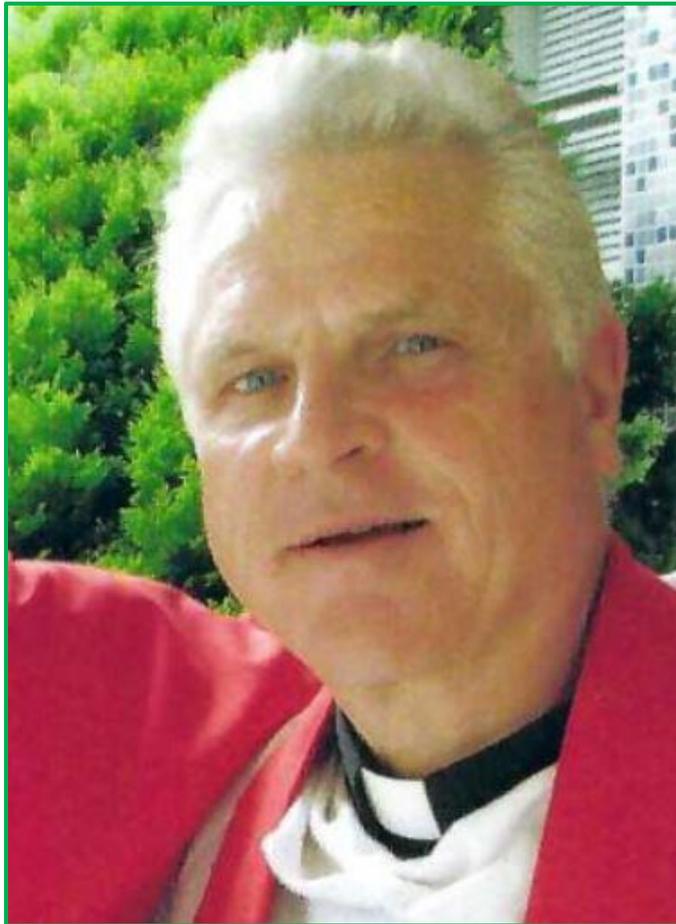




Walking the world with Rev. Thomas A. Nibbe

Written by Jean Bartlett, December 3, 2021



It wasn't easy to find a way into Pakistan, until it was.

Beginning in 1972, Tom Nibbe—with his: Bachelor of Arts, American History and Communication, St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota; Master of Divinity, Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, California; and Master of Pastoral Counseling, GTU, Berkeley—was the UC Berkeley Student Counselor in Sproul Hall.

Married to Priscilla Najmuddin since the summer of 1968 (Priscilla is from Lahore, Pakistan), ordained into the Lutheran ministry in 1969 – throughout his time as University Counselor, Tom took extended audited coursework at Berkeley in Hindi-Urdu. This coursework consisted of language and literature. In addition, he spoke Hindi-Urdu with Priscilla. The couple also welcomed three daughters: Ayesha in 1970, Yasmin in 1971 and Shama in 1975.

In 1976, Tom and his family got a call to go to Pakistan. For two years, the family tried repeatedly to obtain visas to the country. But the Pakistani Visa Office would not provide them. The door remained closed.

"Because we were coming as missionaries to a Muslim country," Tom explained. Then he smiled. "I believe God intervenes."

And so it happened in early 1978, Javed Iqbal, a Pakistani philosopher and, at that time, the Senior Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, was presenting a lecture at Berkeley. The Senior Justice's father was Muhammad Iqbal. Muhammad Iqbal is recognized as the "Spiritual Father of Pakistan."

"Senior Justice Iqbal's father was a renowned Muslim thinker," Tom said, "the architect of modern moderate Islamic thought. He was called, 'Mawlānā.' This is because he was revered as a political scientist and religious thinker of the highest register. Muhammad Iqbal was and remains a luminary to me.

"I attended the Senior Justice's lecture and there was a time for 'question and answer.' I asked somewhat complex questions which revealed that I knew quite a bit about what was going on in Pakistan, both politically, and otherwise. During the session, Senior Justice Iqbal said to me, 'You know a hell of a lot about Pakistan!'

"I said, in turn, 'Sir, I really love your country and I love the Pakistani people. I love studying about Pakistan's history, its poetry and its music. That's all I can say.'

"After his lecture was over he came up to me and said, 'I am really hungry. Would you eat with me? Do you know a good place in town?'" And so the two men sat down to supper.

"You really need to come to Pakistan," the Senior Justice told Tom.

"Oh yes, I want to, but I can't," Tom responded.

"What do you mean you can't come to Pakistan?"

"Well look, I've gotten my degree in religious studies. I am a Christian and I would have to go over there as a missionary. You must understand that?"

"That doesn't make any difference," the Senior Justice said. "You would do good there I am sure!"

"To which I replied, 'Indeed, I would be creditable!'"

The door to Pakistan opened. With one phone call from Senior Justice Iqbal, the Nibbe family had their visas within the week.

"God placed the most important, well-known, contemporary Pakistani in the world right in my lap. Then that influential person wanted me to have supper with him. Senior Justice Iqbal and I, sat and talked, and he made it very clear that he personally wanted me to come to Pakistan. After two years of trying to get visas, we got visas immediately. If that isn't God's provision there, nothing is!"

When the family left for Pakistan, Ayesha was 7, Yasmin was 6 and Shama was 3. The missionaries arrived in Peshawar with World Mission Prayer League of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Call was for four years.



Tom and Priscilla with Ayesha, Shama and Yasmin, take off for Pakistan, April, 1978.

"The biggest question before us, when we got to Pakistan, was where do I go? Should I serve at the Christian Study Center to dialogue with Muslims for four years over issues that have to do with Islam and Christianity? Should I go to the North-West Frontier Province where I would have more freedom to extend the Gospel, become part of the human landscape, or even teach Old Testament at a seminary there? I could teach in the languages of Urdu and Punjabi. Do I go to the Gujranwala Theological Seminary in the Punjab? Should I be a pastor in the city of Lahore, Rawalpindi or Peshawar?"

"The opportunity seemed obvious. I would become the Vicar of the former garrison church, now Saint John's Cathedral of the Church of Pakistan."

Located in Peshawar (Cantt), the former garrison church served British soldiers stationed in the North-West Frontier Province. It was built between 1851 and 1860 and is situated on one end of the 13-acre cantonment. In 1978, the Cathedral Church represented four Christian traditions: Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran and Scottish Presbyterian. There were 10,000 people in the congregation and multiple languages were needed. While dozens of languages are spoken in Pakistan, these five languages, along with English, were needed at Saint John's: Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi and Baluchi. (The first four of these languages have more than 10 million speakers each, in Pakistan, and the fifth language has approximately 5 million speakers in Pakistan.)

"Saint John's was the largest garrison church property in the British Empire. It was large because at that time in Peshawar and in Mardan, most of the British soldiers in old India were fighting off Afghan tribesmen. In fact, their job was to keep Afghans out of India. Guess who had been stationed in Mardan, where I preached once a month? Winston Churchill! He was in charge of the Mardan garrison. I used to enter the chapel that he had built and sit down in his usual pew. Maybe a little of Churchill would rub off!"

"The big question became, 'Which of the five languages would I preach in? I could speak English, of course. I was 'schooled' in Urdu. I could speak a little bit of Punjabi and a little bit of Pashto. But I had a plan!"

Over several months, Vicar Nibbe's plan was actualized.

"I brought up a Pakistani pastor from the Punjab. He spoke good Punjabi. He took one of the houses on the compound. Two of the five Pakistani languages covered! Now I needed a pastor who could speak Pashto – a very difficult task. I met a man by the name of Ashik.

"He was a handsome man, with salt and pepper grey hair. Somewhere along the way, his financial situation had become desperate. As we talked it was clear he was knowledgeable of the Bible and that he had pastored. I really liked him, but I was cautious.

"Someone said, 'Oh, you talked to Ashik?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'he impressed me.'

"'Don't say that!' he replied, 'you don't know about Ashik.'

"'Tell me.'

"'He caused a scandal in the church. He had an affair with one of the women and he was kicked out of his pastoral office in the Church of Pakistan.'

"'That's not Christian,' I replied. 'He should be treated with love though he did wrong. He shouldn't be exiled from church fellowship.'

"'What do you mean?' this man wanted to know. 'He should be kicked out!'

"I said, 'Hey, if you and I are without sin, we certainly can do that. When was the last time you checked and you didn't do something unacceptable or wrong?'

"'Oh, a long time.'

"To which I said, 'Sure. Now let me talk to your wife!'"

Later, Vicar Nibbe spoke again to Ashik.

"'You've been tormented long enough. God needs you, Padre Ashik. You are a man of God.'

"'But I failed,' he cried miserably. 'I committed a terrible sin.'

"'You've repented,' I replied. 'God has heard, though your church has not. We're all sinners. You've suffered enough. C'mon. Choosing to live your life in shame and disgrace – this is going to suffice for you? We need you. Besides, knowing you, you must have asked forgiveness from the Lord, 250 times.'

"'At least,' he replied.

"'I am heading off to Lahore, to our Bishop. He and I will discuss this. You are a rare variety – a Pashto-speaking Christian pastor; too good to be true!'"

It was mid-winter when Tom got on the bus for the 350-mile ride to Lahore. He had two horse blankets for warmth and with all of the bus's windows knocked out, when he arrived the next morning, he was reminded of how he felt when he was a young adventurer in Europe, with seriously-depleted student pockets, waking up after spending a rainy night sleeping in a dump truck in Düsseldorf. He sat down with the Bishop. At first, the Bishop was reluctant in regards to Ashik.

"The Gospel doesn't suggest that if a pastor does something horribly wrong that that pastor should be rejected by the Community of Faith,' Tom told the Bishop. 'That isn't Christ-like. That is Islam. Whose faith structure are you backing?"

"That is a horrible thing to say," the Bishop retorted.

"Basically, that is what you are suggesting.'

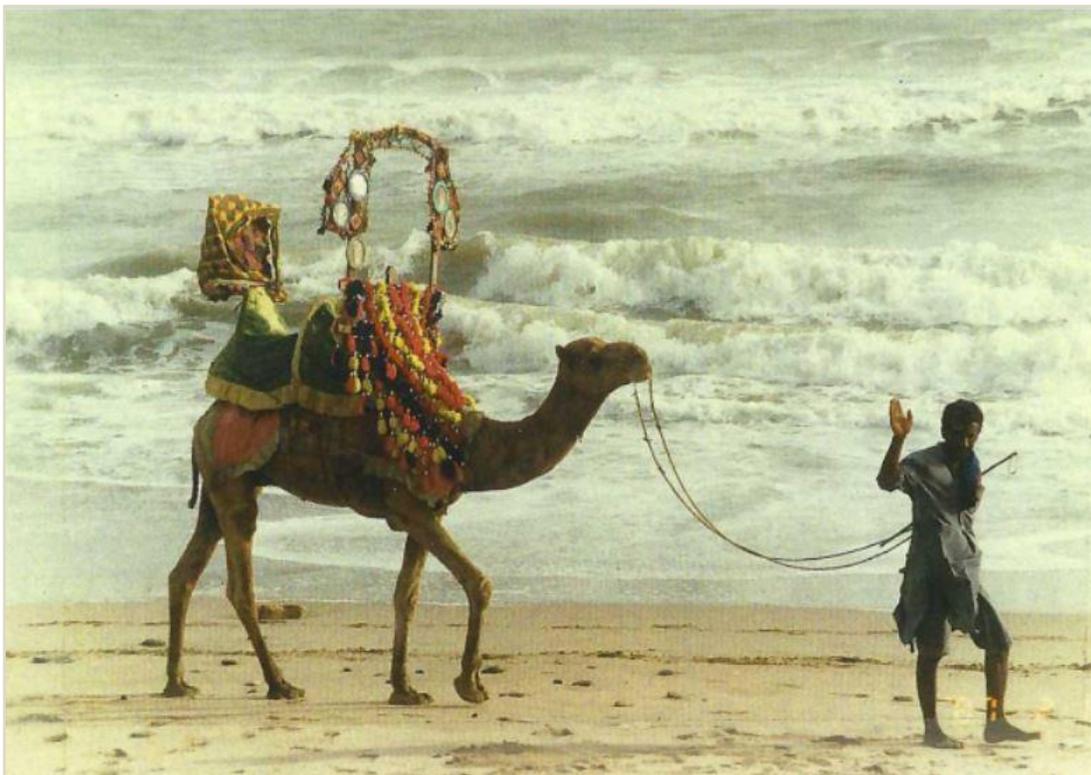
"What do you want of Ashik?' the Bishop asked.

"I want to receive him back into the priesthood and install him. I want everyone to accept him – I know they will."

Padre Ashik was accepted by the Bishop and by the church community, and Tom had all the languages he needed. Forty-three years later, the former Vicar of Saint John's Cathedral was still charged by this memory.

"Christianity is this business of, 'You get to live a Bible standard of repentance, forgiveness and restoration.' I've been fighting judgements like this within the church for 50 years. If you have a pastor who has sinned, follow the Biblical standard. 'Love the sinner and support that sinner in order that, that special human being can repent and be restored.' Just like anyone else in the congregation, don't kick him or her out. That is a 'Scarlet A.' A pastor may be relieved of their duties, but they are still part of their church. Kicking them out has nothing to do with the faith I hold or the Lord I serve."

To Tom's knowledge, Ashik is still a pastor serving in Pakistan.



This is a photo of Tom's favorite camel, taken in Karachi along the Arabian Sea, circa, 1979.

There is so much to Tom's story in Pakistan. He recalled his most famous, jokes-on-him event. It took place in Peshawar, his first time in the pulpit, before a group of 1,500 people. (There were five services with 1,500 in attendance at each service.)

"The first thing that I would like to say is that I really thought that I had mastered Urdu to a certain extent. I had excellent professors at Berkeley. I'd take time for one course per term for years, almost always in South Asian studies.

"I said in Urdu, 'Let us pray.' Followed by, 'Oh, Lord God, I am your humble servant and my life is in your hands.' Due to poor pronunciation I actually said, 'Oh, Lord God, I am your humble monkey and my tail is in your hands.' The parishioners were rolling in the aisles. The Dean was present. He was upset because people were falling from the pews in laughter. You have to watch pronunciation in Urdu. They have a certain movement of the tongue that we don't have. You slide the tongue underneath the lower teeth and slip it out. Everybody reminded me of that for the next four years."

Tom and his family lived in the parsonage, which Tom noted was built in 1848. There is a reception area, right in the middle of the parsonage, where people were received. That led to the dining room, also used for guests. Then there was another door which led into the family's private quarters. Not too far from the parsonage was the Peshawar Air Station/Badaber Base, which is where pilot Gary Powers took off from back in 1960. (American pilot Francis Gary Powers, on a reconnaissance mission for the CIA, was shot down while flying a Lockheed U-2 spy plane from Peshawar into Soviet Union airspace. This created a major international incident and sidelined a major peace summit between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. When the Americans left the base in Peshawar, the base became home to the Pakistan Air Force.)

"I made good and trustworthy friends with a number of the Pakistani Air Force officers. I had also met the Governor of Peshawar. He was a very jovial man and I really couldn't help but appreciate and trust him. We became friends. His home was down at the other end of the Mall.

"But there were times in Pakistan when we had to use great caution and times when it was quite simply, scary. Not as scary as it would be if I went over there now. Now, I believe, I would be beheaded."

There was a horrific world event, November 20 through December 4, 1979, which subsequently led to an extraordinarily frightening incident for Tom and his family.

On November 20, 1979, the Kaaba in Saudi Arabia—a shrine located near the center of the Grand Mosque in Mecca that is the holiest shrine in Islam—came under siege. What would become known was that the men who took over the Grand Mosque belonged to a movement within Saudi Arabia called al-Jamaa al-Salafiya al-Muhtasiba (JSM). JSM condemned what it perceived as the degeneration of social and religious values in Saudi Arabia. JSM entered the Grand Mosque with weapons, shut down the gates and proclaimed the cleansing of the Muslim world from its impurities brought in by the Westerners. There were at least 50,000 pilgrims there for dawn prayer and all of them became hostages. It took two weeks for the Saudi government to regain control and in that time, there were hundreds of casualties and part of the Kaaba was damaged. The Kaaba is so sacred to Muslims the world over, that it is forbidden to bear arms there. The siege, caused by this group of Saudis—JSM—ended on December 4, 1979.

"At one point, Ayatollah Khomeini, in Tehran (Iran), claimed that Christian radicals were responsible for the attack on the Kaaba," Tom said. "And so the reaction in Pakistan to Khomeini's broadcasts was to destroy anything Christian in retaliation. In our section in Peshawar, there was a large convent of Catholic nuns from, I believe, Ireland. Their building was destroyed. Then the Catholic Church was damaged severely. Then the mob destroyed another church, which I believe was Methodist. This is on the Mall which is in the Cantonment area of Peshawar. At the end of the Mall is St. John's Cathedral. That's where I was. The mob knocked down our iron fence. They were after the Christian priest. They were after me!"

Tom sat in the reception area of the parsonage, painfully aware that Priscilla, Aysha, Yasmin and Shama, were in the private family quarters behind him.

"I was doing something similar to what I would have done in the Marine Corps. I sat in the center of the room with a baseball bat. There was a part of me that was busy thinking about options and then fearing the worst. I thought, 'What is going to happen to my family if they kill me?' I saw this as a hopeless situation. I turned to God. God needed to intervene.

"I remembered two verses that have always stuck with me. I certainly use them here in Pacifica. One is Romans 8:28. '*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, and are called according to his purpose.*' And we know (not maybe or perhaps) that in all things (not some things or just good things or constructive things) God works for the good of those who love him.

"'Yes, I love the Lord,' I thought, 'but I am not sure everything is working for our good in this situation. I think I need to take a giant step of faith, over from mere religion to a faith standard – that the Lord is forcing me to get to.'

"The other verse is Philippians 4:4-7: '*Rejoice in the Lord always.*'

"I thought to myself, 'Rejoice if things are satisfying and pleasant. One can do that easily. But what about those kinds of situations in life like I am facing? Why are you pressing me so hard, Lord?'

"'*Rejoice in the Lord always. Do not be anxious about anything, but by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, make your request known unto the Lord and the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.*'

The mob was crazed. They shouted and cried out for blood. They marched down the road which led from the church building to the parsonage.

"There were hundreds of agitated, angry men. I was not sure I was going to make it out of this situation alive. 'Nibbe,' I thought. 'Be prepared to meet your God.'"

Tom took a breath. He was ready.

"But what about my wife and daughters?"

Tom's gaze settled on the Bodhi tree out in front of the parsonage.

"They'll hang me from it upside down. They'll beat me with sticks in my face. That is the way I'll die."

The crowd surged out in front and they raged.

"They sought revenge. They embraced the lie that Christians and Americans had violated the Kaaba."

Tom made a decision. He was not going to panic. He was going to trust God.

"I decided I would go out and address the crowd. I wasn't going to let them come after me. I left the baseball bat behind. I hardly got outside the door when two military 'cattle cars' came driving up on both sides where the people were. They pushed them aside with their vehicles. The sides of those cars had a canvas-like covering on them, and when those were thrown back, they revealed Pakistani regulars with loaded automatic weapons. A Pakistani Lieutenant, with a bullhorn, addressed the crowd in Pashto.

"Disperse now. You are attempting to bring death to proper guests in our nation! As everyone in Pakistan knows, the number one virtue in Pakistan is hospitality. You are violating a basic tenant of our nation. Disperse now, or we fire!"

"The crowd froze in place. Not a sound. Not a shout. Not a word. Then they turned around and left the compound. I recognized a couple of the men from the bazaar."

The Lieutenant saluted the Vicar, "Compliments of the Governor of the North-West Frontier Province."

The trucks departed through the Mall and into the city.

Who is Thomas Nibbe, this man of faith, who underscores several times during our interview that he is not religious, he is spiritual?

* * *



Seated in his mom Edna's lap, Tom, along with his brother Richard, enjoys a late spring day in La Crosse, WI, 1944.

There are two stories of Thomas Adland Nibbe's birth: the one that Tom has known about his entire life and the one that he learned more about in May of 2020.

"I was born on July 10, 1943, and was adopted at the age of 10 months through Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin (Lutheran Welfare originally) by my parents Raymond and Edna (Huus) Nibbe of La Crosse, Wisconsin. Why did they choose me?"

"My father thought I looked like I had the body of a football player! He was a coach for almost 40 years for the high school in La Crosse – La Crosse Logan High School. He was offered other positions, but at that time, he was in the 90th percentile of earners in that position, so he stayed there. He could have gone to the University of Wisconsin or Minnesota."

In 1986, Ray Nibbe was listed on the La Crosse Logan High School Wall of Fame Inductees. The listing notes that Ray was a successful coach and teacher for 36 years, in addition to being Supervisor of the Ninth Ward for 30 years. He also served as Parade Marshal for the Oktoberfest Torchlight Parade in 1973. "Even after his retirement," the Hall of Famer's listing goes on to say, "Ray could be seen at Logan activities. He believed in education, school spirit and kids." In 2004, Ray's son Tom also made that listing.

"My dad quit coaching because I was eligible to play," Tom noted, leaning in enthusiastically with some historical facts. "La Crosse Logan High School is named after John A. Logan, a Civil War Commander under Ulysses S. Grant, later promoted by Grant to Major General." (John Logan is credited with establishing Memorial Day as a national day of remembrance for those who lost their lives in the Civil War.)

"There's another reason my parents chose me. I opened my arms and reached out to be picked up. The other babies just rolled over and remained asleep. Evidently, that made the difference for me."

"What did my parents tell me about my arrival in the world? This has been a saving grace for me all of my life and I can share a story. My mother wrote this in my baby book."



Tom, 2 and a half years old, La Crosse, WI.

"Tommy, the circumstances of your natural birth are nothing compared to the circumstances of your supernatural birth in baptism."

Tom was baptized in the Christian faith as soon as his parents brought him home to La Crosse and to Trinity Lutheran Church.

"My parents, in accord with Romans 6:3-4, believed that when one is baptized, the natural person dies and a 'new creature' is born. I didn't grow up brooding over being an orphan or being adopted. I was told that I was adopted from the beginning. I was a favorite of several of my aunts, particularly the matriarch of the family, Aunt Hilda Peterson. While Aunt Hilda and I were not of the same bloodline, and there is no reason why we should have connected up so strongly, we just did. It was a very special relationship."

Tom said his mom was smart and gifted. She had a double major in English and Physical Education from St. Olaf College, where Tom got his degree. She was the Minnesota Tennis Champ in 1921. (Both of Tom's parents were from Minnesota.) She had a marvelous ear for music. She could sit down at the piano, without sheet music, and play the latest songs from the radio.

"My mother was full of energy and had a great sense of humor. She was so interesting. I know I would have been a better person had she lived. She died from cancer when I was 5. Her death was a tragic thing in my life."

Besides being an educator, football coach and Ward Supervisor – the latter on par here in California with County Supervisor – Tom's dad was a numbers genius. (He graduated from Carleton College with a degree in economics.)

"No one could beat Ray Nibbe at poker. Men would come from far and wide to play cards with him. He was never beat in a card game, ever. Numbers stayed firmly in his mind. He was smart, tough, gentle, compassionate and wise. He was a wonderful dad. When my mother died, he became Mom and Dad."

"Dad was good with people. You could tell that he cared about you and loved you. I remember as a kid, watching how he would discipline his players. I'd get angry and embarrassed. I didn't realize in order to play football, young men need to be disciplined. They need to work as a team and be in shape. At the same time, I could see that the boys really took to him and thought highly of him. I remember one time a high school player mumbled something underneath his breath. He got 10 laps around the track! He never

complained. Dad won 75% of his games during the years he coached. In one time period, his team remained undefeated for six years.

"Dad also contracted acts for our local auditorium. He was responsible for a nationally memorable Elvis Presley concert back in 1956."

On May 14, 1956, Elvis Presley was scheduled for two evening shows, 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. at the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium in La Crosse. Four thousand people attended the first show.

"It was a madhouse. You couldn't hear anything but girls screaming. It was too much for locals. The second show was cancelled.

"Dad had signed Elvis for that 1956 show, back in 1955. He had this sense about Elvis. He noticed how the teenage girls reacted to Elvis when Elvis played the Grand Ole Opry in 1954."

Elvis did not become a national sensation until 1956. In fact, according to old newspaper articles, the management of the Grand Ole Opry wasn't wowed when Elvis played their stage on October 2, 1954. Elvis thought he would get some sort of contract from the Opry, but originally, he got silence. Mr. Presley went on to play the Louisiana Hayride Municipal Auditorium on October 16, 1954, and the women in the audience swooned. From that performance, Elvis got a one-year contract to play the Louisiana Hayride every Saturday for a year. Tom's dad caught one of those shows as well.

Tom's brother, Richard, who was two-and-a-half-years older, was also adopted. Tom said his brother was a very good-looking little boy and a very good-looking adult. "He was a gentleman."

"Richard went to Carleton College (Northfield, MN) which to us was like Oxford. If you graduated from Carleton, you were considered a classy person. Richard was smart and savvy.

"Like Dad, my brother knew how to book entertainment events. He was called the 'Social Dictator' at Carleton. He was the one that got things done. When I graduated from high school, I thought of attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison, but I ended up going to our family school – St. Olaf College. St. Olaf is in the same town as Carleton. Richard was in his senior year when I was a freshman. Since he was the 'Social Dictator' of Carleton, he would get top-notch entertainment on campus. One day he called me.

"I have a job for you."

"Okay."

"Tom, I want you to come across the Cannon River and host guests we have on campus."

"Who are they?"

"I'm not going to tell you. Are you going to do it or not?"

"Yeah, I will."

Those guests turned out to be Peter, Paul and Mary. Tom brought them refreshments and "shot the breeze with them." Before they went on stage, Mary gave Tom a big hug. (Tom's brother, Richard, died peacefully at his home in Winona, MN, on October 9, 2017.)

"With my adoptive parents, Ray and Edna, and their kin, I couldn't have had a better family. They were really good people.'

About 15 years ago, Tom's cousin, Margery Peterson, Hilda's daughter, who was a social worker, told Tom, "I have talked with women who have had to give up their children. You need to contact Lutheran Social Services in Milwaukee. Privacy laws have changed. You need to find out who your birth mother is and contact her. Let her know you're okay, that you're doing fine."

"That was the encouragement I needed from a family member," Tom said.

Tom contacted Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin so that he could find out about his birth mother. He did not, at that time, know her name or any information about her.

"The State of Wisconsin informed me, that my birth mother didn't want me to make contact with her. When I found out who she was in late May of 2020, it turns out that her 'original instructions' were not that at all.

"In 2020, after all these decades, I was finally able to talk to her daughter, my sister. (I always knew I had a sister, I knew, I knew, I knew.) Lori told me that her mother, my birth mother, had been notified, back in 2006 that I wanted to contact her. She had recently had a couple of strokes and she didn't want me to see her in her present condition. She 'looked horrible.'" She passed before Tom could meet her. Since 2020, Tom has learned much about her.

Like his mom, Edna, Tom's birth mother was Norwegian-American and a Lutheran. Her name was Mabel Austad. She was born in a log cabin in the woods of Glen Fora, Rusk County, WI, in May of 1918. She was the fourth of the five children of Edward and Amanda (Olson) Austad, both born in Norway. Later the family moved to Hawkins, WI. Mabel graduated from Hawkins High School and attended Superior State Teacher's College, now University of Wisconsin-Superior. She was in her second year out of school and her second year of teaching third and fourth grade in the Hannibal School District when she became pregnant. The father of her baby is referred to as the alleged father (AF) in the papers received by Tom, in 2020, from the Adoption and Interstate Services Station of Madison, WI.

After Mabel realized she was pregnant, she left quietly to stay with a family in Markesan, WI, who knew her situation. She taught school there. Her co-workers back home were told she left for a job in Chicago. In Markesan she was known as Mrs. Mabel Wells and that her husband was in the service. She noted the family she was staying with was really wonderful to her and had invited her to stay with them as long as she wanted. She did not want to take advantage of them and decided she would go to a maternity home when a vacancy became available. She talked to social workers with confidence about giving her baby up, but when she was asked if she would feel this way after the baby was born, her eyes filled with tears.

In late April of 1943, Mabel entered Summit Hospital, now Aurora Health Center, in Oconomowoc, WI. She worked as long as she could during her stay. She scrubbed floors to pay her bills. She did not receive any money from the AF. In her interviews, Mabel explained that her parents and her brothers and sisters knew about her pregnancy. But as Tom learned in 2021, her parents knew and one sister knew. The rest of the family simply thought she took a job out of the area.

Mabel had a healthy pregnancy. When her son was born in Oconomowoc on July 10, 1943, they were both in excellent condition. After the birth of her son, Mabel remained at Summit Hospital for 10 days before returning to Markesan to collect her things. She then returned to Hawkins as a single woman. When the adoption process was done, Mabel signed papers in Eau Claire, WI, terminating her parental rights and Tom went home with Edna and Ray Nibbe.

In the paperwork the State of Wisconsin sent Tom, he was able to read all about his birth mom's parents, their family trees, a history of any family health issues, or quirks, as well as about Mabel's siblings – their education, jobs, the places where they lived and their children at the time she was interviewed.

Five foot three, Mabel was described in the Agency's paperwork as follows: "Mabel is a very attractive girl. She has black curly hair, a fair complexion with some freckles and bright blue eyes. One worker remarked that she looked more Irish than Norwegian, but she said that that color combination was rather frequent with the Norwegians, although she has been taken for Irish very often."

Tom has since learned about his birth father. He has also learned he has three half-brothers on his father's side. During this past year he was able to contact the wife of his mother's eldest brother – one of the many family members who did not know about Tom's birth.

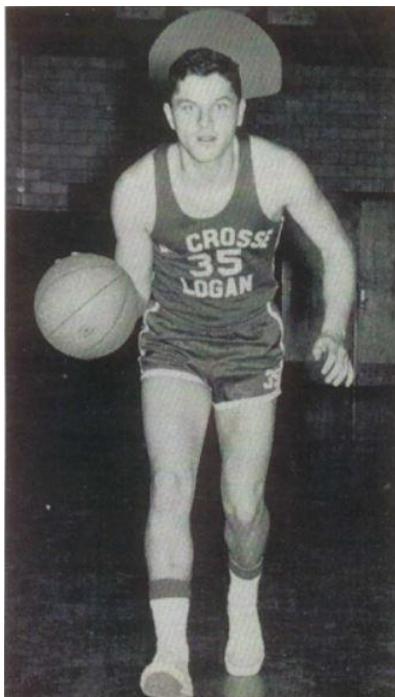
"Aunt Betty had recently recovered from Covid-19. When I spoke to her, she said, 'You've got to tell me everything now! If I die, I'm not going to die, not knowing!' Aunt Betty has a good sense of humor!"

With all the knowledge Tom has gained on his birth mother, her family and his life before he was adopted – he sometimes ponders how these things formed him.

"For instance, I learned that before I was adopted, I had a foster parent who used to rub the inside of my mouth with sugar when I fussed. Perhaps that's why I have a proclivity for sweet things.

"The place where my birth mother is from, Hawkins, Wisconsin. It's a little, little town tucked between the pines. It's a beautiful area." (The population was 387 in 2019.) "It's near the Flambeau River. The 'Flambeau' has always been one of my favorite places, long before I knew I had any connection to Hawkins. All of this has really been a big box of wonder."

* * *



Growing up, Tom was involved in an array of sports: skating, skiing, swimming, bike riding, basketball, football and track. He loved baseball but didn't play it. He had always been at Boy Scout Camp, rather than the baseball field. Consequently, he noted, he didn't play baseball well.

His summers were spent at Camp Decorah in Holmen, WI. When he was older, he worked at the Wisconsin Lions Camp for the Blind or Visually Impaired. In addition, Tom was a Native-American "craftsman" and "ritual dancer" in connection with the Winnebago, i.e., Ho-Chunk tribe, and with the local Native American people.

Before earning the rank of Eagle Scout—the highest rank of Boy Scouts of America—in 1961 Tom received the Lutheran Pro Deo Et Patria Scout Award. The award recognizes the culmination of study, service and spiritual growth, with weekly study sessions and service projects over a year's time. As an Eagle Scout, Tom was the recipient of the Hornaday Award. Named after William T. Hornaday, and replaced in 2020 by the BSA Distinguished Conservation Service Award, the award recognizes distinguished service in natural resource conservation. It is not frequently given.

"My Hornaday project was a huge nature lot, north of Holmen, WI, complete with varieties of animals, plants and an artificial stream."

Tom also received a "Water Safety Instructor" certificate from BSA. This certification would prove useful later.

Tom explained how a boy who was Norwegian American, could be a Native American craftsman and ritual dancer.

"Since childhood, I'd been friends with Ho-Chunk boys, especially Ralph Yellow Thunder and Henry Greencrow. In addition, through my scouting experience and a wonderful, Native-American dance troupe – I grew up with an interest in craft. I loved to go to 'Powwows.' I was taught how to do authentic ritual dances. I became skilled in dancing, including the Flaming Double Hoop. This paid off in football. Precise footwork is so important."



Five-foot-eleven La Crosse Logan High School halfback Tom Nibbe, weighing in at 246 pounds, carries the ball in this 1960 photo.

Tom could make all sorts of native dress, including leggings and vests. He liked it and was good at it. Twice he made the full Sioux war bonnet with the trailer.

For two summers, Tom taught Indian Lore and Drama at the Wisconsin Lions Camp for the Blind or Visually Impaired. In his senior year of high school, Tom was Senior Class President.

"I ran for Class President because I wanted to have a little more authority than I had as a regular student. I wanted the school to start what my dad had started years before, an intramural program for kids that weren't good enough to play on the regular basketball team, softball team, and track and field teams. I did do that. I also wanted to be sure that there were plays scheduled at various times so that games and theater did not have conflicting schedules. I worked with the drama teacher and we got that done."



Senior photo, La Crosse Logan High School, Class of 1961.

After he graduated from La Crosse Logan High School, Tom attended St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN. He received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in American History and Communication. He was also very involved with the drama department. His biggest role was the lead in Shakespeare's "Othello." He played Othello.

"I was the darkest person on campus," Tom laughed, "because I was the only one with brown hair. Everyone else was a blond!"

He also was cast in the St. Olaf pre-Socratic Greek drama series, which included roles in "Oedipus Rex" (Sophocles) and "Lysistrata" (Aristophanes). In the 1870-1880 written operetta "Dr. Drinkwater," actual name, "Oh! Doctor!," Tom was cast as an enslaved African American – Southern to suit the character.

In his spare time, he enjoyed reading about Germany: its language, its history, its philosophy and its art.

"I was a Germanophile. Though I couldn't understand how Germany could have gotten involved with Hitler. For decades before the First World War, Germans were the most important European peacemakers."

While he was at St. Olaf, Tom joined the U.S. Marine Corps, Marine Corps Platoon Leaders Course, Quantico, Virginia (1962-1965). This was a preparation program for Marine Corps officer candidates. Though this was not something new to him, he was deeply aware of a "call" to the ministry and seminary.

"What seemed to set me aside to become a 'man of God?' Two embarrassing things! When I was 8 years old, on a beautiful Wisconsin afternoon, I was spreadeagled on my neighbor's back lawn. He hadn't mowed his lawn yet and I just loved to lie down in the grass in the summertime. All of a sudden, I felt I was being elevated maybe four or five feet up into the air. It seemed so real to me, I was afraid to look down. I felt an exhilaration while it was happening, but I thought maybe there was something mentally wrong with me. There is a history in the church of people being elevated. I don't know why this happened, but I experienced what I did. I never told anybody about this. I was afraid they would think I was crazy. In fact in the 70 years since, for various reasons, I have told very few. I had that uplifting experience and then I felt like I was being lowered, very gently. I remember the clouds in the sky seemed to be 'very friendly.' It was a beautiful warm, afternoon. Everything was perfect, almost like being in heaven. However, I wouldn't tell my dad what happened because I thought he might think I was crazy. I never told anyone for years, though the experience was often on my mind.

"Later, having experienced other charismatic moments, I didn't think 'being elevated' was so unusual. One of the reasons I was attracted to Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church in Pacifica (Tom has been the pastor of Holy Cross since July, 1983) was, in the first place, it's Lutheran! Lutheran theology represents a good, solid, Biblical theology. I am no genius but I have got a pretty good mind. To me, this is the good balance in faith – how I interpret Scripture and how Scripture interprets the believer. I didn't need to 'hang

out' elsewhere. I feel comfortable in a Lutheran Church. With events in this congregation and with experiences in Pakistan, I felt my family was finally at home spiritually.

"There was a second reason from my childhood calling me to the ministry. It happened when I was 13. I believe I developed early in terms of awareness of girls and what is happening to you when you are 13. Then there is springtime in Wisconsin. In Wisconsin's springtime, you have this incredible experience of rebirth, everyone does. You are coming out of terrible winter. It's really bad. Though some people like me really love winter. But when spring comes, there is this incredible beauty. The trees are budding and in my hometown, the whole town smells like lilac. Everyone has a lilac. Anywhere you go there is this gorgeous smell in the air and at 13, I got this sense that I was in love. First I thought it was being crazy about some girl. The girl I liked was more friend than sweetheart. I realized this feeling wasn't infatuation and it wasn't about spring either. It was a sense of renewal, the spring-fresh feeling of being born again. I was like a snake shedding its skin. I retained this powerful feeling of being born anew. Career wise, it was a life in the ministry that always stayed fresh within me, and that is where I ended up and kept fresh and growing.

"Now my earliest thoughts on career were I would either go into politics or be the President of the United States. I am a lifelong fan of Abraham Lincoln, and even as a kid, as I read all about him, I thought if he could get knocked down as many times as he did and still end up as President of the United States – well, if he could do it, so could I! Yet it was the ministry that always stayed with me and that is where I eventually followed."

There was a crucial point in Tom's last four weeks of Marine Corps training. In the summer of 1964, he was assured that he would be placed in charge of a platoon of ten "weapon teams."

"In May-June of 1965, at St. Olaf, I was passing by the TV in the dormitory. President Lyndon B. Johnson stated he was going to release Marine Corps personnel to prove that there was no acceleration of hostilities in Vietnam.

"That caused me to think God was answering my prayer about a vocation in the Marine Corps or one in the ministry. I had developed a personal issue on the bayonet course. I found out I was very good on the bayonet course. I became convinced I could not kill a human being. At the same time, I kept addressing the Lord.

"Look, if you want me to command a combat platoon, and you allow it to happen, that is what I am going to do. You would be giving me permission to do so by not stopping that from happening. On the other hand, if you are honoring what's in my heart, and for me, that comes from you, something will intervene.

"I continue to be a man of faith, but I'm not inclined toward religion. I never have been. I was convinced I would have God's answer either way. If God wanted me to serve, I would serve faithfully, and do the best job I could for God and country. 'Not my will, but thy will be done.'

"Not long after the LBJ episode on television, I got an official letter from the Department of the Navy. It stated, 'You will be released with an honorable discharge if you decide to leave the Marine Corps at this time.' I had three more years left under my obligation. I thought, 'I better be in prayer about this.' I waited a couple of months to make the decision. I accepted the offer to receive an honorable discharge without further obligation."

The Second Lieutenant was honorably discharged from the United States Marine Corps in 1965.

Tom's first job out of college was at Tuskegee University, a historically black college that is a national, independent and state-related institution of higher learning located in Tuskegee, Alabama. His job title was Instructor in American History, English Literature and Dramatic Arts. Additionally, he volunteered to be part of the team that rose early to bring gifted, underprivileged youth to campus.

"These youth were working in cotton fields. The goal was to bring these individuals out of the fields and get them educated through the Federal program at Tuskegee.

"Fifty years later we gathered for the anniversary of that 1960s program. The result was spectacular. The hall was filled with doctors, lawyers and nurses, as well as many other notable professionals."

During his short-lived time at Tuskegee, Tom helped develop six drama teams, each producing six educational plays for eleven Alabama counties. He also worked as the Tuskegee coordinator for relations with local churches. The program was part of LBJ's War on Poverty. But Tom's effort at the University did not go well with everyone.

"To some folks in Alabama, I was considered a 'tennis-shoed, pimple-pocked, sex maniac from the North."

Tom was threatened with bodily harm and death. The Administration was concerned about his well-being. It was time to go. Tom left for California, specifically to the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS) in Berkeley.

"And so began my journey in ministry."

One year later, PLTS joined the Graduate Theological Union (GTU). GTU is "a union of graduate schools and programs that, together, represent the world's major religions in collaboration. It provides a unique community where religious scholars and practitioners from across the world, gather for academic study and dialogue of their own tradition and of other traditions and disciplines."

In Tom's first year, he studied exclusively at PLTS. The summer following his first year, he decided to travel. He found a flyer in a local supermarket. It read, "We can fly you to Paris and back for \$300." Tom had \$305 in his account and some spare change in his pocket. He bought a ticket. After he arrived in Paris, he bought a ticket to Düsseldorf.

"Because Düsseldorf had a robust manufacturing economy and was right in the middle of Europe. My plan was to work there, four days a week, ten hours a day, so that I could go up to Oslo (Norway), or Paris (France), or Florence and Rome (Italy), or Amsterdam (the Netherlands) and wherever else, and then, eventually, vacation in Spain or Portugal. After I paid for my Eurail Pass, I had two French francs left, no other security, nothing."

The first information the traveler received was completely unexpected. If he was planning on working in Germany, he should already have a work permit. He got off the train in Benrath, a suburb of Düsseldorf.

"Benrath is an ancient part of Düsseldorf. It was the place I preferred to live. It is a 13th-Century town and the only part of Düsseldorf that remained untouched after the War."

Tom slept in a dump truck, his first night in Europe, which had crushed gravel in it.

"It rained that night, but those were the days when we wore storm coats and I put my cover over me. When I woke up, I looked and felt like 'hell cooled over.' I saw two guys that I thought were Germans. I decided to try my German on them to which they responded in English, 'Your German really stinks.'

'Hey,' they continued, 'you're from Wisconsin and we're from Minnesota and we're working here. You look terrible. You look like you are going to die!'" Admittedly, Tom felt that way.

"They said, 'Why don't you drop your stuff off at our apartment. You'll have to walk up four floors. We don't have a bathroom. We don't have running water. But you can still wash up and sleep in one of our beds.'"

Tom eventually did that. Meanwhile, the young men continued with the questions.

"What are you going to do for money?"

When Tom responded he had no money and was looking for a job, they told him what they thought of his situation. "This is terrible!"

"One of the guys, his name was John Mayer, was the son of the International Business Manager for Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing. Somehow they got me a work permit and I went to work for Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing in Düsseldorf, four days a week, ten hours a day."

At the sandpaper factory where Tom worked, they produced at much greater percentage than was expected.

"In Germany, if you produce more than you are supposed to, you are paid in-kind. I came back from Europe with lots of money. I went to every major city in Europe, including occupied Berlin. One time I got on the wrong train to get back to West Germany. I was in East Germany, illegally. Fortunately, I always carried packs of American cigarettes. They saved me on several occasions. Offering someone a pack of American cigarettes took care of 'problems.' I asked the conductor, in English, 'Can you get me safely back to Berlin?' And he said, 'That's totally against the regulations.' I took out one pack and said, 'Really?' He looked at me. I pulled out another pack and he put me on a train back to Berlin.

"Berlin was a special place for me. When I finally got there and stepped onto der Lindenstraße (Linden Street), I kissed the ground." (German lyric poet Walther von der Vogelweide, 1170-1230, wrote a song/poem about Linden Street called "Under the Linden." The song is still famous.)

In 1967-1968, Tom had an internship at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Hollis, Queens, New York with connection to Saint Peter's Lutheran Church, Manhattan. In the summer of 1967, as part of his internship, Tom worked at Pleasant Valley Farm in Woodstock, Illinois. Tom's cousin, Jim Mason, ran Pleasant Valley Farm which was then a summer camp and retreat center serving inner city youth and low-income families, in addition to offering a farming alternative to former inmates. Tom's cousin needed a Waterfront Director, and Tom told Jim he possessed a Water Safety Instructor certificate, plus his camping background would make him ideal for Pleasant Valley Farm.

"Do you know anything about restoring a camp pool?" Cousin Jim asked Tom. "Can you fix a Class D pool?"

"No problem!" Tom said.

"I couldn't fix a leaky faucet," Tom laughed. "But the Lord was with me. When I arrived, there was a guy—a doctoral student in mechanical engineering at the University of Wisconsin—at the Farm who was recovering from a nervous breakdown. He and I sat down for coffee the first evening I was there. The next morning I said, 'Steve, I've got a problem. I've got a pool that is rated Class D and I need to raise that to at least Triple A. Can you help me with rebuilding the waterfront?'"

"Oh!" Steve responded. "I was hoping you would ask."

Tom, Steve and a third guy, a young man on staff by the name of James Flagg, worked out all the problems with the entire pool, at no cost. Cousin Jim was amazed. As an aside, James Flagg, who could fix anything, was a phenomenal blues singer. He and Tom became great friends.



Meanwhile, a young woman from Lahore, Pakistan arrived at the camp. Hired as the Arts and Crafts Director, Priscilla Najmuddin was studying at Augustana College, now University. (Augustana is a Lutheran institution in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.) Staying with a Sioux Falls family, Priscilla did not have a great deal of money, nor did she arrive with clothes suitable for South Dakota's weather. It had been a difficult winter.

"Priscilla's advisor at Augustana, happened to be my cousin, Dr. Orval Westby. Orval had called Jim because he wanted to get Priscilla some help financially. He thought Jim might have a job for her – and Jim did."

"When I saw Priscilla, she was 'it' for me! There was magnetism there from the start. I kept it to myself. I was scared out of my wits!"

Tom said Priscilla was beautiful. But what really impressed the former high school track star, was how fast she could run.

"Her shop was across the field and when she would keep her class overtime, she would run across the field to get to her meal on time." Tom estimated she could run the 100-meter race in 10.3 or 10.4 seconds.

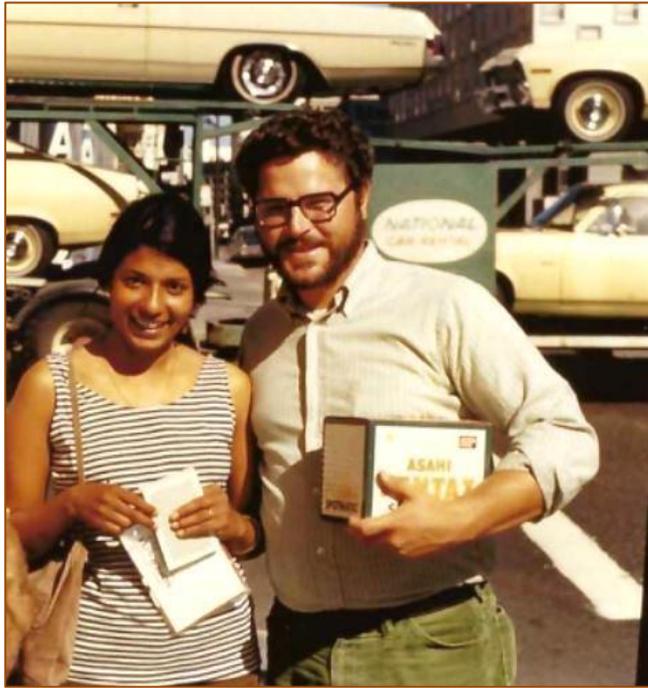
But for a Bible, Tom and Priscilla would never have met. This story begins with a historic event.

In August of 1947, when British rule ceased in India, the subcontinent was partitioned into two independent nation states: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. After the Partition of India, one million died and 15 million were displaced as Muslims fled to Pakistan, and Hindus and Sikhs headed in the opposite direction.

"My wife's family was caught in the midst of the confusion and violence. Because they had a Muslim name, Najmuddin, the Sikhs were intending to kill them all. One minute a Sikh took out a sharpened knife to slit Priscilla's throat, and the next minute the men found a Bible with the family name written in it. 'These people are not Muslims,' the Sikhs cried. 'They are Christians. Let them all go!'

"It is one of these stories you almost can hardly believe. A Bible found in luggage saves a family from death? But it's true."

In the summer of 1968, one year after they met, Tom and Priscilla were married at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in New York City. After Tom's fourth year at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, the couple moved to the North Highlands neighborhood of Sacramento, CA.



In 1968, the newlyweds arrived in California.

"I never was able to meet my father-in-law, Mohammed Sheikh Najmuddin. He died before I met Priscilla. He was a convert from Islam.

"Before he became an Anglican clergy, before he was a husband and a father, my father-in-law was a Christian Sadhu (a holy person, someone who renounces the worldly life). After his conversion, his family tried to kill him – for 20 years. He kept moving from town to town, around Imperial India, before Pakistan existed. He would be given room and board and a few rupees for his teaching and wisdom. In this 20-year-period, he developed a great command of English. A group of Anglicans from England heard him speak and they encouraged him to study in England at Cambridge. That's what happened. If there is any amazing thing to consider here, it is that a country boy from Wisconsin should end up with a father-in-law like this. My father-in-law was an extraordinary gentleman.

Tom went on to note that his father-in-law changed his name from Mohammed Sheikh to Francis. "He did this to honor St. Francis of Assisi." (St. Francis of Assisi, known primarily as the patron saint of animals, was committed daily, through teaching and action, to peacemaking.) "St. Francis is the most famous saint among Pakistani Christians."

Tom loves his father-in-law's daughter, and all the family he has gained through her.

"Priscilla, who is an artist, is also – just like all of her family and friends – very sophisticated. Her family members are like blood relatives to me, every single one of them. My niece is living with us now and she is a real blessing. I consider Sara to be like a daughter."

* * *

Tom's final seminary year in Berkeley took place at a tumultuous time. In April of 1969, several Berkeley activists planted the "first tree" on a University of California-owned, abandoned city block on Telegraph Avenue. It was called an "expression of a politics of joy." Almost immediately, hundreds of people came from all over the Berkeley to help build a park, "People's Park." The University was not having it. They warned that unauthorized use of their land would not be tolerated. On May 15, thousands of people came out in defiance and the struggle became violent. Then-California Governor Ronald Reagan ordered the National Guard to end the uprising and to occupy the entire city. Hundreds were arrested and martial law

was declared. Police brandishing shotguns fired birdshot into the crowd. A military helicopter was said to have "indiscriminately" gassed the campus. The day would be memorialized as "Bloody Thursday."

"You had to have a badge to get anywhere you needed to go in Berkeley," Tom recalled. "I had signed up for Biblical Hebrew that year and I just couldn't get to my Hebrew classes."

In addition, Tom had to keep up with the apartment building he and Priscilla were managing.

"I was trying to figure out all the way back from Delaware, where we had our honeymoon, how were we going to make it financially in California? I figured it out. We'd have to be apartment managers and that would take care of most of our room and board expenses, and then some. The apartment owners were not so taken with me but they really liked Priscilla a lot. She was a good-looking woman. So they let us have the position primarily because of her, so they could come visit her! She took care of the all the rent money and kept the place clean. She was meticulous. I did repairs. When people moved out we would get a little extra money to clean out the apartment. That was fun too because we were really a good team."

Tom became the Pastor of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, North Highlands, 1969-1971. During that time he also served as Lutheran Chaplain at the McClellan Air Force Base in North Highlands. St. Timothy's was right next to the Air Force Base.

"The officer staff was in need of a Protestant Base Chaplain, not just for Protestants, but for all Christians and personnel of faith."

Tom is reminded of story.

"When I was in the Marine Corps, Chaplains were important and essential for me. Sometimes, you'd get the feeling that God was everywhere in the world, except Quantico! I took this calling very seriously. It had been a dream of mine when I was a boy.



Tom and his daughter Ayesha, 1970, No. Highlands, Sacramento, CA.

Tom and Priscilla's first two daughters, Ayesha and Yasmin, were born in Sacramento. Their third daughter, Shama, was born in Berkeley.

In 1972, Tom accepted the position of UC Berkeley Student Counselor in Sproul Hall, and as previously presented in this biography, followed that by accepting a mission in Peshawar, where he served as the Vicar of Saint John's Cathedral of the Church of Pakistan from April 1978 until August of 1980. From 1980 to 1982, Tom taught Bible at the Bible Training Institute in Dera Ismail Khan, North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan.

"We returned to the States in August of 1982. We found a place to stay back in Berkeley. The Synod, instead of acknowledging the work we had done in Pakistan, which included helping to feed 2.3 million Afghans who came across during the Russian Invasion – they forgot about us." (Afghans began fleeing

their homeland soon after the pro-Soviet coup in April 1978. Approximately one-third of Afghanistan's pre-war population of 15 million has been uprooted and scattered.)

With no income and no supporting congregation, how did the Nibbe family keep a roof over their heads?

"It started with a former classmate. He had a one-bedroom house in Berkeley. We were five, my classmate made six and Priscilla's sister made seven. Then an Episcopalian lady took us in. It turned out to be a blessing for her because I repaired many things in her home."

Tom worked with Montgomery Ward, assembling sheds. It was a financially difficult time.

"We would pray every morning that we would have food for breakfast. We prayed for food for supper. I could have gotten a position back at Cal, but if I had done that, I would have gotten too comfortable, I know, and I wouldn't have gone back into the ministry."

Tom knew ministry was his place in this world. "I implicitly trusted God would supply."

Tom writes a weekly column that appears in all six Marinscope Community Newspapers: The Novato Advance, the San Rafael News Pointer, the Ross Valley Reporter, the Mill Valley Herald, the Twin Cities Times and the Sausalito Marin Scope. In November of 2020, Tom wrote a column about his family's return in 1982. That column, edited down for size, is repeated here. The entire article can be found online at Marinscope.

Rev. Thomas Nibbe "Whatever the Circumstances"

November 8, 2020

The year was 1982. We were five then. There was my wife, Priscilla, three great daughters, Ayesha, Yasmin, and Shama, and there was me. Our little family had spent the last four years as missionaries in Pakistan. I had sent a letter back to the States letting church administration know of our return. Arriving back in the States, I had the mistaken notion that the local synod had been thinking about us and had made provisions for us to adjust to life as a pastoral family in California.

"I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire. He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God..." ([King David] Psalm 40:1-3)

There was no provision whatsoever. The fantasy I had had about being warmly welcomed back by a joyful group of fellow believers vanished quickly. Basically they had not only forgotten about us, but I was no longer officially rostered as an ordained pastor. I literally had to fight my way back into the visible church, go before a vocations committee, and in the process, be accused of being "too evangelical"—and almost dismissed—except for one very special committee lady who stood up for me. Moments like this should never happen. At this particular time there were evidently no congregations open for us to interview at – according to the administration, not the Bishop. Was it actually because we were a racially mixed couple? I didn't think it was because I was generally thought to be "unfit" to be a pastor. I knew there were indeed vacant positions open in the area.

The question became not what the church was doing or not doing. The question in my mind increasingly became, what is God doing? What kind of refinement is taking place in my life and in the individual members of my family? At this time I was actually beginning to think more appropriately, spiritually speaking, about priorities. Was I going to be suspicious about other peoples' unknown, unspoken motivations in the church to try to "outguess" the church authorities – and in the end poison my heart and mind, becoming a disappointed and bitter old man? Did I then

really think that other folks were "in charge" of my destiny – or was the Lord? How real was He? Was I able to trust?

Priorities. Who comes first? In the past, had the power of leaders in the church been more important to me than what God put into my heart and planned? In all truth, I had to ask myself – who's in charge here? Who was the one who called me to fulfill my purpose in His Church?

ULTIMATELY

Who was it who had called me from the very beginning – way, way, back, before college and seminary?

IT WAS THE LORD – or I move on to greener pastures.

I'm not suggesting that folks in the Church are always going to be short-sighted and short-change those in their charge. I'm not suggesting that Church authorities are always going to be wrong, and you have to set them straight. I am saying, however, that each of us has a Call from God to serve Him and we need to "stand our ground" with the vision the Lord has given us about what our destiny in the Lord Jesus is.

"...humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time...cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you..." (1 Peter 5:6-7)

It's important that I express my commitment to others in the Visible Church that I must respect them, do well by them, enhance their sense of call from God, and anticipate that they will fulfill their ministry and bless me and those I know and love, but, I want to make myself crystal clear sharing what I have learned over fifty years in the ministry, ultimately, trust only in the Lord. In the process, do not judge others when they fail you. Do not revile them. Forgive them. Pour hot coals over their heads "by your kindness" after they have wronged you. Keep you focus on the Lord. Trust only Him.

Meanwhile in Berkeley, our family kept tightly together. The girls went to school and did exceptionally well. We shopped at local rummage stores and garage sales for jeans and other essential items. The jeans had holes and tears in them and I was afraid the girls were going to be laughed at and teased—but no, all the well-to-do girls in Berkeley wore expensive jeans that had holes and tears in them. (Be it noted: God is good all the time!)

As a family of five, we stayed at first with my former classmate in his one-bedroom house and then were invited to live for two weeks with a Godly lady who lived in a spacious home in the Berkeley hills. We ended up being there with her for a year or so. It helped as an Episcopalian that she thought I should start immediately as the Assistant to the Bishop in Grace Cathedral. What a morale-builder! I kept getting odd jobs along the way. Meanwhile we prayed together earnestly that God would provide supper for five for that day at morning-time, sometimes for breakfast shortly after we awoke in the morning. The Lord always provided on time. We had lots of prayer support from sincere Christians who were pulling for us. The girls were magnificent along the way. What great kids they were! Just love them! Priscilla was a source of peace, love, and family confidence.

There were tremendous needs that went unmet. In one sense, we never had enough, and yet, in another sense, we had each other, and therefore, we had everything. It was tough. Nothing came easy. Secretly, daily, I felt I had let my family down. Somehow, however, deep down inside, in a very deep place, I sensed that my direction and that of my family was secure in the midst of all the uncertainty. At one important moment along the way, I remembered Professor Keith Bridston at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary saying to me (long before) I was a seminarian, "Underneath

it all, Nibbe, I can tell you have a powerful sense of God's destiny in your life working in your behalf."

I became suspicious of what was happening—and not happening—as far as the Church was concerned.

I contacted the local bishop. He was supportive. His words were a huge bandage wrapped around my wounded heart, "We've got to do something about you, Tom. We need you in the Christ's Church!" He suggested three locations to interview. We interviewed at Holy Cross in Pacifica. We definitely decided that Pacifica was the place for us. Pastor and people just seemed to fit. We stayed for eight-and-a-half years. We then accepted a call to serve at the Union Church of Lima in Peru. Four years later we returned to the States. Pacifica called us back again. We've been here for another twenty-five years up to the present.

"...through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature..." (Saint Peter in 2 Peter 1:4)

So, am I holding on to a grudge against the Church folks for certain things that have happened, and things that didn't happen, practically 40 years ago? No. Am I still hurting after making my poor kids and my beautiful wife suffer in those times? No.

Sometime back I was reminding my oldest daughter, Ayesha, of those "horrible, terrible times" in 1982-83. Ayesha replied, "What terrible times, Dad? You mean when we used to pray together, all the time, as a family for all our needs, sometimes, practically all day, because the needs were great. But the Lord provided according to our needs and we knew He was the Great Giver. You played around with us. You were home with us every day. You did creative stuff with us all the time. We laughed together when we were supposed to cry. We totally depended on each other in the Lord. What terrible times, Dad?"

Ah—Ha!

I don't know all the things that went through the hearts and minds of the members of my family, but I do know this about myself. I was too dependent upon the visible church and the leaders to provide a provision for us. God was right in there with us. He's the one who affirmed us and we discovered in the shambles of our situation who we really were, in Him! We needed to learn the way it happened.

Saint Paul said in Romans 8:28: "...and we know that in all things God works together for the good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose..."

God is a gentleman. He will not force religion upon you.

If God seems not to be providing for your needs, it is because you are not letting him do so. He will provide according to His wisdom, and not yours, and it will be sufficient for all your needs. He wouldn't provide for you because of your fabulous personality, your great intellect, your good looks, or your fantastic pocket-book. He will provide for you because He loves you, without condition. That thought will take some time for it to set. He loves you much more than you could ever be fully aware of. If He doesn't seem to provide for you, it's not His fault, it's your fault. Perhaps you are not aware of what great value you have to the Lord.

You don't put your ultimate trust in any mortal – presidents, senators, the Secretary General of the United Nations, archbishops, your pastor, especially your favorite uncle, or even your business partner. That ultimate trust belongs in placing your confidence in God Almighty and only He.

Nobody else. The Lord will never let you down. It will seem at times He has. You will become impatient at times. You will become untrusting. You will wonder if God even exists. You may even have to go through what the Nibbe family did. He will teach you how to live right, and confidently, no matter what the circumstances happen to be. What was true for my family in the 1980s goes for what happens in 2020, even in the midst of a world pandemic – you can always trust in the Lord! Everybody else in this life will ultimately let you down sometime or the other. Just shake it off. Forgive them and trust God. In the process you will grow spiritually.

What the Lord has started in your life will be made complete within God's good time, without fail!

No half-hearted, doubtful commitments, please! Become a genuine follower of the One who is worthy of complete trust! Heartaches will follow those who ultimately trust other human beings.

"...being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ..." Philippians 1:6

It will not happen if you are comforted and coddled and babied time after time in a life in which you think you have control and you can do whatever you please! The expression is—Let go and let God! Once you let go of control in life, a dead-end, you need to let the Lord lead you through what may seem like one storm after the next. It's all part of the process. The Lord will prove His faithfulness when all has taken place!

* * *

In 1986, the Nibbe family bought their home in Pacifica. They knew about Pacifica before Tom accepted the pastorate at Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church in July of 1983. Tom, a world music lover and a jazz aficionado, who has a record collection that can only be described as jaw-dropping, has attended the Monterey Jazz Festival, annually—except for its closure during COVID-19...and of course being in California also has to be part of the mix—and that's how Pacifica landed on the family's radar, a destination on the way to a destination.

"I'm never in the pulpit the third week in September. I'm in Monterey. My interests in jazz and jazz musicians go back to Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Billie Holiday, Dave Brubeck, Thelonious Monk, Count Basie and Duke Ellington, and then just keep moving forward."

Back in the day when Tom's dad was doing contract events for the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium in La Crosse, both Count Basie and Duke Ellington had La Crosse concerts. Tom met both men and got to know them quite well. Later, when Tom was working at his internship in New York City, he'd spend time visiting with each jazz legend whenever they were in town for a performance. The first date Tom took Priscilla on, back when they met in Illinois, was to hear (top notch jazz composer, arranger and pianist) Horace Silver in Chicago.

The Nibbe family loves living in Pacifica. And while the seven-day-a-week-working Reverend has a schedule that is nearly out of this world, he can still be spotted at some of his favorite local hangouts.

"I go to La Playa in Pedro Point as often as I can and sit at the bar and have the chips and salsa, a beer and a taco. I go to Guerrero's Taqueria in Vallemar and Taqueria El Gran Amigo II in Linda Mar. You might find me at Puerto 27 on Crespi Drive. I also like to go to Pedro Point Brewing on Bill Drake Way in Pacific Manor. I can take my dog Cooper there with me. The people are really friendly and so are the dogs." A Bichon Frise, Cooper is 8 years old.

"There are so many places I like here but my schedule is pretty busy."

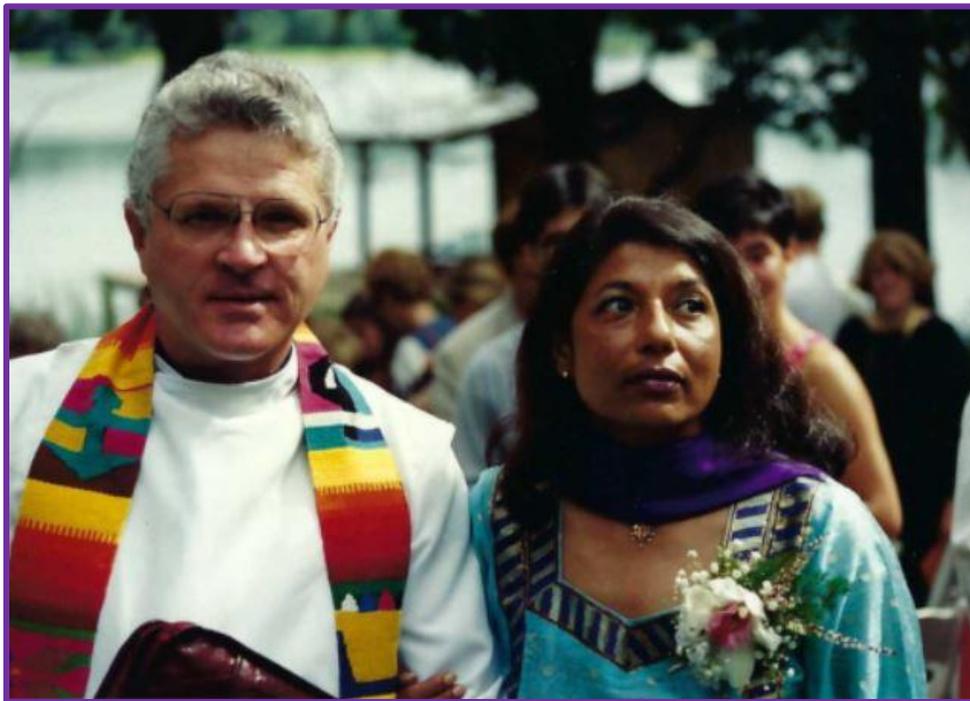
Cooper often accompanies Tom with his SpiritCare Ministry for Seniors. Tom is the Director of Chaplaincy Services and has been doing his SpiritCare Ministry for Seniors since 1999. When Cooper accompanies Tom, he also wears a clerical collar.

Tom is sometimes referred to as the Reverend Doctor. In 2004, he received his Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from La Salle University.

"I always wanted a doctorate in Systematic Theology. I remembered studying at St. Olaf under the great Paul Tillich. Dr. Tillich was a German Existentialist philosopher and somewhat Lutheran theologian. He was one of the outstanding intellectuals of the 20th century. I was fascinated by his intellect and presentation. My dissertation was focused upon the theological thoughts of Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg. Dr. Pannenberg wrote the prologue to my dissertation."

Rev. Dr. Nibbe helped to get the palliative program going at the former Harold D. Chope Community Hospital, now the San Mateo Medical Center. It should also be mentioned that from May 2010 through August 2014, Tom was the Palliative Chaplain at San Mateo Medical Center – while still pastoring at Holy Cross, and while working as the Director of Chaplaincy Services for SpiritCare Ministry for Seniors.

But there was another overseas experience that the Nibbe family took on, and that was when Tom accepted a four-year position with the Union Church of Lima in Peru as Pastor. With their eldest two daughters in college, Tom, Priscilla and their daughter Shama, left for Pakistan in May of 1991 and returned in June of 1995.



Tom and Priscilla in Peru, summer of 1991.

The family's residence was in the Miraflores District of Lima, an exclusive and upscale residential and shopping area. Their residence had a beautiful swimming pool. "Former pastors in Lima lived well in former times." The residence would eventually need five police officers, to protect the Nibbe family in three shifts. It was a time when democracy in Peru was hanging by a volcanic thread.

"Peru was in the middle of a South American revolution. Sendero Luminoso, the Shining Path, killed villages of people and there were hundreds and hundreds of orphans."

The Shining Path then was a revolutionary communist party and guerilla group that endorsed Maoism and additionally followed the models of Stalinist Russia and Cambodia's Khmer Rouge. It used violence, death, rape and intimidation in the poor rural and urban districts of central and southern Peru. Remnants of it still exist today, but its power is much declined.

"Because of the death of so many Andean peasants and parents, people came from all over the world to adopt Peruvian children. The Peruvian government was failing and then it fell completely. There were 150 to 250 Americans and Europeans that were stuck there because when the government failed, there were no adoption decrees of children. When the government stopped paying police salaries, there was chaos."

Recently, Tom wrote a column about this time in his family's life. That column, edited down for size, follows. The entire article can be found online at Marinscope.

Rev. Thomas Nibbe

October 24, 2021

The year was 1992. The Shining Path had murdered, burned, and raped its way from the remote sections of rural Peru to the very capital, Lima, and were commonly referred to as a "revolutionary Peruvian Communist" group. Lima, until recently, had been a Paris-like city of about 380,000. But it had become a huge, unruly mess of 11 million persons, mostly poor families, with hardly any resources. It was a desperate situation. Word had it that the Shining Path would wipe out complete villages – they'd murder complete settlements, starting with children first and then the women.

Disorder was everywhere. Crime had become a regular thing everywhere in the metropolitan area in those insane and memorable days. I can recall being in a traffic jam heading south out of town, heading toward El Silencio beach during a warm summer day. Women, with open car windows, sat on their purses to avoid robbery.

Nonetheless, on this one occasion, a boy swooped in on an automobile, pulled a purse from underneath a woman, and took off running between the cars down the way. A very decent-looking Dad-like man stepped out of his car, aimed, pointing his pistol at the boy, and shot him. The boy fell, evidently dead. Soon after, a policeman man dragged the body off to the side of the road and waved the traffic on. The man got into his car and proceeded forward with the other cars. That was all there was to the matter. Nothing else was done. I was shaken.

Every day some new, terrible tale would be shared by the residents of Miraflores and San Isidro, in our upscale section of Lima. The waterworks down the road from our church would be blown up by a bomb seemingly every couple of weeks. The government installed five policemen to guard the parsonage where we lived. They'd walk around our walled-in compound twenty-four hours a day. The American ambassador would provide an armored vehicle for me if I had an emergency call from one of the hospitals regarding an American citizen in Lima.

Alberto Fujimori was President of Peru and many folks had the opinion that he was a "powder-puff." He was an agricultural engineer, and wonder of wonders, he "Got the Holy Spirit" upon learning he was elected and then he immediately converted to Roman Catholicism. This was very convenient since a person must be Catholic to hold that office.

When he occupied the Presidential Palace (July 28, 1990 to November 19, 2000), he kicked his wife out, installed his daughter as "First Lady" and moved his girlfriend in. Furthermore, within a reasonable period of time, he got complete control of the Lima Police Department and eventually the Peruvian Army.

In the midst of great confusion in the country, our church, the Union Church of Lima, kept their doors open. When we arrived, the parishioners were mainly Americans. Within our first year there, official American and Canadian representatives in Lima would be brought home. The American Embassy in downtown Lima was blown to bits. I remember a church member asked the question, "Reverend, are you sorry you came to Peru?"

One wing of the American ambassador's residence was bombed. U.S. Ambassador Anthony Quainton and his wife Susan, members at Union Church, decided at the last minute to have a glass of milk before bedtime. They went down into the kitchen and the bomb exploded in their bedroom. They were saved by getting a glass of milk. I heard the explosion and called the ambassador. He answered saying they were alright.

The congregation at Union Church of Lima dwindled down to a handful of souls. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:20 came to mind.

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything I've commanded you, and surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Two things occurred to me. Most important to me, the Lord was with me in the midst of this desperate situation. Did I get my wife and daughter into this mess out of initial selfishness? Or did the Lord plan to place me in this situation as His disciple because I could be a suitable agent? Second of all, I was positive I had received a commission, that is, to go and make disciples.

The first disciple was the Indian Ambassador to Peru. He had been diagnosed with a cancer. He called me up to discuss what he referred to as a "strange and wonderful notion." He had been courting the idea of following Jesus. I came to the Indian residence. I talked briefly with him and I invited him to pray.

His next trip to the hospital resulted in him receiving the indication that his cancer had disappeared. Did the clinic make a mistake? Had I been deceived into trusting that God had healed him? You be the judge. In any case he became a Christian and was baptized.

In reaching out, I met a business woman from Beijing indicating that she and her family had studied the Bible every day late at night in the basement in China. However, she had not been baptized because she wanted to be baptized in a church. I received her powerful confession of faith and baptized her the following Sunday.

Our choir acquired two new tenors, one from Ghana, one from Canada, and yet another from the Ukraine. The church was beginning to fill up again with foreigners of all types, and yes, local Peruvians and lots of Koreans, who preferred to worship in English because they were from the so-called "international" set. Eventually the Americans and Canadians returned with a goodly number attending Sunday worship.

Meanwhile, during this same dire period, my daughter Shama and I were walking our dog Toby on Avenida Angamos, when from the north end of the avenue, a large number of government troops were moving in our direction. At the same time, the Sendero forces were proceeding from the south end.

Both forces started firing with automatic weapons and we were caught in the midst of the fire. I pushed my daughter into a ravine and hopped on top of her to protect her from the fire. Toby made his way to our side. The firing continued, but we somehow managed to survive without being hit. Somehow we were able to return unharmed to the parsonage after the scrimmage. Shama, and perhaps Priscilla, needed to return to the States. I would stay. I knew I had a role to play in Peru.

During this height of anxiety and terror, we continued at the church, to encourage large numbers of foreign adoptive parents to stay the course since they were willing and committed to do so. We would meet with the group on Friday afternoons. In those years, hundreds of couples from all around the world, but especially the United States, would come to Peru to adopt those babies that had been orphaned by terrorists, and also those babies whose parents couldn't afford to keep them because of poverty.

In the course of this national confusion, the government failed. There were no certifications of adoption, because there were no judges to grant them. Couples and perspective parents were stuck in Peru – unless they gave their babies up.

Since most had bonded, they weren't willing to do that. Homes back in the States were mortgaged. Automobiles were sold to cover the cost of staying at hotels in Lima.

The prospective parents were devastated, sorely disappointed and broken. Our meetings on Fridays were life-saving for those tender-hearted folks in those dark days. Most, or maybe all, would have proceeded to do terrible things to themselves, or their children, without the fellowship and counseling provided constantly. What a blessing it was to provide respite to the distressed. I was so glad I had left my first congregation to do advanced degree work in pastoral counseling. The stage was set for one of the landmark experiences I have had as a pastor over these fifty-three years.

To reflect, God is a gentleman. He doesn't force "religion" on folks who need it. God allows women and men to volunteer to receive Him as Lord and Savior, freely without pressure exerted, no twisting of arms. As the coordinator of this program of the Union Church of Lima, which was provided free of charge for these beleaguered prospective mothers and fathers, I sensed the Lord would provide a means to witness to the hardest of hearts in terms of receiving Jesus as a personal Lord and Savior. The opportunity arrived.

The Lord impressed upon my mind and heart, an essential element in a life of faith in Christ. That essential was this: to remain "present" in your existential situation, pleasant or unpleasant; to express gratitude in the face of impending disaster, to choose the present situation as the preferential situation, no matter how seemingly terrible and unbearable – and in this not to prefer or imagine some glorious alternative.

"...and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose..." (Romans 8:28)

"...these have come so that your faith---of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire---may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1 Peter 1:7)

"...Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God, and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

It was Friday afternoon. The adoptive parental group gathered. Many didn't want to come because of extreme depression, grief and personal pain brought on by stress. As usual, I encouraged everybody to feel comfortable, have something to drink or eat, and express whatever may have been on their mind.

There was simply an outpouring expression of pain and depression from every participant. It was understandable, but hard to bear. The common sense of negative empathy in the group was what kept them there. It wasn't a pleasant feeling at all. I asked the women and men to share what they were feeling. As people shared, there occurred a strong feeling that the sharing was not helping. A medical doctor, a perspective parent, representing the group, asked if I would be able to help the emotional upheaval obvious in the group.

I was astonished. I paused as though I had everything under control. (Normally, in a situation like this was, I empathize with the feeling, often thinking I can share in the burden. I've learned that this a false sense.) The people were waiting to hear from me. They weren't ready to hear just any advice, but I knew my words were needed. They had come to respect me and they knew I committed not to manipulate them in any way. They trusted in me at this point. I felt the Lord had prepared me for this moment.

I opened my mouth not knowing what I would say. I let the Holy Spirit speak for me. I suggested to them that this set of circumstances for them in Peru was no accident. All that happened and all that would happen was part of God's perfect plan for their lives. I suggested that they not despair, but know that God did not cause the difficulties they were experiencing but He allowed them to happen.

I encouraged them to let God remove the anxiety and depression from their hearts and minds, and accept the present set of circumstances, trusting that God would bring them through the confusion and frustration. Furthermore, I mentioned the importance of keeping positive, of having positive thoughts, and of not taking the "lower road." I explained to them that whether they had a church or synagogue affiliation, or not, they needed to move from thinking that my "sharing opportunity" was "religious" advice.

I amazed some of the folks by suggesting that I was not religious, but nonetheless, a man of faith and prayer, and that would be enough – sufficient not only for me but for them. There was a brief comment by one of the women relating to Peter's reference to "genuine faith." I responded by saying that the Lord most likely initiated the desire for fulfilling their need to have a child of their own, in order that they might live their lives as people of faith and positive thinking, no matter what could happen.

Lord, help me! I wasn't sure if I was communicating stuff that would take. The response was overwhelming. Two hundred perspective parents, all present, accepted my invitation to receive Christ in their lives.

Things in the government cleared up. The courts began to grant decrees of adoption. We received many from the group in Sunday morning worship. Eventually, all of the perspective parents took their children back home to the States. I recall the troubled times in Peru with different eyes.



Tom and the U.S. Ambassador to Peru, Alvin P. Adams Jr., 1994.



Before U.S. Ambassador Alvin P. Adams Jr. spoke at the dedication of the new U.S. Embassy in Lima, Rev. Tom Nibbe delivered the invocation. (July, 1995.)

Lima was fraught with wonder and danger when the Nibbe family was there. One Sunday, their home was broken into. A Lima newspaper article claimed that Tom was held with a knife to his neck, for hours, while robbers stole everything that wasn't bolted down.

Author: Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

Walking the world with Rev. Thomas A. Nibbe (anonymously sponsored)

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"Yes our home was cleaned out. But while it was happening, I was in the pulpit at church. My family was with me. We were safe.

"At one point I was placed on a 'kill list' because I was providing leadership to a remaining group of foreign people, defending what was still worth considering. There were American mercenaries there. This was precisely the time when the City Government placed five policemen around our residence, 24 hours a day."

Tom kept his "ear to the ground" regarding what was going on in the streets of Lima and was often a source of information to the U.S. Embassy. In addition, during the time Tom served in Lima, he became Chaplain and Counselor to each U.S. Ambassador to Peru: Anthony Quinton, serving from 1989-1992; and Alvin P. Adams Jr., serving from 1992-1996.



More peaceful moments in Peru included this 1994 visit to Machu Picchu, as well as a trip along the Amazon River in a peki-peki – a roof-covered, long and wide passenger boat with open sides and an outboard motor with a 10 to 12 foot long propeller shaft.

Returning to the States, the Nibbes interviewed at Georgetown Lutheran Church in Washington, D.C. and at Osaka International Church in the Kansai region of Japan.

"We refused both of those proposed pastoral calls and after five years, we received the Call to return to Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Pacifica."

* * *



There are so many more riveting stories from this pastor's past, as there will be so many more stories today and in the future. It would be remiss not to mention how proud Tom is of his congregation and his neighbors for allowing the congregation to follow through with finding shelter for one, very visible and sometimes disruptive homeless man, and his dog – a two-year process that took a lot of faith and a lot of patience. His pride in the lives his daughters are living is palpable and just one mention of his granddaughter Elliot brings a smile from ear to ear. There are many more mentions of his wife Priscilla, and at one point he simply said, "Love that woman." And not only does he lead his congregation in prayer every Sunday, but he is also there to pastor so many local events, including services to remember those who have served, as well as leading the annual Pacifica Easter Sunrise Service. He has led this multi-denominational service atop Sweeney Ridge since 1983.

← Pastor Nibbe blesses the animals at Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church on October 2, 2016.

But there is one more story and it is Tom's to tell. It begins with a new congregation member, Emily, back in the 1990s, and concludes with Emily – this time in the presence of Tom as Chaplain with SpiritCare Ministry for Seniors. But first Tom examines his thoughts on being present.

"I always encourage people to find a way to find peace and joy in their daily living. The biggest problem we have is women and men regret things from their past and, in addition, they attempt to predict the future. One can spend one's whole life in a human body, being in a place with people, but not being present in mind or disposition. This has been basic to my daily existence, and to my work building relationships with other people. There isn't anything more important in this life than to have the sense of being present with others.

"With SpiritCare for Seniors, the people I visit are elderly and are, many times, confined to a bed. They can't go anywhere. These are people who struggle to survive daily. And so the message of 'remaining present' and finding meaning in that present, is a constant emphasis in what I do and communicate. There are some really difficult cases for caregivers and medical professionals. Sometimes I can perceive what the underlying problem is. It may be a very simple problem to recognize but one of the most difficult ones to come to terms with. I say, invite a person to accept the, oftentimes, difficult present. Allow them to feel and express their pain. There may not be a 'better time' which lies ahead. This is a better time than it has been perceived to be. It's just a matter of perceiving the situation as positive, regardless of the fact that it maybe be painful or unpleasant. Help them remain in the present. The concept is Biblical."

The following is from a column written by Tom for Marinscope, which can be read in full online.

Rev. Thomas Nibbe "The Jesus in Emily was Pure Gold"
September 26, 2021

A new lady in town from Texas entered our church vestibule one Sunday morning, years ago now, to visit our church and to worship with us. Her name was Emily Angle. She was a Southern Baptist.

She was at least passing through her "middle-age" years when we first met. After the worship service, I said I would help her to find a Godly and outstanding Southern Baptist congregation nearby, in fact, there was such a church down the street and with a pastor from Texas. Her response to this was, "No thanks. I think I've found a 'church home' here at Holy Cross. If you don't mind, I'm going to

stay right here." The designation "Lutheran" didn't faze her one bit. Emily remained this way, I mean, a member of Holy Cross, for 17 years thereafter.

Her sister, Helen, remained a Southern Baptist, and joined another local congregation. But Helen always made it for our mid-week "prayer and praise" services. In later years, Helen returned to Texas and called me on the telephone during her last days, asking for the "kind of comforting prayer" she remembered when she had attended Holy Cross. I remember being so pleased to hear from her and blessed to know we'd made a difference in her life, too, as with Emily.

Emily was a constant prayer resource for others in our fellowship. She provided sound spiritual advice for many. She had a way of helping without intruding. It was her God-given gift. I cannot recall one instance when she criticized or mocked another individual, no matter the person or situation. She loved to fellowship before and after worship, and especially enjoyed the coffee hour in our social hall. Our people loved her dearly. She was quick to listen to and pass along good humor. Emily loved a good joke or story.

As the years passed by, Emily's health began to decline dramatically, and within time, she became a patient at the Linda Mar Convalescent Hospital in Pacifica. I visited her regularly. I would have to say she ministered to me more than I think I ministered to her. There was a churning and questioning inside myself at times, and I would pause and reflect, "Where does Emily's inner strength come from?"

Eventually, Emily's body became greatly disfigured. Her pain increased dramatically day by day. She had been a tall and thin woman. Within a comparatively short period of time her body became all twisted up and deformed. I could literally feel her pain in my body by drawing near. The time came when the administrator at the hospital called me on the telephone suggesting that I come to the hospital immediately. He was concerned that Emily was, as he said, "near the end." When I arrived I was absolutely shocked to observe Emily on her bed. It hurt me to see her in such intense pain. As I remember, her body was a sight, her arm and elbow and knee more observable than her face.

I concentrated on the person inside this human body and the God that had brought us together in beginning and caused us to be together in this present moment.

I let Emily know I was in the room. I greeted her warmly and expressed the commitment in love of the Savior we had shared through the years. I placed my hand upon what had been a shoulder and asked her, "Emily, what shall we pray for in this moment?"

Her answer was burned into my inner being for that moment and for all the years that have passed since. You see, I thought she would ask that the Lord minimize her pain, that the Lord would take her quickly, that the Lord would grant her insight into the reason behind the pain she was experiencing – no such thing.

Emily asked me, "Pastor, pray that I might remain faithful to the end."

She didn't need insight into why things were happening to her as they were. She didn't question the wisdom of the Lord in allowing what was happening now in light of all those faithful years of service – to bring about what would be the extremely painful end of her life.

Time stood still for me. This was for me a moment revelation, of divine light. I could have been present at the foot of the cross and I wouldn't have been more moved. It was for me a most holy moment in my pastoral life, a highlight, as with Jesus on the cross, a moment of surpassing pain, at great cost, and death, only to rise again, the assurance of faith. Emily was not concerned about

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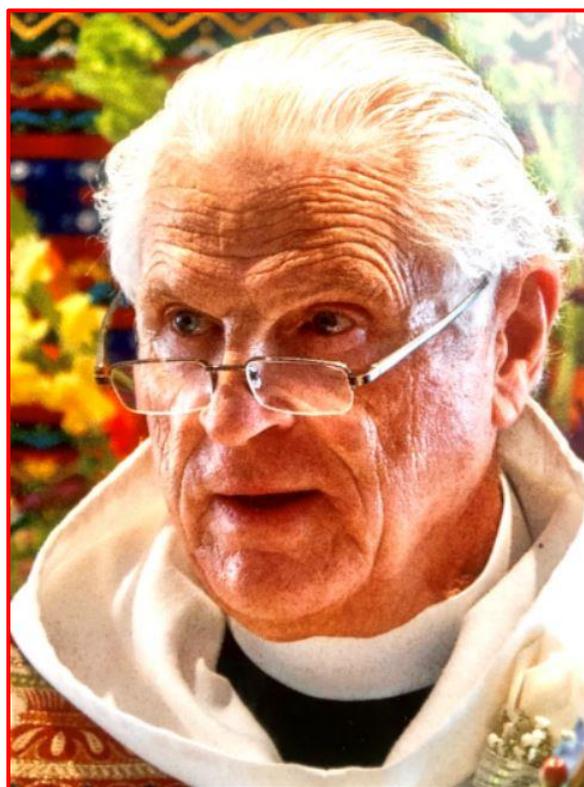
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herself in the most trying, agonizing moment in her life. I stayed with her a comparatively short period of actual clock time – an eternity of precious moments.

Within an hour Emily died, but she was not alone. She had such peace on her face. The battle was over. The victory of faith won. I sense she knew the very moment of her transition. I never felt so valued as to be there for my friend, then and for eternity. In sheer moments, all the preparation for ministry through the years was validated in my heart and mind.

I will see her again.

We'll sing, "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder" and "I'll Fly Away," together in the great "by and by" with Jesus Himself present right there with us.



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: *Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman* and *Catholic San Francisco*. She is additionally the author of: two historical biography books on some of the more than 370,000 interred at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Colma, CA; as well as the children's book, "[IndiAsia and the Dragon](#)." A produced playwright and former Hallmark Card writer, her website is www.bartlettbiographies.com.

(This biography was anonymously sponsored.)