

Dr. Orpha Speicher

In 1936 Dr. Orpha Speicher left for India. Her journey to that point in her life was anything but easy. She initially felt a call to serve as a missionary in the 1920's while attending Pasadena College to become a teacher. After writing to the secretary of foreign missions to inquire about going to India she was told that the list for teachers in India was too long, and the only way that she would be able to go to India is if she became a doctor. So, she did.

After a bit of a struggle Orpha began attending the College of Medical Evangelists, a school specialized in medical missions. She completed her degree there and started working in a maternity ward to pay off her bills. The six months she spent there gave her very valuable experience.

Wasim, India was her mission destination. After arriving there she walked around the U-shaped, mud-walled building that was her "hospital." She found the conditions anything but hospital-like and found out that it had in fact been a school at one time. The building had only eight rooms, no equipment, no beds, no operating table, and no water. Orpha had no money or resources to spend in converting this old school into a hospital and she needed to gain the people's trust and business before there would even be a need for the hospital.

With this knowledge in mind, she set out to find her first patient. "The women of Wasim did not readily open their homes to Dr. Speicher. They were filled with fear and prejudice, and were suspicious of her." (Witthoff 21) After some slow progress, Dr. Speicher finally received her first patient, a pregnant woman named Bismilabai. The

poor woman had been in labor for three days without success and was exhausted. After much persuasion Orpha was permitted to take the sixteen year old girl to her so-called hospital, and provided her with constant care. The baby was still-born, but the mother survived because of the care provided by Dr. Speicher.

In 1942, war overtook the world and with reluctance, Orpha left India for the United States. This trip home was a blessing in disguise because while there she was able to buy some much needed equipment and, with God's help, was able to take all of it back to her in April of 1944 to her practice in India. She soon realized her dire need of some nurses and, "with the arrival of Jean Darling in the latter part of 1945, hope of having a nurses' training school increased" (Witthoff 37). Her dream started within the next year. Personal experience and intuition played a large role in the learning process because of the lack of supplies, they had no textbooks or models like skeletons to learn anatomy. One remarkable example came after a Hindu and Muslim battle. Darling found and collected some human bones that were left lying around and sterilized them. They were then used to teach the nurses' in training about the human skeleton.

Their hard work paid off and between 1946 and 1950, Dr. Speicher was able to erect a surgery wing, maternity wing, men's or surgical wing, an educational unit at the nurses' home, outpatient waiting rooms, examining rooms, laboratory, and a beautiful new chapel. Since then, both running water and electricity have been installed in the facilities. This hospital is available to all people and has changed so many lives in that corner of the world. This story is an example of how God can use anyone who will allow Him to by emptying themselves and being available.

Bibliography

Witthoff, Evelyn M. *Oh Doctor! The Story of Nazarene Medical Missions in India.*

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