

EXCERPT



Cradling Abundance

One African Christian's Story of Empowering Women and Fighting Systemic Poverty

July 27, 2021 | \$26, 240 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5298-7

Growing up in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Monique Misenga Ngoie Mukuna persevered through many challenges to become a businesswoman, church leader, social activist, and teacher. In this unique and gripping resource, “Maman” Monique tells her own story as she sheds light on the lives of Christian women throughout the Majority World at work in every level of the church and community.

The Biography of a Remarkable Woman

Muoyo webe = life to you! That is the common greeting in Tshiluba, the language that Maman Monique and I grew up speaking. I am Elsie Tshimunyi McKee, and I have the great joy and honor of introducing my best friend, Monique Misenga Ngoie Mukuna, “Maman Monique.” My job is to set the stage for her and accompany you along the way. I will begin by telling you why I want to share Maman Monique’s story.

First, Maman Monique is one of the most inspiring people I have ever met. She possesses a remarkable strength of purpose and has exhibited a lifetime of commitment to educating and serving women and girls and all “the least of these”—living her faith in ordinary life, day by day, year in and year out.

Second, Maman Monique is one of the most comprehensive models of a strong and compassionate woman that I know. She has never stopped learning and growing, initiating and creating, and then following through on a wide range of projects to improve life for the world around her. Gifted student and politically savvy citizen, farmer and expert tailor, talented school teacher/principal and successful businesswoman, visionary social activist and smart networker, steadfast church leader and gadfly—all while being daughter, wife, mother, go-to person, and reluctant matriarch for her extended family. And for just about anyone else in need of wise counsel, a meal, a shoulder to cry on, a temporary roof, some frank speaking, a hospital or school fee paid, a biblical story of inspiration. With all this, Maman Monique is also one of the sanest people I know, with warmth and humor, grace and courage.

Third, I want to share Maman Monique’s story because she opens a window on so many levels and aspects of life for women and girls in central Africa (and, I suspect, more widely in the Majority World). She tells other women’s stories; she reveals the varied conditions of life as a girl or woman in that world. She also has brought other women and girls to tell their stories: this book includes many more voices than Maman Monique’s. A significant number of her friends and associates and students graciously agreed to be interviewed, not all of whose first-person narratives could be printed here. This is their story, and its publication is for their joy.

Fourth, Maman Monique’s story is worth sharing for its panoramic view of Christian women at work at every level of the church and community—from the local congregation through denominational and ecumenical women’s groups to national and international venues. It demonstrates the engagement of laywomen (not just clergy or theologians) and provides clear evidence of women’s strength of Christian faith, and the strength women draw from their faith, as well as the ways their faith can lead them to address injustice and discrimination in church as well as society.

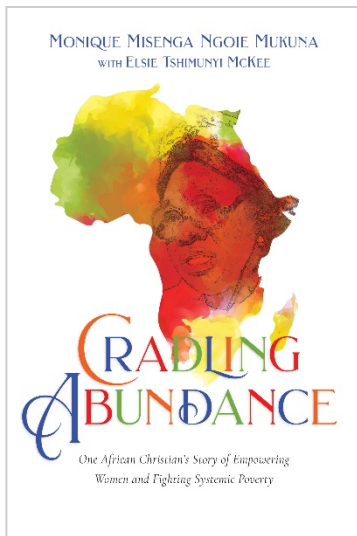
Fifth, Maman Monique tells a good story.



Karin DeHaven, academic publicist
800.843.4587 ext. 4096 or kdehaven@ivpress.com



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To start off, you may want to know how this story came to be written. Every story has a story, and this one began about ten years ago, in 2010, when Maman Monique and I sat on the porch of her home in Kinshasa. This was my first visit back to Congo since she and I had met in 2008. We were both born in the large Kasai province, she in East Kasai, I in West Kasai, but her education was in Tshiluba and French, mine in English, so we did not cross paths at school. In fact, coming to know her as an adult, I was perhaps better able to appreciate how remarkable this sister is than if we had actually grown up together, though I am sorry for all the years of friendship that we missed.

When my husband, John, my sister Beth, and I arrived in Kinshasa in August 2010, Maman Monique was in the midst of a major crisis in her ministry, brought on by patriarchal jealousy (you will hear more about that later). While visiting her home, we met women and children whom she had rescued—and taken into her home. We heard their stories:

- The young girl in shock who fled from an abusive older husband: He already had a wife and grown children when he tricked her family into sending her to marry him, sight unseen. With counseling and education, she is now a confident and accomplished woman.
- The young widow whose in-laws stole her inheritance, who had nowhere to go with her infant daughter. After sewing school and her own further studies, she is now a self-sufficient and successful businesswoman, and her little girl happily visits her "grandmother" at Maman Monique's.
- The HIV-positive widow, victim of her husband's infidelity. She now has the medicines she needs, a microloan-based means of self-support, and a full and active life with her children.
- A family of orphans seeking help to survive. Food, school fees and supplies, and hope.
- All these and more.

We talked with Tatu Mukuna, Maman Monique's devoted husband and partner in faith, and with the colleagues who have for many years loyally followed her in her service to "the least of these." And we heard about FEBA, the nonprofit that is her brainchild, established to empower women and fight systemic poverty. Although Maman Monique has been engaged in various kinds of Matthew 25 ministry all her adult life, as an individual and through her church (informally and officially), the living embodiment of her spirit is the nonprofit *Femme, Berceau de l'Abondance*. The French acronym is FEBA or, in English, *Woman, Cradle of Abundance*. Inspired by the international Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, Maman Monique and some friends established FEBA in 1999. After challenges of various kinds, FEBA was relaunched by Maman Monique in 2010.

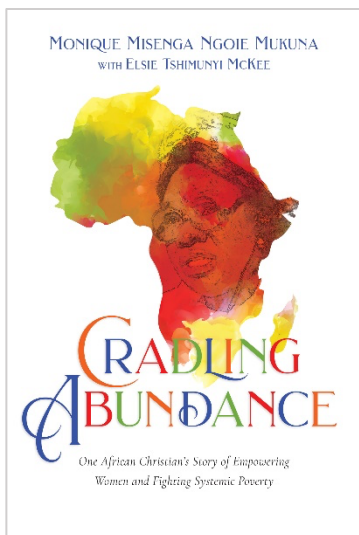
The story I was hearing and seeing in Kinshasa in August 2010 began to take shape in my imagination. Who was this amazing woman? What else had she done? I wanted to know more. And the more I learned, the more I wanted to share the story of this remarkable Christian and her ministry. It is not just Maman Monique's work, though FEBA would never have happened or survived without her. She and those she inspires are demonstrating that those on the margins, "second-class citizens" of their world, can be instruments of "cradling abundance" (John 10:10) for others. This story is a window on the shared faith, deep



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prayer life, and sheer grit and guts of so many African Christian women who confront all kinds of challenges: human and natural, political and economic, educational and spiritual, day in and day out. And they never give up, never stop caring, and never stop singing and hoping and working for life abundant in Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd.

This book is Maman Monique's personal story, and the stories of her friends and students who offered me the privilege of hearing the words from their lives and hearts. It is not an objective collection of statistics about women and poverty. It is not a careful analysis of politics or culture. It is a personal conversation among friends, which English readers now can “overhear.”

—Taken from the introduction



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