

# A Refugee Journey of Resilience

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In February 2013, my family and I fled from Sri Lanka to Malaysia, leaving behind our home and lives as we knew them. It was a decision born of desperation and a will to survive. Threats loomed over us, threats to kidnap my daughter and end my husband's life. The fear became unbearable after receiving a life-threatening call, and with the guidance of a kind Catholic bishop, we made the decision to leave.

When we arrived in Malaysia, we found ourselves without a place to live. We took refuge in the storeroom of a house, a bare space with no fan, no bed, just four walls. It was a harsh welcome to a foreign land. My children were young, my daughter was just 12, and my son, 10. On the first morning, we had no food. My husband and I left early to find something for our children to eat, and when we returned, they were crying from hunger and fear. We brought fried rice for them, only enough for the two of them. That day, my husband and I went without food.

Amid this hardship, we were blessed to find support at St. Joseph's Central parish. Father Alan Pereira, the parish priest, extended a helping hand, offering me a job as a sacristan. For more than a year, I worked there, and it allowed us to put food on the table. With the help of kind church members, my husband also managed to find some work, though as refugees, we were not legally permitted to work. Those jobs paid little, but they sustained us.



Eventually, we registered with UNHCR, which gave us some semblance of hope. It allowed our children to attend a school for underprivileged students, though even then, we faced hurdles. We couldn't afford the fees, and there were days when my children were asked to stand outside the classroom. They often cried, and so did I, seeing their struggles.

As the years went by, my husband and I became increasingly worried about our children's future, particularly their education. They were growing older, and as teenagers, they had never experienced a life of stability or rightful opportunities. We carried a heavy burden, constantly questioning how we could provide them with a life that would allow them to thrive and pursue their dreams.



It was during these reflections that I discovered Our Lady of Good Health parish. By that time, the parish priest was Father Peter, who introduced me to the late Mr. Anton Phillip. He was a true gentleman; a great man whose kindness and compassion left a lasting impact. The process formally began in 2016. Mr. Anton Phillip organized and arranged a five-member team under the Constituent Group (CG) of Our Lady of Good Health parish. He also introduced me to the Office for Refugees Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT), where I connected with the

Director, Deacon Rudy.

Deacon Rudy became an emotional guide for me and taught me how sponsorship works. His guidance, combined with the efforts of the Constituent Group, set things in motion. However, it wasn't until 2021 that things truly gained momentum. Father George Harrison, a Malaysian priest, came forward as a co-sponsor, generously contributing 80% of the required funds. With his help, the resettlement process moved forward. By October 2021, our case was submitted for processing to the Canadian embassy in Singapore, and in 2023, we completed our biometrics, medical examinations, and received final approval.

In late November 2024, after years of waiting and enduring hardships, we departed Malaysia and arrived in Canada the following day. The Constituent Group from Our Lady of Good Health parish welcomed us warmly, with smiles and open arms at the airport in Toronto, including Mrs. Debbie, who represented her late husband, Mr. Anton. Even in his final days, bedridden, Mr. Anton had entrusted his dear friend, Mr. Angelo, with the responsibility of ensuring our journey was successful.



Mr. Anton's unwavering dedication to helping our family will forever remain in our hearts. Even as he faced the end of his life, he thought of us, showing his true greatness as a human being. Alongside him, the ORAT staff, together with Deacon Rudy, were there for us from the very beginning. Their support went beyond official matters. They made us feel welcomed and treated us like their own family. In the end, we were finally able to put faces to the names we had been in contact with for so many years.

Today, as I reflect on this long and difficult journey, I am filled with immense gratitude. Our story is one of hardship, resilience, and hope. It is also a testament to the power of

compassion and the strength of a community that came together, with the grace of the Almighty, to change our lives.

