

Tribute to Alice and Bill Latimer (Mum and Dad, Granny and Grandpa)

On the eve of Chimere setting sail to Vanuatu we think of Alice and Bill - Mum and Dad - Granny and Grandpa. Alice passed away in 2005 and Bill passed away suddenly in 2008 and it is hard to accept that he is not still here.

So many times lately we have wanted to ring them and tell them something about the trip. But of course they are not here; and we miss them more than ever.

Mum and Dad, as a team, were a wonderful blend of adventure and caring. Their travels throughout the world and particularly in Africa set an example. They had few comforts and faced many dangers, yet Dad worked diligently building and servicing infrastructure projects with the Northern Rhodesia Public Works Department. This he did during the week and on extended tours away, but at weekends and when other times allowed, he worked to develop his own 40 acre block of bush 11 miles out of Lusaka. Mum meanwhile embraced the considerable task of building a home from their remote and isolated base in readiness for their expectant family.



Mum was a very competent pioneering woman, having grown up on an orchard in Donvale, Victoria. With a formal education to year 8, her life education seemed to be endless. Her chance meeting with Dad on a train from Sydney to Brisbane in 1950, their subsequent letter writing over several years and Dad's eventual (postal) proposal of marriage from far-off Africa was the stuff of family folklore.

When Mum found herself in Africa, (after first taking a ship from Melbourne to Cape Town to marry Dad), she was often on her own, and had to deal with emergencies using her own resources. She became popular among African mothers who lived on the property giving them advice or reassurance about health and other matters for their families. So popular in fact that there always seemed to be a queue at the back door, so she had to restrict visiting hours to one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon. Mum compiled whatever health and domestic information she could into scrap books for future reference mostly by reading the English Woman's Weekly.



When Dad returned from work he occasionally became the ambulance and would take someone into hospital. On one occasion from a snake bite, and on another with an expectant mother. There were no phones and only one car.

Dad had huge amounts of energy and a hunger to travel and learn. No doubt whetted early on when at the age of 6 his father relocated the family to England (from New Zealand) for 5 years in order to appease a home-sick mother. Dad's experiences aboard ship and in observing foreign lands stirred a restlessness that always remained.

Whilst Dad's boldness and risk taking got him into a lot of "situations", it also saved him from serious harm on others and created opportunities from which he took advantage throughout his 80 years. He also had a big heart and would help anyone he met who had a need.



From a very early age cruising and voyaging under sail became our thing. When we were young Dad started to build a steel boat in the backyard but Mum wisely and quietly steered Dad to waiting a year or two and buying a smaller boat - ready to go. In 1976 Dad bought a Compass 29 and named her ARAWA in memory of the ship Mum travelled to Africa on 22 years before.

Our travels and adventures aboard Arawa around Bass Strait and down to Hobart, stood us in good stead and was not only the realization of a dream, but the beginning of many more. Over the years, two more boats were purchased, both Nicholson 32s, and again the sense of adventure lured Dad out onto the Big Blue.



In all that we four kids chose to embark on, Mum and Dad were always there - supportive, encouraging, caring - helping to realize our adventures and ambitions, in the same way that they had many years before. Reflecting on what Mum and Dad managed to achieve, however, they were always going to be a hard act to follow.



Dad was very enthusiastic about our plans for Chimere, describing her as one serious ship. He liked her construction in steel and at the age of 78 helped us sail back from Busselton (WA) after purchase, joining the trip in Albany. When talk of sailing to Vanuatu advanced to the serious planning stage last year Dad was his ever-enthusiastic self and intended to fly to Vanuatu to be there for Robert's 50th birthday.



Our love for Mum and Dad is strong and everlasting and we miss them both dearly.

We thank them for the life they have given us, plus their guiding influence down the years.

Through the work of Medical Sailing Ministries, we are ever-mindful that Mum and Dad's spirit and legacy live on - first, through the caring nature of the enterprise and second, through the pursuit of adventure and of stepping out into the unknown.

In supporting Medical Sailing Ministries we invite you to embrace this sense of caring and adventure.

Andrew and Robert Latimer
24 April 2009