

## Pass It On®...

### How One Life Can Change a World

On the choppy waters of the Bay of Bengal, somewhere between Rangoon and the northeast coast of India, a ship packed with migrant workers returns to Andhra Pradesh. One of the workers stares out at the waves and has a dream about the 2-year-old son he hasn't seen since birth. The dream is filled with colors—and promise.

When he returns to his village, the man requests a meeting with the elders. Although he is low in the caste system, the father declares his son to be the chosen one of the village. After much time in the small Hindu temple, the elders agree, and the young son, Sam (as he would come to be known), becomes the only child in the village chosen to go to school. They christen him in the river with rose petals and perfumes, and in a few years, they buy his school uniform and books. At 5 years old, Sam walks through the jungle to another village a few miles away.

"I cried every morning because I was afraid," Sam remembers. "And I cried on the way home because I couldn't be with my friends, only with my books, until late in the evening."

Callings come in many ways—that inner voice that touches your passion and ignites your soul. For Sam, his calling was education, even as he learned English by scratching out sentences on a cracked slate.

"I talked to the monkeys when I walked home alone until I wasn't afraid anymore," he says. "I taught them English grammar."

As he grew older, the next school was even farther away, a two-hour walk each way.

"Even though many in my village resented me, and I often felt alone, I kept going," says Sam, who continued his schooling even when his father died, leaving the family to fend for themselves for survival. "I knew that I was chosen to do something for them, even if they didn't understand it at the time."

When Sam finished public school, he was accepted to a small junior college. It meant he would have to

leave his mother and brother living at the lowest level of poverty in the village. He wouldn't see them for two years. But his soul was good, and he was patient, even as his heart hurt. After a year of college, one of his professors pressed Sam to apply to American universities. A year later, Sam boarded an airplane for the first time with a National Scholarship under his arm and headed to Oklahoma.

In college, his soul lit up, and he reveled in learning all he could absorb. From there, it was on to Washington, D.C., for a doctoral degree and a career in the Education Department.

Finally, Sam could fulfill the dream his father had for him: to bring education to the village. For years, the students had gathered on a hard-packed dirt lot and traced the alphabet in the dust. Sam never bought a house but, instead, lived in apartments and sent most of his money back to the village to build a new school and pay for teachers. A brick building went up on the dirt lot. Computers arrived, along with electricity and the internet. Sam returned every summer to work with the minister of education and invite every child to school, regardless of their place in the caste system.

"I have much," he says. "So I give much."

His father would be proud.

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By The Foundation for a Better Life®

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