

# MALSAWM THE BLESSING







# MALSAWM THE BLESSING



# Acknowledgement

**R**arely is a person loved so dearly that everyone is ready to drop everything and do anything for him. But Ginmalsawm Tonsing aka Malsawm aka Sawmte was one such lucky person. A child is special to its parents but Sawmte was special to anyone who has met him or even heard about him. He may have been disabled in many ways by his blindness but he spread joy and light like we never knew.

I am privileged and honoured by God to be his mother. It is this sense of honour that keeps me going during hard times. He was sent/given to us to be loved and cherished to give us perspectives, teach us love unconditional and compassion. He was sent to touch live.

On the occasion of his memorial stone unveiling well wishers and friends and family have come together to celebrate his life and bring out memories and anecdotes of his life which would not have been possible without the contribution of Mr Lian Samte, Miss Chingngaihlon and Mrs Kimte Guite in translating the pieces.

I deeply appreciate all those who have contributed articles, write ups and anecdotes, Mrs Kimremmawi Tonsing for doing all the editing and arrangements, and Mr Singlianmang for design and layout.

Your labour of love will always be remembered and cherished.

*The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away.*

DONDOUCHING

# A Special Note to CCI /TMI

*- an excerpt from her email to Pauzagin Tonsing*



- Lise Grande - Former UNDP India Resident

**I** have thought often, and always with deep love of you, Malsawm and the extraordinary group of people who have brought together in the Centre for Community Initiative.

After 25 years in the UN, I am retiring shortly. Please allow me to say that of all the people I have met, and all the initiatives I have seen, you and Malsawm have touched me like no other.

I feel privileged to have known you. Truly you are with God. With my warmest and deepest affection and respect, Lise.

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# I am Malsawm Pa

*Pauzagin Tonsing*

The morning of Malsawm's first death anniversary (he left us on 23rd April 2016), I dropped by at his school mate Kimboi's house who is the same age as Sawmte aka Malsawm, who joined The Malsawm Initiative (TMI) since its inception. She is a cute little girl adored by every visitor at TMI and with whom the most photo-sessions are shared. She has not turned up for her school for a few months now.

Kimboi was lying on her side on the bed, her sister feeding her noodles. She has a cell phone on her right hand and a nice watch on her left wrist. "Kimboi," I called out. She did not recognise my voice and asked her sister who I was. Her sister told her that I was 'Uncle Gin'.

"Who Uncle Gin?" she asked her sister. When she realized who I was she said "Ah you mean, Malsawm' Pa (Malsawm's father)?" she said with a smile.

"Yes," I said. "I am Malsawm' Pa (Malsawm's father)." My voice breaking.

Earlier, she didn't need to see my face, she knew me by voice and addressed me as 'Sir Gin'. But, today, she addresses me as Malsawm' Pa. Her eyes were on me yet not seeing me; my voice in her ears yet sounding indistinct. Unaware I was overwhelmed with emotions, knowing I'd be unable to hold myself back, I pressed her hand with the small gift I had for her and rose abruptly and took my leave. Just then, her parents came into the room. I couldn't find words as my

voice got stuck in my throat. Fearing that I would break down, I rushed to the door, mumbling excuses that I needed to be somewhere doing something.

Around 2007, we, parents of children with disabilities, would come together and discuss our problems. Sometimes we cry and sometimes we end up in splits of laughter. Although our children are with different disabilities we share a lot of common problems which created a strong bond and we felt like a big close knit family. There were no organizations to come to our help; no institution to send our children for rehabilitation and education. Besides, neighbours and the society at large seemed to ostracise us for bearing such children and more than once asked what sins we've committed to deserve this misfortune. Socializing became uncomfortable which made us withdraw to our shells. We leaned on each other and supported each other.

Especially when Kimboi's parents shared their tale of adversity, it was really dire and almost made us feel like ours is nothing compared to theirs. Kimboi has an enlarged head due to hydrocephalus. Simply put, the swelling is due to retention of fluid in the head which makes it quite visible. It was really touching in a heart breaking way when they said her condition drew attention as though they were putting up a display for public entertainment. However, their determination for her care and treatment is truly amazing. Kimboi is lucky to have parents like them.

It is a blessing that parents of children with disabilities could come together instead of wasting our time worrying and wallowing in self-pity. Things have really improved since we first had a get-together. Today, the shunning and marginalisation of the society and the church has relatively decreased.

A youth group practices choir in the church near Kimboi's home. At such times, Kimboi would badly long to join them, which, her mother says, made them quite uncomfortable due to her physical condition. However, when TMI was set up for children with special needs, the church and society began to understand disabilities and the needs of persons with disabilities to fully participate in society. This is a big relief for parents like us. Now, Kimboi is also

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invited to join the choir without any hesitation, which itself makes us praise the Almighty no end.

Visiting Malsawm's school friend after a year since he left us gives me renewed commitment and strength to work for children with disabilities against all odds. By being recognized as Malsawm' Pa, a realisation dawned on me that I should press on despite all hardships and my personal grieve. Kimboi has become a new inspiration for me.

My sister's encouragement after King David's reassurance of his son Solomon to build the Lord's temple is a constant motivation to me. David knew that his son did not have all the skills and expertise in him, but assured him not to lose heart as there were people with the right skills to help him all the time. Having started TMI without any skill or expertise for such an undertaking, there were days I spent in angst and worry. Initially, around 2007, when the organisation (Centre for Community Initiative) was just a start up, we dared not even openly speak about our enterprise. However, today, God has sent us people with talents and skills to help us out whenever we need one. In times of need, He sent us people from unknown lands, and in times of desperation a helper He would provide beyond our hopes.

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# A Grandpa's Love

## *Sawmte Pupu K Guite*

Mr K. Guite is Sawmte's paternal grandfather with whom he was the closest. They share a special bond unlike any.

**A**s a father, my advice to my children on the matter of finding a life-partner is that they should avoid drug addicts, drunkards, sloths and liars. My eldest daughter, Dondouching Guite married Pauzagin Tonsing, a fine young man with a good sense. A son was born to them who was named Ginmalsawm @Sawmte. My grandson was handsome and had a fine complexion and to me he was born perfect. As my first grandchild, I loved him dearly and couldn't be more proud of him. Whenever I got the chance, I couldn't help myself from holding him and carrying him on my back.

When Sawmte was about two months old, his pineu Nuboih (my wife's younger sister) visited us and she noticed that Sawmte's eyes could not follow the movement of her hand when she waved it in front of him. This was a skill which a normal two month old would be able to do. This shocked me and I found it hard to believe but unfortunately it was true! I felt the pang of an arrow shoot my liver. I thought of the Gospel of John Chapter 9 where Jesus healed a man who was blind since birth. I prayed to God to heal Sawmte's eyesight. Years passed and my prayers remain unanswered.

As time went on, Sawmte learnt to walk and sing. He loved singing and he learnt to hum the tune of many songs. This continued for three years after which he did not sing or talk much. However, his physical growth continued as before. He would play all by himself and run around the room without striking a table or chair or any other furniture around the house. Whenever he walked

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or ran, he would instinctively stop just before crashing into any object in his path. It was wonderful to watch him. Whenever he heard my voice he would call out, "Pupu, pompom," asking me to pick him up and hold him. I never had the heart to refuse him and would hold him fondly and make him sit on my lap.

Ching and Gin were blessed with a second son and I was given the honour of naming him. I named him Songgoumung, "the foundation of wealth." Even though I love my second grandson dearly, I could not spare my time for him because his elder brother Sawmte took up my entire time and attention. Maybe this is the reason why Songgoumung is not as close to me as I would have liked.

On the evening before he passed, Sawmte and his entire family came to my house. As soon as he heard my voice, as before he asked me to hold him and said, "Pupu, pompom." I held him and sat him down on my lap for a while. After a few minutes, I told him, "Sawm, you are a big boy now and you're very heavy, will you go and play instead?" he immediately got down from my lap even though I knew he still wanted to be held. He was very obedient.

The next morning when I heard Sawmte was no more, I said to myself, "If I had known he was going to die, I would have held him as long as he liked." I deeply regret what I said to Sawmte that evening.

The purpose of God in Sawmte being born blind is something which I cannot grasp. Can it really be or will it really be "The Malsawm Initiative," "Centre for Community initiative", an institution for the disabled? The kind of institution which is the first in Churachandpur (a small district in manipur) which spread awareness regarding the differently abled. Oh Lord, is the revelation of your purpose in Ginmalsawm an institution named after Ginmalsawm, TMI, CCI. If so, give me peace of mind.

# Memories of Sawmte in TMI (2011-2016)

*Ms Ngaisangching*

Ngaisangching is Sawmte's paternal aunt.  
She especially trained as Special Educator for the sake of Sawmte. Sawmte's Nisang.

**I** became part of TMI from 2014 till date and would like to share a few memorable times shared with Sawmte and my students at TMI.

Each morning at TMI begins with students arriving from their respective homes. We, their teachers, would wait and welcome our students at the school entrance with joyous good mornings, high fives, hugs and various banter which we intend to impart as a habit to our students and so as to teach and inculcate good manners in them.

Students are then sent to their respective classrooms. Some students need to be helped with their bags and belongings to get to their allotted seats in their classroom. Students who are more independent and capable are trained and encouraged to assist the less independent ones which is also a great way of teaching and imparting humanity and a helping nature.

We have bells for each session like in other schools. The first bell in the morning is for the Assembly, which we named 'Circle time'. This circle time is a time for taking their attendance, a time for morning devotion and it also is a session for each student to mingle with everyone in order to improve their communication and socialising skills.

During the Attendance time, every student is addressed/called by name/ sign their identification name which students respond to according to their ability.

Some students can respond to their name being called verbally saying “Present Miss/Sir/Madam” while some students respond by various gestures such as raising hands, eye contact or physical movement, while some respond with laughter.

Attendance is followed by morning devotion led by the leader of the day. He/she starts by greeting everyone with a “Good morning” followed by a group singing /recitation/dance whichever is selected by the lead student. Then, we have morning prayer together. When all is done, the lead student selects and in sequence announces students to leave for their respective classrooms. This time again, some students require special assistance. Teachers then, guide or assist the students to their respective classrooms’ allotted seats. In the classroom the teacher introduces the day’s schedule to the class verbally or with the help of some pictures, tactile or real objects whichever is applicable to each student. Every student in each class is taught and trained according to his/her individual needs. In order to meet their goals; Individual educational plan/program (IEP) is designed for each student while considering their capability.

At noon time we have lunch break, which is not only meant to fill their tummies but is also another session for students to learn and practice basic hygienic and self-help skills while dining. It is a great time to train them on how to eat by themselves without spillage, how to use spoons, how to open and seal the lid of their lunch box and also proper utilisation of time and also make sure that they know how to take care of their belongings.

Students are also given the opportunity to showcase their talents and capabilities every Friday and at certain occasions and functions held within and outside the school premises. They are also trained and taught on how to perform and participate in various group and solo activities such as dancing, singing, handicraft etc. based on their capabilities.

Each and every student is unique in his/he own way. Among these students , Sawmte was one such gem who was with us from 2011 through 2016.

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If I may share in brief about my times with Sawmte at TMI.

Sawmte was a precious child and student like every other student at TMI who was learning and pushing hard through his training periods. When Sawmte arrives at the school he could keep his bag in the allotted classroom by himself. His friends Lunlun, Tuttut, Kimboi, Timothy ,Khawlching etc are always ready to help him if he needs help. During attendance we have to wait or may need to call his name twice to get his response. He needed no assistance after sometime, such as; to get to his classroom unless it has been altered or shifted to another classroom. He could get to the dining hall or the kitchen by himself. He needs help to open his lunch box but can have his food by himself, learnt to use a spoon and drink from his bottle without assistance and needs minimal assistance to seal the lid of his lunch box and return it to his bag. He was learning how to use cane, learning to walk independently by using a railing that leads to the assembly hall and identifying paths eg; bumpy / smooth roads, muddy / dry, green pastures / dry leaves etc. He also had to go for physiotherapy and sensory training in order to cope better in his daily living skills. Certain activities which is also known as ADL(Activity Daily living) which Sawmte could do by himself includes gargling/rinsing his mouth, brushing teeth and washing face though he needs help in applying toothpaste to his brush.

During story times he used tactile story books in order to make him understand better, at times when the story's content includes rain we have to bring him under the rain, at times make him touch plants and trees so that he could feel and experience nature. Other activities such as watering flowers and plants are made a routine for him.

Activities such as water play, sand play, merry-go-round and swinging etc. were some of them plays he enjoyed.

Sawmte stayed with us for a short while, leaving memories to linger on. He left for his forever abode on April 23rd 2016.

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*Sawmte loved singing songs, he  
loved to be hugged.*

*He smiles warmly when you prompt  
him many times to say things which  
you want him to say.*

*You are missed. Thank you for the  
life you shared with us.*

*Remembering you forever.*

*- Margaret Hmangte*

Ngaisangching is Sawmte's paternal aunt.  
She especially trained as Special Educator  
for the sake of Sawmte.  
Sawmte's Nisang.

# Sawmte, Our Sweet Sweet Little Darling

*Anupi Vungthianmuang*

Mrs Vungthianmuang, paternal aunt is Nupi to Sawmte.

**B**orn and christened as Ginmalsawm Tonsing, his name itself is a blessing. I can still recall the joy that everyone shared at his birth, he being the first boy child of my husband's siblings. Our joy knew no bounds. I still remember my brother-in-law ,Gin, telling me that he was the proud father of a boy child.

But our joy was short-lived. He became sick with fever that led to his hospitalisation and the many more pangs that followed. Ching, sawmte's mother was still on the road to recovery. I never heard her complaining even once, and she bravely faced the situation. The discovery that our darling boy would not be able to see like a normal child shattered our lives. We cried and we prayed, continuing to hope against hope as no stone was left unturned for his recovery. But our fate was sealed.

Today, reminiscing about the past, I know now that God's plan is always the best. Because of Sawmte, many found hope when all was lost. Many lives were blessed. The differently abled children found solace and comfort in the form of The Malsawm Initiative, a school for children with special needs. Here, they are trained to be able, self-sufficient and independent individuals. Seeing children in their uniforms and doing various activities is a pleasant sight.

Sawmte has taught me valuable lessons in life. Through him I could see differently abled people with more love, kindness and compassion. It made me

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realise that we are all children of God, made in His own image.

*The ONE I hold so Dear  
Though your life on earth is short-lived  
Though you left us shattered  
Never to be the same again  
You are and will always be  
Our sweet sweet little DARLING.  
Though it's hard to let you go  
In the Father's hand, we know  
Where there is no sorrow  
Where everything is complete  
There you will dwell in bliss  
Forever and Ever.  
Goodbye Dear, till we meet again at Jesus's feet.*

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# The Boy Who Changed Lives

*Ngaingaihnm*

Miss Ngaingaihnm is the eldest among Sawmte's paternal first cousin.

**F**ar away in a small town in Manipur called Churachandpur, a boy was born, so special, yet no one knew. They said, "Oh! What a sad and tragic life he has to face, poor him and his family!" Not knowing what Great and wonderful things he will bring upon this small town.

He grew up being loved, cared for and he knew nothing other than love and happiness during the very short time he spent with us. In fact, he was so blessed, he didn't know what hatred was. Our darling boy was simply adored and loved.

No one knew that he came here with a purpose, a purpose so beautiful and life changing. His eyes sparkled and his face was a beam of light and hope. He knew life is meaningful because he knew what would be done through him, yes he knew.

Pipi Thau (Fat grandma/ paternal) and Pipi Gawng (Thin Grandma / (maternal) were his favourite people, while Mama and Papa were away, working towards making the beautiful purpose he came to earth for, a possible reality. He was very dear to everyone in the immediate and extended family and friend circle.

Malsawm was his name and Sawmpuang was the silly but adorable nickname given by his cousins and aunts, for he had beautiful skin, white as snow.

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He didn't come here to fit in, but to build a beautiful new world for special and precious people like him!

The Malsawm Initiative - A beautiful paradise for these beautiful people. He became a life saver, a life changer for these beautiful people and their families too. They were lucky to be part of this purpose. And he changed us - he showed us what love was and to never stop loving ...

He left too soon but he knew his part was done. He slept peacefully with a good night kiss, knowing he will be long gone in the morning.

He went back home to his Heavenly father, for his purpose was done. But, Sawmpuang... he was happy and that's all that matters.

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# The School That Makes a Difference

*Niangkhanvung*

Miss Niangkhanvung first worked as volunteer at TMI and later joined as Special Educator.

**O**n the occasion of Malsawm's memorial service, I too would like to contribute a small piece of writing about the Malsawm Initiative School and the lovely students.

I don't exactly know Malsawm in person, but I heard from my friends and colleagues that he is a cheerful boy who loves singing, cares for his siblings and is friendly towards people. How I wish I came earlier at TMI school and got to meet him....

I started working at TMI school in October 2017.... It is a school where children with special needs go. The school is a great place where children learn, play, think, make mistakes and no one will ever be judged. In this school children are taught to improve their communication, social, cognitive and daily living skills.

At first I felt shy approaching the students and I didn't have the courage to speak to them. What if they don't like me?? What if they feel hesitant to talk to me? What if? A lot of questions were running through my mind, but then I took courage and started approaching them and started talking to them. And now, all of them are so friendly to me, their smiles and laughter are so beautiful. I find joy and peace among these children - their smiles make me happy, their laughter brings joy to my face. Even if I am sick or not in the mood to go to school, I somehow manage to, and when I see them, it simply lightens up my

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face, forgetting all my stress, sickness and worries when I am with the children. They taught me how to be patient, kind and friendly. They are my strength, I can't even go a day without them anymore. The children at TMI are the source of my happiness - I feel so lucky and proud to be a part of The Malsawm Initiative School.

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# A Unique Burden

## *Siamnunlian Valte*

Mr Siamnunlian is a family friend with whom we work together very closely in many areas.  
He is the Executive Director of VK Tawna College.

**T**he pains Gin and Ching went through because of Malsawm's blindness has often troubled my thoughts, especially on those days when we worked together and shared social responsibilities.

While taking care of even just one disabled person is a challenge for every family, taking the initiative to provide care for many is a far greater challenge. Though Malsawm's parents and I shared many ideas and responsibilities in the past, taking responsibility for the care of the many disabled children of our district is what I could not share. It is beyond my thoughts and a burden I could not bear.

Sawm, through you, God gave a unique burden many dared not dream of to your parents. Your sorrows brought others to joy. Your blindness gave light to many helpless. You have done a great job! Your journey on earth, though brief, impacted the thoughts and lives of people. You are and will always be remembered for good.

# Why Me, Lord?

*Pauzagin Tonsing*

**T**hough I am asking, “Why me, Lord?”, my inner voice is telling me something else. I do not doubt the calling but Lord, I doubt myself. I do not know the way, I am lost; I have no knowledge, no experience except caring for our blind son with all the protectiveness of a parent for his child. I know, from what i have read and heard from others, what is supposed to be good for my son, but i cannot train him even for the basic skills of daily living. I am engulfed by the sense of my own helplessness, how can I help my young child?

I have been waiting for someone who will come to guide us and provide proper education to our son. I am praying for some miracle to happen in the life of my son. I am waiting for the helping hand of God to touch the eyes of my son, so that he could see even if only for a while, the beauty of this world that he is a part of. Five years have passed and yet, not an ounce of hope in this lonely battle. Seven years have gone by since my first calling to step forward for the cause of special people. I am sitting by, watching and waiting as time slips away from my grasp. In time my hands will be empty and will I still be waiting even then?

It was early morning when my older brother came home from the hospital. He wiped the tears streaming down his face as he told us the grave misfortune that had befallen us. I would not be wrong if i was to say that it was the worst nightmare of every parent expecting a child. My younger sister had given birth to a multiple-deformed baby boy in the hospital. I remember vividly, the anguish

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that tore my heart as I rushed to the hospital. On reaching there, I could not find the courage in me to go inside and see the baby. This was the moment when my heart first broke like it never did before.

I called his father, my brother-in-law, and discussed the situation with him; what were we supposed to do? There was not much we could do against God's design. Choking with tears and with a pain that was clearly audible in his voice he told me feebly that he has no hesitation about mercy killing. It was a solution that many parents have adopted and I do not believe that they loved their child any less. Yet, can we do that to the little boy that has opened his tiny eyes into this world, given by God for our safe-keeping? Can we send him back to eternal darkness without giving him a chance to have the wonderful experience called LIFE? The answer that came to our heart was "NO"! A definite and final No!

I consoled him and promised him that we would never run away from the upbringing of the baby. That was the first promise I made to myself and that promise has taken me this far and it is up to the Lord on how far it will take me from here.

The baby is growing day by day, cheerful and healthy except for the clubbed hand, clubbed foot and cleft palate. He had already undergone three major operations at the age of two. He could not be breast fed and needs a customized nipple as he could not suck onto the natural one. He is making a slow but hopefully steady progress.

It gave us immense joy to see our nephew crawling and shouting, calling out to us in his own special way. The nightmare gradually faded as he progressed much beyond our initial expectation. As the nightmare began to fade, the promise I had once made seemed less and less important as other commitments came into my life.

Then God reminded me of my long forgotten promise on the 25th of June, 2005. It was beyond personal, it touched the very essence of my being. My son, my very own flesh and blood came into this world, for my safe-keeping. A gift so precious that when i first held him in my arms i could not stop the tears of joy. He was

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under-weight and did not cry when he was born and for those few seconds, my heart stopped beating. Then he cried out and I can not express in words the relief that swept over me.

However, he had to be hospitalized the very next day as he developed an extremely high fever. Seeing my frail new-born son on the hospital bed, lying so fragile in his mother's arms, where could I find hope? A few months later he was diagnosed with a rare case of blindness which affects only a few percentage of babies in the world. I was angry at God, and I asked him "Why? Lord, Why me?" But in my heart I already knew the answer.....

Having no choice, we strove to provide him with the best treatment, the best care, the best sympathy, the biggest love that was in our means to provide. Looking for help elsewhere, searching for someone to help our son. But now I know, that was not God's way. His way is much more simple, and he always has a purpose behind everything, as is his purpose in creating man.

Accepting the fact that my son will never recognize my face by seeing is difficult. The multi-faced God created my son in his own image. Just the way he liked it, just the way he meant him to be. As a father, my responsibility towards my son is to provide what he needs. To keep him safe, to help him find his way. But who am I and how am I even equipped to provide for the special needs of my boy?

I wanted to run away from this! I wanted to put away this burden, I wanted not to feel my heart break when my blind son stumbled and knocked himself down on the furniture. I wanted to shut my eyes when I saw him feel his way, taking tiny steps by feeling the walls of our house. I wanted to ignore the undeniable call of God through my son. I wanted to run away like Jonas did, like Moses and Jeremiah wanted to. Just run away and pretend like nothing ever happened.

Nineveh was going to be punished by fire. Jonas was called to warn them so that the people of Nineveh could be saved. Yes, Jonas knew the calling was true but feared the people of Nineveh who were rebellious, barbaric and stubborn. He ran in the other direction as far away from Nineveh as he could go, but God's calling is louder than any thought man has in his head. When he calls out to you, all

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of Nature will convey the sound of his calling to your heart. That was it. I was a Jonas trying to run away.

I had heard the call through my nephew but I ran away from it. Then came a louder one through my son. Even then, 'is this calling true?' was my question i asked myself time and again. Like Jonas, by running around for the disabled, maybe I can spread the message and someone will come up for the cause of the disabled, especially for my son. I did not believe that I had the strength in me to give what people with special needs really needed. A life-long commitment to work with them and never to forsake them as i would never forsake my son.

While waiting for the miracle to come, I sent my son to a regular school as he attained the age of 4. Then came his 5th year and I was still waiting for that someone who will provide training, education, and help in developing life-skills of my son. Like Jonas, I was waiting for Nineveh to be burnt, though knowing his warning would have an impact. Yet, Nineveh did not burn - It never will. But i am not angry like Jonas. I know that God called Moses to lead his people though he stammered, I believe in that God.

He gave me this special child and he will provide for me to take care of his needs. I do not even dare begin to pretend to know how to take care of special children, let alone my own son, but I can do my best and give it my all. I can try and so can everyone else who is willing to open their hearts to the needs of these special children. God gave me Malsawm so that I could obey my calling and fulfill my duties as a father too. It is a fool-proof plan because it is God's design. I never trusted myself and I still do not trust myself enough now, but I will never run away again because I place my trust in someone greater, the omnipotent Lord. In Him I trust.

The Lord has brought me this far and I know He will never leave me midway. Malsawm is gone but not without leaving behind more Malsawms for us to care for and look after.

# The Malsawm Memory

*Deepak Prasad*

Mr Deepak Prasad worked as UNV Special Educator for 2 years at The Malsawm Initiative. He helped develop/create a model of Malsawm Ability Resource Centre.

**I**t was the year 2014 when I was selected as a National United Nations Volunteer to work at Churachandpur, a small town in Manipur. It was my first placement in the North East so I was very excited about it though I was cautioned by some of my well-wishers about its security situations. I didn't pay much heed to their caution as I had an undoubtable confidence that my life there was going to be smooth, if not adventurous, and to my surprise it was as thrilling as it should be.

Initially, I had a flight from Delhi to Imphal, the beautiful capital of Manipur. There, I was picked up by a car sent by the Director of Centre for Community Initiative (CCI), a local Non-Government Organization (NGO) which was devoted to serving the most disadvantaged group of people staying and surviving in the surrounding villages. While passing through the way, I noticed CRPF Soldiers standing attentively with their AK-47 rifles and guarding people to ensure security and peace in the region. However, the scene chilled my bones and I started wondering if my decision to be there was wistful or not, but later I realized how worthy it was to be there as staying and working there opened a new window of my life to create such beautiful memories.

CCI, a Non-Government organization (NGO) was founded by Mr. Pauzagin Tonsing who was the father of Malsawm, a child with complete visual loss along with some characteristics of autism spectrum disorders. While struggling to admit his child in existing schools, he conceived the idea to open a place

where all children regardless of their disabilities or severity of disabilities could learn together and could be valued as important members of the society. Though facing numerous challenges for being at one of the remotest places in India, his determination and enthusiasm never faded and his immense efforts bore fruit when he succeeded to approach the United Nations to bring UN Volunteers for skill sharing to his school 'The Malswam School'. I was one of the UN Volunteers who had the privilege to serve the school children as a Special Educator. Lucky me to get to teach the cutest boy Malswam, and other children with various challenges such as visual impairment, autism spectrum disorders, down syndrome, learning disabilities, and others.

Teaching Malswam was a unique experience for me even though quite challenging as he was a child with contradictory learning characteristics. As a child with autism spectrum disorder, he could be a visual learner, but his complete visual loss made it complicated for him to learn. It was the most challenging task for a teacher to decide on an appropriate methodology for teaching him. However, it was also a golden opportunity to explore appropriate techniques and for me to get hands-on experience teaching him. I organized for many normal real-world objects for him with Braille inscribed on them. This was the perfect beginning as Malswam started learning with enjoyment and his pleasure was visible by his fond bonding with me.

Mr. Tonsing, the Founder Director, was not only a motivating leader, but also a good friend, a guide, a facilitator, and an inspiration for many of us for his visionary footprints in the field of rehabilitation and education, especially for people with disabilities. His evaluation for utilizing existing resources was amazing as he mostly selected the right candidates for individual tasks and he meticulously facilitated those candidates to reach the appropriate community. This might be one of the reasons for his successful community mobilization and the stakeholder's active participation for his noble cause to support persons with disabilities in the local community of Churachandpur District. There, he utilized me not only to teach children but also as a trainer, a facilitator, concept writer and as a communicator with a wide range of people including the government officials, parents, schoolteachers, professionals, and

other serving organizations.

I will never forget Mr. Tonsing's critical help to me and my family the night when my wife was in severe cholesteric pain. It was 12 in the night when the pain started, and she was tormented like a fish in hot sand. I was in complete distress and hopeless to help her. I rang his mobile phone and told him that my wife was dying and he had to do something to save her. Within a few minutes he arrived in his car after calling some doctors he knew in the district hospital and took us there for immediate treatment. This was a very crucial help by him and due to his selfless support we were able to save my wife's life that night. This incident is proof of how devoted he is toward serving humankind. Nonetheless his kindness, he lost his beloved son Malsawm, but the journey of Malsawm's education has lit up many children's lives which will be pioneering milestones in the field of rehabilitation and education.

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# Learning From A Friend

*Anisha Bhaduri, Singapore*

Anisha Bhaduri is a good friend of Sawmte's dad.  
She is a well wisher to The Malsawm Initiative and regular donor.

**W**hen I met Pauzagin Tonsing for the first time nearly two decades ago, he became my first friend from Manipur. “Call me Gin,” he said with an inimitable grin. “I am from Churachandpur.”

A metro girl, born and brought up in Calcutta, my eyes would grow wide open at Gin's anecdotes of casual hikes to the Myanmar border, living with interminable shutdowns and growing up in a remote Manipur district, albeit its biggest. “Yes, we live that close to the border. Practically at the northeastern end of India,” he would say shyly, throwing back his head as he would invariably break into helpless laughter when expected to make involved conversation.

I had never met someone like him before – his smile never faded and his faith remained unstinting. It took me years to figure out that's how people with inner strength were – solid and unshakeable.

We have never met in person since graduating from Indian Institute of Mass Communication and lost touch for years before connecting again. In the way people who become friends for life do – cherishing each other's good wishes and not noticing the hiatus.

My husband and son – who have never met Gin and his family – know he is the friend I am most proud of. When I taught at the Statesman Print Journalism

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School, my students would sometimes ask me about people who inspired me. And I would always name Gin from my generation. Why? Because he had the courage and the humility to learn from his first-born Malsawm and transformed that wisdom into something concrete that helped many others. He showed us it is possible to fashion our own solutions out of adversity and share the benefits of such a transformational process with society at large. Malsawm and his parents have taught us that no tragedy is personal and that it is possible to open our hearts if we want to.

But this is not just about Malsawm and his parents. This is also about the awareness that Malsawm brought into our lives of cherishing the qualities that make rising above our circumstances possible. This is also about learning from our children that parenting is not only about responsibility. This is also about never taking no for an answer when the quest is long and complicated.

I never met Malsawm. I wish I had. The first-born child of my shy friend from Manipur lives on in our hearts with the brilliance of a star that will always keep shining and showing the way, even for the frailest among us.

Thank you, Gin and Malsawm's beautiful mother for making Malsawm a part of our lives too.

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# *'Family'* Is Nature's Masterpiece

*Reena Bhandari, Mumbai*

Mrs Reena Bhandari is former Director of Voice & Vision India, Mumbai who is the first contact we had during the early years of our struggle. She is our mentor.

**F**amilies play a pivotal role in the development and learning of every child, more so a child with disabilities. They have been agents of change, working tirelessly to ensure that their child with disabilities has equal opportunities to learn and be included in the community. Families have been instrumental in starting services in areas and regions where there are no services. Pauzagin is a shining example of a parent whose love, determination, courage and hard work made his dream for his son Malsawm, and so many others, to receive effective services in Manipur, a reality.

When Malsawm was born with optic atrophy in 2005, there were no services for children like him in Manipur. Pauzagin contacted and visited leading organizations and professionals in the country to understand the best practices for working with children with disabilities. In 2007, under his leadership, CCI was restructured. The Malsawm Ability Resource Center, a CCI initiative, was set up in 2013 and offers various services including therapeutic services, early intervention, home-based care, skill development and other vocational rehabilitation and Inclusive education.

Sadly, Malsawm no longer lives with us. He, however, continues to live on in the hearts of all who knew him and loved him. He will continue to inspire parents and professionals to do their best to work in partnership to provide effective services for children with disabilities in the community.

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# SAWMTE & ME

*Thianching*

Mrs Thianching worked as a Classroom Assistant at The Malsawm Initiative, closely working with Sawmte. She is one of the pillars of TMI

**F**irst of all, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude towards Mr. & Mrs. Pauzagin Tonsing, Sawmte's parents for giving me the opportunity to write about Sawmte, and I also thank God for having led me to be around Sawmte. As I have chosen "Sawmte & Me" for the title of my note, I would first like to write about how "Sawmte & Me" could become possible or came about.

As we are all aware, Sawmte was the first born of Mr. & Mrs. Gin. This little guy had to be hospitalized right after he was born and that being the first case I knew about a child being hospitalized right after birth, broke my heart. As a close friend of Mrs. Ching, Sawmte's mother, I happen to learn about their situation once in a while although not always. Later, I learned about Sawmte's problem with sight for which they prepared a trip to Hyderabad which made my heart sink, because there was very little I could do to help them.

Long story short, as time went by, Sawmte like any other child grew into a lovely boy willing to go to school. At that time, his parents had just started "The Malsawm Initiative" and I occasionally volunteered from time to time. Although I badly wanted to participate and volunteer, my capacities and capabilities are too limited for such great opportunity. It was in 2011 I believe that UChing, Sawmte's mother, started a Day Care to back up TMI, where I took the opportunity to volunteer as a helper in the daycare in July later that year. After being in the day care for over a year, I was reassigned at the charity

store opened to back up running TMI. However, in February 2013, Sir Gin called me up from his trip to Gujarat and requested me to help out in the school due to shortage of staffs. And that is how “Sawmte & Me” come to life.

In February 2013, after I joined TMI for about half a year, I shared a table with Sawmte till January of 2016. In his own level of capabilities, he was a very competent and obedient child. Although there were some bad days when he couldn't turn up, we spent most of the time together at school. As much as he seems to find it hard to adjust, he never hesitated to go according to his timetable. His brain was so sharp that he never forgets what he once learned.

**HARDWORKING:** Sawmte, in his own ways, was a very hardworking child with an enthusiastic zeal to learn. Sensory Training was one of his subject or session through which I will list down a few points:

1. To walk barefoot over grass or rough ground/path was necessary for Sawmte as part of the Sensory Training activity, which he finds very challenging yet slowly and persistently overcomes it at his own pace.
2. Sawmte was a child who loved being cuddled and held close. He likes to sit on my lap and would often hesitate to move away. But with the hope that he will someday grow into a young lad, I took the permission of both his parents to make him sit in a chair even if it required a little force, while he was young enough and trainable. It didn't take him much time to get acquainted with it. He also loves to swing but never hesitates to go to class once breaks are over. This shows that he was a very hardworking and obedient student.
3. Sawmte loves music and listening to songs. His favourite songs were Amazing Grace, Showers of blessings, If I have white little box, etc. to name a few. He would automatically sing along to familiar songs or sway his head, grooving with the music showing excitement and pure joy through his facial expressions.
4. Sawmte was a charming and loveable boy whose company was

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loved by all, including students and teachers. All his friends and schoolmates would help him out even with his lunch boxes. He never misses to offer prayers before his lunches. I personally had a special bond with him which made the teachers call on me with any issue regarding him. Once I was in class with him, along with Deepak Sir and I had to leave the classroom to prepare his lunch box at the adjacent room. He noticed my absence and was pestering Deepak sir, asking for me. I heard his faint voice from the adjacent room, and that fond voice is the one thing I cannot forget about Sawmte.

Owing to Sawmte:

Visible or not, Sawmte was indeed a blessing to everyone around him. Especially to me. He taught me how to face my struggles head on, stand firm in difficult times, and when my abilities are too limited, he showed me how to trust God and patiently wait for His guidance. He also became my source of blessing through prayers received from respectable Church workers, families and friends.

I was sent by the organisation on a short term training in Mumbai. The “Mumbai,” a place that never crossed my mind, let alone ever had I dreamt about it. Here, I happen to meet lots of children with different disabilities but with different abilities, and I saw and learnt lots of lessons through this training. Even back home, I happen to be in close contact with the UN Volunteers that happened to be attached with the organisation which was a big insight for me. And during all those times, I felt more disabled than my very own students with disabilities because of the language barrier, but then again, overcoming all those hurdles were made much easier because of the cause we all devoted ourselves to. Although I was Sawmte’s teacher by name’s sake, I, in turn, had a lot to take away, and benefitted more than ever.

It was 22nd April, 2016 (Friday), students were attending school and classes, and preparation was going on strong for the upcoming programme in May that year which was the launch of RAISE-NE Project. Although the following day

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was a Saturday, which was a holiday, we had plans to work since we had very little time to prepare for the said programme. Selected students like Elizabeth Donthianhoih, Puntuahkim (who also left us for her heavenly abode on 13th March, 2020) and Khumlalven were supposed to be picked up by Sir Muante, our driver and dropped off at school by 11:00AM for practice.

The following morning, 23rd April, 2016 (Saturday), I had my breakfast and all the other members of my family also had gone for their own respective work for the day. While I was enjoying my leisure time waiting for Sir Muante to pick us up, I was listening to one of my favourite song, "Love will keep us alive." It was around 9:00 am, I received a call from Ms. Sangi (Sawmte's Aunt), telling me that Sawmte was admitted to the hospital. I was terribly disturbed by her shaky voice and it was evident that she had been weeping. Although I knew that Sawmte was ill and weak and was admitted to the hospital, it never crossed my mind that things will come to such an end. So, I decided, "I'll go to the hospital and tell Sir Muante to pick up the selected kids and drop them off at school for practice, and then I'll head straight to school after I stop by the hospital." When I returned from a quick trip to the ladies room, there was a missed call on my phone screen from the same number, Ms. Sangi. There was no answer when I called back. So, a bit alarmed, I rushed out for the hospital and while I was on the way, I got another call from our School Mother, UVung, telling me that Sawmte was no more. My thoughts froze, and I could not decide where I should be heading anymore. I was confused whether to rush to the hospital or at their home, but then I decided to go to the hospital. While I was on the way, walking fast towards the hospital, I met them returning from the hospital, and so I joined them heading towards their home. After reaching their home, he was laid on a bed, all pale and cold. I sat beside him, and held his hand. It was not the same anymore. He wouldn't respond to my touch. On brighter days, he would have excitedly called out my name, "Nuthian " or at least responded to his held hand. That was the last time I held hands with Sawmte in this world.

On the first day of school reopening after his absence, Sawmte's grandmother visited the campus along with his father, Mr. Gin. I found it really hard to meet

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their eyes because every corner of the school and campus reminded me of Sawmte. And for that, this particular day remains clear in my memories.

NOW, SAWMTE, ALTHOUGH WEAK, HE NO LONGER NEEDS TO SEE NOR WALK ON HIS OWN, BUT THROUGH THE AMAZING GRACE OF THE ALMIGHTY, I KNOW HE IS IN THE ARMS OF GOD IN VICTORY.

Although we can no longer meet in flesh, you are and will always be alive in my heart.

MISS YOU, SAWMTE!

Conclusion: Unlike many of us, Sawmte might be unable to do and contribute much, but he was a great ambassador for the Heavenly Father, preaching through his life story. Although he might no longer be with us in flesh, his name and his story became a legacy, leaving behind all the works in his name, becoming an advocate for the destitute. His parents took their grief as a challenge to the next level by creating awareness for the differently abled communities in the town, and drawing the societies' attention towards disability. With their hard work and initiative, Inclusive Education, a term that was never heard before or which was nowhere near in practice had hit the society's ear and made us realize that persons with disabilities (PwDs) indeed have their own rights and status in the society.

I have to say, all these was made possible by God alone, using Sawmte as an ambassador through his parents. And creating the Parents Community for the parents of other children with disabilities has in many unseen ways, lifted the burden of many parents, put a smile on their faces and shared their untold stories.

Like Jesus said, "It is through them that the glory and works of God is displayed," in the Holy Bible, John 9:3b, for them to be able to display the glory and works of God, all that are involved, touched and associated with them has a big responsibility. How is your take on that?

# Our Lord Works In Mysterious Ways

*Nini Chingzaman*

Mrs Chingzaman is Sawmte's eldest paternal aunt, a Nini for Sawmte.

**I** thank the Lord for sustaining my life thus far and for giving me good health to be able to write. I was overjoyed when Sawmte was born. When his illness was diagnosed, I felt helpless as there was nothing I could do to help my nephew except pray for him. When the problem with his eyesight was first detected, I wasn't alarmed because I thought that he would get cured but after his parents took him to several doctors, we found that his condition couldn't be treated, but I didn't lose hope because I had faith that God, the omnipotent would still be able to fix and I prayed: "Lord, you can cure him, you could give him sight."

In the Gospel of John 9:2-3, when Jesus cured a man who was born blind, the disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" and Jesus replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me." I kept praying to God to heal Sawmte and I thought God would cure his eyesight. However, the Bible teaches us that God's plans are for the good of everyone. Whenever I visited them, Sawmte would say to me: "Ni Man, you have come?" It warmed my heart to hear him say these words and reminded me of my father. I love Sawmte dearly and the memory of his voice and the sound of him singing remain with me even now. He has left us but he has gone to the Lord where he will no longer be blind; where there is no hunger or thirst; where there is no handicap and he will be complete in Him. For this I praise the Lord's name!

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When God made us in his likeness and gave us the breath of life, He made everyone to be equal. But the downtrodden and the less fortunate, the ones we call “disabled,” whom the world often forgets about, are blessed by Him with their own talents and skills to honour His name; to be witnesses to the world that there is one true God and that he is our Creator. The Lord’s plan is for heathens to find God’s salvation and for believers to once again witness the Lord’s greatness. It is God’s plan that those who work closely with differently abled people are also working for Him.

I believe that those working at The Malsawm Initiative School and those working at Centre for Community Initiative will be facing a great deal of difficulties and challenges. But even in times like these, I hope they continue to think of themselves in the Lord’s service and strengthen themselves through prayer as it is written in the Psalms: “Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.”

Through Isaiah 41:13 which says: “ For, I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, do not fear; I will help you,” God comforts us and I am grateful. He heals the blind and gives them spiritual sight to bring light and to those still living in spiritual darkness. He says, “I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.” Isaiah 42:8

The Lord is the creator and he knows my coming and my going, he knows me from the womb and I cannot begrudge the path He has led me on.

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them” Isaiah 42:16 - “I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.”

To God be the glory for it is said, “but those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods.’ Will be turned back in utter shame. (Isaiah 42:17)

Isaiah 43:1 says, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you

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by name; you are mine.” How comforting are these words! The Lord’s name be praised.

I praise the Lord for he says to us that he is with us because he loves us and not to be afraid for he is with us. Let us give thanks to God for he is good and his love endures forever and his word is a lamp to our feet; a guiding map for our path; a walking-stick for the weary; a guide for the wanderer and quenching water for the thirsty.

To think that even though Sawmte could not see the world with his eyes but God has now given him new sight and he now praises the Lord with all the blessed in Heaven. The lord’s name be praised! Through his story, many others like him are given a fighting chance. It is God’s greatness and glory.

“Behold I have created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for work and it is I who have created the destroyer to wreak havoc.” (Isaiah 54:16) our Lord Jesus sacrificed himself and God sent him on earth to the most humble beginning. God had already prepared his enemy, the weapons he would use against that enemy. All this has been prepared by God. Because of God’s love for the sinners, he says that he created the destroyer to destroy him so that we may be saved through Jesus; that we may be redeemed through him and be cleansed through him. God gave his own son into the hands of his enemy and he died on the cross for us. There is not a word in my tongue that the Lord does not know and there is nothing too great or too small and so like Moses said to the Israelites that he would first wait upon the instructions from God and that they should be patient, so too should we be. We should pray to God for our plans for the future. God has set a time for everything; a time to be born and a time to die, a time to sow and a time to reap. In the month of April, God took Sawmte. It was the month of Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It was the time when crops ripened; the time to plant trees and for new buds to spring. If crops are planted at a time other than the time for sowing, they do not grow for it is all the will of God.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken back, so that we could witness his glory.

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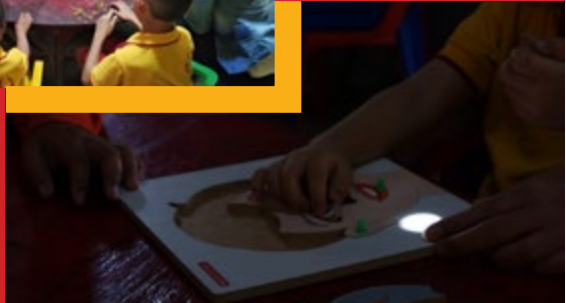
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# Roles and Responsibilities of the Church towards Differently-abled Individuals

*Dr Thangminlun Mangte*

Pastor Dr Thangminlun Mangte is a friend and well-wisher of our family.  
Praying ceaselessly for us and our work.

## I. Introduction:

The common English term for those born with physical or mental problems or disabilities is 'disabled persons.' In Paite, the term used is 'Piangsual' (literal translation: born defective). But even in English, I prefer the term differently-abled people while referring to these persons. I find the term Piangsual uncomfortable and offensive to use. Today, I attempt to address some issues relating to our dealings with the differently-abled persons in the church as Mr Pauzagin Tonsing @Malsawm's father had given me the opportunity to do so. I do not claim that whatever I write here is the best and most correct interpretation on the topic. However, I will try to do so with reference to The Holy Bible and the Church's approach towards this which I hope will be for the greater good in the future.

## II. Biblical Perspective of the Differently-abled:

As mentioned in the Bible, God created us in His own image (Gen 1:26f; 2:7) He created Man and Woman, different in looks, different in ability and capabilities, with different responsibilities. This signifies that God did this for His glory. It is mentioned in the book of Sam 139:13 – 16: For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Amidst these references from the Bible, people might form different perceptions towards differently-abled individuals. We can view the Bible's perception in two different ways. i) God's wrath over one's sin and ii) For the Glory of God. There might be numerous ways we can keep on talking about this. However, we'll talk about only a few of them.

i) God's Punishment: Written in the Old Testament, God who created man can do as He sees fit if His creation disobeys Him. He has told His chosen tribe Israel, in Leviticus 26: 14 ~ 16: But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. Samson proves to be a good example of what God said. Even though he was chosen by God, for loving a Philistine woman from Timnah with whom he was not supposed to be, his eyes got gouged out (Judges 14:2; 16:12) What happened to King Jeroboam was the wrath of God. "Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!" (1 Kings 13:4; Zechariah 11:17)."

ii) The Glory of God Dignified: John 9:1 ~ 3 The New Testament mentioned an instance when the Lord Jesus made a blind man see. His disciples asked Him

whether the blindness was due to his sins. However, Jesus said he was blind so that God's miracle will be proclaimed because of Him. This is not much different from our situation. Some would say, his mother ate something she was not supposed to eat during her pregnancy, or it was because of something his father did wrong and various blame would be passed. In the book of Acts, we can also see God's miracle and wonder when he makes the lame walk. It is mentioned that he was lame from his birth, from his mother's womb itself (Acts 3:1 ~ 11).

Our intention is to see that to be born differently signifies that God's miracle would be proclaimed through us. That emphasizes God's intentions as well. It is mentioned in the Bible that on that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will hear (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5f).

Hence, it is very vital that we all should not ascribe blame towards people born differently-abled and accept that it is the will of God. Ignorance is one thing, however knowing and ignoring your responsibilities? It will have consequences when we all stand before God. So, I request that we all think twice and re-evaluate ourselves.

### III. Possible scenarios in Church, and the Responsibilities of the Church:

Looking at our current situation, the rich limit their social interaction to the rich which leaves the poor and disabled outcast and marginalised. However, Dr Luke said, "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:13f)."

Even though the Bible says the above, we are living in a world where it is questionable whether there is a place left for the poor and disabled in the church and society. If we look at the church, there would be someone we have not heard of a differently-abled person in their family and they would probably be too scared or unwilling to speak out about their situation and struggles

alone in the dark. This could happen and they may be afflicted by fear of judgment, embarrassment or because of someone else's reckless speeches and comments about differently-abled people. It is a very sensitive situation as all these could cause the unfortunate family to stray away from the church, away from God and lose their interest in coming to the church.

Had it been a different scenario for the differently-abled people, we would have never compared their capabilities in various ways. If faith could be measured, their faith in God might be firmer, and it is often seen that their faith gives them strength to go on with their lives. They are rich in spirit and find joy in the simplest of things - all because of their Faith in God. I believe that if the church did some digging and identified differently-abled people and used them to proclaim the glory of God, that would be really precious in God's eye. In developed countries, they have made religious places, offices, roads, schools, etc accessible for the differently-abled people. Our society, our country might not have been developed like other places but I am sure we would not regret it if we could only look for ways to make differently-abled people feel welcome in the church.

I have listed some thoughts below for our consideration:

- i) Church services scenario: We started using a projector in the church which leads to certain problems for the differently-abled people. Some people would question the need of a lyrics dictation when the hymnals/chorus are displayed on the projector screen. In such times, we tend to forget about the people who are unable to see and unable to read.
- ii) Greetings/Welcoming scenario: When we all get together for worshipping God, some of us tend to feel uncomfortable to sit around them while some of us pretend to not see them even as we clearly see them, and some of us do not bother to speak to them. When they come to the Church for worship, the Ushers at the entrance should greet them warmly and guide them to their seats. Knowing that they are always in need of support, we should always offer to help them, ask them politely with respect and speak to them with clarity that

will make them feel comfortable.

iii) Soft spoken and Smiles: Often we feel that we are not enough and unable to complete our duties and responsibilities. They too would feel the same way as you and me. So, when they come to worship God, it is our duty to be soft spoken to our fellow believers, smile at them and always be willing to support them.

iv) In the Church: When we rebuild or reconstruct our church buildings, we should always keep in mind to make it more inclusive for the differently-abled. We can put ramps for accessibility, accessible seats, toilets and also the refreshments that we serve should be done bearing them in mind.

v) Body and Spiritual well-being: The differently-abled also need proper care for their body and spiritual well-being as much as we all need them. We should think of innovative ways for the differently-abled to make them feel included. We should be careful and sensitive when supplying their required equipments like walking sticks, watches, seats, Bible, gloves, etc. To be overly sympathetic or patronizing can also make them feel uncomfortable and left out.

vi) Helping Hands: Even though our local church might not have any differently-abled members, we should always be vigilant and extend our helping hands to other churches having differently-abled members. This is more the responsibility of the Church which preaches love rather than for the society or the government.

Henceforth, in the matters of the differently-abled, the church (Dorcas, BYF, BCD, etc) could extend their helping hands by voluntary work at least once a month (like cleaning their homes, giving them bath, cooking for them, etc). I do expect you to know more innovative ways for the church to help the differently-abled. Instead of choosing to ignore when we are clearly able to extend our helping hands it is wise to always take action because we never know when we would no longer be able to do so.

**Conclusion:**

The church is the body of Christ and it comprises young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, responsible and irresponsible, able and disable, strong and weak and the list goes on. We cannot despise or ignore a part of our body as all parts form the full body. Likewise, it is required to take new steps and innovative ways to look after the differently-abled in the church body. And we should never forget that looking after the differently-abled is an Evangelism you could do without having to walk the extra mile.

When David became the King of Israel, for his beloved friend Jonathan, the King asked, "Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" Ziba answered the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet." (2 Samuel 9:3c, 13b). When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan came to David, "Don't be afraid," David said to him, for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table (v7)." Then, Mephibosheth lived with the King at his palace in Jerusalem, and the scripture said, "Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table; he was lame in both feet"(v13). The act of kindness and restoration shown by King David to the lame Mephibosheth shows that it is our duty and responsibility to show and carry out the love of Jesus Christ.

Mephibosheth did not expect anything from the king and was not planning on asking anything. Rather, when the king called upon him, Mephibosheth bowed down and said, what is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me? (v8). The action of David was not requested, it came from his heart. Here, we can learn three things from the restoration of Mephibosheth:

i) Restoration of Mephibosheth's reputation: Prior to this, Mephibosheth was drowning in the sea of life, he just lived his life ignored and despised. However, with King David's act of restoration, his royal heritage was revived and the realization that he is remembered touched Mephibosheth's life deeply.

ii) Restoration of Mephibosheth's reputation: After spending a couple of years

in the house of the sympathetic Makir, he was made to inherit his Grandfather King Saul's property and assumed his role of a prince. This is indeed great and wonderful.

iii) Restoration of the society: Despised and ignored by his grandfather's servants, he was brought into King David's royal household and once again attained royalty. This changed the societal norms and brought justice to the society.

Like the stories and references we made, we all could take new steps and initiatives towards the differently-abled and implement them. We should not be selfish but selfless and this would bring restoration of individuals, the society and the church. This is the will of God.

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# My General Secretary

*By Mangchinkhup*

Mr H Mangchinkhup is a family friend.

I was requested to write an article on February 29, 2020 by Shri Pauzagin for the upcoming MALSAWM Memorial service that was originally planned for April 23, 2020. I hadn't thought about it or was mentally prepared on how to start writing the article until April came calling. On April 3, 2020 I saw Pauzagin in my dreams, I told him that I would write about his story instead of Malsawm. I also told him that I used "My General Secretary" as the Title/Headline. April 4, 2020, The next day I started writing the article. Since we both share the same ideology, same interest and also worked together for a decent amount of time that left me confused not because i know nothing to write but rather being unable to decide on which part to write. While working together, we gave everything and all we could for the tribe, for the community and for the society.

The electricity of Manipur's second Town - Lamka was terrible with 4 hours of electricity daily and the bill remaining the same. No electricity for the school going students to study at night, And during daytime Electric operated machines remained silent due to no electricity. When an electric transformer broke down, the public contributed money for the electric department to do the repair. Not only were they given extra money for the job they were already paid to do, but were also provided with a hearty meal which most of the families/households could not afford. And those people in the society who could afford to pay the electric department for these situations were treated with high regards in the society. Most of the time such people were always elected as leaders.

Due to its status of being a second town, drugs and other substances were greatly exploited in the town and the aftermath was suffered by a few generations. It might seem like an easy job when we talk about the welfare of the society, however for honesty to prevail it becomes very hard to achieve. The more ban and restrictions on selling and abusing drugs, the situation appears to worsen, in fact the Authority who restricted the drugs in the first place act as a source of drugs business. Nobody loves a drug abuser and the family members of a drug abuser usually chase the person out of the house and declare themselves not responsible and not aware of any action done by them. Amidst the declaration the families would be so fast in claiming fines and bribery in case they faced an accident and died. If they stumble upon a vehicle parked on the roadside and died, the vehicle owner was fined for the death of that person. If this is the situation, suppose a drug abuser stumbles upon a fence and dies, wouldn't the house owner of the fence be fined for that person's death? If the drug abuser stumbles upon a rock on a roadside and dies, who would be fined for his death then?

There is no complaint against such situations, however we all follow the same culture and tradition despite the fact that we all feel unjust and unfair. Likewise, we follow the same in the field of politics where we are deeply rooted in. We have given everything in electoral politics and that left us growing less, stagnant and underdeveloped. With an agenda of the same, politicians and leaders would cunningly brainwash the public and that left us in a situation where even an ethnic conflict wouldn't even bring us together anymore. The farthest a politician could see is the NEXT ELECTION and how to end the policies right after the election is ended. With goals and objectives for the tribe, the politicians always proclaim their concern and support for the tribe, however none of them ever mention the prevailing issues in front of the assembly. In fact our inhabited lands have been sold off bit by bit and that too was never highlighted by the politicians. With much to worry about, We (Me and Gin) work together with hopes and dreams of restoring and rebuilding the community.

With the same objectives and ideology regarding our community, Me and

Pauzagin worked together since 2003. With the same ideology that was absent in preservation and upliftment of the community, we started a protest against the government for the preservation and implementation of 'Human Rights' among the tribals of Manipur.

Due to our concern for the future and welfare of the community, we started protests to the government which led us to being issued with a Police arrest warrant and they started looking for us. For one whole month we shifted from one location to another since we were afraid to sleep at home and Gin's wife being pregnant that time. One was suffering and unable to stay home due to his concern for his community while the other was suffering with an overdue delivery. On June 26, 2005, Gin's wife was taken to Dr. Thangminlian's clinic. That evening my friend Pauzagin was not with me and stayed with his wife for the delivery. Waiting for delivery, there is always a pleasure and suspense of guessing whether it will be a boy or a girl and on the other hand there is always a possibility of thinking the worst which would obviously destroy our mood.

After quite a while, we were informed that a baby boy was born and we all rejoiced at the news. However, the baby got fever and he was admitted to the District hospital. I was happy for the fact that His first born was a boy, we could not really celebrate or be freely and openly happy for him as there was an arrest warrant for the ZSF executives who started the human rights protest. When the baby got better he was named GINMALSAWM after his grandfather but his illness/condition was not detected then.

Time went by and an MOU was signed between the ZSF and the government. Amongst Various important points included in the MOU, there were various points that weren't seen before in CCPUR district - one MVA was shipped from Thoubal to CCpur by Manipur govt. and was fitted at Khengjang Power station. Since then the people of Churachandpur district have received 14 hours of electricity on a daily basis which was quite an improvement from 3/4 hours daily prior to the protest. Also, Manipur PWD was incapable of looking after Guite Road so it was handed over to the BRO. And an agreement was signed for the Autonomous District Council Employees to receive pension from the Govt.

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Years went on, And even though a normal child is able to start their schooling at the age of 4, Malsawm's parents found out that there was a problem with his eyesight. To see the blessings of God in the form of a first born son is a joy I haven't been able to experience and I did not know much to say, however I could feel him deeply. They attempted to admit Malsawm at Foundation school (a prestigious private school in town) however they faced multiple obstacles and unseen struggles, the path towards their aspiration was becoming narrow.

When their hopes of getting formal education failed, God guided Malsawm's parents on a different path. They started looking for a school for the disabled but there is none in the state. That was when Shri Pauzagin realised it was His God's given purpose in life, This purpose hasn't been shown by God to anyone in the town. Ever since then Shri Pauzagin's life had changed forever. He left the world of politics and dedicated his whole life towards this cause and never once looked back. Now he and his cause is recognised by the United Nations and I am nothing but happy and proud of him.

He and His wife started The Malsawm Initiative under CCI and after 5 years, the initiative was established ,fulfilling God's plan accordingly with much satisfaction and contentment that He had served his purpose Malsawm left His worldly journey on April 23, 2020 to stay with Our Father in Heaven where there is no disparity and where there is no disability. Under the shadow of Malsawm, I wish that God would bestow His blessings upon this mission and commitment.

When I first started to write this Article I was planning to use the headline " The life turning Point ", however, I had already written an article titled " My General Secretary " in front of Pauzagin in my dreams so I decided to go along with it. If in case you are wondering why I called him My General Secretary, He was The General Secretary while I was serving as The President for the SSPP GHQ.

God bless my GS.

# My beloved Grandson

*Apipi Thau – Nianngai*

Mrs Nian-ngai is Sawmte's paternal grandmother who he identified as Pipi Thau (Fat Grandma), maternal grandmother is Pipi Gawng (Thin Grandma).

**S**awmte was the first male grandchild from my sons, so we were extremely happy and overjoyed. As he was the first grandson from my sons' side, he was named after his grandfather Liangin – Ginmalsawm. He was a lovely and adorable baby who stole our hearts right away, filling our hearts with joy and hope. But all these hopes and joy were shattered when we later learned that he was born with visual impairment.

Knowing at the back of their minds that the light at the end of the tunnel was quite dim, his parents couldn't simply make themselves stop having hope. After three months of running around in search for a cure to our baby boy's diagnosis to different doctors, different hospitals, different cities, our hopes were crushed with no sign of a cure. Devastated, I prayed to God asking what I should do. And I believe his answer to my question and prayer was, "His purpose was to reveal the glory of God."

Malsawm loved singing as he grew older. He would often say, "Pipi, let's sing some songs," to which we would often sing songs like, "Mittel om nawnlou ding, Jerusalem thak ah..." which translates to, "There will no longer be blindness in the new Jerusalem."

He loves being cradled, so I would always cradle and hold him. But as he was growing bigger, I often told him that I wouldn't be able to cradle nor hold him because he was growing taller day by day. Just while our hopes were high and

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at its peak, he suddenly left us for his heavenly abode, leaving us with a whole new mission. Had I known he would leave this early, I would certainly and obviously have cradled and held him a lot more. Now, that has become my biggest regret!

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You are near,  
Even though we don't see you,  
You are with us,  
Even if you are far away.  
You are in our heart,  
In our thoughts,  
In our life,  
Always.  
~ *Pusawm* ~

Mercy is Sawmte's cousin

# Alas, God!

*Pauzagin Tonsing*

**N**ot knowing how your mother and father look. Not knowing how your brother and sister look. Not knowing the world of your family and your near and dear ones by their look but to only rely on the sounds and dins they make and the perceptive power of your aural sense alone. But to never set sight on the beauty and loveliness of nature for you are conceived and birthed in the lack of the visual faculty. What would you make of yourself, then? All you could do is extend your imagination from what people tell. Oh, how attractive this lady is! How handsome that young man was! You could not help but despair and fret knowing you are born a normal human yet without the ability to see with your own eyes the beauty, charm and wonders of creation around you.

Nature calls. You required mom or dad to take you to the restroom. “Bathe me now, Ma,” you’d say when you feel the need of it. And when you wish to have fresh air or roam the open as any child would, you couldn’t help but require your sweet mother to take you out whether she is free or not. Having no visual resources of your own to tap into, you obviously couldn’t move around by yourself; everything is but dark and blackness. Visual delights such as movies and TV programmes certainly make no sense to you. All you could do would be perk your ears and ask around. The dazzling sun that rises every morning. The silver moon that illumines the night sky in resplendent gleam - you definitely won’t see. Bereft of optical sense, you could only bank on your flights of fancy, conjuring in your mind’s eye what people gloss over as sweet memories

captured in the frames of old photographs. Oh, inconceivable indeed it is to lead a life without ocular vision!

It might seem selfish to talk about my own predicament. But I decided to jot it down anyway because I hope someone somewhere in an obscure corner of the world might take it as an inspiration for a new zest of life. It was not before I sank in the Slough of Despond that I realized God had entrusted me with the responsibility a mere five percentage of the world could only shoulder. Indeed, I would often overwhelm myself with worldly cares and flounder in the river of self-defeatist tears. Yet, I would prove and learn time and again that the Lord I trust is living and worthy. And for that I would come to know that I was more blessed than scourged.

It was on the night of 26th June 2005, at ten minutes to ten that we were blessed with a providential gift. But he was different from the very moment he came into this world. Mawlsawm did not let out a baby-cry as a normal new-born does. Worried, we, those waiting for the delivery outside the ward, could only hold our breaths having not even a murmur to share among ourselves. Not before the alarmed midwives sent for the doctor that he let out a whimper. Even then, he never wailed like a neonate. By the way, he was recorded to weigh 3.4kgs. The following day, following Dr. Kimboi Tonsing, the paediatrician's advice, we headed straight to a child specialist as soon as we were allowed to go.

We'd hardly spent a night at home when the babe developed high temperature again. And as advised, we took him to the hospital around two in the afternoon and got ourselves instantly admitted. Hospitalizing a child two days old really made me dismayed and unsettled. It was disheartening to return home only to bring the mother who was yet to recover from the labour trauma to the hospice to nurse the baby. I had particularly insisted on Dr. Kim to deliver our child. So, I'd decided to strictly stick to whatever advice she had to dispense. As the babe was burning with fever every now and then, we stayed on and did not leave the hospital till our doctor agreed to let us go.

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The infant was constantly fitted with intravenous tubing. He would sometimes let out a painful cry when the needle had to pierce him more than once. It was very hard looking on when the nurses had to go all over the tiny limbs but find not a vein to prick. I would secretly lose a tear or two. A week later, we were allowed to take our leave while the mother was still to recuperate.

As the mother could not produce enough breast milk, we had to feed our son a formula called Lactogen. Malsawm grew fine and healthy as the days passed. He began to suckle his thumb and started learning to smile. We made a weekly check-up routine which we spaced out to a monthly regimen later. Whether out of overconcern or solicitousness for being our firstborn or considering better convenience, I happened to purchase a thick register book to maintain the medical records. The doctors no doubt appreciated the initiative. But they were quite amused at the same time. The first day I brought it, the doctor observed in jest, "Are you intending to fill up the book?" The remark tugged somewhere deep in my heart.

From what one could glean from bookish reading, a child takes about eight weeks to start seeing things. Some may take even three months, the books say. As we had reserved feelings that our son was having some sort of sight by the eighth week, we brought the matter to the doctor's notice. The doctors did not seem to be as concerned as us. They wished us away to hold on for at least the twelfth month. Even by the twelfth month, though, they did not seem to take much concern either. It was not before 8th October when we explained the matter at length that the doctor began to take a more thorough investigation. And he noted: "Mild dilated pupil. No reflex to light. Opacity of lens. Refer to eye specialist."

The morrow was a Sunday; sacrosanct to all of us Christians. In spite of that we were compelled to hurry to the state capital, Imphal, to consult an optometric physician. The specialist subjected us to a meticulous observation. He did seem to have his opinions and inferences. However, as he could not confirm anything for the moment, he advised us to visit his facility at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS). I already had a travel plan for an important

meeting but that was the last of my worries at the moment.. To my good fortune, so to say, the trip got cancelled somehow by the planners. That was an unexpressed pleasure for me. For, our recent circumstances had rendered my mind incapable and numb. A week later, we dropped into the Institute where a number of doctors conducted exams and investigations only to come up with another appointment for the following week. Yet they did make a note of the case as 'Optic Atrophy'.

No sooner than we got back home, I rushed to a cybercafé and made a search on optic atrophy. Optic atrophy is nothing but withered or dysfunctional optic nerve. It relates to poor vision or the lack of it. This little study of mine throws up that this type of case occurs to about five per cent of the total world population. It also lays down various ways of treatment and care for such patients. As I noticed, the concluding paragraph begins with a sombre and ominous word: 'Unfortunately...'" All it has to say was that there is no proper treatment or complete cure of the disorder. I wanted to vent my emotions then and there itself. Yet all I did was quietly cross out the windows and leave the internet cafe with tears streaming down my face. How do I break the bad news to my dear wife? I don't know how to put things in a euphemistic manner. Nor do I have the guts to bring her the dark tidings. It was hard, to say the least. It's true that weSmy wife and ISalready had our inklings from the doctor's little optimism. That was my only assurance that I may not have to make the big bad news after all.

Needless to say, our own children are always the most beautiful to us. But I dare say words elude you when God gives you a precious gift that would never recognise you by your face. Hunger did strike me. But no food would sink into the gullet. Night is a divine order for retirement. But I found no sleep in it. My mind was in constant turmoil, turning over and over the fact that God has made such a splendourous light yet gifted us with a blessing that would never admire it with his sense of sight. I was truly helpless and desolate. I couldn't wait for our next visit to RIMS although it was only a week away.

After taking multiple opinions from various doctors, we eventually decided to

go down to Guwahati to consult with Sri Sankardeva Nethralaya. On October 24, we visited the hospice where we were advised to do MRI brain and VEP tests. We did as told and took the tests at Guwahati GNRC. The first report came. It said in the MRI that the brain was normal. We showed it to the doctor. “Well, there is a good chance,” he remarked. “But let’s wait for the VEP Test.”

The following day, we brought him the results. My better half, her little sister, Mawi, and I stood before the doctor as he gave us his readings. He was making himself as empathic and comforting as possible, intending to make us not lose hope. In spite of that, a lump rose to our throats as we planted ourselves in front of him, not one of us having a word to spare.

The first thing that came to mind was that we had to do a lot less with entertainments of the visual nature, do more with audio-oriented recreations, and not bring home or display things ostensibly meant for visual treats and delight. Willing to dispel the doctor’s depressive briefing at least for a while, we decided to pay a visit to a shopping mall nearby. However, instead of forgetting our woes, it was easier to crack inside and brim with unshed tears when walking among the cute and beautiful children’s toys and wares. When we informed our relatives back home of our situation, we learnt that some of them had to leave their high tea midway in anguish.

In such situations, one couldn’t help but feel selectively doomed and cursed. One of my friends, who is a non-believer, exclaimed, “Gosh, what God would do that!” As I was fighting with my woe-begone thoughts, I came to realise that the blind man was healed by Jesus for the sole glory of God. Then struck the story of Job and how God took all his children away. God has laid out everything for us and we have not an iota of power to change that. Even when Jesus, his very begotten son, prayed with sweat dripping in blood to take away the cup from him, God did not relent or change his mind. I couldn’t help contemplate on the fact that God seldom alters his plan until it comes to its fruition.

As I was warring with my gloomy thoughts, it began to dawn on me that

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God had chosen me to take care of a rare affliction that affected only 5% of the world's children. What a wondrous realisation! While I take myself for nothing and a nobody, God has full trust and confidence in me. As such, he shouldered me with a mission to bring up a child born with only four senses. And I must accomplish it. In no time, I could take heart and encourage myself. Needless to say, we are normally born with five senses. But God has given me a responsibility to nurture a child with one less. However, the daunting task often makes me gripe and complain. I am a man with no experience. Having no learning and wisdom. No wealth to splurge on charity, altruisms, or any such undertakings. I was making my ends meet as a hen pecks the grains and worms that come her way. Oh, how much God has misunderstood me!

When I shared with my wife the message I received thus, she told me she too had a strong and unequivocal conviction about it. "When we suffer hardships and afflictions," she said, "we should not ask 'why me?' but rather 'why not me?'" I couldn't help but completely agree with her. It is indeed a monumental error on our part as humans that we often wish all ills to happen to others while all good things should come to us. A glorious realisation, yet again!

I looked to the heavens and found myself at peace and calm. I turn my eyes to the world and worries engulf me in a moment. Spending my waking hours in dismay and misery, I was half eager and half hesitant for the journey ahead. We were all prepared to depart when some friends began to trickle in to make their calls. One Dr. Ahibjit was among them. We discussed our state of affairs with him at some length. In a while, he offered that he could talk on our behalf to a certain good doctor he knows at Hyderabad if we should care to take a chance. In fact, that was the last ray of hope at the end of the tunnel. I was inwardly prepared to pounce on any chance that presents itself. Yet I did not want it to show right away. "Let me take the opinion of our relatives at home," I said and did the same instantly. Our relatives were all in agreement. They encouraged us not to let any chance blow away, even though it may be a blinking spark. At that, we placed an immediate call to LV Prasad Eye Institute. The doctor at the other end readily agreed to take us in. Dr. Abhijit put me on the line to speak for myself. "Come on Monday," Dr. Nizamul invited from the other end. "Directly to

my room; it's on the second floor.”

I believe that was the answer to our many desperate prayers and supplications. I slept like a log that night. However, something nudged my mind with the rekindling of a new hope and enthusiasm. We had set out with provisions till Guwahati only. Now, how do we make the financial arrangements to land us in Hyderabad? But God always sent us his angels to our aid. Well-wishers, brothers and sisters, friends and acquaintances came together and pooled their resources. In Guwahati alone, we managed an incredible amount of ten thousand rupees. I must take the name of the Good Samaritan. It was U Khamchinlian who lended the handsome figure.

A little quandary greeted our arrival at Hyderabad. The guest house we had reserved sold out despite our advance booking. I had two cell phone numbers with me at that time: Mawite Hauzel's and her brother's. We had never known or met each other before. I did not know their looks, their comfort or their attitude. I just rang them up. We got along well over the phone and became good friends in no time. I hunted them out the next day and they let me join them at their dining table. Then we started out again with Mawite's brother, Sanga, to find us a lodging.

So, on November 14, we called on LV Prasad. “He does slightly see,” the doctors there told us. That was really a heart-warming finding. Then, they sent us back with prescriptions to run several tests and revisit them six months later.

Job done for the day, we then proceeded to drop by the residence of Mawite and her brother. No sooner than we arrived, Sanga would insist that we must put up with them. And before we could even express our glad indecision, he literally dragged us by the arm to our guest house to take us away lock stock and barrel and accommodate in their apartment. As we were on our way to claim our baggage and belongings, he told us the reason behind his insistence to have us with them.

The day before, as he was taking us to their home on his Scooty, we had come across a beggar whose arm was missing. Without any hesitation, I sunk my

hand into my pocket for whatever I could spare. On our way ahead, I happened to disclose that I had never given alms to beggars until I was faced with a circumstance of my own. Since then, I never hesitated to drop a coin or two if I should see any form of invalidity in the mendicant. It appears that my small tale and even smaller act of humanity had won him completely over.

To garb me with strength and perseverance to accomplish the task God has given me has become the core of my prayers ever since. Dr. Nizamul had instructed us to make arrangements for at least three days' investigation. However, once we arrived, we were the only mongoloid face gracing the vicinity of the hospital. As we bided our time in the lounge, everybody would take a peek at us as though we were an alien object put on display in an amusement park. Learning that we were from a far corner of the land, the doctors acted promptly, taking our tests and running our errands like attendants themselves so that we completed all the necessary procedures within a day.

I must say that God has placed good people to render me help wherever I should need. Some old pals from the mainland received me when we arrived in Kolkata. Another one stood a post at Bhubaneswar. Even years in the mainland could not make me speak or pick up Hindi well. In spite of that, when there are friends at every turn to receive us, our co-fliers were surprised no end.

On our way back, I was afraid inconvenience should crop up to prevent us from tarrying at Kolkata. Kolkata was one place where I received a valuable message. As we reached there, we put up at U Siamzaman's quarters and communed with U Thangzalian and company. These good people told me a story about the last words of Pastor Daniel who had served for a whole eight years as a physically challenged minister. "The germs of disability hang in the air," he said. "And God gave them to those he trusts most to handle the debility," they told me. I was touched to the core of my heart. I learnt that God has done everything for our own good and one must practice to accept and make peace with it.

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I write this not because of self-pity or turning to God for the grief and sorrow I had to go through. I write rather because it is what consoles me and wipes away my tears in times of hardships and absolute loss of heart and hope. Now I am dead sure that the God I trust is alive and I rely on him in all my days of despair and woe. I hope this will serve as an inspiration and strengthen someone who has to undergo the same fate as me.

© *December 4, 2005*

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A precious gift  
A brother in heart  
A friend in mind  
Forever missed  
♥ Pusawm ♥

- Mercy

# The Community Initiative @ Churachandpur, Manipur, India

*Anindita Mukherjee*

Anindita Mukherjee is the former Deputy Director of Voice and Vision India, Mumbai.

I met with Mr Pauzagin Tonsing for the first time at the training with PVVI in Mumbai. He was the only participant who was a parent amid the group of professionals. His commitment to extracting the most from the lectures and institute visits was commendable. It is good to see him lead the Community Initiative today with the singular vision towards becoming an exemplary service provider in the region.

As a professional in the field, I have always believed in educating and empowering parents, which strengthens any support service model. Engaging with the community and involving them in the support model is a significant step towards inclusion.

I wish Mr Pauzagin Tonsing and the team of The Community Initiative all the very best in their efforts and hope they reach out to more children and families in their journey ahead.

On his Memorial Day and always, Malsawn continues to live and inspire in the spirit of the activities of The Community Initiative.

# Sawmte; A Beautiful Life.

*Lallian Valte*

Lallian Valte worked as volunteer at TMI and later did MA in Disability Studies TISS, Mumbai.

Mellow and sweet,  
His voice would greet;  
His hands would sway,  
Slowly in every way.

His life was beautiful,  
One that was very graceful;  
Without much hesitancy,  
Nor any rapidity.

They say the good die young,  
But it is the good who live on forever;  
They say love covers all,  
It was love that gave us hope after all.

Sawmte was a pioneer,  
He was, indeed; he was 10.  
Sawmte was a light,  
For his life had defeated darkness.  
'Sawmte' was a blessing,  
Synonymous to everything.  
Sawmte was a hero,  
His life has paved a better tomorrow.

# Bawi aw! Bawi !

*Siamkhanthang Tonsing*

Sawmte Paternal Uncle

My dearest Sawmte, I was overwhelmingly happy the day you were born. Seeing you completely healthy, I was filled with utter joy, seeing my lovely, endearing and adorable little nephew. Unfortunately, the table has completely turned when the news of you being born visually impaired hit us. I am extremely sorry my boy, I wish if only you could see the happy faces of your parents and your siblings at least once. Despite all that, you grew up into a young lad and often I think about how devastated your parents might feel. There was nothing I could do to help you, except pray to God, to make you see. And I never once lost the hope that one day, God will hear our prayers and your eyes would open up, and you'll be able to see all the colourful surroundings that the world has to offer. But then, it was and always is God's will and He made you see not the pleasures of this world but the glory and wonders of the Heaven.

The night before you passed has become our last day of meeting. Had I known, "Pathang, hold me close on your lap," that you said faintly would be the last words we spoke, I would have held you a lot longer. I miss and love you a lot my dear.

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**MALSAWM**  
**THE BLESSING**

*Simlei tung mimbang na pian chil in,  
Gualtoh tanbang kim ding sang e;  
Gual toh tanbang kimlou ka von deih aw,  
Laukha se lou aw Sian siam hi e;  
Sian lemgel mi zata dia vualzawlna hichia.  
Na sakmin lawibang thang e  
Kha na pham zong, mi zatan na paal zou e.*



**MALSAWM**  
**THE BLESSING**

