

## OBITUARIES

## Lucy and Melville Furness

Melville and Lucy Furness both passed away this year. They were two of the very early workers in the field of leprosy rehabilitation, first in India and then among the Aboriginal tribes in the Northern Territories of Australia. Lucy died on the 1st of April and Melville on the 23rd of July, 2001.

Melville Furness had developed lepromatous leprosy in the 1940s, before effective medication was available. He was diagnosed and treated at the Christian Medical College at Vellore, India, and then studied physiotherapy under Ruth Thomas, the first physiotherapist to devote herself to the rehabilitation of leprosy patients. Because he was already well-educated, he quickly became an active and valuable member of the rehabilitation team and an effective advocate for changes in segregation laws in India. Melville's wife, Lucy, served as my secretary and was the organizer of the team.

After about twenty years in this work they both emigrated to Australia in 1971 and joined the staff of the East Arm Leprosarium just outside Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia. Melville was a very effective speaker and quickly became a leading advocate for rehabilitation back into society for the leprosy patients among the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory. He and Lucy served together from 1971 to 1983 and contributed a great deal to the campaign for the uplift of the Aboriginal tribes and especially for the leprosy patients. After retirement they continued to live in Darwin until Lucy died. Melville then lost the will to continue living.

This devoted couple will be mourned by many colleagues and by even more patients in Australia, as well as in India.

—Paul W. Brand

September 11, 2001

Dear Robert,

It is a long time since we have been in touch, but I write to let you know that Lucy and Melville Furness both died recently. I also wrote to Paul Brand, who knew them well and worked with them in India in the early days and he said that he would be writing to you. I understand that he was writing you an Obituary. Could I add a few notes from Australia?

Lucy died on 1st April 2001 and Melville on 23rd July 2001. Melville did not have the will to live after Lucy died as they were so close throughout their lives.

They both came to Australia in July 1971 to the Northern Territory and worked with me at the leprosy hospital until it closed in 1982. Lucy worked as my secretary and Melville as the physiotherapist for the hospital. I am sure you know that they gave their whole lives to leprosy and were indeed wonderful people both to know and work with. Both became firm friends with the patients and were loved by all.

I don't know if you were aware that Lucy and Melville adopted an Indian boy with severe leprosy deformity while they were in India. He had grown up by the time they left for Australia but he went on to study and work in leprosy in India in later years. In fact, you may know him—Ramchandra Rao, who, I think spent some time studying at Carville.

Melville also spent a lot of time in the later years in the Northern Territory visiting patients in the rural areas. This was rather rugged from time to time as the Territory is still very much 'Outback' Australia and in many ways an underdeveloped part of the world. He was a fervent teacher and we learned a great deal from him. Of course, his work with Paul in the early days was crucial to his development and he went on

to study in England and to qualify in physiotherapy. Those must have been very difficult times for him, both because of his age and also for Lucy as they were very poor. Melville brought all Paul's principles to Australia and we were most fortunate to benefit from them. I think Paul's inspiration was crucial to Melville's development.

I think Paul will have given you other more important details. I am not very good at writing this sort of thing, so perhaps you would put it in a better way for me.

I do hope you are well yourself. I have had some coronary bypass surgery but am

doing well. I have now retired completely.

Kind regards,  
John

—Dr. John C. Hargrave, AO, MBE, MD  
(Syd), DSc (Hon), FRACS, DTM&H

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I can think of no better way to express Dr. Hargrave's feelings.—RCH