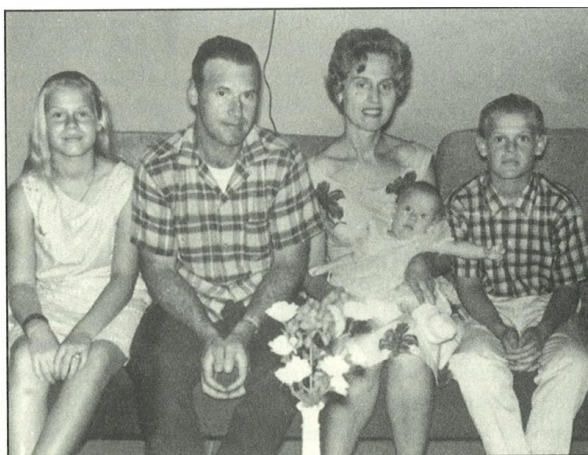


In Memory of Gene and Sandy Thomas by Marie Andreassen

Her name was Madelyn Thomas but for those who knew and loved her, she was Sandy. Gene and Sandy met at a Bible Youth Camp where they both went forward to dedicate their lives for the Lord.

When Sandy graduated from High School, they married. After feeling led to go into Foreign Missions, they attended Columbia Bible College in South Carolina for four years. They then went to France for a year to study advanced French. The year was 1954.

Missionaries that go into the Lord's work these days are not allowed to go unless they have most or all of their support which is a good thing. However, that was not the case for Gene and Sandy. They went out in faith. Their home church supported them as well as other churches and individuals. They were not guaranteed a monthly support. Whatever came in is what they lived on. They never asked for money as they felt God knew their needs and therefore would supply them.



In 1955, they left by ship (21 days) and arrived on the west coast of Africa. They then went by train to Brazzaville. They were both so seasick and ill that they rested there for several weeks. Sandy was expecting their first child.

They then flew in a World War II plane some 650 miles north to Impfondo where they would spend most of their 42 years of service. The plane groaned and one of the motors spewed out fire from time to time. Sandy wondered if they would be going home to meet the Lord before they ever got to Impfondo.

It was 1½ degrees from the equator. This meant two seasons of a heavy rainy season with 200 - 400 inches of rain per year and then a very hot and dry season with no rain.

Learning to use some French with government officials was helpful but the people there spoke Lingala so they had to learn their language as well if they were to be effective to the people there.

Their home would be a mud house with bamboo roof and dirt floors which also liked to house other critters such as snakes and insects. Mosquitoes were an everyday factor so malaria was a common disease. Lots of buckets were need as the roof leaked in the rainy season. They lived in this home for four years. Later on Gene and the workmen built a kiln to make bricks for brick homes which was much safer.



Workers kept the grass cut with machetes so that animals and snakes were kept away. No lawn mowers there until much later.

There was no electricity, therefore no refrigeration so for their early years they did without. Each family had to provide their own food for each day. The people had gardens in the jungle but at 6:00pm (dusk) they had to return to their villages as wild animals would come out at dark. It was not uncommon for people to be mauled by leopards and monkeys.



Village along the Impfondo Road

Gene felt very strongly that local believers should be trained to be Pastors. So a Bible School was started. The Pastors would then go to their villages to teach the Word of God to their own people.

The local hospital had very limited supplies and their lack of sterile procedures was in question. The closest city with a hospital was 250 miles north. The seed was planted in their hearts about a health facility there. So a mission clinic was started. Sandy was a Red Cross nurse and went on for further training.



Cobra killed in chicken house

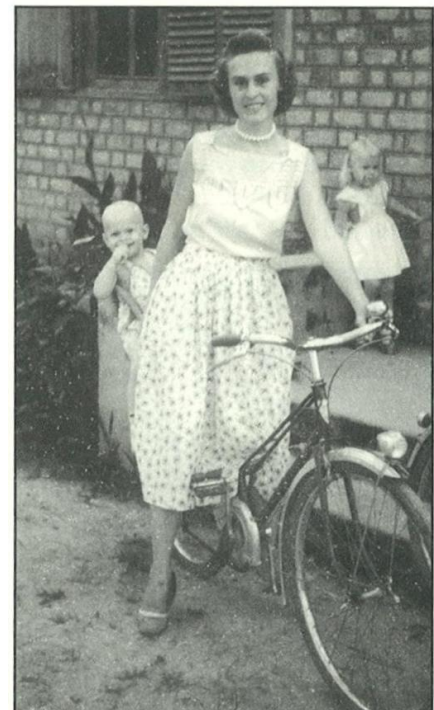
When the clinic was established, she spent 12 hour days dispensing medications, suturing all major and minor cuts, performing amputations on lepers, and doing skin grafts among other things.



Leprous foot that Sandy amputated

They had a prayer list for the things that were needed. A motor for their dugout canoe was a must as there were no roads in the jungle. Since they would not ask for money, they prayed daily for this need. In the meantime a pastor in the USA woke in the middle of the night and felt God speaking to him about providing a motor for the Thomas's. And so they were able to go up and down the river in the canoe. Sandy would treat the pygmies for their physical needs; Gene and a Pastor for their spiritual needs.

They had three children that they homeschooled. When communism came into the Congo, the fate of many church groups hung in the balance. They were in danger, so when their two older children were in grade school, with much prayer and tears, they sent them to a Baptist mission school 250 miles north for their schooling.



Sandy on a bicycle



Gene on a bicycle

They continued their work in the Congo for 42 years and retired in 1997. However their work did not end. They traveled across the United States to many churches, telling their story and getting support to continue the work in the Congo. A mobile home was given to them in Warren, Ohio. Patti, their youngest daughter lived close by.

About 10 years ago, Gene was diagnosed with cancer and within three months went home to be with the Lord. Sandy lived by herself with her dog named Hannah. But as her health got worse Patti sold her home and went to live with her as Sandy's caregiver. Sandy's years in Africa took their toll on her health; she had multiple surgeries along with other health issues. She often spoke of being in such pain she would sit in a chair with her prayer list praying and waited for the long night to end. In all that time, I never heard her complain about what she was going through.



About three years ago Patti remarried and they moved to Pennsylvania (Sandy too). By this time she was in a motorized wheel chair and on oxygen. She didn't get out much but one of her favorite places to eat was Bob Evans Restaurant. They took her there on Saturday. The next day she said she didn't feel well. When she didn't get better Patti insisted she go to the hospital. She was diagnosed with double pneumonia. A short time later her tired body gave in and she too went home to be with the Lord.

They were the kindest, most fun loving people that we were privileged to know. I will miss our phone calls but I rejoice in the fact that she is free from her suffering and pain and is now united with Gene. But most important of all, she is with her Lord and Savior that she loved and faithfully served for so many years. She was buried next to Gene in Canton Ohio.

The hospital work in the Congo is still being carried on by Dr. Joe Harvey. The hospital was named for Gene and Sandy in their honor.

The Bible School still exists and pastors continue to go to their villages to bring the Gospel. God has blessed their ministry over and over again.



Sandy has written a book called *Beyond Jungle Walls*. A copy is in the church library. Art and I also have a copy. It is a small part of their story.

I have often wondered how many hundreds of people came to know the Lord because of their love and faithfulness to the African people.