

## Her Story Silhouette by Shari House

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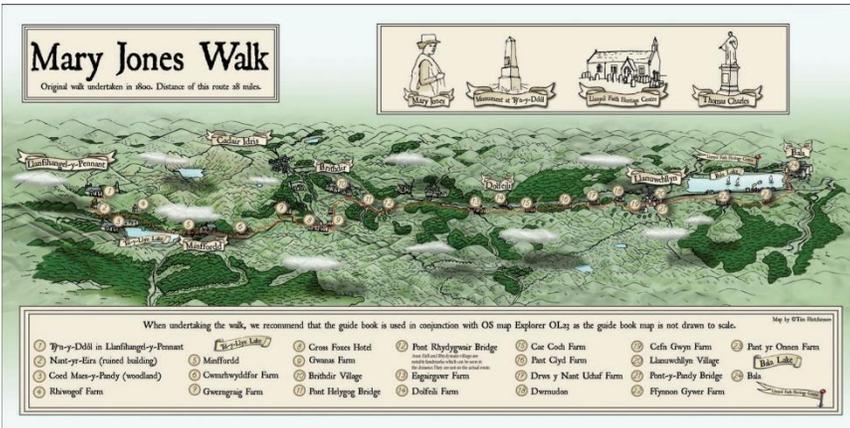
### Silhouette:

Mary Jones was born on December 16, 1784, in rural North Wales. She was the first-born child of Jacob and Mary Jones who were humble wool-weavers much like many of the Welsh people at that time. Mary's father passed away before her fifth birthday leaving her family in further destitution. They were devout Methodist Christians who attended Bible reading and prayer meetings anytime the preacher came to the area, and at the age of eight, Mary made her profession of faith in Christ. It was at these meetings that Mary's love for the Bible took root, and she desperately wanted to be able to read it for herself.

The Bible was the book that was used most often to teach children how to read, but a family had to be quite wealthy to own one. At this time most Welsh people were illiterate as books of any kind including Welsh Bibles were scarce. Rev. Thomas Charles, who lived in Bala about 25 miles from Mary's home, took it upon himself to set up "circulating schools" that trained teachers who brought education to the rural areas. It was here that Mary first learned to read at the age of 10. Mary found a friend in a neighbor lady, who lived on a farm about two miles away from her own cottage. The lady owned a copy of the Bible, and once she learned of Mary's great love for reading it, she invited Mary to visit and read it whenever she was able. Mary made the 2-mile journey each week no matter what the weather was like to read and memorize passages from the Bible so that she could remember them when she was at home.

A desire began to grow within her to have a Bible of her own that she could read anytime she wanted. The problem she faced was two-fold. The first was the cost of the Bible. At that time a Welsh Bible cost 17 shillings or the equivalent to 1 ½ years wages for a laborer. The second problem was that by law only the King's printers in London were allowed to print Bibles, and since they knew many Welsh people could not afford to buy their own Bibles, they would only print one if it was paid for in advance. This made it difficult to even find a Bible for sale. Mary did not let either of these things deter her from her desire to have a Bible of her own, and she began doing odd chores for whoever would hire her. She saved every halfpenny she could and at the end of the first year she had saved up 5 pence. By the end of the second year she had saved 13 pence. She did not quit. It took her 6 long years to save up the money needed to buy a Bible.

One particularly stormy day as Mary was walking to her neighbor's farm, a man on a horse stopped and asked her where she was going in such wind and rain. When Mary told him that she was headed to a farmhouse two miles away in order to read the Bible since it was the nearest one to her, the man responded that he was Rev. Charles from Bala and had some Bibles on order from London and might be able to help her get one. Finally, Mary had saved enough money, and one hot summer's day at the age of 15\* Mary excitedly set off for Bala with her savings of 17 shillings and a few pennies. She put her money, some bread and cheese, and her one pair of shoes in a small bag. Fearing the journey would cause too much wear on her shoes, Mary traveled the 25\* miles up and down mountains and across valleys and streams for the most part in her bare feet. When she finally arrived in Bala, she put her shoes on and began inquiring where Rev. Charles' home was. She eventually found him, but he informed her that the Bibles had not yet arrived. She would not be able to get one that day after all.



It was more than Mary could bear and through her tears her story of working and saving and her long journey came tumbling out. The Rev. Charles was so moved by her story, he decided to let her stay with his maid until the Bibles arrived. A few days later he sent her back home with not just one Bible but three Bibles for the price of one. She was so happy she ran most of the way home.

Mary's determination to have a Bible of her own and the fact that it took her six long years to save enough money to buy one continued to work on the heart of Rev. Charles long after Mary was safely back home. He could not shake the thought of the many who were desperate to have a copy of God's Word nor of the lengths they were willing to go to in order to get one. Mary's story along with these thoughts drove him to the point that he felt compelled at an 1802 meeting of the Council of the Religious Tract Society to propose the desperate need for a society to be formed that could supply Wales with Bibles. After hearing his plea, those gathered at the meeting determined that the need for Welsh people to have an affordable Bible in their own language was indeed great and the comment was made, "If for Wales, why not for England, why not for the whole world?" And so, in 1804 the British and Foreign Bible Society was formed by Rev. Thomas Charles and others for the purpose of producing affordable Bibles for people in their own language. To date millions of Bibles have been printed in over 2,200 languages. Two of Mary's three Bibles still remain. One copy is in the British and Foreign Bible Society's Archives in the Cambridge University Library and the other one is in the National Library of Wales.



Mary eventually married a weaver named Thomas Jones and they had six children. She continued to be a faithful Christian and throughout her life gave sacrificially to missions and to the British & Foreign Bible Society in order that others may have a chance of owning a copy of God's Word for themselves. She became blind in her old age and, although she could no longer read it, her Bible she purchased so many years ago was never far from her

reach. She died at the age of 80 on December 28, 1864, after living what most would call a simple, ordinary life, but this singular act of hers when she was but a 15-year old girl was used by God to burden the hearts of others and only eternity will reveal to us the change it made in this world. She was truly a woman of whom it could be said, "**She hath done what she could**"!

## *Her Story/My Story:*

Although we have been able to piece together most of the sequence of events of this story from Mary's own writings, from the writings of those she recalled the story to, and from the meticulous records that were kept from the time between Rev. Charles' proposal for a Bible society to be created through to its inception and eventual success, there is no record anywhere that Mary was aware that she was the catalyst for the formation of the British & Foreign Bible Society. The story of Mary Jones and her Bible was first written in the Welsh language sometime after her death. It was then printed in English in 1882, and by 1890, had sold over 95,000 copies. Since that time, the story has never been out of print and has been translated into over 40 languages through books, plays, musicals, and films. On the day she determined she was going to save her money to buy a Bible, **she did not know the impact that her decision would have**. Year after year as she determined to persevere in this endeavor, **she did not know the impact that her decision would have**. On the day she set off on a 25-mile journey to buy her Bible, **she did not know the impact that her decision would have**. It is interesting to note that she was known only to a small group of people in her village, but her story has influenced the lives of many and impacted the world.

One time, many years ago now, a man and his family came to candidate as missionaries at my home church. My dad, who was the assistant pastor at the time, happened to be the one to greet them when they arrived. In the course of giving them a tour through the church and showing them through the hallways where our supported missionaries are displayed, the man stopped when he got to my picture and said, "You know Shari House?" My dad replied, "Yes, I'm her father." To which the man said, "She's the reason I'm a missionary today." He then told the story of how he and his family were attending a church while they were stationed at a military base several years before this. I happened to be home on a short furlough between my time in Nigeria and New Zealand and was presenting my ministry at a new church. I was the first missionary they had ever met that wasn't a preacher. They had been discussing what they thought the Lord's will was for their family once he retired from the service, and although they had a heart for the mission field, they never considered it as a possibility for them since he wasn't a preacher. After seeing my presentation, they decided that when they retired they would pursue going to the mission field in whatever capacity the Lord could use them. When my dad was telling me the story, I couldn't remember the church where I had the meeting. I didn't recognize their names, and even now I don't remember what field my father told me they were going to. I do, though, remember feeling humbled when my father told me of the encounter and thinking about how on the day we met I was completely unaware of the influence my life was having on theirs.

# Bible Study: Influences Unaware

Every day in so many ways we are influencing the people around us. Our influence is making a difference in the lives of others whether we know it or not. . . whether we acknowledge it or not. Someone will be **watching us, following us, and imitating us**. The question then is **"What are we showing them," "Where are we leading them,"** and **"What kind of example are we being to them?"**

What does it mean when someone says, "That person is a bad influence" or "That person is a good influence"? It usually means that the habitual actions of one person have caused another person to act in a manner that isn't their habit. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word "influence" means. . .

**Influence – n. the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command**

**The act of influencing someone most often comes then by the way we live our everyday life.**

The Bible also has much to say about influences, for example:

- **Romans 14:7 - "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself."**
- **Hebrews 10:24 - "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:"**
- **Titus 2:7a - "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works:. . ."**
- **Titus 3:8 - "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men."**

The world for sure and even we Christians desperately need people we can look to to imitate or influence us. It is helpful for us to see that another Christian has been able to stay faithful while going through a trial in their life that is similar to one that we are going through. When we have been wronged, it is helpful to see the example of someone who has reacted correctly when they have been wronged. Seeing someone work hard to live a life that honors God is so helpful and encouraging to us when that is our desire as well. The saved and unsaved alike desperately need people who have large hearts, who are God-conscious, who live to serve others, who stay faithful to their calling, who live separated and holy lives, and who live a life full of things worth imitating and worth striving for.

As a Christian it is our responsibility to make sure our life is a good influence not only for those around us, but for those who will come after us. The best way to influence future generations is **to do right today; to live purposefully, righteously, and consistently today;** and **to be faithful to the Lord and His will for your life today.** We never know when the Lord might choose to use the example of our everyday life to influence the lives of others.

The slightest breeze that ever blew  
Some slender grass has wavered,  
The smallest life I ever knew  
Some other life has flavored.

We cannot live our lives alone  
For other lives we touch  
Are either strengthened by our own,  
Or weakened just as much.

- Author Anonymous

Further study:

#### Being a good influence:

- Matthew 5:13-16 "Ye are the salt of the earth. . . Ye are the light of the world. . ."
- Proverbs 27:17 "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."
- Proverbs 13:20a "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: . . ."

#### Being a bad influence:

- 1 Corinthians 15:33 "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. "
- Prov. 13:20b ". . . a companion of fools shall be destroyed."
- Pro. 22:24-25 "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul. angry man...lest thou learn his ways"
- Prov. 12:26b ". . . the way of the wicked seduceth them"
- Romans 14:13b ". . . that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

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\* Her gravestone is incorrectly marked 16 years old.

\* Some accounts give the distance as 25 miles, 26 miles, and 28 miles. The exact route is not known, but the distance was measured according to the likely route she would have taken from her home to Bala.

Resources:

There are so many books and articles that have been written about Mary Jones, but this set of 18 blogposts gives the most comprehensive account of Mary Jones, Rev. Charles, and the BFBS - <http://www.rogersteer.com/how-mary-jones-and-thomas-charles-triggered-a-mission-to-the-world/>