

# Vijsma, Ernest Hugo (1906–1990)

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## DESMOND SIRAMI

Desmond Sirami, M.A. in education (Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines), is the director of the Sabbath school and personal ministry departments of Papua Mission, Indonesia. He was a member of 1000 Missionary Movement and served as a missionary in the Philippines. He was an English and Bible teacher at Doyo Baru Academy, Papua, Indonesia, and director of Papua Adventist Academy and Papua Adventist School of Theology. He is married to Elihama Villanueva Okan and has three children.

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Ernest Hugo Vijsma was a minister, administrator, educator, and builder in many different places in Indonesia and in Australia.

## Early Life

Ernest Hugo Vijsma was born on September 24, 1906, in Kediri,<sup>1</sup> a town in east Java, Indonesia. His parents were Anton and Katherine Vysma,<sup>2</sup> both Dutch, who moved to Indonesia from Holland when the former became a Dutch colony. The Vysma children were all born in Java.<sup>3</sup> The family lived and worked in Indonesia, where Anton was a plantation manager. Ernest was the third of four sons. His two older brothers were Frederick and Victor. Frederick was a police commissioner. He died in the Queensland, Victoria, Point Nursing home, and Victor went to Holland after the war. Ernest had a younger brother named Nono who died at the age of 15 in a drowning accident when he was trying to save someone from drowning, in about 1907.<sup>4</sup> Ernest Vijsma<sup>5</sup> was known as “Boet” (pronounced Boot) by his family. In 1928, he was baptized by Pastor H. Eelsing<sup>6</sup>

## Education and Marriage

Vijsma studied at a technical college in Bandung and became an engineer. But when the Netherlands East Indies Training School opened in Bandung on November 15, 1929, he was among the first ten pioneer students: P. Kairupan, S. Kauntul, M. Silitonga, V. E. Siwy, M. Wauran, C. van Drongelen, E. Luntungan, A. Rhebok, Ch. Rhebok, and E. H. Vysma.<sup>7</sup>

Vijsma married Emelie Marianne van der Upwich on July 6, 1932. Emelie was born on September 16, 1909, in Subang, West Java (Indonesia). Her parents were Dutch Van Der Upwich and Emelie Elisabeth Van Gent.<sup>8</sup> Emelie was a teacher and a nurse by profession. Ernest and Emelie had four children: Elisabeth Jeanette (b. March 29, 1942), Alfred Johannes (b. March 15, 1944, now deceased), Helene, and Heino.

From 1930, Vijsma served in many places in Indonesia. On January 1, 1932, he began his ministry at East Java Mission as a pastor. On April 1, 1942, he was called to West Java Mission. In 1946 he pastored the Dutch

Seventh-day Adventist church at Batavia (now Jakarta). During the Japanese occupation, the church added 42 members, and another baptism was expected after the war.<sup>9</sup> In January 1947, he was called to return to East Java Mission.<sup>10</sup>

During World War II, Vijsma drove ambulances for the Red Cross. He was in and out of prison for three weeks here and there, in solitary confinement, because the Japanese thought he was part of the Catholic Church and that he was politically involved. A Japanese officer who interrogated him later told him that his wife was a Seventh-day Adventist. The officer advised Vysma to apply to be a welfare officer in the Japanese army. He did this and was successful. He had to wear a special band on his arm for 18 months and carry special papers with him everywhere. This band meant he could go anywhere and visit the Adventist church members. This was a special honor because all other Japanese soldiers had to salute to him. Even with his honor, he was beaten approximately six times for no reason, often after the Japanese had lost ground in the war. Food was scarce during the war. His son Heino remembers missing milk and not having any birthday or Christmas celebrations. They did have a large vegetable patch that sustained them. Heino recalls eating sweet potato, tapioca, breadfruit, damper (unleavened bread), rice, soups, and stews.<sup>11</sup>

After the war, Vijsma was ordained as a minister on March 1, 1949. During that year, he served as Sabbath School and Y.P.M.V. director for the East Java Mission.<sup>12</sup> That same year, Vijsma took Heino and moved to West New Guinea to build a house and prepare the way for the rest of his family.<sup>13</sup> He started several new church groups in West New Guinea. In 1950, he organized the West New Guinea Mission, where he served as the president and treasurer.<sup>14</sup> Vijsma pastored a Dutch Adventist church in Hollandia. He found a piece of land in Berg en Dal (Argapura), Hollandia, to build his house and later the first church in Hollandia. Later on, the rest of his family joined him in Hollandia (capital town of West New Guinea, today known as Jayapura). The Vijsmas held Sabbath School and church services in their living room. Later, a site was selected on the same property to build a church, but the land was hilly. The whole family was then employed as an earth moving company, digging and carting dirt every day from afternoon to evening until the hill had been leveled and prepared for building.<sup>15</sup>

In 1953, Vijsma and his family welcomed the Tilstra family to their home, where about 30 Dutch-Indonesian members met for worship on Sabbath mornings.<sup>16</sup> Tilstra, together with Vijsma and with the help of church members, built the first Seventh-day Adventist church building in Berg en Dal.

Vijsma felt a call to help the natives, and an opportunity arose to show some gospel film strips. He set up the equipment in the main street, and everybody who passed was attracted to the display. About 400–700 natives attended regularly, and the missionary explained the pictures. Though most of the natives knew something of Christ, they had never seen Him as he was now presented. Some of the natives requested that a minister visit their village and show the gospel pictures again. One day, Vijsma and his son were traveling by jeep in a bush track on which they had to cross rivers without any bridges, and they got stuck in the mud for several hours. Though they arrived late, they found the people who had come from far away to hear the sweet story of Christ

still awaiting their arrival. The missionary, tired and wet, had to go forward and preach the gospel in the strength given from on high. This same village gave permission to select a piece of land in Doyo Baru for a training school in later years.<sup>17</sup>

On March 13, 1955, they started the first training school at Berg en Dal church to train natives to spread the gospel in West New Guinea. Vijsma taught Bible and prophecies, Pastor Klaas Tilstra taught Bible and church organization, Emelie Vijsma taught language and arithmetic, and Tina Tilstra taught first aid, elementary hydrotherapy, and nutrition. A happier group of students could scarcely be found anywhere. They were eager to learn, they studied hard, and they painstakingly copied the lessons from the blackboard.

After several months, six young men (Habel Sirami, Albert Waramory, Corneles Windesi, Matius Manisru, Lukas Yandeday, and John Uyai) formed the core of the national work force in West New Guinea and were sent as missionaries.<sup>18</sup> Equipped with supplies, medicines, and books, they set out on the long, tedious, and dangerous journey across the jungle and up the mountains to reach the native Papuans, teaching them how to read and count and telling them of our great God's love and power to heal the sick and of how He will be coming back to earth to take those who love Him. These missionaries came back full of zeal and wonderful stories of God's leading and miracles. Who can tell the results of the work of these missionaries? There are still hundreds of villages that have never seen a missionary and who are longing for deliverance from sin and superstition.

In 1956, Vijsma moved to Manokwari to lead a Dutch congregation at Panorama Boulevard (today Brawijaya) and also to supervise the on-duty local missionaries (Habel Sirami, John Uyai, and Albert Waramori) who were sent after being trained at Berg en Dal church to open the school and clinic at Aiwo (today Aibou and in Aimasi, Arfak Mountains, Manokwari). In Manokwari, Vijsma was supported by the Van Wardenburghs, a Dutch Adventist family, and built the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Brawijaya, Manokwari.

In 1960, Vijsma was moved to Sarmi to establish a church and work with the local missionaries from Berg en Dal church and Dojo Baru training school to penetrate the villages in the Sarmi interior to Mamberamo area. He purchased a lot in Sarmi to build a missionary house and a poultry farm. In 1962 Ernest and Emelie taught in Doyo Baru training school.

## Later Life

For the education of their children, the family moved to Australia in 1963 and settled in Cooranbong. Ernest worked for the Sanitarium Health Food Company for nine years. He retired in 1972, after 41 years of service. After long and untiring years of service, Ernest died on June 5, 1990, at Charles Harrison Home, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.<sup>19</sup>

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Vijsma, Haino. "Over the Border They Had Their Struggles, Too." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, August 13, 1956, 2–3.

Vysma, Heino. Unpublished article, August 4, 2017. Personal collection of Sharlene Vysma William.

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## NOTES

1. The Ministry of Justice Birth Certificate no. K. 3/1/5369, September 28, 1951, Ernst Vysma, Djakarta, Indonesia.
2. J. N. Beamish, "Ernest Hugo Vysma obituary," *Record*, August 18, 1990, 13.
3. Heino Vysma, unpublished article, August 4, 2017, personal collection of Sharlene Vysma William.
4. Ibid.
5. His first name is sometimes given as Ernst and other times as Ernest. His last name was spelled Vysma in Indonesia but for some reason was changed to Vijsma when he moved to Australia.
6. Beamish, "Ernest Hugo Vysma obituary," 13.
7. Rajoaman Nainggolan, "Indonesia Union College: A Historical Study of a Seventh-day Adventist Institution" (Ed.D. diss., Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1985), 83.
8. New South Wales Death Certificate no. 10397/2003, Emelie Marianne Vysma, New South Wales, Australia.

9. K. Tilstra, "After Liberation," *Far Eastern Divison Outlook*, June–July 1946, 2–3.
  10. Ernest Hugo Vijsma, worker's file, Southern Asia Pacific Division archives.
  11. Heino Vysma, unpublished article.
  12. "East Java Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1949), 112.
  13. Haino Vijsma, "Over the Border They Had Their Struggles, Too," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, August 13, 1956, 2.
  14. V. T. Armstrong, "Extending into New Territory," *Far Eastern Divison Outlook*, April 1950, 1; "West New Guinea Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1951), 119.
  15. Haino Vijsma, "They Had Their Struggles," 2–3.
  16. Albertine Klingbeil Tilstra, *A Dutchman Bound for Paradise* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 75–96.
  17. Vijsma, "They Had Their Struggles," 3; *Ibid.*, 96–101.
  18. Tilstra, *Dutchman Bound For Paradise*, 96–101.
  19. Beamish, "Ernest Hugo Vysma obituary," 13.
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