

THE MAGIC OF '65

We have all gone back to our homes and started doing the things we have done for the most part of our lives.

BUT

The magic of the reunion still hangs over us like the aroma of sweet perfume that never leaves.

For all of us it will never leave. It started on that awe inspiring day sometime about 1800 hrs on 15 July '65 when this batch was announced at the sunken garden. I remember standing next to Kitchie and Charlie as the names were announced. Kitchie was No: 51, I was 52 and Charlie was 53. Close by was the youngest chiko in the group – Shanky – jumping for joy.

Gomathy and I arrived in Chennai International Airport on the 10 of Aug 2005 at about 2000 hrs. And as we walked out of the airport and entered the waiting room we saw Preman. He had been waiting for me as we had planned to go to Vellore together. Gomathy had some shopping to do in Chennai so I was “free” to go.

Ganesh had already booked a car for us. It was lovely to be with Preman and hear him talk all the way to Vellore. We nearly had an accident as the car skidded on a patch of water. It had been raining the whole night through and the roads were quite slippery. But reach in one piece we did. Preman talked about his work in Manipai Hospital and how he was trying to get it organized again after the ravages of the civil war had left it really in ruins. How does one respond to such sacrifice? These are things we read of in the “Time” or “Newsweek”.

Bella arrived at about 0500 hrs on the 11 of Aug. Of course she woke us up and we joined her for breakfast. The lobby of “Darling” was already resounding to her giggles before the thosai restaurant was open. The two girls from our class who have really kept their figures are Bella and Joyce. In fact Joyce is in better shape than when she was in college. In those puritanical Pentecostal days she wore “clothes” that were only made of pure cotton and did not have the metal uplifting qualities that have since made the lingerie market so pleasing to every red blooded male!!!!

As we waited in the lobby after the thosai breakfast, we saw the whole gumble arriving.

There was Jacob and Shirley. Then came Bobby and Joyce. This couple was closely followed by Shanky and Uma. Then came Ranjit and Molly. Then came the powerful Malaysian-Singapore duo – Priema and Maha. Roop and Meera were next. Sriprakash came alone and left his beautiful wife Mina behind. Raj Shekar Uzgare came with his charming wife Ujwalla.

Sarama Samuel, that lady with the most powerful giggle was staying at her sister's house. Thank God! Otherwise we would not have been able to sleep as she would have laughed at every joke that Preman cracked. Preman always liked her – for the only reason that he could get a laugh with every PJ that he cracked. (Please note the initials. That's how PJ's originated).

Ganesh and Alka arrived to welcome us. They are our only link to CMC. I am sorry I used the word link. Jacob has got a hell of a lot of links in CMC and a few missing ones too. But as I looked at G&A, I felt a sense of sadness that when they retire and leave CMC, we will be a bit like orphans. There will not be any one of "substance" left in CMC for us to contact and have fun with. G&A, you both have been such gracious hosts to us when ever the batch has met - and the various times that we have not come as a batch, you both have welcomed us like long lost children. G&A used to give us the run down of the politics and other escapades and sexcapades that had gone on in CMC during our absence. But everything must move on.

*To everything there is a season
And a time to every purpose under the heaven
(Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

As we met and gathered around seeing all the friends, thoughts of old times came flooding along – till they became a torrent of thoughts, ideas, and feelings.

As I saw the strong man of our class, Cyril standing there in the lobby and trying to pull the white hair off my chest, I remember how he was always considered the macho man. He came with me to Ootari one Sunday afternoon in '67 to take photographs of Gomathy. What lovely photos they were. He was and is gifted with the Camera. His other instruments have been Gods gift too!!!!!! And he snared the most beautiful girl in CMC at that time - Rachel Thomas. (Don't be too upset Joyce – You were the next most beautiful girl in CMC).

Ranjit Oomen has now come to my part of the world and made it his home. He has always been like a brother to Cyril and this has carried on even to this day. Ranjit has excelled as a surgeon and is well respected in Malaysia, especially in Sabah where he is based. But I feel his greatest achievements are in palliative medicine. He has set up a Hospice in Coimbatore with help of Balaji and David Rajan. I don't know what these two guys know about palliative medicine – but nonetheless they are helping out.

Balaji and David are the stalwarts in Coimbatore. They have carved out quite a niche in Coimbatore. This niche also includes sweet Ruby Charles, our mighty Mini Mouse of the class. I have enjoyed the hospitality of both these guys and they have made Coimbatore feel like home to me. Gomathy had ayurvedic massages while we were in Coimbatore - and now I am glowing!!!!

Sushila. I have not seen her since the day I left Vellore. She ditched everybody to marry the handsome cardiologist Sunny. She has learnt dancing and she does wriggle very well. That day she did not bring her leotards. Otherwise there may have been a meltdown at the Darling Terrace.

Uzzi or Raj Shekar Uzgare has not been seen by many for a long time. He has the look of a real successful tycoon. His lovely wife Ujwalla adds distinction to the picture. He wants to hold the next reunion in Bombay next year. I feel he should be given the chance. Even though he was quiet and unobtrusive in college, he always had a lovely sense of humor. Like when he was woken up at 0200 hrs to go for the picnic!!!! He really got into the mood of this reunion and was enjoying himself.

Toka the Jungle Queen or now known as the respected Cardiologist Dr Sri Prakash of Arizona. He mends broken hearts. This is after he breaks them with his smile!! He was told to dance on stage but all he did was marching steps. He did this right up to the time when he came to G&A's home on Saturday after the Scudder Auditorium bash. It was good to see him again and he has not changed. His facial expressions and laughter were a joy to witness. He was making a lot of noise. That was because his wife was not around!!!!

We always had a Cecil B De Mille in our midst. This person is Rohini Shah. She is an SDA but she is not. Try to work out this conundrum. She just loves to produce plays and skits and is so very good at it. She did it again this time and kept all of us in line – except Toka. He just could not dance to save his life. But at the end of the day even he danced like Ashwarya Rai. Rohini Shah is a real live wire and kept the spirits of our batch up during the whole reunion. But she also had to keep the spirits up in the batch senior to us. That is Philip Jonas batch. If she was not around, they would have buried the whole batch and poor Achen Oomen would have had to give the last rites. On her way back from Harvard she called me out of the blue when her flight stopped over in KL. What a time we had talking of old times. She is something else.

Bobby, the staunch SDA who was taken off the straight and narrow by another staunch Pentecostal, was my room mate in MIQ. We had some lovely times together and he did teach me a few SDA tricks. He was single minded about going to the states and this he did in style. His Xray eyes now bore into everything. His sense of humor and laughter has really and essentially remained the same. Joyce has been, and always will be the elegant lady. She has blossomed in the states and has left the Pentecostal ideas way back in the back waters of the costal areas of Kerala.

Shanky, the baby of the class got married very fast. He was the guy who was by passed for the "Trevor Marshall Award" for the best incoming student. When the Men's Hostel guys announced it for me they told him that he had just missed it by a few marks. And when I found out it was a joke, he came over to see me and we did have a good laugh. It was sad that it was joke cos every one of us felt that we were the best. At the last reunion in 2000, when I had the vertiginous episode with vomiting, nystagmus and dizziness, he was the one who held me as I was retching in the drain outside Saramma's sister's home. Thanx again Shanks for being such a good friend. He is one of the youngest grandfathers, and the grandmother Uma looks more like a young girl than a grandma. I well remember the room they stayed in at the ground floor of MIQ. Shanks was so proud for being the guy who beat all the other guys in getting married. Alka Sinha says he is the best orthpod. The story goes that ever since Alka married Ganesh, she had a pain in her neck. This was until Shanks worked his magic on her!!!!

Chin Chee Pada. What a melodious name. We had never heard of this most outback and rural area of Maharashtra. Our knowledge was quickly updated by a letter from Lalitha Wairagar. She came like a bolt from the blue, asking for help to upgrade this really impoverished area. She and her husband Gahu Kamble – a Pathologist cum Surgical team had come into this area and was getting the school and hospital going. This quiet, slip of a girl was doing something that all of us feel we must do sometime in life but soon find that time has passed us by - and we are left not doing it at all. She stood in Norman Auditorium and spoke to all of us.

This shy retiring girl spoke to all the "trying to be missionaries" and showed us what dedication, love and faith in God can do. The VCD showed pictures of the school and hospital. The school children in the school looked like children in any other part of the world. This is only due to the hard work and dedication of this couple. Keep up the good work Lalitha. It can give us some vicarious feeling of doing good for the world.

"Circles without walls". That was the sermon that Shirley had to give. But as usual this overwhelming, overbearing husband had to hijack it and speak at the chapel. He did well. It was not a sermon. It was more a dissertation on life itself. Jacob, congrats on a nice talk. You represented the class and we were proud as we saw you talking. I would have appreciated a few jokes. There were none. You also did not represent the totality of circles without walls. That will be sent to you in a separate letter so as not to offend the sensibilities of the EU and SCM guys. Now that you have finished with the sunken garden talk, its time you "Organ-raised" the next reunion. There is a suggestion that it be in Goa. Lets work on it. I think the person I should really ask is Shirley. She is the more organized part of the duo. You have too much of a "jaundiced" view of life. To both of you, who have been surrogate parents to Avin, thanx for keeping an eye on him. He needs quiet a bit of watching. As Gomathy says "Avin is his father's son" and that is a loaded statement by itself!!!!

The other surrogate parents for Avin are Charlie and Premila. And Charlie has fitted the molding quite well. His philosophy is always “the same thing”. Premila and Charlie were about the most early married couple in our class. I remember my Mom staying with them during our graduation. I really don’t know how you managed to house her in your little room cum apartment in the Rural Health Quarters. Charlie, Kitchie and myself shared the room in the ground floor “Slums” of B block. We were the original Ebony Boys. Each one darker than the other. Only our teeth were visible on dark moonless nights. Let me tell you that was a hellava advantage. Charlie’s son was born in Vellore and now he is a respected plastic surgeon with the US navy. Before Charlie got fixed to Premila he took me to his home in Hyderabad. I remember with fondness the kind hospitality his Mom and Dad extended to me. After he got fixed he only took Premila home. His parents were so relieved he was heterosexual.

I had not seen Kitchie since we left Vellore sometime in July’72. There was a big crowd of guys at the Katpadi railway station who had come to say goodbye to me. Most of the guys were staying back to do their post graduate courses. I remember Kitchie and Shanky telling me that we must meet after a few years. The years came and went - and I only saw Kitchie again on 12 Aug 2005 at Ganesh’s house.

As I walked into the compound I saw this young guy talking animatedly to the crowd. He looked from the back like one of the campus children who had become a doctor and had come to meet us old guys. When I got closer there was Kitchie, dashing as ever and essentially unchanged. What a pleasure. As we talked the years meant nothing. We were just the same two guys of yesteryear sitting in the “slums” and telling each other stories. Even as I write this epistle, I am amazed at how all of us are still such good friends. It truly is Magic!!!!

Priema and Mahadevi Thambaiyah have always been like sisters. They landed up in “Darling” and were welcomed like long lost members of the class. Both of them come from my neck of the woods. And I have met them in Malaysia. Mahadevi has retired and is living the life of ease and comfort. So with Priema who also has retired as the head of Rehab Medicine in GH Singapore. Priema’s dad, Bishop T R Doraisamy was the Bishop of the Methodist Church in Malaysia and one of the foremost educationists in Singapore. Priema was lost to the fold when she was working in the UK but has come back to our shores again like the proverbial “Prodigal Daughter”. She now is the “Line Dancing” champion of Singapore. We should have allowed her to teach us line dancing at Darling. Then Sri Prakash would have become the break dancing champ of Arizona.

Roop and Meera have come to the reunion in spite of being busy getting their “English lad” son married to a wee “Welsh Lass”. Meera is still active teaching women not to “open their legs” and Roop is busy looking after the ICU areas. He always could never talk to his patients and this discipline in medicine has suited him to a “T”. Try talking with a tube down your throat!!!!!!

Saramma, the Matriarch of all the Syrian Christian and Mar Thomites. She kept them in line and made sure they followed the strict code of keeping eyes down and blouses buttoned up to the Thyroid Cartilage. Her second in command was Sushila. But look at Sushila now. She has broken all the rules and dances better than anyone in our class. Her husband told me that her daughters are classical dancers but Sushilla is a far better dancer than any of them. What a proud guy he is. He has every right to be after looking around at the “Pathetic” guys that Sushila left for him.

That highly talented but irreverent son of North India was a class mate of ours. His lovely paintings on canvas and batik transformed the college and hospital into a cultural paradise. The Men’s Hostel Days were really a feast for the eyes with his sculptures and designs. The “muse” that inspired him, brought him to Vellore to uplift the uncultured folk like me. This is Ashok Dyalchand. I had heard spattering’s of information about him through the years. It was a joy to lay my eyes on him at the Norman Auditorium. He had come with his charming wife, Renu. He has been a practicing Ophthalmologist but now does so much of social work and preventive medicine, that recognition has come to him from the Government of India.

Grace Nirmala came and she was a picture of elegance. She is a gynaecologist and has her own practice.

Jhrana Tudu or not to do – came with her husband and her daughter. She has managed to break into the top echelon of the Syrian Christian hierarchy in Vellore. What a coup. Her daughter is married to Chako Korula’s son. That girl is going to soar like a meteor!!! With a married name like Korula, she may take Joyce Ponniah’s place next year. Jacob, if only you stayed on in Vellore, you would have been a beacon of light for us all.

Ronnie Gyi, the Burmese student from Rangoon. He joined us as a Burmese and still remains one – though stateless. He managed in between his ophthalmology to find a bride and have 4 beautiful children. Two of them are in Vellore and will eventually follow the father’s footsteps. He used to sing so well at college functions, but did not perform this time.

Lambar Karakongar who also has a lovely voice, did not come this time but he sent his daughter who is a doctor from CMC to represent him. She was a lovely representative. Her mother must be a beautiful lady. I can’t say that much for Lambar. Bobby stayed with Lambar after the reunion. And he thinks it’s lovely. I think Nagaland will be a good place for the reunion. Think about it Lambar.

We have had a few guys and gals that “joined” our batch. The most prominent has been RRRRaman. He has adopted us and we are grateful he did this. His presence and his wit add so much color to our gatherings. He has stood in as my surrogate brother at the wedding of my daughter. And he has stood in as my rock and sheet anchor in many of the storms that I have faced.

Another guy that we sorely missed was Daleep Murkarji. His commanding presence was not evident at this reunion. He of course is too busy to be with us as he is solving the world food problems – which by the way has been partly caused by him – and the health and spiritual needs of the world. His visit to Vellore during the reunion would have been the icing on the cake for me.

So what are your feelings, Abel?

It was pure unadulterated joy to be in Vellore again. The campus has always evoked in me a wonderful feeling. This is where I grew up. In my world of no brother's, I found an abundance of them. The guys who stood in as my bothers throughout the years in Vellore will always be fondly remembered. They chided me, scolded me, taught me, derided me, laughed with me, cried with me, tried to sing with me, and encouraged me. This is the place where boys became men. I will never forget. These years will be etched in my memory till time and eternity merge.

40 yrs down the road and we are still a force to be reckoned with. The batch has made a lasting impression on the CMC family. In a college that produces great personalities, this batch has stood out. Very few of the other batches have seen so many individuals of such sparkling characteristics. We stand out like stars in a spangled night sky. Every one of us has contributed to society in one way or the other. The ethical lessons taught in CMC have been drummed on to the tympanum of our souls and has made us good individuals.

“The best is yet to come” is a catch phrase that tends to be spoken by older guys who are trying to capture their youth. We have had the best years of life in Vellore. We will still have good times. But the best times are still lovely memories for us – ringed by the everlasting hills of the campus.

God Bless till we meet again.

15 Sept 2005

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