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Houston's Grandmother Missionary

Dear Sirs: Please Send My Security Checks to the Philippines

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Two years ago this month, Mrs. Raymond T. Riphey, now 73, told the social security office to start sending her checks to the Philippines.

Eloise Richey kissed her

daughter and two granddaughters goodbye, and she and her 74-year-old companion, veteran missionary, Miss Mollie Baird, left for Cebu City in the Philippines to do independent Bible missionary work. They had been turned down

for denominational sponsorship as "too old."

Several weeks ago, the indefatigable Mrs. Richey, a widow, returned to her Houston home—but only for a breather. She plans to return to her preaching work in the Philippines in July.

It's harder to think of her going back to the Philippines than it was when she first went, said Mrs. Richey's daughter, Mrs. J. W. Hulme Jr., whose husband is pastor of the Lord's Church, 1616 Indiana.

"My daughter prefers that I stay in Houston, but she knows that if this work is what God wants me to do, then that is the best thing for me and her," said the fragile looking lady with the steel spine carriage of a West Point cadet.

Peace Corps? Nope

Peace Corps personnel in the Philippines, most of whom are 50 years Mrs. Richey's junior, stared with amazement when they encountered Mrs. Richey and Miss Baird in the helter-skelter Philippine transportation system of buffalo-drawn land sleds, crowded public buses, boats and inter-island planes.

"They couldn't believe we just came there on our own," recalled the grandmother.

But Mrs. Richey and her companion make no pretense that their goals bear any similarity to the social change, agricultural betterment and education goals of the Peace Corps;

The ladies' goal is totally spiritual: Fundamentalist, no-doubt-about-it. Bible preaching spiritual. Mrs. Richey

makes that perfectly clear in a clipped-diction, no nonsense way. She describes her preaching and teaching as nondenominational and she is licensed by the Richey Evangelistic Assn. Her late husband, an evangelist, was affiliated with the Assemblies of God, and was widely known in Houston.

She and Miss Baird supported themselves and their Philippines work financially by using their social security checks, church pensions and gifts from interested friends in the United States.

Miss Baird is a veteran of 30 years missionary work in India, plus 10 years of missionary work in the Philippines, and was responsible for interesting Mrs. Richey in going.

Septuagenarians Busy

In the beginning they headquartered themselves in a small house in Cebu City, and soon the word got out that they were available for preaching and teaching. Responding to invitations from all over the islands, the two silver-haired ladies bought lots for building five churches, completely built one parsonage and aided in the building of six others. This is while they were ministering at 216 services, short-term Bible schools, evangelistic crusades and special Bible lectures.

In 1969 the two septuagenarians financially aided one man and two women through a Philippines Bible Institute, and in 1970 put two girls through Emanuel Bible Institute and three men and one woman through North Min-



Photo by Sam C. Pierson Jr. Chronicle Staff

MRS. RICHEY IN PTAGION
Models Typical Dress Worn of Eastern Visayas,

Social ppines

danao Bible School, plus sponsoring radio programs, helping a church buy an organ, and what Mrs. Richey calls "all that sort of thing."

"There is a lot of the same unrest in the Philippines as in the U.S.," said Mrs. Richey. "The young people feel rebellious and are moving away from religion."

"There is an anti-Spanish feeling because of 400 years of Spain's domination, and some anti-American feeling partly because of the Vietnam war. There are also cries for self-determination," Mrs. Richey added.

"But the Philippines' young people took it as a great challenge that two people as old as we are were out there caring about them. They told us they were very surprised that two elderly American ladies would forsake the comforts we obviously could enjoy to come to the remote parts of the world," explained Mrs. Richey. "We had no difficulty in attracting young people to the Bible."

"They respect age and experience more than is done in the U.S. A person my age just couldn't do all that here with the big youth emphasis."

Some Opposition

The Moslem and Roman Catholic religions are predominant in the Philippines, said Mrs. Richey. "The government provides complete religious freedom," she added.

Mrs. Richey and Miss Baird encountered no opposition to their Bible teaching and preaching from the government, but did encounter some from some local Roman Catholic officials, she said. "It



ARRIVING ON CARABAO SLED

Miss Baird, Mrs. Richey on Sled-Drawn by Water Buffalo-Like Animal

never happened during one of my crusades, but during Miss Baird's lectures she told me that sometimes a Catholic priest would come and actually drag people away."

Since there are 80 dialects in the Philippines, the ladies preached in English and used an interpreter. "The primary language is Tagalog and Cebuana, but there is a strong cry for a national uniform language," she said.

"I think Protestant Christianity is taking hold in the Philippines," she said.

The tremendous heat and humidity and occasional lack of modern bathing facilities, plus a broken leg for Miss Baird were the only disappointments during the past two years, said the grandmother missionary, who shrugs off such details quickly.

"In the islands a friend or relative must stay with a hospitalized patient at all times, so I stayed with Miss Baird for 23 days in the hospital. The doctors were amazed at how quickly her bones healed, so pretty soon we were up and preaching again," she

said. "I think Mollie is the most wonderful person."

Likes the Food

At their Cebu City headquarters, food, shopping, plumbing, lights and bottled gas were "just like home" but in the boondocks they existed on what Mrs. Richey described as a pleasant diet of rice, fish cooked with ginger and fruits. It's a good thing I liked rice before I went though," she said.

"You can't get good beef, but we did have canned meat, and a native vegetable similar to potatoes."

Perhaps the characteristic which most distinguishes Mrs. Richey from most persons her age is her ability to talk always in present or future tense — rarely in the past. Her photo collection, too, is not the usual one for a grandmother: Smiling grandchildren or old friends.

It's snapshots of Mrs. Richey with congregations in Tuandua, Delores, Mindanao, Mactan, Cordova; Mrs. Richey at open air market place revivals and groundbreaking ceremonies; "Mrs. Richey arriving at a grass-roofed

church in a sled drawn by a water buffalo, or Mrs. Richey on the wall-to-wall cots on the deck of an interisland ferry.

"I was grateful for the privilege of being allowed to minister," she said.

On the trip from Philippines to Houston, Mrs. Richey had preaching and teaching stopovers in Hong Kong, Taipei and the San Francisco area. She is presently at home at 5211 Arboles Dr.

Mrs. Richey said the present decline in church attendance, giving and interest will soon stop. "I think that because the Lord said: 'I will build my church.'"

The ebullient lady, who describes herself as a longtime acquaintance of evangelist Billy Graham, also says she thinks the "second coming of Christ will be in my lifetime. I'm not dogmatic about it, but I just think He will come soon.

"One of the last things my husband said to me before he died was 'keep busy for God,' and I intend to do just that. The Lord opened the door and I just stepped right in," she said.