



46 ❖ Mama Tina

About 20 percent of the Congo Mennonite missionaries have been single women. Typically serving in support ministries in classrooms, dispensaries, and among women and children, their service has often been low profile and therefore less recognized. And yet they came with a deep certainty of God's leading in their lives and at peace with roles they believed they alone could fill. Among this corps of devoted women was Tina Quiring.

Daughter of a rural pastor and one of three sisters who found their way to Africa, Tina came to the Congo in 1950 to teach. She served first at Ndjoko Punda, where her time was divided between the girls school and a two-year Bible training program for young men who were being groomed for service in village schools as Christian teachers. The custom in the Congo was for African co-workers to give each new missionary a name. Often they would bestow an African term they felt identified and fit the new arrival. But not Miss Quiring. There was something about the name she had come with that suited her new friends just fine. She became simply Mama Tina.

In 1960 her Congo service was interrupted by the violence of political independence. As soon as it was thought safe for women to return, Tina was among the first to volunteer to go back. She was then stationed at Tshikapa, the government and commercial center located just across the Kasai River from the AIMM station Kalonda. From 1962 until her retirement in 1976, she focused her attention

photo—Tina Quiring assisting student Benjamin Ntumba

on distributing Christian literature through a network of bookshops, which she promoted.

Mama Tina was an energetic woman with a quick smile and a well-developed sense of humor. Those who learned to know her will remember her for a number of other characteristics as well.

Tina was always busy. Perhaps it was unpacking a new shipment of Gospels that had just come in the mail. Sometimes it was running off a batch of lesson guides on her office mimeograph. Or maybe it was inventory time at one of the bookshops. She was always somewhere doing something. The partial German expression applied well to her: “I’ve got no time to *dopple!*”

She was always on time. She drove a little Volkswagen “bug” around Tshikapa on her many errands to the post office, to the various bookshops of the area, and to her office at the church headquarters. Every weekday morning she started her rounds promptly at 6:30 a.m, and she rarely got beyond second gear. Other missionaries living nearby often observed that they had no need of personal alarm clocks. When they heard Mama Tina’s little bug go putt-putting by their homes, they knew it was time to get up and start their day too.

Tina was enthusiastic about her work. At any missionary gathering she was eager to share news from her department. She usually had proposals for expanding the mission ministry via the printed page. She was certain that, in the long term, nothing was more important for the African church than to produce and place God’s word in the hands of African believers in their own mother tongues.

Impatient with barriers to progress, Mama Tina often asked: “How can we get this ball a-rollin’?”

Jim Bertsche