

A brief History of my first 100 years – Alfred Emmerson Curtis

1919-1929: I was born on 5th July 1919 the 6th child and 5th son of John Wilson Curtis, b. Waterford, Ireland in 1877, and Jeanette Elizabeth Smith b. Cape Town, Sth. Africa, in 1885, they were married in Hobart, Tasmania, in Feb. 1908, their 9 children all being born in Victoria, I being preceded by Eric b. 1908, Herbert St. Clair, b. 1910, John b. 1912, Kathleen b. 1914, Allen, b. 1917, and then followed by Doris, b. 1921, Minnie, b. 1925, and Tom, b. 1928.

In 1911 Dad joined the Southern Evangelical Mission, read the Bible every night after tea, and we were all brought up in a Christian home; when we got sick we got prayed for and anointed, and got better.

My earliest memories are of a visit to Sth Africa in 1923 when my Mother took Kath, Allen, Doris and myself to visit Grandmother Smith; (Eric, Bert & John stayed home with Dad) we traveled on 13,000 ton steamships Barabool and Baradine and I remember the distinctive food smells from the ship's galley, of asking Mum if I could join a musical chairs game when a clown championed my cause; of being with Aunt Minnie at Fishhoek on the beach waiting for a bus, of the noise of Naval vessels practicing with guns in the bay, of visiting cousins Alex and Don Mason while they operated their donkey engine.

We lived in a maisonette in Inkerman St., E. St. Kilda, (there were paddocks around then) next door to Uncle Eddie & Aunt Millie until 1925, when we moved to a larger weatherboard house in North Rd., Sth. Oakleigh amongst the market gardens. I started school at age 6 (min. age) in July at Sth, Oakleigh State School; we used to short cut through a Chinese market garden on the way. Roads were unmade and we played "Charlie over the water" and other street games with neighbouring children, when families were 5 or 6 children. We had no gas, sewerage, wireless, TV, telephone, motor car, dishwasher, ducted heating or supermarkets, and we were happy.

At night we played ludo, squares, noughts & crosses, snakes & ladders, memory cards etc., and once a year helped make melon jam in a large iron pot. The only holidays Dad got were the public holidays and tradesman's holiday, on one of which we got bus and train to Port Melbourne and travelled by the old Weeroona paddle steamer to Sorrento, where Mum and younger children travelled by horse coach to the back beach while Dad, Eric, Bert & John walked. That was a great adventure. Minnie was born in 1925 and Tom in 1928.

In 1928 we moved to Box Hill Rd., E. Oakleigh (now Huntingdale) and that year we attended Clayton School, walking over a mile there and back, being attacked by magpies in their mating season. I was in 3rd grade and finished top with 70 out of 70 (7 subjects). Kath left school in July at 14 to stay home and help Mum. E. Oakleigh School was built during 1929 and in 4th grade at ½ yr. I went up to 5th grade. I always had an eye for the girls and from the first day I would pick out the girl I liked best, but being an unplanned child I had an overwhelming inferiority complex, which has held me back in so many ways all my life, and so I went all through school life without ever having a girl friend.

1929 was the beginning of the Great Depression.

1930-1939:

Perhaps my most formative years.

In 1930 Dad, after 23 years of faithful service in The Big Store in Prahran was put off without a day's notice. There was no generous welfare payment in those days; we lived on the "Susso"; Dad had to go and work on the roads at Briagolong in Gippsland, living in a tent for about six shillings (60 cents) a day.

Eric was in W.A. working on a wheat farm, Bert was sick and died from peritonitis, John was shipped off to Sth. Africa to work for Uncle William (not a success) In 1931, I was in 7th grade, top of the class at half year and should have gone up to 8th grade (with Allen – others did) but they thought I was "too young", and I was too meek and shy to speak up and say I wanted to go up.

In 1932 I again topped the class and got my Merit Certificate; I also got a half-scholarship to the Working Men's College, (now RMIT) in book-keeping, typing and shorthand, which I attended in 1933 and the 1st term of 1934. having won a prize certificate for typing with which I bought a pocket watch and chain. On the 15th May 1934 I started work as shorthand-typist in the City at Seward's Optical & Scientific Instrument shop, 44 hours, for 15 shillings a week (\$1.50) where I learned a little about surveying and astronomy.

At this time, Allen left to seek his fortune in NSW. and I was the mainstay of the family. In 1935 I bought a secondhand pushbike with one gear for three pounds, and in September 1936 I rode it via Bendigo to Cobram on the Murray River to stay with my brother Eric, his wife Isabel and daughter Jean; Eric worked on an orange orchard. I made three more trips there but with a new bike with 3 speed gears; from Seymour on it was all dirt roads, and the call of the crows still rings in my ears.

During my teenage years I was close friends with the Brabham family from the Mission and also with young people from the AOG Bible class in Oakleigh which I attended. I used to go on AOG Sunday School picnics in a furniture van with wooden stools, but six of us, I among them, would always ride on the tailboard which was held by 2 chains. (!) We would sing choruses all the way there and back. One picnic was in a forest beside the Heathmont railway line. (Would be hard to find the forest now!)

Christmas and New Year were always hot, and the family would go by train to Aspendale and Seaford beaches and on ANA (now Foundation) Day by train to Fern Tree Gully and walk up to One Tree Hill lookout and return to devour the sandwiches Mum always brought.

In Sept. 1939 the 2nd World War broke out.

1940-1949:

In July 1940 I was appointed secretary to the Chief Engineer at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation at Fishermen's Bend, and a new phase of my life began; at the peak of the war 8,000 people were employed working 3 shifts a day. During my 34 years there I also worked in the Supply Dept., Engine Factory stores, Laboratory, and as Asst. to the Aircraft Factory Manager and Supervisor of Production Hour records and Budgetting various aircraft projects incl. the Wirraway, Wackett Trainer, Boomerang, Mustang, Avon-Sabre and Mirage Fighter aircraft, also the Macchi Jet Trainer. Great celebrations were held when the War ended in June 1945.

During this time I became a lay-preacher in various Presbyterian Churches, and also once a quarter preached 3 times on a Sunday in the Methodist circuit of 6 churches in the Mernda-Whittlesea area, to which I travelled on a two-stroke motor-bike and later on a larger BSA 500cc ex-Army bike.

In September 1945 Les & Harold Brabham and I travelled to Smithtown in NSW to visit a branch of the Southern Evangelical Mission, and there I met one who was to become the love of my life, Ena Duck. On a visit to the Hat Head lighthouse I offered to help Ena down the stairs, and thus began a friendship and courtship, mainly by correspondence, until we were married in the Methodist Church in Hampton on the 9th October 1948. Our reception was held in the huge dining room in historic "Chevy Chase", then the headquarters of the Sthn. Evangelical Mission, pastored by Robert Horne, whose ministry was unexcelled in the truths of GOD and His Heavenly Kingdom, and I am extremely grateful to GOD for the spiritual blessing I received. We spent our honeymoon in Tasmania.

We had a house being built, but the builder got into difficulties and with my brother Eric's help we had to finish it, including fitting doors, windows, floors, lining and all equipment, a long and difficult task.

Our first child, Annette was born in 1949 and the first 6 months, having to get up in the middle of the night to still her crying nearly killed me; one night each time I took my hand off her she started crying again, so I put a shoe in place of my hand; thankfully it worked.

1950-1959:

Over the period of six short years we were blessed with five children in total. Three daughters, Annette, Alice, Sarah, and two sons Paul, and Phillip. With five children and only six years between our eldest and youngest, my wife Ena did a tremendous job in caring for us all, in addition to the housework, making the children's clothes and in all respects was like the "Virtuous Woman" of Prov.31-10 whose price was far above rubies.

We bought our first car in 1951, a 1935 Nash LaFayette and at Christmas I drove it to Frederickton where Ena had earlier taken Annette & Alice to visit their grandparents. Next I had a 1937 Buick 8 sedan which I used to drive to Fishermen's Bend to work and take passengers. During Christmas holidays we would camp at Shoreham Beach and Ena would stay on with the children 'til ANA weekend while I was back at work. I still consider the first 20 years of my married life the most fulfilling, when our children were growing up, taking them on holidays to the beach, to the snow and every two years to Frederickton, where Ena's parents lived, and the beaches at Hat Head, South West Rocks and Crescent Head, also visiting Ena's sisters Una at Coffs Harbour and Rita in Murwillumbah.

During these years we lived next door to my Mother in Huntingdale Road, close to my sister Doris and her husband Geoff and their children John, Peter & Stephen, cousins and friends of our children. TV had arrived and our children used to go up to Doris' to watch a favourite show. (Disneyland!) Geoff always enjoyed hearing them laugh.

1960-1969

In 1960 I bought a S/H VW Kombi Van, and it was to prove invaluable for our trips, plus camping gear, to Northern NSW; I made a shelf behind the front seat and Ena would provide sustenance during our journey; sometimes Phillip would lie on top of our gear and look out the back window.

One evening coming home from a meeting at Mt. Evelyn it developed a terrible noise, but I was able to drive it home and down to VW the next morning, who told me the crankshaft was broken !

In Jan. 1961, during 3 months long service leave, I took a trip to New Zealand on the Dutch ship "Johan Van Oldenbarnveldt" to visit churches there in Auckland, Wellington & Christchurch, from where I flew home. The ocean journey was really enjoyable. Later that year I assisted Dewey Burkett from USA at a Tent Outreach in Sydney, preaching or song leading. I slept on the platform at night while Dewey, Marion & Danny lived in a caravan. (I was not to know that decades later his grandson Nathan would marry my grand-daughter Kristen)

In 1965 we bought a large old house on the hill in Belmont Ave., Upwey, where after renovations, each of the children had their own room. Ena used to walk up and down the steep hill with her shopping, a truly virtuous woman. Our children likewise walked to Upwey Primary & High Schools.

In 1966 when C.A.C. had a contract to build the Macchi Jet Trainer, I was sent to Varese, Nth. Italy for 3 months to analyse aircraft production times. Being close to the border of the beautiful country of Switzerland, our group would spend weekends travelling, visiting the lakes and mountains, incl. a trip up the Jungfrau, the last section thru' a tunnel to a station under the ice, whence an elevator took us to the lookout; we also visited Venice. Letters from family during this time were a real pleasure. On the return trip I visited and preached at a Mission Station at Poona in India, run by Graham and Pam Truscott, and then rejoined the rest of the C.A.C. team for a 2 day stopover in Hong Kong.

For a period of 12 months starting in 1968 we had the rather unique experience of having 5 "teenagers" in the house at the same time!, Alice, Annette, Paul, Phillip and Sarah; they were and still are a beautiful family.

In 1969 we moved to Hartwell, close to the Railway Station. I then joined the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship, (FGBMFI) and soon became Secretary and Vice President, thus I was joyfully involved in the "Charismatic Renewal" that ensued in the following years, and it was something new meeting people from all denominations and being hugged by Catholic priests and nuns.

1970-1979:

Our family were growing up, with two of our daughters being married in the same year! Our daughter Alice married Geoffrey, a fine young man from a family we had known for many years. They lived in our house at Upwey for a time 'til we sold it; and later built a house in Alexander Ave., Upwey. Geoff worked at CAC, then with the MFB, and later was Fire Supt. at Puckapunyal.

Later the same year, Annette married Jeffrey, a fellow student from Upwey High School. They were in training to go to Indonesia as missionaries where they still minister full time.

Two years after being married, and over a period of six years, our daughters Annette and Alice gave birth to six beautiful grandchildren – Benjamin, Daniel, Deborah, Jessica, Joel, Matthew. (in alphabetical order). We lost one precious grandchild when Deborah Ann was born on 24 April '74 and died next day.

Three years later our son Paul married Virve. Across a period of five years we were blessed with 3 more grandchildren with Paul & Virve's having two sons and a daughter – Brendan, Nathan and Olivia.

In mid-1973 we bought the Post Office & General Store in Tallarook; Ena became Post Mistress and ran the store on her own for 12 months while I still worked at CAC, coming up each Friday night with a station wagon load of groceries and returning Monday morning to work. I resigned from CAC in August 1974; we sold the store and returned to Hartwell in mid '75.

During the 70's and 80's we speculated in some country real estate; first we bought a house in Lyons St., Ballarat which we rented for a while before selling it. In 1975 I had plans for a house on Rye back beach, but later sold the land; we also bought a house in Stawell and did some renovating before selling it; we then bought two houses in Minyip for \$6000 & \$500, (would be good to have them now!) one a nice large house in which we put new carpet, and the other a condemned house, furnished with old iron bedsteads, etc., with a hook over an open fire for cooking, as well as an outdoor kitchen, and later sold them both to a woman in USA who had been a War bride and wished to come back to Australia.

Ena and I both enjoyed the country trips, camping in houses while we did some renovations, and later selling them. It was fun. In July '76 on a visit to Ena's people we went to Murwillumbah and bought 10 acres of land in Piggabeen, right below the Queensland border.

In 1977 looking for a job I contacted the continuing Presbyterian Church who were short of ministers (after the Uniting Church was formed) , and they immediately sent me out preaching in Churches all over Victoria, a ministry which continued until Jan. 1989, by which time I had preached in 60 Presbyterian churches in Victoria and South Australia. My first service was at Nagambie on July 24, 1977. In November 1977 I took up a full time position as "Resident Supply" at the Penola Church in South Australia with a parish church in Dergholm Victoria, and we remained there until December 1980, when they were able to call an ordained minister, taking all services except baptism and communion, and conducting weddings, funerals, Bible studies, Youth Club, and visiting parishioners over a large country area in S.A. and Victoria. Our Session Clerk was Glen Clifford who with his wife Gayee lived in historic "Yallum Park", a large 2 storied Victorian Mansion, where we stayed the first 3 nights until, our furniture arrived. It was a blessed, spiritual learning experience.

In Jan. '79 Ena & I visited Annette & Jeff in Indonesia when they were running a Bible School at Tentena, Sulawesi and visited some villages in remote valleys where their manner of life had changed little for centuries past.

1980-1989

This decade started with our son Phillip getting married to Lynette, and over the course of these ten years we were blessed through them with two more grandsons, David, Mark and two granddaughters, Kristen, and Rachel.

We completed our time at Penola in Jan. 1981 and returned to live in Wantirna, having sold the house at Hartwell earlier. During this decade I continued as a lay preacher, visiting many churches from Swan Hill to Benalla, thro' central Victoria, the Mornington Peninsula and from Colac to Sale.

In Feb.1981 we bought a quaint house in Tecoma which I worked on doing renovations all that year; it had a beautiful garden of camelias and rhododendrums. We also bought a house in Sorrento where we spent many happy family holidays.

In 1984 Ena had a trip to Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore & Malaysia with Annette & Jeff from 5th May to 28th June which she thoroughly enjoyed, although it was a long time to be separate. In Oct.1984 we bought a two house property in Maroondah Highway, N. Croydon which we shared with Annette & Jeff and their two boys, Matthew & Daniel, who were later to be joined by a sister, and our 14th grandchild, Ruth, so Ena and I enjoyed having a new baby close at hand.

In 1985 I was involved in the 1st F.G.B.M.F.I. World Convention outside of U.S.A. held in the Entertainment Centre in Melbourne, while overseas speakers and visitors stayed at the Hilton Hotel. I also had 4 weeks in India with Vision Ministries, one week in Delhi where we saw the Taj Mahal, and 3 weeks evangelising in villages in the Rajahmundry area. I felt quite at home in India. From there I flew to Hong Kong and made 2 trips into China taking Bibles for "Brother Andrew".

1990-1999

In 1990 Annette & Jeff moved to their own house in Chirnside Park, and having sold the house in N. Croydon, we moved to Mooroolbark, our present home. We also sold the house in Sorrento and bought a high set house in Blairgowrie, and later enclosed the downstairs area with kitchen & bathroom facilities thus virtually having two flats. This house was close to where my cousin Ted Smith lived, and Ena & I saw a lot of him and his wife Alice. We made a mini golf course in the back yard, and had much fun with this, especially after Ben Robins started off from the top of the stairs.

During the 90's I conducted many Bible studies in house meetings at Mont Albert and Gordon. Every Spring I used to visit the Vision Ministry "Old Fashioned" Revival Camp meeting held at Alectown in mid-west N.S.W. where a large number of people from other states would gather for ministry and fellowship; I made many friends there. I used the light plywood caravan Ena's father had made and which we got on our last trip to Frederickton, (after he had died). Ena came for the first time in '99 when we were given the use of the old Manager's Hut. I also regularly played golf at Morack Golf Course with Ron & Grace Bienvenu and then we would share fellowship together. round a cup of tea.

In this decade I was talked into buying a computer, and took some lessons at Croydon TAFE, which was taken over by Swinburne University, so at the age of 79 I became a Univ. Student for the first time ! Ena and I visited Annette & Jeff in Indonesia and also took a trip to the N & S Islands of New Zealand.

It was in 1999 that Ena first became troubled with amnesia, and after tests at the Repatriation Hospital was diagnosed as having Alzheimer's; by the grace of GOD her condition has stabilised. and although she has lost her short term memory Ena is still intelligent and does crosswords and plays Upwords daily.

2000-2009

In June/July Ena & I visited Annette & Jeff in a suburban compound in Jakarta, Indonesia; since then I have regularly cared for my beloved wife; her illness has prevented her from doing any of the cooking or housework, and so we obtained help from Aged Care services which included showering Ena, house cleaning, lawn mowing and provision of main meals. If jokingly asked to work, Ena would reply "I'm retired, don't you know". I still took her to the NSW Camp until the year 2006 and sometimes visited Alice & Geoff in Palm Beach and Ena's brother Willie in Kempsey, NSW

In 2007 Ena was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a mastectomy, and later her knees gave way and she was unable to stand and was in hospital for a month; Ena had lost a lot of weight and with other problems it became necessary to get her into a Nursing Home, which we did at Kirkbrae Presbyterian Home in Dec. '07; fortunately it is only 5 mins. drive away, and usually I am able to visit her daily .

In this decade I also travelled overseas. In April '03 I went with a Vision Ministry team to USA led by Larry Sturm visiting various churches in Texas, Philadelphia, Kentucky & California, and of course visited Disneyland. In May '04 I went with a similar Vision team to England, Scotland, and Ireland visiting churches incl. a Farm Church in Yorkshire, as well as Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral, Wesley's home and chapel, and Edinburgh Castle & Loch Ard. Leaving the team in Belfast, I stayed in Dublin with my grandson Matthew & Sharon, and their young son Joshua, and they took me to Waterford where I saw the house where my father lived, and visited relations in Cork. I returned via Canada and stayed with my nephew Laurie in Toronto, who took me to see the famous Niagara Falls.

In Sept-Oct'04 I visited Israel, linking up with a "Jewish Jewels" team from USA. It was a mercy mission, whereby we took aid to needy Israelites, victims of bombings and of the Holocaust, and handed out many shopping vouchers, both to Jews and Arabs alike; we stayed in a hotel, part of a kibbutz. It was a most enlightening experience visiting so many places where JESUS had walked. I also had a week in Jordan where my daughter Annette & husband Jeff, missionaries of Abbalove Church in Jakarta, were learning Arabic because of their close contact with Muslims, and while there visited the famous city of Petra with its many edifices carved out of rock.

In Oct. 2005 I again visited the Middle East, this time with a group from Australia & N.Z. We went to Egypt, saw the Pyramids and Cairo Museum, took a boat trip down the Nile and saw many famous old temples, the Aswan Dam, and then by bus, under the Red Sea, following the route the Children of Israel took through the Sinai wilderness, stayed overnight at Mt. Sinai, and then via the Gulf of Aquaba to Israel, keeping the feast of Tabernacles, floating in the Dead Sea, baptismal service in the River Jordan, by cable car to the top of Masada where the Jews made their last stand against the Romans and Herod had one of his many palaces.

In Dec. '06 I joined with a "Heaven's Family" team from USA to visit and minister to orphans in Myanmar; a unique country where many people live in abject poverty whilst there are very many Buddhist Temples whose spires are covered with gold, and the great temple in Yangon is said to have half a ton of gold on it! We visited many orphanages, some large and some squeezed into small houses; we gave out clothes, toys and sweets to the children, who joyfully received them, and sang to us in English and Burmese. It was a heart catching visit; they are sponsored by overseas people.

Since 2003 we have been regular attenders of the Presbyterian Church in Kangaroo Ground, we enjoy the country drive there, the love and fellowship of the saints, and I have also been privileged to give some Bible Studies. I still occasionally play 9 holes of golf and enjoy the surroundings and exercise.

I am grateful to GOD for the love, mercy and long life He has granted me and my beloved wife Ena, and for our blessed family of five children, fourteen grand-children and 12 great grand-children, plus in-laws (& outlaws?) takes my clan to 46! I am truly Blessed of the LORD. Together with all the saints I look forward to that great Day when we shall all meet round the Throne of GOD in Heaven, to enjoy His Love and Blessings throughout the ages of the ages. (Prepared for my 90th Birthday, 5/7/09)

2010-2020 (A brief description)

In the first year of this decade, my beloved wife Ena went Home to be with the LORD one week after her 90th Birthday, and just before our 62nd Wedding Anniversary. I continued living at home, playing golf every Tuesday and Friday morning with a my golfing friends, (mostly retired school teachers) who have been very good to me, giving me parties on my birthdays.

In 2015 I visited Indonesia again, and Annette and Jeff took me to a mission station they had founded in Sulawesi, with access to the beach, a beautiful situation. On this trip I had a fall which ultimately caused my thigh muscle to break from my leg bone, and I have since had to use a walker, putting an end to my golfing days, tho' I have played since using a golf cart.

My youngest granddaughter Ruth married Tino, and they now have 2 children, Josiah and Liliana.

In May 2018, lacking energy, I moved into a nearby Aged Care Home, where I enjoyed care and friendship for 2 years, however because I still had the house in Moorobark, the Gov't later reduced my pension by 2/3rds, so I have now moved back to my own home, where I am well cared for by the Christian Aged Care service, founded by Anca Stamatescu, which I joined in July 2018, being the 2nd one to join, and am honoured among the "Elders", as Anca calls them.

Before the Covid plague, C.A.Care.. provided me with drivers by which I was able to fellowship at Crossways Baptist Church Senior's "Drop In" group, with Stairways Senior's Bible Study group, both fortnightly, St, Paul's Lutheran once a month Senior's lunch and Bible Study, and every Sunday morning at the Presbyterian Church in Kangaroo Ground, where I have been a member since 2003, at all of which I was able to share in ministry in Bible Studies, etc

Our family has increased so that we now have 28 g.g.children; with in-laws (and outlaws) our family clan now numbers 62. I am still rejoicing in the Goodness of my GOD, but feeling my age)

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On The Sea of Galilee in Israel - (I missed the boat!)