

Webster, Leslie Allan James (1917–1997)

RUTH WEBSTER

Ruth Webster, B.Ed. Primary (Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia) retired in 2012 as the Assistant Head of Primary of Avondale School in Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia. Ruth Webster served for 28 years in Seventh-day Adventist primary schools in both Australia and New Zealand, as a teacher, personal assistant, and in administration. She is married to David and has two sons, a daughter, and five grandchildren.

Leslie and his wife, Enid, Webster served as medical missionaries and in pastoral ministry in the South Pacific Division between 1944 and 1982. Both were nursing graduates of Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital. During their ministry, they served in the farthest reaches of the division in all four points of the compass, Western Australian, Pitcairn Island to the east, South New Zealand, Kiribati to the north. Their motto in life was “I’ll go where you want me to go, dear Lord.”¹

Early Life and Education

Leslie Allan James Webster was born on December 31, 1917, in Gordon, Tasmania,² where his father was the storekeeper. He was the sixth and youngest child of William Iverick and Lillian Marian Webster with four older brothers and one older sister. Webster was born after his father left to serve in World War I. Unfortunately, his father died of Spanish influenza in Hobart on his return to Australia without ever seeing his youngest son³

Life was difficult for Webster’s mother, a young widow with six children. She moved to Hobart and married Lionel Jacobson.⁴ Webster had a number of religious influences in his early life. He was dedicated by the Salvation Army,⁵ attended a Methodist Church in Hobart with his mother,⁶ and was introduced to Seventh-day Adventists by his stepfather’s grandmother.⁷



Leslie and Enid Webster

Photo courtesy of Ruth Webster.

In 1931, when Webster was 14 and Australia was in in grip of depression, any thought of further education was abandoned and he accepted work as a farm laborer. This was a difficult life and all thought of God was forgotten until a chance finding of the book *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* and an accident that provided time to read *The Signs of the Times* magazine. Webster left his job, found similar work on the farm of the Stanton family, and began attending church regularly.⁸ He was baptized by David Sibley on December 13, 1935.⁹

The Stanton family provided Webster with a loan so that he could attend the Australasian Missionary College in Cooranbong beginning in 1938.¹⁰ Despite continued financial difficulties, Webster enrolled in the nursing program at Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital in 1940 as part of a recruitment program to have more male nurses who could study homiletics and prepare for medical missionary work.¹¹ It was here that he met his future wife, Enid McLeod, who was also studying nursing.¹²

Enid Margaret McLeod was born on January 15, 1921, in Invercargill, New Zealand, to William and Margaret Bain McLeod.¹³ She was also one of six children. The family lived on a farm at Dacre, just out of Invercargill, and from an early age she worked alongside her father milking cows and in the fields. McLeod was baptized in Invercargill and then attended Longburn College near Palmerston North to further her education, working to pay her own way through school.¹⁴ She was accepted into the 1940 nursing class at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital. Enid McLeod and Les Webster graduated at the end of 1943.¹⁵ On completion of their studies, they were married on February 7, 1944, by A. W. Knight in the Wahroonga Seventh-day Adventist Church, New South Wales.¹⁶

Working Life

Les and Enid Webster were appointed to conduct evangelistic work in North Queensland and commenced work in May 1944.¹⁷ Their first position was in Charters Towers where their eldest son, William, was born.¹⁸ They then moved to Mackay where their second son, David, was born.¹⁹

Their medical missionary dream became a reality in April 1947 when the family moved to the gulf area of Papua New Guinea.²⁰ They served on two isolated mission stations, Orokolo and Vaimuru (Baimuru), accessible only by mission boat and where the rivers were crocodile infested. When Les Webster visited the surrounding villages, Enid Webster had full responsibility for medical issues that arose as well as for her young family.²¹ A third son, Allan, born in Port Moresby joined the family.²² After a furlough, the family relocated in 1949 to Batuna in the Solomon Islands where they lived for the next six years.²³ The Websters were the only expatriates on this mission station where duties involved operating the small hospital and dispensary, dentistry, teaching English classes, and running the sawmill, which included buying the logs, selling the timber, and keeping the accounts.²⁴ In addition to her nursing responsibilities, Enid Webster supervised correspondence lessons for the older boys and cared for two additions to the family, Graham, who was born at Batuna, and Rosemary, who was born in Honiara.²⁵ Webster was ordained on March 12, 1955, in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea, when he attended the Coral Sea Union Mission session. Enid Webster and the children were not present for this event as they were still at

Batuna.²⁶

At the session where he was ordained, Les Webster was appointed president of the North Bismarck Mission in Papua New Guinea.²⁷ For one year they lived on Mussau Island²⁸ and then the mission headquarters was moved to Kavieng, New Ireland.²⁹ During this time, Webster acquired his local master mariner's license which allowed him to travel by sea on the *Malalangi* to visit the 39 churches that were part of the Coral Sea Union Mission.³⁰ During this time Enid Webster supervised the mission station and the children with little or no communication while Les Webster was on the mission boat.³¹

The family took an early furlough in 1960 due to Webster's ill health. He was admitted to hospital in Kavieng, then Rabaul, and finally transferred to Sydney Sanitarium in Wahroonga, Australia.³² Physicians suspected he suffered from cerebral malaria.³³ The family went to New Zealand for four months of rest and recuperation for Webster and were preparing to return to the mission field when he was notified that on medical advice it was decided that he should not return to a malarial area.³⁴ He was invited to join the field staff of the South New Zealand Conference and commenced work there in July 1960.³⁵ During their time in South New Zealand, the Websters lived in Christchurch, Dunedin, and Greymouth. Webster was involved with pastoral ministry and when in Christchurch was associated with Austin Cooke's mission.³⁶

While in Greymouth, Les and Enid Webster were invited to serve on Pitcairn Island as minister and medical officer. With the two younger children, they set sail for Pitcairn in mid-1965.³⁷ As medical officer and health inspector, Enid Webster assumed responsibility for the health of the islanders, diagnosing illness, prescribing medication, checking drinking water, seeing to the eradication of mosquitoes, and promoting village hygiene. Les Webster provided dental services. They also ran a Pathfinder Club and supervised the children's correspondence, in addition to their regular pastoral activities.³⁸ On completion of their two-year term on Pitcairn Island, the family was appointed to the North Queensland Conference in Australia in 1967.³⁹ Les Webster was engaged in pastoral ministry in Mackay and then in Ayr. In 1971, the Websters were again appointed to Pitcairn for a further two years.⁴⁰

Following their second term on Pitcairn, the Websters were appointed to Western Australia,⁴¹ first caring for the churches at Moora and Northam, and later a four church district that included Manjimup, Kulikup, Boyup Brook, and Badilla Connelly.⁴² During this time, Les Webster organized the fundraising and acted as the building supervisor for the new Adventist church at Boyup Brook. Most of the work was done by volunteer labor and within seven months the church was dedicated debt free.⁴³ During their time in Western Australia, Enid Webster served as the cook for camp meetings. She had also served in this capacity in North Queensland and South New Zealand.⁴⁴

The Webster's last appointment before full time retirement was as president of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Mission where he served from June 1977 to December 1981.⁴⁵ During the Webster's stay, the two island groups

became independent and their names became Kiribati and Tuvalu. Finding the state of buildings in this mission very dilapidated, Webster set about completing the unfinished buildings at Kauma High School and ensuring that at least four of the nine churches became permanent structures. Originally appointed for three years, the Websters stayed for five years to complete these building projects.⁴⁶

Retirement Years

In 1982, Les and Enid Webster retired in Queensland where they built a home on a small acreage near Beenleigh. Les Webster remained active becoming pastor of the Beenleigh church in 1983.⁴⁷ As part of the Sustentees Overseas Service program, the Websters returned to Pitcairn for one year in 1985, and in 1987-88 they served in Feilding on the North Island of New Zealand where they cared for the Levin and Feilding churches and were able to see a new church erected in Feilding. In 1989, they spent six months in Wellsford, New Zealand, and in 1996 Les Webster returned to Kiribati for two months.⁴⁸

In July 1994, the Websters moved to Alton Villas in Cooranbong to be nearer family.⁴⁹ Then in January 1997, Les Webster, was diagnosed with lung cancer. He died on June 23, 1997, at the Sydney Adventist Hospital in Wahroonga where he had trained as a nurse.⁵⁰ Enid Webster continued to live independently in Alton Villas.

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NOTES

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