

# “Preparing to be a missionary

## THE CALL

**T**he call was loud and clear and insistent: ‘Go to Congo.’ I was in the final meeting of a Whitsun Convention. There had been three speakers—all brothers—and the theme was ‘Your walk, your work, your wealth and your will for the glory of God’. The last one, on ‘the will’, was taken by the UFM (Unevangelized Fields Mission, now UFM WW) General Secretary, Rev. Len Harris, and as I listened I heard this voice in my head, ‘Go to Congo.’ How ridiculous! I had no intention of going anywhere; my plans had all been made. I had made up my mind to gain three nursing certificates by the time I was twenty-five years old and then to settle down as a ward sister. Nearly all my adult life I had dreamed of this. My nursing training had been very enjoyable; my midwifery training less so, but having the certificate was the aim. I passed all my hospital exams well, and the official national ones too. After some post-graduate experience as a staff-nurse, the longed-for post as a ward sister would be mine. I loved my work and really was very happy in it.

I had been a ward sister for three years when God called me to serve him in Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). To me it didn’t make sense. Was I to waste all these happy precious years of nursing to go to Africa? I have a speech impediment: of what use could I be? God was insistent. More training would be required and I had hardly saved any money, for even as now, nurses were not well paid, but God was insistent.

Verses of Scripture were given to me in the course of my daily Bible reading: ‘Why are ye so fearful?’ (Mark 4:40); ‘Who hath made man’s mouth?’ (Exodus 4:11, when Moses made his speech problem an excuse): ‘Being not weak in faith, [Abraham] considered not his own body’ (Romans 4:19). The numerous promises found in Joshua chapter one were also powerfully applied. The final promise (which has never failed) was, ‘My God shall supply all your need’ (Philippians 4:19).

I had decided to spend a day in prayer and fasting, even though I was on duty. It was during that day that I realized I was fighting God and that the fight was unequal. It was with a sense of relief that I submitted to the call of God, but being human, I did say, 'You have promised all these things, please do not let me down.' Of course, he never could or would, but at that stage I had never really had to exercise faith in matters of everyday living. It had been hard living in a non-Christian home. Dad was a lapsed Catholic and Mother a nominal Anglican. I have four brothers and three sisters (all now married) and I am number five, too young for the older four and too old for the younger three. In a way I was the 'in-between'. Living with most of them at the time of my conversion when I was eighteen was difficult, but looking back I can see how God gave daily grace to cope with their mockery. They thought then, and still do now, that I was a religious fanatic.

An appointment was made with the Rev. Len Harris, to meet him at the mission headquarters. Why UFM? No reason I suppose except he had been the main and final speaker at the convention and Congo was one of their fields, but undoubtedly God was in the decision. I told him of my call and of the many reasons why it seemed impossible for me to go. He was very practical and we discussed training. It would entail going to a Bible College, then on to Paris to learn French, then on to Belgium to gain the Certificate in Tropical Medicine. It was agreed that if I could get through all this successfully, we would take it as God's seal upon the call.

The training programme seemed endless. Previously my aim was to finish studies by the time I was twenty-five, but now it looked as though I had only just begun. How much God had to teach me! I went to Bible College. The lessons were hard emotionally and spiritually. None of us likes to have our rough places made smooth, but as God moulded me, yes, remade me, I began to appreciate his holiness and his high standards for my life, in a way always so high as to be unattainable but like Paul, 'we strive' (see Philippians 3:13).

One real lesson I learned there, and one which was to stay with me even to today, was the importance of prayer. On one occasion one of the students was in arrears with her fees, so two of us agreed to meet up after lights out. We crept downstairs armed with flashlights and travel rugs to keep us warm, as the chapel where we were going was cold and draughty. It was there we met with the Lord in intercessory prayer.