



Kenneth and Dorothy Gray with children Josephine, Anthony, and Kenneth, Jr.
Photo courtesy of Milton Hook. From the private collection of Josephine (Gray) Lee, Wahroonga, NSW.

Gray, Kenneth John (1912–1986) and Dorothy Beatrice (Smith) (1915–1999)

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Kenneth John and Dorothy Beatrice Gray were Adventist teachers and missionaries to Papua New Guinea and Fiji.

Childhood

Kenneth John Gray was born in Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex, England, on July 7, 1912, the youngest child of John Edward Gray and Mary Elizabeth (Hinds). His older siblings were Leslie Edward, Rosalind “Linda” Mary, Florence Elianor “Helen” and Thomas Hedley. John Gray belonged to a line of master tailors. He operated his business from a

shop front at their home of three storeys and found sufficient work to support his growing family.¹

The First World War radically changed their lives. John Gray was a reservist and was called to battle throughout the conflict. He was therefore absent for most of Kenneth's earliest years. Food was rationed nationwide and Kenneth experienced hunger. The tailoring business was left in the hands of an elderly man who proved to be unscrupulous, necessitating a fresh start in 1918. Financial recovery was difficult. Kenneth's oldest brother, Leslie, sought to make his own way in life and emigrated to South Australia.²

During the War the family moved to nearby Sidley where Kenneth attended a little elementary school associated with the High Anglican All Saints Church where he sang in the choir. For the upper levels of his schooling, he transferred to St Peters, a larger High Anglican institution closer to Bexhill-on-Sea.³

One day in 1922 Kenneth's father did not return home. The police found his set of clothes at the beach where he swam regularly. An inquest assumed he had drowned but the family was left with questions in their minds, given that he was a strong swimmer. Was he pining for his eldest son? Had the trauma of war destroyed his resilience? Did the pressure of a struggling business drive him to change his identity? Was he stricken with despair over his struggle with alcoholism after the War, or was his condition too complex to diagnose? Elizabeth was left in dire circumstances and poor health. Linda had trained as a nurse and remained with her mother. Helen was adopted and Thomas and Kenneth were reluctantly handed over to the care of Dr. Barnardo's Orphanage at Stepney Causeway, London, and later at Epsom. They were offered a passage to Australia and eagerly grasped it, believing they would live with Leslie. Instead, they were landed in Sydney in early 1923 far from Leslie and South Australia.⁴

Living with Seventh-day Adventists

Both Thomas and Kenneth were placed under the guardianship of Henry and Alice Tempest; Seventh-day Adventists living at Cooranbong, NSW. The Dr. Barnardo's Homes organization paid a regular boarding fee to the Tempests and made inspection visits to monitor the lad's welfare.⁵ For two years Thomas smarted under the weight of many chores at the Tempest home, so he asked and was granted permission to join Leslie in South Australia. Meanwhile, Kenneth endured and attended the high school on the campus of the Australasian Missionary College (AMC) and was baptized in 1926.⁷ He continued to exchange letters with his mother.⁸ Linda and his mother soon emigrated to South Australia, and Kenneth worked overtime to pay for his train fare to visit them in the southern summer of 1932. They had parted when Kenneth was ten years old and were reunited when he was twenty. His folks did not recognize him, initially, but as soon as they became aware that it really was Kenneth then hugs and joyous tears flowed freely.⁹

While Kenneth was studying at AMC and training to be a teacher, Henry Tempest found work for him in the blacksmithing and engineering department of the Sanitarium Health Food Company (SHF) on the same campus.¹⁰ The engineers were following with interest the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. On the day the Bridge was opened, Kenneth borrowed Tempest's car and drove a group to join the celebrations only to end up in the traffic jam that was making the inaugural crossing.¹¹ His most enjoyable extra-curricular activity was swimming. The dean of teacher training recommended the value of life-saving methods, and Kenneth, being a strong swimmer like his father, easily qualified for the Bronze Medallion, the Bronze Cross and the Silver Medallion all on the same day. Later, he progressed to an Instructor's Certificate and finally an Examiner's Certificate; the latter he maintained for the rest of his life.¹²

Kenneth completed his studies in 1933 but was not allowed to sit the final examinations because of a minor infraction of the rules.¹³ It did not affect his employment prospects, for he was offered both a career in teaching on a pittance and an engineering career with the SHF on almost four times the level of wages.¹⁴ He chose the pauper's path, accepting an appointment at the AMC Elementary School for 1934.¹⁵ Prior to taking up his duties, he tried his hand at selling *Bible Pictures and Stories* in the Tamworth area, but he found everyone to be just as poor as he was, since this was during the Depression.¹⁶

First Years of Teaching

Kenneth began his chosen career in 1934, teaching twenty-eight youngsters in grades three and four. The following year he taught thirty pupils in grades five and six. At this time he began to form a close friendship with Dorothy Smith, daughter of Elder J. Lamont Smith and wife Edith. Dorothy was in the midst of her training as a teacher. She was pressured into the workforce before she completed her training; the shortage of teachers being dire. She was appointed to the Auburn Elementary School, Sydney, for the 1936 school year. At the same time Kenneth, conveniently, was appointed to the nearby Fairfield Elementary School with twenty-eight students spread over six grades in a rural school.¹⁷ Their romance blossomed, and on New Year's Eve, 1936/37 they were married in the Hamilton SDA church, Newcastle, NSW.¹⁸

Overseas Mission Service

When Kenneth was teaching at AMC Elementary School in 1935, he came in contact with William Lock, missionary in Papua, who was on furlough and looking for candidates who might join him in his work. Lock spoke glowingly of the Mirigeda (meaning "sand mat") Training School that he wished to further establish. Kenneth's fascination was quickened with the possibility that one day he could be a missionary like Lock.¹⁹ Kenneth's aspiration was realized when he and Dorothy were appointed to Mirigeda just before their marriage.²⁰ Their pre-embarkation leave and

honeymoon took the form of a rushed trip to Adelaide to bid farewell to Kenneth's mother and siblings²¹ and a crash course in tropical medicine at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital.²² They boarded the MV "Macdhui" bound for Papua on February 4, 1937.²³ When they entered their cabin Kenneth was overwhelmed with emotion upon discovering that the Tempests had surreptitiously deposited their gramophone and records there; a generous gift from the couple who knew of Kenneth's love of music.²⁴

The Papua Mission, with headquarters at Mirigeda, was in its infancy. Almost thirty years had passed since it was first established and there were only 144 baptized members.²⁵ Lock had purchased some derelict homes abandoned by a mining company close by at Bootless Bay and transported them piece by piece to Mirigeda in order to reconstruct them. The school facilities were primitive with only one large room for both Kenneth and Dorothy to teach all ages including the mothers who brought their babies and hung them in string bags from the ceiling. To erase their slates, they would simply rub them on their hair. The wind-up gramophone proved to be a popular attraction.²⁶ For five years they taught under these circumstances with Dorothy receiving no remuneration. In addition to the usual subjects, the girls received instruction in sewing and bread-making, and the boys were taught house-painting, motor mechanics, and agriculture. They began to learn the lingua franca of the Papuan coast: Hiri Motu. Kenneth devised a method of soap-making from coconut oil by adding citronella as a mosquito repellent. This little industry earned cash for the mission.²⁷ For the first two years Kenneth served as secretary/treasurer of the Papua Mission in addition to his teaching responsibilities.²⁸

War-time Interruption

The only real communication that Mirigeda had with the outside world was a private telephone line made of uninsulated No.8 fencing wire strung from tree to tree. One day in July 1942, it carried the news that Japanese troops were advancing over the mountains towards Port Moresby. The order was given for all the expatriate women and children to congregate at Port Moresby wharf where a boat was waiting to take them to Australia. Dorothy and their infant daughter, Josephine, joined 1,100 other passengers who crammed onto the SS "Katoomba"; a vessel designed to carry only 300, and they all arrived safely in Sydney, NSW. A company of Australian troops took over the Mirigeda station, and a few weeks later, as Japanese troops advanced, Kenneth was advised to flee to Australia by whatever means he could find. He joined a small group of fellow missionaries and made a dash to Cairns in the little mission boat "Diari," an epic voyage of clever seamanship, good fortune, and many prayers.²⁹

During 1942 Kenneth and his family were back in familiar territory: he taught in the Avondale High School on the campus of his alma mater at Cooranbong, NSW.³⁰

Return to Overseas Mission Service

Naval battles in the South Pacific during 1942 gave the allies the advantage, so it was considered reasonably safe for some missionaries to venture back to service. Kenneth was appointed to Fulton Missionary School, Fiji, for 1943. He sailed ahead of the family while the ship took every precaution against attack by operating under a black-out while travelling. Dorothy and Josephine followed later. They spent four years in Fiji; Kenneth as headmaster and the initiator of a teacher-training program. They enjoyed the association of students from different cultures throughout the South Pacific. Their second child, Anthony Jon Lamont, was born in Suva, March 1945.³¹

At the end of each year in Fiji, the Grays packed up their goods in anticipation of transferring to Papua, but shipping was unreliable and they would unpack again. Eventually, in 1947, Kenneth returned to Papua under instructions to revive the mission school. He discovered that bombing raids had destroyed all the buildings and their personal effects at Mirigeda. Instead of remaining there a large acreage was purchased at Bautama, closer to Port Moresby, and with the help of George Johnson, a carpenter from Western Australia, materials were scrounged from war-time buildings to establish what became known as Bautama Training School³² (later Papuan Missionary School). Kenneth also bought at auction two ex-air force jeeps that were stripped of some vital parts. At the base of a canyon he found many army vehicles bulldozed into a heap that had been doused with petrol and set alight by departing troops. He found many parts still useful. These, together with parts from one jeep that he had purchased, he made his second jeep fully serviceable.³³

Having established Bautama Training School, Kenneth acted as Education and Missionary Volunteer Secretary for the Coral Sea Union Mission located at Lae. This involved travelling throughout the regions of Papua New Guinea for three years, re-establishing the mission schools that had suffered during war-time.³⁴ He was ordained in Lae in May, 1949. His second son, Kenneth John, Jr., was born in Lae in November 1949. The family then returned to Bautama for almost three more years from 1951-1953.³⁵

Late in 1953 Kenneth was asked to establish a central training school for the Coral Sea Union Mission. A site was chosen at Kabiufa, near Goroka in the cool highlands of Papua New Guinea. It was initially named the Coral Sea Union Training School.³⁶ Coastal students accustomed to a tropical climate and staples in their diet such as fish and coconuts did not enjoy campus life in the mountains.³⁷ The Gray family spent 1954 and 1955 at this location.³⁸ Dorothy taught in the elementary school on campus, and during a furlough, Kenneth scouted among church members for disused and broken down bicycles, and, with donated spare parts, he restored thirty bicycles at his former SHF engineering shop. The manager paid the freight to Kabiufa, and the delighted students used them to cycle to branch Sabbath Schools in the surrounding district.³⁹

From 1956 through 1961, Kenneth returned to the twin roles of Education and Missionary Volunteer Secretary for the Coral Sea Union Mission with headquarters in Lae. Dorothy taught English Literature in the government teacher-training college.⁴⁰ They transferred in 1962 to Suva, Fiji, in order for Kenneth to serve in the Central Pacific Union Mission as Education, Missionary Volunteer, Health and Temperance Secretary. He held these positions until September 1970 when he was appointed as president of the Cook Islands Mission.⁴¹ During his term as president, October 1970 through October 1972, he expressed the desire to permanently return to the homeland so that he and Dorothy could be closer to their children and grandchildren.⁴² Their wish was granted and they returned to live in Glenelg, suburban Adelaide, South Australia, to be close to daughter Josephine and family. Kenneth worked part-time as Health and Temperance Secretary for the South Australian Conference⁴³ and Dorothy did some relief teaching in government schools.⁴⁴

Retirement

Kenneth and Dorothy went on a world trip in 1977 and moved home to Wahroonga, NSW, in 1981.⁴⁵ He passed away on July 17, 1986, and was interred on the campus of Avondale College where he had trained for his lengthy mission service.⁴⁶ Dorothy passed away on April 19, 1999, and was laid to rest in the same place.⁴⁷ Together they had devoted their lives to one another and the church educational program, training numerous South Pacific islanders to be school teachers and gospel workers.

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