

TELL YOUR STORY

A refugee story of faith
and hope, told in words
and art.

Manrhing's Story

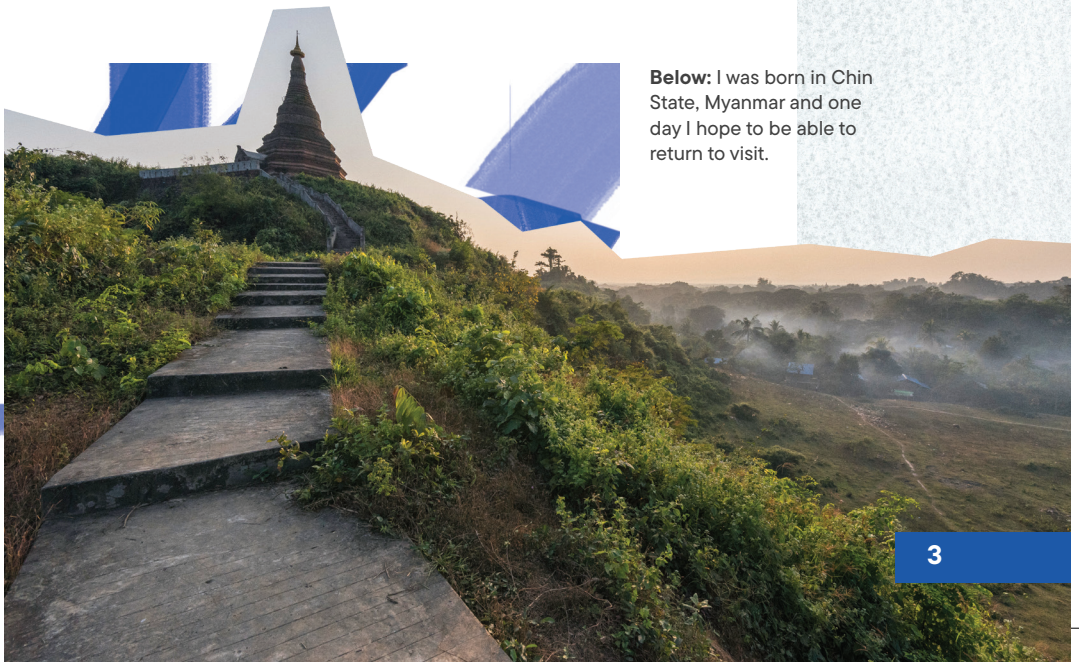


Tell Your Story celebrates the journey of participants from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) refugee backgrounds – including those currently seeking asylum. The aim is to both encourage hope and healing in participants, and to inspire faith, hope and understanding in others.

With training provided by experienced Salvation Army coaches, and with prompts/ questions provided, participants (looking through the lens of faith) use both their words and art forms to tell their stories. These are shared online and in booklet form.

Manrhing's story

I was born in Chin State, Myanmar, and forced to flee in 2001 to escape political persecution. For a decade, I lived in India as a refugee – a period of my life that was full of rejection, pain, hardship and loss. Through it all, I trusted in God, knowing that God's plans are far greater than my own. Today I have a stable home, a loving family, a strong Salvation Army church community and I want to share the love of Jesus with others.



Below: I was born in Chin State, Myanmar and one day I hope to be able to return to visit.



Above: Clay sculpture created to represent a verse in the Bible or personal message from God that has offered encouragement on the journey.

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

John 14:6

Staying on the path: Jesus is ‘the way’

This piece represents John 14:6 in the Bible (NIV), which reads, “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Thirty years ago, I was ‘born again’. This verse guides my life as a follower of Jesus Christ. I chose this verse because Jesus truly is my life and my way. Some people, who do not know Jesus, believe that doing good, or having good habits will take them to Heaven. But the Bible says Jesus is the way to God and to Heaven.



A heart to share the Good News: God's faithfulness and love

I was born in 1970, in Chin State, Myanmar and completed my high school education but was unable to continue with any further education due to family poverty.

Even though I was a Christian, born into a Christian family and attending church services with my parents, I was not able to see clearly or hear the guiding voice of God for close to 20 years. Then, in 1990, by the grace of God, I was 'born again', repenting of my sins and surrendering my life to Jesus. I became a member of The Salvation Army in 1995, which included some leadership and leadership training.

As I had grown up in a poor family, I decided early in life that when I grew up, I would like to start my own business. When I was old enough, I went to Maine Shu (or Ruby Land in Shan State) and worked hard in a gem business and made a lot of money.

"By the grace of God, I was later totally freed from the struggle with addiction."

I was young and had no skills in money management. I soon slipped into a dark hole, driven by my greed. I sadly became addicted to alcohol and drugs. I am so thankful that Jesus Christ saved me from staying in that dark hole for too long. By the grace of God, I was later totally freed from the struggle with addiction.

In 2001, I was involved in an event that supported a particular political leader and party opposing the Burmese government. After this event, the military authorities arrested many people who supported this leader. Almost everyone was arrested and sentenced to prison for many years. I was afraid for my safety and fled to India.

Below: Chin State, Myanmar features beautiful landscapes.

Right: This me and my family.





Hard years of uncertainty in India

Life for refugees in India was (and is) really terrible. They face unspeakable or unthinkable experiences and discrimination. They suffer enormous physical, mental and emotional stresses. If they survive the hardships and continue having to live in India, they have no hope for their lives.

The 10 years for my wife and myself were full of hardship. While we were living in New Delhi, my family and I experienced great difficulties including not enough food and nutrition; often having nowhere to live, no education opportunities for the children, and no health care.

I worked so many difficult jobs for very little money, and my wage was often not enough to buy food or regularly pay rent. We faced and experienced multiple evictions from so many places. Like a domino effect, we had no place to live, no job to earn money, no money to buy even vegetables and we survived on vegetables thrown in rubbish bins at the night market in India. We were bullied so many times and treated like animals, or less.

These were very painful experiences in our hearts, minds and emotions.

Sadly, many other refugees died around us, because none of us could afford to pay healthcare. The health of our children declined over time, even though we cared for them the best we could, with whatever resources we could find. Other refugees from Myanmar took their own lives, as they had no hope.

“THESE WERE VERY PAINFUL EXPERIENCES IN OUR HEARTS, MINDS AND EMOTIONS.”

There were many restrictions to Christian religious practices as well, and often if we wanted to rent a space for a church or use accommodation for Christian gatherings, we were stopped, or rental fees were several times more than usual.

Above: Our years in India were very difficult.



God's plans for good and not evil

In 2002, my family and I were recognised as refugees by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission of Refugees) in India. Then we migrated to Australia in 2013 as refugees under the humanitarian settlement program. I now live in Coffs Harbour, worship with The Salvation Army and my wife and I have six children.

There is a Bible verse that encourages me, *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'"* (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).

What I have learned from my experience is that God has plans for every one of us. No matter how bad a situation looks, it is important to trust the Lord with all our heart, mind and spirit. God controls our past, our present and our future and God's plans, through Jesus, are the best for us.

"The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace."

Psalm 29:11, NIV

Christians are told to go and share the Gospel to the ends of the Earth and my heart is drawn to the Burmese people, but also to all people. I've been to Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and other places and have learned that many people do not know God. I pray that, through offering care and hospitality, I can share the Gospel. I want others to know about Jesus' love, care and salvation.

"The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace" (Psalm 29:11, NIV).

Bible story:

My story is much like Jacob's story in the Bible (Genesis 28:5-22).

When I fled from my home country, the road I took was a forest road, and it was a seven-day journey by foot to reach India. The journey was very rough and it took a day to reach each village. During the journey, there were many difficulties such as hunger and thirst. In the forest, there were many dangerous animals such as snakes and tigers.

In the Bible, Jacob fled his motherland, to journey to Paddan Aram. On this journey, he too, was sleeping alone in the wilderness. At night, God spoke to Jacob in a dream. Even though he surely suffered leaving his home, God had a plan for Jacob and, after many years, God brought Jacob back to his homeland.

“WHEN I FLED FROM MY HOME COUNTRY, THE ROAD I TOOK WAS A FOREST ROAD, AND IT WAS A SEVEN-DAY JOURNEY BY FOOT TO REACH INDIA.”

Below: There are many forests in Chin State, Myanmar.



God's plan unfolds

In the same way, I now understand that my journey was God's plan. God has always been with me and guided me on my journey to New Delhi, India, in June 2002, and through that to Australia in September 2013.

God's plans are so strange and so wonderful. I am confident that when the time is right, one day, God will send me back to my home country.

During my early days in India, I tried to find Salvation Army groups but could not find any. Then, one night I prayed to God saying, "Even though I am alone, you are with me and always with me as the Bible says, and you are the God of everything and nothing is impossible with you. I trust in you, the God of miracles who can do what man cannot!"

I also had a dream, as Jacob did. In my dream, I saw an old man, and he showed me the sky. He asked, "What did you see in the sky?" I said I didn't see anything. Then the man showed me the sky again and asked the same question. I still didn't see anything. He asked the third time. And then I saw lightning in the sky. Then, the man said to me, "I will put you in the lightning."

I woke up and was scared of what the dream meant, but the next day realised I had lost all my desire for alcohol (a battle I'd had for many years). By the grace of God, the bishop of the Roman Catholic Church later visited New Delhi and gave me the address of



The Salvation Army church and soon that became like a family.

Today, I am overflowing with gratitude to God. Like Jacob, he has led and provided for me and my family. May the name of the Lord be greatly exalted all over the world! Amen.

"How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand — when I awake, I am still with you" (Psalm 139:17-18, NIV).



Above: Handing out Salvation Army Soldiership certificates at the Burmese Salvation Army Corps in India.

My journey in pictures



Above: Hornbill painted by my son and daughter in 2023 and gifted to The Salvation Army.

Hornbills are very important to the Chin people and are unique and special birds. They have a two-lobed kidney and are also the only birds in which the first and second neck vertebrae are fused together. This helps to provide a more stable platform for carrying their long bills. They are omnivorous, feeding on fruit and small animals and they nest in natural cavities in trees and sometimes cliffs.

Chin people know hornbills as “king of the birds”. They use the ‘husband-and-wife’ system, staying faithful to one another and they care for, and love each other very much.

When the nest is built, the female is placed in the tree trunk, and sealed in from the outside with a piece of resin, leaving just a small slit. She then relies totally on her mate for food and protection.

After the chicks hatch and when their wings are full, the male then pierces the nest from the outside and lets the mother and babies out.

The hornbill features on the flag of Chin people as a symbol of faithfulness and goodness.

Beginning

This bush reminds me of the forest near my home village.

These high stones remind me of my village. There are many big high stones near my village in Matupi.

Back home people use palm leaves to weave baskets.



Middle

I stayed in India for 10 years before I was accepted for resettlement in Australia. My memory of India was that it was a busy place and had many people. These photos remind me of the crowds in India.

There is a lot of dust in India.

End

We don't have high buildings like this back home. These buildings remind me that now I am on the 'second floor' and my family and I now have higher standards of health and education.

I will keep moving up step by step to the 'top floor'. The 'ground floor' is the foundation and the 'first floor' is the grace of God. Everything is built on God's firm foundation and grace.





BELIEVE IN GOOD