

# AUSTRALIAN BIOGRAPHY

A series that profiles some of the most extraordinary Australians of our time



**Eva Burrows**  
1929 -  
World Leader, Salvation Army

This program is an episode of **Australian Biography** Series 6 produced under the National Interest Program of Film Australia. This well-established series profiles some of the most extraordinary Australians of our time. Many have had a major impact on the nation's cultural, political and social life. All are remarkable and inspiring people who have reached a stage in their lives where they can look back and reflect. Through revealing in-depth interviews, they share their stories—of beginnings and challenges, landmarks and turning points. In so doing, they provide us with an invaluable archival record and a unique perspective on the roads we, as a country, have travelled.

**Australian Biography: Eva Burrows**

**Directors/Producers** Robin Hughes, Linda Kruger

**Executive Producer** Sharon Connolly

**Duration** 26 minutes **Year** 1998

Study guide prepared by Diane O'Flaherty © Film Australia

Also in Series 6: Bruce Dawe, Elizabeth Durack, Margaret Fulton  
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## A FILM AUSTRALIA NATIONAL INTEREST PROGRAM

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## SYNOPSIS

The 20th century brought dramatic changes in opportunities for women, but in religious circles the ordination of women remains a burning issue and on the world stage women have been excluded from international leadership roles in the Christian church. Eva Burrows is an outstanding exception. She began life as one of nine children in a humble Australian family. She would go on to lead one of the world's most interesting and effective religious movements.

This program traces Eva Burrows's rapid rise through the ranks of the Salvation Army to become its remarkably successful world leader. In the role of General she was a strong and effective administrator who nevertheless retained the warmth and humanity that earned her the popular title of 'The People's General'.

General Burrows's experiences in just about every trouble spot on the globe and her meetings with world leaders are analysed here with exceptional intelligence and honesty. Her account of her life provides extraordinary insight into the opportunities afforded a talented person who makes a complete commitment to a cause. It also reveals the difficult personal choices that sometimes confront such a person.

Even the viewer with no interest in religion will be fascinated by this portrait of an unusually capable and wise human being, whose life has made a genuine difference for good in the world.

## CURRICULUM LINKS

This program will have interest and relevance for teachers and students at secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum links include Beliefs and Values, Religious Education, Comparative Religious Studies, English and Studies of Society and Environment.

## BEFORE WATCHING

You will be better prepared for the program's content if you know a little about some areas which impact on Eva Burrows's life.

### The Great Depression

Eva Burrows was born in 1929. It was the year that marked the collapse of Wall Street, centre of the world's economic activity, which resulted in a terrible and extended slump in business activity around the globe. The effects filtered through to ordinary working people.

From 1929 to 1932, industrial production in the capitalist world fell by 35 per cent, the volume of world trade fell by more than 40 per cent and unemployment rose to 30 million in 1932 in the four major capitalist economies. Such a negative cycle, whereby unemployment rises and thus spending falls, feeds on itself. Australia was particularly vulnerable at that time because of our then reliance on wheat and wool exports. Other countries could not afford to buy our commodities because of their own economic woes. In 1932, 29 per cent of Australian men were unemployed and although the figures improved a little in the following years, our nation was just recovering when, in 1939, World War Two broke out.

### The Salvation Army

In 1865, William Booth, an ordained Methodist minister, aided by his wife Catherine, formed an evangelical group which preached to people living in appalling poverty in London's East End. Booth's ministry recognised the interdependence of material, emotional and spiritual needs and thus he not only preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, but became involved in the feeding and shelter of the hungry and homeless and in rehabilitation of alcoholics. This group initially was known as The Christian Mission, but in 1878 it took the name

of The Salvation Army. The church evolved on a quasi-military pattern. Booth became 'the General' and his ministers were given officer's ranks. The 'Army' wages war on sin; its members, known as Salvationists, are called soldiers.

Today, the Salvation Army is established in over 100 countries and has more than 1.1 million members worldwide.

## WHILE WATCHING

As you watch the program, jot down words or phrases to describe Eva Burrows. You will use this information later.

## AFTER WATCHING

### Opening of the Film

The first image viewers see is the Salvation Army Band marching up the street. Thirty years ago, probably less in many country towns, this was a regular sight. The band drew many onlookers. They would march to a chosen street corner where they would play, gathering a crowd. One Salvationist would then preach a lesson whilst another collected donations.

- Examine some of the functions the bands performed during the post-war years.
- Why do you think they are rarely seen today? Has anything taken their place in today's streets?

Eva says she believes that if leaders are inspiring, people will follow them.

- How does the footage of the Salvation Army band reinforce Eva's words?
- What is the effect of the low camera angle on Eva's message?
- Think about the many and diverse areas of your life. Who are the people you choose to follow? What attributes do they display that inspire you?

Eva is shown with Mother Teresa, Ronald Reagan and Bob Hawke.

- Why might these people have been singled out from the many world leaders she has met? How do the pictures reinforce Eva's words?

### The Great Depression

As you have seen, the 1930s in Australia were difficult years to be bringing up a family. Much of Eva's knowledge of her early life comes from her parents' stories and her father's diary.

- Why are these sources valuable in providing historical knowledge? List the disadvantages of each source.

Eva says that her parents were dependent on donations from members of the Salvation Army Corps.

- Were there any social security payments for the poor in the 1930s in Australia?

Eva remembers that everyone in her neighbourhood was poor.

- Do you believe those conditions led to people helping each other more than what we see today? Support your answer with evidence.

Making do with hand-me-downs, whereby the older child's outgrown clothes were passed on to the younger child, was a way of life during the depression. Unpicking a garment, then making a new one from the less worn material, meant the difference between having clothes to wear and going cold.

- During this period, what skills would be valued in a woman? Give reasons for your suggestions.
- Do we still value these skills today?
- Suggest the emotions you might feel if you lived as a young person during this time.
- Suggest any good which might come out of such poverty-stricken years and examine the reasons this might be so.
- Do you think these early years may have influenced Eva's calling to missionary work amongst the less fortunate?

## Education and Youth

Eva says that in school she wanted to achieve and do well.

- In what ways did Eva's leadership abilities surface at school? Bring evidence to your observations.
- Why do you think there was a stage in her life where she rebelled against being part of the Salvation Army? In your experience, is such a revolt against family values a normal part of growing up?

Eva studied for her Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Queensland. In her first weeks of orientation, she was drawn back to the church.

- How difficult do you think it is being open and honest about your faith when it is not the popular thing to do amongst your peers?
- Why was it helpful for Eva to join the Christian Union club?
- What other areas of life can be supported by mixing with like-minded people?

## Eva's Vocation

In the program, Eva recalls the day she had what she describes as a strong inner awareness that the Salvation Army was the place where God wanted her to be.

- Find the dictionary meaning of the word 'vocation'. Can secular employment ever be called a vocation? Support your answer with reasons.
- Have you ever experienced a deep conviction that something in your life was either right or wrong for you? If so, write a few lines about this time.
- Do you think these strong, deep experiences of revelation only come to those who have religious faith?

Eva wanted a teaching position that would challenge her, rather than provide an easy life. Her first appointment was at the Howard Institute, a large mission station in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). She became head of the Teachers College where many black Africans learned to be teachers for the network of Salvation Army schools throughout Zimbabwe. She subsequently became Vice-Principal of the Howard Institute, then finally Principal of the Usher Institute, where she again initiated teacher training for African girls.

- What drives a person to want a job that demands sacrifices?
- What reasons might have prompted Eva to train black Africans as teachers?
- What visual evidence can you find to support Eva's assertion that she found sharing with the African people a 'lovely part' of her own life experiences?
- List some ways that a teacher's job in Australia today might differ from a teacher's role in Africa during the 1960s.

One of Eva's Usher Institute students subsequently became a nurse. In Scotland, when Eva had a heart attack, her ex-student looked after her.

- Do you believe the karmic principle that what you put into life you get back? Support your answer with familiar examples.

In 1965, Ian Smith, Prime Minister of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) issued a declaration of independence from the United Kingdom (though not from the British Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth II). He did this because Britain was systematically moving toward black majority rule in many of the other African countries it had colonised: Smith and his government wanted to retain white minority rule in Rhodesia.

- Why did Eva (and others) think the idea of Smith and his cabinet colleagues was unfair?
- Why might Eva have felt civil war was then inevitable?

There has always been great debate about the morality of missionary work in developing countries. Eva says that most Africans felt their lot would improve if they had 'western style': however many missionaries, including Eva herself, doubted that European ways provided all the answers.

- What do you think the indigenous Africans thought of as 'western style'?
- Do you agree that 'western style' would improve their lot or is it more than that?
- Discuss several different intentions which may provoke charity or church organisations to set up missions amongst poorer people.
- Do you believe missions generally improve people's lives they contact? Bring evidence to your answer.

## London and Sri Lanka

Eva was posted to various countries, including England and Sri Lanka, in order that she might serve in different capacities.

- What might be some reasons why many non-government organisations transfer their people from time to time?
- What does the interviewer, Robin Hughes, mean when she asks how Eva managed important jobs 'without a wife'? Make a list of the functions a wife might fulfil under these circumstances.
- Make a list of pointers for what you would consider to be helpful guidelines for co-existence between people who see the world differently from each other.
- What would be some of the similarities and differences in the needs of communities in England and in Sri Lanka?

## Leadership

In 1986, Eva Burrows was announced by the High Council of the Salvation Army as their General—their world leader.

- What could she have meant by saying that when the decision was announced, 'I felt something of my mother in me'?
- Write a journal entry about any time where you felt an influence of family in your reaction to a specific event.

Eva is particularly noted as the first woman to ever hold the position of General. She served a standard five-year term then an additional two years at the request of senior international leadership.

- Make a timeline of Eva's life, noting events that marked her progression towards greater responsibility in her leadership.
- List the skills and personal qualities that appear to have made her a good and popular leader. Consult the descriptions of her you've jotted down whilst watching the film and say how each one could contribute to fine leadership.
- What does 'a consultative style of leadership' mean, and why did it work so well for her? What other types of management exist in corporations?
- What did Eva contribute to the Salvation Army during her time as General?
- Create a table listing the similarities and the differences you see between the position of General (head of the Salvation Army) and Pope (leader of the Catholic Church). Choose one other religion and include it in your comparison.

The magazine of the Salvation Army, **The War Cry**, commemorated Eva's appointment. In this segment viewers see the cover.

- How does it convey the community's celebration?
- Research the meaning behind the Salvation Army's motto, 'Blood and Fire' and the colours of the flag, both of which appear on the magazine's cover.

### Politics

Although the Salvation Army never became involved in political situations, political events impacted on Eva's work and responsibilities.

- In what ways did the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the demolition of the Berlin Wall both provide opportunities and make demands on Eva and the Salvation Army?
- Why did Vaclav Havel welcome the Salvation Army back into Czechoslovakia (as it was then)?

### Charitable Organisations

The Salvation Army has the reputation of 'Christianity with its sleeves rolled up'.

- What images come to mind through this label?
- Do you believe charitable organisations have a role to play both in Australia and overseas? If so, how can they be of most help?
- What structures ensure these groups exist?

### Relationships

Eva says relationships are the most important things in her life. She recalls a very strong and beautiful friendship with a man when she returned to Australia on leave from Africa—a special time in her life which led her to make a decision about her road ahead.

- What does she mean by 'I was tempted to move away from my vocation'?
- Can a marriage survive and be robust if the partners are strongly committed to different life directions? Explore the demands of such a relationship.
- Why might Eva believe she would never have been General had she married?

### Closing of the Film

The film ends with the Salvation Army brass band marching down the street. The final image is of Eva Burrows preaching.

- Why do you think the film closes with Eva preaching rather than simply with the band?
- Do you think the band is a symbol? What might be the meaning of the symbol and how have the filmmakers used it?

### REFERENCES AND FURTHER RESOURCES

The Salvation Army - [www1.salvationarmy.org](http://www1.salvationarmy.org)

The Salvation Army in Australia - [www.salvos.org.au](http://www.salvos.org.au)

General Eva Burrows - [www.sacollectables.com/history\\_bios/bio\\_burrows.htm](http://www.sacollectables.com/history_bios/bio_burrows.htm)

Ian Smith/Rhodesia - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian\\_Smith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Smith)

Vaclav Havel - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaclav\\_Havel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaclav_Havel)