughter is now six years old and they have to think about packing differently because she's actually going back with her own bags to go to boarding school. And I know there's a lot of conversations around boarding school, especially as global workers you're having conversations about. Could you ever, and should you ever send your children to boarding school? And I know it's done so much differently now, um, than perhaps it was in the past. And you can probably find people who feel really strongly on either side of this, but for better or worse. This was what they were doing with Katherine. And one of the things they were looking forward to was, um, John's sister Katherine and her husband, David would be nearby in the town where Katherine, his daughters boarding school would be.
- Denise: [02:18](#) So it would be close enough that they felt very confident. They could see her at least once a year, as far as John and Isobel, but then also knowing that she would have family nearby. Should she need anything that could pop in and see her more frequently really gave them comfort in making this decision. So all of us who have been ready to go back have been shopping for the entire time, buying all the supplies, the trunks are set by the front door. This is where we find John and Isobel, as they're preparing to leave the next day. And Isobel writes about a phone call that she hears John take in the other room. And just assuming it was people telling them to have a great trip, that they were excited and praying for them. But as she begins to listen, she realizes it was Dr.

Denise: [03:04](#) Wilcox, the head of the CIM missions board calling to tell them that war between Japan and China had broken out and that they had decided they weren't sending anyone back. In fact, people that had gotten on a boat yesterday were being asked to get off of a boat, um, then tomorrow. So they were very obviously shaken by this because they had been gearing up. They were ready, their hearts were wanting to be back and, and Isobel was really not having it. She was like, I know about the war. We know it's happening in the north. Does does a mission board, know we're in the south, that's not gonna affect us. And you, how many of us, like there's word of a conflict somewhere and all of your supporters in your family assume it's happening to you, but you're like, no, I didn't even know about it.

Denise: [03:51](#) Cuz it's so far removed from where I'm at. Right? I think this is like what they're feeling. And um, she's just really believes that they didn't do their due diligence in studying the map to understand that well, some people maybe shouldn't go back, but not everybody. And so John is just saying, you know what, let's just do our usual routine for the evening. We read the Bible together and what they read for that evening with Psalms 91:1. And they realized that God was encouraging him through this verse. And some of you're familiar with it, but it's whoever dwells in the shelter of the most high will rest in the shadow of the almighty. I will say of the Lord. He is my refuge in my fortress, my God in whom I trust. And they both looked at each other and were in agreement that the Lord was using this to tell them you're gonna be okay, give them a call.

Denise: [04:42](#) So they do, John decides to call the mission board. And the next morning as planned the Kuhns family boards, the ship to head back and as they arrive back to the field, their first stop. You know, it is not the city that they're gonna serve in they're they're getting their daughter ready to go. And they knew that they would have to take her to, um, the school. I believe it was in Kunming if I remember correctly. And, but as they arrived, expecting to have a bit of downtime, there was a telegram waiting for them that said, don't send Katherine to that school. We want her to go to the school in CheFu and the school you had hoped that she could go to just isn't ready. It was a smaller school. So the school in CheFu is the main missionary school for children that cim had.

Denise: [05:33](#) And it was much further away and this just blindsided Isobel. And she's just agonizing over this. She's having to re let go of the small amount of contact she thought she would get to have with her daughter. And I mean, it's just painful decision to make already. And then she's six and to not know what it was gonna

be like. So she, she was wondering even, so there was a teacher that was at this boarding house they were at, and she was supposed to send her with the teacher and Katherine was young and Isobel's like, well, what if she begins to attach to this teacher more than me? What if her memories are of this teacher? And I lose my place as her mother in her life. And, and she just was beside herself. And so, you know, as they decided that this, there was no way around it and they did go ahead and send Katherine off and, and Isobel just walked the streets mourning, all night, John was up with her and, and you know, and then she realized, you know what, there's absolutely no good that can come of this.

Denise:

[06:40](#)

Uh, me mourning and being upset and wailing about this and being depressed, you know, there's, there's not any good that I'm bringing to my husband. It's not bringing good to Katherine. It's just not bringing good to the work that we were sent here to do. And so she literally decided that this was too much of a burden for her to carry and the Lord was just gonna have to carry it for her. It was too much. And so she took him at his word that he would carry the burden for her. And so they decided, okay, well, let's, you know, get back to the work they had been. If you remember with the Lisu people and then comes another blow, Isobel had forgotten that James Frasier who had assigned them said, this is a temporary post until your furlough was over. And she had been expecting to return to the Lisu people. And he said, no, actually I'm gonna assign you to Pow Shawn. And she just felt like there was so much that was being taken away from her. She had just lost her daughter to a boarding school. That was not her choice. Now she had lost the people group that she felt like she was destined to live and serve with. And just feeling like compound loss, upon compound loss was just happening to her in the season.

Sarah:

[07:55](#)

Yeah. Well, you had talked about Denise that there was this helper that she had, this companion when she was, um, in the place where they were before, who understood her. Like he understood maybe her Western, some of her Western tendencies. He was the one that went with her to the villages and, um, helped her understand the culture of the people more. To kind of bridge that gap. And, um, even I laughed at this because when I was in Southeast Asia, it was weird to like have a room by yourself to sleep. You know, it was, it was caring to not leave someone alone. And that was something that Isobel dealt with as well, like, um, that it wasn't hospitable to have her own space or sleep in a bed by herself. But, um, Lucius this companion and helper got that. He understood it. Um, but then, you know, even in this, this time of all of these losses, like you

were talking about, um, she lost him as a companion as well. And so, yeah, I just can't imagine like one thing after another of having to grieve and the losses that don't necessarily always make sense to others, you know, it's not so much like a death, but these, these losses of someone who gets you.

Denise: [09:21](#) Um, right. Yeah. Especially cross culturally to find that person that can become a buffer and it translator and, uh, understands your weird idiosyncrasies as a foreigner and helps bridge that gap for you. I mean, I'm sure that felt like a diamond in the rough kind of friend.

Sarah: [09:38](#) So priceless,

Denise: [09:40](#) To have him Marry someone and move away. And she just, you know, just began to feel all of this loss. And so she's just like, I'm just gonna set aside some time to pray. And during this time that she was praying, she believed that God specifically, as if she heard his voice said, you will be going back to the Lisu. And so she trusted him. She believed him 100% and she just grinned and began to pack, to move to Pow Shawn where she was being asked to go. And even, I think she mentioned her husband was like, well, this is kind of unexpected. I, I don't understand why you're being like this, but okay, we'll just go with it. And, and so she decided I'm gonna keep it to myself. I'm not even gonna share it with anyone that this special revelation that the Lord gave me that I would be going back.

Denise: [10:25](#) And so one month after they had gotten to Pow Shawn, she was not surprised when Frasier wrote them and asked them to go to the Lisu people and helped settle a problem that had arisen in the church with the reminder of, remember, this is not a permanent situation, you know, and she's just in her heart going, you think it's not, but I believe the Lord has told me that it is. And so in 1938, they returned to the Lisu people. And the area they lived in was called Oak flat village. And so she felt this urgency because, you know, she had been told it wasn't a permanent situation. So I think she believing that she could be there longer, but also wanting them to make the most of the time really got to work. And she just wanted to make a big difference. And so this is one of the big legacies of Isobel is she began the rainy season Bible school, RSBS, which was, if you remember Sarah, you mentioned, she originally had gone to school to be a teacher.

Denise: [11:24](#) And she did not like teaching third graders, but she had longed to teach adults and she loved teaching. And so what they decided was that yes, in the village where she lived, there was a

church, but there were other Lisu who didn't have access to teaching. And she knew that they had access to scriptures that had been translated into their languages, but not yet put into book form. And so she, with the help of others typed out the book of Galatians and first Corinthians and began to plan to do a rainy season Bible school. And what that would mean is in the season when they aren't being able to do much, come here, come to Oak flats and let's do this teaching. And so they wrote to James Frasier, he approved the school. He was actually really favorable about that because he liked the idea of Lisu being able to teach each other.

Denise: [12:10](#) And he even said, I'm gonna send two other single missionary guys that can help you with this. Um, so the, the only other obstacles they had to get the church in Oak flats to agree to host it. And so that would mean people wouldn't just come back and forth. It's not like they lived close enough. So they would have to, actually come and stay there. And the church was worried about, well, we have to provide for them. They, you know, we have to provide housing and food and they were mostly concerned about the food. And so, um, Isobel was just sure that God would provide that this was of him and he would provide. And so they said yes, and 18 students arrived to that first RSBS and they brought bags of rice with them. And I think, you know, they had this understanding that they would need to contribute to their feeding.

Denise: [12:55](#) And so they had Bible study, preaching practice, personal evangelism techniques were taught. And then on the weekends, after, you know, all of their teaching, they would then go into these villages. They would travel up to 25 miles and it's rainy season. So it wasn't just like normal, just getting there. It was challenging, but they were bringing the word to people that were hungry for it. And the people were so grateful that they often repaid these pastors with food or silver coins, which then they were able to buy the food and the supplies that they needed. So God just provided and helped it all to work out. And it was during this time that Isobel began to write her first book, precious things of the lasting Hills. And she, she used those many beautiful prayer letters to help fill in the details and to communicate the stories, but then some shocking news arrived.

Denise: [13:51](#) They got word that JO Frasier had died of malaria in Pow Shawn leaving his wife and two girls. And, and this just totally was devastating news to them. Um, if you remember, he was the first one to introduce the Lisu, to her, to ignite that fire in her that these were the people she wanted to serve. And, and so he understood the trials that were associated with serving there,

but also the joys when they did have successes. And she, they just felt like he was their biggest champion. And, and she wrote, there was no one else on earth that had such complete knowledge of the details of our problems. And no one could share so perfectly in our joys life can never again be quite the same without him. So CIM is left without their, you know, director of this area and fighting was continuing to increase.

Denise: [14:43](#)

And so they believed, you know, James had people where they were for a reason, he understood why they were, where they were. And so CIM decided, okay, wherever you are, that is your permanent location. And so Isobel is reminded of the Lord's reassurance to her that she would indeed go back there permanently and, and in a bittersweet way, realizes this was what the Lord was preparing her for, that this wasn't how she had hoped that prayer would be answered. And yet here she was. And so she just continues to get back into work and pouring her heart into the Bible school, the rainy season Bible school, and each year it was more successful than the year before. And in 1940, the new Testament was finally finished in their language. And in 1941, they had some other news. I don't know if anybody's tracking here, this is a world war happening.

Denise: [15:38](#)

And it was then in December when Pearl Harbor was bombed. And so they recognized the ramifications of what is happening. Westerners in China had kind of been perceived as neutral, but now they're worried that they're gonna be treated differently and that there's gonna be this animosity. And she's not really just thinking about herself. She's like, I have a daughter who I'm separated from, and now how is she going to be treated and perceived? And so she's, she's obviously she's thinking, how can I get to CheFu, how can I get there and, and realizing that there's no way she can get there with the war and the way that things are happening. She had to just decide that the Lord had put her daughter where she was, and he had put the teachers there and the people around her. And he, she just had to, again, trust him to carry that burden and the staff to take care of her daughter.

Denise: [16:30](#)

Um, just, she couldn't carry it, you know? And so it was a great reminder.

Sarah: [16:35](#)

Wow. So much surrender in that.

Denise: [16:38](#)

Right. I, I, I mean, and it was active. She actually actively made the choice to surrender that. And, you know, so there's a vacancy left by the death of Frasier. And her husband began to assume that role, um, as someone that actually Frasier really

loved and invested in and respected. And so, um, he assumed his role, which meant, um, he had to leave for three months to attend a conference. So she's in Lisu land and she's like, well, okay, well, the Bible school I did in coordination with John, he taught the boys. I taught the girls. And so I'm gonna start a Bible school for girls. And so that's what she did while he was away. Well, during this time she got a really bad tooth toothache and she made plans to visit the dentist in Kunming.

Denise:

[17:23](#)

Well, this was the town where her daughter was supposed to be in boarding school. I don't know if you're tracking with me. This is also the town where Katherine's and David, which are John's sister and her husband lived. And so she's like, okay, well, nearest dentist is there. I'm gonna try to make my way there. Well, on her way, there, she runs into these two pilots. They're the flying tiger pilots. They were on a journey and they see her and they offer to take her by car. And she's like, well, you know what, that's probably a, a better way to get there than walking. Well, she writes in her books about the harrowing attempt in this car and the curves and the death defying look over the edge at the cliffs. And just like, I think I get the impression she preferred walking, you know?

Denise:

[18:06](#)

And so even though it was maybe quicker, but, but they ended up breaking down and she, um, was, you know, they were left without being able to use the car anyway. And so this, um, I think another British driver happened to drive by and offered to drive them the rest of the way, but there was absolutely no room for luggage. They left bedding and luggage. So the only thing that she could have with her was the dress that she was wearing. And even though the pilot said, we'll send somebody back from our stuff. She just knew I'm never seen any of that stuff again. So she's sick. I mean, she's leaving because she has a toothache. That's making her so sick. She's had a hard journey. She gets there expecting to see Katherine and David and they aren't there. They've gone somewhere to minister in a village, and she's just almost overwhelmed and exhausted and just, you know, begins crying because she just wanted a comforting, friendly, face to welcome her.

Denise:

[19:03](#)

And that wasn't there, but she did end up making it to the dentist the next day. And he informed her that her tooth infection had spread throughout her whole body. That's why she felt so terribly. And that if she had delayed by even one day, he couldn't have been sure that he could have saved her life. She was very grateful to have made it in time and to get the medical help that she needed. You know, Katherine and David did end up returning. And, um, she was there hoping that she

would meet John and that they could travel back up to Lisu land together, but they had some more bad news. Um, the Japanese were advancing and her home back in Oak flat was in danger. But her daughter also was in danger in CheFu. And, um, when John did meet her there and he learned of this, he felt, I can't just let the other missionaries who are in these places that have no access to radio.

Denise: [19:54](#)

They have no idea that they are in jeopardy. I need to go warn them. And so when he, he went off and he didn't return as expected. And, you know, she began to get really worried when there was no news of anything happening to him, but he didn't return home. And then she got word that not only was she here stranded in Kunming not knowing what happened to her husband. She now could not travel anywhere without a pass. Chinese government, knowing that things were just heating up required. Everyone had to have a special pass to be able to travel. And she couldn't give that to herself. So she couldn't get a pass to return home. She didn't know where her husband was. And then the British consulate who, as a Canadian, she fell under their authority. They ordered her to go to a new province to Seshuwan province.

Denise: [20:42](#)

And, and she's like, but I'm get, if I go, I'm getting further away from where my husband knows that I am, and she has no way of getting news to him. And so, but she had no choice. And so the trip took her seven days and she just, each day is getting further and further. And she's like, I'm seven days further away from John. That's all she could think. And she only had remember the dress that she was, everything else got left in that car. So she had no permission to travel. She had no money because this was just supposed to be a trip there and back and no clothes. And so she's just sitting in a pretty unfortunate situation. Yeah. And then more news arrived. She soon learned that the Japanese had captured the 97 missionary children at the CIM school in CheFu.

Denise: [21:33](#)

Katherine, her daughter was placed in a Japanese internment camp with the other children and staff. So, you know, she was already coming from a place of feeling like bad news upon bad news was piling up. And then after learning that she's heard that her Lisu home in Oak flat had just barely been spared from the advancement of the troops that were coming. So she just began to pray. She knew, she goes, I'm in a really lonely situation. I have no resources. The only thing I have is the Lord. And so she found a church and she just began to pray and she, she needed money. She needed an invitation to travel. Um, she needed to know where her husband was and she's just laying



out all of this in front of the Lord. And, and she really left that church with peace. I mean, one thing we learned about Isobel is she is just a prayerful woman and she was moving in and out of prayer throughout her days.

Denise: [22:28](#) And so the next day she received a telegram from John asking her to join him in Tali. One of the places they lived. So she knew he was alive and that telegram served as the invitation, she would need to be able to travel. So she was, she was so thrilled. So couple of her problems are already being solved. Her husband's alive. He's invited her with the invitation, but she still had no money <laugh>. And so that day, as the Lord does, a bag of mail arrived, she had been, it had been months and she had received anything in the mail. And two letters had arrived for her that particular day. And those two letters actually had been sent six months apart, but they were from the same young woman. So remember with me back on furlough, in part one, we talked about they had this inheritance and one of the ways they were blessing people was paying some tuition for them to be able to attend Moody.

Denise: [23:26](#) And one young woman said, I will only accept it. If you allow me to pay you back. And they had said, it's not necessary. Well, these letters were from that young woman and each letter contained \$50 that she was paying them back for that loan. So this was her money for traveling. And so just the Lord just continued to provide for her and meet for her, meet her needs, where she was, the trip was difficult. Um, just like in her last trip where she arrived just with anxiety and, and hope of seeing a friendly face, she gets to Tali to not find her husband, but to find a note from him saying that he had gone on a medical mission trip from there. And she I'm sure. She's just thinking, I just wanna see someone and hug somebody. And so she began to have thoughts that God was so jealous that he didn't want her to have anybody, but him. He'd taken her daughter, her husband, her home, and, and now she didn't have a permit to follow him, to Pow Shawn, which is where he had gone.

Denise: [24:27](#) Cuz he'd only asked her to come to Tali. And so she's like, and I didn't have the things I still needed to get to him. And so she began to pray and realized I just have to pray and wait. Well, she soon received a message from the general, from general Song saying, you can expect your husband back soon. And so he did August 4th, 1942. He arrived back home and was summoned both of them by the general and explained why he had brought him back. It was because he needed their help. See the Japanese who they're at war with had enlisted the help of the heathen tribes, which they considered the Lisu to be a

heathen tribe in the west. In reality, the Chinese had a, had neglected these tribes. They kind of thought of them as dirt as they actually called them. The dirt people, I think the earth people.

Denise: [25:17](#) So according to Chinese legend, when God had finished making the world, he scraped the mud from his sandals and fashioned the Lisu and other tribes. And they called them the earth people. So to say they had been neglecting, it was kindly put. And was it any wonder that when they had felt so neglected by the Chinese, when the Japanese came and wanted their help, they were willing to take a side with them. And so the general was like, we know that you have found favor with them. You speak Chinese, you speak Lisu, can you help us gain friendship with them and warn them that it's dangerous to cooperate with the Japanese. And John and Isobel were like, actually, if you would take a look, that's what we've been doing the whole time, where there are Lisu churches, they are not cooperating with the Japanese. We have been telling them that it's not safe for them to do that.

Denise: [26:08](#) And so they agreed to help. And now they had the way back to Lisu land and they had a military escort to get there. By the time they got back to their home in Oak flats, it had been six months since she left with her tooth ache. And I'm hoping she found a new dress somewhere in there along the way. Right. Was it just the one that she had? Just the one, but so, so she's back there and she decides, you know what, Isobel's jumping in. She is jumping in full force and in 1943, she started a Bible school for boys and 76 boys showed up. 76. Do you remember the first numbers we're talking about was like 18. It's just continued to grow. And she found out during all of this, 76 boys arrive, she's overwhelmed. She doesn't know how she's going to be able to do this.

Denise: [27:02](#) And she's exhausted. And she finds out, there's a reason for that exhaustion. At age 41, she found out she was pregnant. And so she also knew her husband, John, who had accepted this role as superintendent would be gone a lot. And she could just continue to do everything she could do to hold these schools. Even though life was difficult. She totally believed that the Lord would provide. And, and because it was during war time, when all this was happening, supplies were in really short supply. Supplies were in short supply. So pens, paper, pencils, the things that they needed for the school there, wasn't no easy way to get there. They were cut off from everything. And so what did Isobel do? She prayed that the Lord would provide,

and he did. In fact, he provided in the way of five US pilots that happened to drop out of the sky.

Denise: [27:56](#) She, they came and found her, uh, after they dropped out of the sky, she took care of them. And when they were finally well enough to leave, they said, what can we do for you? And she said, well, actually we really need some supplies for our school. And so within days, a package arrived with stationary, paper, pens, pencils from the American pilots who had dropped down and found her little homestead and Lisu land. Hmm. So, um, in a season where she had seemed to only be receiving bad news, she received some great news. Her daughter, Katherine had been repatriated to the states with the other children that had been taken prisoner. And she knew that in a few months she would be headed to meet her on furlough. So in October of 1944, I don't know if I mentioned that she actually had her baby.

Denise: [28:52](#) So she was pregnant and she had a little boy named Daniel. So in all of this, teaching the school ministering and taking care of pilots, she has a son named Daniel. And so as they return on furlough in 1944, she has a young son, um, who is full of energy. And because of the war, the normal transportation on boat that had been somewhat enjoyable. That was not the case. It took them 36 days on a ship that was full of refugees. The men and women were separated. She could actually only see her husband for two hours a day. Her baby was super colicky. So I'm sure every mother that is listening to this is just feeling so much compassion for what she was going through. I mean, we don't like taking those 12 hour flights with children. And so to, to have this situation, you know, just such compassion for what she was going through.

Denise: [29:46](#) And as she gets back to Canada and eventually the States, she is reunited with her now 13 year old daughter, she was six whenever she last saw her. I mean, no idea that it would be that many years before she saw her again. Um, during this time Isobel just continues to use her pen. And she, she hates being away from the Lisu people. She wants to continue to bless them and make the work with them known so other people can be praying. So she begins to write her book nests above the abyss, which is stories about the brave Lisa that she served with. You know, all of this war is happening. John is there with them on furlough, but he was actually asked to return to China one year ahead of his family. There was because there was all this hard, um, because it wasn't possible for missionaries to be in China right now for a lot of them, they were reassessing different things.

Denise: [30:42](#) And so they really needed him to be back there to have some conversations. Um, and so he went a, a year ahead of them. And eventually when it was time for them to return, Isobel had to say goodbye to her daughter again, Katherine, because she was now old enough that she was gonna stay in the states to finish school. And so just this constant, you know, goodbyes that were just so heavy and so hard, but Daniel went back with her and they went back to the Lisu people. And honestly, they were received with such celebration. They had been holding the Bible school while they were gone. And each one had continued to be bigger than the one before and yet with the growing war, her husband was needed to be gone quite a bit. And so it, it just wasn't safe for her and Danny to remain there.

Denise: [31:30](#) And, and she received word that people were actually advancing near them. And so she and, and Danny left and, and it ended up being a good thing that they did because after they left, she realized that men had showed up at her, their house with grenades, specifically looking for her. And so she, um, began to realize that it wasn't safe for her. So in 1950, she left the Lisu people, probably with the understanding that she may never see them again. Um, she and, and Daniel went home, but to the states, but John again, would remain, um, three months later, she arrived back in the states, greeted by those girls corner club, people that she had ministered to, they, they still remained that work was continued. And she went to visit her now 19 year old daughter, Katherine, who was a student at Wheaton. And she continued to write her book.

Denise: [32:30](#) She began working on the book stones of fire recounting more of her time with the, she just really felt like her writing was an extension of a way to care for them, them when she couldn't be with them. I think her heart was just constantly with, and for the Lisu people. Um, John is continuing to work, um, in his role as the superintendent. And they realized, you know, that, yes, they couldn't get back into China, but he had found a way that the Lisu could be reached through Burma and through other ways. And so he excitedly rejoins his family in America, telling them news about, Hey, and there, there is still work to be done. Yes. It's not exactly how we thought, but we can still work with this People. In the meantime, cim had to be changed to OMF, which meant overseas missionary fellowship, because it was no longer just China with the way that the war was going.

Denise: [33:25](#) And John would become the new superintendent of the now OMF. And at this point, Isobel is just exhausted. I mean, think about the role that she's played. She's in her fifties. Um, and she's being asked to go overseas again to a different area, a new

language, a new way to reach these people. And she's just like exhausted. And she knows that what this would mean because there's no missionary school. Danny is getting older. This would mean leaving Danny in the states for her to go back. And, and, you know, I think it goes back to that the sacrifice that was asked to be made. And I think some of it is we all look at this with a different vantage point, you know, back in this time with missionary service, this was more of a normal sacrifice. They went into the work knowing I think some of us might listen to this now and be like, um, that's a no brainer.

Denise:

[34:25](#)

I'm staying with my child. My first ministry is to my family. And, and yet just the understanding of what we have learned about trauma and about, you know, the role of that family plays with children. You know, it's just different in the way that some people do missionary service now. And so, as I, as I hear this, I'm just like, I can't believe that that was the choice that she had made, that she would leave her son after basically not getting to mother, her daughter for her entire life, you know? And, um, and yet that was just part of the understanding of the way that missionary work was done in that time. Right. Wrong or indifferent. I'm sure that's a whole topic of conversation. Um, but she felt she was too old. And yet she felt convinced by John that this was exactly what the Lord had for them when they committed to serve with the Lisu people.

Denise:

[35:22](#)

And so she liked Amy Carmichael and there's, um, you know, a phrase that Amy Carmichael's kind of famous for that's climb or die. And it's just like, you have to keep climbing the next hill that he puts before you, and that otherwise you're not making any progress, you know? And so, um, so she kind of took that to heart and believed that this was the next hill that was being put in front of her. And so she, she went ahead with them to this new area, um, where they knew that there were a guest house that she would run and, and there were missionaries going in and out of there. And the missionaries that she was helping to take care of were telling her, there are Lisu villages. In fact, we think we know about 800 Lisa villages. And so she just began to be so excited.

Denise:

[36:05](#)

And as another couple came to take over the guesthouse, she was like, I wanna be in the villages, I want to be back working with the Lisu people. And, and so she would begin hiking into those villages to minister, to those people. And, and it's, you know, in this time that I, I believe she was outside on a hike and a branch flipped back and hit her in the chest and it was extremely, unusually painful. And that was kind of the beginning of what she would later find out was a diagnosis of breast

cancer. Initially it was thought that it wasn't malignant and as surgery was performed. And the physician said, you know, I, I think what I saw was it spreading, I think it is malignant. And so, um, she was sent back to the states for better treatment, better diagnosis and care, but that meant she got to be with Danny, who was now 11 years old.

Denise: [36:57](#) They, they rented an apartment together. John went ahead and stayed again, a different era of doing ministry. Um, he was asked to just stay and as things became more clear about what her diagnosis meant and her treatment that they would send for him. So mm-hmm, <affirmative>, it was a time that she really struggled emotionally and, and she really felt like her legacy was going to be in the stories that she left to tell. And so she used this time of declining health, the notoriety that her books brought her allowed for some speaking engagement. So as her health held out, she did that and she wrote, um, she wrote as much as she could just, um, again, she felt this was her ministry to the Lisu people to connect other believers, to prayer for them.

Sarah: [37:47](#) She even, she even had a surgery so that it would prolong her time knowing it wouldn't like bring complete healing, but it would give her more time to write because that she just felt so strongly, like you were saying that this was part of her ministry

Denise: [38:03](#) You're so right. Yes. And it wasn't about prolonging life for her, or even for her son, because I, I think I even read at one point, she said, you know, having a mother in heaven may be more of an encouragement to Danny than having a mother here. I mean, just the things that she was wrestling with in her thought process is just, you know, so encouraging and fascinating as they're going through this. So, so as it came time that she had to, you know, let her prayer supporters know, remember she's prolific at writing these letters and had a wide reach with those. And she was worried about upsetting the people that had been praying for her when they find out about this diagnosis. So she just continued to encourage them in saying that there is no gloom in our hearts. There's no gloom in his heart as he watches over me.

Denise: [38:48](#) Why should there be in yours, look up for his direction in praying for me, that is all I have to say. So, um, during this time you remember her daughter was attending college. Well she was also in 1955 accepted by CIM to be a missionary to Thailand. And Isobel is now come full circle because she was once the daughter that wanted to go with a mother that wanted her to stay. And her first inclination was to ask

Katherine not to go yet. She knew her time was limited. And she knew that if she asked Katherine to not go that Katherine wouldn't go and she remembered all too well, that feeling of being called and wanting to get there. And so she just decided that wasn't going to be the ask that she made of her daughter. She didn't want her daughter to wrestle with that the way that she did.

Denise:

[39:45](#)

And so mm-hmm, <affirmative>, there were tears at that goodbye, obviously, Isobel, knowing that this would probably be the last time that she saw her daughter. And honestly, probably a little bit of the trauma of almost every goodbye that she had over the years with her was a long goodbye. And knowing that this one would be the longest yet. So in July of 1955, it became clear that Isobel was not going to be getting better. So John was sent home to be with her as they were together, you know, just kind of ministering to each other. In those final years, they received a letter from Oak flat, which was their Lisu home for so many years stating that the rainy season Bible school had continued. And there were 80 students now that had attended. And that a total of 270 Christian families were now living there and over 700 new baptisms had happened.

Denise:

[40:43](#)

And so just this, the work will go on without you theme that had been from the beginning, from that note from the girls in the ship to today was just, um, bookends of a life of a work that would outlive them. On March 20th, 1957, Isobel died quietly by John at the age of 55. One of the notes that was found by her bed was the scripture in Isaiah 46, 9 through 10. He said, I am God. And there was none like me. I make known the end from the beginning. Also among Bel's things was the poem. It was a poem that her grandmother had written her. It had been inscribed in a book many years before. And I'll tell you that when she first read this poem, it was not received with love. She was actually pretty discouraged by it. And yet I think here at the end of her life, it was very fitting to note this poem, the poem said a noble life is not a blaze of sudden glory one, but just an adding up of days in which good work is done.

Denise:

[41:51](#)

I think that at the beginning of Isobel's ministry, as she's looking at things, she's like, I don't want a noble life that is just ordinary days stacking up. I want excitement. And as you get to the end of her story, I think she's had some pretty fantastic days and some pretty fantastic stories, but really it was just ordinary work that she kept saying yes to, the Hills that she kept climbing. And that's what made her life noble at the end of it. One interesting thing, um, is that when Elisabeth Elliott was young, she actually got the chance to meet Isobel Kuhn and,

and Elisabeth tells that she was not exactly sure what she was talking to her about, but she thinks she was saying something about not looking forward to, or unsure of the service of life in the jungle that the Lord had for her and Isobel said, but we have the Lord. And that is the best of all. Isn't it? I love when the stories we have of these legacy women overlap with each other. Because when I think of the women listening to this podcast, the women serving all over the world today, your stories overlapping with each other are the ones that bring courage to the next generation to go, to climb the mountain, to continue to add up your days, however, ordinary or extraordinary they are to at the end, believe that there's a noble life, a legacy left for others.

Sarah: [43:24](#) Yeah. So one of the things that I just love in Isobel's story and that we value, I think in Velvet Ashes too, is authentic storytelling. And we've talked about this a little bit, but Isobel was such an early pioneer of authentic storytelling, you know, with her honest reflections and her books and her prayer letters and her communication talking about her own personal shortcomings and the struggles of married life on the field. And I, I really loved the way that she brought dignity and value to the people she was serving among, um, the Lisu people. You know, sometimes I think, especially at this time, there could be this way that, that missionaries talked about people kind of in a condescending way, you know, focusing on maybe the, what we would consider, maybe the primitive nature of a people group, but she just really elevated the beauty that she saw in them, the value that she saw in them.

Sarah: [44:28](#) And she also, wasn't afraid to, to talk about the things that we would not consider successful. You know, I think even today, we, we want our newsletters to be full of glowing updates and success stories, whatever that means. But, you know, she would talk about sometimes the harsh realities and sometimes even people who had professed faith in God and then turned away. And so through all of that, just seeing her honesty and her vulnerability, um, the way that she also used her writing as a way to glorify God, to share the things that were on her heart and to bring value to the people, bring awareness to her supporters of the work that was happening.

Denise: [45:23](#) There are so many great books that Sarah and I, I was telling Sarah, as I was preparing for this, my desk is Isobel Kuhn. It has so many Isabel Kuhn books all over it right now. And, and if this has interested you, if you would like to know more about her writing is beautiful. She really was gifted in describing where they lived and in drawing you in. And if you'd like to



experience that with her, it's definitely worth your time. And we will link her books in our show notes and anywhere that we have drawn our information from, and we just thank you all for sitting with us. We know that this was a longer, uh, piece. We didn't plan for it to necessarily be this long, but we just couldn't find anything that we wanted to cut out. We wanted to tell our story really well. And we appreciate, um, you sticking through to hear the full story of Isabel Kuhn. We hope that this podcast has blessed you this month. We look forward to bringing you next month's legacy woman. And as always, we wanna thank Eine Blume for the use of their song, daughters and sons in the intro of our podcast. And until next time remember you may be living the story. That will be the courage for someone else's legacy.