

OUT OF THE DARKNESS INTO THE SUN

Nafiesa Natha shares her journey from the depths of despair to finding her place in the sun. By Gilmore Smith.

Finally, being able to put a name to what was wrong with her was also the beginning of the healing process for this young widow and mother who had put her own grief on hold to provide for her children.

When Nafiesa Natha's relatively young husband passed away suddenly and unexpectedly, she not only became a widowed single mother at the age of 28, but, unbeknownst to her, she also entered the debilitating dark spiral of hopelessness, despair and acute depression.

Coming from a small Port Elizabeth town, Nafiesa met Dr Ebrahim Natha during the 1980s, while she was a nursing sister and he was an intern at the local

hospital. When she and Dr Natha wed, she not only married across the cultural divide (Dr Natha was of Indian descent), but also embraced Islam as her new religion. Though they had the support and blessings of her parents, the couple got married without his parents' consent. This decision of theirs, taken with the blissful ignorance of young people in love, would later prove to have contributed directly to her absolute state of despair.

At the time of her husband's sudden death due to an aneurysm, the couple

were living in Paarl with no relatives close by, had four children, and Nafiesa was expecting twins.

Soon after her husband's tragic death, this 'Cinderella' found herself with no income and five young children to look after [she miscarried one of the twins]. On top of this, she further had to deal with her perceived altered standing in the community. After 12 years of marriage, of being 'Mrs Doctor', and dependence on her husband for her and the children's upkeep, Nafiesa

suddenly found herself alone and solely responsible for her own future as well as those of her five children.

In her grief, she was naturally angry at her Creator for taking her husband away and forcing her children to grow up without a father; she was angry at her husband for leaving her alone with their young children; and most of all, she was angry at herself for feeling so lost and weak without her husband. The only thing she was sure of at this early stage in her grieving process was that she *would not* compromise as far as her children's education was concerned. She was determined to give them the best possible education she could afford.

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After moving to Cape Town's southern suburbs, and being extremely conscious of her dire financial situation, Nafiesa re-entered the job market as a cosmetic salesperson at various retailers.

Some 10 years after her husband's death, while working for a big retailer in Cape Town, Nafiesa started feeling tired, restless and lifeless, but most of all, she started feeling hyper-anxious about everything. She found it difficult to leave her house; to get on a train to travel to work; to go shopping; and to socialise with family and friends. More and more frequently she had to be transported by ambulance from work to hospital after suffering anxiety attacks when dealing with customers.

This is when her hellish journey really started.

Doctors, desperation and the road to recovery

Consulting different general practitioners without anyone of them being able to put a name to her sickness, soon Nafiesa was unable to perform her duties at her place of employment and was asked to resign.

Once again, she found herself without the income to support herself and her five children. What made the situation worse this time round, was that she had

neither the energy or willpower to attempt anything and having depleted her medical aid insurance, she also had to face increasing medical costs without being able to put a name to her condition.

During this period, she also, for the first time, seriously considered taking the lives of her children as well as her own, because she could not see any light on her journey forward in this life.

Over the next couple of months, Nafiesa was admitted to the psychiatric wards of various hospitals in and around Cape Town until she was eventually diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Finally, being able to put a name to what was wrong with her was also the beginning of the healing process for this young widow and mother who had put her own grief on hold to provide for her children.

Survival and maternal instincts

After her final discharge from Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital just outside of Cape Town, Nafiesa's survival and maternal instincts kicked in once again and she started selling homemade muffins door-to-door in her neighbourhood to provide for her family. Soon after, she started using her own vehicle to transport schoolchildren between their schools and their homes to supplement the income she was generating from selling the muffins.

Constantly looking for ways to provide for herself and her children and being

intensely focused on their wellbeing, Nafiesa also started selling certain branded hair products.

Becoming a strong, independent businesswoman

About eight years ago, Nafiesa once again found herself at the crossroads, this time, however, a much happier set of crossroads. After more than a decade of feeling worthless and less than human, she finally found her place in the sun. Having always had a keen interest in fashion, she started buying clothes from a local boutique and selling them to family and friends. This 'business' evolved and she was soon designing her own clothes and selling them at various markets in and around Cape Town, from Green Point to Stellenbosch, and at every available festival throughout the year.

Today, all five of her children have obtained a tertiary qualification and are well-rounded young people fulfilling their respective roles in society. Nafiesa, now a proud grandmother of eight, has finally become a person in her own right again. The person she was meant to be. A strong independent businesswoman with a flourishing boutique in Sea Point.

Her journey of hardship and despair has enabled her to listen with compassion to people crossing her path, and by sharing the details of her journey she is able to be a beacon of hope to those needing it most.

