



*What follows is a copy of an email I sent to Father Adam Gudalefsky- a Maryknoll priest with whom I had worked many years ago based in Hong Kong.*

*I discovered that he had been called "home" to Maryknoll New York retirement facility- at age 91.*

*With great reluctance he settled in with the other 111 Maryknoll retirees.*

*For the next few weeks we corresponded- my email below was an aide de memoire for both of us about our shared connections.*

*Then there was silence.*

*Until, that is, a message arrived from Maryknoll to inform me that Adam along with 10 of his confreres had died , all in recent weeks- suspected cause the dreaded COVID-19 virus.*

Dear Adam,

Greetings and may you be well. The other day I received mail from you- inside the envelope was a very special booklet commemorating yet another wonderful milestone in your life- 60 years a priest- Congratulations ad Multos Annos.

The Booklet is an excellent pictorial presentation of your indefatigable dedication to many ministries over the 60 years of priesthood- especially the programs all around the world for "Normal people who happen to be slow".

I was reminded of your age- 91 this year- you were born eleven years before me- our paths crossed along our journeys-

For the first time in Japan in 1948 or 49 at the American Forces Chapel Centre just down from the Japanese Government Building ,known as the Diet, where my family attended mass each Sunday- I cannot remember actually meeting you but, as a new 18-year-old army recruit, you worked there at that time with the Chaplains- do you remember Fr Lambert? Or Father Brucker?- they were US Army Chaplains during the occupation based at the Centre. Father Brucker baptised my youngest sister born in 1948- under the American Flag.

The next time our paths crossed, 33 years later, was in the presbytery of the Redemptorist Fathers in Klong Ruam Rudi, Bangkok- you were sitting on a bed on the third floor sorting papers- you told me that you were working in Kathmandu, having been missioned by your Catholic community in Hokkaido to work with the disabled, your special gift and focus . You suggested that I go and visit- I didn't have enough money so you lent me \$300.00 and off I went. I hope I re-paid the debt.

As I walked into the special House you had rented in central Kathmandu, the children were singing a Japanese song (Haru ga Kita) led, as I discovered, by a young Japanese Uni Student and mountain climber by the name of Wataru Fukushima. He told me that he met you by chance in between climbs as he and his mates waited for the mountains to clear. This chance meeting with you led him to volunteer to help with the children at your special-needs school and with the Missonaries of Charity at an abandoned Ashram near the Sacred river (Bagmati) used as a Hospice for the dying.

Your example and commitment to the disabled children of Nepal and the work of the Sisters made a deep impression on Wataru and he began preparing for Baptism.

At the time there was an Indian couple who among many gifts were skilled in therapeutic massage so helpful to many of the children who were bused to the Centre each day. I remember one lad in particular. His body was distorted, and his limbs atrophied. He was about 14- you had discovered him in a dank back room of his home living in a box- unable to contribute to the needs of his family and they too poor to provide the help he needed. Now he was with difficulty learning to mend bicycle , with a smile.

In the few days I was in Kathmandu Wataru was my guide showing me some of the intriguing and challenging places- one site I grimly remember was not far outside the city- the temple of Dakshinkali- where live animals were sacrificed on certain days during the year- (it was one of those days) a bloody sight indeed.

We also visited the Ashram (Hospice) and met the Sisters caring for the dying as they waited for the day when their bodies would be taken down to the gnats along the river to be cremated and their ashes cast into it.

Our last port of call was the Japanese style squat toilets which Wataru proudly told me, he had built for the old folks.

The following day he took me to the airport. It was Palm Sunday.

Just before our farewells he gave me a piece of paper on which was written his parents address and phone number in Kobe and asked if I would make contact with them when I

returned to Japan. They had supported his decision to stay for a few more months and his decision to be baptised. As I thanked him for his kindness, I assured him I would phone his parents to let them know he was well and safe, put the note in my pocket and subsequently forgot- the reasons follow.

The following week you returned to Kathmandu and baptised Wataru on Easter Sunday.

After leaving Thailand I visited Father Tom Mogan an Australian Redemptorist working at the busy Church of Baclaren, Manila. One evening we went out for a meal-At three am the following morning I knew I had made the wrong choice- one of the veteran priests gave me some "charcoal" tablets-mildly helpful; managed to visit Father Ruis Luis SJ in Macao to give him some money for his "caged boys" of Macao; pressed on to Osaka, tested at the airport for communicable diseases, two days later diagnosed with amoebic dysentery- ordered into the back of a special ambulance with a green light on top as two men wearing masks and knapsack sprays on their backs spraying disinfectant on places where I had been since arriving back in Japan. With siren blaring I was taken to an isolation building of the Takada General hospital- remained there, the lone patient in the care of a 24/7 nurse for the next 11 days.

I mentioned this, Adam, because I completely forgot to phone Wataru's parents.

His story as you know ended tragically-

A few months after returning to Japan I received a call from his mother to tell me Wataru was dead. He and his Japanese companion were on their way back to Japan via Europe where they planned to climb Mt Blanc- both fell to their deaths in their attempt.

Mrs Fukushima told me that her husband was returning to Japan from Switzerland that evening. I hastened to Osaka airport and met Mrs Fukushima for the first time as she waited for her husband to arrive with Wataru's ashes. Mr Fukushima exited customs carrying the copper Urn containing his son's remains. It was a deeply sad reunion.

They were not Catholic but out of respect for their son's faith asked if I would conduct the funeral service.

The Parents mentioned that Wataru had attended the Marianist High school in Osaka. Immediately, with their permission, I contacted the school thinking that it would be a wonderful opportunity to tell Wataru's story to the students who, like Wataru, while most were not Christian, would know something of the life of Christ, and would be impressed to learn that one of their school's alumni had encountered the compassionate face of Christ in and through your work and the work of the Missionaries of Charity in far-away Nepal.

Unfortunately, the School was in examination mode! I was told that It would therefore be impossible for the students to attend. However, if I wished, the funeral could be held in the School Chapel and that Year 7 would represent the school. A Catholic funeral in a Catholic school and the only Catholics present were Wataru and me.

Fast forward a few years, to April 1987, when you and John Ridyard of happy memory were running InterAid based in Hong Kong. I was doing a Sabbatical in Berkeley Ca. John, at your

suggestion, visited me there and offered a job with InterAid- I joined you later that year. Little did I know how helpful the experience I gained during the two years working with InterAid would be for my next appointment. Living in Kwun Tong with you and travelling through Burma, Thailand, China, India, Macao, Vietnam and Cambodia to visit and evaluate the programs already established and looking for new ones, were invaluable and life changing.

In early 1990 I was appointed as Director of the Marist Mission Centre in Sydney- I was then in a position to respond with financial support for of InterAid's programs.

During the following years you never failed to keep in contact- with letters, news of your expanding programs, especially your programs for those with disabilities, together with the gifted Sister Concepcion Madduma; your ministry with the Japanese Community in Hong Kong and Sabastian's special comic called I think "the Gang"- The heroes of the comic all had various disabilities but with skill and determination were able to overcome them and their able but nasty opponents.

So, there in brief is the story of how our lives intersected starting way back in 1948- 49- a story of many happy and fulfilling memories and challenging struggles for which I thank God and You. Your example of generosity, creativity, relentless and selfless commitment to the disabled will remain your legacy forever.

Also, there was an address on the envelope placing you in New York. Is this permanent or are you on holidays and will you return to Hong Kong, with all its upheaval in the New Year?

Do let me know.

In the meantime, lets pray with the Pope for the elimination or control of this epidemic. Stay well Adam.

Be sure of my prayers and with happy memories and enduring admiration your former colleague and friend.

***Jim***

Note: Adam replied to this email on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April. It was the last I received from him. After all those years of offering himself, his talents and his love through the "Special Educational Programs for Normal People who happen to be slow" he has been called to his eternal reward. May he rest in Peace.

**PS.**

#### **An Extract from an article about Adam's work and his foundation in Nepal**

"We have been trying to empower young people with handicaps to learn to educate themselves in some 50 countries and over 300 schools or centres throughout Asia and beyond," said Father Gudalefsky, who is also director of the Interaid <sup>(1)</sup> charity for needy children.

Filipino Sister Concepcion Madduma of the Immaculate Heart of Mary congregation, who accompanied the priest, also conducted sessions for teachers on psychology and sex education.

“Four children from our centre got the chance to prepare for adulthood by learning about their rights, responsibilities and hidden leadership qualities,” said Ganesh Parajuli a teacher at Navajyoti School.

**Navajyoti** was founded in 1979 by Father Gudalefsky and was Nepal’s first day care centre for the mentally handicapped. It is now run by the Nazareth Sisters.

“After arriving here on tourist visa in 1977, three other Maryknoll priests and I conducted the first survey on mental health in Nepal.

“In 1979, we reported to the government that 15 percent of the population had mental handicaps due to poor health facilities and insufficient diet,” Father Gudalefsky said.