

A NEW DAY IN MISSION

Kafakumba Training Center | Zambia, Africa



Deborah Elaine Rigsbee Vance

T'was the 3rd of June, 1978, at the Highland Avenue UMC, in Marion, Indiana, where Ken was pastor that he and Debbie were married! In the ceremony they repeated the phrase, "Till death do us part." When you are 25 and she 21, that phrase seems like an eternity away. However, two weeks shy of 42 years of marriage, that phrase became a reality.

On Wednesday evening, the 20th of May, we had just watched what was Debbie's last African sunset. She had been sick for a couple of days with vomiting and diarrhea. At noon she tested positive for malaria and started on a malaria cure. At 6:15pm, I called the nurse, Lorraine Ledgerwood (Lorraine Enright's Granddaughter and the same nurse that saved Ken's life 6 years ago with Typhoid Fever and Black Water Fever Malaria). She lives just across the path from us and was here immediately. At 6:21pm Debbie stopped breathing. We administered CPR and used the heart defibrillator, but to no avail.

We had a celebration of life for Debbie here at Kafakumba under COVID-19 restrictions, and it was live streamed. The service can be found on Kafakumba's website.

Debbie would have been 63 on the 14th of September. She lived her life to the very utmost limit. Nothing stopped her! Her mobility issues of knees, joints and the fall that broke her leg and emergency evacuation, surgery and recovery of last year only slowed her pace. Following surgery in South Africa she returned to Zambia for several months. She made it to the States for Thanksgiving and Christmas, 2019, before returning to Zambia on Ground Hog Day, 2020. We were planning to return to the States in August for the birth of our 6th Grandchild.

Debbie's life was a witness. She was the behind the scenes person who kept the machinery in motion. Working alongside of the great missionaries Lorraine Enright, Lena Eschtruth Ellinger, Kendra Enright and others, she developed a ministry and style of love that touched many lives. In the 1991 war and evacuation when Ken and Stacie were 100 miles away working on the airplane, Debbie single-handedly coordinated the entire evacuation while she and Joshua huddled together in the center hallway under mattresses as bullets and shell were flying at the house. In 1993 she managed to discern that trouble was brewing and advised the Bishop to evacuate the missionaries and church leaders, which he did. That was when we came under attack, managed to escape under gunfire, and lost our home with everything in it destroyed.

February 26, 1995 was the day of the snakebite! While Debbie was hovering over the threshold of death from the puff adder venom, Stacie 8, and Joshua 6, and I were sitting on the outside step talking about the life-threatening condition of Debbie. Stacie asked point blank, "Is mom going to die?" Before I could respond to her, Debbie, from inside the house, semi-conscious, replied in a very weak voice, "No, the Lord has given me power and authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing will harm me!"

Debbie's spiritual gift was Hospitality. She loved to entertain. She loved people and having a full table for a meal. Once on a flight I ended up with extra people stranded at our home overnight (13 to be exact) and she never missed a beat. She found everyone beds to sleep in and had 17, including our family, around the table, and everyone had plenty to eat. The many work teams that came to both Congo and Zambia were nourished and enriched by Mama Debbie, as she was so fondly called.

Christmas Day, 1997, in Mulongo, Congo, we celebrated by going to church, and John, Kendra, Brian and Nathan Enright were with us. But before we could eat our Christmas Turkey she had her widows and ladies that she assisted and worked

with show up for Christmas dinner. In our storeroom we had bags of cassava meal, corn meal, vegetables and our family could not eat Christmas Dinner until she finished feeding her ladies—302 in total! She had just enough food and everyone went away satisfied. Our family was humbled as Debbie came and called us to the table to serve us our Christmas dinner! She lived and loved to serve! All were welcome in the love of Jesus.

Debbie loved Family! Beginning with the Singing Rigsbee's she grew up in a musical family, singing and playing various musical instruments! Debbie directed the choir at Richland Chapel, our first married appointment in the States and the church from which we launched our missionary service. Raising a family in a multi-lingual, multi-cultural environment was a challenge but she sailed right through. Raising children where one year we counted only 4 days that it was just the 4 of us for meals and we spoke English as a treat! Stacie and Joshua both have families and made us Grandparents. She loved her children, but she supersized her love for grandchildren. Our 6th was born August 26th, weighing in at 9 lbs 7 oz. Rowan Tobias Vance.

We will all miss Debbie! If you knew her you loved her. She was just that kind of person. Our hearts are broken and the pain and loss is devastating. God has given us strength and encouragement to press on. We have found God's presence to be reassuring, and Debbie's legacy to inspire us. Memorial Moneys can be sent to the Marion Mission Storehouse on behalf of Debbie and will go towards our Widows Project and the Fisenge UMC.

Ken's Plans

We are quickly approaching 4 months since Debbie's passing, and I am still stranded under travel restrictions. When I am able to return to the States we will have a memorial service for Debbie, with date and place to be announced. After my time in the States I will return to Zambia to continue our work at Kafakumba Training Center; teaching Kafakumba Pastors School, pastoring the Fisenge UMC and dealing with Widow's, ChickEN's, cassava and agricultural development.

We still have much work to do. We are continuing the vision and goal of Kafakumba and the projects to become self-sustaining programs. We are not there yet, but we are moving in that direction. During the pandemic funds and financial support have dropped off and we have had to adjust our programs accordingly. We are praying that God will continue to supply our needs and financial resources. For all support please send to the Marion Mission Storehouse and earmark accordingly.

We are grateful for your messages of love at the passing of Debbie and your continued financial support in these difficult days. During our lockdown, I was able to complete some household projects for Debbie prior and following her death. We have gone ahead with the cassava harvest and raising of chickEN's, but church has not met since the end of March! We are hoping to be able to begin services under strict social distancing and COVID-19 guidelines soon. We have the doors, window frames and supplies to complete the Fisenge (unfinished, open door church) within a month from when we begin. Our people are very eager to get back to church and pick up and continue the call to make disciples for the transformation of the World.

Ongoing Support

Please send funds for both projects and salary support to:

Marion Mission Storehouse P.O. Box 38, Marion, IN 46952 and earmarked for Salary Support, or for Widows, Pastors School, Fisenge Church, or ChickENS. The Marion Mission Storehouse is 501c3 tax exempt.

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