Hay, Marian Margaret (1908–1983)

HELEN MILLER

Helen Miller, born to William and Nancy Hay and educated in Brisbane, Australia, felt called by God to become a missionary nurse after hearing of health needs in the Pacific. She graduated from the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital (now Sydney Adventist Hospital) in 1969 with high distinction before proceeding to nurse in the Solomon Islands and Australia and then in New Zealand and Pitcairn Island with first husband Pastor Lewis Barker. Helen’s Master of Ministry (Family Life) degree (2009) reflects her love of study and is used in Toowoomba, supporting her husband, Pastor Keith Miller.

Marian Margaret Hay was an editor, author, and second female to graduate from the ministerial course at Australasian Missionary College.

Early Life (1908-1923)

Marian Margaret Hay was born on May 2, 1908, in Napier, New Zealand, to James (1869-1932) and Annie Hay (c.1868-1954). All four grandparents migrated to New Zealand from Scotland. Annie (Carswell) became a Seventh-day Adventist in the late 1880’s when Pastor A.G. Daniells worked in Napier. James and Annie married at the residence of W. Faulkner, Enfield Rd., Napier on November 17, 1905. At ‘Whitsome Hill,’ their farm near Tiki Tiki in the isolated East Cape area of New Zealand, they raised Marian and her only sibling, William (1912-1995).

Annie taught Marian to read. Wanting further education, Marian went to live with her cousins in town, but extreme homesickness forced her to return home after less than a term. At age thirteen, she realised she had only had a few weeks in Standard Three and could not understand it at all. She prayed earnestly that somehow God would give her an education. Shortly afterward, the New Zealand [Government] Correspondence School opened and Marian and William (Bill) enrolled as charter students in 1922. Her teacher Miss Lynn encouraged her to pursue her interest in writing which was already apparent.

Further Education (1924-1931)

After two years of primary correspondence lessons, she travelled to Oroa Missionary School (now Longburn College) and studied for the next three years, graduating with 8 other senior students. In 1924 she had been baptized by Pastor F. L. Sharp in the Manawatu River, Palmerston North, citing the influence of her Christian mother and Christian school as important components of her decision.

After spending 1927 working on the farm with her beloved family, she travelled to Australia where she enrolled at the Australasian Missionary College. Four years before she had written in her diary, “If ever I get the chance, I will learn Greek... No translation, however good, could convey the author’s inner meanings.” Thus she chose Greek 1 in the second year instead of a teaching subject, and similarly Greek 2 in year three. It was hardly surprising that her choice of subjects made her unable to graduate from the Normal (teaching) course.

However, it came as a surprise when she learnt that she had actually qualified to graduate from the Ministerial course – only the second woman to do so, and the first with Greek. Her class poem “Ad Summum” (to the highest point) was read at the Graduation Service, November 16, 1931.
Early Employment (1932-1935)

In 1931 the Australasian Union Conference realising that, “many promising young people, students from our institutions, are applying for work; and ... local conferences are not financially able to provide for additional workers,” voted to “adopt the Ministerial Trainee Plan.” This action on the part of the union enabled “suitable young people to obtain experience and demonstrate their ability for the work.” The initial intake was limited to “five young men and one young woman.”

The Committee on Distribution recommended that “Miss Marion [sic] Hay connect with the North N.S.W. Conference under the Trainee Plan.” Her first appointment was to Bible work in Cessnock in 1932, and then to Newcastle in 1933. Her creativity in weekly Sabbath School reports included a conversation between two lesson pamphlets, and one entirely in verse.

In 1934 the North New South Wales Conference appointed Marian to be the Sabbath School and Missionary Volunteer Young People’s Secretary. Within the first month in her new position, she, and two helpers, held their first camp for girls at Booragul. Her responsibility to oversee both departments included travelling at weekends to take church services, visiting isolated members, promoting the work of Sabbath School, JMV (Junior Missionary Volunteers), and Missionary Volunteers’ coursework and programs. She invested JMV at ceremonies as they completed classes and the first Master Comrade (now Master Guide) in the Australasian Division (now South Pacific Division), James Cormack at Kempsey.

The Warburton Years (1936-1968)

A seemingly unconnected event determined the last, and longest, phase of her employment. “Miss Marian Hay, the Sabbath School and M.V. Secretary for North New South Wales, was called to connect with the Signs Publishing Company as editor of ‘Our Little Friend.’” This arose because A. M. Fraser, Associate Editor of the “Signs” and Editor of “Our Little Friend,” had transferred to the Victorian Conference “to have experience in evangelical work.” He was first listed as editor of “Our Little Friend” in 1935, a semi-monthly paper for children. Now Marian had that responsibility. By February 1937, she was known as “Big Sister” to her readers sending out a 16 page issue every fortnight. Every paper was full of stories, poems, Scripture lessons, and the JMV page with Big Sister’s letter and requests for pen pals. In 1946 Norma Norris took over “Our Little Friend” for 3 years before Marian again edited it from 1949 to 1964, a total of 26 years.

Marian also became Associate Editor of the “Signs of the Times”, a position she held from December 1935 to March 1968 – working with five different editors - A. L. King, A. G. Stewart, R. P. Brown, R. C. Piper, and R. H. Parr. Her first editorial “Oldest Unfinished Dinner” dealt with an archaeological find. Her last dealt with “Water of Life.” Between the two were over 1,500 editorials, comments and articles dealing with a vast range of topics including current events, astronomy, theology, parenting, gardening, crime, and education, to name just a few. She had a unique ability to draw a spiritual lesson from every subject she considered.

Other duties included sub-editing the weekly Australasian Record, selecting and arranging illustrations and supervising the copy as it passed through the linotype and proof-reading process. When the Signs Publishing Company started printing Sabbath School lesson quarterlies in 1952, it was her task to meticulously check every text and reference.

At her retirement, editor Robert Parr wrote this reflection: “In whatever field you had a query, there was but one source of information. "Ask Miss Hay," has become a by-word in this office. Inside her head is a tremendous storehouse of knowledge—of the Scriptures, of natural phenomenon, of current affairs, of history, of biography. Was there a text that eluded you? Miss Hay would know where to put her hand on it. Did you need a quotation to round out an article? You found yourself naturally gravitating to her office at the end of the corridor. There is not one of us in this editorial department but will miss this "court of final appeal," this apparently inexhaustible storehouse of knowledge, this kindly dispenser of wise counsel and helpful advice.

Marian spent a total of 32 years in Warburton. Her mother Annie and brother Bill had left New Zealand to live with Marian in 1934 in Australia after her father’s death and foreclosure of the mortgage on their home, “Whitsome Hill.” That mortgage had been taken out on the property to pay for Marian’s education at Avondale. Bill had been forced to become a student or face deportation, so he worked his way through the Australasian Missionary College, graduating from the Business Course in 1938. Marian’s home on Blackwood Avenue, Warburton, Victoria, provided a haven for Bill till 1941 when he married and for Annie till her death in 1954. Over the years Marian shared her home with at least forty-seven young women in need of accommodation. Her interests were wide. She enjoyed reading, nature study and collecting nature stamps and gardening. Her ability to identify bird species, trees, flowers, ferns and all manner of living creatures was legendary.

The Later Years (1968-1983)

In 1968 Marian retired to Silverwater (now Brightwaters) on Lake Macquarie, New South Wales. She learned to drive and supported the Brightwaters Company (now Lakeview Church). Her strong faith and regard for people
continued to characterise her life. She travelled to New Zealand and the Solomon Islands to visit family. Marian Hay died at home on August 13, 1983.

**Contribution**

Her first book *God's-out-of-Doors* became a worldwide Senior Reading Course book in 1934. Her next book *Radiant Lives*, focused on God’s plan of salvation, *Behind the Shadows . . . God*, co-authored with Julius V. Tucker, American radio evangelist, was published during the latter days of World War II. She also served on the Signs Publishing Company Board of Management from 1940-1945 and the Book Committee from 1950-1967. Marian’s influence touched the lives of those who knew her personally, and those who knew her through her writings. Her selfless life of service and letters of encouragement have left their mark on all four of her nieces – Valerie (Wheeler-Tiller), Helen (Miller), Jillian (Macgillivray) and Carol (Tasker) and their service for God. Her official recognition as a Credentialed Missionary mirrored the way she upheld Jesus and reflected His character. Marian Hay was a pioneer – albeit an accidental one – for female ministerial workers.

**SOURCES**


Hay, Marian M. Private diaries and notebooks. Personal collection of Helen Miller.


“North New South Wales.” *Australasian Record*, November 23, 1933.

Parr, Robert H. “And so we say ‘Farewell...’” *Australasian Record*, March 11, 1968.

“Plans and Recommendations.” *Australasian Record*, September 21, 1931.


**NOTES**


4. Helen Miller, personal knowledge as a niece of Marian Hay.

5. Ethel Kranz, “Closing Exercises at the New Zealand Missionary School,” *Australasian Record*, January 31, 1927, 6.?

6. Baptismal Records of the Palmerston North Seventh-day Adventist Church, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

7. Helen Miller, personal knowledge as a niece of Marian Hay.


10. “Australasian Missionary College Cooranbong NSW 1933 Thirty-seventh Annual Announcement,” College Handbook held in the South Pacific Division Adventist Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education (the Annual Announcements are commonly known as Handbooks, 68-72; Colina E Brown who later married Nelson C. Burns had been the first woman graduate from the Ministerial Course graduating also in 1920 from the Teachers’ Course in 1920, (Ibid.).


20. *See Signs of the Times (Australian)* - mastheads of December 23, 1935 (A. L. King, editor); January 1, 1945 (A. G. Stewart, editor); November 3, 1947 (R. P. Brown, editor); May 21, 1956 (R. C. Piper, editor); May 1967 (R. H. Parr, editor); although Marian was listed as associate editor in December 1935, she was known as an Assistant Editor from January 11, 1937 to October 27, 1947, and thereafter resumed the title of associate editor.


26. According to the *Australasian Record*, vol. 72, no. 11, March 11, 1968, 1 titled “And so we say ‘Farewell” by Robert H. Parr, Marian's last day at work at the Signs Publishing Company was February 23, 1968, after which she took long service leave. Her Biographical Record, pages 6, 8 and
10 give June 19, 1968 as her retirement date page 11 lists the start of her Sustentation payment on June 20, 1968.


