

Pudupet Pangs

By Richard O'Connor

Pudupet is a little neighbourhood in the heart of Madras that lies sandwiched between the Rajarathinam stadium in Egmore and Casino Theatre near Mount Road. The Rajarathinam Stadium is at one end of the rather stately Marshalls Road, while at the other end is the Presentation Convent. Between these two extremities, of course, one finds the St. Anthony's Church and the rather expansive quarters of the Armed Reserve Police. The St. Anthony's parish was first set up by the Mill Hill Fathers in 1873, but for over two centuries before this time, the locality was ministered to by the Capuchin Fathers. Pudupet was considered upscale when it initially developed because Black Town had become congested, and the richer people bought land in Pudupet where they built their garden houses. One of these was said to be Pachaippan Mudaliar who even has a road here named after him. Another was Swamy Naik, whose memorial pillar still stands on Harris Road. Naik was a native Superintendent of Vaccinations besides being a dresser in the Madras Army, and he resided on the Langs Garden Road that spans the eastern boundary of Pudupet until this day. Houses which had a river view were considered premium. The Cooum river, which was at one time both clean and navigable, flowed past the southern and eastern peripheries of Pudupet.

My grandfather Kesava Pai's house on Harris Road in Pudupet, Madras was called Sri Nivas. I was born in that house as were my two sisters, Kanaka and Shanthi. Sri Nivas was a red brick two-storey mansion – I remember it as being a large gracious house, always busy with family, relatives, friends, a hospitable place, a happening place. The gate posts were crowned with seated lions. The broad driveway led up to a covered porch with steps up to a veranda. On either side of the porch, the veranda was shaded by tall palms. In the garage was our grandfather's brand new Studebaker sedan, a distinctive sky blue in colour, which drew admiring glances as we cruised down the Marina on our evening excursions to the beach.

Sharada Nayak— A Journey Across Generations, 2024

In course of time, many of the artisans and traders at Black Town moved into Pudupet, and the inner streets of Pudupet became a bit crowded. In the 20th century, many of these traders took to the service and sale of spare parts for vehicles, and Pudupet acquired fame as a hub for cannibalized automobile parts. Amongst those who made Pudupet their home was the Anglo-Indian community, and they were concentrated in the streets located near the church. The gentlemen found occupations in the mechanical trades in various firms, while the women worked as teachers, nurses and secretaries. The Presentation Convent ran a very popular Secretarial Course, besides a school on its premises. The Tamil Nadu State Government managed two well-known hospitals in the locality, one was ophthalmic while the other was maternity-related, and there were many Anglo-Indian nurses in their employ. The Ashoka Hotel, run by the Central Government, was also in the vicinity.

What was special about the community in Pudupet was that almost every family had musical talent, with the Collins and the Fletchers being truly exceptional. Amongst the O'Connors, Valentine, my dad's brother, emerged as an ace guitarist. All this talent was put to good use at the St. Anthony's Church, whose English Mass was a largely Anglo-Indian affair, with Mervyn Moses, the choir master, leading the community on Sundays and other days of liturgical importance.

Pudupet has this image of being a rough area, but I know that it is actually a very kind-hearted place. I had lived on Labbai Street where there was a mosque and a temple just 20 feet away. People of all communities co-existed peacefully. I remember my Muslim friends pulling me into their mosque on feast days. They were very fond of the Anglo-Indians as we were seen as open-hearted and fun loving. Unfortunately, nearly all the Anglo-Indians have left Pudupet.

Christy Lee

Our time at St. Anthony's was when we actually got to know ourselves; we girls were 15 or 16 years of age. We didn't have a French Master at that time and so we used to bunk the French class, go to Fountain Plaza, sit down and wait for the Don Bosco boys to come and pretend to listen to music you know and get back within the hour. Yeah, it was fun times.

Elvina Ellis

We used to study under kerosene oil lamps. We were not sure of our next meal. Those were very hard days. There were several Anglo-Indian families in Pudupet who were poor.

Russell Nicholas

I remember my Maths teacher at St. Anthony's School, Ms. Neeves who was strict with us. Pudupet area was once dominated by Anglo-Indians, but now it is dominated by Muslims. The 1st and 2nd Streets had families like that of Peter Ross, Rocky, Rennet Fernandez and the D'Costas. They've all migrated to Australia.

Kemkar Rao Prakash, Charm Tailor

The names of the First, Second, Third and Fourth streets surrounding the St. Anthony's Church and the adjacent convent school are all changed. In Pudupet, the Guava Grove, known in Tamil as *Goya Thope*, has disappeared; clusters of tenements now clog the area which still goes by the same name. Change is inevitable in life, but for those Anglo-Indians who stayed in Pudupet a few decades ago, those were the golden days. They were the wonder years of music and song. Especially for the Collins family whose members have spread their wings and flown to different parts of the world. How pleased I was to have come across an article on Milton Collins and his band in *Anglos In The Wind* a few years ago (see Inset).

The band also included Milton's brother Henry and sister Aileen. Aileen's son Alan D'Cruz, now in Melbourne, is of course a gifted clarinet player. He was earlier choirmaster at St. Patrick's Church in St. Thomas Mount, Madras for several years. Other members of the Collins tribe are also singers and musicians, and conduct an annual Carol concert in Melbourne each year where the family is more in number. Indeed, wherever they are, the Collins have not failed to touch people with their magic wand, a wand that was first forged in that little neighbourhood in Madras called Pudupet.

I recall visiting Pudupet sometime in 2017, when I had made an audio-visual documentary on the Anglo-Indians of Madras, which is available on the “Pepperwatcher Channel” on YouTube. Nicholas Moses - the camera man - and I were ushered around the place by Donald Horne, the saxaphonist, but there was not a single Anglo-Indian we could meet here. A far cry from the days when it was peopled by the likes of the Durands, Collins, Bernards, Dubiers, Fletchers, Jeremiahs, Edmonds, Bents, Fernandez’, O’Connors, Vanderputts, Brewetts, Moses’, Borthwicks, Cobbs, Murrays, Sladens and the Lees.

Box: Milton Collins: It was in the early 1940s that Milton teamed up with brother Henry – guitar, cousin Pat Johnson – double bass, friend Terrence Durand – drums to form Mil Collins and the Jive Boys, one of the best bands in Madras! Milton himself played the grand piano like a wizard. The band travelled to almost every Railway Colony in South India at festive seasons only to give the Anglo-Indians a real good time on the dance floor. During the Raj days, soldiers would flood the dance floor only to hear the music of Mil Collins and the Jive Boys, not forgetting the crooner who never used or needed a microphone, Aileen D’Cruz (née Collins) – Mil’s sister. Her powerful and melodious voice was a big hit in the 40s and early 50s. Anglo-Indians at large never missed any show where this great band was in attendance, dancing from dusk until dawn and could never stop asking for an encore. Milton was also in great demand at the All-India Radio Broadcasting Station as well as at Doordarshan TV, before he migrated to Australia in 1994. He enjoyed a few years with his family before passing away on 23rd May 2000.

(Courtesy: AITW)



Introducing Darryl Collins



A series of questions were put to Darryl ... read his responses.

What's your favorite memory from when you were young?

My Journey of Perseverance and Growth

At the age of 17, shortly after completing my high school examinations, I found myself at a crossroad. As the eldest of seven children in a family facing significant financial hardship, the weight of responsibility pressed heavily on my young shoulders. One day, while praying in church with tears in my eyes and my hands outstretched in silent plea, a kind-hearted stranger noticed my distress. He approached me, gently asked about my situation, and, moved by compassion, introduced me to a friend of his. That friend offered me my first opportunity in a reputed organization. It was a moment that changed the course of my life.

From that humble beginning, my career journey began — filled with challenges, determination, and growth. I worked diligently across various engineering disciplines, driven by a desire to uplift my family and prove myself. Simultaneously, I enrolled in part-time evening courses to enhance my skills and qualifications. Over time, this dedication enabled me to rise through the ranks and take on managerial responsibilities.

Looking back, I remain deeply grateful for the good Samaritan who saw potential in a struggling young man and gave me the chance to build a future.

Did your family have any unique traditions and what traditions do you continue to enjoy?

Faith, Family, and the Gift of Music

One of the cherished traditions in our family has always been to attend Mass on our birthdays and receive blessings from the priest — a practice that continues to this day with our grandchildren. Daily family prayers have also remained a cornerstone of our home, grounding us in faith and unity through every season of life.

Above all, we believe in the healing power of music — a talent passed down through generations. Whether in moments of joy or challenge, music has been a source of comfort, strength, and connection. It continues to play a vital role in our daily lives, renewing our spirits and bringing peace to both soul and body.

What was your first job, and what was the best and most challenging part of the job?

From Humble Beginnings to Global Experience

At the age of 17, I began my first permanent job at Binny's Engineering as an apprentice. I earned just 7 paisa (₹0.07) per hour, but I embraced the opportunity with dedication and determination. Over the course of three years, I gained valuable hands-on experience, which laid the foundation for my career in engineering and management.

Through hard work and continuous learning, I gradually rose to managerial levels within the organization. This experience opened doors to various management positions across different sectors — both in India and overseas. Each step forward was built on the lessons learned during those early days, and I carry those values of perseverance, humility, and integrity with me to this day.

What has been your proudest accomplishment so far?

A Life of Purpose and Witness

If I were to name my proudest accomplishment, I would echo the words of St. Paul in *2 Corinthians 10:17*: **“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”**

My greatest honor has been to serve God — even in the most challenging of places, including Saudi Arabia, where practicing the Christian faith openly comes at great personal risk. There, I had the profound privilege of being a vessel for God's word, offering hope and truth to souls thirsting for Him.

This mission demanded courage, discretion, and above all, a deep and abiding faith — even to the point of being prepared to lay down one's life. I consider it a blessing to have been called to such service. Among many moments of grace, one stands out clearly: being an instrument in the conversion of a Buddhist man, and walking with him as he found new life in Christ. His journey of faith led to a sacramental marriage with a Catholic woman — a union that continues to stand as a testament to the power of faith and God's providence.

Yet above all, my proudest accomplishment is the gift of my beautiful daughters and grandchildren. They are the purest blessings God has entrusted to me — a living, breathing legacy of love and faith.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Words of Wisdom for Life

Firstly, always keep yourself closely connected with your relatives — both near and far. Relationships rooted in love and family are a source of strength, especially during times of trial and tribulation. Cherish those bonds and nurture them with care, for they are among life's greatest blessings.

Secondly, dedicate time each day to reading the Bible. In doing so, you will draw strength, wisdom, and comfort from God's Word, and your heart will be enriched by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let Scripture guide your thoughts, actions, and decisions, and you will never walk alone.

What is the most important lesson you've learned about life so far?

The Most Important Lesson I've Learned in Life

The most important lesson life has taught me is this: in times of deep emotion and conflict, I came to understand myself more fully — discovering inner strengths I never knew I had. These were not my own doing alone, but the result of Divine Grace working in and through me.

One of the most profound moments came when I was faced with the ultimate test of forgiveness. While serving the Lord in Saudi Arabia — in a place where openly practicing the Christian faith can be life-threatening — I was caught and reported by someone for sharing God's word. It was a time of great fear and trial.

Two years later, after returning to India and taking up a position in a new company, I came face to face with that very man. It was a moment charged with emotion — but instead of resentment, God moved my heart to forgive him. Not only did I forgive him, but I also prayed for his daughter, who was critically ill and on her deathbed. That experience reaffirmed what I now hold as one of life's greatest truths: forgiveness not only heals others — it sets us free.

How do you want to be remembered and what kind of legacy do you want to leave behind?

My Final Wishes and Legacy of Faith

When my time on this earth comes to an end, I would love for my family to remember me by offering Holy Masses for the repose of my soul, that I may attain eternal life in heaven. There is no greater gift than prayer, and no greater act of love than interceding for one another before God.

The legacy I wish to leave behind is simple, yet profound: *Have faith in God*. Trust Him in all seasons of life — in joy and in sorrow, in certainty and in doubt. Stay close to the sacraments of the Church, which are powerful channels of grace and strength.

Above all, cherish and nurture your family relationships. No matter the differences that may arise, strive for unity, forgiveness, and love. Let there always be room for reconciliation and reunion. An intimately connected family is one of the greatest witnesses to God's love in the world.

What and who makes you laugh the most?

The Joy of Laughter

First of all, I laugh at myself. Life has taught me not to take myself too seriously — and that a good sense of humor is often the best medicine. Comedians, in particular, have a special gift. They make me laugh so much that I sometimes end up in tears — not from sadness, but from sheer, heartfelt joy.

Laughter, I've learned, is a blessing. It lifts burdens, connects people, and reminds us of the lighter side of life, even in the midst of challenges. And sometimes, it's in those moments of laughter that we feel most alive.

What time do you wake up each day? What does a typical day look like for you?

A Day in My Life – Living with Purpose and Gratitude

On weekdays, I wake up at 7:30 a.m., and on weekends, I allow myself a little extra rest, rising at 8:30 a.m. The first thought that fills my heart each morning is one of gratitude — giving glory to God that I am alive, able to praise Him, and ready to do His will. I seek to see Him in every part of my daily routine.

Each day offers small yet meaningful tasks: dropping and picking up my granddaughter from school, helping with household work, and most importantly, spending quality time with my beloved wife. These are moments I treasure — quiet acts of love and service that reflect the deeper purpose of my life.

In today's world, I also see social media as a tool for good. I use it to share spiritual reflections, encouragement, and the Word of God — little seeds of hope that can touch lives in unseen ways. It is my joy to offer others not just messages, but *spiritual food* to nourish their souls.



Anyone celebrating a special birthday, anniversary or special occasions, and would like a special mention, please feel free to drop us a line at collinsconnect.2018@gmail.com. We would love to hear from you.

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