



## 2025: trials, triumphs and togetherness

If 2025 taught us anything, it is that life can deliver heartbreak and hope in the very same breath.

Early June brought devastating news: **Ben's** youngest sister, **Vina Pereira** – undisputed healthiest of his four sisters – received the shocking diagnosis of ovarian cancer.

**Vina** is the mother of four and grandmother of 12.

Within days, family members began landing in **Victoria** like a relay team. **Sister Lisa** flew in from our ancestral village in **Nagoa, Goa, India**, and **Sister Gemma**, already on her regular visit from **San Antonio, Texas**, joined the mission of support, prayer, and home-cooked comfort.

As if 2025 wanted to test our emotional endurance while we were absorbing the news about **Vina**, September brought another piece of heartbreaking news: **Nerine Sequeira**, daughter of **Ben's** younger sister, **Selma Sequeira**, his goddaughter, and the mother of two athletic boys – and already a veteran of beating breast cancer during Covid – learned she now faced cancer in the mediastinum near her lungs. Her grit and humor [still intact] reminded us daily of what courage looks like.

Both are responding to treatments. Please pray for total healing. But the year was not done with surprises.

In March, **Ben** and **Karl** executed a top-secret, three-day stealth mission to **Goa** to attend the blessing of **Premanjali**, once the **Pires** ancestral home and lovingly gifted by **Ben's** father to the **Presentation Sisters**. The dramatic surprise was for **Sister Gemma** and **Sister Lisa**, who were so stunned they forgot to scold them for not warning them. [See page 3]



In May, **Karl** – visiting from **Japan** – and **Jason** tackled the **BMO Half Marathon** in **Vancouver**. They finished triumphantly, cheered by family, who proudly celebrated with the athletes despite contributing

zero kilometres themselves.

This was all a warmup for the **BMW Berlin Marathon** in September where spouses **Saho** and **Anita** joined **Ben** and **Laila** in forming the cheering squad this side of **Brandenburg Gate**.

December 2025

## Pires Review

August brought a delightful first: with **Sister Gemma** and **Sister Lisa** visiting **Victoria**, **Ben** and **Laila** and designated driver **Jason** took a memorable trip to the **Sunshine Coast** – ferry, coastal skies and all.



And the **Berlin Marathon** launched **Ben** and **Laila** on a 57-day odyssey. They did **Belgium** and **Luxembourg** by themselves. **Karl** and **Saho** joined them in **France** and four **Balkan** countries – **Albania**, **North Macedonia**, **Bulgaria** and **Romania** --before **Ben** and **Laila's** rendezvous in **Japan** with **Laila's** siblings, spouses, a cousin and friend. [See pages 4-6]

At every opportunity during their travels, they lit candles and paused to petition for complete healing of **Vina** and **Nerine** in various denominational churches, mosques, temples and shrines.

In **Japan**, **Ben** and **Laila's Japanese** family – the **Izawas** – hosted an unbelievable three-day bus trip [hotel and dinners included] to **Takayama** and other surrounding must-visit areas.

**Karl** and **Saho** hosted **Ben**, **Laila** and available family members at their home in **Yokohama**, where, as usual, **Saho** prepared delicious meals.

The grandchildren continued their own adventures.

**Misha**, now 21, and a senior at **Western University**, spent a couple of weeks aboard a research vessel off **Taiwan** studying marine life, proving that some students do read their textbooks – on the deck of a boat. She squeezed in trips to **Europe** and to **Vancouver** for her birthday.

**Kaiya**, 16, is acing Grade 11 at **Little Flower Academy**, earned her “L” [BC drivers, you have been warned], dazzled in **Arts Umbrella's** dance recital “**Kinder Tales**,” and toured **Montreal** and **Toronto** with her parents and brother before making her decision on where she will study after high school.

**Reyan**, 14, is in Grade 9 at **Vancouver College** and, as no surprise, excels as goalie in soccer [football], baseball, and is increasingly impressive in golf – likely preparing for a future in whatever sport offers the freest travel.

Through every joy, challenge, marathon, ferry ride and family reunion, 2025 reminded us that the greatest adventure we share is simply being a family – rooted in love, strengthened by faith, and powered by humor.









## A homecoming of love and surprises

On March 18, the quiet **Dias Vaddo** [neighborhood] of **Nagoa** village in north **Goa, India**, was abuzz with joy and prayer at the blessing of **Premanjali** -- a sanctuary whose name blends with **Sanskrit** words for “**Love**” [**Prema**] and “**Offering**” [**Anjali**] to beautifully capture its spirit.

**Karl**, who practices law in **Tokyo’s** fast lanes, and **Ben** decided to pull off a covert operation: a surprise visit to **Goa** for the ceremony. Their targets were **Ben’s** elder sisters -- **Sister Gemma**, visiting from **San Antonio, Texas**, and **Sister Lisa**, who is involved in **Premanjali** programs supporting vulnerable women, raising awareness about abuse, and working with the migrant community.

Their mission succeeded magnificently. Their astonishment was worth every air mile.

**Premanjali** stands on sacred family ground -- our ancestral property once belonged to **Ben’s** great-grandparents in the 1800s. They had a small house on the property. Their only child married **Ben’s** grandfather, **John Felix Pires**. Thus it became the “**Pires ancestral home.**”

**Ben’s** dad, **Edward Pires**, was born in the small house in 1910. Six years later, **John Pires** tore down the small house and built a larger one on the site that stood that way for 107 years.

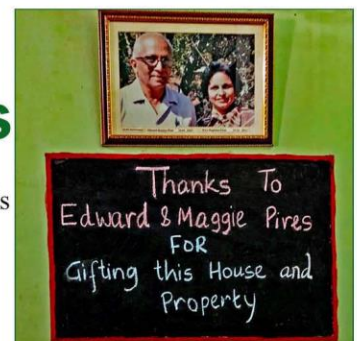
In 2000, **Edward Pires** gifted the house to the **Presentation Sisters**, a **Catholic** religious order, founded in 1775 in **Ireland**, that **Sister Gemma** and **Sister Lisa** joined in 1957 and 1958 respectively. In 2002, it opened as **Premanjali** -- and soon became the beating heart of the **Nagoa** community.

**Ben** went to **Goa** in 2012 to sign documents to make the property transfer legal and in 2019 **Sister Lisa** was transferred to **Premanjali**.

By 2023, the programs in the house had outgrown the space, requiring the building of a second floor that was completed [nearly] in time for the blessing.

After three days in **Goa**, **Karl** and **Ben** capped their trip -- due to a long flight layover [**Karl** heading back to **Japan**, **Ben** to **Canada**] -- in **New Delhi** allowing nostalgic visits to: **Ben’s** old school, **St. Columba’s**; the **Central Institute of Education**, where **Edward Pires** served as principal; the family home on the institute’s premises; **St. Mary’s Church**, the family’s parish; and they had tea with the **Presentation Sisters** at the convent school -- next to the church -- where **Ben’s** sisters once studied.

A homecoming of love and precious memories -- proof that some surprises are truly heaven sent.





# An epic 57-day whirlwide adventure

The saga began because Karl and Jason were running the Berlin Marathon, the official excuse for this international escapade. Before we knew it, we were eating waffles in Brussels, channeling medieval vibes in Bruges and Ghent, soaking up charm in Luxembourg City and Echternach, then after a visit to Cologne, enjoying with Karl and Saho in Frankfurt, Heidelberg and Berlin, where Jason and Anita joined the group before heading for their special time together in Majorca, Spain.



## Kingdom of Belgium

**Brussels:** Where even the buildings look like they are dressed for a royal wedding.



**Bruges:** A fairy tale city so charming even the swans refuse to leave



**Ghent:** university town where medieval might meets modern



## Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

**Luxembourg City:** An underground maze that once kept invaders out and tourists in awe



## Federal Republic of Germany

**Frankfurt:** Old-world charm meets sky-high banking -- medieval selfies with modern skyscrapers



**Cologne:** Built over six centuries -- proof that Germans never miss a deadline, they just extend it



**Berlin:** Five museums on one island -- because Berlin never does culture halfway



**Wilhelmsfeld:** Filipino national hero Dr. Jose Rizal lived here in 1886





From Germany, we zoomed by Albania [Tirana, cute ruins in Apollonia, stone houses in Gjirokastra, castles in Berat], North Macedonia [sparkling Ohrid, Skopje's statues galore], Bulgaria [Sofia, Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo], and on to Romania [Bucharest, the fairy-tale town of Brasov, royal castles in Sinaia, and fortified churches in Prejmer]. All that in one breath. Literally.



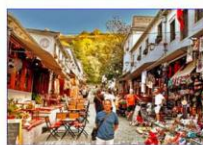
## Republic of Albania

**Tirana:** Where Albania's past present, and traffic all meet in on heroic swirl



## Gjirokastra:

A fortress so huge it could store Albania's entire history -- and probably does

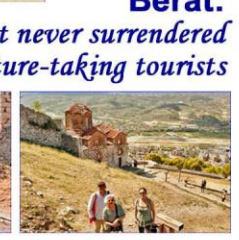
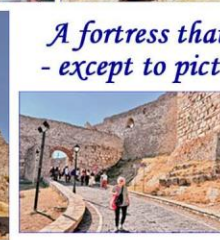


**Apollonia:** Columns, silence and ghosts of philosophers still arguing over lunch



## Berat:

A fortress that never surrendered - except to picture-taking tourists

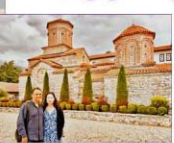


## Republic of North Macedonia

**Skopje:** Connecting old and new -- and everyone's favourite spot for dramatic selfies



**Ohrid:** One of Europe's oldest lakes -- and still looking great for its age

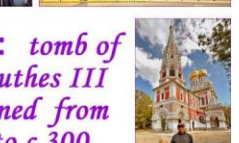


## Republic of Bulgaria

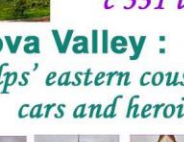
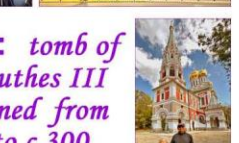
**Plovdiv:** Where gladiators once fought -- now locals battle for concert tickets



**Sofia:** Nevesky Cathedral -- so golden it makes your camera's auto-exposure panic



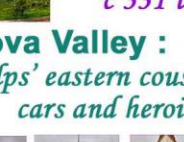
**Veliko Tarnovo:** Kings ruled here, but the view still remains supreme



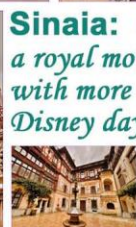
**Bucharest:** Palace of the Parliament -- bigger than Buckingham, heavier than the pyramids -- thank communism for that



## Romania



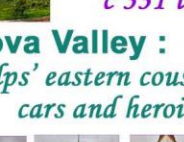
**Sinaia:** Peles Castle, a royal mountain retreat with more turrets than a Disney daydream



**Bran Castle:** marketed as home of Stoker's Dracula



**Skipka:** tomb of King Seuthes III who reigned from c 331 to c 300



**Prahova Valley:** Bucegi Mountains, the Alps' eastern cousin -- complete with cars and heroic amounts of cheese





Then came the Japan act. From Bucharest, Laila and Ben dashed to Yokohama to "recover" at son's Karl's place before barreling off to Osaka for two days to enjoy at World Expo 2025, with daughter-in-law Saho joining them. Back in Yokohama they braced for Chapter Three: a Hokkaido bus tour with six of Laila's seven siblings to celebrate Joel's hitting the big 70 -- nothing like a private, long, family bus trip. A "bus-detox-day" in Sapporo, led by Ben and Laila's Japanese granddaughter, Raira Izawa, was a refreshing change. The finale? A three-night, fully-hosted Izawa family [nine in all] trip to Takayama. Worth it? Every unforgettable kilometre.





**Tokyo:** *Where serene and ancient temples are*

**Tokyo:** Where serene and ancient temples are right next to modern skyscrapers . . . and where Karl works

**Fun with figures:** Ben and Laila's 57-day trip to eight countries, with layovers in two more, involved: 16 flights from 11 airports, flying about 32,000 kilometers [about 80 per cent of the earth's circumference] for nearly

## Victoria

## Our travelling family: leaving us photos, stories and joy





