



Lyndon and Grace Thrift, 1947

Photo courtesy of Merlene Thrift.

Thrift, Lyndon Robinson (1920–2018), and Grace Merle (Stewart) (1913–2010)

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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* and the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Lyndon and Grace Thrift served in the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Australia. Both Lyndon and Grace were trained as teachers, and they made a significant contribution to the development of Seventh-day Adventist education throughout the South Pacific.

An Unsettled Beginning

Lyndon Thrift was born in Quirindi, NSW, on July 18, 1920,¹ to William and Edith (Warfield) Thrift. His parents had become Seventh-day Adventists approximately six years earlier under the ministry of Charles Paap. His father began work with the Sanitarium Health Food Company (SHF) in 1920, serving as engineering foreman at the Cooranbong factory. Lyndon's schooling therefore began on the campus where the factory and the Australasian Missionary College (AMC) were located.²

On the day that the Sydney Harbour Bridge was opened, March 19, 1932, the Thrift family sailed for Western Australia. William Thrift was under appointment to supervise the building of an SHF factory at Carmel and manage its operation. Lyndon therefore attended the nearby Bickley school. In September 1935 the family made yet another move in order for Lyndon's father to initiate the construction and management of a factory at Warburton, VIC. For Lyndon personally the year 1936 was a troubled one, including a suspension from school and failure to attain the Leaving Certificate. He took up work on the printing presses at Signs Publishing Company, but saw no future for himself in that trade. For that reason he transferred to the SHF factory under the Junior Worker's Plan, which guaranteed a wage subsidy that was deposited for future college fees.³ It provided some sort of goal in life, albeit undefined.

Stability

Thrift joined the baptismal class at the Warburton church and was baptized in September 1937. In 1939 he returned to the AMC campus and enrolled in woodworking and Bible classes, still uncertain of his road ahead. Geoffrey Richardson, his woodworking teacher, became a mentor and encouraged him to do advanced studies. In 1940 Thrift therefore completed the first year of the elementary teacher's course even though he lacked the Leaving Certificate as an entrance requirement. In the following year he completed the Leaving Certificate, including Latin to intermediate standard. During this time he supported himself by working night shifts in the SHF factory and splitting wood on Sundays to supply baker's ovens. In 1942 he was permitted to complete the teacher's course, graduating at the end of the year. His first appointment was to teach at the Wahroonga school, Sydney. In his spare time he improved his Latin to the Leaving Certificate level. This gave him entrance to the University of Sydney, where he took part-time studies in English and Latin in 1944 while continuing to teach at Wahroonga. His university studies were successful.⁴

During his studies at AMC and teaching experience at Wahroonga, Lyndon and Grace Stewart became close friends. Grace was born March 27, 1913, in Tonga of missionary parents George and Evelyn Stewart. She had graduated from the Melbourne Teacher's College, followed by various teaching assignments in Victorian and New South Wales SDA schools. She was then appointed as assistant to the education director of the Australasian Division, followed by a position in the demonstration school on the AMC campus.⁵ Lyndon and Grace were married in the AMC campus church on January 10, 1945.⁶

Mission Service

Two months before his wedding Lyndon was appointed to Batuna Training School in the Solomon Islands⁷ but it was wartime, and permission from the military authorities had to be obtained before missionaries could resume their stations. The school at Batuna had suffered deterioration and needed an overhaul. It was 12 months before Lyndon was cleared for entry into the Solomon Islands. In the meantime, throughout most of 1945, he taught at the Wahroonga school.⁸

Permission to enter the Solomon Islands was granted only to Lyndon. He and Grace were separated for 12 months, until he returned to Australia in November 1946. He found the Japanese and Allied armies had done minimal damage to the mission station, but disuse during the four years meant there was more than the usual preparation work to be done before the school could be reopened. Boats were used to transport students and supplies, so it was important to have an efficient harbor. The first priority was to restore the slipway, because shipworm had invaded some of the timbers. Lyndon also had to plan ahead for the food supply. Gardens were replanted, and fencing was repaired to keep out marauding pigs. Logs were floated in from nearby villages, and the timber mill started up again. The school was readied for opening in early 1946, with an enrollment of 55 students. The school year finished with a choral festival, all the surrounding villages staging their own choir. Telina village rendered the Hallelujah Chorus from memory, a cappella and without a conductor.⁹

With school activities in recess Lyndon hurried back to Grace in Australia. Permission was obtained for Grace to make the return trip with Lyndon in April 1947. They had scarcely settled at Batuna when plans were made for a new mission center to be developed near the capital, Honiara. The Batuna school continued to function, but in December 1947 Lyndon and Grace transferred to Guadalcanal Island to pioneer what became known as Betikama Missionary School.¹⁰

The land purchased for the school had been owned by Lever Brothers, who worked a coconut plantation to the north of it. Its alluvial flatlands were bounded on the east by the Lunga River or Big Water (Betikama in the local dialect). Lyndon had chosen 13 young men from the Batuna school to help him establish the food gardens, dormitories, classrooms, and teachers' quarters. Across the river lay the Henderson Airfield, a base for the American troops who had surplus materials they sold cheaply to the mission. Most of the mission buildings were therefore ex-army Quonset huts taken apart and reassembled by Lyndon's assistants. They searched the

jungle for abandoned rolls of barbed wire that they used for fencing. They discovered many drums of fuel, overgrown with foliage or partly buried, and these finds were rewarded with cash from the mission. They also contracted with Lever Brothers to gather their coconuts and process them into copra, splitting the proceeds three ways, one third to Lever Brothers, one third to the Batuna boys, and one third to the mission. The church on site was erected from these mission funds. As the buildings were completed, school lessons were phased in, first in the evenings, then early mornings, and eventually for a regular program of five full mornings each week. In the first year, 1948, the enrollment topped 65.¹¹

In October Grace returned to Australia for the birth of their first child, Merlene. Lyndon followed three months later for a furlough. His next assignment was to supervise the Omaura Training School in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. He and Grace arrived there in May 1949, but within a few months they were reappointed to pioneer yet another central training institution, this time at Kabiufa, near Goroka in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea.¹²

The mission station itself was an established one, but Lyndon's task was to add improved school facilities. It was to be a coeducational boarding institution; therefore an adequate food supply was essential. The move to Kabiufa was primarily prompted by the availability of excellent soil. First, a large area had to be made pigproof, so Lyndon supervised the digging of a deep perimeter trench, or baret (pidgin English). The gardens produced extraordinary crops, some sweet potatoes weighing as much as nine kilograms. Lyndon also set up a sawmill and negotiated a supply of logs from the local Kotuni villagers. A planer was installed to manufacture flooring and weatherboards, and these materials were used to build dormitories and classrooms. Any excess was sold locally to generate some income for the enterprise. Two Mussau men, Moses and Masibau, did most of the teaching, while Lyndon was increasingly involved in administration as education and Missionary Volunteer director for the North-East New Guinea Mission.¹³ A second daughter, Evelyn, was born in Lae in 1951. In August 1952 the family returned to Australia on furlough.¹⁴

Homeland Service

Lyndon used his furlough time to advantage, taking some units of study from the University of Queensland. He was appointed as teacher and assistant principal at Avondale High School on the AMC campus for the 1953 school year. During that year their third daughter, Yvonne, was born in nearby Kurri Kurri Hospital. From 1954 through 1959 Lyndon served as principal of the Wahroonga SDA School, suburban Sydney. He then took two years study leave to pursue further studies at the University of Queensland. He completed a Bachelor of Arts and a Diploma of Education. In 1962 he returned to the AMC campus as a lecturer in the Teacher Training Department until 1964. He remained on campus from 1965 through 1968, serving as principal of the Avondale High School and at the same time completing a Bachelor of Education. There followed three years in the Victorian Conference, 1969 through 1971, as principal of Hawthorn High School.¹⁵

The year 1972 marked the time Lyndon began administrative responsibilities at the union conference level. He served as education director with the Trans-Commonwealth Union Conference until 1979. During that period, in January 1975, he was ordained to the ministry at the Victorian annual camp meeting. His term as director culminated in a sponsored world trip to gather ideas for improving the Australasian church school system according to the denomination's philosophical ideals.¹⁶ On arrival back in Australia Lyndon was appointed education director with the Trans-Tasman Union Conference until 1982.¹⁷

Retirement

In 1982 Lyndon and Grace retired to the quiet country town of Taree, NSW. Five years later, in 1987, he was invited to participate in a teachers' convention at Camp Howqua, VIC, at which he was presented with the Medallion of Merit by George Akers, director of the General Conference Education Department. He was the first recipient of the General Conference award.¹⁸

Grace died peacefully at Taree on November 27, 2010.¹⁹ Lyndon continued to enjoy the comforts of his own home because relatives came to care for him. He died on October 20, 2018.²⁰ He and Grace are resting side by side in the Avondale Adventist cemetery, Cooranbong, NSW.

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