

Johan Peters Recounts



Yesterday is History,
Tomorrow is a Mystery,
Today is a Gift.

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Johan Peters Recounts

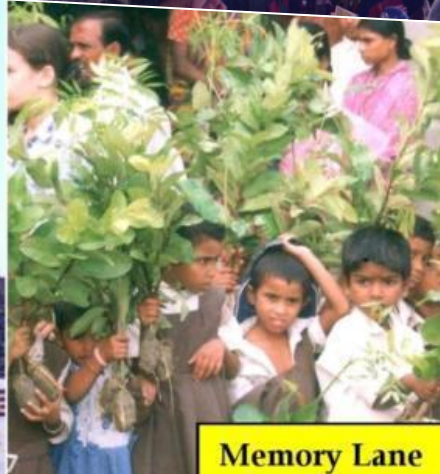
“It's been such an adventure reading through this, a wonderful adventure! I can't wait reading it again...” (Proofreader)

Vincent Paul. (Linguist, Belgium)

“An earnest, but light-hearted recounting of the author's journey from mischievous child, to searching teenager, to zealous youth, to a present day man with a mission.”

T.C. (Beta Reader, U.K.)

Let's start with a few photo pages
as a picture can say it better than
a thousand words.



Memory Lane



My life that I love

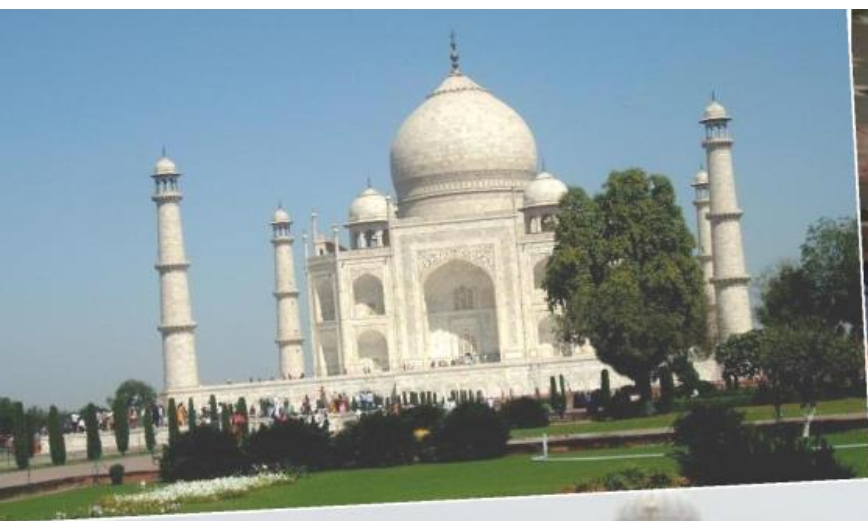


Celebrating Christmas

Teaching wherever, whenever, however



The People I love



Architecture and friends



Camel Market in Pushkar



Crossing Khardungla Pass





The Tsaatan people



Service to God & Fellowman



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Life's greatest TRAGEDY is not death, but life without a purpose,

Life's greatest CHALLENGE is in knowing what to do:

Life's greatest MISTAKE is to be busy for nothing.

Life's greatest FAILURE is to be successful in the wrong assignment.

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970)

'Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest and whatever things are of good report, think on these things.'

Paul of Tarsus

'When we have ceased learning we have grown old.'

'When we stop using our mind to argue and prove ourselves right, then life becomes an amazing journey as we open ourselves up to the beauty and people around us.'

'May we never rest till every child born in this world will be raised with love and will receive an adequate education to develop the God-given talents that he or she was endowed with at birth.'

'There is still so much to learn about what we don't yet understand.'

JP

'We know nothing at all. All our knowledge is but the knowledge of schoolchildren.'

Albert Einstein

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Foreword

Hi, as I am writing and recalling the events of my life it made me feel very small and undeserving of the love and protection that I received in spite of my antics. What started out as a simple recount became one of the most soul-searching times of my life.

I am using my penname as I don't want to put anyone in a difficult position. If it seems like I am a 'lone wolf' it is mainly to protect the privacy of all those who were and are still an intricate part of my life.

As humans we can be prejudiced against others. For this reason I found it wise not to mention any of organizations or charities that I have worked with. Arguments can keep us from adhering to the voice of our conscience imparted to each of us; to love our neighbour as ourselves, to teach and to see how we can help others who are less fortunate in life.

These are only some of the main highlights of my life. There are many more but I will leave it at this. I want to express my sincerest appreciation to my teachers for passing on their knowledge and the incredible individuals whose life of dedication inspired me and helped to shape my life.

By the way, I was categorised as 'mentally unstable' and have been applauded as 'a hero'. I have been labelled 'a heretic' and referred to as 'a saint'.

See what you think.
Have fun.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Johan Peters". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing 'J' and 'P'. There is a small blue arrow pointing downwards to the right of the signature.

CHAPTER 1

GROWING UP IN HOLLAND

Times were difficult during WWII. A beautiful strong girl rode more than a hundred kilometres on her bicycle to see if she could get potatoes and food from the farmers in Friesland to help feed her large family as she was one of 15. The German soldiers at the check-posts allowed her passage and she returned with a heavy load on her bicycle. Thoughts were crossing her mind of becoming a religious nun like her cousin. At home and when things got very bad food wise, she could from time to time get food from the bachelor next door; he was seven years older than her and he was taking over the family's small vegetable business. Their business relationship became a passionate romance. When the bombs dropped, he lost a sister. "I don't want to lose you too, we'll get married as soon as this war is over" was their promise. That was the love story of my amazing parents.

My earliest childhood memories are wonderful. I was raised in the 'fruit and vegetables' family-business. Father had a horse and wagon on which the merchandise was displayed.

At times I went door to door with him to the people in the village. Of course I had to be a good boy and be polite to the customers, but I thoroughly enjoyed it as I was rewarded not only with compliments but with biscuits and those hugs from the ladies that I loved.

My parents loved me and I was the third in a family of six children. I enjoyed it so much when Dad took me riding on his bicycle. I would sit on the front linking bar and we would pretend that I was riding 'horsy' as his knees were bumping me up and down when he pushed the pedals.

MY FIRST PICNIC

During the war Dad had helped many people with fruit and vegetables. Dad sold to the Germans for a high price and then gave away fruit and vegetables to the big families either for free or a token price.

One such couple that Dad helped during the war was the Jewish family of Mr. and Mrs. Berg. When I was two years old Mr. and Mrs. Berg came over one Sunday in their new car to take my parents to Volendam. Volendam is a fishing village situated at the Zuiderzee, aka IJsselmeer, not far above Amsterdam.

It is located along a dike and became a tourist attraction for the traditional costumes, wooden shoes, and its speciality and delicacy: smoked eel.

This time none of us children were allowed to come on this outing, but that did not deter me. The car was parked in the driveway and the booth was open. Dad had put a rather large box with fruit and sandwiches in the booth, so they could have a picnic along the way. When no one was around I quickly snuck in and hid behind the box. About an hour or so later they stopped for their picnic along the dike near Volendam, and boy were they in for a surprise. However they all had a good laugh and I had a fun day. Hence, I am the only child in the cover photograph.

BEST HIDING PLACE

It was Sunday morning. Mum and Dad had gone to church. I must have been three or four. Some of us children played hide and seek. I had found the perfect place. We had a deep well with a little ledge inside of maybe one-and-a-half to two inches wide separating the top part from the deep hole beneath filled with water. I opened the lid and climbed quietly into the well.

I put one foot on the little ledge and my other foot on the opposite side and lowered the lid back on top.

I was safe in the perfect hiding place.

Nobody could find me and I don't know how long I was in there. However when Mum and Dad came home from church and I heard Mum yelling my name in panic, I knew it was time to come out. Mum almost fainted when she saw the lid move and me climbing out, as the well was very deep and full of water.

Within days the well disappeared. It was sealed with a big concrete slab and my best hiding place was no more.

My parents' bedroom was right next to my brother and my bedroom. Sometimes I heard my parent talking softly, but one night they had a loud argument and I was shocked. How could they? I tried to close my ears and hide under my pillow. I never heard them argue again for which I am very thankful because to hear them like that was a shock for me. As I am recalling my youth and reflecting on this, I realise how I must have affected my personal children when I raised my voice more than once, but some things I cannot undo, except make my apologies.

ACCIDENTS

I once asked my mother why I have an L-shaped scar on my upper-lip. Mother told me that when I could barely walk I managed to climb the gate to get off the property and fell down on the other side, cutting my upper-lip.

I had received a little tool kit with a small hammer as a present. The neighbours had a boy that was a year older than me. Either he had exactly the same little hammer as I had, or he had taken mine. I remember we were each pulling at the little hammer and then I suddenly let go of it. He jerked back and the little hammer flew out of his hand. The neighbours had a big Bedford truck to take vegetables to the market. The little hammer hit the front window of the truck and it shattered.

Everyone was trying to figure out what happened, but we were both silent. So finally the blame got pinned on to another vehicle that had passed that morning.

'It must have been that he drove over a stone that flew sideways hitting the window screen.' I told my neighbour much later about the incident. He laughed as the mystery was solved.

When I was about six and my sister seven, we each wanted to sit on the same stool. We ended up pulling at opposite ends and then I suddenly let go again. I am sorry I did that, because she had beautiful teeth and the stool hit her mouth and broke one of her front teeth in half. The dentist tried to fix it, but you could always see that the tooth was slightly different in colour from the rest of her teeth.

ICE SKATING

Although I loved ice skating I was never very good at it. I could go fast, but then would lose control when I needed to stop.

One winter I was with my older brother skating on the canal and when I came around the corner someone was on his knees tying on his left skate, while the skate on his right foot was sticking up with the sharp point aiming in my direction.

How could I miss an opportunity like this? Yes, you guessed it; the point dug right into my right shin next to the bone and made a deep hole. Thank God for my mother who came and brought me back from the farm where I was temporarily taken in to go to Sister Permien. Sister Permien was the epitome of a no-nonsense German nun. She was held in high regard by my parents as our family's children were delivered at our home by her. She took care of the wound, which was great. However the wound did not heal quickly and I had to go back to her several times for redressing it and every time she would yank off the bandage, which was excruciatingly painful.

I realise now that Mum should have taken me to the hospital to get the wound stitched as I still have a big round scar tissue on my shin. However, this cured me from using bandages and plasters.

Since then whenever I had a cut I would not tell anybody; I would use disinfectant and just put toilet paper on it.

Toilet paper dried the wound and was a lot less painful to remove. For me this was the cheapest and best solution.

It did not damage the scab and the wound would heal quickly.

ALOE VERA

Later on in life I personally learned that the Aloe Vera plant is the absolute best medicine and ointment to heal any burn or infected wound. You cut open the leaf and tape it with simple household tape over the wound and let it be overnight.

The next morning you will be surprised. I did it for myself as I had made a fall with a bicycle and the big scrape wound on my upper leg had gotten badly infected. I was advised to definitely get antibiotic treatment. Instead I took an Aloe Vera leaf and it was cured overnight. The leaf was black with the infection that it had drawn out of my wound and in its place was soft pink skin. Wow!

Last year in India a young man had broken his leg and the doctor had put a metal pin in his leg for it to properly heal. The patient was very worried as after months he still had a small hole-like open wound that was discharging. The hospital was 150 km away and it meant days of waiting before he could get to see a doctor.

“Do you have an Aloe Vera plant?” I asked. “No, but our neighbours have one.” I got a leaf, cut it open and taped it over the wound. Everyone looked extremely sceptical, but the next morning he called me that a miracle had happened and that his wound was healed and the hole was closed. This is not medical advice, but I wanted to mention this in case it could help anyone.

Back to my story, the next year we had ice again. I was of course going again full speed. This time I was on a different canal and near the embankment were ducks that had kept a small open water in the ice where they could swim.

Needless to say that duck-pond seemed to have magnetic power and I managed to plunge in headlong. I crawled out and ran home to mother, who gave me a nice warm bath and made me hot chocolate milk.

MY OLDER BROTHER

I admired my older brother because he was allowed to feed the horse. I still remember the hard words I once said to my brother in a fight. We were both doing our homework and I don't remember what sparked it off, but this was the only time we got into a fight. I was looking for ways to hurt him and I said something nasty about his very good friend. I still remember that vicious feeling and I have hated myself for it. I am thankful that I eventually got to apologize to him.

OPA AND OPOE

I had a little garden behind Opa and Opoe's house (Grandfather and Grandmother) in which I grew celery and parsley. I sold the produce to my father and he faithfully gave me the market price, which was about ten cents per handful. I would also breed rabbits during the year, feeding them leftovers and cut-offs from the vegetables. The rabbits would be grown by Christmas time and would fetch a good price for Christmas dinners.

I was fascinated by my Grandparents. My Grandfather from my father's side taught me at an early age how to clean chickens. I learned what the expression means, 'running around like a chicken with your head cut off'. He taught me how to skin rabbits hardly using a knife. Opa showed me how to spot a path where rabbits pass. He also taught me how to make a snare or noose from copper wire to catch rabbits.

He was always full of stories about how they used to poach rabbits to get some extra money to feed the family.

Opa had a big machete with which he cleaned the clay off the sugar beets to feed the horse.

One particular day he was in a jolly mood and came out of the barn with his big machete raised high shouting, "Whose head shall I cut off first?" It so happened that the inspector from the tax office, with a bowl hat and a briefcase, stood at the gate.

The poor man nearly had a heart attack and ran for his life.

Opa was in the pub one time and a travelling tinker said he needed money and wanted to sell his "scharensliiep", a big machine that sharpens knives etc. He wanted 120 guilders for it. Opa said I'll give you a tenner for it. "Sold!" Opa was outsmarted.

However Opa was also hot tempered. One time there was a fire outside and my older brother got the genius idea to tease Opa. He took a burning stick out of the fire and went into the barn where Opa was cleaning out the horse stable with a pitchfork.

My brother comes into the barn and goes near the straw with his burning stick and tells Opa, 'I am going to burn down the barn'.

I was watching this unfold and Opa threw his pitchfork at my brother, who made a quick escape.

MY OTHER GRANDMOTHER

I never knew my Grandfather from my mother's side, as he had passed away before I was born. Mother was one of 15 children and her mother, my Grandmother, was like an angel.

By the time I was in first or second grade, she had become very weak and was moved to a nursing home or hospital for the elderly. The hospital was on my way to school, and I stopped off daily to see her after school. Some of the old folks there asked me to bring them some fruit, so Dad helped me to pack a basket with apples, bananas and oranges, which I would sell bed to bed in the hospital once a week. Then one day Grandmother passed away. That was a shock for me as we really loved each other. Thinking back, I believe that it is her prayers for me that I was assigned a strong guardian angel for protection.

FARMER'S PAYMENT

Father bought vegetables straight from the farmers and they would come over after church on Sunday to collect their dues.

Dad would always pay faithfully.

The farmers appreciated this and would give us children a tip in return. To ensure that this happened Dad would have us children sit at the table when payment was made.

We would be happy to receive sometimes as much as a guilder to put in our piggy bank. One farmer however was not liked by Dad. He always sat in the front of the church but would never give us kids anything. Dad had taken vegetables from him during that week and that Sunday morning the farmer came for his payment. I got the following instructions, "If he does not give you kids anything, then you slip out and pee in his wooden shoes."

Sure enough, there was no tip for us kids. Eager to fulfil such an important assignment, I snuck out after payment was settled and did my necessary duty which was a substantial amount. We hid behind the fence to watch the next scene unfold. He was saying his good-byes and when he put his left foot in, he howled with a smelly wet sock, "Someone pissed in my 'klompen' (wooden shoes)". His Christian graces went seriously out the window, but Dad wisely responded, "It must have been those naughty kids; you know how they are nowadays." I admired my Dad and his antics. You see, we would not do anything without Dad's permission. We had boxes of apples and crates of carrots but we would not think of taking one without asking.

OUTINGS

Times were changing; the horse got old and was sold to the butcher. My parents got a new VW pickup van to go door to door with the vegetables. On the weekends we had frequent outings. Dad would often load up extra friends or children in the back of the pickup to include them in the fun.

One such outing was the 'Autocross'. This was lots of fun as old cars would compete against each other on rough terrain or a farmer's field. There were always lots of crashes and bangs and we loved the excitement.

However the admission was steep and even for us children it was a quite an amount. I remember one particular occasion that we were standing in line for tickets.

There was a rope that separated the people that had paid from the ones that were waiting to buy their tickets.

Father, being the genius that he was, had a simple solution. At a strategically right place he would lift the rope for a split-second and we kids dashed across the field and disappeared between the people that were already in. Were there no security guards? Oh yes definitely, but they could not chase after us as otherwise everyone would have done the same as us kids.

Another time, when going to a large car exhibition at the RAI in Amsterdam, I was instructed to walk ahead with a nicely dressed gentleman, who was just buying his ticket.

This I did and somehow managed to get in without Dad having to pay my expensive entry fee. Whether the gentleman paid for me or he was very important and they were looking more at him than at me, I don't know, but somehow it worked. This was when I saw the talk of the exhibition; the Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow.

Dad did not mind paying for himself, but he was of the opinion that children should be allowed to go in free of charge.

CAUGHT BY THE FARMER

Upon the genius inspiration of my one year older cousin and friend Karel, we decided to snatch some strawberries from the adjoining large strawberry fields next to my little garden. We crawled under the barb wire and then the farmer arrived.

My friend, who was fast, escaped, but me, being a fat little boy, was caught by the farmer and marched off to my father.

Dad only said, “Why don’t you go upstairs!” and as I turned around to leave I got a swift kick under my bottom. I went up to my bedroom and felt very ashamed that I had disappointed him.

That was enough to never do it again.

As a child Dad would take us to Amsterdam to Waterlooplein, a flea-market in the Jewish part of the city. I vividly remember the burned out Jewish houses which were slowly being broken down and replaced with new office and apartment buildings.

MARKEN

At the age of seven or eight the family went for an outing to Marken, which was an island in ‘de Zuiderzee’ not far from Volendam. Marken had just become connected to the mainland by dike, so off we went. My friend Karel came along and soon we were off exploring by ourselves. We walked along the main dike that protected the isle from the sea.

When we had passed some houses on the dike, two huge German shepherd dogs on chains came running out growling and barking uncontrollably as if they wanted to devour us right there and then. Our way back was blocked by these monsters so we decided to go back by crossing meadows and jumping ditches.

I was very careful as I had noticed that some of their outhouses were connected to the ditches. Karel was leading the way and we jumped the first ditch. Yes, we were getting closer; a few more ditches and we would be back at the car-park.

Another ditch; good. Then the next one was slightly wider.

Karel made it; then I jumped and also made it but lost my balance on the side and fell backward in the stinking muddy ditch. Boy, did I stink. Back at the car-park Mum wrapped me in some jute bags or old blanket and I was put in the back of the pickup truck. Once home I got a nice warm bath and Mum took care of my clothes.

Aren’t parents the best-ever invention in the whole wide world?

STORY TIME

When my parents celebrated their birthday it was always lots of fun, as we kids could stay up for an hour to be with the visitors.

I loved sitting next to 'Ome Nelis', who was always full of crazy and fascinating stories. The party would start with coffee and cakes. On his particular piece of cake was a little silver ball.

He then started telling me how dangerous these little balls were.

"Why is that?" - "You see one of those can be lethal. I had a cake like that before. A few minutes after I had eaten it, I had to let a big fart. Now our cat was sleeping under my chair and that little silver ball was like a bullet. It went straight through the chair and killed our cat."

He had a WWII Harley Davidson that he would ride. He also invited me to his workshop and gave me a little working engine.

I think it was also him that had taught me to pull his finger and as I pulled it he would pass gas and give a fart.

In class I wanted to try this trick. As the teacher was writing on the black board, I asked the boy sitting across from me to pull my finger and I passed a loud gas. The students broke out laughing but the teacher turned around, "Who did that?" He found out my mischief, and although I tried to get off the hook by saying, 'But he pulled my finger', I had to stand in the corner.

Dad told me stories about Ome Nelis. Ome Nelis was not the fearful type. During the war he would go in the dunes to gather wood as it was a cold winter. The dunes were occupied by the German soldiers. One time he had gathered a wheelbarrow full of wood and was spotted when crossing a path. "Halt!" He walked on and the bullets started zinging. At home he inspected the wheelbarrow; it had several bullet holes near the handle.

On one of the vegetable deliveries to the German camp Dad had spotted a big pig in a shed next to the camp. He informed Ome Nelis, who according to Dad was totally trustworthy.

The next night Ome Nelis was not in his bed, but was going through the woods approaching the shed. He climbed through the little back window with his bucket, knife and empty jute bags. The bucket went over the pig's head so it could not squeal. Shortly thereafter the pig came out the back window in pieces packed in jute bags. His eight children had food again and Dad also got a piece.

Ome Nelis also liked to tease and when one of his acquaintances needed to have anaesthesia, in order to get a broken finger or toe set, he teased them - "Ooh, big man!" Later Ome Nelis broke his leg so then it was his turn to be teased. He told the surgeon to not give him anaesthesia and to just set it while he was watching. "That must have been painful." - "It was alright."

I heard that at another birthday party someone was interested in buying a horse, so they brought the horse into the living room full of guests. These are some of their many stories. I decided to leave out other ones that are far from being politically correct, but this was the environment that I grew up in and to be honest I had a lovely childhood.

RAZZIA

During the war the German soldiers would from time to time search house to house for all the able-bodied men who would be sent to German labour camps. Although Dad was delivering food to them he did not have the proper papers that exempted him from Razzia and once picked up they would be driven away like cattle so it would be difficult to get out. However Dad always had a bed ready in a small separate room. There he had a bottle of berry juice.

Whenever he was informed of Razzia coming, he would quickly cut an onion in half and put the halves under his armpits. This according to Dad would make him go pale looking like he was very sick. He'd get in bed and would drink the berry juice.

He would then spew it back up into the bowl next to his bed, looking like it was blood.

Grandmother would tell the soldiers that her son was very sick and ask them if they could please help her as she did not know what to do anymore. They would peek into the patient's room, close the door and leave the house quickly.

I MEMORISED THE CATECHISM

Mother said the rosary with us children before we went to bed. In kindergarten the nuns taught us about Jesus and Creation.

I loved the posters of Adam and Eve and the story of how God made the world. I memorised the Catechism and loved the story about King David and how he camped out in the Cave of Adullam.

SICKNESS AND DREAMS

Around the age of five or six I got very sick with bronchitis; my parents and the doctor were concerned that I might not survive. While sick in bed I got upset with God that I was born nowadays and not in the days of King David as 'I wanted to experience living free for God in nature.'

I also had a dream which repeated itself for many a night. In the dream I would take big steps like; hop, skip, jump. With the last jump I would take off and fly. However every time when I was flying and looked down, fear gripped my heart and I fell towards the earth - waking up startled. One day I had the dream again and I took off and was flying way above the people in Amsterdam Central Station. As I looked down at the people, I was again about to fall. Then somehow I took control and said, "Jesus help me to fly." I did not fall and sailed above the people, waking up peaceful to never have the dream again - so I learned how to fly.

I had this idea that if I walked on my hands, and if that was really the way how we were supposed to walk, then everyone would think that I was crazy, as all walked on their feet. Just because people were all doing the same thing would not make it right.

A YOUNG STAND-IN DOCTOR

My bronchitis got so bad that my parents and our family doctor were fearing for my life, so the doctor told my parents to keep me in bed and very warm. Our doctor went on a holiday and a young stand-in doctor came to see me as I was in bad shape.

He told my parents the opposite of our family doctor's advice: "When he gets up in the morning the first thing he needs to do is wash his back with a cloth of cold water, as this is where his lungs are. He needs to get out in the sun wearing only light clothing or a single T-shirt." My coughing slowed down and I recovered. Once I was healed, I never had bronchitis again.

THE SAFETY OF HOME

One outing I went with a business friend of my father to collect potatoes. It was a long drive to the province of Zeeland. On the way back the traffic stopped as an accident had taken place.

We went to see what had happened and I was shocked: a man was lying on the street in a pool of blood, cursing and screaming: "I don't want to die, I don't want to die." He was swinging his arms like he was fighting something invisible. This left a big impression and I was happy to get back to the safety of home.

I remember my first Holy Communion and keeping the communion bread safely under my tongue for as long as possible, as I wanted to talk to Jesus. Afterwards I would walk in the sunshine and be so happy.

I loved sitting outside, hiding in a wooden crate, watching the lightning and thunder. On the beach, when I was alone at times, I would sit on the dunes to feel the sand and rain blow in my face.

Ever since childhood I wanted to know why and also how things fit together and function. So while sick in bed I took my parents' alarm clock apart. It was never to work again. I was one of those youngsters that pester grown-ups with the question, "but why?" I still pester and probe to discover some amazing answers.

SINTERKLAAS

On December fifth we celebrated the birthday of 'Sinterklaas'. I knew that 'Saint Nicholas' had a workshop as he repaired things and would repaint and re-wallpaper my sister's doll houses.

One thing I particularly remember is that the arm of my sister's doll had come off. The doll disappeared a few weeks before December fifth, but was returned to my sister as a present.

The doll had a big button stitched on its arm that fastened the arm back to the body. We would all holler, "Dank U Sinterklaas!"

At the age of nine I discovered that Saint Nicholas was a bishop in Asia Minor who died long ago in the fourth century.

The 'Sinterklaas' who came to our village was sponsored by the business community to help people buy presents for their children. I was thoroughly disappointed.

Around that time I also learned about evolution in school and I was confused. Were creation and Jesus true, or was it another story like 'Sinterklaas' for little children?

That is how I entered my teen hood; getting more and more confused and further and further away from the faith of a child.

Karel I went on our bicycles to the 'veemarkt' or the cattle market some 22 kilometres from our village. One instance I was chasing a little pig that escaped. These little things are amazingly fast and can squeal and scream like you never heard before.

I watched the farmers sit together, drinking and pulling out their wallets that were chained to their clothes. They took out the banknotes of a thousand guilders which made a big impression on a little fellow whose weekly allowance was 25 cents.

The next village over were the beautiful tulip fields which I used to admire and then once a year was the superb flower parade.

SWIMMING POOL

Due to the 'Iron Works' our village became a town with a swimming pool.

I loved the thrill of diving from the high diving board. When I hit the water I would swim underwater and cross the pool width-wise to the side railing that I could grab just in time to catch my breath.

After doing this for a few weeks the life-guard called me out and asked me to swim the pool lengthwise. I muttered and sputtered and barely made it across. I got a stern warning.

“Son, if I ever see you in the deep end again then I will not allow you to come in the pool anymore whatsoever.”

I was wondering why people always want to do everything by the book as I was having so much fun. Oh well, then I will go swimming in the sea where I could swim easier as the water was salty and it was easier to stay afloat and I loved the beach.

TO A NEW SCHOOL

When I had recovered from my sickness I became overweight and was frequently teased by my schoolmates. This was often settled with the fist. On one occasion I came home crying. It was winter time and I had gotten an ice-ball in my face. From the snow you could make ice-balls, which really hurt.

Mum looked at me and did not say much except, “You go to school in your klompen, so you can settle things yourself.” I never came home crying again.

When I was ten years old I had to change primary schools as there was also a school nearer to my home which I had to join.

Primary school had six grades and I entered into fifth grade. I was still a boy and not yet shooting up as many boys do around that age. One boy in sixth grade was very big and about 13 or 14 years old as he had to retake several grades. He was the big bully of that school and so the first day he started calling me names. The whole school was gathering around us in the playground while he was calling me ‘fatso’. I asked him to say that again. He did, and so next thing we were rolling around in the playground.

Someone had gone to get the head-teacher. He separated us and reprimanded me that this was my first day in a new school and that I should not get into fights.

I told him that he was calling me names which I didn't appreciate. After this confrontation people did not call me 'fatso' anymore.

OVERWEIGHT

At the age of twelve I entered high school, where we had to do gymnastics and take communal showers afterwards which I dreaded as I was embarrassed about my bodyweight. For me being overweight was very humiliating. Before the gym programme started, I went to the beach asking God to take away my fat. On the way back home I stopped in the little chapel and prayed like it was the end of the world. When I left the chapel I did not mind anymore that I was fat. I was just going to enjoy life and I also determined to start jogging. At night when it was dark, I went out with our boxer dog and started running about four to five kilometres through a wooded area, hoping that no one would see me. I kept this up during my teen years.

On Sundays, Karel and I started partaking in the beach runs, which is hundreds of people running for seven or eight kilometres. Karel did not train but would always end as one of the first arrivals. I however, with all my training, would end somewhere in the middle.

A, OR B, OR BOTH?

After the first or second year in high school I had to decide what I wanted to do. A meant mainly languages; besides Dutch it was English, French and German. B meant Math, like Algebra and Geometry, which I liked. Seeing I could not make up my mind I chose both and had to work extra to get good grades.

I am glad that I did as having this basic understanding of the languages and maths helped me later in life to understand certain things and to question other supposed facts.

In the last year of high school I was fifteen. Behind me in the classroom sat an amazing beautiful girl. I was shy, but when I talked with her my heart would skip a beat.

One day she was not in school and the head teacher came to our class and announced that she was not in school because she had a baby. "WHAT??"

She did not really show and from what we learned she did not even know herself. In depth sex-education was practically taboo in those days. She was 15 and the boy who lived in another village was 17. In order to get married they had to get permission from the Queen, seeing the age for marriage was 16 for girls and 18 for boys.

SEX-ED

I think as far as sex-ed is concerned, I was in fourth grade of primary school when the priest showed us a slide of the statues of David and Venus to explain the difference between a man and a woman.

My little friend, not Karel, with whom I walked home, finished the sex-ed for me and told that my father's 'you-know-what' would go into my mother's tummy and then mother would have a baby. I thought this was absolute nonsense. My parents would never, ever do something crazy like that and besides my father was not home when our twin was born. I asked Mum about it and her advice was to not be friends with him anymore.

CHAPTER 2

TEEN-HOOD

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

After finishing school at the age of 15 and scoring well I received my diploma on my 16th birthday, as you could not legally finish school before the age of 16.

The teachers visited my parents to talk about my future and for me to continue studying. Mother encouraged me to study, and her motto was, “Whatever you learn, nobody can take away.”

However father asked, “What do you want to do?”

“Well Dad, besides Dutch, I learned French, German and English, I know a bit of maths and geometry, I did my accountancy so I can start any business. I even learned typing, what else is there to learn that I need in life? If I continue studying I’ll probably end up working for someone else’s company.”

That was just what he wanted to hear, so he said, “Great, join the family business”, which I reluctantly did, as I felt my life was being set on a certain track and was not sure if I wanted to travel that direction.

THE CIRCUS RIDER

One Sunday evening I went to the ‘Kermis’ in a village around ten kilometres from my place. The ‘Kermis’ is a yearly fair with lots of beer flowing. On the way back I was riding home alone on my moped. My friends either had left already or were taking a girl home. I did about 50 km per hour. It was a lonely road with meadows and scattered farms.

I had learned how to ride my moped without my hands holding the handlebar. I had drunk a few too many, so I needed to try that again.

Seeing that went well I then wanted to see how long I could look backwards. In my total stupidity I started looking back; first two seconds and then building it up. The next thing I remember was that I was brought into someone's house with my clothes ripped and a smashed up face as we did not have helmets in those days. My dear parents came again to the rescue and although I don't remember it very well; I think they took me to the doctor. This was way past midnight.

The next morning Karel came to visit me and could barely recognize me as my face was totally swollen out of proportion and my lips were about an inch thick. He started laughing when he saw me and I started laughing, which was extremely painful as it burst my lips. Head wounds only take about a week to heal so the next Saturday I pulled the remaining scabs off my cheeks and it was party time again.

ENGLAND

During the summer when I turned sixteen, Karel and I hitchhiked around England. We took a piece of cardboard and wrote 'Dutch Students' on it. Many people were happy to give us a ride and talk with us.

We visited London and spent time in the Midlands. We went to the pub and drank cider, we had great fun. Some people even thought that I was Scottish as they could not place my accent. That summer I kissed a lovely girl called Sue.

One thing I did not like was her older brother Andy, who kept trying to get us involved and interested in this stuff of moving a glass across the table spelling out letters of the alphabet. It felt weird to me and they were also doing this in the pub.

The next year Andy came to visit Karel and me. When in my room, we sat around the table and he tried to do this glass moving thing again to call up a spirit.

After a little while I asked him to stop as I did not appreciate it.

I never liked things like that; I did not watch films like Dracula and I personally hate these vicious horror films with were-wolves and sickening malformed demons and witches.

Just as I think that junk-food and diet-cokes sweetened with aspartame are addictive, so junk-films are addictive and we start craving the scary thrill. What I learned and what we are not told is that aspartame is a poison that sits in our body and is extremely hard to eliminate. Similar to this, scary horror-films poison us by putting fear in our thought patterns, which are extremely hard to eliminate.

MAKING DEALS WITH GOD

One time I had promised the Lord that if he would not allow a certain thing to happen then for the next year I would pray every evening two 'Our Fathers' and three 'Holy Marys'. I think that I kept my promise and all is well that ends well.

This strengthened my resolve in prayer and that it could work. So I started making little deals with God, "If you do this then I will do that." However when it did not work I would get frustrated and blame God. It somehow seems that in human nature we want to find some scapegoat to blame instead of looking in the mirror to see where we went wrong.

FIRE CRACKER

That New Year's Eve we were throwing firecrackers, which were quite powerful. Often you'd read in the newspaper of an incident that happened with the fireworks; people getting hurt or even losing their sight.

Seeing New Year's Eve was a time to celebrate I had a few too many. At twelve midnight we all went outside to light our fireworks.

I lit a powerful firecracker and instead of throwing the firecracker I threw my lighter away. I realised just in time what I had done and as I dropped the cracker in shock, it exploded.

As you can see my life was marked with little and big miracles of protection... Could it have been my Grandmother's prayers?

FRANCE AND GERMANY

The next year Karel and I went on a holiday to France and Germany. We saw the Sacré-Cœur, Montmartre, Place du Tertre, too many things to name. However this helped me a great deal later in life as I had learned basic French and German in school and could practise it while among the French and Germans.

We had so much fun travelling in an old Citroën -'deux chevaux' also known as 'lelijk eendje' or 'ugly duckling'.

Karel had bought it for a few hundred guilders. As we were driving back from our holiday on the German autobahn a car hit us and broke off one of the fenders.

The driver was Dutch. He was driving up from Italy and was dozing off. The others in their car absolutely did not want the police, or the insurance, involved. They gave us a good amount; it paid for the car and it turned out to be a cheap holiday.

In Germany we would go along the river Rhine to places where the tourist boats moored. The tourists were mainly families and some had amazingly beautiful daughters. However they could not escape Mum and Dad's watchful eye.

The solution was simple; Karel and I would make friends at the table with their parents. When the music started playing we would ask Mum or Dad if we could dance with their daughter and usually permission was granted. Needless to say it was a fun holiday with exciting adventures.

RED LIGHT DISTRICT

When I was seventeen, Karel and I went a few times to the 'Red Light' district in Amsterdam. We went to 'Café Peerenboom' on the Ouwesijds Achterburgwal. We would just go for a drink and talk to people mainly to make friends, as we did not want to spend our money on sexual activities.

Some of the girls were sincerely sweet, but lost. Most of them came from the eastern provinces. They had run away from home and just needed money. I remember one particular girl asking me, "Johan, wil jij mijn pooier zijn?" 'Johan, do you want to be my pimp?' I apologized and declined, but I felt very sorry for the girl, as some of those pimps were rough with the girls.

A CAGED BIRD

This seems a rather shallow life, which it was. But there was another part of me that was searching. On the one hand I loved life, my family and my friends, but on the other hand I was incredibly frustrated with life. One day I was sorting the wooden vegetable crates and started smashing them out of sheer frustration. I remember talking to my mother and explaining to her that if I ever have kids I'd want them to be free, I'd want them to climb mountains, ride horses, travel the world, f*** girls, I'd want them to have complete freedom, not be a caged bird like me. My dear mother was shocked by the f-word, but she took it all by stride and that evening we finished our bottle of wine together. Mum loved me no matter what.

SCULPTURE

I loved doing sculpture. At times I would stay up till two or three in the night cutting and carving. I would let my mind wonder, "I have this piece of wood and no matter what I make of it, it is already in there. I just need to discover the form and bring it to the fore, whether ugly or beautiful."

Then I would think about my life. "Whatever I make of it, it is already there and it is for me to discover. I can make it beautiful or ugly or do nothing and leave it as a lump of wood that can be used as firewood."

I would get such highs and inspiration from carving wood, but there was always that feeling that I was missing the bull's-eye in my life.

At that time I also made my only oil-painting of a sailboat, which I dug out recently to use as logo for my letterhead.

However at weekends we lived it up. Life seemed great, nothing could stop us and the girls liked us. This was also due to the fact that as friends we would not gossip or talk behind their backs.

I DON'T REMEMBER THE INCIDENT

We were a pretty close-knit family with friends and looked out for each other. Now this I learned recently from a close relative as I don't remember the incident. She really liked this one guy from the big city. I was not too sure about him and thought that he was a dodgy fellow and a bit of a slippery fish. Anyway suddenly this fellow disappeared out of her life. Decades later, she met him again and asked him why he had disappeared.

He told her that he was afraid of this relation of hers, which was me, as I had supposedly told him that if he would ever mess her up, I would come after him and break his legs.

After that threat he disappeared. I definitely don't remember saying that but if I did say it then it must have deterred him, as obviously he was planning to mess her up, otherwise he would not have been worried about getting his legs broken.

BOXING

At this time I also got into boxing. My parents got me a punching bag and a boxing ball as well as a skip-rope with which I practiced almost daily.

First I went to IJmuiden to the boxing school of Ome Dirk Beum. After a few months of training I had my first match in Hotel Krasnapolsky in Amsterdam.

I liked standing in the chalk box before the match as it got my adrenaline pumping. I was dressed in red and my opponent was dressed in black. He was the champion of Noord Holland and I was in the ring for the first time.

We boxed two rounds and although I knew that I was not winning, I gave the fellow a good fight. The public was cheering for me like mad, “Hup rooie - Hey red, go red, get him red.”

At the end of the second round Ome Dirk threw in the towel and I was peeved. “Why did you do that? I was having such a good fight.” - “I just wanted to see what you could do and now we are going home to train. Don’t worry, you will be back.”

The next morning Ome Dirk came all the way to my home on his bicycle to talk to Mum and Dad about my boxing career. He encouraged my parents to give me all the needed support, as according to him ‘I had what it took’. My next match was in Eindhoven which I won and got a dinky little cup for this.

The following contest was in IJmuiden close to home. My older brother came together with Dad, who had invited one of his friends to come along and see me. By this time the novelty of my ‘boxing career’ was already wearing off. The night before the match I went to the pub and went to bed late having had a few drinks. The next day was a busy day at the markets; I also had food too late. I was tired by the time I went into the ring around eight or nine in the evening and I wished that I was in bed.

My opponent was a tall skinny fellow with long arms who was light on his feet and I somehow could not get near him as he kept me at arm’s length with his left punches.

It is really a sinking feeling when you know that you are losing because of your own stupidity and lack of preparation and dedication. I tried to give him a few hooks, but it was too little and too late. I lost the match on points. I did not feel so bad for myself because I knew why I had lost. Nevertheless I felt ashamed for my brother and Dad who had brought his friend with him to come see me. I really felt that I had let them down.

After this match, I went to Amsterdam to train with Ome Nelis Bischoop, as he had trained some good champions like Rudi Lubbers.

(Actually a few years later in October 1973, Rudi Lubbers was in the ring against Cassius Clay aka Mohammed Ali. However the “king of the ring” was unable to bring Rudi down and for the full twelve rounds he stayed on his feet, which I think was an astonishing feat.)

However, I quickly realised that Amsterdam was too far from home for me and so my ‘boxing career’ went on the back burner.

After this came the army as I was drafted. I was looking forward to it and liked the idea of being away from home. After some days I had a question about my placement and so I asked the sergeant. He could however not give me a decent answer and instead barked at me with an authoritarian voice, “Now that you are in the army, you do what you are told.”

I was surprised and did not appreciate to be talked down to in that way as I had a legitimate question. So after five or six weeks and causing several difficulties I got discharged.

CHAPTER 3

THE SEARCH IS ON

MORE AND MORE RESTLESS

Although things went well in the business I became more and more restless. There was the 'Action Committee Brazil' and my idols like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro.

More and more, I realised how much injustice there was in the world. I was wondering, 'Why does God allow all this to happen?' I became frustrated with established religion. How could they have such big buildings when there were so many poor people? What was religion anyway? What was God all about? Did he even exist?

Meanwhile I lived it up during the weekends, drinking like anything. I smashed up my parents' car at the age of nineteen. Sometimes I did not even remember how I got home.

The next morning I would check out the car and one time I found tree bark stuck between the tire and the rim.

Somehow the Lord protected me from my incredible foolishness.

I WOULD SLIP OUT

My love life was 'great'. On occasion I would go steady with a girl for several months and then the emotional high would wear off and I thought love was gone.

I remember sitting on the beach with sand in my hands and the more I tried to hold onto it, the more it would run out of my hands, just like my love life. I somehow could not prevent it from slipping away.

I had about four or five great friends and we frequented the discos, barn dances and of course the 'kermis' fairs.

Yet I had those moments that I would step aside.

I would look at my friends questioning, “Why can’t I be like them? They are happy with their life, happy with their job, their salary and even thinking about marriage. Why can’t I be like them?” I would slip out and go for a walk on the beach trying to figure out what I was doing.

“HEY MAN, TRY ME.”

At one kermis in my hometown, one of my friends who would not harm a fly suddenly got a fist in his face from an aggressive dude. I challenged the fellow with, “Hey man, try me.”

Well, I was in for another surprise.

His friend showed up and he was a famous 240 pounds, black belt judoka - karate chopper and champion of Noord Holland. He was about 30 while I was 18 and weighed 155 pounds.

He told his friend, “You take care of the other guy and I will take care of him” pointing his finger at me. This particular fellow was also a bouncer at many a barn dance and when he was at the door people behaved. This confrontation sobered me up quickly and I saw myself already as mincemeat on the floor.

Yet, I decided not to run but face the challenge. The people of my village were gathering around and with his karate war cry of ‘aaahhh’ he swung up his left foot to kick me in the ribs in order to take away my breath. By some miracle I was able to quickly swing my arm over his ankle as he tried to kick me, and here I was holding this big karate chopper’s left foot under my right arm. He was trying to keep his balance having only one foot on the ground. I started walking him back and forth in the village square, while he was trying to keep his balance, bouncing on one leg. The village people were cheering for me, as he was from another village and there was a certain animosity between the populations. What could I do next? I guess by now he was thoroughly humiliated and I made him promise that when I would let go of his leg that the fight was finished.

Thank God he kept his word.

Although the villagers were encouraging me to finish him off, I knew that I was somehow miraculously protected.

The next morning one of the village elders came to our home to reprimand me for not finishing him off. Little did he know that I was so happy and got off without a scratch or a bump.

From this event I learned a good lesson, which I remembered later in life - that if I defend or help the poor or the underdog, then I will get supernatural help, guidance and protection.

THE SEARCH IS ON

While these things were happening on the surface, on the spiritual side things were getting intense and I wanted to know about life. What was I doing here?

Why was I born in a place called Holland with food and needs supplied and not in some place in India, Bangladesh or Biafra where people and children with swollen tummies were starving to death? What was I doing on this earth anyway? Who put me here? Why did love not last? Why the injustices? What was going on? I wanted to know and could not figure it out.

I did not want to bring children into this world as the world was becoming more and more of a mess and anyone with their eyes even the slightest bit open could see that. You did not have to be a soothsayer or prophet for that.

It was around this time that I came home from the pub one Sunday afternoon. The living room was full of people and friends. Suddenly on TV, there was this programme about young people serving Jesus. It caught my attention right away as these guys were talking boldly about Jesus and were living in a commune.

People shared amazing stories of getting off drugs, etc.

I asked everyone to be quiet and told them to watch it with me. My dear mother came and sat next to me as we watched this startling programme.

I waited for the programme to end to see if they would give an address so I could go and visit them, but no contact information was given. That did not help too much except that I was amazed that people could live like the early disciples.

I wanted to give not just money but something of myself so I decided to not smoke and drink alcohol for a month. I donated the money to a 'Food for India' programme. However, later I learned that the ship with the grain for India could not be unloaded in Bombay harbour due to some political discrepancy.

HOW IT STARTED

In our village lived a young couple. I especially liked the husband as he was a young fellow like me with a wife and a baby. They had to get married as she had gotten pregnant. From time to time I also delivered vegetables to their house.

One Saturday evening when delivering an order at their house, the wife being home alone pulled me into the kitchen, locked the door behind me and sexually assaulted me. I was totally unprepared and froze in disbelief not knowing what to do.

Afterwards I was still in the state of shock. Although I did not touch her I felt guilty and such a cheap weakling that I did not have the strength to do anything about it and put a stop to it.

I could not tell her husband or anyone what happened, as I did not want to hurt him or endanger their marriage. This was just before Christmas and being the good church boy that I was, I went to confession the following day.

This was mass confession which I much preferred to individual confession, because then the priest could not ask you questions.

That night before Christmas I got a drop of 'holy water' from the priest who was walking around with a bucket and a big brush trying to spray everyone. So with this drop of water this incident was forgiven and forgotten..... or was it?

Could a drop of water erase what had befallen me?

I WAS LIVID

After church I could not take it any longer. I went to the beach totally frustrated and sick of myself and thinking about what had happened. It was in the evening around nine o'clock and it was pitch dark on the beach.

I was furious. "God, where the #*@#X&* are you? If you are real, come out and fight me! #*@#X&* or tell me what the f*** I am doing in this world. If it is only to make money and mess up people's marriage then my life is useless. Show yourself to be a man, come out and fight me or tell me &#*\$# what I am doing here and why everything is so screwed up, including myself. COME OUT!!!"

Torrents of curses rolled off my tongue on that dark beach. I had a big piece of wood in my hand and was livid. Did he come?

No he did not. To let out my pent-up frustrations and emotions I started beating on the sand with all my might.

THE SHOCK OF MY LIFE

Suddenly, as clear as day in a flash of a second I turned into a Roman soldier who with insane fury was beating on the bruised back of Jesus. Oh no, I was angry at God but not at Jesus as I liked him because he helped people. All I could utter was, "I am so sorry. I did not want to hurt you."

I did not see his face but I knew that it was him. Here is no mistake possible and it is just as real to me now as it was then. It was more real than the fact that I am writing this or that you are reading it. Here I was, letting out all my frustrations on his damaged back. He was not bound to a post. If he had been anything like me, he would have turned around and socked me one that would have sent me spinning through space, never to return. However he just gave me his battered, bleeding back and it was like he said in that flash, 'Get it all out, just get it all out.'

Then and there I knew that he was the purest form of love.

He understood my frustrations; he was entirely not like me. He was total love and complete understanding.

It dawned on me that the world was in a mess, not because of God but because of selfishness, including my twisted egotism. Was I sorry? I despised myself utterly for blaming him for the things I was guilty of, I felt like the cheapest cheat. I asked him, no I pleaded with him to forgive me. Tears and more tears were rolling down my cheeks. Then my tears of remorse turned into tears of joy, and I knew that I was forgiven, as peace flooded in. I knew that I had a place in his heart. I knew that I had found a friend, who would love me no matter what. The intense frustrations were gone and I had inner, complete peace.

The experience made a deep impression and for about three days I walked on a spiritual high and a desire to do something positive for mankind. I could not talk this over with anyone, because as soon as I tried to hint about what happened I felt uneasiness from the person, so I left it and kept it for myself. This special feeling left me after some time and I slowly got back to my old frustrated self. I started mixing it all up again; church, religious organizations, Christianity and Jesus. Yet I knew that no religious leader could have taken my idiotic frustrations like Jesus did and deep down I knew that he was different.

FROM A GOOD NEST

I started dating this beautiful girl who all the boys in the surrounding area were eyeing. My parents adored her as she was stable, polite and 'came from a good nest'.

She would be a good balance in my restless life. My parents were even thinking about marriage etc., and I think that Dad was planning to get us a house.

Off to the beach again to gather my thoughts. "Is this going to be my life? No, I can't get locked in." I decided to break off the relationship to everyone's dismay and to her and my heartbreak.

MARKETS

My older brother and I did weekly markets in different places. It was hard work, good money and it was also fun. We would yell as market boys do, to sell our fruit and vegetables. Dad was sharp with buying in the wholesale markets so we could sell our produce for reasonably cheap prices.

On Mondays, we had very busy market and served fruit and vegetables with about six or seven people manning the booth.

The stall next to us was 'Ome Piet', who sold foam rubber for mattresses and couch-cushions and he also enjoyed a drink.

Seeing Monday was not a good day to sell foam, this gentleman also enjoyed his bottle of jenever and was at times found sleeping on one of his foam mattresses.

HE ARRIVED ON A BICYCLE

One particular Monday morning Ome Piet was not there and his booth was assigned to another older gentleman.

He arrived on a bicycle and put up a big sign "Jesus is Alive".

At first we made some stupid jokes amongst ourselves. Yet something inside of me made me admire and respect this man. He reminded me of what the early apostles must have been like.

When most of the customers had left and it was time to clean up, I spoke with him. I was impressed with his gentle manners. He gave me a little 30 or 40 page booklet to read. It was called "The Healing of Betty Baxter". I had only read one or two books partly since I left school.

I did not like reading as I felt it was a waste of time. But that night when work was done and dinner finished I went early to my room, closed the door and started reading. In the booklet she describes how Jesus touched her and healed her spine. Incredible! This was not possible! Again those tears. I had experienced Jesus but not in any way that she was describing. The following week the gentleman named 'Ome Dirk' gave me

another book called “Cross and the Switchblade”, about a preacher who worked in New York among the street gangs. It was fascinating for me to read about these amazing people who had a complete life change. But where did this leave me?

HOW NOT TO ENJOY LIFE

During a discussion Ome Dirk explained that I should read the Bible. Now for me the Bible was only read in church with stories about the life of Jesus and it was only for the priests to read.

My mother had explained to me, that many people had gone crazy while reading the Bible and that it was a guide book for people on, ‘how not to enjoy life’.

That had cured me to ever want to read it, or even go near it as I wanted to enjoy life. Yet my parents had this big two part Bible sitting on the shelf which they had bought from a missionary on one of his fundraising trips.

He worked in Indonesia and had sold Bibles which had these fascinating illustrations by Gustave Doree in there, to support his work. My parents could not say no to him as he was a missionary who grew up together with them in the same street.

CHAPTER 4

GETTING ANSWERS

“YOU, WHAT? NO, COME ON.”

I decided to take it off the shelf and started reading. This particular Bible was explaining creation in such a way that God could have created the world by the evolution process.

I did not care anymore how the world came about and how long ago it all began; whether it was 6000 or 40 million years, which was the guesstimate at that time.

All I wanted was answers for today how to live my life and what I should do, besides making money? I was fascinated and I started getting answers to my questions of why and wherefore and what was happening and where we were going? It became all so clear. Being a typical Dutch fellow and having my two feet on the ground I was wondering at times if this was real. Yet more and more peace came while reading. Even on Saturday night when my friends would come to pick me up I would at times prefer to stay home. “I’ll stay home.” - “But why, what’s wrong?” - “Nothing, I am reading.” - “You never read. What are you reading that is so important?” - “I am reading the Bible.”

“You, what? No, come on man, this is not where it is at.”

However I kept reading and getting more and more answers to my questions about life. I also started attending different churches and visiting home study groups.

It dawned on me that I had eternal life and I could never lose that again. Never again would I have to worry if there was life after death. Never again did I have to worry about whether I would end up in heaven or hell. This was bliss; this was heaven on earth. I knew where I came from and where I was going.

I felt solid ground under my feet and was no longer trying to stay afloat in the morass and bog of humanity, in which I felt myself so often sinking away. Suddenly, here I stood on firm ground, no longer treading muck trying desperately to keep myself from drowning. This was big news for me and I had to tell others.

I had a discussion with one person and told him what had happened to me. He explained that he once felt like that too, but then after many years he felt differently. Well I did not want it to become different. I wanted to keep this happiness or dump it altogether.

HE WAS JUST UP MY ALLEY

I remembered that as a child I would go along door to door with my father and his first words to a customer were always: "What shall we eat and what shall we drink?"

Here I read in Matthew chapter six, "*say not, what shall we eat or what shall we drink*". Okay, what shall I do then?

"For your Father knows that you have need of these things".

Okay what about trusting God for my eating and drinking? What about striking out like one of those early disciples?

No, that would not be impossible. Where would the food come from? Hey, but then what about men like Peter and John? God supplied for them too. Jesus became clearer and was different from what I always thought he was.

I read that when he came to the church or the synagogue, he would cast out devils or get in a fuss with the rabbi or priest. Hey, he was cool; he was just up my alley.

He obviously was not the holy saint that I had seen in the pictures and statues of him, where he looked more dead than alive with little white flowers growing between his toes.

I thought he was amazing when he whacked all the business and money men single-handedly out of the temple. But wait a minute, my heart was supposed to be the temple of God.

Would I allow him to whack all the money and business out of my heart so I could be free to follow him; or would I allow the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches to choke out my fruitfulness?

I was shocked to read about him being in the main temple in Jerusalem (you could compare this with the St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome) and shouting aloud. I liked him, because I used to yell in the market trying to get people's attention.

He was radical and whether he was politically correct or not, he stood his ground.

One thing I really liked him for was how he treated the woman who had extra-marital activities. While the good law-abiding citizens were ready to stone her, he treated her with respect and refused to go along with them and condemn her. I loved to read how he put the hypocrites in their place. I was astonished at the wisdom that was put in such simple human words.

His first recorded miracle was about 800 bottles of wine for those party animals that had already finished their quota at that wedding. It says that there were six pots of two to three firkins a piece; that averages out to fifteen firkins. (1 firkin = 40.9 litres. $15 \times 40.9 = 613$ litres) This is more than 800 bottles of the very best wine. I wish I that I had been there.

I was amazed how he totally fearlessly approached that monstrous hulk that had everyone in the area terrorized and in fear and trembling. This character could break strong chains and lived in the graves at the cemetery.

Yet, Jesus fearlessly walked right up to him and said, 'What's your name?' with the intention to help that poor, frustrated, mentally unhinged, demon-haunted, wretched piece of humanity.

This had nothing to do with religion.

I saw how people mixed it all up, thinking that Jesus had come to start a new religion called Christianity and that this religion was Jesus. But nothing could be further from the truth.

It was so clear to me that he shattered the religious boundaries and exposed religious hypocrisy, that's why the 'good' religious people had to eliminate him in the most cruel fashion.

His aim was to lift us high above the quagmires of religious division. His desire was to connect us back to God, to the all-encompassing cosmic Energy in its purest form: Love!

He made God's love visible to us by healing people physically and spiritually curing their mental health issues; he raised dead ones and showed forgiveness to the sinners that were despised and 'should have been sent to hell'.

DECISION TIME

But where did this leave me? I was selling fruit and vegetables and making good money. I was a product of my parents, my surrounding, my teachers and my friends. Mother arranged a meeting with the local priest. He was a real nice young fellow from Amsterdam, who from time to time came to our home to play cards with us. So we talked and I explained what was happening in my life. He listened and explained that he had similar experiences, which had led him to become a priest. He was a very precious man.

I spoke with other business people who were allegedly 'born-again-Christians'. They told me that these feelings of wanting to serve the Lord will wear off once you become more mature.

I looked at them but was not very impressed as to me they were successful businessmen that did not smoke and did not drink and used the Bible to make themselves feel superior to 'the sinners'.

I THOUGHT 'I WAS SPECIAL'

At the same time I thought that 'I was special', because I started to understand the meaning of life. I was feeling quite good about myself and thought that God must think that I am special and that he must be very happy with me.

You see, by now I was smoking less and less from quite a few rollup cigarettes (you get about forty out of a packet) to only two pipes a day.

Rather smug and pleased with myself I sat down in a comfortable chair on the 11th of November in 1971, 1.15 p.m. and was thinking how happy God must be with me. I had lit my pipe and asked God if he had anything to tell me. I cracked a booklet somewhere in the middle. I told God that whatever I'd read first, that this was what he wanted to tell me.

I opened the book and a verse screamed at me, *"You are of your father the devil and the lusts of your father you will do."* (John 8:44)

For a moment I went into a state of shock. I grabbed my pipe and threw it in the "kolenkit", or coal bin and said, "That? Never! Never, ever, never will I be of the devil. The devil is not my father, God is. I belong to him."

So I stopped smoking and determined right there and then in my heart to serve him. Never in my life was I offered so many cigarettes as in the coming weeks. Everybody wanted to test me and see if I would stand my ground.

Seeing I had tried to stop smoking several times, everyone expected me to cave in as I had done previously. This time was different, as I had made a promise to God.

TENSION WAS MOUNTING

My values started shifting and my dear mother was convinced that I was going overboard and had left the true faith. Things were going from bad to worse and tension was mounting in the home. Father would go to the pub once a week to play pool.

One of those nights he came back after he had a few drinks. He found my mother in bed crying over me. For Dad who always had the final word this was just too much. He came out of his bedroom and started banging on my bedroom door. This happened way past midnight.

That night before going to bed I did something which I had never done before; for some unknown reason I had locked my bedroom door. I woke up and went to the door.

Now mind you, you did not want to mess around with Dad. His hands were strong and one night when we had a burglar in the yard my older brother and I had to restrain Dad, as otherwise he might have killed the person, whose head was gushing with blood, in a matter of seconds.

Needless to say I reluctantly opened the door, "Lord, please protect me." When he barged into the room, he somehow stumbled across the doorstep. I was in my briefs and did not want to wait around till he got up. I stepped over him, went downstairs and left the house. Here I was standing in my briefs in the icy rain. This was again just before Christmas and it was freezing cold. Thank God my younger brother threw me a T-shirt, a sweater and a pair of his jeans out the window, although these were a few sizes too small, I was very thankful.

In my room I heard the big statue of Jesus, which I had previously picked up from somewhere, smash into a thousand pieces. Where to now? By now it was three o'clock in the morning and I was walking in the icy rain. I should have been miserable, but I was happy. Was I going bananas to be happy when, according to the circumstances, I should be depressed?

Maybe I could now live my own life? Maybe I could serve God after all? I hitchhiked to Alkmaar where the preacher of the church that I was attending lived.

When I knocked at his door around four and told him my story. He was shocked.

For him I was a hot potato that he wanted to get rid of as soon as possible. He took me in his car to the little house of Ome Dirk and his wife Tante Agie. This was the older gentleman from the market. They had a little house on the side of the dike where I stayed for the next two days.

OME DIRK

I learned that Ome Dirk used to be a drunk and a wife-beater, hating his wife for her faith. She was always self-righteously praying for her bad husband to change. She thought he was a bad husband and he lived up to her expectations.

Till one day she read the verse *“love your enemies”* - “Lord, my husband is my enemy and I don’t love him.” - “So then you need to change and love him.” - She changed, became concerned for him and was even loving towards him behind closed doors. This went on for some time.

One day she told Dirk, “Tomorrow I will leave your food in the fridge and you just have to heat it up.” - “Where are you going?” She was hesitant to answer, as Dirk usually exploded.

“I am going to an evangelistic meeting.”

Dirk was quiet. “How are you going?” - “With the bus.” - There was a long pause - “What if I take you?” - “That would be nice.”

Dirk was checking things out from the back of the hall. The preaching was going way over his head.

He told me, “As I was looking at the stage, Jesus appeared out of nowhere on the stage, and he stretched his arms out to me. I started crying and that night I gave my life to him, that was only a few years ago. I felt that I had wasted my whole life, so at least these last few years I wanted to do something for others.”

“Thank you Ome Dirk and Tante Agie, I am forever indebted to you for coming out to the market and telling me.” Two days of heaven; simply being free and reading. Ome Dirk talked to me to honour my father and mother and to return home.

The next day was Christmas and I went back home. Father did not say much. It was not exactly a Merry Christmas for our family. It was a quiet dinner and nobody said much.

BAPTISED

After Christmas in the first week of January, I got baptized.

I invited friends and family to come as this was a very important day for me but it seemed they had other priorities.

At the swimming pool where I got baptized I took off my worldly possessions, my ring and my watch. I went in just like when I was born, having only a white robe. The preacher submerged me and I jumped back up elated. I had now officially given my life back to God. It was that same feeling that I had when I kissed a girl for the first time and fell head over heels in love. Thankfully I saw my parents in the back of the crowd and although it must not have been easy for them I was glad that they were there. On that day the pastor asked me to sign a membership paper. I said that I would gladly sign it under the condition that if I would find a church where I could serve Jesus better I would go there without hesitation. This has been my principle ever since. I had given my life to Jesus and this was the start of my journey with my Creator.

TIME FOR A COMPLETE CHANGE

I've never liked people with an air of superiority, giving these controlling vibes of 'do it or else'. I used to think God was like that. However I learned on the beach that night that God is the total opposite. In his love I found the freedom that I always wanted. Everyone should know that there is a reason for living; that life is just a test to see if we will behave like human beings who should be motivated by love for God and concern for others. Finally I understood that God is justice and he will reward everyone according to how we pass these tests here on earth, not according to the possessions we have, or our political and financial position, nor our social status.

My secret prayer was, "Lord, who can teach me? Lead me and I will follow, show me the way, how to walk, where to go and how to serve you."

CHAPTER 5

THE CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

On Tuesday the 25th of January 1972, I used our truck to help the pastor and his family move from Alkmaar to Amsterdam.

When we were done the person who helped with the moving asked me if we could go and visit the 'Jesus People'. I liked the idea as until that point I had mainly been meeting with older believers. We parked the truck at Leidseplein in Amsterdam.

As I was getting out of the truck there was a young man sitting next to where I parked the truck shooting some kind of drugs with a needle in his arm. What was his life story? That could have been me. Where would I be now if I had been raised by different parents? "Lord, what can I do to help people like this? What is my role and what do you want me to do to help?"

On the door was a painting of a shepherd with some sheep. Knock, knock. "Yes come in." - "Wow", I thought, "these people are friendly." I somehow felt at home. There were a lot of visitors; freaks and hippies of all nationalities, students, a prostitute, a business man, refugees from everywhere, Peruvians from the Andes mountains with their flutes, travellers, and so on. A person came to talk to us; he showed me a verse from the Book of Acts chapter two, pointing at these words, "*All that believed were together had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need.*" - "Would you like to do that? You see we are living like the early disciples lived. You can join us if you want to."

I was not convinced, but then the atmosphere was charged with positive vibes and I did feel at home.

We were some of the last visitors to leave.

WHEELING AND DEALING

I went to bed past midnight, but for some reason or another I could not fall asleep. Should I join these people, or should I go to Bible School, what should I do? I was restless and sleep did not come. Okay, I need to sleep, I know something, “Lord, if you want me to join these people then let my watch be off my wrist in the morning.”

This I thought would get me off the hook as I had a watch with a leather strap that I only took off when I showered. This watch was practically part of me and I never lost it, not even when I had gotten in a scuffle.

Ahhh, sleep at last.

I woke up rather early around six o'clock and there was something between my toes. I reached down under the blankets to see what it was...

I was shocked and wide awake; my watch was between my toes. “It must have been an angel that took off my watch in the night. Oh Lord, do you really want me to join these people?”

I was still questioning, so then the confusion started, “Hey, you went to sleep with that idea of the watch in your head, so in your sleep you subconsciously took it off.”

Okay, was it an angel, or was it me? I needed to know. I jumped out of bed, got on my knees. “Okay Lord, I know something else, if you really, and I mean really want me to join these people, then let the door of my mother’s bedroom open now.” It was 6.05 and mom slept every morning till 7 or 7.30, so this time I knew I was safe. I barely finished formulating this proposal and the door of mother’s bedroom opened, “Johan, ben je wakker?” ‘Johan, are you awake?’ - “Yes Mum, bright awake.”

No more wheeling and dealing. This was it.

“Yes, Lord, I will go and serve you. You show the way. I will start with these people in Amsterdam. Please work it out with my family and have your way. I am willing and ready to go.”

JUMPING IN THE DEEP END

I had decided to serve the Lord now not only in words, but in actions. I opened the shop around eight to get the day started. At nine-thirty I had breakfast with my parents.

“Dad and Mum, I have decided to serve the Lord. I need to follow him and I would like to move to Amsterdam to work with these people that I visited last night.”

“Are you sure?” - “Yes, I have made up my mind.”

“But, what about the business?” - “My brother does much better than me.” - “Okay, we need a replacement. As soon as we can find a replacement you can go.” My Mother was slightly more emotional and it was harder on her. At one low point she even blurted out something about wondering if she had been a bad mother. God bless her dear heart.

“Mum, how can you say that, you are my mother; remember how you wanted to become a nun to serve God, because of you being such a good mother and me having such a good childhood, I want to help people who have much less in life than me. I don't want to become a monk or priest because I like girls too much, but I want to serve God, that much I have decided.”

Every spare second I prayed for my parents. Two days later Mum asked, “Are you sure that you want to go through with this?” - “Yes, Mum. My mind is made up.” - “Okay then.” Mum leaves in the car and she comes back with a backpack, an electric shaver and a pair of corduroy trousers and jacket. By this time it was Friday evening. “Why don't you pack, then and I will take you to the train station tomorrow morning to go to Amsterdam.”

TO AMSTERDAM

The next morning, on Saturday, January 29th, 1972, Mother drove me to the station. She obviously had consoled herself with the fact that I was going. “Dag moeder.” - “Dag jongen.”

The train took about 30 minutes.

Once in Amsterdam I stopped at the corner coffee-shop where I ordered two cups of coffee and two pieces of apple pie, as I reasoned that I would never have these again. This was “mijn galgenmaal” ‘my last meal or wish before going to the gallows.’ I knew my life was about to take a drastic turn and it was no more, “Johan does what he wants anyway.”

Finished with my coffee I walked to the front door and rang the bell. Boy, was I in for a surprise.

Everyone was giving me hugs and more hugs. “Wow, come in!” - “Why all this excitement just for me?” - “Well, we were just praying and talking about how we needed another Dutch volunteer and as we finished the doorbell rang and here you are.” - “Well, I hope that I am volunteer material.”

“Don’t worry, God can use anybody.”

“We are going to Dam Square to see if we can be of help to anyone.” - “Okay great, I will come along.” I talked with travellers from all over the world. Especially two boys were very thankful to have met me, and one came with us to the house to see how we were living.

Soon the word started spreading, “Johan is gone to Amsterdam and is with the hippies. He must have gone mad.”

I DON’T THINK THIS IS THE PLACE

Two days later the minister who I had helped to move the week before came to visit me. “You can serve the Lord anywhere you want, but I don’t think this is the place for you. A lot of these people here were on drugs and you never took any drugs. Come with me, maybe you should first go to Bible College.”

I talked it over with another Dutch brother and he said that I should go and find out where I wanted to be.

From Amsterdam the preacher drove me to Den Haag where we visited a Christian centre. There was a big poster of an evangelist’s face and next to it was written, ‘Jesus Saves’.

I was reminded of the story where the people wanted to crown Jesus to be the king and he hid himself. When looking at the poster the thought crossed my mind, 'Well, if they want to crown this preacher king then I don't think he will go in hiding like Jesus did.' After that we went to the Bible school. Although people were polite they kept their distance and none of the warm hugs that I had received in Amsterdam.

As we returned to Amsterdam in the pastor's car later that afternoon, it started thundering, storming and raining. Suddenly all the traffic came to a grinding halt. We were stuck for at least an hour before the traffic slowly started moving again.

A huge tree was blown down in the storm and blocked the road. As clear as anything it came to me, "Do you want to be a big tree and one day block the flow of my spirit, when instead you could simply be like one of these little bushes in the middle that divide the lanes and protect from the oncoming traffic? If you continue on with the team in Amsterdam then you will be like one of those bushes, with all the roots and branches intertwined and no identity of your own, but you will be very useful for my kingdom. However, you could also become a big tree as people will like you, but one day your bigness will become your fall and you will obstruct the flow of my spirit."

The answer was clear: "Let me be little bush."

I wrote to my last beautiful girlfriend inviting her to come with me and be free to serve God with me and live like the gypsies, not bound but free. I never heard from her again.

Except my one dear friend Karel, none of my other friends came to visit. He wanted to see with his own eyes what had really happened to me. "Karel, you can do this too." - "Johan it's okay, I can see that you are happy, but I don't think this is for me."

NOSTALGIC

It really was the end of my former life and the start of a new life.

I wondered if it was really all gone. I had passed a bar and could feel the drawing power of the ‘zware shag’, black roll-up tobacco mixed with the Heineken beer smell. We used to sing, “Al zitten we boven op een mijn, dan zullen mijn laatste woorden zijn, ‘Ooh Heineken bier.’” - ‘Even if we sit on top of a landmine then my last words will be ‘Ooh Heineken beer’.’

Honestly, is that what I really wanted to do with my life; allow myself to be blown up by a landmine with a glass of beer in my hand, singing, ‘Ooh Heineken beer’? I did not regret the path that I had chosen; I was just nostalgic for the past, but what past? Did I really want the frustrations back? No, that never!

I asked the Lord to give me his strength to, ‘*Endure hardness as a good soldier*’. (2Timothy 2:3) I always admired the green berets and wanted to be one of those tough storm-troopers. Now was my chance to grow up and become a real soldier, not by killing people for fatherland, but saving and helping people for my true Fatherland of my Father in heaven. I had hoped for some sympathy from the people I was with, but the only response I got was, “Don’t feel bad. If you don’t think that this life is for you then you should find a place where you think it will be easier for you.” For the people that I lived with it was only an honour to serve. Good, Yes! Deep down I coveted this Spartan dedication.

BRAINWASHING

I didn’t know what to do with myself in the early morning hours as my body clock was set for six or six-thirty while the others woke up at eight o’clock. I had one or two hours to myself, so I used the bathroom as a quiet place to memorise scriptures. One of the main scriptures that I memorised was:

“And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not.” (Deuteronomy 8:2)

Before anybody got up in the morning and wanted to use the toilet I had been memorising. This helped me later in life to hang on when things got tough. Sometimes I had learned by as many as six scriptures by breakfast time. While others were getting up, trying to pry their eyes open and scratching their head, I already had a good start to the day.

MUCH TOO STUBBORN

Several people came by to give very interesting talks and classes. At times I wondered if I was getting brainwashed. I decided that my brain could use a little washing and I was delighted to learn more and expand my horizons.

Upon one occasion when visiting my family, my older sister asked me: "Johan, are you being brainwashed?" However she right away answered her own question, "No, you are much too stubborn. Nobody could possibly ever brainwash you."

I realised that God was becoming a Friend that understood me and loved me unconditionally. He did not demand with "Do it or else". He only requested me. I didn't see him as my boss but more like my co-worker, my right hand, my friend who would bail me out when I got into trouble.

It's funny but somehow trouble seemed to come naturally to me.

WHY PRAY SO MUCH?

One morning someone suggested, "Let's go outside and get some fresh air and do some exercise; some bending, and some stretches." - "Okay, sounds like fun." Once outside he said, "Let's first pray so that we won't hurt ourselves."

I thought, "This praying business is getting a bit too much. Why pray for this? I am healthy and don't need to pray for these simple exercises." I did not really agree and pray along.

We did a few jumping jacks then some bending, and suddenly my back froze. I could barely stand straight. Was it a pinched nerve? A slipped disk? "Should the doctor check him?"

I did not need a doctor because I knew full well why my back went out. I had a weak back for the next ten years. Every time I felt my back hurting, I stopped and thanked the Lord that it was not more serious and for reminding me to acknowledge and include Him. I learned that if I prayed and my request was granted that it made me very thankful.

Much like when a child requests something from his parents, if his request is granted he is thankful. However because he lives in the same house as them, he can also just take it without asking and if he does not get caught then he can call himself "Lucky".

This child won't be a very pleasant person to have in the house. He will harden himself against his parents and in order to justify himself he will teach his siblings to do the same, "Why ask? It is ours for the taking." That offspring will most likely not inherit their parents' estate, but it will probably be given to the ones who respect their parents' property and wishes.

I realised how much prayer had to become part of my life. Not the ritual prayers that I learned before, but a simple acknowledgement, just like you would acknowledge the wishes of your best friend.

These words of "*Your maker is your husband*" (Isaiah 54:5) sum up his love and care for me.

If I get a dry period and there seems to come a distance between us, I confess to him that I am just a very simple man that is bound by these four dimensional walls or parameters and that I cannot audibly hear his voice, nor physically see him. I ask him to be merciful on my life, because I know deep down in my heart that I can easily hurt people and mess up badly with my selfishness.

CHAPTER 6

NETHERLANDS AND GERMANY

THE JOURNEY

One thing that helped me was that I started seeing life as a journey where the end destination is heaven. However to get there I have to travel by different means.

Sometimes I might have to walk alone along a dark path, or I board a train for long journey with many other passengers; although the conductor might not be perfect and I have not seen the train-driver, yet I know that I am progressing to where I am going as “my Guide” is at my side. Other times I might get a ride in a comfortable limousine. However, from time to time I might have to pass through hostile territory with people throwing dirt at me. Yet, as my life progresses, so does my journey and my destination is coming closer. I am learning to embrace the good, the bad and the ugly and try to see the difficulties as an opportunity to learn, but don't worry perfection is still a long ways off. Sometimes my reaction is still the exact opposite of the quote, ‘Treat all the disasters as incidents and none of the incidents as disasters’.

SHE BELLOWED THROUGH THE HOSPITAL

During this time in Amsterdam there was a German girl who came almost daily for classes. Seeing that I spoke German she came usually looking for me. She was the tough type, overweight, dressed in army clothes and boots, short orange coloured hair, doing drugs and several front teeth missing, an amazing sight.

One day she comes running in the house totally disturbed to say the least. She had gone to the hospital due to a pain in her back.

The doctors had discovered a malignant, quick spreading tumour. She was told that she had only one month left to live.

My response was, “My dear, if you give your life back to the One who gave it to you in the first place, then you can trust him to take care of you. However if you prefer to waste your life away, which to be frank is what you are doing right now, then I honestly don’t give you much hope.”

“Johan, will you pray with me.” - “I think it is your turn to pray.” She prayed and her prayer was very sincere. I asked that the Lord would respect her prayer and heal her.

Two days later she returned and exclaimed, “The doctors can’t believe it as the tumour has not grown. It has stopped but please keep praying as it is still there.”

“I will pray for you, but now the Lord expects you to pray.”

In the month that she should have died she was totally healed.

The doctors were amazed, and with her loud German accent she bellowed through the hospital, “You don’t know how I got healed, aber I know. Jesus hat mich genesen, Jesus healed me.”

The Lord in his mercy saw fit to heal her. After her healing I never saw her again, but later I heard that she was playing in a band singing songs about faith, hope and love.

FOOD AND EXTRA

Around this time it was clear that we needed to get better vegetables and fruit. I went back to the wholesale vegetable market in Amsterdam, where my family bought vegetables. I explained what I did and if they would be willing to help with their produce. “Is that really you, Johan?” - “Yep, it’s me alright.” Most were happy to help and give. We were given so much that we were able to serve free meals in Vondelpark.

During the summer months we camped in Vondelpark where we daily fed many young people, travelling hippies and students from all over the world.

Around two thousand people slept in Vondelpark and sometimes the smoke was so thick from the marijuana that you would almost get high just walking around and talking to people. The police was very happy with us being there. They had this feeling that when we were present things would not get out of hand.

THE DRUG SCENE

One sunny day I was talking with travellers on Damrak; that is the main street between Amsterdam Central Station and Dam Square. This fellow who was selling drugs comes up to me asking, "Hey man, what shit have you got?" - "Why do you think I got that stuff?" - "Your pupils are so wide man; I can see that you are really high, you must have some good shit, man."

"I've got Jesus man, that's why I am high. He is no ordinary dope. He's really cool and he gets you high for free." He did not want what I had and I felt sorry for the fellow. Seeing drugs was a daily need, there were quite a few dealers around.

One such dealer was Eddy, a six foot fellow from the Caribbean. His sister wanted to work with us. Eddy was not pleased with his sister's decision and he came over one evening to talk her out of this crazy 'God delusion'. It did not take long to realise that Eddy was a searching soul lost in selling drugs and making money hand over fist. We talked and I explained our life. His obnoxious behaviour melted and he started asking questions.

Before the evening was gone Eddy received the Lord. He was back the next few days for classes. He was changing rapidly.

One day I walked to the Post Office to pick up mail and Eddy came along. While walking and talking I passed out some pamphlets. We passed one young man who looked so lost. As we had passed him Eddy was surprised and asked me "Should you not have given one to this fellow?" - "Here you take it and run after him." He grabbed it from my hand and came back smiling. "Please, Johan come and talk to my friends."

Soon it became clear that Eddy's friends were happy making money. Eddy owned a house in Amsterdam and he decided to let us use his house. He spoke Spanish and to get away from his friends, the drug-world and his connections he moved to Spain where he started his new life and ministry. He is a man I have admired all my life. The Lord blessed him with a beautiful family and ministry in Spain and he let us use his house in Amsterdam.

BANANA BUS MIRACLES

A team of us young people went up to Groningen in an old yellow English bus "the banana bus" as we called it seeing it looked somewhat like a big banana. I was the driver as I was the only one with a valid truck license. We had very little money with us but trusted that the Lord would take care of us. When driving through Drente around nine o'clock at night the bus ran out of fuel so I parked it on the side of the road and we went to sleep in the bus for the night as we had mattresses in the back half of the bus. Little did I realise that I had blocked a farmer's driveway.

The farmer woke us up early in the morning to move the bus so he could pass with his tractor. All of us got out of the bus to push and clear the way. The farmer could not believe his eyes when he saw these long haired hippies pushing the bus.

I explained to the farmer that we were on our way to Groningen to teach students about the negative effects of drugs and to inspire their faith in God, but that we had run out of fuel.

He went back into the farmhouse and told his wife to make us a good breakfast. She made bacon and eggs for all of us and was fascinated with the stories of several young people forsaking drugs in order to teach others the dangers of drugs and how God could help give them the strength to, "Say no to drugs".

The farmer called a relative who owned a petrol pump. The man was happy to fill up our tank and by ten o'clock that morning we were on our way.

HEAD ON COLLISION

One time, on that same trip, we came back from a speaking engagement. It was night and raining. I was driving on a country road with my co-driver while the rest of our team was sleeping in the back. On the continent you drive on the right hand side, but in the bus the steering wheel was also on the right hand side. Next to the road was a deep ditch and the road had no shoulder. There was an oncoming truck and suddenly as we were close another truck swung out from behind him and came straight at us full speed. There was no way of escape and this was to be a head on collision. I don't remember anymore what happened, except for the command of "Jesus help!" I swung the wheel some direction and expected the bus to roll over or dive into the ditch. We swerved going about 60 kilometres per hour. However when the trucks had raced past us we were standing on the left side of the road. As of this day I still don't understand what happened, but there we were unharmed on the opposite side of the road. The truck that overtook had pulled over and the driver ran back to see what happened. He was totally shaken up and could not believe that we were fine. My co-driver and I stopped to thank the Lord for his angels watching over us. The others in the back of the bus stirred a bit but never woke up.

THE CONCERT WAS CANCELLED

After a few months in Amsterdam I travelled to Germany where I lived for about six months. We attended a pop-festival in the "Augusthalle". The main performers were a big band that I liked. I wanted to talk to them, as they had written a beautiful song and I thought that they might be spiritually receptive. My friend and I managed to get into the main hall for free. Just as we got in, someone threw a beer bottle on stage and a big fight broke out, which involved the band.

Needless to say it was chaos and the concert was cancelled.

We took advantage of the confusion and as the band left the stage we walked right along with them to the dressing rooms.

I got to speak with the lead singer about how there were tens of thousands of young people looking for something. They were coming to see them hoping to find some truth or some kind of an answer in their performance.

I explained to him that if he involved the Lord in his songs and performance that he could give a real good message to his audience who were practically eating out of his hands. His only answer was: "We ain't bad, man. We don't do drugs or that stuff. Nah, we don't need Jesus." I sat down with the rest of the band and staff and talked to them. Some of them were shaken up by the event and were all ears, wanting me to pray with them.

OLYMPICS 1972

While in Germany, besides the concert, I hitchhiked down to Munich to attend the 1972 Olympics. Young people had travelled there from all over Europe. I had an amazing time talking to people, especially after the terrorist incident that happened with the killing of the eleven Israeli athletes people were very open to talk and listen to the message.

I was able to attend the Frankfurter Buchmesse, or the Frankfurt Book-fair. Here were different alternative groups advertising in front of the main building.

I remember having fiery discussions with these communist guys, calling me a "doped idiot." - "Who is a doped idiot? You preach, 'share your wealth or we take it at the point of a gun' I share what little I have! You say, 'We will take what is yours', I say, 'Give and it shall be given unto you. Share what you have and God will take care of you.'" Nevertheless they were tough.

CHAPTER 7

BACK TO AMSTERDAM

HEIDELBERG

After that some young people invited me to go with them to Heidelberg, which was a university town with thousands and thousands of students and youth. They had a big German bus in which you could sleep and cook and they needed a truck driver, so I was invited.

At night we would park our bus 'oben auf den Heiligen Berg' and in the day time we would drive down the mountain and park the bus near the 'Untere Strasse'.

This is where all the dropout students and stoned hippies hung out. We often had a bus full of people to talk to and to feed.

AMSTERDAM WAS CALLING

My friends in Amsterdam had asked me if I wanted to come back so I did. I shaved my beard and got a proper haircut and was on the way to Amsterdam. At that time we started a 'stichting' which is a registered charity. The governing body was three Dutch members of which I became the treasurer.

I revisited the vegetable market and got invited several times by one particular family who was very fond of me.

I personally loved going to the 'Red Light district' to talk to people. Here I met precious souls that would tell me their life stories and the difficulties they were facing. They were thankful that someone would listen to them and offer to pray with them. There was this one "working girl" that would invite us into her little room and close her curtain and asked us to pray for her. The Lord's presence tugs on hearts everywhere.

GYPSIES

Around that time we got a visit from Koko Petalo. Koko was the gypsy king in those days. That afternoon a big Mercedes pulled up to our place with none other than the boss himself.

We had a very enjoyable afternoon. He was explaining about his responsibilities, telling us stories how they travelled around the country in convoy with quite a few caravans and how the local town councils reacted differently to their gypsy caravans landing in their village square. Some would offer them a field to park the caravans while others supplied them with new tires and filled their petrol tanks or other needed items, as long they would move on and not stay in their village. Anyway it was fun to listen to his stories. I also learned that many of these gypsies had a deep faith and we closed the afternoon with prayer.

HYDE PARK SPEAKER'S CORNER

I was invited to go to London which I thought was wonderful. I was invited because there was also a Dutch girl in London and someone thought that she might possibly be a good match. "Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match; Catch me a catch". She was cute, and I wondered if we would like each other. We went for a walk together but there was no chemistry. I think we might have even tried to give each other a kiss, but our "love affair" was like a lead balloon and there was no doubt in either of our mind that we were not meant to be together.

While in London, some of us went to Hyde Park, where I was asked to speak in the 'speaker's corner'. I stood on an elevation and had great fun preaching. Not only was I thrilled with it, but there was a crowd listening to this fellow with his Dutch accent.

Although I had great fun in London it was also a serious time for me as I was informed that a friend of mine from Amsterdam had met with an accident and gone on to his reward. Times like this were sobering as I had developed a friendship with him.

I respected him for his unconventional life and determination to serve the Lord and mankind. He was one of those precious friends that I would like to meet again on the other side.

BACK TO AMSTERDAM

Our work was growing and Eddy's house was too small and we needed a bigger building as we wanted to also start a coffee-shop, like I had seen in London. In those days if a building was empty for a long time, you could occupy that building and live there and you were pretty much protected by law. There was this one massive building right in the centre of Amsterdam.

It was inhabited by a group of maybe ten squatters; however the building was way too big for them. One sunny Saturday afternoon the occupants had gone to the beach.

With the help of a person who was a friend of the owner we cracked open a window and opened the doors for a team of us to move into the building and occupy some of the empty rooms.

Needless to say when these guys came back from the beach they were furious. When things had calmed down a deal was negotiated. The deal was that we would take the bottom floors and they would keep the top floors.

COFFEESHOP

On the ground floor we wanted to start a coffee shop. I worked for about two weeks straight to get it ready.

I usually was at the door to keep an eye on the people that came into the coffee shop. One Saturday night it so happened that this well-built older guy maybe 35 or 40 comes in. He looked like bad news and his vibes were no good.

I stopped him and he right away pulls a butcher's knife with a ten-inch blade. I got the supernatural inspiration to go on the attack, "So you think you are tough stuff and you want trouble. If you really want trouble then step outside with me."

The girl who was with me at the door was speechless and her eyes practically popped out of her head. I motioned for her to close the door behind us. I went out first and as soon as she had closed the door behind us, I made a U-turn and boy did I run.

THE AMSTERDAM POLICE

I sprinted as fast as I could to the police station. I knew this fellow was bad news and I really did not want a knife between my ribs. He gave up his pursuit when I entered the police station. Thank God for the police, they sent two officers with me to patrol the coffee shop. They came faithfully around since then to check up on us. By this time the police had become our friends and from time to time they would drop off a young traveller who had overdosed, asking us to take care of him or her.

I remember being invited for dinner by the police officer who was in charge of Amsterdam Centre.

He was a precious man with a concern for the youth. He was very respectful of our work and our faith and he was thankful to have a strong association with us for the sake of the wandering youth.

DIFFERENT DAYS

However in those days in the late 60's, 70's and early 80's, the general atmosphere was totally different from today. People were sick of taboos and were seeking total freedom, whether it was sexual liberty, living in commune or travelling the world.

“Do whatever!” - “It's ‘Flower-Power!’” - “Love is all you need!”

We had ‘Woodstock’ and people like Timothy Leary promoting LSD. In Holland there was the Provo-movement, de Kabouters and ‘Oranje Vrijstaat’. We had the NVSH - Nederlandse Vereniging voor Seksuele Hervorming (Dutch Association for Sexual Reform). A junior member of the Amsterdam City Council smoked pot during the council meeting just to ‘shake the status quo’. Germany had the ‘Rote Armee’ and the ‘Baader Meinhof Gruppe’ there was anarchy in abundance.

Not always without the loss of life.

In the US there was Abi Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, the Chicago Seven promoting violent revolution. The people demonstrated against the killing of the innocent in Vietnam.

“Hate the system” “F*** the system” were common expressions among the hippies and youth. “Forget church! That was the worst place in the world anyone could possibly end up in.”

We tried to help underage boys and girls in Vondelpark that had run away from home. I telephoned ‘de Kinderbescherming’, the Dutch Child Protection Agency, and asked about when children can make their own decisions. The gentleman of the agency told me, “Children run away from home as early as thirteen and there is very little we can do about it.” Those were very different days.

Wikipedia:

- **Timothy Leary** was an American **psychologist** and writer, known for his advocacy of **psychedelic drugs**. During a time when drugs such as LSD and **psilocybin** were legal.
He popularized **catchphrases** such as "**turn on, tune in, drop out**"; and "**think for yourself and question authority**". During the 1960s and 1970s, he was arrested often enough to see the inside of 29 different prisons worldwide. President **Richard Nixon** once described Leary as "the most dangerous man in America".
- **‘Hoffman** came to prominence in the 1960s, and continued practicing his activism in the 1970s, and has remained a symbol of the **youth rebellion** of that era’
- **NVSH**: 3 of their agenda points were:
 - No restraints on **pornography**
 - Criticism of **marriage** and the family
 - No discrimination against **any form** of voluntary sex
 In 1966 the society reached a membership of 220,000. In 2008 the number was about 700.

One of the leaders of the Dutch movement “De Kabouters” visited the coffee-shop and I got to talk to him.

One of the first things he told me, “Why are you always smiling at me? I feel like ripping that grin off your face.”

It did not take long before he softened. After visiting several times, he actually joined us for studies. You just never know how the Lord works as later on I learned that he had gone to Thailand as a volunteer.

THE CHINESE RESTAURANT

Around this time a young couple from overseas visited. They came for a short holiday and requested to see Amsterdam so I took them out. I felt bad as I wanted to buy them a meal but I had no money at that time. They were also not very rich. They were humble and simple people that had dedicated their lives in service to God and to help others. I did not pray but my emotions and desire were to do something nice for them. We walked along the canals and we were crossing Dam Square to go towards the Red Light district. There was a little Chinese restaurant at the beginning of the Red Light district with the best food and the cheapest prices where I wanted to take them.

It started drizzling and Dam Square was empty. As we are crossing the steps there I found a roll of money. I picked it up and waited to see if anyone was looking for it. Money is usually kept in a purse so you can return it to the person who lost it. This however was a roll like the ones the dealers worked with.

No one came so after a while we decided to go to the Chinese restaurant to enjoy a good meal.

I somehow think that God knows the thoughts and intents of our heart and if it is with the motive to love or help others then he will do his best to give us a helping hand.

CHAPTER 8

NO LONGER FANCY-FREE

MARRIAGE

About two years after I left from home, I met a sweet girl at Amsterdam Central station. She liked my classes and I liked her. Once we had courted for several months, we decided day to take the tram to city hall and we got married.

My parents also liked her and arranged a marriage party in my home-town. We had great fun dancing and enjoying the day.

The priest who gave our marriage sermon in the chapel spoke about Abraham going out not knowing where he went and that I had done likewise. It was encouraging for me, but especially for my parents that the priest spoke well of me.

My parents wanted to buy us a house in my hometown, but since our work was in Amsterdam we decided to stay in the big city and continue there.

My wife and I moved around visiting people and doing house visits. I sent out my newsletters every few months and learned that the Lord would supply even if we started a family.

OUR FIRST CHILD HOSPITALIZED

Our little girl fell sick. "Lord, how is that possible? I thought that you would protect us as we are serving you."

We took her to the hospital and the doctors put her in isolation as they could not diagnose her illness.

There is nothing more painful than to have one of your children fall sick, without knowing what to do about it. We could only beseech the Lord for his mercy upon her and our lives. The third day that she was in hospital the doctors wanted us to sign a paper that they could operate on her to find out what it was.

“Doctor, please excuse my ignorance. You don’t know what she has and you are going to operate on her to find out what it is? I am sorry, we cannot sign a paper like that. We are taking her with us and we will be responsible for her.” We took her with us, prayed over her daily and slowly she started getting better.

MOTHER

My mother had fallen very sick with cancer and was in the hospital. One of the patients in the hospital asked her about me, as due to the gossip my reputation had gone down from being a nice well respected young man to pretty much a religious lunatic. Mum told me that she did not want to deny me like Simon Peter did Jesus, so she told her, ‘Yes that is my boy, and he is a good boy. I don’t know what they all say about him, but I know that he is a good boy.’ God bless Mum. I am sure that the Lord has rewarded her for that statement. Shortly after that she went on to her heavenly reward.

My beautiful, strong, Dutch mother, who loved life, worked hard, helped run the family business and loved her children. What a legacy to leave behind; ‘My Marvellous Mum’.

THE END OF AN ERA

In the late seventies we were getting older and my family started growing. The volunteers who lived with us moved back to their home countries and we were on our own, alone with our four little children. Around that time I closed down our registered charity and it seemed like the end of an era in my life.

I was not sure on how to continue, and whether I should get a job to support my family?

I was asking the Lord one day, “What is my job, Lord?” The answer came clear as a bell, “You work for me and I will take care of you!” - “Well, then Lord that settles it. End of discussion. You are my Employer so you need to take care of me and my family.”

ON THE ROAD

The Lord showed us to move out of the house and to buy a van and go travelling, which we happily did.

It took us a good month to clean out the house. Waterlooplein flea-market was the ideal place to take vanloads of stuff.

Finally the day arrived that I finished building in the van. We moved out of the house into our motor-home. Although it was a rainy day my wife and I were happy to leave everything and start our new life. That night when my children and my wife were asleep, I sat next to the van in the pouring rain and started crying. I asked the Lord to lead, guide and protect us and to please not forsake us. I felt that we were all alone in this world totally dependent on his protection and mercy.

As always he answered with peace and faith. We started doing little cheer-up programmes in senior citizens' homes. My wife played the guitar and I had slides. The people loved us and especially the children cheered up their often forgotten lives.

As a family we did a little play with a heart and four keys that I had made of wood. The one who had the heart would say, "I am not happy. Who can help me? What can open my heart?"

The different keys like 'the key of toys', the 'key of education' and the 'key of money' could not open the heart. Finally the last key announced, "The key to happiness is love." This would open the heart to everyone's delight and we were often referred to as the 'Von Trapp family'.

OUR PROGRAMMES

Our campervan became too small. From a total unexpected source the Lord supplied the funds to get a solid second-hand setup; a 508 Mercedes van that I built in and a twin-axel Tabbert caravan, which made our travelling very comfortable. We travelled to Belgium and our little family visited another senior citizens' home, and a club for the elderly.

We were also invited to a school. Some of the meetings were so cheerful and uplifting that the staff of teachers or nurses stood in the back of the room or auditorium often with tears in their eyes.

A BREAK-IN

The pastor who we communicated with at the time had asked us to film our work and had given us a costly JVC camera and a Hitachi video-recorder. I felt it was too big and clumsy to work with so I kept taking pictures with my still camera. I put the video camera and recorder away in a big suitcase in the van.

It was shortly after that we had a break-in. The side window of the van was smashed and the interior was a disaster; mattresses off the bed, everything was turned upside down, inside out. All that was stolen was my still camera and the car papers. The car papers were found again as they were thrown under the van.

The only thing that was not touched was the suitcase with the expensive camera and recorder. The lesson was clear. The Lord allowed the break-in so I would give up taking stills and be open to start using the video camera to record our activities. As a result we got some very good footage.

Shortly after that we were invited to park in Louvain. It was in the beautiful garden behind the home of retired nuns or sisters. The sisters were mainly elderly teachers and school-principals. They loved our family and admired my wife, as she was a good teacher home-schooling our children.

They adored our four children who were happy to show off that they were able to read at their young ages of four and five. The sisters in turn taught our girls crochet and cross-stitch, which was a fun and learning experience for the children.

LIFETIME INMATES

We were invited to do our little programme for several schools and were asked to perform for the lifetime inmates of the notorious Louvain Prison.

These were prisoners who had a lifetime sentence as Belgium did not have the death penalty. We proceeded through many gates and doors to the chapel of the high security prison.

Our hearts went out to these men and somehow I could relate to them because by that time I felt like a mess myself and I shared honestly with them, "I think that I could have easily been sitting in your place, if it wasn't for the Lord protecting me and giving me the grace to surrender my life to him." They were thrilled with our simple programme. The second half of our programme was me showing the slides on the 'Life of Jesus', which were beautiful realistic paintings with lots of interesting details of those days.

My favourite slides were Jesus walking on the water and Simon Peter going towards him. I would explain that: "Simon started sinking when looking at the circumstances and the stormy winds around him. It is so much like us; when we look at our circumstances and the troubles that surround us then we also sink in despair. However as Simon was sinking, he remembered to call on the Lord for help, which was the key for him not to drown as Jesus immediately stretched forth his hand and caught him. If we can remember when things get tough and we are sinking in depression, to at that time call on Jesus, then he will stretch forth his hand to help and pull us up."

At the end of our meeting you could see how people were visibly touched. They would thank us over and over again. We received some beautiful notes from the inmates. One person wrote, "I am so sorry that I had to walk out of your meeting, but I did not want to start crying in front of the other inmates."

IN THE AIR

We were invited to come to a certain town in the north of France to cheer up a senior-citizens nursing home. We arrived in the town after dark and found a quiet place to park.

At six in the morning there was loud banging on the caravan door. The people were surprised to see a Dutch person open the door, as our set up was similar to the ones that the gypsies travel in. They asked us to move because the airplanes needed to pass. We moved the set up and explained that we came to cheer up the senior citizens. Upon hearing this, the people became thrilled with us as several had their parents in “La Maison de Retraite”. Our whole family got invited for an hour plane flight over the area where we were.

We all squeezed into a little single propeller plane and had a fun flight. Our little programme there was one of the best ones we ever did and we got heart-warming reactions from the residents, relatives and staff.

BASKETBALL

Shortly afterwards we stopped to do our laundry at the launderette in another city. As we were sorting our colours into loads, two American fellows came in.

They sorted a bunch of sweaty training suits for washing. One fellow was white and the other was a six-and-a-half or seven foot tall black fellow. As usual we started a conversation.

The white fellow said he was the trainer of this basketball team and they were playing tonight. “Why don’t you come see us? Our guys are quite good.” - “Okay we’d love to see them if you get us free passes.” - “No problem.” By this time the laundry was finished, and we were in our caravan enjoying some good coffee. We then discovered that we crossed paths with none other than the “Harlem Globe Trotters”. We explained about our life and what we did, and they were amazed. “Really you guys do that? Can you guys please stay after the game as we also invite you for the reception?” We had a fantastic evening with the children. Afterwards, the reception was quite impressive with champagne flowing and lots of delicious snacks and hors-d’oeuvres.

The trainer was going around checking up that there was not too much drinking going on with his team, as they had to be in the bus by three o'clock that night. It was very impressive for the children to have these amazing tall black guys with these large hands, shake their little tiny white hands. They must have looked like giants to them.

I realised that these fellows lead a hard life with a very hectic schedule, sleeping in hotels week after week when they are on tour, getting up at three in the morning, attending receptions, keeping in good condition, as well as spending hours on buses and planes. We stayed in touch with them for a long time and sent them our newsletters. We actually bumped into them again years later when visiting a hotel in Delhi.

INTO A DITCH

One evening we had parked in an open field near the motorway. A car came at high speed onto the slip road and rounded the corner way too fast, then rolled over off the road into a dry ditch. I was outside with the children while my wife was cooking in the caravan. "Dad, did you see that?"

"Yes, I did. Let's say a short prayer, 'Dear Jesus, help there not to be any casualties or anyone seriously wounded.' You go into the caravan with Mum and I will run and check it out."

The car was upside down and I managed to open a side door and out crawled four young people, totally unharmed. They were in the state of shock. They came to the caravan for some tea and we prayed with them and thanked the Lord that he answered prayer and that everyone was unharmed.

THE MEDITERRANEAN

We travelled through the South of Europe and along the Riviera, Italy, Spain and Greece. The Greeks loved us and we loved them. We saw some amazing sights like 'La Camargue' in the south of France with horses running and splashing through the waters.

We were fascinated by the huge flocks of hundreds or maybe thousands of flamingos looking for food in the shallow waters.

In Portugal we stood in awe at 'Boca do Inferno'. This is an amazing rock formation at the Portuguese coast and as the waves roll in underneath, it blows the steamy water out of holes at the top of the rock. To me it seemed like a giant bull getting ready to charge.

We loved the climate, the architecture, the Mediterranean people with their warm smiles and their delicious food; it was truly a remarkable and heart-warming time and experience.

MY WORDS WERE LIKE A BULLDOZER

We started reading about India and decided to go back to Holland to see what our next step should be.

I visited a close friend and she was rather stand-offish towards me. I asked her if something had come between us and she told me the following: "Do you remember when my little girl died?" - "Yes" - "And do you remember what you said?" - "No, I don't remember." - "You said, 'She is now in a better place.'"

"Did I say that?" - "Yes you did and you might as well have slapped me in the face." I very much apologized as in my lack of wisdom my words were like a bulldozer that ran over her grieving heart and had left a scar.

I read how Jesus reacted when someone's brother had died, he asked, "Where have you laid him?" He went with them to the grave where the body was buried and wept with them.

If only I could have done the same. I learned there and then to never ever say those words again to a heartbroken person, but instead follow the sample of comfort that Jesus was.

CHAPTER 9

INDIA IS CALLING

WE WERE JUST AMAZED AT EVERYTHING

India had always had a special place in my thoughts and now India started tugging on our hearts. As we read and reflected more about this mysterious country it became clear that we should move there with our family. We got a good price for our van and caravan. Next we bought our visas and tickets. The big day arrived, May 15th 1982. “India here we come.” Before going I was hit with all kinds of fears: “What if the children fall sick? What if we need to get repatriated? What if our stuff gets stolen? What if we all die?” None of my fears happened.

It was the middle of summer, when we stepped off the plane it was sweltering hot. A friend had corresponded with people they knew and thank God someone was there to meet us. The taxi drove us from the airport to a ferry. The stench was unbelievable as we passed a rubbish dump on the way. We were just amazed at everything around us. We carried our suitcases and trunk onto a ferry. On this ferry there was a big sign posted, ‘DEAD BODIES NOT ALLOWED WITHOUT PROPER PAPERS’.

At the other side our luggage was loaded on an oxcart and ‘tunga’, which is a horse and buggy. “Wow, we are in India.”

Our friends had arranged a room for us. It was a hotel cum residence, and our room had a roof made of tin sheets.

During that first night, in the middle of our sound sleep we woke up startled with a loud bang on the roof. We had lived in a caravan so a loud noise like that could mean serious trouble.

I checked outside and realised that a coconut came down thirty or forty feet smashing on to our roof.

We went back to sleep and two hours later the same thing happened again. The next day the owner got a local boy to pick the coconuts from the tree hanging over our roof.

Our room had mosquito nettings on the windows, but that did not deter a big, cat-size rat eating through the screening and seeing if we had any food lying around. These were our first experiences and impressions of India; it was an assault on our senses. However, once you get past these things and the extreme inequalities between the rich and the poor, you fall in love with these beautiful people who are spiritually aware and seeking peace. Especially peace with God as they know that peace with God is the greatest peace anyone can possess.

ONE OF GOD'S CHILDREN

I realised how much religion plays an important role in people's lives in India, as I was frequently asked about my religion.

I quickly learned to say, "I am one of God's children." People then responded with, "Yes, aren't we all?" This set us on the equal footing and people would listen to me without having to worry if I was trying to convert people to another religion, but I could simply tell them about God's amazing love for us manifested in the sacrificial life of Jesus, of whom I am a devotee. I realised that God does not care about what religion people are but that he loves all men equally and sees their heart.

I realised that people don't mind learning about Jesus, as the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' is in many a schoolbook. However, they don't want to hear anything about religion as they are afraid of conversion to another religion. I simply explained that Jesus did not come to start a new religion and that he was not a Christian. He was, and is, God's son, and he lifts us high above the division that religions create. The conversion he wants is not a change of religion, but that we change our selfish adult ways to become again like little children, spiritually.

It matters not where we worship, whether it is in a building with a star, a cross, or a moon on top; what matters is who we worship and how treat and help our fellowman.

OUTING

I wrote how trouble came naturally to me, and that wasn't something that changed as I grew up. Once we went for an outing and there was a mountain next to a lake. So, I thought, let me try climbing this practically vertical wall. Finding places and cracks to put my feet and fingers I made it a good way up.

At a certain point, though, I realised that I was stuck; I could not go forward nor backwards and by now it was a steep drop down. What could I do? "Dear Lord, it is me again, and I am stuck. I did it again and I am sorry for not checking with you before I started. If I fall there is a good chance that I will end up with some broken limbs. Could you bail me out one more time?"

I can't remember exactly how I got down, but what seemed like an impossibility to me, became a stress-free descent. He bailed me out again.

PICKPOCKET-PICKPOCKET

One day I had to take the train into Bombay. In the commuting trains from the outskirts to Bombay Central you are literally packed like sardines in a can. People shove their way in and are hanging off the side of the trains. You are standing so tight that once you have your hand up to hold a rail you can only move it down with very great effort to take something out of your pocket. I had put my shoulder pouch underneath my jacket and zipped it up, but you could see that I was carrying something underneath my clothes.

I was standing next to this fellow, who was pretending to read a newspaper in that situation, which I thought was funny.

Slowly from underneath his newspaper came his hand and he tried to zip down my jacket. I pushed his hand back.

Then I felt a hand around my stomach. I tried to get away from these crooks but could not move as it was too packed.

I did not know what to do as by now they had slit my jacket open and I knew that they had something very sharp.

“Dear Lord, how do I get rid of these characters?” I got the inspiration to call out, “Pickpocket-pickpocket!”

Suddenly everyone on the train was on red alert. These fellows slithered away from me and I got safely to my destination. They had not only cut my jacket open but also had made a slit in the bottom of my leather pouch. Thank God that nothing was missing and that I was not hurt as they were trying to cut my pouch.

I learned at that time also that the commuters have no mercy with pickpockets and they are known to be thrown off the running train. I went to the tailor to get my jacket stitched, but I didn't use the pouch anymore as it attracted too much attention.

BOMBAY / MUMBAI

My wife and I decided to move to Bombay. After looking for housing for a week or two and not finding anything, we were totally stuck in the mindset of, ‘It is impossible to find any reasonable priced housing in Bombay.’ We discussed if it was the Lord's will for us to go to Bombay or not. We were convinced that it was his will, so we ordered a taxi; loaded up most of our possessions and our four children and drove down to Bombay, singing as we went along, “We have come this far by faith...”

We had no idea where to go or where to land. As we were entering Bombay in the evening twilight we remembered this elderly couple in Bandra that had an extra room for rent at one time. We found the house, rang the bell and “Yes, Bingo!!”

The room was available. The couple was happy to rent it to us.

A few weeks afterwards we found a nice sea-facing apartment for a very reasonable rent. Several young Indians joined our home, two Hindu boys and a girl.

It was amazing to see these young people dedicate their lives to Jesus. Not to another religion as they remained 'pakka Hindu' but they became disciples and devotees of the Lord Jesus and were committed to love and help their fellowman.

We had daily meditation and study of the scriptures before they went out talking to the students. Life was a thrill, except I did not appreciate that they were calling me 'uncle' as I was only in my early thirties, but they kept doing it as a sign of respect.

PEACE THE PARROT

We adopted a young green parrot that had fallen from the nest. The children named her "Peace". She was the sweetest thing. She would climb up a chair to sit on your shoulder. She would hide her head in your hair and with her beak she would nibble around the outside of your ears.

When she learned to fly, she almost got seriously hurt by our spinning ceiling fan. With a heavy heart we decided to clip some of her wing feathers. She would go with us everywhere, for walks on the beach, to the swimming pool, and she was an excellent conversation starter. When she had been with us for about half a year, we decided to get her a partner from the pet shop. The new parrot we got was older and not used to humans. Whenever we tried to approach him he would get very small pupils and try to dig his beak into our fingers. After a few days our newcomer lay upside down in the cage, dead. Little did we know that he had been sick with a dry-chest disease. Then, heartbreak of heartbreaks, about a week later Peace followed. We all cried for her as she was such a little darling and amazing lovebird. We had an 'official' funeral and petitioned the Lord to make it possible for us to see her in heaven, so she could be with us again.

I GAVE HIM A GOOD SHOVE

My wife and I and our four children were invited to a wedding celebration in the centre of Mumbai. It was a hot day.

Around two or three in the afternoon we excused ourselves and looked for a taxi to go back home. We woke up a driver who was taking an afternoon nap in his 'Ambassador'. 'Ambassador' taxis were based on the 1956 model Morris Oxford.

When driving along the boulevard close to home I noticed the taxi driver nodding off to sleep, and I gave him a good shove, shouting, 'Wake up'. However, it was too late, and the taxi swerved onto the side walk, where to horror of horrors a boy of about ten was walking. Although the taxi had slowed down considerably, the boy was scooped up onto the front of the car. The taxi went over the sidewalk and we landed six feet lower on the beach. We got out of the taxi and the boy was under the front of the car. "Jesus Lord, please be with this boy."

As I was inspecting the boy, who miraculously seemed okay, another person close-by strongly advised me to take my family and leave immediately for our personal safety, as a mob might gather and could get violent towards us. Seeing we were close to our house, we went in quickly to get our young Indian friend to check up on the boy right away. He dashed out and helped to get the boy to the hospital. Later that evening the boy was sent home as he had only a few very minor injuries. This was startling and very happy answer to prayer.

CALCUTTA – CITY OF JOY

We were invited to attend a conference and fellowship meeting in the mountains of northern India. During the meeting my wife and I decided to move to Calcutta, as we heard that Calcutta was nigh to 'impossible.' - 'Yes, my favourite word.'

By now the work in Bombay was functioning well and we felt that the Lord was calling us to move on to new horizons.

This was a big decision for us as we had heard so many negative things about Calcutta and how things get stolen there and how they don't like foreigners, etc...

Yet we had the promise that, *“When the Lord puts forth his sheep he goes before them.”* (John 10:4) Our train to Calcutta had delays for a total of six hours by the time we arrived. One of our children had a bad case of tummy problems and diarrhoea which kept us busy most of the journey. It was three o’clock in the morning when we finally arrived.

We arrived with our four children and our luggage at Howrah station in Calcutta. You need to have seen Howrah station in those days in order to believe it, but people were sleeping everywhere, not to mention the dirt, roaches and rats.

We found a taxi, loaded up and as we were driving to the centre of town, we could only sing again, *“We have come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord...”* - *“Lord, we lean on you we have no idea where to go or what to do. You lead us and please protect us, you watch over us.”* The stories about all the bad things that can happen in Calcutta had somewhat affected me.

The taxi driver drove us to Sudder Street, where the foreign budget travellers find shelter. It was pitch dark and we were the only taxi. Several people crowded around the taxi with a lot of confusing chatter. ‘Hotel? You come!’ - ‘Come!’ - ‘This best hotel, you come!’ - ‘Best price hotel’ - *“Come with me.”*

“Dear Lord, you please guide me in this confusion.”

As I am standing there a rather simple looking, small man comes and says in good English, *“Sir, will you please come with me.”* I had peace to go with him and he took me down a little dark alley to the side door of a hotel. The hotel clerk woke up and showed me an air-conditioned room with four beds and the price was reasonable. The man that led me, helped to bring the luggage and said that he would come back the next day, but he never returned. However, the peace that came over me when I walked with him through that dark backstreet made me seriously wonder if he was an angel. (Hebrews 13:2)

We settled in and we thanked the Lord that, *“as our feet touched the waters, the waters divided.”* (Joshua 3:13-17)

PRE-MONSOON RAINS

Shortly after we had settled in for the night a storm started with deafening thunder and flashing lightning.

We were on the top floor and I had never heard or seen anything like it. We were right in the middle of it. There was lightning on every side of the building. It started raining not buckets, but barrels full. The next morning as we looked out the window, we saw people wading through the streets in about two feet of water with waste and rubbish floating everywhere. Our hotel was opposite of New Market. Calcutta was putting in a new metro and just prior to the rains the first part from Esplanade to Parkstreet had been inaugurated. I was informed that the complete metro was flooded to the brim, with mud everywhere. Talk about disaster.

“I thought that the monsoon would only start in the middle of July. It is now the first of July, what happened?”

“It will start on July 18th. These are the pre-monsoon rains.”

“Will the actual monsoon be like this?” - “Definitely Sir, most definitely.” I picked a verse from my little promise box and it said, *“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it”* (Song of Solomon 8:7) - This was to be my key verse for the coming months. “Hon, the kids are getting hungry.”

NEW MARKET

I put on my plastic chappals (flip-flops) and my shorts and off I went. “Okay kids. Pray for Daddy to find some nice food and that the Lord will keep me safe.” I waded across to New Market and walked right into the meat section.

I could not believe my eyes, but will spare you the incredible details of what I saw. Did I hear someone say, ‘health and safety’? - “Come on, pull yourself together and get some food.”

“Yes Lord, who do I go to?” Everyone was yelling at me to sell me their meat. I came to a Muslim gentleman who was selling undercuts and his counter top looked somewhat clean.

“Kidna ka kg?” (How much per kilo?) “45 Rupees Sahib”

Not bad for a kilo of undercut beef. “I will take a complete undercut, not the dark one that is buffalo.” - “You know about meat, Sir? Are you from Russia?” - “No, I am from Netherlands.” - “Oh, did you hear, he is from Nagaland.” (Nagaland is a state in North-East India)

“No Sir, not Nagaland, but Holland.” - “Oh, from Poland.” - “Don’t worry Sir, will you pack it for me?” - “Sir, Please come again; I will give you best price as you are my most respected customer.”

I carried my nice big undercut back to the room, but wait a minute, how will we get this into edible form? Then I noticed a fellow selling little gas bottles with a screw-on burner. Next I found a frying pan, salt and pepper and a packet of butter.

To top it off it was litchi season. Litchi is my favourite fruit with an amazing taste even better than mangoes or anything that you can imagine. “Give me a couple of bundles.”

It is time to celebrate, we are in Calcutta! The City of Joy!

“Yeah kids, Dad is back! Mission accomplished”.

We had to be careful with the hot burner as we prepared the food. What a feast; steak with litchis, a feast for the taste buds.

“Life is really tough, isn’t it kids?” - “Oh Daddy, stop being silly.”

TELEPHONE BHAVAN

I remember walking to “Telephone Bhavan” wading through water above the knees. In those days people often stole the heavy iron manhole covers to sell for scrap iron.

“Dear Lord, will you please hold my hand, because here I am walking and I could just disappear in one of those manholes. Please keep me for my children and your work’s sake.”

This was 1984 before the STD phone booths.

In case you wonder what STD stands for, it means Straight Trunk Dial, or intercity phoning. "Telephone Bhavan" was the telephone office from which you could make calls all over India.

I wanted to call Bombay to see how my friends were doing. There were about twenty people ahead of me in the line. Finally, after about an hour waiting it was my turn. "Ma'am I need to make a PP (Person to Person) call to Bombay. I need to speak to Mr. Ravi." - "Give me your number." After dialling a few times she got a connection. "There is a gentleman here that wants to speak to a Mr. Ravi. Will you take the call?" - "Ravi is not home ma'am, Please call back later?" - "It's alright ma'am, I will talk to him."

"He hung up. The connection is gone." My turn had passed and the Bengalis made sure, that like everyone else, I went again to the back of the line and waited for my next turn.

You probably realise by now that patience was not a natural inborn trait with me, and I am still not very good at it. So I started reviewing my scriptures that I had learned.

"Let patience have her perfect work, with patience and longsuffering, in patience you possess your souls." (James 1:4)

"Lord, you make me into the person that you want me to be." Well, that last request was easier said than done. He is still at it, after some forty-eight years of service, trying to make this Dutch cheese head into what he wants me to be. I would have given up on myself long ago, but he does not give up. He is always encouraging me to get up and try again, so that's what I do.

POWER CUTS - 'LOAD-SHEDDING'

We found a small independent little cottage behind a huge mansion and the owner was happy to rent it to us.

We moved into this cosy little cottage with a cute porch right as the monsoon was starting. The summer heat together with the rain turns Calcutta into a sauna and you are constantly drenched with perspiration. People have air-conditioners for times like this.

We also had one of those fantastic machines. One thing that was very prevalent in those days in Calcutta was daily 'load-shedding', or power cuts, which could last between three and seven hours.

The electricity was as a priority first given to the factories, then to the areas where the ministers lived, and last to the common people. This means there is no fan, nothing to make the air circulate and give even a slight breeze to cool you down.

We purchased a small generator which we used to cool down the children's bedroom and school/activity room. So, as you can see, living in Calcutta had its challenges.

The Bengali people are naturally inquisitive so it was easy to start a conversation with them as they would ask many questions.

"Where are you from? What is your name? What are you doing here? Where are you going now? Do you like my India? Have you been to New Market? Do you think our metro is nice?"

We drank many a cup of tea while out meeting people and had some good conversations as many Bengalis are not only politicians but they are also philosophers.

VARANASI

Our visa was due to expire so we looked for a cheap flight to Nepal. Cheap flights went from Varanasi where we spent the afternoon before flying to Kathmandu.

The banks of river Ganges were busy cremation-grounds. People were telling us to bathe in the river. Instead we took a rowboat on the river and I am glad we did, as we saw this object wrapped in white cloth floating by. "What is that Daddy?" - "I think it's time to go back kids. Here instead of burying the bodies they burn them or put them in the river."

Obviously I was taken by surprise - "Maybe we should pray for them Daddy?" - "Yes, let's do that sweetheart."

On the way back to the hotel a bicycle passed us with a covered body on the back carrier. The smell made us stop our noses.

NEPAL

The next morning, we arrived in Nepal. The snow-covered mountain peaks welcomed us. The people there are short in stature but beautiful. Through friends we were introduced to a very nice family, who invited us to stay with them. We loved Nepal. Even the grocery shopkeepers were honest and charged us the same price as they did the locals. We visited the little shops in Thamel where the trekkers and tourists hang out.

We enjoyed a walk in the forest, but seeing it was rainy season we were assaulted by leeches. Yikes, I hated those things.

VISA RENEWAL

Some months earlier we had made a short trip to Europe for my family's reunion. To return to India we were only given a tourist visa. This caused us problems and we could not return from Nepal to India as our tourist visa was expired. I had visited the Indian embassy a couple of times and it did not look too hopeful. One evening I got this decisive burst of energy, "Lord, we either receive our visas tomorrow or we have to go back to Europe and that'll be bye-bye to India for a while."

I left our room at eight the next morning and to my surprise everything was locked down. It was a total strike.

"Do I go back, or continue? I can't waste another day waiting." A motorbike appeared, I waved at him and he stopped. "Can you take me to the Indian embassy?" - "Sir, everything is closed." - "Will you take me anyway?"

I got on his bike and to show off his racing skills the young man sprinted down-hill at incredible speed. He dropped me at the gate of the embassy and they let me in. "You are not closed?" I asked. "Please come in." Two hours later I had received our fresh visas. I found a small tourist office open where I got our tickets, and later that evening we were amazed to be back in Calcutta, with gratitude for our out-of-this-world "Travel Agent".

CHAPTER 10

BIG CHANGES

EUROPE AND MY DAD

Sometime later I received news that my father had fallen seriously ill. I left for Europe to visit my father; he was at home and much weaker than I expected, as due to cancer his stomach had been removed. I overheard him being upset with his body, "Come on, move and get out of bed."

I sat with him and explained that it will be difficult for him if he did not accept that his body had changed, which could make it difficult for others to be around him, but that he could also make the remaining days of his life happy ones.

I offered to pray for him which he kindly accepted, "Dear Jesus, please help Dad to accept that he is not as strong anymore as he used to be and help him to simply enjoy life and not get frustrated with his body." Father seemed okay after the prayer and upon an invitation I went for a short trip to Hungary.

DAD WENT TO HIS HEAVENLY REWARD

The phone call I'd been expecting, but dreading, finally happened. "Father is not well. Johan you have to come right away." Dad was in the hospital. He was very weak and weighed only around forty kilos. He was so sweet to me when I saw him.

All the family was there, but he requested to be alone with me. He asked me to pray with him, because "Johan, you always pray so nice." After us praying together he fell asleep and when he woke up from his nap, he said: "I have seen it. It's beautiful and I want to go there. I have seen your mother too. Tell the doctor to take out these tubes." When the doctor objected he said, "Okay, if you don't take them out then I will pull them out myself."

The doctor then consented. The next day was his 75th birthday and he had us all in stitches as he was so good humoured. Although father could not eat anything he did have a tiny piece of salted herring and a drop of jenever, which was his favourite Dutch delicacy. Someone came to visit him, but she had walked past the room as we were all laughing and it did not give her the impression that someone was dying in the room.

The morning after I was with him and he was very weak, so I read him the scriptures from Matthew chapter 11 where Simon Peter stepped out of the boat to walk on the water to go to Jesus. I encouraged him, "Why don't you go ahead Dad and step out of your body and go to Jesus." - I gave him a goodbye kiss.

At that moment he stopped breathing and went on to his heavenly reward. The ones that stood by were all amazed, "Is he gone now?" - "Yes, he is gone."

SPEAKING AT HIS FUNERAL

Two days later I was asked to speak at his funeral. When we came to the church there were only a few people, but by the time I was to speak the whole church was full. People were standing in the back; at least some five or six hundred people. These were all people whose lives he had affected in some way. I was thankful to share what Dad meant to us as a family and that although he was definitely not the holy or saintly type, he was an honest man who did his best for us.

I went on to explain that he was eager to go to the beautiful place that he had seen the day before he left his body and how pleased he would be if he would eventually see us all there.

I proceeded with the salvation or sinner's prayer and the whole church was filled with smiles and everyone was thankful for the prayer and happy that they had known father.

Many people did not recognize me as some eighteen years had passed since I left home.

They were happy to see that I was still normal and were thanking me over and over for the beautiful words and making this funeral so special.

Dad had given my older brother a gift to divide. He had requested that just the brothers and sisters without spouses would meet to recall his life. We enjoyed the evening and were thankful to have had such a wonderful father.

BIG CHANGES

Due to various personal reasons my wife and I had decided to separate. Needless to say, this was a time of heartbreak for me. We decided that our children would stay with her in India, as she was in a stable situation. After the funeral I decided to return to Hungary where my skills were much in demand: teaching, building beds, tables and benches for a volunteer base in order to bring relief and humanitarian aid to Eastern Europe.

In my spiritual life I was torn between keeping up the front of being a 'good soldier' that will endure hardness like the Greek Spartans, or being a human being that would just honestly lay his heart on the table and say, "Lord, I am lonely, I don't have the strength and that first love anymore, can you please be that for me? Can you change me into what you want me to be?"

It took some time for the Lord to get through to me, but slowly he started taking the different pieces and putting me back together again, piece by piece and it was not until 9½ years later that I officially started my second marriage.

Because of this time, my learning process has become somewhat easier as now I can simply say about problems or projects, "Lord this is too big, this is beyond me. I need your help here. To be honest, I have no idea what to do with this situation. I give it to you. Can you please take care of this for me and tell me what I should do?" This helps me to find solutions easier.

ENGLAND AND DELIVERY

Back to my story; after being in Eastern Europe, a friend invited me to come to England to help in their ministry. His wife was pregnant and she absolutely wanted to deliver the baby at home. Her doctor was adamant against it and told her that she had to go to the hospital. The contractions started and when it was too late to go to the hospital she called the doctor. The doctor was furious and said, "Sort it out yourself, I am not coming."

I had delivered one of my own children before the midwife arrived and was at the delivery of my other children, so I was asked to help. "What do I do Lord? Please help." - "Johan, take it easy and it will all work out fine." I asked the husband to sit next to his wife and coach her breathing and to just keep telling her, "Sweetheart you are doing good. You are amazing, we are almost there." I washed my hands and put on clean clothes.

We prayed together. I saw the baby's head crowning; some more coaching and, "Yes, now go! Push!" - Out popped the baby. As it came out, I slipped the umbilical cord away from where it was around the baby's neck.

I put the baby on the mother's tummy, "Whah... whahhhh". As for the rest, I did not know what to do, but thankfully, shortly afterwards a midwife arrived and she took it from there.

Was the mother's decision responsible? I don't know, but the Lord somehow always seems to come through for his children and everything ended up working out.

THE CHIEF WIZARD

I recall going to a pop festival and talking with a group of boys, and, of course, the conversation turned towards the spiritual. One boy told me that he gets instruction every week from a wizard and was learning about spiritual power.

I explained that both Einstein and Gandhi had confirmed that the absolute greatest spiritual power in the world is love.

“The Chief Wizard of love is Jesus and all spirits have to obey him. When you accept him then he will give you constant spiritual guidance. However, he will teach you to love and not cast spells; you will learn to send positive blessings instead of negative curses. In order to be the most powerful you will have to accept Jesus.” These boys wanted to have weekly instruction to learn about Jesus. They have been on my heart ever since as, I’m sorry to say, I lost their contact details.

TRAVELLING AGAIN.

I went to Holland and bought a big van from my brother-in-law, and my older brother lent me the funds, which later I was able to repay. When I gave him the envelope with the money I owed him he said ‘thank you’, but then he surprised me by giving it back. “My gift to you.” - My fantastic older brother. I got a nice big yellow van and I worked hard to build it in. The van became a motorhome with comfortable bedding, kitchen and living quarters. People said it was a masterpiece. I decided to go with someone else to the East Block.

OUR CHRISTMAS DINNER IN BUDAPEST

So just before Christmas we took off on the road, stopping first in the beautiful city of Budapest. The pastor there asked me if I could drive some young American volunteers to Austria to go across the border as they needed to renew their visas for Hungary. After they had sorted out their visas in Austria we returned and as we were driving back I saw this big deer that was lying near the road. I stopped the campervan and found that the deer was obviously recently killed by a large vehicle.

We loaded the deer in the box on the roof. I was excited as it was just before Christmas and this would be a tremendous Christmas dinner. When we passed the border we were asked if we had anything to declare. “Not that we know of, Sir.” - “Okay, please proceed and safe journey.” - “Thank you, Sir.”

Little did I know at that time that crossing the border with this big deer was not allowed. When we got to Budapest, we hung the deer on a hook above the bathtub and I instructed two young volunteers on how to skin and clean it.

ROMANIA

After our luscious Christmas dinner in Budapest we drove down to Bucharest. Being in Romania was like going back in time. We saw flocks of geese crossing the road, a farmer on an ox-cart, horses and wagons and derelict buildings were our first impressions. In Bucharest I saw older ladies that looked like my Grandmother, begging as they were hungry.

Although I was used to poverty in India I was surprised to see it in a European country. I parked the van next to a mission post and we worked together for the next year and a half.

The spiritual hunger amongst the youth was astounding. Weekly scripture studies were happening and it was invigorating to see the young Romanians craving to learn about the spiritual side of life.

CHAPTER 11

EASTERN EUROPE / MAFIA

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE

After being in Romania a few months, I got into a conversation with a Romanian sister who had come back from Moldova which is the neighbouring state of Romania. She was upset as the border guards had searched her belongings thoroughly. "Moldova is impossible to bring anything in." That was just what I wanted to hear, my favourite word again, 'impossible'.

It did not take long to get three young people together to go on a trip to Moldova. Someone in Holland had given me a gift and with that we got materials together to bring with us for children's homes and printed some Romanian pamphlets with a message of hope for difficult times. I met a Russian comrade who explained that in Moldova many of the people speak Russian. We made the plan that he'd go to Moscow on the train and come back with some Russian materials. He was so excited and was back within a few weeks. We loaded our campervan. In the van was a compartment under the back bed that you could only access from the back of the van through two half doors on which I had fastened a bicycle rack with two bicycles.

SEEING EYES BLIND

We packed bags of children's clothes, the pamphlets, and other items for the orphanages that we were planning to visit. Our team included a Romanian boy and girl, a Bulgarian girl and the Russian comrade.

All of us were happy to use this opportunity to find new horizons and we were on our way.

As we approached the border we stopped to pray.

“Dear Jesus, you helped the blind to see; now we need you to make the seeing eyes not see the items that we are bringing with us to help the people in Moldova.” The border guards looked in the van, under the van, searched the cupboards, the roof-box, our diesel tank, but they never realised that there was a big compartment about a meter high under the double bed in the back. Our passports got stamped and yes... we were in. We visited orphanages for which we had brought clothing. We learned how some of the caretakers had worked for months without payment, but they came back to work as otherwise there would be nobody to care for the children. We also distributed the pamphlets with our message of love, hope and faith in the markets. I loved yelling: “besplatno, ya lyublyu tebya” - ‘for free, I love you’ in Russian. “Te iubesc” - ‘I love you’ in Romanian. We were there for several weeks and we were getting tired.

For the nights we always asked the police if we could park next to their police posts so that we could have armed protection. Police posts and checkpoints were in many places and could easily be found. They were always happy to help.

SHOOT OUT WITH THE MAFIA

Towards the end of the journey I was tired and had a very angry explosion with someone. We all hoped to take a shortcut home through another border post that we saw on the map. We stopped along the roadside to have dinner. A motorcycle drove by and stopped and watched us for some time and then went on. We were done with dinner and clean-up by around 11 that night. We were all tired by the time I drove towards the border post. The road became pretty bad with a lot of potholes.

We passed through a village and I decided to park in the village square next to a farmhouse. We said a quick prayer for the night and fell asleep. Around 1.30 that night someone smashed the window on the driver’s side.

I jumped out of the van in my underwear and yelled “ce faci?” meaning “What are you doing?” I used to do this when people would try to steal the bicycle from the back of the van and then they would run away.

However these people did not run away and suddenly I had four guys on my back. I grabbed one around the neck. As I was holding this fellow another started whacking me with metal pipe and chains, so I screamed because of the pain, but held on to the guy to try to protect myself. The Russian comrade was trying to talk with them in Russian. He told them that we were there to help. Hoping that they would respect that, instead he got a whack with a chain in his neck and they grabbed his wristwatch.

I was going to leave this paragraph out, as it is almost too hard to believe. When we were rolling on the floor I remember one fellow with this iron rod, used for reinforcing concrete, standing above me and trying to plunge it into my abdomen. All I could find afterwards was a hole in my boxer shorts and a small round bruise right where that rod was supposed to have me pinned to the ground. “Dear Lord, thank you and thank you again, for protecting me when I could have so easily been killed.”

Unexpectedly the lady of the farmhouse where we were parked comes out of her house like a tiger and starts yelling at these guys. Everything froze for a second. I jumped in the van, started it and drove off. I was sitting with my boxers in the splintered glass but just wanted to get out of there as fast as I could. Someone threw me a towel to sit on, which was better. After some kilometres we suddenly realised that we had two of the guys on the bicycle rack on the back of the van. I asked everyone to hold on and swung the van to the right and then to the left and they must have dropped off. I drove another kilometre or two and then did something very stupid as I was so angry with these guys and tired of running from them that I stopped the van.

I took the metal pipe that we had up front and I was going to give them my two cents worth. Thank God they weren't there anymore. The Russian brother told me in no uncertain terms to get back in the van and drive as fast as I could, which I did.

He obviously knew the mafia and knew what we were dealing with. In my mirror I saw a light coming up behind us. "Go as fast as you can," my Russian friend said, "and don't let them near you." I was still thinking that maybe it was the police that was trying to come and help us, but as it turned out, it was a motorcycle with side-buggy and in the side-buggy was a second person. As they came up next to the van I swung the van to the left to try to push them off the road into the bushes, but there was a wide shoulder with room for them to swing out, and soon we heard it; 'BOOM!' and a second later again 'BOOM!!'.

I thought their motorcycle had backfired, I realised that wasn't what happened when the tire under me started deflating and shredded down to the rim. We lost quite a bit of speed and only managed to keep to around 50 to 55 kilometres per hour.

After that the motorcycle did not seem in a hurry and kept its distance of about fifty to a hundred meters behind us.

When we wound up a hill through a wooded area I felt the urge to turn off my lights. Although it was pitch-dark, somehow I could see the road ahead clearly. My team members were praying like a house on fire the whole time as there was not much else you can do in a situation like this. Right after this we drove through a village and continued with our lights off on our way to the border post. After passing through the village we realised that the motorcycle was no longer behind us.

Another ten minutes of driving and I turned the lights back on. Eight or ten kilometres more and we reached the border post. The border police could not believe what they saw. They immediately armed themselves with machine guns and stayed alert for us for the rest of the night.

The border guards were very kind and our team spent time talking with them about our mission. I was also able to wash myself and get dressed.

THE MORNING AFTER

I fell asleep that night and woke up in the morning stiff with a lot of muscle pain. None of my wounds were open, only raw and I was heavily bruised. Thank the Lord nothing was broken, but boy was I shaken up. That morning we changed our tire and had a long interview with a female police officer who did a detailed report on what happened.

An older person from the village that we had passed came by on his motorcycle. He stopped to ask us about the bullet holes in the back of our van. He then told us that there was a motorcycle going around the village during the night checking out the hospital and the farmyards and barns as it seemed like they were looking for someone or something.

It then became clear that the East European vans have their engine in the back and their radiator is exactly where they fired their second shot. These guys were crack shots. However, we had a West European van with the radiator and engine up front. That is why they stayed behind us, waiting for the radiator to empty out and the van to overheat so it would come to a grinding halt. They must have thought this happened when I had turned off the lights and drove through the village.

FIRED A SCATTER SHOT.

The guy had fired a scatter shot with three or four good size pieces of lead, the kind that you use for hunting deer or larger animals. We had a guitar in the back compartment; this was the same storage compartment where we stored the literature.

The amazing thing was that one piece of lead went right in at the head of the guitar where you tune it and it went all the way lengthwise straight through the full length of the neck.

When it came out at the other end it had lost its power and then got stuck in a tire of a baby pushchair. Some of the other pieces of lead went into a box of literature that we had left over.

The paper stopped the force of the lead pieces otherwise they would have gone straight through the plywood wall right to the place where everyone was praying together.

SHOT HIM POINT BLANK

Seeing that this particular border post was not functioning anymore, we had to go back the same way to go to the main border post, but this time we travelled under police protection.

We stopped to thank the farm lady for coming out. She explained to us that she was waiting up for her son to return from the hospital as his wife just had a baby. When she heard my screams, she thought that her son was being attacked so she ran out of her house and was like a tiger yelling at the attackers.

When we drove home it was night and I did not want to stop anywhere as I was too shaken up. Finally, we arrived home safely. We had no great tales of 'look what we did' and how we 'conquered the impossible'. We were just thankful to be alive.

These Mafia guys were rough stuff as our Russian friend went back there about a month later and heard that these fellows had killed a French man a week later and had shot him point blank when he passed through the area.

LESSONS TO LEARN

Needless to say; this was a shake-up for the whole team. I had to see my mistakes of allowing my tiredness to override the security and safety of our team. It was a time of learning and asking the Lord why this serious incident was allowed to happen.

I realised how much humbler and gentler I need to be become in my interactions, as two days before the incident I had gotten very angry and had that big argument.

Nevertheless, the consequences of getting so angry did not sink in till much later. Years later it became clear that the Lord could not help me as I really did not want his help, and wanted to settle this argument myself in my angry forcefulness without him, so obviously he could not help. I had angry flare-ups before and this outburst of anger was the last straw that broke the camel's back, or was the final drop that made the bucket overflow.

Seeing I wanted to settle it in my own human strength, the human law of 'cause and effect - action and reaction' went into motion. I understood that although God is all powerful, there are boundaries to the game, that he cannot cross either. God could not help me if I did not want his help. It became so clear; I was very sorry not for the thrashing that I received, but that I did not seek his help in this difference of opinion.

When I eventually understood that, things drastically changed in my life. I did a study on anger management and learned that Moses was not allowed into the Promised Land because of only one angry outburst. Yet it says: *"Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men upon the face of the earth."* (Numbers12:3)

Besides the miracles of protection in this incident, the biggest miracle was that the Lord dug deep into my heart, and it started sinking in, that true strength didn't lie in human prowess or strength, but in humility; not in what I accomplished but how much I loved unconditionally. If that jewel could become part of me and I could truly learn and absorb this principle, then I am still extremely thankful for this whole ordeal to teach me this lesson.

MIRACLES OF PROTECTION DURING THE INCIDENT

- Iron pin did not go through my body.
- Farm lady comes out like a tiger, we get away.
- Two fellows on the bicycle rack had fallen off.
- The urge to turn off the lights, dark night, yet saw clearly.
- How the bullets stopped, no hurt to the team, etc. etc.

BACK TO MOLDOVA AND TRANSNISTRIA

The Lord showed us to go again to Moldova a few months later. However, we were to travel only in the daytime, which we did and were safe. It was winter and I remember my shoes being frozen to the floor. We met many people who were searching for something spiritual after the collapse of communism.

It was during this trip that we travelled to Transnistria, aka Pridnestrovie, a small country next to Moldova. I got taken in for questioning in the capital Tiraspol as I took a photo of our van next to the Lenin statue in front of government headquarters.

The reason was that they considered themselves a nation at war as they had declared independence. Once they met the rest of the team I was released and my camera returned.

We were invited by a very kind Jewish family to dine with them. The kosher meal was delicious, and we spent an enjoyable evening together. The beautiful people that we met along the way were truly marvellous.

THE ACCOMPANYING CONSULTANT

Back in Bucharest I remember one time taking someone to the hospital. I knew that the conditions in the hospital were very sad, so I decided to stay with the person and told the staff that I was the accompanying consultant. They handed me a coat and hat and I was greeted as the accompanying consultant. Things like that were still possible in those days.

However, I could not understand the mentality of the hospital because in order to “keep the germs out”, the hospital staff kept all the windows closed. What they did not realise is that by keeping the windows closed it also trapped the germs and bacteria of any sick patient inside the hospital.

CHAPTER 12

PROGRAMMES IN ROMANIA

OUR TEAM TO THE UKRAINE

We took our campervan to the Ukraine and did programmes in summer camps along the Black Sea coast. We had good music and, of course, my favourite slides. The youth loved our presentation. The Russian friend that was with us during the Mafia incident came with us and he was a good translator. Some of the old-time camp organizers took me in the back room for a fifty gram as they call it, with a slice of salami. A fifty gram is a small glass of vodka, which shows that you are accepted as their comrade. Several confided in me that it was much better during the communist days, as things were well taken care of.

JUVENILE DELINQUENT CENTRE

In Romania we did several programmes in the 'Juvenile Delinquent Centre'. These kids ate out of our hands and loved everything we did or said.

They told us more than once, "You know, other people come here telling us to be good and we don't want to hear that, but then you come, you understand us, you love us, you don't talk down to us and that makes us want to do better."

Besides the music and the slides, we did a mini drama in which I was the surgeon. I had to operate on a patient who came to me with severe heart pains and problems. The operation table was three chairs with a sheet over it, their backs facing the audience so they could only see the patient's head and feet sticking out.

I then pretended to operate on the patient with a big knife and started pulling out of his heart all this stuff: drugs, horror film, a knife, a wallet and the last thing was a plastic bag with glue.

This always got a lot of reactions, as this was something that many boys sniffed and practically burned their brains out. Now that the heart was empty I went on to put good things in there like: love, kindness, scriptures and a picture of Jesus before I proceeded to sew the patient back up.

The patient was brought back to life and jumped up 'oh so happy' about how light his heart was, "What did you do, doctor?"

I would show the stuff that was in his heart and challenged him not to put it back in. I then invited the patient to pray with me to ask Jesus to clean out and change his heart. He would oppose and say, "I am not going to pray with you in front of all these people." - "Would you do it, if they prayed with you?" -

"Then maybe okay, but they have to promise to pray along, or I won't do it."

I tell you these kids appreciated a bit of love and possibly these thoughts crossed their mind, "Maybe there is hope, maybe there is a better life, maybe Jesus can be my friend too and help me." Following this were my slides for about half an hour.

The guards who seemed to have a real heart for the boys were often moved to tears and so incredibly thankful.

Most of these boys had no parents as they were brought up in the 'Casa Copie' or State children's homes. Under Ceausescu, if people did not want their children, they could give them to the State and the State would take care of them. It broke my heart to see these boys eating out of our hands and it made me so thankful for my parents, who gave me such a beautiful childhood.

SEWER KIDS

Under Ceausescu the State promised to make good citizens out of these children, much like the 'Hitler Jugend'.

When Ceausescu was ousted the whole system collapsed and there was no more money to support these homes. Therefore, the children left these homes and started living on the street.

Some of the children were very young. Five or six-year-old children were living in the sewers as this was the only place that was somewhat warm in winter and protected. Some people would bring food to them, but many people were so poor that they hardly had enough for themselves.

Of course, the children that were caught stealing ended up in the Juvenile Delinquent Centre.

When I am writing this I am still thinking what gave me the ‘right’ to be born in Holland when I did, and why I did not end up like a five or six-year-old Romanian urchin living in a sewer?

“Lord, please be with them somehow. I know that you love them, but still you expect us to do something to help them.”

WOMEN’S PRISON

The programme that we did in the women’s prison was very heart-touching as there were many precious women.

One babushka had already been there for forty years and she seemed totally forgotten as it is such a disgrace in Romania to have a relative in prison. She told us the story of how her husband was a drunk and used to beat her. One day she was cooking food in the kitchen. He came home drunk and started mistreating and abusing her. She had a knife in her hand. Next thing you know, he was dead and she got a life sentence.

Of course, it was hard to see what the truth was, but forty years in that place is a long time.

The Romanians have a gentleman-like greeting in their culture by saying, “saru’ mana”, meaning ‘I kiss your hand’ to a lady.

I did this and the women were just so appreciative and so thankful. With some all I could do was to hug them and cry with them. I just pray that some of them will have a more meaningful life now that they accepted the Lord.

“Lord, you please be merciful to these women. Mercy is not deserved, otherwise it would not be mercy, but mercy is given.

Thank you that I can leave these babushkas with you, knowing that you will extend your hand of mercy and love to them.”

The Romanians also have a nice greeting at Easter: “Hristos a inviat!” and then you are to respond with: “Adevarat a inviat!” - meaning “Christ is risen!” - “Truly, he is risen!”

ONCE I WAS A BILLIONAIRE

I was talking to a precious man whose youngest daughter was an active ball of energy and often worked with us. He was cleaning one of his pigs and wanted me to have the ear which is known to be the delicacy of the pig. I don't remember what I did with it.

One thing that struck me was when he started telling me about his older daughter's wedding.

The wedding was supposed to take place in 1989.

He had saved up 15,000 Lei. With this he could pay for the wedding and buy the newlyweds an apartment. Then the revolution happened and Ceausescu was ousted, so they decided to wait with the wedding till things had settled down. When I spoke with the man in '95, six years later, by then the price of a loaf of bread was 10,000 Lei.

I told the man that once I was a billionaire as I had a bill of 100,000,000,000.- (one hundred billion) German Marks.

It was absolutely useless, as the money had no value.

That is why 87% of the German people followed the Führer Hitler blindly as he promised to make Germany great again, but instead led them into horrors of hell.

Hitler is often quoted as saying: “Ein Land, Ein Volk, Ein Führer!” (One Country, One People, One Leader)

Three-and-a-half thousand years ago it was the Golden Calf that the people worshipped in the wilderness. (Exodus 32:19-35)

Today in this wilderness of life the Golden Calf has become the Golden Bull.

Golden Bull is the name given to the financial market when it rises and boy, do we worship it! We go wild when the Golden Bull is strong. However, the Bull is NOT GOLD, but he is Paper Mâché. See this article of 2013 about our present financial situation.

‘THE WALL STREET JOURNAL’ - from the article by Sudeep Reddy - May 11, 2013, 5:00 am. \$223.3 trillion: The total indebtedness of the world, including all parts of the public and private sectors, amounting to 313% of global gross domestic product.

Already in 2013, if you divided this debt by the world population it averaged out to around 30,000.- U\$ (Thirty thousand US dollars) per person worldwide, which is total insanity.

We have put our faith not in a Golden Bull, but a house of cards. If one of the main players removes a card, then the whole house will collapse. Once the financial market collapses, will history repeat itself and will we again get a leader who promises to make mankind great again, but instead will lead us into horrors of hell? Will it again be: “One World, One People, One Leader”?

Will this be the person that the Bible refers to as the Antichrist or ‘the beast’? Then the question remains; will I be one of the 87% that will get swept along with this leader’s speeches and promises?

The devaluation of the Lei reiterated the true values of life for me and that it is definitely not money or ‘mammon’ as Jesus called it.

36 BANKERS RECEIVE 96 YEARS JAIL SENTENCE

My son went on a holiday to Iceland and learned about when Iceland almost went belly-up in 2008 with the financial crisis.

The banks there had asked the government to bail them out like other countries do. According to what my son was told, surprisingly the Iceland government instead arrested the bankers and checked their financial records, as nobody is above the law in Iceland.

The bankers received jail sentences for money laundering and messing about with their accounts. This resulted that Iceland's economy began recovering.

07/02/2018 - "The news outlet Fréttablaðið has calculated that in the past few years the Icelandic judiciary has sentenced 36 bankers to a total of 96 years in prison. All of the criminal cases are linked to the notorious crash of the Icelandic banking system in 2008." <https://grapevine.is/news/2018/02/07/36-bankers> - access 24/03/20

SEMINAR ON TOLERANCE

A friend who had an official foundation in Romania asked me to come along with her to the large 'International Seminar on Tolerance' for which she had an invitation. The venue was 'Casa Poporului', Ceausescu's former palace. It is an amazing piece of architecture. I was informed that it was the second largest building in the world after the Pentagon. It was a large gathering of European Union representatives, human rights organizations, the Romanian Secretary of State, the Orthodox Archbishop and dignitaries that were involved in the development of Romania.

We were sitting in the largest room with tables and chairs set in a big square. Different topics were discussed and the debates were going well and the atmosphere was positive and progressive.

A representative of a human-rights organisation brought up different points, sharply criticizing Romania for what they felt was intolerance. It did not sound good as the meeting was taking a negative turn. I felt bad for the Romanian authorities who had gone out of their way to host this meeting.

"Lord, I have to say something." - "Then raise your hand."

I raised my hand and they gave me the microphone.

I explained what we did and that were working with the different 'casa copie' and the Juvenile Delinquent Centre.

In short I said, "I have only been in Romania for less than a year, but my colleague has been working in Romania for several years."

We are very aware of the difficulties in Romania as we work with the less privileged. Although there is still a lot that needs to be done, we should applaud the Romanian government for their efforts to change things. By hosting this ‘Seminar on Tolerance’ it clearly shows their willingness to bring those needed changes and demonstrates openness for suggestions. However, Romania does not need a critical eye, but instead we need to give her a helping hand.”

After the meeting the Archbishop came to us. “Thank you, who are you?” The Secretary of State gave us his card and asked us to please contact him. When things like that happen I often think, “Now, was that really me? Did I just say all that?”

THE PRAISE OF MAN

Before, when I spoke in a religious gathering, I looked forward to the applause, but I had to learn the hard way to understand how detrimental the praise of man was to my spiritual life. So now if believers in a meeting clap for me, I stop them, and I challenge them to give credit where credit is due. I dare them to clap for the One who deserves the praise and I have seen audiences become very enthusiastic praising God.

More than once I was introduced at a speaking engagement as Doctor Johan. I explained that I was no doctor but if I deserve any title then I need to have ‘SBG’ behind my name. “Sir, will you be so kind as to explain your credentials?” - “‘SBG’ is the only qualification that I have and means, ‘Saved By Grace.’”

Titles and decorations come and go. I told you that as a child I used to go with my father to Waterlooplein. There you could sort and choose all the decorations that you wanted for a ‘dubbeltje’ or ten cents per piece and three for twenty five cents.

These decorations were from people who gave their lives for them, while I could purchase them for a few cents.

"... all the glory of man is as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away." (1Peter 1:24)

HIT BETWEEN THE EYES

Later that year I was invited to attend a conference in Budapest. At the meeting someone had a Newsweek or Time magazine and the front-cover read something like, "Calcutta is cleaning up its act." You know how certain things just hit you between the eyes. Well this article did. As an introduction to the conference, they showed a video about India. During the meetings that followed most of the things went over my head as my mind was preoccupied with India and I felt that India was calling me back.

I wanted a confirmation and discussed it with some of the leaders of the conference. They advised me that I should go exactly by what I felt the Lord was showing me. So that was a bit of a shake-up.

Do you remember Eddy the fellow from Amsterdam? He had heard about Romania and the receptivity of the young people, so he came with his wife and four teens to Bucharest and moved into where we were living. It gave us peace to leave as they had a nice family to continue ministering to the warm-hearted Romanian people.

Thus began the next stage of my life; this time with my new family - India Part Two.

CHAPTER 13

MOVING ON TO CALCUTTA

FUND RAISING

In spite of our love for the people there, it was good-bye to Romania and our loved ones. We were travelling again, first to the Netherlands. Before leaving we received the Romanian registration for our campervan. This was mainly to avoid the big backlog of expensive road-tax in the Netherlands. We worked on making friends who would be interested to receive news from us in India. I had made a big foldout display-board with photos of our work and stood on the walking street in different towns in order to see if anyone was interested. We met some precious people who wanted to keep contact with us in India.

During this period I also had several business meetings to discuss starting an export business from India in liaison with a company in the Netherlands. It was decided that I would go and do market research to see the potential what would come of it.

After the Netherlands we moved to the UK. It was fun doing the same thing there. It was summer holidays and we went to the alternative farming parks where families could enjoy themselves with games, rides and farm animals.

The owners would be happy to help us gain exposure, and so I would stand outside with my big sign and brochures, while the family enjoyed the park and rides.

By September the holidays were finished. A couple that I knew and owned a house in London contacted me to ask if I wanted to build out their attic.

I worked hard for a little over a month on just a few hours of sleep as I wanted to be in India before Christmas.

The attic was a big project, hoisting up steel beams and having government inspectors visiting. But the construction went well, as I had a partner who kept me supplied with the needed materials. The project was a success and the owners of the house wished to donate us our visas and air tickets for India.

When the attic was finished I drove our campervan again to Romania with 25 bags of donated milk-powder. There I met with a young couple who loved our campervan and bought it from me. We drove it back to the UK from where they collected it.

THE JUMP

Just before Christmas I took the flight to Calcutta. I had been corresponding with a professional nurse and her husband. We wanted to team up together as she also wanted to start working among Calcutta's deaf people. I found a little two-bedroom place with kitchen. My family joined me two weeks later.

OUR SHIPPED GOODS IN CUSTOM

The goods arrived from UK. It was a considerable amount of personal items, which were shipped free of charge by a shipping company from UK to the Calcutta harbour. First of all I needed to find a shipping agent. Our shipping agent and I then went to the huge custom building on Strand Road. We spent a good few hours there and it was a disaster. The agent estimated that it would take at least a month to get the work done.

We went from desk to desk.

One person said this and another said that and they all acted like they were the final authority. I could see that this was not getting us anywhere. Then some other person told us to totally redo our itemised list of what was in the boxes.

At this point in time I left my shipping agent and started looking at the little signs that people had above their office doors.

I walked into one of these little offices and the officer was very friendly. He invited me to sit down and we had tea together.

We talked cricket, football and family life. After about fifteen minutes, he asked me what I was doing in the building and if I had any problem?

“No problem Sir, I have just some personal items in the harbour that I need to bring out.” - “Sorry, I am not involved in personal items, I oversee the tankers that come into Calcutta.”

We talked some more and then he said, “Can you come back at four o’clock? Then my friend who oversees personal items comes to see me.”

“Thank you, Sir, I will be back here just before four o’clock.”

This was around two o’clock and when I found my shipping agent he was very discouraged and explained how it would take a long time and a lot of ‘baksheesh’ or under the table gifts to get the items out.

Around four o’clock I was back at the officer’s desk and he introduced me to his friend, a well-built gentleman dressed in a white suit with one or two gold rings on each of his fingers.

He did not seem like the character that you wanted to outsmart, or get on his wrong side. “Hello Mr. Johan, how can I help you?”

“Sir, I have received personal goods that I need to get out of the harbour.” - “Where is your list? Can I see it?”

The shipping agent did not have the list anymore. He had left it at someone’s desk. “Sir, we will be back in two minutes.”

I went with the shipping agent to the person where he had left the list. He explained that this person had refused to return the list as he said that he was the final authority. Once at his desk, the person had the list in his hand and although I asked to see it he refused to give it to me. I then made a quick swipe and pulled it out of his hand.

Our shipping agent was getting more and more worried, but we returned with the list to our newfound friend in the white suit.

“This is all your personal items? Do you have any new items in there?” - “No Sir, it is all personal used items.”

He looked at the paper. He looked at me.

My silent prayer, “Dear Lord you can touch this man’s heart as honestly we cannot waste our time and money in this place.” He took out his pen signed the papers and said: “You can go and collect it tomorrow at the harbour.”

“Thank you, Sir, I am most obliged. You are a gentleman.”

AT THE HARBOUR

The next day at the harbour was a different story. The taxi manoeuvred past potholes, trucks, waste heaps, horse and wagons, and delivery vans until we came to our gate. Once past security we entered the customs office.

An Indian gentleman with a British accent was losing his cool, “You can bl**dy well sign this paper, I have been coming here for more than a f***ing month and nothing has moved. You have not done a damned thing and my car is sitting here rotting away.”

Seeing the reaction of the officer, which was one of total apathy, I knew this was not the way to get things done in the harbour.

It was either lots of money or the soft approach, and seeing the first was not an option I kept it to the soft, respectful approach.

“What do you want?” the officer said gruffly.

“Sir, good morning. I am new at the harbour and I wanted to ask for your advice and expertise. If you would be so kind as to guide me where to go from here or what I should do to receive my personal family goods?” - “Let me see your list.”

“This is it, Sir. This gentleman signed it and told me to come to this gate.” - “Please wait!”

I waited half an hour, one hour, then an hour and a half.

I heard someone say, “Aj hobe na” - this means ‘today not possible’. “Dear Lord, you can make a way into these people’s hearts and you can direct them.” Next thing I knew, the officer and I were walking through a maze of containers.

We got to our container, which was sealed. He cut the seal and there were our goods. "I will need to check them of course."

"Please go ahead Sir. I can see that you do not have a very easy task with all these containers and goods." He gave a slight smile.

The officer proceeded to open a few boxes and looked inside the refrigerator. "You can get a truck and load it up. Please stop at the gate for final checking." - "Yes, Sir. Will do."

That evening I called and thanked the shipping agent to tell him that I had the goods at my house. He just could not believe that it had happened all in two days' time.

"You are a lucky man, Mr. Johan." - "I am a blessed man Mr. Biswas and because I ask God to help me and he blesses me with good friends like you." - "Definitely the gods are great!"

The porch of our little house was packed with our items.

The landlord who was living in the other half of the house had originally agreed to rent us his half also, but he then changed his mind and did not want to rent his half anymore.

A WHACK WITH A MACHETE

Two doors down from us lived two East Asian lady volunteers and they had started a school project in a village. We became acquainted and they invited me to come teach their teachers. They also invited some of the village elders to come along to my classes. I went there several times to instruct the teachers how to teach and I also taught all of them simple parts of the scriptures.

One morning I went there in our small Maruti-van. When I arrived half of the village seemed to be standing around the school and emotions were running high. There seemed to have been some kind of incident and the villagers had locked the volunteers inside the school building.

The villagers thought that I had come to liberate the volunteers, so the crowd stopped us and told me to park along the lake side, which I did. I got out trying to find out what was going on.

Some of the crowd got rowdy and broke the right-side mirror off the van and started rocking the little van.

Then the main teacher, who was the right-hand man of these volunteers, came back from the hospital with his arm bandaged. He told the people, "Don't touch him, these are very good people." I went inside the little school with the teacher and some of the village elders to talk to the volunteers. There seemed to have been a misunderstanding about the wages as the staff had not been paid for several months. The volunteers were hesitating to pay them as their staff did not meet their standards of teaching and there seemed to be disagreement concerning religious expectations. The discussion had gotten so heated that they had given their right-hand man a whack with a machete, hence he had to go to the hospital and the event started spiralling with the village people getting involved.

The teachers wanted their pay so I told the volunteers that they should pay them and finally they reluctantly agreed. I promised the village elders and their staff that it was agreed that they should get their salaries the next day.

"We will not let you go because how will we know that you will come back to help us settle the salaries?" they told me. Several of these people had been in my lessons. "You have my word; if I do not come back then the Bible is not true." They then agreed to let me go. That evening I went over to the volunteers and we had a no-nonsense discussion. The next day I was back in the village to oversee that the wages were settled properly.

TELEPHONE / BUSINESS

Our rented house in Calcutta was mosquito-infested, so it was time to move and search for a better accommodation. Soon the move happened to bigger place. After waiting for a phone line for several months and not being able to communicate with our relatives, I spoke with the director of the telephone company.

I explained to him how difficult it was for us to not have a telephone. He sent someone over the next day to put in a phone line. That was nothing short of a miracle. I needed the phone line also for my business, which was to be exporting of leather goods such as horse harnesses and saddles.

BIG COMMOTION

Another time I wanted to see if I could give a job to a village boy to do errands for me. He was working for a day or two when he came back in an auto-rickshaw. I was upstairs but suddenly there was a big commotion in our yard. About ten to fifteen neighbourhood boys were around the rickshaw and started pounding on the boy. I went down and they were talking about lynching him. I asked one person what was happening and to slow down. It seemed that he had done something in the neighbourhood. It was not clear exactly what had happened, but someone had recognised him. I calmed the boys down and sent our village boy upstairs. Later that evening under the cover of darkness we sent him back to his village, never to return.

After this we realised that, for our personal security, we needed a good dog. We found a beautifully marked six months old boxer dog. She was a good watchdog, but for our family she was the sweetest animal you could think of and she was with us for a good nine years.

HOUSE MOVE

The nurse and her husband, who we had been working with, decided to move out as they wanted to dedicate more time on their volunteer projects within the deaf community.

We decided to move across town to a more modern place, which required less maintenance. This part of Calcutta was built in recent years. We moved into a nice two-story house. The rent was reasonable, and we had nice neighbours.

The Bengalis love to sit with you and drink tea and talk. “Let’s have tea and gossip”, was the common saying. This was mainly discussing politics and the things that were going on in society at large. Our neighbour across from us confided in me and said, “Mr. Johan I admire you; you are always busy. My aim in life is to just sit, drink tea and do nothing.” Nevertheless, they were precious people and his wife enjoyed teaching us Bengali.

WE HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH THE INDIAN PEOPLE

For my business I had sent several horse saddles and horse harnesses across to Holland, however, not much came of it as Eastern Europe was producing these products and it was easier for Holland to receive them from there.

Next, I researched the spice market, but it was very difficult to undercut the established Indian spice export.

My business went on the back burner, but we had fallen in love with the Indian people and wanted to see what we could do to help. For several years we had home-schooled our children and so I had learned quite a bit in the field of education. I wanted to volunteer and started assisting a small charitable society to help bring education for the less privileged.

CHAPTER 14

THINGS ARE PICKING UP

LEARNING BENGALI

When we started in Calcutta we went to Jadavpur University to learn Bengali. Classes were supposed to be three times weekly. Sorry to say, there were various “bhands” or strikes, and also pujas. Puja is a ritual and festival to celebrate a god. The Hindu scholars say that India has 33 crore (330 million) gods. We would frequently go to university only to learn that class was cancelled. If we could get one, or possibly two classes in the week then we did very well. We memorised a hundred-year-old poem by Rabindranath Tagore that I still remember:

“Alu hoi, Gelo bhoy,
Chari dik, Jhikimik”

It was a cute poem but did not help to improve our everyday communication. I became very involved in my volunteer work and left Jadavpur University to learn Bengali in everyday life.

SPONSOR A CHILD

We believed education was important for everyone, and I wanted to help support this charitable society, so we started looking for ways to raise awareness and funds. I spoke at some Rotary Clubs and we made friends. A friend suggested that we should start a ‘Sponsor a Child’ programme. This meant often going out in the sweltering heat and humidity to follow up on people for their sponsorship. Needless to say I lost quite some weight and it started taking the joy out of my life.

PLEASE DON'T MAKE ANY PROMISES

Help arrived. This time he sent us a precious man who with his wife came to visit the nurse and her husband.

He said that he could not believe his eyes when he saw our families. Later on he confided in me, “At first I thought you were crazy.” - “Why?” - “To be here in India, doing what you are doing you must be crazy.” However, after he had lived with us for several days he changed his mind and thought we were saints.

With this precious Italian man and his family we have developed a bond of friendship. He is one of the few people with whom I can let my hair down and just be my foolish self and enjoy life with him as a true friend. Once when visiting him I helped him build a wooden cabin/storage room.

I warned him beforehand that I can be stubborn when I work and that I might rub him the wrong way, as I am what you call a “Dutch Cheese Head”. After a few days he was frustrated with me and finally called me ‘testa fromagio’ or ‘cheese head’.

I started laughing and said, “If I am a ‘testa fromagio’ then you are a ‘testa spaghetti’”. We had a good laugh and he had to tell his friends all about it. His little log cabin still stands today.

POBITORA

I went with two children of my first marriage on a holiday and we had great fun travelling around the north east of India. We were the first foreigners to visit Assam, which had been restricted territory till then. No foreigners were allowed to visit due to the tension in the region. We travelled on local buses and went to a rhino breeding ground, called “Pobitora” which was situated around 50 kilometres outside the capital Guwahati. We stayed there for three days. These giant rhinoceroses come there as a gathering point to mate in the wild. We were going around with armed guards on elephants, as rhinos don’t attack elephants.

It was breath-taking to see so many of these colossi in just a few square kilometres. We were only charged a few hundred rupees for our stay which was a few pounds. This included elephant rides with armed guards, food and beds. It was truly amazing.

CHRISTMAS FOR CALCUTTA'S DEPRIVED

We had read news about volunteers in Mexico City that they had done a Christmas dinner for the poor of the city.

“We can do this too, don't you think?” Of course, the idea was totally crazy because all we had was a five-litre pressure cooker and Calcutta had thousands upon thousands of underprivileged people. This was the beginning of October and I had arranged to leave to Europe for six weeks. The October month in Calcutta is “Kali” or “Durga Puja”, an annual Hindu festival. Offices are closed, roads are blocked by pandals, which are artificial temples made of bamboo sticks and cloth in which the idols are on display. Hundreds of thousands of people are in the streets visiting these pandals. In those days there was first-class sound pollution with crackly speakers, blasting music throughout the night till the early morning hours.

We went ahead and called some of our friends explaining that we wanted to do a Christmas dinner for the poor of Calcutta.

One friend who owned several restaurants said, “Don't worry we will take care of the food and cooking. Call so and so and you can tell him that I am doing this. Furthermore, you can ask him to help with the set up and sound equipment.” That person also agreed. Once I got back to Calcutta we had meetings with the Commissioner and other police officials. We printed three thousand invitations. Ten teachers from the school, that we helped to support, came to volunteer and helped us to distribute the invitations to the most needy.

On Christmas day we brought some sheep and set up the Nativity stable. Some of the schoolchildren came to Calcutta for the event and were dressed up as shepherds, wise men, Mary and Joseph and the angels. It was breath-taking.

I did not think that we needed police protection, but I'm glad we had it, because once people would smell the food they could start pushing; the presence of the police avoided that.

We had asked the police beforehand not to use their lathis (bamboo sticks) on people and they were able to keep things under control without using their sticks. It was a beautiful event.

This older very precious couple in their seventies had hired a rickshaw to come for the Christmas dinner. They wanted to meet with us personally. They expressed over and over again how extremely thankful they were, as this was the first time in their life that someone had ever invited them for dinner; let alone a Christmas dinner.

The people said that the food was excellent. Another restaurant had given us 3,000 ladoos (a local sweet), to serve with the food, which made the meal complete for these people, while Christmas carols played in the background. We served around 2,500 plates. We had at least five positive newspaper articles that followed.

The next year we did it again only on a slightly smaller scale and we then served 1,500 plates. We were thankful for our amazing friends and that we could celebrate Jesus' birthday this way.

These last five years we have received sponsorship to do a big Christmas festivity for 600 to 800 children. I do this together with another NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation). These children are from slum dwellings and they so much enjoy the food, films and games. Likewise, we organize fun year-end celebrations, Children's Day events and sports-days for our school children.

I'M GOING TO KILL YOU

Whenever we hired a person for the charitable society they would come on a two-month trial period and if they fitted in then they got a one year contract. One fellow really did not turn out so well. He was rude and disrespectful to the children. We explained our expected standard of work several times in the hope he would change, but he never did improve. Finally, at the end of his two-month trial period we told him that he did not really fit in and that we wished him all the best in his future career.

However, it could not be with us. "So, you are firing me?" - "No, you have never been hired. Your employment starts only after two months." The poor fellow got so angry. "The next time that you come here by train and pass through the station, I am going to kill you." - "Well, you should do that, because I will be very happy to go to heaven, but you will rot in prison for the rest of your life because you killed a foreigner. You decide what you want to do." I think that it took the wind out of his sails as this happened a few years ago and I am still here, still going by train.

I AM VERY MUCH INSULTED

Manoj is a friend of mine. But seeing that he was scheduled caste, which means the lowest caste, he did not feel free to open his heart to me. "Sir, I don't know if I can as I am from the scheduled caste." - "Manoj, we've now known each other for a few years and do you still think that I am interested in what caste you are? I am glad that I am aware of your culture; otherwise I would say that I am insulted. Never think that again and from now on just talk to me about anything; the good, the bad and the ugly. Don't just tell me what you think I like to hear."

Since that time he has become more open and honest, and our friendship blossomed. Manoj had two beautiful daughters. Upon one occasion he confided in me and asked me to pray for him to have a son. I prayed for him and nine months later... another beautiful girl was born. Two years later we were sitting together and he was quiet. "Is there something that we should talk about, Manoj?" - "Sir, I have three daughters and would so much like to have a son." - "Manoj we prayed last time for a son and you got a daughter. So what went wrong? I know that God is not deaf, so why would he do that..?...? Now that we are talking I think I have the answer. If you would have had a son then you would have treated him like 'a little god' and your daughters would have become second-class citizens in your family.

Manoj, if you promise that you will treat your daughters and your son as equals then I will pray for you to have a son.” - “Sir, give me some time to think this over.” - “There is no rush Manoj take your time.”

He left the room and returned a good half hour later, “Sir, I promise you that I will treat them all as equals.” - “Don’t promise me Manoj, you make your promise to Jesus. This is between you and him.” - “I did, Sir.” - “Good, then let’s pray.”

We prayed together that his request would be answered. Nine months later another baby was born... and yes, you guessed right... it was a beautiful baby boy.

Manoj has been true to his word and has faithfully treated his lovely daughters with the same respect and privileges as his son.

TSUNAMI

In December 2004 the Tsunami hit, washing away villages, boats and families, so we moved to Bangalore to see if we could help.

We stayed with a warm-hearted generous family. They had a small factory and produced electrical materials. Together with other volunteers we visited the affected areas. In one particular village people were sitting around totally devastated. They had lost husbands, wives, parents, children and livelihood. Someone from the team had brought a rope to play ‘tug-of-war’.

We started pulling between us and tried to get people involved. Finally, some men came to help on one side. Then slowly some women came and started helping to pull on the other side.

It ended with the village women on the one side and the village men on the other side.

It was getting more and more exciting and although the men had expected to win, the women were pulling with all their might and pulled the men across the line. Yes, they won. For a few minutes the village had forgotten its grief and the women were jumping up and down because they had beaten the men in ‘tug-of-war’.

Through the charitable society we were able to donate a fishing boat and other fishing equipment. We also received funds to build a hostel for eighty orphaned children. We delegated the building of this dormitory to another NGO who was working in the affected area.

STONES WERE FLYING

Another time I was invited to help distribute relief packages to another area that had been affected by the Tsunami. We went with an open truckload of packages of food items and other basic needs. From the back of the truck I was distributing the packages together with an American volunteer lady from a multinational IT corporation. The truck driver that came with the hired truck was a jerky fellow and when people started climbing the truck, he started driving off and could have seriously injured some of the people, as he was scraping by a lamppost. I banged on the cabin roof yelling, "STOP-STOP."

Thank God nobody got hurt, but the people were angry and started throwing stones and bricks at the truck. The truck had two-foot high sideboards, which was our protection.

In order to safeguard the volunteer lady from the bricks I shielded her with my arms and pulled her down.

As we were lying on the floor of the open truck I started laughing. "What is there to laugh about?" she asked surprised.

"You should call your husband and tell him that you are lying in the back of a truck, in the arms of a Dutch man and that we are both getting stoned." Sometimes a good laugh can save the day.

The riot did not get out of hand and we were able to distribute the packages without too much difficulty around the corner.

DELHI

After being in Bangalore for five months we began to communicate with a young Indian couple in Delhi. We decided to team up with them and we moved to Delhi.

We started all over again in the heat of summer. At first, we rented a small house with little ventilation, but soon we rented a much larger place with affordable rent in a nice location.

THE MONKEY DANCE

Did you ever read the horror stories of a monkey stealing a young child and taking them up a tree? I had to do some shopping at a small marketplace in the Delhi area. As I came into the market there was a gathering of people standing around very worried. In the middle was a lady with a baby in a pushchair.

In front of the baby stood a big, very unfriendly looking monkey showing his teeth, while he was eyeing the baby.

“What do I do Lord?” I got the inspiration to act like a monkey and chase him off. So that’s what I did. I bent over like a monkey walks and went towards him swaying my arms. He was not moving, but looked ferociously at me, showing his teeth. As I got closer I gave him the angry I’ll-get-you stare, I slightly raised myself up and started loudly pounding on my chest, shouting, “Goobah, goobah, goobah, goobaaaah!!!”

The monkey turned around quickly and escaped up a tree.

He wanted to get away from this mad, new ‘ape-man’ species. I decided not to go after him and chase him up the tree.

The mother thanked me over and over and over again, and that afternoon I was the talk of the market.

Although I behaved like an idiot monkey-man, there is no doubt in my mind that my “Protector” chased that ferocious animal off.

CHAPTER 15

DELHI AND RAJASTHAN

THE MIRACLE VEHICLE

As time passed and we had more volunteer projects going, we realised that we needed a bigger vehicle, as our little second-hand Maruti-van was getting up in years and was no longer suitable for our volunteer work. There was a large car exhibition in Delhi at 'Pragati Maidan' and there we spoke with the director of a big car company. I explained our work and asked him if he could donate a vehicle for our work? "I cannot make this decision on my own. I will have to ask about your request."

We followed up on him and the company decided that they could give us a very large discount. Happy with new vehicle we took it on a maiden journey to the shopping mall about two kilometres down the road, for ice cream as it was our daughter's birthday.

We realised that the car was bigger than we had expected and was rather difficult to park, so we parked it next to some other cars in a field beside the mall. This was the last we ever saw of it, as when we returned 45 minutes later the car was gone.

After several trips to the insurance company, we received our insurance claim. I described in a long message to the car company director our misfortune and explained about the funds that we had received from the insurance company, asking if for those funds they could give us the new model that they had just brought out into the market that month. They wonderfully agreed. We put in an extra gear-lock and alarm system and I still pray over it whenever we park it. We got this vehicle ten years ago and it is still doing an excellent job to this day. As a family we had not taken a holiday together for quite some time.

Seeing the dealer advised us that our new car needed to first do a gentle thousand miles 'running-in' journey, we decided to make it a holiday. We drove through the mountains of northern India and visited stunning places like Nainital, Rudraprayag, Rishikesh, and Dehradun. The five-day journey was a thrill as we crossed the southern part of the Himalayas and ended up in Kasauli where we rested up at a friend's place.

DRIVERS GOT LYNCHED

I read newspaper stories of how drivers got lynched when they accidentally ran over a child and saw several buses that were burned by mobs where the driver was involved in an accident. Knowing how easy it is to get into a car crash, as I had smashed up my parent's car at the age of 19, I decided to always say a short prayer for protection when I start to drive.

Believe me, I am very thankful that prayer works for me as I have not had an accident for over fifty years, yet the law of averages tells us that drivers have an accident every 17 years.

RAJASTHAN

One day I was very sick, as I lay in bed I did something that I don't often do; I turned on the TV. There was a shocking documentary on by Preety Choudhary about female infanticide, stating that in Rajasthan as many as 2,500 female babies get killed daily in abortions or right after birth.

This was especially the case in the Jaisalmer area. I was shocked. Thoughts raced through my head a mile a minute. "Do we start an orphanage where they can drop off the little girls that people don't want? Should we get a bus and collect them? What do I do?" - "Slow down, Johan. The babies are given to them so teach them to take care of them." - "How do I do that?"

"Teach them through literature. You can write a pamphlet and make posters." Half an hour later the text was ready for a pamphlet and poster, called 'A Challenge'.

“A CHALLENGE” (edited)

The God that made the heaven and the earth is the only one that can make life and give life. He made man and woman to be together so that life would continue on earth and they could have babies and take care of each other. God has told us that life is sacred and that the children that He gives into the wombs of our women are our fruits.

We know that if we grow up in certain traditions it is very hard to break out of these traditions even if these traditions are wrong..

One man broke the traditions in which he was raised, so the people threatened to kill him. But he said with a loud voice **“I will obey God rather than man.”** He stood strong against the traditions and because he took a stand, God stood by him.. Life is very important and if God gives you a baby girl then He knows that you can take care of her..

So my question to you as a parent of that little child that has grown within you is, “Will you stand strong and allow that baby girl to live, as God wanted it to live, or will you give in to traditions of men and kill the beautiful girl that you have carried for nine months and that is a part of you and your life and family? If you kill her you are not only killing a part of yourself, but you are also disobeying God. I humbly challenge you on God’s behalf that you choose to stand strong and let your little girl live!

A friend translated it into Hindi. The printer whose ancestors were from the Jaisalmer area was thrilled with it. “You just give me the paper cost and I will print for you.” - “Done!”

“I CAN’T, YOU KILL IT”

I asked my lawyer friend if he would like to go to the Jaisalmer to start putting up the posters and give out the pamphlets. He was from the Jat caste which was respected in Jaisalmer.

A young lady student that I knew wanted to go with him. They also went to find out if these statistics were true and came back a week later with their findings from the area as well as amazing stories of what happened. They surveyed ten villages and discovered that in these villages there was one girl to eight boys.

When visiting one village, a lady pulled our female volunteer into her house, as women there do not talk to men. This lady explained that her first baby was a girl and her husband told her

to kill it, but she had said, “I can’t, you kill it.”

The second baby was again a girl and he was furious insisting that she should kill it. Again, she gave him the same response. Their third child was another baby girl. The husband lost it completely and ran away from home to Mumbai.

Some people loved our volunteers and helped them to put up the posters and distribute thousands of pamphlets, while others were threatening to kill them. “How dare you come here and try to change our culture? This has been in our culture for hundreds of years and this will not change.”

The third trip that we made I went myself with a gentleman from Jaipur whom I had met. We started a sewing course for ladies to attend and it was going well for some time. We also set up a small learning centre for children of the Ranisar slum area.

PRIYA’S VISA

On one of my train journeys to Jaisalmer I talked with Priya, a female student in her early twenties.

She excitedly told me how that morning she had received a scholarship to study in Australia. Priya spoke about her life. Our conversation took a turn towards the spiritual. We talked about how the way we live today will affect our future life when we leave this world, which she had been thinking about.

She asked me about my faith and why I do what I do. I clarified that education is the best way to fight poverty.

I went on to explain how Jesus is a friend for life who will always stay by your side and he will be there to guide you through death into the next life. He will teach you to not be selfish but to be loving and help others. I further shared with her, “Priya, when I come to India I need a visa or I won’t be allowed in. Now when we die, which will eventually happen to all of us, we might not get into heaven unless we have a visa.” I clarified if she receives Jesus, she will have a visa for heaven stamped in her heart.

Priya was happy to get this visa stamp. When she got off the train, she beamed, “Mr. Johan, thank you so so very much. This day is the absolute best day of my life. First I received a scholarship for Australia and now I also have my visa for heaven. I am just so happy!”

This is what I love about India, there are practically no atheists there and many are thankful to be shown the way.

This Hindu prayer from the Brhad Aranyaka Upanishad in the Vedas expresses the longing heart of the true Hindu:

Asatomā sad gamaya,
(From ignorance lead me to truth,)
Tamasomā jyotir gamaya,
(From darkness lead me to light,)
Mriyormā amritam gamaya.
(From death lead me to immortality.)

THE BATI RAJPUTS

In Jaisalmer I made friends with this particular clan, the ‘Bati Rajputs’, where female infanticide was rampant and they had practically no girls.

I also learned that opium is pretty much a daily essential. I got it offered while visiting a retired police officer. It was kept in a little plastic bag behind the door, easily accessible when coming home. The taxi driver offered it to me with the promise that it would make me strong for the women and when I attended my first wedding in the Jaisalmer area the plastic bag with the dark brown stuff did the rounds to the men. I gracefully declined.

NO FOREIGNERS ALLOWED - DOWRY

Some of the respectable Batis took a liking to me and I was invited to a village to attend an official Bati Rajput wedding.

I was informed that this was the first wedding that was taking place in this village between a Bati Rajput boy and Bati Rajput girl for almost a century.

This village was in a zone where no foreigners are allowed. This was no problem as it was a dark night and I was in the back seat of a government vehicle with sun-glasses and a cloth over my head, and the one time that we were stopped for checking I had fallen asleep. We arrived safely in the village. The following morning the village elders got together to see the dowry in order to approve the wedding.

The dowry was a room full of furniture and household items. When we were all seated in the courtyard, a tray of about forty centimetres in diameter with silver was brought out. On the tray were silver arm bangles, ankle chains, rings, etc. If that wasn't enough, next came another same size tray with gold: necklaces, watches, bangles and rings, etc. I learned that the dowry had the value of about one kilogram of gold. This is the reason they prefer to kill their girls and keep their gold, as the girl's family pays for the dowry and the wedding. Hence, the girls are seen as a liability to the family fortune and according to the men, "all women do is drink tea and talk."

At home the women live in a separate section and don't come into the men's quarter unless asked to serve tea or food.

THE TRANSLATOR REFUSED TO TRANSLATE

Next the goats were killed and food was served. We sat together and I tried to explain that they have a beautiful culture and if I ever changed my name, I would change it to Johan Singh Bati. We all laughed and I was accepted as their friend.

We also talked about education for the women. I used the example of a lady from Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, who I knew and was the CEO of a multinational company.

When she was born her father promised her that he would give her the same privileges as a son. He pledged that he would not pay one cent dowry for her, but that he would give her the best education. She did not want to disappoint her father and excelled

in her studies, because of this she was now overseeing more than one hundred men, and was getting a higher salary as a CEO than her husband could ever get. I explained that if they educated their girls they would no longer be seen as a liability, but would become a welcome asset to the family. I then tried to address the female infanticide but my translator refused to further translate.

Later I learned that young girls from elsewhere in the country are brought into the household as servants. The young girls are bought directly from the parents or the market. I was informed by a former high-court judge that this market is near Agra.

I was told by one of the elders that if a Bati Rajput marries a girl from another caste then their children form a different caste and according to this man these are the Soni Rajputs.

A hundred years ago these Bati Rajputs were highway men robbing caravans that travelled between Karachi and Bombay (Mumbai). They would stop the caravan to ask for protection or toll money. If they paid then the caravan also got permission to trade in Jaisalmer. If, however, no payment was received then you probably know the story. "Please be careful as others who are less friendly will most likely come and then we cannot possibly protect you anymore." I found an old photograph of these Bati Rajputs and when I showed it to the family which was very helpful, the father got all excited and showed me that this one person in the photo was his Grandfather.

One example to show that they don't mess around is that they run a bus service.

As I was travelling this certain road I noticed a burned-out bus in a rather deserted place. I asked my Bati friend, "How did that happen?" - "Oh, this company wanted to also start a bus service along the same route; the bus was pulled over; the people and driver were ordered off the bus and this is the result. People here don't like competition."

THE LEGEND WELL

I visited a village with a particular well. The legend is: if a woman drinks from this well then she is likely to give birth to a son.

I visited the village headman and before he offered us tea he asked what my caste was. I explained that in my country we don't have a caste system, but all men are considered equals, or at least should be considered equals.

When the tea was served everyone was drinking from porcelain cups, but my tea was served in a glass. A glass is used to serve the low caste. However, the glass of tea was too much for me to drink. To the horror of my host I took a cup instead. I gave the glass to my Bati friend who came with me and he did not mind.

JORDAN

I wanted to see what I could do for Jaisalmer's surrounding land, as there was so much desert land that was not being used. I wanted to see if there was a possibility to grow olives in the area with proper irrigation.

I had the opportunity to visit the most amazing family in Jordan and on that trip I learned a lot about olive growing and went to visit a large olive oil producer who gave me very valuable information and I was getting excited about the possibilities.

I fell in love with the warm-hearted Jordanians, floated in the Dead Sea, visited the fascinating city of Petra which was hewn out of the mountains, and walked around Mount Nebo where Moses died. It was an amazing week and I was treated like royalty and it became an experience that I will never forget.

On the flight back to India there was a mix-up with the seats as the flight was overbooked and at the last minute in the confusion an Israeli gentleman was assigned the seat next to me.

We started talking and he explained that he was from the agricultural department. We had an interesting chat and I was asking about irrigation in the desert, etc.

“Why do you ask so many questions?” I explained that I was thinking about bringing olives to Rajasthan on a small scale.

He was surprised that he would sit next to me as he was just going to Rajasthan and that he was in charge of overseeing a large experiment of olive growing with the Rajasthan government. He continued to say that the whole experiment became a disaster as the Indian climate and the monsoon rains were not conducive for olive growing.

Needless to say I was very thankful for this man’s advice, and that in the confusion of the overbooked flight the Lord somehow planned it that this gentleman would sit next to me.

INVESTING INTO RAJASTHAN

Shortly thereafter, in January of 2012, was a meeting in Jaipur for PIO’s (Persons of Indian Origin) to invest into their motherland, or Grandmother’s land; beautiful Rajasthan. Dignitaries and industrialists from all over the world came.

The President Mrs. Patil and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh attended and distributed gold medals to VIPs.

Through an Indian lawyer friend from New York I also got an invitation to this meeting.

I made a four-page report with beautiful photos of Rajasthan, the female infanticide statistics and the solution. Each report was in a nice folder together with a heart-touching brochure, ‘I had no voice, speak for me.’ I brought 27 copies with me.

I left early around six a.m. to be on time, but on my way to Jaipur the car somehow kept stalling. No one could tell me what was wrong or if they knew they did not have the right part. The trip was only supposed to take a few hours, but it took me at least twice as long. I was happy to finally arrive in the early afternoon at the meeting, by which time it was in full swing. I quietly watched and attended the different meetings, and as I did I noticed the people who wanted to invest.

One person wanted to invest 600 crores, or around one hundred million dollars. Another young Italian couple wanted to start a shoe factory. Business was booming and money was flowing.

At the end of the meetings I went around to the key investors and dignitaries, to the ministers of industries and of tourism to hand them a copy of my report, explaining that I have also invested in Rajasthan, but mainly my time.

I could already see the Italians exploding, “Madre mia, you allow killing of baby girl, ‘bambina’. We will put factory in other state where they do not allow killing bambina. This is folle!”

Within fifteen minutes I was getting feedback.

The ministers called me, “What is this?” I explained the statistics and what was happening. I tried to get them to help build a girls’ school and although the promises were good, nothing came of it.

THE CAR STALLED FOR GOOD

There was to be a gala dinner afterwards in a big fort, but I had the definite impression to not go as I had done what I came for and to see if I could get back home with the car. The car started and as I drove out of Jaipur it stalled, but this time for good.

I came to a halt in a dark deserted street in the outskirts of Jaipur. It was nine o’clock. “Lord, I think that I need your help again.” - Wait, did I see that right? Someone is closing up a little shop of car parts. Run and get him.

He came with me and looked at the car engine. He did not say much but talked to another person that appeared out of the dark. He opened his little shop again and came back with the part that was malfunctioning.

It was jaw dropping! I could not believe that this little shop out in the middle of nowhere had the right part. The other fellow took out some tools and the car was repaired for the cost Rs. 700, which is 7 pounds or 10 Euros. “Wow, wow, wow! What a day!!”

THE HUSBAND WON'T KILL IT

This is not all. Listen to this; about two or three weeks later I was again in Jaisalmer visiting an old friend and shop-owner.

He excitedly showed me a newspaper article. A well-known Bati-Rajput was convicted and given a prison sentence, because their new-born baby girl had died shortly after mother and baby came home from the hospital. It was the talk of the town. You have to realise that the husbands won't kill the babies. They tell their wives to do it. It is done either with a pot of soft clay, a large amount of opium or just by starvation.

Around this time the actor Amir Khan also dedicated a TV programme to it.

Can you believe it? Now the social workers, the doctors and the police were going around and checking up on new-born girls. It seems that female infanticide pretty much stopped as several jail sentences were given. What could not be changed because it was so-called in the culture for hundreds of years came to an abrupt end when the pocket-book nerve was hit and it would mean big financial losses. Let's pray it will stay that way.

PUSHKAR

When my son was eleven years old, we went in November to the yearly camel market in Pushkar, Rajasthan. Thousands of camels are gathered in one place and it is fascinating to see.

Some of the camels had quite a temper and refused to be loaded up on to the trucks for transport.

We offered the farmers a helping hand to load the camels which was much appreciated. The farmers asked if my eleven-year-old son was married yet. To the great displeasure of my son I responded, "Not yet, but we are looking."

The farmers became our friends, and seeing that all hotels and rooms were booked they invited us to sleep with them. Although they had bundles of money rolled in their dhotis for the buying

and selling of camels, they affirmed, “With us you are safe. Nobody dares to rob us.” Instead we spent the night in the car as the seats folded back and we were parked in a safe place.

Later I learned that parents give their young boys in marriage as early as six, seven or eight years old. However, they marry young full-grown women. Since the husband is too young to fulfil his marital duties, this is done by the father of the newlywed.

This matrimonial affair is part of their culture and no one frowns upon it. Everyone is extremely concerned that their son will not remain single. Marrying their boys at early age is one worry less for the parents and so the cycle of “Marry my son means marrying me!” continues.

HISTORY LESSON IN ‘WHY WARS?’

While in Rajasthan I visited one of those amazing beautiful forts and was told that one day the coffers of the Maharaja were empty, so he declared war on Bengal. He took his army, stole their gold and some pretty girls and then considered his problem solved. It was such simple and honest explanation of why aggressors fight wars.

CHAPTER 16

ODDS & ENDS, MIRACLES & PECULIARITIES

THAT'S THE MAN

My good lawyer friend invited me to come to his town near Delhi to meet his beautiful family. He explained, "Some years ago the sons of one family would all marry the same wife."

In the West this is considered 'female polygamy' or in this case it is brothers marrying the same wife which is 'fraternal polyandry'. The reason for this was so the family land would not be divided.

All the sons had the same mother and they all worked the same land. He clarified that it was only a few decades ago that social workers came to educate the families about sexual transmitted diseases, and that now this practice had changed.

My friend had accepted the Lord earlier in life and asked me to pray for his mother. His mother was in bed when I arrived as she was older and weak.

I prayed for her and my friend told me that mother was having dreams about this one man who she said was very kind to her. Nobody knew what to make of it.

I had a picture of Jesus in my bag and showed it to her, to which she responded, "That is the man that keeps coming to me."

She was so happy when I gave it to her to set it next to her bed. I told to her that it was Jesus. I explained that in him we have 'mukti' or salvation. She was a lovely lady and gladly prayed with me. It was not much later that she passed on to the other side.

I had this same picture in my office. One young lady came in the office and told me, "I look at that picture and get goose bumps all over. Who is this?"

I clarified who he was, and she gladly opened her heart to him.

DIFFERENT CULTURES AND MINDSETS

So much of our thought patterns and religions are formed by the social climate and culture in which we grow up, more so than by the actual scriptures. Other cultures have totally different views on what is morally right or wrong, whether it is eating habits, marriage, driving, sex, dress codes, God, gods, family, life, life after death, heaven, reincarnation, etc.

However, God himself is so often used as a stick to enforce our cultural and personal religious beliefs on others.

146 YEARS OLD

In New Delhi we did a free musical performance to encourage the patients in a cancer institute and we distributed flowers to the patients and nurses.

I went and talked to an elderly gentleman. He told me that he was getting on in years. "Sir, may I ask how old you are?" - "I am 146 years old." - "Really, then you are getting on in years!"

The nurse that translated for me confirmed that the man was most likely right about his age. He explained that he was from north Pakistan. I later checked online and there is a tribe called the 'Hunza' in the mountains of north Pakistan who can age up to even 160 years. They are mountain people; they have no gyms or other modern amenities and dieticians to advise them on 'healthy living', but it's amazing what simple living and healthy food can do for a person.

WE WALKED THE WRONG DIRECTION

We had just newly moved to the state of Haryana. This state is infamous for men going forcefully after anything from the opposite sex. Together with a female relative who was with us at that time, I was invited to a function. The house was within walking distance of ours, so we walked there. When the celebration was finished at around eleven at night we walked back.

Seeing that I was not totally familiar with the area we walked the wrong direction.

I realised this and we turned around to go towards our home. Then we noticed that a fancy new SUV had slowly passed us with four men in it and further down the road it had also turned around to follow us. We left the road and walked into an isolated open patch, surrounded by trees and bushes which we had to pass to get home. Our house was about 70 to 100 meters away. The car stopped. It looked like they were not up to much good as they were eyeing my relative. I said a quick prayer, “Lord, you please protect.” I was concerned that if we ran, they might come after us and possibly outrun my relative.

In that situation the only alternative was to face the danger. I told her to walk on ahead while I turned around and I picked up two rocks, giving them the look of, ‘if you are looking for trouble then I am ready’ which made them realise that they might not have an easy prey. I think they valued the windows of their new SUV more than taking the risk to run after the female, so the car slowly pulled away.

“Whew, that was a close call, Lord. Thank you so much for your protection, help me to never allow myself get into a dangerous situation like this again.”

SUBJECT OF CORRUPTION

I was attending one large leadership meeting in Delhi where the subject of corruption was addressed. I raised my hand and was handed the microphone, “Thank you for allowing me to speak. I work together with a charitable society to bring education to the less privileged.

I was talking to one of our volunteers about a newspaper article where someone had cheated his mother out of her money. She then explained the following, ‘I will be honest with you. If I were offered a whole lot of money I might bend some of my principles.

However, one thing I know for sure; I will never ever cheat my mother. Hence, on the subject of corruption, I want to leave us with this question, 'Are we robbing our precious Mother - our dearest Mother India?'

This was then followed by the different handshakes and compliments, and I hoped that it did somebody some good.

MENTAL-HEALTH ISSUES / MY WIFE IS PREGNANT

In Delhi I spoke in a hotel meeting on mental-health issues and how history repeats itself. I compared our issues to the snake bites that the children of Israel suffered when *'The people spoke against God... and the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people'*. Back then Moses made a brass serpent *'and everyone that looked up at the brass serpent lived.'* (Numbers 21:5-9)

Today these serpents strike with mental-health issues: anxiety, hypertension, depression, self-harm, etc. Jesus said, *'As Moses lifted up the serpent...so must I be lifted up:'* (John 3:14,15) By looking up to Jesus the poison of our mental-health problems will be drained from our soul and mind.

After the meeting several people asked me to pray for them.

Three months later I came back there to speak again. After the meeting a young couple came to me and the husband very excitedly told me, "My wife is now three months pregnant because of you." - "Wow, not so fast! Don't worry. I had nothing to do with it." - "No, remember, last time you were speaking here and you prayed for my wife. You prayed that the Lord would open her womb and he did. We had visited doctors and clinics for several years since we got married. However, we had no success until you prayed for us."

"Can I clarify one thing?" I said, "First of all I don't remember it and second if the Lord sees fit to answer prayer like that, that is so amazingly wonderful but honestly that is his business. I only request and if he sees fit to answer, that is totally up to him."

My prayers are as good as anyone else's prayers. If you start praying for others you will see that the Lord might also do miracles for the people that you pray for. That is why praying for and with others is so important."

LISTENING TO THE LORD

We moved back to the UK for different reasons and I visited the projects in India for several months out of the year.

After speaking at a religious gathering in the UK a lady asked me, "What does the Lord speak to you about?" - "That depends on my question." - "I mean to ask, 'How does he speak to you?'"

"It is quite simple really; if I have a question I tell him that I have this question or uneasy feeling about something and if he can give me his point of view on it. I type my prayer and my question and since I don't hear his voice audibly, I tell him 'Lord I serve you with heart, soul and mind. Right now I submit my mind to you. I want to ask you what you think about this, as I am not sure.'

Then whatever comes to mind I type it on my laptop and I simply take that as the Lord speaking to me.

I try to put it into practice and when I do, things pretty much always work out.

However, if I am not sure if I got it right, then I still proceed as if I got it right, but I ask him to please put a stop to it in case I did not get it right, which he faithfully does."

RURAL WOMEN CONFERENCES

Back in India I was invited to speak at several women conferences. These were mainly for women from the farming community. Besides the usual entertainment these were also serious meetings.

Several of the women had lost husbands who had committed suicide. It seemed that quite a few took their lives as I was told that the government gave a financial compensation to the family of the deceased.

So when the farmers could not pay their debts they often saw this as the only way out of their debt. I shared how difficult and disheartening it is for a man to not be able to supply food for his family. I explained the important role that the woman has in the household as when the man is discouraged then the woman can stand strong and she can strengthen the husband by speaking faith and say that it will all work out as we still have food today. God will work it out for us. At the end of the meetings we offered our prayers together also for the deceased.

LIGHTNING STRIKES

We had turned off from the motorway onto the smaller road towards home. Suddenly the sky turned dark and it started raining and thundering with amazing lightning flashes. I was not driving but was fascinated by the change in the weather. Suddenly about a couple of hundred meters ahead of us one lightning bolt came straight down, in one direct line. Next, the cars ahead of us stopped.

There were about four or five cars in front of us. We could see three or four young men standing in the middle of the road nervously stopping the traffic with rocks in their hands. They made sure that no one passed.

“I need to see what is happening.” The person with me in the car said, “No Sir, don’t go. These are bad boys, robbers.”

“If they are robbers they should come and ask for money, but they’re just standing there getting soaking wet.” As I found my way through the pouring rain I saw a body lying on the street behind a motorbike and four nervous young men around the body with bricks in their hands not allowing anyone to pass.

I asked the bearded young man in his mid-twenties, who seemed calmer than the rest, “What happened?” - “Sir, we are riding our bikes; suddenly lightning struck him and he is spot-dead.”

In the Indian culture people don’t touch dead bodies.

Nevertheless, I went over to the body and felt his neck to see if he still had pulse. He was dead, so I prayed over him. The bearded person watched me respectfully. I excused myself and went back to the car.

We waited at least an hour or so. An ambulance drove by; they looked at the body and drove on, as they had a call to take care of a living person. Seeing that nothing was happening and we could not pass with traffic jammed on both sides, we were planning to settle in our car for the night.

Another half-an-hour passed and the young man with the beard came to our vehicle. "Sir, do you have far to go?" - "Yes, to the interior another 220 kilometres." - "Please follow me." He made a path for us through the cars and allowed us to pass the body and we were on our way. Amazing how a simple concern for others can touch people's hearts to help you in return.

YOU HAVE TWO AGES

I was on a business visit to a certain company and as I talked with a young gentleman, he said something like "Sir, you sound younger than you are. Did you know that you have two ages?"

"No, I did not know that. Please teach me."

"One is your calendar age, and the other one is how old you feel inside." - "Thank you so very much. You made my day. I have just become thirty-three." This was several years ago so by now I am thirty-five. My grey hair and my senior physique are my disguise, which has given me definite advantages, especially in the Indian culture where people still respect grey hair. Furthermore, on public transport I often get a seat offered to me. Not bad for a thirty-five year old.

MY MEDICAL PECULIARITIES

Upon another visit to Holland I fell sick with the flu. I don't remember ever taking medicine in my life, except a tetanus shot. Well, someone gave me a few paracetamols, "Here this will help"

That night I walked to the bathroom holding deliriously on to the walls. I thought I was going to die as I perceived someone standing in the hallway. Obviously I am very allergic to paracetamol and who knows what other type of medicine.

After about a week or so I recovered, but that made me decide to leave medicine for others. I was going to try to stay healthy by eating healthy and exercising or walking five times per week.

First thing in the morning I squeeze a lemon in a glass of warm water, drink it and wait half an hour for my body to absorb before I take anything else. I drink several pints of water throughout the day, avoid microwave heated food, and, needless to say, I sidestep soft drinks and junk food.

My teeth did at times hurt because of infection and the doctor said to gargle with salt water. Since then, instead of toothpaste I brush with a bit of kitchen salt and it has done the trick for me.

WHAT IF GOD DOES NOT EXIST?

“What if you die and you find out that God does not exist?” Paul said that if in this life we only have hope and we are not sure that Christ exists, *‘then we are of all men most miserable.’* (1Cor.15:19) Here I tend to disagree with Paul, because even if God would not exist, then I feel that I’ve still had a wonderful life so far and consider myself of all men most blessed and very happy.

However, if you insist that ‘God does not exist’, then the Cosmic Energy does not exist, Quantum Physics is rubbish, the Nobel scientists like Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Max Planck and Albert Einstein with his formula of $E=mc^2$ did not know what they were talking about, and you have just made a complete fool of yourself.

CHAPTER 17

INDIA - THE PEOPLE I LOVE

“JOHAN, CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?”

“This all sounds quite fine, but I am still deciding if you are a crackpot or not. My question is what are you actually doing that is contributing to this world? What tangible changes have come about, or is this all a bunch of hoopla?”

My life is two pronged, my private and my professional life.

In my private life I love doing research on all my personal questions about every subject of life and put the answers in simple writing for people of all walks of life to understand. I respect all religions but adhere to none, as for me God and his word is the ultimate truth and I have the honour to be one of his children. Some of the questions and answers are in chapter 21.

My professional life embraces children and adults of all religions, castes and social backgrounds. My ambition is to help the less privileged of our society have a better start in life through education, whether it is academics or skill development training.

For the rest I am just a simple man that loves and appreciates life and enjoys being around people without pretence.

ONE OF THE MOST FULFILLING PARTS OF MY LIFE

As I mentioned earlier I volunteer with a non-political, non-religious Indian charitable society. The members of the governing body are predominantly Hindu and have supported me in what became one of the most fulfilling periods of my life.

With the help of friends I manage a few academic and vocational training centres in north India. Following are some random reactions of students and parents, starting with an urban area.

“My name is J. My parents live in the village. I live with my older sister because I want to study and there are no proper facilities in my village. My parents are not able to pay the school fees of the private schools, but in the Learning Centre I get free education. Here I can build my future and I am very thankful for the help.”

(The doctor said that J. was very malnourished, he had spots on his face and body and many white hairs on his head. He is doing much better since he receives the midday meals with us.)

“Hi my name is S. There are six members in my family. My father is a painter and he earns little money. He faces many problems for our living. My parents want us children to study.

I study in class two. We are very thankful for the Learning Centre as my parents cannot afford to pay for our study.”

“My name is M. I go to the Learning Centre in class two. Both my father and mother work for our living.

They earn money by ironing clothes all day. But after all that, they still would not be able pay for our education in other schools. I have two brothers and they also study with me in the Learning Centre. This helps us to make our future. And I really want to say that if this school had not given us the opportunity then we would never had the chance to study in our life.”

We have two students named P. and D. whose father is a daily wage worker. He said that because of this school, he is able to send his two daughters to study.

There is K. whose father is a drug addict. He spends whatever he earns on his addiction. K.'s Grandmother brings her to school and says that because of our school K. is able to study.

S. and Z.'s father is a sad case. Their mother came to school crying telling us that many times they don't have food. (It is heart wrenching stories like these that make me so thankful that because of our sponsors we can serve healthy midday meals.)

FROM THE RURAL AREAS:

The children are from very poor families and have barely any clothes. Now they look so handsome in their uniform. In just a few months some of the boys have changed so much. One very smart boy who was a 'pain-in-the-neck' and had the potential to become a criminal or bank-robber, changed into a remarkable, warm-hearted and friendly child.

One Hindu farmer stood up in one of our meetings expressing his thankfulness over and over again. "Sir, we had totally given up all hope for our children's education. Then this person from the next village came and wanted to teach our children. Now our children can already read and write. Thank you for making this programme possible." This village actually constructed a little school building for this teacher to teach from.

Another person told, "In our villages the religious animosity that existed is fading, as the parents have to talk to each other in the school committees and parent-teacher meetings for the running of the learning centres."

One of the parents told us, "I am amazed when my seven-year-old comes home, he teaches us. I am so happy."

We also started adult literacy classes. In the beginning the classes were packed with adults, but as soon as they had learned to write their name they got involved in other priorities.

However, I challenged them and some adults stayed on longer and were so proud to show off once they learned how to read.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING SUCCESS STORIES

G. completed the computer course. He is married and the only earning member of his family with whom he lives together.

His family consists of seven family members. He now runs a small computer DTP (Desk Top Publishing) shop, which gives him an income of approximately Rs. 10,000.- (ten thousand) per month.

This income has changed the standard of living and happiness in his family and he is so thankful for this vocational course, which has opened up this new possibility for earning his livelihood.

P. has two children. She has completed our beginner and advanced sewing course and she received a sponsored sewing machine. She has opened up a tailoring shop in the village and she makes and repairs clothes for both males and females.

Her husband had been trying to run a small business but their family was extremely poor. Now with his wife having a sewing business as the main earning member, the family has changed for the better. She brings in around rupees 8,000.- (eight thousand) per month and is so appreciative of having had this opportunity to learn this trade and expresses her thankfulness over again.

V. was a good student in our school. He continued his studies and has done his Master's degree and completed his Bachelor of Education and is continuing his studies to obtain a diploma in Elementary Education. He got a government appointment as Primary School Teacher and at present receives a salary of rupees 18,000.- (eighteen thousand) He recently got married and lives together with his elderly father and mother. He is the only earning member and is thankful that he received a good foundation and a good start in life for his further studies.

P.'s family has five members and was very poor, with his father doing daily labour jobs in farming and wherever he could get work. P. completed his basic education with us, as well as the auto-mechanic and computer course from our vocational centre. After completion he was able to join a company and bring home a monthly wage of Rs. 10,000.-. He also receives extra food and travel allowance from his company, and he also works as a tutor when he has extra time on his hand. We have also employed his father for school upkeep and painting when it is needed.

S. completed the beginner and advance sewing course of our vocational programme. She has become a good tailor and produces beautiful male and female garments. She has opened a tailoring shop in her village.

She brings in Rs. 8,000.- (eight thousand) every month to help her five member BPL (Below Poverty Line) family.

B's family was extremely poor as father being a daily labourer trying to find work on a daily basis. He completed his basic education with us and continued his studies and is now a Bachelor of Arts (English honours). At present he earns Rs. 7000.- monthly by giving English tuition to older students. He does this from his home, and their standard of living has greatly improved. He is thankful for the education that he received with us.

A. completed the carpentry course. We helped Amrita after successfully completing his course with a set of carpentry tools. His very poor family counts five members.

He started doing carpentry jobs from his home. After two years he was able to join a wood working company producing wooden furniture. His monthly earnings are between Rs.10 and 12,000.-. His father is old and cannot earn so he is the only earning member to support his family and all are very thankful for the education he could receive in his woodworking profession.

S. completed the beginner and advanced course. His family is very poor and consists of four members. After successful completion of the course he is working and tailoring from his home and is earning Rs. 6,000.- per month. Samir has expressed his gratitude for the learning opportunity which has greatly increased his family's standard of living.

D. completed his basic education with us. His family consists of four members, they have had a difficult time to make ends meet. He also completed the auto mechanic course at the vocational centre.

He started his career with repairing vehicles and later moved onto driving auto rickshaws and cars. He is earning Rs. 12,000.- per month. His family is very appreciative of the opportunities that D. received.

M. has completed the beginner and advance sewing course. She was married and has a broken relationship. She lives at present with her personal family and because of her tailoring, she can support them with Rs. 5000.- every month. M. having this income from tailoring has greatly helped during this difficult time of her life to not be a burden for others.

B. successfully completed the beginner and advanced sewing course. She and her husband have 3 children, which studied at our school. They were extremely poor as her husband was selling incense sticks which gave a very meagre income. B. is adding Rs. 4 to 5,000.- to his income by doing tailoring from their home.

P. completed his basic education with us and afterwards continued his studies. He now has a Bachelor of Science. We have partly sponsored his further education and he has completed his diploma in pharmacy. He is presently doing his internship at the sub-divisional hospital. He is promised a good job in any medicine company or will be appointed to a government hospital. He should start on a salary of Rs. 22 to 25,000 (twenty five thousand) per month.

These are just a few of the people that we could help. On behalf of our beneficiaries I cannot express my thankfulness enough for help that we have received from our well-wishers and sponsors through the charitable societies.

CHAPTER 18

ALL MY WISHES GRANTED

MY NARROW ESCAPE

Do you remember how I talked to my mother when I was sixteen and wanted to do all these things in my life? Let me first tell you another story of the Lord's protection and about my narrow escape. Together with my youngest son and daughter we went for a short holiday to Kullu Manali, and the three of us decided to go zip-lining and then para-gliding. We went up the mountain first in a jeep and continued on foot to get the point from where we would dive. I was the first to go in a twin seat with the fellow pulling the ropes behind me. We were standing on the mountain side and as he was strapping us in; he told me to move a little forward. I took a step forward but could not stop as the mountain side was too steep. He said: "stop-stop", but I could not "stop-stop". The cliff edge was not far away, that gave me a bit of a scare. However, he must have managed as a second or so later we were sailing like an eagle. I was relieved and fascinated as we were soaring between the mountains.

MY HEART'S DESIRES

Last year I turned 69 and I went on a holiday with my youngest son who was 19 at that time. He wanted to visit India, see his friends, and pay for his own holiday so we had a low budget, holiday. We made friends among the students and backpackers, travelled on local buses and went for long hikes. We enjoyed spending the nights with the local population in their home-stays. In Ladakh, northern India, we hired a motorbike and with some other bikers we rode to Lake Pangong, with its stunning variety of blue colours, and criss-crossed the Nubra valley.

MY GEAR STOPPED WORKING

My son reminded me that while crossing a mountain, my gear pedal stopped working and the main bolt had come loose and was bent out of shape with some of the thread gone. We were in a deserted place and there was no mechanic or anybody with tools in the area. How were we supposed to proceed? All I had was my Swiss-knife. The other biker had a small pipe socket and the right 19 mm spanner. With the pipe socket and the banging of some rocks the bolt got straightened. I tried to repair some of the thread with my knife but to no avail. However, with part of the thread gone the bolt refused to grip and screw into where it was supposed to go.

After attempting for some time, I finally set the bolt where I thought it should grip and asked for a rock.

“I wonder what good that will do?” said my American friend. Nevertheless, with a “Lord, you can do it,” I gave the bolt a good knock... and yes, it gripped! To everyone’s surprise the bolt was tightened; the gear was fixed and we were on our way.

My life is littered with stories like that. When on the road with my first family, our van that pulled the caravan suddenly stopped going forward. I had no idea why, as I am no mechanic. But as I walked around the van to see what was wrong. I put my hand under the van and, can you believe it, my hand touched the part that had come loose. I got on my back under the van and put the parts back together. Amazingly, we were on our way again.

KARDUNGLA

I was not what you call an experienced rider, however before going I had the feeling that I got a green light to ride and that I should just enjoy it. The most exciting part was passing the Kardungla Pass, which is the ‘highest motorable mountain pass’ in the world; 18,380 feet, or 5.6 km high. My son was till then going on the back of someone else, but they had a slip.

The rider told me that he did not feel confident anymore to take responsibility for my son on the back of his bike, neither did the others. “Okay son, get on with Dad.”

It was off road, trucks, mud, unbelievable. We were brought to a halt by a huge landslide. A bulldozer was clearing the way; mud and big boulders were pushed aside. The minute the road was cleared we were the first ones on the way as we had passed the lines of trucks, buses and cars that were waiting. Yes, we made it to the top. Snow, sleet, mud and freezing cold, but boy, were we excited because we made it. Afterwards it was downhill to reach the capital, the city of Leh.

DALAI LAMA

I also learned that the Dalai Lama had his birthday and he happened to be arriving in Leh on his birthday. I had met him before at a large meeting where he was the guest of honour. Seeing we were in Leh I got him a nice birthday card and wrote him my happy birthday wishes. I also included the pamphlets on Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. Although we did not get to see him as he had just arrived and was resting, we were assured by his personal assistant that our package would be given to him.

We hiked over the amazing mountains of Ladakh and the breathtaking hills of Himachal. We climbed mountains and I got blisters on my feet; we washed in a waterfall; boiled ourselves in hot-spring baths; visited the golden temple in Amritsar and met some of the most beautiful and warm-hearted backpackers and people. Some backpackers from Austria who had learned that it was my 69th birthday got me a birthday cake. Amazing people!

JAWDROPPING MONGOLIA

In early 2019 I overheard two of my daughters talking about going to Mongolia and taking the Trans-Siberia Express back to Moscow. I joked, “Do you need a bodyguard?” - “Oh Dad, really do you want to come?”

“Do you want this old guy to come with you?” - “We’d love it if you wanted to come.”

Through a miscommunication on my part I had booked my air ticket to Mongolia five days earlier than my daughters. During this time I met Steve, a student from Hong Kong and we travelled together to the Mini Gobi. The Mini Gobi is a busy tourist attraction with some sand dunes. I was informed that Mongolia has about three million people and seventy-five million animals, which averaged to about twenty-five animals per person. Due to my age I generally eat very little beef, yet here in the Mini Gobi a major part of the local diet was big portions of beef. It did not take long before I started craving a salad again.

The national sport is wrestling and when men get together you will often see them wrestling.

I was surprised to learn that in Mongolia anybody can take land and develop it without land registration or government permit. I also heard about the Tsaatan people or the reindeer people, who live way up in the mountains near the Russian border.

STEVE

When Steve and I travelled back to the capital he questioned me. He started asking about my work and my findings and the things that I had written. Whatever I told him he listened quietly.

At a certain moment he looked at me intently and asked, “Are you alone on this path Johan, or are there others with you?”

“It gets quite lonely at times Steve, as you are pretty much considered a half-baked crackpot when you think outside the box of our four dimensional parameters, or worse yet when you question the school text-books and modern science.

People get very uncomfortable and will not accept contradictory facts and do not want to hear when you dare to challenge what the learned intelligentsia proclaim as ‘the undeniable truth’ in the halls of higher learning.”

Steve was only 22 and he reminded me so much of myself when I was his age. We shared a meal together and I prayed with Steve before we each went our different ways.

MY TWO DAUGHTERS ARRIVED

The next day my two daughters arrived, and we took the bus to Mörön. A major part of the road was non-existent and the bus drove for many miles through mud, fields and streams. The first day we arrived in Mörön we visited the Nadaam. The Nadaam is the local yearly festival with long horse races of 25 kilometres. The riders were young children of five to eight years old. The lighter the child, the better is the chance for the horse to win the long twenty-five-kilometre race.

My daughters wanted to rest, as they had been working up till their departure. While they were resting at the beautiful Hövsgöl Lake, I took off for five days to the Tsaatan people.

THE TSAATAN PEOPLE AND MY SORE BOTTOM

First it was an all-day jeep-ride; I slept the night in a yurt and helped clean a sheep for a barbecue. The next day I spent two hours on the back of a motorbike and then rode on horseback for seven hours to cross the mountains. I was with a guide and an extra horse for my luggage which was a little backpack.

It was just the two of us and three horses. The horse saddle was wooden and although I had a thick Mongolian coat under me, I could definitely feel the wood.

The mountains and scenery were breath-taking, but my bottom was getting sore. "Lord what did I start?" - "Well you wanted it, so now you got it." We arrived at the Tsaatan people as the sun was setting and I was invited for food. "No thanks, may I please have a bed." I slept in a Tee-Pee like the Native Americans have. Originally these Tsaatan people are from Siberia. The bed was rough, made with uneven planks of wood, but I had a sound sleep and woke up refreshed to a sunny day.

No aches or pains. Sleep, the refreshing healer.

The reindeers are outstandingly gentle animals. When standing between them one reindeer started licking and sucking my hand and fingers. I still can't believe that such remarkable, majestic antlers can grow on top of their heads. After a simple breakfast the men sat down to gamble and the women cooked.

I chopped wood which the women much appreciated. The young children were running around and playing, while the young teen girls were on horseback leading the reindeers out to pasture. There was no school for the children and when hungry they ate reindeer meat. Their life seemed simple and uncomplicated.

The day I left they killed and cleaned one of those beautiful animals and as memory I negotiated a price for the antlers. The men advised me that when I take the fur off the antlers to use the blood from the antler and to mix it with vodka as 'it makes a man strong for women'.

As I was leaving, the father of the family where I stayed also left on horseback for Russia. I asked him, "Do you have a passport?"

He started laughing, "Ha, you need passport; me no passport."

The trip back was another six-and-a-half hours on horseback and although I got some minor scrapes and cuts on my legs, it was definitely worth the trip. We took the motorbike ride back to the yurt, where I cleaned the fur off the antlers. Seeing I had no vodka with me I decided to not make use of the blood.

From there I went straight on the overnight jeep back to Mörön. My daughters had gone ahead to Ulaanbaator. I had to wait a day to catch the overnight bus back to the capital. I used the day to go for a long morning hike with a German volunteer worker who volunteered in the guesthouse where I was staying.

I visited the Nadaam again, and saw more horse races. I attended the wrestling matches in the stadium. 'The Elephant' and 'the Falcon' had their picture taken with me.

‘The Elephant’ means seven times champion and ‘the Falcon’ means five times champion; these were big men weighing hundreds of pounds.

The next evening, I took the overnight bus back to the capital. I met up with my daughters and we spend the day as tourists. We saw the Genghis Khan Statues, visited the museum and looked through the markets. From there we proceeded together to the Khongoryn Els, which were some of the largest sand dunes of the Gobi Desert in the south of Mongolia near the Chinese border. We saw herds of camels, visited the Flaming Cliffs of Bayanzag, where dinosaur fossils have been discovered; and the Khavtsgait Petroglyphs, which are a collection of ancient petroglyphs carved into rocks across the mountainside.

THE TRANS-SIBERIAN EXPRESS

We caught a ride back to Ulaanbaator, where we boarded the Trans-Siberian Express. Once in Russia I realised that the petrol and diesel was half of what we pay in Europe or UK.

First stop was Irkutsk at Lake Baikal, the deepest inland waterbody in the world, 636 km long and flat like a mirror. From Irkutsk we took the bus to Listvyanka. Here we left a part of our luggage to lighten our backpacks in order to make the arduous, but beautiful 27 kilometres mountain trek to Bolshie Koty. The next day we took the ferry back to Listvyanka and the bus to Irkutsk, where we boarded the Trans-Siberian Express to Krasnoyarsk.

In Krasnoyarsk we kept bumping into this student and he invited me to an English speaking youth group that meets on a weekly basis. My daughters went to see the beautiful fountains while I was off to the English speakers. I got bombarded with questions about the work in India and my faith. One person in particular wanted to come to India to help in the project as a volunteer. It was a thrill to speak with these young Russians.

From Krasnoyarsk our next stop was Yekaterinburg. Here we visited the burial place of Czar Nicolas II and his family. The Romanovs were killed by a firing squad in 1918 and were canonized as martyrs by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1981.

From Yekaterinburg we were off to our last stop: Moscow. I can't possibly describe all the places, markets and sites that we visited, but it was definitely worth the amazing journey. You should put Saint Basil's Cathedral and the 'Circle Line' of the Moscow metro on your bucket list, as the stations along this line all look like extravagant old fashioned ballrooms.

From Moscow we took a cheap flight back to London and there I said good-bye to my lovely daughters, and I thanked them over and over again. It was due to their knowledge of the internet, their planning, the booking of hostels, taxis and finding sites to visit, that this month of travelling had become an unforgettable experience for me.

CHAPTER 19

REGRETS? - FORGIVENESS

DON'T FORGET YOUR COATS

Back from our holiday my youngest son told me that when he turned in an office car park, he accidentally scratched a BMW that was parked there.

“So what did you do?” - “I went into the office and asked who the owner of the BMW it was.” - “You did that?” - “Yes, the gentleman came out with me and we settled the scratch with 150 pounds and then he proceeded to tell me, ‘Son, you will do well in life.’”

I told my son the story about when I was travelling with my first family in France. “One day when the funds were low, we needed to buy food and get matching winter coats for our three girls as it was getting cold. We did our shopping and found three nice warm and matching coats, perfect for our girls.

We had just enough funds for all the items and the coats. The cashier lady put the things through and gave us the bill. She then said, ‘Oh, don’t forget your coats’ thinking that they were ours and belonged to the girls. Then there was that split second of decision; take the coats and say, ‘thank you’, or say, ‘Ma’am we still need to pay for them.’ It feels good when you make the right decision; we paid for the coats, our girls looked beautiful and the Lord rewards us for decisions like that.”

“Dad, you said that the Lord rewards you for decisions like that. How did he reward you?”

“He rewarded me with the priceless gift of a son that is honest enough to find the owner of a property that he accidentally damaged.”

REGRETS?

Do I have regrets about my life? Not about the path that I have chosen, that I do not regret for one second.

Nonetheless, like I mentioned earlier, I regret so much the angry words and actions that I cannot undo.

I understand the words that King David prayed *"I acknowledge my wrongdoings; my sin is ever before me."* (Psalms 51:3) I have no doubts about being forgiven by the Lord, but I mainly pray for those that I have hurt because I know from personal experience how difficult it can be for us as humans to forgive each other.

NEVER WILL I DO THAT

A few years ago we were invited to a Punjabi family get-together, the mother, brothers, sisters and grandchildren were present. Suddenly the mother who was 93 speaks up and says, "Mr. Johan can you give us a lecture on religion?" - "On what subject Ma'am? Shall I speak about forgiveness?"

Everyone sat up and mother said, "Please continue." I realised that it was a touchy subject in the family.

"Forgiveness becomes easier when you yourself are forgiven. We are all sinners and deep down in our hearts we know that we need forgiveness from God. We find this forgiveness, when we accept the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus as the Purusha Prajapati, the Supreme Creator who became man."

One of the brothers asked, "Okay, but what do we actually need to do and how do we take concrete steps to start the process of forgiving someone?" - "Our words are real things, so you start by saying out loud, 'I forgive them, I forgive him or her.'"

The mother pipes up, "Never will I do that." - "Ma'am as humans we want to get even. I can see you have a beautiful family. Maybe someone cheated you out of money or land, or maybe a close family member took advantage of you. Thoughts like, 'I would have never done that' make it difficult to forgive."

Reasoning like, 'they need to know how it feels', and 'can you imagine what they did to me?' are very human and that's why we need God's help. Do you by any chance have any candles in the home? We need one big candle and a small candle for each of us." - "Gurmeet, run to the shop and get a box of candles."

It did not take long before we were sitting in the next room all holding a candle and looking at a big candle burning on the coffee table in the centre of room.

"This big candle represents the Lord Jesus. We will light our candle one by one to the big one and say out loud, 'I forgive them.'" I started with an opening prayer. I lit my candle and said, 'I forgive them.' Two others followed. Then it was the mother's turn. It was quiet and the atmosphere was charged. "I know, Ma'am, how difficult it is for us as humans to say these words, but may I take the liberty to pray for you?"

She nodded quietly.

"Dear Jesus, I pray for this dear lady, who I have the honour to be with today. I ask that you at this moment come to her aid and send her your help to take that first step in the process of forgiveness, so you can start the healing that forgiveness will bring in her life." It was quiet again and then the words came, "I forgive them." It was one of those moments when you get goose bumps all over. We finished the circle and afterwards the Mother disappeared into her bedroom.

When I finished my tea I went to see her; she was lying quietly on her bed. "Are you alright Ma'am?" - "Mr. Johan, I don't know what happened to me. I feel so different, I feel so light."

"Mother, this is the love of Jesus that you are experiencing."

No more words were needed, we just held hands.

"WE WILL BE GOOD"

When I look at each one of my children I am just in awe that I had anything to do with any of them at all.

To me they are all geniuses and their studies are way beyond my simple mind. Their variety of studies and career choices shows that they are definitely not automatons, but people with a desire to leave a mark on this world for good.

As children they would at times say, "We will be good." True to their words they are all doing, not just good, but excellent and I admire them for it. I respect them that they do not only stay afloat in this present day world but thrive with new challenges and determination.

BEYOND ME

I must say that life has not been without difficulties and as human beings we can get bitter over everything from the weather to the death of a loved one.

Bitterness is something that I need to stay away from as I know from experience that it eats out my insides and steals the joy out of my life like nothing else can. When I get hit with a negative thought about someone or some situation and I get involved in this court-case running through my head, I have found a simple solution to stop it. I invite Jesus to please come in and listen to what is going on in my head. When I do that, the mountains disappear and everything comes back into proper perspective and focus. It makes me realise what a miracle it is that he can still love a total mess like me and that he even wants to use me in spite of myself is completely beyond me.

He truly amazes me and I love him for it.

CLARIFICATION

The following is my research work. I would like to reiterate that these are my personal views and are completely separate from my social work related activities.

I would like to clarify that I am not a Christian, as I have the honour to be one of God's children. Although my personal faith inspires me and the sacrificial life of Jesus is my motivating force, I am not interested in religious activities and religious converts from one religion to another.

These words of Jesus sum up my sentiments: *"Except you convert (change your ways) and become as a little child you cannot see the Kingdom of God."* (Matthew 18:2) That kingdom is all-including, where its citizens are loving and forgiving people with child-like faith, to not only love God but to likewise love and help their fellowman. Seeing that I often fall short in this I frequently seek his help.

CHAPTER 20

DO YOU KNOW WHO WROTE THIS?

THE TRAIN IS BEDLAM

Besides my volunteering I spend much time in research when I am visiting the projects and have some extra time. Like now I am sitting on the train and using my hour to write. I boarded early and found a quiet corner half an hour before it departed.

Actually, I am on the way to the new medical clinic that we are opening today in our village school. The optician will be there to check people's eyes and prescribe partly sponsored eyeglasses

The train is bedlam. "Cold drink, Cold drink" - "Chai, Coffee!"

There is a blind lady and on her tummy she carries a music box that is blaring out crackly music shaking her hand with a few coins in it. - A person with a basket on his head is selling guavas.

A guy dressed in a sari with bright red lipstick is targeting mainly teen boys trying to get money out of them while loudly clapping his hands. Another gentleman has a tremendous amount of merchandise ingeniously displayed, all dangling off a rope with a hook that he hangs on the train handles. "Dos taka, dos taka." Ten rupees is the price for each of his products. There is a constant flow of hawkers. Maybe it is because I am typing away in my corner that they pretty much leave me alone.

It is a local train and each station supplies a new stream of vendors with bags, baskets, buckets and musical instruments. At every platform, the crowd pushes and shoves to get off, while others push and shove to get on. It is a wonderful confusion.

"Sir, how do you feel about my India?"

"It is amazing and I love it. However, the best thing is that I am going home for Christmas to see my loved ones again."

THIS OLD GUY IS HITTING ON HER - '*Pamphlets*'

Before I took the flight home, I visited the printer to print a pamphlet that I had put together, '***the Matrix of all Matter***'.

It is a compilation of '*In the Beginning... Then What?*' chapter 13. In there I quote Nobel Prize winning scientists and explain in non-religious, basic scientific terms with Einstein's $E=mc^2$ how the world came about and that the Kinetic Energy had to be Jesus.

Link: <https://johanpeters.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/the-Matrix.pdf>

When at the airport I was standing in line for security check and I looked across to this amazing beautiful young woman. She looked at me and for a moment our eyes crossed. I quickly turned my eyes away slightly embarrassed. Then the nudge, "You need to give her your pamphlet." - "No Lord, I can never do that." After security I saw her browsing the perfume shop - "Give it to her." - "No I can't go to her. What will she think? She'll probably think that this old guy is hitting on her." I quickly went to the toilets. "Okay Lord, if I see her one more time then I will give it to her." I came out of the bathroom and walked towards my gate, hoping not to see her, but there she was again looking through books in another shop. "Hi ma'am, I wanted to give you this as I thought that you might find it interesting." She looked at me, took the brochure and started reading. As she glanced at the first page she looked at me with a puzzled face and asked, "How did you know that I was interested in this?" "Ma'am, the 'Upperwallah'* told me to give it to you." - She looked even more puzzled and continued reading while I excused myself.

Recently the RFID-Microchip implant has fascinated me, so I did some scientific and scripture research and wrote a brochure, '***The Microchip Implant***' regarding the advantages and disadvantages. It is something you should read before you make your decision about accepting or rejecting it.

Link: <https://johanpeters.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/RFID-microchip.pdf>

IS THIS YOUR SITE?

On the flight the sun was right in my face and a gentleman came over to help me with the darkening of the electronic window which was new to me.

Again I felt that nudge, "Give him one."

This time, although he was sitting about seven seats away from me, I argued less and went over, "Sir, thank you for helping me with the window, I appreciated you showing me. I wanted to give you this as I thought you might find it interesting. See what you think of it." I excused myself while he started reading intently.

When he was finished he was quietly in thought and motioned something. I went over. "This is good. I am an engineer. Do you know who wrote this?" - "Yes Sir." - "Did you?"

"Yes Sir, I can't place your accent. If I may ask, 'What part of the world are you from?'"

"Argentina, I go to London regularly for meetings. Is this your site: <https://johanpeters.in> ?" - "Yes, it is." - "I will definitely visit the site and see. This is very good." - "Thank you, Sir."

MAY I CONGRATULATE YOU?

It reminded me of the time that I was speaking in a hotel in Delhi and explained in simple layperson terms $E=mc^2$, connecting it with creation. Afterwards this Hindu gentleman comes to me, "Sir, I am a professor at Delhi University. May I congratulate you? This is truly amazing. Please allow me to purchase your books and I want two copies of this one."

Isn't it funny how, "*your word gives understanding to the simple*"? (Psalms 119:130) That is me, a very simple man with no credentials, except for 'SBG'.

SOME MORE OF THE MANY COMMENTS REC'D

- *'With his down-to-earth, straightforward, yet insightful approach, the author has taken on complicated and much debated topics. He is obviously not a religious person, neither is he politically correct. Although some may find his unconventional style surprising, yet it gives us a fresh outlook on life, love and God.'*
F.S. (Fine Arts U.K.)
- *'I have been a believer for over 40 years, but this is the first time in my life that the prophecies make sense to me.'*
Brenda J. (Mother - Wales)
- *'.. Fascinating.. The revelations given in it are so profound that I intend to read it through again.'*
John M. (Minister - UK)
- *'Super! I've already downloaded it, and I put a link on my website.'*
Andres N.V. (Missions - S. America)
- *'The book is awesome... very enlightening, amazing amount of research that you have done.'*
A.S. (Teacher)
- *'Dear Sir, an amazing study. I would say it is the book of the century.'*
David J. (Publisher)

I CANNOT UNDERSTAND YOU - '***Eschatology for Simple Folks***'

Before moving to England, I was teaching class at our home on my favourite subject - the Lord's return or his second coming.

After one class one of my students said, "I cannot understand you, why you don't write this in a book as nobody teaches these scriptures like you do." - "I'm sorry, but this is not my knowledge, it is what I learned from teachers and maybe a bit of common sense." I decided to take his advice and started writing. My first book was '*Eschatology for Simple Folks*'.

Eschatology is a scriptural study on how the future will develop.

Link:

<https://johanpeters.in/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/to-send-English-Eschatology-for-Simple-Folks.pdf>

'The Little Book'

Seeing that the subject of 'Eschatology for Simple Folks' is more or less study material that requires your full attention, I felt the need to do it in picture form, so it is easier to study and digest.

"The Little Book" It is a free download at my site.

Link:

<https://johanpeters.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Little-Book-with-covers.pdf>

A FIERY COURT-CASE - **'In the Beginning... then What?'**

One day when talking to my son, who had spoken up in class on behalf of creation, I realised how much we need an objective scientific study book for students concerning our origins. I understood that our origins have something to do with Einstein's 'theory of special relativity' and the formula $E=mc^2$.

My son advised me to write on the subject in dialogue form so both creation and evolution are represented.

I started researching and writing in the form of a court case, often working till way past midnight. It became a fiery court-case with the professor using the strongest quotations of the Smithsonian Institute to attack creation. While the other party had to do very much research in order to defend creation.

The court-case itself was amazing for me as I fired questions at the creation supporter that I had myself in the back of my mind. It was no holds barred. I had to consciously refuse to get smarter than God. "How can that be?" you may ask. "By arguing with his Word and no longer believing it to be truth." Hence, when I adapted the saying to my studies, 'I like to prove that God is right', then the hard to understand, controversial, and allegedly out-dated scriptures, became doors to a whole new world.

It was a world of beauty and truth, science and understanding, inspiration and excitement.

As I was writing and documenting the different scientists, I had to learn about quantum physics, carbon dating, thermodynamics,

natural selection, evolution, chemical and radioactive mutations, heliocentric, geocentric, firmaments, the human cell, etc...

You name it: anything relating to our beginnings is in there.

I am a simple man and it is written in simple language that is understandable for anyone that is interested in our origins.

You can read it for yourself, "*In the Beginning... then What?*"

Another free download at my site: johanpeters.in

Link:

<https://johanpeters.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/In-the-beginning-...-then-What-Amended...pdf>

ALL MY PERSONAL QUESTIONS - '**My Controversial Client**'

Having friends in different religions I had learned a lot about God and his love for every person no matter what religion. Hence, I started researching their religious scriptures.

I realised that in each religion there is that golden thread woven which leads us to that one specific person with the same characteristics; the Holy One, the Purush Prajapati, the Messiah, the Kalimattulla, the Saviour.

I then wrote part two to the court case "*My Controversial Client*". Woven in there are all the questions that were in the back of my mind. If you have personal questions like I had about God, about life, sex, why does God allow disasters? What about: predestination, divorce, masturbation, porn-sites, polygamy, LGBTQ, suicide, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity or Islam, etc., then download it and take the time to read this, as the non-religious answers that I received are very surprising.

Link:

<https://johanpeters.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MY-CONTROVERSIAL-CLIENT-kindle-cover.pdf>

'OLD-HAT' SCRIPTURES OPEN UP - '**Bible secrets unchained**'

My next project was to show how the so called 'ancient and old-hat scriptures' open up science and truth.

I felt like a rich man, striking gold. The comments are only on the chapters and verses that we don't hear many sermons on, if any. The two most controversial parts of God's word are the Creation and the second coming of Jesus. It is my hope and prayer that this scriptural alternative to the many theories concerning these events will give you a clearer understanding.

You will see that Christianity has no monopoly on Jesus and you will understand why everyone thinks they have the one and only true religion.

Link:

<https://johanpeters.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Bible-secrets-unchained-.pdf>

THE REPLACEMENT OF CHRIST – ***'A Man of Sufficient Stature'***

My last project was, "*A Man of Sufficient Stature*". This is about the Antichrist. Anti now means against, but in the original Greek it's αντί and means 'instead of' or 'replacement of'.

It explains why this 'replacement of Christ' will be so loved according to the scriptures. How he will take the world by storm, using finances to win people's loyalty, forcing us to make a decision that many of us are not ready for. A key quote to remember is, "When we see the 'seven year peace agreement' signed then we will know that Bible prophecy is real, and we will then need to plan ahead of what we want to do with our life."

Link:

<https://johanpeters.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/A-Man-of-Sufficient-Stature.pdf>

A reaction: 'A concise, pertinent and enlightening volume, grasping today's current events and matching them with Bible prophecies that had remained somewhat obscure till now... this book is one of the greatest faith-boosters I've come across... Challenging, thought-provoking and liberating.'

C. Volpe (Educator)

NOT FOR THE FAINTHEARTED

I am now back in the UK having a refreshing time with my family and loved ones. Recently three of us went house hunting to

Wales and stopped at the Roman ruins of 'Caerleon' in Newport. There you see the arena where the soldiers wrestled. There is a museum connected to it with many different items from those days. One thing that caught our interest were the remains of the barracks and toilets, along with a poster to show how the Roman soldiers used the toilets back then.

What I am about to write now is not for the fainthearted.

I'll quote one part from the poster, "*(There was) an open gutter near the 'customer's' feet. This was where they rinsed out the sponges on sticks they used for toilet paper before dunking them in a bucket of vinegar for 'disinfecting'.*"

I'll now quote a part from the scriptures, "*And **the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar***" (Luke 23:36) "*They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots*" (Matthew 27:34,35)

"Now from the sixth hour (12 noon) there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour (3 P.M.). And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:45,46)

*"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, says, I thirst. And they filled a **sponge with vinegar..** and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had **received the vinegar, he said, It is finished:** and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost."* (John 19:28-30)

He received the vinegar and then **enough was enough and he gave up the ghost.** For obvious reasons he kept the fulfilment of this particular scripture till the very end - "*in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.*" (Psalms:69:21)

This vinegar is recorded in all the four gospels so we would realize what it was that the soldiers mockingly did. Shocking?

Yet, he forgave back then and he still forgives. Besides being crucified naked which the Romans did, he also took their and our sssshht... don't say it! Yet he forgave.

"He was despised and rejected... and we hid our faces from him;... he was wounded... he was bruised... he was afflicted... poured out his soul unto death..."

It is for us to - *"make his soul an offering for our sin... as - the chastisement of our peace was upon him... "my righteous servant shall justify (defend, claim, save, validate, redeem) many;"* (Isa.53)

Love so contrary to our human nature and so beyond our comprehension. He died the death of the worst criminal and took the worst punishment that any of us could be given, with accusations flying, being spat upon, punched in the face, scourged, a crown of thorns pounded on his head, falling under his cross, hanging naked for six hours, gasping for breath, while these religious vipers spewed their venom at him and finally the sponge and vinegar which was the cherry on the 'power-of-darkness' cake. He was unshakable until his mission was fulfilled and we would have salvation available to us.

The Innocent for the guilty.

There's nothing more to say, except my sincerest wish and prayer is that his love may penetrate deep into the hearts of the many.

Instead of wondering if our life is worth living, let's give it back to the One who gave it to us in the first place. We will never regret it for eternity, as we'll find inner peace and that 'soul-mate' we so much long for.

CHAPTER 21

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

GET YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

I was going to add many different one-page compilations on different questions and the answers. I decided to leave it with the following as you can [download the books free of charge](#) at my site: <https://johanpeters.in>

Before you start the questions, please download first the six books from the homepage. - You click on the book; it opens; then right-click; do save as; and the book is yours. In the sub-directory 'Free Downloads' you can also download the gospels, a [good study Bible](#) and the pamphlets without any questions asked.

General Questions:

1. If God is so good why did he create evil?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pg.197
2. Why does every religion believe that they are the true one?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pg.220
3. Are the mental health problems a repeat from history?
<https://johanpeters.in/history-has-returned/>
4. What is heaven, hell, and in-between?
'Eschatology for Simple Folks' pgs.143-151
5. Why does God allow disasters and where do they originate?
'My Controversial Client' pgs.26,27
6. All your personal questions about sex, porn, LGBTQ, etc.?
'My Controversial Client' pgs.44-53
7. What is the real reason that Judas betrayed Jesus?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs.202-204
8. Why did Jesus say, "He that has no sword let him buy one" ?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs.206-208
9. Was the time of the crucifixion the sixth or the third hour?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pg.210
10. Is the resurrection scientifically possible?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pg.212 'In the beginning....then What?' pgs.180,181

11. What does the parable of the 'unjust steward' mean?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pg.205
12. Why did Jesus to allow the demons to possess the pigs?
'The Little Book' pg.27
13. Does God want me healed?
'Eschatology for Simple Folks' pgs.160-163
14. What about "I never knew you"?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs.198,199
15. Why was there little or no divorce before the Christian era?
'My Controversial Client' pgs.54-60
16. What is the Holy Spirit's gender? (for this I was labelled an heretic)
'My Controversial Client' pgs.42,43
17. What is considered sin in God's eyes?
'My Controversial Client' pgs. 86,87
18. Is Predestination true or false?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pg.200
19. Why the disputes and disunity about the timings of Creation, our origins, and the Lord's Return, our future?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pg.8 'The Little Book' pg.93

Our Origins:

1. Is Creation figure of speech or scientifically accurate?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pg.9 'In the Beginning....then What?' chpt.13
2. Did the flood take place and where is the proof?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs.43-45
3. Is Evolution scientifically accurate?
'In the Beginning....then What?'
4. How does Carbon-14 dating work?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pg.32
5. How is the age of the earth's rocks measured?
'In the Beginning....then What?' pg.53
6. How old is the Earth in comparison to world population?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs. 33 & 30,31

Prophecy Questions:

1. How do I study the book of Revelation?
'The Little Book' pg.72 'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs.111 & 126
2. What does the 'testimony of Jesus' mean?
'The Little Book' pgs.8, 90

3. What do the four horsemen of the Apocalypse represent?
'The Little Book' pg.57 'Bible Secrets unchained' pg.130
4. How will the reapers separate the wheat from the tares?
'A Man of Sufficient Stature' pgs.29,30
5. What do the 7 heads and 10 horns on the dragon represent?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs.147 & 78 'The Little Book' pg. 54
6. Who or what is the 'Mother of Harlots' of Revelation 17 & 18?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs.167-170
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwn5XGxr7F4>
7. Why did BREXIT have to happen according to Bible prophecy?
'The Little Book' pg.18 'A Man of Sufficient Stature' pg.14
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRosmbfqV4Q>
8. What is 666 and why will the Antichrist be so loved?
'A man of sufficient stature' pgs.11,12,18
9. Why does the Bible forbid the RFID chip implant?
'A Man of Sufficient Stature' pgs.19-21
10. Make an informed decision: Do I take the RFID chip or not?
'The Little Book' pgs.36,37
11. Are there Aliens among us?
'A Man of Sufficient Stature' pgs.31,32
12. Will there be a nuclear disaster or war?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs.171-174
13. Confused about the Lord's Return? Pre-Post-Mid Tribulation, or any-time-now?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs.115-118 'The Little Book' pg.23
14. Will there be an Alien invasion from outer space?
'Bible Secrets unchained' pgs.178

VIDEO CLIPS ON YOUTUBE.COM

Get your questions answered and prepare!



Type in the YouTube search-bar: **johan peters prophecy bites** and you'll find **27 prophecy bites** of around three minutes, explaining in chronological order what will happen before the Lord's return.

Link:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=johan+peters+prophecy+bites



I have also done **10 Prophecy classes** of about ten minutes each. Type in the YouTube search-bar: **apocalypse johan peters**

However, the sound is not the greatest, but does improve rapidly.

Link:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=johan+peters+apocalypse+armageddon+new+beginnings

Then the last and final question: "Is **suicide or euthanasia** a permanent solution to temporary problems?"

Link: (2 min 48 sec.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvNcQDTgACs>

If after all this you still have questions then please write to me at:
info@johanpeters.in

Fire away with serious questions, don't hold back,
Shoot from the hip and let's see.
You write and I will take the time to answer.

A humble request that you please
pass this on to three people!

FREE DOWNLOAD at:
[**https://johanpeters.in**](https://johanpeters.in)

