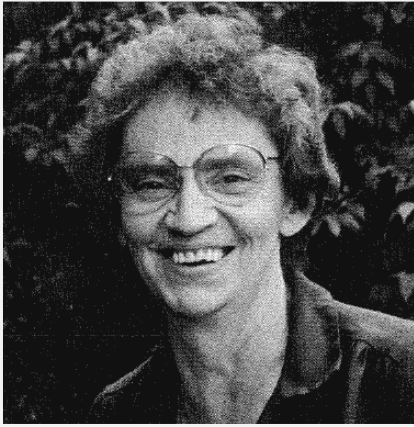




My Sojourn in Mission

...by Ruth Stanley

I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” Psalm 4:8



It was the fourth day of the month when I read this fourth Psalm. I had arrived in Congo a few months earlier and was well aware that the country was not ready to offer a big welcome. The arrival of the Elizabethville, a luxurious liner which ran between Belgium and Congo, had been rather traumatic. The captain announced over the loudspeaker as we arrived at the port of Matadi that the passengers, all four of us, should get away from the portholes as armed soldiers were on the dock and there might be trouble. Independence had arrived on the 30th of June and the country had been in turmoil ever since.

The nationals in Lower Congo, the Alliance area of the country, were most cordial though. I still remember one of them, Thomas, coming in one night and explaining that the local people were different than those from other parts of Zaire. “We will never kill you,” he said, “we might call you names, even throw stones, but we will never draw blood. Murder is unacceptable to our tribe.” This was very reassuring for a young woman who had just arrived in that troubled country. But they were true words - I only remember one murder in all the time I was there!

However, things were different in other parts of the country. One afternoon not too long after that conversation, a station worker had come to tell me that the soldiers from “up country” had walked by the entrance of our secluded station carved out of the Congo forest. They had asked if there were any white women at the end of that trail and the worker proudly said, “I told them there were none, but someone else might tell them the truth so you better be careful tonight!”

Should I rejoice that he had told a lie? Should I pray that others would do the same? I knew that those up country soldiers were famous for slaughter and rape. No, I should trust in God, not in the good intentions of my friends – but it was difficult!

That night the missionary couple on the station invited my housemate and me over for games. About ten o’clock, the husband asked us if we wanted him to put up a couple of cots so we could sleep there that night or if we wanted to go back to our own house. We opted for our house but I confess that I wasn’t feeling too brave.

Should I blow out my lamp and not have my evening devotions? If I left the light on they would know exactly where I was! I was thankful for habits, reading and prayer before bedtime! I took my Bible and since it was the fourth day of the month I would read the fourth Psalm as was my custom then. God had His word there, the word He used to calm my heart – “I will lay me down in peace and take my rest knowing that thou alone maketh me to dwell in safety.” That was the pillow for my head; I went to sleep, I took my rest, and I woke in the morning to face another day of language study in Zaire.

“Now therefore perform the doing of it, that as there was a readiness to will so may there be a



performance out of that which ye have.” II Corinthians 8:11

That was not the first time God had spoken to me through His Word. Back in October, 1953, God had used the above words to confirm His call. I grew up in a good home but never realised that I could know God personally through Jesus until I began teaching at the age of 20. I praise God today for the persistence of a fellow teacher who continued to witness to me, to take me to church, to ask others to pray for me, until I finally accepted my need for a Saviour. As I walked down the aisle that morning I remember the pastor saying, “Oh, Praise God, this is the young lady we have all been praying for!”

It was two years later, I had a dream – I saw myself getting on a boat, unaware of even where I was going. When I asked the captain I was somewhat surprised by his reply, “This boat is going to Africa!” And then he informed me that I was going there as a missionary. The one solace I had was that I was going there with a fine handsome man at my side! (He either died or disobeyed God for I never met him!!)

I woke up suddenly and reflected on the dream as I stared out the window. The next morning all of the details of that dream were vivid as I woke and prepared for another day of teaching. I took my Bible before going out for breakfast – my mentors had trained me well – N.B.N.P.N.B – No Bible, no Prayer, no Breakfast! As I turned to the Scripture Union passage for the day, II Corinthians 8:1-12, it was verse 11 that stood out for me, “Now therefore perform the doing of it, that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance out of that which ye have.” (God was speaking King James English at that time!) This was God’s confirmation of an experience I had the previous summer at The Word of Life Camp. I had surrendered my life to do what God wanted, now that I knew what it was, it was up to me to perform it!

The road was clear; I resigned from the school board in June and went to Canadian Bible College in Regina the following September. My face was set toward Africa.

The years of study were pure joy; I was a relatively new Christian and drank in all the teachings, especially the Bible classes. What an awesome God I served, how privileged was I to be one of His children, one of His servants.... But perhaps God knew what I would face in Africa so He arranged to confirm my call in yet another way. When the time came for me to apply in writing for missionary service with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, I said I would go wherever they chose to send me. After I mailed the application I thought – that was foolish, I know God wants me in Africa, what if the board sends me to South America? But on the other hand, if God made it plain to me He could also make it plain to the board in Nyack – so I prayed! When the letter arrived that I was approved for service and appointed to Africa I shouted for joy. God had understood my willingness and made it plain to Dr. King and the board – I was going to Africa.

Through the years I have been so thankful God gave me a definite call. Otherwise, I might not have had a standard to raise up when the enemy came in like a flood. There was danger, illness, disappointment, loneliness, and testings of all kinds but I always knew I was where God wanted me to be and He had promised never to leave me nor forsake me.

For precept must be upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little...Isaiah 28:10

Upon arrival in Zaire and after two years of Kikongo language study, I moved back into the career I had given up – teaching. It was my experience with Child Evangelism Fellowship that had given me the vision of teaching children, line upon line, precept upon precept. I knew if I was faithful to teach, the Holy Spirit would come to water the seed and bring forth fruit. I was thrilled to go back into the teaching profession, although from a different perspective.

I was assigned to be supervisor of three primary school districts, I suppose there were about 60 teachers in





all. This was the period of strong anti-mission feeling and one of these districts was in an area where missionaries were not welcome. I visited them each Friday morning, however, helped the teachers, taught some French classes, and advised the principal. The schools were under state control and they had to accept my services.

It was a discouraging time, however, because I was not allowed to participate in the daily chapel service or teach any religion classes. At times I wondered just why I was there! Finally, in March I talked to the principal about it – I reminded him that I had been faithfully helping out one day each week, I had come to Zaire to teach the Bible, and I would like to come to the chapel services each Friday morning. He looked at me and replied, “If it was any other missionary I would say no, but you have shown a willingness to help our teachers and to help the children – you can come next Friday and you can preach. From then on I was a regular attendee and often able to use some of my Child Evangelism skills to present the Gospel to the 300 or so children. I learned from the beginning that it would often be necessary “to earn the right to speak”.

When I came back from my first Home Assignment, I was asked to go to the only secondary school, located at Maduda. This educational program which the Alliance in Zaire had launched was not too appreciated by certain of our mission authorities as they felt we were in Zaire to preach the gospel, not to educate children. I can recall writing a letter to my “boss” after I received word later that year that they would be closing the educational work in June and I would be expected to serve elsewhere. I told them I would complete the term but if the schools were closed, I would return with another mission because I was trained to teach, called to teach, and I would teach somewhere on the mission field.

I thank God the policies changed because today there is a thriving educational programme in Zaire; the church recently upgraded the seminary to be the Alliance University and it offers a variety of higher degrees. There is a strong church in Zaire whose president is one of our former students, whose seminary is directed by one of our former students, where 50 percent of the pastors were first graduates of our secondary school and then graduated from the seminary. Ours was the first Protestant school in the whole area therefore the students came from all over Lower Zaire and even from the Swedish mission district next to us. What a privilege it was to be able to work there for the next several years, to plant the seed which would spring forth and bear much fruit.

Among other things I taught pedagogy to the senior classes. Each Wednesday afternoon I had individual interviews with students as they prepared to teach their lesson the next day. These were times when they often opened their heart to me and I had many spiritual opportunities. I remember one boy from Kinshasa who had been sent by his father to our school so he could escape the influences of the big city. He was not a Christian but had a ritualistic church background and felt secure in that. One day he regaled me with tales of all the good deeds he had done, all the liturgies he knew, all the service he had done at the altars of his church. I listened to him, flipped open my Bible to Isaiah 64:6 and had him read the part underlined, “...all our righteousness are like filthy rags.” His face fell as I said, “You know, if you don’t have Christ as your Saviour from sin, if you haven’t let Him reign in you, nothing else that you do will count.” It was encounters like that which made the many hours of teaching, lesson preparation, correcting assignments...worth it.

Along with Pedagogy came English, History, Home Economics or anything else that needed a teacher but I always insisted that I teach religion too. The schools were mission-owned and government-subsidized but we were free to teach our religion as we desired. Really it was an ideal situation! At first it was line upon line, some of the students accepted Christ but during summer vacation they would return to their villages and go back into sin. In September they would repent, and once again follow Jesus, but temptation was so strong





when they went back to the villages that many could not stand. I stuck as close to the Bible as I could because I didn't want them to think this was the white man's religion! I remember the first time I taught the senior class a unit on Christian ethics which was in the general curriculum we received from the central church. I wondered just how I could best flesh out that curriculum – me, a white lady, teaching 15 African boys in their late teens about how their marriages should work! I decided the Bible would be my text book - what did God say? I felt justified in the Spring when the boys filed out of a special chapel service with an African evangelist. Only the senior boys were invited to this chapel time and I knew instinctively what would be discussed – sex, marriage, and all that goes along with it...in other words the same things we discussed in the religion class. One of the boys, who later received his doctorate in theology from a European seminary, was walking past my house alone later that day so I dared to ask him about the meeting. He finally told me they had discussed the same things we talked about in our religion class. When pressed for a few more details he said, "Oh, Mlle, the pastor said the same things you have been saying all year." When I asked how he could explain that, he replied, "he used the same Bible."

Sometimes it was hard going, sometimes it seemed to be two steps forward and two steps backward, but we continued – line upon line and precept upon precept. I remember when one fourth year girl, a good student, earnestly following the Lord, became pregnant. When I visited her in the hospital after she almost killed herself by drinking indigenous medicine to provoke an abortion, I asked, "But, why, why did you sleep with that classmate – you have Jesus in your heart and you know He doesn't like that." Her answer was simple and haunts me to this day, "Mlle, I had nothing to eat and he promised me some yams." At the time we didn't have a dining hall and the students, who came from villages far and near had to carry in enough food for two or three weeks on their heads each time they went back to the village. She had run out of food and she was hungry!

But we continued our daily work until one September in 1975 the Holy Spirit came in a special way to water the seed. We were desperate – the government declared that we could no longer teach religion in the classroom and missionaries could no longer organize chapel with the students. As missionary teachers we were discouraged but agreed to stay until the end of the year for the sake of the academics of the school.

Students, however, were not hindered in their witness. That September, an eighteen year old student had transferred from Boma to complete his final year at Maduda. He had attended a Scripture Union camp, found the Lord in a real way, and was urged by the Spirit of God to bring his new found faith to Maduda. He began holding early morning prayer meetings in the boys' dormitories. The fellows later decided to come to the chapel so the girls could attend too. Before long they also began to hold evening meetings and this was acceptable to the state since the missionaries were not organizing them. Both the fellows and girls began to give their lives to Jesus. At first the leaders used to bring those who wanted to pray to our house with the simple announcement, "My friend wants to accept Jesus, will you show him how to do it?" I lived with two other teachers from the school so we decided to have a training session with the leaders and soon we were saying, "That's wonderful, now you go and pray with him."

This movement was accompanied by a Scripture Union Bible Reading movement which encouraged believers to read the Word according to a certain program and to answer a series of questions which helped the reader to hear God's voice. The leaders of this movement would encourage the new converts to hear from God by reading his Word each morning. It was not unusual to walk down the paths to school and to be stopped by someone who said, "And what did God say to you this morning?" If you didn't have an appropriate answer, citing the text for the day, it was embarrassing to say the least.





As I look back I am in awe of how God brought all things together – the government restrictions on teaching of religion, the young man who came from the big city to spread his faith, (he, by the way, served as a missionary from our church to Guinea for a number of years) the Bible reading emphasis, all empowered by a new breath of the Holy Spirit, to bring many to a solid faith in Jesus. Those boys are now the pastors and leaders of the strong church which exists in Zaire today.

One day, one of the leaders came and asked if I would take a group down to the Catholic girls' school because they had been invited to hold a Bible study there. I went with a carload of eager young people, eager to share the treasures they had found in God's Word with others. When we arrived I told the leader I would go to visit our pastor and come back for them two hours later. I tried to explain that if I went with them, the Bible reading movement might be recognized as a Protestant movement but if they went in alone it would be accepted as a Bible movement. They objected strenuously and said the Belgium sisters who ran the school were expecting me, they had told them I would be coming.

I went into the convent and was warmly received. The African young people were taking the lead in reaching into the Word and reaching out to people. (Much later, the bishop told the Sister Superior that she must forbid this Bible reading club because it was a "Protestant" movement. Her reply was, "I have seen such a change in the lives of my girls since they started reading the Bible, I would not dare forbid it!")

After that Easter and summer camps were a wonderful time of listening to God speak through His Word as young people gathered from both Catholic and Protestant schools. Youth camps in Zaire – that would be a whole big chapter on its own but suffice it to say that God was among us at that time and it was a privilege to be a part of it all.

Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature...

"Every creature" – that phrase led me away from the school one term and to the villages. I travelled with Tona, a graduate of the CEF training school in Missouri. We tried to help the pastors be more conscious of reaching the children in their churches. In the morning we held training classes for the local unordained pastors, those who were responsible for the village churches. In the afternoons we held Makabu Mamayangi, Bible clubs for the children which included singing, contests, and stories, with a goal of bringing the little ones to know Jesus who loved them so much. At nights we had an open service for all of the villagers. Later Tona moved into teaching Christian Education in the Bible School and I travelled with a pastor appointed to develop Christian education in the churches.

We tried, in every place we visited, to leave several trained leaders, armed with an illustrated Bible lesson book and other tools, so the clubs would go on after our departure. The leaders were brought in to a central place every two months for further training at which time we exchanged their supplies for another series and sent them back, equipped for further teaching. Jesus invited the children to come to Him and only eternity will reveal how many little ones believed and grew to be part of the church of Zaire.

In 1985 my bones began to crumble and I was forced to come home for medical treatment. A year later, I was better and looking forward to my return to Zaire but, when exercising one day, another vertebrae collapsed. The Lord said clearly, "Quebec is calling!" Yes, "every creature" included those people in the mission field at our back door, where at that time less than one percent had a personal relationship with Christ.

Six months later I went to Quebec where I travelled among the existing churches to help them set up Sunday school programs to interest the little ones. I knew I was where God wanted me for the moment but my heart was still in Zaire.





Two years later I was able to return to Zaire with my doctor's permission. Some of my fellow missionaries weren't so sure I was fit! When I got on the plane in Toronto, I somehow twisted my ankle and soon realised that it was badly sprained. I could almost hear the enemy's cackle, "See, I got you!" At the same time I recalled a verse in Isaiah 54:7, "No weapon formed against you shall prosper, this is the heritage of the saints of the Lord." I knew very clearly in my mind that the devil was trying to hinder my return to Zaire and make a fool out of me but I knew my God and decided to continue. (What else could I do way up in the air above Toronto?)

As we prepared to land in Kinshasa I feared that the missionaries who were meeting me would send me back to Canada if I came hobbling off the plane. After what seemed like an eternity of circling over Kinshasa the pilot said, "There is a strange cloud cover over Kinshasa; we don't have enough fuel to continue this position so we will go back to the capital of a nearby country and come in tomorrow morning." A big groan went up from the passengers but I was praising the Lord because I knew He had answered my prayer and given me one more day to recuperate.

The next morning I was able to walk almost normally as I descended the plane and then went back to the Maduda high school. Once again I knew God had opened the door and would make the crooked places straight in the coming term.

It was a good thing I knew God had opened the way for my return because in the next couple of years I faced another transition as Zaire once again fell into political turmoil. I was to be involved in Theological Extension so had been sent to Ivory Coast for a seminar on writing new texts in our language. On Monday morning, the day after my arrival, the organizers of the conference asked me to go into their quarters to see the news on television – Kinshasa was in flames. God knew my limitations and promised never to test us above what we were able. Two days later our missionaries were evacuated - I never did return to Lower Zaire.

We left behind a strong church, planted by the first Alliance missionaries starting in 1884. History since that time has proven Christ no longer needed us missionaries to plant the church with Him in Zaire; He would work with the nationals and the church would grow numerically, the church would expand into all the provinces of the country, and the church would send out missionaries. Jesus would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it.

P.S. Two years later I went to Congo Brazzaville to work with the fledgling church in that area. During the two years I was there I was evacuated into "peaceful" Zaire while Congo-Brazzaville suffered internal wars. After more physical setbacks, the dreaded letter came from New York that I was to leave the field and seek medical help in Canada. It was time to finally leave Africa – I knew God was directing and I had learned that His way is always best.

I left my overseas missionary career in 1992 and went to Quebec where I served until 1999. As I look back, I have one regret – I wish I was young enough to start all over again!

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