

Teaching English as a Second Language in Hong Kong
John and Ruth Schwertfeger's story of their years in
Hong Kong from 1963 to 1967

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There is a resurgence of interest within the WELS to reach out to Chinese people. This is due to many reasons. The most obvious is the fact that the Chinese population is about one-sixth of the world population and is on the rise. Another fact is that the Chinese government is communist and thus prohibits or severely limits freedom of religion. As a result of this last fact the true Gospel of the Lord is being hindered and many people are living and dying without hearing the good news of salvation. The need is there. The hope of opening a spiritual foothold for the Lord in China is the prayer of many souls. There is increased contact with China in these years, due to the many business dealings with our two countries. Another point to make is that outreach is open to us with many Chinese people coming to study in America or simply moving to America or Canada.

This paper might also interest people who plan to teach English as a second language in a foreign mission field. Every location offers new and different challenges and blessings. The hope is that this Church history paper offers insights or perhaps things to prepare for in different situations, to open your minds to a different setting than the one they are used to, how to adjust and other nuances.

This paper focuses on the early years of the Chinese Lutheran Mission, the many different activities of outreach and using various aspects used to reach out to the Hong Kong culture of the 1960's. John Schwertfeger was a teacher starting in 1963 to a new school entitled, "Immanuel Lutheran English Middle School." His wife, Ruth Schwertfeger, came over in 1964 from Jenera, Ohio to be a secretary and also teach a few classes. This is their story as they tell it in an interview.

Scott: Today's date is November 29, 2003. I am interviewing John Schwertfeger and his wife Ruth Schwertfeger, inquiring about the time they spent in Hong Kong from 1963-67.

John was a teacher over there for four years at a school and Ruth was a secretary over there for four years.

So when did you get the call?

JOHN: I should probably back up a little bit and mention my acquaintance with Peter Chang.

Scott: Who was Peter Chang?

John: Peter Chang was the founder of the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission at that time, later renamed Chinese Evangelical Lutheran Church. But in those days it was the Christian Chinese Mission. He founded that and his association began with a Missouri Synod missionary teacher named Gertrud Simon, who was a missionary in China who came to Hong Kong in 1949, along with a lot of refugees from China when the communist of Mao Tse-tung took over. She met Peter Chang as he started and got him to start teaching a Sunday school on a roof top in a resettlement area, in a very densely populated area of Hong Kong. In 1961, Peter Chang came to the United States. By that time he acquired somewhat of what he called sponsors. Some of them were individuals sending money over to Hong Kong. Some of them were churches, most of them probably Missouri Synod Ladies' aids societies, but that was a source of his income and the beginnings of the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission.

He came to the United States in 1961 and studied briefly in Washington, Seattle Washington and then joined...

Scott: Is that where he went to school? In Washington?

John: No, But he came to Bethany Seminary in late, late fall of 1961. I was a student at Bethany Lutheran College at that time, a sophomore and somehow we became acquainted. He would

come up to my room very often and we would talk and sometimes we would go out for coffee or tea. We became acquainted throughout the winter of 1961 and into 62. In 1962, in the spring, Peter Chang said that was going to go back to Hong Kong and start an English Middle school, which would be like a junior-senior high school. And he said, "John, how about you come and teach." Well, I didn't take him real seriously because I don't know anybody who would go out and start a high school, but he did and in the winter or spring of 63 – when I was teaching as an emergency teacher at Jenera, Ohio, I received a letter from Hong Kong, from Peter Chang and his Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission. He asked me to come over and teach in his new Immanuel Lutheran English Middle school. The building was being built at that time. This was in the spring and summer of 1963. I took the letter to some Bethany faculty, and discussed it with other theologians and they said that under the circumstances I should consider it a call. The call had a stipulation in it that if I would stay for three years, they would pay my round-trip ticket. I accepted that call in 1963. I went to Hong Kong on a ship.

In the spring after I received and accepted the call, I communicated with Peter Chang about another person who was very interested in teaching in Hong Kong and joining the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission, his name was Rev. Kenneth Seim. He was the bachelor pastor in Findlay, Ohio. I think it was Immanuel Lutheran Church in Findlay, Ohio. He was very interested and we talked several times. I communicated with Peter Chang that Kenneth Seim would love to come along as a Wisconsin Synod pastor and work in the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission.

Scott: So did you know Pastor Seim before?

John: I knew Pastor Seim because he was the pastor in the neighboring town from where I was teaching, so we had become acquainted.

Kenneth Seim and I left in July after getting all of those shots. In those days you had to take about a dozen shots. In those days the big problem was the Visa. Our tickets were scheduled in July of 1963 on the American President lines, "President Wilson." We boarded in San Diego and left in July. However, when we got to Honolulu the ship pointed out that we would have to get off the ship because we didn't have a Visa finished for Hong Kong. We tried to contact the British Consulate in Honolulu. They said, "No we have not received the authorization yet." We communicated this to Peter Chang - that we do not have permission to land in Hong Kong. But we are willing to go the Japanese embassy, which would be the next port of call - Yokohama. That way we could continue our journey at least to Yokohama. Then the British Consulate could forward our Visa permission to Yokohama. So we were allowed back on the ship. We traveled 10 days to Yokohama. Unfortunately, the day the ship docked in Yokohama was a Sunday. The British Consulate was not open. We, Ken Seim and I, got kicked off the ship.

Scott: So did Ken Seim receive a call to be a missionary then?

John: Yes, Ken Seim was also issued a call to come to Hong Kong and teach at Immanuel Lutheran English Middle school and also serve as an assistant pastor to Peter Chang. We had to disembark in Yokohama, because our Visa had not arrived. It was a Sunday, but we went on Monday after the ship had left. The American President Lines next ship was going to be three weeks later, so we were stuck in Yokohama for three weeks, without much more than cabin luggage and ship spending money. We contacted Peter Chang by letter and told him our situation. We learned that the British and Chinese immigration officers in Hong Kong had not issued our Visa because the "tea money" was not sufficient. "Tea money" means, "bribe the immigration officials." So Peter had to frantically dig up 1000's of Hong Kong dollars. We

learned that it probably cost the mission \$3,000 in U.S. to give us both Visa permission to work in Hong Kong.

Scott: \$3,000 in 1963 value?

John; Yes, we learned that later, of course. But Peter was able to find the money to bribe the immigration officials. We were granted Visas about two to three days before the next ship was coming through Yokohama, and that was why we were delayed about three weeks from arriving in Hong Kong. When we did arrive in Hong Kong, Peter was already conducting summer school.

Scott: Do you remember what date you arrived there?

John: It was like August 15, 1963. School was only about a week or two away. Summer school was already in session, but it was not in the new school building, it was in Peter Chang's apartment building that we were going to be staying in, because the school wasn't finished by that time. It wasn't really finished until September first or around that time, that was Immanuel Lutheran English Middle school. I think we have some photographs of the front entrance of that school and so on that we can include in this report.

Scott: How big was that School?

John: I was amazed that when school started there were already well over 200 students already enrolled. I think our enrollment reached probably 300 – 350 maximum by the time 1967 rolled around, when we left.

You have to understand a little bit about the British system of education in Hong Kong. There were very few government school and so almost all the schools in Hong Kong were private schools licensed by the government. But being private schools, they were allowed to charge tuition, and so the students at Immanuel Lutheran English Middle School as well any other

students in Hong Kong would have to pay tuition to attend these schools. One of the things that Pastor Chang was very happy about was that he had three American teachers, and he promoted this. The principal of Immanuel Lutheran English Middle School was Ruth Ruege. She was from Milwaukee. I believe that she had her master's degree in Education and Library Science. She was the first American to arrive in Hong Kong without having all of those Visa problems like Pastor Seim and I did. So when we arrived she was the only American there.

Now the school had a staff of three Americans and probably a dozen or more Chinese teachers who could also speak English, most of them could. The classes were taught in English, except for traditional Chinese literature and Chinese history and so on. So our classes were taught in English. It would have been helpful if I would have had training in courses called "English as a Second Language" because today that's what those courses are like.

Scott: Did you take any preparatory classes to teach English as a second language? Were the students well-versed in English or was this new to them?

John: The students had a little bit of English in their primary schools, their elementary schools. These were like seventh graders. By that time they had already had a couple of years of English as a foreign language, but it was mostly written and not spoken. They had been taught by Chinese teachers who probably didn't know a lot of English too. But they could read it a little bit, probably at the second or third grade level. But they weren't able to speak it very well, or as they said it, "I can't hear English," or in other words, "I can't understand spoken English."

Scott: So now in Hong Kong was it bilingual with English and Chinese?

John: Hong Kong was a British colony and the British forced the Chinese to sign a 99 year lease. Now the 99 year lease was due to expire in 1997. As is recorded in the book, "To Every

Nation¹,” the owners of that country were not about to renew their lease to the British. So in 1963 there were a number of years left before the lease would expire. The British would be kicked out of Hong Kong and Hong Kong would revert back to the Chinese, who at that time were communist Chinese, although, Hong Kong was mostly inhabited by refugees who had left China in 1949 when Mao Tse-tung and his communist took over the country. They fled through Hong Kong to Taiwan, but some of them stayed in Hong Kong.

Scott: The people who stayed there, did they speak Cantonese or Mandarin?

John: Most of the people that we knew spoke Cantonese, which is a southern Chinese dialect; educated people could also speak Mandarin. There were other dialects like Harka, which was the boat people’s language. There were quite a few Shanghai people there, they spoke a different dialect, Shanghanese. But most of the language was Cantonese and everybody could understand Cantonese. A lot of the educated the people in Hong Kong could speak English. It was the goal of the students, the young people, to learn English. Most of them seemed to desire American English rather than British English because American tourist were coming to Hong Kong and this offered them the potential for very good employment with American companies or American tourist.

Our classrooms were very large. It was typical to have between forty and fifty students in one classroom. The classrooms were five students wide by ten students deep. The teacher would move from classroom to classroom and the students would stay in the same classroom all day. There was a blackboard, which was really plywood painted over and a light above it. So we were able to draw or write on the blackboard. We were able to communicate in written language.

¹ Theodore A. Sauer, Harold John, Ernst Wendland, *To Every Nation* (Milwaukee, Wis. NPH, 1992), 245.

Scott: Was there any pre-1963 teaching English as a second language or was that something that started after?

John: I didn't know of anything like that at the time. I think that is a current development of the teacher curriculum in the 2000's and the 90's because a lot of teachers are preparing to teach English as a second language in the United States.

I should mention at this time that Peter Chang had the Chinese Lutheran Mission, that they did own and were sponsoring an elementary school that Peter Chang started before he left. He taught Sunday school. He purchased the rooftop school buildings in Hong Kong, in that densely populated resettlement area, and that was our elementary school. It was sponsored by the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission. It was like a kindergarten through grade six. It was sponsored by the mission. It was four classrooms on the top of a densely populated resettlement building that was built by the government for the refugees of communist China. The Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission owned that school and that was elementary school. It was called, "Spirit of Love Elementary School." It was there before I got there; probably founded in 1960 or even before Peter Chang came to the United States to Bethany Seminary. Also there was a church established there called, "Spirit of Grace Lutheran Church." It was up on the second floor of a building. You had to walk through a noodle shop to go up some dirty stairs and a dirty hallway to a second floor apartment.

The primary school up on the rooftop, "Spirit of Love" was organized in October, 1956.

Scott: Now you are reading that out of, what book is that?

John: It is a booklet that was produced by the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission Gospel Work in Hong Kong, dated, “June 1965.²” On the front cover you can see the classrooms on the rooftop of the resettlement building.

A double classroom was used as “Immanuel Lutheran Church, and this was part of the Immanuel Lutheran English Middle School. On Sunday’s we held worship services there for our students and our staff and our neighborhood. Those services were conducted in English and Pastor Ken Seim was the pastor there.

Scott: About how many students came on Sunday to worship?

John: It would be typical to have between 50 and a 100 in our worship services.

(Here Ruth points something out to John).

John: Oh should I mention that? The “Spirit of Love Lutheran church and school” – the total number of baptized souls of that church was 758 at that time, by 1965 – that was the school on the rooftop.

As far as Immanuel, I don’t have the statistics of the number of baptized souls, but I remember that we would get between 50 to 100 students, staff, and neighborhood people to those services. Kenneth Seim was the pastor and those services were conducted in English.

Scott: Do you think that the school profited as a means of outreach to those people in that area?

John: It was Peter Chang’s entrepreneurial skills that made the elementary school, “Spirit of Love, “and that was also a tuition based school, bring people to Christianity. It was used as a form of outreach – yes. The Immanuel Lutheran English Middle School was a very big step. This included the ground floor of the whole apartment building complex and there were about 8-10 classrooms there plus an office. That was used as a mission outreach too, by having many students who, many of them were certainly not Christian, or weren’t anything as far as religion

² This booklet was copied and is put in the appendix of this paper.

goes. They would come to our schools and hear the Word of God. They had the opportunity to worship on Sundays. They also paid tuition for schools and this helped to pay the teachers salaries, but the mission wanted to expand. Peter Chang had been in contact with the Wisconsin Synod and the ELS, in those days called the "Norwegian Synod," and they discouraged him from soliciting to congregations and sponsors because there was no official fellowship communication connection.

Scott: So the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission was not in fellowship with ELS or WELS at this moment?

John: Not officially because there was no official colloquy or anything like that for Peter Chang at that time.

Scott: But he did finish his studies at Bethany Seminary right?

John: I don't think so. I think that he only finished one year at Bethany. The demands for him to go back to Hong Kong and to build that English Middle School and probably his funds for him to live in a foreign country and attend schools in the United States were starting to dwindle. So he had to go back and attend to business, so shall we say.

(This is the end of side A of the Audio-cassette).

John: Immanuel Lutheran English Middle school was where all of us Americans were teaching, but the tuition was pretty expensive. It was probably eighty dollars Hong Kong money, which would have been between one-fourth or one-sixth of the family income. So even though other children of the same family could get reduced rates, it was still a very big chunk of the family income that was going to this student who was going to this Immanuel school which had three American teachers in it. In the spring of 1964, after a lot of communication (letter writing and so on) between Peter Chang, whose letters were written by Ken Seim, the secretary, (I was the

treasurer of the mission). But Ken Seim was the secretary and he would write the letters as Peter would dictate and put them into proper English. The communication between the Chinese Lutheran Mission and WELS headquarters developed into a visit by three WELS people; one of them was Edgar Hoenecke, executive secretary of the Board for World Missions, the president of the Wisconsin Synod, Oscar J. Naumann, and Pastor Leonard Koeniger from Michigan. These three men came to Hong Kong in the spring of 1964 to talk with Peter Chang about what could the Wisconsin Synod could do to help support the mission, to help support the work and Leonard Koeniger was on the Relief Committee, to see what kind of relief the synod could do. The Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission not only had this outreach of Christian education, but also they had a number of relief programs; food packages and so on, medical supplies. For awhile we even had a nurse at Immanuel Lutheran English Middle school for health considerations.

Probably March of 1964 they (the WELS delegation) came to Hong Kong, and we have several photographs of their visit there, we will have to include those in our report.

Scott: Now did Peter Chang contact the WELS, or did the WELS contact him? Who initiated the contact?

John: I don't know, but I suspect that probably the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission initiated the contact with the WELS. Even though, there were contacts earlier in the 60's, this was official, these were officials of the Synod; the President of the Synod, the executive secretary for World Mission Board, and the Relief Chairman. This was the official delegation of the Wisconsin Synod in the March or April of 1964. They came to Hong Kong. They met with Peter Chang, the chairman and founder. He was in total control of the Chinese Mission. When the delegation of Wisconsin Synod came they met with Peter Chang for probably a week or so. I remember several days that they would meet in the office and would talk about doctrinal things.

Pastor Kenneth Seim was there as a delegate from the Chinese Lutheran Mission to explain to Peter the kind of questions that Wisconsin Synod was asking and wanted to know. Pastor Kenneth Seim would explain to Pastor Peter Chang the position that the Wisconsin Synod has on these certain doctrinal issues and Peter would acquiesce on all issues. The delegation from the Wisconsin Synod also toured various parts of Hong Kong; Hong Kong Island, which was mostly British, the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission which was located in Kowloon, the biggest church which was, "Spirit of Grace Lutheran Church," which was in a middle class Chinese community, the "Spirit of Love Church" was on the rooftop of the poverty stricken ridden part of the city. All of the mission work was in Kowloon, on the peninsula. The Immanuel Lutheran English Middle School was built in a new factory district recently reclaimed from the sea, when they built the airport, shaved off from some of the mountains. The school was in a fairly new district with a lot of factories, a lot shops, independent apartment buildings and generally more upper class than the other two areas of mission work.

I recall now what I recall as a humorous incident, where at that time when Kenneth Seim and I arrived in Hong Kong the mission already had a Volkswagen Bus, which you will see photographs of. The bus in English and Chinese had signs on it, on English it said, "Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission" on it and the translation in Chinese letters on it. On the front of the bus was the Lutheran symbol. So anywhere we would go, the Chinese would see both in English and Chinese the organization of the bus. We took Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, and President Oscar J. Naumann, and Pastor Leonard Koeninger on a tour of the New Territories. When I say we - I am talking about Peter Chang, Kenneth Seim, and myself. By that time I had my Hong Kong driver's license so they asked me to drive the mission bus. The bus was full; we were traveling in the New Territories way up high and one of the places we wanted to stop was a police station

overlooking the border with China called the, "Lockman Chow police station." That was one of the things we wanted to see in the New Territories. I think one of the things the Wisconsin Synod men wanted to see was if there was a potential for other mission work in the New Territories which was still in the countryside. We did go to the police station and then on the way back to the city, this was a three-four hour drive, we came to a stop because there were a lot of Buddhist monasteries and temples in the countryside. It was heavily Buddhist, we came to a stop, and the traffic police made everyone stop. I think we were first in line and coming from the right side were a lot of cars. I realized later that it was from a funeral procession. It was coming from a very big, prominent monastery. I was driving and I thought that the traffic officer had motioned for me to go ahead, even though I had recently got my license and I wasn't familiar with all of the motions that the traffic police would use. I thought he motioned me to go ahead and so I started pulling out and then I realized because of the police whistles that I wasn't supposed to be going. I was supposed to be waiting. I had to pull over after I got through the intersection and the police officer came over and railed on me fiercely. Of course, I was embarrassed because here I was carrying some very important people, the President of the Synod was sitting behind me, and here I am breaking traffic rules. We didn't get a ticket, just a warning. It was very embarrassing.

So we toured not only the New Territories, but also all of the churches (three of them) and all of the schools of the Chinese mission. It was also this time where Peter Chang had as a goal to have education from elementary through middle school through high school and then into Seminary, but in those days we didn't call it Seminary, but we called it a Bible School or Bible Institute. These were for the mature men who could be future ministers. I taught a few lessons

in there. I used as resources the Matthew-Henry commentary and also the Kretzmann's commentaries.

Scott: So you taught at the Bible Institute as well?

John: Only a few times in 1964. Ken Seim did most of the teaching there along with Peter Chang. We were fazing out Gertrude Simon who was still part of the mission, who was still interested in humanitarian things. But we realized that Gertrude Simon didn't really have the doctrinal viewpoints to be teaching in the Bible School, so she was phased out.

Scott: She??

John: She. But she was the one who got Peter Chang started in the 50's. She was a Missouri Synod missionary in China back in the 40's and 50's.

I think that the Wisconsin Synod delegation realized the necessity for acting quickly, because the lease was due to expire in 1997. The colony would revert back to communist China. There was a tremendous amount of young people in Hong Kong. About forty percent of the people were under the age of eighteen, so it was an excellent place for school outreach and for relief because of the poor families. The people needed help. I think the urgency was realized because those years would end and then communist China would take over. We younger Americans thought that forty years was way down the line, but the WELS delegation could see the need for helping the Chinese Mission now. Not only was there a spiritual need and the need for spiritual help in the schools and the churches, but also they could see the relief need that our members and our outreach relief program would do. Edgar Hoenecke, who was known a good movie maker, did produce a movie while he was over there entitled, "Hong Kong – an open door."³ This was filmed when they were over here in 1964.

³ This movie was produced on 16 mm film. The movie was taped via a camcorder and put on a VHS. This is included as part of the appendix of this paper.

Scott: So did you take him to sites for making the movie?

John: I did and so did Peter Chang.

I was busy teaching and so I didn't get to sit in on too many meetings, but there were a few that I did attend. But mostly I was not the theologian; I was the teacher along with Ruth Ruege, who was the principal.

Scott: What grade levels did you teach?

John: Most of my classes were what were called form three, which would be about sophomores in high schools in the United States. I did teach some form four, which would be about juniors in high school. I did have some younger classes as well. It was a great joy for me to teach religious classes to the younger students. We extended our school so that it reached down to primary six, which was like sixth or seventh graders. I considered myself fortunate to teach Bible history and Bible stories to primary sixth students. The series that we used was from Concordia. Their Sunday school stories had very good pictures and simple English, probably grade level two, or three, or four. But it was great to teach from because of the pictures and drawings and the simple English and basic Christian doctrine.

Scott: Was that in 64 as well?

John: That was later, like in 65, or 66, or 67. We added primary six later.

Ruth: It was then when I was there.

John: Yeah that's right and you even taught some as well.

Other subjects I taught were English – really Oral English. I had to teach languages and sentence structure, things like that. I taught some science classes, geography, history and religion. Every morning at Immanuel Lutheran English Middle School the day would start with devotion in the morning. The devotion was at eight a.m., or a quarter to eight. The school day

would only last until one or one-thirty in the afternoon. The goal was to eventually have a morning session and an afternoon session and use the facility twice a day for two separate schools. For awhile we were doing both because we couldn't fit everyone in the morning session. It was preferable by the students to take the morning session because the morning session was always better than the afternoon session. We would always start the day with devotion over the loudspeaker system. I think we used the devotion book, "Walks with God." Then the classes would begin and the teachers would move from classroom to classroom throughout the day.

Scott: So you started teaching in the fall of 1963?

John: Yes, the very first year of Immanuel school through June of 1967.

Ruth and I left in August of 1967.

Scott: But in 1963 you were still single right?

John: Yes, but I kept in contact with this lovely girl I met in Jenera, Ohio. Then Christmas time, 1963 I was engaged to Ruth. In the summer, July 1964 I flew back and we were married in August of 64. Our honeymoon was a trip to Hong Kong with a few lay-over days in Honolulu. We flew over to Hong Kong afterwards. Then Ruth joined the mission and joined our work at the school in the fall of 64. But by that time there was no official Synod sponsorship, but they were sending relief money to us for relief work. We used it for relief work and also for scholarships for students and for general funds. All of this happened in the summer or fall of 64.

Scott: So in the fall of 64 both of you, John and Ruth were teaching?

Ruth: Yes, for a little while I taught Oral English.

John: Ruth's primary role was school secretary, which meant that she received the school fees and tuition, and wrote receipts for the bookkeeping. Also she typed all of the lessons and the

tests, and all of the teaching materials for the teachers and ran off all the materials. She was at the school office, right inside of the main entrance.

Scott: Now they didn't have copy machines in those days did they?

Ruth: No, we had mimeographs. Can we talk about the rats now?

Scott: Alright.

Ruth: The halls had open spaces all the way up to the top of the building and they would throw out the garbage down these air channels. They were not very clean in Hong Kong. They would throw everything out the windows and into the hallways. So that would be in the school hallway, well, of course, rats really enjoyed that because that was food for them. So when the students were in the classroom that's when the rats would be running up and down the hall. The secretary's desk was right there and there was this Chinese guy who would help with the accounting. Every once and awhile a rat about 8-9 inches would run right past our feet and he would say, "big mousey." I got to the point where I just got used to it because it would happen everyday. It was rather interesting.

John: The whole first level of the building, which would normally be shops, we had as a school building. There were eight or ten classrooms.

Ruth: Our first apartment was on the third floor of the building next to that building. So we could walk to school.

John: The Synod convention of 1965 was shown the movie, "Hong Kong, an open door." It was voted by the Synod to support the Chinese Christian Mission and that is when dependable, regular monthly payments were received by the mission from the Wisconsin Synod. These were the good times, when we had enough funds to provide for the growth and the mission work.

Before this it was always sporadic. You could never know when sponsorship would help us and when it didn't.

Scott: Now the wages that you received in 63 was that a livable wage or slightly above livable wage?

John: My living conditions were the same for Ruth Ruege, Kenneth Seim and myself. We lived on the same floor, but on a different wing than Pastor Chang and his family. Included in our salary, which was \$600 Hong Kong a month, which would be about \$100 US a month. In addition to our salary we were given room and board. Which meant that we would eat our meals with Peter Chang's family, served by Maah, that was the house sitter, cook, and baby-sitter too.

So Peter Chang had this house servant and she would go shopping and buy food that she was familiar with. I remember that one of the foods that she often had available was some stringy stuff that looked like rubber bands. It had the same color, same texture, same size. Finally I asked her what it was. It was pig intestines

(This is the end of side B of the Audio-cassette).

Scott: This is the second tape that we are on here. The first tape we were talking about John Schwertfeger and the years 63-65. This is the second year, 64-65. Ruth and John were married on August 15, of 64. Ruth was also a secretary and also teaching Oral English to the primary sixth graders, which is like seventh graders in the US.

Ruth: It was only one class a day or two classes a day. They really didn't know too much English at all.

Scott: Was this the first time you were out of Jenera, Ohio?

Ruth: This was the first time I moved away from home. So Hong Kong was quite dramatic. The thing that I noticed the most was the smell. It smelled like a lot of people. It is really something

to get used to, a completely different way of life. They don't have many things over there and there are so many people. There are so many people over there that there would be people walking the streets. People would have an apartment with 8-10 people living in two rooms. You can't live like that so in the evenings they would walk outside. Most people didn't have T.V. so they would go out and play games.

John: In the school year of 1964-65, as soon as Ruth and I arrived back in Hong Kong, the mission provided an apartment in an apartment building. There was a living room/dining room combination and one bedroom. There was a small bathroom and a very small kitchen. No hot water.

One of the things I forgot to mention was back in 63-64 and 65; Hong Kong was experiencing a water shortage. When Kenneth Seim, Ruth Ruege and I were in Hong Kong we were in a three bedroom apartment. We each had our own bedroom and shared a bathroom. We had to conserve water because the water was being purchased from China and the water would be turned on four hours of running water, every fourth day. The rest of the time there was no water in the water faucets, there was no water pressure and no way to flush the toilet or anything like that. Ruth (my wife) and I also lived like that for about a year when there was an extreme water shortage. So about six o'clock in the morning to about ten o'clock in the morning every fourth day, we knew when the water would come on. We would get up early and take our baths, wash out the bathtub and then fill it with water and this would be the water we would use for drinking water, flushing the toilet, washing our face and everything like that.

Scott: So you would shower every four days?

John: No, there were no showers.

Ruth: We didn't have showers because there was no running hot water. So we had to heat our water for a bath and for washing clothes and nobody drank water out of the faucet anyway. We had to heat it and store it in jars. I think when John was there they were not that clean about drinking water. You had ants floating in the drinking water.

John: You had to boil the drinking water and that means that after you have the bathtub full of water you would take a few containers and put water in them. Then to have drinking water you would put the water in a tea kettle. Then leave it in the kettle on the stove to cool so you could put it in the bottles. We Americans like cold water and Peter Chang had a small refrigerator so the Maah would boil the water and leave it on the stove to cool and then when the water was cold, she would pour it into bottles and put it in the refrigerator. However, after the water cooled, sometimes the ants would climb into the water and drown. Then the tea kettle would be poured into bottles so you would have dead ants in it. So you would never want to drink the very bottom of the glass.

Ruth: You are sort of getting things confused between when you were single and when we were married.

John: Yeah, I know that was in 63-64.

Scott: So when you were married in August of 64 and came back, did you two have your own apartment or did you share an apartment with others?

John: No, we were in a different building very close to the school. Ruth Ruege was in the same building one floor up and Kenneth Seim was by the school too. That was because of the help from the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod that they were able to pay for the apartments for the American workers, and for that we are thankful. 1964-65-66 the school was flourishing, the grade school was flourishing. Immanuel Lutheran English Middle School was getting more

experience and more years of educating. A lot of the students would stay with us even though they started with us in form one and form two. They stayed with us through form three and form four. That was as high as our education went to prepare them for the state certification so that they could enter the university after taking an exam.

Scott: There was primary which was like elementary school – Kindergarten through sixth grade American and also middle school which was seventh grade American through senior year in high school.

John: Yes.

Scott: And now you are talking about a form?

John: Form was the same as grade in the English system. Form one was freshman year. Form two was sophomore year. Form three probably the junior year, and form four was the senior year – age wise as far as the students are concerned and education wise too.

Ruth: Should we say how after school the young kids would like come over to our apartment? They would come over to our apartment and knock on our door. It was really a surprise the first day they did that. They would just come in, they wouldn't talk, they would just come in and watch us. It was happening everyday and I think that they just wanted to learn English.

John: And they wanted to be friends.

Ruth: Yeah.

John: With their American teachers.

The education system was very nice at Immanuel Lutheran English Middle school for teacher purposes. When the teacher would walk into the classroom, all of the students would stand up and be at attention. Then they would say in unison, "Good morning, Sir." They would remain

standing until the teacher would reply, "Good morning, class." Then the students would know that there were excused to sit down. There was always tremendous respect.

Ruth: Should you tell them about the uniforms?

John: The students would all wear uniforms. Every school had their own type of uniform. Ours was a brown two-piece uniform; sport coat and slacks and red tie with a white shirt. The girls wore a brown skirt, but the same sport coat and a red blouse and a red bow tie type tie.

Ruth: They did this so that you could not distinguish between...

John: Who was wealthy and who was not.

Ruth: And they only had one right?

John: Yes.

Scott: Now, before Ruth, off tape, you said that you had a student helping you, someone to go shopping with?

Ruth: Yes, we did, our first year. We paid for her student fees in exchange for her helping us.

She would make us a Chinese meal every night. She would stay there and study which was

really good for her, I mean, because she lived in one of the shacks on the hill. So she would come and study, make us supper and buy us groceries which we got down at the local market.

That is where the meat hangs outside and you walk through. The butchers would stand in the

blood on the ground. There is the meat hanging upside-down and the flies on the meat with the

vegetables in big piles. They would put rice in a newspaper funnel and you would take it home

like that. You would shop everyday. A lot of people didn't have refrigerators so they would get

food everyday.

Scott: Did you have a refrigerator?

Ruth: Yes, we did later on, a small one. We drank tea for our supper, but we had milk for lunch. I believe it was powdered at first. But then we discovered this British store that had milk you could store on the shelf. It was in a triangle carton. It was good. We started buying that, but it was a little expensive so we didn't drink too much of it. If you store it in the refrigerator it tastes a little better.

John: In the afternoons, after school was out and after we had our lunch, Ruth would often go over to the mission office, or both of us would go to the mission office, because I was the treasurer – I would be writing receipts out for the contributions, and checks and so on, and making deposits. Ruth would work at the mission office in 65-66-67 and she would be writing thank you letters to people who would contribute and writing letters for Peter Chang and so on. Often times in the afternoon we would be in the mission office.

Scott: Where was the mission office located?

John: The mission office was in a separate building from the school. That we didn't have until later when the Wisconsin Synod's contributions to us were regular and dependable. Then the mission was able to rent a church office. By that time Peter Chang had moved in

Ruth: Wasn't it in Peter Chang's apartment?

John: Yes, but by that time, Peter Chang and his family moved into their own house.

Scott: House or apartment?

John: It was an apartment, everybody had apartments.

Ruth: There were no houses there.

John: On a different floor we had the mission office. Finally we had a mission office. Rev. Kenneth Seim would go there too and help with the mission in the mission office. But that was later one, like 66-67.

Scott: Where there any events in 64-65 that seem to stick out in your mind at all?

John: Well, there were always special programs or productions that our school would produce. One of them was our Christmas program. I remember one time the mission rented a very large truck that had benches on it, with a canvas on top of it. This was typically used by the factories to pick up factory workers. But in the evening we would go our caroling around Christmas time. I was the choir director, just for Christmas time. It was mission work, the students would learn English Christmas carols, songs.

Scott: Well, not everyone from school could be on the truck then, could they?

John: No, it was about forty to fifty students on the bus. They were all students and they would wear their uniforms and go caroling. Sometimes there were productions in the city hall and it would be open to the public. There would be several thousand people attending those plays and so on.

One of the things we haven't mentioned so far was the, "Voice of Salvation," which was a radio outreach program. The mission had a sound studio and could record dramatic Bible stories. It would be taped and sent to Taiwan and other parts; Philippines, Hong Kong, Southern China, Northern Korea and even North Vietnam.

Scott: Was that in Cantonese, Mandarin?

John: It was Mandarin, because this was the language of Taiwan and most of the expatriate Chinese – their language was Mandarin. So the mission would hire actors and actresses to portray these Bible stories. This was part of the mission too. This went on for several years. It was started, I think in 1962, and continued throughout most of the time we were there.

Now, one of the things we haven't talked about was the Seminary. That Bible school that was on the second or third floor became the Seminary, with the help of the Wisconsin Synod.

Scott: Now was this in the same building as Immanuel?

John: Yes, it was in the same complex as the sound studio. It could have been the same room even. The first person to come to Hong Kong to get a Seminary organized so that we could have Chinese pastors and to have the church, this was a new key word, "indigenous" church body. The first person to organize it and teach in it was Conrad Frey. I think it was 65. There were about eight to ten young men studying to become pastors eventually in the Christian Chinese Mission. He was the first one there. He was the pioneer. After he left, the next friendly counselor was Marlyn Schroeder. After he left, then it was Richard Seegar, who was a missionary in Japan. He came to Hong Kong and taught in the Seminary. By that time, I think the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission was renamed, "Chinese Evangelical Lutheran Church."

We will wrap this up by talking about our departure from Hong Kong in 1967.

Scott: So now you talked about 63-66. You said that one of the largest outreach tools was Christmas caroling on the bus.

John: And Easter, and City Hall productions, Chinese dramatic productions with a Christian tint to it.

Scott: These dramatic productions...

John: They were open to the public.

Scott: Were these plays or Bible stories?

John: They were plays. They were Chinese plays and music and dancing, Chinese culture type things. There would always be a chance and our mission did provide fifteen to twenty minute presentation of who we are, the mission, and Christian principles - that was open to the public.

Ruth: You didn't talk about giving out relief packages.

John: Yeah. Thanks to the visit of Leonard Koeninger as a representative of the Wisconsin Synod Committee on Relief, we were provided with funds to purchase common meal items, grocery items. We would put them in boxes and say who it was from. Not only “Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission,” but also “Sponsored by the Wisconsin Synod Committee on Relief.” We had members who would package up these boxes and we would use the bus to deliver them to refugee centers and poverty areas and...

Scott: Boat people?

John: Yes, sometimes boat people. We met a lot of boat people (maybe we have some photographs of them) also people in resettlement homes, and really poverty – low income housing, sometimes hillside shacks, sometimes government housing. So there was a lot of relief so that was another form of outreach for us, besides the radio, besides the education, besides the programs, besides the churches and so on.

Scott: It sounds like there was a lot going on.

John: You have to give Peter Chang a lot of credit because he was a very open minded promotional type of person, who used the synod to promote Christianity in so many different ways. And he was able to get it organized and do it, and we were glad we were able to help when we could. A lot of our communication and a lot of Ruth’s letters and so on were letters to the Synod and to other congregations.

In the political arena in 1965, 66, and 67 in China there was an event called the “Cultural Revolution.” This was an intense Communist push by Mao Tse-tung, and we remember that the big topic of discussion, and not only of Hong Kong because we were so close, but also in other parts of the world was Mao’s little red book. The book of Mao Tse-tung, and there were thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of people flashing that book around, “The Thoughts of

Mao Tse-tung.” Communist influence became very assertive in Hong Kong to the point where it was dangerous for we Americans to go in certain places and to promote our religion because it was the communist radicals who were beginning to take over Hong Kong. In fact, they were getting into street riots and even double-decker buses were turned over and burned in the street. The riot police, who used to train just below our apartment building, were being called up to contain the riots. So by 1967, the rioting in Hong Kong got to be quite dangerous and got to be the point where we as Americans didn’t want to go out at night or go into certain areas. That rioting happened not far from our apartment building. We felt it was probably time for us to leave. Besides our “tour of duty” you might say was four years instead of three and the mission had promised if we would stay for three years they would pay for our roundtrip ticket. So it was time to leave, mostly because of the political situation, but also because the mission was functioning quite well and the Seminary was getting to graduate the first pastors who were initially in the Bible school way back in 1963. Many of these men stayed with us all through that time. So we left in August, 1967. Pastor Kenneth Seim was still there. Ruth Ruege left in 1966, after her three years.

Ruth: Well, John wanted to finish school.

John: I wanted to go back to school, to return to college at Bethany and a summer session at DMLC.

Scott: Well, we didn’t talk too much about 66-67. Everything was going on, did you still have the same person getting the groceries?

Ruth: No we only did that one year. That was the first year. Then we moved to another part of town, a little farther from the school, which was even less expensive than our place there. We did our own cooking and I would go to the market. If I just showed how much money I had and

pointed they would know how much to give me. I would walk there and walk home. They would always try to talk to me in English. The last year we went to the English-American store. It was like a market store. It was a little expensive, but you know you would just get a little hungry for hamburger once and a while. Kenneth Seim told us we could get our own meat and grind it up – but it was not hamburger.

John: The meat was always in the open market with flies on it so anything that Ruth would buy in the market we would have to bring it home and wash it in soapy water, all of the vegetables you had to wash in soapy water, and all of the meat. Then you would rinse it off with regular water. Was it boiled water Ruth?

Ruth: No, it was just from the faucet. Our second and third year we had running water.

John: By that time the water shortage was solved.

Ruth: We washed our clothes. We had this little ringer washing machine and we hung our clothes out on bamboo poles, like everyone did there. I got tired of people throwing stuff on our clothes, so John put a line under our balcony so we wouldn't get stuff on our clothes. We had breakfast out on the balcony. That was sort of neat. We could see the lights of Hong Kong at night. A lot of tourist came to Hong Kong.

(This is the end of side A of the Audio-cassette).

Ruth: It was a beautiful place, all of the ships would come in there. Vietnam was going on down there.

John: We didn't see any American military people in 63 or 64, but I think in 65 and 66 we would start to see more American Navy ships that would come into Hong Kong for R & R (rest and relaxation). By 65 and 66 American aircraft carriers were coming. I remember the Kitty Hawk came one time and we took some of our students on board. They had an American meal cooked

by the Navy, and they couldn't believe all of the food. How good and so much meat, because Chinese were not used to having so much meat. They would eat it as almost a delicacy. So to have such a huge meal and so much meat was amazing. The American Navy guys were so nice to our students when we brought them on (in small groups – it wasn't 200 plus students).

Hong Kong is a fabulous tourists place. There are so many beautiful spots, like the Hong Kong Island and the tops of the mountains. You have to realize that during the Second World War this was occupied by the Japanese so there were still gun positions, no guns of course, Army tunnels and Army trenches on the hill tops in Hong Kong. The Japanese occupancy was still evident there.

Ruth: After church we would go and climb mountains and go on these walla walla ships to the other little islands and they had beautiful beaches there.

John: There were a lot of islands in the Hong Kong area that you could travel to by ferry boat. There was a ferry going from Hong Kong to Kowloon every three minutes. Because Hong Kong was the island and Kowloon was the mainland. One kind was a car ferry and the other one was just a passenger ferry. It was less than a mile and it would take about ten minutes to cross. The fee for the passenger boat for first class (that is the top deck) was twenty cents Hong Kong money, which would be about a nickel in American money in those days. The lower deck is where the water would sometimes splash on you and that was second class, but it would only cost ten cents Hong Kong money.

Ruth: We should talk about the double-decker buses.

John: All of the buses were British double-decker buses. The taxis were always Mercedes Benz. They were pretty old and did burn a lot of oil and you could see a lot of fumes from the taxis.

Ruth: There were no traffic lights; it was police men who would raise their arms certain ways.

Scott: I saw a picture of you, Ruth, in a BMW. Did you guys own that or did you always own a vehicle for personal use?

Ruth: No, that wasn't even our car. We normally took buses.

John: Maybe early 1965, the mission purchased a small four passenger BMW and another car too, for Pastor Seim to use, because that way we would have a way to get to the mission in the afternoons. We paid lease payments or the monthly payments on the car we had. Later one the mission switched the cars and someone else had the BMW and we had a Hillman, which is a British car. But we had for 1965 through 1967 a car which we used. The mission paid the down payment and we paid the monthly payments. We had to drive on the other side of the road.⁴

We knew it was time to leave when the political situation in Hong Kong was getting intense. The day that our ship departed, the day we boarded the American President Lines ship, "President Wilson" in August of 1967... By that time a lot of ships were coming into Hong Kong for R&R. The Vietnam War was getting pretty fierce. The communist anti-American feeling was intense. The day we left the terminal to get on the ship, earlier that day a bomb had gone off at the information booth and the Chinese girl that worked there and the British girl who worked there were disintegrated on the walls. The bomb was in the form of a package left there.

Scott: Now was this the information booth of the school or the ocean liner's information booth?

John: No this was the one at ocean terminal, so they channeled us through a different corridor.

We were fortunate that we were able to leave safely.

Scott: Well, is there anything else that you would like to mention before we wrap it up?

John: There was a Seminary student by the name Jerry Lange. He came to Hong Kong as a volunteer, but the mission paid him because he was a teacher and he taught religion classes. He

⁴ This is because it was a British colony and thus used the British driving methods.

also taught other subjects in the Immanuel Lutheran English Middle School. I believe it was his Vicar year.

Scott: Was he assigned there?

John: No, but I think he took some time off from the Seminary to travel around the world. He contacted us and wanted to work in the mission and that is what he did. I believe he was there for two years. This was probably 65-66.

Ruth: He actually started a Sunday school for the British over there. There was a military air base over there.

John: For a while at the mission office we had an English service that was conducted by Jerry Lange or Ken Seim or Peter. So that was the third church there, Immanuel Lutheran Church.

Ruth: Was he married?

John: No, he was a bachelor.

Ruth: He was sort of a backpacker, hiking type of a guy.

John: Yeah, a world traveler on a budget. I think the mission provided room and board and a little salary.

I think one of the things that should be emphasized is that the Wisconsin Synod recognized that the immediacy of the situation in Hong Kong. They recognized the needs, recognized that there was an opportunity to assist an already established mission field. I think the Synod convention of 1965 brought real blessings to the mission in Hong Kong.

Scott: Do you have anything to say Ruth?

Ruth: It was a real experience.

There are many other stories I have heard about throughout my lifetime. Picture books are stored in the attic and are pulled out every once and awhile. Ruth said, "It was a real experience." What a privilege to teaching the saving message of the gospel in a foreign land to a foreign culture! What a privilege to see God working through you to bring that saving message to those in need of their Savior.