



Passport photos: Celia Richmond Brines and Rolland James Brines, c. 1916.

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Brines, Rolland James (1891–1987) and Celia (Richmond) (1892–1996)

HEIDI OLSON CAMPBELL

Heidi Olson Campbell, M.A. in English (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI) is currently a Ph.D. student at Baylor University where she focuses on the impact of climatic disruption on women and religion in early modern England. Campbell taught at the Adventist International Institution for Adventist Studies in the Philippines. She wrote a chapter on Adventist women for the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism* and contributed to the *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*.

Rolland James (known as R. J.) and Celia Richmond Brines were Seventh-day Adventist educators who spent two terms as missionaries in China. A hospital administrator and physician in the United States and China, R. J. was the first medical superintendent of Porter Hospital. Celia wrote the popular mission book, *Dragon Tales*.¹

Early Years

R.J. was born in Marine City, Michigan, on November 4, 1891, to William J. Brines (1858-1919) and Louise Basney Brines (1856-1911). His parents became Seventh-day Adventists when R. J. was about 5 years old.² In 1906, R. J. was baptized in Portland, Maine.³ He attributed his conversion to his parents. His sister, Ethel Barto, and her husband later became missionaries in North Sumatra, Singapore, and Malaysia.⁴

Celia Richmond was born in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, on October 18, 1892, to Seelye Richmond (1828-1894) and Anna Boughton Richmond (1856-1938). Her father was a U.S. Civil War veteran. Baptized as an Adventist a few years before Celia's birth, her mother was a committed Christian who ensured that her children received a Christian education.⁵ Celia was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church at age 12. She attended public school, an Adventist church school in Rome, New York, and Vienna Intermediate School.⁶ In the summers of 1908 to 1912, Celia worked as a literature evangelist.⁷ Completing the Normal course (a teacher preparation course) at South Lancaster Academy in 1912, she taught at Adventist elementary schools in North Creek and Elmira, New York, and Takoma Park, Maryland.⁸ An energetic, well-liked teacher, she encouraged her students to raise money for mission outreach.⁹

R.J. graduated from South Lancaster Academy in 1914.¹⁰ That same year he and Celia married.¹¹ Continuing his education at Washington Missionary College, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1916.¹² The church recruited the couple to serve as missionaries while they were still in college. The Brines left with their infant daughter Laurretta Elizabeth (born in 1916) shortly after graduation for China.¹³ Ethel, R. J.'s sister, traveled on the same ship as the Brines to southeast Asia.

Missionaries in China

Both Brines worked at Shanghai Missionary College (also called the China Missions Training School). Prior to teaching, the Brines attended A. C. Selmon's newly opened intensive language school.¹⁴ R. J. worked as treasurer and science teacher.¹⁵ Celia was a teacher and the Normal (or education) director from 1916 to 1922. In that capacity, she introduced and implemented Western practices of education to Chinese Adventist mission schools. A local elementary school served as a model classroom in which to demonstrate and practice Western teaching methods for students in the Normal course at Shanghai Mission College.¹⁶ Among other responsibilities, she assisted Dr. Selmon in preparing elementary school readers for use in mission schools.¹⁷ A daughter, Louise Marie, was born to the Brines in Shanghai on April 11, 1921. The delivering physician was Bertha Loveland Selmon.¹⁸

The following year Laretta Elysabeth fell so ill that on February 25, she and Celia left China for Loma Linda Sanitarium.¹⁹ While on furlough, Celia spoke about her experience as a missionary and visited family in New York.²⁰ R. J. followed them to the United States a few months later, and the medical leave became permanent return, when later that year, he began studies for a medical degree at the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University). When he graduated, he received top marks on the California State Medical Board exam and the medical examination by the National Board of Medical Examiners in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, making California state news.²¹ While her husband was in graduate school, Celia worked as a desk clerk first at Loma Linda and then Glendale Sanitarium.²²

After completing his internship at Los Angeles General Hospital, R. J. served as medical director of Wichita Sanitarium in Kansas from 1927 to 1930.²³ As part of his work in Wichita, he lectured on the seven laws of health, performed routine physical examinations, and vaccinated students at Enterprise Academy.²⁴ At the same time, he was on the executive committee of the Central Union Conference.²⁵ Early in 1930, R. J. became the first the medical director of the newly established Porter Sanitarium and Hospital in Colorado.²⁶ Celia also worked at Wichita Sanitarium and Porter Sanitarium as a matron and desk clerk.²⁷

But, while in the United States, neither Brines had forgotten their time in China. At a special church event in 1927, both spoke about the importance of mission work, and Celia shared about a Chinese boy who went from being a beggar to working for God.²⁸ At a campmeeting in Missouri in 1930, R. J. promoted global Adventist missions.²⁹ Meanwhile, neither the General Conference nor the China Division administrators had forgotten the Brines. That same year the church called the Brines for a second term of mission service to China, now to lead Yencheng Hospital-Dispensary in Henan.

The Brines arrived in Shanghai on December 19, 1930, on the *S.S. Tatsu-ta-Maru*. Their eldest daughter Laretta remained in Shanghai to study at Far Eastern Academy.³⁰ R. J.'s experience as a medical administrator in the United States proved useful as did their knowledge of Mandarin which permitted them to be deployed immediately. The Brines were happy to see that many of their former students at Shanghai Missionary College were now pastors, teachers, medical workers, and employees in other capacities for the Adventist Church.³¹ He worked hard to try to make Yencheng self-supporting—a perennial concern for Adventist medical missions.³² Their time in Yencheng was busy. In addition to the hospital itself, the Adventist Church also ran from Yencheng a school for nurses and another outstation dispensary.³³ The students at the nursing school were involved in extending the Adventist church into Tibet by raising money and at least one student determining to go to Tibet as a medical missionary.³⁴

The years in Yencheng were eventful. The Yellow River (also known as Huang He) devastatingly flooded central China in 1931.³⁵ In 1934, another flood of the Yellow River affected the region, causing, according to one missionary, more than 50,000 people to drown, 70,000 cattle to die, and 2 million people to lose their homes. Travel was so difficult that R. J. diagnosed and treated another missionary, a Mrs. Warren with typhoid, over the

radio.³⁶ Years later, the Brines' daughter Louise recalled standing on top of the church and watching houses collapse, people drown, and the survivors flee to the tops of dikes until the flood waters receded.³⁷ Bandits also proved a perpetual challenge. With so much devastation and lost income from floods, unsurprisingly, some turned to criminal activity to feed themselves. R. J. suspected that some of his patients at Yencheng were bandits.³⁸ In 1935, their eldest daughter, Laretta, accompanied by Bible instructor Abbie Dunn, returned to the United States for college after graduating from Far Eastern Academy.³⁹ During her time in Henan, Celia worked as a nurse at the hospital, began writing stories about evangelism in China, and took care of at least one orphaned child. One of her stories, published in a denominational periodical, featured a Chinese woman Bible instructor who converted a sick woman and her husband through selling a copy of the Gospel of Matthew to the couple.⁴⁰ In 1937, the Brines returned to the United States.

Subsequent Careers and Retirement

After their second term of service, R. J. completed some postgraduate work in Chicago⁴¹ and spent the subsequent years as a doctor in Santa Barbara, California. Celia remained actively involved in their local church and conference in California, participating, for example, in child evangelism and a leadership training program.⁴²

During World War II, Celia wrote a book on their experiences in China called *Dragon Tales*. It proved popular during the war years and went through multiple printings between 1942 to 1945.⁴³ It was one of ten books, including three by Ellen White, chosen by the General Conference to provide to libraries for military personnel during World War II.⁴⁴ Church periodicals also republished her stories.⁴⁵

R. J. retired from full-time medicine in 1963, but their participation in medical mission work in Asia was not over.⁴⁶ In 1968, he and Celia returned to Asia for six months when he served as a relief doctor at Taiwan Sanitarium and Hospital in Tapei.⁴⁷

The Brines' time in China shaped their daughters' life choices. Like her father, Louise Brines Tyrer graduated from Loma Linda as a physician and reported that she was inspired to become a gynecologist after seeing the need that women and children had for medical care when the Yellow River flooded. She was the first woman hired as a full-time staff physician by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in Chicago and was a vice president and head of Family Planning Services for the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.⁴⁸ Laretta became a nurse, graduating from both Pacific Union College and Loma Linda University's School of Nursing, married a physician, Howard O. Stocker, on April 12, 1942, was actively involved in philanthropic activities, and lived in California.⁴⁹ While in China, the Brines also raised a boy, Wu Shan Jun, whom they had found begging on the streets. Wu's son eventually graduated from Loma Linda University as a physician and worked as a surgeon in California.⁵⁰

R. J. died August 18, 1987, in Santa Barbara, California.⁵¹ Celia, who became a centenarian, was featured in an article on the longevity of the Adventist residents of Loma Linda, California. She attributed her lifespan to her

lifelong vegetarianism.⁵² She died on December 11, 1996, in Loma Linda.⁵³

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