

Rena Wood's Faith Journey

*Delivered by Jeffrey Richardson at the Service of Thanksgiving, Blackburn North
Uniting Church, 107 Koonung Road, Blackburn, Victoria 3130
Wednesday, June 13, 2007*



It's a real privilege to speak of Mum's faith journey because the effects of that journey have touched most of us.

Rena Wood was born into a strong Baptist family, with a dedicated and well known close relative in the person of Rev. Hedley Sutton. However, I'm sure she learnt early on that God requires that we have a personal relationship with Him, and not rely on the relationship of relatives.

I have two really treasured possessions from my parents: Dad's Parker fountain pen, which he used to write his sermons – and cheques!; and secondly, Mum's Bible, which was bequeathed to her by Auntie Lois Hawthorn Cox, in 1912. I'm sure Mum, at less than 12 months old, couldn't read it then, because as we probably all know, she was a VERY tiny baby!

Three inscriptions on the inside cover of the Bible are significant. One was written by Auntie Lois from John 3:16 – *For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him will have everlasting life.*

The others are simple life verses... *Have faith in God* (from Mark chapter 11) and *For me, to live is Christ* from Paul's letter to the Philippians (1:21). In my opinion, Mum was the personification of those verses.

Most of her life was joyful not only because of her love for God, but for the love she gave and received from John (Dad). A fine Christian man.

They went through many struggles together, but had great joy in serving the Lord, the church and the town together. It is my belief that Charlton is a better town because of their separate and joint efforts.

Mum's faith faced its greatest test when Dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and subsequently died at the age of 44 years. I can't begin to imagine the grief that situation must have brought to both of them.

Mum was left with four young children to raise alone, take over a struggling newspaper business; deal with a sometimes hostile community, and somewhere in all that, deal with her own loss.

It's interesting that this battered old Bible has a bookmark in it, at chapters 5 to 8 of the book of Esther. How interesting...those chapters tell how a Jewish maid became Queen Esther of Persia (Iran) by exposing a plot to assassinate the King; and later was instrumental in overcoming a conspiracy to destroy the Jewish people in that country. Esther did that by putting on a couple of banquets for the king and his arch enemy, and using some friends to reveal the plot.

Now, I'm not comparing Mum to Esther, but her gift of hospitality, and vast number of friends are well known. There is no doubt that her strong faith enabled her to change the lives of many people either directly or indirectly.

There are not many marks in Mum's Bible but she has underlined two verses from Romans chapter 5.

(i) *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;* and (v8) *But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

So, where has that faith journey taken Mum?

I think the words from Revelation 21, conveyed to Billy Graham when his mother died are appropriate: *Your mother is alive and well, dancing through the gold-lined streets of glory, praising her heavenly father and the lamb that was slain.*

We couldn't wish for anything better than that!

Amen