

He Has Done All Things Well

He Has Done All Things Well

Memoirs of Thomas Chacko

A testimony to God's faithfulness

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*To my wife Ammini,
and to our children, grandchildren,
and great-grandchildren —
that they may know whence they came
and Whom they serve.*

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Introduction



Looking back over the last nine decades, I can confidently say, God has done all things well for me.

Psalm 139:5 — “Thou hast beset me behind and before and laid thine hand upon me.”

This verse has always held a deep personal meaning in my life. When I was a teenager, my uncle, my dad’s brother, needed major surgery. Before the operation, I remember my dad’s oldest brother praying and quoting this verse. In that moment, those words settled deeply into my heart. As I listened, I could vividly picture God’s presence surrounding me, His hand before me and His hand behind me, completely covering and protecting me. That image stayed with me through the years.

During difficult seasons in my life, I often returned to that memory and found comfort in knowing that God is with me, holding me, protecting me, and guiding me through every hardship. His presence gave me peace when I was afraid and strength when I felt weak. Through those experiences, my love for Him and my trust in Him continued to grow more and more.

Philippians 4:19 — “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

I memorized this verse when I was young. As the years passed, I began to understand more deeply what that promise truly meant. Day after day, I saw how the Lord faithfully supplied all of my needs — not only material needs, but emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial needs as well.

Now, at the age of ninety, I can honestly testify that God has remained faithful to His Word throughout every season of my life. He has truly supplied all of my needs, and through the years I have seen His goodness and grace. Truly, “He hath done all things well.”

This memoir is a testimony to God’s faithfulness to me. It is my sincere hope that those who read this will see the invisible hand of our loving God, as He provided, protected, and guided me during my pilgrimage in this world. I also hope this book will help my progeny learn a little more about their roots.

My Birth



It was an ordinary day in November, in the year of our Lord 1935. The hot summer days were over. Crows were flying westwards to find their resting places for the night. Chickens were back in the coop for the night. The glow of the western sky heralded the soon approaching dusk. The golden evening sunray was filtering through the leaves of the tall cashew trees, lining the western border of the three-acre Easaw family estate. As usual, the family gathered in the living room for the evening prayer.

Mary, their oldest daughter, was pregnant with her first baby. She was resting in a nearby room and had been having contractions all afternoon. As labor progressed, she sounded the alarm; however, the nearest hospital was seven miles away. Nobody in the village had a car, and there were no taxis available. Regular bus services between the towns were not offered during the night. Moreover, there was a river to cross, which had no bridge over it. So, they waited as the labor pain increased.

An elderly retired doctor lived about two miles from the Easaw residence. He had stopped his practice because of poor eyesight. Early the next morning, while it was still dark, Mary's younger sister Annamma ran to the doctor's house for help. Within an hour, the doctor arrived in his covered bullock-cart, the mode of transportation for the wealthy.

When the doctor went in to examine Mary, the whole family waited outside. Mary's maternal grandfather, Ghevarghese Kuruvanplavil, a very godly person, led the group in prayer. He had no sons of his own, and his daughter (Mary's

Mom) also had no sons. So, after asking God for a safe delivery and a healthy baby for his granddaughter, he added, *“Lord, even if the child is a girl now, you have the power to change the baby to a boy!!”*

The room was semi-dark under the kerosene lamp, but this was an emergency. So, the doctor opted for a forceps delivery. Mary’s mother worked as a labor and delivery nurse. After a while, the doctor succeeded in his attempt to pull the baby out. The only problem was that one of the blades of the forceps had lodged in the corner of the baby’s right eye socket. Thankfully, it did not damage the pupil or cause permanent damage.

Yes, it was a boy! They named him Thomas after his paternal grandfather. His full name: Thomas (given name); Maniyatte (family name); Chacko (last name).

My Birthplace



I was born in a small village called Kumbanad, in the state of Kerala, in South India. Kerala is one of the most beautiful states in India. The palm-lined beaches, lagoons and backwaters, mountain slopes of the Western Ghats, tea, coffee and spice plantations, hills, valleys, and numerous rivers snaking through the fertile land, all add beauty to the spectacular panoramic view of the topography of the state.

Kumbanad is 7 miles east of Thiruvalla and 3 miles west of Kozhencherry.



India



Kerala



Panoramic Views of Kerala



Kumbanad in the seventies



Paddy fields in Kerala

Political and Religious Background



India became a colony of the British Empire in 1876. The non-violent independence movement, spearheaded by Mohandas Gandhi, succeeded, and India became independent on August 15, 1947. At the time of Independence, India consisted of 571 disjointed princely states, with 19,500 dialects and languages. After Independence, based on major languages, the states were reorganized into 28 states. Malayalam is the language of the state of Kerala.

Apostle Thomas came to *Kodungallur*, a port city in Northern Kerala, in AD 52. He introduced Christianity to India, and several churches were established, primarily in the state of Kerala. In AD 72, he was martyred near Madras (now called Chennai), in South India.

Thomas of Cana, a Syrian merchant, along with 400 Jewish Christians, including clergymen from Mesopotamia, came to *Kodungallur* around AD 345. They introduced the ecclesiastical form of church government. Under the benevolent protection of the princely rulers, the Christian community grew in number, wealth, and political power, but, for the most part, was spiritually dead. The light of the Gospel began to produce spiritual awakening among the so-called Christian churches only around the end of the 18th century.

In the early 1800s, the Church of England was corrupt with unscriptural practices and rituals. Many sincere believers were concerned about that situation. In 1827, four such men (John Nelson Darby, Edward Cronin, John Bellett, and Francis Hutchinson) gathered to pray and to study the Bible. Based on the Word of God, they decided to gather for worship, as the Apostles did in the first

century. They rejected an ecclesiastical system and did not consider themselves as a denomination.

The first meeting was held in Dublin, Ireland. Soon, there were similar gatherings in several locations. The most well-known group was in a town called Plymouth, and the people began to call them “Plymouth Brethren”. The term Brethren was used because they addressed each other as brothers. The first permanent meeting was held in 1829. Before long, this movement spread to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, America, and several other countries.

Anthony Groves of England, called “the father of faith mission”, a dentist by profession, and a member of one of these gatherings, went to Iraq as the first Protestant missionary. While there, his wife and two children died of cholera. In 1836, he went to India as a missionary. That was the beginning of the Assembly movement in India.

In 1896, Joseph Gelson Gregson, a Baptist missionary who was sympathetic to Brethren viewpoints, visited Kerala. In addition to preaching in *Mar Thoma churches*, he held several private Bible Classes. Many people, including priests, attended these classes. In these classes, some of the basic doctrines, such as salvation by faith only, believers’ baptism, the priesthood of the believer, security of salvation, etc., were taught. Many souls were saved at these private meetings, including some priests. Realizing that Mr. Gregson’s teachings are contrary to the teachings of the ‘*Marthoma Church*’, his license to preach was canceled by the bishop, and Mr. Gregson went back to England.

One of the priests who attended Mr. Gregson’s classes was Rev. P.E. Mammen. He was an ordained priest of the Episcopalian (*Mar Thoma*) church and was the vicar of the very powerful and large church in Kumbanad. He attended Mr. Gregson’s classes regularly and started studying the scriptures on his own. Finally, he left his priesthood and the *Marthoma church* and took believers’ baptism. Mr. Handley Bird, a well-known British Missionary, baptized him. On March 19, 1899, he and four other brethren held the first breaking of bread and worship meeting in Kumbanad, Kerala. (My maternal great-grandfather, Mr. Varghese, Kuruvanplavil, attended the first meeting.) Before long, many such gatherings were formed in Kerala. This was the first Assembly gathering and worship meeting in Kerala State.

K.V. Simon was a Christian poet, musician, teacher, reformer, writer, bible scholar, and apologist. He authored around three hundred hymns and poems and approximately thirty books. He started writing poems at the age of eight. He is known as Maha Kavi K.V. Simon. *Maha Kavi* is an honorific title and means

“Great Poet” or “Dean of Poets”. The title *Mahakavi* is conferred by the Sahitya Academy (Literary Society).

Mr. Simon, a member of the *Mar Thoma Church*, was born again at a meeting conducted by evangelist V.D. David, known as Tamil David, and took believers’ baptism by immersion. As a result, the *Mar Thoma Church*, which practiced infant baptism, excommunicated him. Mr. Simon and many like-minded brethren began gathering for worship in the homes of believers. On January 20, 1929, this group merged with the group pioneered by P.E. Mammen (*Kumbanad Achan*).

My Dad’s father and his family were in fellowship with Mr. K.V. Simon, and my Mom’s parents were associated with “Kumbanad Achan”, i.e., P.E. Mammen (Achan means Priest). The merger of these two groups brought both families under the umbrella of the Brethren Assembly. My parents and my grandparents were all attending the Kumbanad Brethren Assembly at the time of my birth.



Anthony Groves
(1795-1853)



J. G. Gregson
(1835-1909)



P. E. Mammen
(1874-1947)



K.V. Simon
(1878-1944)



E.H. Noel
(1883-1944)



V.D. David
(1853-1923)

Paternal Grandparents



Our forefathers came from a place called Kodungallur, a port city in northern Kerala. Around 1850, Kurian and his brother Ghevarghese, from the Karimpanoor family, decided to leave Kodungallur. They moved south. Kurian settled near Kottayam in central Kerala, and his brother, Ghevarghese, continued further south. His destination was Aranmula, a well-populated village. Aranmula was the seat of a very popular Hindu temple, located on the south side of the Pampa River. Due to the rising water in the Pampa River, he was stranded on the north side. While waiting for the water to recede, he became ill and passed out in a sugarcane plantation. The owner of the plantation found him the following day, sick and hungry. He took him home. Ghevarghese stayed with that family and eventually married one of their daughters.

Ghevarghese had seven children. Their sixth son, Paulose, moved two miles further west and settled in a village called Pullad. The property he acquired was part of an ancient riverbed called Maniyaar, a tributary to the Pampa River (*Aar* in Malayalam means river). Our family name Maniyatte is a derivation of Maniyaar. Paulose had four sons. His third son, Thomas, purchased a property at a place called Pularikad, which is another one mile west. His wife, Annamma, was from a wealthy Marthomite family by the name of Mammrapally, from a nearby village, Kuriannoor. They had four sons and three daughters. They were members of the Mar Thoma Diocese of Maramon. Their first four children were given child baptism. However, before their fifth child was born, they left the Mar Thoma Church and joined with the group spearheaded by K.V. Simon. This group eventually merged with the Brethren assemblies.

The following are the names of their children:

- Saramma (Perangattu) Kumbanad
- Aleyamma (Thekel) Ezhumatoor
- M.T. Thomas (Pularikad)
- Mariamma (Thumpukara) Ayiroor
- M.T. Chacko (Kumbanad)
- M.T. George (Pularikad)
- M.T. Mathai (Kavungumprayar)

Maniyatte Thomas and Annamma's four sons and their spouses:



*From left to right:
Mr. & Mrs. M.T. Mathai
Mr. & Mrs. M.T. George
Mr. & Mrs. M.T. Chacko
Mr. & Mrs. M.T. Thomas*

(Unfortunately, I do not have a picture of the three sisters with their husbands.)

Their fifth child, my father, Chacko, married N.E. Mary from the Vandakathil family in Kumbanad. The Chacko-Mary couple has three sons and one daughter.

- Thomas Chacko - North Carolina, USA
- John Jacob Maniyatte - Delaware, USA
- Mathews Jacob - Macomb TWP, Michigan, USA
- Aniyamma Cherian - Chengannur, Kerala, India

My Maternal Grandparents



One of the sisters of Kumbanad Achan (Rev. P.E. Mammen) was married to Easaw of the Vettithara family in Kumbanad. After their son Abraham was born, Mr. Easaw died. Mrs. Easaw was remarried, and she and her son Abraham went to live with her new husband, who was from the Vandakathil family in Mepra, a village west of Thiruvalla, Kerala. When Abraham grew up, his uncles brought him back to Kumbanad. Even though his biological father was from the Vettithara family, he retained the family name of his stepfather, which was Vandakathil.

His oldest son, V.A. Easaw, was my maternal grandfather. My maternal grandmother was Sosamma from the Kuruvanplavil family. Easaw and his wife, Sosamma, had four daughters: Mary (my mother), Annamma, Sosamma, and Aleyamma. Annamma went to be with the Lord at the age of 22. She was not married. Sosamma was married to evangelist V.P. Jacob of Bangalore. Aleyamma was married to P.J. Abraham. They are all now with the Lord.

My maternal grandfather, Vandakathil V.A. Easaw, was a State Government employee, and my maternal grandmother was a government elementary school teacher. My maternal grandmother once shared an episode with us in which she believed she had an encounter with an angel.



*My Maternal Grandparents: Mr. & Mrs. V. A. Easaw
(Vandakathil House, Kumbanad)*

My Grandmother's Encounter with an Angel

My Grandmother was teaching in a school near Kottayam and was staying with a family as a paying guest. She came home only on weekends. One weekend, the bus on which she was traveling from Kottayam to Thiruvalla broke down. By the time they dropped her off at Thiruvalla, it was after midnight. The last private bus to her destination had already left. To reach home, she had to walk seven miles, five of which went through a large sugarcane plantation, which was notorious for harboring outlaws.

The unpaved country road was reasonably lit with moonlight. Since she had no other choice, she committed herself to the Lord and started to walk. Suddenly, somebody called her from behind and said, "Madam, Madam, please wait." A gentleman approached and introduced himself as a teacher. He asked if he could join her. Grandma was very happy and relieved that there was a man walking with her at night. Both being teachers, they had enough common topics to talk about.

By around 5:30 AM, they crossed the sugarcane plantation and came to a populated village called Eraviperoor. People were already up and around doing their morning chores. There, she had to turn onto a footpath to go to her home. She turned around to say goodbye to her fellow traveler, but he just disappeared. Where did he go? Why didn't he say goodbye? Where did he come from? Who was he?

My Dad



My Dad was 12 years old when Grandfather died. One day, shortly before his demise, Grandfather saw my Dad standing near his bed, crying. He motioned my Dad to get closer to him. Then he whispered in his ear, “God will bless and prosper you, my son”. I can truly testify that God did abundantly bless and prosper my father, both spiritually and materially.

After Grandfather’s death, Dad’s older brother quit school and worked tirelessly to provide for the family. The following year, Dad passed the 7th-grade examination. He was qualified to teach primary school and wanted to start working immediately. His brother, however, preferred sending him to an English-medium high school, even though he could not afford the monthly tuition fees.

Before the next school year started, Dad and his older brother went to the owner of the high school. They brought some fresh vegetables, including a bunch of ripe plantain fruit, as a gift. The owner of the school, after reviewing Dad’s grades, offered him a 50% discount on his fees. As soon as the next school year started, Dad enrolled at Sree Vivekananda English High School, Pullad.

Dad was happy about going to the new school, but it bothered him to see his brother struggling to feed the family, and at the same time, trying to come up with the monthly fees for him. Two months into the school year, someone told Dad about a temporary teaching vacancy at a nearby government primary school. Despite his brother’s objection, Dad quit the school and took that teaching job at the government primary school. He was only 13 years old. Those were very hard times. The Maniyatte family was known for their faithfulness to Scriptural truths

and their steadfast faith in God. Their mother was a very capable, God-fearing lady. She had a special gift of making each person feel very special. The bond of love between the two older brothers was genuine as well. Their austere lifestyle, hard work, and unselfish dedication to the family helped them to pull through. They were able to give their two younger brothers a much higher education than what they themselves had. Later, my Dad privately passed higher examinations and was teaching in a Government Middle School at the time of his retirement.

My paternal grandfather died long before I was born. Dad's older brother was like a grandfather to my siblings and me. His love and care for our family was genuine. I have many fond memories of him and Ammachi, his wife. Their son, M.T. Thomas, is the former principal of Clarence High School, a well-known Christian School, in Bangalore. He is my mentor and counselor. His younger brother, Babie, was my age, and we were friends. The Lord called him Home at the age of eight.

Legacy is the faith and character left behind, not wealth and fame. In that respect, my father left us a great legacy to follow. I can share many examples, but for the sake of length, I will mention only a few.

Our grandfather left no verbal or written will at the time of his death. I am told that my father and his brothers took only 15 minutes to divide Grandfather's estate.

One day, a neighbor, my father's friend, came over and offered to sell us a large piece of his property, which was close to our land. At that time, I was on my first vacation from Kenya, and we were in the market to buy a property. But my father told his friend that he should first offer his land to his own brother, who lived on one side of that property. His friend said he will not give his property to his brother because they did not get along well. Then Dad told him that he should ask one of the other neighbors with whom he shared a border on the other side of his property. If he was not interested, then Dad said he would be happy to buy it. Anybody else would have jumped at the opportunity to buy that beautiful and very valuable property diagonally across from our property.

Before joining the State Government education department, Dad worked for a private school run by the Brethren Assembly. It was three miles from our home. Dad would get up around 6 am and, after family prayer, would start working in our compound among the various plants such as bananas, cassava, etc. At 9 am, after breakfast, he would walk three miles to school. After school at 4 pm, he would walk back the three miles and pick up where he left off, and continue working in the yard, or taking care of the buffalo or the cow. A number of our

neighbors had bicycles, but Dad never even thought of buying one. He was saving money for his children's education!

After I went to East Africa in 1962, I suggested that we should either build a new house or renovate the existing one. But my father rejected the idea. He said that the house he built was good enough for him and his wife. If we wanted a bigger and better house, we were free to build our own. My parents lived an exemplary life. Though they were poor in material things, they were rich in moral and spiritual matters. That is the legacy they left for us.

In 1938, Dad began construction of a house. Due to financial constraints, the house was built in stages. Originally, the floor was made of soil, patted down, and smeared with kneaded cow dung. That was the custom for lower or middle-class families in Kerala. After a few years, this was replaced with a concrete floor. In the beginning, we had a thatched roof. Every year, that roof was replaced with a new coconut leaf roof. That annual event was like a festival. All the relatives, with their wives and children, would come together. Able-bodied young men would get up on the roof to remove the old roof, and the older men would take fresh plaited coconut leaves and throw them to those who were on the roof. Children would be running around and playing while women would be cooking simple, but delicious food on temporary fire-hearths made in the yard.



My Childhood Home

Those fun days came to an end when tiles replaced thatch roofs. Electricity became available only in the 1960s. Until then, we used kerosene lamps. A new kitchen and dining area were added in 1963. Before my sister's wedding in 1975,

the house was expanded to include two more rooms with a terrace and attached bathroom.

I have very fond memories of our house. There was always love and laughter, good food and fun. Every morning and evening, the family would come together, sing one or two songs, read the Bible, and either one of the parents or one of the older children would lead the family in prayer. Regardless of denomination, this used to be the practice in all Protestant Christian homes in central Kerala. A visiting missionary from England went for a walk early one morning. He thought there was a prayer meeting going on in every house early in the morning.

Yes, there was hard work. As years went by and as our financial situation improved, we could afford additional household help. Until then, we all pitched in and helped Dad and Mom.

All my childhood pictures, including my college years, were kept hanging on the walls of our original house. They were very rare photos. There was one picture, in particular, that was very precious to me. It was taken in 1935 by missionary E.H. Noel, in his front yard, with my grandmother holding me. I was about three months old. A few years ago, when I went home on vacation from the United States, I had a digital camera and had hoped to copy many of those pictures onto my digital camera and include them in this composition. Unfortunately, someone destroyed all those photos. They are lost forever. I was heartbroken.

In 2021, my younger brother tore the old house down. In a way, I was sad, but I am glad that in its place he built two auditoriums large enough to accommodate 2000 people. That auditorium is used for gospel meetings in addition to other secular uses.

In 1945, Dad applied for and accepted a state government job as a teacher. He was posted at a place called Kottappady, about 75 miles north of our home. For eight years, Dad stayed with three different wealthy families as a paying guest. He came home only during vacation times. In exchange for tutoring their children, they offered him free boarding and lodging.

The first year after the annual vacation, Dad returned to Kottappady, expecting to stay with the same family. However, the day he returned, the head of the family requested Dad to find another accommodation. He was very apologetic, and their son was very sad. He told Dad that members of his diocese (Eastern Orthodox Church) were not happy about Dad staying in his house. They accused Dad of reading the Bible and not attending their church. (In those days, the

Orthodox churches and the Catholic churches did not allow laymen to read the Bible.) That night, he stayed with them.

The next morning, with a very heavy heart and not knowing where he would sleep that night, he gathered his belongings and went to the school. He kept his meager belongings in a corner of the room and, as usual, taught the students. Nobody knew his predicament.

Just before closing time, a messenger from the vicar of the local church came to the school and told Dad that the Vicar would like to see him. Dad expected a tongue-lashing from the powerful leader of the community. Dad went to the parsonage and met with the Vicar, who, to Dad's surprise, received him and politely invited him for a cup of tea. Then he asked Dad if he would tutor his son, and in return, offered board and lodging. What an answer to prayer. When the entire community refused to take him in, their beloved Vicar, head of the church and the spiritual authority over them, gladly offered him a place to live.

Another school year went by. On his return after the next annual vacation, however, there was bad news. On his arrival at the parsonage, he was told that the Vicar had had a massive heart attack and passed away suddenly. He was in his early forties. Since it was not proper for him to live in the parsonage without the Vicar, he had to find another accommodation. Before he had a chance to look around for accommodation, one of the wealthy families in the village took him in. Free boarding and lodging in exchange for tutoring their children. Dad stayed with that family (Chennothmalil) for the next six years until he got transferred to our home district in 1953. (In 2005, one of the children from that family attended Dad's funeral and gave a glowing testimony about Dad.)

During those days, transportation in Kerala was very bad. There was no telephone service between Kumbanad and Kottappady. When Dad's mother passed away, a messenger was sent to Kottappady to bring him. He had to change the government transportation bus three times and walk the last seven miles to reach his Dad. By the time Dad arrived home, his Mom was already buried! There were no mortuaries in those days.

In 1953, he was transferred to a school in our district. From then on, he took an active role in the assembly. We had a large Sunday School, and Dad served as the headmaster for many years. He was one of the elders in our assembly and coordinated the century-old Kumbanad Brethren General Convention until he stepped down due to ill health. He also taught at the Kumbanad Brethren Bible School for several years.

Before God called Dad home in 2005, I had many opportunities to spend time with him. Most of the time, he was tired and sleepy from kidney dialysis. He loved to talk to me during his waking hours. He told me that Maha Kavi K.V. Simon was his Sunday School teacher and narrated a story about visiting him at home. He told me how every Friday evening, he had to walk 15 miles from Noel Memorial School at Kariampalve to Kumbanad on an empty stomach. There were a few roadside coffee shops on the way. The atmosphere around those shops was pregnant with the aromatic smell of freshly cooked, delicious native treats. Bypassing those shops without stopping was not easy. Those were the days when he and his older brother were trying to save as much as possible so that they could give their two younger brothers a better education.

Dad supervised the construction of the current assembly hall and a new mess hall while he served as an elder. He was recognized as a gifted problem solver, not only by his own assembly but also by the neighboring assemblies. He visited us in East Africa once and in the USA twice. At both places, he had the opportunity to minister the Word of God. He developed some kidney problems at the age of 88 and had dialysis for five years. On January 21, 2005, at the age of 93, he experienced chest pain and was rushed to the hospital, which was only a mile away. In the ambulance, while Mom was holding his hand, he took a deep breath and was ushered into the presence of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

At his funeral service, over 2000 people came to pay their respects. In addition to the many prominent brethren from the neighboring assemblies, old students and coworkers, neighbors from all different religious backgrounds, and local politicians paid tribute.

Representing my brothers and my sister, I spoke briefly, highlighting his sacrificial life. We do not grieve as others but rejoice in the fact that he finished his course and is now enjoying his well-earned rest in the very presence of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In his diary, my dad recorded many incidents of his life. I do not want to quote them all for fear of length. However, there is one very thought-provoking incident.

Who is your Brother?

Mathews, my younger brother, had an emergency surgery at Vellore Medical College. Unfortunately, that night he developed major complications. He went to the hospital from his college, and he was alone. One of our acquaintances from home happened to be at the hospital. She sent a telegram to my father stating, “Mathukutty Serious. Come soon.”

It was about 4 PM when Dad received the telegram. Vellore Medical College is about 450 miles away, and the only way to get there was by train. Our nearest railway station was 7 miles and the last train for the day left at 6 pm. If he could get it, he would make it to Vellore the next morning. Suddenly, he realized that he did not have enough cash to make the trip. He had money in the bank. He quickly took his checkbook and ran to the bank, which was only half a mile away. By the time he reached the bank, it was closed. Nobody was in sight.

The largest department store in the area, owned by one of the believers, was only about 500 feet away. So, he quickly went there. The owner of the store was at his desk. Dad tried to show him the check and explain the situation. To Dad’s surprise, he did not even raise his head from the book. Dad repeated his request. Then he said, “I heard you the first time. Today’s proceeds are in the safe, ready for deposit. I can’t rearrange now.”

Dad could not believe his ears. He didn’t know what to do. He said he felt like his legs were going to give way. If he missed the 6 pm train, he would not get to Vellore until the day after, and his son was in critical condition!

He came out of the store, stood by the curb with tears in his eyes. Just then, one of the richest businessmen in the village, who was going home after closing his business, saw Dad. Seeing Dad’s stunned look with tears in his eyes, the gentleman asked him what the matter was. Dad quickly explained the situation. That gentleman, who the whole village affectionately called Manager, turned around and asked Dad to follow him. He owned several businesses in the village, including an oil mill. He went into the oil mill at the western end of the village, opened the office and safe, took out the cash box, and gave Dad the money needed. He did not even take the check from Dad but asked him to leave the check on the table and try not to miss the train. When Dad finally reached the Railway Station, the train was about to leave. After a very close call with death, God in His mercy healed my brother and used him for His glory in so many ways. He is 80 years old as of this writing in 2023.

This reminds me of that verse in Galatians which says, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Gal. 6:10

My Mom



Mary, my Mom, was married at the age of 15 in 1929. She had three more years to complete the Secondary School education. Since Mom's parents were employed away from home, it was agreed that after her marriage, she would stay home to take care of her three younger sisters. Her parents offered to pay for her tuition fees until she graduated. Dad was staying as a paying guest near the school where he was teaching, which was about 16 miles away. He came home only on weekends.

Two years before her graduation, my Mom's parents, on the advice of my maternal great-grandfather, arbitrarily decided to discontinue her education. My Dad's older brother and Dad were not happy about this.

When I was three years old, Dad, Mom, and I moved to my great-grandparents' house. This house was next to the property owned by my parents, and they were planning to build their house on that lot. In the meantime, we used a storeroom attached to the cowshed as the kitchen and used the main house only for sleeping. It was a small two-room house. That change was difficult for Mom. She was raised in a very comfortable home. To spend the day in a single room next to a cowshed, with no heat, no running water, and no room even to put a chair, was difficult for her. She told me once that whenever she got frustrated and depressed, she would take me and walk next door to our property, sit under the shade of a tree, and ask God to give her perseverance and patience. One day, as she was praying, she felt someone telling her that God can give her more houses than she needs. Before her home call, she had more houses than she needed.

Another incident Mom told me will be difficult for this generation to understand. In those days, there was no electricity or gas to cook. All the cooking was done on a fire-hearth using hearthstones. Matchboxes were very hard to come by. It was the common practice to save live coal or embers in a husk of dry coconut for future use. One rainy day, Mom had a very hard time re-igniting the fire. She kept fanning and blowing, but only smoke would come out. After several minutes of trying, a flicker of light appeared, and she quickly lit a kerosene lamp. As she put the husk away with relief, her precious son (me) thought it was fun to blow the lamp out! Poor Mom, she had to start it all over again. Another five minutes of blowing, fanning, and wiping tears from the smoke in between, another small flicker, and the flame was quickly transferred to the lamp. The little guy thought it was fun and did it again. Mom said that the third time, when she got the fire going, she was very tempted to poke her son with the live coal! (But she didn't.)

Dad and Mom moved to their new house in 1939. Together, they provided a godly home for us. When Dad was away from home for work, Mom took care of the home and the farm. My Dad once told Mom he was glad she did not become a schoolteacher.

My Mom was a loving and caring disciplinarian. From 1945 to 1953, Dad was employed away from home. Mom, however, made sure that her children grew up in the fear of the Lord. We never missed a morning or evening family prayer or a Sunday School and worship meeting. Unfortunately, in our neighborhood, there were a lot of rowdy and undisciplined children. Mom made sure that we did not associate with them or join them for games or other activities. Without Dad being home, there was always a possibility of us getting mixed up with them and learning bad habits, practices, and foul language. But Mom made sure that it did not happen. We are ever thankful to God for our dear mother. My Mom, though very strict, had a very tender heart. I can give several examples of incidents in her life that showed her loving care, not only for the children, but even to the animals. I would like to mention two seemingly very simple incidents that exposed her tenderheartedness.

One day, a very dirty and shabby dog walked into our yard and walked straight to Mom. Since there were rumors of rabies-infected dogs roaming in the neighborhood, she got really scared. Despite trying to drive it away with a stick and broom, the dog kept coming to her. Finally, she went into the house and closed the door. The dog hung around for a couple of hours and then disappeared.

A few days later, Mom's younger sister Annamma visited us. She told Mom that their dog, Tommy, was lost and returned a week later. She said at first they

could not even recognize him because of his grotesque appearance. Mommy then realized that the dog she treated badly was the family pet Tommy. That broke Mom's heart so much that even after over 75 years, every time she talked about it, her eyes would fill up with tears.

The other incident involves her precious oldest son (me). While we were growing up, the rule of the house was that we should go only far enough from the house that we could hear when Mom or Dad called. This rule was strictly enforced when Dad was away from home. One day, I heard a soccer game going on about a quarter of a mile from home. Without telling Mom, I just went to the coconut grove where the game was being played. (One of the players was my friend Thomas Rajan, who later became secretary of the Stewards Association of India.) After a while, Mom called me a few times without any response. She repeated the call a few more times; no response. At that time, a neighbor lady passed by and told her that she saw me at the game. Mom quickly changed clothes and came over to the coconut grove and beckoned me to follow her. Once we got home, without a word, she took a coir rope and tied my hand to the railing of the window. Then she asked, "Didn't we tell you not to go far from the house?" She then proceeded to spank me with a wooden stick. Neither she nor Dad had ever punished me like that. I must have jumped up and down a few times, because in that process, she missed her target (my gluteus maximus) and hit my legs. Immediately, she stopped, untied me, and applied some refined coconut oil to my leg. From her facial expression, I knew she really felt bad. Years later, every time I visited her, she would tell me about that incident. Sometimes she would run her feeble hand on my leg as if it happened yesterday, and say, "I did hurt you, didn't I?" I didn't have the heart to tell her that I was 75 years old. Every time it happened, her eyes would become teary.

Because Mom did not finish high school, some of her friends and relatives who were fortunate to finish school and were employed were in the habit of deriding her in public. Had she completed her education, she could have gotten a teaching job. But God gave her a much better job as a mother, responsible for raising four children for God, as a great homemaker, and a partner in all Dad's ministries. God used her to provide a happy Christian home for her family. We are forever grateful to God for the sacrificial life and testimony of our parents.

My Mom had diabetes for over 45 years but managed well with proper medication and diet. In June of 2012, she developed some problems with her heart and was under treatment. A young brother from Annicadu assembly (Biju Philip) helped care for her during the last years of her life. He was a very faithful and dedicated brother. He took care of Mom just as he would care for his own mother.

On July 29, 2013, she took a turn for the worse. Immediately, she was taken to the Fellowship Hospital, Kumbanad. Just as they were taking her to the ICU, she said, “O God, don’t let me stay in this cold room.” (She hated cold rooms.) A very short time after admission, while she was still very conscious, Mom took a deep breath and went straight into her Lord’s presence.

My siblings and I are so very thankful to God for our parents. As my brother John wrote in one of his books, “Against all odds, they raised four children for the glory of God.” (Maniyatte, John, Feast of the Lord, 2024, p. 20)



Mr. & Mrs. M.T. Chacko, Maniyatte

“Against all odds, they raised four children for the glory of God.”

Childhood Years



When I was born, Mom and Dad did not have a place of their own. My maternal grandfather had a nice house and a large property. There were many trees, such as mango, papaya, coconut, coffee, and cashew. He cultivated cassava (tapioca), black pepper, and a variety of vegetables on the property. He also had a fairly large paddy field.

The first three years of my life, my Mom and I lived with Mom's parents. Dad was living as a paying guest in a home at a place called Kariampalve, about 16 miles from home. He would come home only on weekends. In my Mom's family, I was the first male child in three generations. My grandmother and my aunts took good care of me.

Six weeks after I was born, Mom got sick with Typhoid. Mrs. Noel, a missionary from New Zealand, took us, my mom and I, to her residence. Mom was isolated, but I stayed with Mrs. Noel. I was told that we lived there for over three months.

The following episodes from my childhood were shared with me by my mother. I was told that when I was an infant, my grandmother always bathed me. First, she would place me in the spathe of an Areca palm tree. (*Paala* in Malayalam). Spathe is the sheathing bract that encloses the flower of the areca tree. Special oil made out of homemade coconut oil and herbs was applied all over my body, followed by 10 to 15 minutes of stretching and massaging. Then, she would start scrubbing me with the crushed bark of a thorny, creeping plant called *Acacia Intsia* (*Incha* in Malayalam). It was unpleasant, irritating, and even

a little painful, but according to stories of antiquity, it has medicinal values. When Grandma started giving me her designer bath, Mom would go to our great-grandma's home next door, because it was hard for her to watch her precious son kicking and screaming at the top of his lungs.

When I was about six months old, I contracted a disease called Erysipelas (*Karapan*). My whole body was covered with blisters and boils that were filled with fluid. This was a common disease among toddlers, and there was no actual treatment for it. Just keeping it clean and dry is all one can do. One day, after Grandma went through her ritual of scrubbing, cleaning, and drying me, she left me on a clean sheet on the cement floor to sleep. Once I went to sleep, Grandma went to the kitchen to do something. After a little while, Mom came back. She took one look at me and let out a scream. All she could see was a small bundle covered by a large swarm of ants. She almost fainted, assuming the ants had covered my dead body. My grandmother, who was in the kitchen, came running and calmly picked me up, gently dusted the ants off me, declared that I was alive, and that my *Karapan* would be healed in a matter of days. The ants did a great job of cleaning my boils! I must have felt good because I never woke up. Sure enough, in a few days, I was completely healed. (Not a recommended treatment!)

In the early 1900s, Bibles in our language were very rare and expensive. Our family had only two Bibles; Dad used one, and Mom and the children shared the other one. I purchased my own Malayalam Bible when I was 19 years old. In 1954, I was taking some college-level courses in Thiruvalla, a town seven miles from Kumbanad. Dad used to give me bus fare for transportation. But if the weather was good, I walked home in the evening and saved the bus fare to buy my own Bible. I got my first English Bible in 1959, when I was working for the United Mission Hospital in Kathmandu, Nepal. Sixty-four years later, I still have my first English Bible with me.

My Mom's younger sister, Annamma, had a Bible of her own. It was her prized possession. One day, when I was about two years old, my aunt Annamma was babysitting for me. For some reason, she left the room briefly, leaving her Bible and a bottle of ink with a quill pen. I picked up the pen from the ink bottle and started "writing" on the pages of the Bible. As one page was torn and smeared by the sharp tip of the pen, I went to the next page and so on. When my aunt came back, a few pages of her precious Bible, torn and smeared with ink, were spread all over the floor. She angrily snatched the pen away from me and started spanking me with the quill. She was so angry that she could not stop. On hearing my non-stop wailing, Annamma Mammen, our neighbor, came running and rescued me from my aunt. Annamma Mammen was a famous evangelist and a renowned

songwriter. Some of her songs are very popular even today, among Christians of all denominations.

When my aunt calmed down, she felt bad about her reaction. From then on, she lavished her love upon me. In fact, as I grew up, she promised to meet all my educational expenses right through college. She could not keep that promise, and I never had a chance to replace her Bible because when I was 10 years old, she died of meningitis at the age of twenty-two.

My Aunt Annamma loved to tell the following story about me to anybody who would listen. Because Aunt was not very healthy, Grandma used to give her special treats. If I were around, she would always share it with me. One day, Grandma gave her something special, and I kept following her, expecting her to share it with me. But because it was too small to share, she walked down to the cassava patch next to the house, hoping to shake me off, but I continued following her. Our dog Tomy was standing at a distance. Hoping to get a few minutes by herself, she asked me to go to Tomy. I must have been around three years old, but I sensed her ruse. Instead of going to Tomy, I called Tomy, and he was at my side in a minute! She had no choice but to share her treat with me.

I had a very happy childhood. Of the three brothers, I was the naughtiest. Normally, my father would call me *Monea*, which means son, and at other times *Kunjooju*, my home name. That meant he wanted me to do something, or he had something to tell me. If I had done something seriously wrong and if he was upset with me, he would call me Thomma (a derivative of Thomas). That meant I was in trouble. Dad was a disciplinarian, but he very seldom resorted to corporal punishment. Throughout my childhood, as far as I can remember, he only punished me three times. My younger brother John probably received one or maybe two spankings. Every time Dad was about to spank Mathews, the third son, I was told that he would run up to Dad and hold his feet. How do you administer corporal punishment to your child who is hanging on to your feet? The fourth one, our sister Annie, never even received a scolding, let alone a spanking.

Years later, I found out why Dad never punished us without giving us a chance to tell our side of the story. When Dad was in fourth grade, he was unfairly punished for a crime he did not commit. Someone wrote some obscenity on the walls of the public house near the school. The headmaster, Mr. Varkey, lined up the students and, with his rattan cane in hand, asked the students to identify who wrote on the wall. Rather than answering truthfully, the boy who really wrote them, pointed to Dad and said, "He did it." Without giving Dad a chance to deny it, the rattan cane came down on Dad's leg. Being punished for something he did

not do was more painful than the pain in his leg. Maybe that is why he never punished his students or us without giving us a chance to explain. Years later, when I studied in the same school, Mr. Varkey was still the headmaster. I, too, was once the recipient of his rattan cane, but I deserved it. Story later!

When we were growing up, our days started around 5 am with a call from our Mom for prayer. We joined our parents in their bedroom. We, the children, would sit on the floor, on a mat made of Pandanus leaf. We would sing a song, read a portion of Scripture, and Dad would lead us in prayer. As we grew up, he began telling one of us to pray. After prayer, the older boys joined our father in the cowshed (barn) to milk the animals or clean the floor of the barn. We always had a cow and a buffalo. Keeping the cowshed clean, feeding the animals, and washing them down every day was labor-intensive, but monetarily, it was very beneficial. We always had plenty of milk and milk products for consumption. Excess milk was sold for cash. By around 7 am, Dad or one of us would deliver the excess milk to the coffee shops in town.

On Sunday mornings, we went to Sunday School at 8 am, came back home at 9:30, and then, after breakfast, returned to the assembly hall for the worship meeting. On Sunday evenings, we joined the adults for open-air gospel preaching in and around the town. On Monday evenings, we had cottage meetings in different homes, followed by light refreshments. The prayer meeting on Thursdays was in the chapel. We are thankful to our parents for teaching us from childhood the value of honest hard work and the importance of attending meetings.

Mom's parents lived only a mile and a half from our house. On most weekends, I visited them. I could take shortcuts through country footpaths in and through my neighbors' properties. In those days, there were no fences or walls around the properties, and we could walk across them freely. Today, it is not the same. Usually, on my return from Grandma's place, she would send with me a packet of some of her delicious food for our family.

One of my neighborhood buddies was Mathunny Mathews, later known as Toyota Sunny. His specialty was to make kites using old newspapers. He was instrumental in rescuing and helping hundreds of Indians from Kuwait when Iraq attacked Kuwait. He was the general manager of the Toyota franchise in Kuwait. A movie was made based on his story. A few years ago, he went to be with the Lord.

I had a friend who lived next door to my grandparents. His home name was Kunjooju. His father was a very strict disciplinarian. One evening, the whole neighborhood could hear my friend wailing and pleading with his father to stop

beating him. It lasted for several minutes. The next day, he showed me several black and blue marks on his thighs and legs. He told me his hands were tied and he was hanging from the joist of their small house while his father administered his corporal punishment. His crime was that after school, he habitually came home late.

A few days later, he was again late coming home. His mom was very concerned and was afraid that his father would punish him again. She searched the whole neighborhood, but no one had seen him after school. She was afraid that he might have run away because of his father's harsh treatment. His father was called from his shop in town, and a search party was organized, but Kunjooju remained missing throughout the night. The next day, they discovered his body at the bottom of a dilapidated, deep, unused well near the school. It was an accident following a game of tag, played in the school yard. To avoid being tagged by the opposing team, he ran into a neighbor's property, jumped over a mud wall, and fell into the decrepit well, covered with overgrown grass and weeds. As it was almost closing time for the day, nobody missed him. It was a real shock to me.

I have so many good memories about our home and my parents. Dad and Mom loved each other very much. I never saw them arguing or fighting, and they never contradicted each other in our presence.

Early Education



At the age of five, my parents sent me to my Dad's parents' house, which was about two miles east. I joined a group of my cousins and neighborhood kids to learn the Malayalam alphabet. The classroom was a small thatched shed next to the teacher's house. The teacher was one of Dad's cousins. On the first day, all students were required to bring about a pound of rice. That rice was spread out on the floor and would be used to write the alphabet for the first time. That rice would then be given to the teacher as a gift. There was no paper, pencil, or slate in the classroom. Instead, fine sand was spread on the floor. The teacher would help us write the alphabet in the sand using our index finger. Later on, using a sharp iron tool, the alphabets were scratched on dried palm tree leaves. It takes about one year to learn to read and write all 51 letters of the alphabet. After that, students go to primary school.

Primary school education (Grades 1–4) was free. About a mile from home, there was a primary school run by the Mar Thoma church. My Dad also attended the same school. School started at 10 am and finished at 4 pm. There were no school buses, cars, or even cycles to take us to school. In the morning, Mom would pack a delicious lunch wrapped in banana leaves heated gently over the fire. That, in itself, gave a sweet aroma. Cooked rice was the main item. Side dishes included fried fish, vegetables, and pickles. During lunch time, we would go to friends' houses who lived close to the school. Their moms were always good to us. If they had any special curry or side dishes, they would gladly share them with us. Since the banana leaves were disposable, there was no need to wash the tiffin box.

Normally, schools opened for the new year in June and closed at the beginning of March. June was the rainy season. We had no raincoats or hats. When it rained, we would cut a nice, strong, long banana leaf, hold it over our head, and use it as an umbrella. By the time we reached grades three and four, we were strong enough to use a Palmyra leaf umbrella.



Primary School



Noel Memorial High School



Elephant moving lumber at our house.

I did very well in primary school and mostly stayed out of trouble, but I must mention two embarrassing incidents that happened during my primary school days. The first incident happened when I was in Grade 2. Two bullies were sitting right behind me. One of them was the son of the teacher, and the other was his cousin, who was a big boy. Every time the teacher turned his face towards the blackboard behind him, one of the boys would stab me with a pencil. When I turned around, they would tell the teacher that I was bothering them. The teacher, without even bothering to find out the truth, used his rattan cane to punish me. To add insult to injury, afterwards, they would taunt and laugh at me.

One day, immediately following one such incident, the class was dismissed for exercise. While we were outside, the teacher's son, as usual, began to laugh and taunt me. His cousin (and bodyguard) was not with him. I was still crying because my hand was still hurting from the bashing I received from the teacher, for no fault of mine. Taking advantage of the situation, I picked up a stone and hit him hard on his face. He started bleeding through his nose. He ran back to his father, screaming and wailing. In a few minutes, his father (our teacher) came out of the school, running towards me. He had his rattan cane in his right hand. He was yelling, "Who hit my son? Who hit my son?"

I knew for sure that if I stayed there, he would use this to make an example of me before the other students. So, I took off running. I hoped he would stop chasing me and return to the classroom. But no, he continued to pursue me, holding the tip of his Dhoti (loincloth) in his left hand and the rattan cane in his raised right hand. I darted around the school building. All the children were enjoying the scene. When he almost caught up with me, he stumbled. I sprinted

around the school a second time, but he got up and kept chasing me. Finally, instead of running around the school building a third time, I fled towards the public road and raced home.

Mom was surprised to see me before school was over. I explained everything, and she told the whole story to Dad when he came home. Other than a warning against the use of violence, there was no punishment from Dad. I was pleasantly surprised. I suspect my father was glad that I stood up to the bullies. My neighbors brought my books home. Evidently, my father had a talk with the headmaster of the school. The two boys were removed from behind me and seated in different locations. No more bullying.

The other episode was rather embarrassing. It happened when I was in Grade 4. I sat next to a big, I mean a really big boy named Kurian, who, for some reason, did not like me. He would purposely elbow me every time the teacher was not looking. I had no opportunity to stop him. Even if I elbowed him back, he was so burly, he would elbow me back with twice the force. The situation was really becoming intolerable.

One day, when the teacher left the room briefly, I found my opportunity. My adversary dropped his pencil and bent down to recover it from the floor. As he was still hunched over searching for his pencil, I took my slate (a writing pad made of cut slate stone) and jabbed him on his back with the corner of the slate, as hard as I could. The giant cringed in pain. Before he could get up and kill me, the teacher returned. I was saved, or so I thought. But he whispered that he would find me outside during the lunch break. I was so scared that I did not leave the classroom during lunch. A few boys, who were themselves victims of my opponent's malice, assured me that they would protect me. But I was still afraid.

At 4 pm, the school was dismissed for the day. My friends stayed around me as I came out of the school. However, as we reached the corner of the school driveway and the public road, Kurian and two of his friends came out from behind a cluster of bamboo bushes on the roadside. There was a scuffle, with rough pushing and loud shouting. Before any serious injury occurred to anybody, we saw two of our teachers coming towards us, and the fight stopped abruptly. I thought that was the end of the story. But not really.

The next day, after the first period, our headmaster, Mr. Varkey, the same Mr. Varkey who unjustly punished Dad several years earlier, strode into class III, which was in the middle of the four-room school. In a thundering voice, he demanded that all participants of the brawl near the bamboo bush report to class III immediately. A bench in the midst of the classroom was cleared, and all of us,

about seven, were ordered to stand on the bench, so all the children of the whole school could see us. He had his rattan cane with him. He came to the first student on the bench and, without asking any questions, administered two stinging blows into the palm of his right hand. He repeated the same routine with each of the students. When he reached me, he raised his cane and glanced down on the bench where I was standing. His facial expression changed. There was a puddle of urine around my feet! He ordered me to go out and use the bathroom. He waited till I came back to finish what he started! Thankfully, nobody except the headmaster noticed it. Otherwise, I would have been the laughingstock of the whole school for the rest of the school year.

After four years in primary school, I was looking forward to going to middle school. I was doing pretty well in all the subjects and was quite sure that I would graduate. At last, the day arrived to find out who graduated and who failed. Mr. Varkey, our headmaster, called out the names of all who graduated. My name was not among them. Before dismissing all the students, he asked me to stay behind. I was left alone with Mr. Varkey. He said that my grandfather, V. A. Easaw, had requested to keep me for one more year in primary school. The reason was that education in primary school was free, but not in middle school. My grandfather wanted me to be very well prepared for middle school. My father was away at Kottappady, the place of his employment.

Middle School



Until 1947 there were two systems of education in Kerala. One was called Malayalam Schools, where all the subjects were taught in our mother tongue, Malayalam. The other was the English Medium schools, where all the subjects were taught in English. Those who graduated from English Medium schools had a much greater chance to get higher-paying jobs all over India and overseas. It was more expensive to go to English Medium schools than going to Malayalam Schools.

After graduating from primary school, the following year, I was enrolled in the nearest English Medium school, two miles east of our home. The daily walk of four miles on unpaved roads with no shoes or slippers was very hard, especially in the monsoon season. My grandfather's intention was good, but it almost ruined my education. The classrooms were overcrowded with about 60 students in a class. There were frequent fights among the students. One teacher couldn't manage the class. As a result, my grades were taking a nosedive.


There was a Malayalam school in my town run by our Assembly. When I was in the second standard, our Malayalam school received permission to transition to an English Medium school. Initially, they were allowed to start with the first and second standards. Subsequent standards were added one by one every year. I was in the second standard. Immediately, I transferred to the new school, which was only half a mile from home. Looking back, I can see God's hand in this. Had I not been held back for one year at primary school, I would have had to continue in the first middle school. In the new school (Noel Memorial High School) I received the best education and graduated with high honors in 1952.

During my Middle and High School years, Dad taught in a school over 75 miles away and stayed there during the school year. Mom had full responsibility of bringing up three boys. Our sister Annie was not born yet. We boys did the best we could to help her. I used to wash my clothes as well as my brothers' clothes. Of course, there were no washing machines or running water. Water was drawn from the well into large metal pots, and dirty clothes were soaked in it with soap. Soaked clothes were repeatedly beaten on a flat rock, one side at a time, then rinsed and hung on clotheslines to dry. Once dry, they were ironed using an iron box heated with charcoal, which was made with dry coconut shells. I learned to make rice the old-fashioned way, that is, on a fire hearth. We had no strainers. Once the rice was cooked, the mouth of the pot containing the boiling rice and water mix was covered with a wooden lid. Then the pot with the lid was turned upside down, letting the water flow into an empty pot.

One year, when Mom went to visit her sister, Mrs. V. P. Jacob, in Bangalore, I was left in charge of the kitchen. I was trying to drain a boiling pot with Yucca and plantain, the lid slipped and the boiling water flew over my left hand. The skin at the burn site swelled like a balloon. Dad was getting ready to go to school, so I did not tell him. I waited till he was out of the house and then I ran to Mrs. Fountain, our missionary's wife, who had a small health clinic at their residence. She took out the burned and swollen skin and bandaged it with clean dressing. In the evening, I had no way to hide it from Dad. He scolded me for not telling him in the morning. On the third day, Mom was home!

My Salvation



 ur Assembly, which was started in 1899, had a very large Sunday School. The first class was called the Infants' Class, for children aged three to four. I remember being seated on the floor of the verandah of the Assembly Hall. Our teacher was one of my uncles, P. J. John, Perangattu. He would make us loudly repeat, "Jesus Wept" and "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." After the Infants' Class, we moved to Class I and continued through Class X. Graduation from Class X usually coincided with graduation from High School. An astute student, by the time he or she graduated from class X, would have a sound knowledge of basic theology.

When I was 12 years old, we had a visiting evangelist by the name of T. K. Thomas. He spoke about God's love and how God sent His Son to die for us. He also shared that if we rejected His Son, God would send us to hell. After the message, he gave an altar call and asked those who desired to be saved to stand. I was among those who stood up. I remember the inner joy of being born again and how excited I was to tell my parents about it.

I was 18 years old when I took believers' baptism. Evangelist T. A. Kurian, grandfather of Brother Elson Abraham (Texas), baptized me in a small pond on the south end of our village. In the assemblies in Kerala, believers' baptism was and still is a requirement for participation in the Lord's Supper. Also, it is customary not to baptize a new believer until they show evidence of a new life in Christ, by their life and testimony.

Baptisms usually took place on Sunday mornings, just before the worship meeting. None of the assemblies had a baptistry. Some do now. Baptisms took place in nearby rivers or ponds. Saints would gather at the assembly hall and walk as a group to the riverbed or to the pond. On the way, we would sing gospel songs. Every so often, someone would shout one or two scripture verses for the benefit of the neighbors. After baptism, we would walk back to the assembly hall, and those who were baptized that day would be welcomed to the Lord's Supper by one of the elders.

High School



I graduated from High School in 1952. For all three years in High School, I was elected the class president. During senior year, our class decided to have a graduation party. There was no precedent to follow, as we were the first class graduating from this school. To celebrate, we decided to have a party with items made ourselves. The majority of the students in my division were girls and many of them agreed to bring certain items. Some items were made in a believer's house next to the school. We invited all of our teachers and evangelist T. A. Kurian was our guest of honor. The party was a great success.

Class of 1952, Noel Memorial High School, Kumbanad



Row one (seated) are our teachers. The 7th from left is our headmaster, Mr. P. M. Zachariah, Poovanummoottil. To his left is Mr. N. J. Chacko, Kallezbathil, and on his right is our class teacher Mr. C. M. Varkey, Shankaramangatheth. Jolly's (Mrs. Mathews Kuruvilla) Uncle, A. I. Chacko is seated third from the left. Jolly's mom, Aleyamma is the last one standing on the third row on the right side. I am 6th from the left on the second row. To my left is Mathunny Mathews, aka Toyota Sunny.

College Education



My dad dreamed that all his children would graduate from college. I got admission into St. Berchmans College at Changanachery, 15 miles from home. There were two other colleges closer to home, but Dad decided I should stay in the college dorm, even though it was more expensive. I passed the intermediate examination with mathematics, physics and chemistry as my elective subjects. Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com) was my next goal for which I had to go to Trivandrum, our state capital. I was really concerned about the expenses, since I had two brothers and one sister after me. Dad, as a schoolteacher, was the only wage earner in our family.

In 1955 I attended a YMEF (Young Men's Evangelical Fellowship) camp. After the camp I began to think about going into full-time ministry. Some of my church elders encouraged me to do so. But others, including my father and Mr. M. M. John, one of the elders of the assembly, advised me that feeling or desire alone is not enough to make such a major decision in life. They said that I must have a clear calling from God to do so. Based on their advice I decided not to rush into making any decisions.

M. M. John


Mr. John was a Bible Scholar, an outstanding speaker, and a voracious reader. He had a wonderful library. On school holidays, I was a regular visitor to his home, primarily to borrow old editions of Reader's Digest and other books. Once, he told me how he happened to be in fellowship with the Brethren Assembly.

Mr. John was a member of the Mar Thoma Church and was working as a missionary in another state in India. The Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church wanted Mr. John to study at the Serampore University, to prepare him to become a priest of the Mar Thoma Church. Serampore University was started by Missionary William Carey in 1818.

During a week-long convention, towards the close of the convention, Brother P. V. George spoke about the Biblical truth of believers' baptism. Soon after the meeting, Pandit John confronted Br. George about the validity of his statements. Their conversation went on for a long time. By around midnight, Pandit John was totally convinced of the Biblical truth of the believers' baptism. Not only that, but he also insisted that they baptize him immediately. Brother P. V. George, along with a few local brethren, accompanied him to the Manimala River, where Pandit John was baptized by immersion by Brother George at 2 am. They used *choottu catta*, dried coconut leaves rolled into a scroll and lit at one end as a torch at night.

Medical Technology



 One day, I went to visit my cousin T. E. Thomas, who was on vacation from Saudi Arabia, where he worked for the Arabian American Oil Company as a male nurse. Among other topics, we discussed my future plans. That is when I first heard about the field of Medical Technology as a possible career.

As soon as I returned home, I made inquiries and obtained the addresses of eight Medical Technology schools all over India. I prepared application letters for all eight institutions right away and went to the post office to mail them. As I was dropping the applications one by one into the mailbox, something incredible happened. One of my primary school classmates, named Joy Oommen, came by on his bicycle. He asked me what I was doing, and I told him that I was applying for admission to Medical Technology Schools. Looking at the one remaining envelope in my hand, he informed me that there was no point in applying to that particular school, because, according to him, they accept only female students. He gave me the address of another hospital in North India. Joy was a medical technologist. I simply altered the address on the already stamped envelope and mailed it. The only institution that offered me admission was the one whose address my friend gave me. The amazing thing was that I had not seen Joy since graduating from primary school eleven years earlier and have never seen him again in my life. The name of the hospital was Methodist Hospital, Nadiad in Gujarat State.

As June (1956) approached, I had to decide quickly, because the deadline for applying to colleges was June 15th. By the first week of June, it was decided that I should forget about Medical Technology and go to Trivandrum and enroll in Mar Ivanios College for a Bachelor of Commerce degree. One week before going

to Trivandrum, I received a letter from Miss Hannah C. Ghallagher, director of the Medical Technology School at the Methodist Hospital, Nadiad. The letter said that she regretted to let me know that they only admitted students if they had passed the Intermediate Examination. I did pass Intermediate, but somehow Miss Ghallagher failed to notice it in my application. Now the question was how to let Miss Ghallagher know that as quickly as possible.

There was no way of contacting Miss Ghallagher by telephone. Her letter came not from Nadiad but from Camp Nainital, a hill station over 1500 miles northeast of Nadiad. The only other option I had was to send Miss Ghallagher a telegram. I had only 10 rupees with me and didn't know how much a lengthy telegram would cost. As I was contemplating this worrisome turn of events, my cousin, T. E. Mathai (Kunjooju), came to visit me. He said he had Rs. 20 with him. To save money, instead of taking a bus, we decided to walk 3.5 miles to the nearest telegram office. The telegram cost Rs. 27.50. Three days later, I received a one-word telegram from Miss Ghallagher: "Accepted."

I was elated. I spent the rest of the day musing over the many possibilities before me. But my exuberance was severely dampened when Dad and other educated acquaintances agreed that "accepted" only meant Miss Ghallagher had received my telegram, not that I was accepted for the program. Since there were only three more days to meet the college admission deadline, we decided that I should go to Mar Ivanios College in Trivandrum and forget about Medical Technology. Needless to say, I was devastated.

I had no peace of mind. I couldn't sleep. What if I really had been accepted but failed to show up. On the other hand, I could not risk missing the college admission date. My Dad would be terribly disappointed. Lord, what should I do?

Suddenly, out of the blue, a daunting thought came to me. What if I first went to college, registered, and then journeyed to Nadiad to find out if I was or was not accepted for the program. If I wasn't, I could return to college. There were a million unanswered questions before me. From the map, I found out that Nadiad was 1,300 miles from home, and it took four days by train to reach there. I had no money of my own, and I could not ask my dad, because I knew he would not agree to such a crazy venture. I was 19 going on 20 and had never traveled out of the state! Yet, I was so convinced that "accepted" meant just that; accepted into the program.

The year was 1956. I had never seen or ridden on a train before. Due to my present circumstances, I could not sufficiently prepare for this long trip. In fact, I had no idea what to expect during the journey. I did not have a pair of shoes and

could not buy one or take more changes of clothes. That would arouse suspicion. If my parents found out, they would not agree to this crazy plan. If they said no, I could not disobey them. I was really desperate and concerned about my future as well as that of my family. So, trusting in the Lord, I decided to take the plunge and go to Nadiad.

Three days later, on June 15, I prepared to go to Trivandrum to register in Mar Ivanios College. As I sat with my family early that morning for breakfast, I knew it might be over one year until I would see them again. My heart ached, and I longed to tell them my plans, but I was speechless. If Dad or Mom said no, that would be the end of all my schemes. I felt so guilty, I could not even look at anybody's face, especially my mom's. But I put on a brave face. Maybe I would return in ten days if I really had not been accepted.

As expected, my Dad gave me enough money for the college admission fee and the first month's fee. He accompanied me to the nearest junction to wait for the bus. As I was boarding the bus, he handed me an additional handful of change, worth two rupees, which he had just received from the nearby coffee shop, where we sold our extra milk. Another divine provision, which augmented my travel fund to Rs. 52.

After a four-hour bus ride, I reached Trivandrum, the capital of our state. My first stop was Mar Ivanios College. As I stepped past the principal's office and approached the admissions office, someone from behind me called my name. I turned around and there stood Father Kalassery, who was in charge of the Newman's Hostel at St. Berchmans College. He was now the principal of Mar Ivanios College. What a wonderful surprise! I explained my situation to him, and he immediately instructed his admissions office to reserve a seat for me as well as hold payments until opening day! Boy, I was relieved.

From the college, I went directly to the Kerala University office. In those days, all private colleges were under Kerala State University. Just to be on the safe side, I wanted to get an official certificate from the university. I only had a notification from the college that I had passed. The officer I spoke to promised to do his best to have it ready in a week. I explained my predicament to him, but he repeated that it was impossible to acquire a certificate any sooner. If I had to stay in Trivandrum for two nights, I wouldn't have enough money to travel all the way to Nadiad. I was very discouraged when I left his office.

As I contemplated my limited options, I noticed a distinguished-looking gentleman descending the stairs. I didn't know who he was, but he appeared to be someone important. An employee with a notebook was following him closely. As

he strolled through the hall, other employees stood up, an indication of his high position. I took a chance and approached him. To my surprise, he paused and listened. I quickly shared my situation and asked if there was any way I could get my official certificate that same day. He smiled as if I were asking for an impossible favor. He must have sensed my desperation, because he turned to the employee who was following him and directed him to make sure I received my certificate by the end of the day. I was astounded! I picked up my official certificate around 4 pm that evening. Later on, I discovered that my benefactor was Mr. P. S. Abraham, the Kerala University chancellor! My next stop was the central railway station, where I purchased a third-class ticket to Madras. That night I stayed with my uncle P. J. Abraham's brother. Before leaving Trivandrum, I mailed a postcard to my parents, apologizing for my drastic decision to go to Nadiad. I wrote about my encounter with Father Kalassery, explaining that he had reserved a place for me at the college without requiring any payments. I assured them that I had enough money to travel, and as soon as I reached Nadiad, I would let them know if I was enrolled or not. If not, I will return and join Mar Ivanios College.

My Train Ride to Bombay and Beyond



I arrived in Madras the next morning. I bought a third-class ticket to Bombay. It was too late to reserve a seat. The ticket office told me that my train would reach Bombay on Sunday evening and the connecting train to Nadiad would be only on Monday evening. Where would I spend Sunday night and daytime Monday? I never thought of that possibility. I had no money to go to a hotel. I started walking around the railway station, fretting about my predicament. Then I saw the sign of a telegraph office, and like lightning, an idea came to my mind.

My cousin T. E. Mathai was studying at Wilson College in Bombay. The idea was to send him a telegram to meet me in Bombay railway station. Great idea, but one problem: I didn't know his address. I was getting desperate.

I knew my cousin often visited one George Kuruvilla, the purchasing manager of Metal Box, a very large British company. I didn't know Mr. Kuruvilla or his address, but I knew his company was situated in Worli, a suburb of Bombay. So, taking a chance, I sent a telegram to my cousin, and addressed it this way: "T.E. Mathai, c/o George Kuruvilla, Metal Box, Worli, Bombay." The telegram read, "Please inform Kunjooju (my cousin's nickname) that Kunjooju (my nickname) is arriving in Bombay by Janatha Express at 10 pm Sunday."

I had no way of knowing if Mr. Kuruvilla would receive my telegram. The telegram would reach Bombay only on Sunday or Saturday night, at the earliest. Mr. Kuruvilla, being a senior officer, would not work on Sundays. Even if he happened to be in the office on Sunday, and received my telegram, would he know

who I was? Would my cousin see him on Sunday? They didn't even go to the same church. There were many unanswered questions. All of these questions and doubts made me wonder if I had made a big mistake.

Since I did not have a reservation, I had to sit on the floor of the third-class compartment for over twelve hours before I found a vacant seat. Once I located a space, two Hindu businessmen sitting next to me inquired about where I was coming from and where I was going. They spoke to me half in English and half in Tamil. I did not know Tamil, but the combination of English and Tamil was enough for us to communicate. I told them that my destination was Nadiad, in the state of Gujarat, but first I was hoping to meet my cousin in Bombay. They then asked me at which station in Bombay my cousin would meet me. I didn't even know there was more than one station in Bombay! That was when I really started to question my sanity.

My predicament and apprehension must have been quite evident to them. I wondered what their perception of me was, as I reflected on my inconceivable, foolhardy adventures of the previous twenty-four hours. The kind gentlemen treated me to a hot cup of tea. They had probably observed how frugal I had been since I seated myself beside them on the floor the whole previous day. I accepted their thoughtful generosity without any reservations. My physical and mental state was such that any observance of etiquette was infeasible. I really appreciated that hot spicy tea because it really refreshed and woke me up!

The gentlemen then explained to me that the Janatha Express stopped at a station called Dadar in Bombay first, and then would proceed to the main terminal, which was Victoria Station. Before I panicked, they told me not to worry and offered to stay with me until I found my cousin. They added that if I didn't see my cousin at either station, they would take me home with them and then help me catch the train to Nadiad the next day. The Lord sent two Hindu businessmen to comfort me when I needed it the most!

That Sunday after church, Mr. Kuruvilla stopped by his office for no reason at all. While his family waited in the car, he went into his office, and on his office table, he saw my telegram. He had no clue as to what it was all about, but nonetheless he took and tucked it into his pocket and went home. That same afternoon, my cousin decided to make a surprise visit to the Kuruvilla's family home. When it was time for my cousin to leave, Mr. Kuruvilla remembered the telegram he had slipped into his pocket earlier that day. He asked my cousin to wait while he searched for it. When he found it, he gave it to my cousin and asked him if he knew who Kunjooju was. It took my cousin a few minutes to figure out

who the sender was. He then realized that the train was due that same evening. He hastily caught the next bus and reached Dadar station by 9 pm. It was 10 pm when my train slowly inched its way into Dadar station. I frantically searched for one familiar face among the large multitude on the platform. Before the train came to a complete stop, I recognized him. Thankfully, he was standing under a bright light, so I could spot him easily.

It was foggy and drizzling continuously. He took me to Mr. George Kuruvilla's (my future brother-in-law's) apartment, which was a little over two miles from Dadar station. Since I had no luggage, and there were no direct bus routes at that time of night, we decided to walk. There were plenty of streetlights, which helped. That said, I don't know which was more objectionable, walking on the pavement without shoes or getting drenched by the relentless rain. At that moment, I had little time to reflect upon such trivial matters, considering the overarching objective of my ambitious adventure.

It was around 11:30 pm by the time we reached Mr. Kuruvilla's apartment. Even though it was almost midnight, Lizymamma (Mrs. Kuruvilla) gave me a delicious dinner and spread a mat on their long dining table. I didn't mind the hard table because it was the first time in three days that I was able to stretch out completely. I was so tired, I didn't have the strength even to take a shower.

I always wondered about my appearance that night. No change of clothes or a bath for three days. No shoes. I was still wearing my scuffed native loincloth covered with coal dust. In those days, all trains were run by steam engines. Heavy black smoke came out of the engine and was blown into the open compartments by the wind. As a result, my clothes and my face were covered with coal dust. I must have been a sight to see! If my cousin was not with me, I'm not sure if they would have even opened the door for a stranger like that.

In addition to the couple's three children, Mr. Kuruvilla's brother Chacko was also staying with them in their one-bedroom apartment. The two boys and their uncle were sleeping in the living room. The only available spot in the apartment was the dining area, yet they warmly received me. What an incredibly hospitable family. Mr. Kuruvilla became my brother-in-law in 1964.

My cousin went back to his apartment that same night and returned the next morning with a change of clothes and a pair of shoes. That evening, I boarded a train from Bombay Central Station to Nadiad, in Gujarat State. I borrowed Rs. 5 from my cousin, just in case. I arrived at Nadiad station early the next morning.

In Gujarat, Gujarati is the spoken language and unfortunately, I did not know Gujarati. When I exited the train, I was wondering how I would communicate with the rickshaw drivers. As I was nearing the exit gate, the ticket collector pulled me aside and, in pure Malayalam, asked me where I was coming from and why I was in Nadiad. I was pleasantly surprised to see a Malayalam-speaking person. He kindly arranged a cycle rickshaw to take me to the hospital. His name was Mr. Sharma, and later on, we became friends.

I was met at the hospital by a gentleman named Daniel, a Medical Technologist. Miss Gallagher was still away in Nainital, but Mr. Daniel was Miss Gallagher's confidant. Only he had the key to her private office. As Mr. Daniel opened the filing cabinet and found the folder with the list of new students, I could feel my heart pounding inside my chest, my palms sweaty, and my mouth dry. There was so much at stake. The first name on the list? M. C. Thomas! Praise the Lord, I murmured. Mr. Daniel gave an understanding nod and agreed with me. I was ecstatic; my heart was filled with joy.

Mr. Daniel took me to the hospital cafeteria and treated me to a delicious hot breakfast of puri, bhaji, and spicy tea, a typical Gujarati breakfast. I wasted no time sending a telegram to my parents. Since there was still another month before the start of classes, instead of heading home to Kerala, I returned to Bombay. I stayed with my Mom's uncle, Mr. N. A. Chacko, and Mrs. Ammini Chacko, until school opened. While in Bombay, I contracted typhoid. Uncle Chacko and Aunt Ammini nursed me back to health. My father sent enough money to my uncle to buy me shoes and necessary clothes. He introduced me to his brother-in-law, Babu P. Oommen, who had also been selected for the same course. After a month in Bombay, Babu and I went to Nadiad together.



Mr. and Mrs. N. A. Chacko, my maternal grandfather's youngest brother and wife

The Medical Technology course was very challenging, because my subjects in college never included biology. But I enjoyed the course, worked hard, and earned Miss Gallagher's confidence. Because of my mathematics background, Miss Gallagher entrusted me with the responsibility of teaching mathematics to my fellow students.


About a month before graduation, Miss Gallagher called me into her office and asked me if I was interested in going to the United States for higher studies. Our hospital would pay for my travel expenses. The only stipulation was that I would come back to Gujarat and take over the Laboratory school, as she was planning to retire in a few years. For me, it was a dream come true. Without even consulting my parents, I said yes. I wrote home and told my parents that there was a chance for me to go to the United States. I was very happy, and so were they.

Two weeks later, Miss Ghallagher called me back to her office. She looked very upset. The trustees of the hospital, under pressure from the nursing superintendent, had insisted that I sign a five-year contract. Neither Miss Ghallagher, whom we affectionately called *Chachi*, nor my father appreciated the idea of committing to a five-year contract.

Chachi, without asking me, sent recommendation letters to the three biggest mission hospitals in India, even before the final examination. When I returned home after the final examination, there were three letters waiting for me. They were from (1) Ludhiana Medical College, Punjab; (2) Clara Swain Hospital, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh; (3) Christian Medical College, Vellore, Tamil Nadu. Vellore Medical College wanted me to contact them after the final examination. The other two hospitals offered me a job right away based on Miss Ghallagher's recommendation. I accepted the offer from Clara Swain Hospital, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. Bareilly is 200 miles southeast of New Delhi, the Capital of India. My salary was Rs. 75 per month, less than a dollar in today's exchange value. As a side note, I did pass the examination and was ranked first among all the students who took the Christian Medical Association's Laboratory Technicians Examination that year.

Off to North India



 In a warm June afternoon, I packed a bag and left home for the three-day trip to Bareilly, in North India. My younger brother Mathukutty accompanied me to Ernakulam, the nearest railway station, which was about 75 miles from home. The train was due around 5 am the next day, so we found a comfortable spot on the railway platform, lay down on a mat made of a special kind of grass, and took a nap. Before we knew it, the train had arrived, and it was time to board. As the train departed, I gazed out the window and caught a glimpse of my brother waving at me. Until that moment, I had been able to contain my emotions, but seeing his forlorn figure standing alone on that platform broke my heart. I quietly wept and tried to hide it from my fellow passengers.

I was much better prepared for this journey than my first unprepared trip to Nadiad. I had enough money to eat and a reserved seat of my own. Two days later, we reached Agra, home of the world-famous Taj Mahal. A number of locals at the station offered to take me for a tour of the Taj Mahal. But I was afraid to go alone with strangers. Many years later, I had the opportunity to visit Agra and the Taj Mahal with my wife and our friends, Mr. & Mrs. C. V. Baby of Agra. At Agra, I changed trains to Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. The next morning, I arrived at Bareilly station. My limited knowledge of Hindi came in handy as I hired a cycle rickshaw to take me to the hospital.

Clara Swain Hospital was the oldest Mission Hospital in India, started by Dr. Clara Swain in 1870. In 1957, they had a Medical Technology program. One of my responsibilities at Clara Swain Hospital was to teach Medical Technology

students. I would like to mention the story of one of the students who left an indelible mark on my life: Paul Bhattacharya.

When I first reported for duty, all the staff members and students came to greet me, everyone except one student. That student, according to the Laboratory supervisor, was not allowed to enter the main laboratory, and no one went near his work area. The reasons, according to the Supervisor and the Chief Technologist, were that he was a hermit, rebellious, filthy, and constantly interrupted classes. The very next day, I went to his work area. The stench was unmistakable. I extended my hand and greeted him with “Good morning.” He looked very surprised. He stopped what he was doing, washed his hands, and shook my hand. In excellent English, he replied, “Good morning, Sir.”

I said, “My name is Thomas, and what is yours?”

He answered, “I am Paul Bhattacharya.”

This was my first contact with Mr. Paul. “Nice to meet you, Paul,” I said, to which he responded, “I am honored, Sir.”

There was no doubt that Paul was living like a recluse. That said, I was impressed by his language skills and gentlemanly behavior. That was my first impression of Paul. I talked to the Laboratory Supervisor to see if there was any way to integrate Paul with the rest of the class. The answer was a firm “No!” He said Paul was a disruption to the class, that he questions and interrupts the class, never keeps himself clean, and so on and so forth. But I was determined to help him. Eventually, I scheduled an appointment with the medical director, Dr. Stevens, who was in charge of the Laboratory. He agreed with me that all the students must be treated equally. Evidently, he had heard about Paul. He asked if I was willing to take full responsibility and make sure that he cleaned himself up and stopped interrupting classes. I asked him to give me a trial period of three months. He agreed and immediately instructed the Laboratory Supervisor to implement a new policy. This policy gave Paul access to the main laboratory as well as to all the different departments. When I told Paul I was responsible for him, he began to change his appearance and behavior. Once I gained his trust, bit by bit, he started sharing his life history with me.

He was the eldest son of a wealthy Hindu Pujari (Priest) from Calcutta. They worshiped Hanuman, the monkey god of Ramayana, the epic Hindu Poem. Paul was born with the name Surendra Bhattacharyya, as the eldest son of the temple priest. He was very intelligent, and his father wanted him to become a lawyer. He was also being groomed to become the temple priest, a very respected position.

Surendra passed high school with high honors and got admission to the well-respected Scottish College of Calcutta. He was a prodigious reader and enjoyed excellent, thoughtful speeches. Dr. Stanley Johns, the well-known American preacher, author, and missionary to India, was a regular visitor at the Scottish college. Surendra was fascinated by the oratory of Mr. Johns. He had no interest in the Gospel but loved to sit and listen to sound English preaching. Eventually, Paul and Dr. Johns became good friends. Dr. Johns gave Paul a King James New Testament. Being a voracious reader, he began to read it from cover to cover, primarily for the beauty of the language.

Before leaving Calcutta to continue his preaching ministry in other parts of India, Dr. Johns introduced Surendra to the Academic Dean of the college. Surendra started spending time with the Dean, frequently asking religious questions. Before the end of that year, Surendra committed his life to Christ and was miraculously saved. One of his first actions was to change his name from Surendra to Paul. Then he told his family that he now served a living God. His father requested him to keep his conversion a secret, to avoid embarrassment in the community. Paul, however, was devoted to the Lord, and he began to witness to his brother and sister about the joy he had found in Jesus.

One day, when his family had gone to the temple, Paul entered his family shrine. He removed all the idols and other paraphernalia and cast them all into the street, stomping on them. He declared that the idols were man-made and had no power. He professed that he now served the only living God. His neighbors were shocked to see their god being trampled in the street. Thinking he had gone mad, they seized him and bound him with ropes. Some shouted that they should hang him. Others screamed that he should be thrown into their holy river, the Ganges, with his hands and legs tied. The size of the crowd multiplied rapidly.

The mob kept Paul bound until his family returned. They locked him in a bedroom. Much discussion went on in the living room between religious leaders and family members. Finally, much later that night, Paul was summoned to the living room. His favorite uncle asked him to renounce his new faith. Paul refused. His father threatened to stop paying his college tuition, but again Paul refused to denounce Christ. Finally, his father declared that Paul was no longer his son. He asked him to take whatever he needed and leave home immediately. He was never to return. Paul entered his bedroom, returning only with his Bible. Paul's father snatched the Bible away from him, gave it to his younger brother and ordered him to burn it. Paul's mother begged her husband to allow him to stay for the night. He agreed as long as Paul promised to be out of the house before sunrise. Paul's mother spent the night in his room, begging him in anguish to renounce Christ.

Finally, in despair, she too gave up. She handed him some money she had saved from the grocery bills and her favorite woolen shawl. Paul accepted them both and left the house around 5 am, never to return to his home again.

Being a proud person, he did not go to anyone for help. He spent the next three months in the streets of Calcutta. It was summertime. His favorite places were the public library and the city park. Starvation and exposure to the elements finally took their toll, and he became extremely sick. One day, somebody discovered him on a park bench, burning with fever, and rushed him to the hospital. When he regained consciousness, he listed the name of the Academic Dean of the Scottish College as next of kin. When Paul was released from the hospital, the dean took him to his home.

When Dr. Stanley Johns returned to the Scottish College, he had difficulty recognizing Paul. He was too weak to live on his own but refused to have any contact with his family. After some consultation, Dr. Stanley Johns sent Paul to Clara Swain Hospital in Bareilly with a note to Dr. Peril, the director of the hospital, simply saying, "Dear Dr. Peril, I commit my brother in the Lord, Paul Bhattacharya, to your care. Stanley Johns"

When Paul got off the train at Bareilly Station, he walked in the direction of Clara Swain Hospital. He was immensely tired and hungry. Along the way to the hospital, he fainted. Someone found him on the roadside and transported him to Clara Swain Hospital. At the hospital, Dr. Stanley's note to Dr. Peril was discovered in Paul's pocket. After being diagnosed with tuberculosis, he was admitted to the TB ward and received excellent care. It took over six months for him to fully recover. After that, on the recommendation of Dr. Peril, he was accepted as a laboratory student. That is where I found him.

Paul finished three years at the Scottish College, where most of the teachers were British. His command of the English language was extraordinary. I did my best to orient him through the different departments and to prepare him for the final examination. I had in my possession the previous 10 years' final examination questions. I invited him to my apartment and gave him each year's question paper one week in advance and required him to answer them in my presence the following week.

The final examination was conducted by the director of Ludhiana Christian Medical College Laboratory Services. The written and practical examination took three days. Two days after the final exam, all the students, the staff, and the Director of Laboratory Services, attended a joint meeting. The examiner first announced that all of the students had passed the examination. The collective sigh

of relief from the student body was quite audible. She then added that she had been an examiner for over 25 years, and up until then, no one had ever achieved a total score of 90%. She added that she would like to congratulate one of the students who broke every record and scored a surprising 93%. A silent anticipation descended over the room. Almost everyone looked at one of the students by the name of Mull. He was the brother of the chief technician and had worked in the lab for three years before formally joining the class. All were shocked when the examiner said, "Congratulations, Paul!"

Everybody's jaw dropped, except mine. There was no expression on Paul's face, as he had not been paying any attention. He was still just so thrilled that he passed. It took him a minute or two before he realized that everybody was staring at him. When he asked, "What?", the Laboratory supervisor, who initially denied Paul access to the main Laboratory, told him that he was the top scorer with 93%. He still did not believe him. So, he turned to the examiner and asked her if it was true. She said, "Yes, Paul." Then she added, "If you had cleaned your work area well, you could have gotten 95%." Paul, right in front of everyone, ran up to me and lifted me off the floor, and hugged me. I had tears in my eyes too.

When I left Bareilly to go to Nepal, Paul came to the railway station to say goodbye. He was no longer a hermit. He had a sturdy pair of shoes, a spotless long-sleeved shirt, combed hair, and a clean-shaven face. He said he was no longer afraid to take a bath! As my train was leaving, he said, "Thomas, I have only two friends in this world. Dr. Stanley Johns and you." There were tears in his eyes, and I felt a heavy lump in my throat.

Four years later, in 1962, I was working at Bombay Hospital. One day, I looked up from my microscope and saw a familiar figure standing near the office. Our eyes met. It was Paul Bhattacharya. He had just accepted a position in a new hospital in Bombay as Chief Technician. He was overjoyed to see me. What a small world! Paul wanted me to quit my job in Bombay Hospital and join his hospital as the Laboratory Supervisor, at a much better salary. At that time, I was preparing to leave for East Africa. He was very disappointed when I said no. Paul was a transformed man. He was social, and his health had improved significantly. His walk with the Lord was much stronger and deeper. After I left India to go to Kenya, we lost touch with each other. I often wondered if the Lord had sent me to Bareilly for one year, just to help one of His children to find himself again?

Off to Nepal



In 1956, while I was still a student at the Methodist Hospital at Nadiad, I read a book about Nepal. It was written by a lady teacher who was hired by King Tribhuvan of Nepal, to teach his grandson Birendra. In the book, she described the beauty of Nepal, the Himalayan mountains, the snow-covered peaks of Mt. Everest, the people, the beautiful flowers, and the courageous Sherpas. Then she shared the story of how the government of India, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, helped to free the king, who was a virtual prisoner of the Prime Minister and his powerful Rana Dynasty. At that time, Nepal was the only *Hindu* country in the world. India is a secular nation. The punishment for killing a cow or eating beef was death by hanging.

In 1955, Dr. Robert Fleming, an ornithologist from St. Louis, MO, led an expedition to study the exotic birds of Nepal. As he traveled through the countryside, he noticed that there were no hospitals or other healthcare facilities for the general public in all of Nepal. On his return to the United States, Dr. Robert Fleming and his wife, Dr. Ethel Fleming, a Gynecologist, decided to do something about it. They shared their vision with many churches and denominations in the United States. As a result, a non-denominational organization called United Mission to Nepal was formed. The government of Nepal permitted them to open a hospital in Kathmandu.

Dr. Edgar Miller, a cardiologist, and his wife Dr. Elizabeth Miller, a general practitioner, had a thriving practice in Baltimore. The Millers were so touched with the Flemings' plea for help in Nepal that they sold everything and joined forces with the Flemings.

There were many empty palaces in Kathmandu, vacated by the Ranas. The United Mission was given one of the empty palaces called Shanta Bhawan, which means house of peace, to start the first hospital in Nepal. Dr. Robert Fleming was the administrator, and Dr. Ethel Fleming was the Superintendent. The story of Dr. and Mrs. Fleming and that of the United Mission to Nepal can be read in a book titled *Fabulous Flemings of Kathmandu* by Grace Nies Fletcher.

One day in 1958, when I was working in Clara Swain Hospital, I saw a letter posted on the laboratory bulletin board. It was from Dr. Ethel Fleming, of the United Mission Hospital, Kathmandu. She was looking for a certified Medical Technologist to start the first clinical laboratory in Nepal. I immediately applied and within a week, I received a letter from Dr. E. Fleming, offering me the job. I accepted it without hesitation. My salary was 150 Indian Rupees, double of what I was making at Clara Swain Hospital. It was not the money that attracted me to Nepal, but the history and beauty of the land, and the challenges to start the first clinical laboratory in that country.

In the fifties, there were no direct bus services between the two countries. The only way to travel to Nepal from India was to fly. The closest airport to me was Patna, an overnight train ride from Bareilly. A few of my friends and my student, Paul Bhattacharya, came to the railway station to see me off. Just before I boarded the train to Patna, one of my friends, an x-ray school student by the name of George Thomas, pulled me over and handed me a one hundred rupee note. At the time, it was more than a month's salary. I didn't know why he did it, but I was very grateful. I had no savings, because every month, most of my salary was going to my father at home. Whatever was left was used to buy train and airline tickets. I did not expect any more expenses on my way to Nepal.

The next morning, I arrived at Patna station and took a cycle rickshaw to the airport. This would be my very first flight. The scheduled flight time was 11 am, and the ticket counter was not yet open. I went to the small cafeteria and ordered a cup of tea. It was almost 9:30 am. As I was enjoying my tea, a well-dressed gentleman came in and sat next to me. We struck up a conversation. He asked me where I was coming from, where I was going, and so on. Then, out of the blue, he asked me if I had an NOC from a Magistrate. I didn't even know what a NOC was. I said, "No."

The gentleman explained that Indians must have an NOC (No Objection Certificate) from a magistrate to travel out of the country. I was completely unaware of this requirement. To get an NOC, you need to apply in advance and wait anywhere between two and three weeks. Here I was in a strange town and I

didn't know anyone. What was I supposed to do? Before I had a panic attack, that gentleman hailed a cycle rickshaw, gave the driver a note, and told me to follow him. I tried to ask him where and why, but he simply said, "Go quickly."

The rickshaw driver pedaled like mad and in about 15 minutes we were at the front of the courthouse. He jumped out and asked me to follow him. At the entrance to the Magistrate's office, a security officer stopped us. The rickshaw driver showed him the letter from the gentleman at the airport. Without hesitation, the officer allowed us to go in. The driver gave the letter to the magistrate. He read it and asked me my name, my date of birth, where I was born, my profession and the reason for my going to Nepal. He took down those details and handed the paper to a clerk. I was asked to pay Rs. 20, which I did, thanks to the unexpected gift of Rs. 100 from my friend. On my way back to the airport, I asked the rickshaw driver who the gentleman was who had asked him to take me to the district court. "Oh, don't you know?" he replied. "He is the Police Commissioner!"

The plane was about to take off when we reached the airport. I quickly looked for the commissioner to thank him. I saw him, but he just waved me off to the plane. What caused him to approach me and then help in the nick of time?

The plane was a small Cessna with eight passengers. The pilot carefully weaved in and out of the majestic Himalayan mountain ranges. About 30 minutes into the flight, I got a glimpse of the spectacular Mt. Everest, its dramatic peak shrouded by thick white clouds. Suddenly, turbulence struck and like a kite, our aircraft plummeted down causing a huge vacuum between my diaphragm and lower abdomen. After that, I have no recollection of what happened. The next thing I remember was that we were on the tarmac and the flight attendant was gently shaking me awake. I was drenched in sweat. I must have passed out. A representative of the hospital picked me up and took me to the hospital. There, for the first time, I met Drs. Robert and Ethel Fleming and Drs. Edgar and Elizabeth Miller.

First Clinical Laboratory in Nepal



Two young men were assisting me in the laboratory, Prakash and Defton. With their help, I started to organize the laboratory. I introduced them to a number of laboratory procedures. Within a few months, our laboratory was doing a number of tests which were never done in Nepal. In those days, there was no automation or pre-prepared reagents. All the reagents were made by us in the laboratory. Doctors were very happy when they no longer had to wait three or four days for test results to come from Calcutta, India. Only rich people could afford to send specimens to India.

In Nepal, I came across so many dreadful diseases which I had only read about in textbooks: Elephantiasis, Filariasis, Schistosoma, and all kinds of parasites such as hookworm, roundworm, whipworm, malaria, etc. Leprosy and tuberculosis were very common.

One day, Dr. Miller told me that a group of thoracic surgeons from the USA was visiting and they had ten patients scheduled for surgery. He said that some of the patients may need blood transfusions. The problem was that no blood transfusions had ever been done in the country of Nepal. We didn't even have anti-serum for blood typing or any blood-collecting bags or bottles. Dr. Miller called two American nurses who were on vacation in the USA, and they brought blood typing antisera when they returned. My assistants and I cleaned some empty saline bottles, added 3.8% sodium citrate, and sterilized the bottles. Several relatives were tested for matching blood groups. Twelve units of blood were collected, cross-matched, and ready for eight patients. Eight units were used on six

patients. Thank God, there were no reactions. It was the first blood transfusion in Nepal!

In the summer of 1959, Nepal was hit by a terrible cholera epidemic. Thousands were killed. United Hospital shipped in huge quantities of the cholera vaccine and immediately mobilized the hospital employees to start vaccinating the general public. We pooled our resources to make our own normal saline for distribution in the city. Groups of three or four employees would go out into the streets and encourage the people to come out and get vaccinated. Thankfully, none of the hospital employees were affected. As we were administering the vaccine, we would hear loud wailing from houses nearby where someone had just died. One of the customs in Nepal when someone died was for all the male members of the family to get their heads shaved in public.

Shortly after I arrived in Nepal, Dr. Chandy, the director of Mission to Lepers in Nepal, came to the lab with a leprosy patient. I had not dealt with leprosy patients and did not know how to get samples for testing from them. Dr. Chandy taught me how to collect specimens safely. He helped me understand that not all leprosy is contagious and that there is no danger of contracting leprosy if proper procedures are followed. He took the fear of leprosy out of me. He was the father-in-law of Dr. Kunjappan John, who was the medical director of Thiruvalla Medical Mission in Kerala. Dr. Chandy and I developed a wonderful friendship. I accompanied him on many occasions when he visited leprosy patients in their homes.

Mission to Lepers desperately wanted to start a leprosy sanitarium near Kathmandu in Nepal, but wealthy landowners and politicians didn't like the idea of having such a facility anywhere near their city. Once, while we were out visiting patients, Dr. Chandy told me the following interesting story. One day, he went to see the Interior Minister, seeking his support for a leprosy sanatorium. The Minister was totally opposed to the idea. As the minister was explaining his reasons for opposing the idea, his grandson walked into the room and sat on his lap. Dr. Chandy noticed a white spot on the boy's left ear. He took a closer look, and with his grandfather's permission, he unbuttoned the boy's shirt and noticed a few other suspicious marks on the back of his neck. Dr. Chandy explained to the embarrassed Minister that it looked like the beginning of leprosy, but assured him that with proper early treatment, the boy's leprosy could be cured.

Within a year, Dr. Ethel Fleming, also known as Dr. Scudder of Nepal, laid the foundation stone of the first leprosy sanatorium in Nepal. Dr. Scudder was the well-known American Missionary who started the world-famous Vellore

Christian Medical College. Since Dr. Ethel Fleming did the same type of Medical Missionary work in Nepal as Dr. Scudder in India, Dr. Fleming was affectionately called Dr. Scudder of Nepal. I had the privilege of attending that ceremony with Dr. Chandy, just before leaving Nepal.

Leaving Nepal



While I was in Nepal, the recruiting agent for the Arabian American Oil Company sent me a letter, asking me to report to his office for an interview. I did not get his letter in time to go to Bombay for the interview and lost my chance to go to Saudi Arabia. That made me very unhappy, and I decided to go back to India. Dr. Miller, the Medical Director, came to my quarters unannounced. I was in my bed. He sat on a chair next to the bed and asked me for the reasons I was leaving. After hearing me out, he asked me if I would stay if he doubled my salary. He planned to ask his church in the USA to support me directly. But at that time, I was still hoping to get a job in Saudi Arabia with the Arabian American Oil Company. He was very disappointed when I declined his offer.

There was only one safe way to return to India. That was to fly to Patna in India. But there was another rather dangerous way to travel. There were no paved roads connecting Kathmandu to the border of India, and no bus services. The Indian army had carved out a dirt road into the side of the mountain, just enough for one truck to pass. The road was precipitous and curved. Truck drivers who hauled commodities usually took one passenger with them to make some extra money. The adventurer in me foolishly decided to take that route. It was the scariest drive in my entire life. By the time we reached the border of India, there was more than 10,000 feet of difference in altitude.

It was almost midnight when we reached the truck stop at the border of India, which was in the middle of nowhere with a few thatched huts around it. I was feeling feverish, tired, and my throat was really hurting. I found a man with a

rickshaw, and he took me to the train station. I had to wait for the train that would take us to the banks of the River Ganges. From there we had to take a ferry across the river to Patna, India.

Waiting on the open, cold platform with no blankets or any fireplaces was not easy. By this time, I was feeling really miserable. As I was not strong enough to carry my luggage to the train, I engaged a coolie (porter) to help me. Seeing my condition, the porter asked me if there was anything he could help me with. I asked him if there was any place where I could buy a cup of hot tea. He said the only cafeteria in the station was closed till morning, but he asked me to wait and left the station. After a while, he returned with a cup of strong, spicy hot tea with milk and sugar. It tasted so good, and the sugar helped me feel much better. Though uneducated and poor, the porter refused to take any money from me for the tea. He said he made it himself.

The train arrived around 5 am. The porter, with my luggage, ran ahead of me and I followed. When I finally reached the train, the porter had already claimed an empty seat and was loudly arguing with another passenger who wanted that seat. Nobody had any reservations. But he was determined and held onto the seat until I got there. He took the tip I gave him and said “*Kudafish*,” which means “God be with you.” This is a traditional parting blessing of Muslims.

It was about 12 noon when we reached the Ganges River, which is sacred to Hindus. Ritual bathing in the Ganges is an important part of the Hindu pilgrimage. Ashes after cremation, or the dead body itself, was often thrown in, believing that it would free the deceased person from reincarnation and give them direct passage to heaven.

The ferry to cross the river was already on the dock and everybody was running to get in. The train stopped about half a mile from the dock. Porters were in short supply. When I cried out, “Coolie, Coolie”, one passenger, who was also looking for a coolie, thought I was a coolie! Finally, I found someone to assist me, and he carried my luggage to the ferry. Unfortunately, there were no seats left. I stood at the brim of the ferry, carefully holding onto a rail as it started moving.

After a little while, somebody pointed out a bunch of flowers floating on the river. The man standing next to me clarified that it was not just flowers, but a dead body. A few minutes later, we saw a second body floating toward us, and then another one, the last one with no flowers or clothes, but covered with birds! Along the bank of the river were several funeral pyres as well. Not too far from the floating bodies, hundreds of people were bathing where the river was shallower. Suddenly I found myself on the floor of the ferry with other passengers staring

down at me. Someone sprinkled water on my face and I attempted to get up. A gentleman helped me to sit down. As soon as the ferry reached the other shore, the onlookers dissipated, but the gentleman remained by my side. He told me that I had fainted, and fallen into the boat, not out into the river *and* among the floating corpses, thank God.

My benefactor stayed with me until all the passengers left the ferry. He asked me where I was coming from and where I was going. He then felt my forehead and informed me that I had a high fever and insisted that I do not continue my travel before seeing a doctor. After assisting me to disembark, he verbally gave directions in Hindi to a rickshaw driver to take me to a doctor. After examining me, the doctor said that I had a bad case of strep-throat. He gave me antibiotics and sent me to a nearby hotel, where I remained for three days until my fever subsided. I paid another visit to the doctor's office and was cleared to continue my journey. If I remember correctly, two visits to the doctor's office plus the antibiotics cost me Rs. 5. The year was 1959. I took the next train from Patna and arrived in Calcutta the next morning.

After purchasing the ticket for Madras, I sat down on a bench to wait for the arrival of the train to Madras. Then I noticed a senior railway security inspector, accompanied by three police officers, walking past me. Suddenly he stopped, turned around, and walked straight towards me. Looking directly into my eyes, he asked me if my name was Thomas. Shocked, I responded, "Yes," but before I could panic, he said, "You don't remember me, do you?" Puzzled, I replied, "No." He explained that a couple of my friends and I had helped him at Clara Swain Hospital in Bareilly. It took me a while to recollect an incident which happened two years earlier.

One day in 1957, as I was having breakfast at the Clara Swain Hospital cafeteria with two of my friends, a man walked in slowly with no shoes and wearing a torn shirt. He sat down at a table but did not order anything. We thought maybe he had no money to order anything. Just before leaving the cafeteria, we approached him and asked if we could assist him in any way. He told us that he was an officer with Indian Railways and that he was robbed and thrown out of a train by bandits. Robbers had taken everything, including his shoes, his uniform, and his identification. Though we felt quite skeptical, we treated him kindly. We paid for a good breakfast, provided some clean clothes, a pair of slippers and a small monetary gift. He thanked us profusely and took a rickshaw and left the hospital. We were convinced that we had been duped by a scammer.

But there he was, Mr. Gopinath, a senior inspector with the Indian Railways, the one my friends and I thought was a swindler. “Never judge a book by its cover.”

Life in Bombay



After my time in Nepal, I spent one year at home, working at a local hospital. My salary was Rs. 100 a month! In December 1960, I went to Bombay. Within a week, I started work at Nanavati Hospital, Vile Parle, a suburb of Bombay.

I attended the assembly in Bandra, started by Brother Harold McGregor of New Zealand. The meetings were held in a storefront space, and it was always overcrowded. There I was reunited with my friend K. M. John. We had taken the intermediate examination together in 1956 at the NSS College in Changanassery. After the examination we parted, promising to meet in Mar Ivanios College to pursue a degree in Commerce. But then, of course, I changed my mind and went for the medical technology course in Gujarat State. So, we had not seen each other for over four years.

The Bandra assembly had believers from a number of states. Many languages were used during the worship meetings, Malayalam, English, Tamil, Gujarati, Hindi and Marathi. The ministry of the Word was sometimes translated into three different languages, but during worship meetings, men were encouraged to share in any language they felt comfortable to use.

I was staying at the Mahim Hostel with nine other young men from the Bandra Assembly. I worked at Nanavati Hospital for one year, and then joined Bombay Hospital in Fort, Bombay. Those two years at the hostel were spiritually very edifying and I was blessed with great Christian fellowship. Some of my

friends were K. M. John, Sadai Varghese, A. T. Kurian, P. V. Thomas, P. V. Mathew, and Baby Puthukkeril.

Brother and Mrs. McGregor had no children of their own. They were like parents to all of us bachelors in the assembly. Brother McGregor faithfully came to the hostel three times a week and taught Bible classes. He also arranged a Greek scholar, Br. Buffum, to come and teach us New Testament Greek.

Br. McGregor truly was a man of prayer. In 1962, I left Bombay to go to East Africa and in 1974 we moved to the United States. A few years after I left Bombay, Br. McGregor went back to New Zealand. I had no contact with him for the next 23 years. In 1985, I wrote to Br. McGregor, inviting him to our 8th Indian Brethren Fellowship conference held at Mt. Vernon Nazarene College in Ohio. When I tried to re-introduce myself to him, his response was, "Thomas, you don't have to introduce yourself to me. I have been praying for you daily since 1962!"

We had the privilege of having him stay with us at our home in Monroe, Connecticut. Every morning he would get up around 4 am and kneel next to a couch in the living room for prayer. That would last anywhere between two to three hours. What a great prayer warrior!

We had a major disaster at the hostel when we celebrated the 1st anniversary of the existence of the hostel. We, the ten bachelors, prepared a lavish feast for the members of our church, approximately fifty adults and a dozen young people. They were to visit the hostel after our worship meeting on a certain Sunday. Just before the saints from our assembly arrived, about 35 adults from a neighboring assembly showed up for lunch. We were confused and did not understand what was happening. Later on, we found out someone from the hostel had invited them but forgot to tell anybody! In order to deal with this crisis, we creatively altered our menu, for example, slicing the chicken and fish pieces into two, diluting the sambar, and so on. Eighty-five adults were fed with food prepared for only fifty!

The day was hot and humid, and over 85 people were crammed into a six-room apartment. Some sat in the foyer and some in our common classroom. A few ladies found space in our bedrooms, while many young people claimed the stairs and the space just in front of the bathroom. Under the circumstances, everything went well, or so we thought.

By midnight, I did not feel good in my stomach and went to the only toilet we had in the apartment. Four men were standing in line, twitching and turning and rubbing their stomachs. Some were yelling at the person occupying the bathroom

to hurry up. Some who were last in the line just went outside! It was severe food poisoning because of the crowded and hot rooms, mishandling of the food, and the large crowd including children.

In 1961, I almost got recruited for a job with the Arabian American Oil Company in Saudi Arabia. I had more experience than what was required and passed the written examination with a 100% score. The pathologist from ARAMCO, who had seen my application, had recommended that I be recruited. In spite of all that, at the last minute, someone bribed the recruiting agent in Bombay. He replaced me with another person. Naturally I was very disappointed. I almost believed that an overseas job was not in my future and decided to make plans to settle down in Bombay. I left the hostel and moved to a two-room rental facility near the Santa Cruz airport, at a place called Sahar Village.

The facility consisted of eight units, each with two rooms, one living room and bedroom and the other kitchen and dining area. There were no indoor plumbing or toilets. I lived in that building for 18 months before leaving Bombay to go to East Africa. The housing shortage in Bombay was such that, for a short time, eight of us lived in that two-room unit.

While I was in Bombay, my brother Johnychan graduated from college with a degree in Physics. I talked to the head of my department, and he offered Johnychan a job in my department. After I left India, he left Bombay Hospital and joined the meteorology department of the Government of India and was posted in the district of Kutch in the state of Gujarat. Later on, he joined Air India and was posted in Bombay. Before migrating to the United States, he worked for Cathay Pacific Airlines in Saudi Arabia.

Off to Kenya, East Africa



I accepted a job at Bombay Hospital in November of 1961. In June 1962, an advertisement appeared in the Times of India, from His Highness for the Aga Khan Hospital in Mombasa, Kenya. I never saw that advertisement, but a friend did, and he brought it to my attention. I immediately sent in my resume. In September, I received an appointment letter from Aga Khan Hospital.

Ironically, at the same time, I received two other job offers. One was from Caltex, the recruiting agent for ARAMCO, and the other from the Indian Institute of Technology, offering me a ‘gazetted officer’ level job with a good salary and free apartment. Gazetted officers are employees of the federal government at a higher salary and with privileges. After much prayer and consultation with my parents and others, I accepted the offer from East Africa.

I resigned from my job at the Bombay hospital in October 1962 and went home for six weeks. During that time, family members and friends of my parents brought up a few marriage proposals for me. But I was not ready and unbeknown to me, God had already chosen a wonderful spouse for me! After six weeks, I returned to Bombay. A representative of Aga Khan’s community in Bombay arranged my passport and tickets. I sailed third class on a steamboat named “*SS State of Bombay*” and arrived in Mombasa, Kenya, on December 13, 1962.

In Bombay a number of my friends came to see me off. As the ship sailed away, all my friends began to leave the pier. But my brother Johnychan remained, waving until the ship was out of sight. I stood on the deck, waving back, until I could no longer see him. As I observed him standing there alone, new in a large

city, I felt really guilty and sorrowful about abandoning him. I had the same experience when I saw my youngest brother, Mathukutty standing alone on the railway platform in Ernakulam five years earlier, but God took care of both of them. The voyage itself was comfortable. The sea was calm and tranquil. I spent most of my time on the deck, watching the fish jumping in and out of the water. The food was tolerable as well, mostly fried fish, chapati, and rice. The voyage took seven days and six nights to reach Mombasa.

Mombasa was founded around 900 AD. Old Mombasa was a center for the slave trade from the early 15th century, primarily by Arab traders from Oman. In the beginning, slaves were obtained through trade with inland tribes. But, as the slave-trade industry developed, caravans set off into the African interior, bringing back plundered ivory and thousands of captured men, women, and children. Of these, fewer than one-in-five survived the forced march to the coast, most either dying of disease or being executed for showing weakness or insubordination. There is an ancient well in Old Mombasa that was used for hanging slaves.

In 1896 the British started the construction of a railway line to connect Mombasa to Kampala, the capital of Uganda. To work on the construction project, many laborers were brought in from India, which was at that time a colony of England. As an incentive, they were all given British citizenship. After its completion, the Indians settled in East Africa, and became part of that increasingly multicultural, multiracial society. Most of these Indians, through their frugal lifestyle and ingenuity, became very successful and very wealthy. Kenya became independent in 1963.

The Aga Khan Hospital



Aga Khan is the title. He is the 50th hereditary Imam of the Shia Nizari Isma'ili Muslims, a branch of Islam. He is believed to be a descendant from prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fathima. The official name of the current Aga Khan is Prince Rahim Al-Hussain.

The Aga Khan is the spiritual head of an Ismaili Muslim community, with an estimated 15 million adherents. Rita Hayworth, the American movie star, was married to his uncle, Prince Aly Khan.

A representative of the hospital picked me up at Kilindini harbor, in Mombasa and took me to a nice, flashy hotel very close to the harbor. The name of the hotel was Casablanca. The next day, a driver from the hospital came to take me to the hospital. There I met with the Medical Director and the Chairman of the Hospital Board of Directors. In the evening the ambulance driver drove me back to the hotel.

The hotel manager came to my room in the evening and invited me to join him at the hotel lounge. He offered me free membership to the hotel club. I did not know what he meant, but it took only one night to recognize that Casablanca was a nightclub frequented by sailors and ladies of the night. The very next day, as per my request, the hospital moved me to a reputable hotel in town, run by a British lady. The name of that hotel was Palm Court.

After a few days, I met with the hospital Board of Directors and presented my plan for starting a new clinical laboratory. It was an expensive plan, modeled

after the Bombay Hospital Laboratory. They agreed unanimously and granted me complete freedom to set up the lab according to my plans. This included the design and construction of the new laboratory building also. As the new building was under construction, I used an old laundry shed to start the Laboratory. Mosquitoes were a major problem, especially when I had to attend to emergency calls at night. Within three months, I contracted malaria. It took three weeks to recover from that attack.

When I arrived at the hospital, there was no laboratory at all. They had one microscope, a few test tubes, a spirit lamp and some reagents to test urine sugar, and a few match boxes too. Everything else had to be ordered from England. It took three months before I received the minimum necessary reagents and equipment to get the lab going. I was given one African young man as a tech and an Ismaili secretary to help me start. One by one, I started introducing new tests. Seventy-five percent of my work came from private practitioners in town. All the reports were typed out in neatly printed report forms. Twice a day, the reports were delivered to the doctor's offices in town by a messenger on a bicycle. Even though there were three other laboratories in town, receiving the reports in a timely fashion and in neatly typed form, was a real attraction for the doctors. As a result, my laboratory became very popular among the doctors and the workload increased dramatically. More staff and another messenger were added to the department.

The biggest crisis of my career happened about six months after I started the lab. One day I received a telephone order for two units of blood for a patient in the general ward. The patient was a merchant navy worker from a foreign country. He spoke neither English nor Swahili. Unknown to our Lab, the patient's hospital bed had been switched with another patient. As a result, an incompatible blood type was given to the patient. As soon as we observed the beginning of a negative reaction, the transfusion was discontinued. Still the patient had a violent reaction that could have been fatal. The next 24 hours were extremely critical. I knew I could lose my job, but more importantly, a patient could lose his life. God in His mercy saved the situation. The patient recovered without any damage. This incident helped me to set up strict protocols so that in twelve years and hundreds of blood transfusions, we had no adverse reactions. Praise the Lord!

In those days there were no blood banks in Kenya. Friends or relatives donated blood as the need arose. The Ismaili community had a very large population in Mombasa. There were three large mosques on the island of Mombasa. If any member of their community needed a blood transfusion, it would be announced in the mosques. Volunteers would come to the hospital to have their blood group

checked and donate blood if it matched the patient's blood type. To speed up the process, I initiated a program to have all the adult members of the community get their blood group checked in advance. We completed the program in two months and issued a card showing each person's blood type. When announcing the need for blood, the patient's blood group was also announced, so only those with the same type had to come to the hospital. We visited Mombasa in 2006. I was surprised to see those same cards are still in use after 40 years.

One day the treasurer of the Hospital Board of Directors, Mr. Rehamtulla and his brother Dr. Rehamtulla, a dentist, stopped to see me. Mr. Rehamtulla asked me if his brother could use part of my laboratory to start his dental practice. At the time I was using an old laundry shed as the laboratory while the new building was being constructed. That was the beginning of a friendship between Dr. Rehamtulla and his family and our family. His daughter Fauzia was one of Mary's childhood friends.

Dr. Rehamtulla had a very interesting background before coming to Mombasa. He was the Mayor of Zanzibar, an island, twenty-two miles off the coast of Tanzania. Zanzibar was the center of the slave trade from the 7th to the 19th centuries. Arabs from Oman ruled the island. In January 1964, the local African population toppled the 200-year-long control of the Omani Arab rulers. In April of the same year, Zanzibar merged with Tanganyika to form a new sovereign state by the name of Tanzania, with Dr. Julius Nyerere as president.

The day before the revolution, one of Dr. Rehamtulla's patients warned him about the upcoming revolution, and strongly advised him to flee the island immediately, which he did. The very next day, thousands of people, including the Arab Sultan, much of the Southeast Asian population and many members of the Ismaili community were ruthlessly assassinated.

Dr. Rehamtulla came to Kenya and settled down in Mombasa where his brother lived. Being a politician, within a very short period of time, he became a member of the board of directors and eventually the chairman of the board of directors of the hospital.

Marriage Proposal



It is my understanding that my cousin T. E. Thomas and his wife Lucy, Susan's sister, were the first ones to come up with a proposal for my marriage to Susan. Her older brother, George Kuruvilla, her sister Elizabeth, and my uncle M. T. Mathai all knew each other and supported this proposal.



Susan's childhood home, Angadical South near Chengannur, Kerala

In May of 1964, I received a letter from my father. He mentioned this marriage proposal and asked what I thought about it. He wrote that he had seen Susan and was very pleased with this proposal. As I was musing over this proposal, my memory went back to an incident that happened ten years earlier. Susan's youngest brother Madhu was born in 1953. My cousin T. E. Mathai, T.E.

Thomas' brother, and I went to visit the newborn baby. While my cousin and I were standing in the portico of their house, two girls emerged from the house and entered the portico. They didn't know me, but they knew my cousin. One of the girls had some powder in her hand and playfully flung some on my cousin. But, due to the wind, most of it landed on me. She didn't even notice it, as they were running to catch the school bus. How could I know that one day, that high-spirited, beautiful girl would be my wife?

Since then, I had not seen or heard about her. However, as I prayed about it, I really felt that this proposal was from the Lord. After I gave my consent, my family and Susan's family, in the presence of our church elders and elderly relatives, finalized my engagement to Susan Kuruvilla. Although Susan was there, she was never asked if she was willing to marry me. I was not present at my own engagement. It took place at Susan's home in Kerala. The date and time of the marriage were to be announced later. My work at the hospital and the political situation in Kenya prevented me from leaving the country for any extended period of time.


Susan's father, Ghevarghese Kuruvilla, was a member of an Orthodox church which, according to tradition, was established by Apostle Thomas. He left that church and was in fellowship with the Church of God at the time of our marriage. Susan is intelligent, hardworking and very focused on her commitments. When she was young, she was the one her father called to do some of the hard jobs around the house. She studied hard and had very good grades in school. Had she gone for higher studies, she would have done very well. From a very early age, her ambition was to become a nurse. So, she went to a Nursing School in Bombay and became a registered nurse and a registered midwife. After graduation, she was hired by Arabian American Oil Company in Saudi Arabia.

After our engagement, Susan returned to Saudi Arabia. Our parents gave us each other's addresses and permission to write to each other. For the next six months, we learned a lot about each other through our long letters. No direct telephone was available from Kenya to Saudi Arabia. That was the beginning of a lifelong love affair, a commitment undergirded by unconditional love.

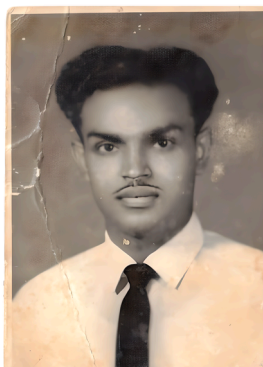
My cousin P. J. Thomas offered to host our wedding at their chapel in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. I flew to his home two days before the wedding. The night before the wedding, a thief tried to steal my wedding suit. He used a long pole, like a fishing rod, through the window. After a few intense minutes of tug-of-war and a lot of yelling, he finally let go of the only decent pants I had for the wedding!

Our Wedding



 n Friday, December 23, 1964, Susan, also known as Ammini, flew from Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, to Cairo, Egypt, all by herself. From Cairo, she flew to Nairobi, Kenya. After a four-hour delay in Nairobi, she flew into Dar es Salaam. Her flight arrived at 12 noon.

In my eagerness to see my soon-to-be bride, I got up early and was ready by 10 am. My cousin was at work that day. Since it was getting late, I offered to go to the airport alone. As we were not yet married, my cousin's wife, Kochamma, said it was not proper for me to meet her alone. My cousin came home from work around 11:45 am, and we all rushed to the airport. We arrived at the airport five minutes after the plane landed. It took Susan about 30 minutes to clear immigration and customs. Finally, the much-anticipated time came for me to meet my life's partner.



As she came out of the immigration department, I walked towards her and took her baggage from her hand. I told her, "From now on I will carry your burdens." Before we could even exchange a word, my cousin's wife told her to get into their car, and I was directed to get into a friend's car. Not only that, but I was also not allowed to go to their house where I was staying, because Susan was going with them to their house! In about four hours we would be married!!

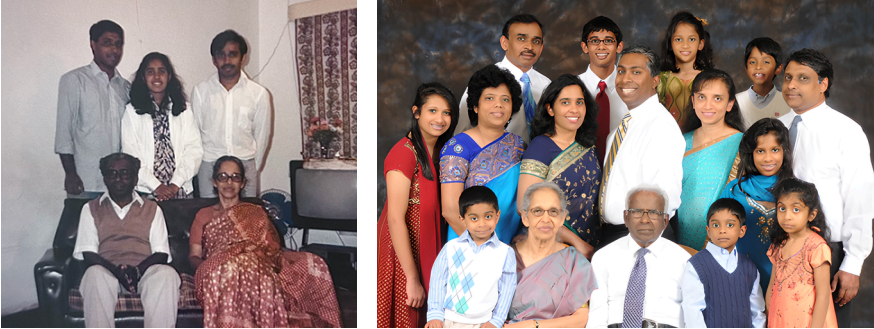
Brother Allen Dalton, a missionary from England, was to perform our wedding. This was the first wedding he performed. The night before the wedding, around 7 pm, Br. Dalton realized that I needed wedding rings. I was not prepared because, in those days, believers in the assemblies in Kerala did not wear any jewelry, including wedding rings. However, my cousin knew a goldsmith who agreed to make two rings that same evening.

On our way back from the goldsmith, we picked up our wedding cake and placed it safely on the floor of my cousin's Volkswagen Beetle. His oldest son, Valson, now Professor Dr. Johnson Thomas, age three, was sitting on the back seat. All of a sudden, he jumped out of his seat and landed right on the wedding cake! It was too late to order another one. We spent half the night patching up that poor crushed cake! A broken wedding cake but a solid marriage, praise the Lord.

At about 3:30 pm, Br. Allen sent word that he would like to have a rehearsal. My friend drove me to my cousin's home. Br. Allen was waiting for me in my cousin's sitting room. He asked me to stand in front of him and asked Susan to stand next to me. But Kochamma interjected. She said she would stand next to me, and Susan could watch. I am not making this up! The wedding ceremony went well. The message was good, I was told! I could not pay attention. I was holding onto Susan as she seemed to be half asleep from lack of sleep from the day before. She was not quite asleep because, now and then when Br. Dalton was administering the oath, she would stop him and ask "excuse me" or "I beg your pardon". When we teased her afterwards about it, she would say, "Why should I say yes without understanding what he was saying?" I can't blame her. Br. Allen Dalton had a very heavy British accent!

As I said, everything went well until the actual ceremony was over. Then, unfortunately, no one remembered to get the forms ready for the signature of the couple and witnesses. Being a proper English gentleman, Br. Dalton would not let us sign the papers before every detail was filled out. The audience had to simply sit and watch. Finally, Susan's form was filled out and she signed it. Then Br. Dalton started with my forms. Name, address, age, occupation, etc. It seemed like an eternity. The witnesses came forward and signed the form. All done. I

turned around to walk down the aisle with my bride, but behold, my bride of 30 minutes was nowhere to be seen. Instead of waiting for me, my wife just walked out. When my forms were done, I too walked out. Nobody stood up, but I did not notice. I was looking for my bride! I went out of the chapel, and behold, she was at the foot of a cashew nut tree in the church yard, trying to pick a cashew nut fruit!



P. J. Thomas & Family

Note: My cousin and his wife, Kunjama (Kochamma), went out of their way to host our wedding. They did everything for us. We are always indebted to them.

Life in Mombasa



After a few days in Dar es Salaam, we flew to Mombasa, Kenya, where I had rented and furnished an apartment. I had also bought a car, a 1960 Volkswagen Beetle, before going to Dar es Salaam. It was our first vehicle.

After putting our luggage in the bedroom, I headed to the only bathroom. To my dismay, I encountered a dark snake, about three feet long, coiled up on the floor. Fortunately, there was a mop with a wooden handle nearby. I was able to kill the snake and dispose of it through the window. Ammini heard some noise but thankfully did not come to investigate. I decided not to tell her about the snake until after we had safely moved to another apartment. When I described the snake to our neighbor, he informed me that it was one of the very venomous species found on the African coast.



The next morning, Susan woke up before I did. She wandered into the kitchen and after finding the necessary ingredients, made a steaming hot cup of

tea for me. She gave it to me with a very benign smile. I sat up in bed and slowly took a sip. I immediately spit it out onto the floor. I could not drink it because it was too salty! Yes, salty! She started laughing and all I could do was simply join in and laugh. She had mistakenly added salt to the tea and she knew it. Yet she decided to give it to me!! She really did have a sense of humor.

Two weeks later, Ammini started working in the Maternity ward of our hospital. After one year, she was promoted to be the charge nurse of the maternity unit which included Labor and Delivery, Nursery, and the Maternity units. Five years later, in 1970, the Hospital board of directors offered Ammini the position of Director of Nursing. This position carried a lot of heavy responsibility. She continued as the Director of Nursing until we migrated to the United States in 1974.

In Mombasa, we attended the Gospel Tabernacle Assembly. I served as one of the elders and as the secretary. When my father visited us, he spoke there in Malayalam, and I translated his message into English. It was a very vibrant multi-racial assembly. My daughter Mary was saved while attending Sunday School there.

Before offering a urine pregnancy test to the public, I needed a known pregnant woman's urine to test my pregnancy test kit. I asked Susan if she could get a urine sample from one of her patients who was pregnant. She asked me to test her own urine. I patiently explained that I wanted a pregnant woman's urine, not her urine. Her reply was "Just test my urine anyway." I agreed and guess what? It was positive. That result was proved accurate beyond a shadow of doubt on February 3, 1966, by the arrival of our first daughter, Mary. That was one of the happiest days of our lives.

When I went into room number seven of the Maternity ward, I got my first glimpse of my newborn daughter. She opened her eyes, looked right at me, and *winked*. I am not kidding. She not only winked at me, but she also attempted to smile. Despite her efforts, that smile turned into a yawn! We named her Mary after my Mom. We went through this same experience two more times. The next daughter was born on August 20, 1969, and the third one on July 15, 1970. We named the second arrival Deena, after Ammini's Mom, and the

third one Irene, after one of Ammini's best friends. All of them are unique in their personalities, but they all love the Lord, are intelligent, and hard-working. We are very proud of them.

My laboratory was on the 1st floor, and our apartment was on the 2nd floor. As the girls were growing up, we hired two local young girls to take care of them

and to help with cooking. Another young man was hired for external work. The girls were named Catherina and Faustina. The man's name was Nyaga.

Our working hours were 8 am to 12 noon and 2 pm to 4 pm. In the evenings, when we returned from work at 4 pm, our daughters were all dressed up and ready to go out with us. We would take them to the seashore, next to the lighthouse at the entrance to Mombasa harbor. We could see the ships coming and going. Because cell phones were not in existence in the 1960s, the location where we usually parked our car was given to the hospital ambulance driver. If there was an emergency when we were out, the ambulance driver would come and call me. That was our daily routine.

As our family was growing, Dr. Rehamtulla kept asking me to request a raise in my salary, but I hesitated. Finally, after some time, I put in a request. A week later, when I was sitting with Mary in a hospital room where she was recovering from tonsillectomy, the treasurer of the hospital board of directors, one Mr. Aziz Lakha, came to the room and asked me to follow him. He took me to the boardroom where the entire hospital board of directors was present. Mr. Lakha brought up my request for a raise in my salary. Then he asked me, "How much do you want?" I did not expect that, and I was not prepared to answer. I didn't want to ask too much or too little. Actually, I was very happy with what I was getting. I put in the request because Dr. Rehamtulla insisted that I should.

Suddenly, I remembered how much Mr. Robinson, the chief technician at the Platinum Jubilee Hospital in Nairobi, was making. Mr. Robinson was a Fellow of the Institute of Medical Technology (FIMLT) from England, and Nairobi was a very expensive place to live. At the time I was only a diploma holder from India. Anyway, I simply said that Mr. Robinson told me how much his salary is, and I left it at that. Mr. Lakha thanked me and I went back to Mary's room. Fifteen minutes later, Mr. Lakha came back to the room and told me that the board agreed to pay me the same amount. I couldn't believe that.

One day, I was teaching Mary to pray. As usual, she said, "God, please bless Daddy, Mummy," and so on. Then she said, "God please bless Nyaga, who cleaned our apartment." Suddenly she stopped and then said, "Oh God, please don't bless Nyaga." I asked her, "What happened?" She explained that she had fought with him earlier in the day!

One evening, I was scolding Catherina and Faustina for something that was not done well. Sarcastically, I asked them if I needed to hire one more person! One for cooking, one for cleaning, and another one for washing laundry? We were in the room where the girls were sleeping. Suddenly, Mary got up from sleep

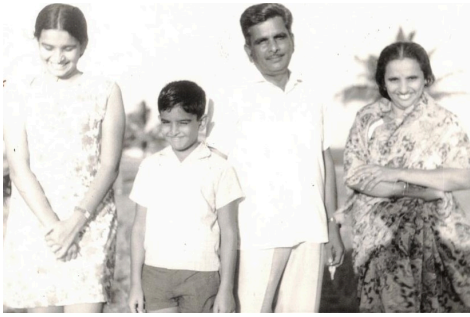
and added, “One for ironing also” and then went back to sleep! All of us started laughing.

When Mary was three years old, we visited our cousin in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. While there, we went on a safari to see the Ngorongoro Crater, Mt. Kilimanjaro, and the Serengeti Plains. The Ngorongoro Crater is over 2000 feet deep and about 100 square miles wide. Only specially equipped four-wheel jeeps can descend into it. Once in the crater, you can see the largest concentration of wildlife anywhere in the world. You may also see several villages where the Maasai tribe lives. It was a very memorable safari.

During the safari, I took many pictures. On returning to my cousin’s house in Dar es Salaam, I unpacked our suitcase onto our bed and joined the others for tea. When I returned, my daughter Mary was perched innocently on the bed with my camera in hand. My undeveloped safari film was curled up on the floor by her feet! She was having fun yanking out the roll of film from the camera! This was in 1969. We only had the old traditional camera. No digital cameras or smartphones!

The Nair family lived on the third floor of a building across from our apartment. They were our best friends. If we happen to walk on the road in front of their apartment, Krishnamma, Mrs. Nair, would call Ammini from the third-floor window and invite us up. If we hesitated, Krishnamma would say, “Ammini, I have made some sambar.” Sometimes there were other delicious Kerala dishes like aviyal or goat curry. As soon as we heard that, Ammini would be on her way up the staircase.

Mr. Nair was the chief surveyor and controller of the town of Mombasa. He and his wife, Krishnamma, had one son, Unni Krishnan, and one daughter, Latha. Unni Krishnan was three years older than Mary. It is sad to say that tragedy plagued Mr. Nair’s retirement life in Trivandrum. His son Unni finished his Engineering Degree and went to Madras to start his first job. Before he joined the company, he fell from the terrace of a three-story building, injuring his spinal cord and becoming paralyzed from the neck down. He passed away seven years later. A few years later, Mr. Nair died of respiratory problems. Their daughter Latha had a daughter and a son. The day after Latha’s daughter’s wedding, Latha died of an aneurysm. Krishnamma passed away in 2024.



Left: Mr. and Mrs. Nair, Latha and Unni. Right: Mary, Deena and Irene.

Life in Kenya was good during the twelve years we were there, ten of them after our marriage. We made many good friends, including influential politicians. Some of them, including the Defense Minister, Dr. Mungai, offered to give us Kenyan citizenship. One wealthy African businessman, whose business partner was Margaret Kenyatta, the daughter of President Kenyatta, suggested that I should start my own clinical laboratory in town. He offered to finance it. Offers like that were really tempting. Yet my loyalty to the Aga Khan community was so strong that I decided to stay with them.

The situation began to change by early 1972. Idi Amin, also known as “The Butcher of Uganda,” ousted President Milton Obote in a military coup d’état. Before long, he began to unleash his fury and anger on all foreigners, including Indians in Uganda. The events in Uganda made us think about our future, especially that of our children. But we were not sure exactly what to do.



Idi Amin, the Butcher of Uganda

Uganda gained independence in 1962, and Milton Obote became the president. Before independence, Idi Amin was hired by the British Army as a Private with no formal education. Despite this, he rose through the ranks and befriended the Ugandan President, Milton Obote, who trusted him and promoted him Chief of the Army and the Air Force. On January 25, 1971, while President Obote was out of the country, Idi Amin staged a successful military coup d'état and declared himself President for Life. In 1972, he expelled all Asians from Uganda, which destroyed Uganda's economy. He was a brutal dictator and was known as the "Butcher of Uganda." Many of our Indian families lost all of their possessions and escaped with only the clothes on their backs. Some of our friends, on their way to India, came through Mombasa and stayed with us. From them, we heard many first-hand horror stories.

One day, Idi Amin's military ambushed a bus returning from a church picnic. They ordered everyone off the bus, both adults and children, bound their arms and legs, and threw them over the bridge into the raging river. There were no survivors. Another group of soldiers walked into the High Court, killed the judge, and everyone else in the courtroom. There were many horrific incidents witnessed by some of our friends during this frightful time.

One of the families who stayed with us was a man and his wife with their six-year-old daughter. The following was their experience. One afternoon, the wife picked her daughter up from school, parked her car in front of their house, and got out to open the door for her daughter. Suddenly, an armed and uniformed man shoved her roughly onto the ground, jumped into her car, and sped away, with her child in the car. She started yelling, "My child, my child!" After about 500 yards, her daughter was callously thrown from the car. Thank God, she escaped with only minor injuries.

Many Indians, hoping that the Indian Navy would come to their rescue, sent their expensive cars to Kenya, loaded with precious items hidden in the car. One day, I got a call from an acquaintance in Uganda. He anxiously explained that he and his brother had sent two Mercedes-Benz vehicles to Kenya as well. He implored us to make sure their cars were in Mombasa. We drove to the gas station where the cars were supposed to be stored and saw both cars, along with approximately 50 other stored vehicles. Two weeks later, I received another call from our friend. This time it was from India. He requested I check again, so I returned to the gas station. This time, all fifty-plus cars, previously stored there, had mysteriously disappeared. No one would give me a straight answer as to what happened. One fact was certain. None of them left Kenya!

Idi Amin tortured and humiliated foreigners, especially white people, before killing them. It is believed that more than 300,000 people were killed and countless others tortured during his presidency (or should I say, "reign of terror"?).

J.B. Nicholson Sr.'s Rescue from Entebbe

It was at this time that our Br. J.B. Nicholson Sr. found himself stranded at the Entebbe Airport in Uganda. At the IBF conference in 1993, brother Nicholson told us how the Lord miraculously saved him from Amin's death squad.

One day, during the tyranny of Idi Amin, the Missionary Aviation plane dropped Brother Nicholson at Entebbe airport to catch a connecting flight to England. They did not know how bad the situation was in Uganda. Soldiers were all over the airport, fully armed, hunting down foreigners. Brother Nicholson was informed that his connecting flight had been canceled, and no planes were expected to arrive or leave the airport. He realized he was the only white person in the airport. Sensing the imminent danger, he cautiously moved to an unobtrusive corner of the airport and started praying. He could hear shouting and gunfire all around the airport.

Suddenly, a plane landed, and an officer quickly strode to the counter to check in. As the gentleman was returning to his plane, Brother J.B. quietly approached him and requested permission to board. The officer said he understood the situation, but there were absolutely no vacant seats on the plane. In fact, he said he had to leave passengers with tickets at the previous airport. Brother J.B. pleaded with him, saying he was willing to stand or sit on the floor, but the officer said the Captain would not allow it. He then hurried back to the plane. As the plane door closed, Brother J.B. felt really helpless and watched despondently as the plane prepared for takeoff. Unexpectedly, the door of the plane opened abruptly, and the same officer rushed toward Brother J.B. saying, "Hurry up, follow me!" He obeyed immediately. Once they were safely on the plane, the officer kept saying, "I don't understand, I don't understand." He told Brother Nicholson that he was positive there were no vacant seats on the plane. He could not comprehend how a seat suddenly became available! Brother Nicholson really believed that an angel had occupied that seat just to save him.

Extended Visit to India



In 1972, we decided to go to India on an extended visit. We sailed on a ship, bringing our new car, a Peugeot 204 station wagon, with us. For the first two days, the sailing went well. After that, the sea became very rough. All of us, except Mary, got seasick. For the rest of the voyage, we ate very little, and whatever we did manage to eat came out quickly the way it went in! Once in Bombay, my younger brother Johnychan met us and welcomed us into his home. His wife, Sophy, and her mom, who was with them at the time, made us a delicious Kerala lunch. It was a wonderful treat after a ‘starvation’ diet on the ship!

We stayed in Bombay for a few days, visiting a few relatives, especially Georgchayan’s family in Parel and Uncle Chackochayan, who lived in the same complex as my brother. Then we started our 1100-mile journey from Bombay to Kerala by car. We padded the luggage area and back of the rear seat so that, when the back seat was folded forward, it made a nice comfortable 4x6 sleeping area for the children. The luggage was kept on the roof rack.

Our first stop was in Pune, where my cousin, Kunjooju, was stationed in the Air Force. The next day, we drove south. Our destination was Sankeshwar, where one of our friends’ father-in-law, Dr. Mathew, had a hospital. Dr. and Mrs. Mathew were going to Kerala for their son’s wedding. We agreed to take some of their luggage with us in our car and follow them all the way to Kerala, with one overnight stop in Bangalore. As agreed, the previous night, by 5 am the next day, we were packed and ready to leave. It was January 7, 1973, and it was almost 9 am by the time the Mathews were ready. The children, who were sleeping in the back seat, got up and were hungry.

Not only were the Mathews late, but after starting, they made several stops in town for various reasons. Since the children were up and hungry, by 10 am, we decided to go ahead and stop for breakfast at a restaurant on the way. We lost track of the Mathews. We took their luggage to their home in Kerala, but we never saw them again.

As a result, by the time we reached Bangalore it was almost midnight. Our destination was our uncle V. P Jacob's house in Bangalore City. GPS and cell phones had not yet been invented. We relied on directions given to us by strangers found here and there on the roadside in the night. One man's direction led us to a huge cemetery. Think of our predicament being in a cemetery in a strange city, in the middle of the night, with four females in a new foreign car, loaded with luggage. Finally, after midnight, we reached our destination.

My cousin M. T. Thomas met us at our uncle's place. After dinner, my cousin took us to his apartment for the night. The next day, we drove directly to Kerala. The girls were sleeping comfortably in the back, and Ammini kept me awake with interesting conversations. Every two to three hours, we would stop at roadside tea shops for a cup of hot tea. An atlas was the only means we had to find directions. Finally, by the grace of God, we reached home at midnight. My parents were waiting for us. By the way, because of the chaotic situation at Sankeshwar, I forgot that January 7 was my dear wife's birthday. I think she has finally forgiven me.

During our vacation, having a car of our own gave us a lot of freedom. We visited a lot of family and friends and many interesting places. My brother Mathews was working at a place called Kanjipuram in Tamil Nadu, and his wife, Kunjumol, was working at Vellore Medical College Hospital. On our way back from Kerala to Bombay, we visited Kunjumol in Vellore. We took her to see her husband, Mathews, in Kanjipuram, Tamil Nadu.

Before proceeding to Bombay, via Madras and Hyderabad, we took Kunjumol back to Vellore. On our way to Vellore, we had an accident. We were on a very narrow, long bridge, and I noticed a bullock cart coming towards us. A transport bus was coming behind the cart. Instead of slowing down behind the cart, the bus driver overtook the cart, swerving precariously into our lane. Sensing danger, I honked, flashed my headlights, but he kept coming towards us in our lane. I stopped the car as close to the edge of the bridge as possible. Deena was standing on the back seat with her face touching the glass of the car door. The bus barreled toward us and collided with our car, ripping off the paneling and part of the rear light. If the bus had crashed into us two inches closer, our car would have been thrown from the bridge, killing all of us. The Lord miraculously saved us.

During this vacation, we purchased a two-story building in Ernakulam, in case the situation in Kenya became intolerable or dangerous. There was no guarantee that what happened in Uganda would not happen in Kenya too. While we were in India, Sheela, Ammini's sister, and her daughter Julie were there. Sheela's husband, Joykutty, my cousin, was already in the USA. Sheela and Julie traveled with us almost everywhere we went. During these trips, Sheela kept imploring Ammini to immigrate to the United States.

On our return voyage to Kenya, we met our Ophthalmologist, Dr. Ved, on board the ship. He was returning from the USA after attending a medical conference in Houston, Texas. He shared with us many of the advantages of living in America as compared to Kenya. From that point on, we began to seriously consider migrating to the United States. After all, that had been my desire for many years.

Upon our arrival in Mombasa, we received one more confirmation regarding the path God was leading us. Our friends Isaac Chacko and his wife, Suzi, informed us that they had applied to the American Embassy for an immigration Visa. They suggested we do the same.



At President Jomo Kenyatta's Beach Cottage

One day, I received a call from Dr. Njoroge Mungai, the personal physician of President Kenyatta, as well as the Defense Minister. He asked me to meet him at the Winter Palace of President Kenyatta in Bamburi Beach, seven miles north of Mombasa. He wanted me to draw blood and do some testing on him. He took down the model and registration number of my car before hanging up. Ammini was working at the time. I grabbed my blood-collecting kit and quickly drove to the President's winter palace in Bamburi Beach. Security guards admitted me onto the property. As I parked my car near the palace, Dr. Mungai himself emerged from the palace. He pulled me aside and quietly told me that he was not the one who was sick but President Jomo Kenyatta himself. For security reasons, I was not to mention the President's name on phone calls, nor record his name as a patient on any medical records. Instead, I was to use Dr. Mungai's name in all documents. I gently opened the door to the President's bedroom and entered with Dr. Mungai. I drew President Kenyatta's blood, drove back to the lab, finished the testing quickly, and then returned to Bamburi. This time, I took Ammini with me. It was 7 pm. I handed the reports to Dr. Mungai, and we left the palace grounds. Since we were near the beach, we decided to take our time and drive around for a little while before returning to the hospital in Mombasa.

While we were driving back, we saw a police car with lights on and sirens blowing, driving past us. We didn't think too much about it. When we reached the hospital, we were told that the police were looking for me, but nobody was told why. They left a message for me to contact the Governor's Office. The Governor, like President Kenyatta, was from the Kikuyu tribe. His office told me, in confidence, that I was urgently needed back at the President's Palace. So, without going back to our apartment, Ammini and I returned to Bamburi. I drove as fast as I could.

When I reached the President's palace, in addition to Dr. N. Mungai, I found Mr. Joseph Murumbi and Mr. M. Koinage, both personal friends of the President and members of his Cabinet. His Press Secretary and Dr. Foster, a prominent specialist in Mombasa, were also there. Dr. Mungai asked me to stand by while they waited for Dr. Harris, a specialist from Nairobi. He was supposed to come with Margaret Kenyatta, the President's daughter, and the Mayor of Nairobi. So, Ammini and I waited in the living room with several cabinet members and other officials. Dr. Harris and Margaret Kenyatta arrived just after midnight. Dr. Harris, after examining the President, ordered more tests. By the time I got back to my laboratory, it was almost daybreak. Over the next few days, I had to go back to the palace several times. President Kenyatta recovered, held a party to celebrate, and invited us. For some reason, we did not go. I can't remember why!

Move to the USA and Life in Silver City, New Mexico



In March 1973, we applied for a Visa at the United States Embassy in Nairobi and received the Visa in June. We set February 1974 as our target date for leaving Kenya. In the meantime, I wrote to a few hospitals in the Southwest. One hospital, Hillcrest General Hospital of Silver City, New Mexico, offered Ammini a job immediately.

When we were in Mombasa, Johnnychan and Mom visited us. Just before leaving Kenya, my Dad also visited us. We had the privilege of taking them to many places of interest around Mombasa, including the Tsavo National Park. Dad spoke in our assembly one Sunday, and I translated his message from Malayalam to English.

From Nairobi, we flew to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, then to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. At Riyadh airport, we were detained for several hours because we had a few homemade movies. After examining the films, they released us just in time to catch the flight to Dhahran. We spent a few days with Kochamma and Unnichayan, and from there we went to visit Ammamma, Babykutty, and Santamma in Doha, Qatar. M. T. Mathai, my Dad's younger brother, was also in Doha. We attended his church one Sunday. It was a very good reunion with all our dear ones.

From Doha, we flew to London and, after one night's stay in London, flew into Kennedy Airport, New York, on February 9, 1974. We were warmly welcomed by the immigration officers, who offered us drinks and, in a few minutes, gave us the green cards. We were promised that our Social Security cards would be waiting for us in New Mexico, our final destination. Joykutty and Sheela received

us at Kennedy Airport. We stayed with them for a week before flying to Silver City via Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Mr. Norman Meyer, the hospital administrator at Hillcrest General Hospital, met us at the airport and took us directly to the hospital. While the kids were sleeping in his car, he took both of us to his office. There, he introduced us to all the department heads. Mrs. Patricia Lund, director of the Laboratory, took me for a tour of the department. On our way back to Mr. Meyer's office, she asked me when I could start working. I said as soon as we settled down.



Mr. and Mrs. Norman Meyer

From the hospital, Mr. Meyer took us to his house, which was on top of a hill. His house had an in-law apartment with two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a dining room. He told us that we would be staying there until we found a place of our own. There was food, like milk, bread, jam, eggs, and other essentials, stocked in the refrigerator. The next day Mrs. Meyer took Ammini shopping, and Mr. Meyer took me to look for a car. His secretary from the hospital came to babysit the girls. The next day he took us house hunting. He helped us pick a Gran Torino for \$3,500 and a three-bedroom house for \$21,000, all in a week.



Our first house in the USA (1974)

Ammini started working at the hospital immediately. Mary started at Harrison Schmitt Middle School, named after the astronaut Harrison Schmitt, who hailed from New Mexico. Deena and Irene enrolled in Silver City Elementary School. Our friends Isaac and Suzi Chacko also came to Silver City. On our recommendation, Suzi was hired at the same hospital. Two weeks later, the *El Paso Times* sent a reporter to interview the “Two nurses from India, who call Silver City Home.”

The El Paso Times
 Thursday, March 14, 1974 Page 1-C

Silver City Called Home By Two Nurses From India



AT WORK — Susan Chacko, left, and Suci Chacko, right, patient records as part of their training at Hillcrest General Hospital in Silver City, N.M. Both came to America from India to seek credentials as nurses. —(Times Photo)

by JIM ELLIOTT
 Times Correspondent

SILVER CITY, N.M. — Two registered nurses from India have relocated in Silver City and are awaiting calls to prove their qualifications for registry as nurses in this country.

Susan Chacko, 36, and Suci Chacko (no relation), 28, grew up in the same section of the State of Kerala, India, and earned their nursing credentials at hospitals in Bombay, India, before moving to Africa. They never met, however, until comparatively recently, when they heard about the treatment being accorded Indians and other non-Africans in Uganda, a neighboring country. Then, through concern for their safety and the future wellbeing of their respective families, they visited the U.S. Consulate and initiated their most important project to date — settlement in America.

They are both married, and both have three daughters. Susan's husband, Thomas, 33, is employed as a laboratory technician at Silver City Veterans' General Hospital where the women are working as "nurse trainees" pending calls to Albuquerque, N.M., to undergo tests leading to certification. Suci's husband, Isaac, 33, is a mathematics and science teacher, but is thus far unemployed.

FOLLOWED SISTER
 Susan Chacko completed high school in her native Kerala rural community, the followed an older sister to Bombay to "seek a career. Since her sister was an X-ray technician in a Bombay hospital, Susan decided to continue her training. After completion of a three-year course in nursing, she entered the field of obstetrical nursing and worked for the next year in two Bombay hospitals.

Her next move was across the Arabian Sea to Saudi Arabia, where she worked three years in a "company hospital" operated by for employees of the Arabian American Oil Co. specializing in pediatrics. Her next move was to Mombasa Island, near the southern tip of Kenya, where she was employed until February of this year in H.H. The Agakhan Hospital. Shortly after arriving on Mombasa she met and married her husband, who had left India in 1962 and was working as a hospital laboratory technician.

Susan says the "H.H." in the hospital name stands for "His Highness" the Agakhan and spiritual leader of the Muslims. "As a leader of the Islamic Faith," she said, "the Agakhan is virtually worshipped. When his followers wish to do him honor, they present him with his weight in gold, or silver, or jewels, or other precious metal and gems. I remember one time they gave him his weight in platinum."

FELT UNEASY
 Susan said she felt uneasy about saying those things about the Agakhan for publication. Upon being assured that the presentation of such gifts to the Islamic leader are known around the world, she smiled and added, "When his followers want an audience with the Agakhan, they make a big donation to his many hospitals, or to some other charitable fund designated by him. An audience with the Agakhan is expected to draw as high as \$5,000 shillings, or about \$2,000 in American money."

"I saw him at the hospital, of course, but certainly didn't seek a formal audience with His Highness," Susan, like Suci, is a lifelong Christian. Suci, who trained for a nursing career at the C.T. Hospital and Cama and Alibhai Hospital in Bombay, did private practice for two years at a private hospital in Bombay, and married in 1969. Her husband went to Kenya in January, 1971, and followed him in May of that year. She immediately found employment at Pandya Memorial Hospital, Mombasa Island. It too, was an Islamic institution, although all faiths were admitted for treatment.

The nurses were asked to comment on medical practices and related matters in Kenya and India as compared in this country. "There is a difference in certain areas," Susan answered. "For instance, here we have disposable diapers and many other items which are discarded after one use, whereas at our former places of employment they went to the laundry."

ABORTION ILLEGAL
 "Here a abortion regarded in Bombay" was the next question. Answer: "It is illegal, but it is done. If a physician tried to do it openly, or without the traditional causes such as danger to the life of the mother, he would lose his license to practice."

Commenting on food markets in the United States, Susan said, "You have more packaged goods, and more frozen foods here. In Kenya, which is a beautiful land with lush vegetation, the housewife finds her vegetables and meats from the vegetable bin or the meat cooler. Of course it takes longer to prepare the food, but help is so cheap that people with modest incomes can keep servants to do the cooking and housework."

In explaining why they chose Silver City, Susan said, "When we became afraid for our families, because of racial tension in Uganda and elsewhere, we took the advice of an American Medical missionary. He suggested that we try to locate somewhere in Texas, New Mexico or Arizona. So we wrote to a number of chambers of commerce. The Silver City Chamber of Commerce answered our letter, and gave us the name of Hillcrest General Hospital, plus a list of physicians and the name of the hospital manager, Norman Meyer. So we wrote to Meyer and to Grant Nelson, director of nursing at Hillcrest General Hospital, and we came Silver City as immigrants."

A few days after we arrived, Mr. Meyer took us all out for dinner. We couldn't finish all the food. When we were ready to leave, Mr. Meyer asked the waiter to bring a doggy bag. I was surprised because they didn't have a dog! We quickly learned who eats the food in the doggy bag. Two weeks later, when we went to McDonald's, I ordered a hamburger. My Indian accent was so strong, they misunderstood and served us root beer instead!

Within a month, I passed the examination for Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT, ASCP), conducted by the American Society of Clinical Pathologists. Then I enrolled in Western New Mexico University in Silver City, with Biology as my major. Susan passed the registry examination for Registered Nurses (RN) in 1975. To help Susan prepare for the registry examination, Ammachi

(Susan's Mom) came and stayed with us. Both Susan and I enjoyed our work in the hospital. We were treated like VIPs in that small town. Since there were no assemblies in Silver City, we attended the Bible Baptist Church.

When my Dad and Mom visited us, Dad spoke in that church and I translated for him. We took them to see Disneyland in California, the Grand Canyon and Carlsbad Caverns. While we were in New Mexico, Johnychan, Sophy, Raju and Kunjumon also came from Bombay to visit us.

Move to Monroe, Connecticut



We eventually decided to move to the Northeast, mainly because Ammini's mother and sister, Sheela, lived in New Jersey. Also, Western New Mexico University was not offering the courses I needed for the B.S., M.T.(ASCP) examination. So, in 1977, we relocated to the Northeast.

Joykutty, Sheela, Ammachi, Julie, and Billy came to help us move. Sheela was pregnant with Betty. Before leaving Silver City, all of us went to visit Carlsbad Caverns, Disneyland in California, and the Grand Canyon in Arizona. We rented a U-Haul cart and hitched it to the back of our van. Joykutty drove our Gran Torino. From New Mexico, we headed north on Route 25, crossing into Colorado. We planned to visit Mr. Chacko and Suzi, who had moved to Chicago the previous year. In Colorado, we stopped at a rest area for a break. We had a small dog, Toto, a Dachshund, with us. He was on a leash. When I got out of the van, the leash slipped out of my hand, and Toto started running. Irene ran after Toto. There was heavy traffic on the road. I was afraid Irene would follow Toto and run into the traffic. So, I yelled at her to stop. By this time, Toto crossed the road. He almost made it to the other side. But his leash was caught by one of the cars. By the time we were able to cross the road, we found Toto dead.

After staying with Mr. Chacko and Suzi for one night, we drove to New Jersey and reached Jersey City early in the morning. Before leaving New Mexico, Ammini had accepted a job offer from the United Hospital in Port Chester, NY. She could not start working because her New York State nursing license was inadvertently mailed to New Mexico.

The first few days, we stayed with Joykutty and Sheela. Since it was taking a long time to get Ammini's license, we rented another apartment in the same building. When we left New Mexico, our house had not been sold. Whatever

savings we had were all spent on our move. So, we found ourselves in New Jersey with no jobs and no money. However, Joykutty and Sheela very generously helped us out. We are very grateful to them.

While we were waiting for the license to come, the schools opened, and we had to enroll the children in a school. We took them to the public school in Jersey City. As we were waiting in line to get the children enrolled, there was a huge fight between a teacher and a parent. We were really terrified. But we had no other choice. The next week, the children came home all shaken up. Mary started having nightmares.

Thankfully, after a week, we moved to Port Chester, New York, and enrolled them in the Rye Resurrection School. Ammini started working at United Hospital in Port Chester, NY, and I was hired by St. Vincent Hospital in Bridgeport, CT. In 1984, Ammini left the United Hospital, and began to work at Norwalk Hospital as a Labor and Delivery Nurse. She continued working there until she retired in 2004.

In 1978, we purchased a house in Monroe, Connecticut, a small town, north of Bridgeport. Within a year and a half, I graduated with a BS degree in Biology from Bridgeport University and continued my studies towards my master's degree. In the meantime, I took the registry exam and was certified as a Medical Technologist, (MT, ASCP).



Prayer meeting in Monroe with M.E. Cherian & M. P. John

Life in Monroe



Toto



I can't stop laughing!!!

Mary, Deena, and Irene attended St. Jude Elementary School, then Deena and Irene attended Chalk Hill Middle School in Monroe. All three girls then graduated from Masuk High School. Mary headed to Houghton College upstate in New York. Deena and Irene attended Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania. Mary and Deena went on to get their master's degrees right after college, Mary from the University of Bridgeport, and Deena from Shippensburg University in PA. Twenty-seven years later, Irene also graduated with her master's degree from Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania. During the girls' growing-up years, we first attended Westville Bible Chapel in West Haven and Black Rock Congregational Church in Fairfield, CT.



Our daughters took this picture of the three of them and surprised us on our wedding anniversary. They saved their lunch money for weeks to pay for it. Looking at this picture, we still feel a lump in our throats. We love our daughters more than anything else in the world.

Holy Land Trip



In 1987, Susan and I joined a group from Black Rock Congregational Church for a two-week trip to Switzerland, Cairo, Luxor, Israel, and Jordan. It was an amazing trip. Our first stop was Switzerland. We visited the memorials of Calvin and Zwingli. From Switzerland, we flew to Cairo and saw the pyramids as well as many other tourist attractions in Cairo, including the famous museums. From Cairo, we took an overnight train trip to Luxor. There, we visited the Valley of the Kings, including the tomb of Amenhotep and many ancient temples. After returning to Cairo at midnight, just as the Israelites did centuries ago, we left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, not on foot, but in a luxury bus, and reached the foot of Mt. Sinai by nightfall.

We stayed at a facility provided by St. Catherine's Monastery. Built between 548 AD and 565 AD, this monastery is one of the oldest working Christian monasteries, with the oldest continuously operating library in the world. They escaped the Muslim conquest of AD 640 by building a Muslim prayer tower in three days and employing a Mulla (Muslim priest) to recite the Muslim prayer every morning and evening. This practice continues even today. Monks who enter the monastery take a vow never to come out of there alive.

The following day, 54 of us started our ascent to Mt. Sinai. Seventeen of us reached the top. The last 1/3 of the way was like climbing a ladder. By the time we came down, it was dark and cold. Ammini was holding on to me because the path was strewn with large pebbles. For one moment, she took her hand off me to adjust her sweater, and lo and behold, she fell flat on her face. A couple of young

men in our group picked her up. There were some bruises on her hand and elbow, but nothing was broken.

The next day, we visited the caves of Qumran, where ancient Jewish religious manuscripts called the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947. They contain 2,000-year-old copies of the Hebrew Bible. In Israel, we visited a number of historic sites like Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Sea of Galilee, Gethsemane, Garden Tomb, Golgotha, Jericho, Hebron, Dead Sea, River Jordan, Masada, etc.

Masada is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Israel. It is situated on top of an isolated rock, approximately 1,400 feet high. It had a summit area of about 18 acres. Herod the Great built a palace for himself on this mountain overlooking the Dead Sea. According to Josephus, the siege of Masada by Roman troops from 73 to 74 AD ended in the mass suicide of the 960 Jewish rebels who were hiding there. When Roman troops entered the fortress, they discovered that its defenders had set all the buildings, except the food storage, ablaze, and committed mass suicide or killed each other, nine hundred and sixty men, women, and children in total. They preferred death rather than being taken prisoner by the Romans. Only two women and five children were found alive. Today, the Israeli troops, during the oath-taking ceremony, shout, "Masada shall not fall again."

After visiting Israel, our next destination was Jordan. One of the highlights of our visit to Jordan was a trip to see Petra. This 3000-year-old city was lost to civilization for centuries until it was discovered in 1812 AD. When we visited Petra, there were no roads leading there. The last mile before the entrance, we had to ride on horseback. Some of the tourists, including us, expressed concerns to our guide that we had never been on a horse. The guide assured us that he would match each tourist with the right horse; that is, if you were old, you would get an old horse; if you were sick, you would get a sick horse. If you were not an experienced rider, you would get a horse with no experience!!!

To avoid embarrassment, Susan and I decided to be the last ones to mount our horses. We waited and watched as the animals were led by local men, one by one, holding the reins securely by hand, with riders on the horses. When it was her turn, Susan, using her limited Arabic, requested the handler to go very slowly. Unfortunately, it looked like Susan's handler misunderstood her. Once she mounted her horse, the handler released the reins, and she and the horse took off as fast as they could. He galloped past all 65 riders, with Susan clinging to the reins and screaming, calling for her mother in Malayalam. Dr. Allaby and the other 64 riders were shocked to see Susan flying by them at such a high speed! She was the first to reach the entrance to Petra! Thankfully, she made it there in one piece! After returning to Amman, we flew back to the States.

Conferences and Retreats: Indian Brethren Fellowship



I was involved with the Indian Brethren Fellowship from the beginning. The first conference was held in 1978, at Greenwood Hills, Pennsylvania. In 1980, I was asked to take responsibility for organizing this conference. I held that position for 30 years, first as secretary and treasurer and later as secretary. Since 2010, I have been a member of the spiritual advisory committee. I stepped down from the committee in 2024.



**INDIAN BRETHREN
FELLOWSHIP
CONFERENCE 1990**



Indian Brethren Fellowship Conference (IBF) — 1990, Nazarene College, Mt. Vernon, OH



Northeast Conference

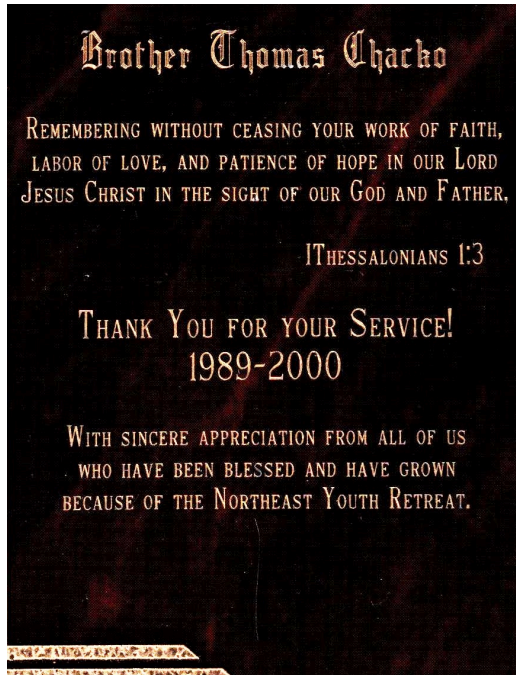
In 1988, I arranged for the Indian Brethren Fellowship committee to meet at Wagner College in Staten Island, NY. That weekend, we invited all the New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia assemblies for two days of combined meetings. In 1989, with the help of all the assemblies in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, I organized another three-day conference at Nyack College, Nyack, New York. That was the beginning of the Northeast Conference.

Northeast Youth Retreat

During the fall of 1990, I invited our Indian families from New York and New Jersey for a two-day retreat at Mountain Lake Retreat Center in Connecticut. Br. Jack Spender was the main speaker. During the meeting, we discussed the possibility of holding a youth retreat. For the next few months, the representatives of the assemblies and I held several planning meetings in our home in Connecticut. The first youth retreat was held in 1991. Br. Sajan Mathew of Chicago was our speaker. The late Brother Baby Mathews organized a team, affectionately called the Kitchen Crew, who prepared all the food in the early years. In 2002, I handed over my responsibilities to Johnson John of Philadelphia Brethren Assembly.



Kitchen Crew



Northeast Youth Retreat Kitchen Cabinet

Veterans Administration Hospital, West Haven, Connecticut



In 1982 I went to Barnes Hospital in St. Louis to specialize in blood banking (Specialist in Blood Banking, SBB). On my return in 1983, I worked in Norwalk Hospital as the supervisor of the Radioimmunoassay and Immunology department combined. In 1988, I accepted a job offer from the VA (Veterans Administration) Hospital in West Haven, Connecticut, as the supervisor of the Retrovirus Division of the Virology Reference Lab. Our department served as a reference laboratory for all the VA Hospitals in the Northeast Region of the USA.

Our major work was in association with Yale University School of Medicine, which was one of the ACTG (Aids Clinical Trial Group) centers. Dr. Brigitte Griffith was my director. We undertook several scientific projects and jointly published many articles in major health magazines; all related to the AIDS virus. I retired from the VA in February 2004.

Normally, when one of the staff retired, our director, Dr. Brigitte, and all of us would go out for dinner at a restaurant in town. In my case, no one mentioned anything about a farewell dinner for me. I could not ask, of course, but I was very disappointed. A week before my retirement, Dr. Brigitte, my director, announced that she was taking a few days off. I could not believe it. How could she go away without organizing a farewell dinner for me? Two days later, she called me from her home and invited Susan and me to her home for dinner, which I accepted gladly.

Her husband, Dr. Ezra Griffith, who was the director of a healthcare facility, another doctor who was the head of the Neurology department of Yale University

and a Presbyterian Bishop were also invited. It was a seven-course dinner which lasted more than four hours. Every item was personally prepared by Brigitte. We had a good experience with authentic French cuisine. Every course had a different variety of wine in special glasses, followed by a break, with lively conversation. Since we had to drive home that night, we used that as an excuse for not drinking wine. After seventeen years, I still keep in touch with Brigitte. I had several opportunities to share my faith with her. I think she is still an honest enquirer, if not already a believer.



Virology Reference Lab, V.A. Hospital, West Haven, CT, with Dr. Brigitte Griffith, Director

Life in Fairview Township, York, Pennsylvania



In 2003, we sold our house in Connecticut and moved to a small studio apartment in Norwalk Hospital while our house in Fairview Township, Pennsylvania, was being built. We both worked until February of 2004. By this time, our new house was finished, and we moved in on February 4, 2004. Our property was a 3.5-acre parcel of land in Fairview Township.

The house had a walk-out basement and two floors with five bedrooms. We developed two large vegetable gardens, where we grew all kinds of vegetables to last for more than a year. Mike, Irene, and their son Kyle were already in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. In 2006, Mary, Regi, and their family moved from New York to Pennsylvania. First, they bought a house in Boiling Springs and later on moved to East York. In 2004, Ryan and Deena, with their family, moved to Pennsylvania. They lived near Harrisburg. Three years later, they moved to Chicago.

We fellowshiped with the saints at the North York Gospel Chapel (NYGC) for the next fourteen years. NYGC is a Christ-honoring, Bible-believing assembly. Mary and her family were also attending NYGC. That was an added blessing. From 2013 to 2018, I served as one of the elders. The Ladies' Bible study, led by Mrs. Michele Irwin, was very helpful to Susan in her spiritual growth.

Thomas Chacko

Mechanicsburg Property



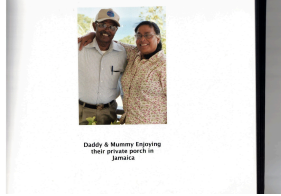
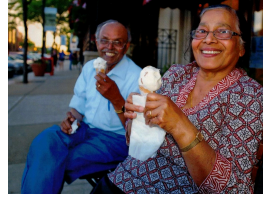
Buddy, Mike's dad helping with canning

Canning

Snake Gourd

Vacations and Trips





Childhood house

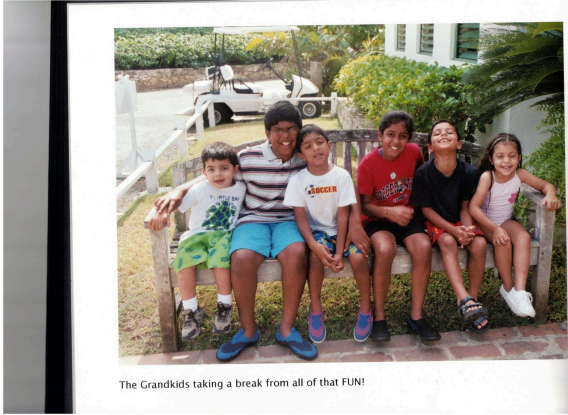


Second house in CT (USA)



Third house in Mechanicsburg (USA)

Kids and Grandkids Over the Years







My Children, Grandchildren and Great Grandchildren



We have been richly blessed. God gave us three daughters: Mary, Deena, and Irene. Mary graduated with a bachelor's degree in science and a master's in education. She married Regi Sam, an electrical engineer. He comes from the Perangattupadickal family. His parents are Idikulla and Achamma Sam. Regi has a brother and a sister. His brother, Sagi, and his wife, Sarah, live in Staten Island and have two children, Nathan and Jessica. His sister, Gigi, is married to Raju, also known as Varghese, John's second son. They live in Delaware and have two children, Hannah and Aaron.

Mary homeschooled their children and was a teacher for many years. Currently, Regi works for the State of Pennsylvania as an energy analyst. They live in York, PA, and have six children. Their oldest, Timothy, lives in Herndon, VA. He is an aerospace engineer and works for Amazon. Ruth is married to Cole, and they live in Newtown, VA. Ruth is a homeschool mom and an avid baker. Cole works as a contractor for the Department of Defense in Washington, D.C. They have four girls: Astrid, Freya, Aria, and Ava. Josiah is married to Moriah, and they live in York, PA. Josiah is a computer engineer and works for XR Trading. Moriah is a homeschool mom, as well as an author of children's books. They have three children — Grace, Boaz, and Joseph — and are expecting their fourth child. Elisha is a CNC machinist, working in Monroe, NC. Enoch is married to Sophia, and they live in Pittsburgh, PA. Enoch is working as a computer scientist and will be joining the Navy as an officer. Sophia is a homemaker and homeschool mom to their son, Matthias. Abigail lives with Regi and Mary. She is working full-time and going to college full-time, studying Psychology. All of the children and grandchildren are in fellowship with their local gathering of believers.

Deena graduated with a bachelor's in family studies and a master's in social work. She married Ryan Gainor, a graduate in business. He comes from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and his parents are Jay (married to Mary Kay) and Sandy. Deena and Ryan live in Chicago, IL. Deena has her own travel business, which allows her to travel the world. They have four children. Mikayla is doing ministry work overseas, working with college students. Ryan Jr. is married to Emily, and they live in Richmond, VA. Katie and Danny are both in college.

Irene graduated with a bachelor's in human resources and a master's in organizational development and leadership. She married Mike Scheib, a graduate of Susquehanna University with a bachelor's in business. He came from Millersburg, PA. His parents were Paul (Buddy) and Clarita Scheib. Irene and Mike live in Mechanicsburg, PA. At the time Mike retired, he was president of Inservco Insurance Services. After a three-year battle with cancer, he was called home to the Lord on June 21, 2025. Irene was the Assistant Director of Human Resources at a local school district. When Mike was sick, she took early retirement to spend time caring for him. Kyle graduated in business and specializes in human resource management. He has a daughter, Cici. They are in fellowship with their local church.

My Siblings



John is four years younger than I am. I have many fond memories of my life with him. John graduated from college with a major in Physics. As soon as he graduated from college in 1962, he came to Bombay, and I got him a job in my department at Bombay Hospital. He stayed with me at Sahar Village until I left Bombay. Later, he worked for the Meteorological Department of India for a few years. Then he joined Air India and was posted in Bombay. He worked in Saudi Arabia for Cathay Pacific Airlines before migrating to the United States. His wife Sophiamma is from the Kooran family in Trichur. She was a teacher in Bombay. It pleased the Lord to take their firstborn son to Himself when he was only eleven months old. That was a very difficult time for all of us. Thereafter, God gave them two more sons.

John and Sophy, with their two sons, Jacob and Varghese, migrated to the United States in 1990. John is a serious student of the Word of God and uses his gift in the ministry of the Word in his local assembly. He has published several articles, and two books titled *The Feast of the Lord and the Feast of the Jews* and *Parables of Matthew 13*. Their son Jacob and his wife Subi have one son and one daughter, Betsy and Bennet. Varghese and his wife, Gigi, have one son and one daughter, Aaron and Hannah. They all live in Delaware, close to John and Sophy.

Mathews graduated with an engineering degree. He was diagnosed with thyroid cancer when he was in college. His doctor gave him only six years to live. By God's grace, he survived a very critical surgery when he was young. He worked with the Kerala State Department as an engineer for a few years. He then went to Saudi Arabia and worked with a large construction company as the general manager. His wife's name is Rachel, and she is a Laboratory Technician by profession. Their daughter Mini lives in Detroit. She and her husband, Jaby

Kooran, have three sons and one daughter, Michel, Allen, Josh, and Eileen. Their second daughter, Reni, lives in Canada. She and her husband, Princely, have three daughters, Joselyn, Joyce, and Jacky. Mathews and his wife Rachel migrated to the United States in 2008 and live in Detroit, MI.

Aniyamma was born when I was 20 years old. It was a surprise for my parents. She went on to Medical School and specialized in Ophthalmology. Animol, as I call her, and her late husband, Professor Mathew Cherian, have one daughter and three sons. It pleased the Lord to call her husband home in 2012. Their oldest daughter, Smitha, and her husband, Philly, with their three children, live in Bangalore. Their second son, Deepu, graduated from Medical School and did postgraduate study in Pathology. He and his wife, Sheeba, with their two children, live in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. Aniyamma's third son, Sibi, is an engineer. He has a Doctorate in Engineering and is teaching in a college in Kerala. Sibi and his wife Susan have two sons. Benoy, the youngest son, graduated with a degree in Engineering and is now studying for his Masters. He and his wife are now in Bangalore, India.



*Going from right to left:
Thomas & Susan Chacko
John & Sophy Maniyatte
Mom and Dad are seated in the middle
Mathews & Rachel Jacob
Late Mathew Cherian & Aniyamma Cherian*



Susan's Siblings



Susan's father had a daughter and two sons with his first wife. They were Elizabeth, George, and Chacko, also known as Ammamma, Georgchayan, and Chackochayan, respectively. They are all now with the Lord. Ammamma's husband died just before her first daughter, Molae, was born. Molae has two daughters and one son: Sherin, Helen, and Allan. They are all settled in Trivandrum, Kerala.

Georgchayan left Kerala when he was 16 years old and went to Bombay. He worked for Metal Box, a British company. Eventually, he became the purchasing manager of the company. Georgchayan died at the young age of forty. He and his wife, Lizy, have three children: Kuruvilla George, Philip George, and Rachel. They are all settled in the USA. His wife, Lizyammamma, died of COVID in 2020.

Jacob, affectionately called Chackochayan, was working for a company in North India. He too died of a heart attack at a relatively young age. He had two daughters. His oldest daughter died a couple of years ago. Surviving daughter Jessu has two sons and one daughter. Both sons are settled in the USA, and the daughter is in India.

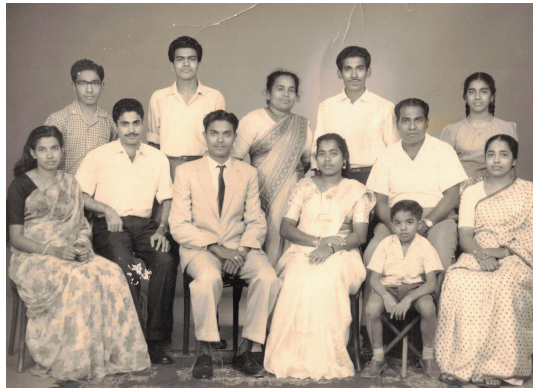
Appachan and his second wife, Deenamamma, had four daughters and two sons. Their oldest daughter, Lucy, and her late husband, Thomas (Unny), have four daughters and two sons, Beena, Ruby, Reni Ruby, Regi, and Jerry. Regi and his wife are settled in Kerala. All others are in the USA.

Santamma and her husband Abraham Jacob have two sons and one daughter. Sunita, Hanson and Hanly. They are all living in the USA.

Thomas Kuruvilla (Appu) and his wife, Annie, have one son and one daughter. They live in Kerala. His daughter, Anita and her husband, Anish, live in New York. Appu went to be with the Lord on March 17, 2023.

Sheela and her husband, Thomas (Joykutty), have two sons and two daughters. Julie, Billy, Betty and Allen. They are all settled in the USA.

Mathews Kuruvilla (Madhu) and his wife, Jolly, live in Fairfield, CT. They have two daughters, Deena and Danice. They are all settled in the USA.



*Seated: Santhamma Abraham, Abraham Jacob, Oommen Paniker, Annie Paniker, George Kuruvilla, Phillip George (Regi), Lizzie George
Back: Kuruvilla George (Mohan), Thomas Kuruvilla, Elizabeth Mathew, Jacob Kuruvilla, Rachel Joseph (Geetha)*



*Susan's maternal grandfather, grandmother and their children
Gheeverughese and Deenamma Kuruvilla*



Pittsboro Christian Village



*I*n 2018, we put our house on the market, and it was sold in two days. By God's grace, there was one small cottage available at the Pittsboro Christian Village (PCV) in Pittsboro, North Carolina. We moved to a two-bedroom cottage in PCV on June 30, 2018, and on July 1st, 2019, we moved to a new three-bedroom duplex.

The following is a quote from the PCV website:

“Pittsboro Christian Village is a place where you can live as independently as you like and continue to exercise your spiritual gifts. Founded in 1952, our continuing care retirement community has provided a home for generations of like-minded believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our common Hope provides the basis for friendship and fellowship, as senior Christians share their interest in the things of the Lord. Many residents enjoy living in freestanding homes on the grounds, with yards cared for by Village staff. You can choose from two-bedroom Cottages and Patio Homes or three-bedroom Heritage Homes equipped with major appliances. You can easily walk to the swimming pool and to the auditorium where the assembly meetings and other formal and informal activities take place.”

The new duplexes with three bedrooms are built according to the latest government requirements for senior living. They are called Legacy Homes. We lived in one of them until 2024. In October 2024, we moved into one of the two-bedroom apartments. We enjoy being able to walk to the Chapel for meetings. We really enjoy our life at the Village. Fellowship of like-minded believers, opportunities to be involved in different ministries, the ability to be part of various social activities, and the quiet lifestyle are unique to PCV. We hope to spend the rest of our lives here until the Lord calls us home.

On December 24, 2025, Ammini and I celebrated our 61st wedding anniversary. I thank God every day for my dear wife. She is my best friend, counselor, supporter, admirer, and my fierce critic, in a nice way, of course!! We love each other very much.



Conclusion



I do not know what tomorrow will bring, but I know the One who has guided, provided, and protected us hitherto. We are confident that He will direct our tomorrows too. As the sun is about to set on our earthly life, and as I look back, I am reminded of a poem by A.M. Overton:

*“My Father’s way may twist and turn;
My heart may throb and ache;
But in my soul, I’m glad I know;
He maketh no mistake.*

*There’s so much now I cannot see;
My eyesight’s far too dim;
But come what may, I’ll simply trust
and leave it all to Him.*

*For by and by the mist will lift;
And plain it all He’ll make,
Through all the way, tho’ dark to me;
He made not one mistake.”*

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” 1 John 3:2 (NKJV)