

# Mitchell, Donald Elmer George (1927–1993) and Ruby Lorraine Brown (1928–2019)

---

## GRACE ANN-PENNING

Grace Ann-Penning was educated in Australia, Fiji, and Tonga; she then attended Avondale High School and graduated from the Secretarial Course in 1968 at Avondale College. She married ministerial student Geoff Kane in 1969 and had a son & daughter and now seven grandchildren. She has life experience as an author, minister/missionary wife, newspaper editor, farm fine wool manager, business woman, and community leader.

---

Don Mitchell served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an evangelist, church pastor, district director, and union and conference president. His ministry and leadership as an administrator in the Pacific Islands for 25 years was centered on his innate love of people and fulfilling God's work with the full support of his wife and five children. He and his wife, Lorraine, lived in 18 homes in seven countries and Australian states over the course of their ministry including Western Australia, New South Wales, Fiji, Tonga, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and North Queensland.<sup>1</sup>

## Early Life and Education



Don and Lorraine Mitchell at the Coronation of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV of Tonga, 1967.

Photo courtesy of Grace Ann-Penning, daughter of Don and Lorraine Mitchell.

Donald Elmer George Mitchell, known as Don, was born at Mareeba, North Queensland, on December 7, 1927.<sup>2</sup> His parents were George Allan Mitchell, born in 1887 at Prospect, New South Wales,<sup>3</sup> and Grace Cherry, born in 1889 at Newbury, Victoria. Grace Brown graduated from the advanced normal course at the Australasian Missionary College (AMC) in 1914.<sup>4</sup> In 1915, George Mitchell resigned from literature evangelism and Grace Mitchell left a teaching position at Wahroonga Seventh-day Adventist school when they were sent to the Mona Mission in North Queensland. Grace Mitchell continued teaching while her husband was a staff member at the mission. Don Mitchell was born eleven years later as the baby brother of four older sisters.<sup>5</sup> In 1934, the family moved to Cooranbong, New South Wales, where Mitchell attended the Cooranbong State School from 1935 to 1939, and then Avondale Central School for his intermediate certificate in 1942.<sup>6</sup>

After spending a year studying the building construction course at the AMC, Mitchell went to work on his uncle's banana farm at Yandina, Queensland.<sup>7</sup> While at Yandina, he became convicted that God was calling him to train for the ministry.<sup>8</sup> He was baptized in Yandina on November 11, 1944,<sup>9</sup> before returning to the AMC to study the ministerial course.<sup>10</sup> Mitchell became best friends with Rex Cobbin, a friendship that has extended to their families.<sup>11</sup>

While attending college, Mitchell lived with his parents on their small farm acreage at 93 Avondale Road. He milked the cow daily, helped in the orchard, and also worked at the Sanitarium Health Food factory in order to pay his college fees.<sup>12</sup> While at college, Mitchell met Ruby Lorraine Brown, newly arrived from Victoria and training as a nurse's aid in obstetrics at the Sydney Sanitarium.<sup>13</sup>

Ruby Lorraine Brown, the only child of Leslie Cecil Brown and Verose Annie Irene Adele Norris, was born at Regent, Victoria, on October 11, 1928.<sup>14</sup> Les and Del Brown were popular members of society in Melbourne when they married. Del Brown converted to Seventh-day Adventism after attending a tent meeting. The Browns moved to Warburton where Lorraine Brown completed her education and worked in various places in her early teens including the Sanitarium Health Food Company, Signs Publishing Company, and Warburton Hydro. When her parents' marriage ended in divorce, Lorraine Brown and her mother moved to Cooranbong, staying with kind relatives, where she met Don Mitchell.

Mitchell graduated from the ministerial course in 1948.<sup>15</sup> Don and Lorraine Mitchell were married on January 18, 1949, at Cooranbong by W. G. Murdoch<sup>16</sup>

## Marriage and Years of Service

Following their wedding, the Mitchells were sent to Collie, Western Australia, a coal mining town south of Perth, to join Ray Stanley's evangelistic ministry.<sup>17</sup> Their union was blessed with five children: Grace Lenore, Lynette Adele, Earlene, Donald Leslie George, and Narell Raye.<sup>18</sup> Lorraine Mitchell would play the organ at the evangelistic program with a bassinet beside her while she kept her eye on her oldest daughter who was supposed to be watching the second oldest.

The Mitchells also lived in Katanning, Midland Junction, Bassandean, and Queens Park while in Western Australia, conducting evangelistic meetings in canvas tents with sawdust floors and posting banners outside their homes that said “Dead Men Do Tell Tales.” Don Mitchell was ordained on March 18, 1955, in Perth, Western Australia.<sup>19</sup> The Mitchells then spent four years in pastoral ministry from 1958 to 1961 in the South New South Wales Conference, in Goulburn and then Bega.<sup>20</sup>

The family of seven moved to Lautoka, Fiji, in January 1962.<sup>21</sup> Mitchell was district director for eighteen months in Lautoka, then moved to Tonga where he was president of the Tonga Mission for seven years. In 1970, he became president of the Central Pacific Union Mission (CPUM) based in Suva, Fiji.<sup>22</sup> Mitchell travelled much during this time, visiting particularly the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, the New Hebrides, French Polynesia, and New Caledonia.<sup>23</sup>

## Church Administration and Leadership

Mitchell was president of CPUM for ten years and oversaw its move from Fiji to Papatoetoe, New Zealand, in 1973 when difficulties arose with visa issues and the Fijian Government.<sup>24</sup> He then became president of the Papua New Guinea Union Mission in 1980 for five years where the headquarters were located in Lae, Papua New Guinea.<sup>25</sup>

Mitchell’s last four years of active ministry were as president of the Northern Australian Conference.<sup>26</sup> He was known as a big-hearted man with an infectious smile.<sup>27</sup> As an innately gentle timid man, for 49 years he went beyond his natural inclinations and absolutely gave everything with an open loving heart to his ministry. Of his 28 years in administrative leadership, 25 years were spent in the Pacific Islands.<sup>28</sup>

## Retirement and Later Years

Mitchell retired in 1989 due to feeling unusually tired, unwell, and unable to carry out his work effectively. His breast cancer, which had been belatedly diagnosed in the early 1980s, while president of PNGUM had unknowingly returned. Don and Lorraine Mitchell settled in Morayfield near Brisbane.<sup>29</sup> For three and half years, Mitchell enjoyed frequently playing golf with his wife—a hobby that began at the end of 1982 while in Lae, Papua New Guinea—and traveling anywhere in Australia to visit their children and grandchildren, preaching whenever asked. When at home, he continued his habit of rising at 5 a.m. each morning to spend time in his study journaling, reading his Bible, and praying.<sup>30</sup>

When Mitchell became too ill to travel or do anything more, other than attend to his early morning devotions, he was cared for full-time by his wife until the last few hours of his life. He died on July 3, 1993, at Redcliffe Hospital, Brisbane, and was buried in the Caboolture Lawn Cemetery.<sup>31</sup>

Lorraine Mitchell lived another 26 years, moving initially to Guyra, New South Wales, where she was on the district preaching plan into her late seventies. Her son, Don, Jr., predeceased her in March 2003. Her family celebrated a surprise eightieth birthday at the North New South Wales Conference camp meeting on October 11, 2008. In 2010, she moved to the Yarra Valley, Victoria, where she spent her final years near three of her daughters, celebrating her ninetieth birthday in October 2018.<sup>32</sup> She died on March 22, 2019. All of her eleven grandchildren attended her funeral. She was also survived by 18 great-grandchildren. She was buried in Upper Yarra Public Cemetery, Wesburn, Victoria.<sup>33</sup>

The legacy that Don and Lorraine Mitchell left behind was evident at Lorraine Mitchell's funeral when Tongan and Fijian family members, in honor of the Mitchells' long service and love for them, gave her a Pacific Island send off with a Fijian tapa cloth and a Tongan woven royal mat. They sang with guitar accompaniment and performed the burial according to traditional Tongan custom. It was an appropriate closing chapter for a couple who gave their lives in service to others.

---

## SOURCES

"1955 Overseas Ordinations." *Ministry Magazine*, March 1956.

"Appointments and Transfers Made at the Annual Meeting, 1948: Final List." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, January 24, 1949.

Beyers, James D. "Life Sketch of Eric H. Cherry." *Australasian Record*, November 13, 1972.

Chaney, Bertha S. "Graduation Exercises." *Australasian Union Conference Record*, October 27, 1913.

Cobbin, Rex, Harold Harker, and Frank Cantrill. "Donald Elmer George Mitchell obituary." *Australasian Record*, September 11, 1993.

"Credentials and Licences." *Australasian Record*, December 10, 1914.

"Distribution of Labour." *Australasian Record* December 10, 1914.

Donald Elmer George Mitchell Biographical Records. South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives.

Donald Elmer George Mitchell Service Records. South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives.

Lock, W. N. "George Allan Mitchell obituary." *Australasian Record*, February 3 1964.

Maywald, G. W. "Grace Mitchell obituary." *Australasian Record*, May 29, 1978.

Mitchell, D. E. G. "Flights Log Book 1951-1990." Held in the personal collection of the author,

Murdoch, W. G. "Mitchell-Brown marriage." *Australasian Record*, February 7, 1949.

"Our Leaders Affirm Their Faith." *Australasian Record*, October 19, 1981.

"Outgoing Missionaries." *Australasian Record*, January 8, 1962.

Owing to the growing attendance..." *Australasian Record*, January 25, 1915.

Parmenter, K. S. "Australasian Division Mission Field Development." *Australasian Record*, May 14, 1973.

Pretyman, C. H. "The Recent Meetings of the Union Conference Committee." *Australasian Union Conference Record*, November 15, 1915.

Stanley, Robyn and Chester Stanley. "Ruby Lorraine Mitchell obituary." *Australasian Record*, June 1, 2019.

---

## NOTES

1. Unless otherwise credited, this biography is written from the personal knowledge of the author, the eldest daughter of Donald and Lorraine Mitchell.
2. Donald Elmer George Mitchell Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Mitchell, Donald Elmer George," document: "Personal Service Record."
3. C. H. Pretyman, "The Recent Meetings of the Union Conference Committee," *Australasian Union Conference Record*, November 15, 1915, 7; W. N. Lock, "George Allan Mitchell obituary," *Australasian Record*, February 3 1964, 15.
4. Bertha S. Chaney, "Graduation Exercises," *Australasian Union Conference Record*, October 27, 1913, 8; "Credentials and Licences," *Australasian Record*, December 10, 1914, 18; "Distribution of Labour," *Australasian Record* December 10, 1914, 18; W. N. Lock, "George Allan Mitchell obituary," *Australasian Record*, February 3, 1964, 15; James D. Beyers, "Life Sketch of Eric H. Cherry," *Australasian Record*, November 13, 1972, 14; G. W. Maywald, "Grace Mitchell obituary," *Australasian Record*, May 29, 1978, 15.
5. "Credentials and Licences," *Australasian Record*, December 10, 1914, 18; "Distribution of Labour," *Australasian Record* December 10, 1914, 18; "Owing to the growing attendance..." *Australasian Record*, January 25, 1915, 8; C. H. Pretyman, "The Recent Meetings of the Union Conference Committee," *Australasian Union Conference Record*, November 15, 1915, 7.
6. Rex Cobbin, Harold Harker, and Frank Cantrill, "Donald Elmer George Mitchell obituary," *Australasian Record*, September 11, 1993, 13.
7. Ibid; Donald Elmer George Mitchell Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: 'Mitchell, Donald Elmer George;' Document: 'Personal Service Record.'
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

10. Rex Cobbin, Harold Harker, and Frank Cantrill, "Donald Elmer George Mitchell obituary," *Australasian Record*, September 11, 1993, 13
11. Rex Cobbin, Eulogy for Ruby Lorraine Mitchell, April 1, 2019, DVD held in the private collection of the author.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Donald Elmer George Mitchell Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Mitchell, Donald Elmer George," document: "Biographical Information Blank."
15. Donald Elmer George Mitchell Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Mitchell, Donald Elmer George," document: "Worker's Biographical Record."
16. W. G. Murdoch, "Mitchell-Brown marriage," *Australasian Record*, February 7, 1949, 7.
17. "Appointments and Transfers Made at the Annual Meeting, 1948: Final List," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, January 24, 1949, 8.
18. Donald Elmer George Mitchell Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Mitchell, Donald Elmer George," document: "Biographical Information Blank."
19. Donald Elmer George Mitchell Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Mitchell, Donald Elmer George," document: "Personal Service Record;" "1955 Overseas Ordinations," *Ministry Magazine*, March 1956, 42.
20. Donald Elmer George Mitchell Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives; Folder: 'Mitchell, Donald Elmer George;' Document: 'Personal Service Record.'
21. "Outgoing Missionaries," *Australasian Record*, January 8, 1962, 1.
22. Donald Elmer George Mitchell Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Mitchell, Donald Elmer George," document: "Personal Service Record."
23. D. E. G. Mitchell, "Flights Log Book 1951-1990," held in the personal collection of the author.
24. K. S. Parmenter, "Australasian Division Mission Field Development," *Australasian Record*, May 14, 1973, 1.
25. Donald Elmer George Mitchell Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Mitchell, Donald Elmer George," document: "Personal Service Record."
26. Rex Cobbin, Harold Harker, and Frank Cantrill, "Donald Elmer George Mitchell obituary," *Australasian Record*, September 11, 1993, 13;

27. Ibid.

28. Donald Elmer George Mitchell Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Mitchell, Donald Elmer George," document: "Personal Service Record."

29. Rex Cobbin, Harold Harker, and Frank Cantrill, "Donald Elmer George Mitchell obituary," *Australasian Record*, September 11, 1993, 13.

30. "Our Leaders Affirm Their Faith," *Australasian Record*, October 19, 1981, 7.

31. Rex Cobbin, Harold Harker, and Frank Cantrill, "Donald Elmer George Mitchell obituary," *Australasian Record*, September 11, 1993, 13

32. Ibid.

33. Robyn Stanley and Chester Stanley, "Ruby Lorraine Mitchell obituary," *Australasian Record*, June 1, 2019, 15.

---

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000