

Hong Kong Report – March 2009

Several weeks ago Jackie Pullinger got in touch with Jo Garcia to ask if she and I may be able to come out to Hong Kong to join them in early March to play in a special 24 hour service of blessing for some new buildings God had provided for her work there. Subsequently she asked if there might be a brass player who could come as well. Lindsey Stoker felt it would be right to offer to come, so she also joined us.

For those of you who don't know about Jackie Pullinger, here's a little background for you: *Jackie graduated as an oboe student at the Royal College of Music in England and then in 1966, at the age of 22, boarded a slow boat to China, praying for guidance about where to get off. She ended up in Hong Kong and has been ministering to the poor (drug addicts, street sleepers, prostitutes etc.) ever since. If you haven't already, you can read her amazing story in the book 'Chasing the Dragon' which is freely available at Amazon bookstore and elsewhere. Highly recommended reading.*

We went with a real expectation of meeting with God and hope of being a blessing to Jackie & all who live and work in the community she founded.

Jo & I flew out together on 6th March (Lindsey travelled separately later that day) and we were met at the airport by 'Charity' (originally from Ghana and grew up in London). Like many workers who come from many nations around the world, she knows she's called to HK to work there long-term. We drove for around 45 mins through various parts of HK to reach 'The Land'. 'The Land' consists of 4 'boys houses' (although there are some girls there also) - all ex-drug addicts or similar. The HK government originally gave the land to Jackie and her work as they could see what an impact it was having on so many lives. Jackie sees the land as lent to them by God.

We were there to take part in a 24 hour time of 'worship & blessing' for an extra new accommodation house which has been built on the land as well as another new building for worship which doubles as a sports hall. The new accommodation house will provide space for more families and others entering the rehabilitation programme that Jackie & the community run. The new worship/sports building has been named 'New Hang Fook Camp' (or 'Camp of Blessing') after the original 'Hang Fook Camp' that Susan, Jo and I had visited more than once several years ago. It is wonderful to see how God has blessed the work and provided these facilities – all through prayer – they have a policy of never asking for money.



The new accommodation house

There are various other smaller community houses all over Hong Kong, Kowloon, and the New Territories.

My first impression arriving at 'The Land' was of the sound of worship, and prayer coming from everywhere - and many others chatting excitedly (in Cantonese which is a very 'tuneful' language). There was nearly always the sound of men's voices singing (not something we hear much here) – accompanied by guitars.

What happens in these houses?

The boys who live in the houses on 'The Land' are nearly all ex-drug addicts. Most sleep in dormitories of several bunk beds. They have a daily routine. For example there are times for worship & personal time with God each day. They also have other duties such as cleaning, sweeping & cooking – and also recreation time. The worship times are free and abandoned – no inhibitions here!



Jackie took us into one of the boy's houses as they had their daily time of worship

Cooking for each house is done in the open air in huge woks. On one of the days I saw that one house had several enormous fish swimming around in a large plastic tub – fish they'd caught that day (still alive) and which were going to be cooked for their lunch.

I had breakfast with the boys one day, which consisted of bowls of hot noodles with extremely hot chilli sauce that you could mix in (hotter than any chilli sauce I'd ever tried here in the UK!!).

They all love & worship Jesus freely – they know they've been forgiven and set free. It is a simple message and doesn't need complicated theology. Gatherings are full of spontaneity and different each time. As Jackie says, church is what they are doing all the time – rather than needing formal services or specially ordained people etc. All of them minister, break bread, pray for the sick, reach out in evangelism.

Lindsey wrote about this subsequently:

I feel privileged to have been able to experience what God is doing at the New Hang Fook Camp in Hong Kong.

It was very humbling to see the abandonment of the men and youths as they worshipped, so obviously meaning every word. The verses "He who has been forgiven much loves much and he who has been forgiven little loves little" came to mind! To see such a community in action was very powerful, both the 'brothers' and all those who are there helping, some of whom are gap year students.

The programme

There are always many people waiting to come on the drug rehabilitation programme that Jackie and her workers run – but there's not enough space for everyone. Most are brought along through evangelistic outreach, but there are also a number of people who are referred to them by other drug & rehabilitation programmes in Hong Kong which are unable to help them – as they see that Jackie's programme works. The new house that is nearly completed will help ease a space shortage.

The process that takes place with most who join this programme is that ex drug addicts tell their friends about Jesus and how he has healed them and set them free (natural evangelism), then they're invited along to gatherings where they have an encounter with Jesus. Evangelism is easy – they come face to face with Jesus and just believe. When there's space they come to one of the 'New Boy Houses' and are helped to come off drugs painlessly by the power of prayer. They all receive the gift of tongues and as they pray in this way they are healed from their addiction (to heroin etc) with no withdrawal symptoms. Someone is with them praying for them 24 hours a day. This process usually takes 10 days to 2 weeks. During these first few days they are kept in pyjamas (less chance of running away!). They can eat/sleep etc whenever they want during this time. Once free from addiction they spend several months (or more if necessary) in the boy's houses. Eventually many of them move on to smaller community houses around HK and are given some work provided by sympathetic businesses for which they're paid (often just a day per week at first – which is all they can cope with). They also learn to reach out in evangelism. The overall aim is to make disciples who will then go to the nations to proclaim Jesus (already there are groups in China, India, Philippines etc).

In the community there are old & young, sick & healthy – and even a large group of teenagers who have been rejected by parents and/or thrown out of school as being useless. The boys are healed and become normal and healthy as they are prayed for and loved. While we were there we saw a great presentation that some of the boys were putting on looking at the problem of poverty in some parts of HK. These young teenage boys are unable to go back to their normal education, as the HK education system currently doesn't recognise what they have learned in the New Boys Houses. Jackie and her co-workers are trying to get an agreement with the official education authorities to recognise the work that they are doing with these boys so that they can eventually return to normal school.

The programme also houses some psychiatric patients – on drugs for depression etc. These people are prayed for and are healed & many come off psychiatric drugs. Sometimes their problems come from a chemical imbalance, but often it is demonic (which doctors can't understand or treat of course).

Our participation

On the afternoon we arrived, 24 hours of worship & prayer to 'bless the Land' began – with the audience being God. Jo & I joined the first group taking part (joined later by Lindsey who had flown in on a later flight – from Oslo where she'd been teaching – via Manchester and London).

Jo had asked if she could borrow a cello from Hong Kong to save buying an extra seat for the flight (she brought her own bow). When she received the cello she was told that it had been 'serviced and tuned in the last 2 years'! As you can imagine, it wasn't exactly in great condition with the C string buzzing terribly. We suddenly realised that the bridge had been put on back to front so had to completely reset the instrument. Thankfully none of the strings snapped.

Jackie was so pleased to have us there – but particularly thrilled that Lindsey was able to come – she'd prayed for a brass player to be able to take part. This 1st session included worship in English & Chinese (mainly western worship songs) and also included a time marching and worshipping round the whole site. At one point we were encouraged to face in different directions to bless the nations around HK. Prophetic words & pictures are expected every time people gather - and are given regularly. All are written down.



The beginning of 24 hours of worship and blessing

Over the next 24 hours different groups of people went down to the new worship building and worshipped either inside or outside for 1-2 hours at a time. This went on all through the night and the next day. I heard the boys from my house getting up and going out to worship at around 1.45am, and arriving back a couple of hours later.

This all culminated in an extraordinary worship gathering at 3pm the next day. Everyone who is part of the community from all over HK had been invited – some 300-400 people. It was so full not everyone could fit inside the new worship building, so some had to take part in an overflow area outside. This gathering began with Lindsey playing a very large ‘shofar’ or ram’s horn (a new experience for her!). The response to this was extraordinary! There were spontaneous cheers from most people there – like a loud roar with many applauding the Lord. Lindsey played for about 2 minutes in different parts of the hall. The presence of God’s Spirit was tangible and incredibly exciting. This led into a time of very free praise (these people really know how to worship with no restraint).



Lindsey playing the shofar

Lindsey’s thoughts again:

The celebration was an amazing time. From the start there was an expectation of God's presence - the place erupted when they heard the Shofar and not because it was anything amazing musically! More of a recognition of a call to worship and them being united in response. There was a very tangible presence of the Holy Spirit and many pictures and prophetic words were given.

One very moving moment during the opening worship was when Jackie felt God was asking everyone to pray for Jo & her husband Jose-Luis (who is still recovering from a brain haemorrhage which severely incapacitated him 2 years ago). The whole room prayed fervently and a number came over and prayed with Jo with laying on of hands. We really believe God heard this heartfelt prayer and Jo was quite overwhelmed by the outpouring of love. Jackie said subsequently that she believes God may well speak to Jose-Luis through dreams.

A little later Jackie spoke for a while about water (a picture of the Holy Spirit) flowing into people’s lives and out again into the world. Phil Lawson Johnston, a good friend who was also there for the celebration (Phil used to lead the worship group ‘Cloud’ at Holy Trinity Brompton

where Susan and I met and were married!), had spent 10 days in November engraving the double set of glass doors at the entrance to the new worship building. The outside doors say in English & Chinese 'Come! Whoever is thirsty, Come' - with a beautifully engraved picture of water coming out of a rock. The inner doors say 'Go! Streams of living water will flow from you. Go!' (again in English & Chinese) and a wonderful engraved picture of water from the throne of God flowing out into the 4 corners of the earth.

Jackie also spoke about expecting Jesus' return and how we should live in the light of that. She feels this must be soon – but there is so much work to do.



Jackie teaching (with a translator)

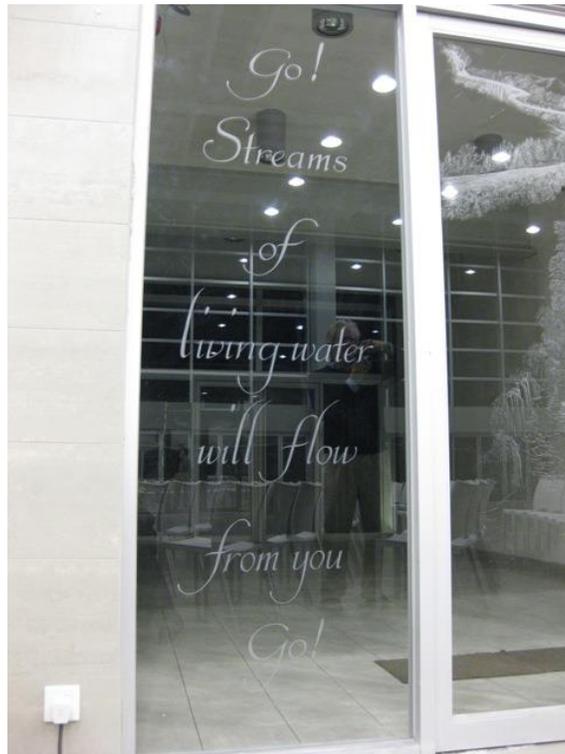
After Jackie had shared, Phil sang a song about the river of God flowing, and then Jo, Lindsey & I were invited to go out amongst the people to improvise.

Lindsey writes:

It was especially poignant when we went out into the crowd and improvised.... unaccustomed as I am to public improvisation... except with the covering fire of guitar/ keyboard it just seemed right and I felt prompted to play and when not to! Jo started a pizzicato figure after a while and I knew it was meant to have a floating horn theme on top - someone responded with a picture of the horn being Jesus and the string pizz being children.

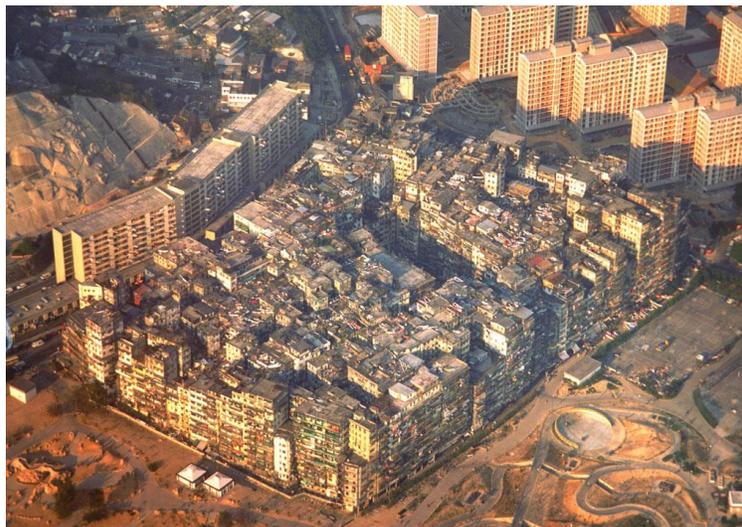
During this time we also had a call to pray for India. People broke into groups to pray for that nation. Towards the end of the celebration we sang a wonderful song by a local HK song-writer about Jesus' return.

This was a worship celebration that none of us will ever forget (including Jackie who was thrilled).



One of the engraved doors by Phil Lawson Johnston that Jackie referred to in her talk

Next day, as we had some free time, Jo, Lindsey & I went into the centre of HK to look around. We first headed to the site of the old Walled City where Jackie worked for many years. The Walled City was demolished in 1992 and the inhabitants re-housed elsewhere.



Original Walled City

Jo and I had been in the Walled City some years earlier and we were amazed and very moved at the transformation. It has been changed from a place of darkness & squalor to a beautiful, peaceful park – with water and bird song everywhere. To us it was a perfect picture of redeemed creation which speaks eloquently of the many changed lives of the people we met.



A scene in the Walled City Park with Jo & me

There are various plaques around the park which speak of missionaries who had come to HK to minister to the poor & destitute, but in the very centre was a rock called 'Jackie Pullinger Rock' with a plaque next to it saying:

Ms Pullinger came from the UK to Hong Kong alone in 1966 to spread the gospel. In the Walled City, she looked after teenagers who were led astray, and despite interference from the triad society, she fearlessly helped drug addicts overcome addiction through the teachings from the Gospel. Her pastoral work subsequently developed into a number of Hang Fook Camps in various parts of the territory, leading many drug addicts, prostitutes and street sleepers to start their lives anew. Even some triad members have subsequently turned over a new leaf through believing in Jesus and dedicated themselves to missionary work.



Jackie Pullinger Rock in the middle of the Walled City Park

What a remarkable testimony to Jackie's work. As Jackie says, there are not many who see a dream come to reality in their own lifetime.

One of the other plaques in the park speaks of a heroin addict that Jackie was ministering to withdrawing from his addiction '*without sickness & pain (with no medication) through repenting from his crimes, believing in Jesus and praying in tongues given by the Holy Spirit*' – a miracle Jackie & her co-workers have seen repeated thousands of times since.

Later we went across HK harbour on the 'Star Ferry', but were unable to go up 'The Peak' (one of the most amazing views anywhere in the world) as the weather was far too overcast and misty.

Very early the next day we left to fly home after 3-4 days of very little sleep, but full of great joy having been able to take part in such a special event.

A last thought from Lindsey:

It was good to get to know Jackie and ask her about her experience of arriving in HK and about the subsequent work, it was also an opportunity for me to meet up with a former student from RNCM who actually lived nearby and had no idea about Jackie's work. I was able to chat to her about her Christian experience and link her up with the folk at the Camp. No coincidence I'm sure!

Finally

It was great to spend time with Jackie (including several lovely meals together). She is so full of life and such an inspiration – and it is wonderful to see how the work has developed over the years we've known her. She's a living example of how obedience and a willingness to risk all for the Kingdom can bear lasting fruit for God's glory.

Do pray for Jackie and her co-worker as they set the lives of hundreds of men & women free to become disciples reaching out throughout Hong Kong and across the nations.

- Richard Williamson