



Lynn Hamilton McMahon

Photo courtesy of Sue Tinworth.

McMahon, Lynn Hamilton (1928–2010)

SHIRLEY TARBURTON

Shirley Tarburton, M.Litt. (Distinction) (University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, Australia) retired in 2008 after 40 years teaching church-school (mainly high school but including eight years at university). An Australian, she has taught in four mission fields, Australia, and New Zealand. She has authored five

books and co-authored one on church history, biography and family history, as well as several magazine articles. She is married to Dr. Michael Tarburton with two adult children and four grandchildren.

Lynn McMahon was an Australian Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) medical doctor who was the first medical director of the Atoifi Hospital, an SDA mission hospital on the island of Malaita in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (now, Solomon Islands).

Birth and Early Life

Lynn Hamilton McMahon was born in Warburton, Victoria, Australia, on September 24, 1928. He was the eldest of the five children of Benjamin Hamilton (1904–1980) and Hilda May (Howse) McMahon (1905–1980). Both of his parents had been brought up as Seventh-day Adventists, and his father was a church schoolteacher at the time of Lynn's birth, although he later became the education director for the Australasian Division. Lynn had three brothers, Val Edmund, John Teychenne, and Bruce David Benjamin, and one sister, Pamela Fay (Kent, May 29, 1935–February 10, 2015).¹

Education

When Lynn was four years old, his father was transferred to the Papanui Central School, so the family moved to Christchurch, New Zealand, in January 1933.² He had barely reached school age when his father was transferred back to the SDA South Pacific Division office, and the McMahon family settled in Wahroonga, New South Wales, Australia, in January 1935.³ Here, in the old hall opposite the Wahroonga SDA School, Lynn went to school.⁴ The family lived in Wahroonga for nine years.⁵ During his school years, Lynn was baptized and joined the SDA church.

In 1944, his father was the principal of the Australasian Missionary College at Avondale,⁶ and McMahon, now 15, studied there for the year. Back in Wahroonga again in 1945,⁷ he finished high school and then, in 1951, enrolled in Sydney University to study medicine.⁸ To finance his study, he took holiday jobs and during term worked part-time. He drove trucks and also became a master drainer, thus able to append "M.D." to his name before completing his medical degree.⁹

Marriage and Family

Part way through his course, on September 1, 1953, Lynn McMahon married Maurine Lenore Powrie.¹⁰ Maurine had been born in Sydney on October 9, 1930. Her parents were Pastor Robert Henry (1900–1993) and Edith Lenore (Hindson) Powrie (1899–1991), and she was the eldest of five children.¹¹ At the time she was born, her father was working on an evangelistic team in the suburb of Parramatta.¹² He subsequently served in South

Australia and Western Australia, where Maurine had her education.¹³ After leaving school, she trained as a kindergarten teacher and taught in South Australia prior to her marriage.¹⁴ When she knew she would be marrying a doctor, she left teaching and enrolled in the nursing course at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital, studying there for just one year in 1953.¹⁵ As her husband was still studying for four years after their marriage, Maureen went back to kindergarten teaching and continued after their first child, Sue, was born, in order to support the family. Sue was cared for by a kind friend, but the McMahons had to live very frugally for those years.¹⁶

Lynn and Maurine had four children, Beverley Sue, Kerry Anne, Michael Hamilton, and Robert Kim.¹⁷

Career

After McMahon graduated with his medical degrees in 1957, he completed his internship at Lewisham Hospital in Sydney and became a senior resident there.¹⁸ In September 1958, the McMahons, now with two daughters, moved about 500 kilometers (300 miles) west of Sydney to the small inland town of Lake Cargelligo, where McMahon was the only doctor for 100 kilometers (62 miles) in any direction. He worked there for eight years, during which time their two sons were born.¹⁹

McMahon loved boats and water sports, and living so close to the lake, he was able to enjoy recreation on the water. Remembering the canoe he built when he was a boy, he started a company to build yachts and speed boats, which he designed as a sideline.²⁰ However, he focused mainly on improving the health of his community, not only during work hours but also in his own time. A big step was to introduce and run a church-sponsored Five-Day Stop Smoking Plan, which was very successful.²¹ He also contributed to improving Aboriginal health at the Murrin Bridge community, about 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) north of Lake Cargelligo.²²

Atoifi Adventist Hospital

Toward the end of 1965, he accepted the challenge to leave his comfortable practice, uproot his family, and go to Malaita in the Solomon Islands to become the medical director of a new SDA hospital that was nearing completion.²³ It took quite a bit of preparation and planning, and it was May 1966 before he left his position in Lake Cargelligo.²⁴ The family left Sydney for Atoifi, Malaita, on June 23, 1966.²⁵

The 70-bed hospital was officially opened on August 25, 1966,²⁶ but even before then, McMahon was already fully occupied with a busy schedule from sunrise to well beyond sunset.²⁷ He treated medical conditions he had never encountered before, many of them very serious.²⁸ He always prayed before treating any patient.²⁹ He and his nursing colleagues, Lens and Betty Larwood, project manager and directors of nursing, ensured that the hospital was soon operating at capacity.³⁰

The hospital was not in an urban area. It was far from any town or other missionaries and was accessible only by sea.³¹ In addition to his work in the hospital and laboratory, McMahon often needed to make his own surgical tools.³² He also contributed to the spiritual life on campus. The whole McMahon family was involved in running outreach, such as Branch Sabbath Schools³³ and visiting nearby villages. Maurine McMahon and Betty Larwood ran a women's club teaching family health and welfare and also provided educational social activities.³⁴ A Bible study class was also formed where participants were assisted to complete a set of Bible Correspondence School studies through the Voice of Prophecy. This was run by the hospital chaplain, Pastor Buka, and strongly supported by the McMahon family and other hospital staff.³⁵

There had been opposition from some local villages ever since the property was obtained, and in November 1965, Brian Dunn, the first business manager and director of nursing, had been fatally speared within the first month of his arrival.³⁶ McMahon was suspicious about a request he received late at night to go to a distant village to treat a sick man, so he instead sent the messengers back with a stretcher to bring the patient to the hospital. The stretcher was returned with the message that the man was now well, but a government patrolman warned McMahon that they had been informed it was a ruse to lure him into sharing Brian Dunn's fate.³⁷

Countering the ever-present concerns for their safety were the expressions of gratitude and love for the family that came from others who came to the hospital. One, a leader of the South Seas Evangelical Church, said,

We do thank God that you are here. You need never fear. In our village church we pray for you every morning and evening. All the rest of our mission churches also pray for you.³⁸

When he was able, McMahon itinerated in other areas of the Solomon Islands where there was no doctor³⁹ and engaged in other visitation around the mission territory.⁴⁰ He went on patrol with a team from the hospital, walking along jungle trails for days, visiting those who because of traditional superstitions would not come to the hospital. Often these visits resulted in new students for the school beside the hospital or even whole families moving to an SDA village where they could learn more about Christ.⁴¹

During his time there, the bed capacity of the hospital was increased from 70 to 100.⁴² To fill the increasing need for well-trained nurses, McMahon dreamed of commencing a school of nursing at the hospital that would supply nurses, not only for the hospital but also for clinics around the union mission.⁴³ His reports always contained impressive statistics. His second annual report stated that the hospital had 1,839 inpatients, 11,869 outpatients, and 4,509 patients treated on patrol.⁴⁴

Further Study

Through necessity, McMahon became skilled in treatments usually given by highly qualified specialists in developed societies. He performed hundreds of cataract operations and many difficult surgeries, from bowel resections to craniotomies.⁴⁵ In 1969, he was granted two years leave of absence in order to gain further

qualifications in surgery.⁴⁶

Leaving Malaita in December 1969, the McMahon family proceeded to Ireland,⁴⁷ where McMahon spent 10 months in Dublin⁴⁸ at the Royal College of Surgeons, becoming a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland (F.R.C.S.I.), a much-coveted qualification.⁴⁹ Leaving Ireland, McMahon took his family to Scotland, where he gained further experience in surgery at Dunfermline, near Edinburgh, for the next two years.⁵⁰

Return to Australia

Although his intention had been to return to Malaita, circumstances had changed, and his maturing family needed to be near their places of education. So, in 1972 the family returned to Wairoa, in Sydney, New South Wales, where he worked for two years.⁵¹ This was followed by 14 years practicing in Melbourne. During this time, as well as running his practice, he regularly worked at the SDA sanitarium at Warburton.⁵² During these years he returned to Atoifi in the Solomon Islands a number of times, applying his surgical skills. He also established and generously supported medical work in Papua New Guinea and India.⁵³

Maurine succumbed to cancer and died on December 26, 1986.⁵⁴ A year later, McMahon sold his Melbourne practice and home and moved to Lake Macquarie, near Avondale, in New South Wales.⁵⁵

In January 1989, he married a widow, Sylvia van Schoonhoven (van Denhoven).⁵⁶ For some five years, he maintained a medical practice, but declining health encouraged him to retire.⁵⁷ Sylvia died in May 2006.⁵⁸

Last Years and Death

McMahon moved into a retirement unit in Cooranbong, New South Wales, where he was able to have meals provided. For a time he moved to the SDA retirement village in Wairoa.⁵⁹ Then about 2006, he returned to Cooranbong, where he lived in the Charles Harrison Nursing Home for his final four years.⁶⁰ There he died on October 21, 2010.⁶¹

Dr. Lynn McMahon was a kind-hearted, generous man who was a blessing to thousands and whose life demonstrated a firm faith in God.⁶²

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