

# Muderspach, Frithjof (1900–1960)

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## SVEN HAGEN JENSEN

Sven Hagen Jensen, M.Div. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) has worked for the church for over 50 years as a pastor, editor, departmental director, and church administrator in Denmark, Nigeria and the Middle East. Jensen enjoys reading, writing, nature and gardening. He is married to Ingelis and has two adult children and four grandchildren.

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Frithjof Muderspach served most of his life as a missionary in East Africa. He was respected and loved by nationals as well as fellow missionaries. His faithfulness and sacrificial service were legendary and an inspiration to many young people in his homeland, Denmark.

## Early Life

Frithjof Hartvig Juhler Muderspach was born in Esbjerg, Denmark, on February 18, 1900<sup>1</sup> to Louis Muderspach<sup>2</sup> and Hakonna Hansen.<sup>3</sup> His grandparents, glove manufacturer Aleth Muderspach and his wife Laura Juhler, living in Copenhagen, first embraced the Seventh-day Adventist faith during an evangelistic campaign in 1890. Their son, Frithjof's father, was baptized two years later,<sup>4</sup> followed by early employment in the Church, and thus the missionary spirit was kindled in the Muderspach family.

Frithjof grew up with three brothers and two sisters,<sup>5</sup> all of whom became workers for the Lord. As his father was a successful worker in the Adventist cause, later to become a busy administrator, the family moved to various places in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and back to Denmark again, with many changes in schools for Frithjof. Later he regretted the lack of stability in his educational development and his limited academic qualifications.

It was in the home that he learned obedience and diligence. So thoroughly were the rules of life and the principles of truth engrafted in him, that industry, firmness of character, and faithfulness “were in his blood” and



Frithjof Muderspach

Photo courtesy of the Historic Archive of Seventh-day Adventists (HASDA) in Denmark.

became some of his most prominent qualities.<sup>6</sup>

At the age of 15 he began work as a messenger boy at the Book and Bible House in Stockholm, Sweden, while his father was president of the conference. From 1916 to 1918 he was *piccolo*, or messenger, at Skodsborg Badesanatorium north of Copenhagen. It was said that he made all the other messengers jobless. He took any task that was at hand and did it well.<sup>7</sup> The office manager, who had worked at the sanatorium for many years, said about him: "I have known many office boys, but nobody above or equal to Frithjof in helpfulness, devotion, and work performance. He was loved and admired by patients and staff."<sup>8</sup>

In 1918 Muderspach enrolled in the three-year nursing course that also included physiotherapy. During this time, he became acquainted with Borghild Kristine Willadssen from Moss, Norway, and after they both had graduated from the course, they married on December 20, 1921. They settled in Horten, Norway, where they ran a health clinic for four years.<sup>9 10</sup>

## Africa is Calling

1925 became a landmark year for the young couple. A call came for them to serve as missionaries in Africa. Before they could go, they had to complete a course in English at Stanborough College in England, where Emanuel W. Pedersen, a friend of the family, was in his final year of college. Later they would work closely together in Africa.<sup>11</sup>

Muderspach's first assignment was as superintendent for the Utimbaru Mission Station in Tanganyika, where he and Borghild did pioneering work among the Wakuria people near Lake Victoria. Here, and at the Ikizu Mission, the Muderspachs served for seven years.<sup>12 13</sup> "Pastor Muderspach built a dispensary there, which is still in use to the present. He also built a school building, which is now used as the boys' dormitory."<sup>14</sup> During a furlough in 1933 he accepted a call to Uganda. He was ordained to the gospel ministry and over the next 13 years filled new leadership positions in Uganda: treasurer for the Upper Nile Union (1933-1934), director for the Central Uganda Mission (1934-1942), and director for Katikama Mission Station (1943-1945). Alongside his primary role he was acting president for the Upper Nile Union in 1936 and acting treasurer for the union in 1938.<sup>15</sup> During this time he was very closely associated with V. E. Toppenberg<sup>16</sup> from Denmark, who had come out as a pioneer worker before him.

In 1946 the Muderspachs returned to Denmark, where Frithjof underwent an operation for a troublesome hip complaint. Here he served the local conference for three years<sup>17</sup> as departmental secretary (home missionary, Sabbath School, and youth)<sup>18</sup> and principal for the Bible Correspondence School from 1948 to 1949.<sup>19</sup>

Not being happy away from Africa, and despite his continuing physical pain, Muderspach set out again for East Africa. The last ten years of his life of service were to be spent there: as director for the Glendia Mission (1950-1952),<sup>20</sup> president for Kenya Lake Mission Field (1953-1954), and president of the Uganda Mission (1954-1957).<sup>21</sup>

From 1957 to 1958 he took a furlough to the United States for medical treatment.<sup>22</sup> Many friends encouraged him to remain at home and find a less strenuous occupation. Among them was his friend Emanuel Pedersen. By then the use of his limbs was reduced and he suffered physical pain, but Muderspach said to Pedersen: "You mean it well, dear friend, and I thank you for your care. It is probably all right, what you are saying, but you know 'One time Africa, always Africa,' and I need to get out there again. I have a duty to fulfill, a task to complete."<sup>23</sup>

Frithjof Muderspach was a missionary *par excellence* from the good, old school. So out he went, returning to the place where he started, first as director for Majita Mission Station in Tanganyika and then finally Utimbaru Mission Station, and the circle was completed.<sup>24</sup> Among other projects he constructed a church, which is still used by the Kimbumaye local church members.<sup>25</sup> Despite not having much academic education, he was a practical person who knew what had to be done and got it done.

At one time Muderspach substituted for another mission director, who was on furlough. At a camp meeting it was decided that he should leave this task and be moved to another place. During the meeting a local member stood up and demanded that he stay: "We love him. He is a true Christian and a real missionary. We want to keep him." Then, 8,000 local members stood up and gave their support.<sup>26</sup>

## A Missionary Team

Muderspach's wife, Borghild (1897-1989), played an important part in his life and ministry. They worked as a team in the clinic in Horten, Norway, and in their work in Africa. Her training as a nurse led her to make sure that she always had a clinic where the sick could be treated. In Utimbaru she and Frithjof together treated 32,000 patients. In a single year, 1932, she treated 14,119 patients on her own. The patients paid a small amount for the treatment and the medicine. Her son Arne says, "Borghild's home was also a little hotel, where missionaries and guests came and enjoyed her good food and kindness."<sup>27</sup> Emanuel Pedersen continues: "She was the perfect spouse for Frithjof. She put all her energy into the work and had a cheerful and bright mind. She also had an outstanding sense of humor and knew how to handle both nationals and Europeans, regardless of who they were."<sup>28</sup>

## A Tragic End

Muderspach's life as an active and loved worker for the Lord ended abruptly when he died in an accident on April 28, 1960, as he was traveling from Busegwe, which was by then the North Mara Field headquarters. His car was swept off the road and he and his co-worker, Pastor Misjael Manjale, were drowned in the Bukwe River in the Tarime district.<sup>29</sup> His son, Arne Muderspach, said: "It had been a very humid day. The mountains close by had caused huge amounts of rain. When they had to cross the river, just before the crossing there was a 10-meter long and very wet concrete road. Very likely they had driven with good speed to force their way through the water masses, but aquaplaning had caused the wheels of the car to lose their grip and they were cast into

the river. The car was carried 100 meters down the river and had hit a piece of rock. In front of the rock the water was deep, and the car got stuck and only the roof rack could be seen above water. The two men did not succeed in getting out of the car."<sup>30</sup>

At his funeral, representatives from the government and other missionaries attended. The Roman Catholics sent a delegation and declared him a true "saint." The Muslims held a special memorial service in their mosque, to which all the missionaries were invited. Their leader spoke nobly and movingly about Muderspach's love and helpfulness towards him as a Muslim.<sup>31 32</sup> His tombstone, next to the church that he built in Utimbaru, has the inscription, "He gave all for Africa" and stands as a testimony to his faithful service.<sup>33</sup>

## Legacy

In the General Conference minutes of May 5, 1960, the name of Frithjof Muderspach was entered among the heroes of the Adventist people. His work was for the honor of God and the salvation of many. His earlier division president said about him, "He was a prince of a man, a godly and faithful worker, among the very best."<sup>34</sup>

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### NOTES

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5. Hakon Louis Juhler Muderspach (1899-1985), Svanhild Juhler Muderspach (1904-1961), Rosa Juhler Muderspach (1908-1992), Finn Harald Juhler Muderspach (1910-1994), and Karl Aleth Juhler Muderspach (1912-1993).
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8. Emanuel Pedersen, 15.
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26. Hans Jørgen Schantz, 5.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

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30. Hans Jørgen Schantz, 6.

31. Emanuel Pedersen, 15.

32. K.B. Elineema, "Tanzania: a triumph of faith," *ARH*, August 13, 1981, 17.

33. Hans Jørgen Schantz, 6.

34. Emanuel Pedersen, 14.

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