

God's Coincidences

In 1971, I was medical leader of the 'War on Want' team flown by the RAF to help with the cholera epidemic among Bangladeshi refugees. Working with Mother Teresa, next to Calcutta airport, several things happened. My setting-up duties ended and I was about to leave to visit South India where I had previously worked as a medical missionary. Firstly, a film producer turned up who had somehow got permission to join the team. Young and medically trained, she had been intending to help but was not needed due to the arrival of doctors from Calcutta. She asked if she could come with me to the south and Mother Teresa was happy for her to do so. We talked of the possibility of making a film of the work of the cancer centre that I had helped to build in my last few years with the medical mission.

To cut a long story short, a telegram to the director of the centre resulted in him finding a cameraman in Madras. This man was free to come at one day's notice and had enough 16 mm film for the job. We all met up at the centre, only 24 miles from the southern tip of India, 48 hours later. Within five days we had planned, scripted and filmed the work of the centre, and of the cancer registry and follow up programme running then under the British Empire Cancer Campaign. The film producer returned to Mother Teresa and I returned to my hospital in Kent. The BBC film-cutter, who edited the film to the script, was amazed at the accuracy of the filming, reducing his cutting to about one fifth of his normal work. A friend hearing of the film introduced me to Donald Swann who arranged the music, whilst Michael Flanders did the voice over.

I tell you this, with its small coincidences, by way of introducing the most amazing 'coincidence' that has ever happened to me. Trying to find additional sponsors for the above centre, I was encouraged when an Indian doctor who had worked under me thought I might get help from Finlay's, a tea estate company. The recently retired managing director was a friend of his family. He suggested I rang his friend in Scotland. The retired director told me that



Finlay's had been taken over by Tata's, the steel conglomerate that ran Air India before it was nationalised - possibly the largest consortium in India. It was now Tata-Finlays! The only hope of making any meaningful contact would be to meet someone very high up in this vast organisation. I gave up the idea.

Two weeks later, my wife and I stopped for a meal at an inn about five miles from our home in Kent. An Indian man and woman came in, ordered their food and, as the room was full,

sat on the seats opposite to us on our table. He turned out to be the president of Tata-Finlays! A year or two later my wife and I stayed at his home in Calcutta and we had the privilege of taking his wife round Mother Teresa's work which, with Mother's permission, we were filming for her co-workers in Kent.

This was not the first time I had experienced this type of 'coincidence'. During the 16 years I worked as a missionary surgeon in South India we did a lot of gastric surgery. I had operated on a very poor patient with a peptic ulcer who had told us that he came from Bombay, 900 miles away. When he was well we gave him the maximum travelling allowed, his fare to the railroad terminal 60 miles away. I was very sceptical that he had come all the way from Bombay. Six weeks later I had to fly to Bombay to buy some urgently needed surgical instruments. Someone called out to me in the street - the very patient! Even in those days Bombay was a city of around nine million people. I felt really rebuked for not believing his story.

We have all experienced ways in which God leads, guides and encourages us in our lives, but there are times when these truly verge on the miraculous. We all know that God can and does 'do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine' (Ephesians 3:20). Sometimes, however, it is only when we 'meet the miracle' directly that it hits home and stays with us for the rest of our lives, deepening our faith.

Derek Jenkins was a missionary surgeon in South India

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