

The Life of Fred Morris: “Navy Boy to Missionary”

This is a summary of the book published in 2018 of the life story of Australian missionary Fred Morris who became author of Manna Publications Bible teaching commentaries (www.mannapublications.org) It serves as a fitting obituary to his life and ministry.

Fred was born Oct 7th 1924 in Sydney and died in Harrisonburg VA Sept 13th 2018. After WW1 was over, Fred's father tried many jobs without success. His mother lost two babies at birth which led her to pray over Fred every day. She ran a haberdashery in Sydney where they lived until Fred was six. Fred's father was eventually given a GI land grant which enabled him to develop a successful dairy farm in New South Wales.



Fred had little to do until World War 2 but milk cows and catch rabbits. He was lonely, without a friend, but became a strong follower of Christ. He was tormented at school, but fell in love with the Australian countryside, photographing birds. He sometimes earned a wage picking peas on a neighbour's farm. Eventually his call-up papers came for WW2 and he trained in the navy at Melbourne. He found it difficult to make friends with the other men except for one who regularly read his New Testament, so Fred joined him at the same time each day. This took away the stress and Fred found a new freedom of spirit.

After training, Fred was assigned to a naval ship charting large areas of the Pacific Ocean to correct any errors in the old maps. He enjoyed mapping. He also learned how to use the radar equipment. His shipmates were vulgar; he said that Satan was there. Again and again Fred said, “I don't want to hear that stuff.” He struggled to witness about “the Jesus way”. His faith was tested in the furnace of life and his sole fellowship was “with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3) – and with the creatures God created.

One night on coastal tide-measuring duties, he was caught in a storm and Fred prayed for a miracle from God to save him. After an eternity of bouncing water the keel of the boat hit a sand bar. He jumped out with an oar prodding as he went forward in the dark to reach dry land, totally exhausted. In the morning Fred knew what Jonah must have experienced! Fred was court marshalled for losing equipment but he said “it seemed a small cost to pay for God saving my life.”

When Fred went on shore with his fellow navy men, he saw they were only out “to pick up a blond” and he realised how God used his natural shyness and Christian upbringing to keep him from being misled into carousing.

Whilst at sea serving in the navy, Fred developed dermatitis and was admitted to hospital in Papua New Guinea where they painted his whole body in sulphur and grease! He was discharged and joined a small boat to rejoin his naval boat.

By day, the boat hid him from Japanese planes in river estuaries which proved a culture shock for Fred, meeting natives in grass skirts. The boat crew traded with the natives for ‘bush lemons’ to secure enough Vitamin C to prevent beriberi. Sadly, Fred caught malaria at this time. He survived rocket fire from the Japanese but experienced severe sea-sickness in storms raging round the coast of Papua New Guinea.

Returning to dock in Sydney, Fred volunteered to take letters to girlfriends of some of the crew who had duties on board. This caused a bout of loneliness and deep awareness of the need of a companion. Whilst ashore Fred was trained in operating radar sets using new equipment from Great Britain. Whilst in training, he lodged with a large immigrant family from Estonia and built up good friendships and attended the local Baptist church, where he was baptised. It confirmed his long-held faith in Christ. It was also the time he developed a love for saveloys!

Eventually Fred was drafted to serve on Her Majesty's Australian Ship *Shropshire*, a cruiser with 8-inch guns and three massive smoke stacks, built in Scotland. It set sail into Pacific waters to provide radar coverage to the United States 74th Naval Task Force.

Among a crew of over 1000 men Fred felt insignificant. In the tropics it was always stifling hot and humid and the food quality “unenticing”. But occasionally they moved near enough to an American

supply ship to get some fresh fruit, meat and vegetables.

Eventually the cruiser docked near Milan where Fred saw all the damage caused by Japanese planes and boats. It was here that he longed to go to China and help in the release of Prisoners of War held there by the Japanese, knowing that his uncle was one of them. Soon, the Hiroshima atom bomb brought a quick end to the war and HMAS *Shropshire* sailed into Tokyo harbour. Preparations were soon made for the release of POWs. Fred continued his duties on board HMAS *Shropshire* and after making a bad mistake he was demoted to peeling potatoes!

Fred long remembered the signing of the Japanese surrender and the VJ celebrations in Tokyo Bay with warships stretching as far as the eyes could see, blowing sirens, plus wave after wave of aircraft overhead. Fred also saw the POWs being shipped home, many too weak to stand. Fred longed to see his uncle Sam who served in the China Inland Mission (now OMF). Fred wrote in his memoirs, "I didn't hate the Japanese. I knew they needed God just as we do. All are sinners and need to be saved by the blood of Jesus."

In December 1945, Fred's ship left Tokyo for Sydney. Fred thought, "Little did I know then that I would go back one day to Japan as a missionary of the Gospel to share their spiritual struggle." Fred had no wife or girlfriend to go back home to but Fred's sister Elsie had already got to know Lorna, Fred's future wife! So Fred met Lorna later through her sister. Before this happened Fred, still in the navy, fell into deep water whilst renovating the ship. "Again, God saved me."

Fred's sister enrolled as a student at Sydney Bible Training Institute and her friend Lorna Doutry followed her. Fred and Lorna met each other and fell in love but their lives were going in different directions. Lorna heard the Lord's voice calling her to serve in Japan; Fred stayed at Sydney University to finish his studies in general education.

Lorna accepted Fred's proposal of marriage and she left for Japan as his fiancée without seeing him for 14 months. Meanwhile, God in His mercy confirmed Fred's call as a missionary through reading Acts 26:18-19. "I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light..." Fred believed "God was sending us out". So after Sydney University he enrolled in Bible College and then joined the Central Japan Pioneer Mission, a British mission working in the main Japanese island of Honshu.

Whilst in training, Fred was preaching as a student pastor one Sunday and was told his habit of telling a funny story at the beginning of his sermon did not add anything to the message. He never forgot that advice!

So after three gruelling years in the navy, Fred found himself working as a missionary in rural Japan. His marriage to Lorna was the first thing on his agenda! The first ceremony was at the Australian Consulate then another four days later at his mission headquarters. The following July 1953, Gay Morris was born. When she was six weeks old the local temple began to bang drums which disturbed Gay so each night when she was put down to sleep, Fred and Lorna prayed over her to "claim the blood of Jesus over the baby and their cottage".

That same summer, the mission commenced tent meetings to proclaim the Gospel. Then in the autumn they met in a house of new converts but it took many weeks to convince the owners to remove their god shelf full of ancient family deities.

That same year the mission workers learnt how to make concrete bricks and build small house extensions to practice for the time they were ready to make a church building. Work commenced the following summer and a thriving place of worship resulted. Fred and Lorna moved back to Australia before the church building was dedicated but Fred's building experience proved useful on the mission field elsewhere. "God moves in wonderful ways."

Wendy Ruth Morris was born in July 1954. It was at this time that Lorna received a letter from home to say her father had cancer and was not expected to live long. It was not possible for Lorna to leave the two girls. Two Canadian Pentecostal missionaries began a prayer vigil and they commended Lorna to share her news with Orvil Roberts. A reply came back within a week that she should have faith to believe the Lord for her father's healing. At one of the mission prayer days Lorna felt the assurance that her dad had been healed. Within six months he was back at work. When Wendy got whooping cough, Fred wrote, "We got down on our knees. Next morning Wendy was not coughing at

all. God reminded us again that we live by faith and not by sight.”

That year was the time Fred suggested to the Mission to start a Christian bookshop and he was asked to source the books. The Japanese loved to read: there was illiteracy in those days. Fred was startled by the rapid pace of developments in finding a small shop to rent near the railway station and the first \$10 for the monthly rental. A local Christian of eight months volunteered to run the shop. Fred sought help from the local pastor to choose the books and Bibles with the most suitable Japanese. The shop was dedicated and the children crowded in. Mrs Adachi told them Bible stories. Japan thrives on storytelling! It was an exciting first venture for Fred into Christian literature ministry for adults and children with literacy needs.

Fred and Lorna also pioneered essay competitions. They handed leaflets out to the high school students which had questions such as “Why do you believe there is only one God? Why do you believe God created the heavens and earth? Do you believe in evolution?” Bibles were given out as prizes to be collected at the book shop.

The Mission suffered from lack of good leadership but later Fred was invited to work with a Canadian missionary who received good responses to his preaching despite the language barrier. However, Fred soon learnt that ministry of indigenous believers was more effective than missionaries from back home.

After their third daughter Jeanette was born in 1955, Fred and Lorna planned to return to Australia. This happened in April 1956 and while waiting in Tokyo, Fred enjoyed working for the Evangelical Alliance Press. They left behind a fully indigenous Japanese church where they ministered and the Bible school was still training godly young men and women. In 2005 Fred and Lorna met a Japanese couple who were from one of the churches started by the Mission in the 1950s. It had a congregation of over 100, large by Japanese standards, and was very much alive.

Back home in Australia, Fred and Lorna applied for a missionary posting with Christian Literature Crusade. Fred was selected as editor for their monthly magazine published in Kingston, Jamaica. It was through this appointment that Fred met father and son of the Laubach Literacy organisation which trained Christians in journalism.

At first Fred and Lorna wanted to return to Japan as missionaries but the Mission organisation ran into problems and Fred struggled to know which was the right way. CLC wanted workers in the Philippines but the door didn't open for them. During that time, the Lord gave Fred much experience in preaching with testimonies in times of hardness. Fred volunteered to put together missionary magazines for Papua New Guinea, printing, collating and binding them and learning a lot about publishing which was invaluable later in literature ministry.

In 1959 Stephen Morris was born. Fred took on the project of writing the life of missionary Jim Spence which involved a visit to Papua New Guinea, earning him the title of an ink-on-paper missionary. Fred's father died the following year and his mother went to live with his sister. This then freed Fred up to go to Jamaica as editor of the CLC mission magazine *Caribbean Challenge*.

Fred and Lorna sold their house they had built and most of its possessions despite a stagnant housing market, which to them proved God's purpose and provision. As ex-missionaries they had lived 5 years in Sydney by faith before their calling to Jamaica.

Whilst waiting in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Fred and Lorna took courses in Writing for New Readers and in Literacy, believing it would be useful in Jamaica.

Working for CLC in Kingston required writing skills in easy-to-read English, culturally suited to the West Indies. Fred was also responsible for planning the circulation of the *Caribbean Challenge* magazine among believers and non-believers.

Lorna took a part-time job with Back-to-the-Bible Broadcast which blessed her with many friends and provided a quick adjustment to Jamaican culture. She answered hundreds of letters that came in to the office from all over the Caribbean, far beyond Jamaica itself.

Fred and Lorna were offered a sabbatical break with mission friends in Ohio in the winter of 1963 and Fred spoke every weekend at different churches about the *Caribbean Challenge* magazine using 35mm slides.

After three more years publishing the magazine the Morris family moved to the USA. They first flew

to Buffalo to stay with mission contacts. Soon Fred was offered the job of running a fledgling Christian book publishing company, New Readers Press, with many readers overseas who spoke limited English and were hungry for Bible teaching and basic English literacy teaching. Fred accepted and it eventually became a million-dollar business over the first 10 years. "God made it happen." The job lasted from 1966 to 1982 which provided a stable location for the children's education. All thought of returning to live in Australia faded and resulted in taking American citizenship.

Until his retirement in 1990, Fred and Lorna built up a successful camp site for touring van owners which provided the capital needed to live in a small cottage on the coast in South Carolina, near North Myrtle Beach. From here, Fred and Lorna took on other literature ministries including Manna Publications, writing his own Bible teaching commentaries for use in the developing nations where literacy needs demanded the use of worldwide easy English. At that time, God gave Fred the unique vision of printing 40-page teaching books at the point of need instead of sending them out from the USA, using the indigenous overseas Christian contacts he had gained while working as a missionary and for other literature and magazine publishers.

Manna Publications (USA) was established soon after 1990 and in 2000 Manna was established in the UK and later in France to publish his books in 40+ countries and even more languages, over half a million copies to date. (www.manna-publications.org.uk)