

# Her Story Silhouette by Shari House

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## Silhouette:

Annie Clemmer Funk was born on April 12, 1874, in Bally, Pennsylvania. She came from a long line of Mennonites who had emigrated from Germany in the 1700's. She was one of nine children, and her family ran a mill farm. Her family faithfully attended Hereford Mennonite Church where her father was a deacon for 25 years and where Annie taught Sunday School. From a young age, Annie wanted nothing more than to be a teacher, and her love for reading books about faraway places like Africa and China influenced her desire to want to teach somewhere on the mission field. Annie was also an active member in the Christian Endeavor Society which was started by her father for the purpose of giving young people like Annie greater opportunities and better training for more effective service for the cause of Christ.

Annie studied teaching at the West Chester Normal School in West Chester, PA, and went on to attend D.L. Moody's Northfield Seminary for Young Ladies in Massachusetts from 1898-1901\* for the purpose of preparing herself for full-time service. In 1899, when Annie was 25 and home on break from college, she attended a special conference held at her home church to address the urgent needs in India, which had been ravaged by famine the past few years. By the end of the conference the church leaders had founded a mission program to send immediate relief to India. After hearing the plight of the people there, Annie was even more determined to serve the Lord on the foreign field. Upon her graduation, Annie was given a home assignment where she worked with immigrants in the slums of Chattanooga, Tennessee. From there she accepted a staff position with the YWCA in Patterson, New Jersey and worked with young woman in the immigrant community. Everywhere she went Annie excelled, and it was said of her that she was not only a skilled and proficient worker but that she delighted to be in the Lord's service.

In 1906, at the age of 32, Annie became the first single female Mennonite missionary when she answered an urgent plea put out by missionaries in India for an unmarried woman to come and help reach the women and children. Annie wrote, "Several years ago I promised the Lord that if the way would open to go to the foreign field, I would do my duty . . . Now the door is open wide enough for me to do my duty to the extent of being willing to go." She left on November 16<sup>th</sup> of that same year and made the 4-week long, 9,000-mile arduous journey all by herself. She settled in the town of Janjgir-Champa, a district of Chhattisgarh in the Central Province of India. She started by learning the Hindi language and getting to know the area. The children in her home church and other churches in America raised funds to purchase Annie a bike. She used it extensively to travel from village to village carrying her Bible and a portable organ. Although the



heat was stifling and she was surrounded by people who were suffering from leprosy, malaria, and cholera, Annie thrived in the primitive living circumstances and the great task of showing them God's love. She believed that the love that drew her to Christ would also draw the people of Janjgir to Him.

In 1908, after being in India for only a year and a half, Annie was able to fulfill her dream and open a village school for poor girls who would otherwise have no education. The school was a one-room mud hut, and she had 17 girls for her first enrollment. In 1910, Annie was able to move her school to a much more substantial brick building which was better suited for her growing enrollment. The support she received from home helped to pay the teachers and buy school supplies. Annie acknowledged that some might see this as secular work, but she wrote to a friend, "by these means the people come to see that we are here to help them and not to hinder them. It is a drawing cord and we trust that through it, the children may be want to see the love of our Saviour, and through them the parents. These things are bound to influence for good even if we will never see the visible fruit of our labors."

In March of 1912, after being in India for five years, Annie received a telegram from her pastor at her home church informing her that she needed to take an early furlough and come home quickly as her mother was unwell and that two passage tickets had been purchased for her. Annie traveled by land and sea through India, France, and finally England. Upon arriving in England, she learned that the last part of her trip, a voyage on the SS Haverford which would take her to America. would be delayed six more days due to a coal strike. At the suggestion of her travel agent, she traded her ticket in for a second-class ticket on a luxury liner called the *Titanic*. The *Titanic's* maiden voyage was set to leave South Hampton the next day, and the agent assured her it would get her home in record time.

On April 14, 1912, at the age of 38, Annie died along with more than 1,500 others when the *Titanic* sunk at sea. Annie's body, if ever recovered was never identified. A memorial gravestone was erected at her home church's cemetery in Pennsylvania that says, "Her life was one of service in the spirit of the Master – not to be ministered unto but to minister." Eventually the school Annie started was renamed Annie C. Funk Memorial Girl's School. Donations of money were given by friends and churches throughout the years to enlarge the school and keep it going. A second-story dormitory was added for boarding students, and in the end, more than 3,500 girls were educated at the school with many coming to know the Lord as Christ before its doors closed over 50 years after she opened them. She is truly a woman of whom it could be said, "**She hath done what she could!**"



## Her Story/My Story:

Annie celebrated her 38<sup>th</sup> birthday just a couple of days into the voyage on the *Titanic*. On the night of their fourth day at sea, as the ship was nearing Newfoundland, they hit an iceberg which tore an opening in the "unsinkable" ship. The order was given for the lifeboats to be lowered and women and children began to be ushered into them. Annie, was safely seated in one of the last lifeboats available when she heard a woman yell, "My children, my children." The woman's children were in Annie's lifeboat. Annie immediately stood up and allowed the woman to have her seat. Several years before this time when she was getting ready to travel to the mission field by ship, her friend expressed concern for her safety on the open sea. I'm sure as Annie boarded the sinking *Titanic* on that dark, dreadful night, her thoughts in that moment were the same as her response to her friend years before, "Our heavenly Father is as near to us on sea as on land. My trust is in Him. I have no fear."

A quick Google search will tell you that Annie Funk is not listed among those who are considered to be the most famous people who died or survived the sinking of the *Titanic*. On that list you will find a millionaire, a famous actress, the owner of Macy's, a socialite, a railroad magnate, a steel magnate, a fashion designer, a major landowner, a

Broadway producer, and a countless among others. Much has been recorded about those famous people and many of them were made even more famous when they were included in the Hollywood movie *Titanic*.

In stark contrast, Annie's story is not well known outside of a few Christian circles. Her only worldly accolades include a memorial marker in her home church's cemetery, a plaque in the chapel of the Northfield school where she trained, a short documentary film that was made about her life, a one-woman dramatization that was written about her, and a short children's story. Annie had done nothing to cause the world to count her as famous in their eyes, but in Janjgir-Champa, a small developing district of India, she has not been forgotten where her story has become a legend. Annie's school, although now in ruins, is still visited by locals and tourists alike who come to see the home and remember the story of this brave woman who came from a little community on the other side of the world to teach poor Indian girls and tell them about Christ. Only eternity will reveal the full extent of the results of Annie Funk's short ministry on this earth.



I know when we serve the Lord we don't always get to see the rewards of our labors here on earth, but sometimes the Lord gives us a glimpse of what it will be like in Heaven to find out the results of the work we have done for Him. In 2016, I traveled back to Nigeria for the first time since leaving there in 1997. Upon arriving in Ibadan, the city where I had ministered, I found many of my Sunday school girls were still faithfully attending church and some had married men I taught in our Bible college. It was a blessing to learn that they had been faithfully serving the Lord in the ministry for these many years.



Lola (sitting in front of me in a greet shirt) S.S. class – 1996

Lola (as a pastor's wife) and her family – 2016

One of my jobs when I first arrived on the field was to start and run a singles ministry at our church. Within a year our group had over 100 members. Most of these also attended the large university in our town. While on my trip in Ibadan, I was being hosted by a friend and her husband who run a local Christian school that I had taught at for most of my short time in Nigeria. On the first day I arrived at the school, a woman came running up to me shouting "My mother is here, my mother is here." I'll admit, I was taken aback as I had no idea who this woman was nor why in the world she would be calling me her "Mother." When she asked if I remembered her, I nodded affirmatively. How could I possibly tell her I didn't have the faintest clue who she was, and I was sure at any moment my searching her face would help me to remember. She began explaining why she was so excited to see her "mother" to one of the other teachers I had just met. As I listened to her tell the other teacher her story and searched this grown woman's animated face, I began to see the face of a young lady who attended our church. Her name was Abbi and had started attending our singles ministry at the church sometime in the last year of her university studies. For the Nigerian university students, getting

through college was a struggle itself as the teachers often went on strike or other things kept them from learning. Finding work after graduation, though, was the real battle, and many graduates spent years submitting job applications and trying to make ends meet while waiting for a door of opportunity to open. Abbi went on to explain to the teacher that on the day after her graduation, I brought her to meet my friend who was the head of the Christian school I was teaching at and recommended her for a teaching position. I honestly do not remember doing this, but she was hired and shortly after that I left Nigeria to work on a different mission field. Since Facebook and social media were not a thing for many years to come, I had no communication with Abbi from the day I left Nigeria until that day when I was standing in the school looking at this grown woman who kept calling me "Mother."



Although I'm embarrassed to admit I had forgotten all about this incident and quite frankly this young lady, she had not forgotten me. She thought of me as a mother figure in her life - a woman who taught her spiritual things and who cared enough about her to find her a job which enabled her to never have even one day of worry about where her income would come from, a job that allowed her to work in a Christian environment for all these years, and a job that provided a way eventually for her and her husband's children to go to a Christian school. What a beautiful treasure the Lord gave me that day. It makes me think how sweet it will be in Heaven to find out the results of our labor for the cause of Christ, whether we remember them or not.

## *Bible Study:* Missing Accolades

One of the tools of the Devil to distract those who are trying to live a life for Christ is to put things in our line of sight that cause us to be dissatisfied or that leave us feeling we are living an unsuccessful life or a life that is somehow less than par to the life of those living for worldly pleasure.

There was a time when I wanted to be a famous fashion designer in New York City. I dreamt of having my designs displayed in the most prominent fashion magazines and to have the honor of being recognized by the fashion elite and have celebrities know me by name. The Lord had other plans for my life. I've never been featured in a magazine, and I'm quite certain that no celebrity has ever even heard my name mentioned.

The psalmist talks about the dangers of having your eyes on the prosperity of the wicked in Psalm 73 when he says, *"But as for me, my feet were well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."* The psalmist goes on to say in verses 22-25 after having a period of reflection and time spent with the Lord in His sanctuary, *"So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."*

The desire to be famous or well known or to even have the work we do recognized is a basic desire in human nature. Getting honor for the work we do is not a sin. In fact, the Bible teaches us in Romans 13:7, *"Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."* In 1 Timothy 5:17-18 we are also told, *"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith . . . The labourer is worthy of his reward."* Again, receiving honor for the work we do is not a sin, but, wanting recognition or honor from man or from the world should not be the driving force behind what we do.

The Bible tells us in Col. 3:23-24, *"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."* Nearly all of Matthew 6 is

dedicated to warning us to not do alms deeds, say prayers, or fast in order to gain the attention of man. The chapter goes on to warn us that the work we do or the treasures we try to acquire should not be of earthly value and instead should be rooted in eternal value. Our goal in life should not be to have our name plastered in lights somewhere, but for it to be hidden in the heart of God so that one day we might hear those words, "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

These verses remind me of the story of the old missionary couple, Henry Morrison and his wife. They had been serving the Lord in Africa for forty years, and they were finally retiring and returning to New York City. They happened to be on the same ship that Teddy Roosevelt was on when he was returning from one of his big-game hunting expeditions. When they pulled into port there was a huge fanfare with the mayor and other dignitaries, with crowds of people cheering and clapping as Teddy Roosevelt disembarked. No one, though, came to greet the elderly missionaries and welcome them home. It was a discouragement particularly to Henry. Later that night once they were settled in their humble one-bedroom apartment that the mission board provided for them, Henry discussed his frustration at their homecoming or lack thereof with his wife. She sweetly suggested he discuss it with the Lord and tell Him how he was feeling. A short while later the husband came out of the room with a peaceful look on his face. The wife said, "I see you have it settled then," to which her husband replied, "Yes, the Lord reminded me . . . I'm not home yet."

You and I are not home yet and won't be until the day we step through Heaven's gates. Until then, may we keep loving the Lord and keep looking for ways to show the love of Christ to others; may we keep serving Him and keep looking for ways to serve others so as to draw them to Christ, One day our accolades will come, and the crowns we have won will not be held up for all to see, but will gladly be laid at Jesus' feet.

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Resources:

<https://mbhistory.org/profiles/funk/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annie\\_Funk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annie_Funk)

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/chhatisgarh-towns-titanic-connection/article3310847.ece>

<https://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/titanic-victim/annie-clemmer-funk.html>

<https://archive.is/20130415093311/http://www.mcusa-archives.org/Features/annie.html#selection-333.0-340.14>

[https://web.archive.org/web/20081011203152/http://www.nmhschool.org/magazine/2003\\_fall/missionary.php](https://web.archive.org/web/20081011203152/http://www.nmhschool.org/magazine/2003_fall/missionary.php)

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Video - [youtube.com/watch?v=AmQ53ysq6VQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=AmQ53ysq6VQ)