



15 ❧ He sold corn at ten cents a bushel to raise boat fare

In a rural Mennonite church in central Illinois in the fall of 1932, a young couple shared their dream of missionary service in Congo. The couple was Russell and Helen Yoder Schnell. The church was the North Danvers Mennonite Church, the congregation that twenty years earlier had sent Lawrence and Rose Boehning Haigh as two of the first three pioneering missionaries of Congo Inland Mission (CIM).

The Schnells had been accepted by this mission. They had their outfit gathered and packed. All that stood between them and their departure was the last hundred dollars needed for their boat fare from New York City to Matadi, the seaport of Congo.

In the congregation that Sunday sat Ali and Anna Weidinger Stahly, a farming couple. It was their custom to invite visiting missionaries to their home for Sunday dinner. In that informal setting the Schnells were able to give much more detail about their plans and needs than had been possible during the morning service. Also seated at the table were two sons, Ali Jr. and Maurice, who were quietly listening to the flow of conversation around the table.

It was in the depths of the great depression. Money was scarce. Some farmers around the Stahlys were in danger of losing their farms because they could not meet their mortgage payments to local

photo—Ali Stahly as a young man

banks. As a matter of fact, Ali Sr. had been named to a federal commission that was negotiating between area farmers and their banks, trying to find ways for the farmers to keep their land.

But Ali carried an even greater concern for the newly launched Mennonite mission venture in the distant Congo. He went to bed that night with the stark realization that all that stood between this young couple and their departure for the land of their calling was one hundred dollars. At some point during the night he made a decision.

The next morning he instructed his oldest son, Ali Jr., to hitch a team of horses to a box wagon and begin hauling ear corn from his bins to the local elevator. He was to continue hauling until he had racked up a credit of a hundred dollars. The price for corn was ten cents a bushel. In other words, the Stahlys sold 1,000 bushels!

A check was forthwith sent to the Schnells. Before year's end they arrived in Congo and were assigned to the CIM mission post at Ndjoko Punda, the place where the first trio of pioneers had set foot twenty years earlier.

All of this was not lost on the younger Stahly son, Maurice. Though he did not fully comprehend what was happening, one thing was clear to him: missionary work in distant Africa was extremely important to his parents. Memories of that ten-cent-a-bushel corn stayed with Maurice throughout his life.

Graduating from high school in 1939, he secured employment in an area Caterpillar plant. Three years later he married Opal Bostic and that same year was drafted. Applying for Civilian Public Service, he spent three years as an orderly in a hospital in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Upon completing his service, he and Opal wondered what was next for them. Reflecting on that time, Maurice later commented: "We felt God saying to us, 'Some I send out. Others I call to stay at home and support the work of the kingdom.'"¹

Maurice eventually became a trucker, then acquired his own trucking fleet. But as his business flourished, he continued learning about God's ways. Reflecting on that era, he observes: "I started out by saying, 'God, I want to use you in my business.' But I found out God says, 'It's my business and I want to use you.' It took me almost

1 Steve Bowers, "What We Share with Teaspoons," *Sharing*, Winter 1992.

20 years to figure that out. Too often, we want to use God instead of Him using us.”²

Along the way Maurice became involved with a variety of denominational boards and committees as well as the boards of Mennonite Mutual Aid, Mennonite Foundation, and Mennonite Economic Development Associates.

But no commitment or involvement has been more enduring than his relationship with Congo Inland Mission/Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission. He served as a board member from 1956 to 1975. It was during that time that he made an extensive trip to Congo with fellow board members. To this day, framed photographs of the trip grace the walls of his office. As he kept current with AIMM news, gifts for the work continued to find their way to the AIMM office in Goshen, Indiana, from a rural Mennonite church in central Illinois.

When told the vision of this centennial story project, Maurice Stahly was the first to write a large check to support it. He said the contribution was a memorial to his father. Maurice passed away in April 2012 as the project was reaching its final stages.

All of us who have learned about Maurice Stahly’s boyhood in the home of a farmer father with a deep commitment to God’s work are grateful for the shared memory of that hundred dollars raised by selling ear corn at ten cents a bushel.

Jim Bertsche

² Ibid.