

**Wed 6 March 2013**

**Doris Bell Blackwell:**

**TRIBUTE BY JOE BLACKWELL**

Mum was born to Roy and Minnie Aynsley on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1928 at Condobolin NSW; the daughter of the local Commonwealth Bank manager and the youngest of 4 – the only girl. Doris was 10 when the family moved to Hornsby in Sydney. She loved her brothers greatly and later their wives and children.

Doris completed her Leaving Certificate, at Hornsby Girls High, against other's recommendations, and after a brief period of office work with Australian General Electric, on turning 18 Mum commenced 4 years of nurse training at Manly Hospital. Upon qualifying as a Registered Nurse Mum decided to apply with a friend to go west to the hospital in Norseman WA (Basically miles from anywhere) – her friend changed her mind at the last minute but Mum went on alone.

At Norseman she met Tom, the local Methodist Probationary Minister (when her Mum and Aunt, whilst visiting, dragged her to Church). Engaged in 6 weeks, their marriage wasn't for another 4 years as Tom completed his ministry training and was ordained. During this time Doris returned to Sydney and completed her Midwifery and Mothercraft nursing certificates. Married in April 1956, their honeymoon was to return to Perth WA, pick up their mission truck and, with all they owned, drive to Port Hedland where they pioneered the Inland Mission for 6 years. It was a tough stint marred with post-natal depression, the loss of Charles, their third child weeks after their fourth (William) was born and Tom finally suffering major sickness.

The family moved to the Bayswater Parish, Perth, with Mum expecting their sixth child. This was 5 years spent close to Dad's family and suburban Ministry, where Mum raised children, listened to "Blue Hills" by Gwen Meredith daily (episode 5287 - can't you just hear it.), faced her own health issues, supported Dad's ministry and quietly served others, especially enjoying the community around the sink – the engine room for a great night of hospitable service.

Post Christmas 1967 we drove east for what was meant to be another 5-year placement at Coolamon NSW. Mum worried that a helpful friend had wrapped & packed her crockery to be opened by unknown new parishioners wrapped in copies of the *Daily Mirror* including their page 3 girls.

Mum endured the loss of Dad's sister soon after our arrival, Dad's Dad in the October and our Dad in the November. Mum moved us to Wagga where she remained until the late 1990s. Our transition was made smoother with the offer to temporarily use the Bible Society's house in Wagga, as they were transferring their representatives. This offer came following an impromptu act of charity by Dad and Mum only months before Dad died, with Dad lending 4 wheels to the outgoing rep when he and his family had their day trip halted by 4 flat tyres near Coolamon one evening and Mum turning a meal for 6 into a meal for 12 for both families. Later, with a house purchased, children to new schools, Mum engaged us fully in the life of Wagga's Wesley Methodist Church.

God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - was Mum's anchor point in which she truly entrusted her troubles, struggles, loves and joys. Giving thanks and endeavouring to listen and respond.

This started very young when from her bed she overheard a doctor and her parents discussing one of her brothers and hearing that he wouldn't live long. (She thought the next few days ... not the 30 more years they had meant.) Mum said that sleep came through the tears once she had entrusted her brother to God.

Doris' personal faith life was fed with scripture study, spiritual reading and prayer but this was always supported by public worship and belonging to communities of faith; whether these were congregations in Wagga, Perth, Canberra, Launceston, Yass and even Lebanon, prayer and scripture groups, the order of St Luke's healing ministries or WEC in Tasmania: Either way, if she was well enough and with means to get to worship, Mum was there. Further, Mum often offered help to others needing transport such as men and women from Wagga's Kurrajong community.

In those early years at Wagga Mum became a very active member and contributor to the life of Wesley: teaching Sunday school, assisting people in need with her time, knowledge and hospitality and often in such a way that 'the left hand didn't know what the right was doing'. In addition to providing meals, visiting the homebound, the sick or offering a helping hand, Mum even sat sit up with other people's very restless babies such that desperate parents could gain a good night's sleep despite having to go to work herself in the morning.

As one of Margaret's friends, who met Mum in Vanuatu wrote "[Doris] was like a mama whom I got encouragement and advice from, to strengthen me in my Christian walk...". This was true for a number of our peers.

Mum really could stretch food well, as I've already said, though not a master of the gourmet (her Yoghurt ice cream saw instant action – especially when we gave it to an unsuspecting mate who did the quickest dash to the front gutter we ever saw: a once off creation thank goodness).

For years 32 Best Street was open to all, with mates and visitors welcome to stay – one spending 6 months in the lounge room recovering from back surgery. Aunty Betty's yellow kitchen tables and bench seats in the middle of the kitchen became a gathering point in the 'tea' making factory and capital of Wagga – we got to the point of a permanent urn on the stove. It was here too that Mum's early recycling activities were prominently on display. Washing up included all plastic bags that were dutifully slapped against the tiles on the wall where they remained stuck until removed when they were dry.

I don't say we were the easiest bunch but Mum was more than up to the task. Trooping the crew off to Church, even on foot, and to more than one service a Sunday, if she thought fit. Sunday school and Youth Groups, not to overlook music lessons and ballet, Mum put in the hard encouraging yards. Wagga High gave Mum the best and worst experiences of parent teacher nights. Expecting the worst after the boys, came the shock of talent and trouble-free diligence of the girls. (Thankfully for her the boys took up educational opportunities in Perth – too far for direct contact in most instances.). Either way, I'm sure she was glad when we all inished and moved onto unis and work, marriage and children.

Transport for Mum was between Car and bike. Mum only replaced the car she had bought with Tom, a 1961 Ford Falcon Deluxe Automatic Green car when her mechanic found a 1961 Ford Falcon Deluxe Automatic Pink one, with less miles. Her bicycles eventually were replaced by one of the first adult Tricycles in Wagga with a basket on the back, a tilting shaft, bell, lights and most memorably the orange safety flag. It carried grandchildren in the back, books, bags and meals for those Mum thought could use a night off cooking. Either way this lady in her red cardigan, blue denim dress and helmet was a sight not readily forgotten.

Mum, throughout her life retained that faith-filled, trusting and humble heart that had enabled her the confidence to embark on adventures, face new situations and see God's hand at work in her life. Mum always looked for solutions rather than accept barriers. For instance, returning to nursing, when our brother George returned from the West, and was thereby able to 'watch over' our sisters who were in Year 7, Mum applied for a position to work nights at Calvary Hospital in Wagga. But, upon seeing her qualifications was promptly told they only required a single certificate nurse and would not be able to afford her, Mum's suggestion was: 'Pay me for the 3 certificates and tell me the difference so I can donate this back each fortnight.' The Nuns were happy for that and Mum began work at Calvary. This soon enabled her to secure full-time work as a baby health centre sister in Wagga and the surrounding districts for the next 20 years: where she was well-known and respected. As children, we were always proud of the way Mum kept her qualifications up-to-date; including becoming an International Lactation Consultant at the age of 61.

This unwillingness to accept barriers continued throughout Mum's life. When in her late 60s she was told she was too old to be considered for WEC missionary training Mum heard that there was a loop-hole that *residents* of Launceston *were welcome* to attend classes. So, following her retirement from the Baby Health Service, guess who became a resident of Launceston, completing their course whilst eventually being invited to live on campus! Our Doris! This was followed by taking herself off to Lebanon for 11 months, connecting into a Baptist community in Tripoli, having known nobody until she got there but making friendships that endured long after her return both in Lebanon and in Australia.

But for every one of our funny, warm and precious memories of Doris' life, we remember too, the difficulties and hardships. Postnatal depression ultimately saw Mum endure 'electric shock therapy' during the mid-1960s in Perth and from time to time, undiagnosed psychoses that, whilst not hindering her work, did make for some interesting decisions and actions. But these too attest to the heart and character of Doris, as all were made with a seeking, obedient heart that often helped others. More recently, severe health issues saw Doris' independence and mobility speedily decline, which resulted in her move to Linton.

We would like to thank the doctors of Yass and Canberra, particularly Dr Williams as well as the staff at Thomas Eccles Gardens who cared for Mum most wonderfully through the past few years and especially the last couple of months. It has been greatly appreciated by us all.

Her life has been an inspiration to us all. She was proud of her kids, our spouses, children and grandchild. We thank God for choosing her to be our Mum and Granny, and for all she endured and taught us.

As for Mum, she expressed her readiness to return 'home' and to catch up with Tom and Charles. Thank you Mum for being our Mum, for the memories, your faith and the example of your life lived AND THANK YOU GOD for the gift of Mum and her peaceful passing in the company of our brother, George. May you continue to rest in peace Mum.