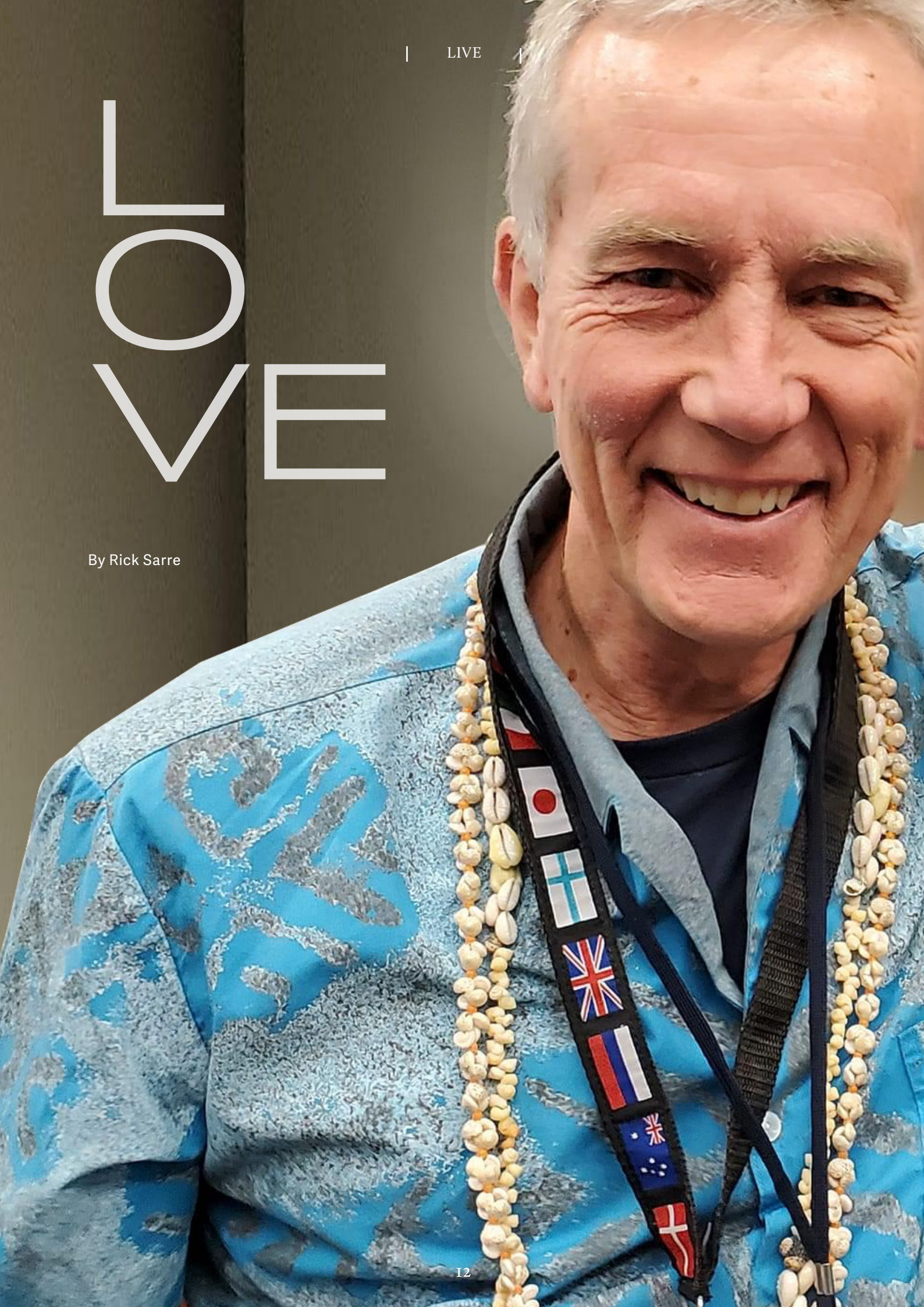


LOVE

By Rick Sarre



In Greek philosophy, *Philia* is a form of love that encourages goodwill, friendship, and affection. Unlike other types of love, such as *Eros* or *Agape*, *Philia* is not solely based on emotions or spiritual connection. Instead, it relies on shared values and common goals to maintain its strength. As a result, *Philia* love is often seen as one of the most important forms of love because it can help people achieve their highest potential.

According to ancient Greek philosophers, love has many facets. Noting the multiple intricacies and nuances of love, the Greeks determined that love could be broken down into seven specific types and only two of them (*eros* and *ludus*) have anything to do with romance. Another of them, *philia*, is love of friends, the affection felt by those in enduring relationships. This is the love that I have felt for members of the congregations that I have participated in over the years, and in three continents. And one of the great vehicles for expressing that love has been in congregational sharing opportunities.

As a young lad growing up in Adelaide, I remember the important role that prayer and testimony services played in congregational life. Indeed, prayer has always come easily for me, and that's because our family engaged in the practice a lot. For example, every time that any member of our family was setting off to an exam, or heading interstate or overseas, Mum and Dad would gather us together as a family right beside the front door, and Dad would offer a prayer. He would pray for encouragement, reassurance, resilience, and safety. I'm sure it didn't make any difference to the outcome of the exam, nor was it going to protect us from the anxieties associated with the uncertainties of travel. But standing there for those few quiet minutes gave us the reassurance that, whatever lay in store, we would not be comfortless.

To paraphrase the writer C.S. Lewis: prayer can enliven the people who are doing the praying. It has certainly enlivened me.

Testimonies, however, have never been my 'thing.' I don't ever remember offering a formal testimony

until just before I turned 28. It happened this way. In 1982 I was flying back across the Pacific to complete my graduate studies at the University of Toronto (I had been home while Dad had undergone open heart surgery) and I scheduled a stop-over to visit Jai Ram who was the church's national minister in Fiji at the time. Jai decided that, on our first afternoon together, we would pay a pastoral visit to several homes. We were at the first home, and, after introductions, Jai turned to me and said, "Brother Rick will now share his testimony." I had not been prompted, so I struggled along. I managed to piece a few sentences together. The saving grace was that Jai then translated my remarks into Hindi, which gave me a few seconds between each sentence to construct the next one. (I should add that, after more than three decades apart, I caught up with Jai at the 2019 World Conference.)

I do want to share a testimony here, however. It is one that I have not mentioned until now, but since I am writing this on the fiftieth anniversary of the experience the timing is good. I was 17 at the time and had just finished high school. I had attended Mountain Hut reunion, atop Mount Wombat in the Strathbogie Ranges, and then drove home for the Grace Valley reunion in the Adelaide hills in the first week of January 1973. The Adelaide youth then filled two cars and we drove all the way back to Mountain Hut for the start of Leadership camp, held over 10 days from 11 January. It was my third such camp. Peter Taylor had taken over as director from David Judd. Other staff that year included Ray Burdekin, Frank Flood, Jack Gunning, Charles Loughlin, Ken Robinson, Anne and Jerry Sutton, Wally Francis, Peter Ridge, Paul Rixon and Ross Boreham. Harry Fielding from New Zealand had attended both the reunions, and now he was at Leadership too, as a

camper. We had formed a strong friendship in our three weeks together.

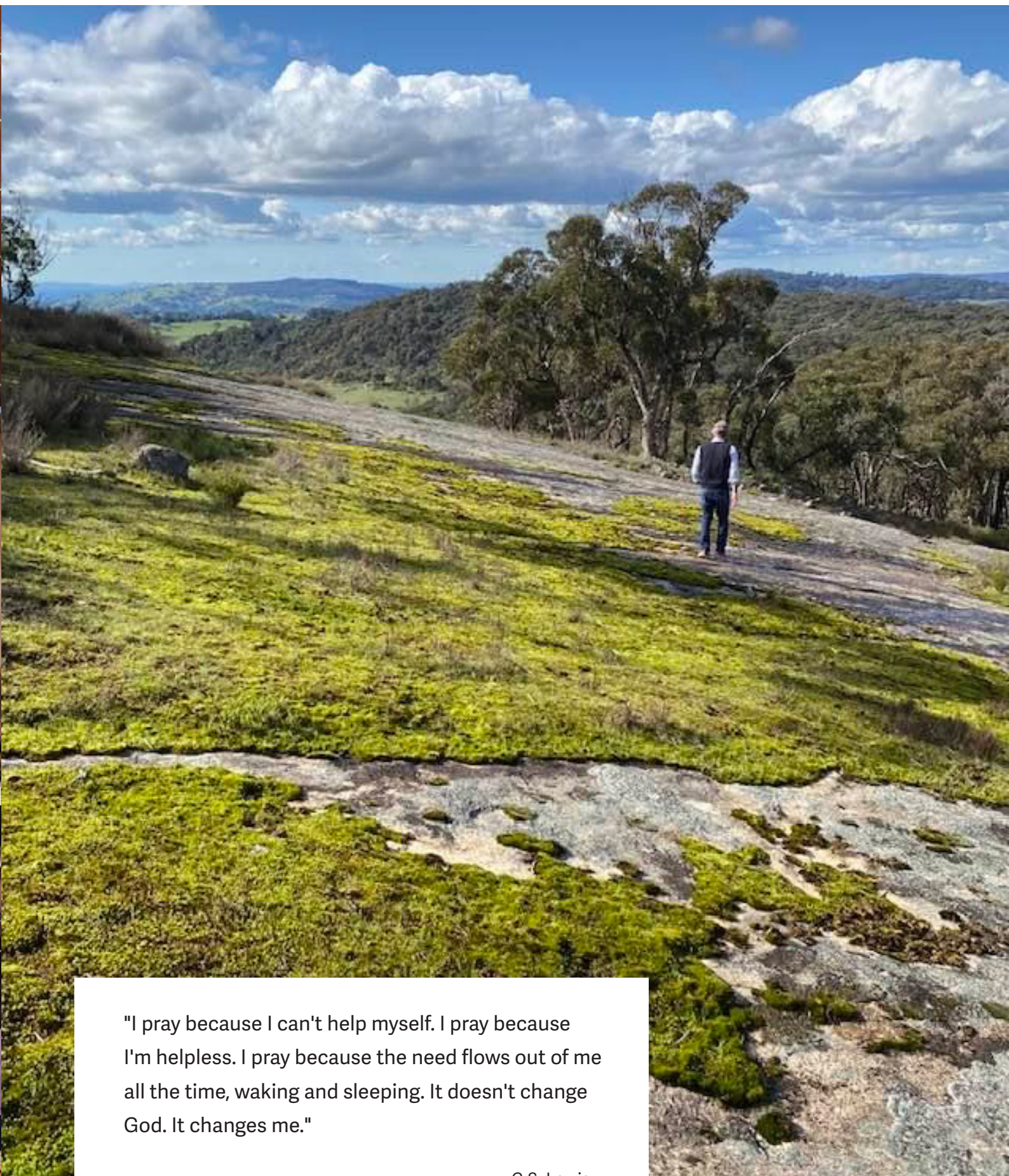
On this particular night, after lights out, I decided to test what I had heard about prayer in the life of the church. The Joseph Smith experience was well known to me. One morning, Joseph, as a young teenager, had gone into the woods near his home to pray for guidance regarding which church to join. According to his testimony, two personages appeared before him and directed him to begin a new church. Indeed, without that event in upstate New York in 1820 there would not be the Mormon church nor the Community of Christ today. I figured that if it could work for Joseph, it could work for me. I left my accommodation (a 'shent' with tin roof, dirt floor, canvas sides) and proceeded to walk into the sclerophyll forest that surrounded the campsite. I knelt and prayed for guidance. Looking back now, it seems a clichéd exercise, but at the time it seemed highly appropriate. Well, as could be expected, nothing happened; no vision, no apparitions, no nothing. There was just the rustling of the wind through the trees. I decided to head home. Halfway back I saw a figure coming towards me. It was Harry Fielding. I have no idea what drew Harry to venture into the night after midnight on that evening or to head to where I had headed. He said later that he just felt "led". We sat down on the old bridge across the creek and talked into the night. A half a century later I cannot recollect any of the conversation, and my journal says nothing about it. I imagine that Harry and I shared the hopes and dreams we had for our participation in the life of the church thereafter. I spoke about our meeting at the dedication service at the end of camp a few days later but have not spoken about it since.

Many profound things can happen in our lives that we cannot explain. The serendipitous meeting with Harry left a powerful and lasting impression on me. My friendship with him, I am very pleased to say, remains as strong today as it was then.

Last October, a number of us gathered at Kallara to acknowledge the events that unfolded for twenty years (1970-1989) during Leadership camps at Mountain Hut. During that weekend I didn't venture into the bush after lights out, nor did I talk into the night, because nowadays I need my sleep more than anything else. But the memory of that philia event, a half a century before, remained firmly in my mind.



Photos (this page) Rick and his wife Debra in Adelaide (Photo: Susie Lang, 2022); Rick and Harry at Forster, December 2022. Over page: Rick on Flat Rock, Mt Hut, October 2022.



"I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me."

C.S. Lewis