

# In the tracks of a missionary – Chapter 17

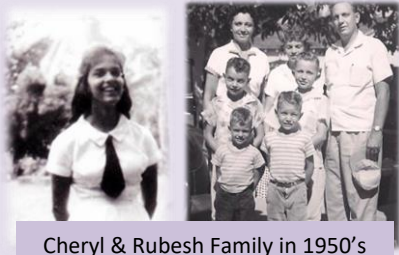
South Africa ..... Dubai ..... Sri Lanka ..... South Africa

**Unexpected challenges; Opportunities seized; Disappointments to overcome; Lessons learned; Decisions faced; God's Amazing Grace!**

2 months, 13 cities, towns & villages;  
15 separate missionary connections;  
6 messages; 5 different missions;  
100-year Anniversary; journey continues

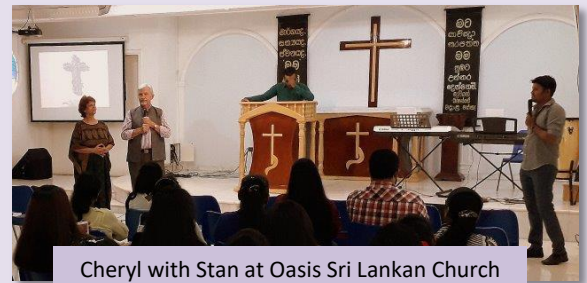
**A brief background:** In Sri Lanka, Cheryl grew up in a church with an American missionary family.

Two of the young boys, Stan & Ted Rubesh, have grown up to lead their own families into the mission field. One family, Stan & Carol, in the United Arab Emirates, (Al Ain, UAE) and the other family, Ted & Renate, in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Stan & Ted and their wives, are veterans in the mission field. They play a pivotal role in the two countries of the UAE and Sri Lanka. Their friendship and hospitality became part of our own personal “journey” to these two countries. Cheryl had not seen Stan in 55 years, nor Ted in 20 yrs. But the ties of being in God’s Family, certainly bind! And her gratitude to the Rubesh parents still holds strong.



Cheryl & Rubesh Family in 1950's

**United Arab Emirates (UAE, Al Ain and Dubai):** Truly an “oasis” in the Arab Peninsula. “The Oasis” is a Christian based hospital and expatriate Church compound that has survived in this Arab-Muslim environment for almost 50 years. When entering the hospital on a table for all to see, are a Bible and a Quran which rest side by side. Scripture verses are painted on the walls, juxtaposed by the photographs of the Ruling Family



Cheryl with Stan at Oasis Sri Lankan Church



Stan, Cheryl, Carol & Tom

in Arab garb. The Mission is led by Cheryl’s childhood friend, Stan Rubesh. Here, 40 different Christian churches from different countries are allowed to meet and worship our Lord Jesus Christ. The land for the church and hospital were donated by the Emeritus Ruling Family, in respect and appreciation for an American missionary doctor who in the early 1900’s, within a Bedouin tent, helped many of the Arab people with medical and spiritual needs. Right outside the Christian compound, a mosque’s call to prayer is interspersed with the singing of Christian hymns. Cheryl was invited by Stan to give her testimony at the Sri Lanka Church, which was translated into Sinhalese.

**L**ater, we travelled to Dubai, where we were guests in a Christian “Safe House.” There, the “M” word “missionary” was not to be spoken. The Gospel could be preached, but only in restricted, designated areas of the Sheikdom. There we met up with missionaries travelling from and to Lebanon, Philippines, Oman, India, Afghanistan, South Korea, China, U.K, Ireland, Canada, USA and Sri Lanka! (For security, we were requested not to take photos). All with intriguing stories of what brought them through Dubai and on their way to their missionary work within the various countries. We celebrated a late “Thanksgiving” Feast with all of them! It was as one might imagine travelling through Antioch in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, meeting up with Paul and Barnabas!

**D**ubai is an incredible place, abounding in wealth, glamour and abundance; a showcase of what the Arabs want the world to see. As Stan & Carol stated, “Desert tribesmen have gone from Bedouin tents to lavish mansions and from camels to Cadillacs in a mere 50 years.” Christmas in Dubai was surreal. We were even showered with manufactured snow amidst Christmas music and decorations. Yet, there was not one musical

number about the true meaning of Christmas, nor was the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ mentioned in public. Even King Solomon realised the futility of it all, *“Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun”* (Eccl 2:11).

**W**e salute Stan and Carol who have been ministering there for nearly 30 years. The stories they tell of how seemingly insignificant events “coincide” to bring about God’s Plan & Purpose, are truly amazing.

**Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and Bethesda Gospel Hall:** Tom was invited to give the Christmas message at the church. This is the church where Cheryl grew up and was saved at age 8. We spent much of our time here participating in their “Breaking of Bread” services (in three languages), prayer meetings, Bible study services and Youth meetings. There were many opportunities for Tom to offer prayer and give short messages.

**B**ethesda Gospel Hall was the centre of Bible teaching during the 1950’s and 60’s, in Colombo. An American missionary by the name of Bruce Kerr, grounded the church in sound doctrinal, expository



teaching. The church is Plymouth Brethren and staunchly Dispensational. God used the early years of Bethesda, together with Bruce Kerr and the Rubesh Missionary Family to establish other sound doctrinal resource centres in Sri Lanka. We visited Lanka Bible College in Kandy, Colombo Theological Seminary, and Back to the Bible in Colombo. Bethesda Gospel Hall celebrated 100 years in February 2019, which we will talk about more, later.



Cheryl at Bethesda Gospel Hall

**Kandy, Sri Lanka (Home of the sacred tooth of Buddha!):** A missionary’s home often serves as an inn for other “transient, visiting or wayward & wandering” missionaries, guest lecturers, students, friends and family, meetings for prayer and Bible Study. When the “window” opened at the busy Rubesh Home in Kandy, we thanked God and accepted their invitation. We were novices in the home of veteran missionaries of 40 years, Ted and Renate Rubesh; an ideal home to apply Proverbs 1:5, *“A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.”* Shuffling between incoming and outgoing guests, travelling between lecturing at two



Veteran Missionary Ted & Cheryl

separate Bible Colleges, writing doctrinal messages for Back to the Bible “Guidelines” Teaching Magazine, Ted and Renate always honour the Lord with their love and hospitality, offering more than a cup of water (Mk 9:41). Ted’s parting comment to Tom as we celebrated Cheryl’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday was, *“What have you learned in all of this?”* His profound question summed-up our entire 2-month journey to Dubai and Sri Lanka. The merits of our missionary journey would depend upon our answer. Ted, like his brother Stan in Dubai, helped us to see more clearly, God’s Plan for our mission service.



Tom, Renate, Cheryl & Ted

**T**here are striking historical similarities between Sri Lanka and South Africa; not to mention the Dutch influence of the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century Settlers, British colonization, and Ceylon’s independence in 1948. The Dutch also became the *Boers* (farmers) in South Africa, speaking the heavy Afrikaans language. The Dutch Reformed Church has strong ties in both countries.





Major Tom, Colonel & Captain



Sri Lanka Military Academy

Cheryl's hometown of Bandarawela in the Hill Country, Cheryl was invited to speak at her school, which used to be a Catholic Convent, "The Little Flower Convent." Today, the school is government owned with over 2,000 young girls. Cheryl spoke to 30 girls who professed to be Christian. The "holy" priest was elated and kept prompting Cheryl to speak of her former education with the school and praises of the Catholic Church. Cheryl categorically presented and challenged the girls with the clear message of the Gospel!



Cheryl speaking with Christian girls at her old school



**Medical Emergency!!!** One of the immediate concerns of a missionary travelling in a foreign country (albeit with a bag, a few coins, extra sandals, but no sword) is a medical emergency. Where to go? How to get there? Whom to see? This was in the small town of Nuwara Eliya. Tom flagged down a bushy



Tuk-Tuks everywhere!!!



Drivers, tuk-tuks and snickers bars

haired Buddhist **tuk-tuk** driver, Shalameer. Zipping along the single lane streets to 3 different clinics (*the fat little smiling Buddha bouncing happily on his dashboard*), but the 3 clinics all with no doctors! Shalameer headed to the only public hospital in the region. With over 100 waiting patients, Shalameer *waggled* his way to the front, sought out a doctor and called for Tom to be examined (*although, it was Cheryl sick in bed*). Tom coughed thrice, the doctor said he would live, and gave him some medication. Cheryl had a speedy recovery. Grateful and thankful Tom bought a box of snickers chocolate bars for the fleet of tuk-tuk drivers. Distraught Tom sitting on a small rock next to the tuk-tuk drivers, one leaned over to Tom and asked, "Are you a Christian?" "Yes" Tom responded excitedly, and the young driver invited Tom to come to his church to give a sermon! Who can explain God's intervention in our times of most need? Here was a tuk-tuk driver "evangelising" Tom the missionary; how ironical?

**Final days in Colombo at Bethesda Gospel Hall:** It was a rather unusual experience: Memorable, yet somewhat troubling. The church revelled in the correct teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to the exclusion of sound expository Bible teaching. Sadly, the church had erased part of its history of the influence of the American Missionaries and Bible Teachers of the 1950's and 60's, and continued to uphold some useless legalistic practices. We were invited to attend its Centennial Anniversary. Everyone was dressed in colourful traditional and cultural dress. Some of the men, including Tom were invited to give short messages.

Tom spoke of “*sic transit Gloria mundi .... the glory of the world passes by*”, as we had learned so many times from our Pastor, R B Thieme Jr. Tom said, “*We can revel in this memorable time of celebration. But we must remember Isaiah’s words, ‘The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever’*”.

Ladies at the Anniversary Celebration



Tom speaking at the Anniversary Celebration



\*\*\*\*\* Thus ended our 2-month mission trip to Dubai and Sri Lanka\*\*\*\*\*

**Return to South Africa:** Many have asked if and when we will be relocating to Sri Lanka. It is a fair and relevant question, and certainly was at the forefront of our thinking. God makes His Plan undeniably clear! All we have to do is **Listen!** As we landed in South Africa, we were picked up by a “CityBug” shuttle, which continued to play Christian hymns during our 4-hour return trip home (the bus line is owned by Christians). We were then picked up by the taxi driver to bring us home. He asked that we pray together before departing.



Tom with Pastors at Barberton Conference venue



Tom with Pastors at Matsulu Conference venue



**We listened** to local pastors in our home town of Barberton who are hungry to increase their understanding of the Word of God. We are now holding Bible lectures in a conference venue across the street from our house. The

owners are also Christians ..... **We listened** to local pastors in the black township of Matsulu who need help to gain accreditation and accountability as *professional preachers in*, Biblical interpretation (hermeneutics and exegesis), Bible survey (Old & New Testaments), Systematic Theology, History of the church, Church Leadership, and more.... **We listened** to the Ethiopian pastors in Johannesburg who have requested Tom to return and teach the Gospel of John and other Books of the Bible.

Our Lord Jesus Christ made it clear when He sent out His disciples: As long as the welcome mat is out, stay and teach (Matthew 10:11-13). And so, our Journey continues.

Our prayer request is that the Pastors attending our Bible Lectures will **Listen**, then faithfully teach their own congregations as shepherds are commanded to feed their sheep. (2 Tim 2:2; Jn 21:15)

As always, in God’s Matchless Grace,

*You a Cheery?*



100-Year Anniversary!!!



Cheerio!