

Jackie Pullinger - Lyfe story

Born: 1944 in London, England

As a child she dreamed of becoming a missionary. This began to materialise around a particular place – Hong Kong. As a young adult, barely into her twenties, she began to take steps towards realising this dream. However, she soon found that her youthful exuberance and a sense of calling were not sufficient to convince the various mission agencies and churches she contacted.

However, she did not interpret the apparent closing of this door as a sign of divine will. Rather, at 22 years old, following some brave advice from a local vicar, she simply bought a ticket and got on a boat. All she had was 100 Hong Kong Dollars and a strong sense that she was obeying the call of God on her life. The first of many miracles was that the immigration officials allowed her to enter Hong Kong! She found her way to a notorious part of Hong Kong called the 'Walled City'.

In the 1960s, this densely populated area was practically free from police jurisdiction. As such, the area attracted drug dealers, prostitutes and all manner of other illegal activity. The Walled City was well known for being run by the Triads, a ruthless Chinese gang. One of the most serious problems in the Walled City was the rampant drug abuse. The drugs of choice were opium and heroin. Jackie wrote, 'I could walk down the street and see a hundred people [taking drugs]... you had to climb over their legs. I wanted something real to offer them.'

Into this context stepped the young Jackie Pullinger who managed to get a job teaching at a primary school. In order to reach out to the community, Jackie set up a small youth club. After time, she gained the respect and trust of the boys who came to the youth club, many of whom were members of the Triads.

Some of the boys who came to the club began to make commitments to follow Christ. Amazingly, many of the boys who prayed for freedom from their addictions were able to come completely off the drugs, even without going through withdrawal. Jackie opened a home for some of the boys to stay at. Not all found freedom from addiction in this manner but it was clear that God was at work amongst the poor and needy in Hong Kong.

Despite initial opposition, she found favour with the most unlikely of groups – the Triads. One evening, the youth club was broken into and wrecked. In response, the Triads posted a guard outside. A gang leader told Jackie that he did not want the young gang members to become drug addicts and so asked for her help. Jackie courageously responded that if the boys followed Christ they would have to leave the gang. Again, the miraculous happened. The gang leader gave his approval to Jackie's idea. He would allow gang members who became Christians to leave the gang. This was unprecedented in Triad culture, as when a boy joined the Triads he became a gang member until death. Jackie opened up other homes, and she founded the St Stephen's Society that continues this work in Hong Kong and throughout Southeast Asia. Jackie Pullinger offers a powerful contemporary example of a life empowered by God's Spirit, seeing freedom come to those who most need it.