

Dear saints,

Thank you for all your love, prayer and support for my family and me during this season of my mother's illness and death. Let me tell you a little about my mother. Ida Jessie Flora Rassiah was born on November 20, 1938 in Neyyoor, in the very south of Tamil Nadu to Yesu Rassiah and Victoria Gnana Thai. My mother's father was a leader of the Diocesan Press in an age when print was the primary medium of engagement, empowerment, and evangelism. He was affectionately known as Rassiah Writer. He was dedicated to his family and the church, which he served faithfully as a founding member of the congregation in his neighborhood. Victoria Rassiah was a dedicated housewife with an amazing gift and zeal for hospitality. She was an accomplished counselor who gave sage advice to many friends. Theirs was a happy home filled with much laughter, music, and joy among the three boys and five girls. My mother arrived after the first three boys. She was seen as a bright light of the family. They were a close-knit family.

My mother, Amma அம்மா (Tamil word for mother) to me, went to college and while there this tall, handsome and charming professor of Economics was smitten by his student whose hand he sought in marriage. They were married before she could complete her studies, which she later did, and even went on to complete her master's by correspondence. In fact, she and I graduated with our respective graduate degrees the same year, 1985. Amma was always filled with a drive for education and excellence. She was a terrific organizer with a keen eye for detail. She gave birth to two boys, Melville in 1958 and me in 1962. We were a family of means with a car, which in those days was considered a luxury by any standard.

In 1974, catastrophe struck our mostly tranquil home when my dad deserted us. My brother was 15 and I was 11. We were left with the clothes on our backs and a trunk (a metal suitcase) filled with photographs of what had been. That's when my mother claimed her calling, her agency, to fight against odds. With the help of our pastor, Rev. Murdoch Mackenzie, she cleared the bills our dad left for us to pay, in the hotel where he had moved us temporarily. She became a social worker at the YWCA in Madras where she served in various capacities. Initially as a field working animator teaching functional literacy to women in slums, and later as General Secretary, before she retired from this position. She also served as a leader at the State Resource Center of Tamil Nadu until 1996. She then accepted a call to serve as Warden of Martin Hall in Madras Christian College where she served for twelve years. She built this ministry to finally retire at age 72. The seeds she sowed take root and today there are three hostels for women students where there was just one when she started in 2000.

My mother was a creative thinker who was not afraid to think outside the box. She helped St. Andrew's Kirk, which was our family's church for over four decades, to move beyond its comfort zone by moving as an affluent congregation into the local neighborhood slums. Her expertise in non-formal education among women translated into teaching primers that have been used by the State government for a long time.

As a mother, she hardly ever preached about Jesus nor about values like reconciliation. She practiced them with great diligence, however. Amma was a reconciler with those who were open to it. This was especially clear in the way she had reached out to all my dad's family over the years after many of them distanced themselves from us with his departure. This was evidenced in that all my dad's surviving siblings showed up for her funeral along with their children and

grandchildren. Amma was not perfect and had her blind spots but was progressive nevertheless in many ways. In recent years she discussed with me at length on my position with regards to the inclusion of gay, lesbian and transgender people. Though it was beyond her immediate engagement zone she was able to receive and accept my theological and sociological explanation with reason and even defended me with folks who characterized me as a non-biblical liberal.

Amma studied scripture with great diligence especially in the last quarter of her innings. She was diligent with her bible quizzes and her studies at church. Wherever she was, she raised the standard of discourse and helped folks around her recognize and embrace their better selves. Her last few weeks were telling in that her cancer was eating her up. She had moments when she was visibly agitated because of the discomfort, not necessarily the pain. Yet even in the midst of her confusion, she was an embodiment of hospitality when she would say, "please go and eat."

Her love for my brother never wavered when he went through a broken marriage and considered it her joy to raise up Nishant our nephew—my brother's son—by herself. His betrothal before she died was a miraculous punctuation of her prayerful nurture of him. She died exactly a week after this happy event.

Amma had the human capacity to rise above humiliation and subjugation with determination because of her tenacious faith in Jesus. Her funeral was at her church, St. Mark's, on January 25, 2020. Over a thousand people who loved, respected and honored her attended her funeral. Many women who mourned her death cried their hearts out. They were rich and poor and every one of them resonated with her spirit of resilience not to be kept down, but to rise up, and to love deeply through it all. That combination is not very common. Amma, in a nutshell, was little noise and a lot of music! She was a devout parent, an innovative social worker, an embodiment of grace, and a woman of great faith. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for her. May angels sing with her and may we all sing transformation into reality one person at a time!

As we enter this penitential season of Lent, I pray that it is a deep time of introspection for each of us to make this gift of life count by making a difference in the lives of others who are vulnerable, remembering always that we are dust and to dust we shall all return! Amen.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. G. Singh', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

*Rt. Rev. Prince G. Singh*

*VIII Episcopal Bishop in Rochester*