

BENZEMEN IN MEMORIAM

1999 - 2022

2006

I return to India in February 2006. My first stop is to Vizak, Andhra Pradesh State, where I'm excited to meet Dr. Raju, our original 22 Indian beneficiaries and their families. Dr. Raju is a saintly man. I immediately feel total trust in him, his skill and his good intentions. He spent much of his medical career in Government service in Mizoram State, from which he retired in 1998. He joined the FXB Foundation at the end of 2000 as their Medical Director.

Dr Raju has made his small office available. Together, he and I, plus two other members of his team, sit to one side of his desk. A consulting bed stands against the opposite wall, over which the same colourful banner bearing our logo is fixed. A small ceiling fan does its best to move the humid air.

Our beneficiaries come with spouses and children; some also bring parents, many have travelled long distances to be here. All without exception are poor working people who show clear evidence of the hard lives they lead. Deep lines, caused by years of heavy toil and worry, cross their faces. Some are terribly thin. Those who are Positive still shows signs of the many illnesses with which I have become all too familiar. Their children, largely ignorant of the plight of their parents, gaze at me with big beautiful dark eyes. Without FXB and Aids Ark these children might now be orphans; might be homeless, hungry and abandoned. Through translation we talk. It's a big day for us all.

The dramatic physical and psychological changes that seven months' access to ARVs has brought is amazing – seemingly a miracle. Within months of starting treatment, each beneficiary describes how new strength and hope streamed back into them. They now know they have escaped premature death, that they will be well again. To meet them is thrilling. All who attend the event are moved and inspired by what they see and hear. There are happy tears, theirs and mine. Some try to kiss my feet but I don't allow this – their restored health is sufficient reward.

There are certain days in one's life that are filled with a heightened joy, the sweetness of gratitude and the presence of grace. For all of us there, this was one such day.

I meet Aids Ark's youngest beneficiary, Benzemen, then aged seven. He comes to the clinic with his grandmother Chandramma. Benzemen was born Positive. His mother and father both died of AIDS. His remaining family and the wider community thought him cursed and turned their backs on him. Only his grandmother showed the boy love and cared for him. Benzemen was constantly sick. At the age of two, he caught Meningitis which caused him some permanent brain damage. He then fought off three bouts of bacterial pneumonia and suffered from recurrent chronic diarrhoea and skin infections. From Chandramma: "He was too weak to stand and stayed mostly on the bed."

Dr Raju describes Benzemen as "the most deserving candidate amongst all the beneficiaries".

"After only seven months on ARVs, his health is remarkably improved," reports Dr Raju. "He is completely symptom free. His weight and physical activity have increased. His community think he has been visited by a God and now revere him. This is the power of ART."





2008

We meet up with Benzemen and his grandmother Chandramma:-

'I am happy that my grandson is healthy again. His appetite and his energy are good. I thank AA and my beloved Sponsor for extending life saving support to people like us.'

Benzemen is a lovely child - a happy, laughing boy with the sweetest smile.



The following day we join members of the FXB family at the Albina Relaxation Camp. It's a wonderful event with sari-clad women running races, cricket (of course), children playing games and having fun. These are people who formerly felt isolated, despairing and lost. Now there are smiles and laughter.

Benzemen rushes over to greet us when we arrive. His pleasure at seeing us is self-evident when he throws himself into J's arms.



Benzemen together with Aids Ark Founder Trustee Jeremy Norman and Dr Raju, Medical Director FXB

2009

Spring 2009 I write to Benzemen's former sponsors:-

'We last met Benzemen and his Grandmother when we visited Vizak in December 2008. He is growing up and now is a healthy, happy, lively child albeit with some brain damage.

He seemed delighted to see us when we met at a FXB sports event and rushed up to give us a hug. Together with others we played cricket 'of sorts'. Needless to say he was much better than me.

2010

We go to the place where Benzemen lives with his grandmother Chandramma. He meets us at a busy, colourful local market with a big hug and leads us down a series of narrow alleyways to a tall flight of old stone steps leading to a small courtyard and the simple room where they live. Over a single bed, shelves proudly display photographs of his family, one a rather fierce-looking man dressed as a warrior. On the same shelf Benzemen shows us his bottles of life-saving medication.



Benzemen with Grandmother Chandramma and AA Founder Trustee Derek Frost

Chandramma says. "I thank my gods daily for Aids Ark and the support they give us." We are happy and moved to hear her words.

(For video of this visit go to <https://jndflife.com/aidsark-videos/> - A Charity Working Across the World)





2014

Benzemen, once our youngest beneficiary, is now aged 15. His grandmother, Chandramma, has become old but is still working to support him. We worry about their future and who will care for Benzemen when Chandramma dies and have decided to fund their long-term needs. Benzemen will outlive us and we have made arrangements to cover the cost of this eventuality. Chandramma is becoming too old to continue eking out a bare living selling fish from her stall and we are pleased to learn from Dr Raju that due to our

additional support she now feels able to stop working; will now enjoy a leisured old age free from worry about money and her grandson's future.

Dr Raju throws a party on the roof of the FXB clinic. Benzemen, Chandamma and many of our former Vizag beneficiaries and their families are there. We all know each other well. From 2005, when we first started funding ARVs here, to now, in 2014, a great deal has changed for these people who are all healthy and living a full life. Most important to these adults, they have fulfilled their role as parents. There are many young, smiling faces at the party, who, without our shared intervention, might have lived different lives, might have been orphans and uneducated beggars living on the streets. All those at this special event know what we have achieved together. There is singing and dancing. It's a joyous event. This party is one of the great gifts that Aids Ark has bestowed on us.





7 June 2022 - from Dr Raju to Derek Frost

With profound grief and deep sadness we inform you sudden demise of our beloved BENZEMEN yesterday due to accidental electrocution near his house yesterday 6th June 2022 in the afternoon.

At that time there was heavy rain with thunderstorms.

Final rites will take place today afternoon.

7 June 2022 - from Derek Frost to Dr Raju

Thank you for sharing such terribly sad news. You and your excellent FXB team have worked so hard with Benzemen's health over the years and to such great affect. That he goes in this way seems particularly hard. Our young man had worked diligently to remain well and joyful. He was successful, in many ways, in doing so. We should all feel blessed that he was able to enjoy a much longer length of good healthy life than you might have expected when you first met him as a young child.

Chandramma will be in terrible pain. The beloved grandson who she had raised so lovingly and carefully, suddenly gone. A ghastly shock. We're so so sorry.

We are hopeful that Dave will agree to continue the required level of support necessary to allow Chandramma to live a comfortable life until the end of her days. He will let you know.

Please deliver our deepest respect, affection and tears to Chandramma and to her other family at this time of their great loss.

..... to you also dear Raju.

May Benzemen go in joy and with our love.

7 June 2022 - from David Primost to Dr Raju

Thanks for sharing the news.

Such a tragic accident and so sad. He was so young and should have had so much of life ahead of him.

It must also be incredibly tough for you and the rest of the team who have worked so hard to give him a good future.

Our thoughts go out to Chandramma and the rest of the family.

We are happy for Derek and Jeremy to dedicate as much of their annual Aids Ark donation as a stipend to Chandramma as they wish.

Raju - what are your thoughts about continuing the stipend to Chandramma? Should we keep it at the same level as previously?

10 June 2022 - from Dr Raju to David Primost

Thanks for your kind words.

I will convey your condolence messages to the family particularly his grand mother Chandramma who has looked after him insight of many problems.

We will talk to her and assess her needs and also who else is supporting her from her family and government welfare schemes.

20 June 2022 - from Dr Raju to David Primost

Discussed with Chandramma about her financial condition. Taking into consideration of other supports she gets I recommend 50% of what we have been giving.

As of now she has high blood pressure and arthritic problems and we are providing medicines for that as well.

22 June 2022 - from David Primost to Dr Raju

Thanks for the update about Chandramma's financial situation. We are happy to follow your recommendations about how best to proceed.

26 January 2024 - from Dr Raju to David Primost

All fine here. Benzemen's grand mother Chandramma is being supported by her son. She is suffering from Arthritis due to old age. We are providing medicines for her knee and back pain.

