

Dearest Aunty Ruby, Allen and Sarah,
And our dear extended family and friends

My uncle, Dr. Mathew Sebastian Maliackal was beloved by family and friends

The Maliackals are one of Kerala's oldest families whose ancestors settled in the tiny village Pulincunoo in an area called Kuttanad in the year 1760. Kuttanad, is a place of stunning beauty with its backwaters, vast rice paddy fields, rivers and canals lined with coconut trees. No wonder, it's called "God's Own Country".

The early Malliackals were pioneers in reclaiming the low-lying backwaters in Kuttanad and cultivating the land with rice paddies. They built beautiful homes on the waterfront in the traditional Kerala architectural style and raised large families who lived well off the land.

According to historians, the Apostle St. Thomas arrived in one of Gods Own Countries and established the first church in Kerala in the year 52AD. Saint Chavara, the first canonized Catholic saint of India, was born in Kainakary, a short boat ride from the Malliackal family house. He was a social reformer, educator and established the Carmelite Order. Thanks to the church's support, the Carmelites and Jesuits established some of best educational institutions in India.

Uncle's grandfather's brother was ordained in Rome and completed his PhD in Philosophy in the late 1800s. He returned as a Monsignor to Kuttanad, where he started the first boarding school for girls in Pulinconoo. Two of Uncle's aunts became Carmelite nuns and one of his uncles became a Carmelite priest. Other family members joined the Jesuits.

The Jesuits and Carmelites built schools and colleges where English was the medium of education and the priests and nuns taught a broad curriculum including foreign languages, arts, humanities, science and mathematics.

Millions of Indians, including many of us assembled here today, received an extraordinary education at these institutions thanks to the dedication of the priests and nuns from Christian families all over Kerala. The next generation of Malliackals like Uncle Mathew and Uncle Sebastian were obviously inspired by their aunts and uncles and decided to pursue higher studies instead of farming.

Uncle would go on to graduate from St. Berchman's College and go to medical school in Miraj and Calcutta, a 3-4 day train journey from home. After medical school, he worked in the middle east before coming to the US to complete his residency in psychiatry at Washington University in St. Louis

He received his Diplomate in Adult and Child Psychiatry from the American Board of Psychiatry and was also a Fellow of the Canadian Royal College of Psychiatry. It took a great deal of determination and fortitude to travel those long distances for extended periods of time away from a home and family he loved so much.

Uncle Mathew's favorite aunt Kochamai from the Malliackal house was his godmother and also my grandmother. She was a formidable woman who had eleven children, oversaw a house full of servants and ran a large working farm from where she got all her produce. She was an amazing cook and treated us to her favorite recipes from the Malliackal house which included grand meals of Kuttanad's famous pearl fish called "karemeen", fresh water lobster and my favorite Kuttanad Duck Curry

Is it any wonder then, that uncle developed a refined palate. He preferred his steaks rare, his fish fresh and seasoned and accompanied of course by his favorite wine – the Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape. After all he was a Malliackal from Kuttanad – fine food was part of the fabric of their lives.

My mom, Rosamma was a teenager and remembers her cousin Mathewkutty Chettan as a tall and handsome bachelor who stopped by during his travels to visit his favorite aunt Kochamai. His aunt teased him about finding him a suitable bride... but she needn't have worried, because Aunt Ruby had captured his heart. He went back to Calcutta to advance his medical education for two years and returned to marry her in 1955

She was his foundation and pillar of strength for better or for worse, for richer or poorer and in sickness and in health. They loved and cherished each other until death did them part. The first time I met Uncle Mathew and Aunt Ruby was when my mom visited me in St. Louis. Over the next few weeks Aunt and Uncle adopted me into their lives. I spent many weekend evenings with them. We talked politics, religion, tennis, books And of course, of our extended family, between bottles of red wine and the best steaks

Uncle was a renaissance man. He traveled the world. He loved to read. He played a great game of tennis and sliced and diced me on many an occasion on the court before we shared a beer and discussed how certain games played out.

When I got married, Aunt Ruby and Uncle welcomed my wife, Lisa, into their family and she joined in on our weekend evenings. Allen and Sarah had moved from Denver to St. Louis so there were more occasions to celebrate as first Meghan and then Hannah were born. When our first child was born, we named him Matthew.....

Uncle lived a full life, full of love of family he cared for very deeply. Family, to him, was more than Aunt Ruby, Allen, Sarah and his grand-daughters Meghan and Hannah. Family for him, extended to all our relatives in Kerala, the US, Canada and around the world.

Uncle's journey mirrors that of many young Indians from small villages and towns equipped with an excellent education from Christian schools and colleges. That journey will continue through the lives of Meghan, Hannah and their generation –

Uncle,
We remember your gentle words of advice
And we will always remember your warm welcome to your home away from home

Epilogue:

The first time Uncle Mathew “sort of” met me was in Cochin airport. He bumped into my mom in the lounge and upon finding out that she was eight months pregnant, advised her that she shouldn't be travelling on an airplane. Fortunately, she didn't need a doctor on the flight, and I was born a month later in hospital in Bangalore

The next time was **25 years later**.....

My mom was visiting me in St Louis and told me she'd like to visit one of her cousins who lived in town. I looked at the telephone number and told her that he lived 250 miles away in Indiana
And that we could not just drive there for lunch or dinner!

She smiled at me, asked me for the phone and dialed his number
After a few minutes, she smiled at me and announced that we were indeed going to meet for dinner and that I did not need to drive her to Indiana. Uncle was going to drive down to St. Louis the very same day to see her!

Life had come full circle over twenty-five years. Except, this time we got to shake hands, drink some wine and eat his signature steaks, grilled to perfection, with his special home-made steak butter.