

Abel's epistle. By Abel W K Armugam 12 March 2012 at 14:19

65-ers Reunion Aug 2010

The morning of the 7 of Aug 2010 dawned early for me in Coonor. I was up before the sun peeked its crescent over the blue mountains in the Nilgiris. It was 45 years since we had joined CMC Vellore. And we were back in beloved India to meet and have fun together. We the batch of '65. The best batch that came out of CMC. Or shall I say nearly the best batch. This is done to add a bit of modesty to the statement.

For me the 7 Aug was extremely significant. This was the day my dad met with an accident 42 years ago and passed on. The class had a memorial service at the sunken garden while I had gone on home to Malaysia. This was conducted by Jacob and assisted by the class mates. I was told about this when I came back to Vellore 2 weeks later. I stood outside the door of my room in Taj Coonor and remembered. We the batch have been an extremely close batch. We have made it a point to come and be with each other as often as possible. To fraternize with our friends and to talk and laugh and sometimes cry together.

Gomathy & I arrived with G Johnson and Jeyarane and Molly and Ranjit at about 2200 hrs on the 4 Aug. We were met by the welcoming committee of Balaji and Ganesh with recycled colored paper ribbon garlands. Recycling the garlands was done to save cost!!!! It was really fun as all the arrivals were met with these garlands. It was fun to see all the faces light up with joy as they were met. This was a lovely touch to the reception of the guests.

We all stayed at Jenny's. Kitchners wife was very suspicious as to who Jenny was as Kitchi was staying with her!!! The hospitality room at 410 was ever so popular. There was a mist of fine malt whisky that pervaded the whole room. It was filled with noise and laughter. The women left to do shopping but the guys stayed back. It was really fun. We even called certain classmates that had not come and tickled them up. The evening of the 5 Aug was the dinner at Jenny's poolside. The entire crowd had arrived and we even had some teachers present. They were so far into the past that I could not even remember their names. Johnson and Samrudhi were taking photographs and flying at the same time. The night ended early as the "organ-risers" wanted us to go to bed early so that we could be up and about at 0800 on 6 Aug. This was because we were going up to the Nilgiris. We all had coffee and got ready for the bus. All except K J Sam. He was 'ellam jam'. He managed to move and we started to leave at 0830 hrs. BUT lo and behold the bus could not start. One bus could but the other one had aircon problems. Balaji used his ENT probe into all the small orifices of the bus and then we could move. Thank god for Balaji and his PROBE. We then made a breakfast stop at BLACK THUNDER. It was a nice breakfast stop and a welcome break. We were already quite hungry before we reached the Black Thunder. It was

a cool drive up to Coonor. The scenery was lovely. In the bus we were divided up into groups of twos and threes. As such we all had a chance to catch up with each other. Gossip was the main topic. But also, health and children and grandchildren. The bus ride came to an end all too soon and we turned a corner into 'heaven'. We had arrived at TAJ COONOR. What a lovely ambience. The hotel is so well sited and the grounds are immaculately kept. We were welcomed by the staff and garlanded with lovely large sweet smelling jasmine garlands. They also had prepared warm aphrodisiac herbal tea for all of us. This was by the orders of the foremost Urologist in India – nay – the world!! Ganesh felt that all of us needed it. My god! You could see the change in everyone after the drink. How the eyes of the women were shining as they looked at their fat, balding, paunchy men. We were then given lunch and then sent off to Sims Park. This was for 3 reasons. a) To work off the lunch, b) to bond, c) just to get us to do something We huffed and puffed up the hill. Not all of us huffed. Some just puffed. I was glad Kitchie and Surinder were on hand to help me as we went up. The park was lovely. Colin was quite excited and ran around quite a bit. We went down to the deepest valley of the park where there was a world map in flowers. A guy came up to us and wanted to know what the whole picture was about. It was sad to realize that what is common knowledge to us is not known to everyone. We must realize that we are truly blest. The night came fast and cold. The sunken garden in Taj had been set up for us with a bar and a fireplace and a screen for slides. I suddenly realized there are intellects in our group!!! The drinks flowed and the fire was warm. We were then given a few lectures. Philip Stokoe first spoke of the Tsunami in Aceh. He talked of the rehabilitation and humanitarian work that is still going on there. He is also proposing that the next reunion of our batch be in Bali. Roop Kishen was next and he spoke on the role of the 'Intensivist' in modern medicine. Ranjit Mathew Oomen spoke on Hospis and Palliative medicine. A practicing general surgeon, he has now also embraced palliative medicine as his life's work. He has been planning to have the next reunion in Kota Kinabalu Sabah. In fact this reunion should have been in Sabah – but due to various reasons the venue was changed. Thomas K Mamman is also a general surgeon. But his passion is painting. He was next to show us his slides of his paintings. His paintings are really lovely. His 'nudes' were not shown this time. He has promised me by the time the next reunion comes he will have them ready. We then adjourned for dinner at the dining room. As soon as dinner was over the men were sent to the sunken garden and the women stayed behind to be trained by Rohini Shah. She made them go into their past, present and future. They really had fun and thanks once again to Rohini. She has never failed to get things moving and helping to make the party a success. If only she was not an SDA!!!! The next day was the 7 Aug 2010. This was the highlight of the reunion. We were sent off to Ooty. But this time thanks to the bus driver we were to take the 'toy train'. The station master was so nice as to arrange a special coach for us. He came and talked to us and had our photos taken with him. He also paid

two guides to help us along. They were Shirley Joseph and Balaji Naidu. The whole journey was a real pleasure. The ride was picturesque all the way. As we passed the Lovedale station there was a warm glow emanating from the whole coach. Till today we cannot fathom the reason for this. We went to Ooty and we were taken to the botanical gardens. You see one garden – and you have seen them all. But we dutifully went thru the motion of seeing the gardens. A few of the women went jewelry and chocolate shopping. Ooty has a history of making fine chocolate. I did not know this till that day. The chocolates tasted good. We were then taken to a visit of Lawrence School Lovedale. It is really a beautiful school. Its history is long and distinguished. Its buildings look dignified and beautiful. It has also a history of producing brilliant students. But to our dismay we have not met any of them!!!! We were given tea, scones and lovely ginger biscuits by the staff. We met some of the students and spoke to them. They seem to get a real ‘rounded’ education here. That is what Shirley tells me. That evening we had our dinner at the lawn. The theme was a village theme. Ganesh wanted everyone to be an Indian villager. Men in lunghis and women braless. Everything hanging loose and low. It was lovely to see the men in their lunghis and the women walking around braless. The fire was nice and warm and everyone was made to answer 3 questions on themselves. a) Where are you now? b) What do you do now? c) Any future plans? As usual the answers were not what were asked for. I really don’t know how these people ever passed medical school!! But we had a lovely evening.

The time really passed so fast and soon we were herded back to our rooms to sleep as we had another early start the next morning. The last day of the reunion had arrived. 8 Aug 2010. We got into the bus to go to Kotada Tea plantation. This is the home of Banu and Prem Wallia. Banu is the lovely sister of Ganesh. Her husband Prem is in charge of the tea plantation and they were our hosts. The house and the environs were heavenly. We had lovely lunch and tea there. We saw bison’s and other wild life. But mainly it was a relaxing and spirit uplifting time at Kotada. Our thanks to Banu, Prem, Harsha and Don Johnson who were all there to make us comfortable.

We all left Kotada at about 1600 hrs and we knew that this fantastic reunion had come to an end. Let us now reminisce about the guys & gals who came and made this reunion a success. Shanker and Uma brought little Colin to be with us. What a joy it was to see him laugh jump and frolic with all of us. His bright sparkling eyes were everywhere. He brought youth and freshness to all the 60-year-olds. Rohini Shah Came alone as Philip was busy. She got the party going in her usual style. She is an authority on Substance Abuse and Addiction and was trained in Harvard – no less. She now has found out that her life’s work must start with the batch of ’65. Samrudhi came too. Better known as K J Sam or just Jam had been away in the gulf for about 25 yrs. He really made enough money – and it is all stored in that belly of his. He was telling me how modern his daughter is in her behavior

and thinking. Poor K J Sam – even 45 years ago he was old fashioned. Thomas K Mammen and his wife Uma were picked up by Balaji. We had told Balaji to look out for a video camera about 2 feet in front of a man. That would be Mammen. His famous words “I’ll bide my time” will always remind us of him. A bit like McArthur’s “I shall return”. Mammen’s paintings are lovely and we only had a glimpse of it as he showed his slides. G Johnson from Singapore flew with me. His wife was with him. When I first told him that he had to come to the Nilgris, he was reluctant. He has started working in a new clinic and is the main stay doctor there. As such the responsibilities lie heavy on his shoulders and also on his head. This has resulted in his shiny pate!!! His video camera was the highlight of the reunion. BUT the quality of the film will be inversely proportional to the Glenfiddich consumed. Mr. Hospis was with us. Ranjit and Molly had come all the way from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. We have to be really grateful to Ranjit for initiating this reunion. He was instrumental in tickling up every one to participate. Getting the emails and phone numbers was quite a task. The classmates that could not come were only a small percentage. This was really a good turnout. Two sons, two daughters in law and a cute grandson in tow. That was what Lalitha Wairagar brought with her to the reunion. She came well prepared to make fun at all our old teachers. She imitated them so well and made all of us feel nostalgic. Dimples deep as ever and with a lovely captivating smile she waltzed in with her leading man Victor Vedamanikam. Rebecca George or Becky as she is fondly known came with the guy who stole her from the class of ’65. She now lives in Trichi but her heart is in the northern tip of Malaysia where her son is. He is Professor of Marine Biology at the University there. Shirley and Jacob rolled into Coimbatore airport with another girl who I thought was Jacobs’s daughter. This turned out to be Jojo or Josephine Joseph who is not from our batch of ’65 BUT could not resist the pull of the best batch that CMC ever had. She also came to help Shirley and Balaji etc to talk to us of the excellence of the Lawrence School Lovedale. I really felt sorry for the rest of our batch for studying in such mediocre schools. The Lovedalers were walking around with halos around their heads. I have to mention and name them so all of you never forget them. They are Shirley, Balaji, Uma Shanker, and Jojo. One famous doctor of Lovedale fame with two halos around his head not present was Thomas Matthew of Canada fame!!! Jacob, I am sorry I could not talk more about you this time as Shirley has overshadowed you. Remember how at the last reunion when she was asked to speak you cheated her and took over the chapel at the sunken garden to talk of “Circles within Circles”. Ganesh and I waited 2 hrs at the Coimbatore railway station to meet Ms Saramma Samuel. She landed bag and baggage at the station. It was lovely to see after a long time. BUT her laugh frightened the dogs and cats at the station. The other passengers were stunned with visible shock!! Joyce and Bobby were soon seen. They had come much earlier from the USA to spend some time in Coimbatore before the start of the reunion. Bobby was his usual subdued self - -till tickled up. We had a

long and lovely conversation from Coonor to the tea estate at Kotada. Joyce had on her ubiquitous hat. This kept the sun from darkening her lovely face – and the same time allowing her to cast surreptitious looks at Bobby to see if he was straying from the “Straight and narrow” – especially as he was sitting next to Satan (abel) himself. We had eight ‘HERO’ boys. They had left their wives behind and were having a whale of a time much to the chagrin of the poor sweet innocent boys who had come with their wives. 1) Stokoe The hero from Aceh. He single handedly pushed back the flood waters that engulfed Aceh. Like Moses parting the Nile he was on hand with Christian zeal and enthusiasm distributing sanitary pads to the women of Aceh. It was lovely to have him among us. He lives in Indonesia and is still an important presence in Aceh and is doing good work there. 2) Jeyaratnam Or Preman as we know him. According to Azra he had dug a hole near his apartment in Colombo and pushed poor Sneha in so he could come alone to the Nilgris. The gold medal winner of the TOM HANKS anesthesia medal in the UK he now works as a volunteer administrator of the Mission hospital in Manipai Jaffna. He was the soprano singer in the group called the HORMONES. He could only get to the high note by squeezing his “hormones”. 3) Surinder Kaul He has been “laost’ in Laos. Because he has been lost we have not seen him for a long time. He is the other guy doing Public Health work in the poorer area of SEA. He is like the Scarlet Pimpernel. They search him here They search him there The class has searched him every where Is he in heaven or Is he in hell The damned elusive Surinder Kell . 4) Rajshekar Uzgare Mr. HIV himself. He hails from Bombay and his specialty is HIV. This guy has written books on the subject. He is now also very knowledgeable on monkeys. His wife refused to come to South India as she is allergic to monkeys. The big monkeys are his class mates. He is only a small monkey!!! 5) Raja Govind Bhatt. We have not seen him at any reunion. As such it was such a pleasure to have him with us. He believed everything that Ganesh had written in the instructions for the reunion. He brought everything – Walking shoes, Lunghis, Mosquito repellent, and CLEAN leather under wear to keep away the leeches 6) Clement Deenadyal He is one of the locals. He works about 30 miles from Coimbatore as an Ortho surgeon. He is going to start a hospital called Ortho2 so he can rival Ortho1. He tried to imitate the women’s hostel watchman on the Saturday. But we saw thru him. 7) Charles Premkumar Charlie came to India without Premila. He appeared sad and depressed. He always was a good actor. He was always sitting at the back of the bus during the trips. His philosophy was flowing fast and thick as we discussed the world in the bumpy back seats. 8) Kitchner The ever young and handsome Kitchner. Charlie, Kitchner and I were roommates in the slums of the Men’s Hostel in the first year. We were also called the “ebony boys” with good reason. The hostel management had to put in 100 watt lamps to brighten up that room. Kitchie came out with some original witty neuro jokes that helped pass the time as we huffed and puffed our way to Sims Park. Lord & Lady Mukarji also known as Daleep OBE and Mrs OBE Azra were kind

enough to grace the occasion. They were with Preman in Sri Lanka before coming over. Her Majesty the Queen had given Daleep leave to fraternize with the plebs. Azra and Daleep were wonderful surrogate parents to my daughter during her stay in the UK. They are staying on to visit Kerala and the environs. Roop and Meera , the couple from the two extremes of the Indian subcontinent were present. I read Chetan Bhgats book called “2 States” and it was an exact story of Roop & Meera. Roop gave a masterly talk on ICU work. Death, Destitution & Destruction – all rolled into one. Looking at what I have written one can surmise that we had a rollicking time. And that is all due to the work of the three couples from Coimbatore. Ortho¹ David and his boss Sunita were on hand to help the ladies in their quest for the ultimate jewels in Coimbatore. Thanks to both of you as part of the organizing group. The Mafia Chief of the Vellore community in Coimbatore. I don’t even need to mention his name. It is etched on every pavement stone from Lovedale Railway station to the entrance of Lawrence School. It is even put up in lights at the “BIG BOG”. Balaji and Gaya³ thanks so much for being there for all of us. The details and finer points of our stay both in the Nilgris and Coimbatore were just exquisite. Ganesh and Alka – thanks for everything. We know the trouble you took to make our stay comfortable. You with the rest of the steering committee took on the task of organizing this show with such enthusiasm. The “monkeys” had to be made happy and fed well and also given excellent single malt. Prem and Banu Wallia deserve our grateful thanks for opening their home to us. What a lovely time we had there. It was a surreal experience being in a lovely garden surrounded by the tea and coffee plantation. The food and drinks were delightful and we even saw wild Bisons. In spite of being under the weather Banu managed to organize the whole show. Our grateful thanks to both of you once again. As the designated scribe I have the final say. Gomathy and I had a wonderful time. As we flew into Singapore, enroute to KLIA we saw banners at Singapore’s Changi Airport proclaiming the national day on 9 Aug 2010. Singapore was 45 yrs old as a totally independent nation. Singapore is a great nation and it is 45 years old. The ‘65ers are also 45 years and we are a great batch. The gratitude I have for somehow belonging to a group of classmates like this is unfathomable. What a batch we are!!! Good Looking Smart & Witty Open Minded Intelligent Professorial Material Voices like Angels Speeches like Churchill Lectures like Chandy Sportsman like tig.. sorry Fedrer So till we meet again GODBLESS abel 10 Aug 2010