

FEELINGS

By Padma Singh

ANTHOLOGY OF
SHORT STORIES
&
POEMS

Fiction

Roots of Dissatisfied Feelings



FEELINGS

Anthology of Short Stories And Poems

**By
Padma Singh**



Other publication of Padma Singh is Feelings 1 that
was published in 1994.

This is a work of fiction. All characters in this
publication are fictitious and bear no resemblance to
any person living or dead. Any similarity to people,
places and procedures is purely coincidental and
unintended.



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Contents

1. Preliminaries- Prologue, Foreword,
Acknowledgement and Preface
2. Short Stories – Freedom
 - Goodbye
 - Shattered Home
 - Surprise
 - The Power of Love
 - Reunion
3. Poems
 - A Rare Gem
 - Human Carnage
 - Refugees Plight
 - Happiness
 - Waves
 - Sky-Piety
 - Jennifer
 - Life is a Gift
 - Realisation
 - I Dreamt of You, Mum
 - Reflection
 - Love Divine
 - A Setting Star
 - Natures Magic
 - Memories
 - Virtues to Behold
 - A Prayer Rain
 - Nature’s Mysteries
 - Glorious Dawn
 - Friends
 - A Smile
 - End of Insanity
 - Life Is A Scream
 - Australians Unite
 - Parliament
 - Sense of Belonging
 - Stop Think Act
 - Who Is Perfect?
 - Dr Alexander Adel
4. Personalities
 - Tributes
 - Mr Anil Maharaj
 - Dr Arumaiturai Sivapalan

PROLOGUE

We humans are rather complicated creatures but are capable of feeling and expressing a huge array of emotions. Although we all differ in the way we look and the things we believe in, there are many things we all share and they are our human feelings and emotions that are innate in all of us.

I have known Padma Singh for a long time and know that she has the capability of expressing her feelings well. In these pages of her publication she has poured her feelings in multiple ways in two different genres of literature- prose and poetry. Padma has positively expressed her emotions for people, places, procedures principles, practices and positions. This is her special talent for the readers to acknowledge and admire.

We all have our type of happiness, sadness, love, hatred, worries and indifferences and these constantly occur in our lives. I admire the way Padma Singh has commanded a variety of her feelings and spread them in her presentations. We would all be a lot richer after reading and appreciating all her feelings.

I heartily congratulate her for making her feelings known to the readers and giving me the opportunity to review her work of art and write a few words. Let us read and rejoice her “Feelings”.

Great work Padma!

Dr Ram Lakhan Prasad
Educationalist and Human Resource Consultant
Brisbane April, 2016.

PREFACE

“FEELINGS” (2) is my second publication. My first Anthology, “FEELINGS” was published in 1994.

I do not claim to be a poet of Wordsworth, Keats or Milton’s calibre. I have given the title “FEELINGS” because it is certainly an overwhelming expression of how I feel about some of the social issues that are reflected in our community. My views are conveyed as “Verse form” and yet they are not “Poetic,” by any means. They are merely a form of “spontaneous flow of human expressions.” If my readers accept this definition, then I will certainly feel a sense of contentment in writing my Anthology: “FEELINGS” (2)

I have always believed in following my conscience. So I have forged ahead to get “FEELINGS” (2) published. The Short Stories included in this Anthology reflect my observations on life as it is portrayed in our community. It is sincerely hoped that my readers will connect with me and appreciate the Anthology. This publication is not meant for “Literary Criticism,” it is a personal reflection about life and living.

Please be informed that I have included couple of poems from my first publication. I felt the poems echo some pertinent issues relevant to our present social climate. Once again, I fervently hope my readers will enjoy the Anthology. Please be assured it reflects my genuine concerns about our rapidly changing social and moral values.

Happy Reading!
Padma Singh

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge a few people who have been instrumental in inspiring and encouraging me to write this Anthology. I am very grateful to them.

First of all, I wish to acknowledge my husband, Jagdish Singh for motivating me to write this Anthology. His patience, understanding and moral support during the course of getting my writing completed was much appreciated I sincerely thank him for being my pillar of strength.

I wish to offer my sincere thanks to my mentor and good friend, Dr Ram Lakhan Prasad, for writing the prologue and reviewing the work to develop an epilogue. His assistance in arranging the services of an editing team and assembling the items in the order they appear in this Anthology is very much appreciated.

I, gratefully acknowledge my various colleagues for their helpful suggestions and for critiquing my work. All their contribution was indeed most helpful. I offer my sincere thanks to Dr Donna McGrath to head the editing team.

In particular, I wish to acknowledge the contribution made by Sarah Gonsalves, for initially typing my poems and short stories. Thank you, Sarah.

I wish to thank my sister Rani and my brother in Derryl Chan for urging me to complete my Anthology.

I wish to acknowledge my dearest friends, Sarwan and Asha Dey for their support and encouragement to go ahead with my effort to publish my Anthology. This is a dream come true. Thank you everyone.

Padma Singh.

Short Stories

A short story is a different thing
all together - a short story is like a
kiss in the dark from a stranger.

~Stephen King



1

Freedom

The sea breeze was gentle and soothing. The tears had dried, and the pain in her heart had lifted. The scenic view of the crystal clear blue sky, the emerald green sea, and the high waves blasting its powerful froth on the golden sands, comforted her. She stared aimlessly at her surroundings and felt a strong sense of calm engulf her entire being. She looked up at the twilight sky and suddenly realised that she had been sitting at the beach for hours! She wondered if her absence from home had caused any alarm and bewilderment to the man she had been sharing her life with for five long years.

She rose slowly from the bench and stood up. She made up her mind that she must leave Adam and return to New Zealand. She must save her sanity before things turned chaotic! It was strange that the anger and frustration she felt earlier had dissipated. She knew that she had to be strong and not let her affection for Adam enslave her to a situation of abuse and indignities. She was determined to quietly disappear from his horizon, his captivity and his emotional blackmail. With this aim, she strolled towards her car. She turned the ignition key, the engine started smoothly and she drove her car towards her beachfront townhouse in Williamston.

She took the lift to the fifth floor. As she walked towards her apartment, she felt her heartbeat rise; with anxiety she turned the key to the front door. She uttered a silent prayer that Adam would've gone out to meet his workmates who had planned to go to the footy that afternoon. As she stepped inside she felt safe and secure. She glanced around the living room and there was no sign of Adam anywhere... what a relief!

She walked towards the bedroom and heard the water running in the shower. She panicked, images of their early morning row echoed in her ears and she feared that if she raised the subject of separation it would only make matters worse. She quietly left the bedroom and walked towards the kitchen. She decided to make a toasted tuna sandwich; she wasn't hungry but she decided to stay away from Adam's presence. She took the loaf of wholemeal bread and began to prepare the tuna sandwich.

Just as she bent down to get the sandwich maker, she became aware of the strong fragrance of 'Joop', his favourite cologne. She steeled herself and very casually lifted herself with the sandwich maker; their eyes met. Adam looked a lot calmer and casually asked, "where have you been?" She remained silent. Adam put his arms around her and kissed her as if nothing had happened between them.

She wanted to avoid confrontation, so she kissed him back. "Ashley, I'm so sorry for the way I treated you earlier, my precious girl, please forgive me...I am so, so sorry for hurting you. I promise it will never happen again". Adam's embrace almost choked her. She wondered if he felt her heart thumping with apprehension and fear. She mustered enough courage to ask, "I'm making a tuna sandwich, would you like some Adam?"

“No darling, I’m going to the footy with my mates. You take care love, I’ll see you later in the evening and I’ll have dinner at the club”. He kissed her forehead and grabbed his house and car keys and left.

Oh! What a relief! She had to sit down on the dining chair to steady her. She had to map her strategic escape and get as far away as she could from Adam’s clutches and senseless control. With this resolve and clarity of mind, she quickly ate her sandwich, drank her coffee, cleaned the dishes and walked to her room to pack a few things, get her passport and other essential documents to start life afresh.

She rang her sister and her confidant, Lizzy, to come and pick her up from her apartment at 5:30pm. She rushed to the shower and got ready for her escape. Everything went according to plan, no hurdles no hitches.... And yet Ashley’s heart rate rose and fell with anxiety. She must get out before Adam returned from the game. She looked up at the wall clock; it was 4:50pm, which meant there was a forty-minute wait. Forty minutes; this appeared to be both excruciating and torturous. “Please God, help me”, she whispered with agitation. “Please God, help me”, she uttered again and again. She quickly tidied up and was careful not to leave any tell-tale signs to alert Adam about her escape.

She hurried towards the front door after collecting her suitcase, handbag and jacket. At that very instant she heard the front door open. Ashley stood paralysed, stunned and utterly dismayed. There before her stood Adam equally shocked to see her trying to make a dash towards the front door. “Where do you think you’re going?” he asked with suspicion and fury. She moved away from direct contact with him. “I’m leaving you Adam, our journey ends as of this

moment.” She said with courage and certainty. What happened next was beyond comprehension.

Adam grabbed her throat and pushed her towards the wall. “You bitch! Do you think you can fool me?” A flurry of punches landed on her head and face. He grabbed her throat once again and squeezed it tightly! She could feel warm blood rush from her head and nose. She could hardly withstand the suffocation and was gasping for breath. A voiceless voice screamed from within her, “Adam please don’t kill me, let me go!”

Within seconds her limp body collapsed and she was shrouded in a pool of blood and a sinister darkness enveloped her. Adam kicked her shouting, “get up you bitch! Get up before I kill you!” He was not aware that the front door was open and the terrified neighbours could hear his raging, bellowing voice. They were too scared to stop him from his rage and violence. His kicking, raving and ranting suddenly stopped when he realised what he had done to Ashley. She lay unconscious in a pool of blood, her eyes shut. Adam was suddenly on his knees crying like a madman. “Please Ashley, I’m sorry, open your eyes, speak to me,” he cried.

Just as he was crying like a wounded animal, two police officers and two paramedics arrived with a stretcher. The action of a civic-minded neighbour brought help for the severely injured woman. The police officers subdued Adam, who was sobbing uncontrollably, while the paramedics tried to resuscitate the unconscious woman. She was not responding, so she was given oxygen to help her breathe while they placed her on the stretcher and took her to the ambulance below. The police officers were with Adam, trying to piece together information leading to Ashley’s injury.

Lizzy arrived as arranged to take her sister home. She met a neighbour in the lift on her way up to the fifth floor. She was dismayed to hear that Ashley has been taken to the Williamston Hospital in an ambulance. Rage and anger soared. Lizzy got out of the lift and rushed towards Adam's apartment. "You demon," she cried, "What have you done to my sister? She wanted to leave you...why didn't you let her go?" Lizzy ran towards Adam to punch him. The police officer restrained her and told her to calm down. Adam stared at Lizzy like a zombie. She saw the suitcase and Ashley's handbag on the floor.

"Those are my sister's belongings, can I collect them please?" The officer said that it was a crime scene and things had to be left as they were. The officer told Lizzy they wanted her to answer some questions, and needed her to go with them to the police station. Lizzy said that she would, but needed to be by Ashley's bedside at the hospital and promised to report to the police station.

The officers handcuffed Adam and took him to the police station. When Lizzy reached the Emergency ward to enquire about her sister, she was informed that Ashley was taken into the ICU and was in a serious condition. Lizzy's heart raced with anxiety for her younger sister's safety and wellbeing. When she reached the ICU, Lizzy was told that Ashley was not allowed any visitors as the doctors were attending to her. Lizzy begged the nurse for information about Ashley's condition; however, she was told the doctors would speak to her once they had stabilized Ashley's breathing.

Lizzy collapsed on the chair, which was in front of the ICU. Tears flowed uncontrollably; she wept openly and unashamedly for the plight that Ashley was caught up in. If only Ashley had the strength to leave Adam earlier, but she

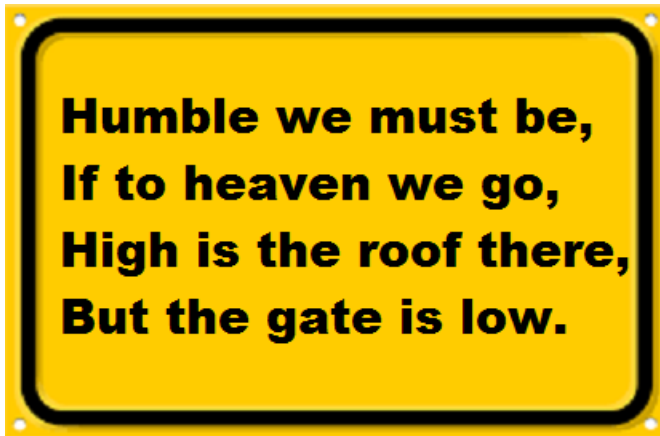
returned to Adam again and again, believing that his abusive behaviour would change, but this was not to be. Today, she lay unconscious and fighting for her life!

Alone in the waiting room in front of the ICU, Lizzy took out her rosary and began to pray for her sister's recovery. An hour passed and there was still no news. Lizzy continued praying, hoping to hear something about Ashley's recovery. A nurse from the ICU approached her. Lizzy's face turned ashen. "Lizzy, come with me," said the nurse. Lizzy followed the nurse, who led her to Ashley's bed. "The doctor would like a word with you," said the nurse gently. Ashley lay with an oxygen mask, intravenous tubes and a bandage on her head. Suddenly it dawned on Lizzy that Adam has fulfilled his promise: "If I can't have you, no one else can!"

Dr Fong Lee placed his hands gently on Lizzy's shoulder and said, "Sorry madam, your sister has lost her battle to live. She passed away a few minutes ago!" Lizzy screamed, "Oh! No! No! No!" and rushed to Ashley's side, held onto her and cried! "You wanted to escape, you craved freedom.... Oh God! You have been freed from your hellish life!" She cried hysterically as she held the lifeless body of her sister in her arms. Ashley lay peacefully, freed from the "torture cage" called home. She was free at last, her last courageous attempt to free herself from the miserable life she shared with her abusive lover and partner of five years!

Lizzy knelt down by Ashley's bedside and prayed, "eternal rest, grant unto her Oh Lord, let the perpetual life shine upon her!" The nurse gently helped her on her feet and walked her towards a chair nearby and another held a cup of coffee for Lizzy and gently said, "In death Ashley has finally found peace, she has found her freedom and eternal peace from an abusive relationship." "How many women have to die, before

the government can establish systems in place to stop abuse and brutality aimed at helpless individuals?” Lizzy said with pain and disappointment.



2

Goodbye, My Shining Star

Joseph sat by his wife's hospital bedside. Belinda lay in a coma, struggling to stay alive. Joseph was distressed to watch his beloved wife of fifty years go through such anguish and pain. Her veins were pierced, tubes running through several parts of her body to assist her normal bodily functions. The machines fixed to her to monitor her progress were time and again beep, beeping away to signal that things were critical.

The duty nurse was constantly by the bedside to ensure that Belinda was given the best of care. Belinda was well known to the Sacred Heart Private Hospital staff, as she has in recent years been a frequent 'in-patient' with many medical complications. Joseph was grateful to the hospital staff for their dedicated services to their patients. "Mr Dale, why don't you take a break? Go for a coffee break, please. Belinda is resting and I assure you, she knows you are there right beside her."

Joseph looked at the nurse and said, "thank you, Nurse Lee, I think I shall, please be assured that I will be close at hand for Belinda's call. I'll bring my coffee to the room so that I can be

with her, if she needs me.” Nurse Lee, looked pleased, “don’t worry about a thing, Mr Dale, you go along and get your coffee,” she said, whilst changing the bandage on Belinda’s left leg.

Joseph kissed Belinda’s forehead and said, “Will be back, honey”. There was no response but her eyes were still shut. He sighed with pain once again to see his darling wife not responding to touch or sound.

Joseph walked towards the hospital cafeteria. As usual it was busy, he joined the queue to order his coffee. Right behind him stood Dr James Royce, he put his hand on Joseph’s shoulder and said, “Good morning Joseph”. Joseph turned around and saw Dr Royce. “Oh! Good morning Doc, how are you?” “Very well, thank you, Joseph,” said Dr Royce. “Oh, by the way Joseph, can I see you in my office after you finish your coffee please.”

“Yes, of course Doc. I’ll see you soon.” Joseph’s turn came to collect his coffee, so he moved closer to the counter. “See you soon doc. Bye for now”. Just as he waited for his order, wild thoughts raided his mind. “Oh God! Please, please, let everything be alright” he prayed.

“Number 76” called the waiter, Joseph walked towards the counter to collect his coffee. Joseph sat at a table, to compose himself, as he sipped his coffee. He was realistic and had for a period of time stopped praying for miracles. He knew deep within his heart, Belinda’s situation had deteriorated. He had an overwhelming feeling of sadness. He knew the future looked bleak without the love of his life.

He has struggled for the past three years to be strong for Belinda’s sake. She was diagnosed with colon cancer. His

beautiful Belinda, his brightest star, the love of his life, gave it her all. But the devastating effects of the illness drained every ounce of her strength and positivity. She fought fiercely nevertheless, until gradually her energy and strength collapsed completely.

Today, his darling Belinda lay motionlessly awaiting the Lord's will. Tears welled in his eyes; he knew that his beautiful rose, his shining star, would leave his side. What would he do without his Belinda... it is this selfish desire of Joseph that perhaps stirred Belinda to cling to life. Joseph decided to let Belinda rest with God, in His Eternal abode. Filled with emotions, he had an intuitive feeling that Dr James Royce had some distressing information about Belinda's medical condition. Joseph got up to dispose of his coffee cup and walked towards Dr Royce's room.

Joseph approached Dr Royce's office, and knocked on his door. "Come in," boomed Dr Royce's voice. Joseph opened the door, and was led by Dr Royce over to the sofa. 'Sit down Joseph, I would offer you a drink but I know you just had your coffee'.

"Thanks Doc" and sat beside the doctor.

Dr Royce cleared his throat and said, "Joseph, you know Belinda has fought bravely to overcome her illness. My medical team has admired the way Belinda has been fighting to challenge the illness but things haven't been smooth sailing. Belinda's other medical conditions have further made it difficult to treat the cancer. My doctors and I have decided to do our best to keep Belinda comfortable and pain free. Joseph, she has stopped responding to treatment, if you wish you could take her home and provide a loving environment with her loved ones. We will continue to provide medical

services to make her comfortable. The decision is entirely yours to make, we are here to provide the services you require.

Dr Royce touched Joseph's shoulder in an attempt to console him. Joseph thanked Dr Royce and his team. "Dr Royce, my family and I are grateful to you all for everything that you have done. In the end, I believe its God's will. We will do everything in our power to make Belinda, comfortable at home. He rose, steadied himself, shook Dr Royce's hand and walked towards the door with Dr Royce close behind. To his surprise Dr Royce embraced Joseph. "Thank you, doc", and Joseph stepped out of the doctor's office.

Joseph walked slowly towards Belinda's room, Dr Royce's voice still echoing in his ears. As he was nearing Belinda's room, he noticed some medical staff rushing into his wife's room. Joseph hurried towards her room. Nurse Lee approached him and informed him that Belinda had taken a turn for the worse.

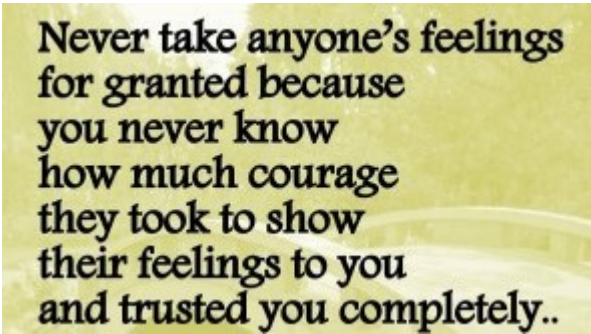
The doctors were attending to her and he was asked to be seated outside the room until they had finished. Joseph was adamant that he wanted to be with his wife, and asked Nurse Lee to let him into the room. Nurse Lee asked him to wait a moment and went into the room to get permission from the doctors.

Just then, Joseph saw Dr Royce rushing towards the room and as he entered, he told Joseph to follow him. Joseph saw the medical staff attending to Belinda, and was deeply troubled seeing her gasping for breath. He asked for permission to be with her. Joseph approached Belinda, took her hand in his and whispered "it's ok my love, I know you are worried about me, don't be, I'll be alright. Please fight no more, go in peace, and

go with the knowledge that you will always live in my heart and thoughts until my death.... Love you, my shining star.... Go rest with God.”

Joseph watched his wife’s final moments, her hand slipped from his grip. Within minutes Belinda passed away peacefully. “Goodbye, rest in peace my love” said Joseph, “may eternal peace be upon you, now and always.” As he knelt down by the bed and bowed his head in prayers, the medical team left the room.

Thus, leaving Joseph to spend the last precious moments with Belinda, his shining star, and the love of his life.



**Never take anyone’s feelings
for granted because
you never know
how much courage
they took to show
their feelings to you
and trusted you completely..**

3

Shattered Home

In an unconscionable rage Jack punched his mother in the head as she tried to prevent him from going out at 10:30pm. His mother tripped and fell backwards hitting her head on the concrete floor and lay unconscious. In a daze he stared at his Mum lying in a pool of blood. He walked away screaming, “die, you bitch!” and slammed the door shut as he walked out of his home.

Jessica, his nine-year old sister who was hiding in her room, came out when she knew her brother had left the house. She ran towards her mother but was terrified to see her in a pool of blood. Jessica ran towards where the landline was installed, lifted the receiver and dialled 000 for assistance. When the operator responded, Jessica told them that her Mum lay unconscious in a pool of blood. She gave her home address and begged for immediate help for her Mum. “I’m alone and I don’t know what to do,” she sobbed.

“Don’t worry Jessica; an ambulance is on its way. Stay calm and stay close to your mother.”

“Thank you,” Jessica replied and put the receiver back. She looked at her mother and wished she could do something to help her.

Within minutes the Ambulance arrived. She opened the door and the paramedic said, “Jessica, my name is William and this is Patricia, we are here to attend to your mother.” They immediately rushed to where her mother, Lucy, was lying unconscious.

William was desperately looking for a pulse and was relieved to find a faint one. Patricia brought an oxygen tank and placed a breathing tube in her nostrils. This helped Lucy breathe comfortably. The paramedics began to clear the blood from Lucy’s hair, bandaged her head wound and changed her into the hospital gown.

William and Patricia gently lifted Lucy and placed her onto the stretcher. “Jessica, would you like to come with us?”

Jessica replied, “May I please make a quick call to my dad?”

“Sure, we’ll wait in the ambulance for you.” Jessica dialled her Dad and briefly explained what had happened. She told her father that the ambulance would be taking her Mum to the Footscray Hospital. “Please Dad, I’m scared, please meet me at the hospital,” she pleaded.

Jessica locked the main door and ran towards the ambulance. Patricia, opened the door and Jessica got into the ambulance. She sat beside her mum and began to sob bitterly seeing her mother there with her eyes closed. She held her mother’s hand in hers and kissed it several times. “Please God, make Mum well.”

Patricia placed a comforting hand on Jessica’s shoulder and said, “The doctors will help your mum. Don’t cry Jessica, your mum will be alright sweetie.” This made Jessica feel

better. The ambulance reached the Footscray hospital. Medical staff were ready with the stretcher in front of the Emergency Department. Jessica was worried and petrified; she was very concerned for her mother.

Just then, she saw her dad rushing towards her as she stood at the entrance of the Emergency Department. She ran towards him, held him tightly and began to sob once again. Her dad put his arms around her comfortingly and said, “Don’t worry darling, Mum will be alright. The doctors will help her get better.” Now that her dad was beside her, she felt safe in his presence and in his loving embrace. The paramedics came over to Jessica and her dad, Jacob.

They led them to the waiting room. William told Jessica, “Two police officers will be here soon. They would like to speak to you.” Jacob introduced himself as Jessica’s father and asked if he could stay with her. William told him that there should be no problem. Just then, two police officers approached them. One of the officers spoke,

“My name is Matthew Molly. This is Officer Steven Barba, and we would like to ask you a few questions about what happened to your mother this evening.” Jacob moved closer to his daughter and held her hand firmly. “May I be allowed to stay with my daughter please, she is a mere child and the whole incident has been traumatic for her?”

“Sure,” said Officer Matthew.

Jessica was nervous and clung to her dad’s hand tightly. The sight of the two police officers made her frightened. “Can you please answer a few questions for us, Jessica?” She nodded her head. Officer Barba took a notebook from his pocket to

record the interview. Officer Matthew drew a chair closer to Jessica and Officer Barba sat beside him.

Very gently Officer Matthew asked, “Jessica could you briefly tell us what happened to your mother earlier this evening in your house?” He reassured her in a gentle manner, “you don’t have to be scared, we are gathering information to ascertain what had actually happened prior to the injury sustained by your Mum.” Jessica began, “My brother Jack came home at about 6:30pm, and demanded a hundred dollars from Mum and an argument occurred. Jack roughed up Mum but she told him that she was not going to give him any money. Jack shoved and bullied her, screaming obscenities as usual, but Mum held her ground. At this stage, I was terrified and ran to my room because I didn’t want to witness another violent scene. I locked myself in my room, waiting for this scene to settle down.”

“What happened after this?” asked the Officer.

Jessica replied, “I just heard yelling and swearing by Jack ordering Mum, ‘Give me the damn money, you bitch!’ In response Mum shouted at Jack, ‘No way in hell will I give you a single cent. Go to your room and leave me in peace, Jack. Don’t cause any more trouble. Go to your Room. Stop this immediately.’ Jack continued to harass Mum and screamed, ‘Give me the damn money’ in a threatening voice. Mum threatened to call the police if he continued to misbehave. Jack in a violent rage promised never to return home. ‘You will stay home Jack, you are just being idiotic,’ shouted my mother. Jack dashed towards the front door with Mum in pursuit. After this I don’t know what happened. I only came out from my room after I heard the main door slam shut. I knew Jack had left home in a raging fury.” Jessica began to weep once again.

“Is Mum going to be alright?” She asked with trepidation. “The doctors are attending to her injury. She will be alright. Don’t worry,” said Officer Matthew. “Where were you when this happened, sir?” he asked Jacob.

He cleared his throat and said, “I don’t live at Jessica’s home. I left Lucy three years ago. I live by myself in St Albans.”

“My name is Jacob Walters. This is my daughter Jessica.”

“Where do you reckon your son would have gone?”

Jacob answered sadly, “Perhaps, to a place where he could get ICE to soothe his nerves.” Jacob said with some element of sadness and anxiety in his voice, “We have to get on to Jack as soon as possible. Only he can tell us of his mother’s injury.”

Sergeant Matthew continued, “Just give us some indication as to where Jack could have gone?”

“Sorry officer, I can’t help you with this, I haven’t seen my son in over two years!” exclaimed Jacob.

Jessica remained very quiet during this conversation. An overwhelming sorrow engulfed her. Jack was the reason why their whole life had turned chaotic. She was only six years old when the problems with her brother Jack surfaced. She was too young to comprehend what the problem was between her parents and Jack. Frequently her parents argued with Jack, who got into trouble at school, with the police, as well as the kids in the neighbourhood. Finally, her dad packed up his bags and left home.

Jessica could not understand why her dad had left home, or why her Mum let him walk out. Once again tears began to flow and Jessica felt a deep sense of sadness and a desperate need to know if the police would arrest Jack before he came to grievous harm. Jacob held his daughter closely to reassure her that he wouldn't let anything befall her. "I love you Jessica, Daddy is going to fix everything," he said.

Both the police officers left them promising to locate Jack and bring him to the hospital. They shook Jacob's hand and gently tapped Jessica's shoulder as they left the waiting room.

Jessica asked her dad, "Dad, what will happen to Jack now!" she asked with great concern.

"Jessica, let's pray for Mum's recovery first, the police will find Jack, he will come to no harm. I think he has gone to his friend's home in Sunshine. Isn't that what happens every time he has problems with your mother?"

Jessica shrugged her shoulders and said, "I want Mum to get better, Dad and Jack to return home and be a good boy!" Jacob looked at his daughter and felt a great sense of remorse and sorrow. He sat there and his mind wondered over the events of the past.

It was a happy middle class home. Jacob and his wife Lucy were such a lovely, well-adjusted couple. Lucy was a senior lecturer in Chemistry at Victoria University, Footscray Campus, while Jacob ran his own accounting firm in Sunshine. Jack was a cherubic youngster, smart, disciplined and a well-adjusted youth. Their little girl, Jessica adored Jack and followed her brother everywhere. He was indeed a devoted, loving, caring brother.

Suddenly their peace and harmony shattered. Jack began to get into trouble at school. The charming, well-adjusted youngster turned into a violent-tempered demon who stole money from his parents and caused violent domestic disputes. These incidents constantly saw Jacob and his wife Lucy, quarrel. Lucy felt that Jacob was too critical of their son Jack, whereas she put Jack's misconduct as "growing pains".

Jacob on the other hand feared their son, Jack, needed strict parental control and counselling for whatever issues he was undergoing. Lucy did not support Jacob on matters relating to Jack. She was allowing her motherly instinct to blind her, and believed he would come around eventually. But it was too late when Jacob realised Jack was taking drugs of all sorts and was not attending school regularly. He and Lucy decided to make an appointment to see the school principal.

They were alarmed when the principal, Mr Albert Jones informed them that Jack was no longer attending classes. He said, "I wrote three letters to inform you of the school's concerns over Jack's absenteeism and misbehaviour, but I didn't receive any response from you."

They sat in the Principal's office stunned, dismayed and saddened. Jacob said, "Sorry Mr Jones, we didn't receive any communication from you."

"Oh! Well, Jack must have intercepted the letters. Despite several warnings, Jack showed no remorse for his unruly behaviour at school."

They thanked Mr Jones for his time and sincerely apologised for Jack's conduct and atrocious behaviour at school. Mr Jones extended his hand to Jacob and said, "Hope it's not too late for Jack. I wish you both the best of luck." It appeared as

if he was also gravely concerned for Jack's well-being. Once again they thanked him and walked out of his office, with a grave sense of worry and a great sense of disillusionment.

As Jacob was driving home, he earnestly asked Lucy, "What can we do to get our son back?"

Lucy looked at him sadly and remained silent. Suddenly a desperate cry escaped from her heart, "Jacob, have we lost our son Jack to ICE?" It was at this point in time it dawned on him, and he realised the gravity of the whole situation. Jacob's shock made him swerve his car. "ICE?! ICE?! What are you saying Lucy? Have you known about this earlier, and yet you never once told me about it?!"

"Oh my God!" cried Jacob in despair. Lucy very calmly told him to keep his eyes on the road. Jacob drove silently and he now knew why his son behaved so erratically and irrationally. The demon, which possessed his son, was none other than the demonic, dreaded ICE! Now everything fell into place! The violent outbursts and the destructive behaviour towards them made sense. "Oh! Why God! How blind am I?"

Tears streamed down his face. He reached out to Lucy and held her hand and told her comfortingly, "Don't worry darling, we will work through this and get our son back."

Lucy squeezed her husband's hand and whispered, "We must at all cost; he is our precious son!"

Jacob and Lucy tried to help Jack but things deteriorated, resulting in Jacob and Lucy's relationship breaking down. Lucy molly-coddled Jack with hope that her love for him would cause him to change, whereas Jacob wanted to put Jack

in a Rehabilitation Centre for drug addicts and get his son cured. But as a couple, they were not resolving the problem.

So, Jacob being frustrated and furious left their family home, leaving Lucy to cure her son's ICE addiction. He could not take Jessica with him as he felt Lucy would care for her better than he ever could. Lucy did not stop Jacob from leaving home. She knew that things would never be the same again.

Jacob told Lucy if she ever needed his help to call him without any hesitation. Lucy never once asked for his help over the three year period. Today he was waiting at the Emergency department for news of his severely injured wife, and praying for the Police to get to Jack before something dreadful happened to him.

Jessica was almost falling asleep; she had gone through a lot at this tender age. He looked at her with grave concern and promised himself he was going to protect his family. He vowed that he would return home to face the situation as head of the family. He held Jessica in his arms and let her rest for awhile. He felt better at arriving at a sensible and responsible decision.

Two hours in the waiting room was torturous. Poor Jessica was asleep, Jacob kept praying for his wife and son. He waited anxiously for news of Lucy. A nurse came to the waiting room and said, "Mr Walters, your wife is presently in the ICU ward. Her situation is critical and she hasn't recovered from the anaesthetic as yet but you are welcome to visit her."

"Oh! Thank you, Nurse; we would like to see Lucy please." Jacob said, "I'm relieved to know Lucy is recovering."

He followed the Nurse with Jessica in tow. Jessica was tired but was happy to know that her Mum was going to be well again. Whereas, Jacob was worried whether the injury sustained by Lucy was critical. He walked towards the ICU ward with his heart thumping with anxiety. When they reached Lucy's bedside they were alarmed to see all the tubes and machines to assist her breathing. Her eyes were shut and a tube was inserted in her mouth. Overall the vision was so intimidating that Jessica began to cry hysterically.

The nurse took her away from Lucy's bedside and calmed her down by giving her a can of "sprite". She kept asking the nurse, "Is my Mum going to die?" The nurse answered, "No darling, she is not going to die, she is just very ill."

Jessica sipped the sprite silently while waiting for her dad. Jacob was deeply troubled to see Lucy in a critical condition. He couldn't believe that the son she loved unconditionally could have hurt her so seriously. Jack, their son, had obviously turned into a monster. He could have killed his mother in his senseless act of violence!

Jacob held Lucy's hand and said repeatedly, "You are going to be fine, Lucy." Lucy moved a little as if to let him know that she was going to be alright. Jacob asked if he could help a little to ease her pain. The doctor, who was recording Lucy's progress, told Jacob to take his little girl home and make her comfortable.

Jacob kissed Lucy's forehead and whispered: "Get well darling. God be with you." He left her bedside to take Jessica home.

Jessica was exceptionally quiet on the way home. She seemed preoccupied with her own thoughts. "Poor child," sighed

Jacob, “It is not fair that she has been brought into a situation of drugs and violence!”

Jessica had fallen asleep, so Jacob woke her up and she walked sleepily to the front door. When Jacob opened the door an overpowering stench of stale blood confronted him. He was shocked to see the blood stained floor. He led Jessica away from the puddle of blood and took her to her room. Jacob told her to have a quick shower and change into her pyjamas, while he went into the kitchen to make a quick snack and hot chocolate for her. After settling Jessica with the hot chocolate and snack he told her to brush her teeth and go to bed.

Jessica asked, “Am I going to be alone, Dad?” Jacob answered reassuringly, “No sweetie, Daddy is going to sleep over here until I settle a few things.”

“Thanks Dad,” said Jessica and got ready for bed....

It had been a very stressful night. Meanwhile Jacob took the mop and bucket of water to clean the bloodstains in front of the living room. As he was mopping he wondered if the police had found their son, Jack. He hoped fervently that the police found his son and no real harm had befallen him. Just at that instant he heard the doorbell ring.

He looked through the peephole and saw two police officers standing at the door. He opened that door to let them in; they were Sergeant Matthew Molly and Constable Steven Barba, the same officers who interviewed him earlier.

Jacob told the officers, “Give me a few moments please, I will complete the mopping and join you. Why don’t you sit down,

I'll be with you shortly." Jacob cleaned the mess, took the mop and bucket to the laundry before joining the officers.

Jacob joined the officers as promised. "Would you like coffee or tea?" Both officers replied.

"No thanks, it has been a very long day, however, we came to inform you about your son Jack."

"Is he alright? Where is he?" asked Jacob anxiously.

"I'm sorry Mr Walters, something terrible has happened. Your son has met with an accident and we need you to identify his body. Three young men have met their tragic end."

Jacob sat down shocked beyond belief! "Oh! No! No!" cried Jacob, "Please tell me this is not true!"

Sergeant Matthew calmed Jacob and in a soft caring voice told him that in an ICE induced craze, the three young men drove a vehicle, which crashed into a pole not far from Footscray Market. Unfortunately all three died in the crash. Jack was identified with the ID he was carrying on him. "Please, Mr Walters, we need you to come with us to identify your son."

Jacob was deeply shaken. He told the officers that he couldn't leave Jessica alone in the house as he had just settled her in bed. Sergeant Matthew said he would ask a female officer to come and stay with Jessica. He rang for the officer to come and stay with Jessica while Jacob accompanied the officers to the Mortuary at Footscray Hospital.

Jacob burst out sobbing heartbreakingly, "Oh my God!" Sergeant Matthew put his arms around Jacob and said, "Mr

Walters, please calm down you have so much to do. We have to first ascertain if the young man taken to the Mortuary is indeed your son Jack.” At that very moment the doorbell rang and a constable, Sarah Dickenson, arrived to stay with Jessica. Jacob grabbed his jacket and car keys and followed the officers.

“Are you okay to drive Mr Walters? You are welcome to travel with us,” said Sergeant Matthew.

“It’s fine, I’ll drive,” said Jacob. With a heavy heart he turned on the ignition of his car. He had to be strong for Lucy and Jessica; he had to do this for them. As he was driving to the hospital, he was wondering if Lucy had regained consciousness, and how he would tell her that her beloved son was dead. He was deeply concerned about how Lucy would react to this tragic news.

He parked his car at the Footscray Hospital car park and followed the officer to the Mortuary. “I must be strong,” he kept telling himself as he walked towards the hospital.

The Mortuary officer led them to where the bodies were kept. Jacob had a powerful sense of loss and sorrow. He prayed, “Oh Lord, don’t let it be Jack.” As the officers approached the three bodies, they took Jacob to where Jack’s body was to be identified. Jacob walked towards the stand. The officer lifted the sheet, and there lay Jack’s badly battered body. Jacob gave a rendering cry.

“Oh Jack, what have you done, my son, my boy!” Jacob wept. “Yes, officer, this is my boy,” cried Jacob.

The officers led him out of the Mortuary. Jacob wept as he was led away from his son. “Oh God! How am I going to break this dreadful news to my wife and daughter?”

Sergeant Matthew had seen such tragic scenes many times. “Mr Walters, our heartfelt condolences to you and your family. We are so sorry that you have lost your son. We need your statement; sorry to impose this on you during such a tragic situation.”

Jacob answered, “Sure I’ll do this; you need to do your job.”

Both officers shook Jacob’s hand and walked away briskly, as if it was too much to witness the sadness of a father identifying the body of his only son.

Jacob walked towards the ICU ward to check on his wife, Lucy’s recovery. He had made up his mind that he would not say anything about Jack’s death to her. He rang the bell to identify himself and the ICU staff let him in. As he entered a young intern approached him and ushered him to the waiting room. “My name is Dr Albert Chan, Mr Walters, I need to speak with you before you see your wife.”

Jacob looked worried as Dr Chan led him to a chair. Jacob sat wondering what was going to be worse than losing one’s son?” He gathered enough courage to hear what Dr Chan had to say to him.

Dr Chan said, “Mr Walters, your wife is suffering from memory loss. She does not know who or where she is. The head injury is serious and it is going to take some time before she fully recovers.” Jacob gave a sigh of relief. “She has regained consciousness, that’s great!”

“Mr Walters, it’s a long road to recovery; in this situation we should not impose any stress on her.” Jacob assured Dr Chan she would be given the best care at home. Dr Chan said, “It is going to take a while before she can be sent home.”

Jacob understood his concern. He asked, “Can I see her.”

“Yes, you can but she may not recognise you.” Dr Chan said. Jacob was comforted by the thought that Lucy was alive. He walked towards her cubicle with a heavy heart.

Lucy’s eyes were closed, as her eyes were puffy from the punch inflicted by Jack. But her heart rate was stable and her blood pressure was normal. Jacob sat for a while beside Lucy and then left the ICU, as he was anxious to get home to Jessica.

Jacob reached home and the police officer, Sarah Dickenson, told him that Jessica was fast asleep. She extended her condolences to Jacob and his family. He led her to the door and thanked her for staying with Jessica during his absence. He returned to the living room and collapsed on the armchair. He was emotionally drained and physically exhausted.

There was so much to be done: the funeral, Lucy’s recovery, Jessica’s well-being and the overall well-being of his family. He must find the strength and courage to rebuild his broken family! Jack’s ice addiction had not only destroyed his life, but had almost ruined the life of every member of his family. The demonic power of this addiction was destroying the lives of so many. Was there no solution to rid our society of this evil drug?

“Oh God!” sobbed Jacob heartbrokenly. In utter sorrow and desolation, the heart of a grieving father cried for a young life

lost! Jack's life was taken at a tender age of seventeen! No parent should be subjected to such a cruel fate.



4

Surprise

Shelly Morris was excited to receive a letter for a job interview at the Coles Supermarket in Watergardens Shopping Centre, Melbourne. She had just completed a degree in Business Administration at the Victoria University, Footscray Campus. She considered herself lucky to be given this opportunity. Although she didn't have hands on experience at the workplace, she had confidence that the expertise she had gained during her three years study at the university will be an asset! She was so excited about the interview, as that was her first application for a job and she received a prompt response. Her mother, Ivy was equally thrilled.

The interview was on the 8th January 2015, and Shelly met up with a few of her University friends to prepare for it. Her friends passed on some interview techniques, and encouraged Shelly not to be overly enthusiastic about the interview.

“Take it easy girl, take it in your stride. Attending interviews are good, it builds your confidence.”

“Good advice,” said her friend Rachel, “Good luck and do well.”

So Shelly kept her excitement under check and quietly went about her business, preparing for the interview. She was grateful to her friends for their support and guidance.

On the day of the interview, Shelly showered, got dressed appropriately and entered the 'prayer room' for the first time in years. After the death of her beloved father 17 years ago, she simply refused to pray, in spite of her mother's frequent pleas to pray daily for God's blessings. Shelly being a cocky youngster, refused to listen.

However, today it came naturally to her to invoke God's blessings to do well in the interview. She took a drop of Our Lady of Lourdes's holy water and placed it on her chest. Strangely, she felt a sense of calm around her. "Please bless me Our Lady, to do well in the interview today." She bowed her head respectfully before she stepped out of the prayer room. Just at that precise moment, her mother came out of her room. Noticing Shelly coming out of the prayer room she said, "Hmm.... am I seeing things?"

Shelly walked away without commenting on her mum's remark. "Mum, on your way to work can you please drop me off at the Watergardens Shopping Centre? My interview is at 10:30am."

"Of course, sweetie. Have you had your breakfast yet?"

"I will, in a few minutes." Shelly answered.

"Well, come join me, I've made yummy pancakes, your favourite." said Ivy.

"Oh Mum! I'm not a little girl, you know. I must watch my waist line!" Her mum smiled and called out as she walked towards the kitchen. "Remember it is important to start the day with a good breakfast!"

“Okay mum, I will join you in a minute” answered Shelly.

She gathered the folder with her credentials assembled in an orderly fashion, grabbed her handbag and had a quick glance in the mirror. She was pleased at her reflection and said contently, “you look smart, girlie!” and walked towards the kitchen, where her mum had breakfast served and a large cup of coffee awaiting her. “Thanks mum; you are the best mum in the world!”

Her mum smiled and said, “Shelly, remember be calm but confident during the interview and good luck baby, go get them!”

They ate their breakfast in silence; cleared the table and left the dishes in the sink. Her mother ensured that the doors and windows were well secured before they left home.

Luckily for Shelly, her mum worked at Harvey Norman, which was only five minutes away from where her interview was. Ivy wondered what Shelly would be doing at the shopping centre for more than an hour.

As if she knew what her mum was thinking, Shelly said, “Don’t worry Mum, I’m meeting a friend from University, Thomas, he will discuss a few things that are involved in office administration work. He just got accepted for a similar job at “The Good Guys”.

“Alright, sweetheart, and remember be calm, and I will pray for you.”

“Thanks mum, see you at home this evening. Thomas is off today, after the interview, I will hang out with him and a few of my mates.”

“Alright, don’t be late. Oh! Let me know how you went in the interview, okay?”

“Yes mum, I will,” said Shelly as she got out of the car.

Ivy prayed silently for her daughter. Shelly waved to her mum as she walked into the shopping complex.

Thomas was waiting in front of Target as promised. She was surprised to see Rachel there as well. “Hi, this is a surprise! I didn’t expect to see you here Rachel,” said Shelly, genuinely pleased to see her best pal there with Thomas.

“Anything for a friend dearie,” said Rachel, “I couldn’t say ‘No’ to join you guys!”

“Thanks!” said Shelly.

“Come let’s have a drink,” said Thomas.

“I had a huge breakfast at home, you two can go ahead while I’ll sit here and go through my notes,” said Shelly.

“Oh no, well we’ll wait until after the interview!” said Rachel.

So all three sat on the bench in front Target, and began discussing the interview. They were deeply engrossed in their discussion, when Shelly realised she had only ten minutes left. In a panic she said, “Oh my God, I’ll be late for the interview, its 10:20am!”

“Don’t get excited, it is only a few minutes’ walk to Coles,” said Thomas and the three of them walked towards Coles.

Shelly was worried that she would be late. Fortunately, they reached Coles at 10:25am and Shelly hurriedly said, “Bye guys, shall see you later, wait for me, okay?”

Quickly she marched towards the enquiry counter to find out where the interview was to be held, the young man at the counter, directed her to the interview room. A matronly looking lady met Shelly. “My name is Alice Wales, I am one of the members of the interview panel.”

“My name is Shelly Morris,” and she showed Miss Wales her letter. “Thank you, come with me,” she said as she led her into the interview room.” Shelly followed her with excitement and apprehension at the same time.

There were two gentlemen in the room. They rose to greet Shelly and introduced themselves. The tall man said, “My name is Daniel Jones, and this gentleman is Neville White.” Shelly shook their hands and said, “My name is Shelly Morris, I’m here for the interview.

Miss Wales pointed to the chair for Shelly to sit. “Have you got all your photocopied documents Miss Morris, we had requested for three copies of each of your credentials in our letter,” said Mr White in a friendly manner. Shelly got up and handed three envelopes to Mr White, “Thank you, Miss Morris, you may be seated as he pointed to the chair, and Shelly sat down.

The interview was not as “tough” as she had imagined, and the panel members were not intimidating. It took less than an hour to finish the interview, and all three members wished her well in her future endeavours. Shelly also thanked them for the opportunity given to her. Before she left, she asked,

“When will I be informed about the outcome of this interview?”

Miss Wales answered, “We have ten more candidates to interview. You will receive your letter by the end of February. Thank you for your interest in our company. Have a good day Miss Morris, and good luck with your aspirations to be employed.”

“Thank you all, for the interview” Shelly smiled and left the room. She felt satisfied with her performance and uttered a silent prayer to the Lady of Lourdes as she walked towards Target to meet her friends. Thomas and Rachel were seated at the café enjoying their Hot Chocolate and Latte.

“Hey, how did it go?” asked Thomas with genuine enthusiasm.

“Okay, I guess....Let’s see what happens!”

“Do you feel like a coffee?” asked Rachel.

“No, not just now... maybe later,” said Shelly. “Thanks guys, for the support and help!” said Shelly sincerely.

“When will you know?” asked Thomas.

“Sometime in February.” She answered.

“Okay then, no more discussion just call us for a big party when you receive your letter!” said Rachel, light-heartedly. They made plans to go to the movies later. Shelly in the meantime rang her mum and said that the interview was not as tough as she had expected. Her mum was happy. “Have fun,

but come home for dinner.... Remember I'll be waiting, Sweetie!"

"Okay Ma, I'll be home, I promise."

Shelly had a pleasant time with her friends but when she reached home, she was exhausted. Her mother had dinner ready, the table was set and Ivy told her to have her dinner before going to her room. Shelly, entered the dining room, gave her mum a hug before sitting down.

"So, your interview went well I see." Mum stated. Shelly answered that she was happy and asked her mum to pray that she gets the job. "You pray to Our Lady of Lourdes, if you need her help."

"Your prayers will help too Mum," said Shelly with a smile.

After dinner Shelly helped to tidy up the dining room and kitchen. "Goodnight Mum, I am going to bed early," Said Shelly as she walked out of the dining room. She entered her room, put her folder back in the drawer and locked it. After placing the keys back in her handbag she went to have a shower, changed into her pyjamas and got into bed. She watched some TV before calling it a day. Shelly sat on her bed with a prayer on her lips,

"Please Lord, please bless me, let me get a favourable response from Coles," She was surprised by the impromptu prayers! She watched TV for about half an hour or so, switched off the TV and fell asleep. It has been a long day, indeed!

As expected she received a letter on the 26th of February. When she returned home from the Salvo's, mum had placed

the letter on her study table. Her heart was racing with excitement but she decided that she would have a shower before she opened the envelope. She got dressed, took the envelope, once again with a prayer in her heart, with trembling fingers, she tore it open. She pulled out the folded paper and read the contents.

“Dear Miss Shelly Morris, we are pleased to inform you that you have been successful in your recent interview with us. You are required to do twelve weeks of intense training prior to your commencement as a Junior Administration Officer. You will be working with the Manager and the Administration team at our branch at Watergardens. You are to report for training on the 2nd of March.”

To her surprise, she walked towards the prayer room to offer her prays to God for his blessings! She bowed her head in prayer and thanked God for his Mercy and his blessings. She knelt down and lit a candle, promising that as of that day she would acknowledge God’s presence in her life. As a young school going child she needed to prayer but as she was growing up, she gradually stopped. Her mother’s constant reminders fell on deaf ears!

She tried calling her mum at the office, but her secretary informed her that Mrs Morris left the office at 3pm, to attend to a personal matter. She was wondering why her mother hadn’t mentioned anything about this business. She thought she would surprise her mum by preparing dinner for them. As she walked into the kitchen, the delicious aroma of beef stew greeted her. The slow cooker was still on, so mum must have come home, set the slow cooker on with the beef and veggies, turned the timer on and then left for her appointment.

So sweet, she even cleared the mailbox and left her mail in her room as well. So typical of mum, she made it her duty to ensure Shelly was taken good care of even though she had just turned 22 this year! She felt loved and blessed.

Her mum rang the doorbell at 6:30pm instead of using her keys. She knew that I had come home and she loved the big hug I give her whenever I opened the door for her. I opened the door, gave her a big bear hug and said, “Mum, I’ve got the job at Coles!”

“Of course darling, I know. So your prayers have been answered,” she answered with excitement!

“Thanks Mum, for your prayers!” The mother and daughter hugged each other with joy. Mum said to Shelly, “Set the table darling, I’ll have a quick shower, change and then join you for dinner.”

“I’ve already done that mum; I’ll watch ‘Current Affairs’ while you are getting ready.” Shelly was wondering why her mother had not mentioned her appointment, usually mum tells her everything. They were not only mother and daughter, but were good friends as well. She decided she would not pry, I’m sure she will tell me sooner or later. Mum came out of the room looking refreshed and relaxed.

“Ready for dinner, Mum?”

“Yes, I am darling,”

Shelly took a serving bowl from the cabinet, switched off the slow cooker before serving the scrumptious stew. The herbs and the freshly chopped mint leaves added to the delicious

aroma and this made Shelly ravenous! “Sit Mum, I’ll serve you!”

Ivy looked at her daughter and realised how happy she looked today; she prayed that she would be happy all throughout her life!

Shelly sat down at the table with her mum to have dinner. She did not ask her about the leave of absence from work in the afternoon. “So, when do you commence work darling?” asked Mum.

“I’ll begin training from the 2nd of March. They have offered me a three-month training schedule. After this is completed, I will begin work with the Administration Team.” Informed Shelly.

“That’s exciting, I’m glad you will go through a trainee induction before starting your work,” said Ivy.

“Yes Mum, this will help me be well-informed about the nature of work that I have to manage on a daily basis.”

They both enjoyed the delicious Beef Stew and started clearing the dining table. “You go and watch some TV, while I clear up here.”

“Are you sure Mum? I’m happy to help”

“No darling, you have done your chores, it’s my turn to clean the kitchen,” said her mum.

“Okay Mum, see you in the living room soon.” Shelly left the kitchen. She sat in her favourite armchair and turned on the TV.

Mum and Shelly watch channel 72 that often aired British Shows, mainly suspense thrillers. Today Shelly was keen on watching some James Bond, “Skyfall”. Her Mum was a Bond fan, Shelly did not think she would fuss about change of channel. Just then her Mum came into the living room, “What’s on tonight?” she asked. “Can we watch “James Bond” on channel 9 for a change Mum?”

“What’s on?” she queried, “Skyfall”, Shelly answered.

“Daniel Craig! That would be lovely,” said Mum as she sat down beside her and adjusted the leg stand on the armchair. They enjoyed the film enormously; That was the first time that they had watched this film. They had missed the earlier screening of the same film on channel 9. “Okay doll, time for bed, I have an early start tomorrow, as I have to make up for the hours I took off this afternoon.”

Shelly wanted to ask her as to why she had taken time off from work, but she refrained from doing so. She knew her mum would tell her when the time is right. She kissed her mum goodnight, and switched off the lights and decided to go to bed.

Shelly wanted Thomas and Rachel to know the outcome of her interview. She had promised them that she would do so upon receiving a response. She walked up to the kitchen and was not surprised to see Mum had prepared ‘French toast’ for her. When she was a little girl, this was her weekend favourite brekkie! She was so grateful to God, to have such a loving and devoted mum. After breakfast she got busy tidying her room and clearing the old magazines she had stashed away, so she could give them to the Salvo’s. Next time Mum takes me to the Salvo’s I’ll drop these off.

She rang Thomas, and wondered if he was free to meet her after work. He said that he would be happy to take her out for dinner, if she would like that better, “That would be wonderful.” She said at first, and then she remembered that she had to meet up with Rachel as well. “Oops, sorry I can’t, I have to meet up with Rachel as well,” said Shelly.

“Look, Rachel can join us, I’d love to see her as well,” said Thomas.

“Okay, at about 7pm, Rachel and I will come over to your place, be ready, okay. Thank you Thomas! Where are we going?” she asked.

Thomas said, “Leave that to me, see you later, bye for now!”

So, Shelly decided to just stay home, do some house chores before going out with her friends in the evening. She was surprised when her mother did not return home by six. Perhaps she stayed back at work she thought, as she was getting ready to go out. When she came out of her room, she decided to ring her mum’s office, her secretary answered the call, “Good evening, this is Ivy Morris’s office, how may I help you?”

“Hi! This is Shelly, Mrs Morris’s daughter, I was wondering if I could speak with Mum,” replied Shelly.

“I’m afraid, Mrs Morris, took the day off today,” replied the secretary.

“That’s alright, I’ll speak with her when she returns home,” and Shelly placed the phone on the receiver. She was shell shocked, what is going on here? It was so uncharacteristic of mum to be so secretive. “Oh God! She prayed, let everything

be alright.” Somehow she felt anxious and concerned about her mother. She was wondering if she should call Thomas to cancel her outing with him and Rachel.

Just then, the phone rang and it was her mum. “Hi darling, I’ll be late in coming home this evening as I’m extremely busy at work. I left you dinner in the fridge. Don’t wait up for me sweetie, I’ll see you later, bye for now.”

Before Shelly could respond, her mother disconnected the call. She staggered to the dining table, sat down on the chair, as she was shocked beyond words. ‘Mum has never lied, why did she say she was at work when she was not.’ She was disappointed with her mother; at the same time she was concerned that her mum was being mysterious. What about? She wondered! She sat there and reflected on their relationship. Her mother was only 33 years old when her father died in an accident. She devoted her entire life in making sure she had everything she needed.

She remembered that she was only five years old when her dad passed away. Shelly’s mum’s love for her was the envy of so many of her friends. As Shelly was growing up, her mum became her best friend and confidante. There were no secrets, no deceit and no reservations between them. She loved her mother unconditionally, and was troubled that she was being secretive about something.

She decided not to go out with her friends; she rang Thomas and said, “Thomas, something has come up unexpectedly, do you mind if we don’t meet up this evening?”

Thomas was annoyed, “I’m sorry Shel, I’ve already reserved a table for us at the Hilton. Don’t disappoint us, I’ll come around as promised!” Thomas ended the call.

Okay then, I'll go out, but when I return I'm certainly going to ask Mum as to why she lied. She went to her room to collect her handbag. It was almost 6:30pm, so she wrote a little note to her mum to say she was going out and will be back before 11pm. She locked the front door and walked outside to wait for Thomas and Rachel. They arrived at 6:30pm, she has never known Thomas for being late! He was so reliable, she was proud to have friends like them.

They dined at "The Hilton", the environment was cheerful and the food was delicious. Shelly appeared to be a little distracted. But Thomas and Rachel avoided asking Shelly what the problem was, or why she was not her usual bubbly self. Thomas paid the bill and said, "It's my turn guys so don't fuss, you guys can take me out to dinner some other day," the girls thanked him and decided to go to Williamstown beach to enjoy the cool breeze and serene environment. Shelly was grateful that her friends didn't ask her any questions about her "moody" disposition earlier.

The beach was not as crowded as they expected. So the three friends strolled along the sand, recalling their childhood escapades. They spent well over an hour and enjoyed every minute of their stay at the beautiful beach. The clear sky, gentle breeze and the sound of crashing waves was totally sublime. Thomas cleared his throat as if to bring them to reality," Hi, tomorrow is a working day ladies, let's get going. Hope you all enjoyed the evening as much as I did," said Thomas.

Shelly replied," Thanks for the dinner and ride to the beach Thomas. You're the best!" Rachel echoed the same sentiments as they walked towards Thomas's car, which was parked nearby. Thomas decided to drop Shelly off first, as

Rachel lived in the same suburb as him. She thanked him once again, as she got down from the car. “Don’t mention it again Shel, the pleasure is all mine.”

“Goodnight Rachel, see you soon.” Shelly took her house keys out, and let herself into her house. Just as she walked in, she heard a male voice in the living room. Her mother came out of the room to greet her. “Hi darling, did you have a good time? Come in to the living room, I want you to meet a friend of mine.”

Shelly didn’t expect to meet anyone at this hour in her home. As she entered, a middle aged gentleman stood up to greet her. Mum said, “Shelly, this is Justin Morrow, he is in Melbourne for a few days on business from Hawaii. He is the CEO of “The White Bird” the company that provides IT expertise to us. I have been working closely with Justin for the past few years,” said Ivy by way of introduction.

Shelly didn’t know what to say to Mr Morrow other than “Pleased to meet you, Mr Morrow.”

Justin looked a little out of place in her presence. “Shelly, we were actually waiting for your return. We have something to discuss with you, please be seated, can I get you something to drink darling?” asked her mum. Shelly’s heart was racing; she could almost hear the thumping heartbeats! All this is too sudden; she thought and felt dismayed and confused. She sat opposite Justin; he was calm and appeared to be at ease. Ivy looked at her daughter, cleared her throat and said, “Justin has just asked me to be his wife, darling, and I have accepted his proposal,” she looked at my face for a reaction.

I was totally blown away, “I’m happy for you both but why didn’t you tell me about Justin Mum?” I said. Ivy looked at

her daughter for a few minutes and said, “Darling, your dad passed away when I was just 33 years old and you were only 5 years at the time. My whole world shattered to pieces; you were my reason for living, I lived only for your well-being and your happiness. I never thought of marrying anyone. Justin is the first man after your Dad who made me feel happy and safe. We both realised that we needed to be together. I didn’t tell you, darling because I wanted to be certain that I was making the right decision. Besides, Justin’s visit to Melbourne was not planned; he was on his way to Asia and took a break in Melbourne to see me. It was sudden and unexpected, so is his proposal. I hope you will be happy for us Shel,” pleaded her mum.

Shelly got up and gave her mother an affectionate hug and said, “Oh Mum, this is totally unexpected, so I looked shocked and confused. You have given me everything that a daughter ever wanted, you are the best mum in the world and I am happy for you and Justin. Congratulations mum,” and kissed her mum, as tears of joy trickled down her cheeks. She dried her eyes, walked up to Justin and said, “Congratulations Justin, I wish you and mum happiness always.”

Justin put his arms around Shelly and said with warmth, “I love your mum and I know how close you both are. I won’t come between your relationships. I will support your mum and respect whatever decisions she makes for your future.”

Shelly felt so comforted by his words. Ivy came over to them for a group hug. At that very instance Shelly knew that she must free her mother, and let her enjoy her life. She was 5 years old and her mum had many sacrifices to ensure that she grew up to be an independent young woman. She looked at her mum and said, “Thank you for being the best mum in the whole wide world.” Ivy, remembered these words and smiled

at her daughter. This was Shelly's favourite line when she was a kid.

Justin said, "I better be going Ivy, see you in the morning. Thank you Shelly, for your acceptance of me. This is one of the best days of my life." Ivy walked him to the door and they hugged each other before she opened the door to let Justin out. Shelly watched them from the living room, she was truly happy for them.

Mum came back to the living room, held Shelly tightly and said, "Shel, I know you will be alright sweetie. You will begin your training at Coles in a few weeks before your permanent placement. It is this knowledge that gave me the inner strength to accept Justin's proposal darling. We plan to live in Melbourne until I complete my contract with my company. I'll make sure that you will be okay, when we leave for Hawaii."

"Mum, thank you for everything, I'll be okay, I assure you. From this day onwards stop "smothering me" like a child... Remember I'll be almost 23 years old soon. Your happiness means as much to me as mine is to you." They both held each other and said "I will always be your mum, always."

"Oh mum, I love you so, so much, I want you to be happy with Justin. Goodnight mum, I'm truly alright with you marrying him."

They both walked towards their bedrooms, happy and yet the realisation that they will be parted brought a tinge of sadness. They both knew deep within their hearts, that their love was supreme and would stand the test of time. "Remember, she told herself, "you are not just a child, but a young adult; you will be fine."

5

The Power of Love

The glorious morning sun's rays seeped through the gaps between the drawn curtains of the bedroom. Its rays dazzled and danced beautifully, as if a thousand specks of diamonds floated in the golden rays, sparkling and glowing its mesmeric glory. She lay blissfully in the warmth of her husband's loving embrace.

Today marked the forty-fifth year of their life together.... it was their wedding anniversary. The glorious morning, in its playful mood promised her inner peace and joy. She lay there content in the knowledge that her husband loved her unconditionally. His love was her strength and she had forged her life to synchronise with the rhythm and tempo of their mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence. She felt grateful for this day, this life and this union.

She lay there gazing at her husband, Suresh's face, a content smile played upon her lips. He was sound asleep, his gentle snoring which has always been a source of annoyance surprisingly didn't bother her as much today. Sweet moments shared the previous night kindled her with girlish delight. There was a time when she had feared that their relationship would not stand the test of time!

Nirmala gently rolled over and quietly got out of bed and slipped into the bathroom. She tried not to disturb Suresh, she had a shower and got dressed. She closed the bedroom door

and walked towards the kitchen. She wanted to make her husband's favourite breakfast- stuffed potato roti with tomato chutney. She prepared the Atta -flour dough, and put three potatoes to boil in a saucepan on low heat. She finely chopped half an onion, crushed a chilly and two pods of garlic and made a fine paste.

Before starting the main preparation, she decided to offer her morning prayers. She entered the 'prayer room', with flowers and fruit as her offering to the Deities. She lit the Diya- lamp, and placed incense in a glass by the altar. She offered her prayers and thanked the God Lord for his blessings, his mercy and for the happiness that he had bestowed upon her family. She placed the 'Shakti' on her forehead and bowed her head in total reverence before she left the room.

She walked to the kitchen to prepare the potato paste as the stuffing for the roti. She began her preparation with haste, as she wanted everything to be done before Suresh walked into the kitchen. She cooked a dozen stuffed potato rotis, and prepared the tomato chutney. She put the kettle on, to brew the masala tea. She was satisfied that she had everything done one time. She set the breakfast table, brought the steaming aromatic tea and placed it on the dining table. She sat down and waited for Suresh to join her.

Just as she sat down, the doorbell rang. At first she thought it was her son, but to her surprise it was a delivery van, and a young man brought her a bouquet of red and yellow roses. She was excited and hurriedly opened the envelope, attached to the bouquet. It was from Suresh, the note simply said: "HAPPY ANNIVERSARY SWEETHEART, LOVE YOU, THANK YOU FOR ALL THE HAPPINESS WE HAVE SHARED, You're Suresh"

She was overcome with joy, the flowers, the note and his love for her lifted her spirit. She thanked the delivery boy and gave him a generous tip. Locked the door, still holding onto the precious gift from Suresh. She entered the kitchen, took out a flower vase from one of the shelves, filled it with some water and began to arrange the roses. She placed the beautiful vase of flowers on the mantle-piece above the cabinet.

Just as she turned she felt Suresh's presence. He turned her around to face him, tilted her face and kissed her on the lips. "Happy Anniversary my love," he whispered. She returned his loving kiss and said, "Happy Anniversary to you, my darling and thank you for the beautiful roses."

Suresh snickered and said, "The Florist was very efficient and has sent the flowers in the morning, just as I had requested! I'm very pleased."

Nirmala held his hand and walked him to the dining table. "Sit here my love" she said, "I have prepared your favourite breakfast." She opened the container and placed a hot roti on his plate, and served some tomato chutney. After serving a mug of masala tea, Nirmala sat next to him to serve herself.

"Thank you, my sweetheart, that is indeed a surprise, I thought you would have made banana pancakes!" said Suresh, who was expecting pancakes for breakfast.

Nirmala smiled and said, "Oh no! Not pancakes on our special day!" Suresh was enjoying the delicious breakfast his wife had made for him. "Darling, pack me a couple of the rotis for my lunch today. It's too early for two rotis for brekkie."

While Suresh was sipping his aromatic tea, she packed two rotis and some chutney in his lunch container and placed it on

the table. Suresh got up to wash his hands, just at that moment the telephone rang and he went to answer the call.

“Hello,” Suresh answered, “Hello dad, Happy Anniversary to you and Mum, we will see you in the evening.” Said his son Ravin.

“Thank you, Son, Mum is just beside me, speak to her,” and Suresh handed the phone to his wife. Ravin said, “Morning Mum, Happy Anniversary, see you in the evening.”

“Thank you, darling. See you later. Have a lovely day!” said Nirmala as she placed the phone down.

Suresh took his briefcase and his lunch container, and kissed his wife before walking towards the door. Nirmala walked behind him, “Sorry love, I could have taken a day off but we are really busy at work,” said Suresh, kissing his wife on the forehead as he stepped out of the main door. Nirmala waved as his car left the driveway. This was a daily ritual for her, until the car disappeared she would stand at the door.

She locked the main door and walked to the kitchen to clear the table and tidy up. She cleared the kitchen bench top and went to the bedroom to make the bed and get the clothes that needed to be washed. As she was heading towards the laundry, the doorbell rang. She put the clothes in the laundry basket and walked towards the main door. She peeped through the glass panel and was excited to see her daughter, son-in law James and their teenage boys. She opened the door to let them in. Her daughter Kamala gave her a big hug and wished “Happy Anniversary Mum,” this was followed with loving kisses and hugs from James and her two grandsons. “Come, have some breakfast boys,” Nirmala offered, but no one was keen on breakfast, nor did they have time to sit down.

Kamala said “Mum we came to wish Dad and you for your Anniversary. We have to drop off the boys to University and head off to work. We will see you in the evening.” James gave her a wrapped gift box, “don’t open it now Mum, wait till Dad comes back from work.”

“Thanks Son, it is kind of you. See you later.” Nirmala locked the door and decided to complete the housework before she could relax.

Suresh had booked a table for dinner at the ‘Mocambo Hotel’. So she was going to be a lady of leisure for the rest of the day! After completing her chores, she sat down at her study table to wrap her husband’s gift. It was a beautiful family portrait, which she had commissioned one of her friends to paint from a recent family photo of theirs. She held the frame close to her chest and said, “Thank you God, for my family.”

Her family was the epicentre of her happiness and existence. She could have lost everything that had meaning in her life... this was beyond belief! Within minutes, the past flashed before her eyes.

Until the moment she entered their lives, they were happy and content with each other. Of course, like any other couple they had their differences, problems and misunderstandings. But it was nothing that would have caused a significant change in their matrimonial life! Nirmala met her at a wedding reception. She was a tall, slim and extremely attractive young woman. Suresh introduces her brother, Raj and her.

“This is Raj Mahadev and his sister, Priti. They are both doctors and recently established a private practice in Namaka,

Nadi. This is my wife, Nirmala, she works for the Department of Youth and Sports.”

Nirmala greeted them. “Pleased to meet you.”

Instantly the girls hit it off, as they had so much in common. The rest of the evening was fun filled. The two young women felt as if they had known each other for a long time. Before they left for home, Nirmala hugged Priti and sincerely declared, “It was a pleasure meeting you, hope to see you again.”

However, Nirmala had not imagined at this significant moment in her life, that this meeting would make her marriage and life chaotic. Suresh and Nirmala, as a couple coordinated their family life with honesty and love. Their two beautiful children played a significant role in connecting them, as loving and devoted parents. Her loyalty and devotion to Suresh had blinded her judgement.

At first she didn’t notice Suresh’s ‘disappearance’ from home in the evenings. Then, she began to notice that his loving, caring devotion to her was slowly but suddenly vanishing. Gradually the realisation dawned on her that they were together but there emerged a subtle distance between them. This was a warning that all was not well between them! She wondered why Suresh was behaving so strangely with her. She never once doubted his loyalty or love for her. She loved him so dearly that she wouldn’t dare question his devotion to her or for their children! She was deeply concerned but didn’t know how to broach the subject.

Suresh’s erratic behaviour became a concern to Nirmala. He began to go to Suva on weekends on the pretext of seeing the family solicitor, Mr Alexander Price. Since there was a legal

matter pending with Mr Price, Nirmala trusted him and believed that Suresh was trying to urge their lawyer to speed up their case. Nirmala accepted his reasons in good faith.

On one such visit to Suva, a very close friend of hers rang her from there. Her friend Shanta, a social worker had gone to Suva to attend a conference. She enquired as to why Suresh was staying at the 'Travel Lodge Hotel' with a rather attractive female companion? It was as though she was struck by a thunderbolt.

“What are you saying, Shanta?” She asked in utter disbelief!

Shanta responded, “Too much trust in one’s partner can lead to domestic upheaval!” She continued, Nirmala staggered a little, and she sat down to steady her nerves. Then she asked Shanta, “Could you describe her to me please?” Shanta responded, “Well, she is slim, tall and very attractive!”

Instantly Nirmala’s world shattered into a million pieces! She held her composure and told Shanta, who happened to be staying at the same hotel, to inform her of Suresh’s room number.

“Sure thing Sweetie, I’ll find out and let you know. I’m so sorry about this horrible news. As a good friend, I thought it is my duty to let you know, I’m sure you would have done the same for me.” Shanta was troubled that she was now responsible for breaking Nirmala’s heart. “Nimi, please take time to discuss this matter with Suresh, be diplomatic and handle it with sensitivity and tact,” said Shanta.

“Don’t worry Shanta, I thank you for being a true friend,” Nirmala said, “don’t worry, I will not throw tantrums!”

Amazing but true, Nirmala decided to take action swiftly. She called her 'live-in domestic helper, and asked Mary if she could look after her children for that night. Nirmala promised that she would be back by midday on Sunday.

Mary asked her, "Boss is away and you too want to go to Suva, any problem madam? I'm worried, what if the children cry for you?" Mary sounded really concerned about being alone with the children.

"Don't worry Mary, I've arranged with Mrs Prema Pillai to let her children sleep over here. You have looked after my children since they were born Mary, why are you worried?" asked Nirmala.

"Okay, Madam, I promise I'll take care of them." Said Mary.

Nirmala rang Mrs Pillai and informed her that some urgent business had come up, and Suresh required her presence in Suva to sort out some legal matters. Mrs Pillai was happy to send her kids over and promised to keep an eye on the children as well. She assured Nirmala if her husband Perumal were rostered for night duty, she would also sleep over at Nirmala's place. Nirmala thanked her friend and was relieved that Mary would be comforted by this assistance offered by Mrs Pillai.

Immediately, Nirmala began to pack an overnight bag with the bare essentials. She had made up her mind to confront Suresh and Priti, and resolve the matter with courage, diplomacy and absolute tact! She rang and booked a taxi to take her to Suva and bring her back by midday on Sunday. She told her children that she had to go and meet 'daddy' in Suva. Ravin, her son said, "Mummy tell daddy not to forget the puppy he promised to buy for us." Her daughter echoed

the same thing, and they seemed alright with her going away just for the day.

Nirmala's taxi arrived, the taxi driver was well-known to Suresh and her, so she was relieved. It is only a two and a half hour journey from Nadi to Suva. It was 2:30pm when she left her home and by 5pm she would arrive. She told the driver, Anthony, to give her a few minutes. She rang Shanta and informed her of plans and her friend was stunned by this information! She told Shanta that she should arrive at the Hotel no later than 6 o'clock in the evening. She disconnected the call, kissed her children and repeatedly told Mary to be careful with them.

“Bye Mum, tell Daddy not to forget the puppy!” repeated her son Ravin. She waved to her children and Mary as she got into the taxi. Anthony started the engine and drove out of Nirmala's driveway. The children stood outside waving and shouting “Bye Mum, see you soon!”

As the taxi sped towards Suva on the bumpy road, Nirmala was amazed that she was so calm and collected. She wanted to confront her husband and his lover, Priti with honesty and dignity. She always vowed that in her life she would never, ever be made a ‘fool’ by anyone. She felt deeply troubled that someone she loved and trusted implicitly could betray her in this manner!

However, Nirmala was determined to let Suresh go, if this is what he wanted. Tears began to gather and slowly flow. Her world of hope and dreams had abruptly come to an end! She was devastated, miserable and angry, and never imagined that Suresh would abandon them in such a cruel fashion. She realised bitterly that one shouldn't take life for granted!!

It took two and a half hours for the taxi to reach the “Travel Lodge Hotel,’ in Suva. She paid the taxi driver and requested him to pick her up at 7:30am on Sunday. She approached the reception desk, and asked the receptionist to contact Mrs Shanta Menon, who was in Room 118. The receptionist rang the room, Shanta answered immediately, when informed of a visitor waiting for her. She said she would be there within minutes. Shanta came to the reception to meet Nirmala and embraced her friend, informing the receptionist that her friend would spend the night with her.

After completing the formalities, she led her friend up to her room. As she turned the key to her door, Shanta told Nirmala that she was truly surprised to see her within hours of her call. Nirmala was calm, she left her handbag and carry bag on the table and sat down wearily. Shanta asked if she wanted a drink. Nirmala said she would be happy with a chilled Fanta. Shanta opened the mini fridge and handed a can to her. Nirmala was thirsty and was grateful for the drink. She flicked open the clasp and sat down to enjoy the Fanta.

“Are you alright Nimi, is there something I can do for you?” asked Shanta.

Nirmala said that she would like to have a quick shower, have something to eat and then perhaps she could tell Shanta her immediate course of action. Her friend was amazed to see how calm and composed she appeared, “I’ll order room service, what would you like for dinner?” asked Shanta.

“Something simple,” Nirmala said, picking her clothes out from the bag, before she entered the shower. Shanta ordered ‘Chicken Biryani, pappadam, and raita,’ to be sent to her room.

Nirmala had her shower and came out of the bathroom, she felt refreshed and calm.

“Well, Nimi, what do you want to do after Dinner?” asked Shanta calmly.

“Well, after dinner, tell me Suresh’s room number and I’m going to confront him.”

“I saw them enter their room at about 5:00pm, they are in room 82 in the East Wing.”

“You stay here after dinner, I’m going to surprise them.” Nirmala said with absolute determination.

Shanta was troubled and blamed herself for creating domestic strife between Suresh and Nirmala. “Thank you, my friend from here on I’ll do what is best for my family.” Nirmala continued, “This is my life, let me resolve it, thanks for your loving concern for my wellbeing and above all thank you for being a good and sincere friend,” she left the unfinished drink on the table and walked towards the door. “Will see you soon” and walked out of Shanta’s room.

Shanta looked apprehensive and earnestly hoped Nirmala’s bold action will bring her the result, she was hoping to gain from the direct confrontation with her husband and his lover, Priti. This whole incident is taking place because of the call she made to Nirmala! Now she was extremely concerned that she had been instrumental in creating this havoc in Nirmala’s life!

Nirmala took the lift to the ‘East wing’, level 2 and walked out towards room 82. She stood before the room, and raised her right hand and knocked on the door. She waited for Suresh

to open the door. It was a surprise to her that Priti stood before her. Priti looked utterly shocked and her face turned ashen, “Oh, hello Nirmala, ummm...” Nirmala didn’t wait to be invited into the room. She brushed passed Priti and entered the room. Suresh was obviously in the bathroom, for Nirmala could hear the water running. Priti sat on the bed staring at Nirmala. Whereas Nirmala sat on a chair facing the television, she didn’t say a word to Priti as her business was with her husband not with her.

“Did room service, bring our dinner Sweetheart?” asked Suresh as he stepped out with a white towel wrapped around his waist. He froze the minute he saw his wife seated in the room.

Nirmala gave him an icy stare and calmly asked, “Would you like to explain?” There was pin drop silence in the room; Suresh staggered a little as he sat down on the bed. Nirmala waited for Suresh’s response. He was amazed at how calm and dignified she remained in the face of such enormous embarrassment and domestic chaos!

“It is not difficult to figure out what is happening here, Nirmala, you work it out,” Suresh responded as he got up to put on his clothes.

This response infuriated Nirmala, she snapped at him, “I want you to explain, and you owe me an explanation.” She said firmly.

Suresh cleared his throat and answered, “You are an intelligent person, so you figure it out!” He said with extreme annoyance. At this point Priti rose up from the bed and said, “Suresh, we owe Nirmala an explanation. Please let’s be civil and confront this situation with honesty,” she pleaded.

“Well, there’s nothing to explain, isn’t it obvious to her, that her husband is with another woman?” he replied with the same irritation.

Nirmala remained seated, “I’m not going anywhere, until you explain what is happening her,” said Nirmala with assertiveness. Suresh was surprised to note how calm his wife appeared at his act of betrayal. Suresh looked at his wife and was perplexed as to how a person can remain so calm under the current situation. “I love you, Nirmala, but I’m attracted to Priti as well... I don’t know what to do!”

“Thank you, Suresh, I’m glad you had the courage to be honest. In my world, there is no room for two women and a man!” She rose from her chair, looked at Priti and Suresh and declared, “Good luck to you both, you, Suresh will hear from my Lawyers.” She walked up to the door, opened it and walked out.

While Suresh and Priti felt like a tornado had just swept every ounce of their self-worth and integrity. Nirmala didn’t look back and walked towards the lift, leaving the thoroughly shocked lovers to resolve their affairs. She was determined what course of action she would take to bring some sense in the midst of all this chaos!

Shanta in the meantime was apprehensive about how Nimi would be facing the situation of her husband’s betrayal. She had known Nirmala for many years and many of their friends nicknamed her “The Iron Lady.” She had an uncanny way of resolving serious matters without becoming too entrapped with emotion and ‘drama’. She trusted Nirmala to act sensibly in the face of trauma. She had a rare ability to act rationally under stress and turbulence!

Just at that precise moment, she heard a knock on the door. She rushed to let Nirmala into her room. Shanta looked at her for any sign of emotional reaction, but found none. She remained calm, “What happened?” Shanta queried, “Nothing” responded Nirmala with dignity. She sat down, looked at Shanta and said, “Don’t ask me anything, I need rest, you don’t mind if I retire to bed, would you?”

Shanta was extremely worried, and wondered if her honesty with her friend had destroyed her marriage. Tears welled in her eyes but Nirmala was preoccupied with her own emotions. She began to undress, get into her nightdress and settled down to sleep, as the taxi driver would arrive to pick her up at 7am.

Nirmala slept well, felt rested, she needed her sanity, her self-preservation and above all, her composure to deal with matters of the future. Shanta was asleep, as Nirmala went about her morning routine without disturbing her friend. She ordered room service, which consisted of toast and a pot of coffee. She opened the door and waited for her breakfast to be brought to the room. A young man arrived with a tray, she received it, tipped him and closed the door. She sat down to have her breakfast.

Shanta woke up and was surprised to see Nimi’s serene disposition. She finished her breakfast and was waiting for the taxi to arrive. “Good morning, Nimi, did you sleep well?”

“Yes, I did,” Nirmala, responded, “Thank you for everything,”

“Nimi, are you going to be alright?” asked Shanta,

“Don’t worry sweetie, I’m going to be just fine. God will pilot my life. I need to be composed, I’m hurting deeply, but

decisions have to be made. Shall let you know, don't worry about me, I promise I'll be fine."

The telephone rang, and Nirmala answered the phone. "Good morning Madam, your taxi is here," said the receptionist.

"All right Shanta, I better go down, she picked up her bag, kissed Shanta and left the room. Before closing the door Nirmala said, "Thank you for everything" and gently closed the door behind her.

The driver was waiting at the reception. He walked towards Nirmala with a cheery "Good morning, Madam," and took the bag from her hands and walked towards the waiting taxi. As Nirmala walked towards the taxi, she quickly looked at the hotel car park to see if Suresh's car was still there. It was not there, so she presumed that they had left before her. She got into the back seat and closed the door. The taxi left for Nadi.

Nirmala took out her rosary and began her recitation, as was her practice every morning. Her meditation always brought her inner peace. She reached home at 9:30am, the children were having their breakfast, when they saw their mother. They both came rushing to her "Mummy! Mummy! Are you taking us to the park later?"

"Yes, sweetheart, let Mummy have some rest first." The children went back to finish their breakfast. She entered her bedroom to leave her bag and have a little rest. After an hour's rest, she got out of bed to prepare lunch for the family. She asked Mary to take the children to the park, and she thanked her for looking after them. Mary smiled, "No problem at all Madam, they were very well behaved."

Nirmala began preparing lunch, she decided to cook dhal, vegetables and roti. Just as she was cooking, her neighbour and close friend Prema Pillai walked into the kitchen with a plate of noodles for the children. “Thank you, Prema, for sending your children to sleep over at my place.”

“No problem at all, they had a ball. Mary is an angel, she looked after them and kept them away from harm’s way.” She gave the dish of chicken noodles to Nirmala saying, “I bought some food for the kids.”

“Oh! Thanks, Prema, very kind of you.”

“Why don’t you join me for lunch?” asked Nirmala. “Thanks Nirmala, but I’m taking my children to my sister’s house after lunch. The lunch is all organised at home, thanks anyway.”

Prema wanted to know how things panned out at the Lawyer’s. Nirmala told her that everything went well, Suresh stayed back to sign some papers, while she had to leave early as she left the children with Mary. Prema said, “Have a great day Nirmala, I’d better go now as I don’t want to keep my sister waiting. Bye for now”

Nirmala completed her lunch preparation, and set the table for Mary and the children. She decided to lie down and catch up with some more rest while the children were away at the park with Mary. As she lay on the bed, she was concerned about the future. She wanted to maintain her dignity, and handle the issue with total honesty and patience. She cried openly behind closed doors. She loved Suresh, and she knew he loved her and the children. So why did he stray? Why did he betray her love and trust?

As painful as it may be, she must free him if he wants to live with Priti. What can be gained by living as a couple for appearance's sake? Life without love, in marriage is meaningless. Although separation will break her heart, she was determined to protect her children from pain and heartache. They were only seven and five years old. She prayed for God's guidance to resolve the problem amicably. She loved her husband unconditionally, but knew that she must let him go if that is what he wanted. She felt excruciating pain and sorrow that things have come to this end.

However, she had confidence in her ability, both as a woman and a professional to support her family. She believed that she has always been an empowered woman of great resourcefulness!

She woke up with the excited cries of her children, "Daddy! Daddy! Did you buy the 'puppy' you promised?" asked her son. Then she heard the yelping of the little puppy. She remained in bed, just then her children rushed into the bedroom with an excited Pomeranian puppy in tow. "Mummy, Mummy, wake up, Daddy is home. Look he bought us a puppy, just like he promised!"

She sat up and was happy for the children. They have been pestering their Daddy to get them a puppy for a long time. She gave the puppy a cuddle. "Mummy! Mummy! Can we call him 'Cuddles'?"

Nirmala smiled and said, "Ask Daddy first, before you name the puppy." She got out of bed and asked the children to go and wash their hands before lunch. "We had lunch at the park Mum. Mary bought a 'roti parcel' and lemonade for us too. "Okay then, don't spoil the puppy."

The children ran away to play with the puppy. She tidied up the bed, and stepped out of the bedroom and headed towards the kitchen. Just then, Suresh stepped in to the kitchen. They looked at each other, Suresh walked towards her and put his arms around her and held her for a few minutes. She returned his embrace, no words were exchanged, and she knew her husband had returned to her and their children. She wasn't ready to spoil this moment by asking questions about the weekend.

Suresh went to wash up, he looked at her and asked, "What's for lunch?" She didn't answer, but got busy serving lunch for both of them. They sat down to have lunch, while the children were playing with Cuddles in the front yard.

After lunch, Nirmala cleared the table and Suresh started washing the dishes, while she stood beside him drying and putting them away. She made a cup of coffee for herself and asked if Suresh wanted one too. He wasn't keen, so she sat down at the dining table and enjoyed her coffee.

Suresh went into the bedroom to change his clothes and walked into the ensuite to freshen up. Nirmala entered the bedroom with some apprehension and concern about what Suresh had to tell her. But she felt deep within her, that he had come home to her and his children. Whatever the result, Nirmala decided that she would not allow her love for her husband to blind her from taking the right course of action. She was determined to show her husband that she was 'no man's fool', and that their marriage will only survive on the premise of absolute honesty, integrity, love and trust.

Nirmala vowed that Suresh must understand that his actions were totally unacceptable by her moral standards. She was prepared for this situation. She loved him, but is he worthy of

her love? Nirmala had to show that she was brought up to be honest and forth right. Now is the time to show Suresh that his honesty and loyalty will be tested without any mercy. It is a ‘make it or break it’ moment between the two of them.

She sat down on the bed and waited for Suresh to come out of the bathroom. He had to face the consequences of his actions! Suresh saw Nirmala seated on their bed. He sat beside her and took her hands in his, and she tried to take her hand from his gentle clasp. But Suresh held her hand firmly.

He began, “There is no excuse for what I did to you. In a moment of temptation, I fell an easy prey to lust and an immoral liaison with Priti. I gave in to adultery. When I saw you in Room 82, I was arrested by your courage and resolve to confront the situation. Though I was stunned and dismayed by your courageous stance, your strength of character simply bowled me over. I don’t think many women would have the courage to stand up for their principles, and you did. Both Priti and I came to the realisation that our actions were wrong. We became conscious of our demeaning acts of indecency. I know that I am not worthy of you. But your calm disposition and dignity, made me realise that my behaviour was truly unbecoming of a husband and father. Priti expresses her remorse and sincerely apologises for almost destroying our family life. She begs your forgiveness for breaking the bond of friendship, faith and sincerity. Nirmala, I want you and my children to always be an integral part of my life. Nimu, our attraction led to our illicit affair, we entered into the affair to fulfil our lust... we meant no harm to anyone. I suppose we thought after a couple of our lustful weekends, we would just say goodbye. I know it sounds ridiculous, but this is what truly happened. I never ever meant to leave you for Priti. Nimu, this is the truth. I don’t expect you to believe, or even forgive me. Whatever course of action you intend to take, I’ll

respect it. I am totally unworthy of your love, loyalty and devotion to me for over two decades. I am so sorry for hurting you.” Suresh looked at his wife with genuine remorse.

Nirmala listened to every word, sentiment and detail of his confession. She knew in her heart that he had spoken the truth about the affair with Priti. She was surprised that she felt no anger or remorse. She sincerely believed that anger destroys the person who bears it, it never destroys the person it is intended for.

Suddenly she remembered her mother’s wise words. Her mother’s voice echoed in her ears, “Children, always remember that it is easy to break a marriage, but if there is deep-seated love between the husband and wife, it is worth fighting for. It is worth saving this sacred bond.” Her Suresh had returned to her and the children, why should this beautiful home be shattered and destroyed by pure jealousy and insecurity?

She embraced Suresh tightly, “Don’t betray your family, ever again.” She said firmly, “We must remain as a unit, through good and difficult times.... Would you promise me this?” Suresh held her close and said, “I promise never to stray again. “This I promise with honesty and sincerity.”

“Please darling, forgive me for hurting you.” She realised there was peace and joy in their togetherness. Their love was sealed at that instant, they both understood this and thanked God for his blessings. Suresh kissed her passionately, to seal their love and unity. She was relieved that their love had survived the tornado, which almost destroyed their home.

Nirmala snapped out of her reverie with the sound of the doorbell. She walked towards the main door. She opened the front door, there stood her beloved Suresh.

“Surprise Sweetie! My boss gave me an early break!” She was delighted to see him. She held him and realised that they have proven, after almost four and a half decades that love had withstood the test of time. Their life together, had synchronised beautifully with their commitment to honour the promise that they had made on that significant day, which almost ripped their lives apart. “Happy Anniversary, my beloved, I’m glad you are home early.” There is no doubt in their minds that they will be one harmonious unit in their marriage until the end of their lives!

This story is set in the Fiji Islands in the mid 1960’s.

Glossary

- Suva- Capital of Fiji
- Nandi- A township in Viti Levu
- Roti- A type of flat bread
- Dhal- Lentil Soup



6

Reunion

She entered the house, which was empty. Dad obviously was late from work and from the noise, which came from the kitchen; she understood that her mother was busy cooking the evening meal. She quietly went to her room and sat on the bed. She decided that she must tell her side of the story today, and make her parents understand where she was coming from. She must get her mother's attention, with hope in her heart; she stepped out of her room and slowly walked towards the kitchen.

Her mum was busy preparing dinner, a well-chilled 'Fiji Gold' beer bottle was beside her. She loved her beer and it was an evening ritual. While preparing dinner Mum would be sipping her favourite beer, she would enjoy a couple bottles, she claimed it placed her in a pleasant mood. Maria, thought she would be lucky to get her Mum's attention today.

She cleared her throat to attract her Mum's attention. "Mum... I guess, you heard." Before she could complete her sentence, her Mum snarled, "Yes, my dear, the whole of Levuka, I presume knows by now!"

"But Mum, there is no truth in...." Her mother interrupted abruptly, "Look, my girl, I have no time to discuss this matter now. Dad will be here at seven this evening to take me to a

party at the Ovalau Club. We will talk about it tomorrow.” She snapped.

“Ma, I want you to spare me some time to listen to my side of the story, please.” She begged, but her mother did not resent, instead in a high-pitched voice she yelled at me. “Honestly Maria, you have brought humiliation and shame upon your family and yet you have the audacity to stand here to give me your side of the story?” Interrupted by the sound of the telephone ringing, she walked away from the kitchen to answer the phone in the living room.

Maria looked at her mother in sheer disbelief! How could she do this to her? How could she show such indifference to her child’s plea to be heard? “Unbelievable,” she thought sadly.

She looked at the glass of beer and felt a surge of anger rise... yes, she thought in frustration, she had a great deal of time for bowling, snooker and parties, but no time to listen or comfort her heart-broken daughter. “Oh! I hate her!” she howled like a wounded animal. In a fit of rage, she threw her glass of beer on the wall; it shattered into a million pieces. She rushed out of the kitchen crying bitterly. She entered her room and collapsed on her bed and cried.

Her mother’s voice could be heard from the living room. “Yes, the chicken chop suey is almost done, David. Tell Richard, I’ll take a taxi to the club if he can’t make it by seven.”

“Yes,” thought Maria bitterly, “Go, mother dear and enjoy yourself, but on your return, your only child would have left home for good!” she lay there wondering if her parents would even notice her absence.

She stayed in her room while her mother was getting ready to go to the party at seven. She wondered whether her mother would care to come to her room before she left for the Ovalau Club. She was disappointed, and heard the taxi driver knock on the front door. Her mother called out “John, could you help me carry the food to the car, please.”

“Sure, Mrs Paul,” he answered as he entered the front door to assist mother. She waited until they left, got off the bed and looked around. “Well,” she sighed with sorrow and said to herself “this is goodbye.” She dragged a small red suitcase from under the bed. It was covered in dust; she took a rag, which was hanging on a hook just near the study table. She dusted the suitcase and began to pack just a few dresses and other things, which were urgently needed for her departure. She closed the suitcase, sat on it and wondered if her parents would look for her when they realised that she has ran away from home.

She rushed into her bathroom to have her shower change into her black slacks, blue t-shirt and she also put a warm jumper on. She came out of the bathroom and sat at the dressing table to get ready. She looked at herself in the mirror and seriously wondered what would happen to her once she departed from home. She had no definite plan, she was painfully aware that she was fleeing from home solely to punish her uncaring parents.

“Serves them right! Let them suffer! Oh, how I hate them!” she cried hatefully. She came out of her room to check if her dad had returned, so she crept silently into the kitchen. She saw her dinner set out and the food cover placed over the plate. “Yes, dear Mum, she never forgets to provide...” she looked away, “Why couldn’t she cancel that wretched party, aren’t I an important part of her life?” Tears filled her eyes;

she clutched her chest as though this desertion hurt her both physically and emotionally.

With tears streaming down her face she returned to her room for the last time. She grabbed her red suitcase and walked out of her room heading towards the front door. She shut the door behind her, and said, "This is goodbye." She dragged her suitcase down the "Baba Hill" with a heavy heart. She was scared but was determined that her parents must suffer for neglecting her, and for not paying attention to any of her needs.

After descending the steps of the Baba Hill, she approached the Levuka Public School premises and walked towards her close friend Jenny's house. Nerves got the better of her, she wondered if Jenny's mother would let her spend the night with them. She knew that this proposition may not work for her, she felt troubled and scared, sadly she wondered, if she has done the right thing by leaving the security of her home. In her house, she hadn't even thought of a positive plan as to where she was heading or what she would do to support herself... she was only sixteen years old.... A cold shudder ran down her spine!

"Oh my god," she uttered in desperation "What have I done?" Just as she was contemplating her next move, she heard a familiar voice call out to her, "Maria, where to? Suitcase and all?".....teased her friend, Emily. Most of her friends knew that she felt unloved and uncared for at home. Emily wondered if her parents found out about the problem Maria faced at school. Maria, did not stop to talk to Emily and hurried along towards Jenny's house. Emily wondered why Maria, who is normally very friendly, walked away without greeting her. "See you later," called out Emily, who felt snubbed by Maria's indifference!

Half way to Jenny's house, Maria changed her mind. She decided not to trouble her friend Jenny, and turned left into the main road and kept walking towards Beach Street. She stopped at Wing Lee's Shop for a moment. She was hungry; she bought a coconut cream bun and a bottle of milk chocolate. She placed it in her handbag. The proprietor of Wing Lee, who knew her parents well, asked, "Where do you think you are going young lady, with a suitcase and all at this time of night?" Maria paid for the bun and her drink and quickly walked away without saying a word to 'Uncle Lee,' Lee looked suspiciously at Maria and wondered if he should call her father.

Maria quickly darted out of the shop and hurriedly walked towards the Post Office. "I can take shelter for the night at these premises and in the morning I will take the boat out of Levuka for good." She thought bravely. She thought she would take shelter with her cousin Rose in Suva. The town looked eerily deserted; Levuka usually looks like a "ghost town" after nine. But today, it looked dusky and a frightening eeriness! One or two people were walking along the road and a few people seated by the sea walk, fishing. The wind was nippy and miserably cold. She wondered if it was the icy breeze that made her shudder or her decision to run away from home, which made her tremble!

She approached the old M.H. Building and turned to the left to get to the wharf region. The planks at the post office creaked as she walked on them. She sat at the far end of the building. The sky was grey and oppressive, it matched her mood. She left her suitcase by the side of the customs office. The Levuka wharf looked cold, uninviting and deserted. Deserted save for a boat named "Rosina" and at the far end of the wharf she sighted an IKA Corporation boat. She felt alone,

and the cold breeze brushed her sorrow face. She sat down facing the lighthouse. The monotonous sound of the machinery from the Fiji Can and the Pafco Fishing Company made her aware of the boring and uninspiring life some people led in the town.

Chin in hand, she wrestled with the thought- 'could she face life alone? She was a mere 'kid' and yet in frustration and pain she left her home. She realised at this point in time, that her departure was a foolish decision. Shivering with fear and anxiety she wondered if she should return home, and apologise for her stupidity. She was just angry with her mother for ignoring her plea to listen to her side of the events. Anger once again soared with her and in the height of frustration she cried, "No way, will I go back to them. Let them suffer!"

She vividly recalled the events of the immediate past. The town's hunger for gossip was ignited by the scandal started by a spiteful schoolmate. Before she had a chance to defend herself against the devastating lies, she had lost her so-called friends, but worse than that, her family had rejected her. This struck hard and wounded deep. She couldn't understand her parents at all. How could they believe in the town's gossip without giving her an opportunity to explain her side of the story? They abandoned her when she needed them most. She was at first stunned, then uncontrollably enraged that they had listened to, let alone believed in the lies spun by vicious people.

Most of her school friends faced similar problems; their parents were never available when they needed to communicate with them. Like her folks they were either drinking with some friends at the club or else playing pool. Left on their own, the teenagers assembled at some friend's

home and experienced a life of freedom and the ‘privileges’ of the adult world! This is how she was first introduced to liquor. It started as fun but like some of her friends, she too had a problem as time went on. But did their parents have time to ponder between their sips of gin and tonic, beer, rum or whiskey? She was saddened and bitter about how life had taken this disastrous end? When the children got into trouble the parents got uptight and indignant, like her mother when she approached her earlier this evening.

Old memories flooded her mind...memories of her childhood and of her family. She clearly remembered how her “maid” a “house girl” as they were commonly known as, attended to her every need. Her parents were the “socialites” of the small Levuka Community. Frequently, they attended some social event like a wine and cheese, birthday, or club party. On the rare occasion they were home, they always invited some friends over to entertain them. So she was always left alone with the maid Emma. Emma was attentive, loving and caring. She made her feel loved and secure; she was indeed like her surrogate Mum, her refuge and her guardian. These thoughts made her depressed. The reason for her departure from home was merely to make her parents realise how wrong they were to be totally absorbed by being “high and mighty socialite” in this wretched community.

The chilly ocean breeze made her shudder with cold. She folded her arms tightly around her, to keep her warm against the cold and the wretched world. It struck her at the very instant that all that she wanted is her parent’s love and protection. She was craving for their love but she has never ever felt she had that precious connection with them. She slowly got up and headed for the Ports Authority Building. To her utter amazement, she saw at distance her parents standing together bracing the blasting chilly wind. Indignantly she

turned away from them. Her mother walked towards her and called out “Maria, my baby, come to Mum!” A lump caught in her throat she fought to suppress her excitement at the thought that her parents had actually cared to look for her. “Let them suffer, I’ll not return to them,” she thought hatefully. “I have suffered, it is their turn now!” she uttered bitterly to herself.

“Don’t bother Ma, go and enjoy yourself at the party!” she screamed at her and began to run in the opposite direction.

“Maria, come back!” called her daddy. “We want you home!” He sounded distraught and desperate. Maria was angry and furious with her parents. She ran towards the far end of the wharf with tears streaming down her face. She screamed at her parents, “I’m going to kill myself, I’ll throw myself in the sea, you will be better off without me!” she shouted as she continued to run away from them. She was determined to jump into the sea to end her miserable life.

She heard footsteps right behind, she was blinded by tears, she couldn’t see her way ahead of her, but she continued to run towards the end of the wharf. Suddenly she felt strong arms encircle her and hold her firmly. “Where do you think you are going to young lady?” asked a Fijian man. She looked up and saw a tall, dark, hefty Fijian man looking down at her. She was trembling all over and crying “Leave me, please, let me die.” Suddenly she felt weak, exhausted and suddenly fainted. A thick curtain of dark cloud engulfed her, floating aimlessly in the sky!

She tried to open her lids but they felt heavy. She heard a soft sobbing sound by her bedside. She tried once again to open her eyes. She saw the matronly figure of her mother sitting at the other end of the bed weeping. She suddenly realised that

she was in her bedroom, she was home again! At first she was happy that she had made her mother suffer. Then she felt selfish, ungrateful and mean. She thought maybe her parents had realised that they were solely responsible for the way they had treated their only daughter. She tried to lift herself up, and her mother came to assist her in doing so.

“Maria, my child, will you forgive us? My baby, how you must have suffered thinking that we didn’t love you,” she cried! She placed her arms around Maria and began to weep with deep remorse.

“Hush Ma, don’t cry. I’m so sorry for running away. I felt as if there was no room for me in this house, where there was no love for me.”

“Oh my darling child, how could you ever think like that, you are our flesh and blood, our precious child,” in saying this she held her daughter close to her and wept. For the first time openly and sincerely. Maria put her arms around her mother lovingly, there in that embrace, she felt warmth and love. Both mother and daughter felt the birth of a new union.

“Ma, I didn’t take the...” said Maria. Her mother placed her hand on her mouth and whispered, “Hush, my child, no more of the past, sad incident. Let the past be buried forever, we learn from our mistakes. Let’s move forward with positive and loving thoughts to make this home a loving and happy home, my darling child.”

Dad looked at the mother and daughter with a tear stained face. It was obvious that he had remained silent, weeping heart-brokenly for the mistakes done in the past. He rose for a group hug and said, “My dearest child, thank you for showing

us that we had neglected you, our home life...” he was choking with emotion and shaking with deep regret.

Maria finally understood, that her parents had done some soul searching and reached the follies of their past. She was ashamed that she too had hurt them in her own selfish manner. She hugged her father and said, “Oh Dad, let us put our yesterdays behind us and look ahead for a better tomorrow.”

The warmth and the affectionate embrace of her parents assured her that all her tomorrows would be better than the yesterdays. She was so relieved to be home at last!

Footnote:

- *Levuka is the principal town on the Island of Ovalau in Fiji. It was founded by traders and settlers in 1830. This small town became the first capital of Fiji and has a prestigious high school known as the Levuka Public School where the author served as a teacher in 1970s.*



**Sometimes tears express
feelings better than words.**

Poems

Poetry is when an emotion has
found its thought and the thought
has found words. Robert Frost.



A Rare Gem

She has enormous fortitude
Charm and resilience!
That's what caught my attention.
She never fails to say "Hello"
And she exuberates a happy disposition.

She opens the door to her heart
And welcomes you
She lets you in with such gusto
And shares her life
Like an open book, this is so rare!

So many scars she has borne
Each tells a tale of woe!
But she bears no grudge
No remorse against life's
Trust and turns, each episode
Has given her a sharpened
Vision, to live, learn and let go!

Nature is her sanctuary and refuge.
In pain and in sorrow
She turns to nature for healing
She prunes, plants and plans
A garden so colourful and gay
Amazing results she enjoys!

"Live I must," she declares
"What can be gained
By anger, vengeance and contrition?"
SHE has vision of such magnanimity!
She is a rare gem!

Human Carnage

Spasm of shock waves
Sends immeasurable sorrow
Disbelief and despair
For innocent lives lost!
“Not again!” Screams
A voice within
“Stop this human carnage!

Twisted ideologies and fanaticism
Against the “INFIDELS”
Triggers unimaginable anguish.
Simmering, surging hatred
For those who are different
Sends cold shivers down my spine!

Trained gullible youths
Are directed to commit
Atrocious acts of carnage
On humanity without any mercy
In the name of “Almighty Allah!”

How many more lives
Must be sacrificed for “Allah!”
Before such evil consumed
Fanatics are stopped?

So many crusaders
Are sacrificed at such
A tender age in their blind
Belief that heavens await them!
OH LORD STOP THIS HUMAN CARNAGE!

Refugees Plight

Refugees have a dilemma
The dreams they carry
In their hearts....
Most often are not easy
To fulfil, and they strive
Relentlessly to pursue
The impossible, on dilapidated boats
Manoeuvred by conniving crooks.

Bodies packed like sardines
In cramped, congested and crippling
Environments. Adults and children
Squat numbed by fear
Of the unknown....but craving,
Clinging, clasping with hope
To land in a country
That would welcome them!

They sail for days in blazing sun
And scorching heat, hoping and praying
For a safe destination,
But ferocious waves impose
Their mighty power threatening
To capsize their boat
In their treacherous path!
Dazed and desperate they cry for help!

Below the demonic, dark sky
Fear dominates and threatens
The helpless destitute.
The rock precariously from side to side
Hoping for reprieve

From this merciless journey
They send their desperate prayers to the God Almighty for
safety!

How many lives have been sacrificed?
How many shattered dreams?
How many indignities and atrocities
Must they endure.
For their hopes and dreams
To attain peace and security
In a land of hope and glory?



Happiness

The love we share
Is so wondrous
Your loving, caring devotion
To me is awe-inspiring and admirable!

Sometimes...

I lie awake pondering
What have I done
To deserve such love
Of undeniable purity?

Sadly...

There was a time when
My life was meaningless
Without an anchor
I drifted without a purpose

Suddenly...

There you were, my guardian angel
My guiding light and hope!
You have shown me happiness
Comes spontaneously to
Those who accept love unconditionally!

Waves

Glistening glorious waves race
In mountainous movements
To create intricate patterns
On the creased golden sands
Rocking and rolling they ebb away
Preparing for another onslaught!
Gloriously...

The early morning sunrise
To shed its glorious rays
On the frothing waves
Like crushed diamantes
Lightening the emerald ocean
With its sparkles and its spray!

Relentlessly...
Fierce waves in playful mount
Ride yet again on its path
Once again in gleeful play
To tease the sandy shore
In harmless tranny!

Wondrously...
The windswept and deeply creased
Shore lay mute and dazed
Just for an instant
And quickly prepared
Its bosom for yet another
Another playful onslaught!

Sky-Piety

Clouds tiptoed in gaiety
In wind swept sky
A silhouette of angels
Dance graceful forming patterns
To adorn and decorate
The crystal blue sky

Decked in satin and ceremonial
Attire they synchronised
To the temp of celestial
Music oh! So divine
They swirled, swirled
On the azure sky

Entranced by this display
Of ballet so elegant
I watched the dancers
Majestically tiptoe away
From the heavenly sky!
I bowed my head in appreciation
To witness nature's supremacy

Jennifer

I had concern you know
When you were little
Engulfed in the world of darkness,
Confusion and chaos!

You were withdrawn, lonely and quiet!
And yet I observed
You had wisdom beyond
Your tender age!

You created an invisible fence
To protect yourself
You knew how to keep away from pain and conflict!

They said you were slow
In your development
And in your learning skills
Oh! What a cruel world, we live in!

You're love of gardening
Brings you such immense joy!
Planting, weeding and watering,
Apparently excites and invigorates you

Remember, your sweet sonorous voice
Is a special gift
Your singing enthralled your fans
You bedazzle everyone
With your melodious voice!

Now it is apparent to all
That you are a survivor

A person of special ability
To have overcome your childhood traumas!

Jennifer, you are going to be fine
Be strong, independent and free
Create your own mould
And be the person, you really desire to be!



Life is a Gift

The melody of love has ceased
She gasps with deep sigh
Sorrow cascades like torrent tide
Crushing her inner being!
Mercilessly...
She stood alone
Bereft of love!

She lifts her eyes skyward
Invoking Divine Mercy
To rekindle her life
With peace and harmony
Possibly...
The power to heal
And live without anger and remorse!

A mysterious voice calls out
Why weep when you can overcome
The past with sheer determination?
Live with strength and courage
Remember...
To live to the full
You must master the will, to be free!

Realisation

Trapped by memories of past
She stays a shadowy figure
Lost, lonely and lingering
Looking for answers for wasted life!

“Change” cries an inner, tormented voice
Let the past be buried
Change happens when you are prepared
To walk away from the tentacles that grip
And squeeze every ounce of life!

Do not be affected by judgment
Of others! Live boldly
Without self judgement and guilt
Your life is yours to live
Why weep over mindless wagging of tongue?

“Guilt” is a cantankerous tool
It has the power to gnaw
Your inner being and rip you into shreds!
More beyond self-criticism and doubt
Leave behind self-loathing and guilt!

“Freedom” comes from inner resolve
The power within is the tool of change
More away from self-destructive thoughts
Instead reach out for the dreams
Still to be explored and won!

“Live” a positive and fearless life
Life is yours to cherish
Allow the power of ingenuity
Mould you into the person you really want to be!

I dreamt of you, Mum



Mrs Pakkiam Naidu (1922-1982)

In my dream, you appeared
So serene and radiant
You wore a green sari
Looking as beautiful as ever!
All I wanted to do was
Embrace and kiss you
As I used to, when I was a kid

But you stepped away from me
You looked sad and distant
I cried, "Mum I love you

Didn't you come to say goodbye?"
Suddenly she hugged me
Her tears wrenched my heart!

I wept heart-brokenly
"Destiny is cruel, Mum
We are but mere puppets
In its grip! It took me
Away from you! But you must
Know how much I love you!"
She stepped forward and hugged me!

A bright glow of light circled
A force beyond recognition,
It gently freed Mum from me
As she was drawn away
I heard her say: "I'll always love you"



Never to be forgotten

Alone...
She struggled
To cope
With reality!

Death...
Too painful to bear
Haunted and consumed
Her entire being!

Reality...
The inevitable truth
Didn't register
Waves of excruciating pain persisted!

Finally...
She cried helplessly
"Darling you have left me
Without even saying goodbye
To a world beyond my reach!"
"Rest in peace, my love,
You will always be with me
Until the day of our reunion."

Reflection

Know your heritage, culture and identity!
Exclaimed my grandfather
In youthful arrogance and temerity
I trotted out showing irreverence
To one who was held in high esteem!

Life has an amazing way of revealing
The follies of youth!
In past life I rode high
On laurels and accolades
Did I know then that success is illusory!

Reflection from the mirror showed
A face furrowed by life's experiences!
I sighed with genuine remorse
For ignoring the wisdom of my elders
To pursue the path of spiritual awakening.

Today I gaze up at the starry sky
Looking for a vision of my grandfather
Seeking forgiveness for acts of ignorance,
Arrogance and stupidity!
Losing one's cultural identity
Is a spiritual death
There is no resurrection!

Love Divine

When you are away
She counts the days
And hours for your return
To tell her
How much you had
Missed her!

Life isn't the same
For her without you
Her life is denied
Of that special glow
That tinkles and shines
When you are beside her now!

She awaits your return
To tell you how much
She has missed you, too!
Your presence, your loving
Tender assurances and generosity
You are her universe!

Your love has given
Her a rare insight
Into the true meaning of life
You're indeed
Her gift of life and hope
Which she once thought
Was indeed impossible!

A Setting Star

This night, this breeze
This softly flowing fragrance
Reminds me of your love
Why does life suddenly
Take meaning, have warmth
A feeling akin to wonder?

Tomorrow is not promised
What do we lose by giving
A little warmth? A little love
To make life meaningful
And inherently refreshing

What does one lose by giving?
A little warmth,
A little kindness,
A little generosity,
A little consideration?

Life is wasted, when not shared

Natures Magic

Wind swept nights
Blur neon lights
Visions from past, smudge
And scatter thoughts
With monotonous trudge.
An inner voice screams
To silence nasty dreams!

Oh! Earth is alive and well
Why let aching heart swell
With tales of untold miseries?
Yesterdays have moved on
Why cloak yourself in memories
That choke, inner peace?
Lighten up, let the past go!

Remember: tomorrow has promise
Of new and exciting events
Forge ahead and explore
The prospects of joyful existence
Nature has a miraculous
Power to heal and reveal
From lessons learnt and wisdom gained!

Let nature's hypnotic magic
Pilot you to a wondrous
New beginning, a promise
Of everlasting joy and peace
Surrender yourself to nature's power
To heal and strengthen you!

Memories

Memories are priceless
Treasures to behold
Some are vivid and powerful
While others are painful or vague
What would life be
Without memories' amazing display.

Memories are brilliant tools
They warm your heart with joy
Incidences from the past
Merrily dance before your eyes
Tinged with colourful images
Reminding you of joyous yesterdays!

Sometimes memories are stored away
Often forgotten for fear
Of rekindling episodes that stir
Inner turmoil and despondency
Nevertheless, memories are important
To live an informed life!

Whatever the recollections may be
Memories are imperative
They guide you along life's path!
So treasure them as priceless ornaments
Which decorate your life with wisdom
To pilot your life with sense and sensibility!

Virtues To Behold

I sometimes wonder
About those who boast
Pompously about their wealth
And status in society.

The truth is...
No one truly cares
About wealth amassed by others!
Does wealth define
Character and credibility?

Frankly...
What comes from meaningless
Existence and trivial pursuits?
Cultivate instead, virtues
Of magnanimity and brotherhood.

Never forget...
The spirit of generosity,
Human kindness and good will
Are indeed the wealth
We must pursue to inherit
To live a worthy life!

A Prayer For Rain

Drifting grey clouds
Drape the dark skies
Once again, playfully promising
A heavy downpour
Arid earth stirs excitedly
For the onslaught
Of rain and drought relief!

“Alas! Not again!”
Mourns Earth with outrage
As thunder clouds drift
Steadily, showing patches
Of blue skies adorned
With rays of golden glow
Thereby dampening all hopes of rain!

“Why such fury?”
Bemoans Mother Earth
Creatures here below
Pray for rain and relief
To heal the parched land
Of its bareness and aridity
Oh! Lord, send us rain!

Signs of promise
Come and vanish
As man continues to pray
For the precious downpour
To redeem Earth of its adversity!

Life's mysteries

I sit completely immersed
One with nature, enchanted,
And hypnotised by its mysteries!
Ever so bewitching and inextricable.

Life can be exciting and ravishing
If we allow nature's transcendental
Charm to dance and dazzle before us
Urging us to accept life
With its ups and downs!
So lets rock on! Life is for living!

It's strange but true
Nature has the propensity
To heal the devastated land
And replenish it with fertility,
Grandeur and glory.
So why fear nature's wrath
When it has the power
To sooth and caress us
So lets live life to the full!

Glorious Dawn

The stillness of the night was gone
And I awoke to a glorious dawn
The glory lay I know not where
And yet I was inclined to stare!

I hear the resonating sound of waves
Rhythmically beat upon the caves
Sending chirping birds soaring high
Above the clear turquoise sky

Trees, plants and flowers gleefully
Salute the earth with its sprightly
Spirit spreading colours so rich and gay
Eternal fragrance fills the way

“come stay by my side”, cried dawn
inviting me to a splendid morn
I freed myself from hazy grope
To gallop on tides of new hope.

My senses tinkled with merriment
I rose with throbbing excitement
That this day be filled with adventure
Of monumental joy and rapture.

Friends

Friends are like precious gems
We have to carefully remove
The flawed from the genuine
It's life's experiences
That gives us the wisdom
To hold on to these friends!

Sometimes "friends" come and go
In a blink of an eye!
They are here and they are not
These are fair weather friends
They serve their needs
And leave you stranded!

Sometimes we weep for friends
We have turned aside
By a hasty ward
Or a show of pride
And ruthless arrogance
Ignorance and prejudice!

Often we get misty eyed
When we remember friends
Who have long departed
Their memories never fade
We treasure the shared
Experiences forever in our hearts!

Friends who stand with us
Through the test of time
During life's rocky path
Are our valuable possessions
They are the finest gifts
To be forever cherished!

A Smile

What does a smile cost?
And yet so many are seen
Everywhere not responding to a smile
So graciously offered by individuals
Who joyously spread good will.

A smile generates concord
It is a sign of acknowledgment
Of fellow humans, responding
To a smile gives a warm feeling, which propagates cheer!

So many around us intentionally
Ignore the smile intended
For them, aren't we the human race?
What difference does it make
If the person who smiles, is black or white?

We are a melting pot of cultures
No one is superior or inferior
A smile is intended as a token
Of warmth and fellowship
Why is it so difficult to respond?

Remember no one deserves
A smile more than those individuals
Whose lives are so devoid of joy
They need the comforting smile
More than anyone else
SO SMILE!

Life Is A Scream

Sardonic smile of life
Displays torrid images
Incidents of poverty
Violence and racism
Rears its ugly head!

Disparity and oppression
Spread its wings
To scatter venomous
Hatred across the globe
Peace seems a distant dream!

A prayer for peace
Escaped from within
My tattered soul
I bowed my head in prayer.

Instantly I realised
Beyond prayers and divine intervention
Man has dexterity
To remedy the prejudices
Of mankind with generosity of spirit!

End This Insanity

Today another man
Was murdered and dumped
In the trashcan!
The living came and wept
Helplessly at such atrocity
Against unsuspecting humanity!

Eight children slaughtered
Disbelief and horror choked the nation
People remained shocked and dismayed!
The living came with grieving hearts
To lay floral tributes for the slain
The little angels lay oblivious of this crime.

Ah! Another victim
Raped, gagged and dumped
In a shallow grave!!
Media lens swirled and captured
The horrendous act against humanity
Society stood bewildered and broken

Benumbed, startled and shaken
I stood there totally devastated
A burning prayer escaped
From my bleeding heart
“Oh Lord, send us no more!
End this insanity, Oh Lord!”

Australians Unite

Anger swelled, surging
From aching hearts
To hear of such atrocity
Executed by a deranged man
Right in the heart of Sydney!
Shock, disbelief and chaos
Was the order of the day
Our land is alive and well
Why inflict our nation with such misery!

Man against man
What madness is this?
Is human life to be toyed upon
By orchestrated demonic motives?
Where has compassion and love,
Kindness and kindred spirit gone?
I weep tears of blood
For brutal acts committed
Against our beloved land!

We belong to the Human Race
We are brothers and sisters
Of this, our glorious land!
Let not divisive religious dogmas
And indoctrination, destroy unity,
Peace and prosperity!
Stop this insanity, prejudice and hatred!
Let's unite as one people, as one nation.

Parliament

In Parliament
Giants clash
Sounds explode
On issues
They claim are
Of national importance!

Vital issues lie idle
Under the carpet
Thickly cushioned
They lie buried
Under weighty
Meaningless utterances!

Ruling party and opposition
Hurl abuse and criticism
Wasting precious time
On failures of the past
While people await
Answers for questions raised
On vital issues
Of national importance!

If people have a choice
They would happily
Refrain from casting
Their votes for ineffective
And inarticulate Politicians!
One wonders if they
Are in Parliament
To line their pockets!

Oh! How tragic is it
To keep toppling
Leaders for this reason
Or that while the nation
Waits helplessly for actions
On health, education and economy!
We need you to keep
Nationhood intact, but are you?



Sense Of Belonging

Harmony and mutual co-operation
Is indeed essential for peaceful
Co-existence in our foster country!
But in the search for this new path
Don't become too flashy
And so frenzied that you roam
Around like the autumn leaves
That flutters and floats
Aimlessly and settle in
A heap of waste!

Hold steadfastly to the values
So lovingly and thoughtfully instilled
By your ancestors
Adapting to a new code
Of behaviour doesn't necessarily
Mean the abandonment of ones cultural
Identity and sense of belonging!
Be proud of who you are
And of your cultural heritage!

Adapt to your new environment
Let the tide of change
Make you a person of vision,
Flamboyance and flourish!
Let the floodgates of shared experiences
Enrich and nurture you
To become a person of tolerance
Of mutual cooperation and understanding!
However...
Should one abandon ones values
And belief-systems
In order to belong?

Stop! Think! Act!

Longevity is a thing of the past!
So many untimely deaths
Occur in our midst
At the hands of evil doers!

Daily reports of violence
Sends a cold shudder
Down our spines
When we hear of shooting and stabbings!

We weep for young life

For young lives violated
Brutalised and battered
By crazed, lawless individuals!

Human values are fast eroding
The Divine Power of God
Is utterly ignored
Such irreverence will destroy
The moral fabric of decency!

STOP, THINK AND ACT
Life is God's gift
It is not yours to destroy
Return sanity and HARMONY
Back to our precious land!

Who Is Perfect?

There are those who take pride
In speaking their mind
They highlight the flaws and merits
In a ruthless manner
Lashing out their observations on all!

Who can claim to perfection?
Aren't we mere mortals
With our flaws and limitations?
If this is the truth
Why do we expound our opinions
On others?

Before we cast the stones
At others, shouldn't we
Examine our own frailties?
Look for strength in others
And strive to change your weaknesses
Into strengths!

Be tactful even in praise
For there are folks
Out there who wish to go unnoticed.
Their joy springs
From selfless service to mankind!

Life would be so very pleasant
If critics and do-gooders
Refrain from subjecting others
With their high and mighty verdicts!

To Dr Alexander Adel

“Giving” with sincerity of purpose
Whilst on “duty” is nothing spectacular!
“Selfless” giving is indeed a rarity!
How many can claim to this
Spirit of benevolence?

In bountiful, burst of bubbly
Enthusiasm, they serve others
Not expecting acknowledgement or praise!
You, Dr Adel, are one of these people
In your chosen profession.

Your sincere effort to comfort
And heal your patients is great.
You take time and vigour
To explain the procedures
You intent to take,
This is comforting indeed.

You are a man of medicine
Pouring your expertise
In your work to bring relief,
Solace and hope to those
Who place their trust in you!

Your devotion and dedication
Is indeed praise worthy
Your humility and selflessness
Is your special quality, which echoes;
“Service to man is service to God!”

Dr Adel, the moment I met you
I knew instantaneously that you
Are blessed to serve others
With sincerity of purpose,
Goodwill and humility!
Thank you Dr Adel.



TRIBUTES

To Anil Prasad Maharaj



(1955-2013)

You were an altruistic person:
Charismatic, compassionate and benevolent!
You will always be remembered
And held in high esteem
For the numerous acts of selflessness!

You were a family centred person
You gave unconditional love
To all, especially to Asha,
The love of your life

Your family is blessed
To have had you in their lives.

You have left us bereft
Of joy, you are enormously
Missed by both family and friends!
Your memories reign in our hearts
You will never be forgotten!

This is a tribute
Dedicated to a man
Who in turn dedicated
Much more to all.
Now gone from our lives
But forever in our hearts!

A true Maharaj- a King among men!





(1948-2015}

Dr Arumaiturai Sivapalan

Your family was ‘the centre of universe’
Your love, devotion, dedication, and
Selflessness have earned
You an elevated place in their hearts.
You will never be forgotten!

As a man of science
You were an embodiment
Of absolute positivity and determination!
Your contributions to science
Have been well documented.

Siva, you have certainly left
Your footprints in the sands of time!
You had placed systems and procedures
In place, to benefit your colleagues.
To this day, they hold you in high esteem!

The recipients of your charitable
Contributions remember you
With sincere gratitude and appreciation!
They will carry a 'torch' for you
For the rest of their lives!

Your determination to face
The debilitating illness, which consumed
Your being was admirable.
You fought courageously
Without a whimper of complain.

You will be remembered
For your "thumbs up" sign
Which signified your courage,
Your resilience and your will
To remain strong in the face of adversity!

Rest in peace Dr Siva
You have carved a special place
In all our hearts.



EPILOGUE

My Conclusions after reviewing these “Feelings” of Padma Singh I had the proud privilege to review this book of “Feelings” of Padma Singh and have drawn some conclusions that I wish to express for the readers:

- Human feelings cannot be fully and adequately expressed in words only or the looks from our eyes because they are not that easy to understand. What we can do is to trust the people who are dear to us.
- Feelings are a magnificent attribute of all human beings to being a good human.
- Explaining our feelings to others is one of the hardest things to do and Padma has done it extremely well.
- Feelings are just visitors so we should let them come and go as Padma has done.
- Of course our feelings are like waves so we cannot stop them from coming but we can decide which one to surf.
- The best feeling in the world is when the person you like likes you back.
- The best feeling is also when someone appreciates everything about you that someone else took for granted.
- I am of the opinion that we should never waste our feelings on someone who doesn't value them.
- I also feel that the more we hide our feelings, the more they show and the more we deny our feelings, the more they grow.
- In my interaction with humanity I observed that all of us can be great not only due to our intellect but also our feelings.

- I do not think that we should trust people whose feelings change with time but let us trust people whose feelings remain the same even when the time changes.
- Accepting, expressing and sharing our feelings like Padma has done brings texture to our life and pulls us into our stories and poems that we are telling our readers.
- After reading these presentations I am convinced that to live well in this complex world we cannot run away from our feelings but we must learn how to integrate them into our life and let them guide us, as the protagonists of Padma have done.
- Finally I have learnt from these stories and poems of Padma that I should always tell people how I feel because as she has ably shown that opportunities are lost in the blink of an eye but our regrets can last for a lifetime.
- So my prayer for the readers is this: Dear Lord when feelings of inferiority, insecurity and self-doubt creep into our hearts, please Lord help us to see ourselves the way You do.

Dr Ram Lakhani Prasad
April 2016

About the Author

Padma Singh was born in Kuala-Lumpur, Malaysia. She was educated in Malaysia, India and New Zealand. After completing her Post-graduate degree, she returned to Malaysia. Her teaching career spans over forty-five years. She began her teaching career at the University Science Malaysia, in Penang. She later opted to Secondary School teaching. She has taught in Malaysia, New Zealand, Fiji and Australia.

In Fiji, she served as the Principal of Shri Vevakananda High School for several years. She was privileged to be elected as the President of the Fiji Principals' Association during 1993/1994. The Ministry of Education of the Fiji Government in 1993 honoured her with 'The Distinction Award' for services rendered to Education.

Padma migrated with her family in 1994. She enrolled at Melbourne University to specialise in teaching English as Second Language. After the completion of this course she commenced her career as a Tutor. She served in this capacity for nineteen years. She retired as an Education Co-ordinator in 2013.

Her first publication, 'FEELINGS' was in 1994 in Fiji. After retirement she has taken up writing as a hobby. "Feelings" (2) is her second publication. It is her intention to continue with her writing, which gives her the opportunity to express her feelings and observations about life.



Padma Singh – The Author

