

During a lifetime of global travels, first in international business and then with charitable endeavors, author Imran Riffat has experienced a wide range of people engaged in complex entanglements.

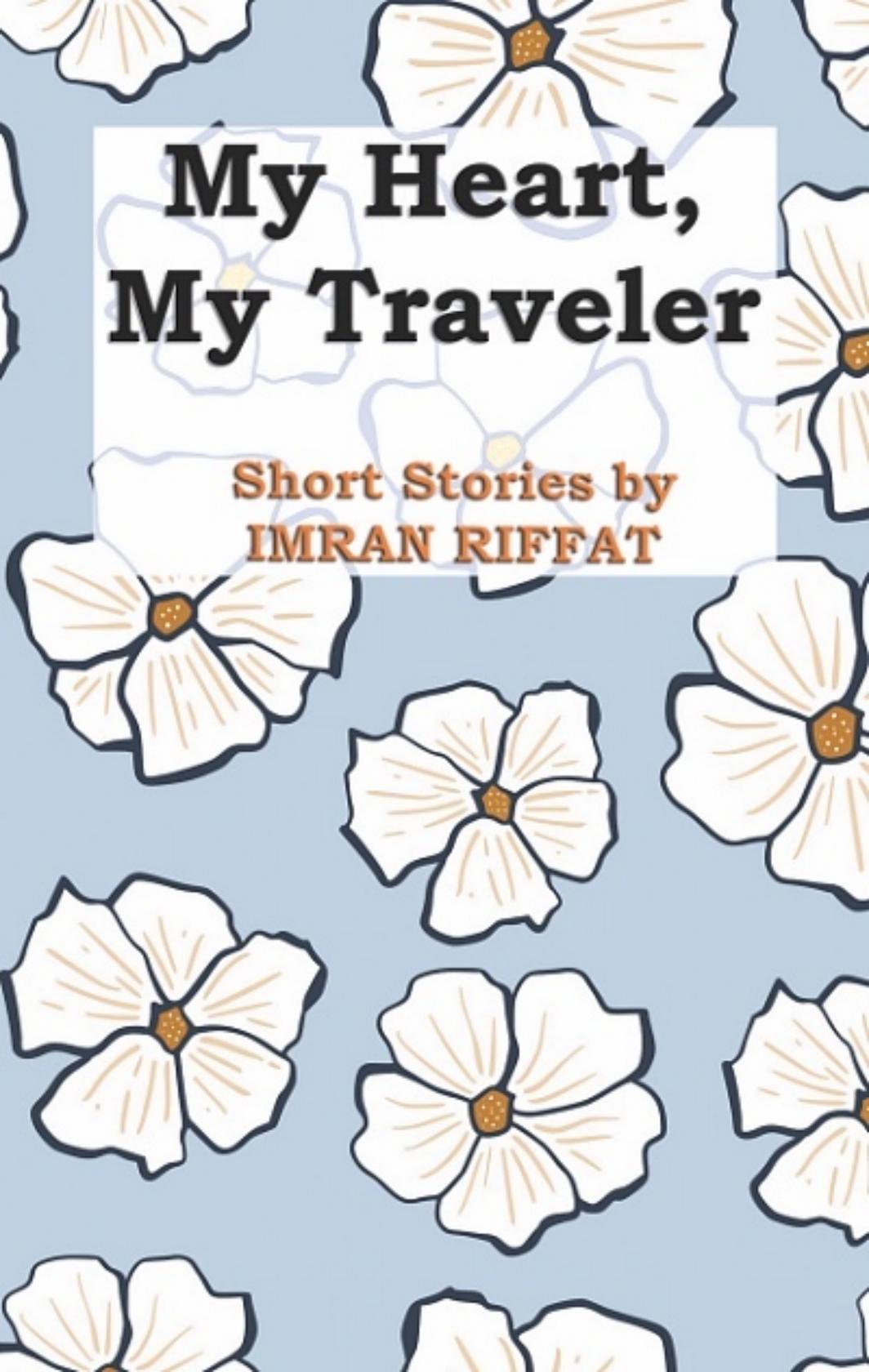
My Heart, My Traveler

By Imran Riffat

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My Heart, My Traveler

**Short Stories by
IMRAN RIFFAT**

Reviews of My Heart, My Traveler

“Like other short story writers who master their craft, Imran Riffat has created a collection of memorable characters facing life-defining questions in his My Heart, My Traveler. Their unique ethical dilemmas and cultural settings are revealed through vignettes and a form of fable. The characters he has formed in these stories, both from his acquaintance and from his imagination, face individual challenges with universal meanings. Each story is a short engagement with long-lasting lessons about living a life of integrity at home and in the larger society.”

—Dr. Robert A. Scott, President Emeritus and
University Professor Emeritus, Adelphi University

"Imran Riffat's deeply felt writing shows us an honest look at humanity in all its forms. His voice based on many of his own experiences and his humanistic perspective are needed now more than ever."

—Veera Hiranandani, Author & Winner of
Newbery Honor Award

“My Heart, My Traveler is so much more than an elegantly written, heartfelt collection of stories. Drawing on experiences from his childhood in Lahore, Pakistan, moving to New York as a young man and traveling the world as an international banker, Imran unravels the inevitable knots of cross-cultural perspectives and perceptions with a grace and wisdom only a true citizen of the world could produce.”

—Daria Sommers, Writer and Filmmaker

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Print ISBN: 978-1-958891-16-2

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-603-3

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia, USA.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Riffat, Imran

My Heart, My Traveler by Imran Riffat

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023919845

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2023

My Heart, My Traveler

My heart, my fellow traveler,
It has been decreed again
That you and I be exiled,
go calling out in every street,
turn to every town.
To search for a clue
of a messenger from our Beloved.
To ask every stranger
the way back to our home.

In this town of unfamiliar folk
we drudge the day into the night.
Talk to this stranger at times,
to that one at others.

How can I convey to you, my friend,
how horrible is a night of loneliness?
It would suffice to me
if there were just some count.
I would gladly welcome death
if it were to come but once.

The title of the book has been borrowed from the English translation of a poem, *Mere Dil, Mere Musaaafir*, by the famous poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-84). Through his romantic poetry Faiz always stood for the cause of humanism and internationalism. His message was always an inconvenient truth, as well as a thorn in the side, for Pakistan's authoritarian rulers, who either kept him in prison or forced him into exile. In 1962 he became the first Asian poet to win the Lenin Peace Prize.

For Nigi,
with all my love

&

For my four granddaughters, who bring me fathomless
joy and pride

Sophia Isabel
Allegra Grace
Olivia Iman
Bianca Geti

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Foreword

By Carole Artigiani

Aren't we fortunate to meet Imran Riffat in this moving collection of stories about people and places, both familiar and distant.

The author has had a storied career, from high-level work in the world of global banking to volunteering and consulting for nonprofit organizations that are addressing critical global issues: poverty and injustice as well as ethnic and religious conflict.

Along the way, one thing stands out about Imran Riffat: he is a good and decent man.

One asks what it means to be good and decent. How do we determine what is good? What does it mean to “do the right thing”? Characters in this short story collection often face this moral predicament.

We will meet many people in this book. All have faced some difficulty or dilemma, perhaps “small,” affecting only close friends and family members. And some, including Imran, have made decisions affecting major institutions or the larger society.

The stories are based on the actions and relationships of real people. They live in various parts of the world, mostly in what we call the Middle East and South Asia, but also in Europe and the United States. The reader might admire or abhor them. They will probably remind us of people we already know. Some of these characters might serve as a mirror into our own lives and experiences.

What lessons can we learn from this book? Let us start with “The Short Rope,” the story of Imran’s personal calamity, a sports

injury that would test even the strongest among us. Not only did Imran endure, but his life-changing experience developed in him compassion and empathy for others who suffer. This applies not only to amputees but to all whose lives have been tested by the pains of family relationships and by geopolitical and economic circumstances. Imran doesn't "take sides." He does what he can to do the right thing.

Being a good person isn't always the easiest path to take.

What does "The Short Rope" tell us about Imran? Are there ways that his life can serve as a model for others? In what ways?

Or consider Ali, the central character in "Shangri-La." Coming from humble circumstances in Lahore, Pakistan, Ali grows up to become a success in a U.S. construction business. When Ali meets up with his old childhood friend, we learn about a rather nasty incident, not unusual for kids at play, that has long affected the relationship between Ayesha and his sister Meena. What happens when Ali meets up with Ayesha after eighteen years? Does he do the right thing? Might he have taken a different path toward reconciliation?

Consider the experience of Sahar and Tarek, who, on the face of it, are a happily married couple with a much-loved young son. Their relationship is challenged in the story "Smartphone." What does Tarek hide from Sahar? Does he have a right to do what he does? What decisions do each make as the truth unfolds? Are Sahar's actions justifiable? What would you do?

This is a story of just two people. Consider actions you might feel compelled to take to uncover the truth about someone important in your own life. Does the end of "Smartphone" justify Sahar's actions? When does the end justify the means?

Each of the stories has a significant message and inspires similar questions. But, beyond presenting ethical dilemmas, Imran's stories enrich us in countless ways. Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Pakistani, Afghan, Egyptian, British, American. Bankers, farmers, religious pilgrims, corporate executives, government policymakers, diplomats. We meet people whose lives are challenged by poverty and others who have been showered with privilege and opportunity.

Imran can tell their stories because he has known them all. He brings us into their homes and offices. We learn much about their diverse lives and experiences. Likeable or disagreeable, lazy or ambitious, cagey or transparent, each person gives us insights into the ways people behave in difficult circumstances. No one is better equipped to tell their stories than Imran Riffat, a man with vast experience across cultures and borders. He teaches us that goodness and fairness have nothing to do with geography. What is good here is good everywhere.

How fortunate that Imran Riffat has discovered his creative writing talents after so many years as a man of action and decision-making. It's those experiences that make this book an authentic introduction to the lives of people around the world. He is showing us what matters in this world, no matter where or how we live.

Carole Artigiani
Founder, President Emerita, and Member of Board of
Directors of Global Kids

Preface

It all started with an innocent question from a little girl; she had just turned four then. I had my walking cane in my left hand and she was clutching my right hand as we ambled out of a restaurant opposite the Lincoln Center in New York City. “You walk slowly, *Dadoo* (paternal grandfather). Does it hurt?” she asked. I answered, “Sometimes.” After a short pause, unable to contain her curiosity, she asked, “How did it happen?” I gave her a brief age-appropriate answer as we got nearer to the car, and added that I would tell her more later. I knew I was now in her debt and wondered when, and if at all, it might be possible to fulfill my promise.

It was then that I decided to write it down for her, and for my three other granddaughters, so that they have access to a firsthand account of an important chapter of my life that they may read when they are old enough to comprehend. The first story in my collection, the only narrative that is written in first person with real names of people and places, I trust, answers the little one’s question sufficiently; it is deeply personal and autobiographical. The other stories are semi-fiction—real events as well as personal experiences narrated through fictional characters.

My life has been a mosaic of interesting crossroads, most of them unexpected. I could never have thought of witnessing events surrounding the Prague Spring in August 1968 that brought Soviet tanks rolling into Czechoslovakia, nor could I have thought that I would be an eyewitness to the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. My career in the corporate world provided me and my family the opportunity to live for five years in Istanbul,

formerly the capital of the Byzantine and Roman empires; it's the only city in the world where one can travel between two continents without leaving town!

In 1990 we moved from the shores of the Bosphorous to the banks of the Nile for a five-year stint in Cairo—home of the ancient Egyptian civilization that is also symbolized in the awe-inspiring Giza Pyramids and the magnificent Sphinx. Both assignments enabled us to travel extensively in Europe and the Middle East. While on the subject of serendipitous occurrences in my life, I could never, ever have imagined that I would fly inside a USAF Boeing KS-135 air-to-air-fueling tanker and see it refuel a F-16 jetfighter mid-air; this was made possible through a “military trip” arranged by the Council on Foreign Relations for a group of its members in 2002.

Notwithstanding many challenges that have come my way, I can never say that my life has been boring. I most enjoy attending events, as well as meeting people, that enrich my mind. Every new day is a gift, and I accept it with gratitude. I always strive to quench my curiosity with “what I do not know,” and I am now spending a lot of my time with my books.

In 2003 I got off the merry-go-round of the corporate world after a twenty-five-year ride; a wise friend wrote to me: “The corporate world is a real killer and makes grown men behave in the strangest ways just to survive.” I decided to celebrate this parting with a gift to myself in the form of a sabbatical, and I enrolled as a student at Columbia University in New York. My older son, who was also attending the same university at that time, found this news quite unsettling; and when his powers of dissuasion did not succeed he and I arrived at a fair compromise: We would use separate libraries and not greet each other if our paths crossed on campus. I

relished the experience of endless chats with professors as well as with fellow students much younger than myself; it led to a paradigm shift in my worldview, and in 2005 I entered the not-for-profit world.

My involvement with a number of projects led me to visit Orangi and Dharavi, two slums in Karachi and Mumbai, respectively. An opportunity to see abject poverty from so close irretrievably convinced me that the striking imbalance between military expenditures and the allocation of resources to provide humankind with the very basic needs of existence—healthcare, education, housing, and nourishment—had to be corrected. The peril of unforgivable neglect over the past century is already visible in the continuing polarization of wealth and the serious risks posed by climate change; we're already on the losing side in this game.

One of my greatest pleasures in life is to spend time with my granddaughters. We play together, and we laugh together. Whenever the subject of McDonald's comes up I tell them about the Ronald McDonald House. This is part of the value system, and legacy, I inherited from my late parents. It was the motto of their lives to be cognizant of, and helpful to, those who were less privileged in life than themselves, and they never failed to walk the walk. I owe it to them, at least as much as I owe it to myself, to pass this message along to my sons, my daughters-in-law, and my granddaughters.

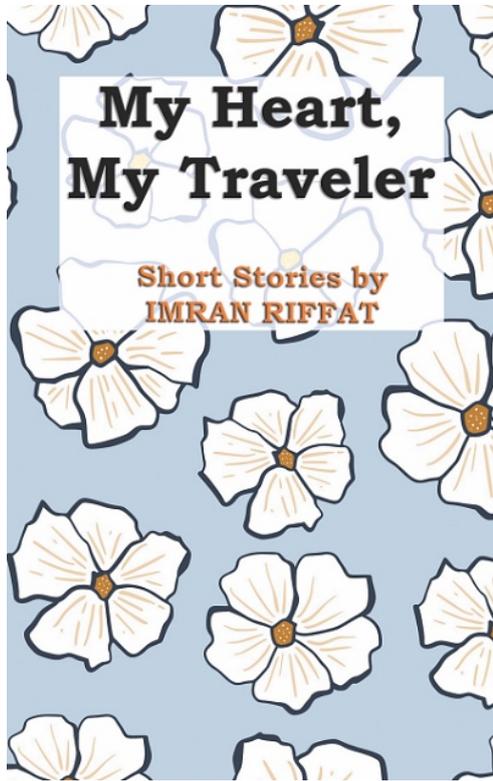
Imran Riffat
November 8, 2023
New York

About the Author



A native of Lahore, Pakistan, Imran Riffat moved to New York City in 1976 where, after obtaining his MBA, he joined a major U.S. financial institution. His twenty-five year career in international banking—which included two five-year assignments in Istanbul and Cairo—provided him the opportunity to travel the world. In 2005 Imran made a successful transition from the corporate world to the nonprofit sector.

Imran was the senior director & CFO of an international nonprofit organization—run by the Rockefeller family—dedicated to alleviating global poverty and social injustice. He has served as a member of the International Executive Committee of Amnesty International, a member of the Board of the Seeds for Peace, and a member of the Advisory Board of BRAC USA. He is a life member of the Council on Foreign Relations.



During a lifetime of global travels, first in international business and then with charitable endeavors, author Imran Riffat has experienced a wide range of people engaged in complex entanglements.

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