



Eric J. Sr., Eric J. Jr., Nettie, and Oran-Lynn in Singapore, 1935.

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Johanson, Eric John (1899–1999) and Nettie Roberta (Hare) (1899–1981)

RUTH S. L. LO

Originally trained as a nurse at Sydney Adventist Hospital, Ruth Siew Lan Lo received a BA in psychology and a MSc in community health from Wollongong University, and a PhD from University of New England. She was a nursing professor and a musician, having taught at Southern Cross University for 12 years and taught piano and theory in United States for nearly 10 years. In addition, she has an interest in Adventist history.

Eric John Johanson devoted 54 years of faithful service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Asia, America, and in his homeland of Australia. Eric and Nettie were pioneer missionaries to China, Singapore, and Southeast

Asia, where their impact was widely felt.

Early Life

Eric John Johanson, Sr. (), was born in Elsternwick, Melbourne, Australia, on May 31, 1899, and died in Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, on November 13, 1999, reaching the age of 100. Nettie Roberta Hare was born on July 23, 1899, in Melbourne, Australia and died on April 27, 1981, in Cooranbong.¹

Eric was the fourth child of three boys and three girls in the Johanson's family: Mabel Stacey, Walter Johanson, Greta Barham, Eric Johanson, Bertram Johanson, and Thelma Rosendahl. Nettie Hare was the fourth of five children in the Hare family: Reuben Hare, Eric B. Hare, Ruth Lane, Nettie Johanson, and Enid Wilkinson.²

Eric's father, Johan Marius Johanson, was the manager of the Signs Publishing Company in Warburton, Victoria, Australia. Therefore, Eric attended the Warburton School there but left school at the age of 14 and went to work at the office of Signs Publishing Company. At age 17, Eric followed the family to move to Avondale (Cooranbong, NSW), where his father took charge of Australasian Missionary College. While there, Eric worked at the business office of the College. While Eric was at Warburton, the family of Pastor Robert Hare moved into a house across the road from the Johanson's. Eric became very friendly with Nettie Roberta Hare, one of the Hare's daughters. She was only 15 at the time. Before long, both families moved to Cooranbong, New South Wales, and their friendship continued. Nettie completed the teacher training course while Eric continued to work at the College business office. Upon graduation, Nettie was appointed the first teacher of the school at Glen Huon, Tasmania.³

The China Years

In 1917, Eric J. Johanson, at the age of 18, was called to Hankow, Hubie, China, to be the stenographer-bookeeper of the North China Union Conference. Eric's ability and hard work were soon demonstrated when he brought down his first trial balance with only a one cent difference.

Those were difficult times in China as the country emerged from the old feudal system to young nationhood, and many regions were blundered by warlords. However, the Adventist mission continued to grow among the population.

Before leaving Australia, Eric and Nettie became engaged. Their desire was to get married as soon as they could live together. After two years of teaching at Glen Huon, Nettie responded to Eric's call and decided to go to China to join her fiancé. Some of the folks at the China Mission compound thought they would give this young Australian some matronly advice about when to marry after two years of absence from each other. Eric recalled Mrs. C. C. Cristler counseled him saying, "Before you get married, you must get to know your woman!"⁴ But nothing could stop this true, red-blooded Aussie, who thought to himself, "Know her? Why, I've known her since she was 15, and we are going to get married as soon as she arrives."⁵

Everything went perfectly for Eric and Nettie on their wedding day, December 25, 1919. The Anglican Dean conducted the marriage honors, the British Consulate waived the usual two-week requirement for marriage bans, and a fellow worker, Gjording, allowed the newly wedded couple to stay in his house for a two-week honeymoon while he himself went away on work assignment. Nettie Hare was very popular on the ship on which she travelled to China because she entertained fellow passengers with beautiful music on her violin during the rather long and boring voyage from Australia to China. As the ship sailed into Shanghai Harbor on Christmas Day, December 25, 1919, who other than Eric J. Johanson would be the first man to jump aboard from a sampan to welcome her? He then took her to a Church of England Cathedral in Shanghai to have their marriage performed by the Dean of the Cathedral, whom Eric had previously contacted and obtained his consent to perform the wedding. Everything went perfectly for Eric and Nettie on their wedding day. The Anglican Dean conducted the marriage honors, the British Consulate waived the usual two-week requirement for marriage bans, and a fellow worker, Gjording, allowed the newly wedded couple to stay in his house for a two-week honeymoon while he himself went away on work assignment. All that could be remembered of the service itself was the Dean's advice "to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth", according to Thelma, Eric's sister, who recalled this many years later. Together, Eric and Nettie Johanson had five children. From eldest to youngest, they were Eric, Jr., Oran-Lynn, Bobbie-Mae, and Beth.⁶

From the stenographer-bookkeeper position, Eric J. Johanson was called to be the president of the East China Union Mission in Shanghai. It was in Shanghai that his first son, Eric J. Johanson, Jr., was born. In all, Eric J. Johanson, Sr., and his wife Nettie worked in China for seven years. They returned to Australia for furlough in 1924.⁷

Years later, Bobbie-Mae Johanson, their third child, recalled her father telling her of his experience while the family was in the Yen Chang Mission compound. He visited the ancient city of Lo Yan Ho while there. On a section of the old city wall was inscribed the story of the wise men of the Christmas story. The writing was so old that they had to rub lead on it in order to read it.⁸

Singapore and Southeast Asia

At the end of their furlough, Eric J., Sr., and Nettie Johanson returned to the Orient and to Singapore in 1924 to become the secretary-treasurer of the Malay-Siam Union Mission which included the states of Malaya, Borneo, Celebes, French Indo-China, and Indonesia. In addition to taking care of the office and auditing work at the Union office, Eric J. Johanson, Sr., also looked after the Singapore Church, combining pastoral ministry with office duties. It was in Singapore that their second son, Oran-Lynn, and their first daughter, Bobbie-Mae, were born.⁹ They now had three children: Eric J., Jr., Oran-Lynn, and Bobbie-Mae. The Johansons were in Southeast Asia for about 14 years.

Around 1934, the Australian Church thought it would be a good idea to have someone to represent the Sanitarium Health Food Company in Southeast Asia to market their products to the people there. Eric J. Johanson, Sr., was chosen as their representative. After returning to Australia briefly for training, Johanson resumed his duties as secretary-treasurer of the Malay-Siam Union Office, and at the same time engaged in a vigorous campaign to promote Sanitarium Health Food products to the Southeast Asian market. He was made many sorties to merchants and grocers throughout the region, including Singapore, Malaya, Ceylon, India, and Java. When G.E. Adair was sent by SHF to Singapore to see how this young representative was doing, he was thrilled to report what he found in Penang, Malaya:

"Weet-bix is already selling here and the grocers give it third place among the breakfast cereals. Instant Postum seems to be in most grocers and coffee shops...."¹⁰

Back home among the Sanitarium Health Food Company circle, the success of Eric J. Johanson, Sr., in Southeast Asia earned him the nickname, "Manager Orient". He recalled in one instance, how he actually went to one of the grocers and removed the British-made "Weetabix" from the shelves and replaced them with what he regarded as the genuine product, Sanitarium "Weet-bix". In fact, in India, to avoid confusing the customers, Weet-bix was once renamed "Joy Weets".¹¹

Including the seven years in China, the Johanson's were missionaries in the Orient for about 21 years.

Australia and America

In 1938, Eric J. Johanson, Sr., was called by his home field to be the president of South Australian Conference. On his way back to Australia, he was ordained by pastors L. D. Lemke and R. A. R. Thrift in Perth. Eric and Nettie spent the next four years in Adelaide, where their fourth child, James, was born. Then in 1942, the family moved to Christchurch, New Zealand, where Johanson became the president of the South New Zealand Conference. It was in New Zealand that their last child, Beth, was born.

In 1944, Johanson was called back to Warburton, Victoria, where he became the manager of the Signs Publishing Company, 34 years after his father, Johan Marius Johanson, served as manager there.¹²

When World War II ended Eric was called to move his family to America where he took up the position of assistant treasurer at General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church headquarters on August 16, 1946. Four years later in 1950, he was appointed statistical secretary of the General Conference.

In 1952, the Australasian Division issued a call to its talented son, Eric J. Johanson, Sr., to return to his home country. In July of that year, the Johanson family moved to Wahrenoonga, New South Wales, Australia, and Eric became an associate secretary of the Division. Later on, he became the treasurer of the Australasian Division, a

position he occupied for 14 years.¹³

Retirement Years

Eric J. Johnson, Sr., retired in 1971 at the age of 67, after 54 years of service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia, China, Southeast Asia, and America. Eric and Nettie then moved to Nords Wharf and lived there for 12 years before moving to Kressville Retirement Village, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia. Two years later, Nettie died on April 27, 1981, at the Charles Harrison Home. They had been married for 61 years. In 1983, Eric J. Johanson, Sr., then married Vera Salisbury.

Throughout his life, he was highly respected. His energy and his work ethic were admired by his colleagues and friends. On November 13, 1999, he was called to rest in the Lord after reaching the age of 100!¹⁴

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