

ALUMINATI

MELPHINE PONNIAH HARRIOTT (BS '98) is the fourth subject of *Aluminati*—a Q&A column featuring a randomly selected Andrews University alumnus.



Melphine Ponniah Harriott & Alwyn Harriott

MELPHINE PONNIAH HARRIOTT graduated from Andrews in 1998 with a degree in clinical laboratory science (CLS). She now teaches various clinical microbiology and immunology classes at Andrews University.

FOCUS: Tell us about yourself and your family.

MELPHINE PONNIAH HARRIOTT: I was born in India but moved to Berrien Springs when I was 3 years old and have lived here for 20 years. A few years ago, I left Berrien Springs to pursue a graduate degree and vowed never to return. But Berrien Springs seems to pull people back, and I am now teaching in Andrews' department of clinical and laboratory sciences.

My husband, **ALWYN** (BSCLS '98), is a fourth-year medical student at Wayne State University in Detroit who hopes to practice surgery. We were married on August 31, 2003, so we are newlyweds, but unfortunately we have to be apart since he's in Detroit.

Although I am away from my

husband, I am blessed to live near my family. In fact, my entire family has at least one degree from Andrews. My father, Melchizedek, has an MDiv and a PhD from AU. My mother, Josephine, has a BS and MS in nursing and an MA in education, and my younger sister, Meline, is currently a senior CLS major and my student—very strange!

FOCUS: What do you do for fun?

PONNIAH HARRIOTT: Being a second-year teacher, I don't have much time for fun. I enjoy reading and am a "hard core" exerciser. My new love is scuba diving.

FOCUS: What other interesting things have you done since graduating from Andrews?

PONNIAH HARRIOTT: I worked as a medical technologist in Watervliet, Mich., and later moved to the Detroit area where I completed a master's in basic medical science and worked as an MT in a clinical microbiology laboratory. I also contract-taught in the CLS program at Wayne State University and participated in a research project on genetic diversity in the betaglucuronidase gene of *E. coli*.

FOCUS: What do you find most fulfilling in your life?

PONNIAH HARRIOTT: Doing my job to the best of my ability. I take my job as a clinical laboratory scientist very seriously. Clinicians depend on the laboratory to make accurate diagnoses. When I do my job well, I feel fulfilled.

FOCUS: What made you choose

the field you are in?

PONNIAH HARRIOTT: I took a CLS class the summer after my freshmen year and did really well. But not only was I good at it, I actually enjoyed it. I especially enjoy microbiology because I love solving puzzles. Each day brings new pathogens to identify. Each organism has its own characteristics, just like humans. It's like finding "Waldo" amidst the crowd.

FOCUS: How does it feel to be teaching at your alma mater? What is most fulfilling?

PONNIAH HARRIOTT: It's a bit intimidating to teach with your former teachers. But I feel privileged because they have confidence in me and have given me the opportunity to teach here. What I enjoy most about teaching here is that it is a Christian university. I love being able to start classes with devotions. If at least one student is blessed by something I've said during devotions then I've done my job, and I find that fulfilling.

God has a purpose for each one of us. Sometimes His purposes aren't what we have in mind, but His ways are always the best. I never thought I would be teaching at Andrews, but here I am, and I absolutely enjoy it!

FOCUS: What is your goal as a teacher? What impact do you want to make on students?

PONNIAH HARRIOTT: My goal is to make clinical microbiology fun and easier to learn. It doesn't matter to me if the student doesn't like the subject; if they walk away with an appreciation for the subject and have learned something they think is cool, then my goal has been accomplished. The great thing about the laboratory is they don't have to work in microbiology if they don't want to.

My goal is also to prepare them to be witnesses in the workplace. I want them to learn that work is not just about completing the task well; it's about the interactions and friendships with coworkers, patients and others.

The ultimate impact I want to make on students is that being a Christian is fun. Sometimes Christianity, especially Adventism, is portrayed as "do's" and "don't's". Being close to the age of many of my students, I want them to see that you can have fun and be a Christian, too.

FOCUS: What are your fondest memories of Andrews?

PONNIAH HARRIOTT: My fondest memories of Andrews include studying at the library with friends, working at Food Service, and my clinical/senior year in the CLS program. One of my best memories is my sophomore year when four of my cousins also attended Andrews. Every Sabbath we would get together at my parents' house and have the most entertaining and enjoyable Sabbaths.

FOCUS: Is there anything you'd change about your Andrews experience, given the chance?

PONNIAH HARRIOTT: I would have probably relaxed more, met more people—increased my social circle. I was a community student and didn't attend many social functions. At one time I was working three jobs while attending school full-time; I didn't have much "play" time.