

# Williams, Alice

## Ruby (1915–2009)

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### SVEN HAGEN JENSEN, AND MELANIE RICHES WIXWAT

Sven Hagen Jensen, M.Div. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) has worked for the church for over 50 years as a pastor, editor, departmental director, and church administrator in Denmark, Nigeria and the Middle East. Jensen enjoys reading, writing, nature and gardening. He is married to Ingelis and has two adult children and four grandchildren.

Melanie Riches Wixwat, B.B.A. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan), currently lives in Beirut, Lebanon with her husband Michael, the treasurer for Middle East and North Africa Union (MENAUI). She is administrative assistant to the president and the executive secretary of MENAUI in addition to working as assistant to the regional editor for the ESDA project. One of her hobbies is studying Arabic and this has led her to be involved with one of the local Arabic Adventist Churches in Beirut.



Alice Williams, staff photo, 1974.

Credit: *Pine Echoes* 1974-1976.

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Ruby Williams was a Bible worker, principal, dean of women, director of community service, and assistant in over 20 evangelistic series throughout her 32 years of uninterrupted service in the Middle East.

Williams was born in British Columbia, Canada, on February 2, 1915.<sup>1</sup> We do not know much about her family, only that she had a twin sister.<sup>2</sup> She grew up in a home and a church environment that did not uphold Christian standards. As a teenager, she felt God's promptings to serve him overseas. Williams left her childhood church at 17 and joined another one, hungry for more light. She wrote: "At that time, I thought surrender to Christ meant going as a missionary. I secretly longed to be one, but the idea of an eternally burning hell shocked me."

Williams experimented with several different denominations until she was confused and weary. She didn't fit in with the fundamentalist churches and their hellfire preaching or with the modernist churches lacking in Christian standards and gospel emphasis. At 22, she turned her back on religion and went to the Provincial Normal School. But when her mother suddenly died, everything changed. She found new hope in the Bible's promise of the resurrection and was impressed God called her for missionary service in 1938. She began attending Adventist meetings. She wrote in the *Review and Herald* on June 8, 1961: "In six weeks, I accepted it all. Now I could really see God's wonderful love and harmony." Williams went to Walla Walla College and in 1942,

graduated from the Bible Instructor course.<sup>3 4</sup> After graduation, Ruby assisted George Adams in an evangelistic effort in Victoria, British Columbia.<sup>5</sup> Soon after, she received a call for foreign service.

## Missionary to the Middle East

The General Conference called her to go to the Middle East to work for women and children. Within half an hour she sent her letter of acceptance. As she later wrote, "I had waited for years for this call." Her family, who were not Adventists, made no attempts to change her mind. But some of her close Adventist friends tried to dissuade her. They could not imagine that a young unmarried woman would go to the mission field alone, especially because it was wartime.<sup>6</sup>

Preparation for her mission service in the Middle East included a winter term in 1944 at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Takoma Park, Washington, D. C., where she had joined the Arabic Language Group.<sup>7</sup> When Ruby Williams arrived in the Middle East later that year she immediately continued with Arabic classes.<sup>8</sup> Her first assignment was to assist Pastor Fareed Srouf with the Amman Elementary School in the Palestine-Transjordan Mission. Classes at the time were conducted in the members' homes and taught by Miss Wadad Waimrein.

The foundation was laid for the Amman Elementary School early in 1945.<sup>9</sup> As the construction of the building gradually took place, the partially completed building was also used for church services on Sabbath. Williams wrote: "Each Friday we had to take out all the desks from two of the three rooms and replace them with folding chairs. Then we removed the removable doors between two rooms to make a large room for the Sabbath service."<sup>10</sup> By 1948, Miss Ruby had become the able principal of the school with an enrollment of 76.<sup>11</sup> She was a credentialed Bible instructor and a member of the mission committee as well.<sup>12</sup> Part of her time she also assisted the local pastor in Jerusalem as a Bible worker in his evangelistic meetings.<sup>13</sup>

In the summer of 1950, Williams was transferred to the Lebanon-Syria Mission in Beirut because of the political situation in Jordan. She became a Bible worker and assisted Wayne Olson and his national associates in evangelism in Northern Lebanon.<sup>14</sup> With the reorganization of the work in the Middle East in 1951, she joined the Middle East Division as a Bible instructor and served as dean of women at Middle East College from 1953-1956.<sup>15</sup> As dean and matron she had to cope with many practical problems. The same room served as the dining hall and chapel, so they had to remove the tables and bring in additional chairs for Sabbath services. There was no hot water in the dorms. Every Thursday or Friday, hot water was brought to the dormitories in pails for the girls to take their weekly baths.<sup>16</sup>

Williams continued her education during furloughs and studied at the Seminary, obtaining a degree in 1955.<sup>17</sup> Her heart mainly was in evangelism and Bible work. In 1957, she joined the East Mediterranean Union as the Bible instructor, living in a rented apartment in the Muslim area close to the Beirut Evangelistic Center. Instead of living in the Adventist community like most other missionaries, she preferred to live in the city close to the

people. She said, "An Arab proverb says we should choose our neighbors before we choose our house." She was nearer to her work and would not have to spend valuable time in travel. More importantly, living among the people gave her more opportunity for service, aided her in practicing the Arab language, and made possible for her to visit people.<sup>18</sup>

Williams actively assisted evangelists with their efforts: Wayne Olsen, the director of evangelistic activities at the Center; A. C. Fearing from Washington, D.C; Chafic Srour, George Khoury, and others, to name a few. She held cooking classes in the same facilities and helped with visitations.<sup>19</sup> Partially, as a fruit of her labor, a church was organized in the Center on October 14, 1961.<sup>20</sup> When on furlough, she did not stay idle but helped with Elder Detamore's three weeks evangelistic work in North America.<sup>21</sup> In 1962, she was chosen as one of the delegates to the General Conference Session representing the church in the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

In 1962, after another reorganization, she continued with her Bible work in the Lebanon Section and the Center until about 1968. Worth mentioning is the Arabic series of 22 evangelistic meetings at the Center held by H. E. Robinson, an American missionary. He spoke to the audience in Arabic and was assisted by Ruby Williams and two licensed ministers.<sup>23</sup> Her initial call to work for women and children in the Middle East was partially fulfilled when she became one of the leaders for women at the division-wide MV Youth Training Camp at Baskinta, Lebanon, where Elder Laurence A. Skinner, a fellow Canadian, was the director.<sup>24</sup>

As the director of the Beirut Cultural Center welfare society, Williams was heavily involved in welfare assistance to the needy in Lebanon, including prison inmates in Tripoli.<sup>25</sup> She served at Middle East College as dean of women (1969-1971) and then was transferred to the new Afro-Mideast Division as Bible instructor, where she completed the rest of her term in the Middle East.<sup>26</sup> Williams later gave this appeal: "Bible instructors are so greatly needed. My greatest desire is that our young people may have the taste of winning others to Jesus. Once they have tasted that joy they will be driven into some form of evangelism and remain faithful through all its joys and sorrows. There is no sacrifice. God but asks us to empty our cup of its dross and froth and He fills it with bliss and blessings running over."<sup>27</sup>

## Back in Canada

After 32 years of uninterrupted service in the Middle East, Williams returned to British Columbia in Canada in 1976, where she was employed as a Bible instructor at the British Columbia Conference until her retirement in 1980.<sup>28</sup>

Her students were heartbroken to say goodbye to such a wonderful mother and dean. In the *Pine Echoes* 1976, Nadia Farag wrote: "You were a loving mother who cared a lot for your beloved daughters and were willing and ready for service in any time and at any place. You tried your best to make us happy. Your experiences and prayers encouraged us in our dark days. Your Christianity shone everywhere." She continued, "For me she is a living example of virtue. I miss her kindness; in fact, I feel an orphan without her. Her cards and letters are the

biggest signs of her love and fantastic understanding." Venice Semaan Khoury remembers how Ruby took an interest in her health and diet. She brought her vitamins and ate in the cafeteria many times to ensure she was eating correctly. Venice thought she was the only special one to receive such attention but later discovered that every girl in the dorm felt the same way.<sup>29</sup>

Williams settled in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. Her last entry in the *Adventist Review* was in July 1999, where she pointed out the importance of preaching from the Word.<sup>30</sup> Ruby Williams died May 21, 2009.<sup>31</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Sheila Macaraig, email message to Sven Hagen Jensen, January 3, 2024. Macaraig is from the Secretariat department at the British Columbia Conference in Canada.
2. "From Here and There," *Middle East Messenger*, January 1, 1962, 4.
3. A. Ruby Williams, "A Foreign Missionary, Why I Became an ADVENTIST," *ARH*, June 8, 1961, 12; "Reflections of an Experienced Missionary," *ARH*, March 15, 1973, 8.
4. Bertha W. Fearing, "An Interesting Interview in the Middle East," *Ministry*, March 1962, 37.
5. "North American Division Gleanings," *ARH*, January 7, 1943, 20.
6. Williams, "Reflections."
7. "The Seminarian Catalogue Number with Announcements for 1944-1945," *Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary*, Takoma Park, Washington, D.C., 1945.
8. E. W. Dunbar, "A. Ruby Williams," *ARH*, October 15, 1959, 24.
9. Miss Ruby Williams, "Amman Elementary School," *Middle East Messenger*, April 1948, 6-7.
10. Fearing, 37.
11. L. J. Norris, "Evacuation From Palestine," *ARH*, March 25, 1948, 1.
12. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, 1947-1949, "Palestine-Transjordan Mission," accessed February 1, 2024, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.
13. E. D. Dick, "News and Notes," *ARH*, October 6, 1949.
14. R. H. Hartwell, "The Movement in the Middle East," *ARH*, December 1950, 15.

15. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbooks*, 1952-1957; Manoug H. Nazirian, "Directory of Employees," *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lebanon 1897-1997*, 93.
16. Fearing, 37.
17. W. R. Beach, "From Home Base to Front Line," *ARH*, November 7, 1968, 45.
18. Fearing, 37.
19. "From Here and There," *Middle East Messenger*, October 1, 1957; October 1, 1959; April 1, 1961, October 1, 1961.
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21. "From Here and There," *Middle East Messenger*, July 1, 1959.
22. "From Here and There," *Middle East Messenger*, April 1, 1962.
23. "Elder Robinson Holds Arabic Series," *Middle East Messenger*, January 1, 1963., 4.
24. L. A. Skinner, "Division Ends First Decade of Camping," *Middle East Messenger*, September-October 1963, 1-2.
25. "Welfare Assistance Given 2000 Persons in Lebanon by Adventist Societies," *Middle East Messenger*, July-August 1966, 1-2; Robert Darnell, "Brief News of Men and Events, Middle East Division," *ARH*, September 22, 1966, 19.
26. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, 1958-1976.
27. Fearing, 38.
28. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, 1977-1980.
29. "Faculty and Staff: Miss Ruby Williams," *Pine Echoes* (Beirut, Lebanon: Middle East College, 1976).
30. "Letters," *ARH*, July 1999, 2.
31. Sheila Macaraig, email message to Sven Hagen Jensen, January 4, 2024.

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