



Susan and Tasha on the beach at Clymping

Turning Points

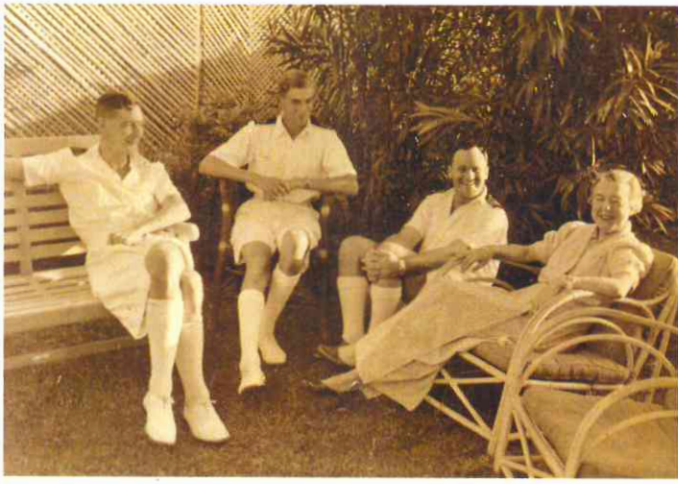
GOD'S HAND
IN MY LIFE

by Jeanne Faber



Our cottage at Clymping

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John (2nd from left) in Bombay on leave from the Indian navy



Our wedding photo, April 1963

AT the age of eleven, during the war, I was evacuated with my school from London to Leatherhead in Surrey. I joined a church, mostly because they had a lively drama group, and I loved acting. We were a close-knit bunch of friends and went to church together every Sunday evening. But that bore no relation to how we behaved at the youth club on a Saturday night.

I took confirmation classes and became confirmed into the church, because it seemed the thing to do, although my faith was very vague and did not appear to relate to my everyday life.

After the war my family returned to our home in south London. I occasionally went to church, but missed my friends and the social activities I had enjoyed in Surrey. However, one Sunday at church a new man was preaching. It suddenly seemed as if every word he said was directed at me! The next Sunday he had invited two young people to speak on what faith meant to them. I was astonished at the clarity of their convictions. They had obviously had a deep experience of God in their lives, which had made all the difference.

At the end of the service the clergyman invited any of us who wished to do so to go up to the altar and sign a book, promising to give our life to God. To my amazement I felt impelled to do this, along with about a dozen other young people. As a follow up, the minister called us together for training. It was challenging and appealing. He told us God could speak to us if we listened - a very new idea to me. He talked

about facing up to absolute moral standards in our lives and putting right what we had done wrong wherever we could. That certainly challenged me.

He also gave us free tickets to see a play, *The Forgotten Factor*, at the Westminster Theatre, owned by Moral Re-Armament. I loved the theatre and gladly accepted the invitation. I found the play riveting. It was a story of two families, an industrialist and a trade unionist, in which the son of one family found a deep experience of change in his life and was able to help solve problems within the family and in his father's business. I was fascinated. After the performance the cast came down to meet the audience and talk to anyone who wanted to know more about this idea of personal change and the decisions and commitment that lay behind it. I was hooked. At last I had met people whose faith was real and lived out in every day life.

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A few years later, after leaving school and finishing a secretarial training, I decided to work with MRA. Working as a secretary I had the chance to go to Caux, the world conference centre in Switzerland. There I saw the principles of MRA, which had made such an impact on my life, working out on a world scale. Communist miners from the Ruhr in Germany finding a new way of bringing change in the world beginning with themselves. A French Socialist leader, who had seen her son tortured in front of her eyes by the Germans, making a costly decision to forgive - and apologising to the Germans present for her hatred. She devoted the rest of her life to building bridges between France and Germany, visiting that country many times to bring healing. She

was decorated by the German government for her contribution to reconciliation and peace. Chancellor Adenauer of Germany and Robert Schuman of France met in Caux and laid the foundation for cooperation between their nations and the foundation of peace in Europe.

I was working in an office with an Irish friend and we used to share the thoughts that came in a time of quiet at the beginning of each day - a common practice in MRA, though still a fairly new idea to me. One day I discovered in my mail box an anonymous typed note, inviting me to meet the writer at eight o'clock that evening. I was shocked. Although a flirt by nature, I did not like being treated in this way and my pride was hurt. I had no idea who had sent the note, and I had no intention of accepting the invitation.

When I reached the office I showed the note to my friend, who said, "Would you let me deal with this?" I trusted her and was only too glad to get rid of it and forget the matter. My friend gave it to one of the leaders of the conference, who decide to go and meet this anonymous writer as he had requested. I never doubted it was from a young man. I can imagine the shock he must have felt to see this distinguished senior man approaching instead of me!

The next day I received a message from this senior gentleman, via my friend and colleague. It was: "Tell Jeanne the young man was sure she would know who had sent the note, and secondly he was quite sure she would turn up. Ask her to think seriously about this." That hit me hard. I knew I had flirted with several young men at the conference and felt deeply ashamed.

I was busy that morning in the office and

went down late for lunch, only to find there was not a single spare seat in the dining-room. I burst into tears and ran to my bedroom. I found myself on my knees by my bed, telling God I was so sorry for the kind of person I was, and deciding I had to leave the conference.

I looked up and saw the figure of Jesus standing at the end of my bed, his face full of love, and his arms stretched out to me. I just knew I was forgiven and need never be the same again, and that I was loved. An incredible experience and one that has been at the root of my faith ever since. I think I can honestly say I have not flirted with any man from that day on, and certainly not with my husband - although I was in love with him for two years before he proposed to me.

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Talking of my husband John, we were married some ten years later, and this is how it came about. Although we were both working with MRA in London, our paths rarely crossed. One day the man with whom he was sharing a room said, "John, isn't it about time you thought of getting married?" John replied, "Yes, but I don't know who to." A few weeks later he was walking in Richmond Park, one of his favourite haunts, and decided to ask God for advice. In his typical blunt fashion, he said, "Please God, tell me if I am meant to get married?" And he felt a clear sense that the answer was yes. He added, "In that case, you had better tell me who to." For the one and only time in his life, he heard a voice saying "Jeanne Archard". My name!

Only then did he remember an incident ten years before when he had seen me walking down the road with two friends, laughing. He remembered he had thought at the time, "That's the sort

of girl I would like to marry." I was still at school then, and our paths did not cross again for several years. I don't think he ever thought of me after that, until that walk in Richmond Park reminded him. Not very flattering!

After that initial occasion when he had seen me along the road in London, John went to work in India, invited by Frank Buchman, the founder of MRA. John was thrilled to be invited because he had longed to return to India, having been in the Indian Navy during the war, and felt he wanted to make amends for the superior way in which he and his fellow British officers had lived in that country. They mixed happily on board ship, but each went to their separate clubs whenever they landed. And John was never invited into an Indian home.

At the end of the six months, after an enthusiastic response to the ideas of MRA expressed in the four plays with which they had toured India and Pakistan, Frank Buchman asked for volunteers to stay on and follow up the work. John was one of those who responded and he stayed for three periods of three years, living in Indian homes, travelling on the buses, and meeting a cross section of people and leaders, arranging meetings, publishing literature to help people build their lives on what is right and to follow their deepest inner convictions. Indian people have a great sense of faith, and respect Christian principles when they see them lived out in practice. John always said India was his second home and he made friendships there which lasted a lifetime.

When John returned to Britain I was working with MRA as a secretary. Following the experience he had had in Richmond Park, it only

took three months for us to become engaged and another three months to get married! When he proposed to me he was astonished to discover that I had been in love with him for two years and always insisted that I had said yes before he finished asking the question! That began 46 years of a wonderfully happy and adventurous life together, until he died in 2009. It seems that life is like a jigsaw puzzle, and God fills in the pieces in his time.

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After three years of marriage, the greatest joy of our lives was the birth of a daughter, Susan, in London in 1966. I had prayed that if we had two children the first would be a boy and the second a girl, but if we only had one child (and we were older parents by this time), please God may it be a girl!

One of our memorable experiences was to go to India together as a family when our daughter was four years old. Her first school was in Bombay where she was the only white girl in her class. It was an excellent start as they take education very seriously in India. She loved it. On our return to Britain after three years she was well ahead of her English class. We had gone to India at the request of Indian friends, who invited John to handle the publishing for the growing work of MRA in the country, and to look after a centre in Bombay to which people could come and learn more about these ideas. We were also asked to host the cast of a play which came from Britain and to find accommodation for them and venues at which the play could be put on. Quite a task, especially for me, on my first visit to India!

We had very little money, although we were partly supported by a group of friends from Britain who believed in the value of the work we were

trying to do who sent a gift every month. However, one weekend the money ran out! We had no rupees to buy food for our household of six people. That weekend we had agreed to take part in an occasion in a friend's spacious home to raise money for the MRA conference centre near Poona. I could not help feeling somewhat resentful that we were helping to raise money by making cakes and fudge etc. for the conference centre when we were so short ourselves! However, I decided to go and give my best. On arrival, a lady from Norway who was on her way to the conference centre at Panchgani, in the hills of Maharashtra, came up and handed me a fat envelope. She said, "We in Norway usually send a regular gift to Panchgani, but this time we had the clear thought to give it to you in Bombay". The envelope was stuffed full of rupee notes! Tears ran down my cheeks. A wonderful proof of God's provision.

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Another memorable time was in America. We were attending a meeting of MRA friends who were planning for a conference in Atlanta. They were clear this was the right place to hold it, but had very few people who could prepare it and get it off the ground. John and I felt clearly we should offer to help, in spite of feeling completely out of our depth, not knowing the area and with only one contact - Conrad Hunte, the well known West Indian cricketer who lived with his wife in the city. A couple from America, a retired doctor and his wife, had the same conviction and we decided to take it on together. It was a wonderful experience and built a friendship that has lasted for life. It proved to be a most faith-giving three months. We were lent

a beautiful home as a base from which to work, and doors opened in an amazing way, just by following God's leading step by step, being led from person to person. Many people came to that conference from all over America and abroad and the results surpassed our wildest expectations, with articles in the press and radio interviews with some of the speakers.

A young Frenchman who had been working with us in London asked if he could come with us to Atlanta, at his own expense. He was a brilliant chef and the meals he produced for our guests in the home we had been lent opened many doors - and hearts! John was much teased by some of his American friends as being the English gentleman who travelled with his own personal chef...

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At the age of fourteen Susan went to a boarding school in Kent. John felt that as an only child it would be good for her to have the experience of living with other children, though I found this decision difficult.

In her early twenties Susan decided to become a nurse and proved to be an excellent and dedicated one, eventually becoming a Sister on the Intensive Care Ward of a large London hospital. During those years she suffered from severe depression, which took my husband and I completely by surprise, and found hard to understand. I greatly admire how my daughter coped with this difficult illness, showing great courage. In spite of visits to hospitals and ups and downs, she held on to her job as Sister and was a much valued member of the staff. She now lives a full and creative life, using her many gifts, and has a special understanding of other people and their needs.

I have learned a lot from my daughter. As someone who had lived a very happy and comfortable life, I felt completely out of my depth, not being able to understand or knowing how to help. I realise we all live through ups and down and challenges on life's journey and this is where we learn the most and come out the stronger.

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Later on my husband suffered a nervous breakdown. He took on a task in his late seventies that would have been daunting for a far younger man. He agreed to drive a friend from Paris to the Czech Republic for a series of speaking dates. This man was Chairman of the International Communications Forum, and had a deep conviction about the positive role of the press and the need for clear ethical values which would enable it to make a responsible and creative contribution to society. The journey itself was tiring and they stayed in different places most nights during the two weeks in the Republic. John became ill, but had to face the journey back. When he arrived home he was completely disorientated, felt he could not cope, and became depressed. We went on a short holiday, and one day sitting on the beach, he said, "I would like to swim out to sea and not come back." I was shattered.

It took time, but he felt he still had a role to play in the world, and with God's help began to live a fresh life, accepting his limitations. He could not cope with crowds or long conversations, but carried on caring for people one by one, and publishing books that gave faith and encouragement to others. God brought us through this difficult period, stronger and closer

to one another than ever before.

In the last year of his life John had conviction that a documentary film should be made about the life and work of one of his friends - a banker in South India whom John had met as a student. He really cared for the villagers around him and gave them loans and encouragement to start small businesses in order to be able to look after their families. He trusted them, and they trusted him. The loans were always repaid. John went to India to discuss this idea with people responsible for the conference centre at Panchgani. They agreed that such a film, based on practical experience of change, would be invaluable for use during the many conferences to which people came from all walks of life and from all over the country. But John knew nothing about making films. He published books but this was a wholly different ball-game.

A journalist friend wrote an article about this banker which appeared in the *Guardian Weekly*. A young film-maker read the article, and out of the blue telephoned John to say he would like to make such a film! We felt God was at work and wanted it to happen. The next issue was how to raise the money for such a project.

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John died unexpectedly in September 2009, with this much on his heart. He was a very fit man of 84 at the time, walking a much loved dog twice a day, and playing golf each week. One summer a friend from the USA and her granddaughter came to stay. Madeline, who was 13, longed to go to the beach. So we set off on a nice sunny day and John offered to go in swimming with her. The sea was rough and they were jumping over the waves, having a lovely time.

Suddenly Madeline felt she was being dragged out by the tide, and yelled at John for help. He was not a strong swimmer, but managed to reach her but the tide was strong and he got swept into the high breakwater. Because he was trying to hold her up above the waves he got badly scratched and grazed. I could see he was in difficulty and ran up to the beach café to phone for a lifeboat. They came within ten minutes and managed to bring them both onto the beach. John had become unconscious. They were taken to hospital, but were able to come home within a few hours.

The next day John seemed fine, and the young girl suffered only a few scratches. John's picture appeared in the papers as the local hero. A few days later he had a fall when walking the dog, and another time had to be brought home by a kind passer-by in a car as he had collapsed by the roadside. He was taken into the cardiac unit of the Chichester Hospital.

The consultant in charge of the ward assured us that John would recover. A week later I was summoned to the hospital to be told he was dying and had only hours to live. Susan came down from London and we went in to see him together.

As we entered the room he greeted us with a smile and said, "I've had a wonderful life and am ready to go." He was clearly at peace. That helped me to accept the situation and to trust that this was indeed God's timing. We had a wonderful hour together. Susan asked him where he would like his memorial service to be held, suggesting, impishly, "Westminster Abbey, Daddy?" With a dead straight face, John replied, "No, I think St Paul's." We settled happily for a service in our

local country church, and later a thanksgiving occasion at our MRA headquarters in London, where we had lived and worked for many years.

Before we left, because John was haemorrhaging badly and needed nursing care, he suggested we might pray together and Susan said, "I'm not very good at that." John said that didn't matter and we both prayed. Susan added, "God's will be done". "That says it all," said John with a smile. On his gravestone Susan had engraved: *"A life well lived in the service of God. Much loved."*

At his funeral the Vicar suggested a retiring collection was usual, and asked how we would like the money to be used. My daughter and I immediately thought of this idea of making a documentary film, and invited people to give a contribution towards it, in memory of John. To our astonishment we received three thousand pounds! Within a year the film was made and has been widely used ever since.

I had always dreaded what would happen if John died before me. We had lived and worked closely for 46 years, rarely being apart. I expected to collapse in a soggy heap, facing life without him. But God gave me an amazing sense of peace, and I knew I had to choose between living with regret, or living with gratitude. I feel as close to John now as I always did, and thank God daily for the gift of those 46 years. Life goes on. I now live with my daughter in a charming old cottage in Clymping, West Sussex. And my sister has unexpectedly come to live nearby, after being in America for about forty years. It is a gift to see more of each other and we enjoy doing things together.

The jigsaw is not yet complete!



Loving life in Bombay



Susan, training to be a nurse in London. Drawing by John

John, Jemma & Jeanne at Arundel

