



Nurse Olive Fisher in the dispensary at the Hansende Colony, Togoba, Mt Hagen, New Guinea, c. 1958.

Photo courtesy of South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.

Fisher, Olive May (1914–2008)

ROSS GOLDSTONE

Ross Goldstone, M.A. (Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia) retired in 1998 as Senior Pastor, Avondale Memorial Church, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia. New Zealand born, Goldstone has served the Church as a pastor, Conference Youth Director, teacher, and Sessional Lecturer at Avondale College. He has authored nine books relating to Adventist history, including *The Angel Said Australia*. He is also co-author of four other books on Adventist history in Australasia. In retirement Ross Goldstone continues to research and write Adventist Church history.

Olive May Fisher was distinguished for her services as a nurse and nurse educator in the highlands of Papua New Guinea (PNG) at the Togoba Hansende Colony and at Sopas Adventist Hospital, Wabag, Western Highlands Province. In retirement she continued to serve others as the first supervisor of the Kressville Hostel at

Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia—a role which she performed voluntarily.

Early Life

Olive Fisher was born on a dairy farm at Mona Bush, nine miles out of Invercargill, New Zealand on January 19, 1914, the second child of William Earnest and May Elizabeth Fisher. There were to be six children in the family.¹ Life was not easy on the farm and all the children learned to work hard, an attribute that stayed with Olive throughout her ninety-four years.

As the oldest daughter, Olive loved to help her mother care for her younger brothers and sisters, particularly when they were babies, an attribute which caused her mother to say that Olive would make a great nurse.²

Fisher's early formal education was confined to primary school. Work on the farm took priority and her experience gained milking cows and caring for sheep on the home property resulted in her gaining employment as a live-in farm hand for a number of years on a nearby-property. She was paid ten shillings (\$1) per week for her services, and in the cold evenings of the Southland winters she developed skills in knitting, embroidery, and crocheting, using these skills to make baby clothes.³

Pastor G. F. Bohringer was appointed to care for Invercargill in 1920 and ministered in that district for approximately four years. It was during these years that Seventh-day Adventist beliefs were shared with the family, who joined the Invercargill Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁴

Years of Training

While in her early twenties, a member of the Invercargill church, Mr. McDonald, offered to pay Fisher's fees so that she could study for the pre-nursing course at the New Zealand Missionary College at Longburn in the North Island.⁵ This God-given opportunity resulted in her eventually training as a nurse at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital, and her graduation in December 1940. Her graduation class chose the motto, "To Do His Will."⁶ Fisher's future life demonstrated her adoption of this as her personal motto. She subsequently trained in midwifery at the Royal Hospital for Women, Sydney, and nursing in this field became her passion. Olive was employed at the Warburton Sanitarium before returning to her alma mater to work in the obstetrics ward for four years.⁷

Mission Service

In the late 1950s Olive was called to the division office in Wahroonga and invited to accept an appointment to India. While giving this appointment thought the call was changed to Papua New Guinea.⁸ As part of her nursing in Sydney she had met many missionaries from around the Pacific and listened to their stories. Consequently, she accepted the appointment to Papua New Guinea where she nursed at the Hansenide Leper Colony at Togoba, near Mount Hagen. It was here she learned to drive, having never driven in New Zealand or Australia.

Considering the hazardous mountainous PNG roads, this was quite an achievement. Her five years caring for the lepers presented a challenging ministry, at times requiring her to function far beyond her training. Extracting teeth (without anesthetic) and conducting a funeral were not part of the curriculum that she studied under!

Nursing and nurse training at Sopas Hospital was Olive's next major appointment. Known for her commitment to humanity, not only did she run everywhere rather than walk, but on Sabbath afternoons when she could have been resting, she would run down to the village to assist with the Junior Missionary Volunteer program!¹⁰ In 1964 under the title "Wabag Clinic Sister," Olive wrote of her work:

I have now been here six months and have nine clinics in my care. I visit them fortnightly. Three of these are new ones I opened and five were taken over from the Government Sister. However, I later made two of these into one and have taken over our own clinic at Rakamanda - infant welfare . . .

At the moment I am covering an area branching out from Sopas hospital. Thirteen miles in one direction there are five clinics. Twelve miles on the way to Laiagam there are two more, and one in another direction, seven miles and up a steep hill. All told there are 1200 babies on the books. I have seen 1000 of these, most of them twice.¹¹

While at Sopas Olive Fisher was part of a team of nurse educators. Others included Ron Plane and Dr. Don Kelly. Their combined efforts produced outstanding nurses.¹² The results in the 1974 examinations showed that of the one hundred thirty-two nurses who sat for their final exams across the nation, the thirteen nurses from Sopas were all in the top forty-five students and all of them passed. A Sopas nurse from the Western Islands, Linnah Pugian, came in first out of the one hundred thirty-two examinees and her friend, Betty Taotao, from the same village, came in fourth. In the Medical Aid Post course exams Ropio Serepa from Daru came in first for the whole of PNG.¹³

Final Years

The sadness of farewell spread throughout Sopas Hospital with the news in 1979 that "Sister Fisher" was retiring. So keen were the people at Sopas to have her remain in Papua New Guinea that they offered her a block of land on which to live for the rest of her life. "She would have been happy to stay, but the church leaders said "No."¹⁴

On arrival in Cooranbong in 1979 Olive Fisher noted that a new \$500,000 Kressville Hostel was being built by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to meet the needs of retirees. February 11, 1980 saw the first residents welcomed into their furnished, ensuited rooms. Fisher's nursing skills were recognized and she was appointed as the first supervisor, a work that she entered into with dedication and enthusiasm, declining to take any remuneration for her services.¹⁵ Five years later she moved into a self-care unit within the Adventist Retirement Village. Her dedication to the service of humanity found expression in many ways. She was most happy when helping with

the plethora of needs of the aged with whom she associated daily, whether it be the feeding of those in the Charles Harrison Home who were beyond feeding themselves or a simple visit and prayer with a lonely shut-in resident. No need was too great or too insignificant for this angel of mercy.¹⁶

Never married, everyone was part of Olive's family until death came on March 2, 2008 in the Wyong Hospital. Her last act of service to humanity was to donate her body to medical research. She lived only "to do God's will."¹⁷

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NOTES

1. Enid Botting, interview with author, February 27, 2018, Avondale Senior Living, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Olive Fisher, "Report to Sev-Ad Meeting," *Sev-Ad News*, vol.4, no. 4, May, 1998.

6. E. B. Rudge, "To Do His Will," *Australasian Record*, January 20, 1941, 1.
7. Olive Fisher, "Report to Sev-Ad Meeting," *Sev-Ad News* vol. 4, no. 4, May 1998
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Lola Wilkinson, interview with author, March 1, 2018, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.
11. Olive Fisher, "Wabag Clinic Sister," *Australasian Record*, February 17, 1964. 6.
12. Sandra Roberts, "Top Marks To Sopas Students," *Australasian Record*, June 3, 1974. 1.
13. Ibid.
14. Enid Botting, interview.
15. Ross Goldstone, "*Avondale Retirement Village*," unpublished document written to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Avondale Retirement Village, personal collection of the author.
16. Personal knowledge of the author as the pastor of the Avondale memorial Church of which Olive Fisher was a member.
17. Ross Goldstone and Alan Saunders, "Olive May Fisher Obituary," *Australasian Record*, April 12, 2008, 30.

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