

Miller, Joseph Henry Damon (1910–1989) and Dulcie May (Hercus) Miller (1912–2009)

RUTH ELAINE DUFFY

Ruth Duffy (Lawrence) is the eldest daughter of Joseph and Dulcie Miller. Born in Santo New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) and educated at the Australasian Missionary College, Ruth is the mother of two children and one grandchild. Her first husband, Barry Lawrence died in 2008 and she married Robin Duffy in 2013. Ruth is a talented soprano. Her other interests include painting and photography.

Joseph and Dulcie Miller spent most of their working life as missionaries in the islands of the South Pacific. Initially, they ministered in Australia, then New Hebrides, Fiji, the Cook Islands, and later for the Australasian Division and the North New South Wales Conference.¹

Early Life

Joseph Henry Damon Miller was born on June 25, 1910, in a log cabin in Winnipeg, Canada.² His parents, Joseph Miller and Georgina Trevett of Liverpool, England, were married on August 5, 1899, in the city of Birkenhead.³ After the birth of their first daughter, Lilian, they moved to Canada in the mid 1890s. After Joseph was born in 1910, it was so cold in the log cabin that they thought that he would die. They migrated to Australia in 1913, settling in Bairnsdale, Victoria, where their younger daughter, Eveline, was born on August 13, 1913.⁴



Joseph Henry Miller

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

After finishing school, Joseph Miller worked as an orchardist and nurseryman.⁵ He became a Seventh-day Adventist in 1926, following visits by literature evangelist Charles Stafford and members of the Bairnsdale Seventh-day Adventist church.⁶ Pastor W. G. Turner encouraged Miller to attend the Australasian Missionary College (now Avondale University College). Between 1932 and 1935, he completed ministerial subjects; however, he did not graduate.⁷ While at the college, Miller met Dulcie May Hercus from Victoria.

Dulcie Hercus was born on December 7, 1912, at Pyramid Hill, Victoria.⁸ She was the second daughter of Robert Bruce Hercus and Maude Elizabeth Hare, who ran a mixed farm near Mitiamo, Victoria. Dulcie Hercus had four brothers and two sisters: Clive, Eric, Lindsay, Elaine, Isma, and Maurice.⁹ She spent 1934 and 1935 at the Australasian Missionary College studying pre-nursing subjects.¹⁰ She then studied and worked as a nurse during 1936 and 1937 at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital.¹¹

In 1937, Joseph Miller began to work for the Church as a literature evangelist and assisted evangelistic campaigns in Queensland under the auspices of J. W. Nixon.¹² On February 21, 1938, Joseph and Dulcie Miller were married in the Bendigo Seventh-day Adventist church by A. W. Knight.¹³ Three daughters were born them. Ruth Elaine was born during a severe earthquake on Santo, New Hebrides. Elsie May was born in the New Hebrides and Joy Elizabeth in Suva, Fiji.¹⁴

Mission Service

Joseph and Dulcie Miller spent three and a half years at the Aore Training School in the New Hebrides. Joseph Miller simultaneously taught at the school and served as secretary-treasurer for the New Hebrides Mission.¹⁵ Dulcie Miller was involved in teaching the women sewing and attending to the sick.¹⁶ They then spent seven and a half years on Tanna, New Hebrides, where Joseph Miller was the district director from 1942 to 1949.¹⁷ Both Millers routinely gave injections, performed dental extractions, and rendered medical aid to the tribespeople.¹⁸ It was a dangerous time. In her diary, Dulcie Miller recorded an occasion when her husband visited Malekula, the island of the "Big Nambus."

...Joe went visiting on Malekula. Joe felt some of the men touching his arms and talking. He asked their interpreter what they were saying. "You would make a very tasty meal." They like fat people to eat.¹⁹

During the years of World War II, the Millers elected to remain in the New Hebrides. During those years, most expatriates returned to their homelands for reasons of safety. Joe Miller was ordained on Aore on June 29, 1944.²⁰

On October 1947, a severe tornado hit the mission compound on Tanna, destroying the church, which was also being used as the school. Thirty children and their teacher escaped serious injury, although some were blown right out of the church and the rest were buried under the walls and roofing iron. However, no lives were lost.²¹

In 1949, the family moved to Fulton College in Fiji. Miller was appointed estate manager, Bible teacher, and business manager.²² The college relocated to the site in 1941 from the Buresala School on the nearby island of Ovalau.²³

Toward the end of 1952, the family moved to the Cook Islands where they lived on the island of Rarotonga. Miller was the mission president for over six years.²⁴ He frequently travelled on the inter-island trading vessels, visiting the church members on the many islands within the Cook Islands group.

Daughters Ruth and May attended the Avarua Side School on the campus of the government primary school there. Joy later started school there as well. Ruth completed high school by correspondence. The girls enjoyed spending time in the lagoon only a few yards from their backyard.²⁵ Despite their isolated education, the girls successfully completed their higher education. Ruth majored in secretarial studies at the Australasian Missionary College. May graduated from primary teaching course also at Australasian Missionary College. Joy completed nursing at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital.²⁶

Australia

At the end of June 1958, the family relocated to Cooranbong, New South Wales, to enable the girls to be educated on the Avondale campus. As there was no available pastoral work for Miller at that time, he worked in the Sanitarium Health Food factory at Cooranbong from 1958 until 1960.²⁷

In 1960, the Australasian Division built a high school hostel on the campus of Avondale College, primarily for the children of missionaries who were obliged to send their children to Australia for their education. Joseph and Dulcie Miller were appointed preceptors of the new boarding hostel, which commenced operation at the beginning of the 1961 school year with forty high school students enrolled as boarders. Dulcie Miller looked after the boarding girls without remuneration. Joseph Miller looked after the boarding boys and was given the additional responsibility of campus supervisor for the college.²⁸ The Millers were remembered as being "strict and loving foster parents who were most vigilant in keeping an eye on their flock."²⁹

Joseph and Dulcie Miller remained at the high school hostel until 1967 when the work of the hostel gradually dissipated following the establishment of Lilydale Adventist Academy in Victoria in 1964.³⁰ By then, most missionary children were being sent to the new school at Lilydale.³¹

From 1968 until 1972, Miller returned to pastoral work with the North New South Wales Conference in Armidale, Guyra, and the isolated members at Yarrowitch.³²

Joseph and Dulcie Miller retired in Cooranbong, New South Wales, commencing sustentation on July 1, 1972.³³ On January 4, 1974, their second daughter, May, died in a light plane crash while returning home on vacation from teaching at the Darwin Seventh-day Adventist School.³⁴

Joseph Miller died on November 27, 1989, aged 80.³⁵ Dulcie Miller died on December 11, 2009, aged 97.³⁶ They were buried in the Avondale Cemetery at Cooranbong, New South Wales.³⁷

Contribution

Joseph and Dulcie Miller represented a generation of pastoral missionaries who regarded a call to the mission field as a lifetime commitment, reflected in the decision to remain in the New Hebrides during the uncertain and risky duration of the Second World War. Their later homefield service was a challenging role when they became preceptors of the high school hostel.

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"Victorians Maintain That You Should Come to College." *Australasian Record*, December 10, 1934.

NOTES

1. Much of the information in this article is written from the personal knowledge and experience of the author as the eldest daughter of Dulcie and Joseph Miller.
2. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Biographical Information Blank;" Les Coombe, "Life Sketch of Pastor Joseph Miller," *South Pacific Record*, February 4, 1990, 13; personal knowledge of the author as the daughter of Dulcie and Joseph Miller.
3. Marriage Certificate of Joseph Miller and Georgina (Trevett), held in the personal collection of the author.
4. Personal knowledge of the author as the daughter of Dulcie and Joseph Miller.
5. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Biographical Information Blank;"
6. Les Coombe, "Life Sketch of Pastor Joseph Miller," *South Pacific Record*, February 4, 1990, 13.
7. Ibid.
8. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Biographical Information Blank."
9. Personal knowledge of the author as the daughter of Dulcie and Joseph Miller.
10. "Victorians Maintain That You Should Come to College," *Australasian Record*, December 10, 1934, 10.
11. Dulcie May Miller Sustentation Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Dulcie May," document: "Weekly Rates."
12. "Colporteur's Summary, January 1936," *Australasian Record*, March 9, 1936, 4.
13. A. W. Knight, "Miller-Hercus marriage," *Australasian Record*, March 21, 1938, 6.
14. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Biographical Information Blank."
15. Ibid.
16. Personal knowledge of the author as the daughter of Dulcie and Joseph Miller.

17. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Biographical Information Blank."
18. Personal diary of Joseph Miller, held in the personal collection of the author.
19. Dulcie May Miller to "the family," n.d., held in the personal collection of the author.
20. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Biographical Information Blank."
21. "Brevities," *Australasian Record*, November 24, 1947, 8.
22. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Biographical Information Blank."
23. See Fulton Adventist University College, Fiji.
24. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Personal Service Record."
25. Personal knowledge of the author as the eldest daughter of Joseph and Dulcie Miller.
26. Ibid.
27. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Personal Service Record."
28. W. G. Turner, "Official Opening of the Ellen G White Memorial Building and High School Hostel," *Australasian Record*, June 19, 1961, 1-2.
29. John G. Hammond, to the author, December 6, 2019. John Hammond was one of the original boarders at the high school hostel.
30. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Personal Service Record."
31. "Lilydale Adventist Academy," School Choice, n.d. accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.schoolchoice.com.au/LILYDALE-ADVENTIST-ACADEMY/>.
32. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Sustentation Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "J. H. D. Miller to A. H Forbes, February 10, 1968."

33. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Sustentation Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Pastor and Mrs J. H. D. Miller."
 34. Department of Transport, "Aircraft Accident Investigation Summary Report, January 4, 1974."
 35. Les Coombe, "Life Sketch of Pastor Joseph Miller," *South Pacific Record*, February 4, 1990, 13.
 36. Joseph Henry Damon Miller Sustentation Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, folder: "Miller, Joseph Henry Damon," document: "Dulcie M. Miller died 11.12.2009."
 37. Personal knowledge of the author as the daughter of Dulcie and Joseph Miller.
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