

A Flight to Freedom

Gladys Aylward (1902 – 1970) was the Protestant missionary to China whose story was told in the book *The Small Woman* by Alan Burgess, published in 1957. In 1958, the story was made into the Hollywood film *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, starring Ingrid Bergman.

Born of a working-class family in Edmonton, London, Aylward always had an ambition to go overseas as a missionary. In 1930, she spent her life savings on a passage to Yungchen, Shanxi Province, China, where she founded *The Inn of the Eight Happinesses* (the Hollywood film changed this to *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*) in a remote and backward area. For a time, she served as an assistant to the Chinese government as a “foot inspector” by touring the countryside to enforce the new law against footbinding young Chinese girls. She met with great success in a field that had produced much resistance, including sometimes violence against the inspectors.

In 1938, the region was invaded by Japanese forces, and Aylward led 94 children to safety over the mountains. In their book *The Hidden Price of Greatness*, Ray

Besson and Ranelda Mack Hunsicker tell what happened.



During Aylward's harrowing journey out of war-torn Yungchen, she grappled with despair as never before. After passing a sleepless night, she faced the morning with no hope of reaching safety. A 13-year-old girl in the group reminded her of their much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

“But I am not Moses,” Aylward cried in desperation.

“Of course you aren't,” the girl said, “but Jehovah is still God!”

When Aylward and the orphans made it through, they proved once again that no matter how inadequate we may feel, God is still God, and we can trust in Him.

Aylward's body is interred on the campus of Christ's College in Guandu, Taipei County, in Taiwan. She was known as “Virtuous One” to the Chinese.

As shown by Aylward's story, and the encouragement of the 13-year-old girl on their flight to freedom, trust in God is very important.

And in the work to which we are called in Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home, trust in one another as we care for God's frail and infirm children is one of the building blocks of our mission.