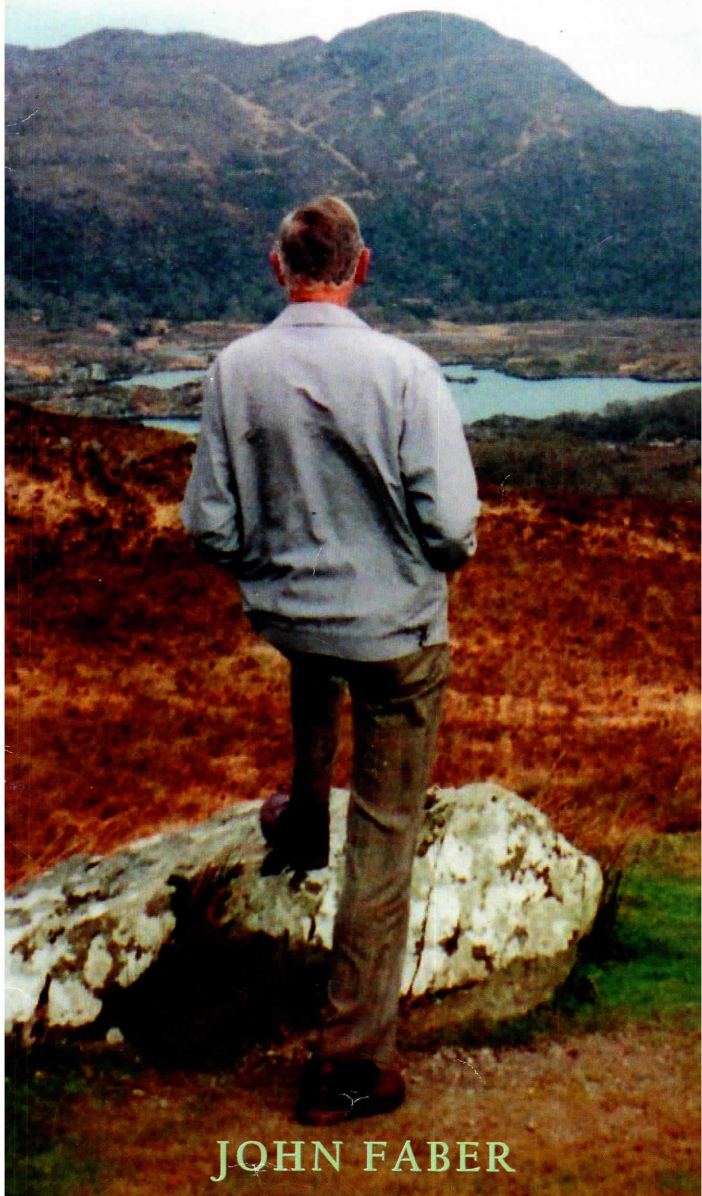


*Finding  
a Purpose  
in life*



JOHN FABER

# *Finding a Purpose in life*

By JOHN FABER

**I**N my teenage years I used to lie awake at night and wonder, "What am I here for? What's my role? What is my purpose?"

I didn't know much about God then, and it was my parents, particularly my mother, who decided my future moves. Her father had been an admiral in the Royal Navy and she was brought up in Portsmouth Dockyard. She wanted to put my name down for Pangbourne Naval College.

My father came from an Austrian family; his father had moved to Madeira where his sister had married into the Blandy family. They owned a bank, a newspaper, hotels; they refuelled ships en route to South Africa, and specialised in wine-making, among other things. Father did not want to steer my career. It had been taken for granted that he would follow his father's footsteps into the wine and hotel business - he had not been given a choice, so he didn't want to influence me.

Mother won the day and off I went, at thirteen, to naval college in 1938. War broke out in 1939 and by 1942 I became a sub-lieutenant in the Royal



*Off to Naval College*



*Father, with John and his twin Gillian, and baby Bridget*

Naval Reserve at seventeen and served mostly in the Far East. In March 1946 I was twenty-one and was demobbed, wondering what to do next.

I suppose our genes play a role in our lives! My mother was a gifted water-colour artist and I inherited a talent for drawing and designing. From my father I think I inherited a love for production and a determination to complete what I take on.

While in India in the war I had admired the cinema posters. When a woman in the advertising business heard of my interest in advertising she gave me her boss's address in London, and when I went to



*Mother*

see him he recommended five small advertising companies where I might get a good training.

A few days later from our home in the village of Wonersh in Surrey, I ventured forth to follow up these introductions. It was difficult to get a job, as posts were held for those who had worked there before being called up for the war. I offered my services free for six months, hoping this would lead to a paid job at the end of it. The third company offered me a modest salary of £2 a week, so I took it straight away. It proved an ideal way to learn the business of advertising. But there was little artwork involved and my mother arranged for me to attend evening classes at the Regent Street Polytechnic.

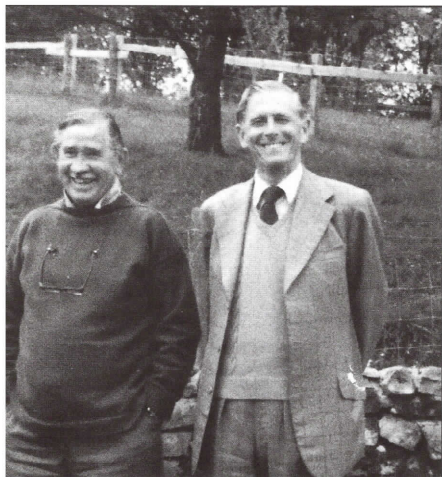
She also arranged for me to be interviewed in the City by two of the family directors of Blandys. My father had died in 1943, and she expected me to follow in his footsteps instead of pursuing this crazy career in advertising!

However, another factor had come into the equation – Moral Re-Armament (MRA). I'd had an accident in the war, driving a naval vehicle in Sri Lanka, when I was forced into a ditch to avoid a bullock cart coming over a narrow bridge. I began to suffer from a severe backache.

In hospital, back in Britain, after an operation for slipped discs in my spine, I got to know a parachute officer, Col. Leonard Fitzroy-Smith. He had slipped on the Mess steps and injured his back (not by jumping from an aircraft!). He told me



*Richard Blandy, chairman  
of the family firm*



Col. Leonard Fitzroy-Smith, with John

how his life had changed by coming into contact with people in Moral Re-Armament, and once we left hospital he took me to see a play. MRA owned the Westminster Theatre in London and ran

a series of dramas which

helped people take stock of their life - what motives ran them and how to find God's plan and purpose. The play, *The Forgotten Factor*, told the story of a young man, much like me, who had found a new role in life after being honest with his father, putting things right, and starting to listen to God for direction for the future of his life.

## *For my glory—or his service?*

I bought two books at the end of the performance, took them home to read, and started the experiment of listening to God for his direction. In obedience to one of my thoughts, I wrote to a naval friend of mine from whom I had stolen some money. Later I was honest with my mother about taking money from my father's wallet when on leave from the Navy. Another thought was to give up life-drawing at the Polytechnic, and study at the London College of Printing instead. This set me on the road for a new future which took me to many parts of the world. Studying art was for my

own glory, but God wanted me to use my gifts for others, in his service.

But where was all this leading me in finding a worthwhile purpose and role for my life? One of the many people I met at this time was Ian Scortino, who suggested that if I wanted to learn more about MRA the thing to do was to take six month's sabbatical from my job, and start working with MRA—unpaid!

He also invited me to come to some Bible studies in London, held on Sunday evenings. One evening the study touched my heart so profoundly that I started to cry. When it was over, everyone left except me. After a few minutes Ian came back with a friend, Roger Hicks, and we sat around a small coffee table (which I now own!) and talked.

Roger asked me why I was afraid of giving my life to God.

I said, "He might ask me to speak at Hyde Park Corner, or to go to China as a missionary."

He replied, "There are two good reasons why God would not ask you to go to China. 1) God is a gentleman, and 2) He has more regard

for the Chinese!" This cut the ground from under my feet, and we had a good laugh.

We knelt down and I asked God to take charge of my life, and if he wanted to, to use me in his plan. I remember walking down the street afterwards, so light in body and spirit that I seemed to be walking on air.



*Roger Hicks*

## *What are your motives?*

This is where my story really starts. I had to choose: should I continue up the ladder in advertising (of course with the motive of cleaning it up a bit by following MRA principles), or accept the chance of a career in Blandys (who insisted I got a degree in economics first, which did not appeal to me), or take six months off to work with MRA?

It was at Easter 1948, when I was twenty-three, that I sat on a hillside near my home in Surrey to face this dilemma. My mother knew my mind was in turmoil. I decided to ask God what He wanted me to do.

Looking down on the village shrouded in a thin mist, I felt as if I was looking down on the world. A question had been put to me by Garth Lean, an author, working with MRA: "What are your motives?" and this rang in my ears.

I had thought I could apply MRA's absolute moral standards in the advertising world, but God seemed to say, "I want you to advertise change—not try to change advertising."

I walked down the hill and returned home. Mother was in the garden.

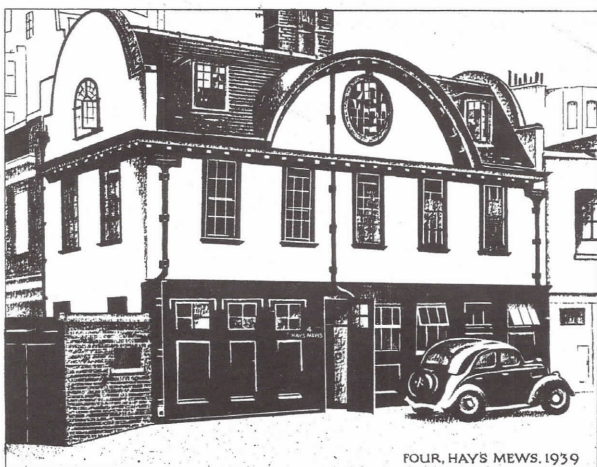
"Well," she said, "what have you decided?"

I replied, "I have decided to let God run my life and to work with MRA."

"In that case," my generous-hearted mother replied, "that is what you must do."

\* \* \*

The following Monday I started work at Hays Mews, the London headquarters of MRA. I was given the corner of a desk and told to file the correspondence in the out-tray of a man called Rex Dilly. A humble enough job, but an excellent way to learn about all the different printing and



publishing projects in hand at that time. Two months later I was thrown into the thick of things in South Wales where MRA was touring with an industrial drama—the same play that had caught my imagination in London.

My job during the Welsh tour was to organise teams who would sell books after the play to the hundreds of miners and their families as they poured out of the theatre. Late at night, in a miner's cottage in Treorchy where I was given hospitality, I would count the money taken and try to match it with the number of books sold. The amounts never seemed to tally!

After a three month tour of the mining and steel towns we assembled in Cardiff for a conference. There I met Frank Buchman, founder of MRA, for the first time.

\* \* \*

Back at Hays Mews I found myself, with several others, involved in the packing of books to go out around the world, and at the end of the day large sacks of parcels were whisked off to the Post Office. I think I spent about two years packing



books. Looking out of the window one day I saw a young woman in the street laughing with her friends and thought “That’s the girl I would like to marry”. And I did—some ten years later!

By now I felt I had begun to find my special calling—the design and production of books. I had a desk of my own. Apart from any artistic skills, I found I loved figures (perhaps inherited from my father?) and I enjoyed the whole process of producing books—from meeting the author, discerning the special reason for each book, then the fascinating process of deciding on the format, what style of type to use, the weight of the paper, gauging how many copies to print, getting prices from two or three printers, and—all important, finding the right artist who could best create the cover design, and then writing the blurb which helps sell the book. In my experience the title and cover design often take as long as creating the rest of the book!



*John (left) became a director of Grosvenor Books*



*John (2nd left) in the Indian Navy being entertained in India*

## *Off to India*

At 17, from Pangbourne, I had been drafted into the Royal Naval Reserve and sent to a battleship in Scapa Flow in Scotland. But because we'd lost several battleships at that stage of the war (1942) we just spent our time sailing around a buoy! I got bored, so volunteered for everything that came up on the notice board, including the Indian Navy. I reckoned their ships would be smaller (mine held 1,200 men), the seas calmer, and the pay double!

I was accepted, but it was only after the war, when I met MRA, that I faced the superior way I had lived as an English naval officer in India. No one had invited me into an Indian home; the British had their own clubs in every port, and we were only entertained by British people living there. Somehow I hoped to go back and make amends for my arrogant attitude by serving that country in any way I could.

I was therefore delighted, in 1952, to receive an invitation from Frank Buchman to join an international group of over 200 people to travel throughout India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.



*Prime Minister Pandit Nehru greets Frank Buchman*

Various plays were shown, free of charge, and books and pamphlets were available for people to buy. After only two weeks every book was sold! When Peter Howard, the well-known journalist, was told of the situation he said, “This is the typical disease of the British—inadequate thinking.”

I made a list of what had been sold, multiplied it by the length of the tour ahead, and then doubled that! My friend Rex Dilly and others in London spent the whole weekend in London packing up the order, and in the event Rex himself came out, too, to be sure we did better in future.

We then had an array of books available for every occasion—performances of the plays, meetings, visits to colleges and unions, etc. I reckoned we sold between eight and ten tons of books by the time the visit ended in Pakistan, via Kashmir.

In Srinagar, capital of Kashmir, Frank Buchman called us all together and asked who would volunteer to remain behind and follow up the many contacts we had made. I was one of fifty to put up their hands.

My slender gifts as a publisher often came in useful in the next three years, when Indian editions of various titles were needed, several of them in local languages. One project suggested by

Rajmohan Gandhi, a grandson of the Mahatma, was a series of children's character-building books by Anasuya Paithankar. There were four titles, beautifully illustrated by David Bygott.

I lived in many Indian homes and found a love for that amazing land second only to my love of England.

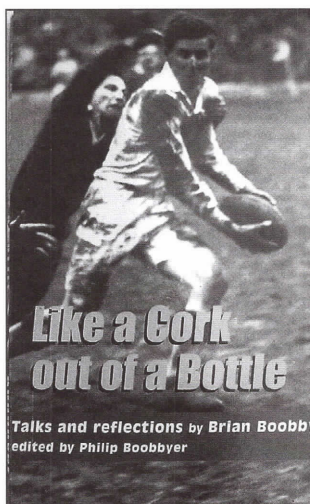
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Back in London the first book I designed was *Annie the Valiant* by Clara Jaeger. I discovered that Maltese printers were cheaper than the UK, where the print unions were demanding higher and higher wages, so several of our books were printed there, and I had the chance to visit Malta with a Maltese friend to attend a Book Fair and to meet his family.

Then Chinese printers started knocking at my door and I began producing books with Mr So and So (two brothers!) Even with the cost of freight, I was able to keep the cost price down and therefore the selling price to our global customers.

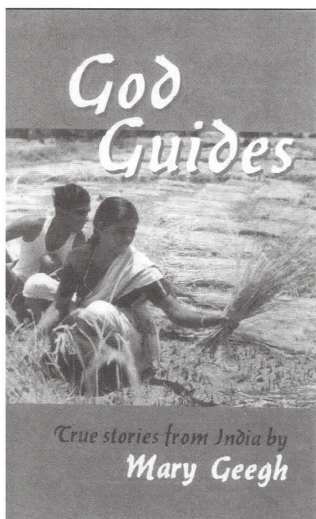
## *Teamwork pays*

Publishing is very much a matter of teamwork. Dr Philip Boobbyer asked me to publish a book of his father's articles and talks to students. Brian Boobbyer had played rugby for England and one newspaper headline described him bursting out of a scrum "like a cork out of a bottle". This became the title of the book!



Another dimension of teamwork is to have a good friend—someone who can help you enlarge your output and outreach, and advise you, yet stay in the background. Enter Hugh Nowell.

Hugh put me in touch with Dennis Foss, who had started a small publishing business called Linden Hall. I was able to join him as a book designer and production manager, and together we published many books about people whose lives had been turned upside down by coming into contact with MRA. Linden Hall came to a halt when Dennis died, but before long Hugh put other books in my path which needed to see the light of day.



*The cover shows Ananda and his wife working in the fields*

Looking through my bookshelf one day I came across a short book titled *God Guides* which a remarkable lady, Mary Geegh, had given me when I was at an American Booksellers Fair some years earlier. I had known her in India, running a school for poor children. Her little book contained striking stories of how listening to God had changed people's lives.

By this time, Mary had died and I was unable to trace her family, but I decided to republish the book. A Norwegian cartoonist friend, Einar Engebretsen, illustrated some of the humorous tales and we were able to print it very cheaply in India in large quantities for the world.



*What a reunion we had—treated like royalty!*

During my three years in India in the fifties Mary had introduced me to a farmer, Ananda Reddi. His transformation from being a communist agitator to a constructive and caring farmer who shared his well water with needy neighbours during a drought featured in one of the Indian MRA plays. I had lost touch with him over the years, as he never replied to any letters. But fifty years later I managed to trace him through another Indian friend, V.C. Viswanathan. What a reunion we had! Ananda by then was 86, a remarkable age for an Indian farmer. Jeanne and I took the local bus to his village, and the entire population turned out to welcome us, with two bands, TV and press—we were treated like royalty.

And of course I felt I had to publish his story, both in English and in his own local language, Telegu. Ananda travelled with me for its launching at a big MRA conference in Asia Plateau, near Pune, in 2006. He made a brief speech:

“I have learned three things from MRA. 1) It’s not who is right, but what is right. 2) When I point my finger at my neighbour blaming him,

there are three more pointing back at me. 3) A man has two ears and one mouth—he should listen twice as much as he talks.” And he sat down to a roar of applause. It was the shortest speech of the conference and probably the most effective!

## *Books change people*

Books make astounding journeys. It is always fascinating to hear where they get to, and the effect they have on those who read them, encouraging them to do God’s work.

An example of this involved a book by Garth Lean and Sydney Cook, on how people can find a faith and live effective lives. So on its spine were the words ‘Cook and Lean’. One woman saw it on the library shelf and thought, “Ah, just what I need—a book on diet and how to slim.”

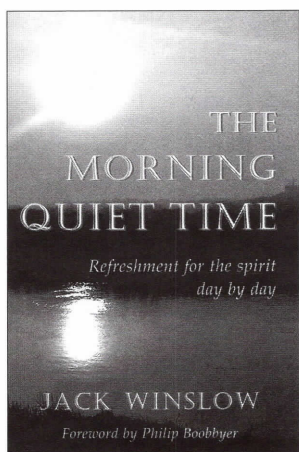
A month later we heard from Garth who said, “A lady has just visited me, eager to find a faith. She has read Sydney’s and my book and has started to do some secretarial work for me. She is very efficient, and I wondered if she could help you in London?” She became a good friend and lived with us in London for some months.

Another example is Jack Winslow, who tells how a book transformed his life as a Christian minister working in India. He describes a journey to lead a Christian convention in Jaffna in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Earlier he had received some unusual letters from two of his sisters. They had been to a meeting of the Oxford Group (later MRA) which had made a great impression on them: “a spiritual experience of a depth and intensity beyond anything they had known before”. Winslow was intrigued and began to wish he too could have the same kind of experience. Just

before his journey to Jaffna a book arrived from his sisters called *For Sinners Only* and he read it on the train. It impressed him deeply. It quickened in him a longing for a greater effectiveness in his own life and work. He saw how much concern he had for his pride and reputation. He also realised how critical he was of others, much too ready to see their faults and not his own.

He arrived in Jaffna. He gave an address to a large crowd and then called for a time of silence. During it he felt a strong urge—a divine command, to tell the congregation of his own decision to make a deep surrender of his own life, and mentioned some of the things that had held him back. The results were astonishing. He had a sense of having been re-made, of new life flowing into him. Hundreds of others had a similar experience that night and in the days that followed. He added, “For me, that experience has stood the test of more than twenty years.”

That all happened in 1932. Six years later he wrote *When I Awake*. This book had such an impact on a friend in Scotland who came across it by chance in 2004 and felt it was the perfect book for



today. She believed it presented so clearly the necessity, and the ease, of having a time of quiet reflection in the early morning. It had long been out of print. We re-titled it *The Morning Quiet Time* and it was a great success, going around the world in English before being translated into other languages, and

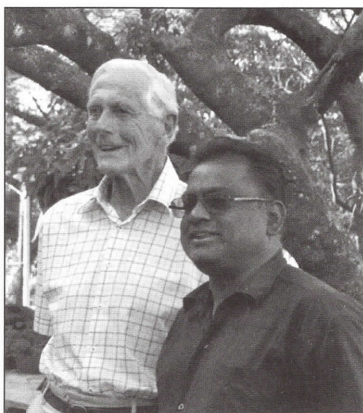


helping many people find something new in their own lives.

So, from the small beginnings of a man reading a book on a train in India, another book went on its journey to many nations, affecting generations in the following century!

## *The next adventure—or?*

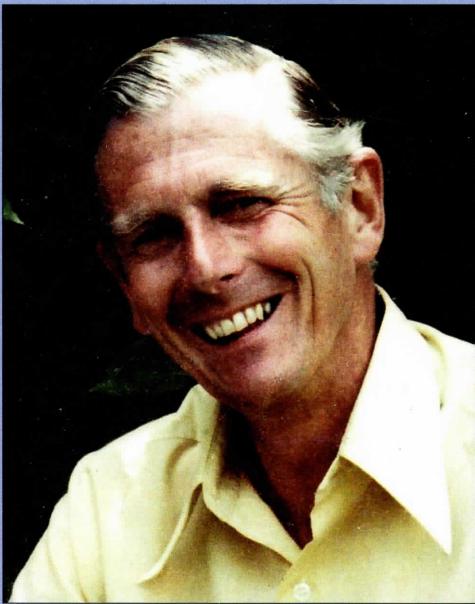
Now I find myself moving in the world of films, which I know nothing about—much more complicated than creating a book. But having read the story of my old friend Parthiban, a banker, and the remarkable work he has done in helping poor people out of poverty and the hands of money-lenders in different parts of India, I had the clear conviction that this story should be made into a short documentary, perhaps with other stories of miracles in people's lives.



*With Parthiban the banker*

When his story appeared on the web of *The Guardian Weekly*, it was read by Andrew, the son of a good friend, Peter Hinton, who was so impressed he offered his services as a film producer and cameraman. Now the script is being written in India and I am helping to raise the money to get this project off the ground. All very exciting.

Life's adventures continue, even at 84!



**John Faber** died on 2nd September 2009, aged 84. The last thing he did was to finish working on this little book.

He wrote it in the hope that it might help those of a younger generation find a faith and a purpose in life, as he himself did in his twenties - and which lasted till his dying day.

Life was always an adventure for John, to be lived and enjoyed to the full, led and upheld by a loving heavenly Father.

