

Chapter 11

For Better or for Worse

by Myra and Ronald Brown

We feared for our lives that day in 1997. Extreme tension between various military leaders in the city of Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, had brought out well-armed and determined militias seeking to gain control of the capital—and then the entire country. Heavy artillery shook the ground at regular intervals near our downtown duplex, where we huddled with our girls, then aged 10 and 13. Fear gripped us, and the future was fully obscured in every way.

As an armed escort, supported by the U.S. military, ushered us to the Brazzaville airport and to eventual safety in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), we had no way of knowing our fragile well-being was going to be firmly tied to the denominational changes which were brewing.

Although we didn't realize it at the time, the future of our sending organization was also going through a period of huge organizational change. The Global Ministries department was being birthed; The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada's (C&MA) overseas branch was moving into autonomy with many dreams, challenges, and significant changes for every member.

Shattered and without any realistic hopes of being able to return to Brazzaville, we went back to Alberta and wondered what was next in God's plan for us. Within weeks, we had received an unexpected call. Global Ministries Vice President Wally

Albrecht cut to the chase—would we join his Global Ministries leadership team (GMLT) to give administrative and pastoral leadership to the 30-plus workers in West Africa?

We had already been working in Africa since August 1980 when a small Cessna Mission Aviation Fellowship plane had deposited us on a red dirt runway in Boma, Zaire (now the DRC), to begin our first term of service. At



Myra teaching at the Boma Seminary
in Congo.

the time, the Gospel had already been planted in Central Africa; in fact, Congo was the Alliance mission field to which our founder, A.B. Simpson, had sent his first missionary team in 1884.

Our ministry years to that point had been primarily in the area of leadership development for this exploding church movement. But unfortunately, that chapter of our lives ended violently in 1990 when a sudden military uprising

provoked huge changes, which led to the eventual withdrawal of the missionary team. From there, we moved to Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, where violence again played a catalytic role in our lives several years later.

Taking a leap of faith and obedience, we accepted the call to join the GMLT. We moved to Bouake, Côte d'Ivoire, because of the continual stream of international workers (IWs) coming and going to the International Christian Academy, where their children attended. As a result, our house there became known as "Canada House," where Canadian IWs, among many others, could drop in for a cold Coke and a clean bathroom before hitting the road to various destinations across West Africa.

As the GMLT began to work together, questions surfaced in light of the newly established Global Ministries' purpose statement: *To glorify God by developing indigenous movements of reproducing churches among least-reached people groups*. Because this statement pointed us toward least-reached people groups, some workers would have to emigrate from reached areas and start up entirely different types of work in unreached areas. The personal and organizational costs of this re-alignment towards harmony with the new purpose statement were challenging and often painful. In some cases, workers who had invested decades into specific ministries were asked to relocate, leaving behind beloved people and fulfilling work.

First to make this move were workers in Kinshasa, DRC, who developed a withdrawal plan with a line in the sand and, as mentioned, moved on, leaving a flourishing church to continue to grow and reach out to other people groups. In 1998, the eleven Canadian workers in Gabon, a country with a greater percentage of Christians than Canada, started to transition to places like Quebec, Mauritania, and eventually Niger and Senegal.

Afterwards, over the next five years, IWs redeployed out of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire. As this focus continued to shift towards the least-reached



Myra engaged with a group of women, c.1985.

peoples of the world, new workers were asked to join some redeployed experienced workers in order to live with the Fulani and Tuareg peoples of Niger. Global Ministries continued to work with unreached groups in Guinea while other workers moved to the unreached living north of the Sahara. There, traditional ways of establishing churches gave way to new and innovative paths towards Kingdom expansion.

During the decade we were on the GMLT, we watched the Global Ministries purpose statement serve to re-align Canadian Alliance efforts in Africa. We were blessed by the vision and skills of the leaders who directed these changes. Perhaps the most poignant memory of this eventful decade, however, was witnessing and being humbled by the all-in attitudes of the fearless foot soldiers who, at great personal cost, took up the challenge to leave mature churches and take the Gospel to the difficult places of the world.

What influences brought the two of us into this vast arena of international Kingdom building? What motivated us to live this nomadic life in four different African countries as well as France? Why couldn't we settle into a ministry and see it through for all the decades of our careers? The reasons why were very similar in each of our lives.

Our Early Years

Myra

"We gave Myra to God before she was born and prayed she would be a missionary," are words my mother wrote just after my birth. The third child of five in a pastor's home, I grew up learning about my parents' faith through Bible storybooks, Sunday school, summer Bible clubs, and getting to know many international workers who passed through our welcoming home. These workers included Roland Pickering, a linguist working in Benin. His work inspired me to someday work in Africa, spreading the Word of God.

My father was a first-generation Christian who worked fearlessly and tirelessly for his God. Starting with outdoor street preaching in his hometown of Mitchell, Ontario, he loved and served God every day of his life; I have many memories of him on his knees beside his bed with the open Bible beside him.

My mother, however, was the strongest spiritual influence in my life. A warm, hardworking, positive person, she lived and breathed her faith – somehow, her faith seemed so full of love, forgiveness, and great joy. Today her portrait smiles at me from across the room and speaks of the Saviour's unconditional love.

At the age of five, I knelt by my mother and asked Jesus into my heart. As I

grew in my knowledge of Him, I gave my whole life to Him when I was thirteen, and that, to me, meant vocational ministry. Baptism was an affirming step along the way, along with countless international influences in my life due to our family having moved to Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills, Alberta. Also very affirming was beginning my lifelong involvement with children – two summers in southern Ontario doing backyard clubs, teaching Sunday school, working in Pioneer Girls and AWANA, ten years of church nursery, doing orphanage work in Africa, and even teaching on two occasions, a class of future pastors about the theology of the child.

After graduating from Prairie College, I took a two-year diploma program at a technical school to learn more about liberal arts and writing. Much later, I completed an MA in Religion and also earned a diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language.

As a student interested in Africa, it wasn't a leap one day in 1968 to notice Ron Brown and eventually join my life to his in 1974. After a long wait, God gave us two beloved daughters, Bethany in 1983 and Rebecca in 1987.

Ron

While in my mid-life, my mother sent me this story in a letter. She was living in the Belgian Congo and on her back resting early one afternoon when she pulled my bassinet closer to her bed. She went on to tell me, *"I heard the Lord say, 'he's not yours, he's mine; you get to look after him for me.'"*

What a privilege I had to be cared for by this strong Mennonite woman from Saskatchewan. She raised me, and all during my years of growing up and ministry, she, along with Dad, was my prayer warrior.

Born and raised in Africa and then returning to work there in a 26+-year career, more than half of my life has been spent there. My mother home-schooled me during my first five years of schooling, with correspondence courses from Saskatchewan. Then after some home assignment years, I was enrolled in a residential school for missionary kids in the Congo for grades eight and nine. Dad would spend three days driving on dirt forest roads to get to the mission school, drop us three children off, and then drive three days back home.

When I was fifteen, rebel soldiers took over our part of the country in NE Congo, and we lived under house arrest for some weeks. The rebels had planned to



Hulda Schroeder Brown with
Ronnie.



My brothers Ken and David with famous Congo missionary and author Dr. Helen Roseveare on her last visit to Canada, 2011. She was our family doctor and the attending doctor at my brother David's birth in the Congo.

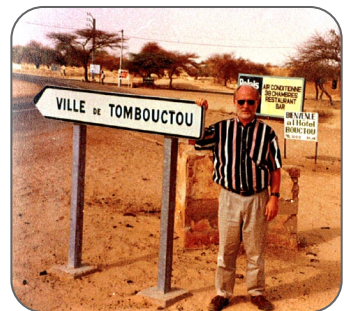
gather all the foreigners living there, missionaries, plantation owners, businesspeople, and diplomats and execute them. An hour before the deadline, mercenaries from Rhodesia and South Africa burst into the town, shooting in the air, and one jeep came up to our mission station. They told us to bring one suitcase and climb into the jeep. We were taken with others to a small town with an airstrip, where we were evacuated by plane two days later.

As our truckload of foreigners headed out, three military jeeps full of soldiers with machine guns were shooting and clearing the way. I witnessed the bleeding bodies of rebel soldiers who had just been killed. "Refugee" was scrawled across my passport page as I left the country and returned to Canada, eventually settling in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. My memoir, *INTERSECTIONS*, includes more details of this story and two other political evacuations I experienced.

Mel Sylvester was my pastor in Swift Current during high school. Before grade 12 students graduated, it was his custom to call them into his office during Sunday school to discuss their futures. During my session, he told me I should consider the option of a future in ministry. So I did head in that direction, first studying the Bible at Prairie College, then education at the University of Calgary, then missions at Canadian Theological Seminary in Regina.

Gordon Fowler was my pastor at Foothills Alliance Church in Calgary during my university years. When I mentioned I was looking to go into missions and trying to decide on a mission agency, he informed me that the Alliance has its own missionary-sending department. This was news to me, but I began to check it out and ended up in Regina (Canadian Theological Seminary) with my new wife, Myra, where our application for missionary service was finalized. Before leaving for Africa, the last hoop was two years of pastoring Vegreville Alliance Church in Alberta. This meant learning to work with an elders' board, learning to prepare weekly messages, and learning how to provide pastoral care to the congregation, primarily of Ukrainian descent – a good learning experience complete with a cross-cultural element.

Just as we had joined our lives 'for better or for worse,' so we embarked on a lifetime of loving,



"Take the Gospel to the ends of the earth" - I made it!

trusting, obeying, and following our parents' God for better or for worse. And one happy day in Calgary, Foothills Alliance Church commissioned us and sent us to the country then known as Zaire and later to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

First Term: 1979-1983

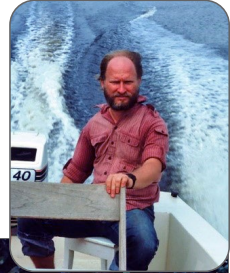
- **France** – a year of French language learning, including an immersion element living with a French woman in Paris.
- **Maduda, DRC**—a year of Kikongo language learning and cultural adjustments. My (Ron) most embarrassing moment was in a Sunday service where, three months into language study, the pastor looked at me after the offering and asked if I would pray. He knew I was a pastor from Canada, and I should know how to pray, but in his language? I knew how to begin and end a prayer, so I bumbled a few words and reached into my French vocabulary to pray a short prayer. I sat down, so embarrassed. During the next week, I worked with my language helper to create and memorize a decent offering prayer, from the start to Amen. I was ready and sat confidently on my bench. After the offering was taken, he turned to an elder to pray. What! I was ready, all my work for nothing?! I was dejected. We had the sermon, and then he turned to me and asked for a closing prayer – you must be kidding!
- **Boma, DRC**—Myra managed the mission guesthouse as well as the literature department, which produced tracts and maintained satellite bookstores stocked with Bibles and school supplies. Ron taught some courses at the Boma Seminary and was field director in our fourth year for a team of about 30 missionaries from three sending countries (Canada, USA, Holland) who were involved in medical work, theological training and church planting. We were green as grass, but we stood on the shoulders of others who had gone before us and leaned into the Lord, who never let us down.



Often 30 or more youth would be lined up on Easter Sunday to be baptized two by two in Boma's largest church of 2,000 members.

Second Term: 1984-1989

- **Muanda, DRC** – first three years training others for leadership in Theological Education by Extension (TEE). An American donated a boat which Ron used every two weeks to travel up the Congo River to three fishing villages for leadership training classes in the local language and travel by road to several other villages for the same courses. Myra taught literacy classes, cared for our first child, and prepared a basic manual for women's meetings.
- **Alberta** – for three months for family reasons.
- **Kinshasa** – Ron spent a year as the business agent for the mission, making purchases for missionaries in rural areas, booking out-of-country travel with a travel agent, meeting guests and visitors at the Kinshasa airport, and processing visa applications at government offices.
- **Boma** – a year with Boma Seminary in administration and teaching.
- **Note** - This five-year term saw us living in three different cities doing wildly different types of work for the mission and church (for better or worse).



A bi-weekly TEE class with village church leaders in the shade of a mango tree, using manuals in the local Kikongo language. They did their lessons during the week; I came to listen and discuss the application.

Second Home Assignment: 1989-1991

- **Regina** – a year as missionary-in-residence at Canadian Bible College (CBC), teaching a couple of missions courses and hosting groups of students interested in international work. We both turned 40 and bought our first computer!
- **Calgary** – a year as missionary-in-residence at Southview Alliance Church.
- **Note** – we asked for a two-year home assignment to avoid returning to Africa after a year in Regina at CBC without having visited churches in our home district of Alberta.

Third Term: 1991-1992

- **Kinshasa** – six weeks after arriving in Africa to start our third term, we were evacuated out of Congo; our home was broken into and looted after we left.
- **Kinshasa** – I, Ron, returned three months later as the C&MA representative on a food distribution initiative of World Relief. Early one morning, I received a phone call from Myra in Canada informing me my father had died. That day, as the mission driver chauffeured me around the city inspecting food distribution centres, I sat alone in a city of six million people, staring (at times with tears) out the Landcruiser window in my grief. I was able to book a flight home in time for the funeral. (We were where we were, for better or worse.)
- **Note** – this third term never materialized but was full of trauma and transition. Because we had lost our belongings, Foothills Alliance and other churches and individuals generously replaced everything we had lost and more.

Leave of Absence: 1992-1994

- Ron was on the pastoral staff of Southview Alliance Church in Calgary, working with such luminaries as Terry Young and Lynda Friesen.
- Myra graduated with her MA from Canadian Theological Seminary. God had provided her with a part-time job and a supportive husband so she could take course modules here and there until all the requirements were complete. (For better or for worse.)
- David Noel, a colleague from Congo days, phoned to say he was starting a new team in Brazzaville, Congo and asked if we would join and provide leadership for pastoral training.

Fourth Term: 1994-1997

- **Brazzaville, Congo** – with a new team of eleven missionaries focusing on discipleship training and helping to launch the Centre for Christian Studies. We learned to contextualize—most pastors were bi-vocational, working all day, so we taught in the evenings.
- **Life Interrupted** – Civil war broke out, and we evacuated to Kinshasa, but after a month of seeing no peace or safety in Brazzaville, we returned to Canada empty-handed once again, having lost all our belongings and our vehicle.



Ron, Rebecca, Bethany, and Myra
on the Congo River in Brazzaville

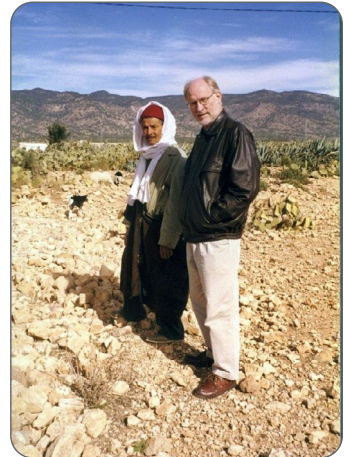
- **Note** – this was our first experience working on a tightly-knit team towards specific goals, and we loved it! When war came, and we fled, leaving developing relationships and unfinished projects behind, we were devastated and lost. Southview Alliance and other churches again replaced all our belongings and welcomed us back (for better or for worse).

Fourth Home Assignment: 1997-1998

- **Three Hills, Alberta**, was our base – In response to Wally Albrecht's request mentioned in the introduction, we joined the newly formed Global Missions Leadership Team and started in January 1998.
- **Note** – this wasn't a scheduled home assignment. Instead, it was time to shift gears and then move on to the GMLT, a brand-new type of work for us. After this, we didn't count our work in "terms" anymore. We just worked and took a month of vacation every year like the rest of the world.

Regional Developers for Africa: 1998-2007

- **Bouake, Côte d'Ivoire, 1998-2002** – 'Canada House' became the base for the C&MA Africa; in our new role as Canadian regional developers for Africa, we visited all Canadian Alliance workers in the region, usually at least twice a year.
- **Three Hills, Alberta, 2002-2005** – our base changed to Three Hills, from where we made periodic trips to Africa.
- **Dakar, Senegal, 2005-2006** – our base moved to Dakar, where the boarding school had moved.
- **Note** – During our nine years on the GMLT, we lived in four cities in three countries, a



Travelling the region of Africa
and connecting with a Berber
in Tunisia

lot of transition – for better or for worse.

- **Mobile Member Care Team** – Ron was involved with the West Africa Mobile Member Care Team (1999-2017) as a board member, a trainer and seminar facilitator working with Dr. Karen Carr, Marion Dicke, and Darlene Jerome –



pictured here at a conference in Senegal. During these years, he researched and wrote a doctoral project entitled “Self-identified retention factors by Western missionaries in Africa who have experienced traumatic events.”



What a thrill on graduation day (2005) to have a handshake with Dr. Tite Tienou, VP/Academic Affairs at Trinity International University. Dr. Tienou is an Alliance pastor from Burkina Faso.

Post Africa: 2006 – Present

Myra

Kept the C&MA Africa office open with Ron’s help until Richard and Merinda Enns were appointed and settled in.

- 2006 - 2008: Administrative Assistant at Trinity Mennonite Church. I needed a job and loved working halftime in this church just outside Calgary.
- 2008 – 2012: Training Events Coordinator, Cooperative ESL Ministries. This organization, founded by Madeline Johnson, opened my eyes to the realities of new Canadians in Calgary. We trained church volunteers to hold conversational English classes in neighbourhood churches of all denominations.
- 2010: Sensing a need to be more qualified for my job, I earned a TESL (Teaching English as Another Language) Diploma at Mount Royal University.
- 2013 – Present: Kairos Head Facilitator, working in many courses with

scores of tremendous volunteers, has been life-changing for me. I now live for His Kingdom in ways I didn't before absorbing this teaching.

- 2013 – Present: Volunteer, at Calgary Catholic Immigration Services (CCIS), in a federally sponsored refugee community program, connecting families to Calgary from Myanmar, DRC, Afghanistan, Syria, and Northern Iraq.
- 2006 – Present: Grandmother, for better or for worse.
- 1974 - Present: Facilitating Ron Brown, for better or for worse.

Ron

- **Vice President for Global Ministries, August – December 2006**

While in Dakar, Franklin Pyles, president of the C&MA in Canada, asked us to consider the Western Canadian District's missions mobilizer position based in Calgary. We said 'yes', and within a month, Myra returned to Alberta while I finished up with some appointments and returned a month later.

I was visiting Merinda and Richard Enns in Montreal, discussing options for them, including taking over the Africa regional role. Dr. Pyles phoned again, asking if I would consider filling in as interim vice president of Global Ministries for six months until the permanent person was designated. So for those months, I commuted from Calgary to Toronto for ten-day stints in the office.

- **Mission Mobilizer, Calgary, January 2007 – July 2019**
 - **Mobilizing the Canadian Church** – On returning from Africa in 2006, I immediately became involved in the Perspectives Course and later the Kairos course to mobilize the church. I worked as the Alberta Kairos coordinator, running the first course at Ambrose University in May 2013 and continued to develop new trainers and facilitators, participating in some 60+ training courses. Both Myra and I were head facilitators. I was on the national coordination team for Simply Mobilizing Canada for eight years.
 - **Missions Mobilizer in the Western Canadian District** - Being part of the district team leadership was a privilege. I frequently promoted God's heart for the nations while meeting with missions committees, having coffee with pastors, and speaking on Sundays in one of the hundred district churches. During these years, I was engaged by Ambrose University to teach a cultural anthropology course, and I began the annual Perspectives/Kairos course at Ambrose every second week of May and worked with the Jaffray Centre to develop a syllabus for a three-credit course.

After discussions with other mission mobilizers, it became clear there was no common ‘vault’ for mission resources we wanted to use nationwide. So, the globalvault.ca was born as a collection bucket for resources; it continues to grow and is today referenced on various websites.



• Producing Books on Alliance Missions, 2016 - Present



With Charlie Cook signing volume 3 of our trilogy

- Dr. Charles Cook, professor of intercultural studies at Ambrose Seminary, and I began working on a trilogy (2016, 2018, 2020) published by The Alliance Canada. See [page 150](#) for more information.
- Since retiring in 2019 after 40 years of employment with the C&MA, I have engaged in some projects close to my heart.
 - A collection of [missionary biographies](#) on the Global Vault since 2007.
 - A new series of mission books, *ON MISSION – Stories of Those Who Went*, available as a [free download](#) and [in print](#).
 - A member care book, a missions primer, and a theology of mission were also produced. These are available as a [free download](#) and [in print](#).

Conclusion



Ours was different from the more typical story of international workers. It was not our privilege to start in a position and mostly work there until our retirement. Instead, we were part of various teams working in four different countries of Africa and living in more than a dozen different houses and communities until we finally settled in Calgary in 2006.

What hasn’t changed during all this time is our deep gratitude to our church, to the C&MA, to our families, and to the many who prayed for us and gave generously to the Global Advance Fund so we could do His work in Africa.

Despite all the transition we went through and our numerous mistakes and

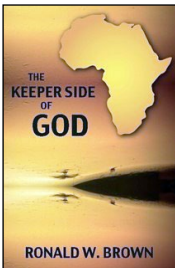
failings, God kept us true to His original calling on our lives. We followed Him then, and we follow Him now, wanting only to give glory to His Name. For all He did and does through us, we praise Him. May His Kingdom come!

Publications



INTERSECTIONS by Ronald W. Brown

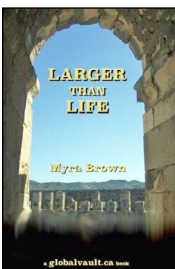
This is the story of my life and how it intersected with the four streams of missiology, showing my place in the history of missions, showing where cultural anthropology helped me as an international worker to journey alongside other cultures, showing a variety of strategic methodologies used in my missionary career, and then showing how a life based on a theology of mission took me from being a blessed one to then engage with the nations of Africa and beyond. Available [here](#).



The Keeper Side of God by Ronald W. Brown

Africa is becoming a more violent place to live and work. At any given time, several countries are involved in ethnic wars, on the brink of a coup d'état, or in turmoil of one kind or another. Working in these settings are human resources associated with non-governmental organizations, relief and development agencies and missionary organizations. One result of populations at war is the sudden displacement of people through political evacuations.

This research project identifies and analyzes factors of retention in Western missionaries in Africa who have experienced evacuation trauma yet have been able to continue in their missionary calling. Available [here](#).



Larger than Life by Myra Brown

On a warm day in July 1956, Jessie and Herb Nehlsen were about to step onto African soil for the first time. They were filled with great faith and optimism—ready to work, laugh, pray, and give their entire lives to the Samogo people.

Throughout their missionary career, they followed the principle: “We don’t need a call to go where the need is endless; we need a call to stay where the work is well supplied.”

And for four decades, the Nehlsens served with joy. No matter what happened, their attitude was always the same, “Hallelujah, anyhow!” Available [here](#).