

Wensell, Gunnar (1933–2017)

DANIEL OSCAR PLENC

Daniel Oscar Plenc, Th.D. (River Plate Adventist University, Entre Ríos, Argentina), currently works as a theology professor and director of the White Research Center at the River Plate Adventist University. He worked as a district pastor for twelve years. He is married to Lissie Ziegler and has three children.

Gunnar Wensell was a doctor, an ordained pastor, and a missionary in Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay, and Argentina; a medical director of Adventist hospitals; and the mayor of Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina.¹

Early Years and Education

Gunnar Edim Wensell was born on June 9, 1933, in Santiago, Chile. His parents, Paul Egil Wensell (1905–2010) and Mignon Albina Block (1905–2011), were missionaries in Chile.² Paul served as director of the Publication department at the Chile Conference. Gunnar's siblings are Lilia, Karen, Erna, and Waldemar. When Gunnar was two years old, his father was designated director of canvassing at Buenos Aires Conference, in the city of Buenos Aires. Years later, the family moved to Chullunquiani mission near Juliaca, Peru. For health reasons, they returned to Argentina, where River Plate Sanitarium was.

Paul Wensell continued his pastoral service in Concordia, Entre Ríos, Argentina. Later he was the canvassing director in the Eastern Brazil Conference, with the office in Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for four years. Erna was born there, and Gunnar began his primary school studies. Returning to Argentina, they first went to Puiggari, Entre Ríos, where Waldemar, the youngest son, was born. Later, they went to live in Florida, Buenos Aires, where Gunnar attended the Buenos Aires Academy (1946–1948) and where he was baptized in November 1946. Gunnar continued his secondary studies at the River Plate College in Entre Ríos, Argentina, where he graduated with a national bachelor's diploma. After that, he studied medicine at the National University of Buenos Aires (1951–1956) and graduated as a doctor at age 23. On December 6, 1955, he married Lissie Nelly Block Kehle.

Lissie was born on July 7, 1932, in Santiago, Chile, the daughter of Enrique Block and Chela Kohle. She began her secondary education in Valparaíso, Chile, and then went to study at River Plate College from 1948 to 1952. She graduated as a teacher and Bible instructor in 1952. She worked as a teacher in the city of Chascomús, Buenos Aires, Argentina, for a year and then in Flores, Federal District, Buenos Aires.³ Lissie and Gunnar Wensell's children are Ingrid Helda, born September 24, 1956, in Buenos Aires, Argentina; Gunnar "Gunty" Ingvar, born May 13, 1958, in Chulumani, Bolivia; and Eileen Karen, born December 19, 1959, in Takoma Park, Washington, D.C., United States.

In the Missionary Field (1956–1968)

On November 1, 1956, Gunnar, Lissie, and their little daughter Ingrid went from Buenos Aires to Bolivia⁴ where the church needed missionary doctors. They spent 10 years as missionaries in the Inca Union Mission. The years 1956 to 1964 they dedicated to Bolivia Mission. Gunnar was the medical director of the Adventist Hospital of Chulumani, situated 120 kilometers (75 miles) away from La Paz, Bolivia, among an Aymara indigenous population. Gunnar learned a little vocabulary in the Aymara language to better relate to patients. He also introduced the values of kindness and responsibility to the nurses in the hospital. As a missionary doctor, he made many types of interventions and attended the most varied of medical cases. Lissie worked in the hospital laboratory, besides being a teacher and the director of the Adventist school.

In 1959 and 1960, Dr. Wensell and his family spent a year in the United States while he pursued further studies at the Adventist Hospital in Takoma Park, Washington, D.C. After, he returned with his family to the Adventist Hospital of Chulumani, Bolivia. Beginning in 1961, he spent three years in Guayaramerín, Bolivia, a high-temperature jungle region on the banks of the Mamoré River, on the border with Brazil, in a government-owned hospital run by the church. That year, his four-year-old son died in a surgical intervention. Gunnar Wensell combined his medical work with the work in the church and evangelization. While they were there, the hospital was renovated and equipped, and a school was also built. Lissie organized the laboratory.

The next destination was Juliaca, Peru, at an altitude of 3,800 meters (12,549 feet) with a very cold climate, where he was director of the Juliaca American Clinic from 1964 to 1966. From Lake Titicaca Mission, they returned to the River Plate Sanitarium in Argentina (1966–1967). Then the Austral Union Conference invited Dr. Wensell to work in Paraguay. In this country, he was director of the Paraguay Adventist Sanitarium and Hospital in Asunción (1967), and then he served in the Hohenau Adventist Sanitarium and Hospital (1968).

In the River Plate Sanitarium and Hospital (1969–1998)

From 1969 to 1972, Gunnar specialized in urology at the Loma Linda Adventist Hospital, California, United States. Meanwhile, Lissie worked as an assistant nurse. In 1972, he returned to the River Plate Sanitarium and Hospital as a specialist in urology and started the department and residence of urology⁵ Lissie graduated as a nurse in 1974 and worked for several years as a nurse and medical secretary. Gunnar was vice director of the River Plate Sanitarium and Hospital for 12 years during the administrations of Dr. Pedro Tabuenca and Dr. Darío Rostán.

In 1979 and 1980, he traveled with a scholarship to study in Germany and then returned to the River Plate Sanitarium. From 1986 to 1998, he was the general director of River Plate Sanitarium. During that time, important improvements were made in the structure and equipment of the institution. Dr. Wensell was ordained to the ministry in 1996. Lissie always participated in musical activities in the church and helped with

the evangelism.

Retirement and Later Activity

On December 31, 1998, Dr. Wensell retired after 42 years of service, but he kept working in medicine for several years. He served the community as mayor of the Municipality of Libertador San Martín from 2007 to 2011. He died in the River Plate Sanitarium on June 7, 2017, at the age of 83.

SOURCES

“Dr. and Mrs. Gunnar Wensell. . . .” *ARH*, April 11, 1957, 20.

Sapia, Carlos, and Ingrid Wensell. Memories of Dr. Gunnar Wensell’s life. Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina, 2017.

Wensell, Egil H. *El poder de una esperanza que educa y sana* [The power of a hope that educates and heals]. Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: River Plate Adventist University, 1993.

“Clase del CAP 1952–2002: Recuerdos y bendiciones” [CAP class 1952–2002: Memories and blessings], 79–82.

NOTES

1. Information based on the story of his life prepared by Carlos Sapia with the collaboration of Ingrid Wensell and other relatives of Dr. Gunnar Wensell, presented at his funeral in Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina. The data were corroborated and complemented with the file of the former Austral Union (today Argentina Union). See Egil H. Wensell, *El poder de una esperanza que educa y sana* [The power of a hope that educates and heals] (Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: River Plate Adventist University, 1993), 207–22, 262–65.
2. Mignon Block was Pastor Godofredo Block’s son.
3. Most of the information about Lissie Block de Wensell was taken from a board prepared for the 50-year class reunion from the River Plate College, “Clase del CAP 1952–2002: Recuerdos y bendiciones” [CAP class 1952–2002: Memories and blessings], 79–82.
4. “Dr. and Mrs. Gunnar Wensell . . . ,” *ARH*, April 11, 1957, 20.
5. Dr. Wensell was the founder of the Argentina Society of Transurethral Surgery and a member of the Argentina Urology Society.

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