

# An Unexpected CALLING

**Baroness Caroline Cox**

**Sharon Toh** discovered that for **Baroness Caroline Cox**, life is about giving all you've got—for as long as you've got it...

She is articulate, friendly and unassuming and someone I might imagine myself taking a prescription from at a clinic somewhere in the upper-class suburbs of London. But The Baroness Cox, of Queensbury: 'Call me Caroline,' she tells me, 'all my friends do, and that is pretty much everybody I meet', has had a colourful career far beyond what she imagined in her days as a student nurse. These days, as founder and Chief Executive of the UK-based Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART), she is just as likely to be found huddled under a bridge with Armenian bomb victims as giving talks to British school children or spending time with her family in London.

'I am a nurse and a social scientist by profession, and a Baroness by astonishment. My title is proof that God has a sense of humour,' says Caroline, referring to the seat that she occupies in the House of Lords, in the British Parliament. It is a position she takes seriously: 'Of course it brings a lot of privilege, and privilege brings responsibility. One of the responsibilities I feel very strongly about is being able to speak in the House of Lords, being able to be a voice of the voiceless.'

In order to express that voice as authentically and truthfully as possible, she does not rely on the second-hand reports of others; she makes the trips herself, a petite backpack-wielding traveller on a mission. These are treacherous journeys that have taken her across borders closed to the Western world for decades; she has been inches away from death on several occasions.

## SITTING ALONGSIDE

The Baroness' entry into the world of international aid and advocacy began quietly. 'I was invited by an organisation called the Medical Aid for Poland Fund to be their patron—organisations like to have a title on their writing paper, you know.' But instead of leaving her involvement at the letter-head level, she insisted upon travelling to Poland herself. Other than wanting to ensure that aid was reaching those who needed it most, she also wanted to give a first-hand account of the suffering behind the Iron Curtain to those back home. She has continued to do this, travelling to places such as southern Sudan, Burma and Timor Leste.

To date, she has made 67 trips to Nagorno-Karabagh, a place seldom mentioned in the Western media and home to 100,000 Christians displaced by one of Stalin's divide-and-rule projects. There, apart from offering medical aid and other supplies, she and her teams simply sit alongside these hurting ones, sharing in their pain.

An important aspect of HART's work is that priorities for aid are decided by the recipients. 'It's important to give them that dignity of choice, to let them know that their voice matters,' says Caroline. 'That actually enables and enhances the local leaders, which is more effective in making a difference in their own community.' By keeping HART's base in London, and its new Australian office, small and minimally staffed, funds are mainly channelled to where they will make the most difference—in the lives of the people that Caroline has worked so hard to represent.

*"She and her teams simply sit alongside these hurting ones, sharing in their pain"*

## BE STRONG AND OF GOOD COURAGE

What is it that has made her go on with this work, at a time in her life when anyone would excuse her for staying home to be a full-time grandmother? 'As a Christian I don't believe people should be left to suffer and die unreached, unhelped, unheard. We have a Christian mandate to be with the lost, the last and the least.' And she goes to any length to fulfil that mandate, slipping through borders unofficially when official channels refuse to open. She is also adamant that, while there is a need to support Christians who are being persecuted, HART, and the church at large, must be willing to help anyone in need, regardless of their faith.

Her own faith has its roots in her Anglican upbringing, but to Caroline, church denominations are irrelevant. 'We're all part of the body of Christ. The church is like a diamond; the denominations are like different facets reflecting the sunlight in different ways. But he is one God, just as it is the one sun.'

Until now, living this life of frequently life-threatening



adventure, Caroline draws comfort from the text that was read at her Anglican confirmation when she was 11. 'It was Joshua 1:9, where it says 'Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go (NKJV).' I haven't always kept to it, I do often get afraid and dismayed, but it's a good text to keep with you.' CW

**In Short**

On taking initiative: 'We have a motto [at HART] that I think could apply to everyone, and it is: 'I cannot do everything, but I must not do nothing.'

On change: 'My husband died suddenly, some years ago. Of course life will never be the same, of course it's difficult. But when God gives you a vacuum, you might as well fill it.'

On reaching out: 'I think the Western church is, largely, a comfortable church. And when it fails to engage with the persecuted church, and to help those in difficulty, it denies itself many blessings.'

For information on how you can participate in HART's work, please visit [www.hart-au.org](http://www.hart-au.org)



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