

# riding the rapids: the story of sylvia jeanes

CMS celebrated Sylvia Jeanes' 40 years of missionary service with the launch of her biography.



Sylvia Jeanes sitting in a jongkong.

Church growth in Sabah has been fast by any standards during the last 50 years. The all-up Christian population of this East Malaysian state now approaches 35%.

Most significant is a national evangelical church movement - energetic, evangelistic, thriving. The growth curve ranks Sabah along with Korea and Nepal.

For four fifths of those 50 years, Sylvia Jeanes has been part of the action. On 5 January 1967, Sylvia left Australia for what was then British North Borneo, for a lifetime of missionary service. She started as a school teacher in central Sabah, then four days upriver from the coast. With further study and development she has moved into secondary teaching and then tertiary, and into the preparation of future leaders of the Church in Sabah.

Sylvia's ministries have not gone unnoticed by the Government of Malaysia. Granted the relatively rare

status of Permanent Residency in 1980, she was also honoured with the "Faithful Star of Kinabalu" Medal of Honour for services to the country in 1986. Then, in 2003, the growing Anglican Church made Sylvia a Lay Canon of the Cathedral.

Now, officially retired from both the Diocese of Sabah and from the Sabah Theological Seminary, Sylvia continues as a CMS-A missionary in Sabah, exercising her diverse ministries to marginalised peoples, as a guest lecturer, and in leadership training.

On the 40th anniversary of her departure to Sabah (5 January 2007), at the CMS Summer School at beautiful Mt. Tambourine, Queensland, Sylvia's biography was launched.

*Riding the Rapids* is a frank account of Sylvia's humble, obedient response to God's call to missionary work, and takes us through the progress of her 40 years in Sabah. Through difficult and dangerous times of service and decision,

through flat waters and whirlpools, the book charts the goodness of God and the progress of the gospel, and Sylvia's humble role in this.

Launching the book, Federal Secretary John Thew paid four tributes: to long-time CMS member Jack Johnston who collected the source material over many years; to former CMS-A Media Officer Ashleigh Hooker who turned that material into an exciting read; to Sylvia Margaret Jeanes who has followed God's leading through all of her life; and to God, who has once again proved faithful and strong and loving, transforming an 'ordinary life' into a work of his grace.

Available through the CMS Queensland bookstore and your CMS branch office, this is a book that will nourish your spirit, and that you can give to your interested and fringe friends with confidence.

Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Isaiah 46:3-4



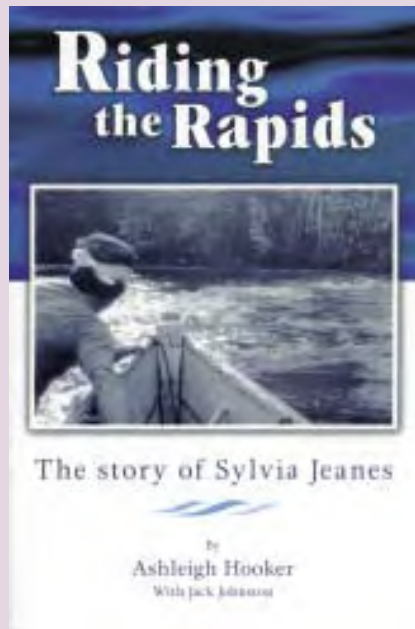
John Thew launching *Riding the Rapids*.



At the book launch.



Sylvia Jeanes (left) and Ashleigh Hooker (centre) at the launch.



## An excerpt from *Riding the Rapids*

The vessel pushed off from the jetty and began the slog upriver. For Sylvia with each turn in the river the breezy days in Queensland seemed further and further behind. The hot Sabah sun dawdled across the sky that day and the passengers squirmed in their seats to try and relieve the aching in their backs. Eduardo puffed on his cigarettes and checked his watch again. They were way behind time. As the sun slipped behind the trees the group pulled into Pin. That night Jacob would sleep in the boat and the others would sleep in the community hall. Its waist-high walls would let in the cool evening air as well as the bugs. After dinner each retreated to a corner with instructions from Eduardo to be up and ready to leave by dawn. Sylvia was tired. The river always drained her. She closed her eyes and like the others she soon snuggled under a blanket of sleep.

But Jacob couldn't rest. Mosquitoes were buzzing, biting and piercing his slumber. After hours of swatting and tossing he gave up. He would make a start on breakfast. He struck a match and its phosphorous flash gashed the black night that was hovering over the surface of the water. Soon a pot of rice was bubbling on the primus at the bow of the boat. Jacob sat for a while and listened to the blub blub of the pot and the drone of the crickets. He could

refuel while he waited. Jacob found his way up to the other end of the vessel to check the motor. When he unscrewed the lid of the jerry can the smell of the fuel was sharp in his nostrils.

And then a flash and thunder ripping apart the night. Slumber was shattered and Sylvia, Eduardo and Marianne startled and jumped up to see over the walls a can ablaze, floating downstream. They rushed to the jetty to find Jacob writhing in his smouldering clothes. His hands, arms and thighs were badly burned. Marianne broke open the packages of medical supplies and rifled through to find something to help him, to dress his wounds, to ease his pain. She thanked God as she broke out some paraffin cream gauze. Just what was needed. Medical Missions Auxiliary had just sent it up from Melbourne and this was the first time they'd sent this item. By the light of a lantern she ripped her bedsheets into strips and swathed him in the bandages.

They laid Jacob in the bottom of the boat in those dim hours before dawn. They gave him boiled water to drink to fend off dehydration. They packed the boat. Wondered at why this had happened. Prayed quietly. Soon the sun would appear and the day would overcome the darkness completely.

Sylvia later learned that as Jacob refuelled, the petrol fumes had slithered to the primus and its flame had leapt back to the petrol can, causing it to explode. Fearing for the boat and its contents, Jacob had grabbed the burning container and swung it between his legs into the river. She also learned that some villagers had put a curse on Jacob a week before, from which they assumed he would die. But Jacob did not die. His wounds healed. His scars were few. And the boatman and catechist became a living testimony to the villagers of the power of God.