

## Audio Transcript of Allan Quigley Recording

### Section 6: Patty's Story

Hi,

If you have listened to some of my voice-over pieces before now, and haven't fallen asleep too often, maybe you are up for one more story?

One that took place in India...

I hope it might bring some of the themes and some of the possibilities of adult literacy together as we head to the final section of this Guide.

This story takes us back to 1967. 1967 was Canada's Centennial year. Canada was celebrating one hundred years with EXPO '67 in Montreal. Canada was building new parks, skating rinks, civic centres... Everyone had a project.

By contrast, my project was to leave Canada and go to India. And, as it turned out, I spent three years there.

I had finished my Bachelor's degree and decided to join CUSO, which is the Canadian University Services Overseas—CUSO...Canada's version of Peace Corps. This was well before I became involved with, or rather, before I "fell into" adult literacy.

I was an English as an additional language teacher in a government Secondary School in North India. It was a boys' School. The students were mainly from poor families. Many came from outlying villages having to be up before dawn and rode their bicycles into town. And, while summers were really hot, winters can be cold in North India. My students often arrived in winter wearing sandals and had a blanket wrapped around them for warmth. All the classes were held outside in the playground. The boys sat cross-legged on long mats and the teachers stood or some sat on a chair at the front. You had to be careful, or your portable blackboard might blow away.

My then fiancé came a year later, in 1968, also with CUSO. And we were married that year in Simla, a beautiful hill station which had once been the British Capital of India. My wife, Linda—we are now 53 years married—taught at a Girls Higher Secondary School down the street from my school.

So, coming to the point of this Voice-Over, in the final year we were there, CUSO had its annual retreat for the, some, forty volunteers. We gathered at meeting centre at Dhiga, on the Bay of Bengal, not far from Calcutta, or Kolkata, as the city is now called.

If all this sounds quite romantic. Some of it was.

But we had seen some awful things. Including the massive slums of nearby Kolkata; which, at the time, was one of the largest slums in the world. I had visited Mother Teresa's Home for the

Destitute and Dying in the heart of the Kolkata slums. We have seen hundreds of beggars, leprosy.... Poverty, at least in Western terms, was, and still is, a way of life for millions.

So, when we were at this retreat, I asked a fellow-volunteer, named Patty, if she felt she had accomplished anything in her years working in India. She had been a teacher in a Boys Orphanage in the heart of the Kolkata slums.

I once had done a rough estimate and calculated, with 40 volunteers from Canada there at that time, if you divided that number into the several million living in India at that time, the ratio was about one volunteer to the entire population of Canada. How could any one of us make a difference?

Patty was a vivacious, funny, very giving person. Super nice person.

She thought about this question for a while, then said:

“Did I do anything that made a difference?”

“Well, I taught my boys and helped out in the orphanage every day.”

But then, after some reflection, she said, “Yes. I did one thing right. I know it made a difference.”

As she said: “One day I put my boys on a bus. We travelled into the centre of the city. The heart of Calcutta where all the shops and stores are.”

And, to interject for a moment, I can tell you, for most people who have never been in such city centres, the crowds on the streets, the people hanging onto the sides of moving buses, the continuous wave of cars, scooters and trucks—each seeming to be leaning on their horns. The smog. For most, it is a shock. What is often called “culture shock.”

But, as Patty told us, “When my boys got down from that bus, their eyes just opened wide. They were astonished. They had never seen such beauty.”

As she explained, to them, having only seen the world of the slums in their lives, this was amazingly beautiful.

Would any of these boys get out of the slums? Who knows. But the point Patty was making was that she showed her students an option.

In her words, she, “Had made a difference.” And, I will add, that “difference” wasn’t far away. About a mile away from the only world they knew.

Here, I think is the job of education--literacy education for sure. Namely, to give options. And, to give the tools of literacy and numeracy to help our learners have more life-choices.

The stories of my learners, practitioners and the former mayor that you read about or heard about in this guide, are a testimony to this.

And I know I am not alone. I imagine everyone listening to this could add to those stories.

So, bringing it all together, the flow-through chart seen in this section, self-directed learning; the methods and approaches seen in this guide can help you open doors. Present options and tools. Change lives.

But can we build our field? What about the future of adult literacy education? This is discussed in the next and final section.

Thanks for listening.