

SKY PILOT NEWS

JAN.—FEB.

1986

Published bi-monthly by Marella Mission Farm Ltd.

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Donations of \$2.00 and upwards are deductible for taxation purposes. Quote No. A.F. 1595C/SF3380

Subscription: 50 cents per annum. Registered by Australia Post — Publication No. NARO599



KEITH AND GWEN LANGFORD-SMITH, NORMA WARWICK
Mum, Dad and Auntie Norma to hundreds of Aboriginal children.

Photo by Ramon Williams

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

by Norma K. Warwick

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

This is a difficult report to write, tinged with some sadness, so I trust you will bear with me in my endeavour to present the situation regarding Marella as clearly as possible. If you have any questions or comments, please direct them to me rather than indulge in speculation. I remember that when the Aboriginal children left our direct care in 1979 we heard of all sorts of wild rumours circulating. We do not want that to happen now, for we wish all our friends to know firsthand of the important decisions that have been made.

We have been prayerfully considering the future for some time, and the Council of Marella Mission Farm Limited has finally decided that our ministry has been completed. As we look back over many years of hard work and perseverance (almost "blood, sweat and tears"—certainly the latter two!) we are amazed at the way in which God has led us, and profoundly thankful for His providence in supplying all our needs. We are also very conscious of the loyal support given by so many friends—literally thousands over the years—without whom it would have been impossible to continue. The loving care given to hundreds of Aboriginal children cannot be measured in practical terms, while the effect of lives transformed by the saving power of Christ will not be evident until eternity. As our late founder, Keith Langford-Smith, used to say: "When the Lord comes to make up His jewels, none will shine more brightly than the black opal of Australia."

PAST

It is difficult to set a time when our work began, but we decided some time ago that the commencement was really on 25th October, 1948, when the first broadcast of the Sky Pilot's Log went to air, with dramatised stories written and narrated by Keith Langford-Smith. These continued for several years, with a children's session being added later. We still hear every week from folk who used to listen to these stories.

Keith's vision, however, since his return from missionary aviation work in Arnhem Land, had been to start a home for Aboriginal children near Sydney, convinced as he was that the need would be great. Eventually this dream became a reality and for over a quarter of a century we cared for hundreds of children

(most of them in desperate need) for longer or shorter periods.

Many stories could be—will be, we hope—told about these children and about the way the Lord provided for their every need. Suffice it here to say that we treasure the friendships we now have with the Aboriginal people for whom we cared when they were children. Some—eight, we think—have gone before us to be with the Lord, the last being Adrien; we heard that he was accidentally drowned on Christmas Day. In most cases these children would not have heard that the Lord Jesus died for them if they had not come to Marella.

We thank God for **Keith and Gwen Langford-Smith** ("Dad" and "Mum" to the children) and their family, who made many sacrifices for the sake of the Aboriginal children. We pay tribute too to the dedicated staff who came and went over the years; they worked hard and for long hours—in home and kitchen, on the farm and in the office—for minimum wages. Most have kept in touch with the children and with us, for many firm friendships were made while we worked together. Perhaps it can best be summed up in a letter received from a former staff worker at Christmas time: ". . . memories from the happy and loving ways you looked after us all at your home. The Lord looked over us as we stayed with you. He touched us all and gave me a path to walk along. I only wish I could follow your footsteps as I have tried to do."

Voluntary workers over the years have made a tremendous contribution to the welfare of the Aboriginal children; it would have been quite hopeless to try to carry on without them. Mrs. Vera Onslow stands out as the one who should be mentioned amongst many outstanding names. A member of our Women's Auxiliary since the very beginning, she became an even more diligent worker after the tragic loss of her husband George (himself a voluntary worker) in 1957. Right up to her death in 1981 she gave herself unsparingly to the Lord's service at Marella. In the process she became a spiritual mentor to us all. I dare not mention other names for fear of an inadvertent omission, but let me place on record my deep appreciation and gratitude to those who have worked so unselfishly for so long. You have been an inspiration.

As I have already mentioned, the care of the children could not possibly have been

maintained for so many long years without the prayers, the goodwill and the sacrificial gifts of our friends and supporters. Not only have you obeyed the Lord's commandment, "Feed my lambs," but you have given us tremendous encouragement in a task which, to say the least, has not always been easy. Thank you for all you have meant to us. We shall miss you.

PRESENT

Many questions will be asked about the winding up process. Let me anticipate some of them:

Tax Deductibility. Our eligibility for tax deductibility will remain until the actual date on which the winding up is finalised. You may safely claim on any donations given in the current financial year, though it is always wise to quote our number (AF 1595C/SF 3380) on your tax return. If we are holding receipts in our office which you will need if your claim is queried, please phone (629-1555) or write as soon as possible.

Home Offering Boxes. Please empty your home offering boxes as soon as possible and send the contents to us. Then either destroy the box or return it to us. You may wish to keep it as a souvenir, in which case we suggest that you ensure it is not possible for others to insert cash under any misapprehension.

Sky Pilot News. This will be the last issue of the Sky Pilot News in its present form. There will be other mailings for various purposes (see below), but these will be sent only to those who have requested them.

I know that many of you will miss our little paper arriving regularly in your mail box. It seems to have had a ministry of its own, for which I am humbly grateful. Even as I was writing this, a letter arrived which reads: "My late husband . . . has always received a copy of the Sky Pilot. I do hope you will continue that — it is most informative and very interesting."

From another letter, received before Christmas: "Many thanks for the Sky Pilot News. We have been reading them since we started to get them, when 'Uncle Keith' had the session on the air, and the fetes were held in the (Sydney) Town Hall. It's so good to know what to pray for."

Back issues will be available. Phone or write for particular issues, or call at our office if you want any quantity. Phone first, please, to make sure I will be here to attend to you.

The Parramatta branch of our Women's Auxiliary will conduct a street stall outside Parramatta Town Hall on Friday, 21st March. A decision will be made later about any future

stalls, though these (if any) will be limited.

The Blue Mountains Auxiliary has now ceased to function. This decision was reached late last year when it became evident that the members were not getting any younger and no new members were volunteering. In the wonderful timing of God, the women came to this decision just before Marella Council made its own momentous decision to complete our affairs.

A great debt is owed to the members, past and present, of these Auxiliaries, who have worked untiringly to raise funds to support the children. Thank you, ladies, for the fun and fellowship we have enjoyed together, and for all you have done as loyal supporters.

Some voluntary workers are remaining with us, to help in the many tasks which have to be seen to during these last months — in the office and garden, with transport, and with sorting goods to be disposed of. Thank you all.

Legacies already provided for in your will may be concerning you. Our legal advice is:

"While any legacy to Marella would probably pass to its successor we do feel that people who have provided for such legacies should be encouraged to alter their Wills to provide that the legacies shall in fact pass to the successor of Marella. This would put the matter beyond doubt."

We suggest, therefore, that an alteration should be made. Our "successor" would be the organisation or organisations to which our assets will be transferred (see below). This decision has yet to be made. If you would like further advice, please phone me on 629-1555.

Donations for the support of the children at present being cared for under the cottage system may be sent direct to Care Force, P.O. Box 427, Parramatta, 2150 (the office is at 45 Hunter Street, Parramatta). It is important to specify that your donation is for the Marella Project.

AND FUTURE?

There will be no Mini Fete this year — or, of course, in any year now. A limited number of street stalls will be held, however, (see above). But **please do not send any more goods for any of the stalls**; we have to dispose of what we have, and we expect to do this profitably, but we must reduce our stock to enable the final sale to be arranged.

A Sale or some sort — possibly an auction — will be held to dispose of our tangible assets such as furniture and equipment, as well as goods not sold at the final street stalls. Pro-

vision is made elsewhere in this paper for you to apply for particulars if you are interested. Please allow time for details (date, etc.) to be decided.

A **Thanksgiving Service** is planned for Sunday, 4th May, 1986 at 3 p.m. in St. John's Cathedral, Parramatta (opposite the Town Hall and not far from the railway station). Please make this a firm date in your diary, for we would like all our friends to share in this service of praise and thanks to God for what He has done in the lives of so many people, both black and white, through Marella.

The preacher will be the Archbishop of Sydney, the Most Reverend D. W. B. Robinson who, as Bishop in Parramatta, spoke at the Thanksgiving Service for our late beloved founder, Keith Langford-Smith, on 1st October, 1981. On that occasion, Bishop (as he was then) Robinson told how, as a small boy, he had donated a penny for the purchase of the plane "Sky Pilot," which Keith was to use in his missionary work in the North.

We hope many of our former children will be there, and we have asked two of them to take part in the service.

We plan to make available a recording of the service—see order form. It will be broadcast later on 2 CBA-FM.

If you would like a reminder of this service, please fill in the form at the appropriate place.

The winding up process, as mentioned, will take some time, but we will make every effort to ensure that this is seen to with the efficiency and carefulness which we have always tried to make a hallmark of our work.

When the children left our direct care in 1979 to be cared for by Church of England Homes (which later merged with Care Force, part of the Home Mission Society) in cottages at Marrickville, we promised to support them to the best of our ability — to the extent that our own supporters stood by us, in fact.

From then until late last year this support had totalled \$179,414.22, as well as gifts in kind such as Christmas presents for the children, clothing and large amounts of foodstuffs.

Our Memorandum and Articles of Association include the following provision for our present circumstances:

"If upon the winding up or dissolution of the Company there remains, after satisfaction of all its debts and liabilities, any property whatsoever, the same shall not be paid to or distributed among the members of the Company, but shall be given or transferred to some other institution or institutions having objects similar to the objects of the Company, and which shall

prohibit the distribution of its or their income and property among its or their members to an extent at least as great as is imposed on the Company under or by virtue of clause 4 hereof, such institution or institutions to be determined by the members of the Company at or before the time of dissolution, and if and so far as effect cannot be given to the aforesaid provision, then to some charitable object."

This means that the General Committee has to decide to which organisation or organisations (similar to this) our financial and other resources will be transferred.

Our Council still has many decisions to make. The members are very much aware of our obligation to be faithful stewards of the money and goods entrusted to us, and will prayerfully consider making a recommendation to the members of our General Committee — a wider body of supporters who belong, as do the Council members, to various denominations of the Christian church. As you know, Marella has always been an interdenominational mission.

Because of the changes taking place, we have suspended the sending of our regular contributions to the support of the children in the Marella cottages. Their welfare, of course, will be uppermost in the minds of those who have to make these vital decisions.

At this stage, let me place on record my appreciation of the voluntary service given by members of the General Committee and of the Council, who have cheerfully given of their time and their skills over many years to forward this work. The fact that the membership of these two bodies has remained much the same over the years is evidence of the stability in the direction of the mission which has been noticed by many.

The land on which our offices are situated does not belong to Marella, but to the estate of the late Keith Langford-Smith. He originally purchased it in 1939 with the home for Aboriginal children in mind, and it was only by personal sacrifice on the part of Keith and Gwen that the work was ever established. For many years the mission used the property rent free; in later times a nominal rent was paid, then in recent years a more realistic sum was paid for the use of the office and the big shed — though not yet at full market value. When the Aboriginal children left our direct care and part of the property was sold, Keith gave a large sum to Marella, partly in recompense for such extra buildings as had been erected on his land, and partly as a gift to the Lord. This was passed on to help in the purchase and renovation of the first cottage in Marrickville and for a mini-bus to transport the children.

Even so, **the sum of our assets** will not be inconsiderable. We have cash on hand from recent donations, various investments (mostly the proceeds of legacies) and, of course, furniture and fittings, clothing and equipment, most of which will be turned into cash. The total to be distributed according to the guidelines written into our constitution will be many thousands of dollars.

A report on the final distribution will be available to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please complete the relevant section of the form if you would like this information.

The Deposit Fund will be terminated. We suggest that those of you who have contributed to this Fund should return the notice which accompanied your receipt, whereupon the matter will be attended to as promptly as possible. Thank you for your generosity in letting us use your resources in this way.

The work of **Vision Videos** will continue. Please file away in your memory (or, better still, in the file you keep for the arranging of programmes!) the fact that I am willing to speak to your group as the honorary Australian representative of Vision Videos. I can screen the beautifully photographed series, **A Mind Behind It All**, and give interesting background to its production; for in 1983 the team raced against time, because of Professor Blaiklock's approaching death, to film him and record his thoughts on the first chapter of John's Gospel. One viewer even suggested that the New Zealand Tourist Bureau should give a commission each time the videos were screened, as the background is superb! I can also tell of the possibilities of further teaching series to come from the same producer.

Books and cassettes will, even after Marella has been finally wound down, still be available through Vision Videos — the books while stocks last and the cassettes for as long as there is a need. Note the new cassettes listed on the supplement to this issue.

WHAT ABOUT US?

Mrs. Gwen Langford-Smith, who retired as Matron at the beginning of 1979, has continued to live at Marella, where her "ministry to the interior" — catering for the many visitors and most of the voluntary workers — has been deeply appreciated. Now, however, having reached the age of 75, she feels the need for a change. She will be moving, as soon as her unit has been completed, to Kooronga Lodge, a small retirement village conducted by the UPA at Orange. Her son and daughter-in-law, Bruce and Margaret and their family, live nearby; indeed, Margaret is supervisor of the hostel section of the retirement complex.

Though the date has not been fixed, Gwen's move will take place in the not too distant future. Please pray for her as she takes this big step after living on the same property for 47 years. Her phone number is not yet available, but her address will be: Unit 2, Kooronga Lodge, Kooronga Avenue, Westlea, Orange, N.S.W. 2800.

As for myself, I do not know what the future holds. After 36 years here (I came in 1950 to help out for a month), it seems strange to think of life apart from Marella. However, I am reminded of something Mrs. Onslow once said, in her practical and forthright manner: "Norma, God doesn't cast people aside like a sucked-out orange!" It is exciting to think that there may be something still for me to do, and I look forward to seeing each step revealed. I have walked with the Lord, albeit with much stumbling on my part, for too long to doubt His promises to guide and direct my life.

One thing I plan to do is to write a biography of our Founder and Director, Keith Langford-Smith — a work which will, of course, include the story of Marella. I hope to apply for a literary grant, though such a grant is by no means certain. If this is not forthcoming, I hope still to do this writing, but it will, of course, take longer. Mrs. Nancy Bird Walton, the famous airwoman, has already agreed to write the foreword.

If you have any reminiscences of Keith, particularly of his early life, or of your association with Marella, I would very much like to hear from you. Please state in your letter whether I may quote your name in acknowledging any material I use. The address on Page One will find me for quite some time yet.

THE PROPERTY

An old friend said recently, "I hope that the property will be used for Christian work, because it has been saturated by prayer and sacrifice." I know that Keith would wish the property which he purchased with such vision way back in 1939 and which has meant so much to so many people ever since to continue to be used to the glory of God — and it appears that this is indeed possible.

The executors of the Langford-Smith estate are negotiating with the Investigating Committee for a Hills Anglican Secondary School with a view to selling the property for use as a Christian High School. Such a school would have a low fee structure, thus enabling middle income families to provide a sound Christian education for their children in their important teenage years. A lot of ground work has been done by the Committee, especially by its Sec-

retary, Mr. Craig Laffin, but there are many more hurdles to be overcome if the school is to proceed. Please pray for this venture; we feel it would be most appropriate to continue the use of the land and buildings as a Christian ministry to young people.

Mr. Laffin writes, "It is with regret but understanding that our committee has learnt of the ultimate termination of the magnificent work conducted by Marella Mission and begun by the late Keith Langford-Smith. It is our earnest and prayerful wish to continue the Christian model of service exemplified by your organisation for so many needed and useful years . . . Our prayerful support for Marella Mission in the closing months of its service are assured to you and we wish to convey our deep sense of responsibility in continuing Christian work on the site of Marella Mission in Kellyville."

CONCLUSION

A member of our General Committee has written, "Whenever I think of all the moves afoot for dear Marella, I can't help but be amazed at the graciousness of the Lord. It is just so wonderful how it all seems to be working out . . . in a way we never imagined it would. And there seems to be such an exciting future for you too." It reminds me of a saying of Professor Blaiklock's which I have quoted before: "God is utterly dependable, but gloriously unpredictable."

What more can I say, except perhaps to quote the old hymn:

How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend,
Whose love is as great as His power

And knows neither measure nor end.
'Tis Jesus, the First and the Last,
Whose Spirit will guide us safe Home.
We'll praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that's to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the following donors for recent gifts. **Please note** that for any donations which may still filter in, a receipt will be sent. Refer to the report above for details of receipts which we are holding for you.

19.11.85—C.T., Redfern	\$ 5
27.11.85—B.A., Wentworth Falls	\$10
4.12.85—E.J., Padstow Heights	\$10
11.12.85—J.G., Concord	\$30
17.12.85—B.C., Glenbrook	\$ 5
23.12.85—R.A., Cronulla	\$10
28. 1.86—K.M., Marrickville	\$10
7. 2.86—E.J., Padstow Heights	\$10

BOOKS

As mentioned above, we will offer Professor Blaiklock's books for sale while stocks last. Most are still available, including **Blaiklock's Bible Handbook** (now out of print) for \$5.95 plus 80 cents postage, and **Living Waters** (Meditations on the Psalms) for \$21.05 plus \$2.20 postage.

Ideal for an Easter gift is **Six Weeks to Eternity**, which is the story of Christ's last journey to Jerusalem—a pilgrimage of deep thought, renewed resolve and searching of the soul, which ends, not with the cross, but with the Risen Lord—and Eternity. Recommended retail price is now \$6.75, but we have it available for \$4.95 plus 80 cents postage.

Please fill in and return to:-

THE GENERAL SECRETARY,
MARELLA MISSION,
BOX 29 P.O.
CASTLE HILL, N.S.W. 2154

Please send me (please tick ✓ in relevant box)

- ☐ A reminder of the Thanksgiving Service to be held on 4th May.
- ☐ Details of the proposed sale.
- ☐ The final report of the disposal of assets.

Comments: