

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

It was you who created my inmost self, and put me together in my mother's womb; and for all these mysteries I thank you: for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works. (Psalm 139:13-16)

THE BIRTH OF HENDRA ISKANDAR LIM (LIEM SIONG HIEN) FOLLOWS THAT OF INDONESIAN NATION

The Dutch East India Company, known in its Dutch acronym VOC, came to the archipelago southeast of the Asian continent in 17th century. Eventually however, they developed into a colonial administration. While a number of Chinese were already living in Java, and smaller numbers in the other islands, the Dutch would bring in more of them, to be used as labourers, artisans and petty traders. They put the Chinese in a legal class between the Europeans and the indigenous; they were categorised as 'foreign orientals' together with the Arabs and Indians.

Almost four centuries later, on 17 August 1945, a new nation was born when in Batavia – now Jakarta -, Soekarno and Hatta proclaimed the birth of Indonesia, comprising all the territories under Dutch colonial administration, a group of territories known as the Dutch East Indies. This proclamation however, did not stop the violent clashes between the independence fighters and the Dutch army – the Dutch refusing to hand over power to the Indonesians. In fact the guerilla wars continued for over three years throughout the new nation.

HENDRA BEGINS HIS LIFE

It was into the midst of this turbulence that I was born on 5 September 1945. My parents had married the previous year and I

was their first child. Six more children were to follow later. My parents gave me the name Liem Siong Hien. I was a very sick baby. It was a difficult time. My mother had no breastmilk to speak of and canned baby supplements were unheard of, so she had to feed me watered-down rice porridge.

My parents had a house in Jalan Lingga III, number 19, in Semarang, Central Java. It was a modest but pleasant area along the river, where former and current Dutch colonial public servants lived.

I was only a few months old when tension spread and conflict, so my father assessed that it was too dangerous for us to stay on there. Across the river was what was known as the 'republic's territory', and everyday there were sporadic shootings and mortar launched from there toward us on this side. So he persuaded my mother to come with him and seek shelter further into town, in the Dutch area. Though at first reluctant, my mother finally agreed. They dressed me warmly, and carrying a few essential belongings, moved less than two hundred metres downtown into a sturdy Dutch building.

We had hardly got there when my mother felt extremely uneasy. She had a sense of premonition, and implored my father to return to our house in Jalan Lingga III. My father capitulated. We returned safely the following day as the house was still standing, intact. That night however, the building where we had been sheltering, was badly damaged by mortar thrown from the other side of the river!

It was not the only time when I have escaped death. While moving back from the Dutch area, my mother had put me on a small mattress in a make-shift pram. Halfway through the journey, I began to cry because I had just wet myself. My mother stopped to pick me up and, as she was pulling the mattress out of the pram a shot rang out and went through the wet mattress. Hugging me, trembling with a mixture of fear, shock and relief, she quickly realised what would have happened if I had still been there.

CHAPTER TWO

"See that you never despise any of these little ones; for I tell you, their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:10)

HENDRA'S CHILDHOOD SPENT IN CHINESE MICROCOSM

Nationalist fervour among indigenous intellectuals began to spread especially in Java in the beginning of 20th century, almost in tandem with the emergence of the Han nationalism in China. By then Ethical Policy had taken roots among intellectuals in Holland, which put pressure on the colonial administration in Batavia. The colonial administration were forced to give the Chinese a choice of coming under Dutch protectorship (onderdaanschap) or accepting the offer from the Chinese government of becoming Chinese citizens.

The period between 1945 when independence was proclaimed and 1949 when the Dutch finally ceded power, was a time of uncertainty and insecurity for the Chinese. Various sentiments, all uncertain in terms of the future, dominated the Chinese community. They can be roughly divided into three groups: those who wanted to accept Chinese citizenship while remaining in Indonesia as foreign residents, those who saw no point in maintaining any legal ties with China and regarded gradual assimilation into the indigenous Indonesians as the best option, and those more or less in the middle, who wanted to maintain Chinese cultural heritage but become part of the Indonesian nation.

In Semarang, the third category appeared to be the majority. They were mostly Dutch educated, though they were not keen on becoming Dutch onderdaans, as they regarded that option to be somewhat inferior. Many of these were members of an organisation called Chung Hwa Hwee.

HENDRA'S FIRST FIVE YEARS

I grew up in Jalan Wotgandul Dalam, number 169, in Chinatown, in my grandmother's house.

I don't remember ever coming across any indigenous persons apart from domestic servants. The whole ambience was

Chinese. It may not have been the same as that in China at the time, but Chinese nonetheless. Or it may have been the kind of Chinese ambience one only comes across when a whole community has been physically detached from its original main body and continues on as if existing in an enchanted world.

My daily cultural diet consisted of an oral version of *cerita silat* or epic martial arts stories set in the contexts of Chinese warriors and scholars fighting, each in their own way, to regain their homeland from the Manchu rulers, told to me by uncles and family friends. And I remember being taken to see performances of *wayang potehi* or Chinese puppet shows.

My sister Mei Ling was born when I was two years old. So we were very close. Indarto (Liem Siong Ing) was only born several months before we left Chinatown.

Mei Ling and I were left a great deal to our own devices, because both my parents were busy making a living. I have no memory of my parents explicitly teaching us how to conduct ourselves. What we learnt was what we absorbed. We knew intuitively for instance, that we had to behave ourselves, and that I had to look after Mei Ling.

My mother would regularly take me and Mei Ling to the local Chinese temple to burn incense and pray. I don't remember what we were praying or for what purpose.

Every year on the fifteenth day of the eighth month of Chinese calendar, my mother would make round sweetmeats called *ronde* and flat sweet cake called *tiong ciu pia*. On the fifth day of the fifth month we commemorated the death of a Chinese patriotic scholar Chu Chuan who had felt betrayed by his king and had committed suicide by jumping into the river. The commemorative day was called *peh cun*, and we would go to the river to bring offerings. The *peh cun* festivities were also celebrated by a dragon boat race, not in Semarang, but in Jepara. On Chinese New Year we would put on new clothes and go around the neighbourhood and visit older family members with our greetings.

My parents spoke Dutch with each other, and with the rest of the family they spoke Chinese Malay, known as *Melayu Tionghoa*. Later on when I went to school, a bizarre situation developed. I was taught Mandarin at school, but my parents could not speak it. And I could not speak Dutch. Lucky for us, we had Chinese Malay.

It was a very close-knit community, where people lived in small terrace houses with no yards or clearance between them, along a stretch of the river where the water was stagnant and dirty.

When there was a wandering street performers, within minutes everybody would come out.

I remember a particular street performer selling *jamu* or traditional herbal medicinal drinks. He would drive a kind of utility vehicle bearing the logo *Jamu Jago* and bringing a group of dwarves, who would perform various feats such as acrobatics, martial arts, even singing and dancing. Much later on I discovered that his son, Herry Yanto, had become a successful businessman selling his own brand of herbal medicines, *Jamu Air Mancur*.

There were also sad and difficult moments. It was during this time that Mei Ling contracted diphthery. At the time diphthery was a fatal and believed to be extremely contagious. So our house was quickly isolated. No one came to visit us, and no one would allow us to visit them. For a couple of months, the duration of Mei Ling's illness, I had no one to talk to outside the house, and no one to play with, because I also was not allowed to come near her. Finally Mei Ling died. We were devastated.

Mei Ling's death jolted my father to the realisation how unhealthy living conditions in Chinatown were at the time. Not long after Indarto was born, we moved back to in Jalan Lingga III, to the house across the road from where we had been living. And there my mother was able to set up a small shop selling food stuffs.

CHAPTER THREE

My Yahweh our God be with us, as he was with our ancestors; may he never desert us or cast us off (1 Kings 8:57)

During 17th, 18th and 19th century, China experienced successive social and political crises. Foreign penetration, government corruption and stresses of rapid population growth in the southern regions forced many, many families whose livelihood depended on the land and the agrarian network, into poverty. They went in droves actively seeking recruitment by Chinese trading ships leaving for the southeast and elsewhere. Unlike the earlier emigrants who sailed on the ships of Ming Dynasty in 12th century enlisting southeastern states to be Chinese tributaries and trading partners, those who went in the later times, arrived in their destinations with much less dignity. In the Dutch East Indies they were mostly employed as manual labourers and various artisans,

subjected to colonial patronising and discrimination. Many however, worked hard into better lives.

THE FIRST LIEMS, HENDRA'S ANCESTORS

My great-great-grandfather, Liem Tjien Sing left Fu Jian, China, with his two sons, Liem Too Thong and Liem Too Sing, during the later half of 19th century, and arrived in Java several months later. Liem Too Thong was my great-grandfather.

My father Liem Soe Liang, was a son of Liem Poo Thaij, who was a son of Liem Too Thong.

When Liem Too Thong, my great-grandfather, grew up, he went and settled in the town of Boyolali and married Lie Na Nio, my great-grandmother, a local-born Chinese from a small town of Masaran, a little town near Solo.

Liem Tjien Sing earned his living by selling *jamu*, complemented by various household items, which he brought with him when he visited different villages on horseback. He must have brought his children with him also, at least from time to time, because my grandfather and his brother were able to ease into the local community and learn local languages with little difficulty. In fact, by the time my own father came along, he grew up more imbued in the local mores than in Chinese culture. He spoke fluent Javanese, and looked a lot more Javanese than Chinese.

He also spoke Dutch because his father sent him to a Dutch primary school founded specially for the ethnic Chinese.

Unfortunately Liem Poo Thaij, my grandfather, died when my father was in fourth year. And since my grandmother was no longer able to afford his school fees, my father had to interrupt his schooling. Luckily for him, his aunt, Liem Hian Nio, who had married well, brought him up as part of her family. In the Chinese society, the aunt's family was well-connected. Their daily spoken language was Dutch. And part of being well-connected then, was being actively involved in sports clubs. In fact, one of my father's cousins is Tan Liang Tie, a well-known sports reporter at the time. My father learned to play golf and rubbed shoulders with sons and daughters of Dutch-educated doctors and lawyers, many being founding members of a Chinese social organisation, Chung Hwa Hwee, which had the policy of maintaining Chinese heritage without necessarily identifying with China the nation.

When he reached working age, my father began working for Kian Goan, a large company owned by the well-known millionaire

family of Oei Tiong Ham, where he stayed for the rest of his working life.

So despite not belonging to the elite class, my father was close to them, and through this network that I was able to be accepted in the Chung Hwa Swee prestigious school in Karangturi.

CHAPTER FOUR

If you do a good turn, know for whom you are doing it, and your good deeds will not go to waste (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

HENDRA'S ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULthood **SCHOOL DAYS**

Chung Hwa Hwee was a prestigious national private school where all the students were Chinese. Former Megawati government minister Kwik Kian Gie was once a student here.

Having lived for five years in Chinatown in the thick Chinese ambience of Chinatown, going to Chung Hwa Hwee school was like stepping into a different world. Despite the Chinese-sounding name, to me the school was very Dutch. Though the language used as the teaching and learning medium was Indonesian, Dutch was spoken everywhere - by the teachers and the school administrators. We even addressed the teachers with *Mevrouw* (Mrs or Ma'am), *juffrouw* (Miss or Ma'am), and *Meneer* (Mr or Sir). In the community these people were known as Dutch Chinese.

Mandarin was taught as a second language in the school.

I was aware that I had been accepted into the school on compassionate grounds, so I worked hard. To my parents' delight I thrived and was a high achiever academically. I made my parents proud of me by staying on the top ranking of my class.

Apart from school, I was also active in the local Junior Scout Club.

During these times, life was pleasant and peaceful. I remember the wide roads and boulevards lined with large shady trees, in the area where we lived. Birds such as white swallows from Australia built their nests in the trees. I remember dark-skinned road workers from Maluku keeping the place neat and

tidy. There was a separate lane for cyclists, and a footpath, safe from motor vehicles which stayed on the road provided for them.

We continued to grow up more or less independent, rarely mollycoddled or watched over with strictness. However in an implicit way, family, and extended family, did come across as important. I even remember being overwhelmed by the demand put on us to remember all the titles we had to use when addressing each extended family member, such as *ithio* (mother's younger sister's husband), *ncim* (mother's younger brother's wife), *ce-em* (sibling's mother-in-law) and numerous others. And we had no choice but to remember them because we saw them regularly.

I gather that our extended family was close because being all struggling we had to work together in every sense.

My memories of the days of my childhood paint pictures of our living on the edge of poverty. My mother would creatively augment our meals to satisfy our hunger by increasing the volume of rice on each plate. We hardly ever ate a full chicken egg. Everything had to be divided among us. Anything above and beyond the main meal was a luxury we could rarely afford. I recall making a quiet resolution that I wanted to improve our lives and move further away from the edge.

Then came the time to start *Sekolah Menengah Pertama* or *SMP* (Junior Secondary School) in 1957. The first year was unpleasant because I had to deal with bullying by a number of big boys who were way above the normal age for that level. I understood that they were forced to go to school because there was nothing else for them to do. Academically they were dismal, and this made them exceedingly bored and resentful for having to be there, and drove them into bullying the younger and physically smaller boys. I was one of the smallest but was not one to accept their bullying lying down. As a result, I was a natural target for them. I got into fights - in a manner of speaking -, almost everyday, where I was practically beaten black and blue. These boys were so bad even the headmaster eventually had to discipline them using his fists.

Despite the school being a national school, I never felt anything but Chinese. It would have been impossible for me to feel anything else, when everyday I came in contact with Chinese fellow students, Chinese teachers and Chinese school administrators, Dutch-speakers though they were. Eventually I began to see the superficiality of the Dutch veneer. What was missing was an indigenous Indonesian identity. Even outside school life, I was mostly moving in a Chinese world. In Jalan

Lingga III where we lived, there were about 20 houses, only two were occupied by indigenous families. Though we were on greeting terms, we never socialised.

Only in *Sekolah Menengah Atas* or SMA (Senior Secondary School) did I finally meet the only non-Chinese in my class. His name was Ekbert Siagian. Even then, he was not a Javanese, he was a Batak (from North Sumatra). And curiously, I don't remember him being any different from my other ethnic Chinese friends. I believe he was sinicised to a certain extent, or maybe we were not that different from non-Chinese people, after all.

*President Soekarno became increasingly prominent as a national leader. His fiery, awe-inspiring, nationalist fervour-invoking public speeches were always attended by the multitudes. In July 1959, after the Constitutional Council failed to reach a consensus on a more comprehensive constitution, Soekarno issued a Presidential Decree that the nation would return to the 1945 Constitution, which bestowed extensive authority on the President as the head of the nation and government leader. On 17 August 1959 Soekarno delivered a speech titled *The Rediscovery of Our Revolution*, better known as the *Political Manifesto of Republic of Indonesia*, *Manipol* for short. He launched the Guided Democracy system during that speech.*

In SMA I managed to land in trouble because of my outspokenness. We were taught Civics where the state ideology - a brain-child of the then president Soekarno- known as *Manipol USDEK* (his political manifesto spelled out into five parts of which *USDEK* is the acronym).

Soekarno, the first president of the Republic of Indonesia, known affectionately as *Bung Karno* (brother Karno), was a brilliant man, but I found the system where the system dictated that the president to be appointed by *MPRS* (acronym for Interim Lower House in Parliament), yet the president also appointed *MPRS*, a complete farce. And I said so. To my dismay, the teacher reported me to the headmaster and I was suspended, barred from attending school for two days.

'What's this?' I thought indignantly, 'Dictatorship?'

However, since I wanted to continue with my education, I learned to keep my mouth shut. But I still thought the system was a farce. I got 5 out of 10 for my Civics subject.

Indonesia under President Soekarno in the 1960s was becoming closer to the People's Republic of China, and seen by those opposed to China and those distrusting of communism with dismay even hostility. Political tension rose in the country. Then on 30th September 1965 something terrible happened. Six army generals and one lieutenant were found horrifically murdered. Fingers were pointed at the communists and their sympathisers.

UNIVERSITY DAYS

I started university in 1963. With my high marks, I was accepted at the best state university in Semarang, *Universitas Diponegoro*, to study Civil Engineering.

This marks an important watershed in my life, because it was when I actually stepped out of my hitherto Chinese microcosm.

For the first time I found myself among a multitude of indigenous Indonesians, but somehow the few ethnic Chinese managed to find each other and socialise together.

However I also socialised with our indigenous fellow students. We formed study groups. I was popular because I was one of the high achievers and considered an ideal group leader. This situation, together with encouragement from *Bung Karno*, who in his awe-invoking and inspiring speeches used to say that the Chinese were part of Indonesian nation, I began to feel Indonesian nationalism growing in me. Gradually I began to feel I was indeed Indonesian.

I joined a student organisation called *Perhimi* (*Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Indonesia* or Indonesian Students Association) where most of the members were of ethnic Chinese. I liked *Perhimi* because they were a lot of fun, always organising get-togethers and picnics.

In the meantime, the indigenous fellow students who became close to us the ethnic Chinese were mostly leftists, being sympathisers of the People's Republic of China.

When the alleged attempted coup by the Communists, known as *Gerakan Tigapuluh September* or G-30-S, or even more sinister, *Gestapu*, my association with *Perhimi*, an organisation associated with a bigger, social organisation, *Baperki* (a People's Republic of China oriented social organisation) and the circles of leftist students, landed me in hot water. I was suspended from university for eighteen months. The unfortunate chairman of *Perhimi* was expelled, arrested and sent with other political prisoners to the prison island *Nusa Kambangan*, off the city of

Cilacap, on the southern coast of Central Java. And along with other members, I was also detained for about ten days in a school building in Semarang.

Our detention threw our families into constant fear and consternation, because most of them did not understand the full implications of the political situation at the time. Curiously, I don't remember being all that distressed, neither were my fellow students who were detained with me. We were not mistreated. It was rather like an extended camp. Maybe because we were all together all the time.

We were later released without charge, I suspect because we were all merely juniors - we had only finished first and second year - and were regarded as 'not too contaminated (by communism)'.

Many of my fellow-students more senior than I were permanently expelled from university and were thus unable to continue studying. A few whose parents were able to afford it, were sent overseas. Those who stayed, had to make do with whatever they had and move on.

The unfairness of it hurt me terribly. I was very unhappy with the political development. I felt disenfranchised and no longer felt part of the nation.

My younger brother, Indarto, however, went on and enrolled in *AKABRI*, or the Indonesian Armed Forces Academy, and is now known as First Admiral FX Indarto Iskandar SE, M Sc. One of his fellow students then was none other than the current president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

After the G-30-S disaster, the ethnic Chinese became targets of riots from time to time, because we were seen as the proxy of People's Republic of China, believed by many to be behind the attempted coup.

During one of the riots in 1966, I had an extremely disturbing experience which I still remember vividly until now. At the time I had started earning irregular income by running a small business with Ratna and her brother, selling household necessity items, and occasionally buying and selling motorbikes and gaining a profit from the difference. One day I was riding my current 'merchandise', and came across a group of demonstrators who were deliberately destroying property and seizing items belonging to the ethnic Chinese then burning them. Those who tried to defend their property copped a beating or two. I knew I was in an extremely dangerous situation. If I moved aside, the angry crowd would pick on me and seize the motorbike. If I turned around, they

would definitely chase me, and pick on me and burn the motorbike. What should I do? I was in a panic. Then something snapped. I drew a deep breath and joined the crowd. Having joined them nobody suspected I was an ethnic Chinese especially as I had fairly dark skin and my facial features were not particularly Chinese. I had to numb my senses and restrain myself from saying anything when the crowd burned and destroyed property around us. They were agonising moments where I was overcome with fear, guilt and confusion. Then I saw a side lane, and quickly but quietly turned into it.

These riots continued sporadically for decades, even after our family had gone to Melbourne. In a rioting incident in 1980, our house was one of the buildings attacked. My father's Vespa was burnt and destroyed. My father stayed to protect the family still at home. My brother Indarto, who was a captain at the time, heard about the riots and knew that our house was under attack, but he was unable to leave his barracks to protect the family, neither was my father able to leave the house to find him.

HENDRA MEETS RATNA

When we started university, during our orienteering period, known as *masa prabakti*, I saw a beautiful girl who made my heart miss a beat, then beat faster. I couldn't get her out of my mind, yet I didn't know how to introduce myself to her. In my desperation I sought the help of a female friend, who had gone to school with me. She was a good friend, but not a girlfriend. I asked my friend to find out as much as possible about the girl.

Once I knew who she was, what she was doing, where she left her bicycle and all the necessary facts, I began to stalk her. I noticed that because she was pretty, many seniors liked to tease her. I felt very protective toward her.

Finally I managed to place myself in the right place and the right time, and we began to talk.

The friendship quickly developed and we started going out. Time, it turned out, was our limitation. We had to go to lectures six days a week. The only free day was Sundays. Ratna, I discovered, was a devout Christian who spent almost her whole Sundays in her church: church service, Sunday schools, choir practice, and organising all and sundry. I had no chance of visiting her at home.

So I also went to church. And that was the onset of my Christian faith.

HENDRA'S FIRST GIRLFRIEND

Ratna was not my first girlfriend. I met my first girlfriend in *SMP*. But then she moved out of Semarang and we parted. In reality I still wanted to contact her but didn't have her forwarding address.

After Ratna and I married, I saw her again by chance.

My first job took me to Jakarta. Since I was uncertain whether I would last in this job, Ratna stayed behind in Semarang. It was probably in 1970. Out of the blue, my former girlfriend contacted me. She sent her younger sister to see me in my workplace. She needed help. Her younger sister had cancer and their father had died. The family had been fairly rich, living in Jalan Kramat Raya, a wealthy residential area at the time. After their father's death, they had to sell the house in Jalan Kramat Raya, and she moved to a big house in Bogor.

I agreed to see her and I did help her, but what I didn't give her was my home address. Unbeknown to me however, she later wrote to my mother, asking for my address in Jakarta, a request understandably, my mother refused. After that I never saw her again.

CHAPTER FIVE

*Woman's beauty has led many astray; it kindles desire like a flame. Never sit down with a married woman, or sit at table with her drinking wine
(Ecclesiastes 9:9)*

MARRIED LIFE AND WORKING LIFE

HENDRA'S NOT LIKING JAKARTA

Ratna came to join me in Jakarta, and our son Boy or Bobby was born there, on 22 March 1971. But I never felt at home in this city despite my attempts to adjust. It was difficult. I loved the job itself. It was with a developer firm owned by a businessman-developer, Tan Joe Sien. And I learned a lot from it.

There were three people my boss trained scrupulously. Tjong Djin who later set up his own business and built among others, former president Soeharto's house in *Jalan Cendana*; Siswono Yudhohusodo, who later became Minister for People's Housing and Transmigration, then moved on and is now Chairman

of Indonesian Farmers Association, known in its Indonesian acronym *HKTI*; the third one is myself.

It was all very promising and my boss was very nice to us. He even invited me and Ratna to live in his house when she came along, until we found our own place. I was able to obtain Jakarta residency, something I was told was very difficult to get. But the city definitely did not agree with me. To me, chaos seemed to dominate every aspect of life, and I didn't feel comfortable with the lifestyle of those I met and with whom I made friends. So a year later, we returned to Semarang.

In Semarang we moved into my grandmother's house, across the road from my parents', in Jalan Lingga III.

BIZARRE INCIDENTS

I soon had another job. This time with a government enterprise, Amarta Karya, a specialist in steel structure. I was the project manager for water civil structure of the region. When I was posted to Brebes, we found a house in neighbouring Tegal. It was formerly used as a batik-making factory and had been vacant for two years.

We thought we were lucky because the rent for such a big house was incredibly low. So I brought the family to Tegal. Tegal seemed a strategic place since apart from my work in Brebes I also had to go to Pekalongan often.

The house, in Jalan Panggung number 42, was large and roomy. We did wonder why the rent was so cheap. Then a project supervisor who had had to house-sit there told us that the house 'had a presence'.

One night, he recounted, he awoke from his sleep when his bed was rocked from side to side. When he sat up he couldn't see anyone but the bed was still rocking. So he called out, 'Who are you? What do you want? Show yourself!' Then he saw the door in front of him shaking, the hinge-pins moving up and down by themselves, and the windows whipping open and shut without anyone seen touching them.

Of course we didn't believe him. My mother however, being prone to superstition, was more apprehensive, and suggested we bring some pig bones with us and bury them in the yard. But we took no notice of such a weird suggestion.

The day we moved in, our next-door neighbour, a haj, said something to me which I didn't understand, but I thought it was his way of welcoming us to the neighbourhood, so I thanked him.

When we stepped in, the house smelled of *kemenyan* incense – a type of incense used by the Javanese in traditional ceremonies. The house agent explained that he had ‘cleansed’ the whole house to make it safe for us.

That afternoon, our son Bobby who was left resting in a pram suddenly burst out crying and calling frantically. Ratna picked him up immediately and eventually calmed him down.

At nightfall, our domestic helper asked if she could sleep inside instead of in the detached servants’ quarter outside. She said she’d seen ‘something’ fleeting past several times and was hence scared of sleeping alone.

We were preparing for bed and our domestic helper was unfurling her mat when we heard the front door slammed shut. But when I went to check nothing was out of order.

We went to bed.

Halfway through the night Ratna woke me up. She said she had been jolted by the bed rocking. I hadn’t felt anything, so I thought she might have been subconsciously ‘suggested’ by the project supervisor’s accounts. ‘Don’t allow yourself to get suggested,’ I said.

I suggested she go back to sleep, but she insisted we pray. That was when we heard strong winds like a gale, followed by the noise of the front door slammed shut several times. Our domestic helper rushed in saying she’d seen something which looked like a big person whooshing past her several times. We all went and checked the door, and saw with our own eyes what the project supervisor had told us: the hinge-pins moving up and down as if pushed and pulled by an invisible hands. Soon the whole house was in total disorder. Bobby began to cry too. It took a long time to take hold of the situation and calm everyone down.

I must admit I was not as affected by these bizarre happenings as the rest of the family including the domestic helper. Probably because I was rarely at home during the day and absorbed in my work. However when our domestic helper gave notice I felt the gravity of the situation.

I sought communication with the ‘presence’. I said to him, ‘We are obviously living in the same space. That is fine. But please let us live and let live, respect each other’s space and not disturb each other.’

As far as I was concerned, that settled it.

Nonetheless, we only lasted four months in the house, just long enough for me to complete the job in the area. We never felt really, really comfortable there.

We then returned to Semarang and returned to live in Jalan Lingga III.

HENDRA'S HAPPIEST WORKING MEMORIES

At the end of 1971, I landed a job in *PT Karang Tempel* in Semarang. That was the happiest times in my working period in Indonesia. It was a well-established and bonafide developer company owned by a Chinese gentleman who had three sons, all engineers. They maintained high quality in all their output.

The owner was well-connected but he and his sons were completely unable to do any networking or lobbying, because they were brought up absorbing the Dutch attitude of well-off middle-class social rigidity. They were more interested in making sure that the projects they were working on were done to the utmost of their abilities. However, since none of them went out looking for new projects, they eventually finished up with none.

I happened to be very good at networking and lobbying. I am a survivor, and probably in the vernacular, I was streetwise. I thought nothing of asking for things. And facing a refusal, I didn't retreat immediately. I'd try again, and again.

So I became the company's spearhead, reaching out and succeeding in winning new projects. It was a very rewarding time for me, as a fairly new engineer I felt as if I were driving a large vehicle, respected by those around us, exploring new places.

We were contracted to build a number of houses, including a big hotel and a church.

We appreciated each other. The company knew they needed me, and I knew I needed the company. I was able to combine quality and marketing so the company continued to grow, and I was able to learn a great deal from their skills. During that time I knew what job satisfaction was.

CHAPTER SIX

We teach what scripture calls 'the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.' (1 Corinthians 2:9)

The Chinese are believed to have been coming to the now Indonesian archipelago since as far back as 5th century though in small numbers. In 12th century trading ships from China began to come to Indonesian shores, and larger numbers of Chinese men came to stay. In 17th century the Dutch VOC brought more into Batavia to be used as skilled and unskilled labourers. Waves of labourers followed, arriving in other places as well. In late 19th century a few women were among the newcomers, mostly accompanying their husbands and other family members. It is possible that some of these families were Han people who had left China fleeing the Ching (Qing) Dynasty whom they regarded as Manchu foreign rulers.

RATNA'S GRANDPARENTS ARRIVE IN JAVA

My grandfather, Ong Poen Tjioe left Xiamen, Fujian, China, with his wife and two children – a daughter and a son - at the turn of 20th century and voyaged south. They stopped in Singapore. There, for some reasons unknown to me they decided to relinquish their daughter to a local Singaporean Chinese family, and continued their journey to Java with their son - my father, Ong Boen Tho -, and arrived in Semarang in 1909. My father was then barely four years old.

I was told that when he arrived in Java, my grandfather was still wearing his hair in a single braid at the back of the head, as imposed by the Qing Manchu government.

We have never been told the reason my grandparents had left Xiamen when they had. We suspect however, that they were fleeing the Qing government for political reasons. Most Chinese men came to the archipelago without their wives. The few whose wives came with them, generally had no children in tow. And most important of all, the women did not have bound feet. Bound feet were only found among well-off families in China, because they did not have to do any work.

My grandmother had bound feet.

Another aspect which marked them apart from the usual migrants was that they took both their children with them, though

they later apparently were forced to leave their daughter with a family in Singapore.

Much, much later, in late 1960s, my aunt did make contact with my father. She had been brought up well and comfortably by her adoptive family, and had continued to live comfortably. She wanted to see her brother and his children, probably sensing that she did not have long to live. She even offered to pay for the airfares of all of us, but my father declined the offer. Not long after that my aunt died, in 1970.

I believe my father refused not because he did not want to see her sister, but because he didn't think at his age then he could survive a long journey, especially a flight. He had never been on a plane all his life.

His marriage with my mother, Tjan Yan Nio, produced seven children. I, Ong Giok Khing, was the youngest, born on 31 May 1943.

My father died in March 1983.

During the first years of the Republic, the explicit and active search for identity among various groups of ethnic Chinese was somewhat limited to their leaders and intellectuals, while the grass-roots went on living in 'business as usual' mode, adjusting as needed to political imperatives coming from the government. Indonesian-language schools, known as national schools, were founded by social organisations such as Chung Hwa Hwee and Kuo Min Tang. However, since the majority of the students were of ethnic Chinese, the exclusivity was rarely broken.

This exclusivity often rankles among the indigenous communities. In the meantime the ethnic Chinese remained in legal limbo, because they were never fully recognised as proper citizens. Whenever there was any legislation regarding the foreign Chinese – those who held citizenship of People's Republic of China or stateless (pro Kuo Min Tang Taiwan), there was confusion as to whether it included those who had opted for Indonesian citizenship.

In 1959 there was Government Directive no 10/59 (known as PP 10/59) which demanded the closure of all businesses operated by foreign citizens by 1 January 1960, who then had to relocate in urban areas. 'Foreign citizens' was immediately interpreted as ethnic Chinese by indigenous communities, generating some violence against those ethnic Chinese who did not leave immediately.

For those who felt they had grown roots in Indonesia therefore reluctant to leave, though they were aware that they were taking some risks, the situation was at best uncertain. So some of them prepared themselves by taking lessons in Mandarin, in case things turned really bad.

RATNA'S CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE, SPIRITUAL LIFE AND POLITICAL AWARENESS

My mother was a local-born Chinese. She and my father set up a wholesale business of buying and selling grains, in Semarang. We the children variously went to Dutch-language and Chinese-language school, though at home we also spoke Chinese Malay. My three older sisters were born and brought up during the times when the ethnic Chinese in Semarang sent their children to Dutch-language school, specially founded by the colonial administration for the ethnic Chinese, so they all went to Dutch-language school. My three older brothers however, went through a transitional period where some families in the Chinese community began to send their children to Chinese-language school, so their education reflected this period. They went to Dutch-language school at first, then to Chinese-language school.

I was born in the days where China's nationalism had developed in the Dutch East Indies and in China. So at first I went to a Chinese-language school.

I had a very pleasant childhood, being the youngest and many years younger than my older siblings. Everyone seemed to allow me a lot more than the earlier children. In other words, I was spoilt

I got into mischief from time to time too. In her old age, my grandmother suffered from senile dementia. She began to become incontinent, and would wet herself wherever she was. This situation often distressed my mother, especially when my grandmother came in and out of the shop at the front of the house. I would follow the domestic helper who carried a bucket of water to clean up her mess, and would tease her by sprinkling water on her body as well. Naturally she would angrily chase me, but with her small feet, she could not go very fast. And I would run away, laughing. I didn't see the cruelty of what I was doing.

I would join my brothers' games, and became a tomboy, adept at catching fish, catching dragonflies, or picking fruit from the neighbours' trees.

Our shop in Jalan Mataram was so strategic that everything my parents had in stock, was sold out. Immediately to our righthand side was the main shopping centre and market, *Pasar Peterongan*. Not very far from our house was *Candi*, an elevated area now a prestigious residential district. At the time it was known as the *Peak*, where post-Chinese New Year festivities *Cap-go-meh* were celebrated. So there were always people around, and I was never lonely.

My eldest sister's parents-in-law were devout members of the charismatic Church of Christ. They were very serious in Christian proselytising. My own parents became Christians through their tireless efforts. Since I was five years old, I had been familiar with church life. My Sundays were always taken up with activities in church.

Like many of my peers, I went to Chung Kuo Chung Xie, a Kuo Min Tang-sponsored Chinese language primary school. On the walls were the portraits of Sun Yat Sen, the founder of Kuo Min Tang (Nationalist Party in China), and Chiang Kai Shek, the first president of Taiwan. I was in the middle of secondary school in 1958 when all Kuo Min Tang institutions were banned, and our school had to be closed.

I moved to an Indonesian-language senior secondary school, Ing Hwa. Like in other national schools where the majority of students were of ethnic Chinese, Mandarin was taught as a second language.

I had no transitional problems as far as language was concerned, because in Chung Kuo Chung Xie Indonesian language was taught as a second language and I was good at it. My problems lay in the academic streaming. In Ing Hwa there was only one streaming, that of maths-science, while I was more suitable for social sciences. I was not promoted for two years, until they finally set up the streaming for social sciences.

My immediate cultural ambience was even more Chinese than Hendra's.

The closure of Kuo Min Tang schools was followed in 1959 with the issuance of PP10/59, which generated widespread fear among the ethnic Chinese. In the years after the violence following PP10/59, many of my friends and neighbours left Indonesia and headed for China, especially those who held Chinese citizenships. Not all however, ended up doing well.

One family I knew, sent three sons to China to continue studying, the youngest being only 14 years old then. Unfortunately for them, they arrived in a country in political instability, leading up

to the outbreak of Mao's cultural revolution in 1966. They were trapped there, unable to study or leave. This caused so much distress on their father that he fell seriously ill with cancer. However before he died, he managed to prise his sons out of China. They ended up in Hong Kong where the youngest one later succeeded in setting up a wallpaper manufacturing business and supporting his two older brothers.

As for me, it never occurred to me to go to China when my school was closed. Maybe I was not the adventurous type. In reality I had been keen to move to Indonesian-language school at fifth year primary school, but because they had told me I would have to stay back one year for the sake of smooth transition, I had refused.

Hendra and I graduated from secondary school at the same time and both went to Diponegoro University. However unlike Hendra, I took Law.

RATNA'S ACCOUNTS OF MEETING HENDRA

I was at first totally unaware of Hendra. Then after the first day of our orienteering period, I noticed that a particular boy was always around wherever I went. I thought it was just coincidence.

Then one day I had to ask for the autograph of a senior, famous for asking difficult questions before deigning to give his autograph. I didn't know the answers to his questions then. He put on a despairing look and said, 'If you don't know, then go and ask someone who does!'

I began to turn around to look, but hello, here was the boy who had been everywhere, right behind me whispering all the answers to me. The senior smiled meaningfully, signed my book, then left. After that we began to talk and meet a lot.

As a Christian I joined *GMKI (Gerakan Mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia)*, a Christian student organisation, though I also went to *Perhimi* with Hendra.

When *Perhimi* members landed in trouble after G-30S, including Hendra, I did not, because I was a member of *GMKI*.

I was very active in church. My whole family are devout Christians. Hendra ended up coming to church with me.

We went out for five and a half years. When we met we had just started university. His parents especially, wanted him to finish his studies before marrying me. Some two years after that though, early in 1966 we were engaged.

Several months into our engagement my mother passed away, and my father remarried. Though my stepmother was my late mother's cousin, my family were keen on me and Hendra marrying soon, because they were concerned that with a new wife, my father might change and decide not to hold a wedding party for me.

Fortunately Hendra soon finished his final thesis and graduated, so we got married in December 1968.

RATNA'S INTERRUPTED UNIVERSITY STUDY

After the G 30-S disaster, while I eluded being detained like Hendra for being a member of *Perhimi*, one of my brothers was implicated and put into detention.

At first I went on with my study, but after a month or two my parents asked me to stop because they were extremely worried that something might happen to me, the political situation being so volatile.

Eventually I left university toward the end of 1965 and opened a hairdressing and beauty salon, RIMA. However, this was quickly superceded by another business venture, started jointly with my brother Tjong, and Hendra. We sold clothes, shoes and other daily necessity items, and were able to support ourselves. When Tjong married in late 1967 however, we did not continue with the business.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Charm is deceitful and beauty empty; the woman who is wise is the one to praise. (Proverbs 31:30)

RATNA'S ACCOUNTS OF THE EARLY YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE

After our marriage, Hendra moved in with us in Jalan Mataram until 1970, and I stayed on there when Hendra first went to Jakarta to work. When I went to join him we then lived in Jalan Cempaka Putih, in east Jakarta.

CONTACT WITH HENDRA'S FIRST GIRLFRIEND

During the first month of Hendra's stay in Jakarta in his job, my mother-in-law approached me, and without any explanation, told me to go and join Hendra. At first I refused, because I didn't think it was dignified for me to come after him when he hadn't invited me to do so. But my mother-in-law was very insistant, so I had no choice.

I discovered later that his former girlfriend had written to her asking for Hendra's address in Jakarta, which made her worry.

After the birth of our first son, Bobby, in Jakarta, Hendra said he would like us to visit his former girlfriend in Bogor, to show off Bobby. I had no objection. He arranged to borrow a friend's car to travel to Bogor. However on the day, the car broke down and we were unable to go.

That was the last time I heard about the former girlfriend.

RATNA'S ACCOUNT OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE IN TEGAL

It was a disturbing time for us. Hendra was less affected, so less concerned about the bizarre occurrences in the house. After the initial attempts to scare him, the 'presence' seemed to leave Hendra alone.

The domestic helper was constantly terrified. While I undoubtedly sensed the 'presence', I never saw it. She claimed she had seen it several times. It was a big male presence, according to her. He would often pace up and down close to her when she was working, 'and he has terrifying big red eyes,' she said.

In the end she couldn't stand it any longer, and gave notice.

The 'presence' never showed itself to me, though continued to make its presence felt. Whenever I sat in the bedroom breastfeeding Bobby, I would hear loud footsteps on the high ceiling above us, and footsteps going to the toilet at the back of the house, followed by the sounds of flushing using the tin dipper. When the flushing was done, I heard the dipper replaced on the side of the basin, *kletak*.

Though I tried to keep calm and be brave about the situation, it played havoc on my nerve.

At night when I needed to go to the toilet, I would wake up Hendra to accompany me. He would come with me to the door, but as soon as I went in, he would go back to the bedroom, leaving me

scared witless. Going to the toilet at night became a nightmare for me.

I knew that I was only able to continue living there because I had never actually seen 'it'. In a way I was able to show 'it' that it would never defeat me. However in all honesty, if 'it' had ever revealed itself to me, I would definitely leave, or ask Hendra to find us somewhere else to live.

Finally we did leave after six months, and Hendra resigned from the job.

We were, I found out, the last occupants of the house. It eventually fell into disrepair after being vacant for years and years.

THE BIRTH OF DANNY IN SEMARANG

Danny was born in 1974, the same year Bobby started Kindergarten. I had to learn to drive a car, so I was able to take Bobby Kindergarten.

STARTING A MINISTRY TEAM

In 1975 we found fellow evangelists, Dr Lukas Sebaja and Hanna Sebaja, and a number of other families, and started our ministry. We visited sick people every Saturday. We would pray and fast first before leaving on these trips.

During these times, we realised that Hendra had a gift of preseance and vision, and that God used him to pass on His message to people.

CHAPTER EIGHT

When you seek me you shall find me, when you seek me with all your heart; I will let you find me (Jeremiah 29:13)

THE NEXT STAGE IN HENDRA'S AND RATNA'S LIFE

In 1977 we left Jalan Lingga III and went to live in Karangjati, Ungaran, until 1979. It was a large and comfortable house, more like a holiday villa than a normal house. The climate was cooler and more pleasant than in Semarang. I had founded his own

business in building construction and used the house in town for our office.

HENDRA TURNS TO FORMAL BIBLE STUDIES

I often came with our Church of Christ group visiting people who were not able to come to church through sickness or other disabilities. During these visits those around me realised that God often used me by giving me directives in my dreams or even through direct vision. Usually when something happened I myself was unaware of its significance.

Once we were praying at the bedside of a man who had been paralysed for some time. We prayed aloud, and suddenly I heard myself saying, 'Oh Lord, you yourself will soon be the father of this family...'

The following day the man died.

I would also have visions which later turned out to become reality. These occurrences urged me to seek further learning. So in 1977 I enrolled at *Akademi Theologia Abdiel* (Abdiel Theological Academy) in Ungaran near Semarang. The course was for three years but I finished it in one and half years.

THE MOVE TO MELBOURNE

Not long after finishing the Bible studies, I received offers for further studies in New Zealand and Australia along with the necessary sponsorship. We decided to choose the offer from the Immanuel Church in Melbourne. I promptly took Ratna and the two boys to Jakarta. And in Jakarta I went to the Australian Embassy to apply for a student visa for the family. It never occurred to me there would be any problems obtaining it.

After waiting for some time in Jakarta, returning regularly to the Embassy to check if it had been issued, I was told by the clerk that student visas usually took a long time. I was becoming desperate. We were so sure we would get the visa, that we had already packed our belongings. Then one day I had a vision: someone was telling me, 'See the door in front of you? Just go through that door and you'll be there.'

The following day I returned to the Embassy, but this time I didn't go to the usual window. I waited at the gate for an Australian-looking person. One, whose name I later discovered as Mr Brown, came along. I rushed up to him and told him that I had lodged a visa application for my family to go to Melbourne but

hadn't received any news until then. The man said, 'Is that so? OK, I'll go to my office now, and call you from there', and walked in, leaving me outside.

Several minutes later, I was indeed called into his office. He introduced himself, then asked me what my purpose was in going to Melbourne. I showed him the sponsorship letter from the Immanuel Church. Mr Brown read it and confirmed that I intended to take up Bible studies with them. Then without any more ado, he processed my visa, and stamped it, valid for two years.

I was taken aback, because I had been told that student visas were usually given only for one year, to be extended.

So in April 1979 we arrived in Melbourne.

CHAPTER NINE

I am not talking about shortage of money: I have learnt to manage on whatever I have, I know how to be poor and I know how to be rich too. I have been through my initiation and now I am ready for anything anywhere: full stomach or empty stomach, poverty or plenty. There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength (Philippians 4:11-13)

FROM INDONESIA TO AUSTRALIA

MELBOURNE, A NEW CHAPTER, A NEW LEAF: **HENDRA'S** STORY

We were not unfamiliar with moving, but this time we actually moved into different cultural environments and it was not easy.

Immanuel Church, to my surprise, was a small, relatively unknown church, but we were well received and put up in a house next to the church, which was then in Canterbury Road, now in Maling Road.

It soon transpired however, that the path before us was not smooth and straight. And looking back, maybe we would have worked things out eventually if a major blunder had not happened.

I had a dream where I was informed that the head of the church, who was nicknamed 'The bishop of Melbourne' was having an affair with a woman married to someone else. I passed on this dream to an Elder of the church, who apparently then told the leader.

The upshot of this information sharing was that the leader was so angry he turned us out then and there. It was a wet and rainy day, but he didn't care. He had our things thrown onto the front lawn and told us to leave the premises.

Fortunately our friends Trina and Yono Abadi immediately offered to put us up, a kind offer we thankfully accepted. We stayed with the Abadis for about six weeks.

In the meantime, the church leader reported us to Immigration, after withdrawing their sponsorship. Sponsorless, we were very vulnerable. However, the Immigration officers discovered that they were unable to deport us, because we had a valid visa for two years. They left us alone, but we received telephone calls from someone who refused to identify himself, delivering threats and telling us to leave Australia immediately.

Help came in the form of two people. Pastor Keith Holt, the Principal of the Immanuel Church Bible College, who introduced me to Rev Richard Holland, who would later found City Life Church, but at the time was the pastor of Waverley Christian Fellowship, a small church in Electra Avenue, Ashwood. Rev Holland and his church offered to sponsor us, and let us live in a house belonging to them, in 26 Cleveland Road, Ashwood, rent-free.

Before we finalised the sponsorship arrangements however, our friend Lucky Kalonta introduced us to his friend, an Immigration officer. This friend learned about our situation, then suggested another option.

The then prime minister, Malcolm Fraser, announced an Immigration Amnesty that year (1980) to encourage illegal immigrants and overstayers to apply. We thought we had a fair chance, so we did apply. We were successful and became legal migrants.

It was to be the last Immigration amnesty from any Australian government.

Again, looking back, I saw that everything happened for a reason. If I hadn't quarrelled with the Immanuel Church leader then, we would have returned to Indonesia after two years.

Incidentally, ten years after the incident, we discovered that the church leader had indeed been discovered to have a relationship with the wife of the Elder to whom I had confided! The leader, the Elder and the Elder's estranged wife were reportedly ex-communicated. A measure I myself found extremely harsh.

RATNA'S PRAYERS

When we were turned out, I was devastated. I had never experienced such humiliation in my life. I sat there crying, unheeding of the rain. The woman instructed to take our things out to the front yard, must have felt very sorry for me, she kept whispering, 'God bless you, God bless you...' though she didn't dare contradict the leader.

That night I couldn't stop crying. I asked God, 'Why did you let this happen to us? We were living comfortably in Indonesia, but you brought us here just to be humiliated.'

Suddenly I heard the Holy Spirit speak to me, 'If the seed does not fall to the ground and die, it will not grow and yield fruit.' I read that again in John 12:24, and Matthew 13:31. Slowly and gradually I realised I had been taught, that if I did not deny my sense of self, I would not grow and develop to become useful for other people. I gained this understanding through talking with close friends, one of them Steve Seumahu.

HENDRA HAS TO EARN A LIVING OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

We had no income after being turned out of Immanuel Church. I had to try to find anything to support my family.

A short stint at supermarket delivery cost me my old car. With one dollar per address, I had to collect as many address as I was able to. However that also means as frequently opening and shutting the car doors. When the doors came off, I had to subcontract someone else to do it. This resulted in the reduction of the already meagre income to half.

The next job was taxi-driving. The income was certainly better than that from the supermarket delivery rounds, but it was hard-going at first. I hadn't sufficiently mastered conversational English language, especially the vernacular, to understand what was said on the car radio calls. As a result, I missed a lot of fares. But I learned fast. In fact, I think most of the vernacular I've learned, I learned during my taxi driving years.

I also had to converse with my passengers, not only socially, but by necessity. The famous Melbourne street directory, Melway, was helpful, but because I was not very familiar with Melbourne to start with, consulting the directory would take a long time. So I would say to my passengers, 'If you don't want to pay more than

necessary, please direct me to your destination. If It is up to me, I may have to drive around and around before finding the address.' They generally obliged. And that way I also, gradually became familiar with Melbourne metropolitan.

And I learned about Australia's socio-political situations from my passengers and other drivers, who, in my day, were mostly of ethnic Greek and Italian.

Then one day I struck a conversation with a passenger, who happened to be an officer of the Department of Social Services who was temporarily relieving the officer in charge of training programs. When he learned about my educational background, he saw the absurdity of the situation. He believed I would have a lot more to offer than taxi-driving. The following day, following his suggestion, I went to the Canterbury office of DSS.

The DSS official had a look at my credentials, and linked up with various training programs of its business partners. He then suggested that I train as a computer programmer. 'As for a job in civil engineering, forget about it at the moment. There are more civil engineers than jobs right now, and many are unemployed,' he said,

So I underwent training in computer programming for six months and graduated.

I was immediately employed by GM Holden. My combined qualifications as a civil engineer and computer programmer were well received. My family began to enjoy living on a proper salary again.

In the meantime, I also followed up the offer for religious studies from Waverley Christian Fellowship, which later became the famous City Life Church. I worked during the day, and studied at night. It was not easy with a young family.

Apart from our two sons, we actually had another, Johanan Sebadja. Johanan, a son of our family friends Lukas and Hanna Sebadja from Bethany Church in Semarang, wanted to do Bible studies in Australia, but he was only able to come with us if we adopted them. So Johanan came as our adopted son. Unfortunately he later died from epilepsy.

After the breakthrough with the GM Holden job, I kept finding better-paying positions in different organisations, the last being at the Land Taxation.

HENDRA LEADS A CHURCH

While I was earning my professional salary, my commitment to the church remained strong. In fact, in 1980 I founded and led the Indonesian Praise Centre, Church of Christ.

We received a great deal of support from many people, without which it would have taken a lot more time and energy. Some people gave their services probono. We needed various licences to be legally recognised as a church. We had to establish a board of Elders, link up with a marriage celebrant, and draw up a proper constitution.

Indonesian Praise Centre was the first official Indonesian language inter-denominational church formed after the founding of an inter-denominational Christian fellowship, called the Indonesian Christian Fellowship. A number of Indonesian-language churches followed.

Despite my enthusiasm, working for salary and leading a church had a toll on my health. Our house was rarely without other people staying temporarily. Some were in fragile mental state to varying degrees, and needed a lot of, and consistent pastoral care. And I was constantly needed to ferry members of my congregation from one place to another.

In 1988, something happened which made me try my hands on property development. My sister-in-law Nining's father, Arief Budiman, came to visit. He knew I had worked in the field when we were still living in Indonesia, and suggested I try it in Melbourne. He was so convinced of my skills that he said, 'If you don't succeed, you can cut my ear!' He was even happy to provide us some capital.

Our close relationship went on when Nining's mother was terminally ill with breast cancer and I was able to provide moral and religious support.

With the 'loan' from Budiman I completed one profitable development project, but did not continue because of my other activities.

After several years, I resigned from my computer-programmer job and concentrated on leading the church and the accompanying pastoral care. Then in 1989, I was attending a religion-related conference in Utrecht, Holland, staying at my aunt's house. Without warning, at least I hadn't been aware of any warnings, I had a heart attack. As luck would have it, the best cardio hospital in Utrecht was only ten minutes away from my aunt's, so my cousin's boyfriend rushed me there and they

promptly put me in intensive care. I remember feeling terribly tired and falling continuously asleep, except that the nurse who kept watch at my bedside would not let me fall properly asleep.

While I was lying there half awake half asleep, I felt really scared.

I had a relatively young family. Bobby and Danny were still in secondary school. If I died, who was to look after them? We had no relatives in Melbourne. I prayed hard. I implored God not to take me then. 'Please give me another fifteen years,' I prayed. To my surprise, I felt God actually answered me, granting me my plea.

I survived the attack and was able to return to Melbourne.

It took a long time for my health to return to normal, though. I experienced an overall sluggishness. I became less alert about any given situation, and slower to react. Psychologically, I believe I was also fragile then. Things were not under control. We had to move house thirteen times that year.

In 1990, Ratna pointed out that we were not keeping our heads above water in terms of income. We only received a monthly salary of \$250.00 from the church. In fact, up till then, we were paying other pastors' salaries.

Ratna began a small catering business, contracting thirty-five people, and it went on for ten months.

In that year also I became aware of a general sense of dissatisfaction among those who helped me in the church, and I also knew that there were moves to take over the leadership from me. This distressed me, as I had not regained my physical and mental strength. Yet I held on. I started this church, I thought. I had nurtured it to its present glory. 'Why should I relinquish it to somebody else?' I thought. It smacked of irresponsibility as well as defeatism.

Events overtook me. In 1991 I realised I was in the wrong path. A congregation member approached me, telling me that my son Bobby had been in relationship with her daughter. She wanted Bobby to decide then and there: marry her or leave her. Bobby was too young to marry, he was still studying and did not have an income. So he broke it off. But I was flummoxed.

The realisation that I had not been a good father, struck me. I called a family conference, and told my family that I wanted to relinquish the church leadership. After a long prayer, I resigned at the end of 1991.

Pastor Agus Budiman took over from me. And as it happened, the church grew and continued to grow under his leadership.

RATNA'S ACCOUNT OF CHALLENGES DURING HENDRA'S TIME OF MINISTRY

When Hendra was working fulltime both in computer programming and leading the ministry, the challenges stretched beyond merely time constraints. Not only did he have very little time for the family, but the demands on his role of a pastor came from many unexpected directions. We had people coming at all hours wanting to consult him, and he would never refuse them. Sometimes they did not only come to consult him, but to stay with us.

There were times when I would come home to find a stranger in our house making herself at home. She might have been a victim of domestic violence and had nowhere else to go, or someone who arrived in town to find that the person who she had expected to collect her, had not shown up.

CHAPTER TEN

Now I am old, but ever since my youth I never saw a virtuous man deserted, or his descendants forced to beg their bread; he is always compassionate, always lending: his children will be blessed (Psalm 37:25-26;)
If Yahweh does not build the house, in vain the masons toil; if Yahweh does not guard the city, in vain the sentries watch. In vain you get up earlier, and put off going to bed, sweating to make a living, since he provides for his beloved as they sleep. (Psalm 127:1-2)

PROPERTY DEVELOPING ERA

HENDRA TURNS TO HIS OLD ACQUIRED SKILLS

I had resigned from the church and was free to concentrate on looking after my family. However I had a big problem: I had no income. The situation brought me to think of the time when my sister-in-law's father had given us a break to try my hands on property development. When I was working for Tan Joe Sien in Jakarta I recalled I had loved it. Why not try that again, now?

We sold our house in Chadstone, and with the money augmented by a bank loan, we started our property developing business.

We bought a property, built on it while living in a rented house behind it. When that was sold, we bought another property

and repeated the procedure. There was no regular income to speak of. For several years we lived from hand to mouth. We were even eating into our capital.

We did a lot of the work ourselves to save costs.

Lucky for us the house we rented belonged to a member of my former congregation who set the rent ridiculously low. Even so, we found that we couldn't afford to pay for six months.

We ended up paying him when my father passed away and I received a small inheritance just enough to pay the rent debt.

PEOPLE BEGIN TO INVEST IN THE BUSINESS

When friends and acquaintances heard that I had begun a property developing business, they started approaching offering investments or partnership arrangements. A number of small investors came in, then the bigger ones also came along.

In 1993 for instance, a Malaysian lawyer, Clifford Kwah, whose wife, Sri Mulyanti was a member of my congregation, set up a partnership with me, where he provided the capital and I the skills.

A year later another major investor, Heru Indrawan (Ong), a banker, whose son George Ong, was also a member of my congregation, came on board. And Clifford Kwah gradually retreated from the business.

The company we set up with Heru Indrawan then, was *Smart Homes*, which grew together with Mirvac. Then Handy Homes started. We gave some projects to Handy Homes, then. Our projects spread from Chadstone, Box Hill, Wantirna, Glen Waverley, Hawthorn, to Frankston.

At one stage our company had won so many projects, approximately 500 homes, we ran short of capital. It fell on me to find more money. I went to approach Mochtar Riady to see if he was interested to come on board. However, Riady deemed the business too small. Eventually I managed to raise the necessary additional capital.

Some of the projects involved dismantling closed-down schools, where the steel structure and other materials were still very useful to use for other buildings. They would then be shipped to other places where these materials were needed. However I knew I couldn't handle everything, so I gave the materials to Mobile Schools Maintenance who took them and did a great job building schools all over the world.

At the time Bobby who was working for a quantity surveyor company in Singapore, told us he would like to join us as well. At the end of 1994 he left his Singapore job and came to join us. We consolidated the business. He was the one who later gave the name of *Golden Gate Group* to our business entities.

Our business grew offshore as well, to Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Hong Kong. The presence of Bobby was like an injection of new energy. Bobby and George were a formidable sales team who travelled to different places.

We began to encounter problems in terms of our partnership with George and his father when I requested a change to our arrangements. I had been paid a salary – admittedly a high six figure salary – and the use of a mercedes car, by the company, and I thought I now deserved a percentage of shares. I asked for twenty percent.

Ong senior (Heru Indrawan) offered instead, keeping the six figure salary and the mercedes, or five percent of the profit, whichever was higher. I insisted on twenty percent worth of shares.

I think by that time, George felt he was savvy enough in the business to manage on his own, so they refused to consider my proposition.

So we parted.

Not long after that Clifford Kwah returned on the scene, and we resumed our cooperation. With Bobby we founded *Monash Mansions and Melbourne Gardens*.

The arrangements with Clifford Kwah soon fell apart, however, because we each had a strong business philosophy which somehow did not dovetail together.

Later on when Bobby had established his own companies, he maintained a business relationship with Clifford, because as far as Bobby was concerned, Clifford only represented an occasional partner for specific the projects.

When we parted with Clifford in 1999, we were not completely adrift, because we had already built a solid network and gathered a lot of experience. Shortly after that, in 2000 Danny, who was working in Beijing, expressed desire to join us, which we naturally welcomed.

That was the beginning of *Golden Gate Group*.

Now that our two sons were on board, we became increasingly solid. Neither of them received any salary. We shared profit instead. Approximately two years later, I decided on the arrangement of splitting the profit three ways, equally. Bobby and

Danny's roles are enormous in developing the business. And we were able to pool our knowledge, skills and energy for the good of the business. Just as important, we had built up enough goodwill and trust all round that we continued to receive offers for investments from new partners.

We won one project after another in rapid succession. We became so established that some streets were named after us.

Bobby's companies grew in Melbourne, Danny's and mine in Tasmania and Western Australia, where we have holiday resorts and shops. Danny later bought properties in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Japan.

HOW AUTHORITIES HELPED **HENDRA** IN THE FIRST STAGES OF HIS BUSINESS

In 1988, when I first tried my luck at property development in Melbourne, I was an absolute tyro in terms of requirements to start the business. And I only had the money to hire a draughtsman, not a consultant.

Unfortunately for me, the plan drawn up by my draughtsman was rejected by the City of Monash. Desperate, I went to their office and requested a meeting with the director of town planning, Graeme Salvason.

I explained that the rejection of my plan had put me in a difficult position, because I had no idea what to do next. Salvason suggested I find a consultant. 'The consultant would then lodge an appeal to VCAT (Victorian Civil Administrative Tribunal), which would look at our objection vis-à-vis your appeal, and would then make a decision,' he explained to me.

I told him I couldn't afford a consultant's fee. 'Can't I lodge an appeal myself without hiring a consultant?' I asked.

Theoretically it would be possible, except that my English was not good enough for writing official documents and we both knew that.

He went to his filing cabinet, pulled out a folder and produced a document. He said, 'This is a template for an appeal. Why don't you copy this, incorporating the necessary modifications?'

I did as he said, and lodged the appeal to VCAT.

And I won.

In another event in 1992 I was working on a project in a tight financial situation. I couldn't even afford a compulsory fee to The City of Monash where the project was. I was stuck. If I didn't pay

it, the City of Monash couldn't certify my property and I couldn't sell it. If I couldn't sell it I couldn't raise any funds to pay the fee.

Someone suggested I contact my local Member of Parliament. When I contacted him on the phone, he was very non-committal. Curiously it was just before a state election where Joan Kirner, a Victorian Labor Premier was defeated by Jeff Kennett, the then Liberal Party Leader, who became Premier in October 1992. My Member of Parliament was subsequently appointed Minister.

Soon after the election win, the now Minister contacted me. He said, 'I will advise the City of Monash to help you. He had a kind of statutory declaration drawn up by Ernst & Young, called Section 173 Agreement, where it was specified that the fee would become payable when the property was sold. So I was off the hook, and was able to proceed with selling the property and subsequently pay the fee as required.

The government officials are generally honest, and they treat you fairly and with respect. I remember another event where I took a town-planner to lunch one day to show my appreciation of what he had done to assist our project. Since I invited him, I was going to pay the bill, but he politely refused. He explained, 'We are adequately remunerated by our employer the government. We shouldn't burden you. Besides, we are grateful to you. You build the houses which will bring us revenue in rates. So in reality, we should pay for the lunch.'

What he said may have been true, but I was impressed nonetheless.

HENDRA ON HIS TWO SONS' JOINING HIM IN THE BUSINESS

The fact that our two sons joined us in business when we were still relatively struggling, has a lot to do with its present success.

Unlike the case with many second generations in a family business, our two sons struggled with us. They didn't 'inherit' a successful business. So I regard my late start in business as a blessing in disguise. Bobby and Danny do not in any way show the 'spoilt behaviour' of many who inherit a successful business from their parents.

Looking back, I am also aware that if I had taken the position of a 'patriarch', dispensing money and power to Bobby and Danny, they would not have developed their own leadership and business skills they have now. What we have now is a group of independent

companies which network among themselves and with other entities. We haven't set up anything hierarchical. Bobby and Danny each had their own companies, and while I am still involved in specific projects, I am weaning myself from managing any business. The healthy development of our group of companies was the fruit of Bobby and Danny's untiring hard work. And they have handled well especially aspects in which I am not *au fait*, such as the legal side.

They still regularly come to me for more mature advice, as they still believe I have a better sense of judgement in any given situation.

Ratna and I are very proud that at such young age, Bobby has already achieved so much. He is well-connected and well regarded in Indonesia.

TIME UP FOR **HENDRA**?

In October 2003, I was fully aware of the fact that the fifteen years I had asked God fourteen and a half years ago, was nearly up. I was grateful for the time and the blessings we had received, and I was not going to ask for more. Ratna and I had a long and sober discussion, and we decided to throw a party for our friends. We thought it would probably be my 'farewell' party.

We had sent out invitations, ordered Indonesian food from our friend *Pak Tri*'s catering business for a party planned for Tuesday 4 November, Melbourne Cup Day. On the Saturday before the scheduled party, I felt unwell. I called our son Danny and told him of how I was feeling. Danny suggested I go to hospital.

Conscious of the possibility of a heart problem, we went to Epworth Hospital. However the hospital then had no bed for me. Lucky for me, the nurse who examined me thought it was worth admitting me to an emergency ward, and I was promptly given an oxygen mask. I can't remember what other equipment was put on me. The following day being Sunday, there was no doctors on duty. On Monday I went through angiogram with cardiologist Dr Swee L Seow. When he saw the results he told me my condition was dire. He did not only instruct me to take it easy, but asked me not to move too much. He then quickly found a cardio-thoracic and vascular surgeon, Dr George Matalanis. On Tuesday, Melbourne Cup day, instead of hosting a party, I was going through a quadruple bypass in Epworth Hospital.

Needless to say, the party we had planned had to be cancelled.

I am well aware God has given me another reprieve.

The event has also made me aware of not only the kindness of our immediate family, but also our extended family.

I was out of work for a long time. Danny and his father-in-law, Wing Yu Chan came from Hong Kong, and Chan stood in for me. In fact overall, Chan did a much better job than I generally do. The business did not suffer any setback in absence. Everything was filed, and the notes were tidy. When I returned to my office, and Chan handed everything to me, nothing was out of place. I was very, very grateful, and knew that I was blessed.

RATNA'S TAKE OF THE HENDRA'S HEALTH SITUATION

After Hendra's heart attack in 1989, he had to have a coronary angioplasty* every three or four years. He had three angioplasties before the major attack in 2003 where he had a quadruple bypass.

Hendra has always been aware of his health condition. In 2002 we bought for graveyard plots for us in Melbourne General Cemetery in Carlton.

Looking back now to the event in 2003, we should have heeded some of the signs for the onset of the attack, but we didn't.

I remember walking in the city with him. He seemed more tired than usual. He had to have frequent breaks to sit down. Even when he was walking, he tended to lean on to me.

Maybe we were both trying to be optimistic, that his health was good, and that there was nothing to worry about. What happened in 2003 has made us more realistic.

*** What Is Coronary Angioplasty?**

Coronary angioplasty is a medical procedure in which a balloon is used to open a blockage in a coronary (heart) artery narrowed by [atherosclerosis](#). This procedure improves blood flow to the heart.

Atherosclerosis is a condition in which a material called plaque (plak) builds up on the inner walls of the arteries. This can happen in any artery, including the coronary arteries, which carry oxygen-rich blood to your heart. When atherosclerosis affects the coronary arteries, the condition is called [coronary artery disease](#) (CAD).

Angioplasty is a common medical procedure. It may be used to:

- Improve symptoms of CAD, such as [angina](#) and shortness of breath.

- Reduce damage to the heart muscle from a [heart attack](#). A heart attack occurs when blood flow through a coronary artery is completely blocked. Angioplasty is used during a heart attack to open the blockage and restore blood flow through the artery.
- Reduce the risk of death in some patients.

HENDRA'S SIXTH SENSE

I believe God gave me a sixth sense. There have been many incidences which happened after I inadvertently dreamt it, or 'seen' it. In the days of our ministry I believe God used me to bring his message to those in need.

Sometimes it gets me into trouble, like the time I dreamt of the Immanuel Church leader's affair. Sometimes it just warns me of an unpleasant occurrence taking place.

There have been times when it seems to have been merely a warning of what is to happen. In October 2007 for instance, I dreamt of someone telling me that there were two people who were jealous of me. One would spread untrue stories about me, while the other would steal from me. However the items he stole would be replaced. When I woke up, I began thinking. I guessed who the first was, but I had no idea of the second.

Not long after that, we came home after an outing and found our house had been burgled. Nothing was taken except our safe, which contained cash, watches and our passports. It was certainly inconvenient, but everything was eventually replaced by our insurance, so was the damage to the window where the burglars had broken in, repaired. So we were not financially set back. It has made us more careful about security.