

A tribute to Eric Alfred Magnusson (1933–2009)

Lynden Rogers

Dean of the Faculty of Science
and Mathematics, Avondale
College, NSW

It was Principal, W G C Murdoch, who in 1950 encouraged the young Eric Magnusson to study at the Australasian Missionary College, now Avondale, and arranged for him to take the external BSc degree from London University. This was at a time when it was otherwise impossible in Australia to obtain a recognised degree outside a university.

Eric took his BSc in June 1953. Within a few years he was back at Avondale with two PhDs, providing pivotal leadership in the new Science Department from 1961–1970, after which he became Principal.

Both as scientist and principal, Eric pursued a long-held dream—the academic advancement of Avondale. The initial challenges he faced included recruiting staff

and upgrading their academic qualifications. When access to London science degrees closed, Eric used his strategic connections to set Avondale on its first tentative steps toward the official recognition of its courses. The large range of fully accredited degrees which Avondale offers today's students has grown out of his vision.

After 10 years as Avondale College Principal, Eric returned to full-time science, firstly at the ANU Research School of Chemistry and later at the Defence Force Academy, where he retired as Associate Professor, and with which he was still associated as a Visiting Fellow at the time of his death.

Over this period of time Eric took a keen interest in the comprehension of forensic science by criminal court jurors, not only publishing in this area but supervising research students. He also participated strongly in the children's drug education magazine, *One Jump Ahead*, published over 12 years by his wife Nainie, for which she was awarded a medal of the Order of Australia. It was for such contributions to society that he was honoured in the

Peoplescape display on the lawns of Parliament House.

Over four decades Eric also tried to help his Christian community face difficult issues relating to faith and science, an area in which he held a keen interest.

In what can only euphemistically be called retirement, Eric maintained research in theoretical chemistry in addition to his forensic work, as well as working as an industrial consultant. He also continued to serve Avondale College: as chairman of various Accreditation Committees, stand-in Academic Vice-President and as visiting science lecturer. Students quickly became aware of Eric's vast conceptual grasp of quantum physics and chemistry.

He was physically active, completing a number of Sydney City to Surf races. He also insisted on taking up new challenges, such as walking through Cradle Mountain in winter in his mid 70s!

One of Eric's most endearing legacies was his ability to mix comfortably with all ages. His friends ranged from College contemporaries right down to current students, truly a rare achievement. **TEACH**