

A young girl's flight from an oppressive environment in search of self-expression and freedom. She chooses her own trajectory, ready to face what lies ahead. She embarks on a modern Odyssey of self-discovery and interesting encounters across three continents before she comes home to roost in the USA via Beijing, Hong Kong, London and e-Harmony.

TAPESTRY OF A LIFE

A Modern Odyssey

Spanning Three Continents

By Nora Curran

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Front Cover picture: tapestry woven by the author

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PREFACE

Trying to make sense of a life before presenting it to the outside world is a challenge. There are choices to be made—selection, simplification, elaboration, and admission.

Perhaps, tapestry is not the right word to describe my life. I know how much planning and preparation goes into weaving a tapestry. Thought has to be given to the warp, the weft, the different yarns and threads, the colors and design. The threads of my life—interwoven and meshed—form the fabric of my history. Trying to choose the right word, the “bon mot,” is like choosing that special color, fabric, or highlight, to weave through the warp. If only life could be planned as carefully. Most of my tapestries are free-form. I work with no fixed plan and serendipitously the shapes, and colors come together—just like the various pieces of one’s life come together, often haphazardly, to form a whole. The front cover picture is of one of my tapestries.

Patchwork might be a better word. I have a patchwork skirt. It hangs loose and is very comfortable. I’ve had it for a long time. Looking at it closely, I can see that the trapezoid patches are carelessly put together—some colors clash. The patterns on some pieces are not pretty, and some pieces have faded. But somehow, seen as a whole, they manage to make an interesting piece of cloth. The underside however is rather messy with fraying threads.

TAPESTRY OF A LIFE

Life can be like that—a patchwork. Memories of places, people, events, and hopes patched together, sometimes loosely, and sometimes tightly. We don't mind showing the "good side" but prefer to hide the underside. A memoir should show both sides—that's honest writing.

A subtitle to my story could be *On the Other Hand* because, when confronted with an unfamiliar situation, behavior, culture or tradition, I try to see both sides—mine and theirs. Not that I enjoy the murky gray between black and white, but in many cases there are no absolutes. Even when I hold strong views, I can still see the viewpoint of others, without changing mine. This is what makes human interactions both special and tricky.

Writing a memoir is simply writing about oneself—people you have known, events in your life that left their mark, relationships, places, and how you experienced them, both then and now—through the prism of time and hindsight. It's as if you were disrobing in front of your readers. You are exposing a body of work, with its scars, bruises, warts and all. It takes courage to open up one's life to the outside world. It can be challenging because sometimes, you have to take out a few skeletons, which have been deliberately locked up in closets, and show them to the public.

At times, I hesitated to write about certain events and individuals, as I grappled with ethical questions such as: *Can I really tell that story? Would it hurt people I know and love or damage my relationship with them? Is it too shocking?* I think every memoirist has had to deal with these issues.

PREFACE

I have tried to put together those pieces that I think are interesting, informative and entertaining. As I look back over several decades, I realize that my perceptions and perspectives have changed. I have tried to be honest and forthright. I hope this comes through. A few names have been changed to protect the privacy of certain individuals.

Some readers may be upset or offended by my honesty. However, this is *my* memoir, my experiences, impressions and reactions seen through *my* eyes.

I have often asked myself the reasons for writing my story. Someone once said that writing a memoir is therapeutic. This memoir is not an attempt at catharsis or laying down ghosts. It began when my eldest granddaughter, Charis, asked me about her antecedents. Her enquiry made me open the chambers of my memory, and the stories just started tumbling out. I began writing. Once the memory dyke was breached there was no stopping the flow. I surprised myself because I had heard so much about “writer’s block” and “fear of the blank page.” To my relief that was not the case.

I write because I enjoy it, along with the chuckles I get looking back on events and people who are part of this tapestry. So I plead *mea culpa*, not to expiate my sin, but to share the chuckles. So please fasten your seatbelts and enjoy the flight. I promise you an interesting trip and a smooth landing.

Nora Curran
January, 2020
La Mesa, California

INTRODUCTION

I am the daughter of a father who said to me, “Education is wasted on a woman.”

Those cataclysmic words propelled me to prove him false. Our relationship became a battle of wills, and I was determined to win. He had money and power on his side. I only had my wits.

It is ironic that a father whose bookshelves held the works of Goethe, Dostoyevsky, Shakespeare and Victor Hugo believed that education is wasted on a woman. Did he consider educated women a threat? Did he believe that a college education would diminish his control over me? He was willing to pay for expensive private schools, but after high school, as college loomed on the horizon, he decided it was time for me to return “home.” His home. A home from which I had managed to escape briefly when he sent me to boarding school in England.

From a young age, I somehow knew—almost instinctively—that education would be my key to freedom, an escape from a dysfunctional parent. The male-dominated society of the Greek island where I was born, aided and abetted by the teachings of the Greek Orthodox Church, primed girls to be respectful and

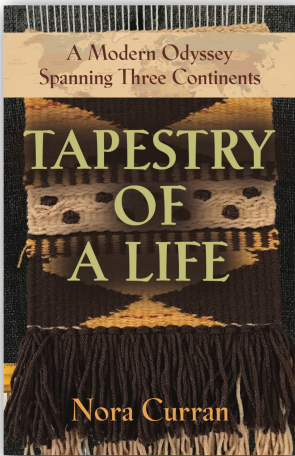
compliant. Gender roles were clearly defined between *them* and *us*—*them* being the dominant males, and *us* the subservient females.

Those words: *Education is wasted on a woman*, fanned the spark of independence in me into an inferno, and it continues to burn.

This is my story—how I managed to break free and soar above those constraints. My flight took me from Cyprus to England, Hong Kong, Mongolia, China and finally to the United States.

My education began when I realized I had choices. That I could take risks and, live with the consequences. And it is ongoing. I remain a perennial student, a work in progress. I want to keep on learning. Some lessons are painful, but perhaps they are the lessons that teach us the most.

Education is *never* wasted on anyone—be it man or woman.



A young girl's flight from an oppressive environment in search of self-expression and freedom. She chooses her own trajectory, ready to face what lies ahead. She embarks on a modern Odyssey of self-discovery and interesting encounters across three continents before she comes home to roost in the USA via Beijing, Hong Kong, London and e-Harmony.

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