



JARGON FREE

LESSONS FOR LIFE AND
LIVING VALUES

VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA

JARGON FREE (3)

LESSONS FOR LIFE AND LIVING VALUES

Vidusha Nathavitharana

A LUMINARY PUBLICATION



**PUBLISHED BY LUMINARY LEARNING SOLUTIONS
FOR FREE CIRCULATION
FIRST EDITION, 2020**

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED © VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA,

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

**EDITED BY TATUM DE SOUZA
COVER DESIGN BY ZAFRAN PACKEERALLY**

**Dedicated to the Grandparents who
are no longer here:
And the children my children are
yet to rear...**

PROLOGUE

We are the stories we know...

Who are we: really? if not for an ongoing saga of our parents, and grandparents, and countless generations before us. Not all within our families are worth emulating true: but we cannot escape the fact that we are their children... their legacy... their story... We add to it... We detract from it... We augment it... We diminish it... Either way: we are indeed a continuation... After all, the entirety of humanity is nothing if not for the stories we tell...

Listening to stories sitting on my grandfather's lap was one of my favourite things. I think I was his favourite grandchild for that very reason: I WANTED to listen to the stories he so intently told. I would rather sit in his room than play cricket with my cousins. He, even at a hundred years, would get animated: excited: roar with laughter at his own wit: and ramble on... No matter how many times he recited the same story, it would still be novel to me... I never could get enough of it... Like a rickety old jalopy his voice would crackle and splutter and spit: but then, find its youthful vigour and roar like the lion he once was...

Oh, how I miss him: and my two grandmas: and those wonderful times spent blissfully happy without a care in the world!

As I see my parents bend with age, wrinkles taking over their once youthful skin, and their youthful exuberance and vigour fade with the years gone before them, I cannot help but visualize myself in old age...

We are the stories we tell... What stories will I tell?

I am blessed: and fortunate. My most cherished heroes (then, and now, and always) have been my parents, and my grandparents: and after I got married, my parents in law. They have, in many many ways, taught me the most essential lessons in life: but above all: the values which I try to live by - not so much because I REALLY want to per se - but because I do not want to dishonour them.

CONTENT

1. Is the store GETTING WASHED AWAY - or GOTTEN WASHED AWAY?	01
2. Return the flower son: and ask for their permission first: and then, say sorry for stealing	05
3. That was yesterday isn't it? Why you talking about it today?	07
4. First and the last time Natha! - First and the last!	09
5. Mr. Snake, get out of here please... ..	12
6. Get out of the House if you don't know how to raise your son!	14
7. I want to die: let me die !	17

1.

Is the store GETTING WASHED AWAY - or GOTTEN WASHED AWAY?



My grandfather, from all accounts I have heard, had been somewhat of a 'character.' A tall, imposing and well-built man (who was wrinkled, and twinkle-eyed when I got to know him) who is often characterised as being both physically and mentally strong. The youngest son in his family, he was forced into being ordained by his father in a bid to quell his rebellious and headstrong nature. It was only when my great grandfather died (the very day in fact!) that he 'disrobed' and later got married: he was in his late thirties or early forties...

He sired 7 children: my father being his youngest son. The four elder children (2 boys and 2 girls) were the 'lucky ones' as my father often tells me. My grandfather had a thriving enterprise: selling wares from the village to the 'town' across the bridge that spanned the river that separated the Deraniyagala town and surroundings from the villages beyond. Getting across the river was only possible by crossing the bridge: and on that bridge was a storeroom my grandfather owned. ALL the wares: from tea to rubber to coconut to the spices were stored in my grandfather's store.

So, needless to say, he was a very wealthy man.

My father often tells me about the 'good times' when Grandad used to bring 'Kraft Cheese' tins (which at the time was the epitome of luxury!), being brought home and then sliced and handed over like 'edible gold'! Life was good...

Then came that fateful day.

My father recalls a midnight ruckus outside his ancestral home: almost all the males of the village had congregated there. It had been raining continuously for a few days: and on that fateful night it was rained torrentially.

My grandfather had stepped out - and the entire house followed close behind him - curious to find out why everyone was demanding his presence.

“Your store is getting washed away sir” they had started in unison: one trying to outbid the other in telling the story.

My grandfather had quickly hushed them – and asked sternly:

“Is the store GETTING WASHED AWAY - or HAS IT GOTTEN WASHED AWAY” It had taken the villagers a few minutes to understand the distinction: and one of them had blurted out quite despondently, eyes rooted to the ground
“it got washed away sir...”

“Then go and sleep” was my grandfather’s reply: stern: but not angry. He turned and went back to bed as did my grandmother and everyone else in the household. Appachchi (how I address my dad) told me that he was far too young to understand the ramifications: but that he still remembers that they never thought anything of it because their father never reacted to that incident.

The next morning, after breakfast, he had taken my father and his younger sister to school (the youngest sister had been too young to attend school at the time) and it is then when they all witnessed the carnage mother nature had brought upon their village. The entire bridge had been torn to shreds - and much of it washed away: making the river impassable (much to Appachchi’s and my aunts glee I am sure - as now they could not go to school for a few days!) This also meant that the store - along with ALL its contents were washed away too. The river had flooded many times before BUT NEVER had it reached the bridge - so no one could have imagined that the entire bridge could have been washed away...

My father tells me about the many ‘divers’ in the river - trying to salvage coins that would have surely been washed away that night, and by some miracle been deposited in the sand below.

My grandfather apparently simply lit up his unfiltered cigarette: smoked it sitting down on the banks of the river: and then took both the children by their hand and returned home.

My grandmother had never inquired as to what had happened: and Appachchi tells me that Aththa (grandfather in my mother tongue) never told her either...

What is CRAZY is that Appachchi swears he NEVER EVER spoke about it.

On the very same day, after lunch, Aththa took the knife used for tapping rubber, and went to the rubber patch that he owned, and started tapping rubber. Appachchi says that he'd lost absolutely EVERYTHING HE HAD on the day: given that he never used a Bank - and that his entire life's savings along with all his produce was in that store! Aththa simply started tapping rubber - a man who would have been a millionaire by today's standards reduced to nothing - and then tapping rubber for a living is, personally to me, unthinkable! Not only did he tap rubber: but he made sure all three of the kids saw it through secondary school and were provided for - until they came of age...

This story, told to me when I was a teen really struck a chord: for two reasons...

Firstly, to think that one could actually be so 'non-committal' about losing everything. Secondly, and possibly harder to fathom, to be able to do something far less significant and menial the very next day to ensure 'you do what needs to be done to make sure the family is fed.'

Life is full of up and downs. Whenever I read Rudyard Kipling's IF (which my mom gave me when I was just 10 years old) it is Aththa who comes to mind...

"If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two imposters both the same"

Every time I go through 'issues' and 'difficulties' this story comes back to haunt me: and every time I whinge and whine, I am reminded of my grandfather: and I imagine him looking at me with a rather cynical smile and asking me "so you think you have a problem do you?" If he DID actually ask me that: how am I to respond. So, every time I am about to open my mouth and say something negative about a situation that had just arisen, I remind myself of my Aththa and stop myself: because whatever I have faced thus far is a far cry from actually losing it all and having to start all over!

Life IS unpredictable. What at one moment in time is glorious can quickly turn into being completely DISASTROUS... Being able to walk through life without being ruffled too much by either extreme helps you put things into perspective: and also live well. Being emotionally detached from both the success and the failures you have - and being ablate and focused on what you CAN DO about it is something easier said than done. However, when you actually have an anchor story like this, it makes it easier: and I often find courage in it: if nothing else, to know that such resilience is my birthright!

2.

Return the flower son: and ask for their permission first: and then, say sorry for stealing



My grandfather 'Hullo Seeya' from my mother's side was I think a polar opposite to my Aththa (fathers' father). Aththa was very much the country boy - born, raised and lived pretty much all his life in Deraniyagala. 'Hullo Seeya' was a Royalist and was completed his graduate studies in the UK. He also won numerous accolades at Royal! He was very much the 'bourgeois': whilst my Aththa was very much the 'godaya' (colloquial for 'unrefined' village boy). Amazingly though, I think both grandfathers shared very very similar value sets...

Hullo Seeya (called Hullo, because when my Aunt - the eldest in my mother's family - was a baby - Seeya would peer into the crib and say 'hullo' to her. The first word my aunt had spoken was 'Hullo' and referred to him as 'Hullo' ever since - and the rest of the family - and extended family followed suit!) was also one of those people who was apparently rather strict: and extremely principled.

One day, walking with his son (my uncle and also a Royalist, and a Math 'genius' - by MY definition - not his) and eldest daughter to Visaka, my uncle picked a flower from one of the branches that had drooped over the wall on to the street.

Watching this, Hullo Seeya had told 'Bunty' Mama (I don't know the reason he was called 'Bunty' - honestly no one does!!) to go to the house that the 'tree' belong to, and first, beg forgiveness for plucking the flower - and then, to seek permission to take it. And this is exactly what a rather taken aback uncle did...

I often asked my mother whether this wasn't actually 'extreme': because, after all, the flower WAS on the side of the road, and therefore PUBLIC PROPERTY!

'It's the principle Baby' Ammi would say indignantly (she is utterly surprised when others' moral compass is not as rigid as theirs!) 'it was not Bunty mama's, to begin with.

And though the flower WAS on the roadside - it WAS their tree: so, why not ASK! Surely - WHY can't you just ASK?!

I got the point - but ever so often, just to rib my mother - I probe her - and ask:

"so, if you wanted to take a shell from the beach - do you ask the beach conservation authority?" and my mother gives me an earful...

Too often we overlook the 'little' lies: the 'petty' crimes: the 'small' thefts... especially in our kids. The message that we give out is that 'it is okay!' when it CLEARLY is NOT okay. We are then incredulous when children grow up not understanding the difference: nor that actions have consequences...

This little story gave me invaluable insight as to why 'small things' matter in the lower term. Compounded and left to 'be' generally never just 'goes away.' WHENEVER we see it, we need to address it. It doesn't need to be anything 'harsh' but digression from values DO need to be addressed then and there: and corrected: rather than allowed to be considered 'okay.' Sure: it was just a flower: and sure: the kid was only ten - BUT - unless you correct it: and get them to understand - it will soon be something much more serious...

Even at work, we often overlook the 'small things' hoping that it corrects itself. It is also because we don't want to be seen as 'pedantic' - wishing rather to be 'cool.' But values are values. If you take a lackadaisical attitude towards it, they are never taught: and yes, never lived by.

3.

That was yesterday isn't it? Why you talking about it today?



Archchi (my grandma from my mother's side) had, in many ways, a lasting impression on me: and she is also the person who got me going in writing and poetry. An avid reader, assiduous writer and an amazing woman, Archchi was, above all, fiercely independent and unflinchingly outspoken.

Archchi lived with us for quite a few years, until her death (she INSISTED that she paid the rent - much to my mother's utter annoyance!) and even when she didn't earlier, she was often quite close to where we lived. So, I was in and out of her house quite often - and loved talking to her. I think much of my debating skills were honed - arguing incessantly with Archchi trying to outwit her and 'get away with it.' Archchi was no pushover: she will not give in: nor would she back down - and being extremely stoic in her value set - and logical at the same time, made her not only a worthy opponent but also, a rather impossible one to ever fully defeat!

Archchi also took a keen interest in my studies, my extracurricular activities and also my accomplishments. Unlike my grandparents from my father's side who genuinely didn't really care about what I did - rather WHO I was. My Archchi was keen to ensure I did well overall - just as much as I did at being 'good' human.

However, something Archchi realized (as much as my mom) was that I was becoming quite 'pig-headed' with every achievement: and both of them tagged teamed (I think..) to ensure I didn't become 'arrogant' and my head was not 'too big to get in through the door'. (an expression Archchi would throw at me all the time !)

The one incident that is forever etched in my mind is this:

We won our 6th Debating tournament in a row - and the same tournament for the second year in a row. I was ecstatic. I was also awarded the best debater AND the best captain awards! I came in like a victorious Caesar after conquering Britain!

At dinner I went on and on about how 'I' was so great: and even after a few taut retorts from mom and Archchi to 'stop being so full of it' I just would not stop. I was elated. I was jubilant. I was ecstatic. I was also extremely vain!

The next morning, at breakfast, I started again...

Archchi looked at Ammi and then at me: and then demanded "That was yesterday wasn't it? Why are you talking about it today? What have you done TODAY that is worth talking about"? I was too shocked to answer, and truth be told: got very annoyed and actually quite hurt. I didn't say anything, and gulped down by food and went away not saying 'bye' either to my Archchi or to Amma... They gave me the same cold shoulder treatment when I came back home and started talking about the debate again: they FLATLY refused to let me 'gloat'!

Archchi sat me down a few days later and told me: "We are all very proud you won. You ought to be too. But keep that pride to yourself. And remember: what is past is past. You forget those 'bad moments' in time, don't you? Forget your achievements too... NEVER think so highly of it so that you forget to do something great TODAY!"

Took me a while to digest that: but it left a lasting impression on me. We often revisit the 'glorious past' so much that we forget to have a brilliant present and a wild future! To be able to 'let it go' matters when it comes to success as much as failure: which was an invaluable lesson to learn. Every time I achieve: and 'gloat' (I STILL do - I am, after all, only human) I remember Archchi, and tell myself: only for today - NEVER tomorrow...

4.

First and the last time Natha! - First and the last!



My parent's 'love story' is somewhat of a legend. Fate had it, that when my mother came to the University of Sri Jayawardenapura for her first appointment at work, she brought some of her photographs with her (photos of her as a baby with the rest of her family) to share with some of the friends she had just made. One of the 'peons' carried one of these photos and asked my father in jest 'which of these girls will you marry Sir' and Appachchi without batting an eyelid pointed at Ammi's picture!

Appachchi is ten year's my mom's senior - but I honestly think it is Ammi who is the more 'serious' one out of the two! It's not hard to understand why Ammi 'fell' for Appachchi... He was rather tall, slim and toned, had a handsome lock of hair greased and combed back - he really did look like something out of a movie (bloody hell, what on earth happened with me is something I often ask myself!)

However, the 'polarities' were obvious. Mom being your typical Colombo girl, and Appachchi your typical (well probably not really TYPICAL - but you catch my drift...) Game' Kolla ('country lad' to loosely translate). Mom was typically English speaking (and doesn't know a word of Sinhala filth - she STILL doesn't!) and my father very much your Sinhala speaking son of the soil (though, he DID know his English well - but like Ammi would not know the F word even if you used it in every other sentence - the only reason I got away with listening to 2 pac whilst studying!). So, technically speaking, they could actually scold each other in gutter filth in their language of choice as long as they smiled whilst saying it — and be none the wiser. (no WONDER they have a successful marriage !!!). My dad was the first in his family to marry outside his 'cast' and 'creed' as it was for Ammi: and all things said and done: I think both families at some point would have had some reservation.

My father's all-important 'first visit' to 'meet the parents' could not have gone more wrong!

He came home, and after basic pleasantries were done, was taken to see a Philharmonic Orchestra performance at the Wendt: the first time my father has ever seen a Western Orchestra perform! Having 'suffered through' it for nearly two hours (his words, not mine!) they were coming back home - and Appachchi 'hitched a ride' with Ammi's brother - Bunty Mama - on his scooter.

Quite innocently, my uncle offers my father a drink: and my father, though hardly a drinker at the time, not wanting to sound unmanly, agreed.

One drink turns to a few, and before you know it, Appachchi is now drunk. The ride back on the scooter with the wind in his face is not helping. By the time he comes to my mom's place his is high as a lark, and 'cocked out of his mind.' Though drunk, being fully aware of the importance of first impressions, he politely asks to go to the toilet, and freshen up: and is shown the guest room. I am sure he 'wobbled' to the room - and before you knew it - was puking away!

One can only imagine what my poor mother would have gone through!

Appachchi never had his dinner. He was summarily given the guest room and told to 'sleep it off.' The next day, a sheepish Appachchi was sternly told by (I am sure, knowing my Grandma, she was more amused than anything else) Archchi

"Never again Natha: this is the first and the last!"

True to his word: that truly was the last time Appachchi ever puked - at least as far as I know...

I asked Ammi if there wasn't a backlash over this at home: and to my great surprise Ammi tells me it was never ever discussed: apart from one simple question "Does Natha drink a lot normally" to which Ammi had answered "Not that I know of Mommy": and that was it...

My grandma isn't the most forgiving person: nor is she the most liberal: she can be quite tough with her opinions: but what I realized through this: and when I grew up - countless other incidents - is that she NEVER imposed those values on others. SHE held firm to her beliefs - and NEVER vilified anyone else for holding on to theirs. When she argues, it is to argue a point: it was never personal: nor was she expecting you to change because of it. It is also worth noting that she never judged my father on that ONE incident: when most would have painted him black: and possibly seen him with blackened eyes ever since...

This liberalism is something that I take to heart quite sincerely. Far too many people are far too judgmental of others. Most are actually hypocritical in it too: in that: when one of their own family does it, it is considered ok, but the very same act done by someone else is booed till kingdom come! Knowing the importance of holding true to your beliefs: but allowing others the same liberty was one of those cherished principles I learnt from Archchi...

5.

Mr. Snake, get out of here please...



Do no harm to any living creature was a credo my paternal grandmother (Aththamma) lived by. She was mostly vegetarian: eating a few sprats or dry fish on the rare occasion. Her compassion was truly genuine: truly sincere: and not discriminatory against the animal or human for that matter. If she could help she would: it didn't matter who it was...

Deraniyagala was, until rather recently, a sleepy hamlet: where the sparse population went about life rather simply. There were large tracts of land for each family: and there were a very few houses in a neighbourhood. Much of the village was paddy fields, rubber plantations, and quite a few 'communal forests' where the villagers would collect dry timber for fire: and also, seek fruit and vegetable and leaves for their daily consumption. 'Wild' animals were quite common - as were venomous snakes: including the deadly cobra.

My grandmother forbade killing - anything. Not a mosquito. Not an ant. Not even a deadly venomous cobra...

On countless occasions my father and aunts have seen cobras in the house: and whenever they have tried to kill them, my grandmother would come running: stand in-between the children and the snake: and address the snake as she would address the children...

"Get out of here Mr Snake: she would say: can't you see my children don't like you"?!"

And just like the cobras: who were by now brandishing their 'hoods' and waiting to strike would bow their heads, and slither away out of the house. Then she would chide the children for trying to harm a 'harmless' animal...

This quality of my grandmother actually made me quite curious.

I asked her once whether she knew they were poisonous: and should they attack we can easily die. I remember her smiling and telling me:

“I know they are poisonous son: but so are we!”

Her belief that they will not do you harm if you don't do them harm was unshakeable. Reading this, it may sound like fabrication: but even at the risk of being called a tall tale, I would tell you in all sincerity my grandmother was NEVER attacked by any form of animal - EVEN an insect. She was just one of those people I guess who gave out the aura of someone truly passive and truly nonviolent: and possibly even animals 'sensed' this. She has, in-fact, STEPPED on snakes without them having attacked her...

The power of living by such principles has amazing effects. I can never quite understand these mysteries of life: but I DID realize: at a very young age: that whatever religion or spirituality you believed in be it God or the Power of the Universe: those who live by virtue often are protected by it.

My grandmother lived to be a hundred-plus years: and died a natural, peaceful death. I am not naive enough to say that her longevity was solely down to her calm, passive and nonviolent nature: but I genuinely feel it DID have something to do with it.

Her ability to truly love all of humanity, and all of life, gave a certain calmness to her that you instinctively felt every time you sat next to her: talked to her: embraced her.

It is a calmness I have often wondered if I will ever have...

6.

Get out of the House if you don't know how to raise your son!



Aththa hated filth. He had a zero-tolerance policy on it. No matter how angry he got, nor how much he raised his voice, you will NEVER hear a word of filth coming out of him. Nor did he tolerate it in his house. Appachchi has told me many a time about this: but the magnitude of the issue really dawned on me when Avurudhu day (New Year) was completely disrupted, because for the first time in my life I saw my generally 'sweet and easy-going' Aththa become an absolute harsh disciplinarian!

We were all congregated in the family home - as is customary for New Years. ALL the cousins, and often, extended family 'descend' to Deraniyagala - and for about a week to ten days, it honestly is a cacophony of laughter, fun and frolics, games and above all, stuffing our faces with sweetmeats and delicacies reserved for the new year, which can only be done to perfection by my grandma!

It is also a time where copious amounts of alcohol is consumed. My dad was not ever an 'alcoholic' and I have not seen my father 'high' often either: but one can rest assured that if the three brothers meet, they will all 'put to fall' (a 'Sri Lankan English way of saying getting drunk.)

Being rather 'conservative' it was not 'normal' for the 'youngsters' to drink with the 'elders' - so, the young cousins would sit and have their own 'session' behind closed doors... The general festive mood was rudely disrupted by angry outbursts from my Aththa. He was nearly a hundred at the time - but his voice bellowed through the house...

'Who is the uncouth idiot who dared use filth in my house!'

Stone silence ensued... Aththa was now down the hallway: his frail hand firmly gripping his 'walking stick' so firmly that one could see the muscle still bulge in his hand - his face stern - his eyes wide open and looking dead straight - and his generally bent back completely straight: for a moment offering me a glimpse to what a handsome man he would have been in his youth.

'Answer Me' he demanded...

One of my cousins meekly came out. We later found out that the 'filth' that was used was actually quite mild - and it was not used in anger - rather in jest (something to the effect of 'what the Fu@# ! over a joke that was made !) - but 'filth was filth' in my Aththa's terms...

Aththa called his son. Demanded he leaves the house with the 'scoundrel' son (my cousin). Everyone knew better than to argue when Aththa takes that tone: and they left - leaving my aunt and other cousins in tears: and the whole house reeling like a funeral... The general festivities were rudely and abruptly halted.

My grandma was the only one who seemed unfazed... She went about her chores without a word, and once she had done all that she needed to do, went to our relative's house (with my dad helping her along the way) to talk to the 'prodigal' son and grandson. What they spoke about I never knew - and my father never said. What I DO know is that my uncle and cousin came back the next day, and both 'bent a knee' and offered 'bulath dungkola' (beetle and Areca nut and a bit of lime along with tobacco - a customary offering of goodwill in our culture) to Aththa.

Aththa gazed at his son for a while: and told him rather plainly

"Raise your son right!" He never said anything to my cousin.

I often wondered why my cousin didn't get a right royal shelling: but NOW I understand. My uncle was the 'senior' and my cousin a mere teen. If my cousin did something derogatory: it was on my uncle given that he was the one who was at fault for not instilling the values that the family considered important.

This was a great lesson for me later on in life - both as a parent and also as a Manager. If my team or my kids ever did anything wrong - it was on me... And in managing my team, if a junior did something that went against the values: then, I will always take it up with their superior - never with them personally.

It was critically important to understand that WE as seniors/ leaders/parents are held accountable for teaching our children/ juniors/ teams their values: and that WE needed to live by them as well. So, simply taking it out on the most hapless individual is both cowardly and also, counterproductive.

It also taught me that you need to take action against ANYONE - even your own son! Aththa could have easily let it slip. It was also 'bad timing' - why 'spoil the mood'? But no: values are values: and there are no exceptions. You don't hold others' accountable ONLY when it is CONVENIENT!

7.

I want to die: let me die !



Archchi got cancer when she was 80 plus...

From the time she was 75 or so, she would often tell me 'I want to go Baby - I want to go.' (referring wanting to die.) I would rant at her for wanting to die - and told her that she was being 'really stupid' - but, having reached a certain maturity in my life, (and understanding the physical demands that come with old age,) I think I can empathize with her now.

Archchi ALWAYS did her own things. She NEVER allowed us to 'help her.' She went and did her own shopping and carried her own groceries. She went to visit all her relatives and friends by bus - and NEVER took a lift. NOT being able to do this for herself would have meant losing her dignity: her pride: the fierce independence that defined her: and that was unacceptable to her.

She welcomed cancer as the answer to her prayers...

She was not afraid to die. She was afraid to live: if she had to live on someone else's terms.

Hullo Seeya died when Ammi was about seven. Since then, Archchi brought up the four kids alone: on a teacher's salary: and a teacher's pension. She didn't remarry: she didn't neglect her kids: she didn't sell ANY of the properties her father gave her: she singlehandedly educated all four kids (one who became a doctor: and one who got a Masters in Statistics in the UK at Sheffield!) and also, gave each one of them a house and a reasonably large property. She reared chickens for their eggs (refused to slaughter them even in their old age), gave tuition for modest rates (some were taught free because she didn't want to charge parents who really couldn't afford it), 'recycled' clothes, made do with what they had and ensured she always had a little spare too... She was, and always will be, my absolute heroine - and beacon of women's empowerment.

People called her stubborn. I now understand she wasn't. She was one of those people who lived life on their terms. She didn't take any handouts: nor EVER called in a favour. She did her own thing: or didn't do it at all.

So, to know that she could not live on her terms, due to age catching up on her was something that would have mortified her - way way worse than dying.

She refused to take medication. My mom and aunt 'forced' her to make sure the operation was done to insert a 'tube' inside her throat to stop it from 'collapsing', but she refused to take any form of radiotherapy or chemotherapy. She had decided that she was going to die and this was God's way of answering her prayers...

I remember her last few days quite vividly. I remember Archchi asking me to read to her. She read every day: no matter what. Even with the meds making her quite drowsy she would want to read: and when she couldn't, she asked me to read to her... I was extremely emotional: and I think, try as I did, not to show it to her - she sensed it - and saw it in my face...

"We all have to go Baby" she said, holding my hand "I am already too late"!

I wanted to find immortality when I was young. Whenever my parents asked me what I wanted to become, I always told them: 'I want to find a way to live forever'! For much of my youth, I didn't want to die and actually fretted over death. Archchi's contempt towards death truly truly shocked me: but now I understand why...

We must all die. It is inevitable. It is certain. Worrying about death is stupid: equally stupid to think you must live beyond the point of being able to do for yourself. You don't have to be old to be a burden on others: but in old age to have to depend - must be god awful for those who never did it in their life.

My mom is the same: and though I argue with her about the same thing: and try telling her it will NEVER be a burden on me to look after them, I UNDERSTAND what she means by 'wanting to do my own thing till I die.'

I learnt the importance of living life on your terms from Archchi. Her final act of defiance may have been rather 'selfish in other's eyes: and quite painful to my mom and her kids: but the truth of the matter is this - It was HER life: and only SHE could decide how she died - as much as only she COULD decide how she lived.

Cancer was NOT the issue. Dying was NOT the issue. LIVING without dignity was the issue. A lesson I learnt well...

EPILOGUE:

Being good in a bad world

What my parents DIDN'T prepare me for: was the realities of the world. I was brought up slightly naive: and honour codes were drummed into me: and I think, for the longest time, I actually thought EVERYONE was like us: and that they lived by the same values. Imagine the rude shock when one realizes it is actually a MINORITY who really live by values EVEN when it is completely to their disadvantage. Living values is dead easy when it stacks up in your favour. Owning up to your mistakes is dead easy when you know you will not face repercussions. Giving up arms during an amnesty is one thing: but giving up arms when you know you will be executed for it: but you still doing so because you have come to the realization that killing is bad - now THAT is what living values are all about. It's being bound to the principle: irrespective of the consequences: and this is where I falter in finding the logic and reason - and the steadfast resolve my parents and forefathers have always had!

I guess the issue is: on WHICH values you will uphold 'no matter what' and which you will 'pragmatically choose when to live by.' For example, I have NEVER given a bribe to get something done nor will I. Even over a traffic violation - I have BEGGED and PLEADED to let me go but I have NEVER offered a bribe to get out of it. This has cost me personally when it comes to running our company: but this is NOT something I will waver on: even if I go bankrupt. But, other values like 'lying' which my mother will absolutely and devoutly stand by I will take a more 'guarded' view of.

I can't profess to ever live by the code my parents lived by. In fact, this is possibly the BIGGEST regret I have. I am just not capable of that amount of stoicism. However, God honestly, I do try: and I know I am far more conscious and true to my parent's values than I was before. I am not doing it because it is what my parents did: blindly.

I do it because deep down inside, I truly know, they were honourable things to have done: and I would like to think my children can one day talk of me with the same level of pride and respect as I do of both my parents...

Each of us needs to decide which values become sacrosanct for us. However, what is important is this: that we HAVE THEM - and live by them. Failing values simply to curry favour or get a quick leg up in life- I think is the hallmark of a decadent and baseless life: which no amount of financial or worldly success can ever compensate for.

The thing to really understand is this! Being 'good' is a CHOICE you make. Not because it is convenient. Not because it is 'fashionable' or because of it being the 'in thing.' You don't do it for the popularity: the likes on FB or your 'credibility' to be established. You do it because that is what you TRULY believe in. You do it silently. Sincerely. Consistently. Unflinchingly. Irrespective of what. Being good isn't easy. It isn't 'financially sensible' either sometimes.

Living by Values is a choice you make for goodness' sake: and also, for two very selfish reasons: firstly, to honour your heritage and upbringing: and secondly, to leave a certain dignity for your children money can never buy!



VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.