

Ramy Pillay

Yuga Purushar

Muthal Naidoo

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Young Ramy



Ramy Grandad



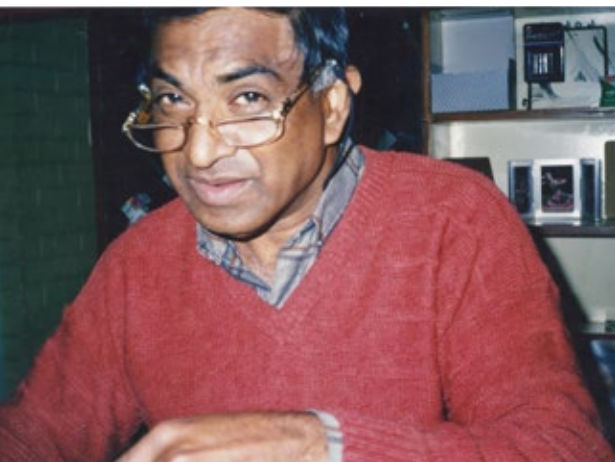
Manoo and Ramy



Keshan, Rajen, Ramy, Kuben, Manoo, Unben, Basha



Cheek-pincher Ramy



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
FOREWORD	3
1. “BE YOUR OWN BOSS”	5
2. THE POWER OF LOVE	9
Being Tamil	11
3. MOGENS AND DOROTHY ROSENFELDT	15
Satyagraha	22
4. FAMILY BACKGROUND	29
5. PHOTOGRAPHY	41
Govindarajalu	41
Dings	42
Rajee	47
Vartharajalu (Ramy)	48
Dings Studios	49
6. THREE NEPHEWS	55
Judge Deva Pillay	55
Morga	57
Deva	60
7. MANOO	63
The Chetty Brothers	67
8. THE MOVE TO LAUDIUM	71
Family time	73
Vanieda Naidoo	77
Roslina Mojela	78
Boogie	80
9. SERVING THE COMMUNITY	83
Amie Choonara	85
Aboo Tayob	87
Pankaj Joshi	89
Pretoria Hindu Organisation	92
Thamaray Investments	93

10. PROUDLY TAMIL	95
Tamil Culture	95
Guru Nadarajah Sarma	99
Delegation to Lusaka	102
Remembering Valiamma and Nagappan	105
James D. Hunt	110
E.S.Reddy	111
Stone Circles in Mpumalanga	113
11. “MY SONS ARE MY WEALTH”	115
WATERFORD KAMHLABA	117
12. KUBANDIRAN PILLAY: FIRST SON	121
AURORA GONZALEZ GAONA	131
EMILY KUMALO	135
FIRST GRANDCHILDREN	137
SARITA	137
SASHIN	140
13. RAJENDRA PILLAY: SECOND SON	143
14. KESHAN PILLAY: THIRD SON	147
VIGNESHVARIE	153
15. UNBEN PILLAY: FOURTH SON	159
WOODMEAD HIGH SCHOOL	159
16. BASHA PILLAY: FIFTH SON	167
DEAN YATES and NEST	167
BANUMATI	174
17. GENERATIONS AND GAPS	177
First Generation	178
Second Generation	180
Third Generation	182
Fourth Generation	184
Being a Coconut	188
18. SARITA PILLAY: <i>The struggle is far from over</i>	193
19. KEMEEL PILLAY: <i>Going Forward</i>	197
References	201

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Ramy Pillay was a man who reached out to everyone around him so his story emerges from remembrances of experiences shared with all those who knew him; members of his large, extended family, his friends and associates. It is a record of the memories of those who loved him. It was not possible to find anyone who did not.

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FOREWORD

From the Thirukural

[Empathy-Compassion]

Of what use is superior knowledge in the one, if he does not endeavour to relieve his neighbour's want as much as his own
(Kural: 31.5)

[Zeal/Self-reliance]

The depth of water determines how tall an aquatic plant grows; Zeal in the heart dictates how far a person goes
(Kural: 59.5)

Thirukural or Kural

[Thiru-sacred, holy; Kural-couplet/s]

"The tirukkural is an ancient book of wisdom, the greatest classic of the Tamil language; the distillation of the essential genius of the Tamil nation. Its author was the sage Tiruvalluvar, a Paraiyan weaver who lived at Mayilapur, the site of present-day Madras [Chennai], in the Christian era. (It is interesting to note that the function of Tiruvalluvar continues that of the Paraiyans and the other lowest castes in the older Tamil Cankam era, on whom the performance of sacred rites and sacred speech depended.) He composed 133 chapters, each containing ten couplets of Tamil verse. The three main sections of the book treat the subjects of Aram, Virtue (Chapters 1-38); Porul, Wealth and Statecraft (39-108); Kâmam, Erotic Love (109-133). This last section tells a love story. It clearly draws upon the heritage of Tamil Akam poems from the Cankam anthologies, showing the stages of the course of Love."
(Franxie03, Yahoo Best Answer)

"I wanted to learn Tamil, only to enable me to study Valluvar's Thirukural through his mother tongue itself ... There is no one who has given such treasure of wisdom like him."
(Mahatma Gandhi)

Ramy Pillay may never have read the Kural, nevertheless its wisdom – inherent in the Tamil language and culture – motivated him throughout his life. He became the embodiment of

empathy/compassion and zeal. He helped himself and everyone around him to discover themselves through achievement. This was his way of proclaiming the dignity and honour of being Tamil.

Writing a life story is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle; it is an amalgamation of many pieces gathered from many sources. To tell the story of Thiru¹ Vartharajalu (Ramy) Pillay, therefore, the biographer was given a list of people to consult; people who knew Ramy and were involved with him in different ways. When one or two people being interviewed suddenly asked: “But why are you writing about me; this is Ramy Pillay’s story, not mine?” it was clear that they were not aware that they had been describing Ramy in terms of their relationship to him.

It is how anyone is described – in terms of his or her relationships. If you ask yourself, “Who am I?” after naming yourself, you usually go on to identify yourself as someone’s offspring or someone’s spouse. It is not possible to describe yourself without reference to other people. You are a person through other persons, both similar to and different from them. You discover your similarities and differences in your interactions and so develop an understanding of who you are as an individual. Your individuality evolves through your interactions with others. As you are constantly meeting new people, you are constantly evolving. The more people you know the more complex you become and to understand who you are, you have to examine yourself in relation to all the people you know.

As your involvement with others occurs within a human context, you are further defined by the systemic cultures in which you are nurtured. If they are cultures that you question, you may become a rebel or a victim. Or you may become subversive, finding humane or inhumane ways to undermine conventions.

The story of Ramy, therefore, is the story of his relationships in colonial and apartheid South Africa. As he was a catalyst releasing the power to achieve in all those around him, it is through his influence on others that his strength of mind (zeal), his insight into human beings and his compassion are revealed. His story, therefore, is the story of those whom he knew and influenced and all those who knew and influenced him.

Ramy was supremely a man of Ubuntu

1 Thiru is Tamil for Mister.. As it also means divine, it is a title of great respect.

1

“BE YOUR OWN BOSS”

For Ramy Pillay, life was a chess board and one could either play or become a pawn in the game. Ramy did not believe that anyone should settle for being a pawn. When he saw his nephew, Rogen Moodliyar, who had just completed high school, opting to be a pawn and dependent, he would not let him be. He knew the boy could become a player.

Rogen was good with his hands; from the time he was a little boy he loved to fix things – he would wire plugs and leave electrical cords trailing over furniture. But he hated school and homework was a bore. He got by because his sister loved the books and always did her homework; she was unaware how that served him as well. School did not cater for his particular gift; his intuitive understanding of how to work with electricity and tools.

At the end of 1974, with a matriculation certificate that did not allow him to go on to university, there was great disappointment. But it was an unrecognized blessing; it enabled him to follow his real interests, develop his great talent and build a profitable business. Like his Uncle Ramy, natural ingenuity, talent and hard work would bring him success and independence. People are conditioned to thinking that university education is fundamental to success in life. Rogen, like Ramy, would prove that wrong.

For all Uncle Ramy’s nephews and nieces who had not yet found their way, there was the studio – Dings Photography Studio in Bree Street, Johannesburg, where they could earn until they discovered their niche in the world of work. So Rogen went to work at Dings’ Studio which was managed by Morga, another of Ramy’s nephews. School had made Rogen’s real interests seem irrelevant, but Morga, watching his cousin at work, recognized his exceptional ability with electrical equipment and tools. Following Uncle Ramy’s example, Morga always read the newspaper from the first page to the last. When he saw an RGC Engineering advertisement for an apprentice toolmaker, he telephoned and arranged an interview for his cousin.

Rogen arrived at RGC Engineering in the suburb of Wynberg in Johannesburg, to be told that the apprenticeship was for a white person – under apartheid highly specialized fields were reserved for whites. To take him on, RGC would be breaking the law; neverthe-

less, they took a chance and offered him the apprenticeship. It was a time when white businesses were beginning to feel the negative effects of job reservation; it had given white labour unions great power and their wage demands had become onerous. Rogen began work right away, learning to make tools and gearboxes for Atlas Aircraft. He worked at RGC for two years, developing and exhibiting tremendous skill in tool making. Being exceptionally competent and hardworking, he was a greatly valued employee.

Then one day in 1977 – the unexpected arrival of two officials from the Department of Labour! They took him by the collar and marched him off the premises. As they pushed him out the door, one said, “This trade is for white people!” They would not allow him back inside to phone or fetch his personal belongings; they brought his things and dumped them beside him where he stood outside. Intimidated, his employers could do nothing.

Rogen wanted to call his father, Mani Moodliyar, a bookkeeper who worked in Johannesburg, but he did not have a five cent coin to make the call from the public telephone booth. An African woman, hawker of mealies, sitting on the pavement with her goods, helped him out. His father arrived after an hour and they set off for home. Mani, a member of the Laudium Child Welfare Society, made a stop in Pretoria to consult with Abu Berma Ebrahim, also a Child Welfare official, on a matter concerning the Society. Mani went in and Rogen waited in the car.

After their meeting, Ebrahim accompanying Mani to his car, saw Rogen, and learned about his ejection from RGC. Ebrahim immediately sent him with his nephew, Ismail, to the Pretoria Diesel Centre about two blocks away, to inquire about openings there. Dave Wolf, the manager, informed them that they would not be taking on apprentices for another two years. But when he learned that Rogen had been working at RGC Engineering, he decided to put him to a test. He took him to the tool room and asked him to create a very specialized shaft used by the military. He gave Rogen an hour to make the shaft and left him there. To Wolf’s astonishment, Rogen was back after fifteen minutes with the completed shaft in his hands. Wolf tested it, found that it met all specifications and functioned perfectly. He offered the young man an apprenticeship on the spot.

Rogen spent his first three weeks at Pretoria Diesel Centre completing tools for the military. His training as an auto-electrician began after that. As he was hungry for knowledge, he undertook as many tasks as he could, often doing the work of others simply to accumulate greater understanding and more skills. This was real education and he was an eager student.

When he was sufficiently skilled, Uncle Ramy brought cars to his home to be worked on after hours. So his work day extended from five in the morning to eleven at night. The extra work helped to supplement his earnings of R54 a week as an apprentice and when he qualified in 1980, a salary of R74 a week. He was the second black person to qualify as an auto-electrician; his cousin, Neelan Pillay was the first. Once he had his certificate, Uncle Ramy could see him as an independent businessman running his own enterprise

so he began to prod him. He kept a constant chant buzzing in Rogen's ears: "You can't work for a boss. You have to be your own boss." He wanted Rogen to hand in his notice at Pretoria Diesel and set up his own shop. Rogen, who could not afford to go into business for himself was quite content to stay where he was.

But Uncle Ramy was adamant. He loved Rogen like his own son and aware of his ability and commitment to work, dogged him relentlessly. It got to the point that when Rogen saw him coming, he would duck out of sight. One day in July, 1983, Uncle Ramy came to Rogen and said, "I'm tired of talking to you. I have secured premises for your business and you need to pay in a deposit of R500." Rogen was stunned; he did not have the money or the confidence to set up in business on his own. His Dad gave him the deposit, told him to pay it and forget about the place. But Ramy was there every second of every day, "Have you given in your notice to Wolf?" When Rogen eventually spoke to Wolf, he said, "No ways are you leaving me." As Wolf was his mentor as well as his employer, Rogen felt obligated to him and could not simply walk out.

Then Ramy announced, "I've taken a lease on the premises and you are liable for the rent of R250 from this August." It did not concern Ramy that his nephew, was young and did not have the financial means for running his own business; he was confident that Rogen would find a way. All he needed was a chance to prove himself.

Rogen was forced to hand in his notice. Though Wolf was most upset; he gave him a severance bonus of a thousand rand. Rogen used the money to equip the old house opposite the Pretoria Show Grounds on Soutter Street that Ramy had leased for him. He walked out of Pretoria Diesel Centre on a Friday and two days later, on Monday, opened Rogen's Auto-Electrical. Clients, who had come to value his services at Pretoria Diesel, pledged their support. Businesses such as SA Breweries, with depots in Garankuwa, Rosslyn and Watloo; Elwierda Bus Service; and AFROX transferred over to him. Today, thirty-four years later, they are still with him and he also has SAP Garage as a client and services all government vehicles.

He struggled for many years at the beginning and his family had to manage with the bare minimum. In those hard times, his wife, Thamanthi, was his great strength; her unwavering faith kept him going. His sister was his other great support. She came into the business with him and they persevered together. As the business grew and prospered, his family moved steadily out of near poverty and into a more than comfortable life style. And Uncle Ramy's belief in him was completely vindicated.



Rogen at the Auto Centre

Like Ramy, Rogen is a very sociable human being, brimming over with kindness and compassion. That, in part, accounts for the success of Rogen's Auto Centre. Again, like his Uncle Ramy, Rogen accepted unquestioningly the commonly-held notion that success in life depends on high academic qualifications so he made sure that all his children received a university education. But Ramy and Rogen, both without degree titles, achieved the success and independence that all graduates hope for – they became their own bosses.

2

THE POWER OF LOVE

A biography is not simply a chronicle of the events of a person's life; it is also an investigation into an individual's discovery of the meaning of his existence. And whatever is discovered is distilled through the biographer's understanding of the meaning of existence; so the reader gets a view of the subject as a person through another person.

Looking at the life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, for example, a biographer may see in the fact that he grew up under colonialism, the catalyst for his passion to assert the dignity of being human; for his understanding of violence as the negation of human dignity; for his determination to eradicate violence from human interaction. The biographer may find in this dedication to non-violence, the striving for perfection – the search for God – that turned satyagraha – non-violent resistance – into a spiritual quest and gave satyagrahis the courage to endure great suffering.

The biographer may infer that it was in South Africa, witnessing the struggles of Indian immigrants that clarified Gandhi's understanding of the nature of violence; that drove him to assert his opposition to it and demand respect for all human beings regardless of race, colour and creed. Those who joined him in satyagraha were inspired and believed implicitly in non-violent resistance to injustice. For one family, it became the gospel that was passed down from generation to generation and commitment to active eradication of social injustice became a natural instinct, part of their DNA.

This was the family of Thambi Naidoo, uncle of Ramy Pillay. Not being a direct descendant of Thambi Naidoo, Ramy's story is not simply the continuation of a set pattern. The circumstances of his life were different from those of his uncle's generation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the fight for Thambi Naidoo and the satyagrahis of 1906–1914, was against a small local authority and there was the possibility of appeal to the British government. After 1910, with the Union of South Africa, the struggle was against a national government, the final authority – there could be no effective appeal to Britain.

With union and a national government, prejudice became systemic. So Ramy grew up in circumstances in which people were being conditioned to accept racial discrimination. Though the congresses continued to fight, their resistance, now channelled through legal routes that enforced discrimination, made progress difficult. For the majority, resistance took the form of inconspicuous dissent. It operated at the individual and private level and meant ignoring or breaking the law surreptitiously. African people, for example, were subject to curfew laws; and in Pretoria, those from Marabastad not home by 9 p.m., would seek shelter in the Orient cinema to avoid being arrested. It was often necessary to break the law to protect people from the law.

When Ramy went to work for Mogens and Dorothy Rosenfeldt, he learned from them to ignore racist laws. And like them, used his strength and compassion to empower others. He became a motivating force in the lives of family, friends, strangers, and in the associations and organisations to which he belonged. Seeking ways to circumvent discriminatory laws, he got to know his community very well and read his newspaper from the first word to the last. Consequently, he became a very resourceful person; he always knew where help and opportunities were available. Aware of people's needs, often before they were, he was ready with practical advice and assistance for the simplest to the most complex problems.

Sathia Pillay, Ramy's nephew and close friend, recalls an incident on the day before his [Sathia's] son's wedding. As they were making their preparations, a water pipe in the house burst, threw them into a panic and had them running about ineffectively trying to contain the flow. In the midst of the pandemonium, in walked Ramy with a plumber in tow. This was typical Ramy; he did not wait to be asked for help. He saw what needed to be done and acted. He was a man with a practical, sensible approach to problems. He could keep his head while those about him were losing theirs.

At the time that Ramy moved to Laudium in 1964, he saw that there were many people who worked in Johannesburg. Few had cars and there was no direct public transport connecting the township to the big city. Workers had to take buses to Pretoria Station, board trains, and at the station in Johannesburg, find buses or taxis to get to work. Ramy, with a car, had no problem getting to his studios in Jeppe and Bree Streets in Johannesburg. But he was a man who never looked away from people in need. In addition, he was a natural problem solver; he could see a solution at the same time as he saw a problem. And because he could not depend on racist bureaucracies, he tackled problems himself. He went personally to the PUTCO bus company and pointed out to its managers that they could expand their business with a service for workers from Laudium to Johannesburg. Soon after, buses were running between Laudium and Johannesburg.

“Of what use is superior knowledge in the one, if he does not endeavour to relieve his neighbour’s want as much as his own?”

(Kural 31.5)

And Ramy lived his life as though he were the reincarnation of Saint Thirugnanasambandar², the special envoy of Lord Siva, and it was his duty to succour all those around him. But Ramy did not write poetry like the saint, whose hymns to Lord Siva comprise the *Thevaram*. Ramy was purely a man of deeds not words. Neither did he perform miracles like the saint, but, like Sambander, he could not ignore the suffering of others and he offered his own, real, practical help.

Being Tamil

Generally dark-skinned and curly haired, South Indian people, Tamils, Telugus and others, have been victims of prejudice in India as well as South Africa. And growing up in colonial and apartheid South Africa, which, through its institutions, inculcated in all its citizens attitudes of superiority and inferiority, South Africans of South Indian origin encountered prejudice inside as well as outside their racially segregated ghettos. So Ramy was involved in the fight against discrimination on two fronts.

The fight against the system took the form of non-compliance with legal restrictions based on race. The fight within the ghetto took a different form. It was Ramy’s proud assertion of his Tamil identity. And ethnic pride being closely related to racial pride, Ramy’s promotion of a Tamil identity was confused with endorsement of apartheid.

When his friend, Reggie Naidoo, needed a pharmacist to fill a prescription, Ramy said to him, “Go to Ravi; he’s one of our boys,” i.e. a Tamil. And Ramy, an official in the local, provincial and national Tamil Federations, wanted all Tamils to join the federations. He asked Reggie, but his friend refused. Joining the Tamil Federation seemed to him to be an endorsement of ethnic exclusivity and, therefore, of apartheid.

Born in the land of racial segregation, Ramy grew up, as all South Africans did and, still do, in a prevailing culture of prejudice. As prejudice arises from the assertion of group identity, an individual in South Africa was/is his race first and foremost: European,

2 Thiru–gnana-sambander [thiru=divine, gnana=endowed with divine knowledge] His name was Sambander, thiru and gnana were titles.

African, Coloured, Asian, Indian. And through institutions and systemic requirements i.e. group areas, racial schools, official documents requiring indications of race, public amenities for whites and non-whites, job reservation, and so on, people became conditioned to seeing others in terms of race and racial stereotypes. It became automatic to acknowledge only the group identity, the clearest indication of difference, and to seek difference everywhere, even within each separate racial community.

People were seen in terms of ethnic, linguistic, religious and class differences. In the White community, people were English/Afrikaner; African people were Zulu/ Xhosa/Sotho etc. People of Indian origin were Hindu/Muslim/Christian and each of these subgroups was divided even further. Hindus, for instance, were Gujaratis, Hindustanis, Tamils and Telugus, and each of these was further subdivided into caste, and religious sects. Stifling groupthink became the mainstay of apartheid and perception of individuality was its antithesis. So Ramy's promotion of Tamil people was seen as supporting racism. And his nephew, Deva, from Uitenhage, challenged this Tamil chauvinism.

In Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth, with tiny communities of Indians, people mixed more freely and the individual took on more significance than the group. Ramy's sister, Allaymall, had married T.K. Pillay of Uitenhage and gone to live there. Her son Deva, growing up in this environment, with its cosmopolitan Southend, similar to Cape Town's District Six, found it difficult to justify Ramy's fervent promotion of a Tamil identity. But Deva did not live in an Indian ghetto and did not encounter poverty or the disdain of wealthier Indian sects. For Deva, therefore, it was not necessary to uphold the dignity of being Tamil – he was in an environment where people respected one another as human beings.

Ramy, however, was not simply reacting to prejudice; he was actively defying it by declaring himself proudly Tamil. In the 1960's in the USA, that is what African-American people did when they declared: "Black is beautiful". Ramy was not advocating any form of racial superiority; he, like African-Americans, was building self-esteem. He was involved in empowering Tamils. He was casting off the stigma of inferiority. And it was being misunderstood in the same way that Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement was misunderstood.

Being ashamed of one's origins is disempowering. According to Kuben, Ramy's eldest son, his father felt very keenly the low esteem of Tamil people, generally the poorer section of the Indian community. Ramy was actively engaged in trying to raise the morale of Tamil people. His insistence on education and ownership of property was part of that. So was his condemnation of alcohol and drug abuse. So were his attempts to set up systems of financial support for Tamil people.

If Ramy's view had been a narrow ethnocentricity, he would have been more assiduous in promoting the Tamil language and culture. But he barely spoke Tamil, his children and grandchildren do not. Neither are any of them literate in Tamil. In educating his children, Ramy sought the best that Western culture offered in South Africa. And that is their culture – interspersed with marginal reference to Tamil traditions.

Ramy was among those who remained uniquely individual, paradoxically, because he embraced his Tamil group identity, an identity that carried the stigma of inferiority. Ethnic/racial/national pride usually inculcates attitudes of superiority and prejudice, but Ramy's pride in being Tamil was a form of resistance to discrimination. It was repudiation of inequality and affirmation of human dignity.

In Ramy, the endorsement of Tamil identity and culture was a weapon against discrimination.

3

MOGENS AND DOROTHY ROSENFELDT

When Ramy was eighteen, he went to work for Mogens and Dorothy Rosenfeldt at their Stella Nova Studio. That is where he trained as a photographer, learned to ride a scooter and to drive a car. In training him, the Rosenfeldts treated him with the respect and kindness that ran contrary to the dictates of apartheid. Though they were extremely wealthy – they owned a yacht and a private jet – the Rosenfeldts did not adopt the supercilious demeanour of the rich or of being white. They recognised the potential of their black employees and gave them opportunities to advance. They were very influential in shaping the careers of Ramy and his brother, Rajee, whom they treated as members of the family. They gave them responsibilities that extended up to managerial level, welcomed them in their home and invited their children to visit and use the pool and tennis courts. They attended Ramy’s wedding, and invited Ramy, Rajee and their families on cruises in the Mediterranean. Simply ignoring the restrictions of apartheid, they taught Ramy a most important lesson – self-respect is dependent on respect for all human beings. They did not believe in racial discrimination.

The Rosenfeldts had lived through the worst form of discrimination the world has ever known. Neils Rosenfeldt, son of Mogens and Dorothy, shares “a little of their quite colourful history.”

My parents had just come out of war-torn Europe. My Dad spent the war in Nazi-occupied Copenhagen, where he was involved in the Danish Resistance Movement. The so-called “Night of Watching” – when in one night, virtually every Jew in Denmark was spirited away to Sweden and beyond out of the Gestapo’s grasp – was their amazing historic achievement. He was never very forthcoming about the war, and I think it upset him deeply, so we never really discussed it in much detail. My Mom was in England. Her family home, Hazelwood, was in Kent, and where they lived was known as ‘Bomb Alley’, as it was where the German bombers that were turned back from London used to drop their load on anything they could.

Mom was my grandfather's secretary. He had invented a rubber called Linotex and was developing applications for it to assist in the war. It was finally used to line the fuel tanks of all the British aircraft, rendering them 'bullet-proof, or 'self-sealing'. While they were doing this, they spent a lot of time at the airbase at Camberley, and Mom told us that she lost 10 would-be suitors who were killed in action. Hard to imagine.

My mother had a dreadful time during the war, and at one point she remembers huddling under the dining room table with her sister as bombs exploded in their garden on either side of the house in the middle of the night. I remember she used to go pale when she heard a certain aeroplane noise which brought back those memories. She was always quite a frugal person, hating waste and ostentation, and I think it all came from the austerity and frightening times she and her family endured during the war.

After the war ended, Mogens left Denmark for Sweden and advertised for an English-speaking secretary, and interviewed my Mother, who was tired of living at home and working for her father, and that was that. They got married, much to her father's irritation, and left Europe to start a new life in South Africa.



Manoo, Ramy, Dorothy and Mogens Rosenfeldt

Mom and Dad were not wealthy people to start off with, and had arrived in South Africa with virtually nothing. Having spent the first two weeks of their Honeymoon in rain-drenched Brighton, they blew the rest of their savings on one way tickets to Johannesburg. Mom got a job as personal secretary to Clive Menell at Anglovaal, and Dad went to Swaziland for a few months so that he could apply for his residence permit. You had to be outside the country to do so. He passed his time writing western novels, which Mom edited and typed out on her weekend visits. Apparently, some were published, but I never saw one.

They started Stella Nova on a shoe-string and some loaned cameras from Mogens' first wife's father, Reiner Kehlet. Reiner was a very wealthy Dane who had made his fortune by starting Stella Nova in Scandinavia. There wasn't a lot of spare money in the first years as everything was spent on opening new branches and expanding the business. I can remember being taken to school in 1958 by Reggie in a Vespa 3 wheeler scooter, and our first family car then was a VW Beetle.

Reggie was probably not his real name but was the name my Mom and Dad used. I remember him as being older than Ramy, maybe an Uncle perhaps. (Reggie was Ramy's older brother – twelve years older.)

They [Rajee, Ramy and other employees] used the scooter for small deliveries as it was nippy and very easy to find a park.

I recall Reggie used to run the framing section, which I used to love. It had all those old stamping and rolling machines for making the brass frames' components, and little assembly jigs where I was taught in my school holidays to solder the frames together. There was also a wooden frame workshop, and I think that is where my love for making things was kindled. Reggie was very kind, patient and encouraging to me. And his wife made the best samoosas I have ever tasted. Even after all these years, my mouth is watering!

Ramy figures in my earliest memories of the Head Office in Bramley, and I can remember Mom and Dad being mortified when they learned, after quite a while, that Ramy's name was Ramy not Pillay! When he had arrived on his first day with them, they had asked him his name and he had said 'Pillay', which they had taken to be his first name. So for years he was referred to as Pillay. (Neils Rosenfeldt, 12 November 2015)

Neils Rosenfeldt gives a little indication of his parents' daring and adventurous flying exploits when they acquired an airplane.

I haven't even mentioned the flying! In 1956, with 26 hours total of flying time, Dad and Mom got into their newly-acquired 125HP Piper TR-Pacer and flew to Denmark. They couldn't get proper maps of Egypt, so they used those that they had found in

National Geographic. They had a compass, an air speed indicator, a fuel gauge, a rev counter and an altimeter. No radio. In retrospect, they must have been mad, but my parents had an intrepid spirit and an independence that fuelled their lives.

Over the next 6 years, in bigger and more sophisticated aircraft, they made the trip, trying all the different routes through Africa that they could. My sister, our nanny Auntie Stow and I went with them on the last trip. After that, they finally decided it wasn't safe enough to do any more trips through Africa in a ZA-registered plane.

The Rosenfeldt's plane gave Ramy the opportunity of flying all over the country on Stella Nova business. And on one occasion when Rajee and Ramy had to attend the wedding of a cousin in Port Elizabeth, and were planning their trip, Mogens insisted on flying them down in his private jet. So Rajee, Ramy and their families set off for Port Elizabeth in grand style. As they neared Port Elizabeth, the pilot who knew that they were headed for Uitenhage, saw the abandoned Uitenhage aerodrome and informed them that he could set them down there. It would save their relatives the trip to PE to fetch them.

The airfield had no landing strip and was dotted with disused farming equipment and grazing cows. Farmers who watched in amazement as the plane settled on the field, ran out, yelling, "Bloody hell! What are you doing?"

They explained that they were looking for the Pillays. T.K.Pillay, husband of Allaymall, Rajee and Ramy's sister, was a well-known and well-liked general dealer in the area. The farmers immediately offered to drive down to his shop and inform him of their arrival.

Then in 1967, the Rosenfeldts invited Ramy and Manoo on a cruise in the Mediterranean. Ramy and Manoo decided to tour Europe and Canada before joining the Rosenfeldts at Palma where their yacht was moored.

Ramy made this record of the cruise in his diary.

Ramy's Diary

(Page 1)

Date: 19-7-67

Place : Spain

Weather: Very, very hot

We arrived in Palma about 3 p.m. We looked silly in suit and sarrie; every one walked around only with shorts and no shirt and women in swimming suits. We took a taxi straight to the yacht club. There we met Mr Rosenfeldt, his wife, two children and their two friends also from South Africa. We were so tired that we went right into our cabin and started sleeping. Mr Rosenfeldt woke us up about 6 pm and took us for a

walk around the town. That night we all went to a restaurant for meals and then Mr and Mrs Rosenfeldt and Manoo and myself went to a nightclub. It was outstanding; they had a Negro band playing, they even asked where we came from and sang *Sarie Marè*. We finished up at 3 am. The next day we sailed off down the Med. First we went to all the Spanish ports and then the French ports, the most outstanding place was Saint Tro-paz, although all the places was like a holiday every day, this place was worst; every person walking around in town in swimming suits, and the

(Page 2)

men with long hair. At night we had to just sit in our yacht and watch all the fun at night; chaps just come and do anything and collect money. This carries on till 6 am and then life starts again at 9 am. Here Mr Rosenfeldt other yacht came and met us. We left our one and took that beautiful delux and much faster than the one we came in, to Canes. It was so fast that Niels skied behind it. We came back the same night. The next day while Manoo and myself was in a shop B. [Brigitte] Bardot came in with her boyfriend to do shopping. I had no pen but I took a photo of her in this place. Most of the film stars spend their holidays and walk around like every other person. So you might come across them in the street. We spent about three day there, most of the other places we only spent a day and night. At times we even stopped at a bay and went swimming. Mr R made it clear to the crew that we get V.I.P. treatment and we really did get it. They just

(Page 3)

Place: France

Weather: Very hot

couldn't see us sitting and they would ask us, is there anything you want. I must say Mr and Mrs, their kids and their friends were wonderful to us. Mr R didn't want me to spend a penny. The whole crowd saw us off, even the crew of both yachts. We left to Rome from Nice. At Nice airport I met Louis Armstrong and said, 'Hello Satch,' and he said loudly, 'Howdy boy, come out and see me,' but I couldn't go back as our plane was leaving. (Ramy's Diary, 19 July 1967)

This is what Neils Rosenfeldt recalls of that cruise.

Manoo and Ramy came with us on one of our annual July holidays to the yacht. I remember walking past their cabin and saw Ramy standing in front of the mirror in his bathing trunks. When he saw me, he said that he had been admiring his tan and peeled down the waist band on his hip a little to show me!

Mogens always paid for everybody. Whoever was there, wherever we went, he paid. And it became difficult sometimes for guests and friends, as they felt they would also like to contribute. Towards the end of that holiday we were in Cannes, and Ramy and Manoo returned from a shopping trip in town and excitedly announced that they

had booked a restaurant that evening and were insisting on taking everybody out for dinner. They had prepaid, and it was their treat! They had found a fabulous Indian Restaurant, and we had a memorable feast.

Years later Manoo told my Mom, that apart from wanting to treat my Mom and Dad in some way, Ramy had actually been longing for a curry and that he was suffering withdrawal symptoms!

(Neils Rosenfeldt, 12 November 2015)

The Rosenfeldts were intimately involved in Ramy's life and offered him assistance in every way: in acquiring property and building his home and in the education of his sons.

I can vaguely recall Daddy being upset that he could not get Ramy and Manoo's boys into private schools in South Africa, and that the solution was to send them to Waterford in Swaziland.

(Neils Rosenfeldt, 12 November 2015)

And Ramy loved the Rosenfeldts like parents. They had more or less brought him up from the time he was sixteen when he started working for them.

Did you know that every year without fail, Ramy would call my Mom on her Birthday, November 14th? After she moved into the retirement home he would call me, and ask me to convey his love and greetings to "Mommy". He always called her that.

The success of Stella Nova was founded upon the team of dedicated staff that Mom and Dad built up, and Ramy at Head Office was pivotal.

(Neils Rosenfeldt, 12 November 2015)

...my Dad's philosophy..... was simply, "Give the other man a chance." My Mother's philosophy was simply a version of the Christian "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," sort of thing. They were egalitarian, progressive and very kind people.

(Neils Rosenfeldt, 12 November 2015)

The Rosenfeldts are also remembered with great affection by Rajee's daughter, Ramany, who shares her memories of the opportunities they created for her father and Ramy.

Uncle Ramy (whom they referred to as Pillay) managed the photographic division and my dad the framing division called Fotorama Frame Manufacturers. They were very hard and loyal workers and were highly appreciated and loved by their boss. They were very close and although they may have disagreed on certain issues, (like most normal siblings), they always stood by each other and protected one another.

Mr and Mrs Rosenfeldt were a wonderful couple and generous human beings who went against apartheid and had no prejudice. He spoilt the brothers as well as their families very much with overseas trips (in those days overseas travel was a privilege not many could afford).

In 1970, Mr Rosenfeldt sent Uncle Ramy, Aunty Manoo, my parents and I on an awesome trip to Rhodesia, Europe and Dublin, all expenses paid. He allowed us to live on his luxurious yacht in France on the French Riviera. We spent a beautiful holiday filled with unforgettable memories. Mr Rosenfeldt really pampered us.

Thanks to the Rosenfeldts' generosity and kindness, we children lived comfortable lives. When he retired he gave the brothers a kick-start and offered the businesses that they managed to them. My dad took over Fotorama and uncle Ramy Stella Nova.

My Dad, Rajeemanikum (aka Reggie) and his younger brother Ramy owned several photography studios called Ding's Studios – named after their brother Ramanuja (aka Dingaan). He started the business and then moved to Canada where he ran another branch in Toronto.

As I was growing up, I remember Uncle Ramy as being a very caring yet a strict uncle, who took us on lovely outings in his company's VW Combi.
(Ramany Chetty, 04.02.2016)

It is significant that Ramy called Dorothy Rosenfeldt "Mommy." The Rosenfeldts were Ramy's first gurus. He learned from them that racial discrimination was not a necessary condition of life even if it was the law of the land. He saw in the natural way that the Rosenfeldts conducted their lives, a way to survive with dignity in an oppressive situation. Without publicly defying and confronting the system, they lived by their own values – empathy and compassion. And in maintaining their humanity, they were resisting and defying the system without seeming to do so. In dissociating the Rosenfeldts from racism, Ramy was released from the groupthink that branded all whites racist.

Years later, Ramy would meet Steyn Krige, and would encounter in him the same humane way to defy apartheid. In 1970, when Krige founded Woodmead High School, a non-racial school established in opposition to apartheid, he said: "I worked on a premise that if we didn't embarrass the authorities with publicity in the English-language press, the kind they hated, they might learn to ignore us. So I went to the newspapers and asked them to let us be; and we won their co-operation, and we kept going."³ Krige's strategy was also that of resistance without confrontation.

3 <http://mg.co.za/article/1998-09-25-non-racial-pioneer-faces-the-chop>

The Rosenfeldts were people who not only maintained but also asserted their humanity in a situation that would have rewarded them for dispensing with it. They inspired Ramy. He too learned to repudiate segregation and discrimination by simply ignoring racist restrictions without attracting attention to his non-compliance. It allowed him to build a productive life that benefitted those close to him and the many friends and strangers who came to him for assistance.

Whilst others were engaged in wresting power from Caesar, Ramy, like the Rosenfeldts, was engaged in rendering unto God the things that are God's.

Satyagraha

Inspired by Leo Tolstoy's theory of passive resistance, Gandhi had coined the term satyagraha – from *sat* meaning truth and *agraha*, firmness – the assertion of truth through non-violent resistance – i.e. turning the other cheek. Its aim was to make oppressors aware of the inhumanity of their actions and thereby induce them to give them up voluntarily.

To dissuade people in India from violence, in *A Letter to a Hindu*, which he wrote in 1908 in reply to the Editor of *Free Hindustan*, Tolstoy quoted from the Vedas, from the sayings of Lord Krishna and included the following from the Tamil Thirukural.

The aim of the sinless one consists in acting without causing sorrow to others, although he could attain to great power by ignoring their feelings. The aim of the sinless one lies in not doing evil to those who have done evil unto him.

If a man causes suffering even to those who hate him without any reason, he will ultimately have grief that will not be overcome.

The punishment of evil-doers consists in making them feel ashamed of themselves by doing them a great kindness.

Of what use is superior knowledge in the one, if he does not endeavor to relieve his neighbor's want as much as his own?

If, in the morning, a man wishes to do evil to another, in the evening the evil will return to him.

(Kural: Chapter 31)

(<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7176/7176-h/7176-h.htm>)

Satyagraha or passive resistance had inspired people like Thambi Naidoo, Ramy's uncle, and through him, Ramy's parents. Ramy had grown up in an extended family whose mantra was non-violent resistance. He took it to heart but, influenced by the Rosenfeldts,

learned not to turn it into a weapon. In its open, active, mass demonstrations against injustice, satyagraha, based on an attitude of moral superiority, was confrontational. Satyagraha – truth force – was still a matter of force.

In *A Letter to a Hindu*, Tolstoy explains “Love and forcible resistance to evil-doers, involve such a mutual contradiction as to destroy utterly the whole sense and meaning of the conception of love.”⁴ By “forcible resistance” Tolstoy means violent resistance; but turning the other cheek though not physically violent, is a moral slap in the face – an assault on the dignity of the perpetrator of violence – it declares his moral inferiority and is an attempt at conversion. “The punishment of evil-doers consists in making them feel ashamed of themselves by doing them a great kindness” (Kural). This inherent condemnation of the inhumanity of the enemy, invites vengeful, violent retaliation as is demonstrated in the treatment of people in satyagraha campaigns everywhere and in the assassinations of Gandhi and Dr Martin Luther King.

Being pragmatic, Ramy saw that confrontation, whether violent or non-violent, was not feasible against an all-powerful oppressor. Following the example of the Rosenfeldts, he chose instead the non-confrontational route of resistance at a personal, inconspicuous level. He did not start a movement; he acted in his individual capacity in the way that religions advocate – do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Under apartheid that was subversive. Like the Rosenfeldts, Ramy became involved in empowering those around him by enabling them to recognise and fulfil their potential.

He helped anyone in need and asked for nothing in return. In undertaking other people’s problems as his own, he applied his energy, intelligence and resources to solving them. And he was successful in his efforts because he focussed on the individual, not the group, and that, in itself, constituted a rejection of racial prejudice. It was the only anti-apartheid strategy that allowed one to survive with dignity. Ramy represents all those, unsung everywhere, who ignore the group identity and respond to the individual as a human being and to his or her need.

Ramy was an unrecognised but effective opponent of apartheid. His power came partly from the fact that he was not considered dangerous; he presented no obvious threat. People inured to violence are blind to the power of love. Unobtrusively going about the business of making opportunities for all the individuals around him, Ramy was a force for empowerment in the midst of apartheid’s disempowerment. His helping hand was an effective form of subversion and protest. Being on a small scale, it was not recognized so it could survive and prosper under oppression. Large scale, violent or non-violent confrontation represents the struggle for power and brings about change mainly in terms of who holds the reins. It does not alleviate inequality and poverty; that is still left to the compassionate individual.

4 Leo Tolstoy. “A Letter to a Hindu”

Ramy did not preach or become involved in a struggle for power; his power was within him – the power of love – made manifest in action. The satyagraha of his parents and Thambi Naidoo had, in Ramy, evolved into genuine Ubuntu, the understanding that he was a person through other people. It was the way of the Rosenfeldts.



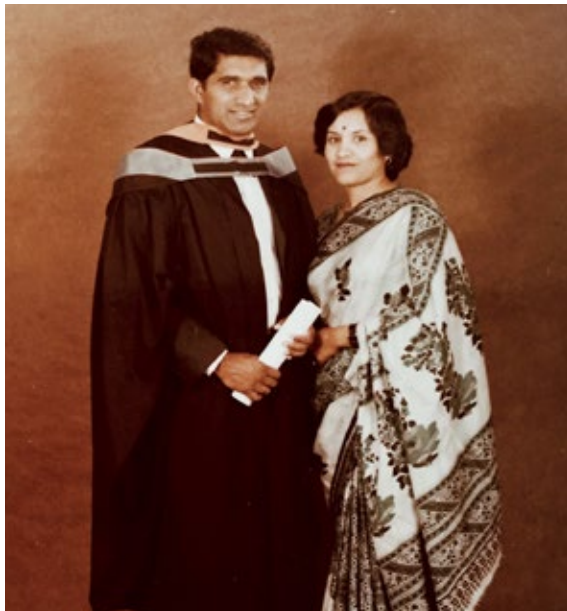
Morga and Ramy at Shonalanga



Rogen and Thamanthi Moodliyar



Rajee, Dings Ramy



**Sathia, the first graduate in the family,
and his wife Saroj Pillay**



Dings Studio, Fordsburg



**Allaymall and her daughter Jaya Pillay.
Mother and sister of Judge Deva Pillay**



**Allaymall, Sathia, Valli (Sathia's mother)
with Ramy**



Laudium Child Welfare Society: Ramy standing, second from left; Sathia seated, second from right. Ahmed Docrat, Chairperson, seated third from left.



Boogie and Ramy at Shonalanga



**Pithukuli Murugudas
and Rajee**



Mpumalanga Stone Circles (Hromnik)



Deva: Singles Champion



**Judge Deva Pillay in the service of
Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II**



Professor Pankaj Joshi



**Laudium Tennis Association. Standing Satchoo, second from left, Sathia centre,
Deva seated right**

4

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Ramy's father, Narayansamy Soobramoney Pillay, a Mauritian, arrived at Port Elizabeth in Algoa Bay with his father, mother, sister and brother around the turn of the twentieth century. Ramy's sister, Allaymall, tells their story to her daughter, Jaya Pillay.

Port Elizabeth, 19 November 2015

This is how Allaymall Pillay, sister to Ramy, recalls the story of their family/families
By Jaya Pillay

"I am Allaymall Pillay, a sister to Ramy Pillay. Born on 18 January 1928, I am 87 years old [2015]. My father was Narayansamy Subramoney (N.S.) Pillay. His family's origin is spread over three countries. His parents were from India. They emigrated with their first son to Mauritius, where their second son, Narayansamy, (father of Allaymall and Ramy) and a daughter, Veerama were born.

They left for South Africa where diamonds and gold had been discovered. They made their way to the diamond city, Kimberley and settled there."



N.S. Pillay

When they arrived in Kimberley, they were in a small community of Mauritian Tamil expatriates that included the young Thambi Naidoo. They had all come to seek their fortunes in South Africa's new mining towns.

“Two more brothers, Govindasamy and Kanabathy were born. Then they trekked to Johannesburg, probably lured by the “gold rush” on the Witwatersrand.”
(Jaya Pillay)

After the death of Narayansamy’s father on board ship on his way to visit family in India, Narayansamy with his mother, sister, Veeramma, and brother, Govindasamy, left Kimberley for Johannesburg. According to Allaymall, her father, Narayansamy, was offered the opportunity of becoming an agent in the market at Kimberley. As he had set up shop in Johannesburg, he passed the offer on to his brother, Kanabathy, who was unemployed at the time.

“Kanabathy took up the offer and made a great success of the business and his life in Kimberley. Every month he would send a bag of rice to us because his mother, Perianaithamba, lived with my parents. This kind gesture was a great source of sustenance for our entire family.

My uncle and his wife would come annually to visit us. They owned a posh Packard motor car and were chauffeur driven. They would come on a shopping spree to purchase Indian garments, fabrics and spices in Johannesburg. Sometimes their children came along as well.

Some of my brothers would go to stay with my uncle in Kimberley to help him in his business or my sisters would help my aunt at home. One could say my uncle’s family enjoyed the upper class life style during the boom times in Kimberley.

He made a success of his life in Kimberley, while Narayansamy struggled on in Johannesburg.

Narainsamy’s mother, Perianaithamba, outlived her husband; she lived with us until her death at the ripe old age of 102. She was a true matriarch, who accomplished a lot i.e. she reared her own 5 children, helped my mother with her twelve children and was an ardent supporter of the struggle movement (Passive Resistance). With my parents, uncles, aunts and other family members, she was imprisoned more than once for involvement in political defiance. She told us that she owned a property in Nugget Street and after her release from prison she found that her property had been confiscated.

By the time Narainsamy's family was established, his eldest brother had died. His eldest brother had one son, the famous Krishnanne⁵ of Pretoria. The three remaining brothers were very close and always consulted each other on any matter and acted in unison. Narainsamy and Govindsamy and their sister Veeramma, who married Thambi Naidoo, put roots down in Johannesburg while Kanabathy remained in Kimberley where he became a very successful businessman, a market agent.

The entire family were devout Hindus of Tamil origin. They attended temple services regularly and always conducted prayers in their homes. My siblings enjoyed singing Tamil songs and performing Purthasi Prayers on Saturdays during this holy month.” (Jaya Pillay)

Ramy's Mother, Letchmee, came to South Africa as a child. Not much is known of her family. This is what Allaymal Pillay recalls.

This is what my mother told me. Her father came from India with his two young children – my mother, Letchmee, and her brother. They arrived in Cape Town where my father, Narayansamy, saw her and requested her hand in marriage although she was only 10 years old at the time. She was promised to him but only married him when she was 15 years old.

Events took a strange twist in Letchmee's life. My mother had blue eyes and soon after marriage she turned blind. Narayansamy's mother, Perianaithamba, then took her to India to perform prayers at the renowned Thiruputhi Temple in Andhra Pradesh. She had to make a sacrifice that entailed rolling around the temple three times on three consecutive mornings.



My mother, mrs N.S. Pillay

5 G.Krishnan Pillay (Krishnanne) was a Tamil scholar and priest who established the Tamil School and was responsible for erecting the temple in Marabastad, Pretoria. The temple is now a national monument. Krishnanne was vehemently opposed to British colonial rule and had fought in India's independence struggle.

And on the third day she regained her eye sight but lost her ability to hear. She remained deaf throughout her life, but because she was able to hear earlier on in life she lip read and was able to communicate in various Indian languages. Perianaithamba told us that they encountered many difficulties during this pilgrimage; on one occasion, their jewellery and money were stolen while they were asleep.

After returning to S.A., my mother bore 12 children to my father. She was fluent in Tamil, Telugu and could even speak some Gujarathi to the shopkeepers but she spoke very little English. She was not literate.”
(Jaya Pillay)

In Johannesburg, the family became involved in passive resistance against the Transvaal government. Narayansamy's sister, Veerammal, had married Thambi Naidoo, a powerful, courageous man, and a leader in the passive resistance struggle.

The following description of Thambi Naidoo is from Enuga.S. Reddy's book *Thambi Naidoo and his Family*:

One of the first satyagrahis in the movement of 1906-14 and a most loyal and courageous colleague of Gandhi was Govindasamy Krishnasamy Thambi Naidoo. Apart from defying the law and going to jail many times, he mobilised the Tamils in the Transvaal to participate in the satyagraha and the workers in Natal to strike for the abolition of an unjust tax which caused enormous suffering.

He was born in 1875 in Mauritius where his parents had migrated from Madras Presidency.⁶ According to his daughter, Thayanayagie Pillay (known as Thailema), his father was a prosperous fertiliser and cartage contractor in Mauritius. Thambi was his youngest son. One day, his father said to him, “You are my youngest son. You must think of the people before you think of yourself”. Thailema continued: “My father was very impressed by his father's seriousness when he said these words and he took them to heart and afterwards built his life on them and taught them to us his children”.

He went to South Africa with his sister and brother and started a business in Kimberley, centre of diamond mines, in 1889 when he was 14 years old. He moved three years later to Johannesburg when gold was discovered in the Transvaal.

6 Mrs. Manonmany Naidoo, his daughter-in-law, said the parents came from Mattur in Tamil Nadu. (*The Patriot*, New Delhi, 1 October 1988).

He started hawking fresh produce, set up shop on Bree Street and gradually expanded his business into that of a produce merchant and wholesaler. He also became a cartage contractor.

His obituary in *The Star and Rand Daily Mail* (1 November 1933) reported that he had founded the Transvaal Indian Congress with H. O. Ally in 1893. If that is correct, this Congress was formed earlier than the Natal Indian Congress which Gandhi established in 1894.⁷

Narayansamy, his wife, Letchmee, and his mother, Perianaithamba, joined Thambi Naidoo in passive resistance against restrictive laws.

In 1910, Gandhi set up Tolstoy Farm on land donated by Hermann Kallenbach, an admirer of Leo Tolstoy. The farm “was established with a view to training an army of non-violent volunteers.” Many activists took their families and went to live on the farm where they remained for the next three years.⁸

Narayansamy and Thambi moved to Tolstoy farm with their families and became involved in all its activities. In 1913, the opportunity arose to put their training into action and Letchmee was in a group of women arrested for opposition to the restrictive laws to which Indians were being subjected.

In 1913, two statutory events that outraged the community set off new satyagraha demonstrations: the Immigrants Regulation Act passed to stop Indian immigration into the country and a judgment handed down in the Cape Supreme Court that invalidated all Hindu and Muslim marriages. Satyagrahis went into action. Since the Act and the ruling closely affected women, Gandhi for the first time allowed women to take part in non-violent resistance. Not only were women to participate, they were to take the lead. Twelve women were chosen from Tolstoy farm: Mrs. Veerammal Naidoo (wife of Thambi Naidoo), Mrs N Pillay, Mrs K Murugasa, Mrs A. Perumal Naidoo, Mrs PK Naidoo, Mrs K Chinnaswami Pillay, **Mrs NS Pillay [Ramy’s mother, Letchmee]**, Mrs RA Mudalingum, Mrs Bhavani Dayal, Miss Minachi Pillay, Miss Baikum Murugasa Pillay and sixteen-year old Valliamma R. Munuswami Mudaliar.

7 E. S. Reddy, Thambi Naidoo and his Family, p. 11. www.muthalnaidoo.co.za

8 Ibid, p.199



Veerammal, who was pregnant at the time, took her tiny toddler, Seshammal, Thailema's younger sister, with her. The women, some with babies and young children, went to Vereeniging where they hawked without licences in order to court arrest. But nothing happened.

Meanwhile at the Phoenix Settlement in Natal, Gandhi had organised a group, including four women, to march across the Natal border without permits. This group, led by Gandhi's wife, Kasturbha, was detained on 23 September 1913 and sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labour.

Following their example, the women from Tolstoy Farm also crossed the border, but again nothing happened. Since they had geared themselves for this expedition, it was most frustrating not to have their brave defiance acknowledged. Clearly, more drastic action was needed. Thambi Naidoo took them to the coalmines in Newcastle where they moved among Indian coalminers urging them to protest against the crippling £3 poll tax. When the miners came out on strike shortly afterwards, the women were at last arrested. On 21 October, 1913, they were sentenced to three months, hard labour, and joined their comrades from Phoenix in the Pietermaritzburg Prison.

They were still in prison during the great march of satyagrahis from Natal across the Transvaal border that began in November 1913 and ended in December with the arrest of Gandhi and hundreds of others.

When...the...women were eventually released in February 1914, they were weak and ailing. Harsh prison conditions had seriously undermined their health. ... The sixteen-year old satyagrahi, Valliamma, who had been reduced to little more than a skeleton, was immediately confined to bed on her release. Gandhi, greatly moved by this young girl's dedication, went to her bedside to speak to her.

"Valliamma, you do not repent of your having gone to jail?"

"Repent? I am even now ready to go to jail again if I am arrested," said Valliamma.

"But what if it results in your death?"

"I do not mind it. Who would not love to die for one's motherland?"
was the reply.

Valliamma died 22 February 1914, a week after her release.⁹

Valliamma's courage and fortitude have become legendary. She demonstrates clearly the calibre of the women who were chosen to lead the great resistance movement of 1913. All were steadfast, understood what they were doing, and willingly sacrificed their freedom; they were equally willing to sacrifice their lives. Letchmee, Ramy's mother, had gone to prison with her baby daughter, Rajammal, in her arms.

When Satyagraha came to an end in 1914, Gandhi returned to India. His followers left Tolstoy Farm and went back to their homes in Johannesburg. Narayansamy, Letchmee and the children moved home several times before they eventually settled in Fordsburg.

These are Allaymal's recollections of those days, as recorded by her daughter, Jaya.

Early life in Johannesburg:

My father always wore a suit, collar and tie and a hat when he went out. My mother always wore a sari tied in the old fashion Tamil style.

My father's mother, Perianaithamba, and my mother's father lived with us. My mother was quite dependent on my grandmother, Perianaithamba. Granny was the one who got up early in the morning, prepared breakfast and sent us to school. I have a picture of her in my mind of her cleaning rice in the yard, picking out the grit and throwing it down to the chickens clucking round her and pecking at odd bits.

9 2007, *Stories from the Asiatic Bazaar*, pages 55-6 www.muthalnaidoo.co.za

Our various dwellings

We were a large family living together. I was born at the Gold Street Residence. Then the family moved to 43 Davies Street in Doornfontein, to a house next to Leon's Cold Drink Factory. We were forced to vacate this property because the factory wanted our premises for their expanding business. We moved to Kliptown (quite far out of town). One day, Mr. Sam Vandayar - a property owner and the owner of Majestic Cinema saw my father at the bus stop and asked him why he was living so far out and offered Pappa one of his houses in Luttig Street, Fordsburg. I got married from this home in 1947. My father also died in this house.

Work

Despite being a large, extended family we lived in harmony and always had enough to eat. My father owned a shop in Booyens while he lived in Kliptown and Doornfontein. In his shop he sold fresh produce, cold drinks, sweets, chocolates and agrabathi [incense sticks]. After he closed his shop, he started working for Atlas Cleaners (a depot in Vredesdorp). From school I used to go to his place of work to help out and he would always keep half of his sandwiches for me.

My mother was an excellent baker, she had merely to look at or taste a cake and she could bake it. She never measured the ingredients. My eldest brother, Govindsamy, once brought a Cheese Cake home, and the next day she baked an identical one. My mother also made some extra money by selling curry and rice when we lived in Doornfontein.

My sister, Parvathie worked for Veronica Blouses where she became a skilled seamstress; she supported the family with her income. I [Allaymall] also worked there for a short stint after leaving school. I was forced to leave school in Std. 9 [Grade 11]. I was very sad, and even cried because I wanted to continue with my schooling. My mother was unable to allow me to continue due to financial constraints. The school, Newtown High School, was in Fordsburg. When we lived in Doornfontein, we had to pay train fare as well as school fees.

Melrose Temple

My father, Narainsamy helped to establish the Melrose Temple, and played an important role on the executive committee; he travelled to Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London to collect funds for the temple. He was also tasked with the duty of keeping a register of all the grave numbers of deceased persons from the Tamil community. His meticulous records led eventually to the discovery of Valliamma Munuswami's gravestone in the Braamfontein Cemetery. The number of the gravestone was found in his register.

Every January for Thai Poosum¹⁰ my mother packed a picnic basket and she would take us along by train to Melrose Temple. We had to start out early. When we arrived at the Temple, she would place the basket under some trees and enter the temple for worship. And after the service she would gather us in the gardens and we would enjoy the eats she brought along.

(Jaya Pillay)

Years earlier in about 1870, Indian labourers at the Melrose Laundry had set up a little place of worship for themselves in the laundry grounds. When the owner saw their makeshift shrine, he made them a gift of land where they could build a temple. At first it was just a tin shack. When Naranyansamy, came to live in Johannesburg sometime in the first decade of the twentieth century, he became actively involved in raising funds for a proper temple.

In Pretoria, Narayansamy's nephew, G. Krishnan Pillay, who also first conducted religious services in a tin shanty, designed and built the Marieamman Temple in Marabastad. Post-apartheid years later, Ramy would be active in having the Mariamman Temple declared a National Monument.

Even though this first generation of Ramy's family in South Africa was actively involved in preserving the Tamil culture and language, Allaymall indicates the beginning of change.

At night we would gather in our living room and listen to Tamil music with our parents and grandparents.

The children all spoke Tamil to our elders except the last 2 born i.e. Savitree and Ramy. They understood Tamil but were allowed to answer our parents in English.

We also attended Tamil classes which were conducted by India born teachers who came to Johannesburg. Ramy's love for Tamil music, culture and traditions were part and parcel of his life and continued even when he got married.

There was always teasing and singing in our home. We had nicknames for each other. Ramy and I addressed each other by these names even after we were married. His nickname was "Rosie Parti," mine was "Long Eye."

10 A festival celebrating Lord Muruga's defeat of an evil demon. People carry kavadi (an arch) and circumambulate the temple.

Ramy, as a child

We were 12 children and now there are only two left, Dings and I. Ramy was my baby brother and there is an age gap of six years between us. Three of my eldest siblings were already married by the time Ramy was born [1934]. My earliest memories of our relationship are very vivid. I remember bathing and dressing him when he was a toddler. One day he fell and hurt himself. His knee was bleeding profusely. I remember carrying him to hospital accompanied by my mother.

He was a timid child. I used to sort out his problems when he was bullied at school. On one occasion a youngster teased him and Ramy came crying to me. I did not hesitate to deal with this bully and that put an end to his being tormented.

On one occasion, my sister, Pungajum, Ramy and I travelled to Durban by train at the invitation of a friend of our parents. This uncle, Springbok Raju, was kind enough to send us train tickets to come and spend the holidays with them at the coast. You can imagine how excited we were because it would be our first glimpse of the sea. Being the eldest of the three, the duty fell upon me to take care of my sister and brother. On this journey the youngsters on the train were trying to imitate the whistling sound of the engine. They covered their mouths with their hands and blew through them. They were pretty good; they sounded a lot like the train. But Ramy was frustrated; he could not get the hang of it. He nagged me to show him. After a few failed attempts, I lost my cool and gave him a shot; he got it right immediately after.

My brother, Dings who now lives in Canada, used to make Christmas hats. Many of his friends and Ramy, who was eight years younger, would gather in one of the rooms in our Doornfontein home to manufacture the hats. This was a fun time because they would all sing Tamil songs and everyone was in a festive mood because of the money they were going to earn from the hats which they would sell outside the O.K. Bazaars in the CBD of Johannesburg.

(Jaya Pillay)

Ramy was a little kid tagging along behind the big boys, Dings and his friends. Being mischievous, Dings loved to play tricks on his little brother. He would send Ramy into a little shop to buy fish and ships, knowing full well that blacks were not allowed in there; they were served from a hatch at the back of the shop. Dings and his pals would watch from outside to see what would happen to Ramy standing innocently at the counter inside the shop. He was only about six so no real harm would come to him.

As a young boy, Ramy used to sell veggies from door to door after school to make some pocket money. By the time Ramy was in his teens, six children had either left home or were married and so the duty fell upon his shoulders to keep the home fires burning. He was forced to leave school to fend for his aged parents.

I got married in 1947, when Ramy was thirteen years old. He travelled with my parents and some of my siblings and my sister-in-law, Vallie Unni, to Port Elizabeth where my wedding was held. He was the 'page boy' at my wedding ceremony. Once I was settled in Uitenhage, my new home town, Ramy would visit me during his holidays. I was extremely happy because I missed him so much and my in-laws and my husband loved him and looked forward to his visits. On one of his visits he replaced the old fashioned lighting in our dining room and lounge with modern light fittings.



Uitenhage: Allay extreme left, Ramy centre, Kuben, baby in arms, Manoo, Pungajum (Ramy's sister)

In the Cape, I encountered a more diverse lifestyle and a favourite pastime was going to the beach which is approximately 30 Km. away from Uitenhage. En route to the beach, the youngsters would sing the popular 'Kaapse Klopse' or 'Ghoema' songs and Ramy enjoyed singing along. Ramy was developing into a very handsome young man, who helped us in our business and he enjoyed this new exposure.

He began working at Stella Nova Studios (a Photographic Company) and being ambitious, quickly worked himself up to a senior position.

(Jaya Pillay, November 2015)

Ramy was always immaculate and his fastidiousness amused the prankster, Dings. Ramy would always wash and iron his clothes when he got home and hang them up ready for

the next day. Sometimes, when he got up in the morning and was getting ready to go to work, he wouldn't find his clothes. And then he would be told that Dings had gone off to work in them. There was no Allaymall there to protect him. And he probably missed her as much she missed him.

My husband had a young cousin in Port Elizabeth who resembled Ramy a lot and seeing him gladdened my heart and consoled me to a certain degree. Ramy was a great soul who was pragmatic, kind, generous and sincere. He loved his Hindu Culture (Tamil) and propagated it in his home and his community.

I was extremely sad when Ramy became ill and I could not help him, but I am happy that we relocated to Johannesburg in 2005 and I was able to spend invaluable time with him. Our two families visited each other regularly and those moments are sacred to me. Ramy will always be a ray of light in my heart and I cherish the gift of having had a brother like him.

(Jaya Pillay, November 2015)



Ramy and Allymall 2007

5

PHOTOGRAPHY

Ramy was the youngest of twelve children, eight girls and four boys. All four of the boys, Govindarajalu, Rajee, Ramanugen (Dings) and Ramy, became photographers.

Govindarajalu (1920-1952)

Govindarajalu, the eldest son, sixteen years older than Ramy, was the first to discover the delights of capturing people, objects, scenes and events on film. According to his sister, Allaymall, he acquired a camera, taught himself to use it and went around snapping everything. He was employed by a radiologist, Dr Weinberg, probably illegally, as radiography was off-limits to black people.

Working in Dr Weinberg's darkroom developing x-ray films stimulated his interest in photography and his enthusiasm and excitement led to real expertise with the camera. Allay remembers that a photograph he took of two cocks fighting was submitted to the Daily Mirror and won a prize. Govindarajalu's younger brothers, Rajee and Dings, inspired by him, also became interested in photography and radiography. At some stage, Govindarajalu brought Dings to work alongside him in Dr Weinberg's laboratory and later Rajee would work with Dings in Dr Ernest Faerber's darkroom.





Govindarajalu with his eldest sister Rajammal



Govindarajalu's son, Deva, and his wife, Valli

According to his son, Sathia Pillay, after Govindarajalu left Dr Weinberg, he went to work for the Stein Brothers, green grocers, before becoming a bookkeeper for I.C. Asherbhai. He was spotted there by a Mr Sunderjee, who offered him a better position in Louis Trichardt. So the family moved up north but not for long. When Govindarajalu went into hospital for surgery on varicose veins, he did not survive the operation. Something went wrong when the anaesthetic was administered and he died. He was only thirty-two. He may have been allergic and suffered anaphylactic shock. His family returned to Fordsburg where his wife found employment in a factory.

Govindarajalu died young but he left a powerful legacy. All his brothers would become professionals in radiography and/or photography.

Dings (1926)

Ramanugen, the third son, was nicknamed Dingaan or Dings as he was born on Dingaan's Day, 16 December, now Day of Reconciliation. Inspired by his eldest brother, Govindarajalu, Dingaan became interested in radiography and photography. And sometime in the 1940s, when he saw an advertisement in the newspaper for a radiographer's assistant, he took a chance and applied. Radiography was a field reserved for whites. But Dr Ernest Faerber, who had placed the advertisement, ignored racist laws and invited Dings to an interview.

Faerber could only employ Dings clandestinely. He also gave Dings' sister, [Pungajum], a job and paid them the same salaries that he would have to Whites. After a while, he secretly took Dings to the gold mines and allowed him to take X-rays of the miners. Sometimes he sneaked him into an operating theatre to take X-rays of White patients unconscious under general anaesthesia. (Mohamed Keshavjee)¹¹

Dings became an expert radiographer and could identify every bone in the human body.

After World War II ended, the Rosenfeldts arrived in Johannesburg. To comply with immigration requirements, Mogens Rosenfeldt had to have medical clearance. That brought him to Dr Faerber for x-rays. Here he met Dings and asked him if he knew of anyone who would be interested in working in the photography studio that he was setting up. Dinga himself was interested and went to work at the new Stella Nova Studio over weekends. He introduced his brother Rajee and his sister Savithree's brother-in-law, Thambi, to the Rosenfeldts who employed them as well. In 1953, Dings would also bring Ramy into the Stella Nova fold.

Working at Stella Nova, Dings honed his skills as a photographer and opened Dings Studio in Bree Street. That led to photographic opportunities in Sophiatown, Alexandra and New Clare townships. By the time he left the country, Dinga had built up a client base that Ramy inherited when he took over management of Dings Studio.

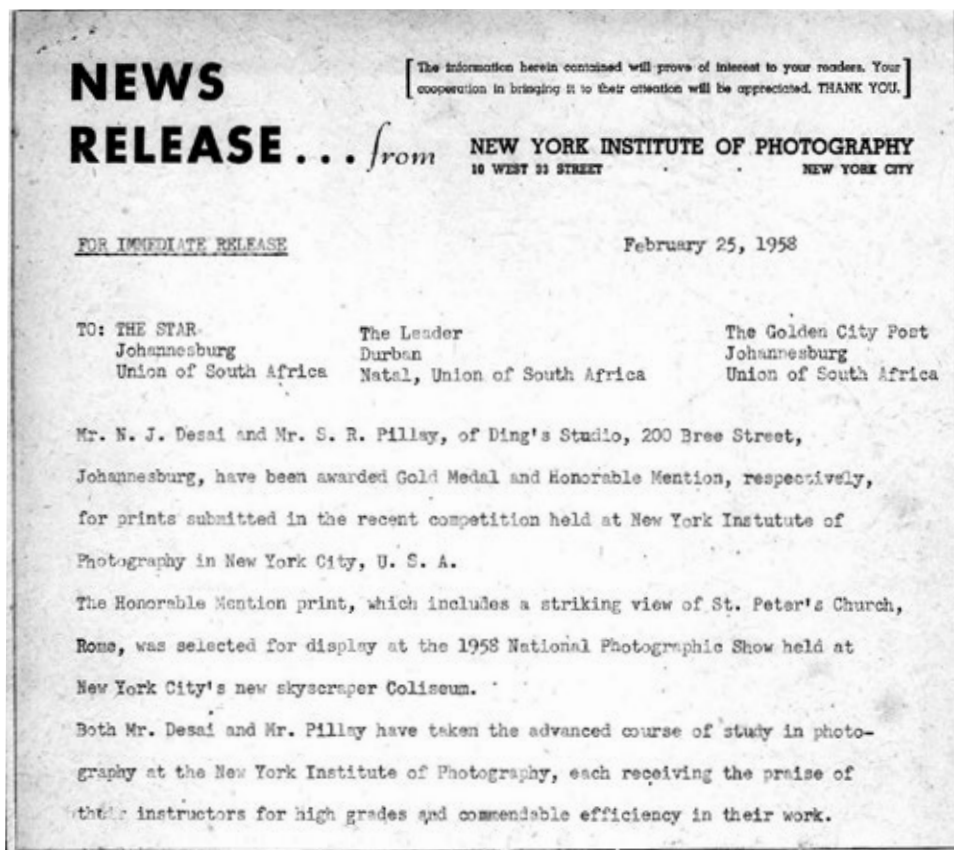
In 1957, Dings saw a newspaper advertisement of the New York Institute of Photography offering the opportunity to study photography in the US. He applied, was accepted and with the help of Dr Faerber, managed to raise enough funds to get to New York. He and Nanoo Desai, who had also been accepted by the N.Y. Institute of Photography, travelled together to the States via London.

In London, they met the Defence Minister of India, Krishna Menon, who provided them with a letter of introduction to Arthur Lall, head of the Indian Mission to the UN in New York. Lall explained to Dings and Nanoo Desai that since they were not Indian citizens, the only employment he could offer them was as messengers. They accepted and worked very hard. Dinga was soon promoted to the Registry Department where he was responsible for the custody of sensitive documents.

While working as a messenger, he also attended an evening course in radiography at the Manhattan Dental and Assistance School. After Dings qualified as a radiographer, he secured a job as an x-ray technician at the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York but continued to work at the Indian Mission as well as he did not have US immigration papers. (Keshavjee, 281-2)

11 Mohamed Keshavjee, *Into that Heaven of Freedom*, by, 2015, Mawenzi House Publishers Ltd.Toronto, Ontario M5M 1K5,Canada pp. 281-2

From June to October 1957, Dings and Nanoo Desai were Honour Students at the New York Institute of Photography. Both won awards for their work: Nanoo Desai a Gold Medal and Dings an Honourable Mention. Dings's print "a striking view of St. Peter's Church, Rome," was selected for display at the 1958 New York City's new skyscraper Coliseum.



Transcript

To: The Star

The Leader

The Golden City Post

Mr N.J.Desai and Mr S.R. Pillay, of Ding's Studio, 200 Bree Street, Johannesburg, have been awarded Gold Medal and Honorable Mention, respectively, for prints submitted in the recent competition held at New York Institute of Photography in New York City, U.S.A.

The Honorable Mention print, which includes a striking view of St Peter's Church,Rome, was selected for display at the 1958 National Photographic Show held at New York City's new skyscraper Coliseum.

Both Mr Desai and Mr Pillay have taken the advanced course of study in photography at the New York Institute of Photography, each receiving the praise of their instructors for high grades and commendable efficiency in their work.]

Transcript: This is to certify that Mr Ramanugen Pillay was a student at our Institute from June 17, 1957 until October 9, 1957, during which time he received training in portrait photography and Oil Coloring. Our records indicate he was an excellent student, receiving an "A minus" grading for his work. In our association with Mr Pillay, we found Him to be of good moral character, a clean, upright, Intelligent student, quick to rasp details and a willing worker. We feel confident he will satisfactorily carry out any duties entruste to his care.

Yours very truly
B.A.McElroy, Registrar,

Upon completion of his studies at the Institute, Dings became a staff photographer at the India Mission of the UN and was witness to many important moments in the history of international politics during his time there.

He was also assigned the task of escorting Indian dignitaries visiting the UN. The first was Rajagopalachari who came to address the UN on nuclear disarmament. When Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was on a state visit to the US, Dings was delegated to accompany him as his personal photographer. Dings was also assigned to Krishna Menon when he came to the UN each year between September and December. One of the tasks given to him by Menon was to work with an Indian diplomat, AK Mitra, in consolidating all the existing racial issues against South Africa into one document called "The Apartheid Question."
(Keshavjee, 281-2)



Neutralism's Calm Voice Meets New York Turmoil

Smiling Dings behind Neru

In 1960 Dings set up a Dings Studio in New York and then sent for Meena, the fiancée Dings had left behind in South Africa. They were married in New York. As the 1960s were turbulent times in America, Dings felt that New York was not the place to raise a young family. With the assistance of Krishna Menon, he gained entry into Canada and in 1963, he and his wife headed north to seek new opportunities.¹²

They arrived in Toronto, where Dings had difficulty finding work; his applications to hospitals were unsuccessful. He “ended up in Construction Radiology. Think of Ram (Dings) whenever you take a trip downtown as many buildings and bridges and even the Gardiner Expressway had the strength of their steel x-ray tested and approved by Ram.” (Sarojini Pillay, Dingaan’s daughter)

Years later, when he was advised of the health hazards of working with the chemicals he used, he gave up industrial radiography and took up photography again. Neils Rosenfeldt recalls that his parents Mogens and Dorothy Rosenfeldt came up from South Africa to set up Stella Nova Photographers in downtown Toronto.

Mom and Dad went to Canada to set up Stella Nova Studios there for Reggie’s brother [Dings]. They were away for about two months (I think) and brought back two gallon tins of Maple Syrup, which I had never tasted before, but loved on my Jungle Oats. (Neils Rosenfeldt, 13 November 2015)

Dings “eventually branched out and built a small empire which included Photography, Printing and Moving & Cartage Companies.” (Sarojini Pillay)

Dings and Meena worked very hard to ensure that their son, Sivaji, and daughter, Sarojini, received a good education. Sarojini became a journalist, worked for Butterworths Publishers and is now [in 2016] senior editor at Nexus Lexus. Sivaji is a pilot; he flew first with Carnival Airlines, then Northwest Airlines and now, living in the USA, he is with Delta Airlines, flying 777s.

When Dings and Meena retired, they sold up and went to live in Florida. After many years, they returned to Canada to be close to their grandchildren.

12 Adapted from Mohamed Keshvjee, 2015, *Into that Heaven of Freedom* (281-2) by and Sarojini Pillay, “A banquet speech.”

Ram (Dingaan) is now [in 2014] just shy of 88 and a devout Hindu, he thanks God every day for the blessings he has received throughout his adventurous life. Ram now spends his time as a professional grandpa who loves to drive his grandchildren crazy with games of 'Pull My Finger' and 'Just hold this Elastic', while they are always determined to mess up his unbelievably full head of hair. He will still burn up the dance floor until 2:00 am and is always seeking opportunities to play practical jokes on people. Be warned that if you visit Ram and take off your shoes to enter his home, there is no guarantee they will still be there when you're ready to leave. Ram's determination to live life to the fullest is reflected in his favourite saying "old soldiers never die", but should he one day be called to the Lord's side, he has insisted to his children, "Make sure you bury me standing up, because I always stand up for my rights."

(Sarojini Pillay)

Rajee (1922-1999)

Pieranthumbia or Rajamanikum, called Rajee, the second son, was twelve years older than Ramy and four years older than Dingaan. After he left school, he went to work for a family friend in Durban, Raju Chetty popularly known as Springbok Raju as he owned the Springbok Garage. Rajee was sent away as he had fallen in love with Veeramma, his sister's husband's niece, and the family did not approve. But Rajee and Veeramma loved each other and kept up a correspondence while he was away. Eventually the family gave in. Times were changing and in the South African environment, the custom of arranged marriages was beginning to lose ground.



Rajee and Veerammah

When Rajee returned to Doornfontein, he worked for a while at Advanced Launderers and then joined Dings at Dr Faerber's radiography laboratory where he worked in the dark room developing X-ray plates. When he was sent with a delivery to Stella Nova Studios, he met the

Rosenfeldts and shortly after went to work for them. The Rosenfeldts trained Rajee, whom they called Reggie, in all aspects of the work and he eventually took over the framing department. He was hardworking and efficient and earned the respect and affection of the Rosenfeldts.



Rajee at Stella Nova

Vartharajalu (Ramy) 1934 -2008

Still a baby when Govindarajalu first took up a camera, Ramy grew up in the wake of enthusiasts in the fields of photography and radiography. Like his brothers, Dings and Rajee, who developed great expertise as photographers, Ramy also made photography his career. When Ramy left school at the age of fifteen, he had no idea what he wanted to do. All he understood was that he had to support the family so he took a job in a factory producing leather handbags. "Because of the heat and the chemicals that he worked with, his nose used to bleed all the time."

(Satch Pillay, 21.01.2016)

He gave up the job and in 1953 went to work at Stella Nova Studios. His brothers, Dings and Rajee were already working there. Being personable, reliable and hardworking like his brothers, Ramy also earned the friendship and respect of Mogens and Dorothy Rosenfeldt. They taught him everything about photography. Stella Nova Studios specialised in the 12 in 1 portrait – an amalgamation of 12 different poses into a photographic collage. This 12 in 1 portrait would become a trademark of the Dings Studio chain that Ramy and Rajee would establish later.

As the Rosenfeldts did not conform to apartheid restrictions, Ramy had the opportunity to work his way up to managerial level and took on great responsibility for all Stella Nova branches.



Rajee, Dings, Ramy

Dings Studios

When Dings left the country in 1957, Ramy took over his studio in Bree Street and Rajee opened a studio in Fordsburg, and they were in business for themselves while they were still working at Stella Nova. Rajee's wife, Veeramma, ran the studio in Fordsburg while he ran the Stella Nova Framing Department. P.D. Pillay, Dings' father-in-law, ran the studio in Bree Street for Ramy.

According to Ramany, Rajee's daughter, "after the Rosenfeldts retired and moved to Denmark, they sold their businesses to the brothers." This was sometime in the 1970s. Ramy and Rajee then established their Dings Studios. The Rosenfeldts' speciality, the "Twelve in One" portrait made their studios very popular. The Bree Street studio became the studio for African wedding photographs and was usually booked out over weekends.



Dings Studio

In the 1960s after African people had been removed from city centres, the Group Areas Board turned its attention to 'Coloured' and 'Indian' people. To avoid being evicted and dumped in Lenasia, Ramy moved from Ophirton in Johannesburg to the Indian township of Laudium in Pretoria.

He urged Rajee, who was still living in Fordsburg, to move to Laudium as well. Ramy helped his brother secure a plot in Jet Street and Rajee and Veeramma, moved into their new home in Laudium in 1973. Their daughter, Ramany had been married from their home in Fordsburg in August 1972, was now living with her husband in Laudium. After Ramany's first child was born in 1973, she and her husband and their baby daughter, moved in with her parents in Jet Street.

For Rajee and Veeramma, living in Laudium meant driving to Johannesburg every morning to get to their studios. The travelling became too much so they moved back to Johannesburg in 1974, first to Mayfair and then to Doornfontein. But they were back in Laudium every weekend as they were very attached to their first grandchild and would be to the grandchildren that followed. In 1987, when their son-in-law passed away, they moved back to Laudium to take care of their daughter and her children.

In 1995, Ramy's work in establishing the Dings Studio chain and training photographers was officially recognized. Ramy was given honorary Life Membership of the Professional Photographers Southern African Association. He was interviewed by Fakir Hassen whose article records Ramy's personal account of his work as an independent Studio Photographer.

After more than four decades of training hundreds of photographers, mainly in the disadvantaged communities, Centurion resident Mr Ramy Pillay has been honoured with Honorary Life Membership by the Professional Photographers' of Southern Africa (PPSAA).

Mr Pillay, 61, started out in 1953 when he joined the then famous Stella Nova studios in Johannesburg, mixing chemicals and drying photos, using his spare time to learn framing and mounting.

He stayed with the company as it grew from three to 26 studios, learning from his boss how to develop and print as well, and was forced to leave when the outlets were franchised.

"Because of the Group Areas Act, I was not allowed to own the licence required for dealing in photographic goods, so I could not take over one of the studios," said Mr Pillay, "so I took over a studio started by my elder brother, Dings, who left for America to further his studies in photography."

The famous Dings Studio in Bree Street, Johannesburg, turned out scores of street photographers who were taught to use better cameras than the old box models they were traditionally using.

But the Group Areas Act again interrupted Mr Pillay's efforts. He was forced to move out of the city centre studio.

Trust in a white former colleague whose name was used as a nominee to secure another shop in the area was broken when he just left the country.

"The authorities then required a white man to be seen opening and closing the shop and I became one of the first Indians to be charged under the Group Areas Act. I received a one-year suspended sentence."

That is when he decided to move into the former Indian Group Area of Laudium, and established studios which were eventually churning out work for more than 20 large organisations in the country.

Mr Pillay also further developed the School for Black Photographers there, and recalls how some would-be photographers were being floored by a correspondence school.

"Many of these students could not even read or write, and I spent much time having to teach them practically how to operate the camera. Many of them still phone me to ask for advice."

Once the most popular camera of the day, the Yashica 120 twin lens was discontinued, Mr Pillay began importing a special model made in China, but he had to do it via Hong Kong because there were no diplomatic relations between China and

Honour for lensman v

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Centurion resident Mr Ramy Pillay with his photographic memorabilia

Picture: FAKIR HASSEN

brand in the world, often thanking him for his role in developing and marketing their brands in South Africa.

Some letters just bluntly seek his advice, and others record their thanks for his role in their success here.

At one stage, Mr Pillay tried to import his own brand of film which would be of equal quality but much cheaper than the international brands, but it failed because of the tradition among black consumers to stick to established brand names.

In a rather strange irony, Mr Pillay has processed hundreds of thousands of photographs taken by other people, but has taken very few himself.

But his collections over the years have become valuable historical records. Some of this material now has pride of place in the Museum Africa in Newtown in Johannesburg.

Although Mr Pillay has five sons, none of them has acquired his passion for photography. They are in law, accountancy and medicine, but very proud of the award received by their father.

And in an age when digital photography and computerised processing machines and cameras puts high-quality colour photography within the reach of everybody, does Mr Pillay have any regrets about his long career?

"None at all," he says immediately. "I am very happy that I trained people to run their own businesses successfully and the calls I still get from them, from all over Southern Africa, are very gratifying."

The following is a transcript of Fakir Hassen's article.

Fakir Hassen: Honour for lensman ... [1995]

Gauteng Gatherings

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When the most popular camera of the day, the Yashica 120 twin lens was discontinued, Mr Pillay began importing a special model made in China, but he had to do it via Hong Kong because there were no diplomatic relations between China and South Africa then.

All this time, photography was largely a black and white business, and when colour printing arrived Mr Pillay’s labs brought in state-of the-art machines which could process up to 100 rolls of film a day.

But then the one-hour labs arrived and instant cameras came in. Polaroid instant cameras were a blessing because before that we would often sleep in the studio working through the night to develop and print the thousands of identity document photographs which were required every day.”

Mr Pillay shows a well-worn file containing cuttings and letters from heads of almost every major film brand in the world, often thanking him for his role in developing and marketing their brands in South Africa.

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(Fakir Hassen, *Gauteng Gathering*, 1995)

6

THREE NEPHEWS

JUDGE DEVA PILLAY**Son of Ramy's sister Allaymall**

This is the nephew who debated with Uncle Ramy about his 'chauvinistic' reverence for the Tamil identity. Deva grew up in Uitenhage, near Port Elizabeth, in a community with a scattering of Indians, where his father, T.K.Pillay, ran a General Dealership and his mother, Allay, a smaller shop, a kind of corner café. His parents were well liked and respected by their black and white customers.



Uitenhage: Allay, front row right, TK, back row left

In the Eastern Cape Deva was not subjected to the kind of ethnic tensions that prevailed in the “coolie” locations of the north which comprised separate groups of Gujarati-, Hindi-, Hindustani-, Urdu- and Tamil-speaking people. In Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, where the races intermingled more freely, people spoke English and Afrikaans; and language was a

unifying factor. The assertion of a Tamil identity in such circumstances was irrelevant and would have been divisive.

Deva went to school with 'Coloured' children, and the teacher who awakened his awareness of the injustices in the system under which they lived was Mr Hendricks, a 'Coloured' man.

Though Deva grew up somewhat free of race consciousness, when he went on to further education, he was forced to conform to the apartheid ethos as separate racial universities had been set up. With the largest settlement of Indians being in Durban, it was there that a university for Indians was established. The army barracks on Salisbury Island in Durban Bay was turned into a university campus and a ferry service took students to the island. Deva enrolled at Salisbury Island in the pre-med BSc programme; Ramy had advised him to enter the medical profession as it was fairly free of political harassment. As a medical practitioner, Deva would not come under too close scrutiny of security police and enforcers of apartheid laws. Ramy was, of course, forgetting Dr Zuma, Dr Goonam, Dr Naicker, and Dr Dadoo.

But the visit of Robert Kennedy to South Africa in 1966 awakened Deva to his true vocation. Kennedy was scheduled to speak at the white University of Natal and Deva arranged for students from Salisbury to attend the lecture. Listening to the dynamic US Senator, Deva was completely bowled over. And Kennedy's words rang in his ears:

"We don't have to be content with having the Negro as a second-class citizen in the United States." He [President John F. Kennedy] said "I'm not promising you that we're going to be able to deal with this problem immediately. I am not promising you that the problem will disappear - but I am promising you that we will face the problem and we will do something about it."

... When President Kennedy ran in 1960... He went to the American people and said: "We can do better. We can find answers, we can find solutions to our problems."

... we have the ability, the skill and the courage - all we have to do is face our problems, realize our potential, realize our own intelligence and realize the fact that we have the courage and integrity and ability to get this job done ... President Kennedy said "problems are made by man, therefore they can be solved by man."
[<http://www.rfksafilm.org/html/speeches/uninatal.php>]

Robert Kennedy's passionate emphasis on human capacity to bring about change turned Deva into a young man with a mission. He applied to the Honorary Society of the Middle Temple to read law at the University College of London, was accepted, left Salisbury Island and went to study overseas. He graduated in 1976 as a Barrister at Law. His parents, Ramy, and all his relatives were very proud and looked forward to seeing him set up his practice in South Africa. He came back to assess the situation. Having experienced freedom and having gained access to the British legal system, it was difficult to reconcile himself to a situation in which he would have to fight for accommodation in a racist legal system.

But Ramy, anxious for him to stay, got in touch with a contact in Legal Services in Swaziland to secure a position for him in that country where a few South African lawyers were working in exile. After taking everything into consideration, the young barrister decided to go back to London where he could gain legal experience in a straightforward and professional manner.

In London, he was granted admission to the Barristers' Chambers. After more than a decade as barrister, he was appointed Recorder – part-time Judge – in 1990. In 1997, he was appointed permanent judge and was sworn in by the Lord Chancellor. His parents, Allaymall and T.K. Pillay, flew to London for the ceremony. A limousine was sent to bring the young judge, in full regalia, and his parents, to the House of Lords where he took the oath of office. After the ceremony, the Lord Chancellor, Baron James Mackay took Allay and T.K. on a tour of the establishment.

When Deva was appointed to the bench, this was his first thought:

My grandfather was a subject of the Queen and in two generations, his grandson represents the Queen in court. As I sit on the bench, I also represent all those non-white classmates who did not have access to the same advantages and good fortune. My achievements are not only my own. They belong to them as well.

Like Ramy, he understands the meaning of Ubuntu.



Judge Deva

MORGA

Son of Ramy's sister Parvathy

When Ramy's sister's son, Morga, was born in 1950, sixteen-year old Ramy took on the responsibility of providing for him. Ramy was working at Stella Nova and was still living in the family home in Luttig Street in Fordsburg with his mother Letchmee, his brother, Dings, and one or two others. When Morga was two years old, he came to live at Luttig Street where his grandmother, Letchmee took care of him and brought him up.

As Morga got older, his grandmother became dependent on his help in getting about as she was going blind with cataracts. Old and blind as she was, Letchmee was still a feisty woman

and always demanded her rights as a human being. Once, when she and Morga boarded a tram, the conductor ordered them off and she challenged him. "Must I open a vein to show you the colour of my blood?" But she was just a blind, old coolie to the conductor and he forced them off the tram. Morga, a little boy at the time, never forgot the incident.

In 1959, when Ramy married Manoo and brought her home to Ophirton, Letchmee was declining and Manoo spent the first year of her married life taking care of her mother-in-law. Letchmee died in 1960. She had been a mother to Morga and he was deeply affected. He would have felt completely lost but Manoo was very kind and loving and as Morga was a son to Ramy, they mourned the loss of a mother together.

And Morga following in his foster father's footsteps came to share his interests. As Ramy loved sport, especially soccer and tennis, Morga also learned to love these games. Ramy took his young nephews to watch soccer matches at the Natalspruit grounds and to the Bantu Men's Social Centre to play tennis. While Ramy and Sathia were on the courts, Sathia's brother, Deva, and Morga were either at the snooker table or playing table-tennis. When he was old enough, Morga took up tennis. He and Sathia became doubles partners and competed in Tennis Association matches.

In addition to introducing him to sport, Ramy also gave Morga the opportunity to learn about photography. The studio in Bree Street was a stopgap for all nephews who were still figuring out what they wanted to do with their lives. But with Morga, it became his career.

When Ramy's brother, Dings, left South Africa to study in New York, Ramy, who was working full-time at Stella Nova, took over his studio and handed the running of it to P.D. Pillay, Dings's father-in-law. Ramy went there in the evenings and over weekends. And Morga went with him on Saturdays and Sundays. Helping out at the studio, Morga developed a keen interest in photography and became proficient in all aspects. When he completed high school in 1969, on the very day after his last exam, he was off to Dings Studio. He started working there full-time and when P.D. Pillay retired in about 1971, Morga took over as manager of the Studio.

At that time, nearby Eloff Street was the most expensive shopping hub in South Africa. And Morga loved being in the big, bustling city, especially in that part of town where the studio was situated. It was a vibrant cosmopolitan area with music blaring from every shop; with wedding cars, Buicks and Cadillacs, lined up outside the studio and wedding groups waiting for their turn to be photographed. Jomo Sono, a young soccer star at that time and their hero, whom they watched often in matches at Natalspruit, was in and out of the studio. As Dings Studio was not far from the Central Methodist Church, they often saw Desmond Tutu cycling past. They didn't know who he was until they saw a photograph of him in the Star newspaper.

Over weekends, the studio was very busy, mostly with wedding photo shoots. On Saturdays, they had to cater to as many as six or seven wedding groups. People would pose, as individuals, in pairs, and in groups. The studio offered a special 8 by 10 frame, on which photographs were mounted. The special mounting made Dings Studio well known and popular. And the studio was doing extremely well. They were given notice to move a couple of times and had to find other premises – first in Jeppe Street and then back again in Bree Street.

When the studio closed on Saturday afternoons, Ramy and the boys always went to the London Fish and Chips shop on Harrison Street and to Fontana's for fresh, crispy rolls. Ramy would buy smoked turkey at Fontana's which he took home to Manoo. She turned it into a delicious Sunday lunch. Manoo, as always stayed in the background, quietly managing the house, which she kept spotless and sparkling.

When Morga married in 1975, Ramy, as foster father, took complete financial responsibility for the entire wedding even though he was beginning to experience constraints on his ability to spend. His studios were a great success as long as people were dependent on them, but photography as a business was beginning to wane. With improved cameras and one-hour labs for developing film, photography was no longer the exclusive domain of the specialist and the need for studios was diminishing. In the 1980s, Ramy gave up the studios in Johannesburg. He retained the studios in Laudium and Marabastad. As he could no longer depend solely on photography to make a living, his studios also became shops, selling cameras and other photographic equipment.

After Ramy closed the studios in Johannesburg, Morga had to find a new occupation. He left the photography business and ventured into other fields. Fortunately, belonging to the large Pillay clan, there was always someone to bail one out. His cousin, the one whom he had helped to a career as an auto-electrician, returned the favour and Morga became financial manager at Rogens Auto Centre.

And so Ramy's torch of benevolence passes on from individual to individual and generation to generation.

DEVA

Son of Govindarajalu, Ramy's eldest brother



With three brothers and eight sisters, it was inevitable that Ramy would have many nephews and nieces. And being the youngest of his siblings, there would be many nephews and nieces who were about the same age as he was. His eldest brother, Govindarajalu had three children, Sathia, Priscilla, and Deva. Govindarajalu died, at the age of thirty-two. His twenty-seven year old wife with her three young children returned to Johannesburg where she found work in a factory. It was a hard life but with Ramy's assistance, she managed.

Ramy was about seventeen when Govindarajalu died, and, in the Tamil tradition, he took on his brother's family as his responsibility. His nephews and niece received his special care and the boys, Sathia, in particular, often stayed over at Ramy's place in Doornfontein, then Fordsburg, then Ophirton. Ramy and Sathia became inseparable and as adults the relationship changed from uncle and nephew to close friends and associates.

Sathia was determined to get ahead in life. He excelled at school. And in 1958 was the first and only student to matriculate from the high school in the new township of Lenasia. He began his career in education as a teacher in the Pretoria High School in Marabastad but that was only the beginning. He went on to become a Head of Department, School Psychologist, Head of Department at the Laudium College of Education, Headmaster of Himalaya Secondary School, Circuit Inspector and eventually Acting Director of Education in the Gauteng Department of Education. He also held high positions in many organisations, including President of the Tamil Federation. After 1994, he became the first chairman of the Laudium branch of the ANC.

Ramy knew Sathia would make a good life for himself but he was not sure about Sathia's little brother, Deva, who needed the guidance of a father far more than his brother. As his mother was working, there was no strict supervision and Deva's interest in things around him often got him into trouble and he would be given nasty chores as punishment. When he was about six years old, as he was washing handkerchiefs in the yard one day, he spotted a box of matches lying on the ground. He picked it up and began lighting matches and throwing them down.

In his delight with this new game, he wandered off to where an abandoned truck was parked. He saw a hole in the side of the truck, peered into it but couldn't see anything. He lit a match, still couldn't see anything, so he threw the match down the hole in order to see better. Suddenly, there was an explosion, the truck was on fire and Deva was on the ground and in flames. The domestic worker ran to the kitchen for eggs and broke them over him. That stopped the burning and saved his life. Deva was rushed to the hospital where he spent the next three months. The truck was completely destroyed; he had thrown the match down the opening to the petrol tank.

The incident earned him the reputation of being a very naughty boy and people expected him to misbehave. As he was a child with a lively curiosity, he was always in trouble and always getting a hiding. That bothered Ramy, so he began taking the boy to work with him. At the Rosenfeldt's home, Ramy worked in the darkroom and Deva played outside with the children. He wasn't on his own and didn't get up to mischief.

Deva loved his uncle and as he grew older, became very protective of him. One day, when he and his brother-in-law were driving past the house of Dr Ronnie Pillay, Ramy's good friend, they saw the doctor and Ramy in a boisterous conversation with three men. To Deva, it looked like his Uncle was being attacked. Deva and his brother-in-law jumped out of the car, ran into the garden and gave the men such a thrashing they even tore their clothes. They ignored Uncle Ramy and Dr Ronnie who were shouting at them and trying to stop them. After the men ran away, Deva learned that they were gardeners. To make up for what his nephew had done, Ramy bought the gardeners new clothes. He also forgave Deva for his rash behavior; he understood that his short-tempered nephew had jumped to the wrong conclusion. In a country like South Africa, people often jump to wrong conclusions.

Uncle Ramy never gave up on Deva. He involved his nephew in all his activities and, helped him discover his exceptional ability in sport. Ramy was a keen soccer and tennis player and a supporter of local football. Soccer, game best loved amongst Tamils, like everything in those days, was segregated. Ramy would take Morga, Sathia and Deva to the Natalspruit soccer grounds to watch teams like Blackpool, Dynamos and Moroka Swallows in black South African Football Association (SAFA) tournaments. Being proudly Tamil, Ramy's favourite team was Moonlighters with its many Tamil players from Doornfontein. Ramy, an enthusiastic soccer player himself, was actually chosen, on a couple of occasions, to play for Moonlighters in the lower divisions. That was quite an achievement.

Deva's heroes, Links Padayachee, Pikie, Paddy, Rugen and "the great Mandy Davis" were icons in the community. When Deva was old enough, he too began playing soccer and showed great aptitude for the game. Playing for the Young Eagles in the junior division, Deva won recognition as an outstanding player. Ramy was delighted and proud. Then Deva was recruited by Sundowns and was playing semi-professional soccer. He later moved to Swaraj, a touring side in Lenasia. He laughs when he says Swaraj paid a transfer fee of R200 to Sundowns. Life for Deva was on the soccer pitch. He trained all the time, and developed all kinds of special skills. Proud of his exploits on the field, he delighted Uncle Ramy with his accounts of them.

Deva couldn't imagine being in any other sport; but that was to change.

In the latter 1950s, Ramy and Sathia had taken up tennis and played at the sand courts at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Sauer Street in Johannesburg. When they moved to Laudium in the 1960s, they continued playing tennis and Sunday mornings were spent at the Laudium Tennis Courts. A number of Ramy's nephews became part of their informal tennis club. When Deva saw them going off to the courts, he laughed – tennis was for sissies. One weekend when he was off from soccer, Ramy invited him to join them. He refused, "Tennis is not even a game." But Ramy insisted; said he needed Deva as a ball boy – just for that day. Deva made excuses but Ramy would not be put off. Deva gave in and went with them. After playing for a while, Ramy suddenly turned to Deva, "I'm tired; you take this racket." Deva was astonished and protested. But Ramy held out his racket, "No, take this racket and play." It was no use trying to resist Uncle Ramy. Though he really resented it, Deva took the racket and went to play. To his astonishment, he found it exhilarating! And that marked the end of a soccer career and the beginning of a tennis career. "I don't know what Uncle Ramy saw in me."

Then Ramy was on the phone looking for a tennis coach for Sathia, Deva, Morga, and a few others. Ramy knew that the best coaches were white – they were professionals; they played at Wimbledon. Ramy ignored the fact this was South Africa and all sport was segregated. Like the Rosenfeldts, he would not succumb to prejudice enforced by the system. And once he got a notion in his head, he had to make it a reality; so he phoned around, phoned and phoned and phoned. Eventually, he got a response from Russell Seymour, a Wimbledon finalist in the 1950s, and, at the time, Chris Drysdale's coach. Seymour, ignoring apartheid restrictions, invited the group from Laudium to his home in Wynberg for several coaching sessions.

Deva's love for the game and his natural ability turned him into a fine player. He competed in the black tennis association matches and championships and in 1971, became the Northern Transvaal Tennis Champion.

"I know that my uncle is looking down at me and saying:
there goes my mischievous nephew and I love him."

7

MANOO

In 1957/8, Ramy's sister, Savithree, and her husband, Mani Moodliyar, were asked to take care of Vella and Govindamal Chetty's six children while their parents were on an extensive tour of India. Mani, Govindamal's brother, and Savatri went to live with the children in the Chetty home – the apartment over the Orient Cinema in Boom Street in the Asiatic Bazaar, Marabastad in Pretoria.

In the year that Vella and Govindamal were away, Ramy went often to visit his sister in the Location – as the Asiatic Bazaar was called by its inhabitants. Ramy was there practically every weekend. He was a loving brother, but he had an additional incentive for the regularity of his visits – sixteen-year old Manoo, the beautiful daughter of the house. And she too looked forward to the visits of this handsome young man. They were greatly attracted to each other, but as there was no such thing as dating at that time, they saw each other only in the Chetty home in the presence of his sister and Manoo's siblings. Nevertheless, they fell in love and became committed to one another.

After Manoo's parents returned from India, Savithree and Mani went back to their home in Johannesburg and Ramy no longer had a reason for his visits. So he and Manoo communicated furtively by telephone. Courtship was not part of Tamil culture and Manoo's parents followed the tradition of marriage proposals as transactions between families. When Manoo turned seventeen she discovered that her mother had promised her to a family that had come with a proposal when she was fourteen. The proposal had been accepted and the family had agreed to wait until Manoo was seventeen. In those days, as soon as a girl reached puberty, people who wanted a connection to the family would come to her parents with a proposal to 'book' her. Manoo had no idea that she had been promised in marriage and when the family came to redeem the pledge, she would not agree. Her mother was most upset; she had made a commitment and to renege on it would be dishonourable. But Manoo loved Ramy and she prevailed; Indian tradition had to give way to western freedom of choice.

On the 25th of October 1959, Manoo and Ramy were married in the Gandhi Hall in Johannesburg – an appropriately named venue; Ramy was, after all, a descendant of satyagrahis. Among the wedding guests were Mogens and Dorothy Rosenfeldt, founders of Stella Nova Studios where Ramy worked. They took the wedding photographs and ten-year old Deva,

the one who would become a tennis champion, watching them at work was enthralled. Manoo and Ramy were the most beautiful people he had ever seen; he couldn't take his eyes off them. And when he visited them in Ophirton, and later in Laudium, he would sit watching Manoo as she went about her chores. In addition to being beautiful, she was kind, generous and considerate. She was, in Deva's opinion, the perfect match for his Uncle Ramy.



Manoo and Ramy

Sometime before his marriage, Ramy had acquired a house in Garland Street, Ophirton, a suburb in Johannesburg. He had moved in with his mother, Letchmee, his brother Dings, his nephews Morga and Satchoo.



Dings, Letchmee, Ramy at the Regional Court

Ramy's brother Dings, remembers that after they had moved in, officials from the Group Areas Board came to inform them that they could not remain there as this was a white area and objections had been lodged by a white school that was close by. As they refused to move, they were arraigned under the Group Areas Act. That set Ramy's mother off. Recalling her days as a satyagrahi, Letchmee led the fight against the injunction. She was in her sixties and ill, but she was determined to defy an unjust law. She argued that Ophirton was not a white area when they had moved in, so they had done nothing wrong and could not be forced out. She got out of a sick bed to fight the eviction order in court. Supported by Ramy and Dings on either side, she walked in to face the judge. No matter what was threatened, she remained adamant; she would not move. The judge was quietly sympathetic and the charge was dropped.

After his wedding, in accordance with Tamil custom, Ramy brought his bride home to live with his family.



Ramy, his mother Letchmee, Manoo

Letchmee was very ill and nearing the end of her life. Manoo spent the first year of her marriage taking care of her mother-in-law. Letchmee died in 1960.

This is what Satchoo Pillay who also lived at Ophirton recalls of that time.

I am Ramy's eldest sister Rasma's son. In fact Ramy was born the same week my mother got married. Ramy was 4 years older than me and we basically grew up together. My mother had 8 children and had a problem controlling us during school holidays. As a result myself and my brother were sent to Johannesburg for the holidays. Together with Ramy and Sathia we spent our vacation together and had a great deal of fun. At a later stage when Ramy got married and I finished High school and started a job in Johannesburg I lived with with Ramy, Manoo and my grandmother for seven years. I eventually became Kuben's official baby sitter. Ramy

was an amazing uncle and friend to all of us. He took pride in the progress of the young members in the community.

Satchoo Pillay, 29 October 2015

I lived with Ramy, my Mom's youngest brother. It was a question of convenience since I worked in Johannesburg. At the time myself, Ramy, Manoo, Morgia and my grandmother lived in the house. After my granny passed away, aunt Parvathy and her husband uncle Anasamy (Morgia's parents) joined us there. Kuben was born shortly thereafter. Myself and Kuben became very attached to each other and that relationship continues to this day.

... [Ramy] was employed at Stella Nova Studios. He started as a manual worker and was soon promoted as a right hand to his boss, Rosenfeldt. He was punctual, honest, dedicated and trustworthy. Shortly thereafter he married Manoo. A marriage made in heaven. They were a strikingly handsome couple. For the seven years I lived with them I never once saw them in a serious fight or argument. They always seemed very much in love. As Ramy made rapid progress with his work Manoo played the role of a perfect house wife.

A studio [that] became vacant was taken over by Ramy. He worked for Stella Nova during the day and in the evening attended to Dings Studio. For someone with limited education, he was extremely talented as a businessman.

At the time, Ramy was still struggling to establish himself. In Ophirton the house he lived in he paid rent. He worked very hard and long hours. From work he went to Dings Studio and worked in the dark room. There wasn't much time for any other activities. As a friend and nephew I was the closest to him. On Saturday afternoons we played tennis and in the evening he would take Manoo to the movie theatre. In spite of his busy schedule we played tennis every Saturday and never missed a live show.

There were about six seniors living in Ophirton at the time. Some of them were from India and engaged in the fruit and vegetable hawking business. Since everyone fasted on Fridays these seniors had an open invitation to an evening meal prepared by Manoo.

Satch Pillay, 27.01.2016

Manoo's son, Kuben was born in November 1960. Manoo was far from her family but she had a kind and dear neighbour, Aunt Nelly, who was married to Ramy's cousin, Barsathi Naidoo, son of Thambi Naidoo. Aunt Nelly helped Manoo cope with the new experience of motherhood.

In 1961, Ramy and Manoo went on a belated two week honeymoon to Lourenço Marques (now Maputo). After Manoo's second son, Rajen, was born, the family moved to Laudium.

As a mother, Manoo was a strict disciplinarian, getting her sons to study and do their homework. While she concerned herself with the home, with the children's education and

their daily needs, her husband was their playmate. Her youngest, Basha, found his mother more formidable than his father. Ramy had a wry sense of humour and Basha was never scared of his Dad. He was most scared of his brother, Kuben, the disciplinarian, and next, his mother. Ramy knew this and would send him to Kuben to be disciplined when he was disobedient.

Manoo was tough when it came to rules and regulations; Ramy was tough in another way. When he saw his sons and nephews settling for less than they were worth, he drove them relentlessly to live up to their true potential and capabilities. Recognizing her husband's intuitive insight, Manoo gave him the freedom to be.

THE CHETTY BROTHERS

When Ramy married Manoranjathum (Manoo) Chetty, he came into an extraordinary Tamil family. The Chettys were the embodiment of the spirit of enterprise and their achievements extended far beyond the tiny ghetto, the Asiatic Bazaar, in Marabastad, Pretoria, and took on international proportions. The men responsible for this phenomenal success were known as the Chetty Brothers. There were four: Siva, Vella, Sanoo and Aroo. Vella was Manoo's father. The Chetty Brothers were living proof that it was not only possible to survive under oppression, it was also possible to flourish. And the secret of their success – the instinctive strategy employed by all who live under repressive domination – inconspicuous non-compliance with unjust rule. Those who are exceptionally resourceful, like the Chetty brothers, probably even find repression a stimulating challenge. These four men stood for everything to which Ramy aspired. They were pragmatic, could look beyond discrimination and see opportunities stretching out before them. They overcame poverty and ignorance and built an empire in the face of racist oppression. And – they were proudly Tamil!

Their mother, Athieammal (Manoo's granny), a hawker of fish and vegetables, was the first visionary in the family. She bought the Nav Jivan Hall which would become The Orient under the management of the Chetty Brothers.

Sometime in the mid to late 1930s, when the Nav Jivan property was up for sale, Mrs Athieammal Chetty, a mother of six sons, put in a bid. Everyone knew Mrs Chetty, a big light-skinned woman, who became the head of her family when her husband died in 1934. They saw her every day, pushing her barrow all the way to the market on Church Street where she bought the vegetables and fish that she hawked around the location. She also collected bottles and sold them. How could this widow, a hawker, with six young sons, afford to buy the property? People thought she was mad. How would she keep up the exorbitant instalments of £50 a month?

She had six sons.



Athieammal Chetty and her six sons.

The three older boys, who had attended the Good Shepherd School, began working after primary school. Kanabathy, the eldest, in his early twenties, was a bookkeeper employed by one of the Keshavjees. Her teenage sons, Vella and Siva, who had taken up the hawking trade, also ran a stall in the fruit and vegetable market on Church Street. When Mrs Chetty bought the Nav Jivan property, these three boys undertook to make the payments. Kanabathy, who had helped to purchase the Nav Jivan, did not become involved in developing it. Namasivayam, the fourth brother, was killed in a horrific car crash in 1938. Aroomoogam (Aroo) and Shunmugam (Sanoo) were still at school.

Vella and Siva took initial responsibility for development of the property which they renamed The Orient. When they acquired the Nav Jivan, it was a double-storey building with dance halls, a barbershop with the striped pole in front, a billiards room and a café. At first they concentrated on developing the potential of the venue as it stood. They improved the café and kept it open twenty-fours a day. They renovated the dance halls and converted the billiards room into a grocery store. Though they worked extremely hard, they couldn't immediately give up hawking or their stall in the market and had to manage all their ventures simultaneously. The café soon became their most successful undertaking; it was the goldmine that allowed them to meet their financial commitments, expand their fruit and vegetable trade and upgrade their grocery business.

Vella and Siva were joined by Aroo and Sanoo after they left school. As the Orient enterprise grew and flourished, these four men, Vella, Siva, Aroo and Sanoo, came to be known as the Chetty Brothers. Driven to succeed, the Chetty boys, like their mother, were not afraid to take risks. They accepted challenges and created new and better opportunities for themselves.

On Saturdays, the grocery store stayed open until 18:00 or later. By law, they were required to close at 13:00 but the need of African customers was so great that they continued business behind closed doors, making sure that customers slipped in and out unobserved. When they bought a lorry, they took their business into the African locations of Marabastad and Bantule where they made deliveries of groceries, fruit and vegetables and supplied the malt and corn for making beer that African people were not allowed to buy. There were harsh restrictions against Africans, who were subject to curfew laws, liquor laws, and restrictions as to where they could shop and what they could buy. As they were not welcome in the CBD, where there were no facilities for Blacks, no restaurants and toilets, African people went to Boom Street where Indian businessmen, who had to obtain special permits and display prominent signs advertising “Native Trading,” reaped the benefits of discriminatory regulations. In the 1950s, the Chettys established a General Dealers’ Wholesales that supplied stores in Atteridgeville and other townships.

Being highly innovative, the Chetty brothers continued to diversify as their business grew. Behind the café, they established a mango achaar factory that supplied shops and cafes. They converted the ground floor dance hall of the Nav Jivan into a cinema – The Orient. The cinema became a refuge from the curfew law for African people out after nine at night. Curfew was from nine at night to five the next morning. Africans were not allowed on streets during that period.

When the Keshavjees emigrated, the Chettys bought their Royal and Empire bioscopes. That gave them the monopoly of the cinema business in the location, and in the next decade or two led to the creation of a cinema network with bioscopes in Johannesburg, Durban, Mafeking and later in neighbouring countries and the Middle East. The development of cinema-related enterprises such as film and video distribution and advertising soon followed. These in turn led to the setting up of Tip Top Printers and Publishers on a stand next to the Royal Bioscope.

As their growing business ventures required proper management, they set themselves up as a Board of Directors: Siva, the administrative genius, was the CEO; Vella was director of the wholesale and catering business; Sanoo, director of cinemas, and Aroo, advertising director.

In the 1980’s, the Chetty Brothers’ were nominated for the Businessman of the Year Award along with Martin Jonker and E.G. Chapman. Their phenomenal financial success gave them the power to negotiate with officials in high places in the apartheid system. The Chetty Brothers were bold and innovative – living proof that great success comes from belief in oneself.



Sanoo, Siva, Vella, Aroo

So Ramy's marriage did not simply bring him a beautiful and intelligent wife, it bequeathed to him a tradition of courage and enterprise that could rise brilliantly above oppression.

And the Chetty brothers were Tamil!¹³

13 Adapted from Muthal Naidoo, 2007, *Stories from the Asiatic Bazaar*, pp.220 – 7.
www.muthalnaido.co.za

8

THE MOVE TO LAUDIUM, PRETORIA

When Ramy and members of his family moved to Garland Street in Ophirton, they moved into a little Indian settlement such as those in Doorfontein and Fordsburg. When a school complained about their proximity to it, they went to court and won the right to remain in Garland Street. But when the Government began in earnest to implement the Group Areas Act, Ramy knew it was time to move.

Africans had been forcibly removed from Sophiatown and settled in Soweto and Indians had been given notice to move to Lenasia, a new Indian township adjacent to Soweto. City centres were being purged of black residents and white suburbs were being restored to 'pristine' conditions. Segregated townships for Coloureds, Indians and Africans had been created on the outskirts of towns and cities. Calls from the Congresses for resistance to relocation were ineffective against the bulldozers that were tearing down houses and buildings in black areas of towns and cities.

After Ramy's nephew, Sathia, qualified as a teacher, he was appointed to Pretoria Boy's High School in Marabastad and was allocated a council house in Laudium, the new Indian township in Pretoria. Sathia's father, Govindarajalu, Ramy's eldest brother, had died at age thirty-two and Ramy, having taken on the responsibility of his brother's family, paid the deposit on his nephew's house. Indians were at last allowed to buy land but only in designated Indian areas; it was an incentive to get them to move into these segregated townships. Deva, Sathia's brother, declares that houses were practically being given away to lure Indians out of the city and into Indian group areas. Housing and facilities in the new townships were, in general, an improvement on the conditions in which people had been living. They were excited to discover such things as toilets inside houses.

Ramy visited Laudium and found that he preferred it to Lenasia, which was on the outskirts of Johannesburg. He decided to move to Pretoria and with a loan from Mogens Rosenfeldt, bought a plot on the corner of 14th Avenue and Heliodor Street in Laudium. He wanted the construction company, Schachat and Cullum, to build his house. The company refused because it was in an Indian area. With the intervention of Mogens Rosenfeldt, however,

they withdrew their objection and built the house. This was the first home that Ramy actually owned.

In 1964, when Kuben was almost four, Rajen, one year old, and Morga, Ramy's nephew, fourteen, the family left Ophirton and moved into their Schachat and Cullum house in Laudium. Manoo was very happy to be back amongst her family again – close to her parents, her brother, Sam, her sister, Radhi, and the extended Chetty family.

The house in Laudium had a park-like garden. Most of the houses being built in the township had modest gardens but theirs was huge. Ramy loved the rolling lawn and took good care of it. He spread compost, watered and mowed and the grass was always green. Rajen, Ramy's second son, remembers how Ramy and his boys romped about in the garden with their Alsatian, Kim. They used the long path from the gate to the front door of the house for races. The boys would line up and when their father gave the signal, Kuben, Rajen and Kim, would dash down the path while Ramy recorded the event on his camera.



The Laudium home: Rajen, Kim, Kuben

In the late 70s, when Vibasha, the youngest son, was about four or five, he attended a crèche near his home. At about the time that Basha, as he is called, was returning from the crèche, his father would come home for lunch. As soon as Ramy saw Basha, he would grab hold of his son and throw him onto his shoulder. Basha just loved that and looked forward to finding his Dad in the garden when he got home every day. But their dog, Chips, who was very protective of the boy, didn't approve. He would go crazy, running round them and barking.

At the back of the house was a large room that they called the playroom which was often filled with Ramy's children and nephews in a variety of leisure activities, laughing, singing, playing games, snacking. This was probably where Basha played chess with his

Dad. Ramy had taught him the game and when they played, Ramy always made sure he won – even if it meant resorting to tricks. Ramy taught all the children, sons, nephews, and grandchildren to play chess and all of them remember his tricks. In the middle of a game, he would suddenly send the child off on some errand, “Amma (Granny) wants you in the kitchen.” The child would go off and when he came back, would find the board completely changed.

And everyone remembers Ramy with the newspaper. He would go through it from the very first page to the last, reading everything in it, articles, letters, notices, advertisements, everything. He was always searching for projects and opportunities for anyone and everyone.

FAMILY TIME



Back: Keshan, Ramy, Manoo, baby Unben Front: Kuben, Rajen

In Laudium, Ramy’s involvement in innumerable social projects kept him out of the house a great deal. But determined to be a good husband and father, he made sure he put aside time for his wife and family.

Wednesdays were for Manoo. He would take her to lunch in a restaurant in Sandton or Fourways after which they would go to the movies. He did not care for Indian films; he preferred Hollywood – Clint Eastwood, his favourite actor and director. But Manoo loved Indian films. As a daughter of one the Chetty brothers, she was steeped in movie culture, especially Indian films. In the Location, they were shown at The Orient Cinema,

above which she had lived as a child. In Laudium, she saw Indian movies with friends and relatives at the Alankar Cinema which was owned and managed by her brother, Sam Chetty. But on Wednesdays, it was Dirty Harry and the gang.

Sunday mornings in Laudium meant tennis. Ramy, Sathia, Deva and Morga played at the Laudium courts. At first they played in a makeshift court in that section of Laudium known as White Blocks. The court was in a pitiful state, and when it rained became a quagmire. They knew they would get little help from the City Council if they simply appealed for proper courts. They decided on a little arm twisting. Ramy took photographs of the tennis court that clearly showed its dreadful condition. Then Sathia and Ramy took the photographs to the City Council and threatened to have them published in the newspapers.



Tennis Players

Back: Kuben, Deva

Front: Sathia, Ramy

Soon afterwards, the City Council put up six courts in 15th Avenue. The Laudium Tennis Association was formed and sometime in the 1980s, was host to the national black South African Tennis Championships. Sathia and Morga were contenders in doubles and Deva, Sathia's brother, competed in the singles events. On behalf of The Laudium Tennis Association, Sathia and Ramy approached Kim Shippey, a prominent SABC sports announcer, about TV coverage. He told them that the championships were "not of national importance."

The tennis courts became the Sunday morning hangout for Ramy, his sons and nephews, where they all played doubles. In his rebellious teen years, Basha, Ramy's youngest son, would be out late on Saturday nights, but he was not allowed to lounge in bed on Sunday mornings. His father got him up early to go to the courts. Though Ramy played social tennis, he was very good. No matter how hard Basha tried, he could never beat his dad.



Ramy and friends Dickie and Shekhar, downtown Johannesburg

Ramy loved riding and driving vehicles – scooters, motorbikes, cars. As a very young man living in Fordsburg, he had had the use of the Stella Nova scooter, and when he bought one for himself, it was a Vespa, on which he would take his nephews for rides around the neighbourhood. In Laudium, his first car was a VW beetle; a choice motivated by the fact that the Rosenfeldts had had a VW that he had learned to drive. When the Volvo was introduced into South Africa, Ramy bought one of the first – a Volvo Amazon.

Over weekends, Ramy took the family on drives to Johannesburg. He had many nephews – he was uncle to the offspring of eleven siblings – so family jaunts always included a nephew or two. And as he was driving, Ramy would put his hand up with his fingers in the pinch position and the children in the back would lean forward to have their cheeks pinched. He loved pinching cheeks.

Ramy always headed for Johannesburg on their drives. He avoided Pretoria after an unpleasant incident in the city. They had gone in for their Deepavali¹⁴ shopping and a bunch of young white ruffians had surrounded them and kicked the car. They never shopped in Pretoria after that but drove to places like Bryanston Shopping Centre in Johannesburg. And Ramy took to exploring the roads leading to Johannesburg, often getting lost and enjoying the adventure of it. And he drove fast – at least for those days – a hundred kilometres an hour was breaking the sound barrier. Occasionally, Ramy would take the family on a drive into Swaziland to visit Kuben and Rajen at Waterford. Unben, son number four, remembers riding up spiralling roads that took them high into the mountains.

14 Tamil for The Festival of Lights

In the 1980s, Ramy had a silver-grey Ford Cortina which was used for studio deliveries. Once with the Cortina packed with children, they set off on a drive. Piet, the domestic worker's son, had eight year old Basha, on his lap. As Ramy took a corner, the door flew open, Basha fell out, rolled onto the tar and hurt his hand. When they got home Manoo was most upset and scolded her husband for driving fast. But it wasn't the speed; the door had not been properly shut.

As Ramy wanted his children to experience every good thing that the society had to offer, he ignored restrictions based on race. His children went to places that others obedient to the law avoided. When a skating rink was opened in Cresta Shopping Centre, he packed sons and nephews into the car and took them there to learn to skate. When white patrons saw these little black kids, putting on skates obtained from the rink management and intruding on a privilege reserved for them, they were indignant. They complained to the management and Ramy and the children were asked to leave. According to Unben, Ramy remonstrated with the rink managers but they would not budge. Ramy took the matter up with authorities and it was reported in the newspapers, but the rink remained closed to them.

On another occasion, Ramy took the family on an excursion to the Magaliesberg cableway; a recreational activity also reserved for whites. But Ramy, determined to expose his children to a wide variety of experiences, always asserted his right as a citizen. Since he took his rights for granted, his confidence probably confused officials, who always allowed him and the children entry and only reacted when there were complaints. So Ramy, Manoo and the children rode up to the top of the hill in a cable car.

While Mum, Dad and the other children were at the viewing site, Keshan, son number three, went off to the tuck shop to buy ice-creams for everyone. When he pulled his money out of his pocket, it fell to the ground. An Afrikaner, seeing this grabbed it and yelled out that Keshan had stolen his money. He kept insisting that it was his money and Whites standing around, some aware of what had happened, simply watched in silence. This hostile, aggressive behaviour reduced Keshan to tears. Ramy came over to find out what was going on. Sizing up the situation, he told Keshan to forget the money and took him away. They were the only blacks there and it was pointless seeking justice from a ruffian whose colour gave him the right to abuse them and the people around, the right to tolerate it.

Ramy did not conform to immoral laws when he could avoid it. He went where he chose like a normal citizen. His motto: "You won't know if you don't try." It meant risking exposure to abuse. For Ramy, better that than living like a coward and accepting inferior status.

Vanieda Naidoo, daughter of Ramy's sister, Parvathy, describes the times she spent at Ramy and Manoo's home in Laudium.

VANIEDA NAIDOO

Daughter of Ramy's sister, Parvathy

The best part of my young life was going with my Mum to Uncle Ramy's home in Heliodor Street in Laudium to visit or spend weekends there. My brother, Morga, lived with Uncle Ramy and Manoo-akka¹⁵; he cared for us as his own kids. When my mother and I walked in, his face would light up and he would talk about so many interesting things. I would sit with him in his lounge and listen to Tamil songs, mostly golden oldies, and I firmly believe he and my older uncle, Rajee, were instrumental in awakening my love for our Tamil, culture, music and songs.



Uncle Ramy had no daughters so he doted on me and took me on outings with Kuben, Rajen and Keshan – there were only the older sons at that time. Drives on Sundays were to the zoo, and to farmyards to see ponies and horses! Every year without fail he would take us to Johannesburg to watch the Wits Rag Day parade.

During my school years in Laudium, when I saw his car on the street, I would run home; Uncle Ramy never wanted us to loiter in the streets. We had to get home and study. After I completed matric, I first went to work for a clothing company in Johannesburg. Then I was offered a job with a coffee company in Pretoria. As I wanted to work near home, I wanted to leave the clothing company, but my employer would not let me quit. Uncle Ramy phoned him to explain why I wanted to leave and he finally consented! Whenever I was unemployed, Ramy who had many contacts, would find me a job. He never wanted me to be idle. He would become very cross if I felt sorry for myself. He would say, “Get up, dust yourself off and move on to better horizons!” He was my second dad!

When my dad was in the last stages at Coronation Hospital, my mum and Morga were at his bedside. I was at school and Uncle Ramy came to Laudium High School, signed me out and took me to the Hospital. He knew I was very close to my dad and on the way, he lovingly counselled me to be brave. He said that death comes to all of us and did his best to soften the blow that was about to fall. He took on the role of father when I decided to get married. He drove my mum, Sathia Anneh¹⁶, Keshan and me to Port Shepstone to meet the family into which I was marrying. He saw that my prospective in-laws were humble people and he was happy to give his consent.

15 Akka = elder sister

16 Anneh = elder brother

When I was working at Rennies Travel in Braamfontein, he would often stop by with Rajen, who was studying at Wits at the time. Kuben was on a scholarship overseas. Ramy would sometimes take me for lunch to Juicy Lucy. When he saw that my thali, (nuptial cord), was not hanging right, he would reach out and straighten it for me. He also noticed that I carried the company cash to the bank and that made him uneasy. Sometimes he would go with me to deposit the money. Then, to my surprise, he went to my employer, explained that the arrangement was not safe for me or the money and advised him to get a security firm to deliver the money to the bank. Within a month, my employer signed a contract with Fidelity Guards Security Services! (Vanieda Naidoo, 11.02.2016)

ROSLINA MOJELA

In 1994, when she was about twenty-one, Roslina Mojela left Potgietersrus for Pretoria where she hoped to find work. She came to stay with a friend in Laudium and everyday set out walking from house to house asking for work. Before five one morning, sitting on a street corner eating her breakfast of bread and fish, she was greeted by a young gardener from Zimbabwe. He stopped to ask why she was sitting out there so early in the morning. She explained that she had to be up early to look for work. So he asked her to go with him to a house where he believed someone was needed.

She walked beside him as he wheeled his bicycle up 14th Avenue. When they came to Heliodor Street, he stopped outside the house on the corner. "You see this gate. Open the gate, go inside." But when Roslina saw the dog, she became afraid. The gardener said. "This dog can't bite. You serious? You want the job? Go straight, go in, ring the bell." Keeping a wary eye on the dog, she went in and rang the bell.

Manoo came to the door. "Can I help you?"

"I look for job."

Manoo shook her head. "You are too fat; you can't work in my house. I want a thin girl who can work hard."

"Please Ma'am try me. I show you I can work hard." Manoo gave her a chance, Roslina proved herself and she became Manoo's helper. After twenty-two years, Roslina is still with Manoo in 2016.



Roslina Mojela

Roslina says, “Aunty Manoo like a clean house. She say, ‘Don’t make kacha-moocha” (Indian expression for being slapdash). “Clean nicely, Makhoti (sister-in-law). I want my kitchen shining like a new one.”” As she wanted everything neat and tidy, Manoo taught Roslina to be systematic and orderly.

Ramy, who loved teasing his sons, nephews and nieces, teased Roslina as well. “Hey, Mafutha (Fatty),” he would call to her, as he cut in half the banana or chocolate that was in his hand, “Half for Mafutha, half for me.”

“He always say, ‘I have six children in the house, five boys and one girl.’” Pointing to herself, she says, “The one girl is me, Roslina.”

After work on Saturdays, when she was getting ready to go shopping, Ramy would ask, “Roslina, where are you going? Put me inside your pocket and take me with you. I know you are going to run away. Put me inside your pocket.”

In 1997, Ramy, Manoo and Roslina left Laudium and moved to Country View in Midrand, Johannesburg; then in 2004, to Blue Valley where they stayed with Kuben and Aurora whilst their house was being built. They moved into their home in 2005 and when Ramy became very ill, couldn’t speak or walk, though he had nurses, he would beckon Roslina with his forefinger, “Come, come, come,” and she would come to feed him. He wouldn’t take anything from the nurses.

When Roslina looks at his photo, she says, “You leave me here but I still love you, Mr Pillay.” She often refers to him as Mr Mandela and Manoo, as Graca Machel. “Ramy, like Mr Mandela, he love everybody.”

BOOGIE



Krishna Mathuray, Boogie to all who know him, became Ramy’s brother-in-law in 1968. He had married Manoo’s sister, Radhi, and they lived on 13th Avenue, next to the Seva Samaj.

Boogie remembers how Ramy helped him through a tragic period in his life. A few months after Boogie’s marriage, his brother, twenty-nine year old, Ganas, who had been disappointed in love, killed himself in despair outside his girlfriend’s home in Lenasia, the Indian township on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Vella Chetty, father-in-law of both Boogie and Ramy, informed Ramy and asked him to break the news to his brother-in-law. Boogie and Ramy had only recently become acquainted and did not know each other very well but Ramy stood by Boogie as a brother.

Boogie did not have a car so Ramy drove him to the scene of the suicide; but when they got there, they found that his brother’s body had already been removed. They were directed to Baragwanath Hospital but could not find the body there either so they went to the mortuary where the white attendant barked at them: “Wat soek julle hierso?” (“What do you want here?”) Ramy explained that they were looking for the body of Ganas Mathuray but the attendant remained hostile, refused to let them in and told them to get lost.

Ramy suggested that they get hold of undertakers as they would know the procedures to be followed. They came back to the mortuary with undertakers, identified and collected the body and made arrangements for the funeral and the cremation.

This experience brought Ramy and Boogie together in a special way and they became very close friends. Ramy opened up a Dings Studio in Actonville, Benoni, which Boogie ran; that gave him his start in business.

Ramy and Boogie met often to share ideas, especially their understanding of Hindu philosophy. Boogie believes in the law of karma and that karma leads to reincarnation. He translates karma as “every action has a reaction.” He does not believe that God is a punishing God. Whatever ill-fortune we experience is what we bring upon ourselves through our actions in this life or in a former life. And we remain in a cycle of birth and rebirth – samsara – until we have atoned for all our wrongs.

Ramy was a man who acted with such goodwill, if he has not already broken out of the endless birth-rebirth cycle of reincarnation, he is sure to do so soon. He will then be released into moksha, spiritual freedom – union with God.

In 1967, when Ramy and Manoo were invited by the Rosenfeldts to join them on a cruise in the Mediterranean, Manoo asked her sister Radhi, if she and her husband, Boogie, would move in and take care of their little boys, Kuben and Rajen, and Ramy’s teenage nephew and foster son, Morga. Boogie knew that Ramy did not allow alcohol in the home but while Ramy and Manoo were away, Boogie, who enjoyed a social beer, did not feel constrained to give it up. And he found that young Morga had secretly discovered its pleasures.

One day, while they were “having a brew” in the lounge, Boogie, contemplating his beer, laughed and exclaimed, “This topi” doesn’t even have a drink.’ Just as he said this, Ramy walked in. He and Manoo, having arrived a day earlier, had come in through the back. Boogie quickly hid the beer and Ramy pretended he hadn’t seen or heard anything. He probably even forgot about it, but Boogie remembers it to this day.

When Ramy found a City Council advertisement calling for tenders for business sites at Belle Ombre Station in Marabastad, he pointed it out to his brother-in-law. Ten years before, through contacts in the Department of Railways and Transport, Boogie and his friend, Sydney Pillay, had signed up for sites at the station; but when the concessions were granted, they lost out to a Portuguese man who had contact with Ben Schoeman, Minister of Transport. So Boogie was sceptical about this City Council advertisement. But Ramy cut it out and put it in his hands. Not really expecting anything, Boogie put in a tender. He was elated when he was granted a site of 180 square metres. He would put up a bottle store at the station. But Ramy shook his head.

Ramy, a strict teetotaller, made Boogie feel like a naughty schoolboy.

Out of respect for Ramy, Boogie abandoned the idea of a bottle store and put up a Supermarket instead. It was a successful business and it flourished for many years. But with the rising crime rate in the new South Africa, Boogie's nephew, manager of the supermarket was killed in a robbery in 1999. Boogie then decided it was time to quit and leased the site.

9

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

With the move to Pretoria, Ramy had opened a Dings Studio on 2nd Ave in Laudium as well as two studios in Marabastad. The first studio in Marabastad was on Boom Street, right next to Fine Art Printers – very convenient for Ramy who needed boards and other materials for mounting and printing his photographs. That is how he met the owner of the printing works, Jivan Kalyan. Being the sociable man that he was, Ramy soon made friends and Jivan, like all Ramy’s friends, got to know about Ramy’s sons at Waterford and Ramy’s determination to give them the best education possible.

When the Child Welfare Society was set up in Laudium in 1965, both Jivan and Ramy served on the committee. In the early 1950s, teenage Ramy had begun his working life with the Rosenfeldts and had learned from them about courage and compassion. In 1965, when he joined the Laudium Child Welfare Society, his learning continued among visionaries who were also pragmatists: Mrs Amy Choonara, Mr Ahmed Dockrat, Dr. M. H. H. Ismail, and Mr Aboo Tayob. Living in a situation of inequality, they were finding ways to squeeze benefits out of social injustice. They were not revolutionaries carrying AK47s; they were builders of society and they negotiated with all, even the enemy. Motivated by religious and cultural beliefs, they were committed to uplifting the community. Ramy was inspired by their altruistic spirit, their commitment to the community and the zeal and compassion with which they undertook welfare work.

The society was first registered as the Pretoria Indian Child and Family Society in 1965 in accordance with the erstwhile Welfare Act. Its purpose was to render welfare services to the Indian Community of Pretoria and its districts. ... Its first elected President was Dr M. M. H. Ismail ... Initially they met at members’ homes ...¹⁸

18 Mahindra Sita, *Laudium Child Welfare Society, Golden Jubilee Brochure 1965-2015*, p.2

Jivan Kalyan remembers that they also met at schools – Jacaranda and Andrew Anthony – and in community halls.

*As the membership grew ... home meetings became too cumbersome; it was then resolved to use the Laudium Civic Centre offices for ... meetings.*¹⁹

The Child Welfare Society raised funds for all its projects. In the early days, there were film shows at the Alankar Cinema on Sundays.

Conditions ... during ... Apartheid ... disallowed ... Sunday movies...in cinemas. So the society used the loophole in the law that allowed private shows for clubs and private institutions to host a show ... on an 'admission-by-donation' basis. This...became the annual highlight event in the community ... back then ... there was no other form of entertainment ... television was only introduced in later years [1976]. The society also hosted many live shows featuring talented artists from India ... In addition, it hosted local artists of other races, which brought the organisation into disrepute with the authorities. It openly flouted the 'mixed audience and performers act'.

*Live shows and local artists [at the Alankar Cinema included] "Ipitombi", an all-black cast..."The Boyfriend", an all-white cast, "The Lahnee's Pleasure," a mixed cast [and] International Artists "Jani Baboo & Party" and "Pithukuli Murugadas."*²⁰

WELFARE ACTIVITIES

Film and stage shows and other fund-raising activities, made possible the following undertakings of the Laudium Child Welfare Society.

1974 Alcoholics Anonymous [AA]

The Child Welfare Society helped to establish and set up the AA Group in Laudium ... [The AA conducts] weekly therapy meetings on Thursday evenings at the society's premises in 4th Avenue.

1975 The Hajee Joosub Crèche

According to Jivan Kalyan, Solly Joosub of J & E Wholesalers established the crèche in honour of his father; it was on the corner of Pearl and Tangerine Streets. Mahindra Sita helped to finance this facility.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.2

²⁰ Ibid. p.2

The idea was to provide a place for working mothers and ‘work seeking’ mothers to leave their children in the care of the Society. This initiative resulted in the society rendering its services to well over 2000 pre-school children. We prepared young children for entry into formal schools. We started computer literacy classes for children.

Anti-Indian Laws

The society lobbied against legal restrictions placed on the community. It demanded recognition of traditional Indian marriages; the right of children of these marriages to be recognised as legitimate heirs of parents; the lifting of the ban on brides from India and Pakistan; the establishment of more schools, a hospital, and sporting facilities; and more land to allow for the expansion of the community.²¹

Ramy was working with dynamic people who kept abreast of happenings in the country, were aware of the kinds of restrictions being placed on them by the law and were active in challenging or neutralizing them. He was in an environment in which people were not docile; they confronted the system and stood up for their rights. They promoted the same values that his parents had stood for and they reinforced all that he had learned from the Rosenfeldts. They would not allow themselves to be reduced to victims; they took up challenges and brought about change.

And, it was a woman and a grandmother, Amie Choonara, who had given the impetus for all welfare activities in Laudium.

AMIE CHOONARA

...over a cup of tea at a small gathering of ladies. A lady with remarkable vision believed that children with mental retardation could and should be helped. It was unfortunate that at that time, Apartheid South Africa refused to acknowledge that ‘Black’ mentally retarded children were also human. Although there were many schools for special children in the area, none would accept a child who was not ‘White’.

The journey from despair to hope started in the seventies. Mrs Amy Choonara, the founder of the school had this to say, “Imagine the heartbreak and despair at being told that your child is retarded. To whom does one turn for help? In 1970, when my grandson Tariq was born, very little was known in the community, about

21 Ibid. p.6

retardation. Without any experience, I was surprised at the results I was achieving by stimulation and some rudimentary forms of speech therapy. Other people in similar circumstances came asking questions. I realized that many others in similar circumstances needed help and encouragement.”

The School Opens its Doors

At the gathering of women, Mrs Choonara made known her feelings about starting a school for retarded children. The women readily offered to help. Mrs Gori Docrat offered a vacant flat for meetings, and the Laudium Islamic Circle, offered their Council house for morning classes. The late Mr Choonara and his friends Ebrahim Hajee (Pancho) and Ahmed M. Docrat (Parktown Stores) raised R7000.00 from the community. ... The school opened its doors in March 1978 to seven retarded children. Mrs Choonara, Mrs N. Cassim, Miss Aadilla Soondka, Miss Nashreen Soondka and a few young people, generously gave up some of their time each to do voluntary work at the school.

Registration of School

The school then joined the Laudium Mental Health Society whose chairman at that time was Dr E.C. Cassim. After much work and assistance from Mr. A.K. Singh of the Education Department the school was finally registered under the Education Act in April 1980. This allowed the school to gain State subsidies. Mr Ahmed Docrat was appointed the Chairman of the Board of Management in 1981...

(World Memon Foundation, Commemorative Brochure, 12 June 1994, pp. 4-5)

Known as the Laudium Training Centre, the school did not have a permanent home. In 1982 it operated from the Charisma Church. In 1984, it needed larger premises and Ramy organized accommodation at the Tamil Cultural Centre. Then the Board of Management took the decision to build a school and a plot of land was purchased from the Pretoria City Council. It was a bold step based on faith rather than resources. All of them believed, as Ramy did, “nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

Many attempts were made to procure funds from the Department of Education to build a school. All attempts were futile and when all seemed lost, Mr Aboo Tayob stepped in, on behalf of the World Memon Foundation to salvage the situation.

(Ibid. p.7)

ABOO TAYOB

Aboo Tayob started his business career in 1957 when he took over his father's shop in Prinsloo Street in the Pretoria city centre. It was a general dealership, well known in the Indian community for the best in children's shoes and sari materials. As was the custom among Indian traders, Tayob allowed his customers to take goods on credit. Being a Memon, Tayob is an astute, enterprising business man, extremely successful, affluent and powerful. When Tayob moved to Laudium, he built imposing business premises in 2nd Avenue just down the street from Ramy's very modest Dings Studio. Ramy knew Aboo Tayob as he also bought shoes for his children from his shop. In Laudium, the close proximity of their work-places changed their relationship from mere acquaintance to close friendship.

Tayob frequented Ding's Studio for family and passport photos and discovered in Ramy an amiable man who often did not charge for his services and was very proud of his sons and their educational achievements. Their relationship grew stronger when Aboo became involved in the school project for mentally challenged children. In the mid-1980s, Tayob entered the scene when the school's Board of Management was struggling to get funding from the House of Delegates (HOD) – the Indian House in late apartheid's Tri-Cameral Parliament. Aboo Tayob offered to find a million rand towards the establishment of the school if the HOD would subsidize the project on a rand for rand basis. Tayob approached the World Memon Foundation (WMF), a Trust formed and based in London to promote the welfare of Memons worldwide. He was successful in obtaining a grant of a million rand for the school. But there was still resistance from the HOD.

The Education Department was intransigent in its views that we did not need a school and that the Department had no funds. Mr A. Docrat, our chairman, Mr Joe A.A. Carim and Mr A. Tayob flew to Cape Town at their own cost, and after much lobbying with parliamentarians, managed to get the House of Delegates to subsidise the building of the school to the tune of One Million Rands.

(World Memon Foundation, *Commemorative Brochure*, 12 June 1994, p. 8)

And the project was underway. By 1988, the school was built and Mrs Choonara's Laudium Training Centre became the Sunrise School. Ramy was on the Sunrise School Board and, characteristically, took his responsibilities very seriously. According to Aboo, he was at the school practically every second day, keeping in touch with its needs and ensuring its smooth running.

Sunrise School was only the first step in a plan that also included a community centre with a community hall, a school with training facilities and offices for the Mental Health Society. More funds were required and Aboo Tayob donated a further R600 000 to complete the project.

The World Memon Foundation Community Centre was officially opened in 1994

Our Own Premises

(A Dream Fulfilled)

We now have our own school. The new Premises are being shared with the Laudium Mental Health Society. The Centre has been named the “World Memon Foundation Community Centre” in gratitude for the financial assistance received. Although the school and the society have full use of the centre, a ‘board of governors’ has been established to monitor that the centre is being used in accordance with the aims and objectives stipulated in the constitutions of both the school and the Society.
(Ibid. p.6)

Aboo Tayob and Ramy Pillay became good friends and associates. Even though one was affluent and the other not, both shared the same values. Both served the community – each in his own way and often in tandem.

Ramy was known in the community as one who never refused assistance to people in need. And Dings’ Studio on Second Avenue became an unofficial welfare office to which needy individuals made their way. Tayob called Ramy “the poor man’s priest”. On one occasion two widows who had just lost their husbands and had nothing, came to Ramy for help. Ramy applied to Aboo on their behalf and was given a R1000 to see them through the next couple of months.

Where Ramy was the poor man’s priest, Aboo was the poor man’s banker. When Aboo was made aware of children studying under trees in Soshanguve, he came up with a practical, though unorthodox, solution. He put together a small committee which approached SAFMARINE for containers. These containers were taken to Soshanguve and converted into properly equipped classrooms that provided a much improved environment for learning and teaching. Ramy accompanied Aboo to the official opening of this little “container” school. The Guest of Honour was Education Minister, Sibusiso Bengu, who praised this effort to uplift the people of Soshanguve.

Being friends, Ramy and Aboo, aware of each other’s personal circumstances, provided sounding boards for each other’s concerns. For instance, when Kuben decided to marry Aurora, a Mexican girl, Ramy was able to confide his doubts to Aboo. They were like

brothers and Aboo, aware of the constraints on Ramy's finances, helped him out with loans when needed.

Just as Ramy was proudly Tamil, Aboo Tayob is proudly Memon:

They [Memons] have settled down in new lands not by force of arms like the conquerors of old but with rare business acumen so characteristic of this enterprising and industrious community.
(wmo.africa.co.za)

What is most laudable is their commitment to uplifting the communities in which they live. The following mission statement of the South African Memon Foundation (SAMF) derives from the objectives of the WMF.

The mission of the SAMF and its members is to undertake welfare work in our communities so that we may serve those most in need of it. We also take great pride in working alongside many other distinguished charity organisations to best serve the needs of communities. Further, we participate in natural disaster relief efforts and community projects.
(samemonfoundation.co.za)

PROFESSOR PANKAJ JOSHI

When Mr Ahmed Docrat, Chairman of the Board of the Laudium Training Centre, and Mr Andy Chetty, Principal at the Laudium Training Centre, asked Dr Pankaj Joshi to take on the chairmanship of the Laudium Mental Health Society, the young doctor refused. He had just completed his specialist degree in Internal Medicine and did not feel qualified to deal with the needs of the mentally challenged. But Docrat, like Ramy, could read people. He saw in Joshi a highly capable young man and overcame his reluctance by asking him to undertake it – just for one year. He promised he would find someone else at the end of the year. That was in 1980.

Now (2015) smiling ironically, Joshi says, “Thirty-five years later and I am still chairperson.”

This is Joshi's view of the circumstances that dictate the need for an institution such as a Mental Health Society:

In moving to a high “tech” and super-sophisticated society, have we gained or have we actually lost? What would I have gained if I gain the whole world – but at the expense of my humanity? We have stopped loving because loving is anti-selfish, and one has to be selfish if one wants to gain the materialistic world. We have accepted

for ourselves a code of behavior that goes against the principles of basic morality and ethics.

Who is going to wake us from this ignominious slumber of ignorance and depravity?
How are we going to circumvent the inevitable moral catastrophe that will follow us into the next century – when the generations to come will point accusing fingers at us for sliding into an abyss of moral depravity?
(Pankaj Joshi, Commemorative Brochure, 12 June 1994, World Memon Foundation, Laudium, pp. 10-11)

In 1980, Joshi set about his task by first assessing the needs of the community. In addition to mentally challenged children, there were the needs of the aged as well as the growing problem of alcohol and drug abuse. He asked Mrs Choonara, founder of the Sunrise School, to join the executive committee of the Laudium Mental Health Society (LMHS) and take on the portfolio of care for the aged.

In order to provide support for the elders in our community, a Senior Citizen's Club was initiated and has been run by Mrs Amy Choonara. Apart from meeting regularly, excursions have also been arranged, both locally, and as far as Durban when our group of elders spent an unforgettable holiday as guests of the Aryan Benevolent Society.
(Pankaj Joshi, *Commemorative Brochure*. p.12)

The doctor also approached Ramy about serving on the committee. He had met Ramy at Dings Studio in 2nd Ave, when he went to have family and passport photographs taken. He had found in Ramy an amiable, modest man. At their initial meeting, he remembers Ramy telling him about his two sons, Kuben and Rajen and Waterford Kamhlaba High School in Swaziland. He was very proud of his boys; they were exceptional students with bright futures ahead of them.

Joshi had discovered that Ramy was a very resourceful person. He knew useful people at every level of society and could always recommend someone for anything that needed to be done. He asked Ramy to take on the problem of substance abuse in the community. Though Ramy abhorred alcoholism and drug abuse, he accepted and dedicated himself to gathering information about the problems of addiction. The AA held meetings on Thursdays and Ramy took to attending them. As he listened to the stories of these unfortunate people, he knew he had to help them. At that time, the Laudium Hospital did not minister to people with problems of addiction; the hospital was a private facility and addiction was chiefly a problem of the poor. But when Dr Joshi started working at the hospital, he set up the means of assisting those that Ramy brought to him.

It is well known that the [Mental Health] Society initiated the earliest drives against drug addiction and alcoholism. Many of its drives that were implemented for many years were hampered by the fact that the Society had no premises to function from. When our anti-drug and anti-alcohol programmes were supplemented by hospital admissions of individuals for purposes of rehabilitation, we were rapidly approaching the peaks of our performance.

(Pankaj Joshi, *Commemorative Brochure*, p.11)

Ramy's work with AA had resulted in a meaningful collaboration between the two organisations. After 1994, however, the Society suffered a setback.

But alas, for reasons that defied common logic, the local Hospital became transformed into a Day Clinic. The Psychotherapy Clinic that was sponsored and run by the Society, and was functioning at the local Hospital was refused access to the offices it was using. Office space became a priority.

(Pankaj Joshi, *Commemorative Brochure*, p.11)

Later, when the World Memon Foundation Community Centre was established at the entrance to Laudium, the LMHS could at last launch its activities from a permanent home.

Through its Psychotherapy and Family Counselling Clinic, the Society tended the needs of those with family discord, those with problems of psycho-social adjustments, and further supportive psychotherapy was provided on an ongoing basis to those with drug and alcohol problems. It developed a mutual relationship of common interest with the local chapter of the Alcoholics Anonymous – a relationship that has been maintained for a long time. The AA group provided supportive self-help therapy for those rehabilitated individuals that were discharged by us from the hospital. Their contribution has been highly commendable. The rekindling of the interest in the prevention and treatment of drug addiction and alcoholism has been taken up and spearheaded by the Representative Committee on Substance Abuse (RECSA), and [the] lead is being provided by our Society. They will also function from the WMF Centre under the auspices of the Society.

(*Commemorative Brochure*, p.11)

Working closely together in the Mental Health Society, Joshi and Ramy became very good friends. They socialized, got to know each other's families, shared their problems, and assisted and advised each other. For instance, when Ramy's son, Rajen, decided to marry, Priya, a Gujarati girl, Ramy consulted with Joshi about the wedding ceremony. As Dr Joshi is also a spiritual and religious leader in the Gujarati community, he acted as go-between to help find ways and means of adapting the wedding ritual to meet the needs of both Tamils and Gujaratis. He also provided a running commentary during the wedding ceremony to explain the significance of the ritual acts being performed.

Joshi always addressed Ramy as – anneh, Tamil for elder brother. He had great respect for this man who was always willing to help and always had a smile on his face.

THE PRETORIA HINDU ORGANISATION (PHO)

Ramy was not a capitalistic businessman. He worked with people on an intimate and personal level; and in running his photographic studios his focus was on assistance, not profit. But working with people like Ahmed Docrat, Amy Choonara and Aboo Tayob, Ramy was impressed, not only by their willingness to help the disadvantaged in the community but also by their financial acumen which made possible their provision of community services. When Professor Joshi proposed the establishment of an organisation to provide similar assistance to poor Hindus and so keep the Hindu community intact, Ramy readily agreed.

As a religious leader as well as a medical professional, Prof. Joshi was concerned about the loss of faith amongst Hindus.

There has been a high conversion rate of people of the Hindu faith to other contemporary religions within South Africa, and the situation in Laudium was no different to the national problem. Numerous studies had been done at the University of Durban-Westville investigating the root causes of this phenomenon. Their finding was linked, inter alia, to the indigence amongst the largest faith following amongst Indians in South Africa, viz. Hinduism. With some of the other contemporary religions being proselytising ones, it was easy to provide material and financial support in exchange for conversion to their religions. With this background, some of us, including Mahindra Sita and Rookie Soma, decided to convene a meeting of all Hindus (Tamils, Hindis and Gujaratis) to present this finding. We invited leaders and followers of the Hindu faith from all the linguistic groups to a meeting. This included Sathia Pillay, Ramy Pillay, Murthi Sooboo, Jivan Kalyan, Baboo Mooloo, Mr Latchman, to name a few.

It was decided to form an all-inclusive unified organisation for the first time, and we named it the Pretoria Hindu Organisation. I was nominated the Chairman of the Convenors, and with two representatives from each linguistic group, we set out to draft a Constitution for this body, referred to as the PHO. Sathia Pillay was elected the first President. The first task was to collect the moneys already pledged by community members to the initial Task Team, which was about R180,000. This money was to be invested and the interest used for assisting the indigent in our community. Soup kitchens were started in the so-called ‘White Blocks’ area, which ran successfully for some time, over some years. But, alas, it would appear that its original objectives were lost and later heads of the PHO became more emphatic about having an Annual PHO Diwali Show and an annual Shivaratri March. The

interest money was more ‘conveniently’ distributed to non-sectarian bodies in the community, and the primary objective was lost. As time went on, it appeared that no one was really interested in taking the Chairmanship, and even the Annual PHO Diwali Show and the Shivaratri marches were scrapped. The body had become a nominal one. When the issues were discussed with Ramy, he was equally disappointed at our failures.

(Prof Joshi, 27-01-2016)

THAMARAY INVESTMENTS

As the Pretoria Hindu Organization had become more of a cultural body, and no longer had as its objectives the economic empowerment, development and progress of Hindus, Sathia and Ramy decided to set up an investment company for Tamil people, who constituted the poorer section of the community. They enlisted the support of Professor Len Konar, an economist, and Thamaray (Lotus) Investments came into being.

In order to raise the seed money for the investment company, a hundred people who had agreed to become shareholders, contributed a R1000 each. But having a hundred people on the committee proved to be unwieldy so the shareholders were reduced to 15 members who bought out all the other shareholders. The money was invested and its earnings were meant to be used to foster the economic growth of the Tamil community. But there was no strategic plan and the scheme has devolved into a kind of pension fund for the now ten shareholders.

10

PROUDLY TAMIL

TAMIL CULTURE

Culture is the way of life of a people – their customs, beliefs and achievements. All cultures initially came into being to protect and enhance life on earth. In earliest times in a world shared with ferocious animals and natural disasters, the main focus was on security. Once human beings had created stable situations for themselves, their cultures evolved from measures for basic survival to enquiries into the meaning of existence and the mystery of the universe. Culture is multi-layered and includes all the ways in which we conduct our lives – all our customs, beliefs, technologies, institutions, arts and sciences.

As group coherence is necessary for security and development, to build unity, societies develop norms and values to which everyone is expected to adhere. These evolve into conventional practices – customs, traditions and rituals – and Prophets arise who confirm these as absolute truths and each society has its version of the Ten Commandments. Amongst Tamils, it is the Thirukural or Kural, written by Thiruvalluvar²² who lived more than two thousand years ago. The Kural comprises 1,330 couplets, in which Valluvar lays down the principles for leading a productive and moral life. The first couplet reads as follows.

22 Thiruvalluvar. Thiru means revered and is also as a title of respect such as the word Mister in English. Valluvar is the name of the person who composed the Thirukural (Thiru-sacred, Kural-couplets)

As the letter A is the first of all letters,
so the eternal God is first in the world
(Kural, 1.1)

In linking the alphabet with God, Valluvar expresses the reverence of Tamils for their language, both verbal and written.

According to legend, Lord Shiva created Tamil in the person of *Thamizh Thāi* (Mother Tamil). His son, Murugan, revered as the Tamil God, with the sage, Agastya, brought Mother Tamil to the people. And it is believed that Tamil is one of the oldest languages, if not the oldest, in the world; it is a Dravidian language and predates Sanskrit.²³

As language is the vehicle of culture, learning a language, both spoken and written, gives access to the norms and values of a society. Being literate in Tamil, therefore, was of primary importance and by the first century BCE, a Tamil grammar, the *Tholkapiyam*, had been produced.

An Avvaiyar (Tamil poetess), who lived in the 9th Century, wrote *Konrai Venthan* and *Attichudi* – maxims of moral virtues. Written as couplets in alphabetical order, they are known as the “Golden Alphabet”. The first four maxims of the *Attichudi*, beginning with the first four letters of the alphabet, are as follows:

அ	அறம் செய விரும்பு	Have desire to do good deeds
ஆ	ஆறுவது சினம்	Anger should be reduced / controlled
இ	இயல்வது கரவேல்	Help to your best possible extent
ஈ	ஈவது விலக்கேல்	Don't stop doing charity

(ilearntamil.com/aatichudi-english-meanings)

Tamil has 16 vowels and over two hundred consonants which are really combinations of consonant sounds with each of the vowels. Vowels come first, in pairs representing a long and a short sound. For example: அ (a); ஆ (aa); இ (i) ஈ (ee). Consonants are also in pairs as each consonant is a combination of a consonant sound with a long or short vowel. That accounts for the number of letters in the Tamil alphabet. Tamil children learned the alphabet by reciting the *Attichudi* and *Konrai Venthan*.

The couplets were easy to learn because of their rhythms, rhymes, alliteration and assonance. As they learned the alphabet, children simultaneously absorbed the values of Tamil culture.

Tamil was brought to South Africa by indentured labourers and by traders such as Ramy's parents. Tamils in the diaspora always establish schools wherever they go. According to his nephew Satch Pillay, Ramy was involved in establishing a Tamil school in Ophirton.

While living in Ophirton in spite of his busy schedule together with a few other members we formed the Ophirton Tamil School. I can safely say this was initiated by Ramy. We were six members. We collected 25 cents a month from each parent. At the end of the month we never had enough money to pay the teacher, Guru Pathi, and the rent. The members collected money amongst themselves to fill in the balance.
(Satch Pillay, 27.01.2016)

In Laudium, Ramy became an official in the Pretoria Tamil League which has a Tamil school on Bengal Street. In Tamil schools, children learn prayers, songs from the Thevaram, couplets from the Kural and the poems and sayings of the Avvaiyars.

But the Tamil language in South Africa is in an environment that does not support its maintenance. Despite its stirring qualities, it is dying out. Loss of the Tamil language means the loss of the *norms* of Tamil culture – not its values. Norms are like the clothes that cover the body. Whether the garment is a sari or a dress, it covers a body; garments are culture specific but bodies are universal. Similarly, norms (customs, traditions, dress, language, cuisine, etc.) are culture specific but values are universal.

In losing the Tamil language, therefore, one does not lose Tamil values. Take Ramy as an example, he did not speak Tamil, and he loved Clint Eastwood not Tamil films, but he was kind, generous and compassionate. These are Tamil values but they are not exclusively Tamil. Based on respect for all human beings, values do not differ markedly from one culture to another. Values, such as love and compassion, which are expounded in the Kural, the Bible, the Torah, the Qur'an, form the basis of civilized living everywhere and are never lost.

As values are abstract and norms observable behaviours, it is the loss of norms that is usually taken as the loss of culture – especially as cultural identities are based on external features such as dress, accents, manners, cuisine, forms of worship. The loss of these visible traditional norms leads to the loss of racial and ethnic identities and to the adoption of new identities based on a fusion of cultural norms. This can be seen in something as obvious as the clothes we wear; most South Africans have adopted Western dress. Segregation was an attempt to keep all ethnic and racial groups strictly within their own cultural norms. But subcultures generally adapt to a dominant culture and all South Africans have adopted Western norms. Tamil cultural norms have, therefore, been in a process of continuous change since 1860 when indentured Indians arrived in South Africa.

There are those who mourn the loss of traditional norms, but norms, being external expressions of inner values, are subject to change. Values, however, are the same though they are expressed through different norms. Some people bow their heads, some bow from the waist, some curtsy, some put their hands together as in prayer, some avert their eyes, some kneel, some shake hands, these are all ways to show respect. The forms/norms are different, but the desire to show respect is identical.

It doesn't matter what anything seems to be,
wisdom lies in seeking to grasp its true nature (Kural. 35.5)

As we move forward in time, we lose our understanding of the original purpose of many customs and traditions; as a result they become perfunctory and take on a magical life of their own. Then our adherence to them is superstitious. Those who insist on strict conformity to norms when their meanings are lost, become mystics or fanatics. Fanatics wish to fix us in a static past, and their insistence on fixed cultural norms in a changing world, denies freedom of choice. Prejudice is based on externals, on differences in cultural norms.

Though Ramy did not read and write Tamil, he gained the values of Tamil culture from the Tamil language, which was spoken by his parents. Tamil speech is filled with references to the Kural and other moral tracts; all place emphasis on love and compassion, respect and endeavour. Ramy was ruled by these values – universal values to be found in all cultures under turbans, hijabs, yarmulkes, hats, caps, bonnets, mantillas, berets, bandannas, hoods, scarves, etc.

GURU NADARAJAH SARMA

When the architect, also the officiating priest, Krishnanne²⁴, (G. Krishnan Pillay) of the Mariammen Temple in the Asiatic Bazaar Marabastad, passed away, the Board of Trustees of the Pretoria Tamil League had to find a new priest. Krishnanne had made them promise that when he died, they would bring in a new priest from India.



*(Back) M. Padayachy, R. Pillay, P. Padayatchi, T. Govender, D. Naidoo, S. Pillay
(Front) K. Arnachellan, R. Moodliyar, V.M. Sooboo, S. Pillay*

While they were still considering how to go about this, Sathia and Ramy, two of the Trustees, were invited to a Tamil wedding in Gabarone, Botswana, where they were introduced to Swaminathan Sarma, a medical technologist from India. They asked him for help in finding a priest for their temple in Marabastad. As it happened, Swaminathan's brother was a priest in Tamil Nadu, India and Swaminathan gave them his brother's telephone number. Ramy got in touch with the priest and asked him if he would consider coming to Pretoria and serving as the priest of the Mariammen Temple.

The young priest, who had officiated at temples in India, Sri Lanka and the Far East, wrote to Ramy, enclosing his CV. The letter was in Tamil and Ramy had to find someone who could read and translate it for him. Mrs Soobroyen, a Tamil school teacher, obliged and at a meeting of the Trustees, it was decided to bring the young priest down. And in about 1983, Guru Nadarajah Sarma became the priest at the Mariammen Temple.

24 Krishnanne = Krishna + anne (elder brother).

Ramy's success in finding a priest became widely known and people from many other temples came to him and Guru Nadarajah for assistance in this regard.

In the following year, Guru Nadarajah brought his wife and children to Pretoria and the family lived in Laudium, in a house adjacent to the Tamil School in Bengal Street. Guru Nadarajah took charge of the Tamil School, became its principal and a teacher as well. And he prepared the children for the Tamil Eisteddfod that is held each year. He has a beautiful voice and he taught them traditional songs and poems.

Working together in the management of the Mariammen Temple, Ramy and Guru Nadarajah became very good friends and the priest officiated at all the ceremonial occasions of Ramy's family; all weddings, births, deaths, and events that needed to be consecrated. Then for one of the Laudium Child Welfare Society's fundraising efforts, Ramy, who was an official, came to Guru Nadarajah and sought his help in organizing a visit to South Africa of the renowned Tamil.



Ramy with Pithukuli Murugudas, singer and musician from Chennai.

A South Indian singer and musician, and one of Ramy's favourite performers, Murugudas was a Brahmin and had been a political activist. At age eleven, he had taken part in Gandhi's salt march and at age sixteen in protests against the Jalianwalla Bagh massacre for which he had been imprisoned for six months. He had been a satyagrahi like so many members of Ramy's family.

Guru Nadarajah telephoned Murugudas and helped with the arrangements for his visit and his performances. Murugudas's tour was an overwhelming success; all his recitals in South Africa were completely sold out.

Ramy also involved Guru Nadarajah in counselling children who were experimenting with smoking, drugs and alcohol. And a proverb from Pazha Mozhi, the Tamil book of proverbs, came to mind as the priest worked with Ramy; "Look after the children of others, and your children will be looked after."

And the priest discovered in Ramy, a commitment to the welfare of the community that struck him as a form of devotion to God. Rarely had he met a man as selflessly concerned about the progress of others as Ramy. And he raises his hands, palms up, as he says, "Ramy's favourite word was upliftment. Upliftment!"

The priest refers to Ramy as Suththa Aathma – pure soul, great soul. He goes further and declares him "Yuga Purushar." To understand what that means one has to have some understanding of the Hindu concept of the cycles of existence.

Reincarnation is a fundamental concept in Hindu religious philosophy. It applies not only to individuals but to the whole of human existence. Human existence, like the seasons, is envisioned as a movement of cycles within cycles of time.

A kalpa, the major cycle, is 4.32 billion years and consists of a thousand mahayugas (maha-great, yuga-epoch). Each mahayuga consists of a cycle of four yugas:

1. Satyayuga/Krtayuga (The Golden Age of Wisdom and Truth)
2. Tretayuga (The Silver Age of Ritual),
3. Dvaparayuga (The Age of Doubt)
4. Kaliyuga (The Age of Discord) that ends with a major battle between the forces of good and evil.

Hindu philosophers indicate the degree of morality of each yuga with reference to the bull – the symbol of dharma (morality). The number of its legs indicates the moral status of the yuga.

In the first epoch, Satyayuga/Krtayuga, The Age of Wisdom and Truth, the bull stands on four legs – morality is at 100%.

In Tretayuga, The Age of Ritual, the bull stands on three legs, morality is at 75%.

In Dvaparayuga, The Age of Doubt, the bull has two legs, morality is at 50%.

In Kaliyuga, The Age of Discord, the bull has one leg – morality is at 25%.

It is a cycle of moral degeneration – a view of human existence that reflects the continuous decline and need for renewal of morality.

According to Hindu belief, we are in Kaliyuga, the last and shortest epoch of a cycle, 432,000 years. It began in 3002 (B.C.E); so we are at the beginning of the epoch. Kaliyuga, an excessively materialistic age, is characterised by uncontrolled lust, anger, greed, pride and jealousy. Murder, rape, exploitation and corruption are rampant. It is the age of the demon Kali (pronounced kully meaning strife and discord), and is not a reference to the goddess, Kali, (pronounced kaalee, meaning Time).²⁵

Through every yuga, according to Guru Nadarajah, walks a pure spirit untouched by moral decay. Such a one is called “Yuga Purushar” and such a one was Ramy Pillay.

DELEGATION TO LUSAKA 1988



Ramy 2nd from left

Nadas Pillay met Sathia and Ramy Pillay in the early 1980's, at a time when the Nationalist Government was trying to co-opt the Indian and Coloured communities by offering them the pretence of participation in government. The Nationalists first established racial national councils in the 1960s: The South African Indian Council (SAIC) and the Coloured Representative Council (CRC). In a parody of democracy, there were racial elections to these councils.

25 Muthal Naidoo, 2014, *Kaliyuga*, foreword.

Anti-apartheid organisations, such as the Indian Congresses, set up Anti-SAIC and Anti-CRC committees to discourage people from standing for election and from voting. But some people became candidates, stood for election and were voted in by friends and family members. Their collaboration allowed the government to take the process further. It came up with the Tri-Cameral Parliament. This, in reality, simply meant the transformation of the National Councils into the separate racial Houses of Parliament with superficial administrative functions.

To counter this desperate attempt to entrench separate development, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched to conscientise people about the fraud being perpetrated upon them. Nad was one of the founder members of the Actonville Rent Action Committee (ARAC) and a member of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC), organisations affiliated to the UDF and committed to opposing the Tri-Cameral System. At the time, strong cultural groups, such as the Tamil Federations, were considered reactionary, easily intimidated, and prone to co-option and collusion with the government. It became necessary, therefore, to infiltrate these organisations with the intention of making them aware of the consequences of collusion.

This is when Nad joined the Benoni Tamil School Board, an affiliate of the Transvaal Tamil Federation (TTF). Sathia Pillay was President and Ramy, PRO of the TTF. They were politically aware and opposed to apartheid, but there were those in the general membership who were not. And though the Congresses were successful in reducing the numbers, the tiny minority that voted, made possible the implementation of the Tri-cameral scheme. Three racial parliaments were set up; only one had power. The other two were dummies set up to disguise maintenance of the status quo and thwart the struggle for real democracy.

But with international economic pressure bearing down on apartheid, the Nationalists recognizing the futility of their efforts began to negotiate. The ANC government-in-waiting was also lining up its support within South Africa and was establishing contact with various groups in the country. In 1987, Van Zyl Slabbert, leading a delegation of progressive Afrikaners, met with ANC leaders in Dakar, Senegal. The ANC then requested the Indian Congresses to organise a delegation of influential Indian leaders to meet with them in Lusaka to relay at first-hand their expectations in a free South Africa.

In 1988, over eighty influential Indian leaders from various organisations all over South Africa went to meet with the ANC in Lusaka. Sathia, Ramy and Billy Pillay represented the Tamil Federation. Nad Pillay went as a representative of the Transvaal Indian Congress. The delegates couldn't openly declare that they had been invited to meet with the banned ANC. As they assembled at various airports before their flights to Lusaka, they pretended even to one another that they were simply on a visit to Zimbabwe.

When they arrived in Lusaka, they were welcomed at the airport by Ruth Mpati and Aziz Pahad of the ANC who accompanied them to their hotel and saw them settled in. Their gracious welcome allayed the doubts of some who feared they were going into the bush and would be among guerrillas carrying guns. This is what Nationalist propaganda had led

them to believe. South African media in general presented the ANC as “die swart gevaar” (the black danger) – savage and vengeful. It was a tactic meant to instil fear, win the support of Coloureds and Indians, and keep black people divided. And there were those, among these delegates to Lusaka, who feared even greater discrimination under an ANC government.

Alfred Nzo, Secretary General of the ANC, chaired the first session and introduced the ANC leaders present: Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, Essop and Aziz Pahad and others. The delegation then divided into various commissions to deliberate the way forward for South Africa. Sathia and Ramy were in the Education and Culture group. So was Nad. During the course of deliberations in that week, Nad was impressed by Ramy who stood out in his group. He struck Nad as a forceful and principled man whose arguments were clearly thought out and well-formulated.

But Nad was surprised when Ramy asked: “When the ANC comes into power, is the future of Indian people really safe? Will I be able to practice my religion and culture?” Thabo Mbeki assured him that minority and cultural rights were protected under the general rubric of human rights. For Nad, Ramy’s question represented conservative thinking and he had not pegged Ramy for a conservative. Later that day, he asked Ramy why he had asked such a question and was most impressed by his answer. Ramy explained that he was aware of the inherent fear in the Indian community, a minority community, the fear of extinction. Though he did not subscribe to such a fear, he felt it was necessary to expose it; if it remained unexpressed it would fester. Indians would remain victims and would not be able to participate as equals in the new dispensation. Ramy had asked the question as he knew no one else would. He had no fear of being thought a racist; he knew he was not. Nad had never encountered such supreme self-confidence before.

Perhaps that is what gave Nad the confidence to put forward his own discomfort at what was happening in South Africa at the time – the Wimpy bombings. Despite the ANC’s expressed declaration of a strategy of limited violence that targeted structures not human life, he had been witness of the opposite. Walking down the street in Benoni on a Saturday morning to meet a friend at a Wimpy Restaurant, an African man rushing towards him, bumped him hard in the shoulder, pushing him back as he raised a fist in the ANC salute. Before Nad could react, he was thrown back by an explosion at the Wimpy where his friend was waiting for him. He pulled himself together and rushed to the restaurant to look for his friend. Nad found him badly hurt and it created serious doubts in his mind. He later realised that the man who had bumped him, was the one who had thrown the bomb and had tried to keep him out of range of the blast.

At the Lusaka conference, Nad asked how the ANC could renege on its strategy of limited violence. Why was it now targeting human beings? People were being hurt and killed in the bombings of Wimpy restaurants. The explanation given was that the ANC had entertained the idea of adopting a more violent approach but had dismissed it; some activists, however, not aware of this, had gone ahead with it.

After the Lusaka conference, Sathia and Ramy, as officials of the Tamil Federation maintained contact with the ANC and when the ban on the Congress was lifted in 1990, the Transvaal Tamil Federation was the first organisation to officially welcome the leaders of the ANC back into the country. In 1991, ANC officials met with the membership of the Tamil Federation and were assured of its support and financial assistance. After 1994, when ANC committees were set up in all townships, Sathia became the first Chairperson of the Laudium ANC.

Ramy was happy; Tamils were at the forefront.

As a result of meeting Sathia and Ramy, Nad became immersed in Tamil Federation activities, developed pride in being Tamil and served two consecutive terms as President of the Tamil Federation of Gauteng. He admits he was inspired by “the leadership of his political Heroes, Sathia and Ramy Pillay”. It was an unexpected consequence of his infiltration of the Tamil Federation. He had gone in to influence its members and he, in turn, was converted.

According to Nad, Sathia and Ramy felt that the involvement of Tamil political leaders in the struggle for freedom in South Africa has never been given proper recognition. To begin to rectify that Ramy became actively involved in trying to find the gravestone of the young satyagrahi, Valliamma Munusamy Moodaliar, and in having it consecrated and getting her story publicised.

REMEMBERING VALLIAMMA and NAGAPPAN

As President of the Tamil Federation, Nad became involved with Ramy and Sathia Pillay in honouring two young martyrs who died in Gandhi’s Satyagraha campaigns: eighteen-year-old Nagappan Padayachee who died in 1909 and sixteen-year-old, Valliamma Munusamy Moodaliar, in 1914. As a result of Gandhi’s recognition of these two youngsters, in particular Valliamma, they have become icons of heroism and self-sacrifice in the Tamil community.

Dr Enuga S. Reddy, former Director of the United Nations Centre against Apartheid and Gandhi scholar, who was invited to South Africa by the Universities of the Witwatersrand, Durban-Westville and Cape, is well acquainted with the stories of Valliamma and Nagappan. According to Dr Reddy,

One of the last acts of Gandhi before he left South Africa was to hold a ceremony for erecting gravestones for Valliamma and Nagappan,

Most South Indians are cremated and do not have graves. But in South Africa they had the practice of erecting gravestones. The gravestone of Valliamma in the Braamfontein cemetery was well known.

(E.S. Reddy, Jan 2016)

In 1991, when I was in a car going to Wits to speak, I saw a traffic sign for Braamfontein cemetery. I said I would like to visit it sometime as Valliamma was buried there. Ismail Vadi, I believe, said that the gravestones were removed by the municipality as it was a “white area”. I denounced that in an article on Indian martyrs in South Africa and called for action by India. I heard that the matter was raised in the Indian Parliament.

(ES Reddy, from a letter to Abdul Bemath, 15 February 2011)

My statement was, however, wrong. The gravestone had not been removed.

(E.S. Reddy, Jan 2016)

Access to the gravestones had probably become difficult under apartheid and people may simply have lost track of them. After E.S. Reddy had drawn attention to them, they became the object of a search by officials of the Tamil Federation and others with an interest in Gandhi’s work in South Africa. Meanwhile memorials to Valliamma were being erected in various Tamil communities in India and elsewhere.

In July 1996, the Rev Dr James D. Hunt, like E.S. Reddy, inspired by Gandhi, and making an extensive study of his work and beliefs, arrived in Johannesburg in search of information about Gandhi and all the people who had worked closely with him. In Johannesburg, he located Gandhi’s house and then went in search of the gravestones of Nagappen and Valliamma in the Braamfontein Cemetery. Towards the end of his tour, James Hunt was invited to Ramy’s home to discuss the matter of the gravestones. Ramy had most probably read about James Hunt in the newspapers, and had not hesitated to approach him. When Hunt got back to the US, he wrote to Ramy about the locations of the gravestones. His letter reveals considerable interest in and knowledge of Gandhi’s work in South Africa.

120 Pineland Circle, Raleigh NC 27606

August 20, 1996

Dear Mr Pillay,

I want to thank you for your generous hospitality when Jane and I visited you on July 25. You supplied me with some valuable information, as well as introducing us to your community and some of its institutions. I regret that I had not made your acquaintance when I was in Pretoria at the beginning of my tour. E. S. Reddy had sent me a list of persons who might be helpful, but the letter did not reach me until I had already left for Johannesburg. Such are the mishaps of travelling.

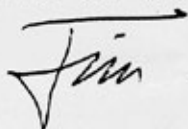
I am enclosing some data on the Valliamma and Nagappen monuments in the Braamfontein Cemetery, including a photo of the missing Nagappen stone. A photo of the dedication ceremony of Nagappen's memorial was published in the "Golden Number" of Indian Opinion in 1914. My 1977 photo shows it standing near a large tree. Perhaps the tree fell and knocked down the stone. Perhaps the organization which controls the cemetery might have some record of the event. I doubt it was removed because of Apartheid, since other Indian stones and many Chinese stones were left.

I have also included a list of persons who lived at (or were significant to) Tolstoy Farm. The sons of G K T Naidoo are listed, but I understand that his daughters were also at the Farm. Do you know their names? Would anybody know their birth dates? Children are often mentioned in diaries and letters by their first names (or nicknames) only. I know something of the careers of the Naidoo boys. When happened to the girls?

In the large photo you gave me you identified N. S. Pillay, the brother-in-law of C K Thambi Naidoo. A Mrs. N. S. Pillay went to jail in 1913, along with Miss Minachi Pillay, Miss M. B. Pillay, Mrs. K. Murugasa Pillay, Mrs. K. Chinnaswami Pillay, and Mrs. N. Pillay. Can you supply names attaching to any of these initials?

Hassim Seedat says you called him shortly after our meeting. He was a most helpful host in Durban. He took us into his house and did everything to help my work as well as looking after our comfort. I met him in Delhi when I was editing Pyarelal's last volume (Volume III, "The Birth of Satyagraha") of his projected series Mahatma Gandhi. His sister Sushila Nayar has now nearly finished the whole series.

Again, thanks for all the help you have given. Sincerely,



Jim Hunt

In 1996, the headline of an article in the Durban newspaper, The Leader, announced: Valliamma's grave "re-discovered". The article stated that,

The memorial which had been unveiled by the Mahatma prior to his departure from South Africa ... was found intact by the distinguished American scholar, Professor James Hunt, when he visited South Africa recently
(The Leader, 20 September 1996)

Ramy, took it upon himself to inform E.S. Reddy of the discovery and the consecration that followed. In the letter that Ramy wrote to Reddy, he mentions that James Hunt gave him directions to the gravestone.

P.O. Box 13147
Laudium 0037, 82
6-4-97

Dear Mr Reddy.

I know you must be surprised to receive a letter from me, I am really not a person to write letters. I am very sorry about that.

I met Mr James Hunt and he gave me the directions to the grave of Valliamma Mousamy. so I went and found it the following week I took the High Commissioner of India Mr Gopal Krishna Gandhi and the brother son of Valliamma to the Boasengadeni grave, it was rather very sad as he broke down, he said he remembers coming there about 50 years ago with his father, he was only 10 years of age he is now 68 years of age. he also said he had to enter through a hole in the fence to lay flowers on the grave.

After two months the A.H.C. also found the grave just opposite of Enoch Santonga so they had a very big ceremony and moved the white grave from Enoch Santonga Park, we also had a ceremony on the 22 of Feb 1997 with all his family and the very big fountain on the 20 of April, the grave stone of Nagaperi is not around, but the council marked it off.

Yours Sincerely
Ramy Pillay.

On Gopalkrishna Gandhi's appointment as High Commissioner to South Africa in 1996, he had heard from his friend, E.S. Reddy, about Valliamma and Nagappan and the need to find their gravestones and consecrate them. When Valliamma's gravestone was found, High Commissioner Gandhi arranged an impressive ceremony of rededication.

As Nagappen's gravestone was not found, a memorial was created to honour him. In his letter to Dr Reddy, Ramy mentions that Nagappan was honoured on the 20th of April, 1997.

After the consecration of the gravestones, the Tamil Federation proceeded with further plans to commemorate the heroism of Valliamma.

STATE TIMES (DELHI)

Johannesburg, Sep 27 2014

Valliamma Munusamy, a Tamil girl who marched alongside Mahatma Gandhi as South African Indians protested discriminatory laws which would have required them to carry permits, [was] honoured on the centenary of her death [22 February] at the age of 16.

A bust of Munusamy has been unveiled recently on South Africa's public holiday Heritage Day [24 September] after the third edition of awards made annually in her name on the day by the Tamil Federation of Gauteng to women who had made huge sacrifices in the fight against apartheid.

...Flanked by two columns, the bust, unveiled in Lenasia, south of Johannesburg, tells her story in the liberation struggle.

...The bust was a dream of Tamil Federation of Gauteng (TFG) President Nadas Pillay for several years.

"I must compliment my fellow executives on the TFG who shared my dream and worked so hard to ensure the success of the project, together with the support of South African Tamil Federation President Karthi Moothsamy and past office-bearers of the TFG," Pillay said.

Sathia Pillay, founder President of the TFG, related how Tamil leaders had located Valliamma's unmarked grave in a cemetery in Johannesburg following a long search after democracy arrived in South Africa. An annual memorial service is now hosted there by TFG on Youth Day, June 16, every year.

(<http://news.statetimes.in/gandhian-follower-valliamma-honoured-s-africa/>)

Ramy was a man who knew no boundaries; regardless of their status, he embraced all who had the same concerns as himself. In following him in all his ventures, therefore, one comes across remarkable people from all walks of life, people like E.S. Reddy and James Hunt.

The Rev Dr James D. Hunt

Rev Hunt died in 2011. The following is an excerpt from the obituary written by a family member.



Jim lived a full and adventurous life. His early years were spent in Rhode Island, and he was a graduate of Tufts, Boston and Syracuse Universities. His first career was as a Universalist minister. The parts of being a minister he liked the best were studying and preaching. This led him to pursue a second career in teaching, which has some elements of both. For almost 30 years he was a Professor of Ethics and Religion at Shaw University. His first major publication was a comparison of the lives of Martin L. King and Mohandas K. Gandhi. He then began an avocation of research and writing on the early life of Gandhi which culminated in the publication of 4 books. Jim had a passion for fairness and justice. Working with Amnesty International, ACLU, Witness for Peace, Peace Action, CITCA, People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, and the Congress of Racial Equality. He also had a passion for fun: cycling, reading, hiking, folk dancing, playing the recorder, singing, travel and family.²⁶

26 <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/newsobserver/obituary.aspx?n=james-d-hunt&pid=148454679#ixzz1E5i6AwyD>

Stanley Wolpert's book on Gandhi, ends with the following words:

A hundred years from now the world over may still “scarcely” believe that “such a one as this even in flesh and blood” did walk “upon this earth.” As those who wait outside Birla House daily cry:

“Mahatma Gandhi amar rahe!”

“Mahatma Gandhi is immortal!”²⁷

And Gandhi lives on in the spirit of all people who, like Rev. James Hunt, actively seek the welfare of all human beings.

ENUGA SREENIVASULU REDDY

My Meetings with Ramy Pillay

In September 1991, I visited South Africa for the first time at the invitation of the WITS Alumni Festival in Johannesburg. Ramy Pillay met me after one of the meetings and invited me to go to Pretoria. I was reluctant as I was very tired after a long flight from New York, but he persisted.

So on 9 September 1991, he drove me to Pretoria. He took me to the Asiatic Bazaar and the temple, and then to the home of Sathia Pillay [in Laudium]. I believe Sathia was then secretary of the Tamil Federation. We spoke about the role of Tamils in the struggle for the liberation of South Africa. They felt that the important contribution of the Tamils was not recognized as [other more affluent ethnic groups] were dominant in the Indian community.

(Some Indians criticized Sathia Pillay and his colleagues as “Tamil nationalists.” I felt, however, that it is appropriate and desirable to recognize the contribution of different communities in the struggle. In later years I wrote about the role of Tamils and Parsis in the struggle.)

Sathia presented me with a book by Hromnik, a historian, about ancient Indian contacts with South Africa.**

Sathia was a relative of Vella Pillay, a friend of mine since 1964. He had left South Africa for London around 1949 because of the Mixed Marriages Act - his wife, Patsy, was white. He was one of the founders of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in 1959 and was in the leadership since then. He was also part of the liberation movement.

27 Stanley Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi*, 2001, New York::OUP, p.268.

Patsy obtained a job in the Indian High Commission, and Vella in the Bank of China. In 1955, they approached the Indian High Commissioner, V.K. Krishna Menon, and he helped Moses Kotane and Molvi Ismail Cachalia to go to India and from there to the Asian-African Conference in Bandung where they were seated as observers. Vella also helped the ANC in its contacts with China.]

We then went to the home of Ramy Pillay and had dinner. Ramy was head of Dings Photos. He gave me photos of Valliamma, Indian women satyagrahis in 1913, and Ama Naidoo. He told me that his mother was one of the satyagrahis.

After dinner, we went to another home where there was a wake after the funeral of a relative. I met Ama Naidoo, Thailema Pillay and others there. Thailema [daughter of Thambi Naidoo] was the last surviving inmate of the Tolstoy Farm. She was four years old when she lived in the Farm.

Ramy then drove me back to Lenasia where I was staying with a family.

After my return to New York, I sent Ramy my notes from the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* on the crucial role of Tamils in the satyagraha in 1906-14. They were published in the annual publication of the Tamil Federation. Since then we had occasional correspondence.

I visited South Africa again in 1995 to receive an honorary degree at the University of Durban-Westville, and visited the major cities in the country.

In Pretoria on 6 June, I had dinner with Ramy Pillay and Rogen (Pragaladen) Moodliyar of [Rogen's Auto Centre], another member of the Tamil Federation.

I suggested that they consider the preparation of a Who's Who of Tamils in the liberation struggle and offered to send the information I had. They welcomed the suggestion and said that Rogen's sister, Rumilla, could work on it as she had a computer.

The next day Rumilla Moodliyar came to see me. She was a travel agent. I gave her a disk with my file on Indians in the liberation struggle and promised to send more files from New York.

(I sent more information from New York, but apparently no who's who was prepared. A who's who of satyagrahis from Indian Opinion and other sources, as well as all available information about them, is included in a forthcoming publication *Pioneers of Satyagraha*, prepared by Kalpana Hiralal and myself.)

Thursday, 8 June 1995, Johannesburg

6.00-8.30 p.m. Reception by Indian Consul-General, Mr. Harsh Bhasin, for me. Rami Pillai and Sathia Pillai were invited at my suggestion.

Guests included: Walter Sisulu; Mr. and Mrs. Prema Naidoo; Mrs. and Mrs. Issy Dinat; Mr. and Mrs. Murthi Naidoo; Shanti Naidoo and Dominic Tweedie; Ramnie and Issy Dinat; **Rami Pillai**; Sam Ramsamy; Rica Hodgson; Yusuf Saloojee, formerly ANC rep in Canada; Maniben Sita; Mr. and Mrs. Ahmed Mangera; Monique Vajifdar and David Cooper; Dr. M.F. Randera; Govin Reddy; Mrs. Amina Cachalia; **Mr. and Mrs. Sathia Pillai**; **Mr. and Mrs. Vella Pillai**; Gulam Pahad; Firoze Cachalia; Luli Callinicos; John Barratt, former head of SAIIA, and Dr. Sara Pienaar, his successor; Mr. and Mrs. Rice - Mrs. Ruth Rice is the daughter of Bram Fischer; Albie Sachs; Dilshad "Coco" Cachalia; Horst Kleinschmidt; Gerald L'Ange.

(Enuga Reddy, 10 January 2016)

Stone Circles in Mpumalanga

In the above report, E.S.Reddy makes reference to a book by Cyril Hromník given to him by Sathia. Cyril Hromník is the historian who offered an explanation of stone circles discovered in Mpumalanga. His interpretation excited Sathia and Ramy who went to inspect the sites.

The best known and most substantial of the exotic explanations has been offered by Cyril Hromník. He has long maintained that most of the significant innovations and social systems in Africa are the result of Indian influences – a perspective which has led him to argue that the Mpumalanga stone-walled sites are Hindu temples and that the Indian Forgotten World settlers who worshipped in them lived in nearby shelters or caves. ... He further claims that the first Bantu speakers came to Mpumalanga as slaves of the Indian or Quena gold traders and that the BaPedi were the descendants of mixing between the Indian traders and these slaves, who acquired their technological knowledge of metalworking from their Indian lineage but were not as culturally advanced in it as their Indian ancestors. Gold and metalworking form another important part of Hromník's argument. According to him, Indians introduced metalworking to southern Africa some time before AD 1200 or 1300.

[Forgotten World - The Stone Walled Settlements of the Mpumalanga Escarpment by Peter Delius, Tim Maggs and Alex Schoeman.

<http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/one-most-extraordinary-archaeological-and-historical-phenomena-southern-africa>]

Hromník came up with his theory sometime in the late 1980s. It is only a theory. Sathia and Ramy were in pursuit of ghosts.

11

“MY SONS ARE MY WEALTH”



Manoo, Ramy and sons, Rajen, Kuben, Basha, Keshan, Unben

The duty of a father towards his children is to give them a headstart in knowledge over the best of scholars.
(Kural 6.7)

According to Satch Pillay, one of Ramy’s many nephews, his sister Rasma’s son, and four years younger than his uncle.

Being the youngest child of twelve children he [Ramy] was forced to sacrifice his education to take care of his Mom. This is one of the reasons why he allowed the sweat to drop from his forehead in order to provide for his children the education he was denied.
(Satch Pillay, 29 October 2015)

When people speak of Ramy, you hear phrases such as, “Though he wasn’t educated...” “Though he only went up to Std. 6 (Grade 8)”. The word “though” indicates firstly, that

great achievement followed despite the lack of secondary and further education; secondly, that success depends on formal education; thirdly, an understanding of the meaning of the word education as purely academic. Leonardo da Vinci, considered the greatest genius the world has ever known, did not complete primary school; Albert Einstein was a high school dropout – but Einstein and Da Vinci learned from life, through observation and experimentation, and profoundly changed our lives. No one thinks of them as under-educated.

Before the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, education for the majority was acquired through observation and practical experience – apprenticeships. As the modern school provides structured access to knowledge and skills, that kind of practical acquisition of knowledge and skills has been relegated to a lower order. Now knowledge is passed down and acquired through study, not the slow process of self-discovery. And the more formal knowledge one accumulates, the greater the chances of recognition and material success in society. Ramy endorsed this common view of formal education because, in our time, education has become synonymous with schooling. So despite his many achievements, he too probably regarded himself as under-educated.

But Ramy's university was the University of Life and he achieved as much as, and even more, than many institutional university graduates. At a basic level, learning directly from life experience gives one a common sense understanding of how to function in the world. And as Ramy did not have apartheid secondary school education, he was not as conditioned to accepting apartheid values as those who went to high school. And when he became an employee of the Rosenfeldts, who did not conform to apartheid values, he developed awareness of the different sets of values in which he operated. And he saw that he had choice and could determine his own destiny.

Being a Tamil Hindu, Ramy equated ignorance with the darkness of evil. The lighting of the lamp in his home was symbolic of his search for the enlightenment that leads to freedom. And for him, freedom was not an empty slogan; freedom was the real purpose of life. It meant unshackling oneself from ignorance and gaining understanding of one's circumstances in order to evolve. Education, therefore, was a life process. And Ramy was a learner and teacher – not in a classroom, but in all his endeavours and all his relationships – at home; in his photography studio; in every organisation of which he was a member and even in sport. He was bent on lifting himself and the people around him out of ignorance and poverty and setting them on the path of opportunity.

Education is a means to freedom but under apartheid separate development, the majority of Black people received an attenuated form of education at school that was meant to limit their perspectives. If he could have, Ramy would have dismantled such a system of education, one that attempted to enslave rather than free the mind. The best he could do was to save his sons from such indoctrination. They would not be educated in apartheid schools.

As he came from a tradition of political activism, Ramy moved in circles in which commitment to eradication of discrimination was very strong. According to Sathia Pillay, Ramy's nephew, close friend and companion, the suburb of Fordsburg, to which Ramy's family had moved from Doornfontein, was a hotbed of revolutionary activity. It was where Dr. Yusuf Dadoo, Ahmed Kathrada, Essop and Aziz Pahad and the Cachalias lived. Many activists were avowed communists and Sathia recalls that the cops would charge into public meetings at Red Square (now the Oriental Plaza) wielding their clubs and sending everyone flying. On one occasion, some of the communists hijacked a shop and started selling goods at cost. They accused the shopowner of exploiting people who were starving. They held the shop for three days before they were evicted.

The 1950s, Ramy's formative years, was a decade of protest and challenge – a time of great learning. It was Ramy's school and university. It was the decade which made clear that resistance had to give way to revolution; that freedom was dependent on the overthrow of the government. It was the decade in which the government passed The Immorality Act, Bantu Education Act, Group Areas Act, Separate Universities Act, and the Native Resettlement Act, among others. And education was being used to fix people in a racial hierarchy with whites at the top, the majority of black people at the bottom and black minorities in between in a buffer zone. Leaders of the anti-apartheid movement could not subject their children to conditioning of this kind; they were sending their children out of the country for their education.

Ramy also wanted the best education for his sons. When Kuben his eldest son was ready for high school, Ramy turned to the Rosenfeldts for advice. Neils Rosenfeldt remembers their concern: "I can vaguely recall Daddy being upset that he could not get Ramy and Manoo's boys into private schools in South Africa, and that the solution was to send them to Waterford in Swaziland."

And though it meant a great sacrifice on his part that is what Ramy decided to do.

WATERFORD KAMHLABA, SWAZILAND

Waterford was founded by a small number of teachers, led by the young British teacher Michael Stern, as a multi-racial school in opposition to South Africa's apartheid policies. Stern had previously been head of a school in Johannesburg, but the educational policies of the apartheid government in South Africa drove him from the country to Swaziland where he was determined to create a new school in which students of all races could study together and cooperate in community service.

After years of courage and dedication, the school was founded in 1963. Land on a hillside near Mbabane had been obtained through a grant from the King of Swaziland, and the main buildings were designed by a Portuguese/ architect from Mozambique, Amâncio d'Alpoim Miranda Guedes.

Campus

Waterford Kamhlaba is situated on a mountain ledge, approximately 15 minutes from the city centre of Mbabane . The sporting facilities on campus include a sports hall and gym, tennis courts, cricket, rugby and football fields, as well as a swimming pool, squash, netball and basketball courts. Furthermore, direct access to the feet of the mountains Tom and Kelly provide the students with the opportunity to go hiking and climbing.

Additionally, the Waterford campus houses an IT-centre, a library, an indoor-outdoor dining hall, amphitheatre, tuck-shop, and several other halls for recreational activities. (Wikipedia)



Waterford Kamhlaba in 1972

Michael Alexander Stern

Michael Alexander Stern was born on 13 January 1922 in Egypt , the son of a civil engineer. He attended Ravenswood Preparatory School in Devon and Gresham's School in Holt , Norfolk.

Stern went to Downing College, Cambridge for a year before his studies were interrupted by World War II . Stern served in the Royal Signals in the British Army in North Africa, Italy, and Greece, rising to the rank of captain. He graduated from Downing College in 1947.

Stern taught school in England, later serving at head teaching posts at approved schools from 1952 to 1955. In 1955, Stern read an article by Rev. Trevor Huddleston and, at Huddleston's invitation Stern went to South Africa and

became the headmaster of St Peter's, a school for African children in Johannesburg. However, educational policies under the apartheid government in South Africa forced the school to close. Stern was then appointed by the bishop of Johannesburg, Ambrose Reeves as the headmaster of the new (white) school, St. Martins, which took its place. He stayed for five years. (Wikipedia)

Thereafter Waterford Kamhlaba!

Kamhlaba is a Swazi word which, loosely translated, means 'one world'. It was given to the original Waterford School by His Majesty King Sobhuza II Ngwenyama of Swaziland when he visited Stern and his small multi-racial band of students and a staff of 10 in 1967.

Harry Oppenheimer (one of the world's richest men and the owner of most of the mines where so many blacks lived, worked, and died) was an early financial and moral patron. So was Robert Kennedy.

Today, with more than 500 students and a staff of over 60, Waterford KaMhlaba is associated with an American educational network which promotes schools of excellence all over the world [the United World College movement].

Despite blistering attacks from Pretoria, the school flourished and Stern went on to become a southern African legend. Nelson Mandela sent his daughters there. So did Desmond Tutu and Walter Sisulu.

During his years at Waterford KaMhlaba, Stern displayed a fearsome energy, teaching blacks and whites Latin as well as introducing them to the glories of English literature, the Classics, the Christian religion, and gardening.

...10 years after he founded the famous mountain school, he met Jim Bailey, founder/owner of the influential African magazine *Drum*. Bailey recruited Stern who left Swaziland for London to manage *Drum* and its two sister publications, *Trust and True Love*.

[Trevor Grundy www.heraldscotland.com/news/11956466]

A liberating education, such as Ramy's sons received at Waterford, and other non-racial schools, gave them the freedom to determine their own destinies. And at the end of his life, Ramy would have no regrets. Though he was confined to a wheelchair and his speech could not be understood, he could see in his sons' achievements, the rewards of a lifetime of effort.

Ramy's sons, leaders in the community, are men of zeal and compassion.

12

KUBANDIRAN PILLAY

RAMY'S FIRST SON

In 1972, when Ramy's eldest son, Kuben, turned twelve, he was told that he would be going to Waterford Kamhlaba High School in Swaziland. He was very excited and watching his mother sewing name labels on all his clothes, signified the beginning of a great adventure. Now looking back on his life, Kuben sees in his experience at Waterford, his emergence from a cocoon. He had led a sheltered life in Laudium that had allowed him to remain a boy. At Waterford, with classmates like Zinzi Mandela, Karabo Motlana, Firoz Cachalia, he was being made aware of the reality of being black in South Africa.

Zinzi gave him her father's book, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, and at age thirteen that book opened his eyes to the evils of apartheid. He could not have read it at home; it was banned in South Africa. It was his introduction to other banned reading material that supplemented what he learned from his classmates about their firsthand experiences of repression. Zinzi's mother, Winnie Mandela, had been banished to Brandfort and her father, Nelson Mandela, was on Robben Island for life; the children, dependent on comrades in the movement, did not have the care and protection of a normal home.

Kuben's father had sent him to Waterford for a superior academic education but Kuben was learning the greatest lesson of his life, not in the classroom, but from the experiences of classmates who had not been sheltered from the violence of apartheid as he had. Ramy had experienced a life of hardship and sacrifice as a child. In sending Kuben to Waterford, he had thought to protect his son from knowledge of such a life. Instead, he inadvertently gave Kuben the opportunity to discover the brutal reality of conditions in South Africa, especially for indigenous people. And Kuben would become a man like Ramy, concerned with the empowerment of people – but he would be one with high academic qualifications that would give him entrée to power and the means to address, on a large scale, the practical needs of those most disadvantaged by the system.

In 1976, after five years at Waterford, Kuben had to come home for his final year in high school as the A Levels that he would have acquired at Waterford were not recognized in South Africa at the time and he would be refused admission to University. Despite his frantic protests and passionate outbursts, he was brought back to Laudium where he found it difficult to relate to childhood friends who did not question their existence within the apartheid system.

In 1978, he had to apply for Ministerial permission to attend the white university of the Witwatersrand (Wits) – it was a requirement under the Separate Universities Act. He was given permission and he enrolled at Wits, completed the BA degree in 1982, went on to study law and in 1984 obtained the LLB. He served his articles with Jody Kollapen and partners, correspondent attorneys for Priscilla Jana, but he was not really interested in correspondent work. He wanted, as he puts it, ‘to really work’ – use his legal expertise to improve conditions and provide viable growth opportunities for the underprivileged.

But he wasn’t sure where that was. So he applied to the South African Council of Churches for a grant to study for a Master’s in Comparative Jurisprudence at Howard University in Washington D.C. and left for the US in November 1984. One day in the International Student House where he lodged, he turned on the television to watch a programme on PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) about the rise of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in South Africa. It featured a man called Cyril Ramaphosa. And as he listened, Kuben said to himself, “I am going to work for that man.” He had found his niche.

In 1987, back in South Africa armed with the Master’s in Comparative Jurisprudence, he applied to Cyril Ramaphosa and was granted an interview. Unexpectedly he was also invited to an interview by the Anglo American Corporation (AAC) for the Friday following his interview at NUM. It was a tremendous boost! He had been headhunted by the AAC! This was the opportunity of a life time! But it plummeted him into a major dilemma. Should he join AAC, a corporation with control and power equal to government, or should he join NUM, a union struggling against corporation and government? He would gain tremendous prestige and power with one and with the other would be involved in a struggle for human rights. Formal Education had geared him for life in the corporate world; informal education had opened his eyes to wider issues than the accumulation of wealth and position. Where would he be more effective? Working for change inside a mammoth corporation that controlled the lives of millions of workers? Or in the trenches, trying to enforce change on the giant? For a young man starting out in life, the prospect of personal power and prestige that the AAC offered was mind-blowing. When he spoke to his Dad, Ramy put no pressure on him – simply told him to follow his heart. This was an issue similar to that of the Tri-Cameral Parliament and the problem of cooption – only this was more enticing; it would be real power.

Kuben attended both interviews and the choice that he made was one that not many would make. It was the choice that heroes in literature make. He chose to work for Cyril Ramaphosa and NUM.

When he started at NUM, Kuben was immediately thrown into the deep end. He was not from the same turbulent background as the mineworkers he had come to serve and for the first time in his life, he was right in the midst of the anger and violent desperation of a people struggling against abject conditions of living. In his book *Cyril Ramaphosa*, Anthony Butler describes Kuben's first attempt to deal with a volatile situation.

After just two weeks on the job, he was sent out with one colleague to Kloof gold mine, where his task was to advise workers engaged in a three-day-old strike about their legal rights. The inexperienced Pillay stood up to address the crowd of workers, who were fired up with discontent and had gathered excitedly to hear what their union's representative had to say. Pillay told them straight out that the legal position was clear: if they did not go back to work immediately, the employers would be able to dismiss them"²⁸

Kuben was, of course, speaking with the voice of formal education. It enraged the mineworkers who went on a rampage and forced Kuben to flee for his life. It was a learning experience. The next time he had to deal with a similar situation, he did not preach about legal regulations, instead he came up with a ruse that fooled mine security, who were holding striking mine workers hostage, and forced them to withdraw.

Kuben had begun to learn to look at problems from a human as well as a legal perspective. And in all his work, he became focused on ensuring fair and humane treatment of workers. This is evident in the outcomes of cases that he handled.

A landmark case in the early 1990's was FAWU vs SAB in the Appellate Division. The late Ismail Mohamed SC (later Chief Justice of SA) was the advocate. This case made it illegal for employers to enforce overtime work with employees. No such thing as compulsory overtime anymore.

Another landmark matter was the Leon Commission of Enquiry into the Vaal Reefs mining disaster. This was in 1994-1995. This set the precedent for health & safety in the mining industry.'

(Kuben Pillay, 02 November 2015)

But Kuben wanted more than mere protection of workers' rights; he wanted to ensure their financial security and progress. That led to the establishment of the Mineworkers Investment Company of which he was a founding director.

The Mineworkers Investment Company (MIC) was established in 1995 with a seed capital of R3 million acquired from NUM.

MIC was established to focus and drive Black Economic Empowerment. It has current assets under management of over R10 billion and was awarded the Business Map Top Unlisted BEE Company of the year in 2006 as well as the Barloworld/WBS Top BEE Deal (Peermont) in 2008.

Since inception, MIC has disbursed over R419 million directly to MIT, which in turn advanced the money to fund its social development programs.

In June 2008 MIC made a further disbursement of R245 million to MIT making it the largest single South African distribution ever made by an empowerment investment company to a beneficiary trust. This lump sum has been invested into an MIT annuity fund and will provide solid and secure cash flows for the next 5 years. (www.mic.co.za)

MORE ABOUT MIC

MIC is 100% BEE Investment Company established in 1995 by the Mineworkers Investment Trust (MIT) to create a sustainable asset base for the benefit of mine, energy, and construction workers and their dependents.

MIC ... over the past 19 years has disbursed over R 390 million to the MIT which has in turn advanced the money to fund its social development programmes.

Since 2008, MIC has also initiated its own directly funded enterprise development programmes in agriculture and small business incubation.

(www.jbmarksedutrust.co.za/.../mineworkers-investment-company)



Anglo and NUM open talks on preventing strike violence: facing each other across the table are Anglo's Bobby Godsell and Kallie van der Kolf and the NUM's Cuban Pillay, James Motlatsi and Cyril Ramaphosa (right). The talks collapsed after two sessions.

The following article from The Business Day newspaper indicates the growing strength of the MIC:

NUM's investment arm thrives even as rest of union loses ground

by Natasha Marrian and Karl Gernetzky, June 04 2015, 06:01

THE National Union of Mineworker's (NUM's) investment company has grown its net assets to more than R4bn indicating how well it has thrived in spite of a slowdown in the economy over the past few years.

The NUM provided the seed capital for the formation of the Mineworkers Investment Company (MIC) 20 years ago, and it offers an example of a successful business wing [that] operates in relative isolation from the rest of the union, which has not fared nearly as well.

According to NUM secretary-general Frans Baleni's secretariat report circulated at its congress on Wednesday, the MIC — with a net asset value of about R4.1bn — invests in media, financial services, industrial technology, gaming, leisure and rail.

Mr Baleni said the MIC had increased its shareholding in the First Rand Empowerment Trust to 10.5% and had made new acquisitions, including ones in Puregas, Much Asphalt and Multiknit.

The link between the company and the union is through the Mineworkers Investment

Trust, which was established in 1995. The trust gave MIC R3m from union funds to invest and it has now grown into a multibillion rand investment entity.

The trust was the sole shareholder of the MIC, said its chief operating officer, Simphiwe Nanise. The MIC pays annual dividends to the trust and these are then dispersed among other NUM-owned agencies such as the JB Marks fund, which disburses bursaries to mineworkers and their families. Mr Baleni is the chairman of the JB Marks board.

The MIC's dividends are also allocated to the Mineworkers Development Agency, which aids retrenched workers. According to Mr Baleni's report, the agency had trained 16,539 beneficiaries in food security by helping them plant vegetables in their homes and creating community gardens.

The national office bearers of the union are the trustees.

According to insiders, this is among the reasons contests for leadership positions in the union are so intense because trustees can influence the MIC's investments.

Mr Nanise said the MIC could invest in any sector it chose except those in which the NUM operated.

These articles show how the capitalist system can be adapted to benefit workers by allowing them opportunities to invest, increase capital and apply their investment earnings to improving standards of living and creating better conditions and opportunities for their families.

In putting his ingenuity and expertise at the service of mineworkers and assisting them to find the means to enhance all aspects of their lives, Kuben continues in the tradition of his father. As it was for Ramy, so it is for Kuben; empowerment of the individual is the driving force behind all his endeavours. And his formal education, encouraged and supported by his father, gained him positions in institutions that gave him much greater power to effect change. His work benefits the lives of thousands of people.

TRIBUTES

Excerpt from a PRESS RELEASE issued MARCH 2014 when Kuben stepped down as chairman of MIC.

Frans Baleni, [Secretary-General of NUM and] chairman of the Mineworkers Investment Trust (MIC's sole shareholder), welcomed the new MIC chairman's appointment and saluted the outstanding work of the outgoing chairman.

He noted: "Kuben Pillay has made a huge contribution to the MIC over two decades. On his watch, the business has developed a professional executive team and created exemplary governance and oversight structures.

He can take justifiable pride in the MIC's record for sustained, responsible investment growth and ethical dealing. "Under his board stewardship, all targets relating to the ongoing funding of social beneficiaries were met or exceeded. His watch was also notable for the development of a board with strong representation by independent directors and black female professionals.

We look forward to Kuben's continued contribution as a non-executive director on the MIC board," he concluded.

Kuben's career, which reflects his endeavours in a variety of organisations, is summed up in the following press release issued 14 November 2014.

Kuben Pillay stepped down as CEO of Primedia and he was honoured by the company this week.

Terry Volkwyn, CEO of Primedia Broadcasting, offered the following tribute:

"As we all know, Kuben is a lawyer. He did his BA and LLB degrees at Wits majoring in Politics, Law and International Relations. After Wits, Kuben went to Howard University in Washington DC where he studied for his Master of Law in Human & Civil Rights and Labour Law.

On completion of his studies in 1986, Kuben approached Cyril Ramaphosa at NUM. Anthony Butler best describes the young Kuben in Cyril Ramaphosa's biography, "a highly talented young black lawyer called Kuben Pillay". Kuben successfully set up and ran NUM's legal team.

He later joined the public interest law firm of Krish Naidoo, Nicholls and Cambanis. In 1992, he joined Cheadle Thompson & Haysom as a managing financial partner. Cheadle and Haysom had and still has as some of its areas of focus: Employment Law and Constitutional Law. During his time in practice, Kuben was involved in many landmark labour law and policy decisions. He left legal practice and became one of the founding directors of MIC. It was through MIC that Kuben came into the Primedia family.

During his time with us, Kuben has jealously guarded against any encroachment on our right to freedom of expression – the constitutional right that is core to what PMB is all about. Our ability to freely express ourselves is the cornerstone of our existence and is a must-have ingredient for our success now and going into the future.

It is therefore befitting that we honour Kuben's legacy and contribution to our much cherished human rights through the establishment of the Kuben Pillay Award to be awarded to the top LLM Student in Human Rights Advocacy and Litigation degree at Kuben's alma mater - the Wits Law School.

The Wits Law School has graciously agreed to this and we should be signing the agreement within this week. We have been advised that the first such recipient will be announced at the Wits Law School graduation in March 2015.

This Merit award will also come with a R20 000 cash prize to the deserving student who may use the money as they see fit. We will be doing this for a period of 5 years.”

Ramy would have been very, very proud.

And equally proud of a father who gave his son the best education possible, Kuben has established the Ramy Pillay Scholarship at Waterford Kamhlaba High School.



Kamogelo with her grandmother

I set up the Ramy Pillay Scholarship in honor of dad, on the 50th anniversary of Waterford, through my family trust. It is offered to an ‘African girl child’ from a disadvantaged background, to study at Waterford. The scholarship is in its 3rd year and is worth R75 000 per annum. Current recipient, Komogelo Tlou, from Alex in JHB, has just finished high school & is on to pre- university. (Kuben Pillay, 2015)

And so the legacy of Ramy Pillay reaches far beyond the Pillay clan and lives on. By no means a rich man, but definitely a visionary, Ramy Pillay had sent his son to a school founded by a visionary, Michael Stern.

The scholarship at Waterford is a tribute to both men.



Ramy, Sarita (first grandchild), Manoo



**Kuben with his mentor and friend,
Kgalema Motlanthe**



Kamogelo with Kuben



Kuben and Aurora wedding photos



Sashin, Aurora, Kuben, Sarita



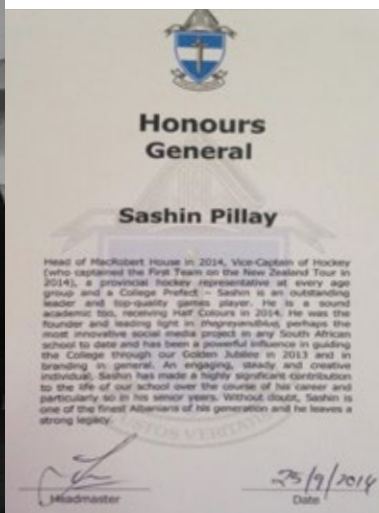
Kuben and Sarita biking with friends



Aurora at Orange Babies Montessori School for AIDS orphans



Dings and Kuben messing around with an old camera



Sarita and Aurora frolicking in Indian traditional dress

AURORA GONZÁLEZ GAONA.

In 1986, after Kuben returned from Howard University in Washington DC where he had completed the Master's in Comparative Jurisprudence, he sent for Aurora. They had met at the International Student House which provided accommodation for about sixty foreign students. Aurora was not studying at Howard; she was enrolled at the Washington Montessori Institute. After she and Kuben had completed their studies, she had returned to Mexico and he to South Africa. Soon afterwards she received his invitation and a ticket to come to South Africa. She was hesitant. South Africa had become something of a pariah in the world by then, the late 1980s, and the situation in the country was volatile. There were protests, boycotts, assassinations, detentions of schoolchildren and activists, and international boycotts. But she rationalised her fears -- or were they hopes? She told herself, it was only a short visit -- three months.

When she arrived in South Africa, Kuben's family did not know quite what to make of the situation. They had their suspicions but they could only watch and wait. Aurora was accommodated in Kuben's Aunt Radhi's home in Laudium. Many curious neighbours came to visit his aunt and her husband, Boogie, "to see what a Mexican looked like".



**Aurora in the midst of Boogie and Radhi's family
(Boogie with beard and Radhi on the right)**

The thought of marriage, a very conventional expectation, was unspoken but in everyone's mind. Ramy was not happy and remained aloof. He had been looking at the situation in silent disapproval; she was not Tamil and he did not want them to marry.

Contrary to expectation, however, Kuben and Aurora, being a modern young couple, were not thinking of marriage; they were thinking of getting their own place and moving in together. That shocked everyone, especially Ramy. It forced him to accept the idea of marriage. Marriage was preferable to what they were planning.

And Ramy insisted on a completely Tamil wedding. Aurora was not a Tamil girl; she was Mexican and a Roman Catholic. Ramy expected her to object, even to denigrate practices that were foreign to her. Perhaps he was hoping she would be forced to end the relationship. But she had no objections. She saw Hinduism, in common with Catholicism, as a way of life; two different ways of life but both dedicated to one God. And as Hinduism has no requirements such as conversion or baptism, she knew she could take part in a Hindu ceremony without giving up her own beliefs. She agreed to a Tamil wedding.

To familiarize herself with the procedures, she watched a video of a marriage ceremony and then she practised walking around in a sari. On the day of the wedding, she was dressed as a Tamil bride and Guru Nadarajah, the priest, guided her through the ceremony. She performed the rites without really understanding what was going on but she was fascinated by them.



Wedding of Aurora and Kuben

The ceremony was videotaped and Aurora sent a video to her family in Mexico. Her late mother's people were excited, interested, fascinated; they sent the video around to all the family. Her father's people, orthodox Catholics, traditional, like Ramy, did not receive a copy of the video.



Cyril Ramaphosa honoured guest at the wedding

Ramy had not wanted his son to marry someone of a different race and religion as he had witnessed the disastrous collapse of a nephew's marriage not long before. The nephew had married a woman of a different background – different religion and ethnicity. Ramy attributed the failure of their marriage to cultural differences and was afraid that Kuben was headed for the same fate. But, in the first few months, seeing Aurora fitting in quite naturally and adapting to their way of life, which was not that different from what she was used to, he soon came to accept her. As he got to know her better, he began to love her for who she was, a kind, considerate, loving person, very similar to himself in that respect – even though she was not Tamil. And he became a loving father to her.



Honeymooners

After the wedding, Aurora and Kuben moved into a house in Mayfair, a white area. At that time, group area restrictions were beginning to fall away. Mandela and De Klerk were negotiating and Mandela would soon be released from prison – the demise of statutory apartheid was on the cards. Aurora and Kuben lived in Mayfair for two and a half years.

In January 1988, just before her marriage, Aurora had started working at the Montessori Primary school which was situated next to Woodmead High School.

It was relatively easy to get a job as there were not many trained Montessori teachers. I worked there for three years until Sarita, my first child, was born. After her birth, I stayed home to look after her until she was old enough to attend school. When she was two and a half, I started working at the Montessori Country School in Midrand and could take her with me. This school later joined Phuthing School, what is now Summit. I worked there until Sashin was born in 1996. From there onwards, I did occasional teaching jobs, filling in for teachers. At this point I had two children of school going age who needed to be transported around. It was not until Sashin became a border at St. Albans school that I started doing voluntary teaching, twice a week at a children's home. I've been at the Orange Babies Montessori School in President Park for the last six years.

[Aurora Pillay, 16.02.2016]

In 1990, after her daughter, Sarita, was born, Aurora and Kuben moved to Country View. Ramy had urged them to buy a plot and build in this new housing development, the first non-racial residential area in the country.

Being a man who read the newspaper from the front page to the last including all advertisements and public notices, and one who had his ear to the ground, he knew of this development before most people and he urged his sons to buy stands in the area. He would not let them lose this opportunity. It would be a good neighbourhood with lots of mixed couples.

When they objected, on the grounds that it was beyond their means, he told them to take a chance. According to his son, Keshan, his father would always say, "Don't worry about money; you will find a way. Take a chance; it is better to fail than to spend your life wondering what might have been."

Though it wasn't easy for them, Kuben and Aurora did take a chance; they bought a plot and built a house in Country View. It was a struggle at first; Aurora didn't have her own car to get to work, and she was a mother with a very young child. But she and Kuben persevered – as Ramy knew they would – and they gradually built a secure life for their family.

When one of Ramy's nieces, Saroja, whom he had also urged to buy a plot and build a house in Country View, emigrated to Canada, Ramy bought her house and he, Manoo, and Roslina, went to live in Country View to be near Kuben, Aurora and their children, Sarita and Sashin. Ramy spent a lot of time with his grandchildren; they went for walks or played chess, or went for rides in his car. And when Ramy realised that the youngsters in Country

View, needed recreational facilities he presented a proposal to the Midrand Town Council and a basketball court was laid out for the area.

After about a decade in Country View, Ramy, who was always on the look out for bigger and better opportunities for his sons, heard of the proposed golf estate at Blue Valley and urged them to buy plots there. Kuben and Aurora built a new home and relocated in 2001. Three years later, Ramy, Manoo and Roslina also moved into a home in Blue Valley custom built for them by Kuben.

Ramy had developed Parkinson's disease. It was in its early stages while they lived at Country View but soon after they moved to Blue Valley, his condition grew worse. When he lost his speech and mobility, Ramy's Mexican daughter-in-law provided him with wonderful loving care. She was his ministering angel in his last days. And Ramy remained cheerful and happy right to the end.

His brother-in-law, Boogie, remembers the day he and Santha, one of Manoo's brothers, came to visit Ramy. He was in his wheel chair, and he launched into a long discussion with them. Boogie could not understand a word Ramy was saying. He felt very embarrassed because Santha was sitting there vigorously nodding in agreement. "Yes" he said, and again "yes" and again "yes", "yes". Eventually Boogie was forced to ask, "Do you understand what Ramy is saying?" Santha turned to him in surprise. Boogie asked again, "Can you understand Ramy?" Wide-eyed, Santha, looked from Ramy to Boogie, then confessed, "No, I can't". At that, Ramy burst out laughing and couldn't stop.

EMILY KUMALO



Zanele, with her mother, Emily Kumalo

In 2004, Ramy, Manoo and Roslina, Manoo's housekeeper, came to stay with Kuben and Aurora, while their house in Blue Valley was being built. And that is when Ramy found his second daughter, Emily Kumalo, Aurora's housekeeper. As with Roslina, he teased her, shared snacks with her, paid her taxi fare when she went home over weekends and gave her money for Lotto tickets. They had this understanding that they would share the jackpot when she won it.

But Emily's life before she came to Blue Valley in 2001 had been a life of abject misery; it was an existence reduced to a desperate struggle for the most basic needs – food and shelter. It was the inhuman existence of those who live in extreme poverty.

At twenty, Emily Kumalo had left Ntha near Lindley, in the Free State, in search of “green pastures”, first in Sasolburg and then Johannesburg. In Sasolburg, she went to stay with her mother's sister who did not welcome her. Her aunt tried to send her back home to finish school, but school was not an option Emily could afford. Emily had to find work and there was nothing in Ntha. In Sasolburg, she would go out early in the morning to look for work in the white neighbourhoods. But she couldn't find a job and her aunt kept nagging her to go home, so she left Sasolburg and went to Johannesburg. There she found a job with a Coloured family.

In 1985, she married, went to live in Kliptown and became the mother of four children, three girls and a boy. But it was not a happy marriage and after twelve years, Emily divorced her husband. It was an extraordinarily brave step considering that she was penniless with four children to support. And for the next four years, she and her children endured the most painful suffering. She could not find permanent work, just odd jobs doing people's washing or household chores and getting a plate of food as payment. When she could not find work, she collected bottles in the street and sold them. At times she was forced to feed her children with rotten vegetables that had been thrown away. Those desperate times remain an extremely painful memory and she sobs as she recollects them.

Emily and her four young children eventually ended up in a shack in the yard of Lydia Mabe, the tea lady at Primedia where Kuben was CEO. At the time, 2001, Kuben had just moved to Blue Valley and was looking for a housekeeper. He asked Lydia if she knew of someone he could employ. She told him about Emily and Kuben invited her to an interview in the Blue Valley home. When Kuben and Aurora learned of Emily's desperate circumstances, they felt they had no choice but to employ her. They were very concerned; she looked so tiny and frail.

Emily came to work for Kuben and Aurora and left her children in her brother's care in Kagiso. After Kuben built a house for her and the children in 2006, she was no longer dependent on her brother. And now when she goes home to Kagiso over weekends, it is to her children in her own house.

Like his father, Kuben regards education as the key to progress so he has made it possible for Emily's children to complete school and go on to further education. Emily's children

are his wards, and he has paid their school fees, and the university fees of the three older ones, the girls. Sebongile, the eldest, enrolled in a paramedic's course after high school and is now working as an ambulance dispatcher in Roodeport. Lindiwe, Emily's second daughter, is a clerk at PRIMEDIA where Kuben was CEO until he retired a year ago. The third daughter, Zanele, won a bursary to study at Wits University and enrolled in the pre-med BSC course. But after two years, she decided that this was not for her. She is now studying to be an Air Traffic Controller at OR Tambo Airport. All the girls are self-supporting and independent. Emily's son, Mthandazo, the youngest, has just completed matric at Mosupatsela Secondary in Kagiso, is learning to drive and has not yet decided on a career. When he makes up his mind, he knows he can count on his godfather's support.

Emily says of Kuben and Aurora, "Since I work for them, I'm okay in life. I was size 38; now I am size 42."

Ramy's spirit lives on in his son and his Mexican daughter-in-law.

FIRST GRANDCHILDREN

SARITA

Ramy's first grandchild, daughter of Kuben and Aurora, was born in 1990, the year in which Nelson Mandela was released from prison. Sarita was born into a country on the verge of constitutional change and about to reverse a dispensation based on racial difference. And she is of mixed parentage. Her mother is Mexican; her father of East Indian descent. As a child, Sarita had visited the small rural town in Mexico where her Mexican grandparents live. So South Africa was not the whole world to her and it was like Mexico in terms of the variety of its people.

What is more, Sarita was the first baby girl in a male dominated family. Ramy had five sons and many, many nephews; had pinched all their cheeks, taken them for drives, taught them to play chess, encouraged them to take up sport and introduced them to cameras and photography. Now he had a granddaughter. It made no difference; she got exactly the same treatment and the same loving concern and care.

While Ramy and Manoo still lived in Laudium, little Sarita spent many a weekend with them. Sarita and Ramy, still in pyjamas, would be up to feed the birds early in the morning before it got too hot. Manoo would give them bread for the birds and they would go out into the garden. Rambling about among the flowers and bushes with her Pappa, Sarita felt very free. One day, as they were feeding the birds, a pigeon shat on her pyjama sleeve. When Ramy saw that he cracked up; he couldn't stop laughing and she had to laugh too.

In Laudium, she would go with her grandparents to visit all their relatives. As they passed people on the streets, everyone would greet Pappa and stop to chat. Sarita was amazed; everyone knew her grandfather.

When Ramy and Manoo moved to Country View, Pappa took his grandchildren for walks and drives, and played tennis and cricket with them. Even when he became ill and was losing his balance, he continued to be active. Though he struggled, he still played with his grandchildren. And he had a camera room where he tinkered with all his equipment, fixing old cameras and taking photographs of all the children.

After Sarita turned fifteen, Pappa decided that she had to learn to drive; it would give her mobility and independence. He wanted her to start driving lessons right away and kept on about it until she got the learner's licence. While she was still learning to drive, he became very ill. He passed away before she became a licensed driver. Wistfully she says, "He would have been so proud."

In Country View, Sarita grew up amongst people of all races and different cultural traditions. Right in her home there were different cultural traditions: Mexican and Indian. Sarita's mother, Aurora, was from a Roman Catholic family and her father, Kuben, from a Hindu family; Sarita was brought up to respect both religions. Living in a Hindu home, however, she experienced more of the Hindu practices. There were visits to the temple, there was the month of fasting just before Deepavali, and there was Ramy's prayer room and prayers at home. She tried to learn the words of bhajans (devotional songs) and to sing them.

Though Sarita was born in the time of transformation, schools were not yet non-racial so her parents, following Ramy's example, looked for a non-racial school and found one right there in Midrand where they lived, Sagewood School. It was founded by another visionary like Michael Stern, who had established Waterford Kamhlaba High School, the non-racial school that Sarita's father, Kuben, had attended.

This time the visionary was a woman.

A strong-willed mother's determination to provide a holistic and stress-free education for her children was the principle on which Sagewood School was established in 1985.

Jill Conradie, a mother of three young children, started a school embodying her ideas in a flat in Cyrildene. The school was named Sagewood, "sage" being an indigenous tree in our country.

A year later the 'school in a room' was bursting at its seams with 65 learners and necessitated a move to larger premises. The school relocated to two other places and eventually settled in an unusual building of the Johannesburg Children's Home in Observatory with 200 children, growing to about 300 by 1992.

The first principal, John de Jager, an educator with immense foresight was specifically chosen to extend the school and see it grow. Sagewood embraced the values of non-racialism, non-denominationalism and multi-culturalism in the environment of an apartheid South Africa. The school did grow, in spite of having meagre resources; the learner numbers increased to 260 and the teachers to 16.

The concept visualized from the communion of these two visionaries was Sagewood Education Centre, an institute that offered academic excellence and community service. The members of this institute developed an astute awareness of the importance of serving the community and contributed positively to these needs.

By 1989 the school grew to 300 learners and attracted the attention of the Anglo American and De Beers Chairman's Fund who provided the opportunity for Sagewood to plant its roots on its current 70-acre site in Midrand where its custom designed facilities now stand. Sagewood continued sharing its resources with the community and opened its doors to many other fields of study. This led to the establishment of the Adult College, The Teacher Development Programme and the Alexandra Resource Centre.²⁹

To give Sarita the very best education – not just at secondary school level but from the very beginning – she was enrolled at Sagewood School in 1995 when she was five. Sagewood was unique; Sarita was impressed when she discovered that Transcendental Meditation was part of the school routine.

After she matriculated from high school, she studied at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, and completed the BA with majors in Journalism, Politics and Geography, and in 2013, BA Honours in Geography and Politics. She was awarded a Fulbright scholarship and spent two years at the of Minnesota in the USA where she obtained the of Urban & Regional Planning (MURP) in 2015.

29 <http://sagewood.co.za/index.php/history>



Aurora, Sarita, Kuben at Sarita's graduation, 2015, University of Minnesota

When Sarita learned that Aunty Allay and her son, Deva, had been to India to search for the family's roots, she was fascinated. They had found information about Deva's father's family in Puducherry, formerly Pondicherry – the independent territory in Tamil Nadu. This spurred Sarita's interest in India. So when she was studying for the Masters in Urban Planning at the University of Minnesota, and was required to do an internship, she chose to do it in Bangalore. While in India, she travelled extensively in the South and loved it – visiting Kerala, Tamil Nadu and exploring Karnataka.

She had no difficulty about food as she is a vegetarian. She had become a vegetarian when she was thirteen going through her animal rights phase. This had made Ramy very proud and he would boast to everyone, "My granddaughter is a vegetarian!" Sarita in turn would tease Pappa because he ate fish, "Are you sure you're a vegetarian?"

Sarita knew how proud Pappa was of his Tamil heritage and when she was in India, she looked for the temple at the source of the sacred Kavari River that flows through Bangalore. She climbed endless stairs through cold and fog to get to the temple. It was a personal pilgrimage; she was doing this for her Pappa. And as she climbed, she became very emotional because she could feel him with her.

SASHIN

Sarita's brother, Sashin, is Ramy's second grandchild. When Ramy came to live in Country view, he would take baby Sashin on his walks around the neighbourhood. Being a very sociable person, it wasn't long before Ramy got to know all his neighbours, was spending time with them and inviting them home. One day, when Sashin was about two years old,

they set out on their walk as usual, but were not back by the time Aurora went to fetch her son. She assumed they would soon be along and waited with Manoo. After more than an hour, there was still no sign of them. She became anxious, informed Kuben and they went on a search of the whole neighbourhood. When they couldn't find them, they became extremely worried and hurried back to Ramy's house to question Roslina, Manoo's helper. That's when they discovered that Ramy, with his grandson, was next door, chatting and having tea.

Grandad became Sashin's best friend. Pappa, that is what the grandchildren called Ramy, took him for walks, for drives and played catch with him. When Sashin started school, he looked forward to coming home afterwards as he and Pappa had plenty to do in the afternoons. In addition to their walks, drives, and ball games, they played chess or watched movies. Pappa could see in Sashin, named after the great Indian cricket player, Sachin Tendulkar, great potential for cricket and he encouraged him by bowling and catching with him. In high school, Sashin made the cricket team but despite his name, did not continue with the game after grade 10. Instead he focused on hockey. That was his game. He excelled at it and in 2014, captained the St Alban's College hockey team on its tour in New Zealand.

Ramy taught Sashin to play chess; all his children, grandchildren and nephews learned the game from him. He showed Sashin how to beat an opponent in three moves. And he had a favourite trick. When he saw that he was in trouble, he would suddenly need a glass of water and would send the boy off to the kitchen. When Sashin came back, he would find the board changed – his king would be gone! This was Ramy's usual ruse; he used it on all his children, grandchildren and nephews. It was good for a laugh.

For a really hearty laugh Sashin and Pappa would watch their favourite movie. No matter how many times they watched it, they always roared with laughter. Kuben, Sashin's Dad, declares that they watched it over a hundred times. And they laughed as heartily the hundredth time, as they did the first. The film: Leon Schuster's *Mr Bones*. And Ramy had a passion for chocolates. He had a secret stash and always brought a supply for their movie sessions.

In the house at Country View, Ramy had an office where he kept and repaired all his cameras and camera equipment. And Sashin would sit there with him learning about cameras and looking at old photographs – especially big blow ups of the family. Ramy was very skilled in all aspects of photography. When his friend Dr Pankaj Joshi showed him a set of posters depicting sections of a scene from the Mahabharata – Krishna riding with Arjun in his chariot in the Great War – Ramy took the parts and assembled them into a huge portrait with no visible signs of how it was put together. It is mounted on the wall in Dr Joshi's prayer room.

Much of Ramy's camera collection has been donated to the camera museum near the Market Theatre in Johannesburg. Amongst all of it was a torch with AM Radio on it; he gave that to his grandson and Sashin still has it. One of Sashin's most prized possessions is Pappa's watch which his grandmother, Manoo, gave him after Pappa passed away.

Ramy's older grandchildren saw the gradual deterioration in Ramy's health after he developed Parkinson's disease. They more or less grew up alongside it and saw how it reduced his mobility as it progressed over the years. But even when he was losing his balance and had fallen a few times, Ramy still went for walks with them and still played catch. Nishan, Rajen's son, remembers that he never refused to play no matter how ill he was. He would struggle to throw the ball and they would wait and wait and wait for it to leave his hand.

He did not live long enough to celebrate with his grandchildren all their successes in school. The eldest grandchildren, who are at university or high school, are all high achievers like their parents, but under very different circumstances. Ramy's sons achieved in spite of the system; his grandchildren achieve with the blessings of the system.

Sashin has made his parents as proud of him as Ramy's sons had made their parents.

Sashin was awarded an "all-rounder" scholarship from Waterkloof House Preparatory School to St Alban's College in 2009. Nishan, his cousin, received the same award in 2011.

Sashin played provincial hockey in every age group in high school and captained the St Alban's College First XI on tour to New Zealand

He founded his school's social media account at St Alban's College called "thegrey-andblue"

He was the first Indian boy in the history of St Alban's College to become a Head of House. He was head of his boarding house: MacRobert House. Nishan following in his footsteps in 2016 is a Head of House.

Sashin was one of three boys to be awarded General Honours for excellence in Academics, Leadership, Sport and Cultural Activities.

He was awarded the prestigious Von Geasau Award for "courage and kindness towards the school community".

He achieved four distinctions in matric and was subsequently accepted at UCT for a Business Science Degree.

(Sashin Pillay, 11-01-2016)

13

RAJENDRA PILLAY

RAMY'S SECOND SON

On 16 June 1976 hundreds of school children in Soweto marched in protest against the Government's imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in African schools. It was satyagraha revived – non-violent mass resistance. Afrikaans was not their home language and would be a barrier to gaining knowledge. Before 1976, with ANC leaders imprisoned on Robben Island, exiled overseas and in other African countries, activists banned, under house arrest and being murdered in South Africa, the government believed it had quelled the impetus towards revolution and could act with impunity.

But inspired by Steve Biko's assertion of Black power, the revolutionary spirit was revived again in the Black Consciousness Movement, which aimed at restoring human dignity and self-respect. It had led to schoolchildren demanding recognition of their right to respect, and marching in protest against the newest tactic to enslave the mind. The satyagraha of Indians in 1906-14 and in 1946-7 had been manageable threats – Indians were a tiny minority. But the Soweto Uprising played right into the paranoia of the Government which saw in the open resistance of African people, a real threat to their existence. The police opened fire on the children, killing and wounding many. And the outrage that followed, set open resistance in motion once again. Schooling would be disrupted for the next decade at least.

It was in these turbulent times that Ramy's second son, Rajen, was sent to Waterford Kamhlaba in Swaziland where his brother Kuben was in his last year at the school. Waterford was a complete contrast to South Africa. It represented the future; what South Africa could become. This was an international school, with students from all over the world. And here Rajen met other South African students. Though they came from the same country, having lived in racially segregated areas, their experiences were very different. Nevertheless, they tended to gravitate towards one another, and Rajen's closest friendships were with other South Africans – Gandhi Maseko, Duma Gqubule, Brian Thoka, and Zaheeda Khotu. In a totally new, different and stimulating environment, Rajen's encounter with different

racism and nationalities at Waterford gave him a more vivid understanding of the evils of apartheid. And after seven years in an environment free of racial prejudice, he would return to a South Africa in which the struggle against apartheid was in its final phase, and he would become a part of it.

At Waterford, he was the top student of his class, was the first to complete A levels and obtain the International Baccalaureate. His outstanding results led to the offer of a number of scholarships and international opportunities were open to him. But he returned to South Africa and enrolled at Wits Medical School in 1983.

It was the time of the United Democratic Front and the final thrust against systemic racism and separate development in the country. Schools and universities had become battle sites and students and lecturers were involved in protest and defiance. Student organisations worked with the Congresses, the PAC, AZAPO and with underground MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe) and APLA (Azanian People's Liberation Army) operatives. At Wits University, the Black Student Society (BSS), affiliated to the ANC, kept the struggle alive on campus. And Rajen, a member of the BSS, became involved in the protest movement.

In 1983, the government was implementing its new policy of a Tri-Cameral Parliament. There would be two additional but separate houses of parliament, the House of Delegates for Indians and The House of Representatives for Coloureds. These Houses would not be policy making bodies; they would simply be responsible for administration of certain areas applicable only to their own separate communities; such as Education and licensing of trading ventures. The United Democratic Front was formed to oppose election to these sham structures.

And the BSS at Wits, working with the Congresses and the UDF, was part of the movement to bring about the end of apartheid. In 1988, when Rajen completed his medical degree, the BSS opposed participation of medical students in graduation on the grounds that the law did not allow Black Medical Students internships at white hospitals – Johannesburg General Hospital and J.G. Strydom, the better equipped hospitals. Black interneers were sent to black hospitals – Hillbrow, Baragwanath and Coronation. So Rajen boycotted graduation. He was really sorry to disappoint his Dad who would have been elated to see his son receiving his diploma and the title of Doctor. But Ramy understood.

In 1989, Rajen completed his internship at Hillbrow Hospital and served as Registrar (Medical Officer) at Kalafong Hospital for the next two years. Thereafter he went into private practice and set up as General Practitioner in Midrand. Ramy helped to purchase equipment and furnish his offices.

Marriage

When Rajen announced that he was going to marry Priya, a Gujarati girl, it was a surprise to both their families. Priya's choice of a life partner, a Tamil boy, had been quite unexpected. But the two families came together and adapted all arrangements for proposal, engagement and wedding to suit both parties. Rajen and Priya were married in the Seva Samaj hall. It was a huge affair; the hall was full to overflowing as it had to accommodate two communities, Gujarati and Tamil.

Priya, a medical student at the University of Pretoria, completed her degree in 1994 and her internship in 1995. In 1996, she took over Rajen's practice in Midrand to allow him to return to Wits medical school to specialize in Ophthalmology.

In 2000, when Rajen qualified, he had the opportunity to atone for disappointing his father earlier. This time, Ramy could attend his son's graduation as a Specialist Doctor and he was very proud.

In 2001, when Rajen returned to his practice, Priya went back to Pretoria University Medical School to specialize in Obstetrics and Gynecology. After she completed in 2004, she was invited by the Medical School to stay on as a lecturer in the department and twelve years later, 2016, she is Adjunct Professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.



Rajen and Family

14

KESHAN PILLAY

RAMY'S THIRD SON

Unlike his older brothers, Kuben and Rajen, Keshan was not removed from Laudium for his secondary education. He did not go to Waterford Kamhlaba High School in Swaziland. Ramy couldn't afford it at the time. So Keshan remained at home, attended Jacaranda Primary School, then Laudium High School for most of his secondary education.

And he was very glad.

Being at home, he could spend time with his Dad, go about with him to visit his Dad's sisters and their families, meet with his cousins who were more like uncles and aunts as they were about his father's age. But more importantly, he was at the studio, Dings' Photography Studio. From the time he was little, like his brothers and all his cousins, he would go with his Dad to the studios in Jeppe and Bree Streets in Johannesburg on Saturdays. Dings Studios provided a place where Ramy's sons and nephews could work weekends and holidays to earn pocket money.

But for Keshan it was more than that. He was taking on real responsibility at the studio, In addition to taking photographs, working in the dark room developing film and framing, he was also keeping records and accounts. He was developing professional as well as business skills. And as he worked at the studio, he was discovering the direction that his life would take. By the time he was twelve, he could run the studio by himself. And when he was thirteen and his dad had to go to Cape Town for a week, he managed the studio.

Ramy had a studio on Second Avenue in Laudium and two in the Location, the old Asiatic Bazaar in Marabastad. During the week, the studios in the Location were run by Piet, their domestic worker Betty's son, whom Ramy had trained in all aspects of the work. When Keshan was about fifteen, he managed the studios in the Location on Friday afternoons and Saturdays when Piet was off. Every Friday afternoon after school, Keshan was on the bus to Marabastad. Because his Dad trusted him with such great responsibility, he became a very independent lad and his experience in the studios helped him discover

his aptitude for and interest in business. And that would become his career. It wouldn't be photography; new technologies – one-hour labs, digitization of cameras etc. – were making photography studios obsolete. Ramy had closed the Bree and Jeppe Street studios in Johannesburg and he worked in Laudium, at Dings' Studio on 2nd Avenue.

In 1986, Ramy sent Keshan to Woodmead High School for his final year of secondary education. At Laudium High School, a conventional high school, he wore a uniform, the method of instruction was teacher-centered and he had simply followed instructions. Though he had become very independent in his Dad's studios, at school there had been little opportunity to use his own initiative. That changed at Woodmead. First of all, he didn't have to wear a uniform and that meant he could be an individual, not a product on an assembly line. And there was no spoon feeding. As teachers were interested in what students could bring to lessons, he was expected to contribute his unique views in class. That meant research in order to clarify his ideas. Fortunately, working in his father's studios, he had learned to depend on himself. So despite the very great difference in the education being offered at Woodmead, he could cope. And that final year at Woodmead prepared him for University where he did well, unlike some classmates from his former high school, who, with distinctions in matric, could not cope at university.

After he matriculated from Woodmead, again unlike his brothers, he did not proceed to the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). He had sent off applications to several universities and was placed on a waiting list by Wits; but he did not have to wait. He had other options – the University of Cape Town and the University of Durban-Westville (UDW). As he had an aunt in Durban, he chose to enroll at UDW, which had been established as a separate tertiary institution for Indian students. Before its relocation to Westville in 1970, the Indian university had been situated on Salisbury Island in Durban Bay.

By the late 1980s, with apartheid in its statutory death throes, the university was beginning to enroll students on a non-racial basis. Keshan was at UDW from 1987 to 1990, a period of great turbulence in the country which impacted on education in the form of student protests and boycotts.

At UDW, Keshan lived on campus and, as at Woodmead his friends included people from all races. Living in the hostel, Keshan became involved in many house committees and his qualities as a leader won him great popularity. He belonged to SANSCO (South African National Students Congress), which supported the Congress and UDF and was in opposition to AZASM (Azanian Students' Movement) which represented the Black Consciousness Movement. Both groups wanted control of the Student Representative Council (SRC). When elections were held, not being from Natal, he stood as a representative of students from outside the province. SANSCO won all seats and as a member of the SRC, Keshan worked closely with Kovin Naidoo and Dennis Nkosi, political activists from Chatsworth and Soweto, members of the NIC (Natal Indian Congress) an affiliate of the UDF, and of MK (Umkonto we Sizwe), the ANC underground.

The NIC-UDF was involved in demonstrations against the government's attempts to co-opt black people into its new version of separate development with Homelands for African people and the Tri-Cameral Parliament with separate Houses for Coloureds and Indians. The SRC kept in close touch with the NIC-UDF which included undercover MK operatives, Archie Gumede, Pravin Gordhan, Yunus Mohammed and Zac Yacoob. They were aware of all protest actions being planned and they organized student participation in UDF marches down West Street and marches on campus. They protested against detentions of political leaders, against separate education; demanded the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Nelson Mandela. They were chased, teargassed, and blasted by water cannons. When the Naidoo brothers, Kovin and Kumie, were being sought by the Special Branch, they were hidden in the UDW hostels.

The UDF marches and demonstrations were a renewal of satyagraha – open mass non-violent resistance to injustice. Times had changed. In Ramy's time, the State was all-powerful; in Keshan's time, the State could no longer act with impunity. Now there was international economic pressure on the government; it needed to transform for its own survival. Its weakened condition made public protest and criticism possible once more. And the strategy of private non-confrontational resistance that Ramy had adopted, gave way to satyagraha again – mass demonstrations that invited violent retaliation. In the government's final, desperate attempt to retain power, there were murders, assassinations and numerous detentions, including the detention of children. But negotiations that would bring apartheid to an end were underway between Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk.

In the midst of protest activities, Keshan started a tuition programme for Grade 11 and 12 students in township schools. He held the Education portfolio on the SRC – Ramy must have been proud of that – and aware that with all the political unrest in the country, schooling was being severely disrupted, Keshan and Rupert Neville organized a tuition programme for students from high schools in the townships. They got together a team of university students who provided the tuition; got permission to use the lecture halls for their sessions; got sponsorships from companies like Kellogg and Shell for the transport of students from the townships to the university and for their meals.

Early on Saturday mornings, there were twenty buses, carrying about a thousand learners, plying the routes from the townships to the University. The learners were committed and eager to learn. Keshan provided tuition in Accountancy, his favourite subject. He had discovered a flair for Accountancy when he first encountered it in Std 6. Ever after, in his choice of courses, he always looked to see whether there was an Accountancy component. He found that the students from the townships lacked the basic concepts so he took them back to the beginning to ensure a good foundation in the subject. It was a very successful programme. Like his father, Keshan placed great importance on education and even in the midst of strife, had found a way to keep it in focus.

Keshan was in his final year at UDW in 1990, the year that Nelson Mandela was released from prison. In the next two years, he was at Douglas and Velcich, serving his articles. As this very progressive auditing firm works with Trade Unions and NGOs, Keshan's work

at Douglas and Velcich had brought him into the environment in which he would make his career. Recognising his exceptional qualities, the National Union of Mineworkers [NUM] approached him to take charge of their finances. He was interviewed by Kgalema Motlanthe and Paul Nkuna and became NUM's Financial Manager. After five years he was seconded to the Mineworkers Investment Company (MIC) which had been set up by the Mineworkers Investment Trust [MIT].

The MIT was established by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in 1995 as a wealth-creating entity to uplift and improve the quality of life for its members, former members, their families and communities in the mining, energy and construction industries.

The trust is the sole shareholder of the Mineworkers Investment Company, which allows the MIT to make a meaningful contribution to its beneficiaries, comprising the Mineworkers Development Agency (MDA), the JB Marks Education Trust Fund and the Elijah Barayi Memorial Centre.

Elijah Barayi Memorial Centre: Since the trust's inception, R368-million has been raised to improve the lives of its members and provide them with education ... all courses offered by the Elijah Barayi Memorial Training Centre are available free of charge to union members. The centre offers facilities for the training and capacity building of union members and generates income by providing conferencing, catering and accommodation services to the public, with top-up funding supplied by the MIT to ensure training courses remain cost effective and within reach of civil-society structures.

In 2011 the MIT helped the centre acquire new premises in Midrand, expanding its capacity to provide services to unions, nongovernment organisations and small businesses. The centre applied for FET accreditation in 2011 and obtained partial accreditation, as it needs to [offer] a labour law course, to receive full accreditation ... the labour law course will educate mineworkers about labour laws and their associated rights, enabling them to communicate effectively with mining companies. "The labour unrest and the resultant deaths at Marikana last year were unfortunate and emphasised the need for South Africa to pay attention to the social issues of the mining industry."...

"Owing to a shortage of jobs in South Africa, mineworkers are responsible for extended families. Therefore, their salaries are inadequate to cater not only to their own needs, but also to those of their families. ... some mineworkers are also heavily indebted to loan facilities. ... Mining companies are required to set aside a budget to improve mine communities in their areas of operation, according to the South African Mining Charter. "To date, not much of that has happened, which is why we see an increase in labour issues across industries,"...

JB Marks Education Trust Fund: Nanise states that the MIT plans to increase the number of bursaries it awards and to provide bursaries for postgraduate studies, funds permitting. ...“Our bursary scheme, established in 1997, is the MIT’s biggest accomplishment. To date, we have produced more than 948 graduates in various fields, such as the medical and engineering fields... The fund provides bursaries for NUM members and their dependents, which cover the cost of schooling and tertiary education. It has assisted in educating more than 4 000 bursary recipients and is investing in the education of 250 new students each year.”³⁰

In all the companies in which he works or has worked, Keshan’s first concern has always been empowerment of the worker and his family – the same concern as Ramy’s for the welfare and development of the disadvantaged.

Keshan was appointed to his current position as CEO of MAKALANI HOLDINGS in 2008.

Makalani was established in 2005 to perform the activities of managing a R2.5 billion mezzanine asset portfolio for South African institutional investors which included the activities of deal origination, mezzanine and debt structuring as well as portfolio asset management. Fund I is fully invested and Makalani is in the process of raising a second fund in order to continue the success of Fund I.

Fund I had assisted and facilitated in excess of 25 BEE transactions which has impacted on transforming the economic landscape of South Africa.

Keshan continues to apply his experience in the structuring and financing of Corporate and Black Economic Empowerment (“BEE”) transactions, including Management Buyouts, Leveraged Finance and Mergers & Acquisitions. Applying his experience in the arranging, underwriting and distributing of senior and mezzanine debt instruments for BEE investments has culminated in his becoming a leading expert in driving the BEE social transformation agenda.

Keshan Pillay is a senior investment professional with significant experience in the structuring and financing of Corporate and Black Economic Empowerment (“BEE”) transactions, including Management Buyouts, Leveraged Finance and Mergers & Acquisitions. Keshan is also well experienced in the arranging, underwriting and distributing of senior and mezzanine debt instruments and has become a leading expert in BEE finance.

30 (<http://www.miningweekly.com/article/trust-aims-to-enhance-the-lives-of-the-num-members-2012-12-25>)

Prior to joining Makalani, Keshan was the Executive Director - Finance and Strategy of the Mineworkers Investment Company (“MIC”), where he was also the driving force in growing MIC’s asset base strongly in the 10 years he was there, leading transactions that grew the assets under management to over R10 billion. The significant transactions led by Keshan included BP Southern Africa, FirstRand Limited, Tracker Holdings and Metrofile Limited, as well as the very successful R15 billion public to private transactions of Peermont Global Limited and Primedia Limited.³¹

In addition to being CEO of Makalani Holdings, Keshan has also served as a non-executive director, chairman or trustee in over twenty listed and unlisted companies.

Of all his achievements, Keshan is most proud of his accomplishment as Executive Director at MIC, when he and his colleagues turned the assets of three million to in excess of 10 billion rand. As a result of his efforts the MIC operates from a very sound financial base in its provision of aid to thousands of mineworkers and their families, and will continue to do so for many years to come. Benefits are deployed to workers and their families through the agencies of the Mineworkers Investment Trust i.e. the Mineworkers Development Agency (MDA), the JB Marks Education Trust Fund and the Elijah Barayi Memorial Centre.

Working as a capitalist, Keshan is accomplishing what capitalism in its purest sense is meant to do, secure the welfare of the group and each individual in the group.

Wealth acquired capably without causing any harm yields righteousness and joy (Kural, 75.4)



31 Adapted from <http://whoswho.co.za/keshan-pillay-8509>

VIGNESHVARIE PILLAY

Soon after Vigneshvarie had completed matric, she accompanied her parents on a visit to her aunt Saroj, her father's sister, in Laudium. Saroj's husband, Sathia Pillay, suggested that she apply to the University of Durban-Westville for further studies. Vigneshvarie's mother was rather apprehensive about sending her daughter so far away from home and family. She didn't think her daughter would be happy. Sathia reassured her; she would be quite safe as he had a cousin studying at UDW. He would ask him to look after her. That didn't appeal to Vigneshvarie at all; she didn't want some old guy checking up on her at varsity. But the suggestion allayed her mother's fears; Vigneshvarie applied to UDW and was accepted.



One day at the university, a young man came up to her, "Are you Vanessa's cousin?" Thinking he was being fresh, she gave him a sharp reply, "What's it to you?" She got a bit of a shock when he said, "I'm Sathia's cousin, Keshan, and I have been asked to look after you." This young, handsome guy! Uncle Sathia's cousin?

She was not aware of Narayansamy and Letchmee's long line of offspring, and the wide disparity of ages between their grandchildren. Sathia was the son of Narayansamy and Letchmee's oldest son, and this young man confronting her was the son of Narayansamy and Letchmee's youngest son. The age difference between the cousins was about twenty-eight years.

Being Ramy's son, Keshan is a very responsible and reliable person. He was asked to look after Vigneshvarie, and that is what he would do despite his many responsibilities in the hostel, as member of the SRC, as tutor in the Saturday Programme. He went to every one of her lectures even though she was in the sciences and he was in business. And he accompanied her everywhere ... perhaps it wasn't just from a sense of duty – Vigneshvarie is beautiful. When Keshan completed his studies, he left UDW and so did Vigneshvarie. She went back home to Benoni; her mother was right she couldn't do without her family. Or perhaps just one cousin or was it uncle?

She completed her studies at Wits and went to work in a biomedical lab at Lancet Laboratories. She loved the work she was doing. She was fascinated by genes, the structure of DNA, the processes involved in giving a human his or her unique characteristics and the way in which these are passed on.

...a gene is a portion (or sequence) of DNA – a code for a cellular function or process. A gene is like a word in language. The nucleotides (molecules) that make up genes are like letters. All words have letters, similarly all genes have nucleotides. And just as a word with other words makes a sentence, a gene interacting with neighboring genes makes a code for a cellular function, a function such as “manufacturing melanin molecules”.

(Adapted from Wikipedia)

Vigneshvarie’s interest in genetics took her into a world of experimentation, discovery and conjecture; into an examination of the meaning of existence – very different from the pragmatic world of business. In science, evolution leads to an understanding that truth is relative not absolute. In business, rules, regulations, laws are absolute as they provide the framework for interaction in which chance can have no part.

Soon afterwards, Vigneshvarie and Keshan decided to get married.

After Keshan told his parents about our relationship, they immediately contacted my parents to set a date for the proposal cum engagement. I was very fortunate to have both sets of grandparents present. My grandparents, Shunmogum & Thainayagi Moodley and Runga and Rookoo Govender, were very instrumental in every journey of my life and I never made any decision without their blessing.

It was a typical Tamil proposal with Keshan’s entire family visiting my family. A female representative from every branch of Ramy’s family carried a brass tray with a sari, jewelry and other gifts.

Keshan’s dad was from the same generation and cultural view as my grandparents so all the necessary wedding arrangements were processed very smoothly amongst them.

(Vigneshvarie, 13-01-2016)

The family wedding planner, Ramany, Ramy’s niece, daughter of his brother Rajee, who had organised the proposal-engagement, was put in charge of arrangements for the wedding and the decoration of the venue, the Seva Samaj Hall. The family presented her with a challenge. “You gave them a wonderful engagement, now you have to top that for the wedding”.

Vigneshvarie ecstatically declares,

And that she certainly did!! The Seva Samaj was transformed into a magnificent ballroom straight out of a Disney fairytale, completely unlike the traditional Tamil wedding. A new trend was set with unusual props that have now become the norm. The decor and layout of the stage were visible from every angle.

Keshan and I were married in a magnificent setting with Guru Nadarajah Sarma, the family priest, officiating. The wedding was a mammoth affair; almost celebrity-like with a 1000+ guests. And every detail was overseen by my meticulous mother-in-law. She pulled out all the stops including an elaborate fireworks display as I entered their family home for the first time as a daughter-in-law.

(Vigneshvarie, 17-02-2016)

As is the custom, Vigneshvarie came to live with her husband's family. She felt quite forlorn at having to leave her grandparents and parents. Her mother, aware that she would miss them, made sure they visited her every weekend. She had come from a family with different religious and family conventions so she missed her family most on holidays like Mother's Day and Deepavali.

Vigneshvarie's mother was a Saivite; she had broken away from conventional Tamil customs, but she and her daughter always went to the temple on Sunday mornings. So the first Sunday after her wedding Vigneshvarie got ready to go to the temple, and when she appeared dressed to go out, Manoo, her mother-in-law was surprised. When Vigneshvarie explained that she was ready to go to the temple, Manoo said, "That's not necessary. We don't do that." There may have been a time when Ramy's family did go to the temple on Sundays, but Sunday mornings in Laudium were now set aside for tennis, and for Manoo and Vigneshvarie to prepare a family lunch.

And Vigneshvarie came to see that religious practices were really a matter of individual choice. So she has allowed her children the freedom to make their own choices about what they believe and the interests they wish to pursue; their choices in life have to be consciously made, not simply adopted as a matter of tradition. And her role: "I am here to support you." When her children were born, Vigneshvarie stopped working and stayed home to take care of them. She did so as a matter of choice; to provide them with a stable and caring home environment.

Giving her children the freedom to evolve in their own way is a challenging process. Their choices do not always coincide with what she wishes for them. For instance, when her son, Kemeel, matriculated from high school with outstanding results, he was accepted by every university to which he applied. When the Wits Medical School invited him for an interview, Vigneshvarie was very excited. This was a prestigious university; and with a medical degree from Wits, her son would be set for life; he would never have to look for a job.

He was given until 10:00 on a certain day to appear for an interview. The night before, Kemeel sat discussing the pros and cons of such an opportunity with his mother until the sun came up; then he went to bed. At 09:00 he was still in bed and she became very anxious. By 09:50 he still hadn't got up. She begged him to phone, apologize and ask for another appointment. But Kemeel told her he was not interested in a medical career and if he did not appear for the interview that would be understood. But the next day, there was another call from the Wits Medical School. He wouldn't answer; he had made up his

mind to study at the University of Cape Town. The person who called asked Vigneshvarie if her son understood that this was the Wits Medical School that was calling. The following day, they called again for the third time; it was hard to accept that anyone would turn down an interview with this prestigious university.

Vigneshvarie was extremely disappointed; her son had given up a wonderful opportunity. As far as Kemeel was concerned, the career that he had chosen for himself would allow him to serve many more people than a doctor with his patients. Perhaps he is inspired by his father, who is making a difference in the lives of thousands of people. As Vigneshvarie has encouraged her children to be independent and make their own choices, she had to accept the situation. But it was a hard lesson for her.

Vigneshvarie has succeeded in developing in her children the understanding of who they are and the confidence to act independently and boldly. Her son demonstrated these qualities in his choice of study. Significantly, these are the very qualities that her father-in-law had instilled in his sons. According to Keshan, Ramy always said about any undertaking, “You won’t know until you try.” It is a philosophy that has inspired the phenomenal successes of all Ramy’s sons. And, it is the same understanding, derived from her own life experiences that Vigneshvarie has given his grandchildren.

Her daughter, Deminkha, is very different from her mother. At fourteen, she has feminist leanings, knows her own mind and is an independent person. When she goes to university she will not need the support of a kind uncle or cousin.



Deminkha



Rajen at Waterford, second from the left, front row.



Priya (F20531) at the finish of the Comrades Marathon 1993



The Wedding of Rajen and Priya



Priya's graduation as a Doctor 1994



Basha at Phuthing



Ramy and Manoo at Rajen's graduation as a Specialist Doctor



Nelson Mandela meets Keshan and Rupert Neville, members of the SRC, UDW after his unbanning in 1990.



Wedding of Keshan and Vigneshvarie



Keshan's family: Standing: Deminkha, Keshan Seated: Kemeel, Vigneshvarie



Godparents, Rogen and Thamanthi Moodliyar with Deminkha and Kemeel



Unben, Taylen, Vera Lee and Marisa



Unben at Woodmead



Basha IT Executive



Basha, Banumati, Preshanti, Rushil

15

UNBEN PILLAY

RAMY'S FOURTH SON

Like his brothers and cousins, Unben worked in his Dad's photography studio from the time he was in primary school. He was responsible for cleaning up and packing albums and files. He was paid for that, but the payment was not a gesture of generosity; it was acknowledgment of effort. It developed pride and a spirit of independence. Unben also worked in his grandfather's grocery shop at the Orient in Marabastad. His grandfather, Manoo's father, Vella Chetty, came from that same tradition of self-reliance and hard work.

Unben could also have worked in his uncle's bottle store at the Orient. But he knew that Ramy did not approve of selling liquor, not simply because he was a teetotaler, but because he was aware that alcohol abuse led to degradation, misery and sustained poverty. Ramy saw a great deal of this in his work for the Laudium Mental Health Society. Alcohol was a means of disempowering people and that was quite contrary to his mission in life. So Unben did not work in the bottle store. And when he went to school and mixed with learners who smoked, drank and did drugs, he did not give in to such temptations.

WOODMEAD HIGH SCHOOL

When Unben was ready for high school, Ramy was determined to send him to a non-racial school. But he couldn't afford to send him or Keshan, his older brother, to Waterford in Swaziland. He had to find a non-racial school nearer home. But this was apartheid South Africa. It seemed a vain and futile undertaking.

Oddly enough, it was not.

There were, in the society, educators who valued their integrity more than their security. They deplored the system of separate and unequal education and dared to set up multi-racial schools that offered excellent education. One such person was Michael Stern who established Waterford Kamhlaba in Swaziland. Another was Deane Yates who set up

Maru-a-Pula in Botswana.

But the most daring was Steyn Krige, who established his school right in the heart of South Africa, in Johannesburg, at the very time, 1970, that racial Education Acts and the Separate Universities Act were being implemented. His spirit of defiance, his assertion of equality, his rejection of discrimination, attracted likeminded parents, staff, and students and became the ethos of Woodmead High School. And simply going to school there was a radical act; it was opposition to the government and exhilarating. It dissipated race consciousness and led to close bonding of students. It infused in them the ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality. South Africa would have to change and they would be the ones to change it.

When Ramy became aware of Woodmead High School sometime in the 1980s, he sent Unben there for his secondary school education and Keshan for his final year of high school. The Woodmead school environment with its ethos of opposition to discrimination freed Unben from a blinkered view of life in South Africa and gave him a new appreciation of his father's endeavours to lift his sons out of narrow and confining prejudice.

Woodmead was a boarding school situated in a wooded area through which the Jukskei River flows. Unben and his friends would go down to the river, sit on its banks, chat and enjoy their surroundings. They shared ideas, studies and fun. Riaad Isaacs, Selvyn Dorasamy, Ivor Chipkin and Kagiso Mokgatle would become his life-long buddies. Unben now had friends from very different backgrounds, with very different perspectives on life.



Back Row extreme left: Unben, Ivor

The Woodmead environment enhanced the sense of freedom that students felt at a school where “no one forced them to do anything.” And in this atmosphere, Unben was stimulated to learn. He had been an average student before; at Woodmead he became an

A student. And being popular among students, Unben was elected to the Student Council, and then became Student Council President.

What Woodmead offered was not simply a non-racial school; it offered education of the highest quality, as good as if not better than education offered at private schools.

Outside and opposed to the state system, Woodmead under Krige introduced innovations that also made it a pariah among private schools. “I am not an admirer of private schools,” he told me [the staff reporter of the *Mail and Guardian*]. “It was six years before they would even accept our existence.”

This was hardly surprising. The school was not only co-educational, but the first to replace the traditional prefect system with a democratically elected school council, consisting of pupils and teachers, and chaired by a pupil with meaningful powers.

“Integrated studies” was pioneered, drawing praise from and copied in other countries. Children were encouraged to use their initiative, and taught how to research from a diversity of sources.

I was struck by the extraordinary political awareness of many of the remaining 160 pupils, who were prepared to debate and question the free market shibboleths of the “new” South Africa just as their predecessors had questioned apartheid.³²

After 1994, when all schools became non-racial, Woodmead was no longer unique in that respect and its survival was threatened despite the superlative education it offered.

Non-racial pioneer faces the chop

A school that fought apartheid is threatened with closure. John Pilger believes it should be saved.

The school’s funding came from parents who could afford to pay and from non-profit trusts and the “conscience departments” of business, both domestic and foreign, concerned about their image in the pariah state. Since the fall of racial apartheid and the election of an African National Congress government, these sources have all but dried up.

Paradoxically, it seemed that this school, with its strong opposition to apartheid, could only survive under apartheid. But the school was saved.

32 Staff Reporter, “Non-racial Pioneer Faces the Chop” *Mail and Guardian* September 25th, 1998

...after reading an article in the Mail & Guardian two weeks ago, [Sept 1988] a private tertiary college, the Forum Institute of Technology, which has links with the University of New South Wales in Australia, has entered into a partnership with Woodmead.
(Mail and Guardian, 9 October 1998)

After Unben matriculated from High School, he applied to Wits Medical School; his choice of career was based on the understanding instilled in him by his father of service to the community. Ramy spent all his waking moments contriving schemes for the upliftment of others. All Ramy's sons grew up with the living example before them of a man for whom self-respect meant service. And from the time they were little, his children were learning that helping others was as necessary as breathing. They saw how their father helped all those around him but most of all they saw how he sacrificed to make possible a healthy future for his sons.

But Unben's Dad wasn't Santa Claus handing out gifts. He did not give money or goods; he handed out opportunity. Ramy would read people, assess their capabilities and assist them by pushing them to recognize them as well. They had to find within themselves the capacity to fulfil their potential.

This was a belief that he applied not only to others but to himself as well. Though he could not easily afford to send his sons to the best schools, he did not hesitate to do so. He set high goals for himself regardless of whether or not he had the means to achieve them; he was confident he would find a way. Unben remembers his oft repeated words: "Nothing is impossible to a willing mind." Ramy was not a moral coward; he took risks – because they stimulated him to succeed. And failure in any venture was simply regarded as a spur to finding a better way.

*The compassionate care for all other lives
and do not fear for their own*

[Kural: 24.4]

With his insistence on self-reliance and hard work and his trust, Ramy gave his sons and nephews the very best preparation for school, their careers and the lives they would lead.

*They who persevere resolutely without respite
will triumph over fate*

[Kural: 62.0]

Ramy's kindness and compassion had nothing to do with charity. It had to do with empowerment. That is why when his sons went to university, he paid only for their first year; for the rest, they had to get student loans which they would pay back when they started earning. All people, who bless Uncle Ramy, bless him not because he provided them with material benefits. No. He opened their eyes to the power within themselves to discover who they were and to achieve what they wanted. He did not open doors for his sons and nephews; he simply made them aware that they had within themselves the keys to open them. He believed in them so they believed in themselves and they achieved.

In 1998, after graduating from medical school, Unben joined his brother, Rajen, in private practice. In 2000, when Rajen qualified as an ophthalmologist and opened up a practice in Halfway House, Unben took over the practice in Midrand.

Compassion being a necessary component of their treatment, both Unben and Rajen have flourishing practices. They are Ramy's sons.



Unben's family: Vera Lee, Marisa, Unben, Taylen

And Ramy inspired Unben to venture out into world.

Dad's dedication to do community and social work has always inspired me to follow in his footsteps.

Through out my career as a doctor in private practice, I've tried to give back to the community in some small way, be it providing community clinics at my surgery or helping set up medical camps in the township communities.

Some of the medical camps that I volunteered and helped set up:-

- the 'Sai Baba' community medical camps in Alexandra township & Ivory Park
- the 'Acts of Love' Church medical camps in Tembisa, Olievenhoutbosch & Rabie Ridge
- the 'Art of Living' medical camps in Orange Farm
- the 'Oneness' foundation's Feeding schemes & Christmas parties for township orphanages and old age homes.

In 2005 I spent several months in Islamabad-Pakistan after their massive earthquake. I helped set up a medical camp under NATO. I worked closely with organizations like the International Red Cross and UN in providing medical care in remote mountain areas of Pakistan-Kashmir devastated by the earthquake.

I've done volunteer medical work at the 'Central Methodist Church' in Johannesburg CBD treating foreign refugees.

During the 2008 Xenophobic violence, I worked at the medical tented camps set up for displaced foreigners.

I was the only Doctor volunteering at 'Tshwaranang', the HIV/TB/ Aids Hospice in Midrand run by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Church.

"The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page."
— Saint Augustine

Besides the passion to do community work, Dad also encouraged me to travel and experience different cultures and customs. He strongly believed that travelling was a great form of cultural, intellectual and spiritual education.

In 1997 I worked in the UK and got to travel Europe extensively. The travel bug bit.

I've stayed in some nice places and enjoyed the more luxurious side that can often accompany travel, but in addition to lunching at Parisian cafes or relaxing on white sandy beaches, I've also trekked up Mount Kilimanjaro, the Inca trail in the Andes, hiked the Annapurna mountains in the Himalayas, Atlas mountains in Morocco and camped under the stars in the Fish River Canyon in Namibia.

I've been to some amazing cities: Katmandu in Nepal, La Pas in Bolivia, Cusco in Peru, Damascus & Palmyra in Syria, Lhasa in Tibet, Marrakesh in Morocco, Havana in Cuba and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam.

I got to observe the natural wonders of the Amazon rainforest, Everest Base Camp, a live volcano eruption, see the Dead Sea scrolls, go inside the ancient cities of Petra in Jordan, Machu Picchu in Peru and Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

My travels were filled with infinite experiences, wonders and once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. They introduced me to other cultures, humbled me and taught me things that would never be as profound from a class room.

(Unben Pillay, 03 April, 2016)

16

BASHA PILLAY

RAMY'S YOUNGEST SON

Men like Steyn Krige, in establishing schools like Woodmead, gave students a real understanding of the meaning of democracy. Keshan and Unben had come under his influence at Woodmead School. Basha would come under his influence at Woodmead and at Phuthing, the NEST school established by Deane Yates and Krige. Like Michael Stern and Steyn Krige, Deane Yates had a vision of a South Africa, free of racism, in which every individual could develop to his or her full potential.

Deane Yates was born in the United Kingdom in 1922. After serving in the Second World War, he read Latin and Greek at Oxford University. He taught at Mill Hill in London and, at that time, still thought that he might become a priest. Through his contact with the Community of the Resurrection, he came to know Father Trevor Huddleston, who was later to become famous in South Africa for his resistance to apartheid and forced removals. As a result of these interactions, Yates and his wife, Dot, were encouraged to go to South Africa in 1956, where he became the Headmaster of St. John's College in Johannesburg.

He was acutely aware of the need for young people to meet across the racial divide and frequently arranged for boys from St. John's to attend services at the community church in the then Sophiatown. Despite his successes at St. John's, Yates experienced significant obstacles in working towards his goal of a non-racial, multi-cultural school. By 1970, it was clear that the South African political framework significantly curtailed the possibility of further progress, and he therefore became instrumental in the establishment of Maru-a-Pula, a multi-cultural, non-racial school in Gaborone, Botswana, in 1972.

In 1981, Yates returned to South Africa, intending to draw on his Botswana experiences to develop new models of independent education in this country. From 1981 to 1991, he was a driving force behind the creation and growth of the New Era Schools Trust (NEST), an initiative supported by the Anglo-American Chairman's Fund that led to the establishment of a series of multi-racial schools. Yates sought in NEST to allow each learner the opportunity to embrace his or her cultural heritage in a diverse environment without prejudice.³³



Basha, Phuthing School, back row 2nd right

Ramy who wanted the best education for his children sent them into school environments that challenged political and educational conventions. As he was on the Board of the New Era Schools' Trust (NEST) he chose to send his youngest son, Basha, to Phuthing, the NEST school in Johannesburg. The Board included Steyn Krige, Prof Guerino Bozzoli, former Vice-Chancellor of Wits University, Ramy Pillay and others.

[It] had to be built on “no man’s land”, not in a white or black “group area”. Yates insisted that you couldn’t create a truly nonracial school by taking a white one and admitting blacks or the other way round. You had to start from scratch. And you had to locate it within easy reach of both white suburbs and black townships.

33 <https://www.wits.ac.za/alumni/notable-alumni/honorary-degree-citations/honorary-degree-citationdeane-yates/>

At that time, the National Party government was still hostile to school desegregation. Those few schools, notably Woodmead, north of Johannesburg, which had begun admitting blacks had done so illegally after years of futile attempts to get permission. Its former headmaster, Steyn Krige, became deputy director to Yates on the NEST board.

They drew up a “hit list” of 200 prominent South Africans (including some in exile) and set about mustering a critical mass of support for the NEST schools. Yates told them: “It is only by growing up together in their formative years that the boys and girls of the emerging SA will remove apartheid from their hearts.”...

Everything was done discreetly. Yates feared that if his plans leaked to the press there would be such a hullabaloo that the government would shut NEST down. But two top Nats were kept in the know: JP De Lange, chairman of the Broederbond, and Gerrit Viljoen, minister of national education and also erstwhile chairman of the Broederbond.

They realised there had to be alternatives to apartheid education. They wanted NEST to succeed. And they gave it political cover.

The first school, Uthongathi, opened in January 1987 north of Durban. The second, Phuthing, north of Johannesburg near today’s Diepsloot, opened in 1989. A third, Zonnebloem, was established in Cape Town in 1992.³⁴

According to Reggie Naidoo, who was also on the NEST Board, Steyn Krige was the driving force in getting Phuthing set up.

Ironically, just as the [NEST] schools got off the ground, liberalisation of the political climate accelerated. In 1990, the government announced that some of its own white schools could admit blacks on the Model C formula. These provided (cheaper) competition for the NEST schools, which relied heavily on private funding and their own fundraising efforts for bursaries. So NEST’s corporate funding dried up. But Yates and Krige had bravely helped to pave the way towards the end of apartheid education even before the change of government in 1994.³⁵

34 “Schools Designed to ‘Remove Apartheid from the Pupils’ Hearts” by John Kane-Berman [CE of the South African Institute of Race Relations.] 09 July 2012, *Business Day*

35 “Schools Designed to ‘Remove Apartheid from the Pupils’ Hearts” by John Kane-Berman [CE of the South African Institute of Race Relations.] 09 July 2012, *Business Day*

When Phuthing opened in 1989, Ramy had Basha transferred from Woodmead to Phuthing. So Basha received the first two years of his secondary education in the ethos of innovation and challenge that prevailed at both schools. Then he transferred to Himalaya Secondary School in Laudium in 1992. After high school, Basha enrolled at the University of Pretoria (UP) for a BSc degree in Computer Science. In 2009, after working in the field of IT for several years, he enrolled in the PMD (Programme for Management Development) at the GIBS Institute for Business at UP.

Basha is the youngest of Ramy Pillay's five sons. Two of his brothers became administrators in the National Union of Mineworkers concerned with enhancing and protecting the interests of workers; the other two became doctors concerned with the health and care of patients. Basha, however, jumped right out of traditional concerns, followed his passion for technology and moved into the field of IT.

This is how Basha describes himself on Twitter:

"Proudly South African, Innovator, Mobility Evangelist, Techno Freak and wannabe Cyborg Anthropologist...and that's just my day job."

Basha's IT career began at GIJIMA and is described in the following article published in the *Sunday World*, 15 Jan 2012.

INNOVATIVE BASH: BUSINESS SCHOOL IDEA COMES ALIVE AT GIJIMA

by Andile April

WE EXPLORE the world of Bash Pillay, the innovation team manager at one of the largest Information and Communication Technology (ICT) companies in Southern Africa, GIJIMA.

What does a day in the life of your job entail?

My day usually starts with me going through some e-mails and actioning any items that may require it. Thereafter, the rest of my morning is spent reading up on the latest trends and technologies on my iPad, that I can relate back to my peers and colleagues within Gijima.

We use creative sessions to explore new possible areas to invest in that Gijima may not have considered before.

If the team have deployed any campaigns for new ideas within any of our industry sectors, then I would also spend quite a bit of my day exploring the ideas that come out of these campaigns and assist in building these ideas into proper business cases that can then be taken back to our executives to assess and action if required.

This team is lucky to get to test all the latest new technologies that our partners bring out long before it gets released to the market.

What are your working responsibilities?

I am responsible for creating a culture of Innovation within the organisation. This will allow new revenue generating ideas to be channeled through the right areas so that Gijima can then bring these new creative solutions to our customer base.

I am also trained to use specific facilitation methods in order to extract creative ideas from people.

My job is to find that new, creative idea that will set Gijima apart from its competitors and allow us to be the leaders in the services and solutions that we offer. Our vision is usually within the 3-5 year period for business.

What did you do before this job?

I was the Resource Manager for our System Integration business area managing about 400 skilled individuals within Gijima.

What challenges do you face in your job?

Changing the culture of an organisation is not something that can be done overnight. As people, we do not like change and it takes persistence and perseverance to get people to change their habits and ways.

Innovation is also usually very disruptive to normal business and as a team we need to ensure that the true business value of the ideas that come out is properly articulated. This can sometimes be very challenging for a large organisation where people are very much set in their ways.

Where did you study and when?

University of Pretoria (1994) and GIBS Business School (2009).

What do you like about your job and what do you hate about it?

I love that I get to explore new and exciting services and solutions that could change business landscapes. That I get to interact with new, creative individuals on a daily basis in my job. I am very passionate about this. I can't say that there is anything that I really hate about it.

Has it always been your dream to do what you do?

My passion for innovation was released when I did my MDP through the GIBS institute. After realising the possibilities that could be achieved through innovation, a number of individuals and I got together and put a business case for our executives to show them the need for a formal innovation area within the business. This resulted in the team being put together and a new business area called Group Innovation being formed in Gijima.

What's the worst thing that ever happened to you in your line of duty and how did you overcome it?

When I took the position of resource manager for Gijima, one of the first things I was asked to do was to retrench 11 individuals in the business. This was definitely one of the worst experiences of my life as I promised myself there and then that I would do whatever I could in my new position to ensure that this never happens. In the two years that followed, we had some tough times within the business but I made sure I never had to retrench another individual in my time as a resource manager.

If you were not doing what you are doing today, what do you think you would be doing and why?

Believe it or not, but I always saw myself acting in movies and ultimately being in Hollywood. Hey, if a girl from Benoni could do it, why not me, right?

Any advice for young people who would like to do your kind of job?

If you have the ability to think out of the box, enjoy working with people and have a passion for new ideas and innovations, then this job would be perfect for you. You will encounter numerous obstacles and barriers along the way, but if you are persistent and push on, it's possible to achieve anything you want.³⁶

In the last sentence of this interview, you can hear the voice of Ramy, "Nothing is impossible to a willing mind." And Basha's concern about retrenching workers reflects the compassion that was characteristic of his father.

As he was growing up, Basha did not seem to conform to his father's expectations; he believes he was the conventional difficult teenager. For instance, he did not have the same reverence for Tamil culture as his father. When asked if he went to Tamil school and whether he could speak the language, his response, "I only learned to swear in Tamil." Basha has an impish sense of humour; what else can one expect from "a wannabe cyborg anthropologist."

Basha has been operating in the IT sector for well over 20 years now and has built his reputation around his skillset, experience and ability to deliver.

He considers himself an "out of the box, against the norm, big idea guy"

His experience ranges across numerous areas of the technology space, from web and software development, project management and programme management, resource management, innovation and Strategy facilitation, to building solutions and services within the space of Enterprise Mobility and providing strategic insight and guidance from a technology perspective.

36 Andile April, *Sunday World*, 15 Jan 2012

He has been involved in numerous industries and has a good overall view of where IT and business need to come together in order to Innovate. At heart he is a people person and believes that the success of any company lies in the commitment and passion displayed by its people.

Before he became a CTO at DIMENSION DATA, he was Head of Innovation at GIJIMA and has become somewhat of an expert in the field of Mobility, In 2012 he wrote: This year has been the year of the smartphone. The wide selection of devices featuring a myriad of new technologies promises to be a major driver of consumer demand.

Top of that list has to be the Apple iPhone 4s. The new phone has an updated processor, camera and storage capacity but, most significantly, it boasts a groundbreaking personal assistant, called Siri. For the first time, artificial intelligence has been successfully incorporated into a smartphone.

Siri does not just listen to your questions, but is able to interpret what you mean as well, in similar fashion to the HAL 9000 in the sci-fi classic 2001: A Space Odyssey. This technology will have techies and geeks in a froth.

[Basha Pillay, Head of Innovation, Gijima)

(<https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/qeldBIRNamdhz>)

Now at Dimension Data, he manages part of the company's technology strategy across all of Middle East And Africa, evaluating the latest in computer technology and the efficacy of such developments as BYOX (Bring Your Own Everything), the latest in high tech practices, applying wearable technology in the Enterprise and exploring new concepts such as the "Internet of Things". His views are very well regarded in the industry and he often gets invited to speak at numerous technology conferences these days. One such conference was the Enterprise Mobility Forum in 2015, a gathering of experts and thought leaders across Africa who have a specific focus in the space of Mobility. As a keynote speaker, Basha focused on the future of Enterprise Mobility and the impact it would have from an African perspective.

[http://media.withtank.com/81948f39d4/enterprise_mobility_-_looking_to_the_future_by_basha_pillay.pdf]

In the cyber world, nothing stands still; everything is constantly being updated. So Basha operates in an environment of continuous change, innovation and movement.

BANUMATI

Banumati met Basha in Std 9 (Grade 11) in 1992, after he left Phuthing and came to study at Himalaya High School. They courted for nine years and got to know each other really well before they married. On their wedding day in 2001, Banu went from her home to Ramy and Manoo's home to be dressed as a traditional Tamil bride. After Manoo had helped her into her sari, headdress and jewellery, Ramy came in and knelt down to put toe rings on the second toe of each foot. As he was slipping the ring onto the second toe of her left foot, Ramy explained that when he got married, he struggled to put them on his bride. So he was doing this to save Basha time and trouble.

After the wedding, Banumati came to live in Country View where Basha lived with his parents. They remained with Ramy and Manoo for the first year and a half of their married life. Banumati got to know her father-in-law very well and, of course, got her cheeks pinched. Little things like that and Ramy's attention to the toe rings and the time he spent with her on their walks, sharing news, watching TV together, filled a gap in her life that had been there from the time her parents had separated when she was seven. And Ramy was more a father to her than a father-in-law.

On Sunday mornings, she would drive up with Ramy to Blue Valley and they would go for a walk on the golf course. He would tell her all about himself, about his life in Johannesburg, his first car and so on. When they got back to Country View, Ramy would first go into the sauna, then he would use the foot spa, after that into the jacuzzi and finally into the shower. The whole routine took him a couple of hours after which he would say, "Your turn" and she would go through the process but in much less time.

Then he would watch Eastern Mosaic, a Sunday morning Indian programme on SABC. And if there was something funny on the programme he would call to her. "Today they are going to cook a running fowl." He would watch them chasing the fowl and would laugh. His laughter was infectious. When he started laughing, she couldn't help laughing too.

In about 2006, he became seriously ill and he couldn't speak – the sounds he made were not intelligible. He would struggle to express himself and would become exhausted with the effort. This must have been the most frustrating aspect of his condition – he was a person whose life was predicated on his ability to communicate with others. Without speech, he was disconnected. And it disturbed Banu. "This was a very difficult time for me as well, not being able to communicate with him the way we used to made me feel disconnected too."

Ramy died in 2008, when Banu's first child, Preshanti, was four years old. And to help her daughter accept what had happened to her Pappa, Banu told her that as her grandfather was very sick he had to go to God's house. To do that, he had to get into a magic box to travel there safely. Preshanti accepted that. She sat down and drew pictures of things

Pappa would need when he got to God's house and she put them in his pocket when he was sleeping in his coffin.

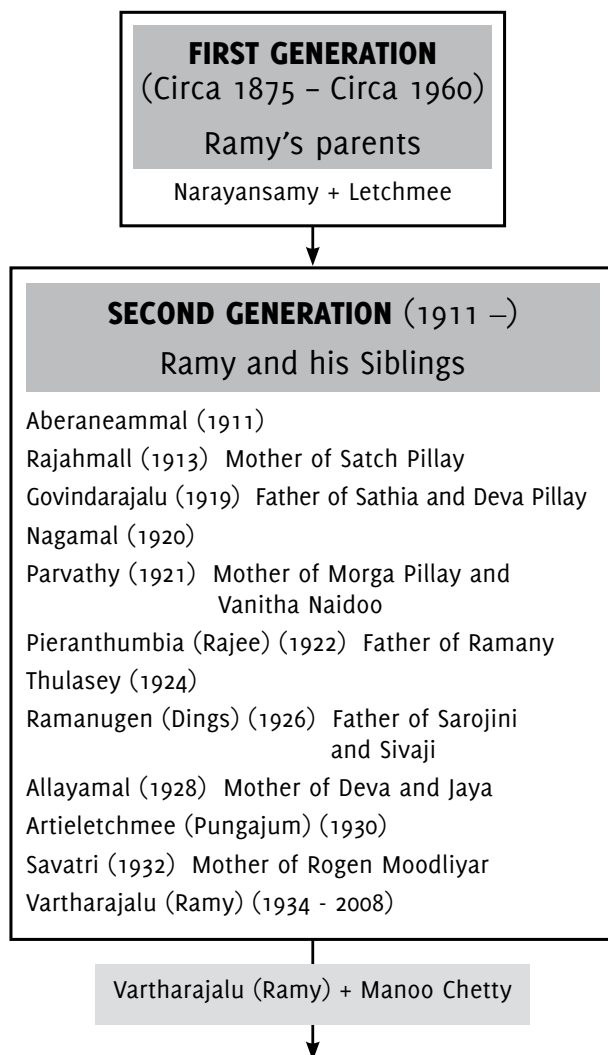
With regard to her son, Banu says, "Rushil, my second child was almost two years old. He didn't really understand what was going on and sadly didn't get to spend much time with his Pappa. It is only from stories like these that he can have some idea of what his Pappa was like."

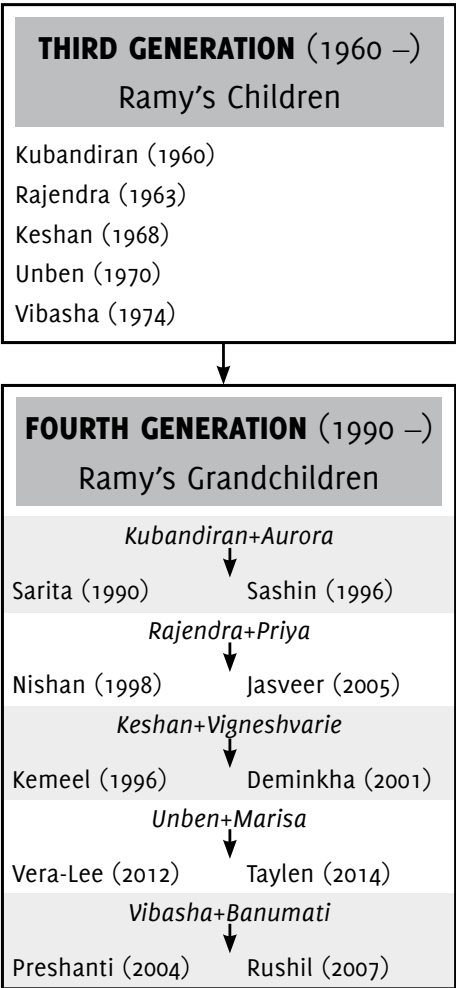
Banu remembers Ramy's advice to her. "Ramy always reminded me to stay grounded, to keep up with current events, to always think of those less fortunate and to never forget where I came from. These things will always stay with me."

17

GENERATIONS AND GAPS

Ramy's story extends over four generations:





THE FIRST GENERATION: RAMY’S PARENTS

The first generation was born in the British colony of Mauritius, the island to which their parents had emigrated from India. Colonization, like everything human, is both positive and negative. On the one hand it means plunder, exploitation and enslavement; on the other, expansion of human opportunity and knowledge. When India, along with many other foreign territories and peoples, became part of the British Empire, it opened the world to Indians.

For Ramy’s grandparents and great-grandparents, it meant travel, adventure, new prospects. They were self-confident people who put aside fear and uncertainty to venture into the unknown. They had no idea what awaited them in the new territories to which they were going, but they believed in themselves and were ready to meet the challenges

of foreign places. They left their homeland, boarded British ships, made their way to Mauritius and later to South Africa.

In South Africa, they found themselves in hostile territory. The British had brought in Indian indentured labour and the influx of independent merchants that followed had not been anticipated. These enterprising traders were not welcome. Local authorities passed laws to limit entry of independent “passenger” Indians into the country. The Transvaal government restricted entry into their territory and the Orange Free State barred it altogether. The Transvaal Act 3 of 1885 denied Indians ownership of land and confined them to ghettos. The authorities also attempted to enforce repatriation.

Despite these efforts to contain the Indian trading class, it grew. And once indentured labourers had completed their contracts, they too became settlers and set themselves up in trade or farming. Their need for land was growing and the struggle to obtain it would become their major battle against the authorities. Being independent, resourceful individuals, the merchants took legal action against local authorities but their efforts did not lead to success. When the young barrister, Mohandas Gandhi, came out in 1893 to settle a dispute between two brothers, the merchants invited him to stay on and represent their legal claims. But local authorities continued to pass restrictive laws that rendered legal challenges ineffective. And that gave rise to Gandhi’s Satyagraha movement in which Narayansamy, his wife, Letchmee, his parents and sister, Veerammal, participated.

The early years, therefore, constituted a struggle against local authorities that treated them as aliens. They were segregated in Indian ghettos where they set about building their communities. Some criticise them for not identifying with the indigenous people; some even accuse Gandhi of being racist, but Indians had to fight for their survival against antagonistic forces from the very beginning. Under such circumstances, their focus was on stabilising their own situation. They were new in the country and had only a superficial idea of the circumstances of the local people. It would take a few more decades before all black people in South Africa – Africans, Indians, Coloureds – would understand that theirs was a common struggle and they should all join hands.

Narayansamy and his parents had left India to make a life for themselves in South Africa, but their ties to the motherland remained strong. They had family in India with whom they kept in touch; Narayansamy’s father had died on his way back to visit the home he had left in the subcontinent. Theirs was a Tamil culture, developed in the southern regions of India that placed emphasis on education in humane values. So they built temples and Tamil Schools, spoke and studied Tamil, and lived and worshipped according to Tamil customs.

Narayansamy and the people of his generation left a legacy of courage, perseverance, hard work, the readiness to take risks and meet challenges. So Ramy came from a tradition of adventurous people resolutely creating their destiny and actively resisting all attempts to obstruct their development. And they were proudly Tamil people, made more proud of

their culture by the prejudice against them, the measures to control them and the threats of repatriation. From the very outset, they were forced to resist the assault on their dignity as human beings. Though they were a tiny minority, they vociferously demanded the right to freedom and equality of opportunity.

Land and property rights became pivotal in their striving for equal opportunity.

THE SECOND GENERATION: RAMY PILLAY

Narayansamy's children were born between 1911 and 1934, the last born being Vartharajalu (Ramy). The family was large, twelve children – four sons and eight daughters. They were poor and the children had to begin earning as soon as they were old enough. Allaymall, the ninth child, indicates that her brother, Ramy, when still a little boy, went around after school selling vegetables. In the old days, a large family meant many hands to bring in an income; but it also meant many mouths to feed. So Narayansamy's family remained at subsistence level.

As the family's survival was precarious, school became a privilege that they could not afford. Having to leave school in their early teens, the children felt an acute sense of deprivation. Going to school had become standard procedure and education was generally recognized as the means to employment and earning a living. But it was not for Narayansamy's children. Consequently, education took on supreme importance in Ramy's mind. As it obviated the need for large families, he would have fewer children and would make every sacrifice necessary to ensure that they did not have to drop out of school.

In Ramy's time, Indians lived and worked within the framework of segregation and separate development. It was a system that taught that they were not entitled to equal opportunity because they were inferior. White people were called Europeans and black people, Non-Europeans; i.e. having no culture of their own, they needed to be civilized through induction into European culture in an education system that made no reference to their origins and their existence.

It was a system that denied black learners free will and free choice. It determined their needs and aspirations and scaled down education to meet limited goals to keep them functioning at lower levels. In government schools, therefore, they were being programmed to accept inferiority. But Ramy wanted equal opportunity for his children; so he could not send them to government secondary schools. They had to go to non-racial schools where blacks and whites received the same education. With first class education, his sons could assert their right to equal opportunity. The decision to send his children to non-racial schools was bold and unconventional, especially for a man with limited resources. But Ramy wanted nothing less than the best education for his sons.

Though he was proudly Tamil, it was not education in the Tamil culture. In order to be successful in this society, one has to adapt to its dominant culture and Ramy confined his pride in being

Tamil to the personal and private sphere. Though he spoke some Tamil, he was not literate in the language and his children would not learn to speak it. They had become South Africans and Indian customs were losing their hold. In 1961, the government, in declaring Indians citizens of the country, at last acknowledged that they were South Africans. But the aura of being alien lingers on in the use of the word “Indian.”

In retrospect, Ramy was very fortunate to have dropped out of school. Formal education would probably have deprived him of his pride in being Tamil – a pride that protected him from accepting inferiority and kept alive his striving for equal opportunity. More importantly, had he not dropped out of school, he would not have met and worked for the Rosenfeldts who had a profound influence on his life. From them, he received genuine education; not conditioning for separate development and acceptance of inferiority. They made it possible for him to discover and develop his interests and abilities and use them to overcome the injustices of the system. And they did it with love and compassion.

Education is not confined to book learning; school is all around us in everything we do and observe. Ramy, as a child and teenager, had lived in the time of the growth of the Congress movement and had learned as much from it as from the Rosenfeldts. With leaders like Dr Yusuf Dadoo, the Congresses were engaged in very determined efforts to win the right to ownership of land. And satyagraha did not remain a thing of the past; it became a present day reality.

...they began to advocate the strategy of non-violent, non-cooperation (satyagraha) to protest against the land and trade restrictions embodied in the *Transvaal Asiatic Land Tenure Act of 1932*, amended in 1934, 35, 36, 37, and replaced by the *Asiatics (Transvaal Land and Trading) Acts of 1939 and 1941*, the *Trading and Occupation Land Bill (Pegging Act) 1943*, and the *Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act (Ghetto Act) of 1946*.³⁷

These laws eventually led to the Passive Resistance Campaign of 1946-7 in Durban. It was a massive demonstration against the Ghetto Act which attempted to suffocate Indian business enterprise and destroy its viability. The Passive Resistance campaign continued over two years and Indians from all over the country took part in it. It created country-wide awareness and widened understanding of oppression as the condition of all black groups. That led to co-operation between leaders of all people opposed to separate development, black and white. And the next decade, the 1950s, was a decade of mass demonstrations that culminated in the Treason Trial of 1956-60.

37 Muthal Naidoo, 2007, “Outline of South African Indian History 1860-1960,” *Stories from the Asiatic Bazaar*, p. 258.

It was only in 1961, when South Africa became an independent republic and people of Indian origin were at last recognized as permanent residents that they could buy property freely and did not need permits to visit three of the four provinces; they were still not allowed into the Orange Free State. They had been in the country a hundred years and the authorities had had to accept that they were a fixture. Though they were no longer aliens and intruders, they were still clearly not welcome.

Being deprived of formal education had made it of paramount importance to Ramy. Similarly, the Indian struggle for land had opened his eyes to the value of property. The understanding had grown in him that ownership of property meant freedom and security. And it became his mission to get everyone he knew to invest in land or property – all his friends, relatives, acquaintances and, in particular, his sons. In the late 1980s, he became aware, before most people, of the first non-racial housing development at Country View in Midrand, Johannesburg. And he urged his sons, relatives and friends to buy homes there.

Some years later, when Ramy heard of a golf estate being planned just down the road from Country View, he again urged his sons to take advantage of this new opportunity. Kuben and Rajen went to look at the site. They saw open veldt and wondered why they should buy there. What Ramy saw was opportunity; this barren piece of land could flower into something beautiful and very valuable. He urged them to risk it; and though they did not have his vision, they trusted their father and bought plots. Ramy intuitively knew that taking a risk was the first step to success; it would unleash the energy and ingenuity necessary to make it worthwhile. This was his strategy with sons, nephews, nieces, friends, and associates. He trusted people to make things work; and his trust was an additional stimulus that drove their achievement.

Not all Ramy's sons have homes in Blue Valley, but all of them own property and have built beautiful homes. And they are grateful for their father's foresight. So are all the friends and relatives whom he steered towards investment in property.

THE THIRD GENERATION: RAMY'S SONS

Ramy's parents had twelve children, Ramy had five. Ramy's sons each have two. The reduction in family size is an indication of changing values, changing resources and changing circumstances. It indicates evolution towards a more meaningful existence.

Ramy's sons were born when people of Indian descent were no longer officially regarded as aliens. But the boys would grow up in times when the Nationalist government was refining its implementation of separate development and the opposition to apartheid was evolving into a revolutionary movement. Having abandoned passive resistance, the ANC and PAC were establishing military wings and training camps and deploying underground operatives. They were planning to bring down the system through violent means if necessary. But Gandhi's legacy of non-violence was still strong and would keep violence to a minimum.

1960, the year in which Ramy's eldest child, Kuben, was born, was the year of the Sharpeville Massacre that led to the banning of the ANC and the PAC. As the ANC could no longer operate legally within the country, it was forced to work from the outside. That led to the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), its military wing which would operate underground within the country.

In the Manifesto of Umkhonto published on 16 December 1961, we said: "The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices – submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means in our power in defence of our people, our future, and our freedom."

(Nelson Mandela, extract from the Rivonia Trial speech)

It was a daring development: a small group of revolutionaries declaring war on a well-fortified state with army, navy, air force, police force, secret police, spies and undercover operatives. Almost as soon as the revolutionaries began to put their plans into operation, they were arrested, Nelson Mandela in 1962, ANC leaders in 1963 at Rivonia. In 1964, Mandela and the Rivonia men were exiled to Robben Island. But resistance continued and attacks against Government installations led to greater repression and in turn to more determined opposition from activists and revolutionaries of all races and sectors of the society.

When the ANC was banned, the Indian Congresses were not and, in 1961, people of Indian descent were given official status as citizens. These concessions were probably attempts to co-opt Indians and create division amongst the militant forces. Though opportunistic Indians did co-operate with the government, the Congresses continued their opposition and became arms of the ANC within the country – contrary to what the government had intended.

In addition, open opposition in the country was being revived. Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement was inspiring black people to throw off fear and apathy and stand up for their rights. That led to the Soweto Uprising of 1976 and to school boycotts which would continue into the next decade.

Ramy's sons, as students in schools and universities, alive to happenings in the country, grew up breathing the air of revolution. They were in non-racial schools established in the spirit of revolution and being among learners of all races, they learned of deeper prejudice and discrimination than they experienced in their little ghettos. And they began to see the fallacies of racial and ethnic superiority and inferiority; people of all races had in common that they were human beings and colour did not make them any more or less human. As they all spoke English, and language is the carrier of cultural values and norms, they found that they shared a common, though adopted culture that superseded racial and ethnic differences.

Tamil, as a defence mechanism against racism, was no longer necessary in a situation where people respected one another as human beings. Cultural traditions become divisive when they are treated as character traits rather than as ways to show respect and consideration.

Ramy's sons, functioning in non-racial situations, were becoming part of a new culture in which values were more important than cultural norms or customs. Prejudice arises from perception of difference in externals: colour, customs, traditions. Apartheid focused on external differences. Being in non-racial environments, Ramy's sons learned to distinguish between the extrinsic and the intrinsic, between norms and values. They were able to see that the values underlying different cultural norms are common to all. Prejudice disappears with the acknowledgment of common humanity.

So when Kuben married, he chose a partner who embodied the values that he respected; Aurora is a compassionate woman, self-confident and daring. She lives by the same values that he learned at his father's knee. Kuben and Aurora put differences such as race and religion in proper perspective and did not let superficial differences come between them and their love for each other. And when Kuben chose a career, he made a decision based on the qualities of the man for whom he would work – a dynamic leader, with a strong sense of purpose and a determination to ensure the advancement of his people. Kuben went to work for Cyril Ramaphosa as he wanted to be involved in finding ways to bring the benefits of the modern world to those who had been denied them.

Kuben and his brothers, following in their father's footsteps, look past race and ethnicity as they dedicate their lives to the service of the community. Community for them means the South African community in which everyone is a person through other persons regardless of race, ethnicity, class and colour.

Ramy had made it possible for his sons to enter into a different dimension and a new appreciation of being human. What they learned and put into practice exceeded his own experience and he, in turn, was learning from his sons; education had become a two-way process. That is as it should be. It is the duty of parents to introduce their children to the processes of the world in which they live and as human experience is continuously evolving, it becomes the duty of children to introduce parents to the innovations of their world.

THE FOURTH GENERATION: RAMY'S GRANDCHILDREN

Ramy's determination to give his children the best education possible has become a family tradition. All Ramy's grandchildren attend or have attended the best schools in Johannesburg. In post-apartheid South Africa, no struggle or sacrifice is required anymore to get children into non-racial schools; all schools are now non-racial. Ramy's grandchildren do not live in segregated group areas and everything is open to them; they have never seen signs over doors, at bus stops, and all public places that read EUROPEANS/ NON-EUROPEANS or WHITES/NON-WHITES. Do they have any idea of racial discrimination? Unlike their Pappa whose dreams were censored, unlike their parents whose dreams challenged the system, their dreams depend entirely on themselves and are limited only by their own competences and interests. Or are they?

Ramy's grandchildren, being of the liberated generation not restricted by systemic discrimination, are moving into new and greatly diverse areas of experience. The first four of Ramy's grandchildren are Sarita (1990), Sashin (1996), Kemeel (1996) and Nishan (1999).

NISHAN

Nishan, Rajen and Priya's son, has his eyes on a career in cricket. Professional cricket is not out of his reach. Black cricket players are no longer confined to weekend events with champions known only in their own racial communities. In the old days, blacks could only be spectators of professional sport in their own country. As they watched professional teams from Britain or Australia playing against all-white South African cricket or soccer teams, they boisterously supported the visiting teams – their way of protesting against discrimination.

With the demise of apartheid, the cricket team is now a truly South African team. The first black player to become a professional cricketer was the fast bowler, Makhaya Ntini. He represented South Africa in international cricket from 1998 - 2011. Now the cricket team is mixed and in 2015, Hashim Amla, who ranks among the top ten batsmen in the world, captained the team.

Nishan has had a mentorship with Dale Steyn, the South African fast bowler. That could not have happened before 1994. So Nishan's dreams of playing for South Africa and touring the world are not wishful thinking as such dreams were in his father's and grandfather's times. Talent and dedication are enough to make his dreams come true.

SASHIN

Sashin, son of Kuben and Aurora, rejoices in the new found freedom.

“I was fortunate enough to attend really great schools which ultimately enabled me to get into a top degree at university. I am currently studying for a Bachelor of Business Science at The University of Cape Town. It is a four year degree and my dream is to head up one of South Africa's largest corporate companies one day. Like my dad, I too share a great passion for the media and advertising field (hence I have chosen “marketing” as my major). I do see myself as an entrepreneur too, and I believe that after gaining some solid work experience, I will one day start my own business.

Besides my obvious passion for business, I have great interest in social media, sport, music and fitness. One of my hobbies is DJ-ing and I often do so at various parties in Cape Town. I enjoy meeting new people and socialising as Pappa always taught me to. It's a skill I'm grateful to have as networking plays a vital part in business.”

(Sashin Pillay, 29.01.2016)



On the right, Sashin the DJ

Full of the joy of living, Sashin is the embodiment of the spirit of Ramy, the man who loved and laughed.

Sashin and Nishan see the world as a place waiting for them to make their mark in it but for Sarita and Kemeel things are not so clearly defined. They are ambivalent about the advantages that their parents have made possible for them. Circumstances have placed them in a position of privilege in a society in which there is still the great divide between rich and poor. The struggle against injustice, fairly clearly outlined for their grandparents and parents, is not as straightforward for them.

The first generation of the family, Ramy's parents, belonged to the poor working class, struggling to earn a living in a colonial environment. The second generation, Ramy and his siblings, with minimal education, worked hard, overcame poverty, fought and evaded discriminatory laws and rose to lower middle class status. Ramy's sons, the third generation, university graduates, have achieved upper middle class status.

Ramy's grandchildren, the fourth generation, have not only the means and education, but also the freedom to overcome all barriers to progress. But for some of the grandchildren, their freedom is tainted with feelings of guilt. They have inadvertently joined the ranks of the entitled minority. Pre-1994, wealth and opportunity had been privileges to which blacks in general had not been entitled. Post-1994, most black people still lack opportunity. And those belonging to the privileged minority are labelled 'coconuts.'

In his article, “Cracking the ‘coconut’ dilemma” published in the Young Movers and Shakers Magazine, Kuben writes:

A coconut... [refers] to a black person who is supposedly ‘white’ on the inside, as indicated by lifestyle, accent and the schooling received.

The coconut debate has been sharpened by a much-read speech [*Of Coconuts, Consciousness and Cecil John Rhodes: Disillusionment and Disavowals of the Rainbow Nation*] at this year’s Ruth First lecture at WITS by self-confessed ‘coconut’, journalist and storyteller, **Panashe Chigumadzi**.

...[she said]

‘coconuts’ were not seen by other blacks as torch-bearers of democracy and the Rainbow Nation, but as ashamed of their roots, ‘Uncle Toms’, ‘house negroes’ and ‘agents of whiteness’.³⁸

In Chigumadzi’s address, she deals with the sense of alienation of blacks called coconuts – those who, like Ramy’s grandchildren, have been to non-racial schools and have risen in social status. They are rejected by underprivileged blacks who see them as white; and they are not fully accepted by whites, who see them as black. Where do they fit in? Their education and achievements have lifted them into the world of white privilege where they encounter the racist-classist attitude of entitlement.

You see this attitude in the popular TV series, *Downton Abbey*, where people have fixed places in a hierarchical social order and one’s position in the order determines the privileges to which one is entitled. The character, Tom Branson, steps out of line. First he is the chauffeur of an earl, and then he becomes the earl’s son-in-law. He is not entitled to the privileges of those at the top and he no longer fits in with those at the bottom. He is in no-man’s-land. Though not black, Tom is a coconut. He has to conform to traditions that he formerly opposed and he is not respected for doing so.

Of coconuts, Chigumadzi says:

I call it the “Add blacks and stir” model. Stir, while continuing with the same structure, same rules, same teachers, same traditions, same school songs and same curricula. And, of course, this is symbolic of the wider Rainbow Nation project: include blacks but don’t dare touch the underlying structures of inequality that rely on racism.

(Panashe Chigumadzi, *Of Coconuts, Consciousness and Cecil John Rhodes*)

38 Kuben Pillay, February 2015, “Cracking the ‘coconut’ dilemma,” YMS Magazine

And that is precisely where the problem lies; coconuts and all of society have to fit into the existing structures of the previous dispensation. BEE and Affirmative Action simply confirm old ways. There has been no revolution; no application of thought and energy to creating a system in which entitlement means equality of opportunity not privilege.

In all his endeavours, Ramy fought for entitlement. For him entitlement did not mean preferential treatment; it meant his rights as a citizen; it meant equality of opportunity. When he took his children to a whites-only skating rink, when he sent them to non-racial schools, he was asserting his right to equal opportunity.

Ramy, who “only went up to standard six,” was a man working among people, becoming acquainted with their needs, providing them with opportunities and helping them to grow. His sons follow in his footsteps, identifying needs and providing opportunities for the working class.

Is this possible only at an individual or private level?

Poverty is common to all societies. History makes it clear that unemployment increases with technological advancement, but, as yet, governments have not turned their attention to this kind of imbalance. It seems not to occur to rulers to anticipate such problems of displacement and to make alternative provision for the many who are made redundant. Poverty, therefore, remains and will always be an indictment of the democratic process as long as the main focus on new advancements is only on the capitalistic gains that they produce.

BEING A COCONUT

Labelling people is indicative of attitudes of intolerance and contempt. In pre-1994 South Africa, black people were “coolies”, “kaffirs”, “bushmen.” Labelling reduced people to stereotypes and made it easier to hate them. In 2016, apartheid lives on in new labels such as “coconut.”

One of the ways to overcome the negation implied in a label is to adopt the label and give it new meaning. It is what Biko did. It is what Ramy did when he called himself Tamil.

That is what Chigumadzi has done:

Indeed, I choose to appropriate the term ‘Coconut’ and self-identify as one because I believe it offers an opportunity for refusal and this very refusal allows for a radical anti-racist politics to emerge. In the first instance, it’s an act of problematising myself within the socio-economic landscape of South Africa as part of the black middle class that is supposed to be the buffer against more ‘radical elements’. It’s the recognition of how someone like myself “who speaks so well” and “is not like other black people” can be so easily coopted into maintaining the inequalities of post-apartheid South Africa.

This recognition opens up the possibility for refusal of co-option and thus the space to make use of the unique positioning of those of us who have borne witness to and experienced the very intimate details of whiteness in all its mundane manifestations as we slept at each other's houses and went on school trips.

(Panashe Chigumadzi, *'Of Coconuts, Consciousness and Cecil John Rhodes'*)

But the problem is not simply non-acceptance in a white elite stratum. The problem is also, and perhaps more importantly, rejection by the black majority.

The term coconut is applied to those black people who have acquired middle and upper class status. And in its perjorative sense, it means all those who have adopted white ways.

This is a misconception resulting from conditioning in a racist society. Resentment of black people who have acquired middle and upper class status, has little to do with the adoption of white culture. All people in South Africa, rich and poor alike have adapted to a dominant western culture. It is most obviously seen in dress and in the language of communication. All have been socialized into Western culture and aspire to the benefits it offers. People are people through other people, even their enemies.

And Black people, having been processed through apartheid structures and having internalized its ethos, are a fusion of black and white influences. Furthermore, we are moving into a global culture which is also predominantly western. In all of Africa, the middle and Far East, technological advancements are spreading a western way of life. We are all being assimilated.

It is not, therefore, the adoption of the ways of a dominant culture that makes one a coconut; it is the adoption of the attitude of superiority and the demand for more than ordinary respect. This attitude of entitlement, the assumption of privilege, adopted by the nouveau riche affirms an adherence to class even though we have officially abandoned a race-class system. And it is seen as the illegitimate assumption of power.

The "born-free" in South Africa, Ramy's grandchildren for example, most vulnerable to being labelled 'coconuts', find themselves in circumstances in which freedom from discrimination is as elusive as it has ever been. Like Tom Branson, in Downton Abbey, they are in no-man's-land.

As Kuben puts it:

... the "coconut" phenomenon confirms, it's not enough to take the child out of disadvantage and create a student that can 'pass for white'...

We have to work to lower the racial and socio-economic divide and build closer understanding of what it is to be poor and black in this country. We address the poverty-versus-privilege barrier or we risk social breakdown.

(Kuben Pillay, *Cracking the coconut dilemma*)

What is being called for is real change.

Two of Ramy's grandchildren, Sarita Pillay and Kemeel Pillay share their perspectives on life in South Africa.

Sarita Pillay, the first of Ramy's grandchildren, is the daughter of Kuben and Aurora.

Kemeel Pillay, the third of Ramy's grandchildren, is the son of Keshan and Vigneshvarie.



First and Second Generations



Second, third and fourth generations



**Fourth and third generations:
Malini with her mother
Ramany, Rajee's daughter**



Second and fourth generations



**Second and third generations:
Ramy and Manoo**

Fourth Generation



**Ballet Dancer:
Deminkha**



Bowler Nishan



**Sashin: Captain of St Alban's
Hockey Team 2014**



**Nishan with mentor,
Dale Steyn at Lords 2013**



**Cricketers:
Sashin and Nishan**



Sashin leading MacRobert House, St Alban's College in war cries

18

SARITA PILLAY

THE STRUGGLE IS FAR FROM OVER

I walk into the shiny revamped shopping mall, a monolith of flurried consumption, nestled in the suburbs of Port Elizabeth. It's a welcome relief entering the air-conditioned building. Summer in Port Elizabeth is not particularly comfortable, with its blustery wind and blazing hot sun. But it does feel good to be back in the Eastern Cape.

The past week or so has seen me travelling the south eastern coast of South Africa. I'd just spent a few days on holiday with my family in the "Republic" of the Western Cape – in

the lily-white seaside town of Knysna. My grandmother was with us, and many of my cousins, aunts and uncles. In the gated community where my family rented a home for a few days, I only saw a handful of brown faces. Barring those that came in every morning to clean the homes and wash the cars. It's moments like these that are always stark reminders of an abnormal society. Yachts parked outside spacious holiday homes on canals, while on the hills in the distance peeked tightly packed corrugated iron homes – their racialised patterns far from coincidental. Our middle-classness is now a gateway to spaces that were the purview of the few. "Pappa and I probably drove past, but we could never stay in these places, you know?" Amma says one day when I ask her if she's visited Knysna before. I remember once having a discussion with my dad, about how being privileged enough to holiday in places

across South Africa, he's now realising the depth of apartheid. From St. Francis to Cape Town, to the Waterberg, and hills of Mpumalanga. The spaces kept for some, the landownership, the wealth, the access to natural resources. Still for the few. Where money now buys access. Are we fine with it being this way?

As my family drove back up to Gauteng, I hopped on a City 2 City Bus that snaked eastward along the coast – past Plett, Jeffrey's Bay, P.E. and then inland to the historical colonial outpost, the divided dorpie, my home for 4 years, Grahamstown, eRhini. Grahamstown is a quiet town in December – the students gone for the holidays, the academics out of town, and those who can, travelling to visit family elsewhere in the country. I hadn't been back to Grahamstown in over two years – after I graduated from my Honours. I owe a lot to the town and the university – my two-year Masters stint in the US made possible by something of a political “awakening” that came from my experience in the segregated and starkly unequal small town. Grahamstown is a town split in two. On the western part of the town, the grand architecture of a university named after one of the British Empire's most reviled colonists, up the road some of the country's most expensive private boarding schools, next to quaint and large homes that sheltered historic and systemic privilege. This contrasted to the east of town, Joza, Fingo Village, Hlalani – where schools are regularly under resourced, families grapple with poverty and unemployment, in neighborhoods of RDP houses, shack settlements, and modest working class homes. This is no coincidence. Grahamstown carries the weight of its colonial legacy of dispossession, violence and plunder. Named after a British commander who led the pillage of Xhosa settlements, formed as a military headquarters and settler town, and the site of one of the country's forced mass force removals – its colonial foundations morphed into its apartheid legacy. Today, the life of a young person growing up in the west of Grahamstown differs enormously from that of a young person growing up in the east – as, more often than not, does their skin colour. Just as the life of a young person growing up in Sandton differs from that of a young person growing up in Alex. Or the life of a young person growing up in Constantia differs from that of a young person growing up in Mitchells Plein. Grahamstown is a microcosm of South Africa's continued spatial, racial, social and economic injustice. Are we fine with it being this way?

I left Grahamstown for P.E. in the morning. I'm here only for a few hours before I head back to Joburg. I scan the corridor where I've entered the mall, looking for a familiar face. Earlier this morning I'd reconnected with friend who had recently returned to P.E. after working in Paris for a well-known innovation company. He chose to come back to South Africa to start a business and employ young, black talent. Returning home was important to him. There was just so much that needed to be done – although it was not going to be easy. I felt the same. We both had been privileged with time at suburban schools, a university education, and experience abroad. Arguably, we are “the new black middle class” – the benefactors of the post-apartheid “liberation”.

But we are a minority. Systemic barriers continue to plague the majority of our peers of colour, wealth rests in the hands of the few, and the poor get poorer. How real, then, is our supposed liberation? Are we fine with it being this way?

It's almost midday now, and I have one more friend to meet before I leave the Eastern Cape. Walking through the busy mall, I finally spot Asanda. "Molo Sarita, my comrade, how are you?" He smiles broadly. We find a corner in a restaurant to catch up on over two years. We pick up right where we left off – although much has happened in between. He tells me of the recent promise by the municipality to provide electricity to the eThembeni shack settlement in Grahamstown, and his dismay at the sidelining of poor students without model-C English accents from #FeesMustFall student movements at Rhodes. What is most difficult for him to share with me is that he is no longer at university. Here is someone who, whenever I meet, I learn something new. Yet his is the story of South Africa's disregarded youth, who, initially, were the focus of the student movements that erupted across South Africa in 2015. Those who continue to be systematically sidelined are excluded not just by the university system, but an entrenched political and economic system. For them, the "historic victory" of a 0% fee increase means very little. They have done everything that the myth of a liberal capitalist democracy tells us will enable "success", irrespective of your skin colour and where you were born – get an education, work hard, live "morally". With some luck and support from mentors and friends, Asanda managed to enroll in a university, and access government funding. He worked tirelessly through first year, staying in a backyard shack for a while, travelling late at night to access the school computers, and struggling to put together money for groceries. He did not pass two of his modules. Unlike his wealthier peers whose parents would simply pay for another year of university to redo two courses – failing meant his government funding was revoked. He was now in debt, and the doors of the institution shut. He deserves an education no less than anyone else, an opportunity to fulfill his potential no less than anyone else, dignity like anyone else, and the chance to take care of his mother and brothers no less than anyone else.

Are we okay with it being this way? When will we drastically reimagine and recreate the form that this country and the world takes? As Asanda would say, this requires a revolution. Unlearning, reimagining, questioning. Building a new humanity that recognizes the worth of every human; that is cognisant of historic systemic inequality, and genuinely seeks to undo it. A world where value and dignity is not the purview of profit. A true liberation, because it's become increasingly clear that the struggle is far from over. Like Asanda, I'm not quite sure how we get there yet. But perhaps it begins with our own consciousness, to build a collective one.

[04.02.2016]

19

KEMEEL PILLAY

GOING FORWARD



Being just under 12 years old when my grandfather passed away, it was nearly impossible, with limited time and his declining health, to relate to him completely on a personal level, and fully grasp the values and beliefs of his character. Unfortunately, for most of the grandchildren, we know Papa predominantly through accounts of others, and immature memories. Nonetheless, his impact on our lives today remains extraordinarily profound.

The worlds of generations before us: the hardships they endured, values they adopted, and ambitions they strived for shaped the world we live in today. Because race plays such an important role in our history, and thus, the world we live in today, it is only apt that the concept of race and racial inequality be engaged with to a significant extent - particularly by the first generation to be “born free”. My grandfather, an Indian man, living in a society systematically designed to oppress people like him, looked to lives

of white people as an ultimate ambition. The one direct link which was, perhaps, most influential in my upbringing was the reasoning behind the school I attended. My grandfather became exposed to St. John’s College through viewing the lives of his (white) employers: the Rosenfeldts. Looking at this elite private school, where his employer sent his sons, it became a dream that one day one of his grandchildren might be able to attend a school like that. And being part of the first generation where

black people were treated equally in the eyes of the law, I became the grandson to fulfil that dream. And whilst I remain grateful for the sacrifice endured - not only by my ancestors, but by the generations before me who dedicated their lives for the recognition of our rights so that I may be able to attend such an institution - it is of great importance that my generation highlight the flaws in this system, and stress the need for further change.

Looking back over history, those in a position of power and privilege have traditionally been white males, and thus, institutions and spaces of privilege have existed to benefit and suit the needs of those in power: white males. Moreover, these institutions have existed to systematically oppress all other groups. Post the era of colonialism, the predominant liberation movements have been for that of legislative equality, and with particular focus on South Africa, that victory was claimed in 1994 by the generation before us. However, it is the duty of each generation to strive to leave the world better than the generation before it. In a time where women and black people possess the right to franchise, there is a calling for the current generation to combat the systemic and cultural oppression that exists today: to face the ghosts of an oppressive past and begin the process of healing.

Drawing from the writings of Marx, power in a society is equated through economic structures. One's likelihood of flourishing economically is directly related to one's economic situation and, thus, the resources one can access. With growing critique of the capitalist system by the current generation, the notion that in a post-apartheid society everyone is on an equal footing is being quickly dispelled. Focussing particularly on South Africa, an oppressive past has resulted in wealth inequality being linked directly to race. Despite consensus of this growing, those most in denial of this have, naturally, been those who benefit from it: white people. And thus, the conscientisation of the beneficiaries of certain privileges such as that of "white privilege" needs to be achieved - not because we seek to stimulate white-guilt or blame individuals; but because in achieving an equal diverse society, it is important that those in control of wealth and industry play a role in justly redistributing wealth and resources.

Nonetheless, the call for equality goes well beyond merely redistribution. The gradual inclusion of blacks in a middle to upper class bracket that does not simultaneously promote a diverse and accepting culture serves no purpose but simply to assimilate the oppressed into the world of the oppressor. Many of the institutions designed to epitomise success are plagued with a patriarchal culture that stems from that of white South African males.

And this brings us back to institutions like St John's. Looking at the example of your elite private schools: Hilton, Michaelhouse, St. John's, St Alban's etc. there is a common racist culture that prevails, but is often unnoticed. Racism extends beyond prejudice and is more about the concept of power, and the using of that power to oppress. This is why it is often unnoticed - it's easy to defend the diversity of the system by pointing to the number of black people - which, regardless, is an inaccurate representation of the demographics of the country. So when these institutions act to promote a particular culture - and in this case, a white South African male culture - they are inherently racist. The best examples of this are often the students who tend to thrive in these environments, successfully allowing their accents, political ideologies, cultural preferences (music, food, sport) to be influenced. This not only acts to create inferiority complexes amongst blacks, but often assimilate blacks to the point where blacks begin to consciously or subconsciously suppress elements of their own identity - elements expressed by family members at home, but discouraged in these spaces.

However, this critique of these schools forms only one part of a greater problem for this form of cultural oppression extends well beyond schools to most, if not all, spaces of privilege. And it's further perpetuated through pop culture, mainstream media, and the education and judicial systems.

But there is hope. The rise of movements designed to combat this "new" form of discrimination - particularly at a student level - has served as a catalyst, increasing dialogue and awareness in privileged spaces. Protest movements such as 2015's "Rhodes Must Fall" (at UCT) and "Open Stellenbosch" have experienced enormous success because they've been able to resonate with the struggles and philosophy of the youth today: a philosophy with deep roots in Steve Biko's Black Consciousness - notice how I have referred to myself as "black" subscribing to Biko's definition of "black". Moreover, it is movements like these that laid the foundations for the nationwide "Fees Must Fall" - and there is more to come.

Consistent with global feminist movements, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) rights, Black Lives Matter (USA) and Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford (UK), it has become clear that the post-colonial call for equality has become my generation's fight. In a society where we are "born free", but haunted by an oppressive past, it is our duty to continue the struggle. *A luta continua*. Those before us fought for the right to speak; we need to fight now to be heard.

[16.02.2016]

And Ramy Pillay lives on in the dreams, hopes, strivings, achievements and concerns of his children, grandchildren and the generations to come.



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