Chapter 5
Chefoo Schools

My sixth birthday came and went. It was time for me to go to school. I realize now that Mother's heart was breaking at the thought of giving up her little boy. She had lost her daughter Ruth, and now her oldest son would be gone for a long ten months. With the unrest in China, she must have had fears of never seeing him again. The China Inland Mission owned a large compound in Chefoo, located on a beautiful sea-shore in Shantung Province. There they had established a fine school primarily for the children of missionaries.

Mother must have had quite a series of discussions with Dad about escorting her son by mule-cart, bus, and three trains to Tientsin on the coast. That journey usually took from seven to fourteen days, depending on how late the trains were running. In Tientsin I would board a coastal steamer for the twenty-six hour boat-ride to Chefoo. She took me all the way to the China Inland Mission Home in Tientsin, where she turned me over to Miss Priestman, a teacher who would accompany me to Chefoo.

I have almost no recollections of anything on the trip except my first experience with a railway train. I was excited as I saw the plume of smoke in the distance, and I watched eagerly as the train came round the last curve toward the station platform. But when this noisy monstrous mass of machinery, like nothing I had ever seen or heard,

came roaring and clattering down the track and shaking the very ground where I stood, I must have thought the end of the world had struck with a vengeance. That hideous, roaring beast, its deafening whistle howling, belching out steam in every direction, terrified me. I can still remember clinging to the safety of Mother's long, black skirt.

It was while riding on one of the three trains on this trip that Mother suffered severe frostbite on her feet, frostbite that caused pain in her feet for the rest of her life. When we finally reached Tientsin, someone – I don’t know who – came to take us to the China Inland Mission home, a fine three-story building surrounded by an attractive English garden. I remember being fascinated with the electric lights, but terrified as I went into the bathroom and had to pull the chain to flush the toilet. The deafening noise of the water rushing down from the tank high up on the bathroom wall terrified me, and I had no idea what was happening.

The time came all too quickly for Mother to hand me over to the tender mercies of Miss Priestman. Even as I write, I find the tears starting to run as I think of the agony Mother must have suffered as she turned her son over to a Chefoo teacher she had never met before, who would take him the rest of the way to school. This was the first of February, and she would not see her son again until December.

Arriving in Chefoo’s fine harbor, we transferred to a harbor launch that took us to the pier. Someone from the school met us and hired rickshaws to take us with our trunks and suitcases to the school.

Of those early days I have no memories except being assigned to an upstairs dormitory room, Room Number 7, right across the hall from Miss Blackmore, our awesome principal, second in power and majesty to the Almighty God Himself. All too soon I discovered she possessed a “magic slipper,” which when applied to the proper part of a boy’s anatomy, turned a bad boy into a good boy.

As I recall, eight or ten of us slept in that bedroom. My bed was in the corner behind the door. Over my bed a large poster depicted a shepherd carrying a lamb in his strong arms. I

remember the feeling of comfort I received when a grown-up explained the wording under the picture, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Another scene comes to mind. It must have been August of the next year. I must have "graduated" from the little kids' room, and now I was downstairs, and the bigger room was filled with twelve or fourteen beds. I woke up that morning, August 26, 1925, before the bell rang. I remember saying to myself, "This is my birthday; I'm eight years old today! I'm going to be a good boy all day long." By 9:00 o'clock I had suffered my first paddling, though I have long forgotten what I did to merit that punishment. By the end of the day, I had been in trouble, it seemed, all day. During that terrible day I became convinced that all the teachers hated me. *Why did Mummy and Daddy make me come to this horrible place?* I remember lying there in that bed after the light was turned off, crying quietly and thinking, *"I wanted to be a good boy today, but I couldn't!"*

The C. I. M. Schools in Chefoo, at that time almost exclusively British, consisted of a "Prep School" for boys and girls from six to ten years of age, and a "Boys' School" and a "Girls' School" for the older children. The three schools included a total of perhaps 220 to 250 children, almost all children of missionaries. The staff found themselves totally responsible for the education of the children, and also served as surrogate parents. Chefoo was a boom town with a serious criminal element, so the staff took their responsibility seriously, and in view of the danger of kidnapping or other serious crimes, the rules became unnaturally strict. We were forbidden to talk with Chinese people. Since the schools were British, and all the teachers British, and almost all the students British, the few of us who were American students often found ourselves in the unhappy position of being a despised racial minority. One lady teacher who taught art showed her prejudice against me quite dramatically. We had done some drawings

of an ornate clock hand and she had failed to record the grades she had awarded, and so in the class she asked us each to tell her the grades she had given. The highest possible score that day was ten. When she called my name I answered "Eight." She looked up and said, "You couldn't have had an eight. That must be a mistake." When she saw who it was that had received that grade she lowered it to a five or a four. I recall that in our geography class we had to memorize the names of every bay and promontory all the way around the coast of Ireland, although we learned almost nothing about America. One of the finest of our teachers gave us the idea that everyone west of New York was either a gangster or else a "Red Indian." And yet, in spite of the exclusion of any teaching about the USA, the educational program was excellent with graduation exams from Oxford University. Of course the social side of our development as Americans suffered seriously. This led to an absurd superiority complex on the part of all the students, and a pitiful lack of knowledge of China, of the Chinese people, and of Chinese history and culture. Unintentionally, this must have contributed to the animosity of the Chinese toward the foreigners, even while missionaries sincerely tried to influence the people for Christ. This attitude of superiority on the part of the British and other foreigners, led ultimately to their expulsion when the Communists came to power.

Another serious result of the school assuming total parental responsibility was the poor relationship between boys and girls. The school must have been afraid of facing morality problems, and so in an effort to prevent any appearance of immorality, did not allow for any contact at all between the boys in the Boys' School and the girls in the Girls' School. The fact that missionaries were continually trying to preach to the Chinese, added to the apprehension concerning contact between the sexes. Had any appearance of immorality shown up it would

have made the preaching of the missionaries much more difficult. When I came to the States after graduating from Chefoo, I found this to be a real problem in adapting to a "normal" society.

As I think back about life in the Prep School, various snippets of activity come to mind. We enjoyed digging in the sand in the "Lower Yard," which was really a part of the beach but enclosed by the school's fence. A paved street ran along just outside that fence, and I recall the excitement when a motor car chugged along that road. We all ran to the wall to watch. I remember hearing someone say that it was probably traveling nearly twenty miles per hour. What blinding speed!

The school building itself stood on a hill above the "Lower Yard" and separated from it by a grassy bank perhaps ten or fifteen feet high, where a number of tiger lilies brightened the landscape.

Swimming in the sea was the highlight of every summer day. We played in the water, but learning to swim was something I did not master till I moved up to the Boys' School. We enjoyed various simple sports activities. I remember Foundation Day, June 15, when we celebrated the founding of the Chefoo Schools with various sports activities. Running never was my strong point and I remember trying to run in the one hundred yards race the first year I was there. The other five or six youngsters had already reached the finish line while I was still only halfway there. What I remember about that race was how good I felt with the folks on the sidelines laughing and cheering me on. For a rare moment I was the center of attention!

The highlight each year was our trip home for the Christmas Holiday. Travel in the summer in China carried a definite health risk as cholera, typhus and other diseases were rampant; so the schools planned a mere four-week holiday in August, and then an eight-or-nine-week holiday in December and January when there was less risk of contracting serious diseases.

I felt sorry for some of the students whose parents were stationed in remote parts of China or even on the border of Tibet or Burma. Because it would take a full month or more for them to go home, the unfortunate kids stayed at Chefoo and went home only once in three years! To make up for this hardship, parents were encouraged to visit Chefoo at least once during that time, but it had to be heart-rending for both parents and children.

There was one year, 1927, when we could not go home. Most of the missionaries had left their stations because of the chaotic conditions in the country, but Mother and Dad stayed in Shansi, and that winter conditions were so dangerous that we could not go home. We stayed at school, and Mr. and Mrs. Gordon P. Welch invited another boy and me into their home for the holiday. Mrs. Welch had been my teacher in kindergarten and I thought she was the best teacher in the world; or was she really an angel? Her name then had been Miss Anderson. Mr. Welch, who taught in the Boys' School, agreed, it seems, with my assessment and married her.

I know I was unhappy about not going home that winter, and I must have been difficult as I lived in the Welch's home. At best I was emotionally upset, but being unable to go home gave me an excuse to exhibit even more disobedience, hostility and belligerence. I am sure I brought them very little cheer that Christmas. One of the pleasures of that winter was sliding down the hill on sleds in the middle of the compound. On cold nights someone arranged to have water poured on the road coming down the hill from the Girls' School to the hockey field. As the water froze, that road was a perfect place for our sleds. In the morning, bundled up in our warmest clothing, and wearing "hoggie-doggies" (shoes made of water-resistant pig-skin, and lined with warm dog-fur), we would bring our sleds to the top of the hill. Coming down we had to be careful to steer our sleds in a gentle curve to the left before turning right into the hockey field at the bottom. To add to the excitement, on the outside of that left-hand curve a rock wall awaited

any careless sledder. As I recall, we had only one serious crash into that wall, and the unhappy sledder suffered a broken jaw.

I am afraid I had very little appreciation for the beauty surrounding us that winter. I simply wanted Mummy and Daddy. The snow on the hills must have been spectacular, but I had no eyes for all the beauty. The frozen foam piled up on the beach about five or six feet high. But all I could think of was the miserably cold weather, and the many chill-blains on my fingers and toes, and, yes, I wanted to see Mummy and Daddy.

However, the next summer more than compensated for all the unpleasantness of that cold winter at Chefoo. At the end of July, as political conditions quieted down, travel conditions improved, and Mother and Dad spent July and August in Chefoo. They rented a small house a quarter of a mile down the beach from the school, and we enjoyed the swimming. Dad bought a twelve-foot-long kayak for us, a kayak that provided fun all through the holiday and again each summer afterwards.

This was the summer I moved up to the Boys’ School. No longer could we be allowed simply to play in the water; we had to learn to swim. The master on duty, again Mr. Welch, took a group of us boys out in a row-boat into deep water and had us jump out, one by one, as he watched to see whether we could swim around the boat. I failed the test, but by the time we had to go back to shore I had begun to learn the art. The next summer I was ready to swim a measured quarter-mile, and felt quite at home in the water.

According to my memory twenty-two of us moved up from the Prep School to the Boys’ School. The Prep School consisted of four classes, Kindergarten, Transition, Lower I, and Upper I. When our class moved to the Boys’ School we were to go into the Second Form from which, year by year, we would be promoted to Third, Fourth, Five-B, Five-A, and finally to the

prestigious Sixth Form. However, the teachers who looked over our records decided that the bottom five boys were simply too dull, and so they split our class into Two-B and Two-A. Since I was the fifth from the bottom of the class in Upper I in the Prep School, that made me the top one in the new Form Two-B. For the first and only time in my educational career, I had the distinction of being the head of my class – at least until we had some exams at the end of the first term when I lost my status forever!

The staff at the Boys' School included some brilliant men who could have been a success in any field they chose. I think of Frank McCarthy, the principal when I arrived on the scene. He had suffered severely in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. There was Gordon Martin, who had been the stroke on his rowing crew in Cambridge University, and also, I believe, captain of his cricket team. I remember him leading our devotional time one morning, reading from his Greek New Testament and translating into English as he went. He taught Latin and wrote the school song in Latin. We even put on a play in Latin. I think of Fred Harris who taught math, and I recall seeing him work a math problem all the way across a fifteen-foot blackboard. He and Mr. Welch both taught science and really did a great job. In spite of great teachers, I simply failed to "fit in." I recall one conduct report card that really brought tears to Mother. The terse comment on the report card read, "Would like to feel his word was more dependable!" Although I had accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior, my conduct was deplorable, and my young life was a mess.

Then too, I remember the day, July 24, 1932, when I was baptized in the sea right in front of the Boys' School. Following a service in the "Memorial Hall" (erected as a memorial in honor of students who served in World War I) we walked down to the beach. We walked out a few yards from the shore into the water, and a crowd of Chinese watched as Mr. Whitelaw baptized his son Bob and another boy and me. As he baptized us he quoted to us the Apostle Paul's

testimony from II Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith." Mr. Whitelaw said, "Make sure when you come to the end of your life that you can say the same thing." Fittingly we sang a hymn there on the beach:

> "O happy day that fixed my choice
> On Thee my Savior and my God.
> Well may this glowing heart rejoice
> And tell its raptures all abroad.
> Happy day! Happy day!
> When Jesus washed my sins away."

To be certain that I would not forget the occasion Mr. Harris presented me a copy of "Daily Light," a little devotional volume with a reading of selected scripture verses for each day. I used that precious little book daily for many years, till it finally fell apart. It seems to me now that my life slowly improved about that time and those last two years were the best of my life at Chefoo.

Organized sports included soccer, cricket, field hockey, swimming and rowing, in addition to hiking on the beaches and in the hills. Chefoo stood on the south shore of an excellent lagoon, five or six miles in diameter, protected from the Pacific storms by a row of small islands to the east and north, and a row of hills known as "The Bluff" jutting out from the west and stretching around to the north side of the lagoon. The American navy anchored a dozen destroyers in the bay, and the British navy used this bay to station an aircraft carrier or some other ship, and often on Saturday afternoons the school challenged the British teams in soccer or cricket.

The school owned a diving raft floating perhaps two or three hundred yards from the shore, which provided a perfect place for swimming and diving. In high tide the water was about twenty feet deep. To earn the privilege of swimming from the raft, students had to pass a test by swimming a quarter-mile. So many swam that distance that the raft became too crowded; so they

raised the requirement to a half-mile, then one mile. By the time I left Chefoo most of us had completed the three-mile course. There always have to be thorns with roses, and the thorn in this case was the mass of jelly-fish that loved to congregate under the raft. Many a night I went to be scratching my skin where the jelly-fish had stung.

Swimming and boating were unforgettable experiences of summer at Chefoo. Other organized activities included tennis and field hockey. Squash-courts that doubled as fives-courts provided considerable variation. In addition to these sports, most of us owned bicycles that gave us pleasure.

The Children's Special Service Mission (CSSM) conducted a week or two of special meetings for the school children at the end of August. The older boys built a sand platform about two or three feet high on the sandy beach, and then rows of "pews" in a semi-circle in front of the platform. During the week the CSSM held the meetings just before sunset, but on Sunday nights they waited till after dark, and then all of us headed to the beach carrying Chinese lanterns. I still remember the deep impression made on my mind as I walked towards the meeting one Sunday night while I was still in a lower grade. One of the "big boys," David Landsborough, whose father served in Tibet, swung his lantern in a big circle, and as I approached, the people were already singing,

> Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
> Look full in His wonderful face,
> And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
> In the light of His glory and grace.

At the end of the summer holiday in the Boys' School the older boys staged a concert in the evening, shortly after sunset. A principal feature was poking good-natured fun at our teachers. One of the teachers had a habit of prefacing every command with the word "be." He

did this so consistently that the students nicknamed him, "B." I remember someone recited a limerick in his honor:

> At the B.S. *(Boys' School)* a teacher there be;
> "Don't be playing, be working" says he;
> "Be being obedient, lest it be expedient
> To show you I be who I be,"

Then there was another limerick poking fun at the Girls' School, where it was reported that the teachers had a telescope trained on the diving raft during the swimming season to ensure that the girls were safe and behaving properly:

> At the G.S. *(Girls' School)* the mistresses laughed
> When their telescope's power I asked:
> "It's not for the stars or for gazing at Mars,
> But for watching the girls on the raft."

Without question, the Winter Holidays were by far the most important part of the school year. I remember being jealous of the "Southern Party." When we went home for the Christmas Holiday, most of the student body was divided into two groups, the Northern Party, which went by boat up to Tientsin, and the Southern Party, which sailed down to Shanghai. From those two port cities the children found their way to their homes all over the country. I found myself jealous of the kids in the Southern Party, because on one occasion their ship was taken over by pirates. Wow! What fun! The only excitement on the way to Tientsin was being seasick. I remember a Miss Christensen who was traveling with the Southern Party when they were pirated. One of the pirates pointed a pistol at her. She looked him in the eye and said, "My God is able to make your next bullet a dud!" He pulled the trigger, and the bullet was indeed a dud. Not one person in that party was hurt, and God demonstrated His power in protecting all those children.

Life at Chefoo was more than memorable. The teachers gave me a fine spiritual foundation, and I am also deeply grateful for the excellent scholastic education. We have had opportunities to compare our high school education with the education other young people received in the States. When my brother graduated from Chefoo and went to Wheaton College in Illinois, he was immediately placed in third year French. But at least eight of the ten years I spent at Chefoo, from 1924 to 1934 were the most unhappy years of my life because of the arrogance of the British towards the Americans. After graduating, I spent several years with emotional scars so serious that when World War II broke out, the United States Army would not have me in the armed forces. And I am not alone in my unhappy memories of Chefoo. Some years ago my wife and I attended an IFCA Convention in Colorado, and one of the speakers had attended school at Chefoo. After the meeting we talked with her, and she said she had spent three or four years in a Japanese concentration camp, but without doubt her years at Chefoo were the worst in her life.

On the other hand, we found exquisite beauty in our surroundings. I will never forget one special sunrise I viewed from our dormitory window. The previous night after "lights out" I had crawled out of my bed in the second floor bedroom of our dormitory, and gazed through the open window at the long waves rolling gently onto the sandy beach just a hundred yards north of our dormitory. As each wave broke onto the shore, millions of phosphorescent cells sprang into action and I watched in awe at the sight of illuminated waves quietly splashing their shimmering light on the dark beach. Five miles northeast across the bay the beams from Lighthouse Island shone brightly as they danced on the calm water. I watched, fascinated as those beams crossed the phosphorescence of the gentle waves. I counted as the lighthouse sent out three flashes –

one, two, three – and then paused before sending out two flashes, then three more flashes and another two, a sequence it maintained all night long.

Eight iron beds filled our room, each furnished with a firm mattress stuffed with dried seaweed. Between the beds small chests of drawers provided space for storing our clothes, and above each bed a small bookshelf held the private library of the student who slept in that bed. I do not recall any pictures on the whitewashed walls. Three or four feet above each bed a light wooden frame suspended from the high ceiling, held a mosquito net, our only protection from the voracious mosquitoes that never seemed to be satisfied. I remember on one occasion I tore a hole in my net, and the next morning I gladly murdered twenty-four of the pests, each fat critter filled with a big drop of my blood. Outside, the wall of the two-story building where ninety of us lived, was covered with a thick coat of English Ivy, providing perfect breeding places for the pesky mosquitoes. That night I slept free from the pestilential mosquitoes, and woke up in time to watch the dawn.

Now, as the sky began to brighten, I crawled out of my bed to enjoy the grandeur of the sunrise. The lighthouse had faithfully sent out its beams all night, and was still shining as I looked out into the dawn. As I watched, the lighthouse lamp was extinguished. Now the blackness of the lighthouse, as it stood on top of that island, a black tower on a black island on a black sea – that blackness stood in striking contrast with the dim light slowly creeping up over the sky behind it. As I watched the sky brighten, a small cloud behind the lighthouse called my attention to the changing colors. At first I could see nothing but gray, but as that little cloud turned pink, I watched, fascinated, as the sky just above the horizon slowly turned pink, and gradually, almost imperceptibly, changed from pink into a fiery red. Meanwhile the black lighthouse, the back island, and the black sea seemed to become even blacker.

Suddenly a sliver of fire appeared on both sides of the lighthouse, starkly silhouetting the island. Almost at once I could see on the smooth surface of the sea a brilliant path of light from the shore below our window all the way to Lighthouse Island as the sun changed from red into bright white light. The pink clouds had changed back to gray, and a new day had arrived.

The bell rang, and now it was time to leave my reverie and prepare for another day of school.

Looking back now I can see that all the way through Chefoo days, yes, there were rough times, but God was leading, providing everything I needed and filling my life with beauty. Even as I still paddled in shallow, ankle-deep waters, learning to know God, the stones I walked on sometimes hurt my feet, but even in those early days I knew He had a plan for my life.