

Minguelin

God writes straight on crooked lines!

Dedicated to the fond memory of a simple soul called
Minguelinho Joaquim Xavier Toscano
who with his positive spirit and silent resolve rose from the brink of
disaster to create endless good with his life
besides giving me my very own.

God bless his soul.

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1. Introduction

Imagine yourself being diagnosed with AIDS and having to spend the foreseeable future in an isolated sanatorium where in a short time you find yourself in the critical ward – the last station before the grave – and one of your lungs deteriorates so badly that it is non-functional forever. By a stroke of luck a medical cure arrives just in time and you kick the grave but are now faced with a bleak future where you cannot possibly marry and lead a normal life. You feel lucky to have survived yet your future looks doomed. What would you do?

Many Goans of the previous generations faced this plight due to Tuberculosis (TB), a deadly scourge of their times. Minguelin was one of them. But where many other TB survivors gave up and drank themselves to an early death Minguelin with a quiet resolve, faith and perseverance unprecedented for most Goans rose above his handicaps to do so much good in his life that even full-bodied and well-positioned Goans are normally not known to do. Why? Because Minguelin dared to chose the positives over the negatives and make a difference to his own life, his family and the village at large. Instead of letting his circumstances dictate his life he chose to make the best possible out of it.

90/10 Principle: 10% of your life is what happens to you, 90% is how you react to it.

– Stephen Covey

Somehow we Goans are easily swayed by everything glossy and western than what is solid, real and ours. Preferring to converse in

English or Marathi we look down upon our own mother tongue, Konkani. We would easily trade our homeland for any other place in the world. We spend lifetimes away in our new foreign homelands and reminiscence about the good old Goa but do not dare to return to our dried roots to give them a new lease of life. We admire and adore heroic people around the world but suspect our very own who have spent their lifetimes trying to make Goa a better place or to atleast keep it alive. We spend more time philosophizing in taverns than work for our families' and community's future. Our cynicism, indifference and selfishness has gotten the better of us breeding all-round degradation in the community over the years. As a result we Goans, especially Christians, already almost strangers in our own homeland, are nearly reduced to decorative value as pallbearers of the Indo-Portuguese culture left behind by the colonial rulers. Soon we could be declared extinct species meant for museum glass cases if we don't wake up soon.

All that's needed for Evil to thrive and triumph is for Good men to do nothing.

If poor Minguelin with his ordinary abilities, health tragedies and limited resources could actively contribute to numerous village projects ranging from bandhs, comunidade, school, church, chapels, parochial house, old age home, etc. what wonders would not happen if so many of us better-placed sons and daughters of this village took that small step out of our comfort zones, leaving behind our personal differences and indifference, to work together for the collective good of our village! Our sleepy Chorão could be transformed into an unprecedented model of people-driven

progress in Goa! It could be transformed into one of the greatest places on earth.

Every great civilization or place has been made so by the vision and hard work of its people. Their greatness did not fall from the heavens but rose from their toil, blood and sweat. We live this life on earth only once in all of eternity. It is the only chance each one of us has...to make a difference...to do something greater than our petty selfish goals.

Imagine...resolve...just do it!

2. Growing Up

Minguelin was the first child of Anna Ernestina and Vincent Luis born on August 16, 1924 at Pandavaddo, Chorão. The family grew with the birth of a daughter (Assuntina), another son (name unknown, he died by the age of 10 of some disease) and much later another daughter (Rosita). By now Minguelin was in his early teens and he would later fondly reminiscence about playing with little Rosita like a doll in his right palm lifting her up in the air. She was a beloved toy for this young boy.

His mother prohibited him from learning to ride a bicycle fearing for her only remaining son's life. But Minguelin made up for it with his love for swimming. He loved fishing in the riverlets of Chorão, especially Kanyâ, from which developed his life-long fondness for *shevttalleo*, a local fish from Kanyâ.

Like many village boys of those days Minguelin would be in the fields before sunrise watering his mother's vegetable garden (*Varvem*) during the dry seasons of the year. Watering usually involved drawing water from a wide field-well using a 6-7 meter long wooden lever mechanism called *Latt* which required a good amount of human effort! Most of these have disappeared with arrival of electric water pumps today.

With no schools in Chorão the village children, mostly boys, would study at St. Thomas School at Aldona, a good 1 hour walk including a canoe ferry crossing at Ambarim. And like many of his friends he failed in the Matriculate exam (equivalent of SSC today) which had to be given either in Belgaum or Bombay. His school friends from

Chorão remember him as one of the few to wear leather slippers to school. Then there is also an incident of a bullock cart running over his right big toe deforming it into a blob for rest of his life.

Though details about Minguelin's early days are sketchy it can be safely assumed that the family had a decent life with his father working on ship and his maternal grandfather running a tavern at Boctavaddo.

During World War II when food supplies were scarce in Goa the leased comunidade field at Kanyâ was an asset and relief for the family. Ernestina gave away rice from her stock to many poor Christians and Hindus from the locality who would come to her doorstep seeking help. The family values of peace, kindness and honesty laid the foundation for Minguelin's life. However his father's meekness and alcoholism left a mark on him resulting in low assertiveness and, on the positive side, aversion to alcohol.

Many young men of his age from surrounding vaddos had begun working in Bombay and would visit Chorão during their vacations. There are stories of many picnics and parties that would happen in such days and Minguelin was actively involved in the same. I remember him telling me that during these events boys were even physically forced to drink alcohol and some would resist leading to scuffles. To avoid any hassles he would take any drink that was offered and would quietly pour out giving the impression of having actually drunk. It would tickle him to recount these happenings even in his old age.

Overall his life up to his early youth was mostly uneventful.

3. Young Tragedies

Through some relations and friends Minguelin left Chorão in search of a job in Bombay. Being soft mannered his relations recommended against taking aggressive jobs like bus conductor. So he began as a helping hand in an electrical workshop doing motor winding and other odd jobs. Accommodation was at the Chorão “Holy Family” kudd (village club’s dormitory) at Chira bazar.

I remember him fondly recounting the night of India’s independence from British rule when he and others in the kudd listened live on radio to Nehru ushering in Free India with his historic speech. For a young man whose world till then had revolved around Portuguese Goa it must have been an inspiring experience. Probably it was this and other experiences in Bombay in a free India that Minguelin developed admiration and deep respect for everything Indian for I grew up listening to him harp about the great Indian civilization and the freedom fighters, especially Mahatma Gandhi.

Smallpox

Soon the first tragedy of his youth struck when he contracted one of the most dreaded and contagious diseases of those times, Smallpox. His friends in the kudd kindly looked after him. However his condition deteriorated further and as per the law a municipal inspector was to come check him next day for possible shifting to the Smallpox sanatorium which meant the end for most patients. Luckily somebody brought one Mr. Heredia (grandfather of Fr. Luis Heredia presently serving in Pune diocese), also referred to as *Divaddkar*, who gave Minguelin an ayurvedic potion made from the

root of the Soap tree (*rintto*). Overnight the smallpox boils shriveled and when the municipal inspector visited he diagnosed it as chicken pox thereby ruling out hospitalization. Thus, thanks to divine intervention through *Divaddkar*, Minguelin kicked the grave for the first time in his life!

A little later his sister Assuntina was married away to Sebastian Paul (SP) D'souza who worked in Bombay.

Tuberculosis

In pursuit of a better job Minguelin shifted from Bombay to Gujarat to work as a supervisor in an Italian dairy. Life as well as his superiors were good but the other tragedy of his life was lurking around the corner. Dairies involve refrigerated rooms where the cheese is seasoned and other products like butter are stored. It also involved working with poor farmers and laborers. Somewhere in this environment Minguelin contracted the other most dreaded and contagious diseases of those times, Tuberculosis (TB).

When his condition didn't improve with medical treatment his brother-in-law, SP went from Bombay to Gujarat, brought him down to Goa by train and admitted in the TB sanatorium at Margão. Here he spent 3 years of his youth during which he lost his right lung to the Plombage surgical procedure. It involves collapsing a highly infected lung to rest it and allow lesions to heal. Later throughout his life radiologists and doctors would be alarmed about his nearly missing right lung in X-Rays and invariably would take him aside to disclose the tragic discovery of a serious TB infection only for Minguelin to smile and explain the history!

Minguelin saw many young lives in the sanatorium being lost to the savagery of TB, including one of his close friends. His condition deteriorated to the point where he was shifted to the critical ward, known to be the last station before the grave. One night he dreamt of his dead friend pulling him by the collar into a grave. He woke up utterly shaken and sweating. It was in such times of nightmares and desperation that Minguelin's faith in St. Jude, the patron saint of hopeless cases, was founded and lasted a lifetime. Another saint in whom Minguelin had profound faith was St. Anthony of Padua. As far as I can remember a picture of St. Jude has been hanging at our main door and Minguelin would begin and end his day with a small prayer in front of St. Anthony's framed picture in the bedroom.

Divine providence was to salvage him again from the grave. The first antibiotic remedy for TB, Streptomycin – discovered in 1946 in the USA, had just arrived in Goa. With it began Minguelin's long road of recovery to whatever could now be a normal life. Certainly it meant he could not marry for many more years due to risk of infecting his wife as well as children with TB.

It would have surely taken Minguelin a lot of courage and faith to see the prime of his youth be washed away while friends and relations of his age got married and started their families. But this test by fire laid the foundation of positive determination and perseverance unprecedented for most Goans. Life at the sanatorium introduced Minguelin to some new skills and many inspirational books. He learnt to make paper flowers, which would help him later to make a living, and was greatly inspired by books like "The Power of Positive Thinking" by Norman Vincent Peale and

“How to Stop Worrying and Start Living” by Dale Carnegie. And his lifetime favorite magazine, Reader’s Digest.

On completing his treatment at the TB sanatorium Minguelin returned to Chorão to be an outcast. People avoided visiting their house fearing they would contract TB from him. Also Streptomycin being relatively new he was advised against marriage on medical grounds that his wife and children would be at risk of infection. In today’s terms it is somewhat similar to somebody having AIDS.

Minguelin gave up all hopes of a normal life. He could not imagine that one day he would marry, have children and actually live long enough to see his grandchildren as well. It was an impossible dream then and if not for the Lord’s deliverance of Minguelin from these two major health tragedies and His grace that followed in Minguelin’s life you would not be reading this booklet today.

4. The Creative Years

Paper Flowers

Never the one to idle away his time Minguelin earnestly began earning his livelihood in Chorão making beautiful paper flowers like dahlia which were then sold in Mapusa market. Moti Anton from Belbhat is known to have been his handy salesman. His cousin Adu vividly recollects that it was marvelous to see these flowers being made from ordinary colored paper, coconut leaf sticks (*vir*) and thin wire. Some school boys are known to come to him to learn flower-making. He continued making the flowers through his tenure at the St. Bartholomew school stopping only later when he began the bag business.

Teacher, Secretary and Dramatist

Since 1953 Minguelin was actively involved with Fr. Elias – founder of St. Bartholomew school in Chorão – in development of the new school building (now the older part of the existing building). He taught the Primary section as well as Arts-Crafts-Calligraphy to Secondary section besides serving as secretary to Fr. Elias Gama. Many of his students, now in their retirement years, still recollect their affectionate but strict teacher. And that he would provide pencils and encourage poor students to study well and allow late fees payment to those who could not afford.

During his tenure he wrote/directed/organized many stage dramas (*tiatr*) to raise funds for the school. Some of these, which could be traced from the *tiatr* scripts found in his archives and are in his own hand-writing:

- Zogdem (short play)
- Farce (short play)
- Sezarnichi Bud
- Mhojem Voddponn
- Hanv Dolle Asun Kuddo (originally named Khuddo Jaki)
- Gundulecão (Patron saint's feast in school, 1955)
- Divors (Infant Jesus feast day in school on January 1, 1956 at 9:30pm)
- Fulgoddi Sasumai (On April 9, 1956 at 9:30pm in school)
- Ompta tem Picta (Patron saint's feast in school, year unknown)
- Visvashi Govachi Fitfiti Bail (Patron saint's feast in school, year unknown)

There might have been more *tiatr* by him but they are not traceable. Most of the above have a clear indication of being authored by Minguelin though it cannot be ruled out that others might have contributed in this work. He was an avid reader of English literature and must have borrowed many ideas from it for his work. In pre-liberation days every *tiatr* had to obtain a permit from the Portuguese administration before it could be staged. It required reviews and approvals by upto 7 different officers from the village up to the state level. This was done to ensure that a *tiatr* would not be used for political purposes against the colonial rule. Many of Minguelin's *tiatr* bear testimony to this colonial scrutiny.

Minguelin had great support from the enthusiastic students in organizing these activities. It seems he was very particular about discipline during rehearsals and final staging of a *tiatr*. Any indiscipline or poor performance would anger this otherwise calm and composed gentleman and he would knuckle-knock (*kutti*) his faulty actors. It is also known that Minguelin and Suresh Thali made

few *tiatrache podde* (curtain scenes) for the school to save rental costs.

Minguelin's archives show a significant collection of more than 50 Konkani songs from various sources including his own creations. As I grew up I remember him fondly recounting many times the success of his comedy tiatr *Fulgoddi Sasumai*. A simple man that he was he would still be tickled by its storyline based on domestic squabbles in the village and the audience's reactions relating it to happenings in their own families. He taught me few of these songs which along with some from my mother got me the best entertainer prize during our school's Scouts & Guides camp in Londa in the 1980s.

During his years at the school his father passed away and it is said that his funeral cortege was carried in a huge procession comprising of school children carrying school flags.

In the early post-liberation years Fr. Elias took to drinking for various reasons. Sometime during the monsoons of 1964 one Tio Abreu from Camarbhāt misinformed Fr. Elias that Minguelin and Domingos Caetano Abreu were secretly planning to start off another school in Chorão. At this time Dayanand Bandodkar School did not exist. The visibly upset priest in an inebriated state summoned Minguelin to the school in the evening. And in the presence of a student from Ambarim (youngest son of Lorso) lambasted Minguelin about what he had heard, threatening to remove him from his school job. Minguelin, not the one to tolerate nonsense and not getting an opportunity to speak up, quietly walked down the school stairs and went home before Fr. Elias could finish his verbal barrage. Minguelin explained what had happened

to his mother and Rosita, and that he would no longer work at the school. They both stood firmly by him saying, “lets make do with kanji (*pez*) if required to make ends meet.” Fr. Elias expected Minguelin to return to school duty which didn’t happen. So he sent Minguelin’s outstanding pay through a messenger which was accepted by him. He sent Sudan Thali four times to call him back but Minguelin had decided that the school was a closed chapter for him. Finally Fr. Elias, while distributing some exam results, announced from the stage that with immediate effect Minguelin was being replaced by Sudha Mahale from Saude as his secretary.

Despite these happenings and Fr. Elias’ weaknesses Minguelin always had high regards for him for pioneering education in Chorão. Without the work of Fr. Elias the children of Chorão would have continued for many more years to walk, mostly barefoot, many miles everyday to schools in neighboring villages. Undoubtedly most of us Chodnekars, in a way, owe our progress to Fr. Elias.

5. The Bag-maker

Jobless at home one day while taking a nap he noticed a sewing machine lying in a corner. It belonged to his cousin Ruby who had drowned a few years earlier in a canoe accident at the Ambarim ferry crossing. Though he had never before handled a sewing machine he saw a possibility in it and immediately got down to cleaning it up.

He requested his cousin Adu, who was into tailoring, to come check the sewing machine. To make the first trial bag Adu borrowed Felix D'souza's daily-use hand bag. Minguelin and she replicated the same in rexine. Encouraged by the successful outcome more material was bought and Adu collected many more sample bags from all over the vaddo. All were successfully replicated. Then baby suits and dresses were added to the portfolio and many designs were tried out. Adu continued to assist Minguelin establish his fledgling business for the next 6 months on the single sewing machine. Then she sent most of the girls whom she had been training in stitching at her place to Minguelin for making bags.

One of the staunch supporters of Minguelin in his new endeavor was Maximiano C.M. Toscano, father of Albino, from Pandavaddo settled in Bombay. He stood surety for Minguelin to take a Rs. 5000 government loan to establish his business. He pledged his property – plot of land and house in Pandavaddo worth Rs.20000 then – for the loan which implies greatness of his generous heart as well as his faith in Minguelin's abilities and determination. Thus came into existence **Fancy Dress & Bag Industry**, one of the earliest cottage

industries in Chorão which ran for the next 36 long years. Sudan Thali made the business sign board for his ex-teacher.

Initially Minguelin had a tough time selling his products to merchants in Panjim and Mapusa. A successful businessman from Divar, renowned as *Sotrekhar* (Umbrella-maker), gave Minguelin a big break by introducing him to M/s Manerkar, the big shop right next to Abe Faria statue, in Panjim. *Sotrekhar* personally convinced the skeptical manager (Dada) at Manerkar's to go for Minguelin's products. The first lot got sold within a week and then there was no turning back. Besides sharing his business wisdom with Minguelin, *Sotrekhar* also provided contacts in Margao and Vasco which brought more business.

Minguelin's brother-in-law SP helped organize cheaper raw material supplies through wholesalers in Bombay. Many times he would personally visit these suppliers in Crawford Market to select the material and ship it to Goa.

In his pursuit of new innovative bag designs Minguelin created many popular ones like Bell-bottom, Nun's bag, variety of school and college bags and many others. However his biggest hit of all times was a simple box design with 2 small handles – Shopping Bag. This highly utilitarian bag was an instant hit with Goans in Goa as well as Bombay. In the process *Choddnemchim Begam* (Bags of Chorão) became a legendary brand and Minguelin, the school teacher ("sar") became *Begamkar*, the Bag-maker!

Nonetheless life continued to pose many challenges for Minguelin.

Overall his poor business acumen ensured that he slogged long hours, Monday to Saturday every week, till 77 years of age to make a living from the bags. Initially the business was based more on volume rather than premium margins. It required a lot of physical effort from Minguelin as well as the family to keep it going. Through the late 70s to early 90s my mother literally ran a farm in the backyard with pigs, chicken, fruits (mainly *papayas*) and flowers (mostly *abolim*). This generated her some savings which she would plan to use to buy furniture or other things for the house or new dresses for herself and us. And here would come Minguelin seeking her savings to get raw materials for the bag business. And once taken the funds would hardly ever return since the business was barely profitable. The situation was further compounded by Minguelin's active involvement in community initiatives. Leaving the business in hands of his workers he would pursue the social projects be it the church, chapel, old age home, relations houses to be built or maintained, comunidade, whatever. We even doubt whether he recovered his own expenses on these projects leave alone making money from these as some people would claim in those days.

It should be noted that electricity arrived in Chorão only in 1975 – a good 10 years after Minguelin began his business. And the only viable transportation mode for goods was the *Gajolin* (catamaran) which would start off from Aldona and reach Ambarim jetty at around 8am. And here we were my father, mother, sister, myself and a Sadha *dadi* (from Ramachem Bhat) or a Pandlo (Rajan Karbotkar's father) or a Pasculo (from Khursavaddo) or a Chandrakant (*ghatti*) in tow carrying loads of bags in sacks from our house in Pandavaddo all the way to Ambarim jetty. There were few

times when we would still be climbing up the Ambarim slope and could hear the *Gajolin* at Kalvim jetty – the last stop before Ambarim. And then it would be a mad run to reach the jetty and catch it in time. I remember scenes where we would still be climbing down the slope to the jetty and the *Gajolin* was all set to leave having boarded all passengers and my mother would be shouting, “*Ooiiiiiii, rav re, rav re....!!*” (“Hey, wait, wait!”). Thanks to the kindness of the *Gajolin* captain and other passengers I don’t remember missing it anytime. But if you did then it would be only the next morning that you could think of reaching Panjim, for the *Gajolin* made a single trip in a day! Can you imagine this in today’s Goa where every house has a bike and every other has a 4-wheeler?! And here was a man running all over Goa for his business on a single lung but countless challenges! This was till the earlier 80’s. Later tempos, frequent ferries and 3/4-wheelers arrived and life became a little peaceful. Gabru from Ambarim carried my father and his goods to Panjim in his Fiat Padmini or Ambassador cars for a few years. Later Jose Menezes (*Kaptti*) would help with his bike.

After he had constructed the new house, where we have lived since 1975, in the hope of expanding his business through mechanization he took a Rs.10000 government loan to purchase a plastic welding machine from Monga Electronics (MIDC-Bhosari, Pune). He and SP visited Monga to order it. Minguelin pledged his new house as a loan guarantee. However due to certain delays in delivery of the machine and with the government officials chasing him for proof of loan utilization he developed a terrible paranoia of losing his new house, then valued at Rs.85000, to a public auction (*pavnni*). This brought him to the brink of a nervous breakdown but the situation fortunately resolved with the arrival of the machine. However due

to technical complexities this machine – the biggest single business investment by Minguelin – turned out to be a failure and he could not even recover his capital cost.

Minguelin spent most of his bag-making life repaying the government loans which he had taken earlier. If not for the advice of his friend Carlos Fernandes (Pandavaddo) and financial advisor John Mascarenhas (Pomburpa) Minguelin would have retired a pauper as a result of his poor money sense. Through their advice he began making some savings with small investments in LIC and UTI resulting in a retirement corpus of just about Rs.4 lacs when he retired at the age of 77 in 2001. This is peanuts for 35 years of business.

Fortunately in the early 90s Minguelin began making instrument cases for Pedro Fernandes Music Store in Panjim. He was already past 65 years by now and this new venture brought a welcome respite. It was relatively easy but creative work and involved premium margins. For the next 10 years this would be the mainstay of his business as focus shifted out of the tiresome volumes.

Minguelin was neither a success nor a failure in business. Basically he managed to put food on the family's table and give his children the education required for a better life. In Minguelin's own words God sustained his business more than himself. He was a social worker by nature who was compelled to do business for livelihood.

6. Leaps of Faith

Once his fledgling business, which began as a necessity for a livelihood, took a footing Minguelin got some confidence to face certain major decisions in his life. Already 46 years old he was running against time and was yet to be settled in life.

Marriage at 46

An impossibility till a few years earlier now there was some hope with new TB medications available. The legendary Dr. Bobo (Pomburpa) who had monitored Minguelin's post TB-sanatorium health finally okayed him for marriage. However Minguelin faced many questions. Did it make sense to marry so late? Would he live long enough to look after his family? Was this risk worth all the trouble? Who would marry him, an aging man with history of TB? Ofcourse no woman from Chorão would dare to.

But as his strong faith unfolded nothing is impossible in God!

There was this unfortunate and dark girl from Moira who had lost her mother at the age of 4 and her father unable to look after his 4 growing children decided to put her, the youngest of all, into an orphanage in Margão in the hope that someday she will become a nun and pray for him. She grew up an orphan taking care of many other younger orphans and toiled like a laborer to build the convent buildings, grazing the cattle, running the kitchen and all imaginable errands of an orphanage life. Later she ran away to Bombay and worked as a resident house-maid with Goan and Mangalorian families. She was now 35 years old and though she did not intend to

marry her relations coaxed her into it. Her name was Faustina, my mother.

Through common relations from both sides in Korjuem the unlikely alliance of Minguelin and Faustin came to pass. By their looks this couple would be a perfect mis-match – a fair and handsome Minguelin compared to a dark and unsophisticated Faustin – brought together through strange twists of fate. When the news broke out many skeptics did have a laugh about this old man's wedding dreams.

On November 4, 1970 Minguelin and Faustin were married in Bom Jesus Basilica in Old Goa. Later that day a simple reception was held at Kaptti's house in Pandavaddo. The very next day Minguelin was back to work with his bags as the business was still hand to mouth. Soon Faustin conceived their first child but it was to be lost in miscarriage within 3 months. Must have been a very tense time of his life for Minguelin and his faith did falter atleast once when he told Faustin that if she did not conceive again she would have to go back to her family. By God's grace, as always in Minguelin's life, my sister Judith Rose was born in February 1972 followed by me in May 1973. With a struggling business, 2 little children and his 75 year old mother on hands their life had no room for solace and peace. Add to that a harassing neighbor within the joint family house, Ethelvin *timai*, about whom it is less said the better. If not for the kindness of poor Kadu *timai* who would look after us my mother might not have seen this day. God bless Kadu *timai's* soul.

Thus came into being the next generation of Minguelin – an impossible dream till a few years earlier. He would now, for years to

come, pray to God to keep him alive till I, his son, would atleast get through SSC. But God was not only to let him see my SSC but through my two failures in HSSC, topping at all Goa level in Polytechnic, graduate as an Engineer and travel round the world, both his children get married and see all four of his grandchildren. He would acknowledge this many times saying, *“Dev vankddea riskamcher nitt boroita”* (“God writes straight on crooked lines”). Praise the Lord!

A New Home

As though his life wasn't challenging enough – or probably realizing that it was now or never – in 1973 Minguelin bought a comunidade plot in Pandavaddo to build a shed for his business which till now had been running out of his centuries old gloomy ancestral house. He had been trying for this plot for many years but faced delays due to another villager's interest in the same. His young architect suggested a plan that fitted a residence as well as the business within the same building. This was good as it would get his family out of the old house and from Ethelvin *timai's* persecution. Minguelin took the plunge.

He began construction with just Rs.5000 in hand but a lot of faith in his heart. He took loans from Josico Menezes (Caraim, Chorão), his brother-in-law SP (Bombay), his cousin Albano Toscano (Bombay) and Bentu (Saloi). Additionally his youngest sister Rosita, who had by then settled in Canada, lent him a significant amount from her husband Philo. There were couple other villagers who made promises to help Minguelin but didn't when the need arose. All the loans were paid off in the following years.

Ground preparations for the house was a major challenge since the terrain comprised of a hard laterite hill slope, 2 water tanks from earlier quarries and a monsoon water drainage through the plot. Professional stone breakers, *Gavddi* from Salcette, led this work. Dynamite was used to break chunks of the hill slope into the tanks. But when a neighbor complained to police about the dynamite blasts rocking her house the innovative laborers switched to cutting construction blocks (*chire*) from the rock. Enough stock was produced to build Minguelin's house, thereby saving him material cost, as well as to sell away to others.

The usual skeptics in the village rumored about Minguelin's house not going above the plinth level but it did till the roof of the first floor! Some scoundrels stole 6 ready-to-install window frames one night. Though he couldn't afford such loss it didn't deter Minguelin.

All cement work was done by a young mason named Bali (Khursavaddo) who refined his expertise under Minguelin's keen eye for detail. Faustin would water the cement work in the afternoon drawing water with a rope from the 30m deep well while my sister and I played around. One day Faustin slipped and fell from a 2m high wall while doing this. Fortunately the hurt wasn't much as anyways there was no possibility of any rest in those times.

The new house, unpainted on the outside due to fund shortage, was inaugurated in 1975 with a simple blessing ceremony by Fr. Figueredo. Soon my second birthday was celebrated here with a simple dinner for a handful of close family and friends. There were no funds for any party!

The bag business still continued in the old house. A little later when Minguelin decided to shift it to the new house the girls went on strike for more than a week demanding a wage hike. Minguelin pursued some of the good workers to return back, hired a few new girls and left out the trouble makers.

The only blemish on this endeavor was a small triangular piece of land at the back of this plot which, on suggestion of the then comunidade Escrivão (Secretary), Minguelin had not paid for but where we grew fruit bearing trees over the years. He would later regret it and got it regularized by paying the dues to the comunidade in the mid 90s.

7. The Social Mission

Throughout his life Minguelin has been actively involved in community work for no monetary gains. His earlier near-death experiences due to Smallpox and TB had probably instilled a deep sense of purpose to this second inning of his life. All this was in addition to Minguelin's bag business where he was the manager, laborer, salesman and accountant all rolled into one.

Though I have grown up knowing my father as an ardent patriot and from whom my own patriotism originates no details are available about his direct or indirect role in the Goa Liberation movement. Probably it was pre-empted by his job at the school funded by the then Portuguese government.

Konknim Basha Mandal

Nonetheless he was the founder Chairman of Konknim Basha Mandal (Chorão branch) inaugurated on April 19, 1964 at a function held near the Post Office in the presence of Dr. Manohar Sardessai, Udai Bembro, Chandracanta Kenim and others. The committee comprised of Alfred Abreu (Secretary) and Elvira Fernandes (Treasurer). Further activities of this Mandal are unknown.

Regedor

He was appointed as the *Regedor* (Sarpanch in today's terms) of Chorão by Goa government in 1965 and served this additional responsibility till 1968. Individuals of repute and integrity in a village were chosen by the government as *Regedor* who was responsible to administer the village affairs, including authorizing issue of gun powder for the *Fojne* (mini-cannons) used during the novenas and

feasts in the village. I remember him recounting that every other morning there would be someone at the doorstep with some or other petty dispute like somebody's cattle having strayed into somebody's garden or fields and caused damage. Though the police outpost in the immediate neighborhood (*postar*) facilitated his duties he was known to dispense fair justice in all disputes irrespective of the status, caste or religion of the parties involved.

There is documented proof of Minguelin heading a special 3-member committee appointed on August 11, 1968 in the General Body meeting of the shareholders of Chodan V.K.S.S. Society to investigate the fraudulent practices of and losses incurred by the society. It submitted a detailed report within a month pointing out serious lapses in the functioning of the society and implicating the Managing Committees of the society as total failures leading to the problems. Action plan to revive the society was also proposed. Further details are unavailable and also it is not clear if this was part of Minguelin's responsibility as the Regedor of Chorão.

Comunidade and Bandh Committee (2 terms)

It is a known that he was actively involved in the Chorão Comunidade as well as the Bandh committee (i.e. Kandlem Khazan Tenant Association) though details are sketchy. I remember him recounting challenges faced in those times with certain set of villagers hell bent on sabotaging community assets. One night these scoundrels removed the sluice gates of Kanyam *manos* (mini-dam). Fortunately Minguelin was informed before the tide came in and the entire *khazan* (agricultural land below sea level), protected by this dam, was flooded with salty sea water and rendered uncultivable for years. Minguelin with some workers (Mukund from

Khoddpar, Sadha from Ramachem-bhat and others) worked thru the night to reinstall the sluice gates. Similarly a lot of effort went in annual maintenance and repairs of *bandhs* to prevent breaches from super high tides during monsoons. Surely there must have been others in the committee who contributed in these efforts but details are unavailable.

Later at a ripe old age of 81 years he was again made the President of the Chorão Comunidade till he fell terminally ill in August 2007. This time though he was more of a figurehead and could not actively contribute to the activities due to this advanced age.

Holy Family Chapel Committee (3 terms)

Between 1970 and 1990 Minguelin served on atleast 3 committees of the Pandavaddo chapel each term lasting 3 years.

During one of his early terms the Parochial House was built against opposition from skeptics in the vaddo. Till this time the chapel priest was compelled to stay in rented houses. Late Fr. Michael D'Silva, then Principal of St. Bartholomew school, was the first resident of this new house. This was around 1975-6.

During another committee term of Minguelin in the early 80's the porch structure was constructed to provide permanent shade in front of the chapel and eliminate need of the rental pandal for the May feast. Inorder to generate revenues for chapel maintenance and projects a land plot in Boctavaddo belonging to the chapel was sold off.

During Fr. D'Silva tenure Pandavaddo flourished with many new initiatives like the Our Lady of Perpetual Succor novenas and feast, the Christmas Tree program, feast-time activities (housie, kermes), etc. Many folks helped in the chapel work either as part of the committees or externally. Significant were Anton Jose D'souza, Moti and Polu besides Minguelin.

Minguelin would get a variety of wholesale gift items from Manerkar's shop in Panjim for feast-time *kermes* for the church and chapel for which the crimped tickets were then made at our house by us a group of kids from colored paper to indicate denominations. As a little boy then I have vivid memories of this old man in his black suit running behind big shots after the feast high mass at the church or chapel to sell the raffles. And I would be his assistant to collect the tickets and fetch gifts from the stall for the patrons! Since the remaining items could not be returned back to Manerkar except in rounded counts (dozens) Minguelin would end up paying for the odd ones which we then used in the family. Or if the odd quantities were significant then he would store these for the next chapel or church feast paying the cost in the meanwhile from his own pocket.

Our Lady of Fatima Home for Aged

Next to the Holy Family chapel stands the house of a once prosperous Abreu family whose last generation had 3 sons; Gerson, Pascalit and Jovit. The father of this family passed away when the boys were still small. The widowed mother, who was worried for her family's safety, requested her neighbor Minguelin to sleep at her place at night for security. Minguelin, a young lad then, would sleep in the room which is today the chapel of the Aged Home. By the late 70's the dilapidated house was inhabited by 2 mentally

weak sons – Pascalit and Jovit – while Gerson was well settled in London. One of the sons, Jovit, passed away and Minguelin arranged for his last rites. Later the other son fell gravely ill and Minguelin admitted him in GMC, Panjim. He passed away there and Minguelin alongwith Moti did his last rites. The house keys were now with Minguelin.

At this time the Fatima Sisters who had begun their mission in Chorão a few years earlier were struggling for a residence. Moti's wife, Martha Noronha, brought their plight to Minguelin's notice who wrote to Gerson in London suggesting the house be donated to the Fatima sisters. Gerson immediately agreed and granted the power of attorney for the property to Minguelin. John Abreu and Liban Fernandes in London greatly facilitated this process. Minguelin and his contemporaries – Anton-Jose, Polu, Moti and Benjamin Toscano – worked hard to complete all formalities and renovate the house before handing it over to the Fatima Sisters. Thus in 1987 started the first and only old age home in Chorão which runs till today.

On similar lines Minguelin tried for many years to get the *Padrinchem ghor (Postar)* in Pandavaddo donated to the chapel by the Noronha family settled in Canada. Minguelin's youngest sister, Rosita, in Canada was helpful in this pursuit. The power of attorney was almost granted to Minguelin and Polu but due to some issues in the legal document it was being redone. Simultaneously, assured that the property would eventually come to the chapel and since the house was being ravaged by nature and petty thieves from the village, it was partly demolished and its timber, roof-tiles and laterite blocks sold off to pay for the demolition costs. The grand

painting of *Maria Auxilium Christianorum* (Our Lady Help of Christians) hanging today in the Holy Family parochial residence comes from this house. So do many benches found today in village chapels and churches were made from the huge thick door planks of this house and gifted away. Unfortunately due to the untimely deaths in Canada of Rosita and aged Carmelin Noronha, daughter-in-law and sole heir to the Noronha property, the legal matters have remained unresolved till date with the house yet to be transferred to the chapel.

Recently in 2005 when Sr. Edith undertook the project of extending the Aged Home at the rear-end Minguelin provided her moral support and advice regularly. Though he was 81 years old he would still make it a point to visit the construction site every other day and provide his suggestions to the project. His lifelong support to the Aged Home is widely acknowledged by seniors of the Fatima Sisters congregation.

St. Bartholomew Church Committee (3 terms)

Though it is not clear whether Minguelin was in the church committees during the 1970s my mother remembers the electricians who had completed electrification of our house in 1975 then being deployed to electrify the church. These men, numbering 4-5, would come to our house for their meals and she had a tough time cooking for them 3 times a day.

Minguelin served in atleast 3 church committees during the 80's and 90's each term being 3 years long.

A major church restoration project was undertaken during his 1983-85 term under the direction of Fr. Nuno. Due to poor maintenance the church was in a bad shape and many Chodnekars will still remember Fr. Nuno appealing in his sermons to help save the church from falling down. This simple priest on a bicycle was the dynamo behind this massive project and his relentless work has ensured that our church is still standing today. Minguelin as the committee President played a crucial facilitator role on this project alongwith Moti as Treasurer and Cosma (from Belbhat) as Secretary. Appeals for monetary help were printed and sent to Chodnekars all over the world bringing in significant funds. A huge lottery was organized and I remember my father personally selling many books and buying the remaining 4-5 books for the family. Sadly we didn't win a single prize! Also the feast-day *kermes* personally organized by Minguelin with his usual enthusiasm for many years helped bring in trickle of funds. The Christmas Tree program at the church began during these times and added to the Christmas spirit in the village.

Under the renovation project the church exteriors, including the massive façade, were completely re-plastered with cement. A banyan sapling that had caused significant damage to the northern bell tower with threatening cracks and water seepage into the structure was painstakingly removed. And the full interiors of the church were repainted including all altars. Among the army of laborers working at the church I remember one highly skilled but dumb (*mono*) young painter who did the most delicate painting of all statues in the church.

The modern mass altar was made during this project. The self-sacrificing pelican bird, symbolizing Christ, was the endearing

symbol of this project. The pelicans seen today on the mass altar and pillars of the sanctuary came up under this project.

Red-colored pads for the kneelers and seats for some benches in the church as well as the Holy Family chapel were made during these times by Minguelin using his bag-making resources. I am not sure whether he charged for his material and labor.

I accompanied my father over the hill many times every week to the church in those days. Since Minguelin never learnt to ride a bicycle there was no option but to climb over the hill. It wasn't easy for this aging man on a single lung. I remember him taking a pause after reaching the hill top to catch his breath. He wouldn't sit down but just stand still for a minute or two looking down at his beloved village spreading out to the fields, the rivers separating Chorão from the neighboring islands and the Shirigão mines on the horizon.

During these times Minguelin's mother died of pneumonia at 84 years of age and was buried on August 22, 1983, a day before the patron saint's feast. The funeral procession walked over the hill to the church. Minguelin had been a very obedient and caring son to his mother till her end. As little children we found it amusing to see our father immediately present himself whenever she would call to him "*Bab re!*" ("Dear boy!").

A disputed church land plot in Pomburpa was sold to bring revenues for the church restoration project. Minguelin, Moti and Polu worked hard to get this deal through despite many difficulties created by the manipulative Bamtto Bezmi from Khursavaddo.

Minguelin conceptualized and undertook implementation of the Family Grave project to extend the cemetery with the main aim of generating funds for the church renovation project. Due to paucity of funds he spent his own Rs.18000 to get the project started and this “loan” was later paid back to him by the church committee. Each family grave was sold for Rs.5000 each and Minguelin himself bought the first one. As is not uncommon for Chorão this project too faced opposition from many village skeptics who feared it would cause a status divide among the dead besides the caste divide which prevailed among the living in the village. Anyway many of these people today own family graves built by Minguelin.

One night a decorative box with mermaid figures on it under the mezzanine balcony (*kor*) inside the church crashed down as its internal structure had weakened from white ants and aged brittle wood. Fortunately since this happened at night nobody was hurt. Minguelin employed the master blacksmith from Khursavaddo, Vitturai, who skillfully restored this decorative piece to its original look and secured all of the remaining ones with metal strips, still seen today, to prevent any accident in the future. Vitturai also restored the broken left wrist of the life-size Infant Jesus statue on the southern altar.

All this work was done by Minguelin at an age of beyond 50 years, on a single lung and while still struggling to make livelihood from his bag business. Such passion was and is unusual for most Chodnekars who would rather while away their lives in taverns and balconies in philosophical hallucinations of politics and non-existent glories. In the process he earned the title of “Minguelin chor!” which didn’t bother nor deter him. He would snub my mother’s pestering to give

up the church work by saying, *“Lok kiteim mhonnun amchi igorz ami sambainam zalear konn sambaitolo?”* (“Let people gossip, if we don’t care for our church then who will?”) One of his favorite sayings was, “Let the dogs bark, the caravan must go on!” He was a man to whom his personal gains did not matter anywhere closer to the collective good of the community and was possessed by this greater purpose. He firmly believed – and through his life’s example now I do – in the eternal judgment of God before which human judgments and opinions are nothing more than dirt drifting in the wind.

We, the family, couldn’t help but be involved in Minguelin’s church work. On feast days the snacks for priests and musicians would be made at our place. We would wake up early in the morning to make corned beef and chutney sandwiches. And would get one sandwich each as our tip...certainly a big reward in our poor days! During his third committee tenure as the Treasurer the mass collections would be brought to our place and we, with a select few of our friends, would sit at our big dining table to count the coins. Anybody wanting to have a special coin would have to keep it aside and Minguelin would then replace it with his money. He was scrupulous to a penny.

St. Bartholomew School New Building

Around 1990 when Fr. Saude Perreira, then Principal of St. Bartholomew school, thought of constructing the new school building and sought Minguelin’s advice he assured him of his full support and gave suggestions on raising funds for the project. I remember my father recounting that he picked up a notebook, drew lines on it to record donation details and took Fr. Saude

around in the vaddo to solicit monetary support from the villagers for the new school building project. I remember him visit the construction site many times when he would take a break from his bag work around 6pm in the evenings. He was already 65 by now and was still making bags for a living.

Relations' Estates

In his life's second inning Minguelin has been the caretaker of his relations' estates in Pandavaddo:

- Regina and Martin Abreu settled in Bombay
- Costa family settled in Bombay
- Lovienne Menezes from Divar

This involved maintenance, repairs and renting of houses, maintenance and leasing of fruit-bearing trees and fields, legal matters and other errands.

After having self-supervised construction of his own house Minguelin was requested by his cousin, Antonio Toscano who worked in the Gulf, to supervise construction of his house in Pandavaddo. Minguelin faced many hardships in executing this project from scratch to finish.

Minguelin was partly involved in the initial construction of Joseph Abreu's house.

In the late 1980s as part of the reformation of his cousin, Arcanjo Toscano, Minguelin alongwith Polu renovated his ramshackle house which was joint with Minguelin's old house. Minguelin sold his old

house, renovated earlier, to Arcanj so that he could have a full residence in preparation for his wedding.

In early 1990s he undertook large-scale renovation of Regina and Martin Abreu's house which had been bought by Minguelin's sister Rosita from Canada. He was looking forward to both his sisters and their families spending their vacations in this house. Unfortunately as fate had it both of them died of cancer couple years apart before this house was ready. This devastated Minguelin and over the years he lost complete interest in it.

Minguelin advised and facilitated legal formalities in the sale of Jerome Toscano's house in Pandavaddo.

Handling his relations' affairs was a mixed bag for Minguelin. While in return for Minguelin's and Faustin's laborious efforts in few cases we got to enjoy fruits like mangoes and jackfruit, where we had none of our own, in other cases he got accusations, abuses and even an attempted assault at his own residence by his cousin. Instigated by his cronies a drunk Arcanj one night marched into our house when we were reciting the daily rosary and after hurling abuses at Minguelin proceeded to hit him when me and my mother rose and pushed him down the stairs. Fortunately for Arcanj I was just a teenager and uninitiated to fist fights else he would have been a mess of broken bones that night. Next day Minguelin almost filed a police complain but withdrew at the last moment saying that would put an end to Arcanj's Gulf job and that he would be back in the pig pit from where years earlier Minguelin, Polu and Luis Jose had salvaged him, renovated his house and got him married. If not

for this wise decision Arcanj would have finished himself many years earlier than he finally did.

Endless Goodness

Though at home we hated him at times for it, we didn't have to go beyond Minguelin to find a true follower of Jesus Christ.

No person who would come seeking help to our doorstep would go away empty handed. Be it relations, friends, neighbors or even strangers irrespective of their status, religion or caste. Probably it was his weakness that he couldn't say "No". Many people in Chorão, both Christian and Hindus, owe him money even today!

In the late 1970s and 1980s Minguelin celebrated a number of chapel and church feasts on behalf of villagers who were in Bombay or abroad. One that we clearly remember was the New Year's feast on behalf of Mario Mascarenhas (*Tottu*) from Pandavaddo. This meant the feast lunch would be at our house and Marian (Martha's mother) and my mother slogged themselves to cook the food.

Though never the one to seek favors for his own family Minguelin wouldn't shy away from doing it for others. Through Minguelin's request to a priest in his wife's family young boys from Pandavaddo – Kaptti Jose and Venancio Fernandes – got admission into Don Bosco technical institute at Sulkorna.

In his own words, "I have helped many people, not in big but in small possible ways, with no expectation of even a 'Thank You'. Gave money to many and just forgot about it. If it came back then fine else no regrets."

8. My Father

Growing up as Minguelin's children was not always easy – frustrating at times – but I would not trade those cherished memories for anything else in this world.

Grandpa Dad

The yawning age gap of 49 years between us, his lofty principles and his arduous community work at the cost of our needs was hard on us. Everything about him in my growing years looked old fashioned and out of gear with the times. Everybody else had younger prosperous fathers but here I had a grandpa as mine. Thanks to his selflessness in his social mission as well as business we managed most of the time with second hand things and clothes from our better-off relations. But today when I look back I think it all happened for good as it has left me with a deeper appreciation of what my father achieved in his work for the community rather than just providing for his family which everybody else does. This sets him apart from the general public and makes him extraordinary...atleast for me.

Nevertheless, despite all hassles of his life, I remember when I was still a little boy this 60+ year old father of mine playing catching-cook with me around our big dining table in the hall with a playful *"Dor re taka! Dor re taka!"* ("Catch him! Catch him!"). I remember him today when I do the same to my little son. I remember him coaxing me to finish my food with *"Ekuch unni re mhoji ... ekuch unni!"* ("Just one more morsel of mine...just one more!"). And I would reluctantly give in. But today when I don't meet the same

success with my son I wonder probably today's kids are smarter than we were.

I remember one Christmas eve when I was a little boy my father finished his bag work almost at midnight and then got down to making a crib neatly cut out from a cardboard box. My grandmother, sister and I sat around him as he went about this work. We used this crib for many years till I began making my own.

He would take me to Panjim during my vacations and when his customers would enquire if I was his grandson (*natu*) he would smilingly respond, "*Amchoch re to*" ("Ours only"). I longed for these Panjim trips since every trip would entail an adventurous ride on the Gajolin or Gabru's car to begin with, fetch me tasty cutlets and milk shake or cold coffee at Café Jesmal, a tour of half the city to his customers and suppliers, and, an Amar Chitra Khata comic book to bring the curtains down.

Then as we grew up to teenage there are those memories of our long dinners filled with roaring laughter with father, inspired by a mini-peg of feni, recounting his dramas and village events of good old Chorão days. Not even once I remember father being drunk and out of his senses but his daily mini-peg (*kals*) of feni before dinner brought terrific humor out of him like nobody would ever imagine.

Testing Times

The happiness of my topping in SSC at the village level was short-lived with me barely scrapping through XIth and then failing twice in XIIth Science. These were my terrible adolescent days and the age gap between us only made matters worse. Later I learnt that fearing

I might take some drastic step like suicide both my parents had decided to remain silent if I failed. But probably I had pushed things a little too far that one fine summer evening, after I returned home from roaming whole day all over the village on my bicycle with friends, lightning struck me without notice within our house. I remember going up to father's workshop and enquiring the usual "*kitem kortai re?*" ("what's up?") Father, then 67 years old, was busy at work cutting bag material for the next day. There was no response so I got closer and with concern asked if he was overloaded. Without stopping nor even looking at me he calmly dropped a lightning bolt, "*Zannoi mu re? Ganvar bhovnlear pottan poddona.*" ("Do you know? Roaming all over doesn't feed.") And continued with his work as though nothing had happened or been said. I couldn't utter a word nor stand there any longer. This was the moment of truth of my life. SSC-fail though that he was he had had the foresight to get me admitted into a computer course at Datapro in Panjim the previous summer. The logic work of computer programming had begun arousing my mind unlike the drab theories of HSSC Science. And this lightning bolt presented the spark needed to ignite a fire that would see me soar through Polytechnic topping at all Goa-level and then graduating as an engineer with Distinction (Honors). When I had finished Polytechnic and the decision was to be taken about either a job or graduation my father, then 70 years old and still making bags, said he would continue to work for my education and combined with similar support from my sister encouraged me to take up graduation. When I graduated and took a job he was 73 years old. How I wish more children in our village had such parents who would show extreme patience, stand by them in their failures and encourage them for higher education. Why do most parents give up so easily?

Certainly most of them are far more fortunate than Minguelin who lived his life praying to just see his son get through SSC. Why do so many of our children end up as petty cooks, butlers and waiters?

The Inspiration

It would be pertinent to note for today's children that during our college days my sister and I would carry bags in nylon sacks to deliver to customers in Panjim so that it would save our father his travel. I would travel at the rear of goods-carrier rickshaws and carry loaded sacks on my shoulders between Pedro Fernandes and Manerkars – a good mile-long walk – with total disregard to the world around but with pride for our old father's hard work. I am not sure how many children today would do something similar.

One of Minguelin's many core traits was the total absence of any pretence. He was inside what you would see outside. There was no unnecessary blabber nor double standards and he meant what he said. A man of far fewer words than his deeds. Though he made us aware of the Goan caste system and its origins he never taught us to differentiate others based on caste nor religion. He lived this by example and later when we both married outside of the *Bamonn* (Brahmin) caste he had no objections nor reservations about it.

Peace and calm were his hallmarks but Minguelin did demonstrate his angry side in extreme situations. At Antonio Toscano's wedding reception in Aldona Church Club hall when a drunkard created a riot Minguelin snatched him by the back of his neck and kicked him out down the entrance stairs. On another occasion when a petty thief tried to run away with his rexine roll from outside Manerkar's shop in Panjim, Minguelin caught up behind him and smashed a blow so

hard to his face that the poor chap was knocked down to the ground with the roll over him.

The accusations of “Minguelin chor!” had bothered me when I was younger. After I began working in Pune, on one of my visits home, I intentionally asked my father if he had swindled anyone or bungled any funds on any of his social projects. In his down-to-earth style with a smile and looking me in the eye he said, *“Nam re saiba! Kednach konnakuch fottounknam nim mhunn konnachoch ek poisoi khaunk nam. Tuvem kainch bieouchi goroz nam.”* (“No my lord! I have never cheated anyone nor stolen a single paisa. You need not fear anything.”)

Personally, today, I do not need any inspiration other than Minguelin who, I feel, I was privileged to have as my father. Did he leave me any worldly inheritance that makes me think kindly of him? Zilch, except his house in Pandavaddo. But yes he has left us a spiritual inheritance beyond compare with his lifetime’s good work.

Final Curtain

In May 2001 Minguelin finally closed his bag business of 36 years just before my wedding. He was now 77 years old! Rarely is a man heard of who works till this late in life to earn his livelihood; standing on his feet for 6-8 hours 6 days a week to cut the material for making bags and travelling from Chorão to Panjim to deliver the finished goods every week or two. Though it might look like a tragedy it was the secret to Minguelin’s longevity. It kept him engrossed – ensuring a mind free of unnecessary worries – and mobile – sustaining his physical fitness. He himself would admit that it kept him going as he had something to wake up to every morning.

With closure of his famed bag business began the decline in Minguelin's health, both physical as well as mental. He began slowing down physically and his memory began fading. He found it difficult to recollect names to the point that one day he could not recollect his daughter's name and after multiple "*amchem hem re...*" ("our this one...") attempts in frustration said "*tuji bhoim re*" ("your sister"). Later he would mix up numbers and confuse on currency notes completely. Though we did not realize it then, later when he had the fatal paralytic stroke we realized all these were symptoms of multiple recursive mini ischemic strokes resulting from the sedentary lifestyle post 2001.

It pained his heart to see first both his children leave Chorão and then he and our mother having to move to the Aged Home leaving his beloved house empty for the first time since it was built. Finally when the paralytic stroke felled him Minguelin left Chorão for the last time in his senses on the night of August 30, 2007. Thanks to a mis-managed treatment at the hospital my father whom I had always seen walking upright couldn't walk anymore and had to be shifted to Pune. Over the next 10 ½ months, in and out of hospital many times with tubes going in and out of his body, he would hallucinate of his mother calling him, give instructions to imaginary masons to straighten their cement work, see visions of St. Jude and Holy Family, recount his near-death days in the TB sanatorium, cry bitterly for no reason, smile at nothing...he had come a full circle at 83 years and become a baby again. His four grandchildren got a chance to crawl all over him in bed and shout "Grandpa!"...and he would be happy. I looked at this phase of his life as his last chance to repent for his sins and my last chance to serve my father whom I

couldn't for many years due to my job keeping me away from home.

My family had celebrated Christmas 2006 in Goa with my parents. Later I visited them again for the Holy Week and father keenly came with me to the church on Good Friday and Easter midnight mass and took part in all processions holding my hand. While walking from the car to the church he told me, *"Atanch ieunk zata toxoch aillo boro re. Konn zanno anink mhaka fudde mevta noko nam mhunn?"* ("Its good I come while I still can. Who knows whether I will get another chance?") I had also heard mother mentioning in those days that he says many times that he would live just as long as his mother, Ernestina, who had lived till 84 years of age. It was now all coming true. Realizing that the end could be near we brought him to Chorão for the Holy Family feast in May 2008. It was the one feast which we had not celebrated together as a family in a long time.

In June 2008 during the monthly feeding tube change at the hospital the new feeding tube went into his lung instead of stomach. So began the final lung infection which didn't subside despite a bout of hospitalization. Though we didn't realize signs of his flickering life the previous night I was fortunate in that I had to prepare and send a crucial management presentation to USA and so worked through the night till 6:30am on July 14, 2008. Throughout the night whenever I heard him breathing heavily I would attend to him and suck out the phlegm using the suction machine. However this night it wasn't the usual phlegm but more like soap lather which confused me. In the morning Diana and I had planned to visit the City Church cemetery as it was birthday of her father who had

died of heart attack in December 2007. Around 7am my mother remembers going to the toilet and noticing that father was staring her as she went and came back. She told him to close his eyes and sleep. He did and never woke up again.

Emy, our maid from Chorão, while feeding Minguelin his morning milk noticed it coming out of his mouth and rushed to inform us. With barely an hour's sleep I was getting ready to go out as planned but the scare on Emy's face signaled something serious. We rushed to parent's room to find father's body still and pale. Always one with a rosy complexion and a deep breathing pattern my father had never looked like this ever before. Even before I touched him the sinking feeling had set in that he was gone...that Minguelin's 83 year long, long journey had reached its destination...that I had become fatherless. Still hoping against hope I touched him to find his body warm. Rushed for the stethoscope to check his heart beat, checked his pulse, put my ear to his chest to check his heart beat...but there was none. Woke up mother to inform her about it. We found ourselves lost as father had always been there...always. I remember pointlessly wandering to the sitting room and back to father's bed. He was gone. As I held his hand in mine a ramming train of childhood memories hit me hard – of his warm and solid hand holding my little hand and leading me to Panjim or to the church over the hill or in the Confraria procession during Holy Family novenas or in the Old Goa feast fair – and a suppressed shriek escaped through my clenched teeth “Pai re!” for a split second.

Thereon I found myself obsessed with the task of getting my father back to Chorão and laying him to rest in our still unused family

grave which he himself had built some 30 years earlier. After all no other place on earth deserved more than the soil of Chorão to embrace and absorb back into itself its son Minguelin who had given his entire life for it.

A beloved son had finally returned home for eternal rest after a very long journey!

9. Conclusion

Unlike the cinema and novels, in real life you don't have to look nor act nor talk nor walk like a hero to be one. A real hero doesn't need to climb mountains nor conquer battlefields nor sail the seven seas but perseveres with a steely resolve to attain his worthy goals against all odds. To me Minguelin was this in all his humility. Never trumpeting his work but trusting in the Lord for his eternal reward which I hope has been granted to him in the infinite mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To re-emphasize the main theme of this little book as exemplified in Minguelin's life: if one poor, dim-wit and unfortunate man could do so much in half a lifetime what wonders can't happen if just 10 such good hearted and genuine individuals from Chorão rise above their petty egos and personal differences to work together for the greater good of the village!

None has achieved real greatness simply by virtue of lineage, inheritance, natural talents, caste, creed, culture, birthplace nor educational qualifications, experience or capabilities. But by what they did out of what was given to them. Remember the *Parable of Three Servants* (Luke 19:11-27, Matt 25:14-30)? It serves no point in trumpeting "I can do this and I can do that" if we don't get down to doing it in the right earnest. The typical Goan theme of "Kha, pie, mouza mar ani mor!" ("Eat, drink, make merry and die!") makes us sophisticated tribals at best.

Utt Goenkara, utt Chodnemkara....just do it! God bless!

IF

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

...

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

...

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

...

Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

- Rudyard Kipling

Thank You

This life account of Minguelin, as he was called in Chorão, is a collection from various sources like his documentary archives, his own recollections and those of his family and others mentioned below to whom I am indebted for their precious time and inputs:

- Adelaide Abreu (Adu), Chorão
- Polycarpo D'Souza (Polu), Chorão
- Mathias Noronha (Moti), Chorão
- Sudan Thali, Chorão

Views expressed in this booklet are my very own based on what I firmly believe is true with no bias for or against anyone including Minguelin. May God judge me appropriately if I have intentionally distorted anything here to suit my ends. Nonetheless if you notice any discrepancies or missing points then I sincerely request you to kindly point it out to me.

Thanks to my wife Diana and sister Judith for their reviews and feedback on this booklet as it evolved.

And thanks to you for reading this book. Dev borem korum.

Vincent Paul Toscano

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Pimpri, Pune

+91 98222 88520, +91 20 2746 0792

theToscanos2003@yahoo.com

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*What use is a life lived without the greater purpose of doing good
beyond our petty selfishness?*

Minguelinho Toscano
(August 16, 1924 - July 14, 2008)