

# Oss, Melvin (1901–2003) and Mae (1900–1987)

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## JOHN B. YOUNGBERG

Dr. John B. Youngberg served 25 years at Andrews University, where he chaired the Religious Education department. He and his late wife Millie authored 35 books, served 2,700 couples in Marriage Commitment Seminars, directed Family Life International for 25 years, founded WIN! Wellness, co-authored by their son, Wes, and translated into 31 languages, and trained leaders in six continents.

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Melvin and Mae Oss were missionaries to India. Melvin was the founder of Camp MiVoden and co-founder of Upper Columbia Academy.

## Early Years

Melvin Oss was born on Palm Sunday, March 31, 1901, of Norwegian parents, near the small town of Newman Grove, Nebraska.<sup>1</sup> He was the youngest of five children, including his sister, Bertha, and brothers John, Gorden, and James. Four of the five siblings became missionaries: Bertha [Youngberg] to Bengal, John to China, Gorden to Trinidad, and Melvin to Bombay, India. James served in financial administration at Oakwood College, Pacific Union College, and Paradise Valley Sanitarium.

When Melvin Oss was in eighth grade, the family relocated to a farm near Burke, South Dakota. Oss graduated from Plain View Academy in Redfield, South Dakota, and received his bachelor's degree from Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. While studying theology at Union, he did field work in evangelism in the farming community of Gothenburg, Nebraska. There he met Mae Carskadon (born May 9, 1900, in Wilcox, Nebraska), a registered nurse.

## Marriage and Missionaries to India

Melvin and Mae married May 27, 1923. They soon traveled to India. They arrived by ship in Bombay (also known today as Mumbai) on their first mission appointment, and were stationed at Kalyan, near Bombay, for nearly five years.<sup>3</sup> In Kalyan they learned the Marathi language and ministered to the people of 200 villages. Mae operated a dispensary and ran the girls' school there. They then transferred to Lasalgaon, where Melvin led the Bombay Union Training School. The girls' school was also transferred to Lasalgaon, and expanded to include male students. Mae continued to help in the school and operate the dispensary at Lasalgaon.<sup>4</sup> Melvin was ordained to the ministry in 1928. The needs of the school demanded that they extend their mission service in India to eight years instead of the customary seven. The Oss's two sons, Paul Melvin and Donald Ole, were born in the Sasoon Hospital, in Poona, India.

Devdatt Narayan Tilak, the son of the world-famous Indian convert to Christianity Narayan Vaman Tilak, and editor of the *Daganodya*, spoke at Melvin and Mae's farewell in 1931. Though not a member of the Adventist church, the leader in the Indian Christian world was a great friend of the Osses. He paid tribute to them and stated that in his years of mission work in Asia with a wide variety of characters, he had never met such simple and Christ-like people as Melvin and Mae Oss.<sup>5</sup>

## Ministry in the United States

Melvin and Mae had been asked to return to India after a furlough, but due to Mae's health, it was necessary for them to leave permanently. Following the young family's return to the United States, Oss did pastoral and educational work in Kansas and Missouri, before serving for four years in Nebraska, where he became principal of Shelton Academy (later known as Platte Valley Academy). During his tenure as principal, Melvin completed the Master of Arts degree in



Melvin and Mae Oss with son, Paul in India.  
Photo courtesy of Paula Oltman.

School Administration from the University of Nebraska.

Oss also pastored a church in Durango, Colorado, for a time before moving to the Northwest, where he served in the Upper Columbia Conference. He served as Superintendent of Education, Young People's Secretary, and War Service Commissioner. He was instrumental in selecting and purchasing the new site for Upper Columbia Academy near Spangle, Washington. Likewise, a beautiful property was purchased by Hayden Lake in Idaho as the conference youth camp. It was named Camp MiVoden. "Mi" stands for "missionary," "Vo" for "volunteer," and "den" for the last letters of "Hayden".

Camp MiVoden was ready for operation in the summer of 1940, having just been purchased a few months earlier. Oss spent many hours of personal time, along with the help of his sons and others, getting the grounds in readiness and planning for the first camp season. In 1997, Camp MiVoden's, dining hall was dedicated in his honor as the Melvin Oss Dining Hall, remembering his foresight in establishing this church camp which has been enjoyed by tens of thousands of campers and visitors.

Oss pastored churches in Lewiston, Granger, Toppenish, Wapato, Milton-Freewater, Stateline, Hermiston, Moses Lake, Ritzville, and Colfax communities before retiring in 1966 in Spokane, Washington, where he moved with Mae to be near family. They enjoyed frequent visits from their six grandchildren, who always begged for "another story." He seemed to have an anecdote for every situation, and they loved to hear these over and over again. He also had a keen sense of humor. When people asked him how he was doing, he would often respond, "I'm pretty good for the shape I'm in."

## Later Years

Mae Oss died June 11, 1987, in Spokane, Washington.<sup>6</sup> After Mae's death, Melvin maintained their home in Spokane for several years before moving into The Waterford, a retirement center. The chapel at The Waterford was later named The Melvin Oss Chapel in appreciation of his ministry there. In January 1997 Oss relocated to Rose Arbor Assisted Living Facility in Hermiston, Oregon, owned by his granddaughters, Patricia Carroll and Paula Oltman, and Paula's husband, Dr. Guy Oltman.

Melvin Oss was dearly loved at Rose Arbor, where he conducted weekly Bible studies. Residents often requested him to pray with them and give spiritual guidance. In 1997 Oss received the Oregon Health Care Association's Resident of the Year Award for Life Enrichment. Oss attributed his long life to an everyday joy for living, an ongoing quest for knowledge, and trust in God.

Melvin Oss authored the book *65+ Making the Most of Your Retirement* (Southern Publishing Association, Nashville, 1972). He wrote poems prolifically and self-published them in at least seven volumes. According to Oss, when he reached 2,500 poems, he stopped counting. One of his last works was a manuscript titled *Remember*, featuring a chapter outlining his 70-year collection of unusual, meaningful tombstone epitaphs. A favorite epitaph reads, "I told you I was sick!"

Oss died July 31, 2003, at the age of 102. He is buried next to his wife at the Fairmount Memorial Park in Spokane, Washington.

Guard well each passing hour,  
Time's sand is running low.  
Lay hold of God's great pow'r,  
And do the best you know.

--Melvin Oss<sup>7</sup>

## SOURCES

"A Farewell Meeting at Lasalgaon." *Eastern Tidings* of the Southern Asia Division, September 1, 1929.

*Life of a Centenarian*, letter from Elaine Huey for Melvin Oss' 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday, 2001. In the author's private collection.

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Oss, Melvin. *Life—Retrospect, Purpose, Prospect—Poems of Maturity*. Spokane, Washington: Self-published, 1977.

Oss-Youngberg, Bertha and Melvin Oss. *The Saga of Mr. and Mrs. Ole Gullikson Oss*. Montownsville, Pa.: B. Oss-Youngberg, 1970

## NOTES

Bertha Oss-Youngberg and Melvin Oss, *The Saga of Mr. and Mrs. Ole Gullikson Oss* (Montonsville, Pa.: B. Oss-Youngberg, 1970), 57.?

2. "Oss, Mae Carskadon," obituary, *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, August 17, 1987, 16.?
3. Oss-Youngberg and Oss, 10.?
4. *Ibid.*, 20.?
5. "A Farewell Meeting at Lasalgaon," *Eastern Tidings of the Southern Asia Division*, September 1, 1929, 3.?
6. "Oss, Mae Carskadon," obituary.?
7. Melvin Oss, *Life—Retrospect, Purpose, Prospect—Poems of Maturity* (Spokane, Washington: Self-published, 1977).?

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