

## UP CLOSE & PERSONAL



# Robin Wales

*Here is the conclusion of an interview with Robin Wales by Peter Hill, on Robin's awesome missionary work.*

*How did you start out?*

I trained as a medical laboratory scientist at Wellington hospital in New Zealand from 1949 and worked in hospital and private medical laboratories in NZ until 1975. My wife Gaylene and I married in 1957 and were always interested in missionary work. In 1975 we left NZ with the youngest five of six children when I went to work for the PNG health department at the New Guinea islands Base Hospital in Rabaul for two years. This was a special time for our family and also my gaining experience in tropical medicine, especially malaria (including an attack).

Our whole family moved to Australia in 1978 and we came to Ipswich in 1981, I managed the QML branch here until retiring in 1992 so that Gaylene and I could do YWAM training to serve as missionaries in the Philippines.

God had opened our hearts to the needs of the poor, especially children during several short term visits to work with YWAM in Tondo and Balut, two slum areas of Manila, during my annual leave. In Tondo we used to visit kids in Mother Teresa orphanages, cleaned out toilet drains, visited railway line squatters in homes, joined in bible studies and formed relationships. This was the base which discovered scavengers living on Smokey mountain Garbage dump and established the Balut YWAM base near the dump. Balut worked a lot in health care on the dump with especially with vaccinations and TB ministry and I provided microscopes for this. We also helped with a survey in a 'Tent city' for Mt Pinatubo refugees after the volcano eruption..

In 1991 YWAM asked if we would consider setting up Mercy Ministry at their base in Davao City in Mindanao, we did this after I had attended a Primary Health Care school in Adelaide and following our Discipleship Training course in 1993 worked for three years in Primary Health Care, caring for sick and malnourished children, Bible studies, income generating projects, school sponsorship, and relocating squatters to better homes.

While visiting us in Davao my son Andrew met his dear wife Sheila and I am now blessed to be able to live in a caravan at their home in Blackstone with them and three delightful grandsons. This is an ideal base for me.

*What is life like with the Karen people?*

Wonderful, but it's a completely different life. Gaylene died in 1999 and in early 2000 I was asked to help at a YWAM clinic in a refugee hill tribe village in Thailand. I stayed in the guest room of a church, and taught Em the nurse in charge of the clinic to use a microscope I had taken. One of the Karen guys cooked and cared for me, we lived mostly on local vegetables and rice. The only meat



was one chicken donated by a Pastor but I managed well on rice and peanut butter and bananas. The following year I lived in the refugee camp

with a Baptist Pastor and his wife and family and taught (and preached) in their church. They run one of the Orphanage Schools our team visited last year. Because the refugees have no Thai ID they are confined to the camp. Clasper, the Pastors wife has not been outside the gates during 12 years there. Last March at the YWAM PHC training school near Mae Sot we were cared for and fed by the Karen students and staff the food was very basic but enough, a little meat or dried fish with the rice and vegies occasionally.

The Karen are great friends and welcome me as part their families, they are peace loving people with one desire: to be able to return to their homeland and live in peace. They are victims of cruel atrocities by the Burmese Military – destruction of homes and villages, looting of crops and animals, rape, genocide, torture, child labour, and deaths and injuries from landmines set to prevent their return to their homes.

The Karen officials have to choose times to take me across to Burma, some clinics including one where we support a microscopist are often a safe and simple boat trip over the Moei river, and we can take food supplies etc. others we need to go in under cover of darkness and wait until the way is clear to come back to avoid Thai border police.



*What supplies do you take over there?*

Microscopes, Malaria testing strips for field use where microscopy is not possible, special medicine for drug resistant malaria, other medicines and medical supplies, educational materials and money to provide food, animals and items to buy locally. I work in conjunction with a mission network called the Yeshua foundation. Many items donated here by hospitals including beds, surgical instruments and medical supplied are channelled through them to missions who need them, and in turn they are able to provide me with useful items.

*Do you have any more trips planned?*

We will be holding a follow up Primary Health Care School at the YWAM base near Mae Sot for the Karen early next year for 4 weeks. During this time I will include my microscopy training for Karen IDP clinic workers from Burma at a safe location arranged by their Health Department. John and Dellas also hope to be able to come back with a team for a week or more while I am there.

Later in the year we will be running a similar Primary Health Care School in the Philippines for at least four weeks, probably in Davao.

*How can we support you?*

Pray for continued health and an ability to keep helping in whatever way I can. I rely completely on donations from friends and our church to cover travel expenses and help with providing microscopes, testing equipment, medicines, food etc.

Fortunately my age pension can be paid during most trips and helps to cover some living costs overseas after deduction of standard commitments here.

Any donations for this work would be gratefully received.