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The world is Bob's oyster: God provides

From Mauritius to Kenya to Italy to Australia, this is Bob's story.

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Bob Chung's life story is a testament to providence. There are many moments where Bob stumbled across the right persons or situations - while keeping an open mind and heart - which ultimately led to a very fulfilling life in the spirit of Opus Dei as taught by St Josemaria Escriva.

Although born and raised in Mauritius, Bob's parents were Chinese. His father had migrated from China during civil unrest in the 1920s, only going back to marry before returning to Mauritius with Bob's mum. They weren't religious but Bob describes them as generous - Bob is one of 10 children.

Life was simple and good, and took a divine turn when Bob was in his teens. It came in the form of a woman named Madame Gabrielle Pitot, who knocked on the Chung family's door and asked to teach the Catholic faith to the kids. Bob's dad said, "If it's something good, why not?" and soon enough Madame Pitot was visiting weekly for these classes.

She encouraged them to put their learning into practice by receiving baptism and the other sacraments, to which their parents did not object. Bob is still in awe of this woman who

came into his life unexpectedly and transformed him and his siblings through her generosity.

As Bob grew up, he had ambitions to study architecture, but limited options meant a Bachelor of Science was his only option and he would have to go overseas. Tertiary institutions in the UK or France were too costly for Bob's parents, so they looked into competitive state scholarships - offered by foreign governments as aid to underdeveloped countries. Bob applied and was awarded one to study at the University of London campus in Nairobi, Kenya. This would prove to be a blessing in every sense of the word.

During his studies in 1962, Bob became acquainted with the university chaplain. When looking for a place to stay at the end of the academic year, it was this priest who

suggested a student residence called Strathmore College. This was where Bob began to get acquainted with Opus Dei.

In his second last year of study in Kenya, Bob became good friends with a Strathmore College resident named Sean, who at one point mentioned the possibility of Bob having a vocation to Opus Dei. Bob thought it wasn't for him at the time – he was in the Legion of Mary and simply didn't see it working. But the following year, Bob was having some personal issues and reached out to Sean. Sean encouraged Bob once again to pray about his vocation as a means to help him through life. Bob felt the supernatural calling and joined the Work on 19 March 1965 as a supernumerary, and continued studying and growing in his love for God.

At one point Bob met Don Pedro Casciaro, one of the first members of Opus Dei, who was visiting from Rome. Bob told Don Pedro that he had recently climbed Mt Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa. When he was near the top and suffering from a lack of oxygen, he offered it up for Monsignor Josemaria Escriva and his intentions.

Don Pedro smiled, gave him a hug and asked him about his plans after his studies. Bob mentioned his dream of becoming an architect, at which Don Pedro told him that the Italian government was offering scholarships for foreigners to come and study at any of the universities in Italy.

Bob was amazed that this chance encounter had opened up the possibility for him to fulfill his dream of studying architecture in Europe. He applied, received a scholarship

and enrolled to study Architecture at the University of Rome, La Sapienza. This was a choice that would lead Bob to see Monsignor Josemaria around many times during his stay at the RUI (Residenza Universitaria Internazionale).

Bob felt completely out of his depth at first – he was still learning Italian, he didn't have the same educational background as others, and he found the Italian culture so foreign. Fortunately the RUI residents were very helpful and he was shortly able to follow the courses properly.

Five years passed quickly and as Bob's graduation approached in 1970, he began to think about where life would take him next. At this time he met an American man named George Block who was visiting RUI, but who was living in Sydney, Australia and helping with the running of a residential college

called Warrane. He told Bob that he should consider coming to help in Australia, and before long an enthused Bob was booking his flights.

Although Bob had often seen Monsignor Josemaria in large gatherings, he only got his chance to properly meet with him a week before leaving for Australia. Super excited, he arrived at Villa Tevere (location of the central offices of Opus Dei) with his head full of the questions that his RUI mates had requested him to ask. When Monsignor Josemaria entered the room, accompanied by Don Alvaro Del Portillo, Bob was overcome with a feeling of being with someone who loved him.

“He just opened his hands with a big, warm, smiling welcome and gave me a big fatherly hug,” says Bob. “You see, I am Chinese... always cautiously

respectful towards parents and elders, so I do not easily get emotional. However something out of character happened, I found myself crying! I could not control myself, I was crying! I just couldn't say a word and the list of questions from friends just did not exist, I forgot about everything!”

After Monsignor Josemaria calmed Bob down, they sat and talked. Bob told him what he studied, what he wanted to do with his life, that he was one of 10 kids and that his parents lived in Mauritius and were not Catholic.

“He said ‘Don't worry Bob, your parents are as good as many Christians that I know, maybe even better. And I said ‘I'm praying for them to convert' and he said ‘I will pray for them also'. And eventually both my mother and father

converted, just before they passed away.”

Bob soon moved to Australia to help with the beginnings of Warrane College. Life would change dramatically once he met his wife, Coreen - a Malaysian Chinese woman who became a Catholic after they got married. Today they live in Sydney, have been married for over 50 years and have three daughters, four grandchildren and 21 nephews and nieces.

Bob is forever grateful to God for blessing him with a most fruitful life. He recognises that his heavenly Father gave him all the necessary means to live a good life, in particular his Catholic faith and a vocation to Opus Dei.

Sebastian James

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