

# THE OTHER SIDE OF LAURIE BAKER

BY ELIZABETH BAKER

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*Elizabeth Baker was born and brought up in a middle class family in Kottayam, Kerala State. It was at a time when female higher education was in its infancy and there were no medical colleges in Kerala, that she had the privilege of studying medicine under the famous Dr. Ida Scudder at the Christian Medical College, Vellore one of the few medical institutions in India. Dr. Ida Scudder influenced the life and character of her students very much and many of them went to serve in very remote villages. Elizabeth spent nearly ten years serving as medical superintendent in Mission Hospitals near Karimnagar and Medak in the then state of Hyderabad. Later she spent over 16 years along with Laurie Baker in the very inaccessible district bordering Nepal and Tibet. In the 60's they started and developed a rural hospital in Vagamon, in Kottayam District. Later settling down in Trivandrum she concentrated mainly on leprosy and rehabilitation work at the St. John's Leprosy Hospital. In the late 90's when health, both personal and that of Laurie's needed more attention, she retired to devote her time mainly for the family.*

## Contents

Introduction

Young Laurie Baker

The Society of Friends

Journey to China

In China

In the Burmese Jungle

Back in China

Laurie meets Gandhiji

Back to India

My Life with Laurie Baker

We are one in Spirit

The Waiting Period

The Wedding

The March into the Unknown

Life in the Himalayas

The Hospital  
Life in Chandag  
Building with a Feel for People  
The Bhotias  
Mitranikethan  
The Literacy Village  
The Journey to Nepal  
To Kerala  
In Vagamon, Kerala  
Building for Kerala  
The Structure and Fabric of Life in Kerala  
Laurie's Architectural Life in Kerala  
Life goes on  
Laurie Baker, the Architect  
Conclusion

*These pages are to say a Big Thank You to you,  
Laurie - for your Love and Thoughtfulness, your  
Patience and Encouragements that have made me  
what I am today.*

*-Elizabeth Baker*

### Introduction

I am relaxing on the very special armchair that Laurie designed and made for me, many years ago. It is at the side of my desk, and from here, I get a good view of the garden and the road below, through the large trellis that fills the whole of one side of our bedroom-cum-living-cum-working-cum-everything else-room. From here, we watch the sunrise over the highest mountain in Kerala, the *Agasthiaparvatham*, nearly eight thousand feet above sea level, lighting first the tip, and gradually turning the whole into a red-hot cone. In the evenings we enjoy watching the sunset through another set of windows which are really openings in the brick wall filled with coloured bottles-beautiful blue, red and green. This, for Laurie, gives the 'Coventry Cathedral effect'.

The view out, onto our wooded garden, with papaya, mulberry, mango, teak and coconut trees give us the privacy and protection from the traffic and the associated pollution. In the evenings, we watch the crows in hundreds, coming to roost on the trees.

When perched, they are very quiet and invisible, but if you keep on watching, you will see them all suddenly getting up, and flying to another tree. We watch the crow pheasants flitting idly from one bush to another, displaying their brown and black feathers. The ordinary mynahs in large numbers often visit us, to tell us they are still here. We occasionally see the green barbets, the thrushes and the blackbirds. The honey suckers shift from bush to bush displaying their brilliant green, purple and black feathers. The woodpeckers come every summer to make their nests. Then of course, there are the many different varieties of butterflies and bees that go from flower to flower.

Though we are right on the main road connecting Trivandrum with all the important cities in the north, our bedroom window seat is a lovely place to just sit and think and reminisce. It was on one such occasion that I realised what a unique, rich, productive and exceptional life that Laurie and I have had. I began to put down on paper the many things that happened to us, the places we have been to, the kind of people we met and lived with, our adventurous honeymoon which went on for sixteen years in the Himalayas and the last forty years in Kerala, where Laurie was able to make use of his talents, time and energy for one of the most important basic needs of our country - a house for all. There are still millions of people in India without a roof over their heads.

I met Laurie in 1946. Many things have happened since then. This book is a reminiscence of our life together. It was an unusual but satisfactory and productive life. When I think of Laurie's life and the contributions he made to the world, I am reminded of the few verses from the words of Chuang Tzu which seem to fit Laurie. They read:

### The Man of Tao

The man in whom Tao  
Acts without impediment  
Harms no other being  
by his actions.  
Yet he doesn't know himself  
To be 'kind; to be 'gentle.'

The man in whom Tao  
Acts without impediment  
Does not bother with his interests  
And does not despise  
Others who do.  
He does not struggle to make money  
And does not make a virtue of poverty.

He goes his way  
Without relying on others

And does not pride himself  
On walking alone.  
While he does not follow the crowd  
He won't complain of those who do.  
Rank and reward  
Make no appeal to him  
Disgrace and shame  
Do not deter him.  
He is not always looking  
For right and wrong  
Always deciding 'Yes' or 'No'.  
The Ancients said, therefore:

*The Man of Tao  
Remains unknown.  
Perfect virtue  
Produces nothing.  
'No Self'  
is 'True Self'  
And the greatest man  
is 'Nobody'.*

Chuang Tzu. xvii.3

I think these verses sum up Laurie. I am fortunate enough to be his wife and companion, and share his life for over sixty years. I am neither a great writer nor a linguist, but I feel compelled to write and share my life and experiences with Laurie Baker.

I am afraid that I have got down to writing this 'book' rather late in my life. But the truth is that we have both been rather busy until about a couple of years ago, when our worn bodies have forced us to restrict our involvements. Finally having more leisure time at home, I decided to venture on this exercise and I realise that the gaps one may find result from my own failing memory.

## Chapter 1

### Young Laurie Baker

Laurence Wilfred Baker, or LAURIE BAKER as he is better known, was born on March 2nd, 1917, and brought up in Birmingham, England. Laurie's parents, Charles Fredrick Baker and Milly, were from a very staunch and faithful Methodist family. The

whole family took an active interest in church activities. Both parents were interested very much in the church music and all participated in the church choir.

Laurie's interest in architecture and buildings started at a very early age. He accompanied his father who spent most of his Saturdays and holidays, visiting old cathedrals, churches and old manor houses in England.

This is the story I have heard, told by Laurie, about his joining the School of Architecture in 1933. He was an average student in the matriculation class. He did not have much idea as to what he wanted to be, but there were vague suggestions, from friends and relatives that he should try architecture. The Birmingham School of Architecture was still in its infancy; it worked along with the School of Arts. After Laurie's matriculation, his father took him to the School of Architecture for an interview with the Principal. The Principal went through his records - just average marks in all subjects, and even less than average in mathematics. The Principal turned to Laurie and asked - "Can you draw, boy?" His father answered, "Yes. He is fairly good at drawing". The Principal then asked him if he could draw the teapot that was on the table. Laurie, of course, did it in his usual style - just a few strokes and there was the teapot! The Principal was impressed. He asked Laurie if he made models. "Yes" was the reply. "I have done models of a few buildings and some cathedrals we visited" "Go and fetch them" the Principal ordered. So he went home, fetched them and apparently the Principal was impressed, and that was how Laurie got admission to the School of Architecture in Birmingham. He became an Associate Member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (ARIBA) in 1938, but had the privilege of working as an architect in England for only a very short time. World War II broke out in 1939. The war changed the lives of all people in England and Europe.

## Chapter 2

### The Society of Friends

In his youth, Laurie was a staunch member of the Methodist Church, taking part in all the church activities, but in his teens he started questioning his own beliefs and the traditional teachings of the church. It is at this time of his life that he met some members of the 'Society of Friends', otherwise known as the Quakers. The Society of Friends is a group of Christians, who try to follow the teachings of Jesus, to live in respect of each person, to respond peacefully when confronted, and to care for all human beings. The Quakers believe in the power of non-violence, and refuse to fight as soldiers in wars.

During the First World War, the Quakers, knowing that everyone was suffering in one way or the other, formed what is called the 'Friends Ambulance Unit', and engaged themselves in non-combatant service. The Friends Ambulance Unit (F.A.U.) played an important part in Laurie's life.

When the Second World War broke out, the original members revived the F.A.U., lending a helping hand yet again, both in their home country where towns were being bombed, and also in actual war zones. It was by no means easy to join the F.A.U. or to become a 'Conscientious Objector' or a 'CO'. One had to prove that non-violence was not just a pretence to avoid unpleasant and dangerous war life, but that non-violence was one's normal way of life.

In England, young men were called up and conscripted to join war services at a certain age. When Laurie's turn came to be conscripted, he was already in the Friends Ambulance Unit, but he had to go to the tribunal, and prove his inward conviction about the evils, and the unchristian business of war and killing. As he had already joined the Ambulance Unit, it was easy to prove his firm belief in non-violence and love for humanity.

When the F.A.U. was formed during the First World War, the method of fighting was much more personal. It was literally fighting face to face with men of the enemy army. The Quakers took ambulances to France, where the fighting was strong. They would go to the fighting area, pick up wounded soldiers, and take them back to their field hospitals, also manned by Quakers comprised of qualified doctors, nurses and other paramedics. But in the Second World War, fighting was more a matter of planes from great distances dropping bombs on towns and factories, or on ships and submarines, firing torpedoes at supply ships bringing food from the East. In all towns and cities there were air raid shelters or underground structures where people and families would sleep for the night, as no one knew when and where bombs would be dropped from enemy planes.

After a brief training in nursing and first aid, Laurie and a few others went to some of the big hospitals in London where they were given training and experience in such fields as anaesthesia and surgical nursing. In those days, giving anaesthesia to patients was mainly confined to the old 'drop' method of dropping chloroform or ether, onto an open mask. They also learnt to assist in surgical operations, and to anticipate the needs of the surgeon while operating. Laurie had training in midwifery. This was necessary, because sometimes a woman might go into labour while air raid bombings were being conducted. There would be no way of getting the woman to her home or a hospital. In those days women went to a hospital or a nursing home, only when their birth delivery was abnormal or prolonged.

During the war, many families spent nights in the big common air raid shelters. A few of the F.A.U. workers would be on duty to help rescue victims injured from dropped bombs. Often whole buildings collapsed, and people were trapped and injured under the collapsed buildings. The F.A.U. volunteers were always ready to help under such circumstances. After a period of training in London, Laurie was sent to a port on the south coast of England. During these times, it was quite common for ships to be torpedoed by the enemy as they tried to reach ports. There were also big air raids over port facilities. It is significant to note that, at Weymouth in England, he had to deal not with only the crews from British ships but also crews from enemy ships. In the wards of the hospital where Laurie was attached, sometimes he would be nursing a crew from the German enemy ships or planes. This care for all people, involved in the war would have suited his Quaker philosophy and beliefs.

While the regular bombing of England was going on at full scale, the news broke that Japan had joined forces with Germany, and was attacking big cities and ports in the South China Coast and Hong Kong. Later, the Japanese also started bombing inland China. The Chinese government asked the F.A.U. to send teams to China as hospital facilities were few and poor in the inland areas. Several senior members of F.A.U. went to China to investigate and see what the needs were, and what jobs the Unit could do. A six member

team selected from the F.A.U was chosen to go and start their work in China. Laurie was one of those selected.

Meanwhile, Laurie wrote to his parents regularly (almost daily accounts of his life, work and thoughts). I had the privilege of seeing some of the letters, which his mother had preserved and handed over to me. A few of his letters written during the training period in England are given below.

### Fever Hospital

21.3.1940.

Hello - Many thanks for letters and enclosures - all greatly appreciated. Let me first tell you how I am. I'm still as busy as I've ever been. A continuous stream of nurses, matrons, doctors, sisters and others have filed past, the end of my bed with fatuous remarks about death's door, league of health and beauty, wasting away etc. Yesterday the doctor passed by and came back, and said "you look disgustingly healthy - he can get up, nurse", and then started to tell of all sorts of things. So - up I got - and have since nursed the people - now being an efficient fever nurse, as well as a commoner. They keep separate blocks of building for the separate diseases. This ward is full - 24 beds - of German measles. Some people have been in it for several weeks, and get colossal temperature, and are really ill. I apparently had all the 'troubles' - but made a lightening recovery. I had all the troubles within a few hours - temperature, rashes, pulse, throat, glands, nose, etc., etc., came during the night when I slept. As from my point of view, I've had nothing at all! I may be let out as soon as Friday or Saturday, Thanks for suggestion of rest-I had all I wanted on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, t feel really sorry for people I've been nursing at Bethnel Green, who have been in bed for years. I am very glad to be up and doing things again.

Yes - I am being flooded out with letters, ever since I came to London. I wrote quite a lot too on Sunday, and Monday and Tuesday, being able to catch up with all the letters I had received, and not yet answered. I tell people I am O.K. but they seem to imagine I'm just saying that to cover up a dread disease, or something, for they all answer by return post, very long letters of comfort and cheer.

They'd laugh with the nurses, if they saw me in bed! 23 people, all in various stages, between, lying down, and half sitting up, all propped up with many pillows. The 24th - me - sitting bolt upright, in the middle of the bed, busily writing away, and having a noisy between times. It really is so silly - however. I've thoroughly enjoyed myself, and found out lots of new things. (I even think it would be a good thing, if all nurses had to be nursed for a week, so that they can see what it's like.)

I expect Easter will go very quietly even if you are not going away, visiting and gardening. It would probably be a bit nicer weather, by the time Whit comes. If you remember, last Whit was colossally hot and muggy. Remember me to all the other children.

What joy to have the pullover finished! Doris has worked quite quickly, and hard at it - hasn't she? It will be useful, thanks a lot - I shall now be equipped for all weathers. Edna's is useful for indoors wear, when it's cold, I can wear collar and tie at the same time, and still look respectable, when I want to wear something, not too hot, but up -

round my neck, I've got the blue one you knitted, and now, this one for outdoor cold nights etc. Very good.

London is very, very hot - in and out - (lousy hole). No - Ma - there is nothing I need here. I get plenty of food (more now, I've joined the nursing staff of the ward]. I wasn't allowed to bring anything into the hospital except paper and writing materials, and my picture of Bach. No one here has even heard of him!! I am now waiting for the doctor - 2 separate docs have to recommend me for dismissal - and a third passes one out. Only one doc, per day. So I was recommended by No.1 yesterday, and I hope by No.2 today - I hope even more by No.3 tomorrow.

Bach's mass in B Minor is on at Queens hall at 2.45 on Friday, and I am trying to wangle things, so that can go.

Symphony concerts and organ recitals etc. seem to be London's one redeeming feature.

The nurses here, can't quite understand how it is I know nursing, and live at London hospital and work at Bethnel Green, and am an architect. From time to time I explain - but they seem rather dense. By the way, all the nurses seem to be ardent militarists - seems rather strange to me, when they spend their whole lives, trying to relieve suffering - the only people I convert to pacifism seem to be soldiers! There are quite a lot in the hospital, and they support all my arguments most vehemently. Everyone else, just think am mental. Hope you are both well - have a good weekend. Must write more letters, my mail comes in batches - had one from Edna.Ta-Ta.

And love and Thanks - Laurie.

### London Hospital- White Chapel

30.04.1940.

Hello - thanks very much for your letters. I was very glad to hear from you and glad to know you are O.K. Work here gets more and more interesting; often I go on after the appointed time for departure. Yesterday, I met Norman, and we had a most enjoyable time. I met him at the bank, so we bused and walked to Regent Park, and 'did' the zoo. It was quite interesting and we gassed away for hours. The penguins were very funny; the keeper was feeding them with fish. Lots of animals are rather moth eaten, and are apparently too well fed. They just lie and sleep and look bored, poor things! Most of them reminded me of various people we knew. Mrs. Booker, and Auntie

Annie were very faithfully copied. Later on, we returned to Norman's hotel, and ate a large meal there. We met again on Wednesday. Today, we are rather slack. (You never know what will turn up).So I am writing this in between dressings and bedpans. Yesterday was very, very full. The man who had the very juicy operation, a few days ago, at last decided he'd die. He took rather a long time about it. We eventually got him toggged up in the orthodox gown with frills on. Then three new cases came in; one had a fight with someone and had a fork mixed up with his eye. Rather a mess, and so, down we went to the theatre and out it came (the fork - not the eye). His brother, I believe, is kicking the fork-sticker-in down one of the local streets today. So we will probably have another case in. They don't do things by half in this district. They certainly have very few



pacifist tendencies. (The doctor is now making his round, I am still writing this. The doctor and the matron think I am making notes.) Must stop now, to send this off today. Ta-Ta - Laurie.

**Friends Ambulance Unit (F.A.U.) London Hospital, White Chapel**  
**5.5.1940.**

Hello - Sorry this has been such a long time coming. I get busier and busier, and there seems to be little time to do anything.

Health:- I am very well, and work on and on, go from 5 a.m. till 8:30 p.m. Then I sleep very, very solidly till 5 a.m. again.

Weather:- Is very, very good. Hot, many days, warm and buggy evenings and nice and fresh early mornings. I walk from London to Bethnel Green in about 25 minutes, and enjoy it much.

Hospital work:- Gets more and more fascinating. Poor Mr. John's back - he got bedsores on it - thro' lying perpetually still for weeks - has gone all gangrenous, all black and yellow and raw. We have a hell of a time 'doing' him every few hours. We have to fetch other nurses from the women's ward. Seven of us lifts him up from his plaster cast, two rush around dressing and anointing him. I've been promoted and am now allowed to do work in the women's ward! Quite fun. Most of them are P.T. (Pulmonary Tuberculosis) and not very exciting. They just lie around and spit. I am expecting to do my midwifery too, in the near future, but I will have to change hospitals temporarily for this. It will probably be done at Queen Elizabeth's Hospital. Only a few of us are picked to do this side of hospital work. It would be fine to have a plate outside my office - a plate like this -

LAURENCE WILFRED BAKER. ARIBA.

Hours: 9 to 11 Chartered Architect

11 to 3 Certified Midwife

One of my favourite clients has been trying to die all day today. Very trying. He has most things wrong. He came in for a perforated ulcer of the tummy and was found to have bad lungs, heart, liver and kidneys etc. With great trouble and care and operating etc., they thought he was improving, but he turned funny during the night. When came on at quarter to seven, he started having fits and rigor, and difficulty in breathing etc. Doctor came but couldn't do anything. While fits were on, I held him down and held his tongue - fifty people try to bite off their tongues for some obscure reasons. I dosed him with oxygen. He wouldn't die, so we had to do it on shifts-as it's very tiring, keeping these people going. Then all the friends and relations came to weep and sight-see. It really is very disquieting the way they sit around in rows, like watching a 'Punch and Judy' show. I've seen quite a lot of people 'going' out now and always, there is this viewing of the scene by relatives. In all cases, the victim changes completely, and doesn't look a bit like his old self. And in all cases, the victim is nearly oblivious to the eager gaze and noisy weeping of the onlookers. He never says anything except groans and moans in some cases. As soon as he has popped off, his face changes back again. In all, the sight-seers are very upset - they can't do anything -they can't talk, they just sit there and gape, and -

or weep. It is most embarrassing for the nurses to carry out the necessary jobs, with the onlookers gaping more than ever - often one has to slap or shake or poke the victim, and they think you're killing him etc. So altogether, this sight-seeing is most unsatisfactory. I sincerely hope none ever come sight seeing round me, should the occasion arise. Everyone would be far better at home.

I have another youth who is epileptic. You can't do anything during the fit - except hold the tongue, and see that the body doesn't do itself any serious harm. Then when it's over, he just breaks down and weeps and I have to spend about 20 minutes comforting him and giving drinks, and soothing his brow and wiping eyes and saying, "there, there",' and "now, now'." I went down with him to be X-rayed, and the photographs are most interesting. Did I tell you about the eye case? It's rather funny. It is funny that most people come with a broken leg or an appendicitis, etc. and then it is found that they have a lot of amazing things as well. The eye-out man has his legs covered with V.D. ulcers, rather unpleasant, and of course he has to have all his own things - crockery, bottle, pan, knife, fork, spoon etc. It is very exciting for me though probably not so very exciting to read about. (Rest not found).

(Place not mentioned).

21.5.1940.

Hello - I've just had your letter and envelope and for all, much thanks.

I've yet not come across refugees - but might possibly be doing work in connection with them very soon.

Had a nice long juicy letter from Ed too this morning. I should think you will be OK in Sutton Coldfield, re - air raids etc. People seem quite panicky down here in London. These last few days special precautions are being taken in hospital for dealing with fire, explosions, panic, hysteria etc. so we are all prepared. Personally, I don't think anything will happen. Yet-ma - it's now evening and I've just had the first anti-tetanus injection. Am now going on duty - Ta-Ta - Love - Laurie.

F.A.U. St. Barts (St. Bartholomew Hospital) E.C.I.

3.7.1940.

Hello - very many thanks for your epistles and enclosures. All of which are very greatly appreciated. Am glad to hear you are all O.K. after the Air Raid warning, and that you are now beginning to get used to them. Isn't it monstrous that we shall have to get used to such things, and the thought that the greater part of Europe is constantly in fear of them?

The air raids - we'd had lectures on their effect on people (i.e. apart from the actual bodily harm). It is rather interesting to see how people are actually reacting to them. Fear, is at least one of its many aspects, for at least in the beginning of the first raid or warning and is quite universal to normal people. Various types of lunatics and ill people may be immune. The feeling of sickness or depression in the pit of the stomach is the most common symptom - and the runner upper, is the desire to visit the nearest convenience quickly and frequently. Apparently, the only remedy is to be firm with oneself, or with

the victim, and to do something - read or write or knit, or even do things like rolling and unrolling bandages, or counting matches out of the match box or do crosswords puzzles etc. The doctors all told us that the nervous energy went up on such occasions, out of all proportion to the usual consumption. To counteract this we should eat energy giving foods such as sugar and nuts (barley sugar and chocolates or fruit or drinks like bovril or marmite - or eat raisins and currants and things). Hunger, during or after fear, only tends to increase it or bring it up again. This is one of the reasons for increased panic with fleeing refugees from bombs!

Re - shutters, I read in one of the A.R.P. books that shutters are O.K. But there must be shutters on the inside. Very heavy curtains or rugs or something, as the glass in spite of the outside shutters, blows in, and is the cause of a lot of minor casualties. So - on your landing window, I should have something strong at nights - like the rug that used to be up - or like the curtain that is over the front door.

Actually, if the bomb drops anywhere near, it doesn't matter how many shutters, or sand bags, or sticky paper or curtains you have, all the glass will just blow in. So - all you can do is to see that it won't blow on you - either by having a thick but yielding material, like the heavy curtain. The hall is actually a good place, very little glass and only the front door that is a single thickness of wall between you and the outside.

I have heard a lot of funny stories about the raids. I've heard too of several people who didn't wake up, till the all clear signal - and then dashed off to their shelters. Actually my first thought on realising that the sirens were blowing, was - Oh, my recorder!!

Re - these famous preachers. Don't take my comments about them, as my final judgments. I realise they are all very fine men, and most of them have done excellent work. I actually have no right to condemn them after a single hearing - or even to judge them at all. I merely pass on to you, the impression they give me. The more I wander about London, the more I remember of our visit, when we first had our motorbike and the sidecar. Quite clearly, I suddenly recall little scenes and incidents. Do you remember a hot Sunday morning, in tripping around from cathedral, to famous buildings to Abbey, ad infinitum, what a heat and what a thirst! When i went to the R.C. Cathedral on Sunday, I remembered your very words (whispers) as I was hoisted on to the back row of the vast place. How, when the people all stood up, I couldn't see a thing except chair backs and behinds - and then when the plate came nearer, we rushed out to go to the next place. I am enjoying life here very much. I now know most people by sight at least, and a lotto smile at, and a lot to talk to. Everyone seems very-very decent to us. I looked on the vicar on Saturday - this is a church within the hospital grounds. The hospital is itself a parish, I believe. I said 'how about seeing your organ?'-and he said, 'sure'. So I said, 'when' and he said, 'call and see me anytime, and I will show you! So I called and saw him, and found out where the key lives, and he says I can use the organ when I like. So - I do use it! It's a beauty - quite small, but a first class job - built by William Hill etc. who built and rebuilt the Birmingham Town Hall Organ. The tone is superb. I've never felt such an organ for touch. There was the speaking stops and five couplers, and five thumb pistons for the manuals, and six foot pistons. There are the small and great pedal keyboards. What's even better, it is in a gallery and you can take the key up, so no one can come, watching and upsetting you. I bought a second-hand book for 6d, today. It was printed and published in 1755. Typical old binding, that old parchmenty sort of paper, with a

quite faint print. All the S's are F's. It's called Select Epitaphs, collected by W. Toldery. It's full of figures and quaint epitaphs. The earliest being of St. Alban in 293A.D. Must now flee.! go to bed early now, so that I don't lose too much sleep in the event of raids. I am keeping fit, again much thanks for epistles and enclosure. Love - Laurie.

F.A.U.St. Barts. E.C.I.

9.7.1940.

Hello-Thanks for all your news. I was glad to hear from you of all your escapades. Hope you are making the best of your week. The weather isn't too good here - so I am quite glad to remain in hospital, with all its fun and games.

I am still working mainly in Surgery, and the outpatient department. There is quite a large laboratory belonging to the hospital - there, the outpatients take away small bottles and test tubes and cartons, one week and bring them back the next week, full of desired samples - of spit or vomit - or urine or other Things. Well - one man brought back his ice-cream carton full of - the other thing and a somewhat powerful aroma filled the Surgery, so at last I volunteered to take them up to the lab, some pretty distance away. Everyone - willingly and joyfully said - "yes, do take this away" - so off I went, most embarrassing, for everyone I passed gazed after me, or stood aside in doorways and deep recesses while I hurried by nonchalantly. I am sure they all thought I was the patient, in spite of my overalls. Then I got to the lift which was just leaving its gates closed on a lift full of people, all telling the lift man, which floor they wanted to go to - "fifth floor please," "third floor - thank you" so on. So I sprang into the lift and up we started to go. Everyone looked around suspiciously at everyone sniffing alt the while - with one accord, 'Oh! Will you stop at the first floor please? I forgot I had to see the doctor or sister or nurse or something', and out they all 'bundled' - leaving me and the liftman and the smells. I felt like Pandora and her box of evils. (Unfinished).

42, Rodwell Road, Weymouth, Dorset

6.11.1940.

Hello - many thanks for the most welcome letter, just received. I've left it in the ward, and am starting to write this letter while I am having my lunch and so will deal with any point you raised later on. I am enjoying my 'skin'(the skin ward) more than ever now. You really needn't be afraid of them at all. The first day, I had occasional doubtful thoughts about catching the disease etc. - but on thinking it over in bed it occurred to me that it didn't matter, if I did catch anything -because the real trouble with all these men is, that they let it go on for weeks without treatment, so that it gets a real hold on them - whereas, if treated immediately, and of course correctly, then there is no danger or much unpleasantness at all. So why worry! So now I revel in them, and it is better than ever now, because owing to their unpleasant nature, and also owing to the fact, that they have sores ail over, I now have the complete nursing and treating of all the bad cases - ten in number.

As I am all togged up in gloves etc., I can't touch clean things, i.e. things that other people have to use, without scrubbing up, and disrobing - which is a long and

complicated process. So I have at my disposal, a bevy of head-maidens in the form of nurses, who fetch me bandages and ointments and bowls of water and do all the cleaning up and so on. Poor sister was in quite a flap this morning, because, I was to have two hours off. All the dressings are done in the morning, and for the last two days, she has been hinting, and moaning - "oh Laurie! What will happen on Wednesday morning with you 'off'?"

I can't let any of the nurses do the treatments, they just won't understand, I suppose I'd have to do it all myself." And a good thing too - I thought. It will do you good to get an idea just what I do in the morning. However this morning, she came and begged me to stay on, and have the time off any other time, so I am going on after all, and having the afternoon 'off'. So at last I really am a bit of use, and not merely an ornament.

Yesterday was a gala day - besides all the usual work, I had a death, and two new cases came in - all within an hour. However it all made a pleasant change. Most of the men in my ward are from Lancashire or Yorkshire with loud vulgar voices - quite interesting, if you don't suffer from headaches.

It is now afternoon and I have your latest epistle in front of me. Your weather sounds much like ours. It rained very heavily and continuously for several days. Today it's changed and is lovely and sunny, though very, very windy. I am afraid nearly all the leaves have been blown away off the trees now. I am glad you were able to go to Hall Green and found them all O.K. I am afraid I haven't written to them or N.F.B or Edna, or indeed, to hardly anyone else, since I've been back. I spend so much more time at the hospital, and now it is dark, when I go out in the morning, and so can't do any walking or writing before breakfast. I get home anytime after 9 in the evening and go straight to bed.

I wondered if the Coventry family would do another move. One of the nurses who have relations in Coventry is always telling me they are having heavy raids and things, and so I am not surprised to hear they've gone. The present arrangement doesn't sound too bad - does it?

I am afraid the organ can't be used much as the place is now blacked out - so unless I am free, during the day I can't use it. When I am free I like to make the most of the fresh air - you ask, when I will be finished with mentals and skin. Well - I've now finished with mentals. They are just being moved to a mental hospital. And skins, I shall finish with all probability in a fortnight, on Saturday. The time does fly. I've been on skins now for nearly two weeks. I am having a day off - on Saturday - the first for ages - so I hope it won't rain - so that I can go off to the hills. If it does rain, I will be able to do a bit of writing, and start to catch up with my long list of letters to be answered.

The China business is getting clearer. It is intended to send out a large ambulance and a repairs lorry, which will enter China through the Burma Road and operate between the base hospitals in Central China. And as near to the front line as possible. The size of the Unit and names of those to go is not decided.

I saw a post-mortem on my old patient - the one who conked yesterday - most interesting! And found out all sorts of things that we didn't know he'd got. It'd be nice to see one's own P.M.!

Well - the sun and air calls. So I must go out and keep my cheeks bonny and what not

Love and kind regards (at your discretion) to people who require them and explain how busy I am and that I've not forgotten them -Love - Laurie.

42, Rodwell Road, Weymouth, Dorset

2or 3.12.1940.

Hello - many thanks for your letter, and for the enclosed. I think you know by now how greatly relieved I am to know, that everyone, and you both, are alright. It is rather disconcerting, continuously hearing on the wireless, and evening paper of big industrial areas in the Midlands again being attacked and so on. We've had a grand game tonight. I've been down in the theatre, with some emergency cases for the last 4 hours - with a raid going on outside. The whole place was shaking and rattling, instruments and glass cases and so on - trembling about all over the show. However the operation was successfully completed and now I am back in the ward, and all is more or less peaceful within and without. I've got a screamingly funny nurse down here, her name is Cleghorn. We call her Cleggers. She has a couple of children in boarding in Scotland and a husband who is a tea planter in Ceylon. She came over to collect her children, but war broke out and she had to stay. So she's here at Portway, Nursing Night Sister, Acting Matron and Matron for the whole place, whom one is supposed to bow and scrape to be called Cleggers.

It's a pity that the chapel's been mucked about so, still, suppose it'd have been worse if the bomb had been twenty yards further south.

We get a lot of soldiers in for hernia; in fact there is a whole unit of 4 wards, continuously more or less full of hernia cases. Probably due to unaccustomed work in the lifting line, it's quite an interesting operation to watch. Though, as it's so common now, you soon get used to it, as the procedure is very much the same each time.

It's a bit more exerting when they get a double hernia. One man we had, had an operation for duodenal ulcers, appendicitis, and double hernia. His scar formed a beautiful arrow all over his tummy.

Thank Uncle Joe for messages etc. It's highly improbable I shall get as far as Bournemouth, on my bike, but I'll certainly call if I can. One never knows. Is N.F.B. sleeping at Coventry or at Lemington? Does he take his hens about with him? Must be rather tiresome (I mean the poultry, not Mary, Peggy and Christine). My socks (the second) continue but slowly due to being busy. Yesterday I slept from 9am till 6.55am. Only 10 solid hours and thro' two raids too.

What's going to happen at Xmas? It's highly improbable that I'll be home, as it is an extra busy time in hospitals - having to do all the routine stuff and do extra to make it more Christmassy. Are any of the family coming to 17 Maxstoke Road and or staying the night? The blackouts make visiting hours so short, doesn't it? It will seem funny going to work on Christmas day, still it seemed funny working on Saturdays and Sundays at first, but once you are inside a hospital, there is nothing to make it different. The patients can't wear Sunday clothes, nor can the nurses, and they have Holy Communion on Thursday mornings early. One of the parsons is very temperamental or something. He can't work, i.e., do his stuff unless he is facing east or west or something, one has to rush about with a compass. Do you know what 'Barnacle' is? He told nurse Cleggers to go and get him

the Barnacle, but she didn't know what it was, so took him a hot water bottle instead and put on her 'deaf ear' stunt. So at last he had to get on without it. He was awfully mad on one ward, because the men, some sailors, managed to change the wine for some Guinness and he recognised the taste half way through the performance. However they had downed it by then, so he couldn't do anything practical about it.

Well - must work now, a bit more and so cheerio for the present - Love - Laurie.

40, Rodwell Road, Weymouth, Dorset

7.12.1940.

Hello - Very many thanks for your letter etc. of last Sunday. I had it yesterday — Friday - don't they take a long time to come, these days.

Our weather has been very-very windy and fairly cold tho' we get 'wet-cold' than frost. Am afraid I've not been awake to see whether it's been raining or not. I go to sleep straight after supper (9 a.m.) and sleep solidly all day till about 6:30 p.m. Several days I've slept 10 solid hours without a break. Last night I was particularly busy. Lorry load of soldiers had been for a bath and were returning at great speed, down a steep hill. Unfortunately the brakes gave out and there was a sharp bend and some big trees at the bottom of a hill. They were going far too quickly, to take the corner - so the trees stopped them in lieu of brakes. Several were killed. Several have fractured spines and skulls and all the rest have at least broken legs, to say nothing of cuts and bruises and shock etc. So we were busy in the theatre all night patching them up. I've been Emergency Night Theatre Nurse while I am on nights. So I get the full brunt of all these little excitements. Tonight there has been nothing in theatre, so I am down on the fracture ward with those men - most of them are pretty bad. I've just given another three of them morphia injections.

It struck me a short while ago, how funny this is - a year ago I'd only been inside a hospital about twice and then only to visit people, and now I am here in a ward, alone with 30 odd bad cases to deal with, giving injections, and doing their dressings and so on, preparing the theatre for operations, assisting with the instruments and apparatus - etc. It's all such fun too - thanks very much for storing the records, it sounds a grand place to keep them, doesn't it? Don't worry about the stockings; I'm only doing the pair for fun. So you won't be the chief-sock-knitter. Actually I rather prefer knitting on four pairs, than on two. No -Ma -I am not needing any winter woollies or scarves or anything. I've not even had to put a vest, on yet.

Sorry this is so short, but am busy - must now start up again. So all cheer - and Love etc. - Laurie.

42, Rod well Road, Weymouth, Dorset

Saturday, 14.12.1940.

Hello - Golly - what a surprise. Thanks very much for letter and parcel - they both came this morning, Saturday 14th, posted on

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup>! The cake looks grand -just like old times - we used to get cakes on Saturdays, but it seems to be non-existent now. So this is even more - if possible - welcome and appreciated than it always would be. I am now back on days, and am

having a very busy time. I do 'skins' in the mornings, and the small surgicals in the evenings' spare time - I am making ward decorations, scenery for pantomimes and costumes and so on - so there's not much time left each day, by the time I've done all these things. Sorry to hear about Amy, what did she die of? Don't tell me she died of a Saturday. She wasn't very old, was she?

Glad you've been having a few peaceful nights. We have too, though Thursday night was pretty bad, I am told. Afraid I didn't hear anything, but slept all thro' the night as usual.

We have a siren quite near, that nearly knocks you over - but once I'm asleep it makes no impression at all on me. There are several big guns too, very near, that shake the house and hospital with each bang. But again I seem to be unimpressionable - either I've grown used to it or I'm equipped with efficient shock absorbers. The nights have been grand - very bright skies, and the sea, very, very calm and cold looking. Have not had time for any walking though, lately.

I've not written to Bessie for sometime - but I will try and do so for Xmas. More and more can I see where she acquired her manner and habits and views on subjects and people, particularly her way of pulling up and keeping people in their places! I don't know why it is, but as soon as you get people in bed, you immediately become their dictator, and they accept you as such. You tell them they must waggle their big toe six times every half hour and they waggle it. You tell them you're going to cut off their hair, and they acquiesce as lambs. It is the rarest thing ever to hear of anyone even trying to disobey or disagree, and the nurses of course grow up in such an atmosphere, and thrive on it too for the rest of their days.

Must now stop and flee and work - so love and look after yourselves - again heartiest thanks for the parcel. You bet I'll enjoy it - Love - Laurie.

48, Rodwell Road, Weymouth, Dorset

24.12.1940.

Hello - How have you been getting on? I've wondered quite a lot during the last day or two and thought things like - I expect they're just finishing dinner now - and now they'll be starting to encourage children that it is a very good thing and desirable that all small people should sleep long and silently and start fairly early in the morning and so on. I've had a very good time, though very, very busy - in fact - this is about the first few spare minutes I've had for a week or more. I am glad to hear them saying on the wireless at this minute that there have been no bombing operations during Xmas by R.A.F or Germany. So presume you've had no upset in that line. Everyone just goes wild in hospital during the festive days. Unlimited quantities of drinks in all forms seem to get smuggled into the place, And everyone except a few - show signs of wear there from, before long. This includes most of the staff. Sister and I were kept going doing all the routine work and dressings & of course, all the extra food and good things etc. on the surgical ward. I thoroughly enjoyed being very busy. As I can't say, I really enjoy the 'Xmas spirit', as interpreted by most people, and being busy was as good an excuse as any - at the same time being necessary. I spent quite & bit of time in the operating theatre too. (Incomplete).



BullenWard, Portway Hospital, Wyke Road. Weymouth

28.12.1940.

Hello - Just another note to keep you well read. Had another grand day yesterday, and another today. We repeated the prank for friends and relations' benefit, last night. And it went down excellently. Being stage manager, I had the job of clearing up afterwards and was just hurrying to take back the last piece of property to the rightful place, when I slipped outside the operating theatre door and dislocated the bones in my foot - metatarsal bones - officially - and tore a ligament or two. I was X-rayed there and then and had one foot set etc. and was put to bed. Here I am still. Actually, it is all rather fun.

The Medical Superintendent was there, when I did it, and he had me put in the officers' ward, but the next morning with the crowd of visiting nurses and sisters came a deputation from my favourite ward, asking if I could be moved down there. When the M.S. was consulted he said, wouldn't I rather remain in the officers' ward, and be a gentleman. (Rest not found).

(Place not mentioned),

23.1.1941.

Hello - Many thanks for letters. Was glad to hear from you and hope, by the time you get this, your aches and pains and colds and snow will have vanished, It's funny, but it's been quite warm and muggy weather down here for some time now.

I've been having quite a hectic time. I've at present been on the roof, watching for fires-half an hour ago, I was working in the theatre on an emergency case. Last night, there were several, and I had the job of theatre nurse, quite a promotion - and one I particularly enjoyed. The night before, I had a very bad pneumonia and pleurisy-case to deal with, so it was quite a nightful - keeping her alive - and dealing with two other bad cases as well.

I forget when I wrote last, did I tell you about the raids, and the fires? We had dozens of incendiaries descend on the hospital and a high explosive one very near. Had great fun putting out fires - one -quite a big one. No people were hurt, and the H.E. only blew in windows and doors and did very little damage to the walls. That was last Thursday or Friday. It was the night when the wireless said (next morning) that there's been no evening activity over England.

How quickly the time's flying. I shall be finishing nights at the end of this week, and going on to unit 3 again, where I used to work for the first 2 or 3 months that we were here at Weymouth. I've just realised I've been at Weymouth well over 6 months now. In some ways, it seems no time, yet when I think of some of the events that have happened here, they seem like bits out of the dim-distant past. (Rest not found).

(Place not mentioned)

31.1.1941.

Hello - Parcel received today. Very many thanks - hope it wasn't a great trouble. Also - more thanks for letter. I am glad the lumbago is now better than it was. Hope it's now disappeared completely.

Funny you're having such weather. We are having it warmish and muggish and lots of drizzly rain. Certainly not snowy or frosty. I expect it's the sea. I am having a full day today. There is a staff dance on tonight. Tony wanted to go-so I'm doing his night shift until 10'clock. Then this morning, one of the people who was to have been roof spotting went sick. So I went on at 5 a.m. So my day will have been;

Roof	5.00	8.30
Breakfast	8.30	8.45
Ward	8.45	10.00
Off Duty	10.00	12.00
Theatre	12.00	1.30
Dinner	1.30	2.00
Ward	2.00	7.30
Supper	7.30	7.45
Ward	7.45	1.00

Then bed -1 hope. In about 5 min there is going to be a Schumann piano concert on the wireless, played by Kathleen Long - rather good-unfortunately the noise of the dance band in the room below is rather much, but by gluing my ear to the wireless set - I hope to hear. Love - Laurie.

42, Rodwell Road, Weymouth, Dorset.

Thursday.2.1941. (date not clear).

Hello - another note to let you know of developments. I am at present journeying between London and Oxford. I left Weymouth at 6.50 in the morning and went to White Chapel (the remains of the

London Hospital) and was medically examined there - Doctor says I am perfect. Then I dashed back to Paddington, and just caught the train to Oxford, where I am viewing or rather being interviewed by Professor Hughes - one of the China Committee. Then I hope to get back to Weymouth, sometime, round about midnight.

Money is now forthcoming for the China expedition, and 4 men and a doctor have gone to China to make arrangements there. Meanwhile they are going to start a training camp for another 40 men at Northfeld, probably on Feb 27th. If they find they have enough splash, they will have another camp later on. This week, they are picking out the 40 - hence all the interviews and medical exams and so on. I don't think I've ever been so excited - it's very hard not to start counting chickens.

So after next week, there is a faint possibility of my turning up at home! Meanwhile life at Weymouth is as still exciting and interesting. Last night we had sudden orders to get everything in a semi-packed condition - e.g., all linen to be laid up in bundles of ten - clothing and apparatus etc. similarly ready for immediate departure. So when I get back, the hospital might be an empty shell devoid of people or things. I hope not - but it wouldn't be beyond the powers to be. If you get parcels of my things by post it will only be that I am sending home unnecessaries - so as to be prepared for evacuation from the coast. Hoping you're well - Love - Laurie.

42, Rodwell Road, Weymouth, Dorset

9.2.1941.

Hello - Very many thanks for your letter and the enclosure. They were ail most welcome and well received. I am sorry I've not written before this - but time does fly so - and I seem to sleep any spare time do have. On my day off, I took one of the spine (fractured) men for an outing. We went a grand walk on the hills in the snow and it was lovely and sunny - just like mid-summer - apart from the snow. He thoroughly enjoyed himself. He used to do a lot of walking, and this was the first time he'd been out far. The fresh air and sun did him good too - he slept from the time we got back - 6 p.m. till 12 noon the next day. Then he slept all afternoon and woke up for tea, stayed awake till supper, and then slept again from 2-4. By using my dinner and tea times, and getting an extra !/2 hour, I made it from 1.30 till 5 p.m. and took the other spine case to see a Charlie Chaplin film. The doctors said he could go out - if he'd got some responsible person with him- and fortunately nothing untoward happened, and we got back quite safely. He too slept for the next few days! On Tuesday, I get another day, and I am taking another couple of men on the hills for a walk. They've got poisoned hands and arms etc. On my other spare hours, I dashed out on my bike and gathered bunches of gorse and catkins and willow and such which and gaily walked back to the ward. Matron daily makes covetous noise and remarks, as she passes through the ward, so i now supply her with bouquets and floral tributes too!

Am glad you are both O.K. again and hope you continue so - also that you're free from raids. We've only had a bit of activity lately and no damage done to us at all. Thank you very much for the books - I shall enjoy reading them when things quieten down again. I've not done any for ages, except odd bits of papers and Holy writ and such like. I sometimes try and start regular habits like an hour for reading, when I get home, and 1/2 hour for writing letters so on, but when you have been working since six and perhaps get back to the dogs at nine, bed calls far too strongly, and when day's off do come along, they just fly past with cleaning and letter answering and shopping for the men etc.

Tonight there is a dance on, for the staff, and a few people who do not dance, are holding the fort, while others hop, so on till midnight - one grand event - i was carrying dishes of jellies and trifles etc. from bed to bed, and had just collected a large blancmange - I vaulted one way and the blancmange went the other. Not only did it smother the staff nurse, but also it managed to spread itself over large portions of other people and all over the floor. A funnier stickier sight I've never seen!

Must now flee, as some people are still tossing and turning, and just won't sleep. So again, lots of thanks. - Love - Laurie.

Weymouth, Dorset

21.3.1941.

Hello - a very short one, to let you know I'm definitely coming to Birmingham on or before Thursday 7- (i.e., as definitely as anything is nowadays). Most probably I'll arrive home on Wednesday sometime and on to Northfield on Thursday, but it may just possibly be before.

Could you look out for me, please, my white pumps and my white running shorts. Never mind, if you don't know where they are, (I don't) oh! also dirty linen bag (I think I sent it home), a sort of sack like effort, with a pyjama girdle to tie it up with.

Where does one buy cut throat razors from, pa? What does one look for in the way of good qualities, and things to avoid? Must now flee, it's a very busy night, emergency operations - two from my ward - several very bad cases to look after and an air raid on, besides all the usual routine stuff. Hope you're all well, looking forward to seeing you.

Lots of love etc. - Laurie.

### Chapter 3

#### Journey to China

The journey to China was long and risky. Communications were almost non-existent. Enemy ships and their torpedoes were a constant threat. The journey had to be a secret. Close relations of the crew or passengers were not given any hint as to where from, or where to, ships were going. The sea around the British Isles was filled with German submarines, all trying to prevent the supply of food from getting into Britain from places like India and Burma. Japanese and German warships and submarines were also on the high seas, trying to block any ships from either arriving at or leaving England. The ships that did get through to England then had to try and return to the Far East Asian countries for more food, and raw materials like rubber and cotton.

The team of six British F.A.U. volunteers and a few Indians managed to get onto one of these boats returning to the Far East. The Indians were people who were stranded in England when the war broke out. They wanted to get back to their own country. So, with such a bunch of people, Laurie and his comrades camped in some part of Scotland, until one dark night, they were awoken and sent to a ship, ready to leave the west coast of Scotland with hopefully its destination as Calcutta. It was obviously a dangerous journey. The ship could not go on the regular route. Furthermore, the Suez Canal was closed and unusable, so a ship to India had to go round the coast of South Africa, before it could get to India.

The usual sea voyage from England to India took two to three weeks, but the voyage, which Laurie and his friends undertook, took them three months. To avoid an enemy attack, they went first north, towards the coast of Greenland and Iceland and then south, parallel to the North American Coast, then across the Atlantic to dock at Free Town, in

West Africa, presumably for refilling with food, fuel and other necessities. After a short wait at Free Town, the ship went back to face the blizzards of the South Atlantic. They then re-crossed the Atlantic and sailed south, somewhat parallel to the coast of South America, and south towards the island of Tristan de Cunha lying between the tip of South America and the southern most part of South Africa. It was here that they encountered a terrific storm. The cargo in the hold included among other things, several huge cylindrical steel boilers which got loose, and rolled backwards and forwards, as the ship tossed about on the mountainous waves. The sound of steel crashing against the steel sides of the ship was terrifying. The mental and physical strain that the crew and the passengers experienced is difficult for anyone to understand. (Those who had lived in cities like London and Birmingham during the war could probably understand, because they too were never sure whether they would live to see another day, or were to be buried under the debris of their houses by the next morning). Laurie, his fellow passengers and the crew lived in constant fear of a shipwreck, or an attack by the enemy torpedoes. Eventually, after a few more weeks of this ordeal, the boat arrived off the coast of the southernmost tip of South Africa, and then went north to the port of Durban on the eastern coast of South Africa. British people, being 'friendly', were allowed to land at Durban, while the necessary repair work was done on the battered ship.

In South Africa, Laurie had his first live experience of Apartheid - the geographical segregation of people into categories of 'black', 'white' and 'brown'. There were big clear notices everywhere, 'For Whites Only'. The two Indians who travelled with the F.A.U team were not allowed to enter the post office or any eating-place, or anywhere which specified 'For Whites Only'. In South Africa, these Oxford graduates, returning home to India after their studies, were discriminated against and segregated from free movement in the city, for being 'non-whites'. When they returned to India, there must have been a big welcome with garlands and sweets, waiting for them, but in South Africa in the early forties, Indians were only 'second-class citizens'. They returned and stayed in the ship to avoid further embarrassment and insult.

The six F.A.U. boys however, unlike the Indians, were able to stretch their legs, go for long walks and eat plenty of South African food. At last they were able to post letters to England, although letters took many months to reach their destination. These young enthusiastic boys had ten days at their disposal. They walked, hiked and enjoyed their freedom, climbing the nearby mountains. At the end of their ten days, while returning to Durban, an army jeep was waiting to arrest them. They were missing from the boat for several days and they were found trespassing on a 'Native Reserve, for Blacks only'. Fortunately, they were forgiven, and were allowed to return to the ship to continue the rest of the journey to India, and then on to China.

The next stage of the journey from Durban to Calcutta, was around the outer coast of Madagascar, and north across the Indian Ocean to Colombo, and then to Calcutta. This part of the journey was uneventful, though there was always the fear of being attacked by Japanese submarines on the prowl. Rangoon was the eventual destination. From there they would go overland to China. After spending ten days in Calcutta among 'friendly and cultured' people, Laurie was struck by the vast difference in varying lifestyles of the people in Calcutta. They of course, were taken to the elite section of the city where there were huge, palatial buildings with beautiful gardens and big flowering trees. There was this sign of luxury and wealth and learning in some parts, but on their walks around the

city, they also came across the miles and miles of slums, and dirt and real poverty. This was a big eye opener for Laurie. His previous knowledge of Calcutta and the East was what he learned from history books. He had heard about the many-headed goddess Durga, and the Black Hole of Calcutta, where many Europeans were supposed to have been locked up in a small dungeon without air, water or food. During the ten days of waiting in Calcutta for a boat to Rangoon, Laurie learned a lot about the hospitality of the Bengalis. Fellow passengers, who were very rich jute mill owners, entertained them in real royal style. Among the people on the ship from England with whom they spent three perilous months were also the 'cabin boys'. These men came from a different strata of Calcutta society. Nevertheless, the hospitality shown by these cabin boys and others of that strata was amazing. Laurie and his F.A.U. friends were overwhelmed by the hospitality shown, even though the homes of these workers were in the slums. This experience reinforced Laurie's awareness of the vast discrepancies in lifestyles of different sections of the community.

After spending a few days in Calcutta, experiencing the lordly life of the 'whites' in pre-independent India, the six young friends went by a small steamer to Rangoon in Burma. It was a comparatively peaceful journey, though there was always the ever-present threat of attacks from Japanese submarines. No drastic incident took place on that journey.

## Chapter 4

### In China

The different parts of six lorries had already arrived packed in crates, from American Quakers. The Unit's first job was to put the lorries together, and pack them with fuel and medical supplies, while waiting to be taken to inland China. Almost all supplies to China had to go through India and Burma. This was the time when the famous 'Burma Road' was being constructed, connecting India and Burma with China. The road crossed several big rivers, and most of the bridges were very narrow and primitive wooden structures, and had to be negotiated very carefully. Their destination, Kutsing, in southwest China, was several hundred miles from Rangoon. This long drive up the Burma Road was a real experience for the F.A.U. doctors, educationalists, academicians, journalists and one architect, all men in their early twenties.

Laurie's knowledge about motor vehicles and driving was limited to what he had been able to acquire during his crash course in London to get his driving license. He had, and still has, an innate dislike of all mechanical devices. It is a miracle how he managed to drive his lorry over high mountain passes and over wild rivers, all on partly constructed roads. They managed to reach Kutsing safely after traversing this newly built rough earth road. It had taken them ten days to cover the distance from Rangoon to Kutsing. Later in the book there is Laurie's own narrative of his driving experience and similar adventures.

By the time Laurie and his friends arrived at Kutsing, other members of the F.A.U. had already arrived, and were in the process of establishing their centre and headquarters from where they could send supplies to various parts of China, where food and medicines were required. Laurie became the warden of their base camp. Here he started his architectural work again. This is probably where he started using his own ingenuity to

design for the local needs, using local materials. Laurie had practiced as an architect only for a very short time in England. In China, he had nobody to consult or take advice from. He had to design and build, using whatever material was available, working with local artisans and labour. Being the warden, he looked after the physical needs of the other members. It was at this time that several members of the team went down with smallpox, have heard from many of the Unit members, about how well he looked after them, when they were ill. This is what Chris Barber, one of the team members told me about Laurie. "I met Laurie once for about a week. Laurie got a lift to Kutsing from me and exposed himself to the risk of smallpox and German measles. He got neither disease, and was a wonderful nurse. In addition to seeing that his patients were supplied with food and water he also gestured music, one item of which I can clearly remember was Bach's Christmas Oratorio. Good man - you're Laurie!"

In course of time, their numbers increased. Their base camp had developed at Kutsing. It was a good centre, about midway between Rangoon and Chengtu. Chengtu was a city of some size, and there were schools, colleges and hospitals in and around Chengtu. Laurie spent several months at the base camp. He also made a few journeys up to the north and made friends with various missionaries. One such group at Pichieh was run by German sisters. I will have more to say about these German sisters later, as they were responsible for a great change and diversion in the future life of Laurie in China.

Meanwhile, the Germans and Japanese were gaining strength. They were attacking supply ships from the air and the sea. The Unit was in need of more trucks and more supplies of medicines and food. Communications were very difficult, but the news of more trucks and hospital supplies arriving in Lashio, on the Burma-China border reached them. The lorries included a truck fitted up as an operation unit, and another, with an X-ray and laboratory unit. The Burmese inhabitants were running away to the hills to the west and north of Burma. Laurie and a few others, who were in the team, came to take delivery of the new cargo. But the night before they arrived in Lashio, the Japanese were already there. Their aim was to cut off the newly built Burma Road and all supplies going into China. All of Lashio was in turmoil. They were running with whatever they could grab. Some went to India, and some escaped to the thick Burmese jungles, north of Mandalay.

Laurie's party managed to find the two trucks, and without waiting to complete the formalities, some of them managed to get back into China before the Japanese stopped them. Laurie and a few others stayed back to settle with the officials. They were cut off on the Burma side, and they couldn't get back into China. There was panic everywhere. They met an old man with an open truck, who couldn't run away or drive his truck. He urged them to get away in his truck as fast as they could. They filled the vehicle with all their possessions, and whatever food and fuel they could find. As the China border was now closed, the only way open to them was to take to the jungle and its rough roads, which would eventually take them to India. The roads were only mud roads cut into the mountains with many rivers and streams to cross. Temporary bridges had been constructed for the use of the army. In one or two places they used ferry barges with the help of other people who were also escaping. It was always a puzzle to me, how the Unit which was in China ever got into Burma. Here is the rest of the story as narrated by Laurie.

## Chapter 5

### In the Burmese Jungle

“There are one or two periods or chapters in my life which were intense. One such period was this one or two month episode, when I was in China, but got sidetracked into an extraordinary journey through Burma. It was all very intense and extraordinary; with one episode followed quickly by another, and the whole scenario was changing from day-to-day. I was occupied with mainly one particular job, so I had very little time to take in, where I was, or what was happening all around me. It was an extraordinarily physically and mentally exhausting time. There was no time to sit and think things over, or write down what was going on. I was carrying no notebook or pen and there was no question of writing my usual letters home to let them know where I was, or what I was doing. I was mainly in an open truck piled high with boxes and bundles. And now, sixty odd years later, my memory is of some situation or episode, but it is not clear about exactly where it was, why we were in that particular place and situation, or how long we stayed. It is all mixed up with endless bumping open trucks riding through jungles with no proper roads, and only rough dirt tracks. From time to time, we had to find open barges, lashed together and, perilously try to take our trucks onto such make shift ferryboats to cross some big river. I had never done any motor driving until I had joined the Unit in 1939. The family, rightly believed that neither I, as a driver, nor the family and friends as passengers, nor any unsuspecting persons, using the same road would be safe, as I had wrecked two or three push cycles, and seemed to be devoid of what they called road-sense. After I had the preliminary hospital and first aid causality training in London, the Unit decided that I must learn to drive. I well recall, when we were training in London, some of us were housed in a youth hostel, which was a beautiful old period, manor house, with a magnificent wrought iron gate supported by two classical carved gateposts. A lorry was brought and one of the Unit’s experts on vehicles and driving told me to get in, So I got in, and clung on to the big steering wheel. He told me about the gears and the clutch and other such devices and said, “OK - now let us go!” I manhandled and foot-handled some of the devices in front and below me. We shot off like a bullet from a gun - and alas, straight into one of these architectural classical gems of gateposts. “We will deal with that tateri’ said my tutor, “and now carry on slowly and try to remember all I have told you”. The second episode was going down a big wide empty hill - but round the corner was a man pushing a large handcart piled high with apples. Alas, one of my wheels happened to hit one of his wheels - and hundreds of apples rolled off, down the hill with an angry man, and his now one-wheeled cart with its side up in the air, furiously following. The third item on this programme - we had to go to a garage and fill up with oil and petrol or whatever we filled up lorry tanks in those days. There was a nice semicircular drive from the road up to the pumps and then on to the roads. The drive was lined with white stone posts two and a half feet high, twelve or fifteen feet apart and then there was a fancy chain, looped from post to post. I am afraid that was the situation before I drove in, we - the truck and I, gathered up this chain and much of the posts as I drove by, and that was the end of my training as a truck driver.

When we arrived in Rangoon, after three months at sea, there were six of us, and in crates and godowns in Rangoon there were six trucks, which we had to ‘put together’ and



I had to drive one of these trucks up this wild, unfinished Burma Road. So, one of my best friends drove the first truck - then my next best friend in the third truck -and I in the middle one, and off we went, going north, from Rangoon, up into lower and central Burma, from where, we turned to the east to go up into China. It was not too bad with good wide dirt roads, nice long bends, not too much traffic - so I only managed to scrape the side of a van, coming towards me, and his van took two planks from the side of my truck, but after that, once onto the infamous Burma Road, I simply had to try and concentrate, and be not too entranced with the wonderful, mountain scenery, over which we were going -and, believe it or not, only once did I go over the edge, but I stopped just short of the precipice ahead of me. My friends ran in with ropes etc., and towed me back and after a calming down period, we continued on with the journey. We eventually arrived in Kweiyang and after doing various jobs there, and in Kunming and (Kutsing), they wanted me to go back and open up a depot for the Unit, at a place called Hsiakwan, near the famous Tali lake. So, going back, half way down the Burma Road was my last journey as a truck driver. Everyone realised that, as the old saying has it – “Enough is enough!”

Later, when it was obvious that the Japanese would shortly be trying to take over Rangoon and its harbour, our trucks went down there to bring up into China as many supplies of various categories as we could before the Japanese could confiscate them. To expedite loading and sorting, two or three of us who were doing our jobs along the road (as I was in Hsiakwan), were gathered up and we got down as far as Lashio. I must remind you, that journeys in China in those days were measured in the number of days, not hours. News only travelled from mouth to ear, no telephones - no telegrams etc. When we got to Lashio - a half day journey from the Burma border, late in the evening, we could hear the noise of Japanese bombs, and it was generally believed that their intention was to come up and take over Lashio during the night, and thus prevent supplies from going into China. So on joining the others waiting for us, it was decided to drive what trucks were already up from Rangoon, including the two fancy hospital vans as quickly as possible, preferably before the Japanese army arrived to take over Lashio. So, off they went, and safely got into China, and so to the Unit in Kweiyang. A small party of us was to go and join up with a few others who were coming up from Rangoon. If the Japanese didn't actually get to China, we would drive with all we had, and try and get back to China - but if the Japanese took Rangoon, and moved north up into Burma - perhaps, we could save our goods and trucks, and get as far as one of the important towns before Lashio, and drive them north, and get them safely up through Nagaland and then perhaps into India - or we thought there may be some other roads going to China - we had no maps with us.

In fact the Japanese did cut us off on the Burma Road at Lashio, and a few of us were stranded in Burma - by morning we were in the town of Mandalay. We got the bad news that the Japanese had control over Lashio. We also found the town of Mandalay almost deserted. The Japanese had a very bad reputation - especially regarding the manner in which they treated the people and the property they conquered. The few people who were left, advised us to commandeer trucks and fuel, and whatever would be of use to us, in order to deal with casualties, which we were sure to come across - and so - we set off to find a way out of Burma, and on the way, help refugees, as much as we could. We had no map - and our knowledge of the Burmese geography was abysmal, but there were eight of

us - three were doctors - we had also commandeered a primitive sort of metal operating table (later - it was the kind of metal operation table my wife and I used in our Himalayan hospital for deliveries). So, off we went - into the night - the forests - the unknown - and we hoped to avoid meeting the Japanese or Japanese bombs.

In spite of all these imponderables, and possibilities, we fell into a typical sort of routine. We'd aim to travel north, adjust to things as they came - several times, we'd get as far as some big river, after driving through the jungle tracks, and find a town deserted by its inhabitants. As the rumours of the Japanese advances and bombings spread - we'd find town after empty town, (empty, except for the people who had been victims of the falling bombs). We'd take over any large building - big houses were our favourite choice and use it as a temporary hospital. The three doctors got down to operating wounds and broken bones from the bombings - two or three of us would prepare and do dressing and sterilize instruments and so on. I had had a bit of training in giving anaesthesia. Whoever was free, would carry the treated patients into the trucks, and go off in search of the next town (most were little more than villages) - take over an empty building, house or school, deposit the patients, and then go back and help the doctors. As soon as we heard the warning about a bomb dropping, we would pile our instruments and tables and ourselves into the truck and move north, mainly through jungles to the next river and town. I recall one such stop - we had just arrived and found a suitable house to use as our hospital. As we were working daily from dawn till nightfall, we couldn't resist a bath in the nearby river. We had barely got into the deep water, when we heard the noise of the planes, and before we could get to the bank and our clothes, the bombs started raining on the area. They were aiming at the town on the south side of the river - some bombs dropped right into the water, where minutes before, we had been swimming; small tidal waves came rolling in where we were scooping up our clothes - so off we'd go again. Most of the time, I was fully occupied with the anaesthetics - only one or two steps - better than my driving skills. I remember intense hunger - we had no fixed time for proper meals, we'd just eat whatever we could find in deserted houses and shops - but mainly it was work - work - work - then, a hurried packing and settling patients, wherever and however we could, and then off again through jungle tracks to the next 'town'.

Finally, as we approached Nagaland, our fellow refugees seemed to have thinned in number. They had presumably gone off the main northern route into the hilly regions on both sides of us. I think most of the people fleeing including our group were puzzled why the Japanese would pursue us, and what good this hilly inhospitable countryside would be to them. Finally, we found we were among the Nagas who seemed totally unaware and unconcerned about conditions in Burma, south of their own hills. We were intrigued by the Nagas - who were very small in stature - wore very few clothes - except for a small band around their waist in which they invariably carried their bows and arrows. Our aim was to reach Calcutta - but the rest of the journey is absolutely blank to me - the next thing I remember is that I was in a modern, mission hospital in Shillong, Assam being treated for a malignant type of malaria. The rest of the team and trucks reached Calcutta - it was the time of the big famine in Bengal and India - they remained in Calcutta with Quaker friends and helped with distribution of food grains to the needy before they went back to China from Calcutta.

As I started off, by saying that I only have a few clear pictures in my mind now - sixty years later - names of places were hardly ever known - let alone remembered. I have a

clear mind picture of various special little episodes - like being bombed, while swimming in the river, but absolutely no memory of the sequence of towns and villages where we had opened up hospitals for two or three days and then moved on - it seemed endless - we also seemed to have to get across many streams and big rivers but I never knew the names of these rivers or places nor have I ever been back to Burma to see if I could retrace our epic journey. In fact I think of the whole episode as a dream; much of it being in the nightmare section. Of course we learned a few lessons; if there was a river with small towns on both sides of the river, we'd always find some way of crossing the river first, and then 'setting up our shop' - another lasting generalised memory I have is that invariably, victims whom we patched up, whether civilian or army personnel, were always grateful and often I recall that, it was they, who urged us to move on before it was too late. I also learned in that trip, that it is not always soldiers and army people who are exposed to the terrors of war - in fact, they have organised leaders, and recognised ways of retreating, but for civilians it is a different picture. There is no organisation to move them and there is panic among their neighbours, and members of the family, they know they must leave and run - but where to? And what next? I had always felt that war was one of mankind's worst evils. The Burma episode convinced me as never before that war couldn't be anything but wicked and evil."

## Chapter 6

### Back in China

Laurie spent some weeks at the mission hospital in Shillong, recovering from malaria, and regaining his health, after the unusual and exceptional experience in the Burmese jungles. By this time, there was a sort of air service from Calcutta to Kunming and so Laurie was able to make use of this, and avoid the perilous long journey of many days by road and trucks.

At Kutsing, he continued and took part in all the various activities of the Unit. He made several lorry trips to Chengtu in the north. It was on one of these trips that he developed malaria again. There was a small hospital at a place called Pichieh, run by some German missionary sisters. During the war, the Germans were the enemies, but these sisters were not taken prisoners, considering all the good work they were doing for the community. They were, what was called 'House Arrested'. They were also running a small leprosy hospital and home not far from a very remote village, in the hills away from any human habitation. Leprosy was such a dreaded disease in those days that anyone found wandering in towns with the disease was taken and buried alive in inaccessible mountain slopes. These sisters were not allowed to go out of their compound, or to visit the leper colony, a long day's walk, and they couldn't get a suitable person who would go and live there and look after the lepers. While recovering from malaria at the Sisters' Hospital, Laurie offered to visit the lepers and do whatever was necessary. He found them in a very pitiable condition with no proper food or medicine. He decided then and there, to stay and look after them till someone suitable arrived. Of course, he had to get the permission of the F.A.U. Chief to be able to break off from the Unit. He did that, and went to live with the lepers in this very remote and inaccessible part of China. He dressed their ulcers, gave them their medicines and injections whenever

he could get any. He was their father, mother and brother. He was the doctor, the nurse, the pharmacist and the pathologist. On Sundays, he was the parson of the church!

Laurie continued to write to his parents regularly. The letters were written more than sixty years ago from China, on very thin rice paper, on both sides, with very poor ink. It was worthwhile going through them and deciphering them because the letters reveal a bit of the hazardous life that Laurie spent in China, and also his very strong Christian principles, and his ability and steadfastness, in carrying out his principles. Letters, which could be salvaged and deciphered are reproduced in the following pages.

**On Train**  
**21.9.1941.**

Hello-Well at last the journey has started. I got to New Street in good time and collected my baggage from the bag room. Then I met the other two, and we heard that there was going to be an extra relief train from Glasgow, leaving earlier than the scheduled time. So we put our things in the goods van, and bagged a compartment. This train was leaving from platform 2, and the ordinary 11.55, from platform no.3, so I was just about to leave the train and look for Leonard, when the guard bundled me back in again, shouting, all aboard! Just then, who should appear, but Alf Bennett, so as the train moved out, I had about 7 people, all shaking hands and so on. There were several people from camp there too. Then just as I was settling down into a seat, I heard a commotion on the 3rd platform, out of the window and the other side of the compartment, there was Leonard racing along the platform yelling and waving all his arms so I was just able to put out my head and arm, and wave back, and shout across to him. I was very sorry to have missed seeing him altogether.

Then we settled down to compose ourselves, and have raced up thro' Wolverhampton, Stafford, and now have passed thro' Preston, in about three quarters of an hour, before schedule time.

There are three of us on this train; the other three who are coming from London. With me are Terry Darling (poor man to have such a name - he is one of the doctors who are coming with us - quite young, and an Irish man, very nice and very tall), Allan Hill, known as Body Hill because he sunbathes on the slightest provocation sun or no sun, and - wears tight tights, and his body budes out of them like one of those Michigan Tyreman. We are joined at Crewe by a man with a glass eye, and a loud voice, though he's quite nice, an elderly Scotsman in a grey suit. We are now leaving the awful Lancashire towns, and coming into the Lake district, it is a lovely sunny day, and so it's all very pleasant, will write more later on - 5 o'clockish - hello - what a lovely ride this is. We have just come thro' the Lake District, the most wonderful views of mountains covered with golden and red bracken and heather and gorse. Oh -dear - why haven't I been here before? Still, never mind - we will soon be in Scotland. There are some crows following the train and have done for miles - if we throw out bits of food, they swoop down and catch them, like gulls following a boat.

I've never known a train journey go so quickly. I feel it's about 1 o'clock, but it is actually 5.1 expect the rest of the party on the London train, are now worried. You see, they were going to join our train at Crew or Preston, as they were the relief trains. We are

well ahead of time, and have picked up on time. I expect they are now tramping up and down the corridor, peeping into all the compartments.

Well - it's now nearly midnight - and I am in a hotel at Glasgow, and have just filled dozens of documents on dotted lines, and I can hardly keep my eyes open. We get up early in the morning and go along to the docks and depart fairly quickly, I believe. So now I'll bid you adieu and you should hear from me again in a few months. Love - Laurie.

### On Board

22.9.1941.11.15a.m.

Hello - Just a short one to let you know we are all on the boat, much sooner than we expected. Spent last night at the Regent Hotel, and were very comfortable, had a proper supper - ham & hen, and a good breakfast - ham & tomatoes. Left the hotel at 8.15. Came along to the docks - entered a vast tin shed, where we waited for our fellow passengers. Queue formed - but we just sat and waited for them to disperse, and then went through the customs part of it very quickly indeed - we had no trouble - then the excitement of walking up the gangway, finding one's cabin, and settling in. We have 3 rooms between the six of us. All our doors open into a little corridor off a main one. I am sharing a cabin with Terry Darling, the doctor. There are two very comfortable beds, fitted with little shelves and racks for morning tea, a bed light each and an electric fan. There are lots of cupboards and wardrobe room and dozens of drawers. The walls are cream - the curtains nice - there are lots of mirrors and a porthole - a washbasin, jugs and jerries - bottles and basins and so on. So altogether we are very comfortable. It is a middling-sized boat. All the usual decks and lounges and bars and side rooms and such which.

By the time we've lived in it for a month or two we should know every inch of it. I know it by yard already! Well - now I'll have to stop, (I can lean out of my port hole, and spit into the water if I want]. All joy - Love - Laurie.

### Friends Ambulance Unit. China Convoy, Kweichow

21.1.43.

Hello - how are you getting on? I'm afraid we have not had any letters for ages - everybody - I don't even know if you are getting one.

Anyway, I'm having a wonderful time. I'm very-very fit, very happy and very-very busy. I've developed into an architect for F.A.U. in China and most other foreign (other than Chinese) bodies. I'm afraid censorship is very strict. I can't tell you what I'm undertaking or where, still no doubt you will be glad to hear that. If I didn't have an opportunity leaving and sign off my architecture in England, I'm having the opportunity here, enough and more. Absolutely snowed under with work. Hence such rare epistles, and short ones when they do get written, I'm glad I'm being useful and able to do jobs that no one here has done. In another day or two, I leave here for the West, to do another job of architecting. There is of course a strong possibility; you won't hear from me for quite a long time. And if that is so I hope you'll not worry at all, as communications all over the world are a bit odd just now.

Well - that was all I could write yesterday. It's impossible to read or write after dark, and it's now Sunday 10.2.43, I wonder what you've been doing and what sort of birthday you had. Today has been the first whole day off I've had since being on land - and a very wonderful one it has been. Contrary to all the laws of nature, for this time of the year, it has been a very hot long day and I went to a small tour, not far away with the Methodist minister - the missionaries I've been living with, in case you've not had the former letters, and a lot of Chinese and on to a Chinese wedding. Odd lots of bowing and scraping and drinking of tea, with chrysanthemums, floating about, is a strong delicious tea. Then I climbed some mountains in the afternoon, very high and very odd slopes and very good views of dozens of miles around. It was really wonderful. Collected a huge bunch of flowers. Gentians and violets, both very bright rich colours, pussy willows, lovely wild snap dragons, and heaps of others I didn't know. Holidays like today are very exceptional.

Everyone is very happy on sunny days; they all fly kites and let off fireworks, and bring their work out to the door-steps. Oh! We had a lovely funeral too, a day or two ago. Funerals are gay affairs, lot of flowers and gay streamers and of paper decoration. All the people wear white and have fireworks and play drums and violins and pipes and have feasts, comparatively hot - and important affair. Short-ceremony-weddings are comparatively dull and unimportant affair; no honeymoon and the couple don't have to say anything - it's all done for them.

I'm looking forward for my next move. I shall be within climbing distances of 14,000 ft. high snowy peak and I have a letter of introduction to the missionary who lives there and is keen on wandering in the mountains and often goes up this particular peak. The only snag is I'm not expecting any spare time for the first few weeks. But never mind, mountains don't run away.

Well, I do wish I could hear from you. It is sad that you have probably written many letters, I've not had one yet. 19 weeks ago, to the day, since I last heard from you, still - patience is a virtue etc.

I'm just praying, and hoping you are all well and safe and sound. I only hope you've heard from me, so that you won't worry. I may send a cable before long, just a short one to say I'm O.K. Now I must stop, as It is dark, I can't see any more. I want to post this before I depart. Sorry it is short and snappy, but I've never lived at such high pressure at such heaps of love. Tell people I'm sorry that I've not written to them. I hope to some day, but I can't yet see when. Love as always - your Laurie.

**China Inland Mission (C.I.M) - Pichieh, Kweichow. Free China.**

**18.3.43.**

Hello - my loved ones - how are you getting on - I've just had your letter, mother, written on the Easter Sunday. What a long time back it seems! And I am very thrilled, in spite of the pink paper. Fortunately I'm not given to bilious turns, so all is well. Well - it is good to know that you were, then well, and that dad is making progress. I hope by the time you get this letter, you'll almost have forgotten the operations. Now to answer your letter - first thank you, I'm very well. Probably a dose of rheumatism but as there is no real doctors handy, I could only go by what my book said. However, I've got over it, and I'm as fit as anything, except for fleabites. I'm afraid I'm far too tasty a morsel for the

fleas around here, and they go through thick and thin to get a taste of LWB. I have tried many remedies, but none of them work. Oh dear - I'm sorry; this word means plans of campaign -

My Chinese is very limited, but as I have to speak no other language-what I do know etc. gets overworked and a result is I think a mixture of English and a sort of Chinese Coolie talk. To go back to fleas, I'm tired of stuffing my trouser leg and stockings with furs, and with mothballs. I've bathed my legs with Iodine, in oil, and all sorts of things. I've worn short clothes and long clothes, thick and thin, old and new, smelly and clean - but the fleas love me just the same. My present scheme is to plod around in gumboots - but in this hot weather it is too tiring.

The American boy, who would grace us with his presence, for a few weeks, never even had a bite. He might as well have been made of concrete as far as the fleas were concerned and it isn't that I don't wash. I'm always having to wash myself, because of the leprosy contacts - (Yes mother - don't worry - I've taken enough precautions).

Yes - I have returned from my travels. They seem months and months ago. They were very happy and successful ones. We are still feeling the results and hope to do so for many years to come.

You ask what I was doing on the Easter day. Well most of the day I was travelling on the top of a loaded truck to Sichuan. During the morning, I took an Easter service at a place called Luchienli. It was a lovely, hot sunny breezy day. You do seem to see life these days. Dozens of visitors, and trips to the park and so on. I'm glad everyone has been so good to you.

I don't think it'll be very long before we meet again. In my letter to Win, I was saying if this letter takes the usual 3ish months, I might have left here before I get any reply to my letter. I shouldn't leave I suppose this year. But I expect that the last date here will be my birthday. You see, I want to see that everything is in order for the coming year and the winter. This winter will be semi-famine conditions here, and it'll be a hard time for them.

There were one or two cabbages and a cucumber or two. Two radishes about the size of a small pea. The one flourishing things are tomatoes. I have five big plants, trees, almost; three are red and one yellow. Tomatoes come as big as oranges or even grape fruits, and ripen nicely about four a day so I have enough to eat and to give away. There's one of my lepers, a blind man, he used to be our deacon. He just lies in the bed all the day, covered with sores. His main joy seems to be when he asks for 'kill pain' medicine and holds out his hand, what there is left of it. And I put in instead of the medicine, ripe tomato everyday it happens like a child play.

Your flowers sound very lovely. Alas - mine don't come up at all. But now, we are having a bit of fine weather after heavy rains, all sorts of wild flowers have come up.

I think I told you, that a few weeks ago; huge wild Madonna lilies grew all over the mountain sides. I'm glad you went to hear Myra Hess with Win. She is a wonderful woman. Isn't she? I'm very sorry to hear of Leslie Howard's death. It is a big loss to musical world - (Incomplete).

**C.I.M. Kweichow, Free China,**

14.7.1943.

Hello - wonder how you're getting on now - I do hope all's well with you now and that you are both fit and blooming, also the family - I wonder how the anniversary went down-and if you were able to go after all.

Well - not knowing whether trucks will come this way and pick up my letters, I am writing them in trust to send off before St. Swithin's day, so that you'll know, I've not forgotten July 15th, Even if there's no very concrete token descending on you, at the right moment. So, here's all the best wishes, and may there still be plenty of happy returns to come and then there is also Doris's birthday following you pretty closely, and the same goes for her too.

The sixteenth is the fifth (I think) anniversary of my first starting to work. In the office, as a full-time worker with Mr. Ashford, So it's quite an auspicious week that is before us. Both these two latter events seem a very long way away. I know I was very glad to leave Aston. But I don't remember what my feelings were about starting work. I don't expect they were very bright. The years fortunately fly by very quickly, don't they? It seems no time since I was in Shillong a year ago, and very little more since I was at High Gate waiting for a boat, or when we were at Bournemouth at just about this time of the year, and the year before at Weymouth and the year before that with Ashford, and before that gadding around Europe and before that I think it was Tenby, and the two years proceeding that was Shrewsbury and Salisbury - so the years roll away - with a Hey! and a Ho! etc. -

I wonder if you're planning any holiday this year.

How is the garden getting on? And whether the water stays in the pond these days?) was thinking last night, of that Cosmos I put in and kidded Win, it was Lilies, poor girl, what a lot she'll have to put up with me as a husband. I feel very sorry for her at times. However I've given her enough opportunities to back out if she wants to but she certainly seems to have a rare amount of loyalty and devotion. She's not missed a single day of this ninety-four weeks, I've been away from England.

Well - what sort of weather did you have? Ours has been rain after rain, and yesterday and today are dry sunny again, like the drought days.

Yesterday my good friend Mr. Liu came to see me and we spent the evening working out suitable names for you and all the family It caused mild mirth because the Chinese characters have not just the one meaning. For instance Edna's name is Tendency Ai (to rhyme with eye) - ai which really means one who is overflowing with love. It can also mean, she loves sticky soups.

Your name, mother, is pronounced like Bay May Lee, which vaguely means precious and beautiful. So you see it was quite fun filling the right name to the right people. There are only one hundred names in Chinese - so one is fairly limited in choice.

Well - I am in Pichieh and a couple have just passed thro'. They have only recently been married. She was a school marm in a school in Szechwan for the C. M. children, like all school marms she had her little howlers to tell me. I am sure you'd enjoy them.

She was serving out the porridge, and one small boy called Theodore said - "Miss Porteous, why did the cook take off his woollen hat, when we said grace?"



“Theodore - when I say my grace I keep my eyes shut, I don't see what the cook does with his hat” -”But Miss Porteous, can't you even think why you suppose he would take off his hat when we were saying grace.” “Theodore, stop asking so many stupid questions, I expect the man has seen foreigners take off their hats when they pray, so he thought, he had to take off his hat off, when he saw us saying our grace.” “Well, Miss Porteous, you suppose wrong, because he took it off, to wipe his nose on!”

Well - I may add that this is one of the main uses of soft hats, in this part of China.

Well - two of the 'most serious' of the lepers have just died, and two new ones came the next day. It's a case of the lord giveth and the lord taketh away! It is all quiet again. But it's wonderful how all things will work out for good.

That old caretaker, who buys the corn for us, begged me not to let any more people in, as the price of corn is going steadily up, and we haven't the money to buy it. His words certainly seemed wise, but I found it wrong to turn people away, who are in need, I told him we would pray about him, and see what would happen.

Well - these two have come along, asking to be admitted - and no money - and had been turned out of their house. I doubt if either of us had expected two! One confronted like this so soon, after he had asked me not to take any more. So I called him into the house, and was just going to work out if we could possibly manage till harvest, with the corn we have in the granary. I asked him how much he had, and felt how very cold and calculating I was and it flashed thro' my mind, the words I'd been reading from proverbs to the lepers early that morning.

“Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hands to do it. Say not to thy neighbour go and come again tomorrow I will give'.

Well - here I was with some grain in the granary, how could I say, go and come again later, when I had it by near. These two were certainly in need, so I showed the old man the passage, and I took in the two lepers. Then we all prayed that because of more members, the food will not be enough and work not hindered, but that the need might be supplied. (Rest not available).

**C.I.M. Pichieh, Kwekhow, Free China**

**16.7.1943.**

Hello - I wonder how you are. I sent off a letter to you a day or two ago, and am starting the next, so that whenever any opportunity comes for sending it off and I can do so. I am afraid these opportunities will be rare now, and I will have to depend on the post, so if there are big delays you will know that I am sending off, but the route is difficult, so they'll probably come in batches like mine do. It seems a long time since I had any news from you, and I am looking forward to another letter.

Well - I wonder how and where you spent your birthday Pa? I hope you were well, and out of hospital. Possibly I will be home to see you retire! I hope Doris is having a good time today. No doubt she is. Ask her how she likes being a 'boiling piece', because I can't really describe her as a chicken any more. Even when I first met her, and saw her wading thro' a pretty square meal, I had my doubts!!

Well - at last I've had Win's Xmas present, the empty 'whisky bottle', it arrived a day or two ago, having been flown in from India, as a priority article. Most people seemed to doubt my intention when I claim, that it is to hold water.

I am now getting back into the work again after a few days off colour. The climate and the work were pretty exacting and in a week or two I'm going for a holiday. I have some missionary friends over in the wilds, several days by horse from us, at a place called Kopu, pronounced 'Cor Boo'. They keep writing and sending messages telling me to pay them a visit. So as soon as an opportunity comes, I shall go. It is a job to find a time when the lepers can be left, because as soon as one job is done or even before I finish, another takes its place.

Owing to pressure from other things I still haven't got very far with the new buildings and there are lots of other very pressing jobs wanting to be done. So I don't want to go on a holiday, really, though I suppose I have to, or I'll get bowled over with the work again, like at Christmas. I sometimes think of all the spare time I used to have, when I could just sit around, and do more or less nothing, and every evening from 5 onwards free, and all day, Saturday and Sunday. I expect in England I could quite easily fit in with such a life again!

There doesn't seem to be the great need there. Here you don't even have to look around you. Just straight ahead is enough to see a thousand jobs clamouring to be done - a hundred wrong and injustices, waiting for someone to start and put them right. For example, I hardly see a single person, that I don't want to treat some sore on him, or put some drops in her eyes, or tell them that a doctor or a hospital could cure their diseases.

Just at present, the trouble is opium. One of the new patients I have admitted turns out to be an opium addict. Poor man - started it - thinking the enjoyment he could get from it would compensate his disease. (Incomplete).

**Salachi Leper Home, C.I.M. Pichieh. Kweiehow, Free China.**

**1st Sept. 1943.**

Hello - isn't this extraordinary - it is already September - I can hardly believe it - Just think, next September - I expect then I'll be thinking - how extraordinary - September already - let's think, was it last year or the year before, that I was in China...

Well - how are you? I hope - well and blooming as I am - It is a hot sunny day - Injections for the syphilis people - but those who have not been done - have gone to sleep - I'm not waking them -but writing a few lines instead - I've had such a busy time this afternoon. Several people have had typhus fever and I've been up with one girl quite a bit in the night, she died. So on the top of yesterday's work there was a grave to dig, a coffin to make and a funeral service to conduct. Actually it was quite gay. The girl has been miserable for weeks now, and was, in her last days, very unhappy and a trouble to everyone. The Chinese, if they have any pain, make a great fuss and cry out continually. Ai yah! Ai yah! And it tends to get boring. Really it is a happy release. When it gets beyond a certain stage, really it is not cruelty or hardness to wish them as speedy a death as possible. They all know it and the worst cases know that, one day, it will be their turn too. So no one worries unduly and they are very philosophical about it.

I feel I miss a sort of service book. I have to make up all my own services, whether they are for funerals, or ordinary lessons, or communion - or baptism or what? It's

probably a good thing not to rely on other people's methods, though it takes a long time to find what I want to read-and then I've to translate it all into Chinese etc.

"I am the resurrection and the life" - sounded very much alike in Chinese - After the service in the chapel, just a few of us went to the little cemetery, perched upon the hilltop, some 10 miles or so away - It is quite a hazardous journey, along a riverbed crossing and re-crossing the water several times - and then up narrow steep path in procession on one side. Twice we dropped the body and it was in such a rickety amateurish coffin that I was continually afraid, the bottom would drop out. However, there was a gay air about - partly like people doing their own furniture and partly, like a picnic. The place is sufficiently out of bounds, to make the excursion exciting. More than once I found myself humming. "We went to the funeral just for the ride, just for the ride, just for the ride" - I've not yet been to a Chinese funeral where they have made the grave hole, big enough, and this was no exception. So while some whittled corners off the coffin, others made the hole larger and then the bottom did drop out! Bottom falls out, no punishment, as for Leonard and Pa, laughing! Well actually it was even worse! As I happened later to be writing to a Unit friend about it and I sent it to H.Q to be forwarded, I get news, well, curiosity was around and someone saw this episode and had it as an article in the Unit Newsletter, which is sent all over the world. What was worse, I was writing a week or so later about another just as funny funeral and they seized on this too, and published that. More funny friends, goodness only know how people, like, Dame Lizzie, will take such Unit news! I discovered all this when I went to Kutsing. Here, I seal everything with heavy seals because of the Information Officer wanting news. Hunting through my letters for more funny funerals, I was asked to send a description of a birth! But have declined the request. What do you mean - primitive sanitary arrangement? I have the largest in China (Free China - that is) the room is twelve feet long and the bucket is a fine iron one, rather rusty in China. I admit, the bucket leaks, but dash it all; do you want gravy on it? I was keeping so many dogs, but they all but one had puppies at the same time. The one didn't because it was a he and he dogs don't have puppies. Most of them have now been eaten, and I've but five now. They are very happy today because we killed a pig for Christmas and they are eating the bones. No, I won't get bitten again. The dog, which bit me, is now a very close friend, and follows me everywhere, even to the pulpit. Four of the five dogs I've follow me wherever I go. A lot of it is cupboard love. I might say it really is a squash for all of us in the pulpit. Then they all lie down and sleep anyway. It has cured me of the nervous habit of not standing still, when public speaking. You should have seen the commotion they made, when I was handing out bread in the communion service yesterday, and I didn't give them anything! We can't keep them out of the church, because there are no doors.

Yes - I am sure Leonard will appreciate a lot of humour here. A lot of the time I lay quite helpless with laughter. Today I was cutting out cloth for mending bedding. And to save my legs, I was cutting out upstairs and dropping them out from the balcony. One man, a bit deaf came later. So I called his name. When I sent him there he threw down the cloth. He didn't know where the sound came from and looked everywhere, but upwards to the balcony, until the cloth fell over him, and he let out the most blood-curdling shriek. He must have felt like Henny-Penny and Cocky-Locky and that lot.

It is so wonderful that they have learned to laugh again. A leper lot is not really a laughing matter. I've been asked to design a new leper colony in Yunan for the C.I.M, for that Miss Howard, who I wrote about from Tali Fu. When I'll get it done - I don't know -

Well - now I must stop. I'm keeping fantastically late hours these days. So for the present I leave you -

Be good - I wonder if you got my Xmas cable - it is to judge the timing from here. With love - Your Laurie.

Salachi Leper Home, C.I.M. Kweichow, Free China

10.9.1943.

Hello - How are you? Am very thrilled to get another graph -from you, mother - 19-July-43. A messenger came in the night before last with a lovely big bundle of mail. Besides your graph, was one from Win, and three of her letters with photos of herself and Ma and Pa. Some letters from Indian friends and a lot from China ones, besides business letters. One letter included the news that some money has come thro' from London H.Q. for my leper work. Another was a gift from my unknown friend in China, of nearly 4 thousand dollars for the lepers and there were several smaller gifts too. So before, between, and after injections and dressings yesterday, I got down to business letters answering, and now I can settle down to yours and Wins.

Well - it's good to know that everyone's fairly well and I am very glad you are better - Pa - I hope you won't have any further trouble, and enjoy yourself these last few weeks at work. When do you anticipate returning for good? Is it next summer? It will seem funny to see you as a daily feature on the home landscape. You must buy a piece of land and have pigs and ducks and things. I've now got quite a menagerie around me. I have a water buffalo, an old big fat grey creature for rice ploughing, two bulls for cornfield ploughing, a nice old cow, which keeps me in milk and cream and butter and cheese. Actually, her milk is not very rich, and it's not worth making butter, because with the hot weather I can't keep the cream more than a few hours before it turns. So I eat it raw and drink the milk. There is a calf, now 3 months old. Next come 4 pigs. One is nearly ripe, two are half grown and one is smallish. We kill one only for special occasions like Xmas and New Year, and buy another small one at the same time to start feeding up for sort of rotary system. Then come 11 dogs. The lepers have 2, the old Chinese couple who live in my house and help farming etc. have one, and she has 5 puppies and I have one dog and she has two children, 'Cough' and 'Spit'. She had another but sat on it, and it died. Then each leper has a hen or a duck, and quite a lot of them have extra chickens. The old couple has a cock and a hen, and a family of growing chickens, quite big now. I have four ducks. Henry, Elisa, Isabella and Wasabella, of course I have a lot of other unnamed livestock, which I tend to carry around with me. Oh, and there are the 9 rabbits and I think they have a lot of tiny ones under ground, that are not allowed out yet, I have quite a farmyard atmosphere in my hospital, and I like it, very much. I am glad you received the snaps of Salachi. They are old, but they'll give you an idea. Yes - it is a pity about the crops. Only the last few days it has been bitterly cold, and pouring with rain. The hillsides are like waterfalls. This morning I almost had to swim to the morning service.

We have planted a lot of winter vegetable crops and turnips and stuff we call *beytsai*, like a cross between lettuce and cabbage. And of course, there will be more planting

when the harvest is in. Our bean harvest, which we mainly dry and use in the winter months, has been very poor and I've had to institute a ration system. (Rest of the letter lost).

**Salachi - C.I.M. Pichieh**

**4.10.1943.**

Hello - how are you all? This is just a short one as I'm off to the country, the day after tomorrow, for a week or so. I won't be able to post anything from there, as it is even more in the wilds than in Salachi. I'm going for three main reasons, and several minor ones. To examine some people, who are thought to be lepers but no one is sure - to bring back one of the sisters from an outstation. She can't travel without a military escort, and the government has given me permission to act instead of this escort - to see where she works, and measure the site so that I can get out plans for a new church, she is going to build. The place is 3 days journey from here. I shall be away for 9 days altogether. It's quite a job to arrange injections and dressings and so on, while I'm away. But I've now trained a few of the lepers to be useful. So now I only have to wangle at the times of the more elaborate and complicated treatments. The trips should be quite an exciting one, as it is through wild high mountains, and there is not even paths to mention of. Winter now is more or less here - no sun, very cold and windy and very damp. But I find these conditions easier for walking, than the hot sunny summer days. However I'll tell more about it when I get back. We finished getting out the end of the quarter reports and statistics. Quite a long job, but it has to be done for various governments and other organisations also. Then we are in the middle of the big epidemic season here. All sort of people go down with all sorts of fevers and plagues. At present there's an unknown (to us) fever here. All the village is spark out with it - and in spite of all my efforts to keep it out of the colony, five lepers have just gone down with it. It is like one of the worst forms of malaria. I've made microscopical examinations, and can't find any malaria bugs at all. We've now finished harvesting our corn. It didn't take long this year. Alas, we are now gathering our bean crop. These we dry and use all the winter through. Our hemp too is very poor; we shan't be able to make many feet of cloth. The field is now empty and being dug to plant with vegetables for winter, mainly a sort of cabbage and lettuce, what everyone eats in these parts, and a variety of turnips, which is rather fiery to taste. My tomatoes still continue to appear, though they don't ripen now so quickly. I found they are good to eat green, not at all sour and hard, like they would be in England. I've also planted my winter vegetables. This time I've confined myself to plants, which I know will grow in these parts. (Incomplete).

**F.A.U. Kutsing**

**26.11.1943.**

Hello - How are you? I do hope, well and happy - I am both -thanks - as you will see by the address I am down in Kutsing again. Terry Darling came up to visit me in Salachi and we had a great time together. Then had to come down with him to deal with various matters. We had quite an exciting journey. After 2 days on the road, we came to a place called Weining, where there are some Methodist Mishes. We had to wait with them for 2 or 3 days, and had a very good time with them. 3 youngsters they are - and then we had 4 days journey over rather wild barren mountains to Ahisting, the centre of Methodism. We stayed with the Chairman of the district, and his wife, Kenneth and Cathie May, both

delightful people. They were most kind to us. Oh -we had come, by the way, to bring drugs and supplies to the hospital. We just spent a few days with them, visiting in turn, the entire compound. There is quite a fair sized community of foreigners (Methodists and R.Cs) who incidentally get on very well together (a quite normal sort of affairs out here). The R.Cs are all Yugoslavians - most delightful people. Both the R.Cs and Methodists have hospitals. I gave a few anaesthetics to the Methodist hospitals, on operating day. Quite fun - the Dr - Oliver Lyth is a grand bloke -he also has his small leper colony with families out in the country and he took me to see over it. I am very relieved to find that in spite of having a doctor in charge it was no better than Salachi and in many ways much worse - i.e., in regards to general treatment and hygiene and sanitary conditions etc. There were quite extensive effort both on Dr. Lyth's part, and from Mr. May, the Chairman, to transfer my affections from Salachi to Chaitang and they went into great details about, coming out under Methodists team to Weining. After the war - I wouldn't do it now. It certainly has its points and much of the idea is very attractive to me - but we will have to wait and see what goes on at home. For the present plans all have worked out - or rather are working out - and it looks as though I'll only be in China two or three months longer now. Naturally it is impossible to give any exact date, tho' I've talked with the Council and we have settled on a date to act as a sort of guide. Things may mean that I might come a month earlier or later, but I expect I will only just get in another birthday here in China - maybe not even that. One big advantage of returning, in comparison with the outward journey is that now it is very much quicker - and it shouldn't take more than 2 months, as compared with the more than 3 months to get here. It's very exciting to think of seeing you again so soon, tho' it's also very sad having to start making arrangements for leaving China and the lepers, however it all seems to be in The Plan' and it is ours, not to reason why.

Well - to continue after that diversion - we left Chisting and came up to Kutsing, where I had a grand-sort of welcome back - it certainly was fun to meet so many old friends again, after being alone so long. It seemed like crowds and crowds of people everywhere. I was duly given feasts and parties and so on, and one felt rather unworthy of so much attention. Oh, while I remember will you tell Norman that his friend Llewelyn Evans, went out to India to buy mechanical spare parts, and came back engaged to the Secretary of the F.A.U. station in India. He will soon be going back to India to be spliced and will stay and work there with the India section. His brother is still in Hong Kong - a prisoner - we - Llew and I had some good times together this week. He is rather an amusing core.

Well - the week here has gone like a flash. There were all sorts of business to deal with. I also had to turn architect again, and got out to design and draw for new buildings, here in Kutming. Have also been carving gravestones for the members who died, while they were being out here. So I am quite busy. Thursday was American national holiday of Thanks Giving.! was invited over to the American Air Force place, several miles from here to their celebrations. Which was in truly American elaborate style, including foodstuffs flown from America for the occasion. Turkey and cream cheese and butter and other unheard of delicacies. In more ways than one, I was sorry my stays were short. Have also been out in the evenings to various other feasts and functions, given to me by old friends.

I was quite amazed, that with all the flow of people passing through headquarters, local people had remembered me after a year's absence.

A thing I am trying to wangle while here with the council is about a holiday. You see, we have a set scale of leaves, which is more or less compulsory, which for various reasons, I avoided. So I am confronted with a large sum of 2.5 month holiday to my credit. Well, I am determined not to have it here in China, because I feel that as long as I am here, there is far too much work to do. If things get to the stage when I can take 2.5 months leave - well - I can come home so I have asked if they will try and arrange with home F.A.U. headquarters, for me to have the leave in England, when I get home and spread it over 1944 summer and autumn. Then I can have ample time to be fully with you to go on holidays to places, to go and see distant friends and relations and to get married and so on. There are various difficulties but I am hoping my proposals will be accepted.

Well - today is Sunday - and it's cold and windy and there has been snow. After lunch I am going out bird watching, with a bloke called Duncan Wood. He has also just got engaged to a girl in Scotland, using my system of using the cables to do the dirty deed. He knows all about birds and so we should get on well -

Have just had news from the finance department that an equivalent of £5-10, has arrived for my lepers work from Sutton Coldfield Meeting. Isn't it good of them - I'm very thrilled about it. Shall be writing to them, of course. Though soon I will be able to give them an actual earful!!

We have now in the Unit quite a number of Americans, who I find very attractive people - (in their own way]. I am consequently picking up many various extraordinary American slang and expressions.

By the way, I am now very fit, and have had thorough examinations. X-rays and things all seem to be fairly well. So I hope to arrive home in a reasonably healthy state - if a little thin! May be I'll fatten up with boat life.

Now I must stop - I was so sorry to hear about Anthony and hope all is well with him now. All joy & love - Laurie.

Salachi -

about 21 st December 1943.

Hello - a sort of Postscript -

I sent a man yesterday to Pichieh with a Christmas tree for them there, and he brought back two air graphs from you, Mother - I'm very thrilled to get them and thank you. They have come very quickly too. I'm sorry my writing is even worse than usual - go - on - say -you thought it is quite impossible. But I've still got rather a dose of old rheum, in my arms. And after a day's work it tends to be worse. However if don't write this now it may not get written for days and days. Xmas looks like being quite hectic - now the harvest is over.

I'm answering your graph - now. This is sad about poor little Anthony. I've seen and gone around the hospital, rather a fine hospital I believe. I should think Norman couldn't have taken Anthony to a better place. Let's hope that they can cure him of whatever it is. I'm so sorry and hope by this time you get this letter all will be well. All this about being on a roll of honour. Babies on the roll again!

Disconcerting - isn't it, dash it all, surely you don't have a conclave on it. I still can't claim any place on it. By the way I'm not entitled to any letters after my name. My friends put B.F after... And I'm just Laurie Baker. I've with me one or two name cards for when I'm travelling incognito. It was very nice of Mrs. Muns to write and ask after us. I'd have liked to have written to her and Queenie. But I didn't. If they ask after me again please give them my warmest greetings and thanks to their enquiries etc.

Now - the matter about the leper child you ask. I did not attempt to let her help in the house. There is so much disease about, one has to be fussier and particular about washing and everything - boiling water not only for food, but also for articles one uses on all sorts of occasions one either does oneself or carefully trains a local person. It is not very easy to stop them spitting and blowing their nose with the fingers while about the house, or household duties! So I just have her as an ornament. Then she did make herself useful. I have now found her a house in the village, where she earns her living or comes to see the child often. A funny thing happened today. A new leper came, a very bedraggled 'spectacle.' I was so busy, so I gave him only temporary examinations (he was obviously a leper) and handed him over to my deacon, and told him to feed him and wash him and get him to bed etc. - well. He must have thought the establishment a very loose-sort of place, because after he had been through the rituals of settling in with the brothers, it was discovered he was a sister. As the dress is identical to both the sexes, and as beggars let their hair grow, it hadn't occurred to anyone that he was a she - (Incomplete).

### Salachi Sunday.

14.1.44.

Hello - how are you? I hope it's warmer with you, than it is here. It's utterly cold, and though everywhere it looks lovely and beautiful covered in snow, the mountains around look like Switzerland. I got up very early this morning, and after a quick breakfast, went on a long trip over the mountains - I was very tired when I got back, and hungry - and soaked through with snow, that had melted into my clothes. However, I had a bath, or the nearest approach to a bath here, and a meal, i feel very good of course. Everyone thinks I am quite mad. No one ever goes for walks or climbs here, unless they have to. By the way, how is Paney these days? If she increased in girth at the same rate as she was doing, when I last saw her, she will now be a good substitute for a balloon. Well not long back, a messenger brought me letters etc. - a graph from you, Ma, of mid November, and one from Edna, October 1942, and some letters from Win, a few years old, telling us, we are engaged. It is good to hear this news of course, even though it's a bit late. Also from Dorothy and Laura Deggs, and a very welcome one, graph, from Nell Kent. Quite a voice from the dead! I am afraid I'd not written to her or Mrs. Hesketh though I have often thought about them and nearly written. Glad you got and liked the snap of me at the well and harmonica. Sounds like a pub! I must say, I agree with Shirley. I'd laugh heartily, to see someone falling down a well, though it's difficult, in China due to the small diameter of the well.

I am so sorry Anthony is still suffering from this unknown disease. I think he has gone to the best place though and I'll hope they will soon find out what it is to do with him.

Europeans do not know what red tapism is; of course it remains to be seen, if I caught Pichieh tomorrow. It took a hardy local - a neighbour who lives on the mountains



opposite, who brought my letters a few days ago. It took 2 days to get there. And it's snowed more since then. However, it's good fun trying it, and I want to go now because it's a week to Chinese New Year, their biggest festival, corresponding to our Christmas. So I must be back here before that. It's a good idea. They chose the worst time of the year too - cold, damp and miserable, impossible to work out of door, nothing doing in the farming line. They go on working for a week or two. Every shop and business is stopped. If you're travelling, you can't even buy meals or food or you will have to take it all with you. And everyone I ask doesn't work at all, and eats and eats and eats and make merry generally. This is one of the few occasions when you eat the little rice you grow, instead of the daily corn meal. Last year i was in Pichieh, and the year before in Kunming, and this year I want to avoid all the feast and the parties. There are so many of them - and all together it gets a bit too much. The feast and such are affairs that one can't really stand up to and more than one at a time. So I would rather be here, and feast in our simple leper style. We will kill another pig and have carrots and turnips and this rice I've mentioned and we will feel like lords. After that week, I have managed to get hold of a Chinese pastor of the C.I.M, and he is coming to stay with us for a week, and will hold special meetings and bible study etc, and then it's goodbye to Salachi. Oh! Telling of feasts! I got mixed up with a very odd one a day or two ago, one of the lepers had a wife who used to come and pay me visits. (NO-ME, NOT HIM). Then I didn't see her for sometime. Then one day, this week, insisted that I should go and feast over at their house, on the other side of the valley. I must confess. I was very busy, but went out of sheer curiosity to see their building, a sort of farm with a high wall all around the buildings. Well, I satisfied my curiosity and hunger, it was an excellent meal. Nice and simple, but so well cooked, after doing all the necessary bowing and scraping etc. came home, only then did I discover that the feast was in honour of her wedding to the owner of the house, his fourth wife. And she certainly isn't now. What the leper thinks of me, I just can't imagine.

Well - I do wish you could see out of my window now. The sun setting on the big mountain opposite is mainly in shadow. The peak tips and the sides facing the sun are a lovely pink. It is such a pity that snow is not as kind as it is beautiful. However I am very glad our new building is habitable and warm, I managed to buy quite a lot of coal just before Christmas, with my pocket money. So, besides the usual ration of coal, the common room is now kept nice and hot and stuffy all day, and night. In China you don't let ferries go out. You put a lid of mud on top, with a tiny hole in the middle, and fires stay in all night and in a grand fashion. It saves all the bother of lighting fires too and keeps the room, and uses hardly any extra coal. When I am out working all day, I do the same to my fire during the day, and just use them for mealtime and evening. Now I must stop - however - never mind -I'll see you soon - That's all today. Meanwhile - all joy and love -Laurie.

Salachi

24-1-44.

Hello - how are you? I hope well and blooming. I had planned to write last night, but I was so tired that I decided to leave writing till today. Just think - over 122 weeks, it seems a very short while to me, though a few things that happened during that time seem like wild dreams of the long distant past - especially Burma. Well -yesterday was a funny day. I got up and it was dull and cold as usual - the snow had nearly melted away.

Suddenly the wind changed and blow all the mist away in no time. And there was the deep blue sky and bright hot sunshine. After we all recovered, I hurried up with the services and the meals, and took the dogs long walk. We went miles and miles through mainly new land - all very interesting! Came across some cave dwellers too. Great clefts in vertical mountainsides and they had beautiful floors - one above the other - with built-up stonewall up the front. They had no windows and seemed to live in the dark quite happily. Also found some more lepers - in an early stage -they hadn't realised it themselves. And most of the people had never seen a 'white person' before and many of them had never been as far as Salachi, which they seemed to think, was a great city, instead of a collection of mud huts. Also came across a young woman in the hut. She has had a broken arm for a week and was in a great agony. Fortunately I had some dope with me. I did her up with splints etc., though how long she will have them on - I don't know. I'm sure her arm had never been washed, so she won't take off the splint for that reason. Also her clothes! I doubt if they had ever seen water, if so she would be disturbing that arm for that purpose. It was a wonderful walk. Though up and down high mountains and deep valleys thro' gorges and under overhanging cliffs and so on.

The only trouble was I had forgotten to change from my winter clothes. It was so hot, the sun in winter here when it does come out is like the English summer sun at its hottest. The dogs too were very tired, when we got back. Two of them were only puppies - about only 5 or 6 months old. After eating a meal on our return they just sank down on my steps and slept like dead ones.

Well - every one is very excited. Tomorrow is Chinese New Year's day. Preparations are in a full swing. It is the greatest of many Chinese festivals - they eat and drink and are merry as long as they can keep it up. Most people keep it up for a week and some go on as long as a month. No work or business of any kind is indulged in during the period. We have killed a pig to eat, and we'll be having white turnips, carrots and 'dofoo' - a preparation of a special bean that grows in China. We shall eat rice instead of our corn meal. They are also busy making, what is called *Ba-Ba*. This is a frightfully, sticky concoction, made from grain of various sorts. Something like a white sticky, soggy, salt pudding, in consistency. Quite unpleasant to eat, usually the sort we are making, but everybody eats it here like we eat our Christmas pudding during Christmas time. It's all like having Christmas over again. The other two Chinese New Year I've had were rather tiresome, because I was travelling, the first one, and all the food shops were shut. And so it was a great inconvenience. And the other one, I was with foreigners, but this time busy with the Chinese and preparing for and with them. It is much more exciting. All the year here has shown me that it might be interesting to go travelling and sight seeing. You have seen such a lot of people, and know all about them. (The rest lost).

### Salachi Leper Home

5-2-1944.

Hello. How are you? I wonder - I hope well.

This is going to be a short one - probably the last one from Salachi - sad in most ways - but it's good to see you again. On Monday, a messenger is probably coming in. I shall be leaving sometime, during the week, in all probability. But shall send that with the messenger, as the last day will be extra full and busy. Everywhere it's so beautiful here just now, we have been having a lot of snow, and the last few days have been snowing

very hard. OH! so cold - this morning, when I was up, my tooth water and washing water were frozen, at the bathroom. So you can imagine what it is like outside. We are not able much to work in this weather - found is so hard and frozen - to say nothing of the people. So we have been having a week of meetings instead. Unfortunately the visiting preacher has taken fright. Instead of having meetings in the church, which has permanently open doors and windows i.e., just the upholds, I'd planned to have the meetings in the new common rooms, which I've built, and which is nice and cosy, and warm with windows and two fires. The snag is when you get ten lepers in a warm room for over an hour, the smell is not anything like florist shop. However, bad smells never gave anyone leprosy, but as I say, after the first day our preacher took fright and so for the rest of this bitter week, we or those stout enough to do it, have shivered away in the church draughts. I suggested he stood outside the common room and preached to us thro' one small open window, but he didn't seem to like the idea.

In spite of this cold - I went a walk one dusk, and came across lots of wild camellias out on the hill side, the petals turned brown -but I gathered lots of buds just opening - and they've opened in the house without a blemish. So the house is a mass of gay flowers, even though there be snow outside, i also have a few bowls of violets - I collected the roots long ago, and kept them in the pots, with little ferns. The violet keeps on flowering in fine style. I shall be sorry to leave my little house. It's grown up so nicely and is very cosy and liveable. I've been trying to work out a water supply scheme, these last two days. But haven't succeeded. I am afraid - you see, we all have to go a long way to get water, carry it all in buckets, and it's a long-long narrow steep paths, which are very narrow and dangerous. In this weather, unfortunately, for this one reason only, we are on top of a hill, or a spur of land - and the streams are in the valleys below. My plan was to divert a little gully from one of the streams higher up the mountain, and let it rundown gently on to our spur. I got a perfect route which wouldn't have meant too much work, but alas it crosses another man's land, unfortunately once, when Sr. Margarete was here, she had a row with him about something and vowed she'd never have any business or connection of any sort with him again. He of course flared up in like manner, and although he and I are quite good friends, he sometimes comes and sits and talk, and drink tea, etc. he had never forgotten the vow! (The rest lost).

### Salachi Leper Home

16-2-1944.

Hello - how are you? I hope bloominger than ever. Have just had a big batch of air graphs arrive. Win, Leonard, Sanders, Diggers, etc. and two from you mother - very thrilled. I suppose I'll be with you, as soon as this letter reaches - Nevertheless - I will write - in case I get a slow journey. The first graph is December 12. Thank you - yes, I am as well as I've ever been here. And this week have had no rheumatism or anything. Just like going to dentists, all pain goes when you're on the way and now that I am about to leave, I am as fit as anything. Moreover - passages are booked etc. now - so don't worry - yes - sister Emma, was a bit disappointed so was I, that I didn't go there. But it is too late now for me to go - she still can't get a travel permit - poor creature is in a lonely wild spot, and not at all well.

Yes - Terry duly came, as you will have heard from me by now -we had a grand time together, and then I went with him back to Kutsing. I hope you will meet him someday.

He is a grand bird. He seems to have made a remarkable recovery from his illness, and is now back at work, with no apparent ill-effect. So he is staying on in China for a while. We have unfortunately, lost two men though - one this typhus - and the other thro' a truck accident.

Am so glad to hear that Anthony is home again! Poor child! Let us hope he is now in, for a long spell. Yes - it is sad about Pa. Morris - especially to Bert & Dorrie as you say - but with parents at that age - have to expect these things, each they go for another spell abroad. It is one of the problems, and nothing much they can do about it. If they are to continue in their work. Yes, no doubt my brothers and Pa would be amused about you and W.C. window. (Rest assured, that these objects are not the only things that make me think of you, ma). And anyway you would love my W.C. windows, and there are two of them, big ones, and the most wonderful view from each. I move this object of art, about from time to time merely to vary the view. Primitive sanitation has its points you see.

Yes. Christmas meant - a milestone passed - thought you mustn't get too excited, you know.

Yes - poor Trebor hasn't seen much of married life; has he? How some of us are spared! Your other graph dated 26th Dec. Glad you had a good Christmas.

Yes, I certainly did and the lepers too, as I've already described these Christmases. So I won't repeat them for you again. Today is a celebration day too - Win's birthday. I am celebrating it with doughnuts sent from Pichieh - was also given bits of embroidery for Win and for myself. So hope to have one or two interesting things to show you if I can get them home. I envy your listening to the autumn oratories. Never mind, I'll soon be able to hear some music again.

Hello - it's now night late. There's a man going out to Pichieh tomorrow on a horse, and is going to take letters for me. So - although this isn't much - I am going to finish it off, so that you'll get at least a few words - Love - Laurie.

F.A.U. Kutsing

6-3-1944.

Hello - How are you? I hope well etc. I am afraid this won't be a happy letter for you, so it will be a short one. I will write more another day. I suppose the cable was a bit of a blow, I am so very sorry! I had to send it. It is all really simple, as I am not coming as it was planned. I left the sisters and lepers - and when nearly there learnt that the boy, who was coming to replace me, had suddenly had the jitters, about being here alone with lepers in the wild, decided not to come. I was a bit peeved not with him for changing his mind but for learning it so late, that we would not try to find anyone else. However - it is no good worrying now - it was just perfectly clear, that I had to go back. You see - I left them on their own again - the lepers would be back in the state, as they were in, when I came, within 3 months. Also I would never be happy knowing I'd left about 80 people, to rot and die with a famine on its way too. Most people are against my going back - but can see no other way and hope and pray you'd forgive me. I hope it won't be far long and still hope to get married next year - even if it's not in the summer that is if Win still entertained the idea, after this news. It is a testing for both of us, in a good many ways. At the same time, there was news that it would be impossible for me to leave for India, due

to the new restrictions etc. before the end of April, at the very earliest, so any way I'd not have been home by what as I'd hoped.

They (F.A.U.) won't let me return immediately, and insist on a holiday, so I will probably be away for a few days at Tali.

I suggest you continue to write to Kutsing not Pichieh, they can always forward my mail, just in case I leave earlier than, now seems likely. Now I will close - I do hope this news has not made you too unhappy and may be by the time you are reading this, I will be preparing to leave again. Meanwhile - my love - more than ever -Your Laurie.

F.A.U. Kutsing, Yunan, China

about 24 March, 1944.

Hello - I wonder how you all are! I hope well and blooming and recovered from the last news I sent you of my delay in homecoming. Since then I've officially been on holiday! Though it's been no real cure, however! It's been good fun and I am having a grand time. I am in a military area now. So can't give you place names or whatever -so you'll understand why these letters are a bit lacking in meatyness. First I came down to the place, where I spent my first birthday in China, and spent a week with old and new friends. There a grand week too, hot and sunny and breezy. Planned for them, and there were alterations to do now and new plans for further extensions, also, not so far away. They hope to start a new leper home. I got out the plans and organisation for that. Then there was lot of hospital work, I helped in operations etc. - none of the doctors has had anything to do with leprosy, and so brought their leper patients to me to examine and prescribe medicine.

Quite amazing - to be treated as an expert, by the medical profession itself, realised how far from being an expert I am though it was surprising what a lot of help I could give, even after a short practical leper experience. Well - I was about to return, when I was introduced to an American colonel - and he offered to take me down to where I was 2 years ago - with the Swedish Mission. Remember, then it was peace, now almost frontline. Do you also remember, a honeymoon couple of the Mission - Bill and Dorothy Pepe? Well -they are at this place, the natives here are mainly glad, so he is now the chaplain to the American forces. So I came down with the colonel in fine style, and have been since with Bill and Dorothy, for a week. Now you'll laugh when I say, how I've been spending the weekends. Second, going from camp to camp, taking services, and preaching the gospel to them. And third, giving talks at the colonel's suggestion, about the leper work, well - it has been such a scream. They just lap up, leper stories and news, they seem to think it is such an extraordinary and wonderful thing to live in line with a bunch of lepers - and at each service and talk - on their own accord, they suggested having a collection for the lepers. Do you know, on the first day alone, the collections amounted to e even thousand eight hundred dollars - getting for £100 - I nearly passed out - and each day has been a long series of meals, services, talks and seeing the military sights etc, (The rest lost).

Salachi, Leper Home

29.4.44.

Hello - how are you all getting on? Time seems to go quicker than ever. I never seem to be able to settle down to write a good long letter. This afternoon is the same. However

I am starting off, with hopes of as few interruptions as possible. Well, since last writing, I've had a very pleasant week, though a very, very full one. One of the F.A.U. men came up with one to spend a week's holiday to finish off recuperation after typhus. The only trouble was, there was lots of work to do after my absence, and it was rather a job to get through half of it and still have handy time to entertain my guest. He is very keen on sketching. So in the evening we were able to sketch together. It's a very bad time for food too. It's between seasons, that I had to get something appetising for invalids' diet. However, he enjoyed himself and the peace and quiet of the place very much. He couldn't have come at a better time for beauty of the scenery. All the hills are ablaze with deep red rhododendrons, and azaleas, and pink white camellias etc. and the weather was mostly kind to us. So all was well, he had rather expected to see a leper colony a place of gloom and depression, and was very surprised to find everyone so happy and gay, singing and laughing. A lot of lepers make hats out of bunches of rhododendrons. The effect of several of them, attract like this and working together on a summer field is all rather gay.

One day I finished early, as Robin wanted to climb a mountain peak, at the back of our house, see the sunset, spend the night up, aloft, watch the sunrise, and then get back for breakfast. So we started off in sunshine, just taking a cake and our sleeping bags. But clouds drifted up, and there was no sunset, then we spent rather an uncomfortable night, as it was very hard and stony, and before long, mist and rain came and later on, it became more wild. There was summarily no sunrise. However, we laughed a lot, and got back to a large breakfast of porridge and duck eggs.

I now have a beautiful duck, beige at one end, and slowly changing turquoise greeny blue at the other. Also have a cock; he was handsome until he met in battle several of the lepers' cocks. They pulled most of his more beautiful feathers out for him. Of course he's lost an awful lot of face, with his hens, who will now no longer talk to him.

Wish you could see my room now. It's so nice and cosy with my charcoal fire, 3 walls are wooden, light natural colour, and the other one is whitewashed. There is bright red painting on the ceiling, and pale blue and white striped curtains. (Sounds patriotic, doesn't it?) I have great vases of autumn berries everywhere that look really lovely with the white and wooden doors. The Chinese lanterns are long and red, too, the same colour as the ceiling paintings. All very cosy and delightful. My boy has at last learnt the art of cleanliness, and the scrubbed wooden floor looks neater than any carpet and one can wash the home made straw mats too.

Just at present, it's a bit noisy. I've taken to taking in lodgers -actually I put in my spare rooms, friends and relatives, who come to visit a few of the lepers. And this week - there is young Mrs. Goo, and her 3 children, who make loud squealing noises. I believe they have just perfected a perfect rota system, so that there is never any sign of a silent 5 minutes, and they are very afraid of the system, quite obviously, (The rest lost).

**Salachi, Leper Home**

**4 May, 1944.**

Hello - the cuckoo is cook-woosing away, as I started to write this - quite near too - have you heard him yet this year? I wonder how you are - I hope, well and blooming - and got over the shock of my not being on the way yet - Hope it won't be long. Things seem to be moving - though of course you can't find anyone in a minute to come and

look after a lot of lepers. How is the garden these days? Mine is bare - or bear anything eatable except a few parsnips. I planted them over a year ago. They only just came off, some self set tomato plants, are nearly a foot high. My wretched birds - ducks, cocks and hen will eat up the seeds and the flowers. So I expect I'd have to go on being content with the wild flowers which are certainly lovely enough, not to want any more. Now added to the azaleas and irises are a lovely white wild roses and the white acacia trees are in bloom - the white laburnum. My 6 W.C windows are just a picture and just cluttered up with them. Talking of the W.C. windows not only reminds me of you, and the activities of the past day or two. It is seed planting time, and the weather is just right and we have been going at it like wild things - corn and beans all over the shop. I am convinced that I am not really made to do hard manual work - so it's a good job, we weren't born farmers or that I am not a law-breaker! However it was good fun so long as one hasn't go to do it as the life's work.

My trouble here is that I am always having to set good example, besides corn and beans - and I've to swoop down on the most unpleasant jobs that I can see that wants doing, and which nobody else is doing and pretend I just LOVE doing it. Praise be that I'm kept busy in other directions. My lot therefore this time fell on with the Manure Squad!

We - like angels of light - or like the king scattering largesse, gaily trip around the countryside and we are closely followed by others, who drop onto our manure a beam here and a grain of corn there. These are followed by others to do something else - rather obscure - and others who rake over what we have all done - before us went the oxen and ploughs - I might have said. I am at the moment reading the life of Hudson Taylor, the founder of C.I.M. [China Inland Mission] and his biographer keeps about his suffering for Christ -manure however is not mentioned in the list of sufferings.

One of the oxen 'took sick' a few days ago and I excelled myself by curing it. I know nothing about curing animals, though I seem to be successful from time to time in a miraculous way. Talking of oxen - my lone she-cow, I am told is going to have a baby! I don't know when! However, as I have no idea of when it was naughty, and even if I had, I still wouldn't know how long it takes. So she will just have to have it at the spur of the moment sort of thing -I must stand around like a boy scout - be prepared. A good motto for an emergency midwifery squad. The black sheep has been christened Moses - Miriam

- in Chinese, pronounced MOR-SHEMAR-LEE. We don't know its sex as its coat is too long and shaggy and matted and it doesn't really matter anyway as there is only one of it. (The rest faded).

**Salachi Leper Home Sunday,  
7th May 1944.**

Hello - the messenger has not yet gone to the city - so I'm starting to write a few more lines. I've hopefully retired to the balcony, at the back of the house, which faces out in the hillside. It is not overlooked at all. And I am hoping, that anyone who comes up the path will think I am out. The lepers are very good, and do not want things done on Sundays, except of course, when there is someone especially ill, and there are always a few who have to have dressings changed, or drops in their eyes etc. But the outpatients do not know Sunday as anything different from the weekday. There is no week in China,

like we know it. The days are known by their number in the month or Red days or holidays. So of course someone in the village had no idea, when they set out from home for medicine - that it is our Sunday - so one cannot blame them, but use it as a stepping-stone to tell them about the gospel. One cannot turn people away either. "Look!" - when saw we thee a stranger - or took them in -Hungry and fed them not - sick - and we ministered not so on - My only grievance is that these outpatients are getting so numerous, that it interferes with my work for the lepers now. I do not mind how much of my time outside that is given to the lepers, I use for the village work. It is difficult not to be able to keep to routine, and not being able to do what we ought and would like to do for the lepers.

Now the days are longer - and the weather has now become very hot and sunny. I need all the patience I can get hold of, towards the end of the day. So often I have to leave off doing a job, when I'm right in the middle of it - and it is this that tires me so. To get any quite time at all, now I have to get up before daylight and ensure getting no interruptions - for in the evening after dark, I am too tired for anything but sleep.

I often think of Mrs. Hesketh, saying of me, it is so easy for you to smile - and if only she knew what job it is for me to keep my old temper down, you know how 'short' I would be - and to say a cross word or to frown - and be irritable - under months of smiles.

It is becoming an increasing burden to me, too - to know that in my outing, and in all the district behind, there are no Christians and indeed, a huge percentage who have not even heard, anything at all about the gospel. It is very little that I can do - spending most of my time in the colony, and I do long to get some Chinese Christian who would come and live here, as his or her centre and do the district. The time is so ripe - too for the week - now that the people have accepted us. They have had first the mere curiosity, and are now accepted by the people. They are now interested in us, and what we do - and why we do. My own trouble - outside of the work and time question - is the language. (Rest lost).

### Satachi Leper Home

20<sup>th</sup> May, 1944.

Hello - Once again! How are you? I wonder! I hope blooming and fresh etc. (Not too fresh of course - as the young lady said to the curate). Well - only another week and it's whit time (I think) - the time I'd expected to see you again - and here I am, firmly rooted, still in Salachi - one good bit of news for you is - Robin is here again for a while - and he has offered to look after the place for me, and as soon as we hear that C.I.M. person is definitely coming to take over -so that I needn't hang on until they are eventually here. Of course -the client hasn't yet agreed to this but is another little step in the right directions - I feel that I won't be long now, before some help does come. I hope so - because I've not been too robust these days, and the work gets heavier and heavier.

On Thursday it was Robin's birthday, so we took the whole day off. We had an early breakfast, and set off for a nearby mountainside. We packed our bags with food, and billy cans etc. We cooked food when we wanted. Then in the evening, we returned to a meal I had prepared the day before. It was hot and sunny, so it was nice to come back to a cold meal, and cold roast pork and chicken on a delicious cold vegetables. I had made some delicious mayonnaise. The only snag was I had no proper oil to make it with, so I used castor oil. You couldn't make it with egg and vinegar and pepper etc. of course I didn't



tell Robin or he wouldn't have enjoyed it. I only ate a little, moderation, but as it was Robin's birthday he made a pig of himself, with the result that he was up all night running backwards and forwards to you know where! And most of next day too!

After the salad came some rhubarb, I'd managed to get in Pichieh and then a delicious chocolate and walnut cake covered with white icing, piled high - the walnuts I've had for 2 years, and the chocolate I had saved from last November's visit to Kutsing and the icing I made with medicinal glucose (only don't tell anyone). Then we had to go to bed, we were so full. Robin of course, wasn't able to stay there long! As this hymn says emptied himself of all, but love. Now it is cold and wet and we had a fire today. The winds too are very strong, at this time of the year, a lot of damage is done to buildings and property and crops. I've had to get in men to repair roofs in several of our buildings. - Laurie.

### Salachi Leper Home

23-May-1944.

Hello - How are you? I am not really starting to write much. You see - yesterday the boy went into the city to post letters, and hope he'll bring back some, tonight, if the roads are not too bad. It's cold and wet again for a while. You have a postman everyday or more - we only every week or so. One gets frightfully excited when one knows he might come today - and it's awful disappointment if nothing does come. However, I always do settle down to answering them as soon as I've had them. So I've started one to you and one to Win, so that I don't have to delay, writing addresses and openings, etc.

Well - much disappointment. He didn't bring any letter at all, and now it is May 31 st. I've come into the city myself to help celebrate sister Jo's birthday - and there was a graph from you waiting - and so very thrilled. So here goes - to answer it - Thank you. I am not particularly well - but nothing to worry about. As a matter of fact - I've got to go to Kweiyang tomorrow to see this Superintendent of C.I.M., the provincial health officials - about leper business, trying to get government support etc. So I am going on to Kutsing to make a round trip - really it will be a triangular one. Glad I can bring back drugs and supplies with us. So while I am in H.Q. I shall be getting another X-ray and check over. I am afraid it will depend on the results, as to how long I stay on here. Please do not think there is anything seriously wrong, there isn't. They want to keep a regular check on me. So that, if I should pick up a tiresome germ, it can be nipped in the bud! Glad to hear more about Eric Westwood. After your last letter I sent him a letter fixing in this, you mention Leonard's desire to meet him. think they will get on well together, and I have a faint idea he did actually meet Leonard when he came to Northfield to supper. Win too would like to meet him. Fancy you hearing from Dick. I haven't written for ages, but will do so, shall probably send to you, to readdress, if you don't mind. It's good to know he is alive and well. You know I am often afraid to write to people in the forces, or ask about people from their relations in case anything has happened. I dread every mail hearing that something has happened to either him or Jack - so it is good to hear of Dick. If you write to him again, please give him all the best wishes and greetings.

Weyrnouth days seems a long way back in history - but they are very clear and very vivid memories. (The rest lost).

F.A.U. Kutsing

11.6.1944.

Hello, now about June 11th, and still your letters are not posted. So I am adding a few lines, and then sending it today. I thought it would be quicker to bring it here, and post it from here. Since last writing, a lot has happened. First, lost my voice for a week, quite amusing, and no loss to anyone. It's back now, though I am still a little hoarse. Well, had a good quick ride to Kweilang, and was able to get thro' all my business - most very successfully. Main item of interest being, that I secured land tax exemption (a considerable item) and also being promised for the lepers, a monthly rice ration from this government, together with a grant of two thousand dollars each month. The Governor and the Chief Health administrator have become very interested in the work (It gives them face to be able to say, they are helping with leprosy work in their provinces, seems anxious for it to continue and be developed).

Then I came on to Kutsing. It took a week on the road, mainly due to breakdowns. The journey usually only takes 4 days, if all goes well. However, it was a very pleasant trip, and a nice rest in some ways, having nothing to do, all day long. The only snag now, is that my fellow passenger has yesterday blossomed forth with a sort of measles and a few hours later, the driver of the truck also came out with spots and fever, so now the M.O. keeps rushing up to see, if I have spots - as I am so flea bitten anyway, it will be a job to find places to have spots! Also I've had measles, the ordinary and German ones, so let's hope I am now immune to any other variety. Terry is here - and it is good to see him again. The church missionary society had a hospital here - in Kutsing run by Chinese. That is now closed down. So the Unit was temporarily taken over - and Terry is acting Medical Superintendent. He seems to have got over his T.B. and typhus remarkably well - though he is still very thin and pale.

The rains are here, with rice planting and what! Very distressing news from the world, there is - I am afraid it doesn't make one want to come out of one's own little world one bit. I suppose I will be termed an escapist for saying this.

Well, I will be writing again in a day or two -

Do hope you are all well. My love as ever - Laurie.

F.A.U. Kutsing

-6.44. (date not clear).

Hello - how are you. Well - time is rolling along at a fearful rate. In about 10 days I am due to leave China - and if I continued to show no signs of developing chicken pox *or* small pox or German measles etc.

Already I am down on the list in India for a boat passage, for the first available one after July 10th. Of course, with all this crowds of important people wanting passages - it may be ages after that, that I actually get on the sea. Anyway it is a date to think about. I can't really give any estimate of when I will be with you. Given maximum good luck and minimum delay, I suppose I could get a boat and be with you, by the end of August. It is far more likely to be about the same date that left you three years ago. And of course I have no idea how affairs in your part of the world, will affect me — but it may be months after that date. I'm afraid, it's not in my hands! After last February, I'd sworn, not to get too excited again. It's too awful to be disappointed - but it's useless - here I am already bubbling all over the place with excitement. I am already heaps better. I was under 9

stones, when I got here - 123 pounds - now after a week of a bit of special food, and medicine and vitamins and so on - I've got up to 130 pounds. Let's hope it continues on the boat - and may be I'll be getting back towards normal six again - by the time you see me. I'm already very sun burnt too - I am also made to sit around in the sun - and I am also made to go to bed in the afternoon, after lunch - whoever heard of such a nonsense! Between limes, I look after the other sick - and take them their food and medicines. So - you see - I can't be too bad, if I am doing that! I wonder, how you all are, I hope you got a holiday at the sea.

When I arrive in England, I have orders to go straight to headquarters (Gordon Square) - I don't know how long, they'll keep me - but I expect only a day or two. Then I will be coming straight to Maxstoke Road. As soon as I land, I will send you and Win cables each. Am suggesting, that if she wants, and if it's possible, Win comes down to meet me, and again, if it's possible and only if it's convenient, she stays at Norman's, and I meet her there. However - he may not be there - she is writing to him - (At least I suggested she does).

Apart from this I can't give you any other plans. Maybe - you will have found out, roughly what happens to people arriving home, from Gordon Square - if you write there enquire of one - Ronald Young, who I believe is in charge of such matters, as sending people abroad etc, - or from Eric Westwood, or someone.

I've just learned that Maggie is in Pott Said, and Sam has been at Aden for a long time. I suppose - both of them may have bumped into Reginald in Suez. The world is an incredibly small place - these days - I'll let you know, if I meet any of them.

I wonder how Anthony has been getting on these days. Hope not been in hospital again.

Weil - I wonder - how I will find England. There are some new people just out - their stories and reports are rather frightening.

I am glad the anniversaries went off well, as usual, I am sorry I missed Jesus Joy of Man Desiring. I'd rather like to have straight hymns, as set in the Methodist hymn book. Also - would like to have the last bit of Bach's Wedding Contata. (Incomplete).

Place not mentioned.

9.9.1944.

Hello - Messenger has come with an air graph from you, Pa - and as he doesn't return with my mail till tomorrow, I can answer it. Many thanks for it - and it has come in record time - dated 30.12.43, and it is here in the wilds of Salachi on 7.9.44. Thank you yes - although the weather has been coldest, I've ever known, I'm fitter at the moment than I've been, for over an year.

Glad you have been able to get outside a bit at Xmas time and that you had a good time - No - I've not heard about Mr. Morris - sad, tho' one can't complain, as he was 73. A pity he couldn't have waited till Dorris returned. However it is a thing that missionaries have to be prepared for. The last time I saw him, I was passing along Grange Road and he came running out and he gave me a large apple, and patted me on the back, as one would do to a small boy. If I remember rightly he also called Win 'little Winnie', in similar circumstances. So this fate is his due. It would upset Mama's Christmas, I am afraid.

Thanks - our food situation is O.K. for the present. Prospects for the district look very gloom, but I wrote and called all our supporters, who had promised money - asking for it as soon as possible, so that I could buy grain, while there is grain. They all responded wonderfully and I have now got into the granary enough to last almost until next harvest - while of course it is a big load off my mind (and off their too). Supplementary diet, though, is very scarce, and as you suggest, one of the main factors in treating leprosy is to have a good sound diet and not just the corn meals. We grow and eat our own vegetables, though both limited.

Each leper has his own garden for such purpose - and I've also brought in quite a big supply of beans, a type which are of excellent food value. Have also introduced a number of hens and ducks - and consequently eggs - so just at the present we are well off for the food.

'In the pink' is an excellent description of a recovering leper. One of most sought after things here is to see the new clean flesh come, where ulcers have been, and strangely it is not yellow but very bright pink at first. The extra cold weather has not been good. Several have been quite ill. However, now most of them are better or recovering. Yes, I am certainly getting excited about coming home though these last few days here - sadness of leaving tends to have the upper hand.

So Leonard is now looking towards Coventry - seems a famous place. You were there, Norman was there, and now Leonard contemplating of setting up on his own, is an excellent idea. I can't say I am fond of the place myself. I should think George's idea of setting up on his own is an excellent one - well worth encouraging, have often wondered that he has not done so before this, though of course, there is more work in running one's own. I should think there is certainly plenty of opportunity and openings for such work. It all depends on how many other people think the same.

Sorry the organ is not working. But I am glad you are having a blower. Your choir programme has certainly been a good and full one-hasn't it? You must get them going in a few months, etc. They're the goods and something worth getting your teeth into. What's more, they are meant for choirs of your size and working in such surroundings. Straight Bach Chorals would be grand, instead of anthems now and then. I have a most wonderful setting of his, "Oh Scared Head, Now Wounded" You must use it some time. Yes I am looking forward to a spring visit too, I expect I will be a bit late for it, but I hope in time for blue bells. My estimate is somewhere about Whit, though of course it is impossible to give you any date.

Thanks for New Year wishes and greetings. It is now Chinese New Year. They have not come untimely. Prospects certainly look good. So far 1944 has been all that it could be for me. I hope it is same as well for you both. If for no other reason, the prospect of being with you again this year puts the year on a special level.

Well - now - must stop - All Joy - and my Love - Laurie.

Place, date and beginning of the letter not available.

1944.

Have had disasters among my livestock. An eagle carried off and presumably devoured Isabella the young duck. I carried off and devoured her sister Wasabella and a wild cat ate one rabbit and killed two others.

These we retrieved and the lepers ate them with relish. Yesterday I picked up an unusually large and hungry crowd. Today I am one big item!

Well - must start. I am sorry this is so short, but I want to give you an idea, that I am not idle with my statistics.

In the month of September I made 114 lab tests, gave 454 injections, did 348 dressings, and I made 67 examinations for various things such as neurological findings and sensory disturbance. Of course there was all the other illnesses to treat - scabies, malaria, cholera, dysentery, worms, etc., and quite a lot of non-leprosy outpatients come every day, from all over the district. So now you know why my letters to other people are not very many or frequent.

Well, today is injections day, and I must start fetching people. So be good,

Lots of Love - from Laurie.

## Chapter 7

### Laurie meets Gandhiji

It was time for Laurie to leave China, and the leprosy patients for several reasons. One was his failing health. He was running an intermittent fever, which did not respond to any treatment. His Conscientious Objector's certificate was hearing expiry date, and he had to return to England for its renewal.

Passenger boats to England were irregular and infrequent. One had to wait at a port of call like Calcutta or Bombay, sometimes for a couple of months or more, before one got a berth in a boat. That is how Laurie happened to meet Gandhiji.

Laurie had to wait three months in Bombay, living with some British Quakers at the time when Gandhiji was also in Bombay. The McLeans were also friends of Gandhiji, and they regularly attended Gandhiji's prayer sessions. Laurie also thus came in contact with *Bapuji*. He was immediately attracted and touched by Gandhiji's teachings of non-violence and love. He listened to Gandhiji's discourse on overcoming hatred with love. Laurie was able to have talks with Gandhiji and although it was Quit India time, Gandhiji was able to explain to Laurie that it was not the British people he wanted to quit, but the British government. Gandhiji was also able to point out to him, that Bombay was not the real India, and that more than seventy-five percent of the people live in rural India - in villages. Gandhiji's life and principles made a deep impression on Laurie. He left India on the next available boat with the firm determination to come back to India and learn more from this great man.

This was early in the year 1945; World War II was in its last throes. Boats had resumed going by the Suez Canal. It was a pleasantly uneventful journey back home, after nearly three years of fear and uncertainty.

## Chapter 8

### Back to India

It is said that God has a purpose for each one of us, and in Laurie's life at least, I think it is hundred percent true. When he went back to England, he had still not really made up

his mind whether to go back to China and continue his work at the leprosy home, go to India, or, stay on in England and carry on with architecture and lead a normal happy life in England. But everything changed in a flash.

One weekend, while he was staying with his brother Norman in London, he went for a walk in the city. A big name board flashed before his eyes. It said, 'The Mission to Lepers'. He went in and found that it was an international Christian Mission Organisation, providing money and personnel to various institutions, scattered all over the world, to help people affected with leprosy. Laurie went in to know more about the organisation. When he came out of the office, he had already made up his mind to join The Mission to Lepers. He had long talks with the people concerned. It transpired that they were in great need of an architect or builder who would be willing to go to India, and build new modern hospitals where, hitherto they only had 'asylums'. Leprosy was no more an incurable disease and could be treated, like any other disease. New drugs had been discovered during the war. The Mission to Lepers had many leprosy centres in India - at Chandag, on the Nepal border in the north and Neyoor, in the Kanyakumari district in South India. Laurie had no two thoughts about the request. He had already made up his mind to go back to India, and build homes and hospitals for the lepers.

He arrived in India as a young missionary in 1945. He was taken to the mission headquarters in Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh, and was accommodated in the mission bungalow. It was a different kind of life from what he had lived before, either in the F.A.U. or at the leper home in Salachi.

In pre-independence India, the life of a missionary was only one step lower than their fellow countrymen in the diplomatic service, which was part of the British Raj. They lived in big bungalows, served by their cooks and butlers, and a boy to look after any other needs. The *mali* or gardener, looked after the garden, and the *chaprasi* fetched the post. There was also the indispensable sweeper who removed the night soil, and kept the bathrooms clean and fresh for the *sahibs* and *memsahibs*. The *punkawailas* sat outside the bedrooms or the dining rooms and pulled the *punka*, so that the *sahibs* and *memsahibs* could eat their dinner in comparatively cool comfort!

A day-bed in the room and a night-bed on the verandah was an absolute necessity. The boy made up the night-bed, tucked in the mosquito net, so that the *sahibs* and *memsahibs* could be free from mosquitoes by night. For the *sahibs* and *memsahibs*, the day started with the 'bed tea' and biscuits that came promptly in the morning to the bedroom. Along with the bed tea was also the hot water for shaving. Breakfast was always in the dining room where all the members gathered. Quite *pukka*, with porridge or some cereals to start with, followed by an egg - or egg and bacon and homemade bread - then marmalade, followed by some fruit. Lunch and tea were more informal, but dinner was always a grand affair. This was the kind of life Laurie was introduced to when he first arrived in India. He didn't fit in easily to the surroundings or the way of life he was pushed into.

One of the first things he did after his arrival in Faizabad was, to hire a bicycle. It was easily available and being the mode of travel for the ordinary local person, it was cheap. He had to pay only a quarter of a rupee for hiring a bicycle for a whole day. He cycled everywhere and visited the neighbouring villages.

There was a leprosy hospital and home run by the Mission to Lepers about twelve miles outside the city. This was a fairly big home and hospital with inpatient facilities for

over a hundred people. They also had a big outpatient department, where patients could come from the neighbouring villages and get their weekly medicines and injections.

This was started and run by Dr. P. J. Chandy. Laurie found in Dr. Chandy, a kindred soul. They had a lot in common, and they soon became good friends. Before long, Laurie decided to break away from the mission circle, and share his life with Dr. Chandy and his family. He also decided to take only the same amount in salary that Dr. Chandy received as a doctor. Laurie decided to live as much as he could as an ordinary Indian. He worked with the Mission to Lepers and travelled all over India visiting the various leprosy hospitals.

The Mission to Lepers had already established many homes all over the length and breadth of India, which were invariably in remote villages, and not in big cities. One of the many things that Laurie had to do was to visit these scattered homes all over India - from Kanyakumari in the south to Chandag on the Nepal border in the north. He always travelled third class on the railways. The first class was only for the very, very important people, and for the whites. The second class was comparatively expensive, but Indians of the upper strata could use this. The third class was the class used by the common man. There was no reservation in the third class; if you arrived early and occupied a good seat, you were all right. Otherwise you were obliged either to stand all the way, or sit wherever or on whatever you found suitable.

Laurie however, did not adopt the Indian dress as he found the *dhotis* very cumbersome and difficult to handle, so he stuck to his shorts and T-shirts. It is very surprising and strange that in spite of all his 'Indianisation', he never managed to learn any Indian language properly. This was probably because he never felt the need, since wherever he went, he met someone who could converse in English. So language study did not become an essential part of his programme, and of course, there are many Indian languages so different from each other, in different parts of the country.

## Chapter 9

### My Life with Laurie Baker

It started in the year 1946 in Karimnagar in the then Hyderabad State, where I was working as the Medical Superintendent of a sixty-bed Mission Hospital. I had a letter from my brother, Dr. P.J. Chandy, who was the initiator and Medical Superintendent of the Leprosy Hospital at Faizabad. He asked me if I would go there for a holiday -as he was in need of an operation for 'piles', and whether I would kindly do the operation and then look after his patients for one month, while he recuperated. I consented and fixed the dates. It was quite a rash undertaking - I realised later.

A few days before the departure, I received a letter from a strange Englishman - I had known of course that an Englishman was living with my brother. This Englishman told me in his letter that he would meet me at Allahabad station as he was officially visiting a hospital there. At Allahabad, one had to change trains for Faizabad. This strange letter also had a small snap-shot of a knock-kneed camel and at the back of which it was said - "for recognition purposes"! 'Here is an interesting person', I thought to myself. The day came for my journey and the date to meet the 'knock-kneed' camel.

I arrived at Allahabad station, after three days of hot-dusty journey in the third class compartment of the Grand Trunk Express as far as Jhansi, and then on some local train to Allahabad. I had no difficulty in recognising the knock-kneed camel. There he was, thin as a rake in khaki shorts and an aertex T-shirt. He welcomed me, and made me feel as though I had known him ail my life. I had a bath and change of clothes in the ladies' waiting room. Our train to Faizabad was not till five a.m. and we had a few hours to wait. So we sat on one of the few benches on the platform. All of a sudden, we heard a call from the ladies waiting room - "Is there a lady doctor? - and if so to please come to the ladies' waiting room'." In those days there were no loudspeakers - messages went by human chains. I rushed to the waiting room and there was a lady in labour and a lot of other women were gathered around her wringing their hands and shouting. I went in and helped deliver a live healthy baby, but then there was the question of separating the placenta and I needed a clean blade or something to cut off the cord. I went out and asked my knock-kneed friend if he had a blade or scissors or something, which I could borrow. He provided me with a pair of nail scissors, I went back and separated the baby - but then the question arose as to what was to be done with the mother and the baby. She and her husband were travelling alone from Bombay and had no friends around. We decided that it is better to remove her to the nearest hospital until he could get more help from his people at home. So we found a *tonga*, and took the mother, child and the husband and got them admitted in a hospital. The connecting train was only in the morning. It was probably a full moon night - my knock-kneed friend suggested going to the *Sangam* and spending the rest of the night, watching the stars. I don't remember what we talked about, but time went quickly. We collected our luggage from the 'locker' and got into the Faizabad train at 4:50 a.m.

Our breakfast, at some funny station called Pratapganj, is still vivid in my mind. My friend went out and brought me an earthen vessel with some tea. The vessel smelt of pure mud and tasted about the same. Nevertheless, it was accepted with goodwill and delight, but it was not easy to gulp down. Along with it were two pun's and potatoes wrapped up in some leaves stitched together with thorns. That was our breakfast. The train duly arrived at some remote, godforsaken station and he told me that this was the place to get off. I must say, I had my doubts about it. It was a place called Bharat Kund and from there it was a few miles to Faizabad where the hospital was. A 'short-cut' he said - (later I was to experience several such 'short-cuts' on our journey through the Himalayas) - however, it was a very beautiful drive, on the Tonga passing the famous Bharat Kund, which was just covered with beautiful red lotus flowers. We stopped the *tonga* and this 'knock-kneed' friend got out into the water, and picked out large red lotuses and presented them to me, which I accepted with great delight!

## Chapter 10

### We are one in Spirit

I was relieved to finally reach my brother's place, easily got into hospital chores and Laurie's experience as a paramedical worker in the London hospitals and Weymouth at the beginning of the war, and his later experience with the F.A.U. in China made him an excellent nursing assistant! Laurie and Mr. Lal, the compounder, assisted me with my brother's operation, which fortunately went off well.



During the post-operation convalescing period, I went on with the hospital work. I saw the outpatients during the morning. Patients came in large numbers, with all sorts of ghastly sores and deformities. I had seen leprosy patients in my student days at Vellore when we went for the wayside clinics. There I had seen some deformities and ulcers - and I used to do the dressings and give the injections. The treatment for leprosy in those days, was injecting thick Chaulmoogra or hydnocarpus oil into their buttocks, a horrible enough thing for the giver, and I don't know how much more the recipient suffered. Most of them had lost the sensation of pain and touch. So I hope it was not too horrible for them.

In Faizabad, I had my first real experience of 'living' with leprosy. There were at least a hundred patients living in the hospital on the same campus. Some of them had no noses - there was only an open cavity in its place. Some of them had either the foot or the hand missing, with only stumps covered with open ulcers. Ulcers with maggots crawling over them was a common sight. The smell was simply unimaginable. This was before the antibiotic era, and ulcers had to be washed and cleaned with Dettol or Lysol and dressed with thick pads of cotton wool, so that the stench was reduced. I spent most of my forenoons seeing the outpatients. The compounder helped with the dressing. But I did most of the difficult ones.

Laurie was working in the city of Faizabad with the missionaries belonging to the Leprosy Mission. He invariably came back from his office in the afternoon (he cycled all the way to and from Faizabad -at least ten miles each way). He joined me at the hospital and helped with the dressings and minor operations - amputating necrosed hands and feet.

Thus the month went by very quickly. My brother recovered from his operation and the day had come for my departure after a month's 'holiday'. On the last day, Laurie took me for a walk. We sat on a jagged rock. He took my hand and asked - "Will you marry me?" There was no hesitation from my part because; from the beginning of our acquaintance I was quite sure that we had to be together. It seemed to me the most normal thing to do.

The same evening, we approached my brother. He was simply furious. It was a most unexpected reaction from him. He and I always got on well together. I admired him a lot and he too understood me better than the others in my family including my parents and sisters. This was a great blow to him and to us. Laurie was his best friend and they got on well together. They both had similar ideas about life, possessions, and service to others, and were trying to follow Jesus' teaching in a practical way. But this marriage proposal was too much for him. His sister being married to a 'sahib' - a 'white man' - "impossible!" He said "I can accept you as my brother, but not as my brother-in-law!!"

Laurie had similar reactions from his father, who considered anyone who is not British a 'heathen' So how could he have a 'native' -a 'black' as his daughter-in-law! We decided not to do anything in a hurry. However, we both believed that we were meant for each other and that we must spend the rest of our lives together.

## Chapter 11

### The Waiting Period

The waiting period of two years was full of 'thorns and thistles' but it also had its roses. The daily letters, which I received at the end of a long tiring morning in the hospital, was always a source of great bliss. We shared the problems and achievements of our daily work -exchanged ideas about our views on life and religion, and ambitions and disappointments, and thus were able to know each other better than we would have otherwise done.

The few occasions we managed to meet and spend together were also somewhat unconstitutional! Karimnagar Hospital, where I was working, was about forty or so miles away from the nearest railway station near Warangal. Meanwhile, my few missionary friends were aware of our escapades. They were not too hostile. I usually met Laurie at Kazipet, the Junction, and travelled the forty odd miles by car or bus. The missionary couples in Karimnagar were willing to let Laurie stay with them (mainly to avoid a scandal and bad name for them)!

Those were wonderful days. He met all my friends in Karimnagar, and they all approved. As Secretary and Architect for the Mission to Lepers, he had a lot of travelling to do, but he always managed to pass by Kazipet, and thus Karimnagar, on his travels. He always travelled with the same old rucksack, khaki shorts and T-shirt. Sometime during this time of waiting, he transferred his residence from Faizabad to the Vellore Medical College premises, where he was asked to help in acquiring land and plan a new leprosy hospital, now known as the Karigiri Leprosy Hospital. He was at that time living with the principal of the hospital - in the 'Big Bungalow' as it was called in my day. But he wanted to experiment again and so he built for himself a shed with an *Ola* (coconut leaf thatch) roof and a sand covered floor. As far as I remember, it had a little enclosed space where there was a bed for me and a little corner, which was the prayer room (he was deeply religious in those days). He asked a friend also for the weekend - to 'chaperone' me. It was a beautiful place, opening out onto a lovely tamarind tree. His friend Selvanayagam and his family were next to our hut. I think we had all our meals with the Selvanayagam family. I did not really think there was anything so terrible about this arrangement. But the next day we went to see the Medical College where there were still quite a few of my old professors. They were furious and asked me why I had stayed in the hut with Laurie - an unmarried man. Anyway, that visit was not a great success as it created so much confusion in the minds of the old missionaries, who considered Laurie an exceptionally talented person and a 'saint'.

Meanwhile we went on with our work in our own way, I, at Karimnagar and Medak, and Laurie at Vellore, and wandering all over India, as the architect and secretary to the Mission to Lepers. Our respective relatives began to 'thaw', and I at last mentioned it to my mother, who, others thought, would die of 'heart failure' at such a suggestion. She, however, was the most understanding and sympathetic of all. "If you think this is the right thing - go ahead - I have no objection," she said, and so the big hurdle was over. Laurie's father also gave the O.K. My brother Dr. Chandy, finally gave his approval, though with reservation. My younger brother Pothachan (P.J. Philip) remained a firm objector for a few years more. My sister Annamma was a great support. She and her husband K.V.Chcrian helped us by offering hospitality, when we needed it. They were very generous and understanding. Meanwhile, Laurie went back to England for a few months. At that time, he was suffering from an irregular fever, which couldn't be diagnosed and there was a pale, depigmented patch on his right leg. He had spent nearly

three years in a remote village in China, in close contact with the lepers, in very poor surroundings. He was running this fever on and off ever since he returned from China and even before. So this time, while he was in England, he was advised to go to the London Hospital for Tropical Diseases. They said he probably has contracted Hansen's Disease. By this time, there had been revolutionary changes in the treatment of this disease. The old Chaulmoogra oil was replaced with Dapsone, a sulpha drug. The treatment was still a very long process and the success was still uncertain. One day, as usual I collected my mail at the end of the morning's work - and as usual I went to my room to read. It was an ordinary letter, but as I read on, it read, "I went to the Tropical Disease Hospital in London - they said I was probably suffering from leprosy and will have to start Dapsone Treatment" He did not ask me if I still considered marrying him, but just laid the facts clear on the paper. I just did not know how to react. Isn't it foolish to go and marry someone with this disease? If I did, I may not have any friends or relatives to support me. I could not go and talk about it to any of my friends or relations. This is how I argued with myself- I am a doctor- I can treat him. If he had to be admitted to a hospital, I could easily get a job in a leprosy hospital and treat him and be with him. Nobody else can do this. So I wrote back immediately and shared my thoughts. There was no more mention about the subject. When I came back from England, we got married. I did not think the disease was anything serious. It may have been just the result of the three years of poor food in China. The patch and the irregular fever disappeared in course of time.

## Chapter 12

### The Wedding

The wedding should have taken place at the Medak Cathedral, with all my friends and colleagues. Everything was arranged including a big Hyderabad! feast. As I said before, Laurie had gone to England to say 'goodbye' to his family and friends and to get their blessings. But it was a couple of days before the landing of his boat *S.S.Mooltan* that the Great Razakar movement and the Indo-Hyderabad war started. I fortunately had gone home for the weekend and to get the final okay from all, and was able to send an SOS to the boat to say -"Don't go to Hyderabad"! Instead we met at Madras, where my sister Annamma and her husband stayed. They were my staunch supporters and confidantes from the very beginning.

Thus, it was how we happened to get married at Pallavaram, Madras, by Cannon Clarke of the C.S.I. Church. The wedding was attended by only eighteen people!! My mother was one of them. And she did not die of heart failure - but lived for many more years -making our future visits to Kerala happy. This was on Thursday, August 26, 1948.

## Chapter 13

### The March into the Unknown

From the church, after saying goodbye to *Ammachi* (mother) and others who came from Kerala to attend the wedding, we started our journey into the unknown. After the two years of doubts and criticism and 'friendly' advice from the dear ones, we were at last free - and nobody could separate us now. We boarded the third class compartment of

the Grand Trunk Express for Delhi. Our destination was Chandag in the Western Himalayas - via Delhi.

Why Chandag of all places? At Chandag there was one of the Mission to Lepers Colonies where there was an English doctor Miss Kate Young. Laurie had been there previously when he was Assistant Secretary to the Mission to Lepers. It was high up in the Himalayan foothills - about seven thousand feet above sea level and it had wonderful views of the Great Himalayan Peaks. So we decided to 'honeymoon' there at Chandag, so that Dr. Young could go to the plains for a well-earned holiday. Laurie, of course was quite delighted with the idea. He loved the Himalayas and Chandag and the beautiful breathtaking views of the snow-clad mountains. This is why we aimed at this unknown place Chandag after our marriage.

The train journey from Madras to Delhi was a bit of a nightmare of five days and five nights in a crowded train, with riots going on in the Nizam's State of Hyderabad. The train took several unplanned deviations from the route, sometimes waiting for hours at some remote station for further signals. It was good to be out of the train after the five days of detouring all over India.

In Delhi, we went to the 'Friends House' or the Quaker Centre, where we were received with much love and kindness. There I met people like Gladys Owen, Agnes McLean, and Horace Alexander. All of them were 'Friends' (Quakers), who have worked with or known Bapuji personally. It was good to be out of The train and to be with friendly people for a couple of days.

Chandag was just a name to me-and I had no idea what it would be like in the Himalayas. My only idea about 'hills' was the tea, coffee estates of Vandiperiyar, Kerala in South India, where I had gone previously to visit my cousins, who owned coffee and cardamom estates. We tried to locate the place on the maps. But there was not even a mention of such a place in the atlas. Laurie had copied the local maps of our route to Chandag from maps available at the Public Library in Birmingham. He tried to explain to me the route we would take, but it just remained as black lines on the paper. I had absolutely no idea of the terrain, or the height or the depth, which we had to cover. I knew there would be no roads and the paths would be rough, and it would be cold as we were going to a height of nearly seven thousand feet. The only thing to do was to 'trust and believe'.

Chandag is a tiny village, about five miles from Pithoragarh and fifty miles from Almora, in the Kumaon hills of the Himalayas. The nearest bus station was Almora, and the nearest railway, at Tanakpur in the Terai area of Philibit Section. Tanakpur is hundred miles away and there were no proper roads; so we decided to go via Almora. From Almora, the walk was only fifty miles.

From Delhi, we went by train to Bareilly where we changed to a small single line railway, to a tiny place called Kathgodam, which is at the foothills of the Himalayas. From Kathgodam, we took a bus to Almora. There I had my first glimpse of the Himalayas. The road was well made, but winding with many hairpin bends. Sometimes ascending, sometimes descending, crossing small streams, but it was very exhilarating to feel the cold air on the face and take in the breathtaking views of the Himalayan range - mountain after mountain. At Almora, Dr. Manohar Massih and his wife received us. They were at the leprosy hospital at Almora. Here in Almora, we began to enjoy the love and

hospitality of the hill tribes. We stayed with the Massihs for a couple of days walking everywhere as there were no local means of transport. It was a good beginning and an experience for me.

Laurie had brought with him two rucksacks; a small, very light Boy Scout's tent (6ft x 4ft), weighing only a few pounds (we had no kilograms, only pounds in those days), a spirit stove, a pot to boil water and another to cook in. Also, two very light down feather sleeping bags. After a most delightful lunch with the parson, Dhansingh Chowdari, we were on the 'road' again. Laurie put the big rucksack on his shoulders and the small one on mine, my first experience of carrying rucksacks. Dhansingh Chowdari gave me a walking stick and we said "goodbye'."

Suddenly my eyes filled with tears! But I don't think anyone saw it. There, we were, on our way to the new world, new friends, and destination - unknown.

The roads, if one could call them that, were only narrow paths, used by mules and runners, it was rough and narrow, sometimes crossing over boulders, sometimes crossing small streams. We rarely met another human being. Sometimes at crossroads, there was a small 'teashop' where we met 'fellow human beings' - the road was deserted most of the time. We walked and walked. The unaccustomed weight began to rub the skin off my shoulders. The road was up and down, sometimes climbing to the top of hills, then coming down to cross a stream. At last, at dusk, we came to a lovely stream with a beautiful level grassy bank, solitary and no human being anywhere in sight. There we decided to pitch our tent for the night. The fear of night howlers like bears and leopards was lurking in my mind, but I was tired and was happy to stop. It was a relief to take the load off my shoulders, and have a refreshing bath in the stream. The Massihs had packed some '*parottas*' (a kind of Indian bread) and curried rabbit for us, which we enjoyed. We had some coffee powder and milk powder with us, which we thought would be useful for the journey, I made my first cup of coffee. I wanted it to be really good, but it was too strong and kept us both awake all night even though there were no bears or leopards to disturb us.

In the morning, after more *parottas* and more coffee we set out on our journey again. We walked in the mornings when it was cool and spent the hot midday at some beautiful spot, usually near streams. There were Villages with four or five houses and a teashop at crossroads, where we could get delicious hot sweet tea. We always aimed to reach one of these teashops in the evening. The people were very friendly and hospitable. They made *chapattis* and a *sabzi*, a vegetable dish for us (usually potatoes or aubergines/brinjals). They were tasty, and we enjoyed them after the day's walk. We did not have to pitch our tents any more. The locals gave us food and shelter. Usually, a wooden bench or some planks formed our bed. We had our sleeping bags, so we were comfortable and slept well, ready for the next day's journey. The sleeping bags were wonderful things - very soft and cosy when you got into it except when you had to get out of it in the middle of the night. We could fold one to almost the size of a Bible, but it weighed even less. Thus we went on our journey; it took us eight days to cover the fifty miles. Sometimes we used the *Dak Bungalows*. These bungalows were wonderful legacies left by the British Raj. They were usually situated near the top of a mountain, with beautiful views all around. The bungalows had comfortable rooms, with real beds, and a fireplace. When we reached a Dak Bungalow, we usually went out, gathered dry sticks and pine cones and

made a lovely fire, it was wonderful to sit near the fire, and warm ourselves, and rest our weary legs. These bungalows also had a *chowkidar* to tend to them and look after the weary travellers. He cooked food for us and made tea, and told us tales about the history of the place and the people who used to occupy the bungalows etc. We often found wonderful old reading material - old copies of 'Readers Digest' or copies of 'Punch' dating back to the late nineteenth century. It is difficult to believe now, that these bungalows only cost us two rupees for the night!

The other interesting and memorable event on this journey was the day we spent with the Grundy's. They were an Anglo-Ceylonese family, settled down in a place called Berinag. They had a small tea estate and a tea factory. Berinag tea always remained a very special tea to us, until we left the Himalayas. Here, we also met several other Anglo-Ceylonese and Anglo-Indian families. Among them we met Grace, a grand daughter of Matthew Arnold, whose son was a tutor to some royal family in one of the many states of pre-independence India. It was a very interesting community, some of them were very gifted, and we were to have more contacts with this group, in our later life at Chandag. We stayed with them for a day, enjoying a somewhat 'civilized life; eating good food, and being able to talk in a language we were familiar with. Miss Grundy, an elderly spinster was a good cook. She gave me valuable advice about life in the Himalayas, what to cook, how to cook and so on.

## Chapter 14

### Life in the Himalayas

At the end of eight days we reached Chandag, our destination. Normally people take five days and some, three days. Though I was tired and weary at the end of each day, I enjoyed the journey and I look back with nostalgia to those days of simple food and simple living. All the people we met on the road were extremely welcoming. Wherever we stopped, they brought us milk or lovely thick curd to refresh us. I have never felt such kindness and hospitality anywhere in the plains. The hill people were wonderful people, full of laughter, kind and hospitable. We were a strange combination - a 'Madrasi' and an 'Englishman'. Yet, they made us feel quite at home.

At Chandag, Kate Young and her staff welcomed us. We had a room to ourselves. Good food, which I did not have to cook, was provided at the right time. Table and chairs, plates, spoons, forks and knives seemed like luxuries after our austere journey. The view from Chandag was absolutely fantastic. We were on the top of the world with hills and valleys and pine forests, wherever we looked. There were many small villages, which were scattered, in very small groups, around the horizon. No buses or cars, no loudspeakers, no crowds. Chandag village had only four or five houses, which, actually was the village market place for the many tiny villages scattered around. The small leprosy hospital and the 'homes' were scattered on a strip of their own land at least a mile long.

We could see for miles around - nearly six hundred miles from east to west. From some points, we could see a whole range of the snow-clad mountains of the Himalayas - Laurie knew the names of all these peaks, and he pointed them out to me. To me they were all just names - Nanda Devi, Nandakot, Panchchuli, Trisul etc., etc In my limited

knowledge of the Himalayas, they were all 'Himalayas'. Whole mountainsides were covered with pine and *deodar* trees. There were the occasional oak and rhododendron trees. In fact, the whole place was very different from anything I had ever seen. Kate Young's bungalow was a bit 'missionary-like' with a number of servants and they had a lovely garden with a lot of flowers, most of which were unknown to me.

Kate introduced us to the place and the people. We went around the 'homes'. An interesting thing was that the men and women lived in homes separated by at least half a mile! They only came together on Sundays for the church service.

On the second day of our arrival at Chandag, a baby, born only a few hours before, was brought to the hospital. The baby was born without the anal opening, known to the medical world as an 'imperforated anus' which meant that the baby could not pass any motion. There was a skin covering the anal opening. Kate was not willing to admit the baby - partly because, hers was a hospital only for leprosy patients, and not for others. She said she didn't have enough facilities for such an operation. But, the nearest hospital with surgical facilities was at Bareilly, which was a hundred miles away, with no ready means of transport. The baby was sure to die before it reached the hospital. So, I begged Kate to allow me to do the operation, with what little facilities we had. She very reluctantly agreed. Laurie and I set to work. Fortunately for me, it was a very simple operation. I only had to open the skin covering the anus and large quantities of black, faecal material flowed out! I left the passage open with suitable appliances, and the baby was able to perform the excretory functions without any trouble. So, that was the beginning of our medical and surgical work in this Himalayan region, for the next decade and a half.

## Chapter 15

### The Hospital

The month of locum that I did while Kate went away to the plains went very fast, but meanwhile people in the neighbouring villages heard about 'this young new doctor'. The news about the success of my first operation spread like wildfire. People began to come in large numbers for treatment. But I had had strict orders from Kate, not to treat anyone other than leprosy patients in the hospital.

We had no medicine, no hospital and no money. By this time, we had about two and a half *annas* left in our purse! We had to buy medicine, rent a place to live and work in, and we had to eat. By this time, we had made several local friends, one, a local shopkeeper selling rice and *dhal* etc., who was extremely kind. His name was Jeetsingh. Then, there was another gentleman, a Brahmin, Hira Balleb Patni who was also very kind and understanding. They, and several others from the village of Chandag and from the small town of Pithoragarh, begged us to stay on. They were willing to do everything for us; find us a place to use as a 'hospital' and a place to live in. Their cry was "Please don't go away," and so we stayed on. They gave us a part of a 'teashop' with two tiny rooms - one for us to live in, and another, for us to see and treat patients. We borrowed some medicines and some instruments for simple operations from Kate. Thus we started our first hospital.

The nearest village was about two and a half miles away, and had only a few houses. Pithoragarh, a small town, was five miles away from the top of our hill. We could see tiny villages, dotted along the slopes of the hills. I don't know how they knew about us. There were no newspapers, no radio and no T.V. but the news about this new *Madrasi* doctor and her *Angrezi* husband, spread like wildfire. Patients began to flow in, in large numbers; we had to get more medicines and more instruments. But how? There were no medical shops; Almora was a fifty mile walk away and Bareilly another hundred miles further away to the plains.

Thus our hospital started in a small 'teashop' consisting of two tiny rooms. But patients began to come continuously from morning till evening. Some walking, some were carried by men in baskets, or on what is called a *dandie*, which was carried by a relay of men, each one carrying only a few miles and then handing over his burden to another man, all over rugged paths, sometimes ascending to heights hundreds of feet up and then descending, often down to rivers and streams which had to be crossed. Sometimes they had to cross passes between the tops of big mountains. It was a wonderful experience, though sometimes exasperating, when they came, very often at the late stages of the disease, too late for medical help, they had to be sent away disappointed. It was not our simple medicine, but because of their own will power to live or some divine blessing on the patients and the doctor, most of them went away happy, and helped. I saw patients from morning till evening, some of them stayed in some nearby shops or with some kind neighbours. I could not tell them to come again next day, because they had come from very far off places, some almost inaccessible!

## Chapter 16

### Life in Chandag

All letters came by 'runners', who literally ran from Almora. It was a wonderful system, much more efficient than our airmail or other modern 'improvements'. Each man ran only eight miles each, and then the sack of letters and parcels was handed over to another man, who did the same eight mile run to the next man. Thus letters from Almora reached us within two days, whereas it took ordinary people five or six days to walk.

Another problem arose. We had to get all our medicines and equipments by post. But how? We had no money! When I was working as the Medical Superintendent of the Mission Hospital in Karimnagar, I used to get all our medicines and surgical equipment from a firm in Bombay. So I wrote to them, explaining the situation. I told them that everything should be packed in small parcels, suitable for being carried on the back of mules or sheep! They did that and agreed to have the payments later.

Some of the patients needed to be kept under observation for further investigation and diagnosis. Our good friend Hira Balleb Patni came to our rescue. His uncle had an unused house, some three miles away, in a small village called Chera. This house had three rooms built on two levels. The lower one was called the goat. The name has no connection to the animal but it just meant in the local *Pahari* dialect that it was the lower room and was usually used for the animals (cows and buffalos). This was mainly to keep the domestic animals safe from wild animals like leopards and cheetahs at night. This arrangement also made the upper room comparatively warm. The floor, between the



upper and lower rooms, was made of split wood and mud, and was covered by a good plastering of cow dung! Believe It or not, the floor always looked very beautiful with the 'leaping' (plastering) by expert hands, a mixture of cow dung and *lal mitti* - a red earth. The walls were whitewashed with white *mini* or white earth. They told us whereto get the red and white *mitti* and we set to work on this house, in our spare time. I cannot say that I particularly enjoyed removing the many layers of cow dung cakes from the walls and floor of the goof. All this had to be done by hand; I still remember my first venture in applying this cow dung-mitti mixture on the floor. It was really repulsive but I tried not to show it and I eventually became quite an expert at it.

We saw the outpatients at Chandag, in the original two-roomed teashop and we brought all the people who needed hospitalisation to our new hospital at Chera. We also changed our home from Chandag hospital to Chera, and occupied one of the rooms upstairs in the 'hospital'. Even though it was small, and we only had one room for us to live out of, it was adequate for us, because we had no furniture other than our sleeping bags and a few cooking vessels. We also acquired a *'thali'* (a brass plate) and a brass *gilas* (glass) each. I think we also had a couple of spoons. It was a very happy and satisfying existence. We worked all day, walked the two or three miles to and from the hospital, cooked *chapattis* and *sabzi* and crept into our sleeping bags, exhausted at night!

There was no electricity and no lighting. Kerosene oil was very scarce, as all these commodities had to be brought by pack animals. We had a couple of lanterns, which were a great luxury. Most of the villagers used little *diyās*. A *diya* is just a small mud saucer with oil and wicks in it. Actually, we didn't miss the electricity and lighting very much because we got up with the sun and went to bed with the sun.

All the people around were very kind and helpful. They brought us all kinds of things: vegetables, fruits, *atta*, rice, ghee and such things that were essential for our living. The number of patients increased steadily. They began to come from very long distances. Some of them who came from Nepal had walked or had been carried for eight days before reaching us. Our place was only fifteen miles from the border of west Nepal, which was at that time a most neglected and 'forbidden' area. There were no roads or other facilities; all transport was by foot or on mules only.

Gradually, we got somewhat organised. We made many friends in the villages around and at the small town of Pithoragarh. Pithoragarh in those days was not the district headquarters, but only a Sub-division of Almora District. It had a small government hospital, but no doctor. There were a few shops selling just essential foods and daily articles like rope, sickles, nails etc.

Whenever we wanted a little 'change' and refreshment, we walked the five or six miles each way to Pithoragarh. Among our local friends there was Jeetsingh, the shopkeeper, Hira Balleb Patni, the Brahmin gentleman who spoke English and who helped us to find the house, and Khadir Bux the venerable old Muslim chief and his son Hyder Bux who had a big orchard of apricots, peaches and apples. I cannot think of any disappointments or unkindness from anybody. They just accepted us, Laurie was their *Dado* (brother) and I was their *Behanji* (sister).

In all these days of adventure, Laurie was the most thoughtful, loving, resourceful, understanding, adventurous husband anyone could ever desire or hope for. We both had difficulty with the language. He knew a bit of Hindi from his Faizabad days and I knew

some Urdu from my Hyderabad days. But the people talked a dialect of their own known as *Pahari*. We managed. I just don't know how. But manage we did!

By this time, the war with Hyderabad State and the Nizam was over, and things were back to normal. We were able to contact my old bank and make use of whatever money there was in the bank. Meanwhile, a few of Laurie's friends who were with him in China, with the F.A.U. came to know about our adventure. They decided to form themselves into a society and collected money to help us financially. Thus the Laurie Baker Society or the L.B.S. was formed. They were people who were genuinely interested in our work. They helped us not only financially, but still remain our genuine friends throughout. Their financial and moral support throughout our life in Pithoragarh was very much appreciated. With their support, we were able to expand more, and managed to get more equipments and medicines.

The range and extent of our field was enormous - E.N.T. to gynaecology, general surgery to orthopaedics. It was just a big challenge.

Most of our patients came from very far, with great hopes in the new doctor. I could not disappoint them. My vast experience in the rural hospital of the old Nizam's Hyderabad State helped me. I attribute my success only to the intense faith in me by my clients and the healing power of the Almighty.

Laurie's experience in China - with the F.A.U., where he helped the surgical team, with giving anaesthesia and doing the various postoperative treatments, was the greatest asset. When someone asked him, what he, as an architect, did in the hospital, his answer was invariably this - "She is the Doctor and I am the rest of the Staff" -which was literally true. He cleaned, he gave anaesthesia and he nursed. The work was hard, but we were happy and the gratitude of the patients was enough reward for all our hard work.

## Chapter 17

### Building with a Feel for People

During this time, our landlord allowed us to build a small house for us to live in, on his land. It was wide enough for a bed - six ft. long and about four ft. wide. On one side of the bed was a window - the same length as the bed. On the outer side was a two-piece horizontal door, which we could open by day, and it became part of the wall. By night when it was shut, we were secure! Next to the bed was a small built-in table and two stools. This formed our dining and work-table. Adjacent to the table was the cooking place. We cooked entirely on wood charcoal. So there was no smoke and no black soot on the pots. Later, we added to this house, a bathing space and a storeroom and a bed for a guest. Our small room in the cowshed house could now be used for patients. But there were too many patients. They were all over the courtyard and in adjacent houses. There was just no respite from morning till evening. Sometimes at night also we had to be with the patients! We were desperate for more space and more facilities.

It was not possible to get anyone from the 'civilized' world to help us because we had nothing to offer them - no money, no accommodation, no comforts, only work and more work. By this time, we had a couple of local people to help us with the cleaning, sweeping and washing etc.

We looked at several possible sites where we could build. Even though the whole of the Himalayas was before us it was not possible to buy land. Land belonged to composite families. Any one person of a family was not allowed to sell the land. They lived on what they could produce on the land. There was no money available. They grew their rice, wheat, *ragi*, *jwar*, potatoes and onions and *dhal* of various kinds at the right season and stored them in huge baskets, which were made airtight by coating them with cow dung. Onions were strung on strings and tied like festoons and hung in the warm part of the house, where the cooking was done. All the houses were double storied. The cattle - cows and buffalos - were downstairs. The upstairs rooms, served as kitchen, bedroom and storeroom etc. The whole family - mother, father and all the male members and their wives and children were under the same roof, but separated by walls. The girls were married off as soon as they came of age. So they were not a problem for the common living. If any member of the family wanted to sell any property, they had to have the consent from all the brothers and sometimes from the cousins and other distant family members. We used to go and look for possible spots where we could build -but always, it turned out - 'not available' - because it had so many family claimants. We didn't want to go away very far, because we had already established ourselves in this small village of Chandag. It was no use getting some land, where it was absolutely unreachable and where there was no water. So we just went on, doing what we could, for those who came from far distances.

One day, the headman of another village nearby, came and requested us to help his wife who was having a baby. They asked for help only when there was some serious difficulty; otherwise the locals did not need any help during childbirth. Childbirth was taken as a normal occurrence. When a lady goes into labour, she is transferred to a part of the house where she is isolated. She is 'unclean' for the next eight days. She delivers the child and cuts the cord with a stone. When the placenta comes, she takes care of it and when the deed is over, she collects all the dirty linen and washes herself and the clothes and comes back to her delivery corner, which is usually separated from the rest of the room by a border of cow dung (a *Lakshman Rekha!*), At the end of the eighth day, she bathes and washes and smears cow dung on the floor and sprinkles cow's urine over everything. Only then she is accepted back into the family.

This gentleman who had called us was Digar Singh, and he was also a friend of ours. We used to meet him at Jeetsingh's shop in the evenings. Jeetsingh's shop was a favourite meeting place for all the locals, in the evenings. On our way back from the delivery, Digar Singh accompanied us. It was early morning; the sun was just about to emerge over the snow peaks.

Just adjacent to Digar Singh's property was a hilltop of rocks; there was nothing green. We sat on one of the rocks. The sun was just emerging and lighting up the whole horizon of snow peaks. As we watched the tips of the mountain tops began to glow - a pink hue, first the top of Nanda Devi, then Nandakot, then the Panchchulis. The Panchchulis are a most spectacular range of five pyramidal peaks. From this spot where we were sitting, we could view about six hundred kilometers of mountain range. It was a marvellous sight! Digar Singh was apparently getting impatient to go on. He asked, "Do you like this place?" To us, it seemed to be one of the most beautiful spots that God ever created. Digar said, "So would you like to have just this top? It has no water and nothing will grow on it. If you like, you can have it." On our part, there was no hesitation. The

whole hilltop was transferred into our name within a few days for just a nominal price. Water was from a spring at the foot of the hill, it was always there, pure and uncontaminated. Labour was cheap, and there was no scarcity of labourers. In fact, it was one way of giving work for a few more people.

Laurie was elated. At last, there was some building to do! He could do his own job of planning and building, and evolving his own methods of building. It was his first experience of building with entirely local materials, local stones, local mud, local layout, local slates for the roofing etc. in India. It was his real beginning in cost reduction building according to the need, avoiding imitation, but, at the same time, something attractive to look at, avoiding anything superfluous and unnecessary, avoiding any waste of space or materials, but at the same time building beautiful structures; all the time taking care to make the best of the natural beauty of the place.

We had the panoramic view of the snow-clad mountains on the one side, and the beautiful hills and valleys, on the other sides. The only luxury item that we got from the plains was glass for the windows. With such a view that nature offered, we could not afford to build windowless rooms. So we always indulged in big glass windows. The first building that we put up had a big waiting room for patients, where they could be comfortable when they waited and not exposed to the cold icy wind from the Himalayas. Then there was the doctor's consulting room, a room where we could concoct and dispense medicines, a small room for minor operations and maternity cases and finally, a room for us, with a tiny kitchen, a bathroom and W.C. combined. So, at last we were living in luxury!

Gradually, we added more and more rooms - 'wards' for the patients. These were really single rooms, each with a fireplace and chimney, so there was a place to cook and keep them warm and a bed for the patient. The floor was earth-covered and plastered with a mixture of red earth and cow dung. The walls were whitewashed with white earth, dug out from a certain quarry nearby. Cow dung is sacred to the locals; and cow's urine is used for purification. I have no scientific proof for its efficacy but I can say that none of my operations or delivery cases ever went septic. I attribute this, not so much to the cow dung or cow's urine but to the fact that the people in the hills had wonderful resistance; and the only 'professional' personnel who touched the patients were Laurie and I. So they had no 'foreign' or outside infection or bacilli to cope with. They already had resistance to their own breed of bacilli.

We expanded more and more. During certain seasons, we had as many as fifty inpatients at a time. Our clientele included all - Brahmins, Rajputs or Thakurs, and the 'low castes' carpenters, masons, coolies and sweepers. They all had their own castes and customs. But when they came to the hospital, there was no caste mentioned. People also came from Nepal, the other side of the Kali River. On the Tibetan border further away, there lived another special tribe called Bhotias. They were like Tibetans in appearance. They were the border tribe who lived on the fringe of Tibet.

## Chapter 18

### The Bhotias

The Bhotias were the traders - the real link between India and Tibet. They had their own special features, their own identity, their own customs and religion. They were friendly, hospitable, and full of fun and laughter. They made their own clothes with the wool taken from their sheep, cured and dyed and spun by themselves. They dyed their wool in all hues of colours; bright red, yellow, black, and green were the predominant colours. They prepared dyes from local herbs and earth. They were very hardworking people, but always happy. Bhotias were the most generous people I have ever known. They had actually three homes. One at the foot of the high peaks was a place called Jaljibi, near the river Kali. From October to January or February, they camped at Jaljibi, and the men went down to the plains, to sell what they had brought from Tibet. They travelled to various towns at the foothills and the plains of India. There they bartered their commodities for fancy articles like tea, sugar, clothes, hats and articles, which were not available in Tibet, in exchange, they gave India, rock salt, borax, varieties of semi-precious stones, wool, carpets, etc. This kind of friendly trade had been going on between the Bhotias, the Tibetans and the Indians for thousands of years until alas!, in 1961 the border was closed. There were security posts and guards at all the passes. None of Indian origin was allowed to enter Tibet, which China claimed was part of China. Thus the age-long trade between Tibet and India by these 'middle men', the Bhotias, came to an end. Some of them have gone to Tibetan China and others remained in India and integrated with the Indian hill people.

As we are on the subjects of Bhotias, I think it is appropriate to narrate our adventurous journey with the Bhotias, to the Tibetan Border, near the Milam Glacier, about thirteen thousand feet above sea level.

As I said before, we were very fascinated by the Bhotias. We had many friends among them. So we decided to make the journey with them and go to this border town of Milam. We managed to discharge all the patients, and by not admitting any new ones for some time, we managed to make ourselves free for the journey. We packed a basket (called a *Tokri*) with all kinds of medicines (tablets only), a few surgical instruments and some food. We hoped to make use of the local teashops on the way, for food. Footwear was one of the many problems regarding my personal attire. We had to wear thick wool stockings. Ordinary open shoes or sandals were not very practical for rough terrain over rocks, glaciers etc. In the end I decided to wear canvas shoes with thick woollen stockings. I decided to stick to my *sarees*. I tried the North Indian *Salwar Kameez*, but found it very inconvenient and not at all comfortable. So I decided to stick to the usual saree. Laurie's mother had sent us both, something called 'combinations'. These are thick woollen undergarments, top and bottom all in one piece. They had suitable 'trap doors' at the appropriate places, for nature's calls. I also wore a long-sleeved pullover; I did not go in for any headgear. I decided that my own thick hair was ample protection. We had two coolies to carry our *tokris*. Laurie carried his rucksack with our personal belongings and our sleeping bags and tents.

After several days of walking, we reached the foot of the very high mountain. I don't remember much about the first part of the journey, until we got to a place called Thai. Thai was on the other side of the river Gori Ganga, one of the many tributaries of the Ganges. The Gori Ganga came straight from the Milam glacier and the water was icy cold. It had a very strong downward current, which was rather frightening, it was not very deep, only up to the waist, but I must say I was somewhat nervous. What if I

suddenly got a cramp in my leg! Laurie appeared brave, and tried to encourage me with one of his silly untimely jokes, which did not actually encourage me! Seeing my predicament and hesitation, one of the localmen came and offered to hold my hand. The water was chilly and the current was very strong. I held on to this stranger and we safely crossed over to the other side. There, fortunately was one of those Dak Bungalows, where we spent a day, drying our clothes, warming our hands and legs, and preparing for the next step.

Our next stop was at a place called Mungsiari, eight or nine thousand feet above sea level. Our local coolies decided that they had had enough and they were not willing to go any further (I don't blame them either). At Thai, we got hold of a real hill tribe coolie, very sturdy, and willing to climb and carry. We transferred all the goods into his *tokri* and after a good rest at Thai, we started on our real journey!

We mainly followed the Bhotias, who were travelling with their whole families, their sheep and bulldogs to ward off any wild animals. We did not meet any wild animals, though we were told that we might run into a bear or a cheetah. Mungsiari, the Bhotias' second home, was where they had proper houses and fields of wheat, oats and maize. They kept sheep; they had their looms and all other requirements. Milam was another two days from Mungsiari. All old people, handicapped and 'expecting' women were left there. Only the strong and able were allowed to go to Milam. The Bhotia traders had their third home at Milam. There, they waited till the representative from Tibet came to the pass and gave the welcome call for them to enter Tibet for trading purposes. All the able-bodied men, with their pack animals carrying the trade materials, entered into Tibet. There they remained for a few weeks, selling and buying from them, commodities like rock salt, borax, precious stones etc. to take back to sell in India.

About our journey from Mungsiari to Milam, I remember two incidents clearly. Laurie carried our tent and rucksacks, and the *coolie* carried the basket of medicines. At one place between Mungsiari and Milam, we had to go over a tributary of the Gori Ganga, which was absolutely frozen and very steep. One false step was sure to land us straight into the white frothy, rapids of the Gori Ganga. I was clad in my saree, not particularly suitable for such an adventure. I decided to pick and pin my saree and skirt up to my waist, and crawl on my hands and legs like a four-legged animal. I, of course had mother's 'combinations' underneath so I was alright. Anyway, somehow, I managed to cross the river. Finally we reached the much talked of Milam - thirteen thousand feet above sea level with ice and snow all around and at the foot of the great Milam glacier.

We tried to pitch our thin Boy Scout tent and settle down, when some of the Bhotias saw us. They offered us a little house, just one room, an *angetti* and charcoal, where we could cook and keep warm. They were very friendly and generous. Everyday, they brought us a huge chunk of lovely mutton and big chunks of frozen ghee etc. Milam was quite a big village, with at least five hundred to thousand people.

Their houses were interesting. They were built strongly, with stones. They had wooden doors with beautiful carvings.

These houses had no permanent roofs. They covered rooms between the stonewalls, with the skins of animals stitched together, placed over wooden rafters. Among the Bhotias, there was no segregation of sexes. They all worked, sang, danced and played together. They were a very happy, fun-loving people, quite different from the area where

we lived, where the women were confined to the kitchen, unless they were out gathering fuel from the forests, or looking after their cattle. We treated the Bhotias for their minor ailments and advised others to come to Chandag, when they came down to the lower terrain for their summer camps. We were with them for about a fortnight and made many good friends.

## Chapter 19 Mitranikethan

Our work at Chandag went on increasing. We expanded with more and more space for operating, and a bigger, proper house and a few rooms for guest accommodation. By this time, the roads had improved. The road from Tanakpur to Pithoragarh was constructed. It was just an earth road, prone to frequent landslides. It was very narrow. Overtaking was virtually impossible and traffic was only a one-way affair. Buses from Pithoragarh started at six a.m., in a convoy of ten or twelve. Similarly buses from Tanakpur in the plains started at six a.m. These buses met midway at a place called Champavat. Buses from Pithoragarh, reached Tanakpur at six p.m. and similarly the buses from Tanakpur reached Pithoragarh at six p.m. Thus we had a twelve-hour bus journey instead of the five-day walk we had to undertake previously. Bareilly was the nearest town of any importance, with trains running between Tanakpur and Bareilly, so we were no longer isolated. This also meant that we had more guests. We were getting more and more 'civilized'!

We wanted a name for our house; we asked our local friends, what we should call our house. They suggested *Mitranikethan* - 'the abode of friends! And we did try to live up to the name. A number of my missionary friends from Hyderabad came for their summer holidays. We had a number of Laurie's F.A.U. friends visit us. We also made friends with a lot of people from Pithoragarh, our nearest town. Among them there were the S.D.O., the *matdar* (the local moneylender who owned most of Pithoragarh), a couple of lawyers - Joshi and Chilkoti, the forest ranger and a few others. We were no longer a strange unknown couple.

Quakers and other friends from Delhi and Lucknow visited and stayed with us for short and long holidays. Meanwhile, work steadily increased. During this time, a couple of friends from England decided to join us - Bertha Mills, a retired school teacher and Gladys Hague, a retired medical doctor. They were both members of the Society of Friends.

I am afraid, the medical doctor Gladys found it impossible to adjust to our strange ways. She was meticulous. She wanted to start 'surgery' as she called our clinic at eight a.m. sharp. That was impossible in a place like Chandag. The patients came when it was possible for them. Their day started with the sun and ended with the sun. I don't think many people had heard of a clock! She found it difficult to cope with abnormal deliveries. She wanted to 'consult' -but there was no one to consult! On the whole, she found us very irresponsive and casual. She couldn't cope with the food either, so she left soon. Bertha Mills, on the other hand, was excellent. She had no previous experience of medical work, but she was willing to do anything. She cleaned, she concocted some of the 'mixtures', she did the dressings, and helped with the cooking. She had no preconceived ideas, so she fitted in perfectly well.

Laurie was able to go to the plains occasionally, now that travelling had become less difficult and less time consuming. One of his major worksites was in Lucknow - the Psychiatric Centre at Nur Manzil. This centre was the first of its kind in North India. Laurie built a very unique and beautiful building, around, and incorporating an old unused Muslim tomb. He also built houses for the staff. All these buildings were of unplastered brick walls and were admired by all. This was followed by the beautiful boat shaped church in Allahabad. The 'Literacy Village' in Lucknow is a story by itself.

## Chapter 20

### The Literacy Village

One day, there was a telegram from Lucknow; it said, "please come to Lucknow to plan the Literacy Village, signed, Welthy Fisher"! Promptly, the reply went. "Not a hope - signed - Wealthy Baker." It was followed by another telegram which said "If you cannot come, I will come to you" again "Welthy Fisher" Welthy, apparently was a common American name. Welthy, at that time was in her late eighties, a remarkable woman. She was the widow of an American Methodist Bishop. She had done a great deal for adult literacy in India. In fact she was the first to start the "Teach one, each one" movement in adult education in India. She is the founder of the Literacy Centre in Lucknow. Unfortunately this remarkable woman was also lame; she couldn't bend one of her knees. We, of course, didn't know that when Laurie sent her the naughty telegram. The journey from Lucknow was not very easy for her. The road connecting Tanakpur and Pithoragarh was not completed. There was no bridge at a place called 'Ghat' - which is over the Gori Ganga. She came as far as Ghat and found her car could not go any further. All other passengers walked over a tiny wooden bridge to get across. But she could not walk and she could not get onto a pony, because of her lame knee. The hill people are a very resourceful lot. They saw her predicament and got hold of one of the mules used for carrying sacks of potatoes. They lifted her, and put her on the back of the mule like a sack of potatoes and they reached the other side of the river!

There, fortunately, was a bus, ready to start for Pithoragarh. Pithoragarh was another five miles from Chandag and our hospital. There was no motorable road. Fortunately, we knew about her possible arrival, and so had arranged to meet her with a 'Dondie'. That was the beginning of the Literacy House in Lucknow. It is now a flourishing center. The little prayer house Laurie built there has been featured on one of the Indian stamps in 1980 as a tribute to Welthy.

## Chapter 21

### The Journey to Nepal

Our visit to Nepal, in the year 1950, was a very memorable incident from our life in the Himalayas. West Nepal was practically cut off from main Nepal by the formidably high Himalayas. There was practically no communication between main Nepal, particularly Kathmandu, the capital and west Nepal. The minor princes mainly ruled this part of Nepal. Baitadi is the main town of western Nepal. A number of people from this part of Nepal used to come to our hospital at Chandag. Some of them included the families of the Rajas. They used to beg us to visit Baitadi and treat some of their family



members who couldn't make the journey to India. This was a period when no foreigners were allowed to enter Nepal. The punishment was either imprisonment or death. So we discouraged them and told them that we couldn't oblige them, unless we had written permission from the Raja of Nepal, or whoever is responsible for granting the permit. One morning, a deputation of Nepalese came with some kind of a written document, inviting us to Baitadi. Unfortunately, we did not study the paper carefully or consult our local government authorities. We believed them and took that piece of paper as an official document. They also brought horses for us to ride on!

We made arrangements for our journey. A selection of people came to take us. Horses and carriers were waiting on the other side of the river Kali Ganga. The Kali Ganga is the boundary barrier between India and Western Nepal. We packed enough drugs and other necessary equipment and set out on this wild journey. The first hurdle was the swift ferocious river Kali, which flowed between India and Nepal. There was a homemade coir-rope swinging bridge, connecting the two countries. Any minute without warning, the rope could be cut off, and thus stop all communications between the two countries. It was the most precarious contraption. Above was the blue sky, and below and on every side you looked, was the ferocious Ganga river, with the firm determination to take anything she can take, on her way to meet mother Ganga at Varanasi. I was quite terrified, to put it very mildly, but Laurie pretended to be very brave, and tried to encourage me. I just held on to the ropes on both sides without looking either to the left or the right, and walked on the flimsy pieces of split-wood tied together, which formed the actual bridge. There were pieces missing, every now and then. Anyway, we reached the other side somehow, and we were in Nepal. Some Nepalese gentlemen were waiting there with horses for us to ride on. But as neither of us was familiar with horses let alone riding on top of them, we decided to use our legs, of which, we were most sure.

Baitadi, the village we were aiming for, was about fifteen miles from the border. There were no proper roads, only well-used tracks over ridges and valleys. We were gaily walking along, when we were suddenly stopped. Everybody became very quiet. They talked in their dialect, which we did not understand. They led us to a tiny hut made of stonewalls and stone roof, with a very small opening for a door. We went in and they shut us in with no explanation, except to say, not to make any noise. After an hour or so, they came and opened the door, and we were allowed to come out and continue with the journey.

Eventually, by dusk we reached Baitadi and were taken to a very beautiful old house, belonging to one of the princes. We were fed on all sorts of Nepalese delicacies, sent from the Raja's palace. There was only one snag. Laurie was asked not to leave the palace and roam about. We discovered in course of time, that the written document they brought was from the local Raja, and not from the ruling Raja of Kathmandu. The local Princes or Rajas as they call themselves were only princely landlords, who owned most of the land in west Nepal. Anyway, we had a wonderful week there, working from dawn to dusk, seeing hundreds of patients, and then feasting on Nepalese delicacies at night. I must say, even though it was an interesting episode, we were quite relieved when we got back over to the other side of the river, and put our feet on Indian soil again!

## To Kerala

So life went on in the remote village of Chandag from 1948-1963. There was always a feeling of being a part of a big family. We were *bhais* and *behans*. We went to their houses for their festivals, and they came to ours. There was only one Muslim family in our neighbourhood. He was Khadir Bux or Khadir bhai as he was called. He was a venerable old man, who wore a fez hat and *shervani* and loose white pyjamas. How well we remember the Bakri-id feast we shared with him and his family every year.

Vidya, was a new addition to our family in 1954. This did make a big change in our lives as we had the little one to attend to. Vidya's presence gave us great happiness and a sense of fulfilment. Life seemed more complete. I spent my spare time doing things for the little one, and creating small garments was one of my greatest delights. Laurie also played his part and shared the extra work. He made all kinds of little toys for the little one. But the work in the hospital kept increasing too, and Vidya was always with us. While travelling she was always on Laurie's shoulders.

Laurie's sister Edna also finally decided to make a trip to India in 1961 after her husband died. So she and Laurie's mother, who was 83 came to spend a vacation with us. The road to Pithoragarh from the plains was still *kutch* and Mother had to be carried in a *dandie*. Edna and I had become good friends and it was she who had sent me a couple of 'Good Housekeeping' books from which I learnt English cooking. So I was very pleased to host her and Mother for their vacation. Mother was delighted with the place and to be 'with her favourite son'. She loved the country, the flowers and the chirping of the birds. She enjoyed the scenic beauty of the mountains. When it was time for them to depart, Mother decided she was going to stay on, and Edna had to return without her! Mother fitted in really well although she continued to be very British in her food habits. But by then, I was quite accustomed to cooking English food and so it was no burden. She was absolutely 'devoted' to Laurie, and he to her. Her vacation turned out to be the ten last years of her life with us, a time we still cherish. That same year, Tilak was born. He was an adorable child loved by all. 'Grannie' had a special love for him. We left him with her in his cradle when we went to the hospital. She couldn't walk much because of her lame leg, but her chair was next to his cradle and she rocked him when he cried. She had a magic touch with him.

In the years between 1948 and 1963, which we call the Himalayan era, Laurie's architectural work was mainly involved in establishing a hospital and local schools. He followed Gandhiji's advice and dictum, that a building is for the people, and that it should be built with only materials that are locally available. A building should take special note of the prevailing climatic conditions and it should meet the needs of the people using the building. It was of course absolutely imperative for us to follow this dictum. Only local materials were available. Cement and steel were commodities that were only available in the plains. The nearest motorable road was a hundred miles away, so anything like cement and steel had to be carried either by men, ponies or sheep. So Laurie naturally learned to use locally available materials. He used stones dug out by locals for the walls. The stones were cemented together with special clay like mud, which was also available on the spot. Pine and deodar wood were grown locally and there were very clever carpenters, who could make beautiful doors and windows using very simple indigenous implements. The carpenters, masons and the coolies worked together, each

complementing the other. Laurie worked with them, not as a *sahib* but he was always the *dada* (brother). Language was a problem for Laurie, but that did not deter him from getting the job done.

In the sixties, things began to change very suddenly. Our small town of Pithoragarh with only about three thousand inhabitants became a very important place - the district headquarters. The district extended in the west to Nepal and in the north to Tibet. The wild and ferocious Kali Ganga river was the barrier between India and Tibet, and thus from India and China. Darchula, only a few miles from us, was the natural pass between India and Tibet.

One of the many things that the Indian government did after independence was to develop these border districts in a big way. Roads were constructed connecting us with the plains. Bridges were built, where there were none. Communications became easy and quick. Schools, colleges and hospitals were coming up everywhere. More and more young people went down to the plains, and they brought back more money. Our old shops which sold only wheat, rice, a few chillies and salt began to be filled with all sorts of fancy goods. More people came from the plains and established themselves in the area. The simple, honest, happy people who lived in peace as one family were infected with the dreadful disease of greed and avarice of money.

*The "Hindi-Chini, bhai-bhai"* (India and China are brothers) slogan was also changing. There were already disputes about the boundary between India and China. Clouds of discontent began to form over the peaceful land of Pithoragarh. Helicopters and small planes had started to fly over us. The army had made their headquarters at Dharchula, only a few kilometres from Pithoragarh. There were army trucks going up and down the newly built road. The sight and noise of landing helicopters and small planes in the playground of the nearby school was a frequent source of entertainment for the locals and especially the school children.

By this time in 1963, we had been in the district for fifteen years. Our family had grown. Laurie's mother, aged 84, was living with us for some time. Vidya, our eldest daughter was nine, and our son, Tilak was two. They needed proper schooling. The hospital had grown from the one-room teashop with a few borrowed bottles of medicines, to a hospital for at least thirty patients and their helpers. The operation theatre, though fairly primitive, was still sufficiently equipped to do essential surgical and obstetric operations. Our district was suddenly becoming 'modern'. The Government was also establishing hospitals, schools and colleges in the district.

Considering all these different changes, we decided that it was time for us to leave the Himalayas and our wonderful friends, and look for a new place to live and work. For some reason or the other, the medical need of a community was the priority in our thinking in those days. Architecture had been pushed into the background. Architectural work was only considered if Laurie was especially interested in the person or project. Apart from our house, hospital and schools, Laurie had helped design and build other's houses. He built the delightful ashram at Kareli, the Nur Manzil Psychiatric Centre, the Literacy Village in Lucknow, and the beautiful boat-shaped chapel in Allahabad. The alterations to the Uttar Pradesh State Museum were well received and appreciated by the U.P government, and was inaugurated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

Now our thoughts moved towards the south and Kerala. Kerala, mainly because it is my homeland. We knew that Kerala, in general, had the best medical care and facilities in the whole of India. But we were thinking of the extremely neglected tribal people in the south. As it had happened before, there was always a 'guiding hand', which led our lives throughout, and that guiding hand was again with us, and brought us to where we are now.

One day it so happened, that Laurie was visiting my home in Kerala. He decided to go with my brother to his cardamom estate at Vandiperiyar, near Thekkady, the famous wild game reserve in Kerala. When they had got half way up the hill, they found that the bus operators had decided to go on strike. There were no buses going either way. My brother decided to walk or hitchhike to his coffee estate. But Laurie thought about another nearby place in the hills, where a Belgian monk had started a Christian ashram, like a Hindu *matt*. Another French monk, Swami Abhishiktananda who had also taken to the Hindu monastic approach, used to be a frequent visitor at our home in Chandag. He was a delightful person and he used to talk very highly about this other monk, who remained Christian, but followed the Hindu, or rather, Indian way of monasticism. On enquiry, Laurie found that this ashram was only about twenty miles from where they were stranded. He decided to walk the twenty miles to visit the ashram. My brother went on his way to his estate.

Laurie reached the ashram finally at the end of the day. He was welcomed by the Acharya, Father Francis, and his other companion, a monk from England, Father Dom Bede Griffith. Father Bede Griffith was also a very learned and enlightened man. Laurie spent a couple of days with them. He discovered that it was a very neglected part of Kerala. There were no motorable roads from the plains. It was occupied mainly by the socially neglected tribals, and by the poor, displaced families from the plains. The ashram had acquired several acres of grassland. They had also imported jersey bulls for cross breeding, to increase the local cattle's milk yield. There were a considerable number of small villages scattered around, but they had very little income. They were very poor. The Government of Kerala was constructing a road to connect them with the more productive and prosperous villages in the plains. When Laurie told the monks about our work in the Himalayas and our desire to come south, they implored him to come to the district, and start our work there. Nowhere nearby were there any hospitals or any form of proper medical care for these people.

The ashram was called the *Kurisumala Ashram*. A nearby mountain top was called *Kurusimala*, 'the mount of cross because the apostle St. Thomas is supposed to have visited and lived there in the first century A.D. Father Francis Acharya and his companion, Father Bede Griffith, requested Laurie to bring his family and start some medical work, as it was so much needed. They were willing to extend all possible help.

Laurie duly came back to Chandag. We discussed the matter, but Laurie had already made up his mind about the place. He was quite sold on the idea of shifting from the Himalayas and starting life again in Kerala. There were big problems of disposing of the property, and the many buildings we had built on it and packing up all the hospital equipments and shifting the entire family from the very north of India to the very south of the Indian peninsula. The age of the family varied from two to eighty six years.

Property, money and possessions are only very secondary in Laurie's world. He has never wrangled over money or property or fees. So, disposing of the property was very easy. He unfortunately decided to give the property to the first bidder, who was a wily army officer. Laurie, unfortunately (or may be fortunately), believes the word of everybody. He always thinks the other person is as honest as he is, but it is not so in this wicked world! This army officer offered a ridiculously small amount, which Laurie in his innocence agreed upon. But when the actual deed was drawn up, and the documents were signed, the gentleman declared that he only had a part of the amount handy, but would sign a promissory note and pay the rest later. That was the end of the so-called 'transaction'.

We managed to pack all our hospital equipments, including an X-ray unit, and all our earthly possessions onto two trucks and sent them to the nearest railway station (down in the plains], to be booked on the train to my home in Kerala. Fifteen years before, we went to the Himalayas with our two rucksacks, and now we were returning with two truck loads of medical equipments, two children and old mother, who adjusted herself to all the changes.

## Chapter 23 In Vagamon, Kerala

It was a complete change for the family, from the Himalayas, on the border of Nepal, seven thousand feet above sea level, to the very southernmost tip of India, Kerala. The climate was different, the food was different, the people were different, the language was different, the culture was different - in fact it was a truly completely different new world, altogether for the family (except for me). I too had to adjust myself to the new surroundings. I had left Kerala at the age of fourteen, for higher studies and except for the few holidays I spent at home i had not lived in Kerala since then. The language was not a major problem as most people in Kerala are educated, and could understand and talk in English and Hindi. Learning a new language has never been one of Laurie's accomplishments - in fact he never made much of an attempt to learn.

We temporarily settled down in Kottayam, with my family, with all our bags and baggage. Laurie's mother aged eighty-six and our two children aged nine and two, must have had a terrible time getting adjusted from the extreme cold of the Himalayas to the wet, humid, hot climate of Kerala! But, they all survived the change. Laurie's mother took it all in her stride and never complained even once.

Vagamon was a very small village of about two hundred people and is the nearest place of any significance to the ashram. It is an important place however, because it is the trading centre for all the hundreds of coolies working in the many tea estates, scattered all around the area. These estates were then all owned and manned by English sahibs, but were being replaced slowly by Indians. Vagamon was the nearest and the easiest link with the more advanced and economically developing trading centres like Palai and Kottayam. A motorable road down from the hills to the plains was being constructed, and was nearing completion when we arrived in this area.

Vagamon had a post office and a telegraph office, but telegrams came by runners from the main post office at Elappara, fifteen miles away. There were already rough dirt roads

connecting all the various tea estates, and thus it was possible to reach Vagamom, by road, if one hired a jeep, or shared a jeep (usually with at least twenty other passengers!).

From my home down in the plains, Laurie and I visited the ashram and the surrounding villages several times. We liked the place, and decided to make it our future home. The Ashram helped us to find and rent an old unused tea factory and its premises for our temporary stay. We moved into our 'tea factory home' at the end of 1963. It didn't take long for the people to find out about the new doctor in the area. They started coming for medical help immediately after we settled into our temporary tea-factory house. Side by side, we started our hunt for a piece of land, suitable for our future hospital and home. The Ashram friends helped us in our hunt and we found a most delightful and enviable piece of land next to the ashram. It had a running stream, with clear water, running from one end of the land to the other. The owners were willing to part with it for a reasonable price and thus we acquired a most delightful and most enviable piece of land, with the most magnificent of views in all directions. The new road connecting Vagamom with the plains was very easily accessible. The ashram had already made a road to connect the ashram with the road and of course we also could use their link lane.

Here was Laurie's chance to build again in entirely different surroundings, and entirely different climatic conditions, and for entirely different clientele.

Just as it was in the Himalayas, the news about a medical doctor, arriving in the district, spread like wildfire. Before we could look around and settle down, parents began to arrive in large numbers, from the neighbouring villages and the tea estates, and quite a number from the many scattered villages along the new road connecting us to more developed towns like Palai and Kottayam. Our tea-factory house was not adequate enough to see the many patients who kept coming every day from dawn till night. We had procured the new land, but there was nothing but big boulders and thick tall grass growing on it. To wait till we built a *pucca* hospital was not practical. We had to do something to meet the immediate needs. Laurie now had an opportunity to use his talents and capacity to innovate something practical, quick and economical.

We discovered that all the *adivasi*, or the tribal huts were made of grass and bamboo only, both of which were easily available locally. The *adivasis* and the local people were ready to help us with their skill and know-how. Very soon, Laurie built our first dispensary near the existing Ashram road, which was easily accessible from the new government road. He also built a few huts, where we could keep patients who needed more than just outpatient treatment. The Ashram friends lent us a few beds and other necessary furniture for immediate use. This is the beginning of the present Mitranikethan Hospital. I am presently writing this after thirty-eight years, from the guest room of the hospital. The hospital is still running as an institution for the poor and needy. They attend to more than five hundred maternity cases a year, and have a daily average attendance of at least a hundred patients.

We started first with huts for the patients, later we built a more elaborate hut for ourselves (but it was of the same bamboo and thatch construction). It had two bedrooms - one for Laurie's mother, and one for the family, a dining room, and a living room, and a separate kitchen. The bathroom and lavatories were in real Gandhian style, outside. We also had a couple of guest rooms, which were always in use, mainly by the lady guests of

the Ashram. Both Father Francis and Father Bede were very learned, and highly sought after by a lot of people, especially people from overseas, like England, France and Belgium. As a very strict ashram, ladies were not allowed in after six p.m. So ladies visiting them usually stayed with us. In this way, we met some very interesting and important people.

There is an amusing story, connected with one of our guests, the wife of the Swiss Ambassador to India. The Swiss Ambassador and his wife were in our district in connection with the work of the Indo-Swiss project, which they were starting in the area, not far from where we had settled. The Ambassador and his wife arrived by car to the Ashram. They spent all afternoon and evening, talking with and listening to the monks. They had not intended to spend the night at the Ashram, but the Ambassador was so involved and interested with the conversation he was having with the two monks, that he didn't realise it was already too late to return to Kottayam, where there was a proper Rest House. Our new road was not yet suitable for travelling by night so they decided to spend the night at the Ashram. Also, the Ambassador wanted to spend more time to see the ashram life, which included night prayer sessions. We invited them and the two monks for the evening meal. During the meal, we unfortunately talked about the wild animals and reptiles, which also inhabited our local jungle. During the meal, we realised that Madame (the Ambassador's wife) was not allowed to spend the night at this very strict male monastery. So we offered to look after Madame for the night. I prepared her bed and made it as comfortable as I could. After supper I took her to her hut, and explained everything, including how to put out a hurricane lamp. Unfortunately Madame was a chain smoker. She went on smoking for some time, and then the time came for her to get into bed. But she suddenly realised that she had forgotten how to put the lamp out. She was also worried about the cigarette butts she had dropped on the floor. She kept on worrying about these, and so couldn't go to sleep. Then suddenly, she heard a loud snorting sound just behind her head outside the hut.

Hearing her loud scream, we jumped up from our bed and I ran to her hut. She was in a real state of panic. She was sure that there was a wild animal trying to get into her hut. We discovered later what the funny snorting noise was. There were two piglets, which arrived the previous evening, and were put in a temporary pit enclosure just outside her hut. These piglets were probably having a little late night fun. As the poor lady was really in quite a hysterical state, I had to spend the rest of the night with her. She left early at dawn with no intentions to return ever again'

## Chapter 24

### Building for Kerala

As I have already said, we were extremely fortunate to have acquired the most coveted piece of property in the whole of Kerala. There were around twenty-six acres of it on either side of a small stream, which had ample fresh water from various springs along its course throughout the year. Being in the valley, we escaped the very strong winds. The whole area was devoid of trees as a result of many years of uncontrolled tree felling. Many tea estates scattered around used only wood as their fuel for their factories. So it wasn't surprising that there were not many trees left in that area. On both sides of the stream there were clusters of a variety of bamboo, which was excellent for building.

The grass available was a long coarse lemon grass used usually as a thatching for roofs and walls. This tall grass growing everywhere was excellent fuel for the wildfires that we had every year. It also provided good shelter for all kinds of reptiles. Cobras and vipers were very common sights. One morning, to our surprise we saw a python enjoying itself in our garden. Wild pigs and jackals were common, but they didn't give us much trouble until we started growing vegetables and keeping hens. Porcupines were our nocturnal visitors; they always left behind their calling-card - their quills to let us know they had been our guests. Actually the wild creatures that I dreaded most were leeches. With the first bit of rain, they arrived in thousands. They were all over the grass. They are hardly visible, their bites are painless, and you are hardly aware of their presence on your legs. After a walk in the garden or in the field you came home with legs covered with blood. The bleeding continues for a long time. These creatures bite you and they inject a kind of anti-coagulant into your blood, so the blood doesn't clot and the bleeding goes on. Meanwhile, the leeches drink your blood, get engorged and finally roll off when they are sufficiently full. The victim is not aware of the bite until he or she gets home and finds a trail of blood following him/her or an engorged leech inside the socks or shoes. After the bite, the wound goes on bleeding for a limited time, but the itching goes on for days.

Bandicoots were like huge rats, almost as big as rabbits. They were another pest we had to deal with in our early days in Vagamon. There is one funny incident that happened when we lived in our hut. In our various huts that we occupied, Laurie had not bothered much about the floor. The ground was levelled off and made more or less even and smooth. We had borrowed a few essential pieces of furniture like beds, tables, and a few chairs from the ashram. One early morning, as usual, Laurie got up to make the bed-tea, but he fell over a mound of fresh soil in the corridor to the kitchen. Mother, who was in her late eighties also called out from her bed and said, 'Laurie please come, there is something going on under my bed. To our surprise and amusement, we discovered that the bandicoot had been very busy during the night and had dug up so much soil that the heap of mud it made was high enough to make mother's bed balance on top of it! However, we enjoyed our hut-life. (And so did Mother).

The more polished, but more selfish and assertive people from the plains, were replacing the *Uralis* - the tribals who had been occupying this part of the land, between the plains and the high mountains. These simple, honest, hardworking tribal people, who had owned the land for centuries, were easily persuaded to part with their land for a bottle of intoxicating drink, or some cheap, glittering, imitation jewellery.

When we were first in the area, there were still a few tribal families living there. We found them a very loving and ingenious people. They had their own trades. They were experts in creating lovely grass huts, using only the local grass and bamboo. They made their own string, rope and needles out of local materials to tie and make the grass walls and the thatch on the roof. These huts were very cool, wind and rain resistant, and quite comfortable. Before we could build our new proper home and hospital, Laurie made our huts like theirs, but with a few improvements like adequate windows for ventilation, and a good open sitting room, from where we could get the best view of the hills and the valleys.

The *Uralis* were also experts in catching bandicoots, which were becoming quite a big problem for us. So we sought their help. One of them came with a big sack and a short



stout stick. We don't know what or how he did it, but within half an hour, he went back with half a dozen bandicoots in his sack.

Life in Vagamon, in the foothills of the Western Ghats, was very different from the life in the Himalayas. The climate was different, the people were very different, and the language was also very different. Around Vagamon, the people were in many ways, more knowledgeable and civilized. The language was very different from the hill language that we had got used to in the north. Language was no problem for me. Malayalam, which is a Dravidian language, has not got much in common with Hindi, which Laurie tried to speak in the north. Kerala, being one of the better-educated regions of India, a good many people can understand and talk in English. So he soon gave up trying to learn Malayalam. His ability to draw always helped him. He always carried a pack of cards and a pencil. That was one of his essential pieces of equipment; he was quite lost without his cards and pencil as he could make himself understood quite a lot from the little sketches that he made on these bits of waste cards.

Laurie had to re-learn a lot and make a lot of changes in his architectural style. In the Himalayas, the mercury sometimes went down below freezing point and he had to cut out the wind and cold drafts. Here in Kerala, we wanted all the fresh air and breeze that was available. In Kerala, lime and cement and *surki*, (a fine red powdered by-product of the tile industry) were all freely available. Very good wood - teak, rosewood or jack was also easy to get. The road connecting Vagamon to the small towns at the foothill was completed after our first year or two and thus transportation of these materials was also easy. Very fine bricks were also available down in the plains. Carpenters and masons were good, and they knew their job well. Kerala is very famous for the old temples and houses, where we find very beautiful carvings. So, building in Kerala was very different from what he had to do in the Himalayas. Unfortunately though, many of the fine skills like wood carving were dying out.

By March or April, the small streams were nearly dry. So conservation and collection of water was one of our first priorities. A dam across the small stream was the first thing to do. Laurie built quite a big dam across the stream before the water left our boundary. It retained water to a depth of eighteen feet and gave us quite a beautiful natural lake just below the area where we planned to have the house.

The next immediate need was a *pucca* house for us to live in, and a hospital with facilities for outpatients and inpatients and also an operating room where minor surgery could be done. Anybody who needed major surgery could be sent down to the plains, where there were already many such facilities.

Any building in that area had to cope with the very heavy monsoon from June till November and, the strong east winds from December to February. As there were no big trees in the district, there was nothing to block the wind; sometimes, whole roofs of local cottages and huts were lifted off and blown away! Here too, Laurie had to re-learn a lot to cope with the terrific wind and the very heavy monsoon.

Our house in Vagamon was a bit like a Swiss chalet. It was a double-storeyed house with the roof coming down very low. The whole of the eastern end had one big fixed glass window. The house had six bedrooms, one big living-cum-dining room and a small room in the centre with only one door, and a small window. We also had a lovely

fireplace where, on very cold and wet nights, we could sit around a fire. It was also necessary to keep all our books in this inner room, to protect them from the damp air.

It was a lovely house - very spacious, comfortable and very beautiful, with a beautiful view of the hills on one side, and the big dam and lake on the other. The hospital also was built more or less in the local style, but with double walls on the western side to avoid dampness from the heavy rains.

Life was good in Vagamon. The medical work steadily progressed, our clientele, ranging from the illiterate tea pickers and *adivasis*, to the more educated people from the plains, the officers and other specialist workers from the tea estates and the neighbouring Indo-Swiss Project. We were able to add to our staff of medical workers.

Build,ng tor Kerala

This freed Laurie to get on with our much needed buildings and to build for others too.

Wherever we could, we planted trees of many varieties and they grew quickly. Many learned and famous people, not only from our neighbourhood, but also from other parts of Kerala and outside, visited the ashram. We often gave hospitality for all those 'dignitaries'. One of our good and frequent visitors was Mar Athanasios, the Bishop of Thiruvalla. Whenever he visited the Ashram, which was frequent, he visited us, and Laurie and he used to have long conversations. The Bishop was at that time thinking of building a Cathedral at Thiruvalla. He did not want a cathedral in the usual Roman or Byzantine style. They used to discuss this, and Laurie suggested and drew various plans and styles. At last they both agreed on a circular plan, like the Kerala temples. The future cathedral in Thiruvalla actually started taking shape in Vagamon. Later, Laurie drew up detailed plans for the cathedral, which the Bishop took to Rome for the approval of the Vatican and the Pope. The Pope apparently, was quite pleased with the plan, and gave his approval and blessing, and even sent a medal for Laurie.

## Chapter 25

### The Structure and Fabric of Life in Kerala

Whenever possible, Laurie visited the old Kerala temples and the old *Tharavads* (traditional family) houses. He was very impressed by the simple beauty and effectiveness of these old buildings, their structural stability, the practical utility, the cost effective values, and above all, their natural blending with the surroundings. Nothing was imported or foreign. People sold these old Kerala buildings even in spite of Gandhiji's advice that a building should only use materials available in the neighbourhood. But Kerala, at this period was going through a very unfortunate stage of imitating the West in every way it could. Many people went from Kerala to the Gulf countries and America, and came back with large amounts of money. The 'new rich' culture invaded the whole state. Anything old and *Keralian* was scorned and destroyed. Pure concrete structures with flat concrete roofs became the fashion. Nobody seemed to consider whether these were effective, or suitable for the Kerala climate and the Kerala way of living. A lot of old tiled roof houses were pulled down to be replaced by flat concrete roofs. People, especially those who came back from the western countries with money, discarded their old ancestral homes and built modern concrete flats. Also, people like changes and always want to be in the front line of 'fashion' and 'progress'. The concrete succeeded,

and the tiled roofs became old fashioned and outmoded. Fortunately, Laurie has found many good uses for these old discarded items and uses them in most of his work.

During the same period, the Indo-Swiss Project came to Kerala and they started their cattle farm very near our hospital. We made several Swiss friends and Laurie was interacting with their architects and engineers. Laurie also helped them with ideas and plans for their headquarters at Mattupetty in the Munnar high ranges.

This period in our lives, between 1963 and 1968, was very productive. The hospital work expanded. The X-ray unit, which we installed, was a great asset. We were able to bring in many young educated girls to help us with the care of the patients. A couple of friends from England and New Zealand, who were trained nurses, came to help us with the work. They also helped in training our young enthusiastic volunteers, in general nursing and postoperative care.

Laurie was able to spend more time in planning and building. His main contribution to architecture, outside Vagamon during this period, was mainly in the Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. There, he built a Christian place of worship in the pure Dravidian style. The main hall, opened on to a water tank with floating water lilies. He also did part of the theological seminary for the Church of South India and a college affiliated to the Madurai University supported by the Catholic Church.

The Ashram and our house Mitraniketan became a very popular place where friends from the plains could come for weekends and holidays. We made many friends from all sections of society, and enjoyed having them. They found peace and relaxation in our home and that was what most people with work in the busy centres in the main stream of commerce and industry needed.

Our third child Heidi was born in 1967. She was a very delicate child, premature and tiny. She needed great care and attention, but at this time of our life we had more people to help us. One of them was Mariamma, our most faithful friend and 'daughter' who still shares all our joys and sorrows. With Mariamma's help and dedicated service, little Heidi gained strength and vitality. She is one of our greatest treasures.

At the end of 1968 we had been in the place for nearly five years. Laurie's mother was nearly ninety, Tilak, our son was six, and had yet to start formal education. He was however, not ready to go to a boarding school. Vidya was already in a boarding school and was doing well. Heidi, our youngest, was only two. Mother also could do with a change; she had been with us for six years and she did not want to go back to England.

Yet again, the right thing happened at the right time for the Bakers. We had heard about a new school, which a friend was running not far from Trivandrum. It was a boarding school where children lived like a family, taking part in the running of the school and the boarding section. They were taught carpentry, weaving and agriculture along with academic work. It seemed to us to be a very good place for Tilak and so we decided to take a break and join this community for six months, until Tilak had adjusted to this way of life. By being in Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala, we thought it would also give us access to good libraries and music. Meanwhile, we had also come across a few friends who were members of a lay order called *Auxilliaire Feminine Internationale (A.F.I.)* They were from Italy and Germany and had just finished their work helping to establish a new hospital in Central Kerala. They, a trained nurse called Alina Cattani, an

Italian and Dr. Hildegard Sina, a German, wanted to remain in India for a further period, and were looking for suitable places where they could be useful. When they heard about our plans, they were willing to give us all assistance. They promised to look after our hospital for six months or longer, if we so desired. Everything worked out well, and we decided to take the break -and thus we came to Trivandrum, at the beginning of 1969. Again, a most unexpected move - but it proved to be a good one.

## Chapter 26

### Laurie's Architectural Life in Kerala

The institution where Tilak had joined, which by the way was also called *Mitraniketan*, had no accommodation to offer for our family for five or six months. So, in true Baker fashion, we decided to build a small house on their land, and we transported or borrowed the necessary furniture and necessities. Laurie went there first, and started to build for us to live in. The building was in the shape of a doughnut, open to the sky in the middle. This was to give us privacy without cutting out fresh air. There were separate bedrooms for the family, a kitchen, a storeroom and a guest room (because wherever we went, we had guests!). Materials like bricks, cement, and sand were easily available, and the local carpenters and masons were very quick in understanding Laurie's ideas. The whole house with a thatched roof of coconut leaves was completed within two weeks. That made the small house, very cool and comfortable. Thus at the end of May 1969, we left Vagamon and our beautiful house and hospital there, and settled down near Trivandrum. We thought at that time that it was only for six months, but now in 2007 we are still here in Trivandrum city (though not at Mitraniketan)!

A warm welcome awaited us, from the Mitraniketan community. We soon settled down in our new house and the new community and friends. The house built with burnt bricks and lime and cement bonding duly cost Rs. 2,500/-. This was also the time when Sri. Achutha Menon was the Chief Minister of Kerala, and Sri. M.N. Govindan Nair was the Minister of Housing and Rural Development. There were also in Trivandrum, a few dynamic personalities like the most Rev. Benedict Mar Gregorios, the Archbishop of Trivandrum. They were genuinely interested in the common people and were concerned about the many homeless people in Kerala. The Archbishop was a dynamic and practical man. He didn't wait for any protocol and within a few days of our arriving and settling in our new house, he arrived at our house, and wanted to see for himself, the "wonder house" and the "wonderful architect" who constructed it. He went around the house with a critical, but approving eye. He could not believe that a house of that size and facilities could be made at such a low cost. He had been trying to get engineers and builders to construct for the poor, but none could think of constructing anything for less than Rs.4,000/-and that too, without a kitchen or toilet facilities. The Bishop, as I said before, was a very practical man. He challenged Laurie to build a house for Rs.2,500/-, showing him a piece of land right near his official residence. Laurie took the challenge and produced the required building, which did include a kitchen and toilet facility! This was the beginning of Laurie's architectural life in Trivandrum.

Another interesting and important piece of architectural work Laurie did, when he first arrived in Trivandrum was the extension of the small Anglican Cantonment Church. It is done so cleverly and ingeniously that I don't think many people know now, where the old

building ended and where Laurie's work began. The capacity of seating in the church is nearly double than it had been before. He extended eight feet on both sides, but it was so carefully blended with the original that it is now impossible to discern any "modifications" made to this beautiful building.

The arrival of a British architect, who built Indian style houses to suit Indian conditions and requirements, for as little as Rs.2,500/- became the talk of the town. But at the same time, there was also an undercurrent of malicious talk among the big builders and contractors. The big engineers and builders charged their clients a certain percentage of the total cost, and so it was not in their favour to reduce the cost of the building. The students of architecture in Trivandrum, however, were very impressed by Laurie's work and they invited Laurie to preside over their valedictory function. Accordingly, he was asked to give the valedictory address, and was allowed to choose his own subject. Just before the big function, he went around the city to learn more about the contemporary architecture. He saw that most of the famous buildings were built in bricks; they were then plastered over, and then painted over to look like bricks. He decided to speak on "Truth in Architecture". Unfortunately, he named a few of the buildings he visited during the day, and the same architects who invited him had built some of these buildings. The people who invited him for the function, and famous local engineers and architects, were not exactly amused (to put it mildly) when Laurie pointed out to the students how appropriate to the local climate and conditions the old buildings are, and the unsuitability of the new - imitation Western buildings.

The Chief Minister of Kerala, Sri. Achutha Menon was a man of great intelligence and learning, and a man of integrity and a rare jewel among politicians. He was trying to get a temporary building to house the thousands of books the Government had, at the State Institute of Languages. The estimate given by the P.W.D. engineers and contractors ran into lakhs, and poor Laurie in his innocence, said it was possible to do it under or within one lakh rupees. Laurie accepted the job on one condition, that he would not sign any contract, but would keep an accurate account of the amount spent. Laurie was given the job on trial. He had not realised at that time that he was making himself an enemy of the most powerful architectural organisation in Kerala - the P.W.D. Laurie set about things in his own way, building his first official building in Kerala. He bought bricks from the local brick merchants, employed his own masons and carpenters and coolies, and paid them all himself, everyday.

His first building was supposed to be only a temporary building, built of burnt bricks and cement. It had a wooden roof with Mangalore tiles. That building is standing strong, and is still serving the purpose for what it was built. One morning, in one of the 'rags' it was reported that one of the Laurie Baker buildings had collapsed! The Chief Minister sent out his people to ascertain the truth, but to his relief, he learnt that it was only an old shed, built long back by some contractor, for storing building materials, that had collapsed in the rain. This is just one of the many examples of the sort of opposition that Laurie had to face in the beginning of his career in Trivandrum.

At the same period, Sri. Achutha Menon was also negotiating with Dr. K.N. Raj and other eminent economists, about the possibility of starting a sort of School of Economics in Trivandrum, where the various problems specific to Kerala's economic development could be studied.

They acquired a sizeable piece of land, which was dry and barren, except for a few cashew nut trees, and one or two tamarind trees, just outside the city limits in a place called Prasanth Nagar. The scheme was partly supported by the Central Government and partly by the State Government. It was started on very modest scale. Laurie often talks about the first draft of the building requirements Dr. K. N. Raj had produced at their first meeting. Their requirements were very little. Laurie immediately drew a few basic sketches, which later evolved as the Centre for Development Studies. The Centre started with a core staff of eminent and devoted people like Dr. K.N. Raj, Dr. T.N. Krishnan and Or. P.G.K. Panikar. Later on, people like Dr. A. Vaidyanathan and Dr. I.S. Gulati joined the faculty.

It was not all smooth sailing for Laurie, whose main theme was cost reduction. He believed that houses must be affordable and comfortable for all, and not only for the small privileged class. At one time, Laurie became friendly with a retired P.W.D. engineer, whose exposed brick-house he designed and started to build. Then it came to the roof stage. The common practice was the usual flat concrete roof with reinforcement. Both flat roof and concrete reinforcement are totally unsuitable for Kerala climate, where one has to cope with very heavy rains at one time and extreme heat at other times. All the old houses and temples had very steep, tiled roofs, with big overhangs, which were essential for protection from heavy rain, and direct heat from the sun. But a tiled roof required a lot of wood, which was becoming expensive and difficult to procure. Moreover, concrete roof being in fashion was more acceptable. But eventually, they decided to have a pitched (sloping) concrete roof.

In Lucknow, Laurie did a certain amount of construction with an engineer, a contractor from West Bengal, when they used reinforced brick slabs for roofing. This was much lighter in weight, and used less steel reinforcement. Once the sun had gone down, the slab quickly emitted its stored heat and the rooms below became cool for the nights, whereas the full concrete flat roofs took all night to emit their stored heat, and by sunrise it was ready to absorb another day of hot sunshine. While the engineer and Laurie were discussing ways and means to replace the bricks with even lighter and cheaper material, they happened to notice a pile of old Mangalore tiles from an old house, heaped in a corner of the garden. Suddenly it flashed through Laurie's mind - 'why not use these tiles instead of the bricks?' Two Mangalore tiles, one on top of the other might make a good filler. The tiles were corrugated. One tile placed upside down' on the other tile made an excellent light weight filler, which had the added advantage of being hollow and furthermore, it was much larger in area than two or three bricks. So they tried out some small roofs with this filler slab system. In England, these were already being used in various forms of hollow burnt clay blocks and beams for slabs.

Laurie has continued using the filler slab method with Mangalore tiles wherever possible, including many multi-storied buildings. The P.W.D and it allies are still very sceptical about it, even though it has been accepted and tested by the Central Building Research Institute, Roorkee, where they proved that the filler slab with Mangalore tiles is as strong or stronger than an ordinary concrete slab. It is lighter and more economical. It is also cooler, because of the air space between the tiles and is more acceptable in earthquake regions.

## Chapter 27

### Life goes on

As far as money matters were concerned, Laurie didn't acquire the status of a businessman, and he never will! He didn't sign a contract when he undertook any new work, as he said - he cannot state before hand, how much a building was going to cost - but always he gave a rough estimate. COST REDUCTION was the keyword, and that manifested itself, in everything he did.

We were dealing with many clients, sometimes more than a dozen at a time, and many thousands of rupees. It was very important to keep an accurate account of the money received, and money spent by each client. He refused to keep a secretary or clerk, or even have an office, as all that would add to the expenses, and the client would have to pay for it. So I tried to keep separate accounts for each client. The head mason gave me a daily account of the money spent on wages. I dealt directly with the brick-man and the stone-man, and those who provided the sand, the cement and such other materials. We personally did all the purchases like timber, electrical and plumbing wares, etc. All these small details saved us and our clients from being cheated and overcharged. There was always a very good relationship between the client and us. In almost all cases, our clients became our good friends. But of course, as can be expected, some, when they got the main building finished, refused to pay up the vast sums of money. This kind of attitude of some of the clients, who had benefited so much, was very difficult for me to accept, but Laurie took it all as part of the game. Fortunately these types of clients were very few.

We managed to buy an Ambassador car, and we engaged a driver. Laurie didn't approve of it at all in the beginning. He called it bourgeoisie, and high living! But later, found it an absolute necessity. Another absolutely necessary part of his daily existence was an on-the-shoulder bag. It was no ordinary shoulder bag either! It was specially designed by LW.B and created by E.B. It had an inner pocket with a zip fastener to carry his purse. (He paid the workers daily because they had a hand to mouth existence). There was one pocket for the measuring tape and the compass, and another for all the various plans of the many buildings that he was doing. There was also an old six-inch ivory scale and few pieces of coloured chalk to explain with diagrams to the masons and others what was in his mind. He carried in his left hand shirt pocket the 'Dairy' - a postcard-size card with the date and time and place of his appointments for the current period. In fact it was the entire architect's office that went with him, wherever he went. He was quite lost without his shoulder bag and the diary.

We came to Trivandrum for a short holiday, and to find a suitable school for our son. We had left our hospital temporarily with the two medical friends, who were willing to run it for us for sometime. But now Laurie was really and truly into his architectural world, and was enjoying it very much. There was no question of my going back alone to Vagamon. Fortunately, our friends, Hildegard and Alina were willing to carry on with the medical work, if we chose to remain in Trivandrum. Thus we are still here in Trivandrum after thirty-eight years. Once settled in Trivandrum - our first priority was to find a suitable piece of land to build our own house in Trivandrum. Living in rented houses in the city was quite alien to our way of living. Again Laurie managed to find a very enviable piece of land just outside the city, but touching the main road. Except for a few meters of good land along the roadside it was a very steep hill with nothing but rocks

and more rocks. The view from the top of the land was excellent. I don't think there are many places in the whole of Trivandrum with such a magnificent view of the Ghats, with the most spectacular Agasthya Mountain framed in the middle of the mountain ranges. There was no water, and neither was there much hope of finding any. However, luckily for us the well we dug at the bottom of the hill gave enough water for our needs.

With such magnificent views, the house had to be at the top. It was impossible to find any level ground unless we excavated and levelled off enough area for a house. But we had very little money to build. So in true Baker style we started with a long temporary hut built with coconut leaf walls and roofs. Later we built our present house in many stages and in many levels, which we found very exciting and interesting to begin with, but now in our eighties, it is somewhat unsuitable with our 'hearts' and 'joints' to slow us down. However, we love and enjoy living in this house complex, which we call 'The Hamlet' - the dictionary meaning of which, is a collection of dwelling houses without a post office or a chapel or any official buildings!

A lot of timber was used in this house. Old houses with lots of good, already made doors and windows, and roof timbers were being sold for a very negligible price. It was the Gulf boom period. Everyone wanted a nice clean concrete flat roof and not the old fashioned tiled roofs. Laurie managed to get a lot of very good priceless pieces of carving and antiques. He also followed a lot of the principles and details used in the old palace at Padmanabhapuram, which, at that time was his favourite building. You will see bits of the palace in our house. For instance, he has incorporated the old Kerala-like *jalis* over the whole of several walls. The entire end wall of our bedroom is one big wooden *jali* with vertical curved planks of wood leaning outwards; the small horizontal wooden slats keep the whole *jali* wall rigid and strong, giving us an almost uninterrupted view of the scenery, trees, clouds and mountain';.

The news about this 'low cost architect' spread all over the city. The reaction from the people to the 'new' way of building was very varied. Some people came because they could get a house for less than a quarter of the amount they would spend, if they built through the regular architects or contractors. But there were always a few who genuinely appreciated Laurie's ideology and principles. At the same time there was a big section of the professional architects and engineers and contractors who were definitely hostile and were willing to go to any extent to malign his name and thus put a stop to the rising trend of "Laurie Baker housing technologies"!

There was one amusing incident that I remember quite vividly. It sounds very silly and childish now, but at that time to me at least, it was serious. One afternoon my niece who was studying at the local Engineering College came back from the college very agitated and confused. She asked me "Aunty, is it true that Uncle has no professional architectural qualification?" I asked her, why. She was very confused, unlike her usual self. I assured her that her uncle definitely had a professional ARIBA (Associate of The Royal Institute of British Architects) from the Birmingham School of Architecture at the University of Central England. Her cause for this sudden concern was because one of the oral questions in the architectural exam in their college was to name the foreign architect who is practicing 'without a proper qualification' in Trivandrum spreading a low-cost technique in architecture!! Obviously, the answer expected was Laurie Baker. I was furious, and my first reaction was that I must file a lawsuit against the college. But Laurie took it as a bit



of funny news. But I insisted. The next day when he saw the Chief Minister Sri. Achutha Menon, he mentioned the incident but Achutha Menon, being a very level headed, sensible, and experienced man, just laughed and asked Laurie to forget about it, and go on with his work.

Laurie went on with his work, and the numbers of clients increased. During this period, at any given time, he had at least twenty buildings in the process of being built. But neither his mode of living nor work changed. He always left home at eight a.m. with his favourite shoulder bag (which was his own sacred property and nobody dared to touch it!). This low-cost architect's office is also somewhat 'low-cost' and unorthodox. It was, and still is, a corner of our bedroom. There is an ordinary table surrounded by shelves and cupboards. He still has the old drawing board he used as a student, the same ivory scale, compass, setsquare and dividers. There are a few old baked bean tins for the various grades of pencil, some soft, and some coloured. When t first met him, and for many years afterwards, he used an ordinary steel pen with a very fine point and ordinary black Indian ink.

Another very practical routine item was the pack of white cards he carried in his shirt pocket, wherever he went. When he stopped the car, or when he saw something interesting we stopped the car, and he very quickly drew whatever he saw on to a card. When we got home he translated all the scribbling on to proper drawing paper. He mainly used watercolours and later he used poster colours and oils, but watercolours were always his favourite. Thus we have a large collection of paintings of the various places we have seen, and been to in the last sixty years. Unfortunately, I could not manage to get any of the paintings he did, while he was in China.

## Chapter 28

### Laurie Baker, the Architect

The discontent and disagreements that started in the forma! "architect-engineer" world began to die down. Gradually, several of them began to accept and adopt some of Laurie's ideas. The old concrete flat roof, multi-storeyed fancy modern houses are being replaced by the bare brick slanting roofed houses in some places and among some strata of society. The 'Baker Houses' are amusingly now being considered modern and the 'in thing'. It is alright when used by good architects, who understood the principles, and used as originally intended. But unfortunately, even some masons started advertising 'Baker mode! houses'. There were advertisements in the leading daily newspapers and magazines by 'Baker Construction Agencies', "For Baker houses. ...phone so and so", etc. I felt it was illegal, and libellous but when I talked about it Laurie just said, "Kerala needs more houses, the people want them so let them carry on."

Wherever he was called to talk about housing or architecture, he always started and ended with the same note, "there are millions of people in India without a roof over their heads. India has no surplus energy. Both cement and steel need energy to get them in the forms we are using in building. So we must use both these commodities sparingly. Our backwaters are full of seashells. They are there for us to take and use. By using seashells we can give more local labour to the unemployed to make lime. If we use lime instead of cement, we can save on energy and fuel, and transport." When he gets on to the subject of

fuel and energy and cost reduction in housing, he can go on talking and keep his audience enthralled, amused and laughing for hours. He intersperses many funny stories and anecdotes into his favourite topic of cost reduction, keeping his audience entertained, but informed. Also, when he gets on to the topic of cost reduction he forgets all about his heart problems, which give him trouble from time to time. There are strict instructions from his cardiologist not to let him overtire himself, and to keep regular hours of rest, but that is only on the doctor's order sheet. When it comes to housing and cost reduction, his energy comes back, and nobody can stop him. However the 'heart' has cooperated though we went through several episodes of crises over the years. He is now nearing ninety and is still active and contributes to his pet slogan "There are millions of people in India without a roof over their heads."

You will never see Laurie without a pencil or a piece of paper either in his hand or in his pocket. He can see something funny in everything and anything! Simple, common day-to-day subjects, like the way Kerala men wear their dhotis, intrigued him. He has done several variations on the same subject, which a local magazine published. Recently, it has been computers and computer terms, such as 'email', 'Internet', 'modem', and so on. As soon as he hears something funny (i.e., funny to him!) he immediately visualises it and translates it on to paper. Similarly he has done many cartoons on the medical doctor's language and phraseology, which he used to hear while he was recovering from a major surgery. Now that his eyesight is very poor and doctors have not given much encouragement about regaining the sight, he has given up fine drawings. He uses a thick felt nib and uses black ink on white paper and draws thick lines, but the result is still very good, and very funny.

Even though Malayalam is still an alien language and he still cannot read, write or talk the language to any great degree, he loves the curves and rounds and loops of the script and uses them to make beautiful patterns! He says it is good for making patterns for decorative panels for ceilings and walls or gateposts. This linguistic blank or blind spot in his otherwise extraordinarily quick and active brain, has been a great hindrance to him, in understanding and appreciating more of Kerala history and philosophy, and the Kerala way of thinking.

The Baker building technique has now come to stay. Even though it was a stiff fight in the beginning, it is now accepted and recognised, and is no longer, 'a crazy Englishman's crazy idea'.

A cost effective housing venture was initiated by Sri. Achutha Menon, along with another enthusiastic and practical man, an engineer, Sri. Chandradath from the Government Polytechnic, Trichur.

This grew to be what is now called COSTFORO (Centre of Science and Technology for Rural Development). For Sri Achutha Menon and Sri Chandradath, providing shelter for the homeless was foremost in their minds, but not personal gain and popularity. They started with the lower strata of the society, and supported and encouraged local industries such as making of country bricks. They recruited young engineers and architects from the local engineering colleges, and gave them not only the technical know-how but inculcated in them the need of the country, and our responsibility towards the homeless and the marginalised people.

COSTFORD works mainly in the northern districts, because it originated there. Now, there are many COSTFORD centres, spread all over Kerala, working in their own unpretentious and simple ways. In the last few years, they have done several hundred buildings of all categories - domestic, panchayats, rural hospitals, community halls, and even whole villages. The movement is growing stronger everyday, as there is both a need and a demand for such constructions. A very prestigious and unique beautiful building built by COSTFORD outside Kerala, in Coimbatore is the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History.

I am more in touch with the COSTFORD in Trivandrum. They have done an enormous amount of work in and around Trivandrum, in the last twenty years, under the leadership of P.B. Sajan, engineer and his architect wife Shailaja. The buildings planned by Laurie are executed perfectly by the COSTFORD centres. They also manage to remain always within the finance allotted. The Panchayat Hall and Office in Quilon are real beauties, and I am sure they are appreciated and admired by all who use them. Simple houses for the fisher folk, around two hundred of them, are also unique. They are beautiful, cheap, and functional. I remember the care and thought that Laurie took while he was planning these houses. He made several plans and the COSTFORD trainees made models of each different plan. Laurie thought that the women should be given the option to choose from these various plans. After all, it is the women who have to live there and look after the house and family, when the men go fishing. So the women, the would-be users, were called to make their choice, and only then the men were called. The scheme worked. I am told they are very happy in their new houses.

To the COSTFORD workers, architects and engineers, Laurie has always been 'Daddy'. There is a warm relationship - they come to him for all their doubts and difficulties, and in return Laurie also depends on them a lot. These days, when he is physically not able to go out, and inspect a site for building, and do the necessary drawings and measurements, the COSTFORD team does all the preliminary work, enabling Laurie to do the designing.

It is a very healthy and satisfactory feeling to know that the small seed that Laurie cast, will not die, but will grow more and more, and his great dream of a house for all - will eventually materialise, at least to a large extent.

### Conclusion

Now, as I am sitting and reminiscing over our past few decades, when we decided to live together, sharing everything as we promised, in front of the parson and the few friends and relatives who attended our wedding in the year 1948, "to have and to hold, from this day onwards, for better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish - till death us do part" here we are now, at the even tide of our life. I have only one regret - I wish I were a bit younger than Laurie, so that I could be a bit more helpful now. Unfortunately, we happen to be almost the same age, and have similar health problems as well. So much so that, our cardiologist remarked after examining us - "You are kindred souls, you both have similar health problems. You had both better have the same treatment" and he prescribed the same medicines for us! We have had a very happy and fulfilled life together, and many things to remember and laugh about.

In spite of being in Kerala for more than four decades, his knowledge of Malayalam is almost abysmal. He probably understands more than is apparent, but is always very reluctant to use the language, probably because we Keralites are not very sympathetic and tend to laugh at foreigners who have difficulty in producing the guttural sounds that form spoken Malayalam. Yet, it has never stood in the way of dealing with workmen or tradesmen. His one redeeming quality in such situations was, and is, his ability to draw and explain. I remember one incident when we were on our way back from England. It was in the year 1957 and there was no official travelling route through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to India. We used the local transport system from one country to the other. We happened to be in Greece and wanted some butter. We tried all sorts of languages, English, French, Urdu, Hindi etc., but no one could understand. So Laurie resorted to his paper and pen, and drew a cow and the udders and a lady milking the cow, the churning of milk etc. A big audience of curious and amused people had gathered by that time, and they all roared with laughter and the desired butter did finally appear!

Laurie is still very British in a lot of ways, in spite of his Indianisation and admiration for India, and its people and architecture. Unlike us Indians, he never forgets to say 'thank you' or 'you first' when you are going through a door. When he is trying to be in a queue or waiting for a bus, he gets very annoyed when someone pushes in and tries to get in first. His thoughtfulness and consideration for women and children is always apparent, even if he is in a hurry or busy. He still loves his morning bed tea, but unlike the *sahibs* who depend on their boys to produce it, he is always up punctually at six o' clock, makes the tea, and brings it to me in bed and then we have it together. This is a ritual with him, and he doesn't like to start the day without this little ceremony.

Our family consists of our three children who are married, and who have a child each. They are all very independent and have their own lives, but all three of them are very much attached to Mummy and Daddy, and very rarely end the day without calling and enquiring after our health and wishing us good night. We are equally fond of them and their families.

Vineet (Vinu), our eldest grandson doing his post graduation at NT Delhi, provides his grandfather with all the up-to-date computer terminology like floppy disks, CD-ROM, monitor, CPU, etc., and Laurie translates them all into cartoons and funny drawings. He has now nearly three hundred or so of such funny drawings, which we think will make a book someday, and provide amusement to many. Tejal, the next one, born on the same day as her grandfather, has always been fascinated with architecture and her grandad's drawings. Lisa, our youngest grandchild, also a very talented girl has decided to become a doctor like grandmother.

We wish them all success and fulfilment of their desires in their future lives. They have given us great joy and happiness.

Laurie's 'clients', for whom he has planned and built houses, have become our friends. They are many in number, and we are grateful to all of them for their love and kindness throughout our life in Trivandrum. They all keep in touch with us even when far off, and we value their love and friendship.

The masons and carpenters, and others who worked with Laurie have always remained very loyal to him. Two masons who started working with him almost from the beginning of our work in Trivandrum are still with us - Vijayan and Madhavan, who started as

helpers are now head-masons and remain very staunch and faithful followers of 'Bakerji' or 'Daddy' as they all call him.

Even during these last couple of years when we have been less mobile, our friends have kept us very occupied and have been very caring - our clients, our workers, our neighbours, our many friends, and the COSTFORD family with all the other architects and engineers. We are also grateful to the students who visit us from the many universities in India and abroad, for training in the eco-friendly and cost-effective Baker architecture.

Our motto, when I left the medical college in Vellore in the year 1938 and impressed on us by Dr. Ida Scudder was - you are 'lighted to lighten'.

Let this light that Laurie Baker lighted to build affordable houses for all go on till all the people of India have a roof over their heads.

End