

Boulting, Wanda Eliza (Niebuhr) (1898–1997)

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Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian*, *Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Wanda Eliza (Niebuhr) Boulting was a teacher in the South Pacific Division in the first half of the 20th century.

Early Life

Wanda Niebuhr was born in Tahiti on April 27, 1898.¹

Her mother, Grace, learned of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) message from American missionaries in Tahiti and came to the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital (SS&H) seeking medical treatment in 1912. There she decided to become a Seventh-day Adventist.² Not long after she returned home, her husband passed away. Grace, then 39 years of age, and her daughter Wanda, then 15, were baptized in Samoa on the last day of 1913³ Grace was persuaded to sail back to Australia with Wanda so that both could prepare for mission service.

Education in Australia

In 1915 Wanda entered the Australasian Missionary College (AMC), New South Wales, to do preparatory studies before training to be a teacher.⁴ She made steady progress throughout the war years until government authorities became aware that she, being from Samoa, had German citizenship and should be in a low-security



Wanda (Niebuhr) Boulting

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

prison. College authorities negotiated a compromise, enabling her to remain as a student on the condition that she reported to the local policeman periodically. She was struck down in 1919 with the influenza epidemic that was sweeping the world.⁵ She recovered and graduated from the teachers' course at the end of 1919.⁶ Meanwhile, her mother had entered the SS&H and completed the nursing course in 1920.⁷ At 46 years of age, Grace was understandably dubbed "Gran" by her classmates⁸

First Years of Teaching

Conveniently, Wanda's first few years of teaching were spent in Sydney, where her mother was studying and working.⁹ Then she was appointed back to the campus of her alma mater to teach in the elementary school!¹⁰ In 1930 she transferred to Tasmania for five years, teaching at Glen Huon, a multigrade elementary school catering to the small Adventist community of orchardists and farmers. In 1934 she had 12 pupils in grades one to six.¹¹ She taught at Papanui Central School, Christchurch, New Zealand, from 1935 to 1937, where there were approximately 70 students and three other teachers for company.¹²

Overseas Mission Service

From the bracing climates of Tasmania and South New Zealand, Wanda was appointed to the steamy coast of Papua for a three-year stint, 1938–1940, to pioneer a girl's school at Vilirupu.¹³ Her mother, Grace, accompanied her to render medical assistance to the local people.¹⁴ This assignment was eventful for both women. Wanda wrote of her successes with the youngsters, even taking into her home a motherless babe suffering malnutrition.¹⁵ She told of her mother, then over 60 years of age, trekking into the jungle to treat patients. On one occasion, her mother spent all day applying hot water and ointment to a lad's arm that was pierced by the poisonous barb of a stingray. He recovered.¹⁶

Unfortunately, after about 18 months in the tropics, Grace Niebuhr came down with filariasis and returned to the SS&H for treatment.¹⁷ Wanda remained at the mission station, teaching until her recall to Australia at the end of 1940.¹⁸

Back in Australia

In 1941 Wanda taught at Newcastle Central School¹⁹ and then moved north to Toowoomba (1942)²⁰ and Rockhampton, Queensland (1943–1945).²¹ After World War II she was transferred back to her familiar school at AMC for the important role of teaching where trainees learned pedagogy by observation and practice. Her years of teaching experience were obvious in her work at AMC elementary school, where she remained for 12 years until her retirement in 1958.²²

On December 8, 1960, Wanda and widower Elder Charles James Boulting were married in the Avondale SDA Church, a service appropriately concluded with a guard of honor formed by some of Wanda's former students.²³ Wanda and Charles James remained in the Avondale area. Charles James Boulting died 14 years later;²⁴ and shortly after, Wanda's mother also died, just a few months short of turning 100.²⁵ Nimble and alert almost to the end, Wanda died on March 17, 1997, just over a month before her 99th birthday.²⁶

Legacy

After 39 years of elementary school teaching in New South Wales, Tasmania, Queensland, New Zealand, and Papua, Wanda Niebuhr's influence was widespread and well established in the Adventist community. Her teaching style was orthodox, highly regarded by church officials, and imitated by numerous trainees.

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