

Rosemarie Daher Kowalski: Missionary Wives of Early Twentieth Century Pentecost.”
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Missionary Wives of Early Twentieth Century Pentecost:
Called, Competent, Challenged, and Complement (Abridged)
Missions & Intercultural Studies
Rosemarie Daher Kowalski, AGTS
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MISSIONARY WIVES OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY PENTECOST: CALLED, COMPETENT, CHALLENGED, AND COMPLEMENT

Many women felt called to missions after they were baptized in the Holy Spirit in the early 1900s. Many challenges lay ahead on the mission fields for these Pentecostal women. They left the comforts of home to spend a lifetime abroad. Wives joined their husbands to serve as a missionary couple. Single women who entered missionary work sometimes married missionary bachelors or widowers. Outstanding missionary partnerships emerged as couples increased their effectiveness by serving together. Some women died on foreign soil, leaving their husbands and children behind. Others struggled to carry on after their husbands died. This paper examines the call, competency, challenges, and the complementary ministry of six such married missionary women.

Introduction

Soon after the Azusa Street outpouring of the Spirit with its missionary emphasis, Pentecostals arrived on mission fields. Unlike traditional denominational missionary agencies who had begun to question their obligation to preach the gospel to non-Christian nations, the baptism in Holy Spirit and a belief in the imminent return of Christ stirred Pentecostals with an urgency to win as many souls as possible.¹

¹ Wilhem Andersen, *Towards a Theology of Mission: A Study of the Encounter between the Missionary Enterprise and the Church and Its Theology*, IMC Research Pamphlet No. 2 (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1955), 23. Reporting on the World Missionary Conference in Jerusalem 1928, Anderson writes that the confidence of traditional Protestant missionary agencies was shaken. “No longer... was the right of Christian Churches to carry on missionary operations in the non-Christian world taken as something in itself self-evident... Behind this formulation of the problem one can trace the influences of the ‘comparative religion’ school of thought. Is Christian faith, perhaps, only one particular form of that mystical experience of the divine with is the common ground of all religions?”

The Pentecostal experience gave women as well as men permission and empowerment to minister as God’s prophets and proclaimers.²

Six Pentecostal Missionary Wives

Margaret Peoples Shirer, who served in West Africa, was born in Ireland in 1897. She was saved under the ministry of three English women, called to African missions when she was fifteen years old, and called to preach the following year. Because her father would not allow her to attend higher education, she began to rise at four in the morning to study scripture, memorizing and assimilating the Bible for two years. In 1917, she immigrated to Philadelphia to live near her sister. Margaret found Christian friends and sought the Holy Spirit baptism. She was home alone when she received the baptism, but it was confirmed in public with a message in tongues during a church service. Her church promised to support her as a faith missionary.

Margaret was twenty-two years old when she became a single missionary to Upper Volta (French West Africa) in 1919.

During her first furlough, about 1925, Margaret was ordained by E. S. Williams, her pastor in Philadelphia. She spent three months in the United States and nine in France, learning French because the French were taking over Upper Volta. On her return to Africa, she met and married fellow missionary Lloyd Shirer.

They opened missions stations in Gold Coast, the first Assemblies of God missionaries to Ghana, starting at Yendi. Her respect for indigenous customs earned her

² Acts 2:18. For this paper, six women, representing many others, were examined through the updates in their files at the Assemblies of God World Missions archives.

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many open doors.³ From their base in Ghana, around 1938-9, Lloyd and Margaret went into Nigeria to minister after the outpouring of the Spirit there. They pastored a church in Washington, DC, before resigning in 1947 to go back to Africa for the last time. During Lloyd’s subsequent moral failure, Margaret kept the family together and stayed with him while he worked for several African governments.⁴ After he died, she preached and recruited young missionaries in the USA well into her eighties.

Lou (Farthington) Page served in Fiji. She was a schoolteacher from New York before her marriage to Albert T. Page in 1913. They became Assemblies of God missionaries and had four children. Albert died of influenza in December 1918 and Lou succumbed three months later. The children were thirteen months to six years old when their parents died. A single missionary cared for the children until their relatives from Australia came for them. The youngest daughter died in Australia within a few months, but the older three children were separated and sent to live with relatives in New York.⁵ The siblings did not know their parents were Assemblies of God missionaries until 1986, just before Lloyd and Olive took a trip to Fiji where Olive had been born.⁶

Jessie (Jennette Arms) Perkins was born in 1862 on a farm near Bridgeport, WI. Perkins served a total of six terms in Liberia, beginning her missionary career with the Methodist Episcopal board in 1895 and returning to Liberia in 1900 for a second term.⁷ Within three months, only two of their party of ten missionaries survived or remained on the field. Jessie married the other survivor, widower John M. Perkins, in 1903.

³ Ibid. For instance, Margaret always showed respect to village chiefs, going first to talk to them when she entered a village. She would wait for the chiefs to call the people together. Then she would preach.

⁴ Ibid., 12. Margaret greatly admired and supported Lloyd: "My husband was a man of many talents. He could do almost anything. He was the one who started printing in Ghana."

⁵ Olive Page DeLano, "Return to Tomorrow," *Unknown periodical* (1986).

⁶ Sarah L. Dowie, "Sister Lou Page Asleep in Christ," *Pentecostal Evangel*, (May 3, 1919): 4.

⁷ George M. Kelley, "Sainam, South China," *Weekly Evangel* (December 8, 1917): 10.

Both Jessie and John were baptized in the Spirit during their furlough in 1906,⁸ so they returned to Africa as Pentecostal faith missionaries in 1908.⁹ They served nearly forty years in Liberia during long terms.¹⁰ Jessie’s ill health forced their return to the United States in 1935. Jessie continued to recruit others to become missionaries, though she was blind for three years before her death in 1941 in Pasadena, CA.

Abigail (Chant) Slager was a missionary to North China. She was born in 1889. After being baptized in the Spirit, she ignored warnings that she would die before reaching the field due to her poor health, arriving as a single missionary in Mongolia in 1910. She was nineteen years old. She married Netherlander George Christian Slager in 1914. Slagers served two more long terms in Tsingtao¹¹ before being interned by the Japanese from 1942-1946. The Swiss consulate negotiated their return to the United States in 1947. They worked for a year in Holland and then assisted at a retirement home in Seattle, WA, before retiring in Vancouver, BC.

Margaret Kelley, born in Magnolia, NC, married George M. Kelley in 1910. They went to the interior of China as Free Will Baptist missionaries later that year. Their credentials were recalled due to doctrinal differences with the Baptists after two years, and they became affiliated with Pentecostal centers. The Kelleys opened up the interior of China to Pentecostal missions, pioneering unreached areas and building churches.

When Margaret died in 1933 of smallpox, George became increasingly uncooperative and divisive in his relationships with other missionary coworkers. After

⁸ “Reaching Liberia for Christ,” Unknown (March 1977).

⁹ “With Signs Following,” Unknown (1941): 172.

¹⁰ For example, they served five years from July 1922 to August 1927 and six years from October 1929 to October 1935.

¹¹ The terms lasted from 1930-37 and 1939-41.

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several appeals from other missionaries, his Assemblies of God missionary papers were revoked. He continued as an independent faith missionary.

Ruby (Fairchild) Nicodem met missionary Frank Nicodem during classes in a Bible Institute. After Frank set off for India, she followed with single coworker Sarah Coxe. E. N. Bell personally endorsed her missionary application.¹²

Ruby and Frank married in 1920 in South India. They moved to North India in 1926 to take over a mission station and orphanage for boys from an aging single missionary, Lillian Denney.¹³ Located on Nepalese border, the mission was ideally situated to reach Nepalese workers who migrated to and from India in search of work.

The Nicodems loved children and had six of their own within fourteen years. Due to limited funding, Frank and Ruby left their three older boys in school in India while a younger son and two daughter returned to America with their parents so Frank could regain his health. Frank died in 1938.¹⁴ Ruby remained in missions as a widow, raising their six children. After her final return from the field, Ruby married Louis Petersen. She died in Springfield, MO, in 1973.¹⁵

¹² E. N. Bell, handwritten note on Ruby Clarissa Fairchild, "Application for Endorsement as Missionary, June 11, 1919," (Springfield, MO). "Splendid for her age, and as she is to marry a missionary, though she is young, I endorse her going. ENB"

¹³ Ruby Nicodem Petersen, "Frank Nicodem, February 18, 1954: Biography by his Widow," Department of Foreign Missions (Springfield, MO). Also, Frank Nicodem, "A New Boys' School in India," *Pentecostal Evangel* (August 21, 1926): 11-12. Frank ministered in a boys' home with twenty-eight orphans by the end of 1919, forty-five by the middle of 1920. The boys' home usually had forty to seventy-five boys in it. Frank suffered with rheumatism and weak heart even before he married, but lived another eighteen years.

¹⁴ Ruby Nicodem, "Back to the Land," *North India Field News* (1939): 6-7.

¹⁵ Editor, "Obituary for Ruby Nicodem Petersen," *Pentecostal Evangel* (October 21, 1973). Their children remained active in church and ministry, and son Frank later became treasurer of National Association Evangelicals.

I. Called

Why go into missions? The Pentecostal church felt compelled to share the gospel with all the peoples of the earth.¹⁶ Responding to the baptism in the Holy Spirit, Pentecostal missionaries were thrust into cross-cultural harvest fields with an urgent Pentecostal eschatology of Christ’s soon return. Margaret Peoples (Shirer) was called to be a missionary immediately after being saved and her Pentecostal experience confirmed that call. Abigail Slager recognized her genuine call to missions, despite warnings due to very ill health.¹⁷ She spent thirty-seven years in the Chinese interior and north.¹⁸

The role of women in culture was transformed by their inclusion as prophets and fully empowered members of the Church.¹⁹ Though the Pentecostal movement was never completely egalitarian, the result of the early theology was to open the door for women in ministry. Missionary schools often included girls or were designed to educate girls,

¹⁶ DeLonn Rance, "Fulfilling the Apostolic Mandate in Apostolic Power: Seeking a Spirit-Driven Missiology and Praxis," in *38 Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* (Eugene Bible College, Eugene, OR: March 26-28, 2009), 5. "The gospel is God’s agenda, God’s ministry of revelation and reconciliation... This gospel thrusts the Church into the apostolic mandate as the purpose of ministry. The Church is a people called for His purposes. Mission, then, becomes the continued ministry of Christ in the world in the power of the Spirit." Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Pub. House, 1953), 136. Hodges affirmed the role of a missionary as an apostolic calling: "The ministry of the missionary is one of great importance, since he is an ambassador for Christ and is sent as God’s representative to the people. He must remember that above all else he is a servant, and should never consider that race or control of finances entitle him to exercises lordship over the assemblies... The missionary should never consider that he is permanent in any one place, but ever have his eyes on the regions beyond, seeking to make the assembly in each place a self-supporting and self-propagating unit. He will, of course, like the apostle Paul, find it necessary to exercise a spiritual oversight for the new assemblies until they are fully established..."

¹⁷ Abigail Slager, *First Medical Examination of Furlough: History* (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Missions Archives, 1947). Her physician recommended against her return because she was suffering from so many illnesses.

¹⁸ Slager, "Divinely Healed," 21. "I went forth to China as a young woman. The Lord spoke to me and separated me from my parents and loved ones in Canada. I had a very frail body and some tried to discourage me and said I would not live to see China, but my Heavenly Father said, "The Lord thy God in the midst of Thee is mighty."

¹⁹ Douglas G. Jacobsen, *A Reader in Pentecostal Theology : Voices from the First Generation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 80. "The leaders of the Azusa mission believed that God was unfettered and could freely speak through anyone regardless of age, gender, race, or class. The Azusa revival belongs to God, and no one had the right to silence those through whom God chose to speak... At Azusa, everyone was on equal ground, and the glue that held them all together was Spirit-inspired love."

educated future wives and mothers. These women, who could read and had gained skills beyond what their culture normally taught them, influenced the next generation.²⁰

Those who experienced Pentecost at Azusa Street had mixed educational backgrounds. Likewise, on women’s missionary applications, it was not always apparent whether they would be successful or not. Ruby Nicodem listed her average grade in Bible College as 95%, so she was an exceptional and gifted student. However, Christ-like service was also incarnated in relatively uneducated women. Margaret Shirer appeared to be the ordinary daughter of an Irish farmer, with only a grammar school education. Her application indicated that she was a hard worker, holding two jobs daily as a domestic servant. She knew no language besides English, could not play a musical instrument, and her Bible training was informal, consisting of “a persistent study of the Bible since saved.”²¹ She learned about Africa through the literature of the Africa Inland Mission, but when she received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, she applied to the Assemblies of God missions committee. She did not know of anyone she had won to Christ, listing her results of personal efforts to bring others to Christ: “Sorry to say not much as far as I know. I’ve always worked with others.”²² Her call was strong and personal and she completed her first term as a single missionary. When she married, she continued to preach and teach.²³ In spite of the lack of obvious promise on her application, Margaret –

²⁰ Cox, 137. “Women have become the principal carriers of the fastest growing religious movement in the world. Eventually this is bound to have enormous cultural, political, and economic implications. There is considerable evidence that once women join Pentecostal churches they learn skills they can utilize elsewhere.”

²¹ Margaret Peoples (Shirer), “Application for Endorsement as Missionary,” Foreign Missions Committee of the General Council of the Assemblies of God (November 11, 1919), 3. Margaret studied scripture for two hours in the morning as a teenager, memorizing and learning from four to six o’clock to build a solid foundation for missionary evangelism and translation.

²² Ibid.

²³ Dalton, 8. “Even after my husband and I were together, I went into these villages by myself. We were both missionaries and he was very wise to know that I was more than a housewife. He knew that I

like many other missionary women – became a gifted linguist, translator, and informal anthropologist through her observations and writing.

II. Competent, with Signs Following

Pentecostals emphasized the missionary nature of God and believed literally that Jesus’ promise of healing and miracles gave spiritual tools to his Spirit-filled Church.²⁴ The Spirit had been poured out to empower a Pentecostal proclamation, confirming the Word with supernatural manifestations and gifts.²⁵

Those who were baptized with the Spirit believed the Pentecostal revival ushered in the end times and hastened the return of Christ.²⁶ The driving force behind a woman’s willingness to leave the comforts of home, suffer great hardships and perhaps death, and put her family at risk, was the hope of saving many souls before Christ’s return.²⁷

Pentecostal periodicals sent out hot rhetoric about the urgency of the Last Days and the need to support missionaries on the front lines of spiritual battle. Such sent-out ones were God’s vanguard, storm troopers who would proclaim Good News just before the rapture

was a missionary as well as he was and he wasn't going to stop me. Any time that we went preaching [they had a Ford by this time],... he would drive to the farthest town. He would let me off at the first town, and someone else at the next town, or vice versa, so that we were preaching in several places. I always had someone trained to take care of my children when I was away."

²⁴ Jn 14:10-20

²⁵ Andrew Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Missiology*, Studies in Pentecostal and Charismatic Issues (U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2005), 37. "The Pentecostal movement has a natural emphasis on the Holy Spirit understood as essentially the *missionary Spirit*. It is the Spirit that empowers and sends Christian disciples in mission and this is what the early history of the Pentecostal movement testifies to... a classical understanding of *missio Dei* focused on the Spirit. It is an experience of God the Holy Spirit that empowers and sends disciples out in mission and Pentecost is the prototype: a 'baptism in the Spirit' that generates mission." Also, Hodges, 132.

²⁶ Jacobsen, 64. "This revival was the culmination of all previous revivals, completing the restoration of gospel truth that had begun with the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century... This was not just one more revival of faith and trust in God; this was the beginning of the great end-time revival that would usher in the return of Christ."

²⁷ These early Pentecostals read scripture with a view of end times, participating in the breaking in of God’s Spirit for one more worldwide revival and harvest of souls. Anderson, 138. "The eschatological vision of Matthew 25 sees all nations gathered at the glorious throne of the Messiah, from which will be selected those who have responded to the apostolic witness."

of the Church. Just like other soldiers, they expected comrades in arms to fall around them while they fought on.²⁸ Missionary suffering and hardship were considered a privilege rather than an unexpected occurrence.²⁹ Jesus was returning so soon that they had only a short time to serve, and sharing the gospel was worth any sacrifice.³⁰ Entire families relocated into unfamiliar cultures. Women as well as men could be used by God in such desperate times, called, empowered, and prophesying in the power of the Spirit.³¹

What Pentecostal missionaries found especially difficult to understand was the indifference of people at home. The desperation of some missionaries was heart wrenching, seeing the fields ripe for harvest without enough coworkers, and unfinished work sending people to a Christ-less eternity. At missions conferences and on furloughs, they pleaded for others to sacrifice comforts and complacency to reach the lost. If people would not go, missionaries appealed for generous supporters so representatives could work effectively on the field.³²

²⁸ J. Stephen Jester, "Azusa Stree Redux: Renewal for Twenty-First Century Pentecostal Missiology," in *38th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* (Eugene Bible College, Eugene, OR: 2009), 5-6. "The short-life expectancy [of Pentecostals due to the imminent return of Christ] was worth the price of the urgent task. Missionary graves can be found in many countries throughout the world, evidence of the ultimate sacrifice." Also, 12. "Some [missionaries] paid the ultimate price for their missionary passion, but in death they sowed seeds of eternal life to their persecutors."

²⁹ Rom 5:3; 2 Tim 1:8, 2:2-5, 9, 4:5; 2 Thess 1:5; 1 Pet 4:12; Rev 1:9. Before that glorious day at the throne of God, suffering and pain, as prophesied by John in Revelation, were to be expected. Cox. 83. The millennial outlook of Pentecostals, "its insistence that a radically new world age is about to dawn [was] the kind of hope that transcends any particular content... Thus despite the fact that the early pentecostals' belief in the imminent and visible Second Coming of Christ seemed to be controverted at one level, the tenacity of primal hope has made their message more contemporary with every passing year."

³⁰ Cox, 95.

³¹ Allan Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 92.

³² J. M. Perkins, "The Call for Missionaries," *Pentecostal Evangel* (December 30, 1933): 9. George and Abigail Slager, "Untitled Update," *Pentecostal Evangel* (November 25, 1922): 27. From China, Slagers pleaded, "We earnestly desire to see other Pentecostal missionaries come to this part of China to preach a full Gospel to these needy people... Please pray especially for laborers to be sent to these needy places. There are many missionaries, comparatively speaking in Shanghai and other coast cities, but so few in the interior. We have prayed and earnestly desired other missionaries to come here for some time but thus far none have come to stay any length of time except Miss Rediger a young missionary who is our co-worker." Lloyd Shirer, "Interesting News from the Gold Coast, W. Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel* (February

Hardships were attributed to spiritual warfare. Missionaries pleaded for missions education about demonic attacks before young missionaries arrived on the field.³³ After being widowed, Ruby Nicodem wrote supporters about a frightening Satanic attack that left her shaken but thanking God for his superior power.³⁴ God’s supernatural intervention was expected since the coming of the Lord was at hand.³⁵

III. Challenged

Missionary wives exchanged their families and community support networks at home for isolation and loneliness among people they did not know. Many lived with severe deprivation, lacking basic necessities of shelter, clothing, and food while trying to carve out family life and ministry. Pages worked hard in Fiji without seeing many results for nearly five years.

6, 1937): 11, 16. Shirers pleaded for missionaries to set up new stations as well as replacements for those on furlough in Gold Coast.

³³ Spirit empowerment meant access to divine guidance. Pentecostals set off for foreign lands, sometimes without a clear plan and without more than a general region or country in mind. They trusted that the Holy Spirit would reveal the place and take them to people who needed the gospel. Also, Albert T. and Lou F. Page, "Update," *Christian Evangel* (July 27, 1918): 10. "Much of our trials and troubles, we believe, were more to lead us into the light, as how to fight against the awful Satanic powers which grip the minds and bodies of these people... Ignorance on the part of missionaries of Satanic power as revealed on the foreign field will cause them much trouble and sorrow. Schools at home, we believe, should pay attention to instructing missionaries in a special course on Satanic wiles, etc." The modern equivalent in Pentecostal theology can be found in Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline*, 178. "Christopraxis is the critical intersection of the new humanity of Christ with the structure of humanity in this world. What ideological praxis sees as primarily a struggle between an inhuman social order and a humans social order is understood through Christopraxis to be a power encounter between the old, unredeemed human order and the new, redeemed order with Christ himself the authority (*exousia*)."

³⁴ Ruby Nicodem, "Holdup Staged by Satanic Power," *Pentecostal Evangel* (September 28, 1940): 8. After a visit to (with special permission) to visit a Rani (queen) just across the border in Nepal, a sadhu (holy man) climbed on the bumper of Nicodems' car. The law required a life for a life, so if the man was run over, Ruby would be accused of murder. She and her Indian coworker Andrew had to drive backwards a half mile on winding mountain roads until they reached the palace, to obtain permission to pry him off. The man ran across the field, met the car again around another bend, and jumped back on. After a second trip to the palace, palace servants tied him up until Ruby and her coworker could drive away. "How we did thank God for His protecting power as we realized anew the terrible forces of darkness that we are facing in this land!"

³⁵ Cox, 110. Also Jester, 9. "Pentecostals believed God would act and expected their praying would result in miracles, healings, and conversion of the lost.22 All these things were signs, manifestations of God's kingdom here and now, a glimpse of the glory of another realm, alive within each believer, creating a community truly reflective of Christian unity (Col 1:27)."

“The first four were spent in different part of the island as doors opened. Our living was exceedingly poor, sometimes reduced to \$1.00 per week. Trials were many and at times we could not appear in public owing to our scanty and worn out attire. Our dwelling places of the past were grass houses and often the rain would pour in on us in bed, but things have been greatly changed of late.”³⁶

The family was given a free, fourteen-year lease on a small house, conditional on Lou establishing a small school, which began with twenty-four Indian children.

Thereafter, scores were saved and healed.³⁷

Finances were often insufficient to maintain a normal life, not to mention for the possibilities of ministry that missionaries hoped to do. Faith missionaries sometimes experienced insufferable conditions and poverty.³⁸ Wives often lived in half-finished homes and among unfinished projects while the men left for missionary service.³⁹ Abigail Slager must have learned patience, especially since she was frail physically. There was no money to build the house they so desperately needed, so materials they had purchased lay on the ground for over four years, waiting for funds to pay builders. Before their home could be completed, rebel Chinese soldiers ruined it.⁴⁰

³⁶ Page, "Untitled update."

³⁷ Olive Page DeLano, "Return to Tomorrow," *Unknown periodical* (September 9-22, 1986): 25.

³⁸ George and Abigail Slager, "Untitled update," *Latter Rain Evangel* (July 1924): 19. "We are very crowded in our present quarters, there being a chapel, school, five missionaries, two children and a family of eleven Chinese all occupying a few old Chinese buildings, some of which we have remodeled in order to use them at all. We hope to build on the recently purchased land soon. The cost of erecting the two much-needed buildings will be about \$5,000 (U. S. money.) Please untie with us in prayer for the supply of this need."

³⁹ Mrs. Vernon Morrison, "Twenty-Seven Natives Baptized," *Latter Rain Evangel* (May 1927): 14. Mrs. Vernon Morrison wrote from Liberia: "We are living in a new plank house which is only about two-thirds finished. In a week or two, Mr. Morrison will be leaving for an extensive trip, at which time he will preach... he may be gone three or four weeks."

⁴⁰ George Slager, "Chuchowfu, North China," *Pentecostal Evangel* (March 19, 1927): 10. "Our chapel, schoolrooms, our partially completed new foreign house, in fact, almost every available space, except for the small house we live in, has been repeatedly requisitioned and filled with soldiers... we had over one hundred of these soldiers in our new house for ten days recently. During the time they were here they damaged and stole at least \$150.00 worth of our property besides the indescribable filth and disorder they left behind... The Knowintang Army is intensely anti-Christian and anti-foreign... Naturally it is a terrible strain, but it is remarkable the rest and peace of mind we are experiencing in Him these days. We have no place of real safety to flee to. The 91st Psalm is very precious to us..." describes closed mail route, assurance of Jesus' soon return."

Experienced missionaries like the Kelleys in China, asked that support first be given to missionaries on the field, rather than to those just beginning missions service.⁴¹ Many veterans continued to live in inadequate housing, often in dangerous conditions.⁴² Still, most tried to sound upbeat and optimistic when they wrote home, as did Perkins from Liberia: “Expenses here are naturally quite heavy. But it is simply marvelous how the Lord, in spite of war and famine, continues to supply our needs.”⁴³

A woman’s care for her family often demanded hard manual labor. Sarah Dowie described Lou Page’s chores when she came to care for the children after Lou and Albert died of influenza in Fiji: “Carrying water a long way, splitting wood, doing all the washing, cooking and housework. The washing is something startling in all this heat.”⁴⁴ Farm skills came in handy. Both Perkins had experience in physical labor and running a

⁴¹ George M. Kelley, "Wise Counsel, and Good News from Sainam," *Weekly Evangel* (January 12, 1918): 11. "It is wisdom indeed to take care of the old missionaries first, then send new ones afterwards. We are, some of us, just existing, as it were, and we are not able to do much work for the simple reason we are financially unable, although we have a working knowledge of the language. The new missionary that comes out must spend a number of years in studying before they are able to do much real work. Then to send new missionaries out to study the language for two or three years, when we have missionaries here who have a working knowledge of the language, but who are not able to work for the lack of finances, seems to me very unwise. We have missionaries now living in quarters that would not be good enough for cattle at home. One of the native workers lives in this same house, and he has the asthma so badly that at night he is compelled to prop himself to half sitting posture. This is caused from the damp room. If the native feels the dampness like this, what of the foreigner." George Kelley reports that they were able to purchase a plot of land they had sought for six years. (Chinese made many excuses not to sell to foreigners.)

⁴² George M. Kelley, "Untitled update," *Christian Evangel* (September 6, 1919): 11. "For many years they have had to live in a house with the hot sun beating down upon them, with no ceiling to protect from the dirt and dust, and no proper partitions to allow any one to speak above a whisper without being heard in the adjoining apartment. Just recently the heavy rains have flooded their station again, and as the waters are abating the odors are almost unbearable. Bro. Kelley writes, 'The Lord is blessing the work. We have one convert in the adjoining province working for the Lord and devoting his entire time to preaching. We have a convert at one of our stations who is giving all her time to preaching Christ.'"

⁴³ Letter, by John and Jessie Perkins, 1916, Report of the Base Station, Garraway, Cape Palmas.

⁴⁴ Dowie.

farm household.⁴⁵ Married women were less dependent than singles on others to repair and build for them.⁴⁶

For tidy North Americans, daily life in the villages and towns was a great adjustment. One missionary wrote from Liberia: “There is filth and disease on every hand, but God is abundantly able to keep what we commit into His hands.”⁴⁷ Furlough could be an equal shock; returning home to American luxuries created a disconnect between missionary life and missionary supporters.⁴⁸

Suffering was commonplace.⁴⁹ During times of danger and hardships, missionaries depended on the protection of the Holy Spirit. Many were courageous adventurers by nature, and enjoyed retelling the challenges they had faced. For example, fearless Margaret Shirer set off on her bicycle one evening to pray for a child. Darkness fell and a tropical downpour began as she was in the hut. She put a lantern on her bike handles and set off for home, but became lost. “That gives a very peculiar feeling to one in the heart of Africa, to realize you are lost in the darkness, with wild animals all around

⁴⁵ John Perkins, "A Busy Day in Africa," *Latter Rain Evangel* (August 1930): 22. “I arose at 4 a.m. and after some time for devotion I started in. It being breadmaking day, I lit the fire for Mrs. Perkins...As we were expecting to make jelly the next day, I had to superintend the picking of guava and other fruit so as to be ready to start work early the next morning.”

⁴⁶ Lloyd Shirer was a handyman of some repute, constantly in demand by fellow missionaries Lloyd Shirer, "A Prosperous Journey: French Sudan Party Nears Destination," *Pentecostal Evangel* (March 28, 1925): 10. Soon after his arrival, he reported fixing the missionary car: “I tore the rear end out and found several pieces broken, among them the bearing for the axel. I telegraphed to Bamako for the needed parts.”

⁴⁷ Morrison. Also, John Perkins, "New Chapel Dedicated, Liberia," *Pentecostal Evangel* (April 27, 1935): 11. During a time of ministry reverses, when Liberians were turning back to idolatry and questioning the efficacy of the Christian faith, “Mr. J. M. Perkins of Liberia requests that we pray definitely for Mrs. Perkins, who is very tired and run down in health. Mr. and Mrs. Perkins have spent many years in Africa.” The Perkins had been in Africa for thirty-three years, at this point.

⁴⁸ John and Jessie Perkins, "Grateful Missionaries," *Pentecostal Evangel* (February 22, 1936): 6-7. “It is most difficult to describe the difference between living in a fine new house in America having all modern equipment with living or trying to live and eat and sleep in a low mud hut in Africa, filled with darkness and smoke, to say nothing about goats and chickens and sometimes plenty of insect life.”

⁴⁹ Lord, 69. “By the Holy Spirit the disciples bring the blessings of the ‘heavenly’ kingdom to birth in the world today. This is a mission that reflects that of Jesus and hence is also characterized by a suffering that includes a yearning over situations where blessings are not in evidence.”

you and no natives passing that hour of the night. So I stood there in the midnight darkness and thought, ‘What shall I do?’” She looked for a light, prayed for guidance, and followed a faint beam to a native hut, where she asked for directions. ‘‘He told me to go a certain distance ‘‘this way’’ and a certain distance the ‘‘other way,’’ till I would come to the main road that led to the station. I thanked him and was off, pushing my bicycle till I came to the main road and finally I reached our home.’’ She used the experience to illustrate the lost-ness of humanity and the need to find the light of the gospel.⁵⁰

Natural disasters included encounters with wildlife. A driver ant army overran the missionary compound and attacked the missionary poultry house in Liberia, before being burned to a stop by the Perkins.⁵¹ Margaret Peoples (Shirer) sent an early, curious request to supporters: ‘‘The white ants have destroyed my Bible and so I must have a new one. Will you please send me one?’’⁵²

Many missionary women experienced healing for themselves and their families, along with healings for others. Carmichael writes, ‘‘The hardships endured by early missionaries can scarcely be imagined. There were staggering losses of life due to the trying climate, tropical diseases, lack of supplies and primitive means of transportation.’’⁵³ With so many missionaries dying, countries like Liberia became known as the ‘‘white man’s graveyard.’’⁵⁴ Missionaries lost all they had built and collected during

⁵⁰ Margaret Shirer, ‘‘Shall We Give Them the Light: Stone Church Convention Speech,’’ *Latter Rain Evangel* (August 1937): 20.

⁵¹ John Perkins, ‘‘One of the Africa Missionary’s Foes,’’ *Pentecostal Evangel* (August 3 1935): 8.

⁵² Margaret Shirer, ‘‘Fruit from the Sudan,’’ *Pentecostal Evangel* (November 10, 1923):13.

⁵³ Christine Carmichael, ‘‘A Look at Liberia,’’ *Pentecostal Evangel* (March 22, 1964): 9. Also, George and Abigail Slager, ‘‘Undisturbed,’’ *Pentecostal Evangel* (August 8, 1925): 11. ‘‘The weather is very hot these days. This means unrestful nights followed by days bathed in perspiration for us. We are unable to obtain cold drinking water as all water used for drinking purposes in China must be boiled... Ours in an example of the common lot of many other missionaries in the interior of China... the intense heat on the plain.’’

⁵⁴ Christine Carmichael, ‘‘Liberia,’’ *Pentecostal Evangel* (September 21 1969).

times of national upheaval or through crime.⁵⁵ Travel also took its toll on the health and strength of missionaries.⁵⁶

Missionaries were dependent on supporters for money for health-mandated vacations, medical treatments, and traveling to and from furloughs.⁵⁷ Ruby Nicodem lived with a sick husband on the field.⁵⁸ When Frank had to return to the United States in 1934, desperately ill after eight uninterrupted years on the field, Ruby appealed in vain to supporters for enough money to bring all the children back to the States with them. They

⁵⁵ George C. Slager, "War Horrors in China: As Related by a Missionary," *Pentecostal Evangel* December 18, 1937. "How we thanked the Lord for deliverance from danger, for just as we came into the safety zone some Chinese, walking along the same road over which we had just come, were machine-gunned... Since coming to Shanghai we have been hearing the roar of cannon, the purr of machine guns, the explosion of bombs and the sputter of anti-aircraft guns almost incessantly. It is quite a strain." Also, Kvamme, "Territory," *Pentecostal Evangel* (July 17 1943): 11. In her first letter to her mother in four years, Abigail wrote, "We are fairly well, but thinner than when you last saw us. [George had lost fifty pounds and Abigail fifteen during internment, according to their medical exam on furlough, August 28, 1947.] We are surely thankful that the war is over. The time of our release from here is not yet decided, but we expect it will be soon. We shall likely be returning to Tsingtao, although we have no home to return to. Others occupy the flat we rented formerly. The Japs took most, if not all, of our furniture shortly after they interned us in October, 1942. On December 17, 1941, Japanese Navy officers came to our home and took George off, leaving me alone for nearly five months... For nearly three years, we have been interned together. However, when all is considered, we have fared better than many others in the world today... We live in a room 12 X 9 feet. All our worldly goods are packed in with us. There are community kitchens, and dining rooms of a sort. Many of us have done extra cooking on stoves made of bricks and tin cans—when we had anything to cook. Red Cross parcels were given to us last winter. They augmented our supplies. However, our food supplies have increased of late. We have had liberty to move freely about in the camp daily until 10 p.m. We have appreciated this liberty. The Lord has surely been good to us. We do not regret any experiences we have passed through." Also, Mr. and Mrs. George Slager, "Untitled Update," *Pentecostal Evangel* January 12, 1946. After a warm reception back in Tsingtao on September 25, they reported "Although we are certainly thankful to be free once more, we believe it is God's will for us to carry on here again, for a time at any rate. We have had little opportunity for visiting stations so far, as conditions here are not yet normal by any means. But there is hope that they will be better soon."

⁵⁶ Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, "Modern Miracles," *Pentecostal Evangel* (February 25, 1939): 9. The Shirers took their house trailer 900 miles to minister to a Pentecostal outpouring in Nigeria. Margaret spoke at women's assemblies and asked for testimonies, most of which were about divine healing.

⁵⁷ George Slager, "Building Needed," *Pentecostal Evangel* (July 24, 1926): 11. "We have been on the field over seven years without a furlough and it is needed very much, but have not written before of this need because of our present building needs—i.e., we desired funds for the completion of the building first and funds for furlough after.... As we realize how our hands are tied, financially, being unable thus to hasten the work of building; and now as the warm weather is upon us and re realize anew how worn out our bodies are, we at times seem pressed beyond measure." Editor, "Need Help to Come Home," *Pentecostal Evangel* (July 25, 1936): 6. The editor appealed often for money on behalf of faith missionaries. For instance, Stephen Vandermerwe and his wife were both ill in South Africa, but lacked funds to come home for rest and medical treatment.

⁵⁸ Frank Nicodem, "Untitled Update," *Pentecostal Evangel* (June 26, 1920): 12. Editor, "Untitled Update," *Pentecostal Evangel* (September 2, 1922): 13.

left three sons behind in school in India when they began their two-month homeward journey in 1934.⁵⁹ They returned to India in late 1935, but Frank continued to have health challenges until his death in 1938.

A fairly regular occurrence was the death of fellow missionaries on the field.⁶⁰ The most traumatic loss was the death of a spouse or child. Children were often felled by disease and illness, and the bravery and courage of parents determined to carry on ministry in the face of loss is heart breaking.⁶¹ When their husbands died, widows had to decide whether to go home or stay to do the work they to which they had been called.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ruby Nicodem, "An Appeal to Mothers," *Latter Rain Evangel* (February, 1934): 2. "We both are very much in need of a furlough; my husband's desperate need is making it imperative that we face the possibility of leaving at least three of the boys here. Only a mother's heart can know what this means, and I want to appeal to you mothers at home to pray that either the money shall come in for their fare or that God will do a miracle and give me grace and courage to leave my little ones behind. Prayer changes things." In this case, it changed Ruby's heart, and Nicodems left three children behind in India on April 8, 1934. Also Ruby Nicodem, "To Mothers Who Read the Evangel," *Pentecostal Evangel* (January 13, 1934): 11. Editor, "Missionaries Returning," *Pentecostal Evangel* (October 12, 1935): 6.

⁶⁰ John Perkins, "On and Off the Trail," *Pentecostal Evangel* (July 26, 1930): 10. When a missionary from Scotland died, "Mrs. Perkins directed the splitting of the plank and the making of the coffin."

⁶¹ Brother and Sister Dixon, "Through Fiery Trials," *Latter Rain Evangel* (July 1911): 15. Soon after Dixon's arrival in Canton, daughter Gertrude, aged three, and son Wendell, aged four and one-half, died of diphtheria within sixteen days of each. They were buried near Canton. "Our arms feel quite empty and our hearts will sometime ache in spite of all we can do. But we are doing all we can to be brave, and He giveth more grace... And then our hearts cry out to God, 'What wilt Thou give unto us seeing we are childless? If we may be have souls now, we are quite willing to wait until the resurrection of the just for fuller rewards, if so be the will of God.'"

⁶² Noel Perkins, "The Needs of Nicaragua," *Pentecostal Evangel* (June 2, 1927): 10. Missionary deaths were commonplace in Pentecostal historical updates. For example, missionaries Schoeneich wrote from a dangerous political situation in Nicaragua that fellow missionaries, the Radleys, were ill, and had recovered. When Schoeneichs went to visit, they found the husband had died of blood poisoning, leaving his wife behind. She returned to the States after his death. Lucile Booth-Clibborn, "A Letter from Sister Lucile Booth-Clibborn," *Pentecostal Evangel* (September 13, 1924): 10. "In the midst of my own overwhelming grief and sorrow, my heart is going out in prayer and sympathy to others at home to whom the death of my beloved one will come as a dreadful shock and stunning blow. May the god os all comfort and grace enable us to bow our heads in submission to the wisdom of the mystery of His ways, giving us grace to press on undaunted in Him.

"You can imagine the terrible blow this has been to us, for just nineteen days after we arrived at our destination Ouagadougou, the place to which we felt God had called, and opened up the way before us brining us to our desired haven, my dear husband was called up higher. It is certainly beyond our poor, weak, human comprehension, so we can only accept the wisdom of God's divine leadings with unquestioning confidence, trusting and believing that the "corn of wheat" which has fallen into the ground shall bring forth much fruit unto the praise, honor and glory of our God."

Rosemarie Daher Kowalski: Missionary Wives of Early Twentieth Century Pentecost.”
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The decision was more difficult when they had children to look after.⁶³ Ruby Nicodem remained in India with her six children and ran an orphanage after her forty-year-old husband died. Her oldest was seventeen, her youngest almost seven.⁶⁴

IV. The Complement of a Missionary Wife

Women missionaries engaged in evangelism, hospitality, translation, social services like health and education, and wrote appeals to supporters. The foreign culture freed them to lead in ministry in ways that the home church might not have permitted.⁶⁵ They supported and partnered with their husbands' ministries while running their households. When their husbands were ill, wives added the men's ministry responsibilities to their own.⁶⁶

Keeping relationships and ministry life in balance required constant personal effort. The stress of living with others, being under constant scrutiny, meeting high expectations, and staying humble in the face of ascribed spiritual authority could lead to

⁶³ Lou F. Page, "Unnamed update," *Christian Evangel* (March 8, 1919): 10. Sarah, a single missionary who came to care for the children until relatives could take them to Australia, apparently also died of influenza. Also DeLano, 2.

⁶⁴ Ruby Nicodem, "Nicodem, Mrs. Frank, Ne Fairchild, Miss Ruby Clarissa," Missionary file (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Missions Archives). Ruby Nicodem, "Settling Christian Families on the Land," *North India Field News* (July 1939). Ruby carried on Frank's dream of founding a Christian community on about a hundred acres where displaced converts could farm to provide for their own families. "Through the native estate we have been able to obtain land at a very reasonable rate, just three miles from our mission compound, and right on the edge of the Government jungles. Families who have come out of heathenism are given a chance to settle on this land and work the soil... Our present plot of ground covers... about a hundred acres."

⁶⁵ Cox, 125.

⁶⁶ Frank Nicodem, "A Letter from Brother Nicodem of India," *Pentecostal Evangel* (July 12, 1930): 11. For example, when Frank Nicodem took their four older children to the cooler climate of the hills to recover from blackwater fever, Ruby stayed behind with their baby and managed the boys' home. Ruby wrote her husband of the difficulty in obtaining supplies: the market was closed due to cholera and she had to let their helper go, taking care of about seventy boys and her eighteen-month-old baby. "Last night the sand flies were so bad that one just couldn't sleep even when it did get a little cooler toward morning."

imbalanced life and spiritual weakness.⁶⁷ One of the most pressing spiritual challenges was keeping peace among missionaries. With strong personalities and entrepreneurial characteristics of missionaries, interpersonal harmony required ongoing effort. Often missionaries were forced together and disagreements were inevitable.⁶⁸

Wives sometimes served as peacemakers. Disagreements between George Kelley and other missionaries created chaos and unrest among Chinese converts.⁶⁹ After Margaret died, a missionary coworker appealed to the Assemblies of God missions department for help because of a rocky relationship with George, “Sister Kelley has been released from it all. We believe her heart was right. They say she was a woman of prayer. [George] will miss the restraint of her prayers.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Jim Bryant, "Letter, November 7, 1976," (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Missions Archives). Margaret Peoples-Shirer experienced the trauma of an unfaithful spouse. She stayed with Lloyd when they lost their missionary appointment after his moral failure, and they worked for government in Ghana, Congo, and Haiti, losing touch with the AG. “Margaret... is a terrific preacher... [She] stayed with him all through the years and kept her home together... [After Lloyd passed away, Margaret held meetings in churches in Springfield, MO.] She is a beautiful Christian lady who deserves any recognition we may give her.”

⁶⁸ John and Jessie Perkins, "Off Again for Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel* (September 7, 1929): 11. When everything went smoothly, missionaries were grateful for the harmonious relationships. An oblique reference to the need for missionary cooperation in an update from the Perkins: “Above all pray that a fresh anointing and endowment of power from on high may be given to us all for the work there, that peace and harmony and co-operation may prevail among the workers, and that the Lord will send a mighty revival...” Also, J. M. Perkins, "A Great Convention in Liberia," *Pentecostal Evangel* (April 25, 1931): 10-11. “Brother and Sister Schwartz had everything in readiness, and the compound looking fine. From the very beginning peace and harmony reigned, so that there was scarcely a jar throughout the eight days we were there.”

⁶⁹ W. R. Williamson, "Letter, January 30, 1932" (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Missions Archives). A long stay in China changed the Slager’s relationships with fellow missionaries. By 1932, letters of complaint from the Assemblies of God district in South China to Noel Perkins, head of Foreign Missions in Springfield, MO, were detailing a lack of cooperation and division among missionaries caused by Kelleys. Mr. Slager overrode decisions made by other missionary and his lack of support for unified discipline among the Chinese churches created havoc among converts, who played missionaries against each other to secure the decisions they preferred.

⁷⁰ Mattie Ledbetter, “Letter to Noel Perkin” (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Missions Archives), 2. After Margaret had died, Mattie Ledbetter appealed for help because George was dividing the work, pitting the Chinese Christians against other Assemblies of God missionaries. “Sister Kelley has been released from it all. We believe her heart was right. They say she was a woman of prayer. [George] will miss the restraint of her prayers.”

A couple in missions could double their effectiveness, and Cox attributes the rapid spread of Pentecostalism partly to the work of women, empowered by the Spirit, set free for ministry and proclamation.⁷¹ Margaret Kelley told supporters: “When Mr. Kelley went out to take Bibles to the Chinese, I was a mother, and I said I didn’t go to China just to rock a baby, and I prayed and gathered in the dirty children.”⁷²

Most husbands recognized the impact of their wives’ ministry, and praised them to supporters.⁷³ Margaret Shirer was called to evangelistic missions, and even into her old age was known as a great preacher. She alternated preaching in churches with her husband,⁷⁴ and recounted that God would give her words of knowledge through parables,

⁷¹ Cox, 121.

⁷² Kelley, "Preaching and Living the Gospel," 3. "The love of God enabled us to love [the children]... We taught them to read the Bible. From the beginning our work has been evangelistic. You cannot educate them into Christianity, but you have first of all got to get them saved."

⁷³ Perkins, "Three Days in a Heathen Town." 21. John wrote about his partnership in evangelism with Jennie: "After we had showed [the Liberians] a goodly number of pictures [of the life of Christ on a screen], they begged us for more. The next morning we spoke of going on to another town, but they would not heart to that, so during all the time we spent there the majority of people remained in town, following us about, filling the house where we stayed almost continually and listening with rapt attention to all we had to tell them. First one of us would talk and then the other. After a searching Bible lesson on the secret sins of the heathen, they began to confess their sins, and poured out some awful confessions."

⁷⁴ Margaret Shirer, "Teaching in the Gold Coast: New Book Printed," *Pentecostal Evangel* (July 28, 1934): 10. "This month we have finished printing a little book in the native language... It is a simple story, easily understood by the natives, beginning with the creation, the fall, and the promise of the Saviour. The story is then told of His coming, His life, death, resurrection, His coming again and the judgment. There are twenty-nine boys in the reading class and they are now eagerly reading the new book.

"We have a separate reading class for the Konkomba boys, taught by the native evangelist, under our supervision. The need is great for a young couple to work among the Konkomba Tribe. They are untouched by either civilization or Mohammedanism, which would make it much easier for them to receive the gospel message. Their language has never been reduced to writing, but this could be done. We are trying to translate a few choruses into their language, and how they like it! Every Sunday Mr. Shirer and I take our turn in holding services for them in their new church."

Rosemarie Daher Kowalski: Missionary Wives of Early Twentieth Century Pentecost.”
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African proverbs, and stories that highlighted scriptural truths.⁷⁵ She continued to visit villages to preach on her own, even after she was married.⁷⁶

Sometimes missionaries would “go native,”⁷⁷ and sometimes they continued Western traditions in their homes. Jessie Perkins maintained a Western household, producing a sigh of relief from her husband: “I reached home alive, and was so thankful to sit down to a real table, covered with a clean tablecloth where I was not afraid of finding undressed fish and white grubs with red heads.”⁷⁸

The women were accomplished organizers. Not only did wives manage their own families, but they were often expected to host other missionaries and take in strangers. New missionaries might stay for months while their own stations were being constructed.⁷⁹ Three months pregnant with their sixth child, Ruby Nicodem reported on a

⁷⁵ Margaret Peoples Shirer, "Out of the Chicken Coop," *Women in Touch* (January 1978). Margaret may have been the better preacher in her family. On his missionary application, Lloyd mentioned that “three or four souls” had been saved in five years of street preaching. He was a handyman, roofer, and furnace repairman, and Margaret highly admired him for his skills. He proved very useful in repairing and building not only at the Shirer mission stations, but also for other missionaries.

⁷⁶ Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, "Yendi, Gold Coast," *Pentecostal Evangel* (November 25, 1933): 7, 15. Margaret also ran a Sunday school for children on the mission station and hosted incoming missionaries. Meanwhile, she continued to translate scripture, helped standardize the spelling of the Dagbani language, and wrote a grammar and dictionary. Eventually, she translated Matthew, Mark, Acts, Ephesians, and 1 Peter. “We spent nearly the entire month on translation work as the boys who are saved are so anxious to get the Scriptures in their own language.” Also, Department of Foreign Missions, *Field Focus (Ghana)* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1992).

⁷⁷ T. M. L. Harrow, "Report of the Mission: From 1908 to 1916," Letter (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Missions Archives). “Here at the town of Newaka the people compelled us to “sit down” with them and... cleared us a hill near by their town, and built us our first mission house of materials brought from the surrounding forests – bamboo undressed country plants, and thatch or leaf for the roof. The native women plastered the walls with cow dung.” Three months later, the Perkins and other missionaries came up from the coast. “The nine of us, practically strangers one to the other, found ourselves “at home” among the heathen.”

⁷⁸ John Perkins, "A Trip to a Cannibal Tribe," *Pentecostal Evangel* (August 1, 1931): 8-9.

⁷⁹ H. B. Garlock, "Brother and Sister Garlock in Gold Coast," *Pentecostal Evangel* (May 7, 1932): 15. For example, the Garlocks, fellow missionaries to Shirers, arrived at the mission station in May and expected to stay with them through the rainy season until they could establishing themselves in another location.

convention they hosted at their station: “We had from sixty to ninety native people to look after, as well as twenty-two missionaries, and we found our hands full.”⁸⁰

Wives learned nursing skills and could take care of many basic illnesses because there was no other help available.⁸¹ Some women were educators, bringing the skills from a teaching career to the field.⁸² The extreme poverty of the Page family’s first four years in Fiji ended when Lou, formerly a schoolteacher, opened and taught in an Indian school.⁸³

Tongues or glossolalia were initially considered empowerment to speak a foreign language without preparation or study.⁸⁴ Missionaries were disappointed by the failure of the gift of tongues to provide such an easy transition. However, the time needed to learn

⁸⁰ Ruby Nicodem, "From Our Letters," *Latter Rain Evangel* (July, 1931): 22. She added, “The little chapel just seemed to be filled with the glory of God... On the last day we had a precious water baptismal service... before we left the place, instead of seven there were twenty-two who had obeyed the Lord in baptism... We do not class them as Christians until they proclaim it openly to the world through water baptism.”

⁸¹ Noel Perkins. John Perkins said of Jessie: "She has never been known to refuse a difficult task. On four different occasions in answer to calls from sick missionaries she has started out in the darkness over trails which were almost impassable even in daylight. For twelve long weeks while I was suffering with that dread disease, malaria, Mrs. Perkins scarcely left my bedside. She loved especially to work among the women and girls of Africa, where she was known as a real mother." Also, Lloyd Shirer, "Recent Progress in the Gold Coast," *Pentecostal Evangel* (November 20, 1948): 11. In Liberia, Margaret Shirer was known for her care of women and babies, but men with sores and complaints came for care as well as her preaching.

⁸² Carmichael, "A Look at Liberia.," 10. “Because most of the converts were illiterate, the early missionaries started an elementary educational program. This continues as an integral part of our work. The oldest and largest school, opened in 1931, is the Feloka Assemblies of God Mission School.”⁸² Liberia: “In 1932 a school was opened in Newaka to provide elementary education for girls and to train them to be efficient homemakers and wives for the pastors. More than 100 girls attend this school [by 1964].”

⁸³ Yvonne Carlson, "Someone Remembered: A Story of Fiji's Pioneer Missionaries," *Pentecostal Evangel* (December 31 1989): 21. In return for Lou Page’s pedagogy, the family received a place to live and food to eat. Kelley, "Preaching and Living the Gospel." Kelleys emphasized reading skills and education as well: “We are standing for every Chinese who is saved being able to read the Bible for himself. Everywhere we have a mission station, we have a little day school... If China is ever to be evangelized, the Chinese themselves are to be the leading factor in it.”

⁸⁴ Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions*, Lynx / Regnum Studies in Evangelism, Mission and Development (Oxford: Lynx Communications, 1994), 117. Charles Parham intended to train missionaries in his Bible course in Topeka, and he saw the gift of tongues as “the speaking of real foreign languages, which gift would enable missionaries to preach immediately and effectively in every foreign country.” Cox, 95. Tongues, initially considered God’s short-cut, became the means of expressing worship and needs to God when they could not be expressed in human language.

the language allowed them to study the culture and begin to incarnate the gospel into the new setting.⁸⁵ Margaret Shirer was the first Westerner to understand the Moré language.⁸⁶ She joined village women at their grain-grinding station and gradually learned the language. From there, she formed an alphabet, taught the Mossi tribe to read, and translated scripture.⁸⁷

Many wives functioned as amateur anthropologists, writing updates to supporters from a woman’s point of view.⁸⁸ Another contribution was an understanding of the role of indigenous women, who often were the first to listen to the gospel message.⁸⁹

Missionary wives were keen observers and participants in culture and kept excellent notes. Ruby Nicodem wrote many insightful observations of life in India. She noted how Indians worshipped idols, their home life, and the caste system’s stranglehold

⁸⁵ Cox, 87. “The practice of tongues... has persisted because it represents the core of all Pentecostal conviction: that the Spirit of God needs no mediators but is available to anyone in an intense, immediate, indeed interior way.”

⁸⁶ “Mossi” <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Brazil-to-Congo-Republic-of/Mossi.html> (accessed January 7, 2010). “The Mossi language is Moré. It belongs to the Gur group within the Niger-Congo language family. Like many African languages, Moré uses pitch (how high or low a tone is) to distinguish meanings. Also, as in other African languages, a verb form shows whether its action is continuing or happens only once.” Department of Foreign Missions, *Upper Volta*, (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Missions Archives, June 1981). Margaret Peoples (Shirer) wrote: “I cried myself to sleep every night, praying, ‘Lord, what shall I do’ One morning at 2 o’clock God said to me, ‘Have I ever failed you?’ ...In our village there was a place where each evening the women went to grind their grain between two stones. I got some stones and grain and went to grind with them. As I listened to their conversation, I began to understand what they were saying, and I wrote down everything I heard. When I had enough words I wrote little stories in Moré in order to teach the women to read. Then I translated...”

⁸⁷ Adel Flower Dalton, "Then and Now: Eight Decades of Foreign Missions," *Mountain Movers* (January 1991): 8. “Margaret taught reading classes, and as the pages of the Bible were printed by mimeograph, the delighted Mossi read by lantern light until the oil ran out. Then they used cornstalk torches to keep reading. Today a strong national church exists in that area.”

⁸⁸ Slager, *First Medical Examination of Furlough: History* (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Missions Archives). Work was “mostly evangelistic, also teaching women and children.” Some, like Harvey and Schoonemacher, were excellent writers who became well-known in their own right as speakers. Abigail Slager worked as an evangelist, but also taught women and children. She did quite a bit of writing updates and stories, including articles for an unknown publication: “Yuan-Hwa, a Chosen Vessel” (April 1949) and “Timothy” (October 1949).

⁸⁹ Often missionary wives had better access than their husbands into the homes where women worked and raised their families. Eugene Albert Nida, *Customs and Cultures; Anthropology for Christian Missions*, [1st ed. (New York,: Harper, 1954), 116. Nida says evaluating the position of women in society required consideration of their treatment, legal status and rights, public activity, and their type and extent of work.

Rosemarie Daher Kowalski: Missionary Wives of Early Twentieth Century Pentecost.”
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on the culture.⁹⁰ The closed country of Nepal was opened to Western anthropologists and other observers through updates like those from Ruby.⁹¹

Childbearing and child rearing in the tropics could be daunting and draining. Margaret Shirer, always interested in education, homeschooled her own children with Calvert, a standardized curriculum from the States.⁹² After their furlough about 1933, the children stayed behind in the United States while Lloyd and Margaret returned for a third term. The separation was difficult for the whole family.⁹³ The Nicodems had six children between 1920 and 1931. Their whole family was missional. Even the children were willing to sacrifice to minister to locals during famines and other disasters.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Frank Nicodem, “India Not Civilized,” *Pentecostal Evangel* (June 24, 1922):12. Frank Nicodem observed a young boy burning to death when his clothing caught fire and no one nearby would help put out the blaze. Such “inhumanity” caused Frank to write a letter about the lack of “civilization” in India.

⁹¹ Ruby Nicodem, “One from Nepal Hears the Master's "Come Unto Me,...I Will Give You Rest",” *North India Field News* (January 1940). Nepalese were constantly passing from mountain homes into the Indian plains. Ruby describes standing at the gate watching them carry baskets, through the “third largest gateway into India. Some of them will work during the winter months and earn a few dollars to take back into Nepal with them.” She describes fruit, their reaction to cars, native evangelists and their struggles. Similarly, Abigail Slager wrote from Shanghai about the Chinese New Year, describing the details of the celebrations, along with hints of loneliness, a sense of isolation, and a heartfelt burden for those around her. Abigail C. Slager, “Interesting Letter from Shanghai,” *The Weekly Evangel* (April 1, 1916): 12. “Today is the Chinese New Year... I have written the foregoing with the prayer that it will give you some insight into the idolatry that abounds in this land. All their worship seems like child’s play to us, but it is not so to them. They are much in earnest in their worship... God has encouraged us much in Himself of late. With a deeper realization than ever before, we can say with Paul, ‘I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I...’ We have been having some very good meetings with the Chinese. We mean to continue in this blessed way of taking up our cross daily to follow Him who suffered to redeem us unto himself, and not only us but also these poor darkened people among whom we live. Pray for us that the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified even as it is with you.”

⁹² Dalton, “Interview with Margaret Peoples Shirer: Upper Volta” (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Missions Archives). Margaret was a very strict teacher. When the school bell rang and she entered the room, her children stood out of respect for their teacher.

⁹³ Margaret Peoples Shirer, “How We Flew Home from Africa,” *Pentecostal Evangel* (December 5, 1942): 8. The children had been left behind in the USA with their uncle for five years before a warm family reunion in 1942. “The next day our children took us through the streets of the little town where they have lived the past five years so that we could meet their boy and girl friends, and to show these friends that they really had a daddy and mamma.”

⁹⁴ Frank Nicodem, “India,” *Pentecostal Evangel* (May 4, 1929): 11. The Nicodem children were willing to go without food to help feed the hungry: “Many of [the people in the famine relief camp] are people that we have known for years, and to whom we have many times preached the gospel. Now they are in a sense looking to us to see just how far our religion is practiced... There are many cases in which we are forced, being Christians, to give food, for some come to us who are too far gone to work. There will be many such in the near future, and it is hard to turn them away [during this famine]. We are suggesting here

Children fell ill, died, or were in harm’s way. Slagers had to leave behind their adopted Chinese daughter during the rebellion of 1927.⁹⁵ The oldest son of Ruby and Frank Nicodem (Frank Jr.) was enveloped in lightening. The rafter of the porch roof above him split and the stone step on which he stood broke in two. He was unhurt.⁹⁶ Both Shirer children were spared permanent disability by God’s healing power. Margaret and her nine-month old Marguerite were struck by lightening, but the baby revived after a half hour of fervent prayers by natives and missionaries. Shirers’ six-year-old son was severely injured with multiple broken bones after falling from a tree. He required a month’s hospitalization. Margaret prayed over him when he came home, and he was completely healed.

Entire cultures experienced social change as a result of missionary presence and proclamation. Cannibals and violent tribes became more peaceful.⁹⁷ Governments began to recognize the advantages brought by the gospel.⁹⁸ Margaret Kelley, speaking at a missions convention during a furlough, reminded Americans of the Chinese government’s open door, if they were only willing to go.⁹⁹

that we go without certain meals. Our boys, too, are always ready to take part in anything like this. In this way we shall have a little to give to those that come, but what is this among so many.”

⁹⁵ Slager, "Perilous Days in China," 5.

⁹⁶ Frank Nicodem, "Miraculous Protection," *Pentecostal Evangel* (June 13, 1936): 8.

⁹⁷ Perkins, "A Trip." "I am just back from Dorobo, where I dedicated a new chapel last Sunday. We call Dorobo a cannibal tribe: for they used to be very fond of human flesh, and shortly before we came to this part, they had eaten a man. Now two of our best workers are from this tribe, and many of the people are Christians. Praise the Lord. The gospel of Christ is still the power of God unto salvation to all who believe.”

⁹⁸ In contrast, British, French, and Dutch colonial governments initially resisted missionary advances because missionaries tried to prevent exploitation of indigenous peoples.

⁹⁹ Kelley, "Souls Won," 24. "The Vice President of China said to Mr. Mott when he was making a tour, 'Go back to America and urge the church to enter these open doors. Two thousand walled cities are waiting for the Gospel. Urge the church to enter these open doors now. Five years from now may be too late.' The doors are open now, but I fear with the Vice President of China that five years may be too late. If we do not take in the Gospel, other things will get in, [sects] and all kinds of false doctrines, and we cannot reach them when they have given up their heathenism and accepted something else We lose our opportunity.”

Family structure itself was changed as missionaries presented an egalitarian view of women and men equal in God’s eyes. In China, Kelleys observed the changes in family life: “The father becomes a father indeed. The family that was separated by sin is reunited. The concubines have been let go. The family altar has been set up. Is it worthwhile to preach this Christ? Yes! Re-echo Yes.”¹⁰⁰.

The welfare of children was also directly affected as cultural practices changed.¹⁰¹ Missionaries, burdened by the plight of orphaned and abandoned children, opened orphanages and homes to care for them.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ George M. Kelley, "Do Missions Pay?" *Weekly Evangel* (February 16, 1918): 10. “We have seen such great changes that you would hardly recognize it as the same place we went to thirteen years ago. At first, men and women would not come together. The man would go on ahead and the wife follow with the burdens. The women were the slaves of the men. The only way we could reach the women was to go into their homes and preach the gospel, and today our congregation is made up of men and women. Now husbands and wives come and sit together and sing praises to the Lord Jesus Christ.” Nicodemus noted the difference in marriage between Indian Christians who had grown up with missionaries and marriages of unbelievers. Ruby Nicodem, "Wilt Thou Go with This Man?" *North India Field News* (January 1941). After husband Frank rescued a baby from the dead breast of her mother, little Flower was given to another missionary to raise. Frank rescued a young boy ten years later, and the two met and were to be married. Ruby wrote: "I felt God had truly led us to His choice. I talked with her first to see if she would be willing to consider the young man's suit, and found her so shy that I feared she would never answer me, but after a long time she lifted her blushing face to mine and asked me just one question... "Will he beat me?" Poor little girl, only too well she knew the lot of so many young brides in this country. We assured her that he was a real Christian and would love and care for her, so she agreed to meet him. We left them together for a little while; when we went back into the room they were reading the Bible and their faces were beaming as they told us that they would like to be married in a month's time. Today this young couple are still with us, working on the compound...once more we have had cause to thank God for the results of the laid-down life of our loved one..."

¹⁰¹ Kelley, "Preaching and Living the Gospel," 3. “You have heard how they would bind the feet of the babies and break the bones of the feet, so that women weighing 125 or 130 pounds had feet only two inches long. Now no longer in South China do they bind the women’s feet; but that is only the beginning, and changes are brought about every day through the preaching of the Word of God.”

¹⁰² Frank and Ruby C. Nicodem, "Does It Pay?" *Pentecostal Evangel* (September 13, 1930): 10. “Several years ago when we came to India, and God laid it upon our hearts to take in and care for the little orphan boys of this land, we found that there was considerable opposition on the part of dear ones at home. They told us that Jesus was coming so soon that it would not pay to take in these poor little ragged, hungry, dirty, diseased boys; but that we should spend our time in evangelizing this great country.” After ten years, Frank and Ruby reported on two of their boys who “have felt His call upon them for service among their own people... and have consecrated their lives to His service... Has it paid? Yes, thank God, a hundred times over for every heartache, for every sacrifice. Today we can feel that we have feet going in many directions throughout India, and souls that are on fire with the love of God and eager to spread the good tidings....Our older boys are going out from us one by one... They are our children in the Lord and they certainly have become very dear to our hearts... We still have over seventy boys.”

In later years, missionaries moved toward administrative and supportive roles within the local churches.¹⁰³ Nicodems planned their ministry and training to produce social change and provision into the future.¹⁰⁴ Ruby carried on Frank’s vision of resettling ostracized Hindu converts after her husband died, moving five families onto an acreage and supervising its use.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion and Summary

Missionary wives were called to proclaim the gospel. Most considered their call to missions as personal and important as God’s call on their spouses. Amid severe challenges, they competently opened fields and helped maintain missionary projects alongside their husbands. They raised children, often ministering to orphans and abandoned children alongside their own. Their hospitality and care for the personal needs of others were vital to the survival of missionaries and the practical demonstration of the gospel to indigenous peoples.

Their courageous legacies continue to demonstrate the power of the Spirit working through women. They brought to life the prophecy of Joel that women as well as

¹⁰³ Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, "Nigeria, March 1943," Missionary update (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Missions Archives). "In Nigeria the missionaries' task is not to form assemblies, to preach and work in a certain area until a group of believers is gathered together. The churches are there, the workers are there but very ignorant of many fundamental matters. The missionaries must be an organizer, an executive, a teacher. The people are anxious to be taught." They appealed for a strong staff of missionaries, a Bible school and staff, and a printing plant.

¹⁰⁴ Nicodem, "Back to the Land," 6. "All of us as missionaries have at some time or another had men on our compounds for whom we have made jobs of drawing water, cutting grass, etc. simply because we have nothing else to offer the man who lost every means of making a living when he accepted Christ... How is our indigenous Church in India to become self-supporting if the individual must always be financially dependent on the missionary?"

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 6-7. "[The husband] builds his own three-roomed house from sun-dried bricks, which he also has made with his own hands. Wood for the roofs and doors and windows is given us free from the Estate but the sawing is one item we had had to help with as it is one of the most expensive items. Each man is encouraged to plant both shade and fruit trees... Four years ago when it became necessary for me to take over this branch of the work, I felt very inadequate for the task and with trembling asked the Lord to enable me to settle one family a year... today we have five fine Christian families... We give these families financial help only the first year until they have their first harvests, then they are expected to carry on and bring in their tithes to the local Church here."

Rosemarie Daher Kowalski: Missionary Wives of Early Twentieth Century Pentecost.”
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men would be used by God as they crossed culture barriers to minister throughout the world.

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