

Olive Frost reflects on a change in career direction

# Out of the RECYCLE BIN



The author (front left) with doctors and students in Central Asia

**I would urge many doctors at the end of their professional lives to consider using their skills and sharing their faith in other environments**

**I**n June 1999 it seemed right to resign from a consultant post in the NHS and move into what might be compared to a recycling bin. At the time I felt I would like to be somewhere in the 'less developed world'. I thought I would like to be teaching women's health, with opportunities that involved more than dealing with physical needs and teaching. I wanted a change from my over-busy clinical load. So was such a position available and if so where?

One day I was turning these questions over in my mind when these words, 'You have wandered long enough in these hills, go north' became very meaningful. If I'd been in my home in North Wales I might have wondered whether I should go to Scotland or the North of England. But I was in Mazar in northern Afghanistan. From there Central Asia is rather directly north. So much of the time since has been spent there, teaching women's health and trying to encourage existing local believers in the health field and hoping for an increase in their numbers.

This area is part of the so-called 10/40 window. This is a term coined by global mission strategists to designate a huge region of the world (between the 10th and 40th parallels) where the gospel has least penetrated. There are many windows of opportunity within these windows at present. But although these opportunities abound now, we don't know for how long. So the more people who climb through them while they are open, the better.

The people of Central Asia are very hospitable and friendly. As anywhere else they have a mixture of beliefs. Many are nominal Muslims but are affected by the atheistic teaching of the last decades. Now that there is more freedom there is an understandable desire to return to roots that are mostly Islamic. But there is also a vacuum to be filled especially in the spiritual sense. With this has come an openness to hear, digest and accept good news. There is a great interest in Western medical information and practice as the medical system there is mostly based on Russian methods and teaching.

God speaks in ways unfamiliar to us Westerners and we need to discern his voice and leading. Recently I was asked to take a Russian Bible to a person living in a rural town. She had dreamt that someone would give her a book with the good news about Jesus. One of her tenants soon gave her a

book but it was in Kyrgyz, while she was more at home in Russian. Hence the request to me which was rewarded with a lovely Kyrgyz meal and the news a month later that she had become a believer. She happened to be a midwife.

Leading a basic beliefs course through translation is one of my most memorable experiences. 'If this man died, was buried and got up again and has no known grave he must be alive now!' 'How good that perestroika occurred – we can now sit here learning from the Bible.' One nurse in the group came because her husband over ten days had stopped smoking, drinking and beating her. Why? Six days later she was a believer, too.

On speaking at a meeting on termination of pregnancy, I was brought flowers and three doctors befriended me. One said she had believed two years previously and she would like to meet with other health field believers for fellowship. Another said 'I read my Holy Book, but don't really know God – when did this happen to you?'

These are common experiences and many believe. But of course there are problems, too. There are many parents and traditionalists who do not want their children to be different and give them a hard time. Some politicians wish to change laws to restrict the present freedom and to make it more difficult for groups to be registered and function as they would wish.

For me this experience is a wonderful entry to what could be described as the autumn of my life – the colours are startling and changing and one wants to achieve as much as possible before winter comes. Life is not always easy and much patience is needed, for example in dealing with different ways and time frames for obtaining visas and to face fatty foods from day to day.

TCA no longer means 'To come again' but 'Third culture adult' – someone who is more at home in the presence of 'passing peoples' than a more stable population – something of course which has its own problems. But the rewards outnumber the problems and I would urge many doctors at the end of their professional lives to consider using their skills and sharing their faith in other environments.

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