

Heggie, Ronald Neil and Alvine (Reye) (1911–1982)

LYNETTE 'JOY' HUGHES

Lynette 'Joy' Hughes, B.Ed. (Nepean College of Advanced Education, Sydney, Australia). Hughes retired in 2001 from Wairoa Adventist School in Sydney, Australia. She taught in both denominational and public schools wherever it was possible during child raising years and beyond. During her teaching career, she led a number of instrumental groups among her students. She is married to Lionel with two adult daughters and a son and four grandchildren.

Ronald Neil Heggie was an educator, pastor, and administrator from New Zealand.

Early Life and Education

Ronald Neil Heggie, the son of a Scottish architect, John Philp Heggie and his wife Mary Gertrude (nee Cresswell), was born in Stratford, in the Taranaki region of North New Zealand on January 19, 1911.¹ At the time of his birth, Ronald had three older half-sisters: Oona May Ferguson, aged 17, and twin sisters, Ivy Gertrude Ferguson and Myrtle Doreen Ferguson, aged 16 years. Later in 1916, his younger brother, Ian Douglas Heggie was born.²

When Ronald was 9 years of age his mother took him to hear a public debate in Whitefield Memorial Hall, New Plymouth between Pastor W. D. Smith of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church and a well-known Protestant minister, Napier Milne. After losing the debate, Napier Milne said, "I would rather spend eternity in hell than 5 minutes with an SDA in heaven."³ Ronald's mother 'Gertie' was so impressed with the sincerity of Pastor W. D. Smith and the fact that his church's doctrines were all bible based that she took further studies and was baptized. Heggie was much impressed by the debate also, and he, too, was later baptized at age 16 in 1927.

Heggie enjoyed school life in the Taranaki region and succeeded well in all academic studies. He completed his high school education at the New Plymouth Boys' High School. During his high school years on a shooting



Ronald and Alvine Heggie, August 17, 1937.

Photo courtesy of Lynette 'Joy' Hughes.

expedition with his brother Doug, Heggie accidentally lost his index finger on his left hand when his gun discharged as they were climbing through a fence. The accident did not seriously affect Heggie's love of outdoor life, his sporting achievement, or the significant practical ability displayed throughout his life and mission service.

Aged 17 years, Heggie attended Longburn College completing the pre-Ministerial Course in 1929. The Wall Street Crash on October 31, 1929, resulted in great hardship and unemployment throughout Australia and New Zealand. After a further year at home selling religious literature and assisting his father in the building trade, Heggie enrolled at Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia. His parents bid him farewell, as he boarded the "SS Ulimaroa" in Auckland in February 1931 to travel to Sydney before catching a train to Morisset and then on to Avondale College. He graduated in 1933 from the Ministerial Course.⁴

Ministry

Ron's first appointment in 1934 was to South New Zealand selling religious books supervised by Frank Fox⁵ In 1935 Heggie was invited to assist Pastor C. A. Wrigley conducting evangelistic meetings in Wellington, North New Zealand. The following year saw him as assistant to Pastor Len Harvey at Paeroa. In 1937 Heggie married Alvine Reye whom he had met at Avondale College four years earlier. They were married in Auckland on August 17, 1937 at the SDA Church, William Street, Mt Eden, a suburb of Auckland. They had three children.

Ronald Heggie assisted with Pastor Stan Leeder's evangelistic series at Te Aroha in north New Zealand. At this time the main responsibility for the evangelistic series was assumed by Heggie and with good success.

With the declaration of War in 1939, Heggie was given the task of appealing in court on behalf of many young people who, as conscientious objectors, refused to carry arms. Heggie also assisted Pr Nelson Burns with an evangelistic series in Auckland. This series was threatened with closure but because of intervention by Prime Minister Fraser, the series continued.⁶ During 1940, Heggie was transferred to Wellington, New Zealand capital city to conduct a further evangelistic series.

From Wellington, Heggie received an invitation to conduct an evangelistic series in Dargaville, north of Auckland. Heggie was ordained as a minister of the SDA Church at the Auckland Camp Meeting on Sunday, 11 October 1942. The officiating ministers were Pastors Reuben Hare, Erwin Roenfelt and Henry G Moulds.⁷ While living at Te Kopuru, 7 miles from Dargaville, Heggie and Alvine's third child was born. At the time, Heggie was away in Auckland assisting with yet another evangelistic series. Dedication and sacrifice were hallmarks of Ron's ministry.

From Dargaville, Ronald and Alvine were invited to continue with evangelistic work in Auckland until he was appointed in 1944 to lead out as principal in the Batuna Training School in the Solomon Islands. Wartime conditions rapidly worsened as the Japanese moved south, and the Australian Church Headquarters changed

the destination from the Solomon Islands to Tahiti where Heggie was to replace Pastor Harold Wicks as president of the Church in French Polynesia.⁸ In order to gain passage to Tahiti, Ron, Alvine and family first travelled to Sydney on the vessel "Wahine." As it was wartime, most passenger ships were not operating. While they waited for any available ship to take them to Tahiti, Heggie spent time at Avondale College attending lectures which would better prepare him for service in French Polynesia. While waiting to obtain passage by boat, the family rented a cottage at Dora Creek, near Avondale College and Heggie filled in his time teaching and preaching.⁹

In early 1945, finally found a phosphate steamer willing to take the family to Tahiti.¹⁰ Captain Henderson laid down stringent rules for the 28-day zig-zag route to Tahiti avoiding marine mines, observing blackouts at night and ensuring regular evacuation practices. Arriving in Tahiti in an unconventional manner was just the start of strained relations with the French authorities who did not fully accept a New Zealander with a British Passport. It was virtually impossible to arrange for suitable travel arrangements to the many islands of French Polynesia. Any land dealings and property transfers by anyone who was not a French national were extremely difficult. During Ron's 5-year tenure, he requested that a French national become the next superintendent of French Polynesia.

During his years of service as superintendent of the Society Islands, Heggie's talent for practical work proved a great asset. Together with Charlie Flohr, he built a 20-foot mission boat for use around the island of Raiatea. This boat was one of seven built by Heggie during his lifetime. Heggie's practical ability, supported by his wife's ability to speak a number of languages made a team effort which was a key factor in the contribution made by this missionary family. Alvine spoke Samoan, German and English, and her knowledge of the Samoan language enabled her to quickly learn the Tahitian language. Together with Agnes Poroi, she produced a Tahitian Hymnal incorporating both words and music which was used by the church members for many decades. The life of a missionary can be demanding and lonely and this was the case for the Heggie family when Heggie was absent for long periods of time with no contact with home.¹¹

After returning to Australia the family located in Rockhampton, Queensland where Pastor Ernie Reye, a brother of Alvine was stationed. Heggie was subsequently asked to return to Tahiti for a time until the new French superintendent was due to arrive. The family remained in Rockhampton. In actual fact the French superintendent did not arrive for 9 months. After returning to Australia, Heggie spent the last three months of 1949 back in Rockhampton relieving the headmaster of the Rockhampton Adventist School.

In 1949 Heggie began a five year period as pastor and evangelist in the Victorian Conference. In the Bendigo Church, his practical bent attracted men to the church. Heggie had a special gift in appealing to the males in the church because he could relate to male work activities and male recreation. In 1953 he was called to pastor the Horsham Church in Victoria.

In 1955 Heggie was invited by Doctor E. E. White, principal of Avondale College to be the preceptor in the men's dormitory at the college.¹² The family, now consisting of teenagers, had to adjust to living in an apartment attached to the dormitory. It was a demanding time, but Heggie and the family survived the program and lack of privacy that is part of living in a college dormitory. The college office functioned 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Thursday and 9 a.m. to 12 a.m. on Friday. Out-of-hours phone calls were then all handled in the preceptor's home office so boys and girls spent time waiting for phones on the preceptor's front porch or walking through the house. During this time, though he was busy both day and night Heggie found the time to build a boat for the Life Saving Club at the college. Heggie also completed his B.A. in theology with commendable distinction graduating in 1959. He was a popular dean of men, a good counsellor and a well-respected pastor for both younger and older students.

Returning to the Pacific in 1960, Heggie accepted an invitation to be the mission president of the Cook Islands where he and Alvine enjoyed two years of service in Raratonga. During these years Alvine not only ably assisted her husband but was also very involved with the Dorcas Society of the mission caring for the needs of the poor and unfortunate members of the community. This period of time presented a challenge for the children of the family who had no real home apart from Avondale College and had little support with parents located so far away in the Pacific. Separations of this kind are again an example of the kinds of sacrifices made by missionary families in the promotion of gospel work.

The final ten years of Ronald Heggie's service to the Church took place in the South Queensland Conference. With their children now grown and pursuing their own careers, Ronald and Alvine worked as a team serving the pastoral needs of a number of churches. Alvine sold Adventist message books, door to door, sometimes using her bicycle for transport. For a time Alvine was top sales person for SDA religious books in the South Queensland Conference and as a result found interested people with whom Heggie arranged Bible Studies.

After serving the Ipswich church as pastor 1961-1963, the couple moved to Rockhampton between 1964 - 1966. Ron's practical abilities allowed him to construct his own house during spare time in these three years. From 1967 - 1969 Heggie concurrently pastored two churches, Maryborough and Hervey Bay. Gympie was their final pastorate in 1970 and 1971.

Later Years

In retirement Ronald and Alvine Heggie moved to Cooranbong, establishing an extensive garden and orchard on their property in Butler Avenue, not far from Avondale College. Heggie built a shed and continued to use his practical skills in various projects. These activities which included spraying fruit trees and utilizing fibreglass in various construction projects could have been factors in cutting short his life. Ronald Heggie, a non-smoker with an active lifestyle developed lung cancer which took his life on November 5, 1982. He was buried in the Avondale Cemetery, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia.¹³

Ronald and Alvine Heggie were friends to a wide spectrum of people - the strugglers, the workers, the academics and both men and women in their pastorates. A hard worker, a man of integrity, Heggie gave of his best to his family and the church he loved and served. His deep concern for preserving the doctrinal purity of the church came at some personal expense, but Heggie remained a faithful servant of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and he is remembered for his warmth, devotion and sincerity.

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NOTES

1. Much of the information in this article comes from the personal knowledge of Joy Hughes (Heggie), the younger daughter of Ronald and Alvine Heggie.
2. Rovada Kum Yuen (Heggie), personal knowledge as a daughter.
3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.
5. "Distribution of Labour," *Australasian Record*, September 9, 1933, 6.
6. Rovada Kum Yuen (Heggie) personal knowledge as a daughter.
7. Ronald Neil Heggie Personal Service Record, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives. Folder: "Heggie, Ronald Neil," Document: "Personal Service Record."
8. Ibid.
9. Ronald N. Heggie, "Delayed Journey," *Australasian Record*, November 18, 1946, 7- 8.
10. Alvine A.M. Heggie, "It Made My Day," *Australasian Record*, May 24, 1986, 10.
11. "Letters from Old Friends." *Australian Record*, April 9, 1945, 4; Alvine A. M. Heggie, "Marooned on Tiki hau," *Australasian Record*, February 9, 1985, 8-9.
12. "The New Preceptor," *Australasian Record*, March 28, 1955, 3.
13. Ormond K. Anderson, "Life Sketch of R. N. Heggie," *Australasian Record*, January 22, 1983, 13-14.

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