

“Draw the Circle Wide” (Hymn 418, Anglican Church of Canada’s Common Praise Hymnbook)
Parishioner Interview
JEYAKUMAR (Jeya) ANUGRAHAM; June 15, 2025

Laura Locke

Great to meet with you, Jeya - thank you so much for being part of our Parishioner Interviews project. Can we start by learning a little about where you grew up?

Jeya Anugraham

I was born in Madurai, which is a very well-known city in South India, and this is also where I spent my early years. Then we moved from Madurai, when my father took a job in the east of India - that is, in Calcutta.

Laura

How old were you when you moved to Calcutta?

Jeya

I was 10 years old when I moved from Madurai to Calcutta.

Laura

And how long did you live in Calcutta?

Jeya

I finished my schooling in Calcutta, so I was in there for about six years or so. Then I went to do my Engineering in Hyderabad.

Laura

When you think back on those years of growing up in India, is there a special memory that comes to mind?

Jeya

Growing up in India was challenging as well as very fulfilling. India, as you may be aware, is a country of diverse cultures and peoples – everything is different, state to state. And since my father was with the railways, we moved a lot. I had to move from school to school, which was challenging in many ways, but also it gave me a lot of confidence as I grew up.

Laura

What values do you think you carry from your early family life?

Jeya

I grew up as a Christian, in a Christian family. The Church of South India, to which we originally belonged, is the Anglican Church - the Church of England transferred to India. India is divided into the Church of South India and the Church of North India. Both follow the same prayer book, the same

hymnals, the same tradition. My parents both were active members of the Church, and we were members of the choir and the youth group and other things. I'm one of five children in my family. There were three girls and two boys. So we grew up with the right values, the right guidance, the right goals to achieve.

Laura

How about your work life and your professional journey, after you finished your education?

Jeya

When I finished my engineering I started work in a steel plant, which was set up with French collaboration. I worked there for a year and a half in the initial 'setting-up stage' of a steel plant. This was called Bihar Alloy Steels Limited in Bihar. But I always had the itch to serve with the Army, so I went for an interview. I got selected, but my parents said no, because nobody from our family had ever served with the Armed Forces. I went back to the steel plant, and I stayed there for another six weeks, but I just couldn't continue - I really wanted to join the army. So, I resigned from my job and came back to Calcutta.

My parents made a big fuss, but they finally relented. I did the training in the Officers' Military Academy at Dehradun in the north of India, and I was commissioned into the Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers of the Indian Army. I served for 21 years all over India, as well as on a Peacekeeping Mission in Sri Lanka. During this time, I married and then we had one daughter. Every three years we had to move, and our daughter had to learn a new language, and go to a new school. It was kind of unsettling for her. And so, when I was posted in Baroda, in the state of Gujarat, my wife Alice joined the University. She retired in 2019 as a professor of French and Linguistics. But during my army tenure, when we were moving so frequently, that there was no chance for a career for Alice. At one point we decided to settle in Gujarat, Baroda, very close to where the disaster took place recently.

After being an engineer, I worked in the corporate sector for two years. Then I was invited by the Board of Governors of the Methodist Technical Institute, which is one of the biggest technical and vocational training centers in India, to take over as Director of the Institute. I served there for five years.

We decided to move to Canada, so that Alice could do her Ph.D. She enrolled at the University of Montreal, and our daughter and I joined her. At one point I worked in Cambodia as a consultant for a Technical and Vocational Training Centre, and thereafter I've worked in different countries. I went to Afghanistan, and then back to Cambodia for a second tenure. I also went to the Solomon Islands, and then to Myanmar, where I was leading World Bank projects. This is a branch of the World Bank called the World Bank International Development Agency – the World Bank IDA – where we help the local respective governments of different countries to improve their skills, and to find market opportunities for their beneficiaries. I served many years with so many countries, and I still get calls from the World Bank. But I've said, "No, I should now spend time with our grandchildren." We have twin granddaughters who are seven years old now. We spend half the year here in Canada, and half in India every year.

Laura

What did you think of Canada when you first arrived?

Jeya

Canada was frightening to us when we first came here. Compared to the cost of living in India, Canada appeared to be formidable. It was almost ten times the cost of living in India when we arrived here in 2000. Now, we have gotten used to it, but initially we were counting every cent, every dollar that we were spending. It is a beautiful country and very well organized; a very, very good place to live – but all the same, India is home. We still love India.

Laura

How about our winters?

Jeya

We've been through many winters here, even the worst of winters. But now we've decided that we'll spend the winters in India, and summers here.

Laura

That sounds like a wonderful idea! So Jeya, it sounds like you inherited your Christian faith from your parents.

Jeya

Yes, you're right. And that faith was strengthened when I was director of the Methodist Technical Institute, where the mission statement was to train needy youth in technical skills, along with Christian values. I would say that we were one of the best in the skills that we imparted. Companies would come just before the students' graduation, to select and employ them. Our students, our trainees, were very hard-working, with the right values. We also had regular worship services every day. And every morning, we would have an assembly with a thoughtful prayer. It was very fulfilling.

Laura

Was there a person who was inspirational to you, or who helped you on your path?

Jeya

My parents, of course. And we had a choir director whose name was Mr. Bhaktamitran, a very good musician, who was also the Librarian at the Indian Institute of Management. He was a very, very inspirational and spiritual person.

Laura

When you look back, has your faith evolved or changed from your early years?

Jeya

I consider religion as a very personal experience and a personal way of life. I believe very strongly in Jesus, and I've had times when I thought everything was lost, but I would get on my knees and pray, and I came out a winner each time. For instance, in 2009 I had a massive heart attack while I was in Cambodia. Alice was with me in October of that year. She was still in university, but she would join me

during her vacations. She also used to have three-week vacations for Diwali, which is an Indian festival in October. So, she was about to return to India in two days, when I had this heart attack. And since Cambodia doesn't have any surgical facilities - at least in 2009 - I had to be airlifted to Bangkok. As it happened, my passport had been sent for a Visa Extension one day before I had the heart attack. It took 36 hours to get my passport back, because I was in the city of Siem Reap in northwestern Cambodia, where the Angkor Wat Hindu-Buddhist Temple is located. Then the Bangkok hospital sent a medical jet to pick Alice and I up and take us to Bangkok. By then, my heart had suffered severe damage. I was rolled in straight to the surgery for angioplasty. And a week after the surgery, my heart stopped completely, and it turned out that I had a condition called ventricular tachycardia, which is a very rapid heart rhythm. They had to use a defibrillator to revive me. Alice stayed with me, but then she finally tucked me into bed and left the hospital. Thirty minutes later, I had a second attack of ventricular tachycardia. Again, the heart stopped, and I was revived. So, I consider that I've been gifted by God with a second lease of life. I have an ICD implant in my chest, which will make sure that if ever my heart stops, it will give me a kick and revive me again. As it happens, I'm going in for a surgery here very soon to replace the ICD, because it has now lasted ten years.

While I was in the ICU, I used to think of myself as a little worm in God's palm, and I would pray that he would take care of me, which he did.

Laura

What a story – thank you for sharing that. Jeya, how did you and Alice end up at St. Stephen's?

Jeya

Our daughter bought a condo in a building called Dorchester Square not too far from St. Stephen's. When we would come from India to stay with her, we would walk to the church. We moved to Toronto for a while, when my son-in-law was posted there with Imperial Oil. But since we returned to Calgary, even though we now live close to Mt. Royal University in Garrison Green, we continue to worship at St. Stephen's. Our grandchildren – two little twin girls – were baptized here at St. Stephen's.

It's a very friendly church; not like some other churches we have attended where people don't really interact very much.

Laura

Yes, I agree wholeheartedly. And it's been a pleasure to get to know you a little better through this interview. Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

Jeya

Well, my life has always been blessed, and through God's grace, we are where we are now. Both Alice and I have retired and have taken the conscious decision to spend time with our grandkids. We drop them off at school, pick them up after school, and take care of them till our daughter and son-in-law get back from work. We really enjoy that, and my wish is to last at least ten years more. I'm 75 now, so I'd like to see the career choices they make, and which way they are going in life. But it's all their choice.

Laura

Jeya, I have enjoyed speaking with you today so much, and it's been a privilege to get to know you a little better. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today.

.