

**PRICELESS ROLES
OF A
MOTHER**

*If mothers were to go on strike
what would the world be like?*



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Contents

Introduction: My Gift to You.....	1
Chapter 1: Why I Wrote this Book.....	7
Chapter 2: My Journey as a Mother	25
Chapter 3: Origins of Mother’s Day	59
Chapter 4: More Roles for Mothers.....	75
Chapter 5: A–Z Unpaid Roles of a Mother.....	111
Chapter 6: Mothers, Rock with Your Roles!	133
Chapter 7: Voices of Mothers... ..	151
Chapter 8: Inner Growth of a Mother.....	173
Epilogue: My Reflections as a Mother	195
Resources	205
References	206
Meet the Author.....	212

A Mother is...

*... someone who loves unconditionally
and places the needs of her children
above her own, not only with words,
but also actions.*

Chapter 2

MY JOURNEY AS A MOTHER

A Mother's Struggle... Sacrifice... Love

"Wouldn't it be nice if every child could be born into the world with an absolute guarantee they would have the right kind of upbringing and live a happy life?"



As a mother, this may be the most difficult chapter for me to write. I was hesitant about revealing my past for fear of how I would be frowned upon, labelled and judged.

'Until we have seen someone's darkness, we don't really know who they are,' Marianne Williamson wisely stated in her book, *Return to Love*. Too often we are afraid and ashamed of being who we truly are. We hold back from expressing the choices and mistakes we made, the guilt, the shame we feel for fear of what others will think. We are so preoccupied in judging ourselves and others trying to be the 'super perfect image' that society and we ourselves envisage us to be.

Life is a mystifying journey. We are on a journey in everything we do. Nothing in life is perfect, even though we may have spent many years mapping out our hopes and dreams, especially when it concerns our children to provide a better life for them than we experienced. Life doesn't always turn out the way we plan.

In spite of what we think, we are not in control of our lives. The reality is that we can't know what will happen even one moment into the future or what our next thought would be. This was certainly true in writing this book. I hadn't the slightest clue when I started my research how many chapters I would end up writing. Or on becoming a mother, especially a single mother, the struggles and sacrifices I would encounter to provide a home and happy life for my son.

While on this journey, it was pretty scary. I had to drive through some unforeseeable ferocious storms and long dark gloomy tunnels with different paths

and passengers, clutching the steering wheel, deciding whether to accelerate or push on the brake, overcoming obstacles and barriers, swerving in and out of sharp bends for fear of losing control while single-handedly raising my son.

It's strange the memories we choose to keep in the forefront of our mind. Similar to our cupboards in the kitchen where all our herbs and spices are kept, our mind is like store cupboards where we accumulate everything we have lived through. It has memories of childhood, memories of relationships and other various experiences. But somehow we seem to mainly focus on what's wrong in our lives and overlook the many happy, beautiful things for which we should rightly be grateful.

My overriding memory is the moment my life miraculously began to change. It was a bright sunny day and I was visiting Portsmouth, a beautiful city on the south coast of England. I was taking myself on a short walk following the Nelson Trail on the cobbled streets towards the waterfront with streams of ferries and navy ships. On my way, I came upon a small dusty second-hand bookshop with so little stock that I wondered how it survived. Most of the books looked undisturbed on the shelves.

By some sort of super force, I was gravitated to a shelf and picked up a slim frail paperback titled *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl (1905–1997). The little book had obviously been read thoroughly as there were markings on pages by previous readers. Leafing through the pages I noticed these words highlighted: '*to find a sense of meaning in life*'. I couldn't put the book down. As I continued leafing through a slip of paper floated out of the book and landed on the floor. These words jumped out at me: 'When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.'

Those words transfixed me. The strange thing was, at that particular time in my life, I was experiencing a multitude of conflicting issues, especially feelings of guilt and shame for allowing my son to live with his father. I bought the book for £2. I have a lot of books that I've purchased in the name of bettering my life, but somehow I was captivated by this tiny book full of knowledge. It revealed how anyone can choose to make meaning out of any situation, no matter how dark things are. Viktor Frankl shares his experience of three years in captivity in the Holocaust concentration camp and his observations of how different people survived their time in the camp in different ways.

Frankl went on to say that two people can view the same experience in two

different ways. Our thoughts and feelings are shaped by our conditioning, our beliefs, our knowledge, our experiences and our present state of mind. He concluded that we each have the freedom, the power and choice to respond to any given situation that arises in our life. If you are not able to change a situation, you can control how you choose to respond to it. Your thoughts, your response, your life – all are your own.

That was a moment of truth for me. It was a wake-up call that I was the one in charge, even if it didn't always feel that way. I remember thinking "I wish I had read this book a long time ago!" Frankl's story caused me to reflect on how I had been responding to my past, especially my childhood upbringing and also as a mother, being in a tug-of-war with my emotions. He also went on to say; 'Everything can be taken from man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms, the ability to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.'

And that's not all. This book made me realise that in life we have choices. What we do with them is up to us. Most of us are not aware that we are conscious creators of our experiences because we are taught to believe that we are not. We seem to carry around this fixed image due to our unhappy background circumstances or past painful situations that our life will only get bitter not BETTER.

Our minds are powerful, creative and imaginative, and we can truly alter our worlds with our thoughts. What we think about we attract. We have the choice and ability to transform things – both in negative and positive ways – from the past and in the present – and, more importantly, we can control how we transform them. We can't solve a problem with the same way of thinking that created it.

Don't get me wrong. I am not suggesting your past is your fault. I'm saying that your present is the result of choices you have made, as you have allowed your past to influence them. Even in your darkest journey no one but you, has the choice and freedom to change directions, reactions, and behaviours to situations that come onto your path in life. I certainly know this for a fact - continue reading and you will soon understand why I said that. Be it suffering, disappointments or tragedy you have multiple choices to choose how to respond. This isn't easy, but ultimately we have control and we can move towards a more positive outlook if we choose to.

PRICELESS ROLES OF A MOTHER

When I thought about how much my mind has the ability to transform the world around me, and that I have multiple choices as to how to view my past and present life, I remembered how, as an innocent child, my creativity and imagination were free and wild – I saw myself like a bird with the freedom to spread my wings and fly high up in the sky. I also remember years ago reading this verse in *Dark Night of the Soul* by Thomas Moore: ‘Creativity is the making of life and the world. It may require the courage to experiment, to stand against society, and be eccentric in developing your style of personality and life.’

So with Frankl’s and Moore’s words imprinted in my mind and with the realisation that memories are leftovers of the past – they don’t go away, it’s how we deal with them that counts – I now choose with consciousness, creativity and imagination, my individual right of free will to be who I am, how I feel, what thoughts and beliefs to harbor and to learn ways to change my thinking and interpretations of life.

I now choose to use my creative imagination to be the author, the actor, the producer, and the director of my life: to rewrite, reinterpret and renovate my traumas, guilt, mistakes and disappointments into worthwhile triumphant lessons and solutions to help others to become aware that they can do the same.

I now choose to retrieve memories from my past journey and describe them as ‘dark’: laden with old stories, old baggage, and wasteful thoughts of unhappiness, fear, anger, resentment, aggression, guilt, blame and shame. And to identify my present journey as ‘light’: filled with new stories, growth of self-awareness, wisdom, peace, love, compassion, happiness, acceptance, respect, understanding, non-judgemental, kindness, forgiveness, gratitude and lots more for myself and others.

I now choose to have the courage to share my life experiences with YOU because I feel compelled to reach out to many mothers, sharing their burdens and to reassure them that they are never alone.

I now choose to help YOU to be aware that we need the dark as well as the light, just as we need day and night while at the same time finding a balance between the darkness and the light. To help you reap the lessons learned in the darkness; to strive, thrive and grow and walk into the light.

Bear in mind when reading; I now choose to be a CATALYST to others as I have embarked on a miraculous transformational healing journey through the

growth of self-discovery and mastery by the choices I made which has changed MY LIFE!

Now before we set off on this mystifying journey, as Bette Davis's character said as she stood on the staircase in the film *All About Eve*, 'Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy ride!'



A MOTHER'S STRUGGLE...

... is a tireless, unending role

Do you ever feel as if you got dropped into this life and someone forgot to give you the guidebook? Flashbacks of different scenes from my childhood and adulthood are surging into my mind.

Should I start with where I was born, my home or my family? Never mind, I shall start with myself. I am a divorced single mother. I have one lovely son and have been a mother for over thirty years. I was born in Aruba and grew up both in Trinidad and New York City.

My mind is drifting back to the birth of my son; I will always remember the day my life changed forever. The day my precious son, a new life was placed into my arms; the day my commitment, my duty, my responsibility, my journey as a mother began. Oh, hold on a second, my mind is going back beforehand as to when and how my pathway into motherhood began as my son certainly was not delivered by stork.

Pathway to Motherhood

I wasn't prepared for this

What is the fairytale myth we have fallen for? I think we've all felt this way at one time or another. I know I did. Ah, yes. Once upon a time the Cinderella myth was that little girls were brainwashed, groomed, prepped, and primed that on becoming a woman she will become a Princess and will meet a Prince

Charming, her knight in shining armour, who will come galloping on a white horse into her life. If the glass slipper fitted, he would scoop her up and carry her off and they would live happily ever after.

I met my Prince Charming in New York City. I was 21, with a wild care-free attitude towards life, hungry for love, adventurous and eager to travel the world. He was a freelance journalist based in London. The glass slipper fitted perfectly. Within four weeks we were married. Without a doubt, worry or fear, I gave up everything: my home, my family, my friends, my studies and my job, and went galloping off to London with him. I knew no one but him. Come to think of it, never once did I think or plan to live in London. I didn't research the place before moving. Or even the frequency of the overcast weather. Prince Charming and I did everything together. Working, socialising and travelling. He had a strong influence over me. I became part of him, or more so his shadow, his possession. My whole life was him. We spent quite a few happy years together. Eight years later our son was born.

Motherhood Changed My Life Forever

Life and love is like a river constantly flowing, nothing stays the same...

Becoming a mother is a life-changing experience – not just in the sense you have to take care of your children, but externally and internally, everything shifts. It changed my perspective and it gave me a new purpose in life. As mentioned earlier, we are not in control of our lives or thoughts beforehand. People grow, people change. I changed. I was no longer the centre of my universe, the carefree social partying girl, wife or lover. I had a son to take care of, guide and protect. It was like I was reborn and had given birth to motherhood.

Dark: Eighteen months after giving birth to our son I fell off the horse. (Ouch!) It was a tough landing, especially when there was no one to pick me up. The glass slippers shattered. I was heartbroken. Stranded and alone I had to pull myself together, pick up the broken pieces. Brush myself off. Take a few deep breathes. Clench my teeth. Hold my head up high. I had to walk forward.

Even though I lived in London for ten years, I felt like a stranger in a strange

city. I had no clue how the country operated. I was an isolated single divorced mother in a foreign country with no resources or extended family. A lot of people who I thought were friends vanished.

I was alone at a crossroad. My baby son was the passenger, my life. He was my primary responsibility. I had to make sure his seatbelt was secure and stable. I had to decide which direction to take. Either remain in London or return to New York City where my family resides.

Light: When we are young we usually think with our hearts and not with our minds. Our expectations aren't always realistic. Let's face it, we are uncertain of who we are and what our role is in the world - much less how to deal with another person. Looking back as to when and how I tied the knot with my son's father. We were young and adventurous. We were strangers to each other; and had no idea about each other's character or values.

I think girls should be told at an early age to let go of the fairytale myth, and that it's okay to live a little on their own, to get to know and love themselves and to fulfil their dreams, hopes and aspirations.

Think seriously before getting married or starting a family; it is a sacred union and long term relationship between a man and a woman to communicate and compromise, to accept and respect each other and to build a happy and healthy family home environment.

I now choose not to blame or hold any animosity towards my son's father. We had opposing thoughts and feelings about the reality of having a child and the responsibility of parenting. Similar as to how it takes two hands to clap. I realise now that you cannot have a happily-ever-after relationship with two people of different family values.

Oh, one last thing: Do a background check and take time to really get to know someone before committing to marriage. Now I am beginning to see the benefits of global on-line dating!

I trust my memory is not playing tricks on me. I seem to be travelling way back in time to revisit scenes of my childhood memories.

Childhood Hidden Memories

A child is like a seed...

Dark: My most abiding childhood memory is of seeing my father strike my mother on the head with a brass lamp pole.

Yep! My parents had an abusive relationship so I saw horrible violence. I was raised in a two-parent family, in a strict religious environment. I attended a religious school on weekdays, confession on Saturdays and communion on Sundays. There were six of us: one boy and five girls. My father was an alcoholic and an abusive insecure bully. My mother was a submissive silent sufferer.

Looking back, parts of my upbringing are very fragmented and heartbreaking. It was awfully dark and sad, and a very lonely place to be. My tears could have filled an ocean. I cannot remember what I did at school, my best friend's name, my favourite subject or game, as my mind was drenched in emotional pain.

Although my siblings and I grew up under one roof, bear the same family name, sat at the same table, ate the same food, we did not manage to have a bonding relationship. No whisper or sound of our intimate thoughts and feelings, nor our dreams, goals and hopes shared amongst us. We never had any friends and extended family around, never celebrated birthdays or exchanged gifts, or even sang songs or went shopping and partying together. We were all living in our own world of fear, eager to escape.

It's funny how certain thoughts drift into your mind at the right scene. I remember six young children huddled together – myself, my brother and my four sisters – sitting on a veranda, rocking back and forth, listening in despair for the sound of our father's jeep pulling into the driveway as he arrived home from work. Praying: 'Our Father who art in heaven I hope our father do not come home drunk and beat up our mum.'

Do you know that up to this present day I still cannot seem to get my head around this – if religion is a ruling force in your home and life, and you believe in God, why is there so much violence and unhappiness in our home?

Though I was infused with emotional pain I had a headstrong, outgoing, outspoken courageous attitude. Many times I tried to intervene in the violence to defend my mother and received some of her blows. I remember one incident,

I might have been ten or eleven, where I tried to knock my father down with a large block of wood, but he wrenched it out of my hands and sprained my wrist.

Man, at times it was so unbearable. I was so vexed. I wanted to run away and hide. I had no one to turn to. When I wanted to block out the scenes of abuse and drown out the siren sounds of screams, I would console myself by listening to the comforting melodies of Mother Nature; birds singing, leaves twittering, water flowing. Or climb up my favourite mango tree in the backyard, perched on the highest branch like a bird eager to fly high up in the sky.

Light: I realise dipping into the darkness of childhood memories can rough up some strong emotions. So go gently. No matter how painful a life anyone has had, there must have been a moment of joy, a moment of beauty, a moment of happiness – bring it into the light. Allow the light to shimmer onto it. I am now in the light, in the present, and I am alive, and beautiful present thoughts are on the screen of my mind deleting my past unhappy childhood memories.

I now choose to remember the blinding rays of the golden sunrise and sunset, colourful rainbows threading the sky, bright stars twinkling at night, green-slated mountains protruding from the ground, soft cushiony hills rolling up and down, water flowing in ravines, birds and bees singing songs and butterflies flying around radiating their true vibrant colours.

I now choose to remember the healthy fresh food and fruits I ate and the aromatic smell of homemade bread throughout the house, especially the yummy tasty fruitcake my mother baked each Christmas. Along with having a roof over my head, shoes on my feet, and clean clothes to clothe my body.

I now choose to be grateful for having had instilled in me, through my religious upbringing, personal pride, presentation and grooming, good behaviour, manners and discipline.

Rebellious Age

I was desperate to escape...

Dark: When I was fifteen, my family immigrated to New York City for a better life and with the intention that everything in the past would evaporate. Wrong.

Within a year my father started round two of drinking and beating the crap out of my mum.

Two years later I could not bear the emotional pain any longer. Like many of today's young people growing up in a dysfunctional abusive environment, I had two options: 'fight or flight'. I was getting taller, my mind bolder and my hands stronger. I felt if I had hung around and witnessed my father beating my mother one more time, I would have probably killed him. I fled.

Alone, under the dark grey sky, I walked slowly along the city streets with shadowy skyscrapers looming high above. I was frightened. Filled with anger and hurt festering inside of me. I had no direction or purpose as to where I was going. I looked left and right. Occasionally I looked over my shoulder. There was nothing that could be done about what I left behind. Gradually I became aware that a long tunnel with a narrow path stretched out in front of me. I saw a bright glint, a shimmering light in the distance.

Curious, I looked into the tunnel. I could see it would be a long challenging journey. The path seemed steep. I hesitated. I took a few steps forward. I finally entered the tunnel and started slowly walking down its narrow path. The further I went the darker the tunnel became. Lonely and forbidding, every once in a while I saw a flash of light. I heard strange howling sounds. I continued, stumbling, unsure of where I was headed. I noticed various shorter and wider side paths branching off to the left and right. They looked very inviting and easier to follow than the present path I was on. I saw other travellers, some like me, taking the long, narrow path. Others were wandering around aimlessly and some racing towards wider and shorter paths.

As I approached the opening of a wider path, I heard a wooing whisper: 'Try me! Try me! My path is so much easier for you to walk. You can link up with street gangs to feel a sense of belonging and protection and commit crimes to seek attention.' I felt a mysterious, irresistible urge to start walking towards the path.

Suddenly, a few steps away a shorter path loomed up ahead of me. The whispers changed: 'Follow me! Follow me! My path is really cool man, one of the smoothest and easiest to follow. If you step upon my path you can drench your mind with alcohol and drugs; and you will be able to suppress your emotions. Or you can sell drugs or become a prostitute to earn a living.' As I approached

the opening, the insistent whispers of these paths were growing louder, coaxing me with words of ease and comfort to deviate me from my present path. I stood pondering.

Light: I first read this amazing verse in *The Secret*, the book by Rhonda Byrne that hit the world like a storm. Written by Jack Canfield, one of the teachers; 'A lot of people feel like they're victims in life, and they'll often point to past events, perhaps growing up with an abusive parent or in a dysfunctional family. Most psychologists believe that about 85 percent of families are dysfunctional, so all of a sudden you're not so unique. My parents were alcoholics. My dad abused me. My mother divorced him when I was six... I mean, that's almost everybody's story in some form or not. The real question is, what are you going to do now? What do you choose now?'

I now choose to realise that although I was very resentful towards my unhappy childhood, due to my headstrong rebellious attitude and sheer determination, I chose education, reading books and travelling as a way out. I was so passionate about showing my parents that I was going to make something of my life. This was much more important than the continuation of violence by hitching up with a street gang or the consummation of alcohol and drugs.

I now choose to believe that, though our background and circumstances may have influenced who we are, we are responsible for who we become. We cannot change what happened in the past or choose where we come from, but we can choose where we are going to go from there.

For the Sake of my Son

Once a woman becomes a mother, her child is number one...

Dark: Although I felt acutely isolated with no family member for support and my social network was not large, and I hadn't the slightest inkling about government financial support, I chose to continue my journey in London. I didn't want to deprive my son of his father.

I guess some of you may be wondering why? It's a bit weepy.

PRICELESS ROLES OF A MOTHER

Deprived of a close bonding relationship with my family, especially my father. I grew up with a deep father hunger. I yearned to have a daughter-father relationship with him. Oh, I so wanted to be his special little girl. I wanted to sit on my father's lap, rest my head on his shoulders and curl my soft cuddly little fingers around his neck sharing my hopes and dreams. I wanted to be loved and cherished by my father. I cannot remember calling my father 'dad'. Not having a father-daughter relationship created a huge hole in me. The pain was severe that for over 23 years I cut my father out of my life.

I remember the day I received a phone call to inform me my father had died. I felt pain in my heart, as if a part of me had been ripped out. I remember screaming and my body collapsed.

I did say earlier that it would be slushy.

No matter what differences and animosity my son's father and I had between us (and I say this as someone having had first-hand experience how broken and violent relationships can leave an imprint on the mind of a child), I made a commitment on becoming a mother not to repeat the behaviour patterns I had learned from my parents. My unbending desire was fuelled with determination, passion and commitment to provide a happy and healthy home environment for my son.

For the sake of my son, I tried my utmost best to put aside my personal feelings and maintain a good healthy communicative relationship with his father. To prevent any continuation of family feuds I did not use my son as a sound-board or a weapon, nor did I claim alimony or child support. I even sent Christmas, birthday and Father's Day cards and gifts from my son to his father. And on several occasions, I told him how grateful I am to him for being a father to my son.

Wait a moment. Another image is on the screen of my mind. It's a beautiful little boy about two years old, sitting under the Christmas tree on his own, shaking unopened presents trying to guess what's inside. Oh, it's my son. It was the first Christmas my son and I spent together following the separation of his father and myself.

A tear slid down my cheek; I felt sadness as if I had broken the vow, the dream of providing my son with the role model two-parent happy home family environment – seeing the smiles and pleasure on my son's face opening gifts together.

Thereafter as I did not have any family around I allowed my son to spend Christmas with his father, grandmother and extended family whilst I spent it alone.

Light: Sorry if this sounds harsh. I am not telling you this because I want to tell you how to parent your children. Lord knows I am not. I would never dream of giving advice on parenting. I am currently learning the things never taught to me, which I need to become a rounded and mature adult and parent.

Children do not ask to come into this world. It is our choice to have children, unless by force. Think before having children. It is a hard road to travel, especially on your own with no extended family support. Most of us are blinded by immaturity or ignorance and seem to have children for our own self-interested reasons without thinking of the child's needs. And in some cases parents are irresponsible because they have too many children and know they cannot support them as they should, especially if there is abuse and suffering in the home; the child will also suffer. Why bring a child into suffering? Perhaps some people should be allowed to take tests before having children.

Children are number one while they are young. I remember a few years ago I had a conversation with a male acquaintance who was a single father bringing up his son. He stated that he has not been a good father role model due to his self-centeredness, thoughtless behaviour and lack of communication with his son's mother. Now that his son has grown he can see the emotional impact it has had on him.

Children do not have to be involved with your mistakes. Parenting and relationships are totally different. If you are divorced or separated, cast aside your selfish egotistical feelings towards each other. Think of your ex-partner not as an enemy, nor a friend, but like a professional parenting partner; approach parenthood in a business-like way to cooperate and negotiate for the child's benefit. Just be there to support them throughout the learning and growing process.

One of my favourite quotes from Fredrick Douglas, an African-American civil right activist: 'It's easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults.'

A Mother's Hidden Secret

Ssshhh... I am going to tell you a deep dark secret...

Dark: One afternoon while I was sitting in a café stirring my extra hot latte and reading the newspaper, I was aghast to see a headline: 'Female London Underground worker sacked for having epilepsy.' The headline was like an assault made without warning. I read the words over several times like a child learning to read for the first time. An underground worker was dismissed from her job because she has epilepsy. This is the 21st century and it seems epilepsy is still a stigma as it was in the 19th century.

This article jolted my memory. A fleeting flashback of a scene came into my mind: a woman pushing a buggy with her two-year-old son on a semi-busy street. All of a sudden the woman started wandering off the sidewalk, walking towards the centre of the street. No, she does not seem to be jaywalking. A stranger alerted her as cars were coming in either direction, tooting their horns.

The woman was me with my son. Less than a year after my son's father and I separated, I was diagnosed with epilepsy which may be a genetic medical condition in my family. When I was quite young my only brother died while having a seizure and one of my sisters who is also epileptic has been institutionalised for over 40 years. It was a horrible shock to me, especially being on my own bringing up my son. I was so scared to tell anyone, and so scared of their reaction. I never allowed it to leak out for fear that I would be deemed mentally incapable of caring for my son or lose my job, due to the stigma still attached to it as mentioned earlier.

After undergoing several EEG, CT and MRI scans, I was registered disabled (Ugh! I dislike that word disabled), put on anti-epilepsy medication and wore a hidden Medic Alert pendant. Neither Social Services nor my GP informed me that I was liable for government funding assistance; however, I do recall a list of all the 'I can't do's' shoved into my hands. The only things I eliminated from my life were driving a car, having deep relaxing baths and taking my son swimming.

As the responsibility of a mother I had to be present for my son - my health was secondary. Living on my own and with my son quite young I am not sure how often I had these seizures. Though the seizures mostly occurred during the night while I was asleep, on several occasions I woke to find myself strapped to a stretcher in an ambulance or in a hospital.

As I am writing I can see the faded burnt scar on my wrist from an incident where I was cooking with my son nearby, and had an epileptic seizure. Tears welled in my eyes. I remember reading an article about a young girl killed during an epileptic seizure. She fell into the path of a train.

Light: Some people think that epilepsy is a mental infectious disease and that it's too dark to be exposed. Though the cause of epilepsy is unknown, along with ongoing discoveries of scientists and the Epilepsy Research UK (epilepsyresearch.org.uk) it has been brought to light that epilepsy is not a 'disease', it is a 'symptom'. It is not a form of 'insanity' or 'contagious', like chickenpox or measles, and is not caused by 'mental illness' or 'mental retardation'. Epilepsy is a temporary disruption of the brain where the person loses consciousness for a few minutes. According to the Epilepsy Society's factsheet, around 87 people are diagnosed with epilepsy every day, and more than 500,000 people in the United Kingdom have epilepsy (60 million people worldwide).^{8 9}

I now choose, despite all the myths and stigma attached to epilepsy, to help turn the page by removing the stifling silence and the obscuring cobwebs in many people's brains which surround the subject.

I now choose not to allow my diagnosed condition to hold me back from feeling free, being who I am, and to live a normal, healthy enriching life as I am presently doing.

Great Expectations of a Mother

The days and nights as a mother have no beginning or ending...

Light & Dark: Bringing up a child as a single parent was not the fairytale myth I had dreamed of. Not to say the least, a single wage-earning parent, with no active extended family around. I was like the main character, Kate Reddy in

Allison Pearson's book *I Don't Know How She Does It*, a working mother valiantly juggling her multiple obligations. It broke my heart working two jobs outside the home, not being able to spend quality time with my son during the crucial years of his life. As exposed in Pearson's book I was society's ideal full-time wage-earning juggling 'Supermum' and worked my butt off to provide a home for myself and my son. Along with trying to be a positive role model and teach my son right from wrong, putting food on the table, shoes on my son's feet and doing fun things together. I even purchased a house on my own. Painted and decorated it myself, paid the mortgage and utility bills – I had to be "on" all of the time. Phew!

No matter how hard I worked and juggle my roles, the most complicated struggle was just beginning. Over the years as my son, the little genius, grew so did his needs. He was a bright 'hyperactive inquisitive feisty little bugger' and he kept me on my toes. At school, he received many awards from various subjects, especially mathematics. On several occasions, he interrupted lessons and was suspended from school (I later learned his IQ was exceedingly high) as he was bored after completing work before other classmates. I continuously received calls from teachers about his disruptive behaviour while at work. Each time I had to go and collect him as there was no-one else to do so. Sometimes I even took my son to work. During the summer, I made sure he was involved in lots of activities. I sent him to summer camps and drama schools to channel his high energy and to occupy his time.

Let's be honest, juggling too many roles causes one to become very exhausted. Like a hamster on a wheel, I worked every day outside the home including weekends while my son was visiting his father. I hardly had any me, myself and I time.

I was stunned. How quickly life can change. Out of the blue things took a twist in an unforeseen direction. The frequency of seizures started escalating, and anxiety, stress and panic attacks followed. I was out of control. There were so many things happening all at once. My thoughts were confused. My scariest moments were having these constant seizures and the fear that I could harm my son. Whirlwind chaotic thoughts cascaded in my mind that I would be labelled an unfit mother and my son would be taken away and placed into foster care.

MY JOURNEY AS A MOTHER

It was really frightening, living on my own with my son with no family around. I had no one to monitor my behaviour or seizures. Who could I tell or turn to? I needed help. I had absolutely no one to help me at all.

I felt isolated and lonely. I began to realise that I was not all the people (mother, father, grandmother and extended family) I thought I could be to provide a happy and secure home environment for my son.

At a young age my portrayal to a lot of people was that I was a very strong-minded, assertive and positive person. Fiercely independent, outspoken, energetic, stubborn, some might say. This all stems from my childhood upbringing having had no one to look up too, to turn to for help, guidance or support. I learned to depend on me and made my own decisions. That's the only way I knew how to survive.

Now it was no longer all about me. My son was now a passenger on board in my life. He was my main priority and responsibility. I looked in the rear view mirror. I decided to reverse and go back to New York to rekindle my relationship with my family to find a job with the intentions of both my son and I going to live there together. I placed my son in boarding school and off I went to New York.

Light: It was daunting being a first time parent single-handedly bringing up my son at the early stages of his life. It was also a happy experience and a growing pleasure in nurturing him. The joys, blessings and lessons learned, I would not have missed out on them. Helping someone grow, guiding and instilling life values, not only in my son but also my own personal development.

I now choose as a mother to truly understand many mothers who are abandoned by their husbands/partners that vowed to love, honor, cherish and forsake all others, found herself a single mother without any financial help or active parenting support from the male perspective.

I now choose to also have a lot of compassion for many mothers who tolerate violence, pain, or suffering in unhappy or abusive relationships to provide a home, food and other necessities for the sake of their children – especially my own mother.

Gosh! You mothers are courageous and strong! I give you honour.

Complexities of a Mother

Against all odds...

Dark: This part of my life is ambiguous, distorted and fragmented. I may have had transient amnesia: a memory lapse which can be a main symptom of epilepsy. I can only share the parts I recall. I cannot remember the steps I made to rekindle my relationship with my family in New York. I think I did find a job. My only lucid memory was that I missed my son. I missed my little baby so much. It tore me apart being separated from my son. I could not bear it. Eventually, I returned to London.

Soon after my son and I were reunited, the speed at which things changed was mystifying. Everything just started falling apart. My hands were clenching the steering wheel as I approached several dark sharp bends, twist, turns and barriers. I did not know whether to brake or accelerate. My vision was blurred. Along with the increase of seizures, anxiety and stress, I collided with financial setbacks and mountainous debts.

Despite these hardships, I had to keep moving forward. I was responsible for my son and was determined to provide him with a better life. I continued working. I dimly remember even knocking on doors selling products to help keep a roof over our heads. But my physical and mental health was deteriorating with the frequency of seizures. Sleepless nights, headaches and worries integrated. Eventually, I began to feel like an overheated car engine, ready to explode. I felt so overwhelmed by everything going on around me, internally and externally. It was like I had taken an overdose of anxiety and stress. They were tearing me apart. My situation seemed utterly hopeless.

I felt like I had hit rock bottom and my battle and life journey was coming to an end. It was like I had reached a roadblock and no matter what I did I would be unable to get through. What could I do? Who could I turn to? Where should I go? I had my son as a passenger.

Choking back the tears, I find this hard to think, feel, say and write. So many stories are being unravelled about caring mothers who have a strong connection with their children committing murder-suicide. One in particular that stands out in my mind is a very friendly strong-minded positive person like myself who, while pregnant with her fourth child, killed her three children and leapt to her death.

Gripped with fear, I found the trauma inside my head overwhelming. It felt as if it was consuming me. Ever since I was a child I had been on this journey on my own with all the bottled-up emotions inside me. It seemed like they were all catching up with me. I was terrified of what would happen to my son. I could no longer face the journey on my own. I longed for someone to rescue me, but I never had such a person – someone to lean on, someone kind, compassionate and loving.

And then the most amazing thing happened; have you ever met an angel? I did. No, he didn't have wings, halo or a lyre. Perhaps these words from the law of attraction in *The Secret*, 'whatever is going on in your mind is what you are attracting' and the verse 'Ask and you shall receive' from Matthew 7:7-8 really do work. Well, that's exactly what happened. A stranger, a second Prince Charming, came galloping into my life.

I can't remember what Prince Charming said or did to hook me in. I suppose I listened to what I wanted to hear. He came across as a charming, compassionate, caring, intelligent, kind-hearted very religious man.

Soon after he moved into my home, his character vanished.

Prince Charming turned into (a toad) Prince Harming. With my vulnerability status high, like an innocent child, my mind was like a sponge.

A friend of mine who wishes to remain anonymous told me her first-hand experience with her former partner and how she ended up having an emotional breakdown:

"Ten years ago I embarked upon an emotionally abusive relationship that in the two years it lasted wrecked my self-confidence and almost my life. Our relationship began with floods of flatteries, dinners, parties and theatres. He was always giving me gifts. He couldn't do enough to woo me. I felt like he cherished me. I thought it was complimentary. He said he loved me and wanted to build a future and family with me. Once we were living together, he controlled and manipulated everything I said and did. He counted the cups of coffee I drank and the trips I made out of the flat, and perhaps even the strands of hair on my head. He even told me how I should breathe, what I should wear and not wear. He isolated me from my friends and family. He also taunted me about my bad habits and

appearances. He was controlling every moment of my life to the point where I didn't have a life.”

This is not an isolated story. Over the years, I learned of so many women who had entered a string of relationships which had left them wrung out like wet towels. Have you ever watched television when someone else is holding the remote control and they keep pressing the buttons and changing the channel? Well, imagine that remote control is your life and that someone else is pushing the buttons of your life.

To this day, I racked my brains as to how Prince Harming got the keys to my house and took the steering wheel of my life. I was so protective of my son, and especially coming from a strict religious background I was very adamant about a man living with me without marriage. And also, how we got engaged and I got pregnant. As a child it was drummed into my mind, body and soul; morning, noon and night that it is sinful to conceive a child before marriage.

It's horrific. Certain periods of the relationship are so dark, foggy and fragmented. I cannot recall the part my son played in my life at that time or the relationship my son had with Prince Harming. Those who knew me could not believe this was me. The things I was thinking and doing were definitely not my thoughts. I was not myself.

Whenever I share this part of my life with others, many said there is a possibility that Prince Harming may have drugged my food or used some spiritual psychological abuse. The latter means misuse of religion for one's malicious selfish needs, making the victim utterly reliant on their religious system.

Little did I know I was heading for a very serious crash.

Light: We all have struggles in life in one form or another. It's how we deal with them that count. For me, it took something extremely devastating – something that would take me to the deepest depths of self-awareness.

I now choose to believe that the struggles of life are what make you who you are; struggles are what make someone grow; struggles are what make you realise how precious and valuable life really is; struggles are what prepare you for the unforeseeable adversities that lie ahead.