

DR JOAN ANNE CHILVERS (MILLARD):

I was born Joan Tonkin at Shawbury Methodist Mission where my father was the resident doctor. After he had been there a couple of years the Methodist Church decided that there was no money to build the hospital they had planned and we moved on. My father instilled in each of his five children a love of history and of the Methodist Church.

While at school I gave my life to Christ and this was to be a guiding factor throughout my life. After completing my schooling at Rustenburg School for Girls in the Cape I trained as a nurse at Groote Schuur Hospital and also did courses in midwifery and mother craft. Ray Millard and I were married in 1959.

Ray and I had four children – Robert, Kathryn, Andrew and Ian. Many of our mission activities became family activities. Robert and Kathryn went to their first holiday club when they were two years old and six months respectively.

We lived Worcester, Uitenhage and Grahamstown and finally, in the late 1970's, moved to Johannesburg. Here we joined the Randburg Methodist Church. Ray had held a number of positions in the Church and served on various committees. I had become a local preacher in 1972 and was put onto the preaching plan. We were both Sunday School teachers and involved in the Randburg church activities. By this time, encouraged by my husband, I started to study theology through the University of South Africa. It is very easy to get hooked on studying and I went from B Th, B Th Hons, M Th to D Th.

One day in the 1980s I received a telephone call from Unisa offering me a research position. This was the beginning of almost twenty years of teaching at Unisa – very happy years as part of the staff of the Department of Church History in the Faculty of Theology. Finally, just before I retired I was made Head of Department. This is where I first started teaching Methodist probationer ministers. Part of the job was writing study guides and delivering papers at Church History conferences, both in South Africa and overseas. Many of the papers were on South African Methodist history as this was my particular passion. Many of the papers were published in journals or became chapters in books. During these years I also became a marker for TEE (Theological Education by Extension College) and an examiner for the Joint Board for Theology, a moderating body for theological colleges. Both these had to do with the training of Methodist probationer ministers and local preachers. These were good and rewarding years and I will always remember with gratitude the many friends I made.

During my 1996 sabbatical leave I attended the British Wesley Historical Society meeting at Manchester in England and during this time I did research for my book "Malihambe – Let the Word Spread", a book on pioneer African preachers. I made contact with a number of overseas Methodists and was later asked to become a Vice-President of the World Methodist Historical Society, a position I held for ten years.

In 1998 my husband was killed by hi-jackers. I became a Chaplain in the Johannesburg Emergency Medical Services to help those who had gone through the pain that I had had to endure. This was a voluntary position which I held for five years. In 1999 I retired from full-time teaching and worked part-

time at Unisa. From 2000 I started teaching Church History part-time at John Wesley College in Pretoria and Soweto. This is where my main contribution to South Africa Methodism was made.

It is always a privilege to teach the clergy of your own denomination. It was interesting to chat to those who were just entering the ministry. The Soweto mission outreach was a wonderful experience as all the ministers in the District took part. At JWC Kilnerton I not only taught Church History but also listened to problems and rejoiced when babies were born. I served there for nine years – until 2008 when the College moved to the Seminary in Pietermaritzburg.

An interesting event in 2003 was the Wesley conference at Manchester University where I read a paper on South African Methodism. I discovered that scholars read Wesley's sermons for literary form rather than spiritual content. I had been teaching Wesley's Studies to local preachers using the sermons for their spiritual content alone. It was during these years that I wrote about events at JWC and the Brooklyn Methodist for Dimension and also the centenary booklet for the Brooklyn Methodist Church (2010). I also produced a book on the Namaqualand Mission for the Wesley Society.

In 2004 the JWCs tenth anniversary was celebrated. The church history students put on a most professional show about the founding of Kilnerton which was presented at three Synods. When I married Chris Jackson in 2005 in the Kilnerton Chapel all the probationers attended the wedding. Chris had grown up at Kilnerton where his father was head-master of the High School. He attended all the events at JWC and was popular with the students. I now lived in Pretoria and I started to teach more subjects and when the College moved to the Seminary in Pietermaritzburg I was teaching five subjects!

At this time I was a Circuit Steward for the Moreleta Circuit. Our workshops to train Society and Trust Stewards were the brain child of the Rev Zak Mtombeni but I did the organising and some of the teaching.

Chris died after a heart operation in 2011 and I returned to Johannesburg. I joined the Bryanston Methodist Church and became involved in the Counselling House doing mainly bereavement counselling. I have had the joy of running courses, among them Griefshare, in their School of Discipleship and also teach the newcomers about the history of Methodism.

In 2013 a Methodist Heritage Indaba was held in Durban where I presented a paper on Methodism in the Transvaal. The same year I spoke to the Combined Methodist African Choirs in Pimville, Soweto on how the hymn books, both English and vernacular, came into being. At one stage the whole hall with about 200 people broke into song – same hymn but many languages. It reminded me of Pentecost! The third event was the service of memory which I helped the committee for the Kilnerton class of 1962 prepare. That year the government closed Kilnerton and five of the matric students were sent to Robben Island. The Chapel service took the place of the valedictory service they had been denied.

In 2016 Stan Chilvers and I were married in a wonderful family ceremony and together we serve the Lord as communion stewards and leaders at Bryanston. I continue to write Methodist history in the way I always have where all Methodists contribute equally to the story of God at work in South Africa.