

Mallee Patrol News

January – February 2010

UNFINISHED BUSINESS FOR 2009

Greetings in the Name of the Lord, Jesus Christ!

Just before we settled into Christmas mode, I



thought to get a box of groceries and make another trip out to the fellow I told you about who had not seen anyone in nine weeks before we showed up.

He was surprised to

see me back so soon and invited me in. We talked about the seriousness of being an obedient follower of Christ Jesus. He told me about his days in boarding school, far away from mom and dad – and how he was impressed by the sermons of the local minister in town; then, of course, he slipped away, went through a broken marriage, lost his work – and everything, even ongoing contact with the children – to the point where he wants to offer me a cuppa, but can't because there is no tea or coffee on the pantry shelves.

I invited him to follow me to the car and presented him with the groceries, including tea, coffee and a Christmas pudding. You must have seen the appreciation on his face!

"I know of someone else who has it really bad," he said. "I will share this box with them."

Now my face was shining for joy! I gave him two boxes prepared by the Ladies of the Riverina Presbytery to give to her.

A week or something later I received an email: "I am ...'s friend. He dropped a couple of boxes of goodies over. My daughter and I were rapt. I thank you with a smile."

A NEW DECADE

We spent Christmas Day on the road after a Christmas Eve service with our congregation in Kerang. It was a pity not having Phil and Heidi there for the few days. For the rest of it we were in full number and thoroughly enjoyed the time together.



The Schwartz clan in Bathurst

Our new decade kicked off with blistering heat in the Mallee. We have not had the dust storms – or fire storms – of last year yet, in spite of frightening forecasts from time to time.

FIRST PATROL FOR 2010

When Heila and I made our first patrol we took it to the furthest corner in our patrol district: the Werrimul area between Mildura and the South Australia border, north of the Murray Sunset National Park.

We used the caravan park at Lake Cullulera as a base for the days we did the patrol. (Use this campsite on your way between NSW and South Australia! [Latitude -35.7272856167, Longitude 142.3739266833]).

Were these hot, sultry days a foretaste of the year to come? Rarely does the heat with combined humidity in the inland become so oppressive.



Why do they call it sunset country?

On our first visit we had to leap aside as the young mother aimed at a king brown snake with a shotgun and shot it to pieces!

It was indeed a surprise to meet two families, devout members of the Sikh faith, at our next address. The welcome was very sincere and the conversation was friendly. While Heila was talking to the ladies, the fellows and I were feeling our way through evangelism: they wanted me to understand what they believed, and I did not want to remain behind with the Gospel. We left with the promise to return. They promised to serve Indian curry when we visit again.

As the patrol progressed, we ran into the opposite reception at one place. The fellow didn't want to talk and showed his appreciation for my visit by turning around in his seat with his back to me, puffing smoking into the opposite direction. I managed to leave a *Challenge* newspaper with him, but he promised to use it to kindle the fire with.

Could the Lord use the *Challenge* to speak to his soul before he does it? Pray with me.

The lady was busy in the garden when we pulled up somewhere down the track. "What is the purpose of your visit?" she enquired, at first a bit apprehensive.

"We want to know how things are with you", I said and shook hands. She repeated the question. "How much time do you have?" she replied. "The whole day", I said. "You better come in then."

While this lonely person was telling her life story, I just realised how gracious God is to us who have had to sacrifice so little in comparison.

We held hands, prayed together and asked the Lord to bring healing to a soul that has experienced much trouble. We took to the throne of God her concerns for her family. It was good to stop there.

Outside, the pet goat got into my car (I forgot to close the door) and ate a fair bit of the pamphlets that were in the door pocket!

We caught with other people, some I had visited before, and others we met for the first time. The day came to an end with a visit to friends I had stopped with a previous time. Here also we had the privilege to share with them in their daily concerns by praying for them.

One cannot help but see how the country people just can't escape the long arm of state departments, even in the remotest corner of the state. I had to stop and take a picture of the scene below!



A water pipe, a tap and a meter

A SECOND ATTEMPT

Heila had other commitments, so I packed the trailer and headed off into the west. I had not visited the areas surrounding Hopetoun and decided to tackle that district.

My first stop took me to Yaapeet, just adjacent to the (now) dry Lake Albacutya. I found the town with not a soul in the streets.



The wide horizons of the Wyperfeld

The only little building on the western side of the main street caught my attention. It was the unattended post office. The murals are striking, depicting farm life of some years ago.

“James” walked across the street, obviously to get some mail. I introduced myself. I had to use my left hand, because he lost his right hand in some accident.

“How many people live in Yaapeet?” He started counting, using the five fingers of his left hand.

“Forty”, was his answer. That excludes him. There are eight students enrolled at the local school. About all the shops have closed down. There is one with a display window, also displaying the dust of a few decades.

More people arrived to collect mail. I introduced myself to them and a warm conversation followed. They now know the purpose of my visit and they understand the work of the PIM. They are very appreciative. Each of them got a bag of toiletries as a gift from the ladies in churches elsewhere. “James” got one for his wife. They posed for a



The friendly people of Yaapeet

picture, received some reading material from me, and we parted company.

What a wonderful place! If you want to visit some place where time does not count and where you can still enjoy warm friendship without all the strings of modern society attached, go to Yaapeet. You will walk away feeling better for it.

The rest of the day was a struggle to find a farm with people actually living in the house. The effect of the depopulation of the outback was probably the worst in this part of Victoria. There are some farmers who now live in the closest town with education facilities, only to visit the farm when they need to.

“I am not a religious person,” the elderly lady said. “Not yet”, was my reply. “No, I am so disillusioned with the church that I walked away many years ago. My best friend was a Christian, but she was the biggest liar and chat about.” I shared with her that there are times when I am also very disillusioned with the church. But the message of salvation in Christ Jesus remained the top story! That is what I shared with her. She got some reading material and a pamper pack too!



One of the striking murals on the Yaapeet Post Office

My groceries needed replenishment. As I pulled up across the local food shop in Hopetoun someone approached me. "I could not help to read the sign on your door." It was one of the local ministers. He ministers in a combined ministry over three towns between two denominations – the only way they can afford an incumbent clergy.

I ended up having coffee with him in his manse. His wife was in hospital for treatment (please pray for her recovery). The two of us prayed for one another's ministry before I took off into the dusty horizon.

The rest of the day had no highlights, but no low points either. I called on six properties and was received very friendly.

What struck me were the monuments and memorial stones of schools and bush churches strewn all over the place. Rationalisation of farming led to the amalgamation of properties, with smaller operators leaving the district. The shortage of water, as well as the new way available water is distributed became the impetus for many farmers to find some other form of living.

Like "Chris", now working for the Council. He sold his property to the next-door neighbour, but kept the house for living. He does not like the busyness of town. (Makes you wonder what is going to happen if he ends up in a metropolis!)

"Chris" told me of his family, his daughter's wedding and another grandchild born to them. He is a proud man, and you can tell by the tone in his voice. I was welcomed to visit another time.

One of the advantages of camping in caravan parks is to meet other "incidental" people. Like the couple touring our country from Switzerland. They

had difficulty in understanding that one has to put your camping fees in an honesty box before you leave. "What sort of box is that", they asked. I explained, they understood, but the concept for them seems somewhat strange.

The work of the PIM is also explained to them – another concept they find difficult to understand. I gave them a PIM pamphlet and some other Christian reading, as well as my calling card. We made friends.

Almost like my friend in another caravan park last year who emailed me after receiving my last report.

"It is people like you who are to be admired for taking up the challenge and giving practical expression to God's love, for we are indeed, the hands and feet of Jesus. We, the weak and helpless; we, the sinner and the saint; we, the good and the bad; we, the weak and the strong; we, the men and women of this world are the ones who pick up the cross and take it where He guides. You are often in my thoughts and I pray that you will be strengthened to carry on labouring in the only vineyard that really matters. God's blessing on you and yours."

Feedback like this keeps you on the road and on your knees.

PRAYER POINTS

- Thank God for safe travelling and warm reception
- Pray for the wife of the minister, now receiving treatment
- Pray for the very concerned mother
- Pray for the fellow who regards Christian reading only as good fire kindlers
- Pray that Christians will not be a stumbling block for others.



Lake Albacutya. In good years more than 5,800 hectare are covered in water