

## "THE REJOICING CRISIS"

Reprinted from Chapter Seven of  
"Born to Climb" by Dr. Dick Hillis

Miss Joy Ridderhof -- Missionary to Honduras. Founder and Director of Gospel Recordings.

And every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11, Living Letters).

"You a missionary?" Mr. Ridderhof laughed benignly at his youngest daughter. "Joy, darling, be reasonable!"

Mr. Ridderhof turned to the visiting Quaker missionary and explained, "Our Joy is much too fun-loving and impractical to be a missionary. But you must meet our daughter Amy, What a fine missionary she'll make!"

Joy Ridderhof got the same reaction from her school friends. "You in Africa?" they would chortle. "Oh, Joy, you're afraid of a frog. You'd never be able to live in Africa, with witch doctors and lions and pythons."

They were right, Joy admitted sadly. Her older sister Amy had all the qualifications for missionary service. Joy could not do much of anything. Still, she clung wistfully to the dream of serving God in Africa.

Joy's dream was born as she listened to a missionary message when she was just five years old. A woman spoke about the needs of Honduras, and little Joy wished that some day she might go and tell foreign people about God.

The stream of missionaries visiting in the Ridderhof home in Los Angeles kept Joy's dream alive and interested her particularly in Ethiopia and the Sudan.

Joy attended Bible School, spent two years in practical church work in Miami, and completed a degree in professional education at U.C.L.A. In the spring of 1930, Miss Ridderhof was ready to go to the mission field.

That spring very few Americans were going anywhere, except bankrupt. But Joy's God was not bankrupt. He sent her first to the very parish in Honduras whose needs had first aroused her compassion.

There the girl who was "too impractical" to be a missionary survived two revolutions and constant persecution with the triumphant testimony that "Fierce battles lead to glorious victories." Too sick to return to Honduras after her first term, Joy seized pick and shovel, hammer and nails, and turned a dirt-floored Los Angeles stable into a snug recording studio.

The girl who "couldn't do anything" mastered the technicalities of the finest recording equipment. She traveled from Alaskan igloos to stone-age New Guinea, recording the Gospel message in the languages of illiterate tribes. The child who was afraid of frogs grew up to spend a year in the Philippine jungles. In the shanties of brown-skinned natives, she endured gekko lizards and monsoon rains.

The girl who was "too impractical" to be a missionary now directs a recording studio, pressing and processing plants, and a phonograph factory in Los Angeles. She supervises a hundred workers, oversees branch offices in six countries, and trains and directs field workers.

"It is good," Joy admits, "I did not know in the beginning how vast the task was to be but I did know that God had pledged His Word. Of Abraham He said, 'But Abraham never doubted. He believed God, for his faith and trust were strong, and he praised God for this blessing before it even happened. He was completely sure that God was well able to do anything He promised, (Rom. 4:20, 21, Living Letters). Could I not accept this inheritance too?'"

Through five million whirling discs in over three thousand languages and dialects, Joy Ridderhof's faith speaks to the world. Testimonies to new life through the recorded message pour into her Los Angeles desk daily from the four corners of the earth. What turned the wistful Ridderhof girl into a woman of victorious faith? In three stages Joy recounts the experiences that led to the founding of Gospel Recordings: The healing of her disposition; The follow-through of obedience; The secret of rejoicing.

Her friends and family good-naturedly disparaged her missionary ideals. But that did not particularly concern or bother school-girl Joy too much. She was not particularly concerned about her lack of ability or adaptability. One thing troubled her -- her disposition.

Joy set high standards. Missionaries must be victorious Christians in every-day life, especially in their homes. Joy knew she did not qualify. "I wanted to be good," she says "but I was willful. I was often cranky and cross. I was selfish, very critical, easily aggravated. I fussed at my mother and blamed her for things that weren't her fault. The manners of my brothers and sisters annoyed and embarrassed me. I quarreled with Amy, my closest sister."

To the Friends' meeting that the Ridderhofs attended in Los Angeles there came old-fashioned fiery evangelists who preached the verities of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; "----one who is not holy will not see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14, Living Letters), they thundered. The text dug deeply into Joy's consciousness and convicted her of need in the give and take of daily living. Impatience, short temper, irritation -- were these normal traits for a child of God? "You don't act like a Christian," said Joy indignantly one day, applying her high standards to her older sister.



"Neither do you," retorted Amy

"No, but I expect to when I'm your age."

Yet Joy was no better as she grew older. She disappointed herself daily. Was she torturing her conscience unnecessarily? Going outside the Quaker fellowship, Joy found preachers who told her she could never expect anything more in this life than daily defeats.

Outside of her home, Joy seemed a model Christian. She invited her schoolmates to church youth classes and attended the meetings faithfully herself. She never let down the strict standards of her home and church. She was active in all sorts of Christian Endeavor, street meetings and city missions.

As soon as she enrolled at U.C.L.A., she hunted up other Christians and found a prayer group that met every morning. Joy made it her primary obligation in life to attend those 7:45 a.m. prayer meetings each day. The need to witness for Christ rested heavily upon her, and she forced herself to speak to other students about her Saviour. Christianity for Joy Ridderhof, college freshman, age twenty, was a list of arbitrary negatives and a parallel list of arduous obligations. Ever with her was the nagging consciousness of her failures at home. Surrender? Of course, the solution was to surrender her life completely to God. Joy tried it...no result. She went on praying, fretting, hungering.

During finals week, Joy was drawn away from her anxieties about her grades by a conference at the Friends church. Dr. R. C. McQuilken was scheduled to speak on "The Victorious Life," basing his messages upon the book of Romans. If the subject brought Miss Ridderhof to the first meeting, the speaker kept her coming. The assurance in his voice, the radiance on his face, the freedom and joy of his spirit gave a ring of reality to his words.

"What a surprise!" says Joy, describing the impact of those sermons. "Instead of harping on the sins of anger or bad temper, he bore down hard on the worst of my defeats--worry. 'Worry is a sin,' he would say.

"I was undone. With all my spiritual inadequacy I had thought that at least my concern for my own condition was commendable. But now I saw it for what it was--worry--a slap in the face of a loving, all-powerful God. No wonder my attempts at surrender hadn't worked. I'd never surrendered my right to fuss over my own spiritual life."

Sitting in the church, hearing the words "surrender" and "trust," Joy at last let go of her own efforts to live like a Christian. "It seemed as though I would fall over a steep precipice and be lost if I did, but the word trust rescued me. I trusted that God's arms received me, that His Spirit had taken control."

For Joy Ridderhof, surrender was an act of the will, not an emotional experience. In the following months, as she watched God turn her into the kind of person she felt a missionary should be, her heart filled with gladness. Miss Ridderhof likes to say that life began for her then. Immediately ahead of her lay seven years of training and patience and then a crisis of decision about her missionary call. Several things in those years could have held Joy back from missionary service. A man she loved proposed to her. She turned him down because of her missionary commitment. Still, the desire to have a home and family pulled strongly. Later the friendship was renewed. Because Joy had no immediate plans for going to the field, she decided to say "Yes" to him but was prevented in the simplest possible way. He never "popped" the question again!

For two years Joy did church work in Miami. In a fast-growing community, she saw much fruit among needy people. Lives were transformed. Prayers were answered. Young people were steered into Christian service. Should Joy remain in Florida and continue to serve God there? Perhaps some of the young people she influenced would become missionaries in her place. But family needs in Los Angeles recalled Joy to the West Coast. There she turned her face once more towards Africa as she set to work to complete her studies at U.C.L.A. for a teacher's credential. About to graduate, Joy looked around for missionary openings. There were none. The depression had closed the doors. Missions were considering retrenching. What should she do? She had already bypassed marriage and a successful ministry in Miami.

Joy possessed a brilliant mind. Her high grades and recommendations brought her an invitation to teach in the Los Angeles school system. She was delighted. She could earn a comfortable salary in spite of the depression. She could save money for her missionary outfit and she could help pay her own way to Africa.

When a college Bible class teacher asked Joy what she planned to do after graduation, Joy told her, "I'm going to teach for a year or two and then apply to the Sudan Interior Mission or Africa Inland Mission." The teacher looked at Joy in surprise and said, "But you know the time is short."

Joy went home and faced the matter. She prayed, "Lord, if You want me to go abroad now, show me an open door before the date of entering into my contact with the city schools. If You will give me an opening, I'll go to the mission field." Of course, Joy meant she would go to Africa.

Several days later, a member of her church asked Miss Ridderhof if she would be interested in working in Honduras under the Quaker Mission Board. A needy post was empty there.

"I was shocked," recalls Joy. "I almost felt like Jephthah with my rash vow. I was caught."

Joy Ridderhof felt no pull toward Latin America. As a little girl, she had been afraid of Mexicans and would cross the street to avoid them in Los Angeles. She did not know any of the missionaries in the Quaker work in Honduras. Besides, she planned to apply to one of the interdenominational faith missions. Though they attended a Friends church, the Ridderhofs had never identified with the denomination. Joy's heart was heavy. A



strange country, strangers to work with, a denomination to serve, and of all fields, Latin America! But in the face of her promise to God, how could she refuse?

"I waited before the Word," says Miss Ridderhof. "I hoped in the Scripture to find some 'out' or else some very clear command to go. But no special message was given me, just the general impact of the Great Commission. I didn't find anything to bolster up my resistance or to urge me forward." Her promise to God, her realization that "the time is short," and the plain teaching of Scripture caused Joy to accept the appointment of the Friends mission to Honduras.

There her time was indeed short, and opposition faced her at every turn. In a remote hill town, she worked with just one Christian companion, an illiterate native girl. The Roman Catholic village priest spared no effort to destroy her work and get rid of the Protestants. Political upheaval, primitive living conditions, and extreme personal danger took their toll. Joy caught a tropical fever.

But how could she leave this little town where she had seen such miracles of grace? She had seen lives changed by the Gospel; she had been rescued again and again from imminent danger. She stood by the death beds of those who had just turned to Christ for salvation. She watched helplessly as young believers were swept away into revolutionary activities. She heard the testimonies of new Christians who blessed God with all the words at their command.

The time was short; the work just beginning. In the excitement of service, Joy hardly realized the condition of her own health. Back in Los Angeles for a belated furlough, Joy yearned for the needy in the hills of Honduras. A year wasted away and still she lay in her attic room. The tropical disease was stubborn. Seeing no immediate prospect of sending Miss Ridderhof back to the field, the mission board dropped her support. Lying there weak, penniless, with the desire of her heart closed to her, Joy faced what she calls her "rejoicing crisis."

God had been good to her, she reminded herself. He had lifted from her the burden of a willful temperament. He had given her grace to follow through on her missionary commitment. He had allowed her six intense, fruitful years in Honduras. The way had not been easy, but happiness had always followed obedience.

"I at last woke up to the fact that even on my sick bed I must rejoice. God could use me right there in my garret as well as on the mission field. If I would wait, with rejoicing, faith, and expectation, God would work in some greater way to reach the unreached in Honduras."

Thus Gospel Recordings was born. Convalescing Joy cut a record in Spanish for use back in Honduras. The attic became an office where scripts were prepared. High-fidelity equipment, technical aid, finances, appeared as if on cue.

By the time Joy's health would permit her to go abroad, missionaries to other countries had begun asking for Gospel records. Joy hesitated. How she longed to return to Honduras! But God said to her, "I have other sheep, too, in another fold. I must bring them also..." (John 10:16, Living Gospels).

Millions around the world had no missionary who knew their language and no Bible to read. Joy promised God that she would make records in any language or dialect for which He would help her find speakers and translators.

Rejoicing as each new door opened, Joy Ridderhof and her team moved forward. To the Navaho, first, then the Mexican Indians, and the Alaskan Eskimos; to ninety-two Filipino tribal groups, naked Australian aborigines, and on to Ethiopia, the Congo, and the Sudan.

Simple Gospel messages have been recorded in over three thousand languages and new dialects are added week.

The missionary faith of a girl who has never outgrown being "too impractical" reaches ahead to the day when "every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:11)

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