

WFWP USA: An Entrepreneurial Missionary Tale

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The following narrative is an excerpt of a memoir I'm writing of my time in Africa as a missionary in 1975 in Congo (1975) and Zaire (1976-1979). The nation of Zaire is currently known as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Both countries were French-speaking and I was not. The story here is the brief early history of LOGOS, a typing school that I founded for young women in Kinshasa, Zaire. LOGOS also served as a business center for embassies, foreign companies and local businessmen. It was the early financial foundation to support the mission as well as provide an opportunity to connect and share our faith with others.

Because I was blessed with an entrepreneurial spirit and modest business skills, I was attracted to the idea of creating something that God could bless abundantly. I may not have had higher education, but I was a wiz typist. So, I decided to open a typing school and secretarial service.

One afternoon during midi (the extended hours after lunch when folks took a break or a siesta), I was meandering through downtown Kinshasa, and I came upon "Zeka Brothers Photocopy" shop. Peering in the large window, I saw that the photocopy business consisted of one xerox machine, one reception counter, and one loyal worker. I scanned the rest of the room: a lot of empty space. I smiled, envisioning desks lined up with typewriters and textbooks, and Zairian girls learning the skill of typing. Typing was one area where I excelled, having operated a highly successful typing service for two years near the University of California, Berkeley. I was excited by the idea of creating a public secretarial service in downtown Kinshasa.

On June 10, 1976, LOGOS Service de Dactylography et Traduction opened for business on Avenue Tombalbaye, a quiet side street off Kinshasa's main Boulevard 30 Juin. The Zeka brothers owned the only business on the block. Although the photocopy shop hosted a makeshift counter and one photocopy machine, a steady stream of businessmen came through all day long. I set up a desk and chair, and I rented (\$45/month) an IBM Selectric II typewriter with a selection of exchangeable multi-lingual fonts. Every day I sat at my desk, respectfully greeting the businessmen who came into the shop for photocopies. I caused a bit of controversy - a young American woman in the middle of a large empty space; one who couldn't speak, read, or write French. But that gal sure could type (120 words per minute)!

At first, I busied myself poking around on the keyboard, typing letters to my family, to other missionaries; and a mission report. Within a short time, Zeka customers began giving me letters and various reports to type, usually in different languages. I tapped away in French, English, Lingala, Swahili, Tshiluba, Kikongo, and Bobangi. I had no idea if I was typing properly or not. I just pecked the letters as they appeared, making clean professional business forms. Within weeks, LOGOS became immensely

popular, especially with Zairian businessmen who wanted to send letters to American companies. Also popular were letters to President Mobutu, whom the locals called Papa Mobutu.

Sometimes it was only the Zeka cashier and I together in the shop, and when people came in for a photocopy, they would look over at me and speak to the cashier in Lingala. I imagined them saying something like, "What's that white lady doing there, sitting at that desk twiddling her thumbs?" And the cashier would say, "She is the proprietress of a typing service for people who write letters to President Papa Mobutu."

Within months, I had obtained a second desk and an Olivetti electric typewriter, purchased with cash. I took in my first student, Miss Josephine Shungu. She was smart, lovely, and well-groomed in her dress and hair styles (I loved her corn rolls or tiny braids that stuck out all over her head). Her patient manner made me think she could be a good teacher for the school I was hoping to open the following year. Miss Shungu was a big hit with the local businessmen, who frequented our shop to watch her timed typing tests, cheering her on. Some of the patrons began to directly request the services of Miss Shungu.

LOGOS generated a friendly, inspired atmosphere; there was no other such service in town, and Miss Shungu was a person my clients seemed proud of. I was thrilled with the modest success and so I accepted a new student, Miss Bambi Feza. Bambi was a different student altogether than the studious Josephine. Bambi loved to preen at her desk and wore her hair in different exotic styles. Because she was so pretty, she attracted more business to LOGOS. For months, Miss Shungu took her lessons in the morning, and Miss Feza took hers in the afternoon. I was so happy that the simple skill of typing was producing a lucrative and promising enterprise.

After some months, another student seeking business training appeared at the door of LOGOS - Nsitu Yangi - a lovely, tall, dignified, and quiet-spoken young woman. What I enjoyed about her appearance was that she wore glasses and her hair was always done in neat little pigtails that shot straight up around her head. She was gracious, well-mannered, and responsible. Her goal was to work at her uncle's law office in downtown Kinshasa. My cherished dream that LOGOS would provide an alternative career choice to young African women was slowly being realized. Office skills would allow them opportunities in the professional business culture, instead of the bleak choices most readily available to them at that time - selling veggies and fruits and unknown items at the city market; becoming a second or third wife of a businessman or distant uncle making his home in Kinshasa; becoming a village schoolteacher; even worse, becoming a prostitute (the most financially lucrative profession).

Word of mouth brought precious girls from all over. They often showed up with their Papas. Sometimes the girls had graduated from the missionary school in a nearby quartier, or they had traveled from an outlying village. In several instances their Papas had no money, so I found a sponsor among my clients to support their training. One of these sponsors was a Lebanese businessman who dealt in diamonds (smuggling) and often wanted to donate to our mission work - in diamonds. That was a bit complicated - and also, another story for next time.

By spring of 1977, LOGOS was taking in translation work from the American Embassy. Our friends Kasongo and Sombo helped with translation. The students worked hard, and after three months of lessons, they graduated to a position of stagiaire where, for another three months under my supervision, they were allowed to type letters and reports for the customers directly. After six months, I placed the talented girls - often a result of requests - in designated businesses, firms, and embassies around town. It was progressive and ambitious, and within two years, we had graduated around twenty-five young women (of which quite a number joined our mission).

These girls were proud of their skills. They gained a lot of prestige because they could type and had the basic knowledge of business letters, reports, and forms. They had also learned to type in different languages, albeit like me they did not understand what they were typing. The professional standard in the city of Kinshasa was lenient and forgiving when it came to formalities and different languages. Many of the graduates landed jobs in the government where their 'uncles' arranged employment for them. The Uncle System was rampant in Kinshasa; everyone had an Uncle who was willing to help them advance - for a price.

LOGOS was very busy, but sometimes it was utterly quiet; like midi where I would stare out the front window and literally twiddle my thumbs. One memorable event stands out. I sat watching the street, waiting for the next customer, my fingers still buzzing from the nonstop typing earlier; and musing on the mundane events of a previous life long gone, such as how good a McDonald's burger would taste.

Suddenly before me outside on the street a large African man walking past, collapsed. He started banging his face on the ground, which gave me a big shock. It looked like he was smashing his nose and teeth! I jumped up and ran outside. He was foaming at the mouth and making gurgling sounds. I knew from working in the hospital some years prior that this man was having a seizure. Without thinking I grabbed him and with all my might turned him over. He was enormous; I was not. I searched for something to

shove between his teeth so he wouldn't suffocate from his tongue rolling back in his mouth. I looked around for a stick, for anything I could put between his teeth. Nothing! Then I looked at my left hand and stared at my index finger. Should I sacrifice my hand to save this stranger? I would lose my finger. My career and mission would be over. The man's lips were turning blue, and his eyes were rolling to the back of his head. He looked gruesome. I had no choice. I prepared to stick my hand into his mouth.

In that dramatically intense moment, I felt calm; and then for some unknown reason I looked around one more time. There on the ground right next to us was a long stick that had not been there before. How did it get there? I grabbed it and managed to get it between his teeth. I yelled for a taxi. I spoke quietly to the man, I told him he would be fine, not to be afraid. The taxi arrived, and some good person jumped in with the driver to accompany the journey. I paid the driver all the money in my pocket, given by my last client. I don't remember how much.

My racing heart, and trembling legs and arms made it back to my desk. I sat down to catch my breath and calm myself. Minutes passed. I resumed gazing out the window at the empty street, waiting for the next customer. So peaceful was the moment of rest that I considered if perhaps what I had just experienced might have been an illusion. Yet my trembling body, aching all over, told me otherwise.

By 1979, when I left, we had many young people who 'graduated' from LOGOS and landed professional jobs in embassies, foreign corporations, law firms, and local businesses. This is one small example of the impact of our investment in this thriving country and people which I am proud of. Through our faithful efforts, God planted seeds of heavenly goodness which are continuing to thrive and grow until this day.

BIO: Pamela Stein joined the Unified Family in 1969, Berkeley, California. During her mission years in Africa (1975-79), she established a public secretarial business and typing school for young women. Her passion to support education and leadership training for the youth in Africa never waned in forty-plus years, and in 2020, she co-founded the Kevin Winter Foundation to provide leadership training and business skills for the blessed children and grandchildren of UM members throughout Africa. She and her husband Dan have four children, and live in Maryland with their second son's family. She is affectionately called 'Grammy' by her twelve grandchildren.