

South City's Mr Bs

God's Faithfulness in the Lives of Nonagenarians

Mr Bhaktamitran and Mr Bycroft

Concept, compilation, and arrangement by Nahomi Dhinakar
Photoshoot by Natalie Rose (Dare to Dream Photography)
Printed in India by Paul Surendar (Poorva Pathaigal)
December 2017

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Foreword

The Lord has given me the privilege of serving Him as pastor of the flock, which He purchased with His own blood. There is surely no greater privilege than this. These are people who have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world and called to be saints. These people come from all cultures and ethnic backgrounds; some young and some not so young; some babes in Christ and others mature in their faith.

Over the years, I have found it a great blessing to have, in the church, people who have walked with the Lord for many years. They are not only a great encouragement but often wise counsellors. South City Church has had the privilege of having two such men, from its inception. We affectionately address them as the two Mr Bs.

These two men share many things in common; the most important is their love for the Lord Jesus Christ. We often wonder what it would be like to live into our nineties. What would we do with our time? What is there to look forward to? How would we cope with the restrictions of old age?

Even among Christians, there is often a fear of getting old. For anyone with such fears, please spend some time with our two Mr Bs. What do they do with their time? Every Sunday finds them in the House of God. During the week, they study God's Word, listen to sound preaching, spend time in prayers and worship of the God they love.

What do our two Mr Bs look forward to? They would answer in unison, "We look forward to that day when our faith gives way to

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sight, to that moment when we will see the face of our blessed Saviour.” They look forward to being able to cry, “Home at last!”

Ask them how they cope with old age, and they will be quick to reply that old age is the result of the fall of Adam. So, to them there are no surprises. They wrestle like all men with their physical health and feel the restrictions of their age. I know they often wish they were more mobile. But then, they will be quick to say that their old restricted body will not always be like that, soon their body will be made like the glorious body of their Risen Lord.

These two men have been such a source of blessing and encouragement to me and many others. We often say to them that we hope the Lord will spare them for many years to come. Are we being selfish by making such a statement? Yes, I think we are, but for the right reasons. We want them to continue to be an inspiration to us and many others.

Are our two Mr Bs perfect? No, but they are looking to that day when they will be. We know that the day will come when they will no longer be with us. That day is in the hand of the Lord whom they love and serve. There are four verses in Psalm 92, that sum up **Mr Bycroft** and **Mr Bhaktamitran**.

‘The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like the cedar of Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the Lord is upright.’

“Thank you Lord for giving South City Church these men. Be pleased to give them joy and peace both now and in the days to come.”

Alfie Orr (Pastor)

Introduction

This photograph marks a milestone in the lives of the Mr Bs. Although they had been worshipping together for some years, they got to know each other better on this occasion.



John's grandson Simon Rose and **GB's** grandson Tim Dhinakar were both baptised by Pastor Orr on this Sunday in 2012.

Taking this rather symmetrical photograph brought out the similarities in both families. Both Mr Bs had only one child—**John** had Rona and **GB** had Nahomi.

This little book puts together some aspects of the lives of John and **GB**. In spite of the similarities, it becomes obvious that they are very different in temperament, culture, and background. Yet somehow, the Lord, moving in mysterious ways, has brought them together to serve and bless South City Church.

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Young **John Bycroft**

John: What my childhood home was like



John Crosby Bycroft

I have to cast my mind over the course of eight decades with the possible result that the vision of yester-years has somewhat dimmed with the passing time. Having said this, I still have found memories of those early days.

I was one of a family of five children, ten years younger than them all. I had two brothers and two sisters. Of these one brother and sister left home when I was very young, with the result that I hardly knew them.

My two brothers were in the fulltime ministry plus one sister was married to a clergyman. So you see it was rather an ecumenical family.

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My parents were very old fashioned Methodists, very strict but very godly. We lived close to the church and as a consequence were always at both services. The atmosphere was always devout, with father always leading family devotions on a regular basis.



Family of Frank Bycroft

Growing up in a Christian environment is a great advantage, in fact I would say is very precious, because the gospel and all its consequences are constantly before our attention. I will always be grateful for my upbringing and for the formative years in a godly home with all its training, love, and conservative teaching in early days. No doubt a Christian home moulds the thinking and conduct for the years of advancing years.

The hymn 'O Happy Home' describes my early days.

O Happy Home

O happy home, where Thou art loved the dearest,
Thou loving Friend and Savior of our race,
And where among the guests there never cometh
One who can hold such high and honored place!

O happy home, where two in heart united
In holy faith and blessed hope are one,
Whom death a little while alone divideth,
And cannot end the union here begun!

O happy home, whose little ones are given
Early to Thee, in humble faith and prayer,
To Thee, their Friend, who from the heights of Heaven
Guides them, and guards with more than mother's care!

O happy home, where each one serves Thee, lowly,
Whatever his appointed work may be,
Till every common task seems great and holy,
When it is done, O Lord, as unto Thee!

O happy home, where Thou art not forgotten,
Where joy is overflowing, full and free,
O happy home, where every wounded spirit
Is brought, Physician, Comforter, to Thee—

Until at last, when earth's day's work is ended,
All meet Thee in the blessed home above,
From whence Thou camest, where Thou hast ascended,
Thy everlasting home of peace and love!

Words: Karl J. Spitta 1833, Tr: Sarah B. Findlater

GB: What my childhood home was like

It is difficult to paint any one picture of my childhood home, as it kept changing according to the children who were in the home at the time and the town in which we lived.



Rev Gnanamanickam

I was the ninth child in a family of 11 children. Among these, two girls did not live past their childhood.

My father, Rev Gnanamanickam served for fifty long years as a Lutheran Pastor. He was sincere in his faith and his zeal for serving the Lord was unquestionable. It was not unusual to see him travel long distances on foot, carrying his harmonium on his shoulder, to minister to adults and children in other villages. He was very skilled as an organist.

He did not care for money or earthly rewards for his

ministry. This was painfully obvious to us, because he worked night and day and we were still poor.

Being a pastor's family meant that every few years we moved to different towns to serve in the Lutheran churches there. However, the one comfort that we did not lack was for a place to stay. Every church had an ample parsonage.

Mathuram, my unassuming eldest brother, completed his degree in Madurai, trained to be a teacher and became a fine teacher and Headmaster of a high school.

Asaph, my second eldest brother, was a sportsman who was also emotionally high strung. Because of his excellent grades, he was sent to Madras to do a diploma in electrical engineering, but when he heard that his little sister Jessie had died of Typhoid fever, he discontinued his studies and returned home to Tirupattur where my father was posted at the time.

One died and the other lived. In the same sick room, with Jessie, my third brother Anbunathan was also sick with Typhoid. God's ways are beyond understanding; Anbunathan was restored to full health, but Jessie died. I was very young when this happened. Anbunathan was brilliant academically. He would go on to study medicine, eventually being awarded the coveted accreditation of Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh. So it was this gifted brother who, though only 10 years older than me, took a fatherly interest in my life. Among my sisters, one named Gunaseeli was like a second mother to me.

Bleak years in Pudukkotai: During our time in Pudukkotai from 1933 to the middle of 1935, the family seemed to have one main goal, which was to help Asaph make something of his life. The bleakness of those years cannot be forgotten.

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In order to help Asaph set up the match factory that he wanted, Father opted to forego his future pension and instead accept a sum of money as compensation. Soon the house reeked of matches. The danger of fire accidents was real, and my mother had some near escapes. Moods were as volatile as the chemicals. Asaph also rented an additional building for the manufacturing of matches. One day, it caught fire, and Asaph in his attempt to put out the fire, rushed in, banging his head against a lintel and suffered a skull fracture. He was profusely bleeding. It was 16-year old Anbunathan who rushed to his aid and took him to the hospital. As a child, to me, the wretchedness of the Pudukkotalai years seemed to go on and on, and I was resigned to my misery. But the Lord was gracious and in due time, the winds changed.

Golden years in Trichy: Father's new posting took us to Trichy and to the golden years from 1935 to 1942.

I had the responsibility of taking my younger siblings to school and back, a distance of more than five miles through complicated streets. I also had my own school work to attend to. My family was proud of my abilities in dramatics. I was not particularly good in acting, but because, back in the day, Tamil dramas were musicals, a good actor had to be able to sing well. I could sing and therefore was considered to be good in acting, by default.

My mother was a God-fearing lady who taught me to fear God from infancy. Then she was a wonderful cook. When it was meal time, we headed for the kitchen, where we sat on the floor in front of Mother, and she always served us the most tasty meals.

In the parsonage, in which we lived, was a piece of unused land that Anbunathan fenced off for a garden. It was a joyful pastime

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for all of us to work in that garden under his leadership for an hour every evening. Within a month or two, there were a number of banana plants, vegetable patches, and flowering plants, that made my mother beam with joy.

My mother also told us stories, not just simple fairy tales, but stories from voluminous novels of 600 to 700 pages with complicated plots. I don't remember how she got hold of such books. Each story took many delightful weeks of regular telling before they ended.



Family of Rev Gnanamanickam

*I will bless the Lord at all times,
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul shall make its boast in the Lord;
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.
Oh, magnify the Lord with me,
And let us exalt His name together.
I sought the Lord, and He heard me,
And delivered me from all my fears. Ps 34:1-4*

I was brought up in the orthodox Lutheran tradition. When I was studying in my school final class at the age of 15 years, I was formally confirmed by the Bishop along with a number of boys and girls of my age, according to the tradition in vogue. From that time onwards, I was eligible to partake in the Holy Communion, something that I took very seriously.

I continued to be God-fearing. I still vividly remember my struggle, as a 16-year old, to keep my lustful thoughts in check. I had opportunities to err but I resisted for fear of God. My music was helpful in this regard. I had been proficient in organ from the age of thirteen. This God-given gift of music was a tower of strength, as a healthy hobby, in saving me from harmful and lustful pre-occupations. But I had to wait many more years before I would experience the new birth.

John: How I became a farmer

My mother's family, the Blacketts were English farmers who had come to New Zealand in the late eighteen hundreds. They had capital and so were able to purchase land and over time increase their holdings.

In my mother's generation were three daughters and two sons. The two sons inherited the farm from previous generations. For some unknown reason, the two boys and a girl never married.

Consequently, as the brothers who owned the farm advanced in years, there were few persons available to follow on.



Frank and Annie Bvcroft

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My father, Frank Warren Bycroft married my mother Annie Blackett in 1907, and we lived on Blackett Road, Te Kowhai in Hamilton.

So at the age of 17, when I left secondary school, I went to live and work on the farm, joining my unmarried uncle and aunt.

In some ways it was not easy. When I started working as a farmer, I was a 17-year old boy and living with my much-older uncle and aunt, both unmarried. Needless to say there were times of tension, in large measure because of the age difference between them and me, a generation gap. However looking back, I can see that in many ways they were good to me and generous.

In those days, there was no training necessary to work on a farm; one learned the trade, as one went about the daily tasks.

I continued to farm for 40 years and it all turned out well in the end. I inherited half the farm, and as I was there for so long, I carried on in a manner with which I was familiar.

Looking back, I have no regret. It was a healthy life and rewarding in many ways.

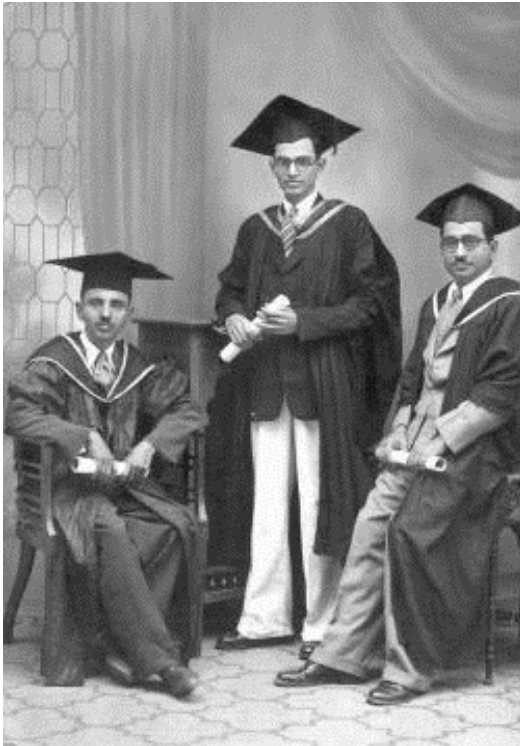
Sadly the farm, which was in the family for over a hundred years, is no longer owned by the family, with one exception—Rona holds title to a section.

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John during his farming days

GB: How I became a Librarian



With brothers Mathuram and Anbunathan who came up to Madras for GB's convocation

After completing my **B.Sc.** degree and **Diploma in Library Science** from Madras University, I began working as a professional librarian of the Madras Christian College.



GB in Syracuse University

After about 10 years of work experience, leaving my wife Kamala in India, I completed an **M.S. in Library Science** in Syracuse University in New York, USA.

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GB in front of the UN building, NY

I then worked in Brooklyn Public Library for two years before returning to India. My overseas qualifications opened up many exciting new career opportunities.

I was the founding librarian of an industrial library in Fertilisers and Chemicals Travancore Limited in Cochin, Kerala in the mid 1960s. The next assignment I took on was as the Chief Librarian of the Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta.



GB in IIM Bangalore

In the late 1970s I completed an **MA in English**, which I had wanted to do for many years.

Perhaps, my greatest achievement as a librarian was that in 1974, I became the founding librarian of the library of the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore and served as the chief librarian of this prestigious library till my retirement in 1986.

Built in India and wrecked in New Zealand

In the bustling city of Calcutta, the seat of the largest colonial Presidency of British India, a merchant vessel called the Hindostan was built and launched in April 1813.

The great William Carey was very much in Calcutta at that time. Missionaries were being persecuted and sent back to England in disgrace. That month, Carey penned these intense lines in a letter to a friend.

"I trust, however, it is too late to eradicate the Gospel from Bengal. The number of those born in the country who preach the Word is now very considerable. . . The Bible is either translated or under translation into twenty-four of the languages of the East, eighteen of which we are employed about, besides printing most of the others. Thirteen out of these eighteen are now in the press, including a third edition of the Bengali New Testament. Indeed, so great is the demand for Bibles that though we have eight presses constantly at work . . . In short, though the publishing of the Word of God is a political crime, there never was a time when it was so successful. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.'

Six months later, the Hindostan reached England having sailed her maiden voyage. She was bought by the British Admiralty, and HMS Buffalo became her new name. After serving 20 years as a storeship for the British Royal Navy and three years as a convict ship to transport convicts to Australia, she served her last four years as an emigrant ship.

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In 1840, although no one knew it at the time, she sailed with her last group of emigrants. This included someone very important to our story, **John**'s great grandfather John Bycroft I.

Not long after John Bycroft I disembarked in Auckland, when the Buffalo was anchored in Mercury Bay off Whitianga and loaded with Kauri spars, a strong gale parted her from her cables. When it became clear that her crew could not save her, the captain steered her onto the beach. All the crew except two were saved, but she herself was a total loss.

The wreck of HMS Buffalo is still visible today, at Buffalo Bay off Whitianga, but only from the air at low tide and in clear water conditions.



HMS Buffalo model

John's ancestors

John has told us about his mother's family, the Blacketts, but it is his father's family—the Bycrofts—who are more well known in New Zealand.

John Bycroft I came to New Zealand on the HMS Buffalo in 1840. Three years later, he married Mary Jones and they had eight children.

Their first child, a boy, was born in 1844. He was called

John Bycroft II. This was **John's** grandfather.



John Bycroft I



The business of Bycroft, Limited, was the oldest established flour-milling industry in the Auckland province. John Bycroft I started as a miller, making flour at the old Epsom Windmill that used to stand on Windmill Road, Auckland. Then in 1854, he bought a mill in Onehunga, and this mill was run by water

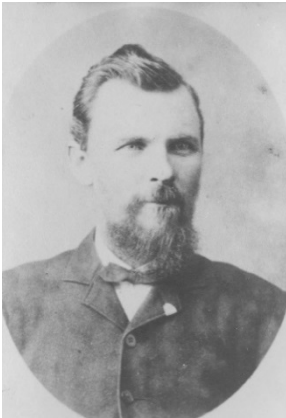
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power, the water supply being taken from the Onehunga springs.

John Bycroft II married Emma Stone in 1869. This Emma Bycroft, **John's** grandmother, gifted some land for a school in Te Kowhai Village near Hamilton. Some of the Bycrofts have studied in this school and a number of the Roses too, including Simon Rose. John Bycroft II worked alongside of his father in the Bycroft Flour Mill and Biscuits business, which became very popular.



Another premises was bought, which had a frontage to Shortland street of over 80 feet, and depth of about 240 feet. This new place had a two storey and three storey building with a common cellar on the groundfloor extending throughout the entire width and depth.



John Bycroft II

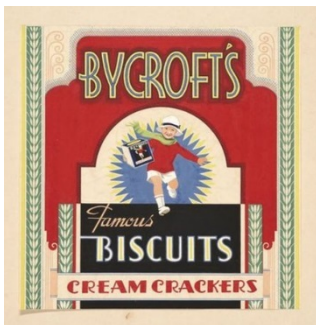
Eventually he inherited the business and was then joined in partnership by Mr. C.J.Stone. In 1898 the company was awarded a Gold Medal for its biscuits, with special mention for excellence and quality.

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Let's leave the lovely biscuits and see how all this pertains to South City's Mr Bycroft.



Bycroft Biscuit Factory



John and Emma Bycroft also had eight children. Their first son was named John James Bycroft III, but he died as a young man of 28.

Readers of this little book are advised to pay attention to the fifth son in that household, Frank Warren Bycroft, **John's** father.

GB's ancestors

GB's great grandfather Muthusamy Pillai had been led to the Lord in an amazing way. He had changed from one who actively hated Christians to a follower of the Lord Jesus.



Manuscripts in the Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji's
Sarasvati Mahal Library

He had been a librarian in the Royal Palace Library when the Indian kingdom of Tanjore was ruled by King Serfoji II.

Serendipitously, he came across a copy of the New Testament among the collection of manuscripts and books in the library. He sought out the elderly court poet who was a Christian and argued with him about the merits of the way of Jesus. This was the first of many such meetings. In the end, he became a Christian, forsaking a promising career in the employ of the king.



Rev N Samuel

His son, **GB's** grandfather Rev N. Samuel was Professor, Theologian, Pastor, Poet and Author of many books.

He was the first Indian Professor of Divinity in the Theological Colleges in Tranquebar, Porayar, and Bangalore (United Theological College).

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His theology was rooted in Lutheran Pietism, a renewed form of the post-reformation Lutheranism that was held by theologians in Halle in the 17th century. Needless to say, he was well versed with the life, works, and teachings of Martin Luther.



Family of Rev N Samuel, GB's father standing back row, second from the right

He was a great lover of Spurgeon's works, and possessed many of his books in his library. He was known as Tamil Spurgeon, although it is not clear if he was thus known because of his theological leanings or because of his homiletic gifts.

Among his works were books for Bible students, books for children, and books for parents too. He also translated German books into Tamil.

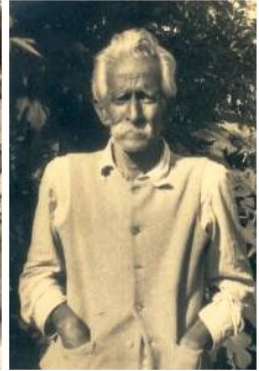
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He wrote 100s of hymns, many of which are loved and sung in Tamil churches today.

Three of Rev N.Samuel's sons became well-known pastors. These were Rev Gnanamanickam, **GB**'s father, Rev Gnanachariam, who served in Burma, and Rev Gnanabaranam, who served as a missionary in the Rewa Mission in North India, travelling with Sadhu Sundar Singh as his translator, whenever needed.



Rev S. Gnanamanickam



Rev S. Gnanabaranam

How John met Heather

Karapiro was the second power station built in the Waikato hydro scheme. Construction of the dam and power station began in 1940, but a materials and labour shortage due to World War II meant that progress was slow. The station was completed in 1947, four years behind schedule.

It was in Karapiro that the Malcolm family, originally from Invercargill finally settled down. Mr William Malcolm had worked all over New Zealand, with his family in tow, but now at last he had been offered a permanent engineering position in this hub of construction work on the Waikato River.

The family, which included two teenagers, Graham and Heather, were Methodists, and naturally began to attend the Methodist church in Cambridge, where **John** also attended and was in fact the Bible Class Leader. "Thus Heather and myself were thrown together," **John** explains, when asked about how he met his wife.

Heather's greatest desire was to do nursing, which she started at the Hamilton Hospital as a trainee, but sadly this did not last long as she developed a skin complaint and had to give this up. Next she applied for Teacher Training and was accepted in Ardmore Training College in Auckland where she trained to become a Primary School Teacher. During this time, she came to saving faith. Around this time, **John** began courting Heather.

Heather began teaching firstly at Leamington, Cambridge and then at a Country School at Hora hora, just out of Cambridge.

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Heather Bycroft

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Mr and Mrs Bycroft

When they got married in 1954 and moved out to the Farm House that was built for them in Blackett Road, they worshipped at the local Methodist Church in Te Kowhai Village, where Heather played the Organ for Sunday Evening Service. Heather also played the Piano Accordion for various activities.

When asked about what Heather was like, **John** simply says:

“Words fail.

“Efficient, capable, devout, dedicated, loving, loyal.

“Sadly missed.”

How GB met Kamala

All my sisters had worked as teachers and saved up for their weddings—to buy the required gold ornaments and silk sarees.



Mr and Mrs Bhaktamitrn

By the providence of God all my sisters had been married off to fine men from good families. Only my younger sister remained.



The newly weds in June 1954

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Mercy Kamala Bhaktamitran

I was informed that ideal matches were found for my sister and me; we were being matched with another set of siblings—a brother and sister—children of another God-fearing but poor Lutheran Pastor. Each family could thus give away a daughter and take in another.

When asked if I wanted to meet my wife before the wedding, I thought it was pointless, considering that the decision had already been made.

Thus it was that I first set eyes on the woman who was to be my wife for a few months short of 50 years—only at the altar. But as with everything else in my

life, in time, I realised that this too was God's best for me.

John's testimony

Romans Ch 10 tells us that *faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God*. There were times when I have felt envious of those who can tell of a mighty experience of amazing proportions—something like Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. However not all conversions are the same. God in His grace moves in many different ways—in many diverse ways.

I would have been about 17 at church one Sunday night. I cannot recall what the preacher was on about. But God by His Spirit spoke to me. I remember going home and speaking with my mother, telling her that I was sure that God had done a work of grace in my soul. *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

I also remember as I began to hunger after spiritual food, sharing new discoveries. The word which had been ignored suddenly became real. I sought to fulfil the exhortation of Paul to young Timothy to continue in the study of God's word, knowing that *all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

Life has told me we never arrive, but must be always pressing onward, so that we *know Him and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of sufferings, being conformed to His death.*

GB's testimony

Wherever I lived, I never missed going to church to worship on Sundays. So it was when I was employed in IIM Calcutta, my family comprising my wife and young daughter faithfully attended services in a traditional church. One Sunday in June 1970, during the Holy Communion, I felt stifled by the pretentious atmosphere and prayed a passionate prayer within my heart somewhat as follows, "Oh God Almighty, if You are the God of the Bible and You really exist, You would not be pleased with our worship today; for this mockery, we should be annihilated en bloc. I tremble to be party to it. I am fervently seeking after You and am at a total loss as to where I can find You, so that I may fall at Your feet and worship You. But if there is no God why should I waste my time here? It seems to me as if everyone is playing a game of pretend—drama acting—and yet no one seems to be even a little embarrassed. If I am out of mind, please heal me."

My daughter was five at the time and asked all sorts of questions and I enjoyed answering her . . . until she started asking me questions about God. In answering her questions on religion, bluffing her I would not, and telling her the truth I could not, because I did not know the answers myself. I could have told her plainly that I did not know the answer, but if she turned around and questioned me as to why I was going to church week after week, I was sure to be stalemated.

Days turned into weeks and weeks into months.

On my way to work in the Institute bus one morning, about six months after this prayer, my attention was drawn to an attractive

banner at the entrance of Thoburn Methodist Church, announcing a three-day convention. I laughed within myself about the futility of these conventions.

On my way back home that evening my Institute vehicle unexpectedly came to a halt just by the side of the entrance of this church which made me look at the attractive banner once again. But the bus would not move from this place and this was not a usual stop for anyone to alight. In a city like Calcutta, traffic jams were not uncommon, but the duration and location where this delay was taking place was peculiar. Since we were still not moving, I had an urge to get down and walk into the church out of curiosity. Once or twice I even got up but changed my mind and sat down. The bus did not move. No one seemed to notice the unusual delay, engrossed as they were chit-chatting with one another. I made up my mind to get off the bus, just seconds before the bus was finally ready to move. As I rushed to get off, the usually-irritable driver smiled and said, "Watch your step sir; I will wait till you get off." Thanking him, I quickly alighted from the bus and walked into the church.

It was 6.10 p.m. or so and there was twenty minutes more for the meeting to commence. The time passed pleasantly enough because the pianist played with such finesse. I felt that the evening had not been wasted as the music alone made the meeting worth attending. At the end of this meeting, when I went to the pianist and complimented him for the music, he did not seem to be very pleased.

The next day I remembered to tell the driver in advance that I was getting down at this 'peculiar stop' to have another chance of hearing the pianist play. This was the way the Lord ensured

that I would listen to a certain crucial message He had kept ready for me. This convention had been arranged under the auspices of the Keswick ministry, an Evangelical ministry in Scotland, and they had arranged a missionary from the U.S.A. at that time as the main speaker. He appeared to be an unassuming sincere man of God and his talk that night, unlike the previous night, completely mesmerized me as it were, since many of the things he spoke that night pertained to matters that had been troubling my own mind for some years.

On the third and concluding day of the convention, I was careful and anxious to hear this speaker. I forgot all about the music that had interested me earlier. The concluding session was as if it were 'the straw that broke the camel's back!'

The convention was over and the crowd slowly dispersed. As I sat, an intense battle waged within my mind. On the one hand these urgent words came to my mind, "*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.*" This was countered by the thought cautioning me not to act hastily but to go home first and think it over. The battle was very intense until a sudden recognition dawned that it could only be Satan who was tempting me to postpone such an important matter. It also dawned on me that this was God's answer to my anguished prayer six months earlier.

At that very moment, God enabled me to respond clearly, deliberately and heartily somewhat like this, "Almighty God, forgive me for this momentary delay. You have answered my prayer without any ambiguity whatsoever. I am deeply grateful to you. I have no hesitation in committing my life totally to You. I have now clearly understood and believe that salvation is only

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through Your Son, Lord Jesus Christ: I now take refuge in You with repentance for my sins. I come to You through Lord Jesus Christ believing in His atoning blood sacrifice and death on the cross which He died to rescue me from sin, Satan and death. I beseech You to accept me and grant me these blessings. One thing more Lord, help me to stand firm in my faith till the end; in Lord Jesus Christ's name I pray, Amen."

I left the venue for my home as an altogether different man. On reaching home, I had a heart-to-heart talk with my wife, and she heard me with astonishment and great interest for which I thanked God. Within a month, she confessed to me that she wanted to commit her life too in the way I did. I taught her clearly and convincingly the Gospel of Christ. The most difficult thing we faced at this juncture was to leave the erstwhile traditional church in order to join the William Carey Memorial Baptist Church. It was a heart-breaking parting. The entire church pleaded with us not to leave.

My wife, my five-year-old daughter Nahomi and I were gladly welcomed in the new church. Within a few months of our joining, we asked for baptism. My wife and I were duly baptized in obedience to the command of Lord Jesus Christ in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

John as Lay Preacher

In Cambridge, **John** was a lay preacher in the Methodist Church.



John after a preaching assignment

GB as Evangelist/Pastor

Since his experience of new birth, GB was instrumental in leading scores of people to the Lord and baptising them. After his retirement from active service in 1986, he served as the Pastor/Evangelist of Evangelical Bible Assembly, which had several small congregations in South India (Bangalore, Madurai, Karur, Chennai, Coimbatore), comprising members that he had taught and baptised.



EBA Congregation in 1994; the photo includes seven South-City members plus other familiar faces

South City's Mr Bs



GB addressing the church during a baptism

Today the people who came to faith through **GB's** ministry are spread far and wide. For a season in the providence of God, they shared a unique fellowship, being taught and nourished from the word. As **GB** was a musician,

the church enjoyed singing good hymns, many of them translated or composed by **GB** himself.



At an annual EBA church retreat, Madurai

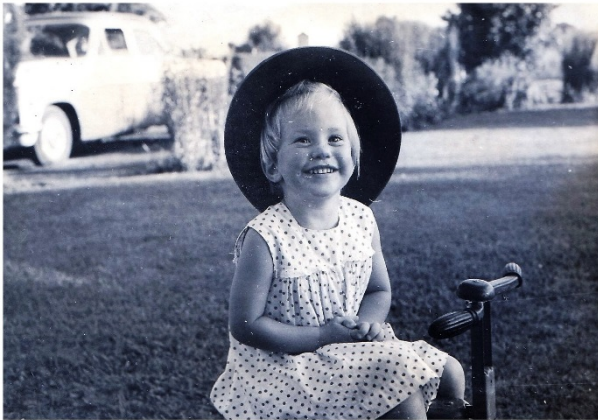
John's daughter Rona

I grew up an only child but was used to entertaining myself with farm animals and music.

I lived in a home that was built on the farm for Mum and Dad when they got married in 1954. The road on which we lived and I still live is Blackett Road, named after my Great Grandfather, Thomas Crosby Blackett.

I would often walk around the farm with my dog, and he would catch Opossums and kill them.

My parents used to have a lot of missionaries staying in their home from time to time. I found this interesting as they spoke of



Young Rona Bycroft

the work that they did in the different countries. Mum and Dad often had Missionary meetings in their home. We would often have Missionaries to stay, and it was a great way to

meet people and to see so many folk spreading the Word of God, some in practical ways and some by Bible studies etc.

South City's Mr Bs

Mum and Dad bought a Beach Bach at Mount Maunganui, in the Bay of Plenty where we would go over in the school holidays each year. I would often take girlfriends from school.

I went to the local Primary school, Te Kowhai Primary School where my Great Grandmother (Emma Bycroft) gifted the land for the School in 1902. The bus would pick me up right outside the house and it would take 20 minutes to get to school with all the stops and pick-ups it made.

We went to church every Sunday as this was a very important day to praise the Lord and sing hymns.

Mum had a gentle character and was kind. She was a very caring mother but quite strict with me. I was not allowed to have my first ice cream till I was seven years old. Dad was even more strict. I was not allowed to wear jeans or have my ears pierced.

Mum was a good encourager as well. She used to read Bible stories to me when I was small, and we used to play a Biblical Game named Quartet, which taught you the different books of the Bible.

Mum also got material from Postal Sunday School Movement (PSSM) for me. PSSM was for children and was started in 1938, to enable young people in remote areas of NZ to learn about GOD through studying His word.

Dad used to have a house cow, and he milked her once a day. We enjoyed having fresh cream and milk. Mum and Dad used to make butter.

I remember when Dad had a Clydesdale Mare (horse) and she used to pull the sledge with farming tools around the farm.

GB's daughter Nahomi

I was born as the only child to my parents 11 years after they were married. At the time, Daddy was on the faculty of Madras Christian College, Madras India. When I was about six months old, we moved into a house in the 365-acre campus, with its rare trees and deer, preserved even today as the second largest scrub jungle in Asia. Our means of transport was my father's treasured bicycle, me nestled in the basket on the handlebar in front and my mother riding pillion, seated sideways, sari and all.

When I was about a year old, Daddy had the opportunity to establish a library for Fertilisers and Chemicals Tranvancore (FACT Ltd) in Cochin in Kerala. My first I-am-a-person memories are from our home and church there.



Young Nahomi Bhaktamitran

Not quite three, and we had moved to our most adventurous station yet, Calcutta, the city of William Carey, where we stayed six years. This was where my father was saved in 1971. Here he worked as Chief Librarian in the Indian Institute of Management (IIMC).

When I was eight, we made the final move as a family to Bangalore, where Daddy joined the Indian Institute of

South City's Mr Bs

Management (IIMB) as founder Librarian. He would complete the rest of his service in this library.

The IIMs are a group of autonomous business schools created by the Government of India for Management studies. His working life had its highs and lows. All Daddy's lunch breaks and holidays were used up for kingdom work, which annoyed some and probably cost dearly, career-wise.

Let me now describe to you what life in our home was like when I was 10. Daddy ruled our household of three. My mother kept house. She was a wonderful cook. Sadly she was unwell a lot. We did not own a car and my father mostly used the Bangalore buses, walking the longish distances to and from bus stops. (He had a characteristic brisk walk and always had a briefcase.) We also used the three-wheeled autos.

My mother served us our dinner at six in the evening. Much as we would have loved to have her seated with us for our meal, she would not hear of it, choosing rather to serve us in the traditional way, which meant that she sat down to eat only after she had served us.

My mother had a maid servant who would come once or twice a day to do the dishes, wash clothes, and sweep and mop the floor. Although we lived in an apartment, my mother raised chickens in the large balcony. She had no qualms about turning a chicken into a dinner and could dress a chicken in double-quick time.

My father had very little work to do once he was home. He spent all of his time in his study, pouring over scripture, reading books on Biblical subjects, and making notes. This has been his

South City's Mr Bs

practice from 1971 to the current day. When I was younger, I would have sat and played under the table at his feet for hours.

He tried to make family prayers a regular feature with a measure of success. I remember the season when he read to us from 'The Cross and the Switchblade' every day; mummy and I loved to listen and groaned when daddy stopped the reading, as was his wont, just when something exciting was about to happen in the story.

My dad was born to be a Bible teacher and I have sat in the shadows listening to long sessions of teaching. Unlike the fortunate children in South City church, I was not made to memorise scripture, but to this day, I remember many scriptures the way he taught them to various groups.

My father placed much emphasis on academics and ensured that I studied in the best schools. The steep fees meant that we had less than satisfactory clothes to wear and very little by way of luxuries. We might have had to do with ordinary fare for meals, only that my mother would rather sell her gold rather than settle for anything less than the best. So for the most part, I grew up a contented happy well-fed poor child going to posh schools. That I did not go on to do a doctorate was perhaps something of a disappointment to daddy. But it has been balanced out by my otherwise happy life.

South City's Mr Bs



John with his Bible [Photo by NR]

John's thoughts for South City Church

It must be said that in these present days, there is much to disturb and dismay, if the church is to remain faithful to divinely revealed truth.

Carnal entertainment in place of reverent worship:

Since about 1960, a tremendous movement has occurred. Patterns of worship have greatly changed. Reverent worship has degenerated largely to be replaced with carnal entertainment. This must be resisted.

Liberalism:

Liberalism still rears its ugly head. The attack on the authority of scripture as the infallible word of truth is still with us today. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and thus is profitable. Liberalism must be resisted.

A watered-down gospel:

The Bible gospel is often watered down, and as a result, the hearers are unable to understand and appreciate God's redemptive plans. It is necessary for the sinner to understand his or her need. It is absolutely necessary to understand the bad news to understand the good news.

The influence of the world:

A ship at sea is safe provided the sea remains outside the ship. But when it invades the ship, it is then in dire peril. In today's church, the world has invaded the church or perhaps the church has invited the world in. The Bible says love not the world.



GB with his Bible
[Photo by NR]

GB's thoughts for South City Church

About Preachers/Teachers (for those considering this vocation):
Those who choose to preach should take care of the warning of apostle James, *'Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.'* James 3:1

The preacher ought to be a spiritually disciplined person. Apostle Paul is our model in this. We read his statement *'but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.'* 1 Cor 9:27

The preacher must be overwhelmed with a passion to preach the gospel with an attitude that Paul had, *'for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel'* 1Cor 9:16

About Progressive Sanctification:

It is important that believers grow in holiness with the help of the Holy Spirit, progressively from glory to glory. *'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'* 2 Cor 3:18

Two characteristics of healthy growing Christians:

- Being genuinely humble (poor in spirit)
- Being deeply grateful to the Lord Jesus

South City's Mr Bs

Some more photos



John [Photo by NR]

South City's Mr Bs



GB [Photo by NR]

South City's Mr Bs



GB and John [Photo by NR]

South City's Mr Bs



John on his favourite couch [Photo by NR]

South City's Mr Bs



GB in his study [Photo by NR]