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# Exploring the experience of loneliness among older Sinhalese immigrant women in Canada

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EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF LONELINESS AMONG OLDER SINHALESE  
IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN CANADA

by

A.V. Pramuditha Madhavi, RN, RM, BScN

A thesis

presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Nursing

in the program of

Nursing

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2009

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# Exploring the Experience of Loneliness among Older Sinhalese Immigrant Women in Canada

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## ABSTRACT

Although people can become lonely at any age, older people are more likely to experience loneliness due to changes and losses that accompany aging. Older women are more likely to be lonely owing to their greater longevity as compared to older men (Hall & Havens, 1999). This situation can be worse for older immigrant women (Guruge, Kanthasamy & Santos, 2007). The purpose of this study was to uncover the experience of loneliness among older Sinhalese women in Toronto. Using a narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Clonnelly, 2000), I conducted in-depth individual interviews with two older Sinhalese immigrant women. Study findings show that their feelings of loneliness were triggered due to loss of status and privilege, declined social network, negative role transition, and family oppression. Practice implications can include: work towards strengthening and expanding older immigrant women's social network in order to create a conducive environment for psychosocial health and wellbeing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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My great appreciation goes to my dear brothers and their families who helped me in times of need.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving parents, A. V. Thilakaweera and P. A.

Wimala, who gave me warmth love and affection throughout my life to be the person I am today,  
and to my loving husband, Mohan Jayakady.

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## Prologue

I can visualize even now what my trip to Canada was like two years ago. I thought my journey began at the airport in Sri Lanka and ended at the airport in Toronto after a 19- hour flight. But when I began the thesis work for my master's studies, I started to travel again in order to find co-participants for my study. Only when this work began I came to realize that my journey actually began after I visited three couples in Sri Lanka who were lonely. During the data collection and analysis process for my thesis I traveled together with my co-participants to share our experiences and to co-construct our narratives. Thus "journey" became my metaphor for our travelling *alone* and *together* to find a way to overcome our loneliness. To overcome my own feelings of loneliness I wrote reflective letters to Mother Nature. Mother Nature was my companion who constantly walked with me during times of loneliness and sorrow and helped me to identify my inner strength to overcome these feelings. I invite you, the reader, to understand my co-participants' and my journey through these metaphors and our unique and shared experiences of loneliness.

## Chapter I - Introduction

### *Background*

Loneliness is a universal and common phenomenon in the society (Gibson, 2000). Yet it is unique for every individual and therefore difficult to define (Killeen, 1998). Humans as social beings have a need to interact with others and loneliness may result if/when they lose these relations and interactions. Killeen further explains that loneliness is an embarrassing, painful and negative feeling. Although people can become lonely at any age, older people are more likely to experience loneliness due to life changes and losses that accompany aging (Hall & Havens, 1999). Eshbaugh (2009) supported that people in older age are at risk for loneliness. Lee (1994) added that among older adults, women are more likely to be lonely owing to their greater longevity as compared to their male counterparts (Hall & Havens). This situation can be worse for older immigrant women because of the unfamiliar environment in the new country (Guruge, Kanthasamy & Santos, 2008).

### *Rationale for the Study*

Literature suggests that immigration itself is a stressful situation for immigrants (Synder, 1987) and uprooting and resettlement is more difficult for elderly immigrants (Choudhry, 2001). However limited research is available on the health of older immigrant women in Canada, in general, and their experience of loneliness, in particular. In order to begin to address this gap, I sought to explore the older Sinhalese immigrant women's experience of loneliness in the post migration context. While some attention has been given to the needs of South Asian communities in Canada, the Sinhalese community in Canada has received minimal attention from the health sciences researchers (Guruge & Malone, 2007). My choice of the community was also influenced by my background as a Sinhalese woman and a newcomer to Canada.

## *Emergence of My Interest to the Phenomenon of Loneliness*

My interest of this phenomenon was triggered by my encounters with three older couples who lived near my village in Sri Lanka. Two of the couples lived in my native village and the other couple lived in a close by village. The lady of one couple was the charge-nurse in a special unit of a teaching hospital. Her husband was a teacher. Both husband and wife of one of the other two couples were teachers with the husband spending his post-retirement time as a justice of the peace (J.P.). The third couple were administrative officers who retired recently. Within a six week period, just prior to my departure, I met with these three couples which left me thinking about their experiences of loneliness. Prior to these particular encounters I never assumed that they would be lonely even though I knew them for years. Next, I will present these three encounters as short stories.

### *Short story I – My encounter with the justice of the peace and his wife.*

It was a dark evening and I felt as if it was going to rain soon. Still I wanted to meet a JP to get an affidavit that I needed. I went to meet the JP who lived in a near by village. He has no children and lives with his spouse. He is one of richest persons in that area. They own many properties and have many people working in their lands and maintaining their buildings. When I went there, both husband and wife were at home, and warmly welcomed me and offered me tea and cookies. Lots of papers were piled up on the coffee table and the few artificial flowers in a wooden vase were covered with dust giving a sense of an abandoned place. Before I had a chance to tell them the reason for my visit, they started to tell me about their current situation and about their loneliness. I listened to them for more than an hour. Even though I was in a hurry to return, I could not stop them from talking as they were very interested in talking with me.

They talked about their health problems, the medication they took, and their helplessness when they were ill. They said, “Now we are very helpless. Money is not every thing. Although we have money we can’t buy love and affection. We have only each other for every thing and day by day we are getting older. The day we won’t be able to help each other is not that much far. Your parents are very lucky to have children like you and your brothers. We do not have children.” After listening to them for more than an hour, I told the JP my reason for visiting them. While he was preparing the document, his wife told me about the pain she had on her right leg, perhaps hoping to get some advice from me (as she knew I was a nurse). I believe that they might have sought a moment of solace by talking to me. Even now I can visualize the woman’s face when she explained her agony. Little wrinkles appearing on her face, her eyes partly closing, and her lips shivering. Her husband took a deep breath that said more than a thousand of words about their life. On my way home, I thought about their experience of loneliness.

*Short story II – My encounter with an insurance agent and her husband.*

A few weeks later I met with the second couple. It was a very bright sunny Sunday morning. I had to meet with my insurance agent to renew my life insurance policy. She had retired from government service and presently worked as an insurance agent. As I was busy over the week with my work, I arranged to meet with her on that Sunday morning at her home. However when I reached her place, only her husband was at home. So I sat talking with her husband until she returned. They have four daughters and I knew them when I was growing up. He mentioned that their life is dull and monotonous since their daughters moved away. He further said “my daughters do not come to see us often because they are very busy and do not have enough time for us”. He added “I had a bypass surgery about six months ago and my daughters came to see me but they did not stay for too long”. Their children have become famous

in their areas of work. He stopped talking and came back with lot of newspapers that showed their daughters' photographs and many achievements. "These are the memories we have instead of our daughters. But their photos can't talk to us, can't give us a warm relationship." He said "I am very pleased to have a chance to talk with you. For me it is like talking to my daughter." At one point he came out of the house to show me some flower plants and said "here, this is my second daughter's. She loved this so much. So I take care of these plants as if I took care of them. Some time I talk to these flowers, you know?" I spent more than two hours listening to him. Meanwhile his wife called apologizing for her delay due to unavoidable circumstances. On my way back I thought about their experience of loneliness.

### *Short story III – My encounter with a retired charge-nurse and her husband.*

I met the third couple when I took my father to the doctor for a follow up two weeks after his discharge from the hospital. There was a long delay to see the doctors and many others were ahead of us. Among this crowd, all of a sudden I saw a familiar face. While I was trying to remember who this was, she came to me smiling. She was one of the charge-nurses who worked in one of the hospitals where I worked as a student nurse. As students we admired her work, and the way she interacted with us and with patients, their families as well as doctors. She started to talk, "How are you? Why are you here? With whom did you come?" Before I answered her first question she asked me a few more questions. I asked about her life. She said "You know? Now they are our friends (pointing to the doctors). We always come to see them. Now we are alone. We do not have any friends other than them." She was with her husband. She said that both her daughter and son got married, and only she and her husband live at home. She further said "You know? Now we are hanging there. We feel isolated and alone. We are old now so people do not like us. I am very pleased to have a chance to talk to you." It was very hard to hear how things

have changed with her. All of a sudden I heard a nurse call my father's name and we had to leave. On my way back I pondered about this couple's experience of loneliness

These couples involved in the three incidences appeared to be deprived of their desired companionships either with their children or other relations.

*Short Story IV – My own silent crying.*

Because of the three stories described above, I became interested in learning more about the phenomenon of loneliness. Meanwhile I had to leave the country to do my Master's of Nursing in Canada. Being out of my country for the first time made me also feel lonely. It is this story of being lonely I describe next.

During the period immediately before I left my country, I had to finish a number of projects and hand over my responsibilities to others at the university. Therefore, I did not have time to think about how I would manage being away from my family and all my close relatives. I left Sri Lanka on September 13, 2007 at 5.30 am. My parents, my two brothers and their children came with me to the airport. On my way to the airport I went through fond memories of my time with them. At the airport I said goodbye to my family. Even though I felt being in a very strange environment going through all the procedures at the airport and my past memories kept flooding my brain, I was still in my country. During the flight, my mind was filled with lots of strange feelings that incorporated my past and the new experiences, but I still felt connected to my homeland.

At the Toronto airport, I saw no familiar faces. As my husband could not come to the airport to pick me up, I had to wait until one of my relatives, whom I had never seen before, arrived. He took me to his home where several others waited to welcome me, all of whom were new to me. I thought of how far away I was from my parents and my brothers. For the first time,

I felt lonely. While previously I had an “outsider” knowledge about this phenomenon, at this point, I was looking at the phenomenon from an insider’s point of view. I felt my mind was crying but nobody could hear it. I recalled what my mother said when I asked her “why didn’t you cry when I left at the airport? And don’t you feel sad about me leaving?” She said “You don’t have to have tears in your eyes when you cry. Though you couldn’t hear, I cried in my mind to be heard by the whole world. You couldn’t see my silent cry.” Although I could not make sense of this at the time, I now understood what it meant and how true it was. Only I myself could hear my silent crying! In my mind my cry was like a flare but nobody else heard or sensed it. By being in a totally different cultural, social, and geographical context, I experienced loneliness. This unpleasant experience urged me to find other women who might be experiencing loneliness so that I could understand the experiences of loneliness among other Sinhalese immigrant women in Canada.

## Chapter II – Literature Review

Loneliness is a universal experience (Ouellette, 2001). Although people can become lonely at any age, loneliness is a more prevalent issue among older people (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001). This is because, when people grow older, they have limited opportunities for social contacts due to retirement, death of spouse and peers, physical limitations such as lack of mobility that limit visiting friends and relatives (Pinquart & Sorensen). Among older adults, women, in general, and immigrant women, in particular, are more likely to be lonely (Hall & Haven, 1999; Guruge, Kanthasamy & Santos, 2007).

To understand the older immigrant women's experience of loneliness, I conducted a literature search initially casting a broad net using search engines such as CINAHL and MEDLINE and a combination of key words including immigrant, older women, loneliness, health, resettlement, and mental health. The search found nearly 350 articles written in English and published in United States, Canada, Australia and the Netherlands. These were then narrowed down by focusing their relevance to the research question to 31 articles published from 1981 to 2007. The studies focus on the older immigrant women and resettlement in the post migration context.

### Section 1: Literature Review

Most of the literature addresses loneliness in terms of social isolation. However my focus is on loneliness in relation to immigration and more specifically as experienced by elderly Sinhalese women. In the following sections, I discuss the literature under the subheadings of loneliness, loneliness and ageing, and older women in the post-migration context.

## *Loneliness*

As Kim (1999) describes, loneliness is influenced by both the presence or absence of relationship and the quality of the relationships. Weiss (1973) defines loneliness as lack of close and intimate relations. Further, loneliness is the feeling people have when they lack personal relationships (Gierveld, 1998; Fees, Martin & Poon, 1999; Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Many researchers agree on three points in terms of loneliness. First, lack of person's social relationships leads to feeling of loneliness. The second point is that loneliness differs from social isolation since loneliness is a subjective experience. Therefore the person can be alone without being lonely or can be lonely even when being in a crowd. The third point is that loneliness can be distressing. People may suffer, worry and / or feel exhausted when they experience loneliness.

Perlman and Peplau (1981) further explain that the nature of loneliness can be understood from different perspectives. As they describe, the deficit perspective of loneliness explains that lack of relationships in one's social network and feelings of loneliness may be the result of insufficiently met or unmet need for companionship or intimacy. According to the cognitive perspective, loneliness refers to the subjective experience of one's desires, expectations, and preferences for personal relationships and their dissatisfaction with existing relationships.

As Hall and Havens (1999) describe, loneliness is a person's feeling of dissatisfaction with social contacts in terms of quantity of contacts, quality of relationship or both. As Gierveld (1989) defines, loneliness is an experienced lack of social contacts, intimacy, or support in social relationships. Dykstra and De Jong-Gierveld (1994) described loneliness as a discrepancy between actual and desired interpersonal relationships.

As can be seen from the above discussion, there appears to be no single definition, however, almost all authors agree that loneliness is a feeling people have when they do not have their desired or expected social relations regardless of whether social networks exist or not.

### *Loneliness and Ageing*

Researchers such as Dugan and Kivett (1994), and Mullins and Dugan (1991) have suggested that there is a relationship between ageing and loneliness. Older adults who have experienced the loss of close relationships may become susceptible to feelings of loneliness (Dugan & Kivett; McInns & White, 2001). Blizard, Harwood, Prince and Thomas (1997) study findings showed that those who were older than 80 years felt higher rates of loneliness than those in the lower age group. Dugan and Kivett, and Mullins and Dugan also noted that adults are at risk of experiencing loneliness as they grow older whether or not they change their place of residence. But movement from one living environment to another is strongly associated with loneliness (Berge, Creecy, & Wright, 1985; Ryan, 1996).

Edith, Jog-Gierveld, Kromhout and Tijhuis (1999) have studied the changes in and factors related to older men and loneliness. They found that those men who became dependant and without their partners reported more loneliness than those who lived independently or with their partners. Some authors identified that older women were more vulnerable to be lonely than their male counterpart. For example, the findings of the study done by Anderson, Ericsson, Holmen and Winblad (1992) in Sweden showed that, in a sample of 1725 individuals over 75 years, 38% of women became lonely as compared to 24% of men. As another example, the study done in England by Blizard, Harwood, Prince and Thomas (1997) revealed that female participants (19%) were more likely to be lonely than their male participants (12%). Further, Hall and Havens (1999) found that women in their sample were twice as likely to live alone and three

times more likely than men to be widowed. In her review of loneliness in older women, Beal (2006) observed that women's vulnerability to loneliness was triggered by certain life events such as chronic illness, changes in social relations, widowhood, and immigration experiences.

Some authors discuss that there is a strong relationship between loneliness and health in older age. For example, Kivett and Scott (1979) describe that health is a significant predictor of loneliness among older people. Supporting this idea, Bowling, Edelman, Hoekel, and Leaver (1989) describe that increased physical impairment in older age significantly increases loneliness.

### *Older Women in the Post-migration Context*

Immigration experiences are important to be studied in a multicultural country like Canada. According to the Oxford Dictionary, immigration means arrival in a new country to settle. According to the Census of Canada, an immigrant is defined as any one who is not a Canadian citizen by birth (Statistics Canada, 2006). According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC, 2006), "immigrants are those born outside of Canada and are, or have been a landed immigrant. A landed immigrant is a person who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities." (p. 4.) Context refers to "the historical, social, economic and environmental conditions within which the individual is located" (Guruge, 2007, p. 4). Accordingly the immigration context is considered as the historical background, economic and social situation, and environmental conditions to which the individual has immigrated (Guruge & Collins, 2008).

The Canadian immigrant population has dramatically increased (Donnelly & Mahony, 2007) and 18% of Canadian population consists of immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2003). There is limited literature on the older immigrant women's experiences in Canada. Choudhry's (2001)

study that explored the challenges faced by elderly Indian women migrated to Canada showed that social isolation and loneliness, family conflicts, economic dependency, and settling in and coping as major themes of concerns among elderly Indian immigrant women. Anderson's (1987) phenomenological study on how immigrant women experienced their every day life shows that feelings of loneliness, depression, and isolation are most overwhelming to the participants. More recently, Chandler, Miller, Sorokin and Wilbur's (2004) study of a group of recent immigrant women in the U.S. revealed that women in the 55 to 65 year age range are at a higher risk for depression. Immigration related losses in professional roles and family roles of immigrant women were perceived to contribute to their difficulties in adapting to the new setting.

Murty (1998) describes in her writing that immigrant women may experience hardships in the process of social integration because of cultural and linguistic barriers. Buck and Ivanov's (2002) study with immigrant women from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine to the U.S. found that the women accessed the U.S. healthcare system based on the health care systems in their countries of origin. Choudhry's (1998) study on the health promoting practices of immigrant women from India to Canada showed that immigrant women were knowledgeable about the actions such as regular exercises, rest and relaxation, having adequate diet for good nutrition, managing stress, and quitting smoking that help them to remain healthy. However, the author described that these immigrant women were unable to perform these healthy lifestyle practices due to their resettlements, life transitions and failure to fulfill their cultural expectations in the new context. As Guruge et al., (2008) describe, many of the older immigrant women are more likely to be dependant on their children and engage in unpaid labour in the post migration context in comparison to the pre-migration context. The authors further explain that immigrant women tend

to loose access to a wider social network as a result of the move to a new country; the effect of which is social isolation and loneliness.

### *Study Population*

#### *The Sinhalese community in Sri Lanka.*

Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, is an island located in the Indian Ocean. Ceylon was the name given by Great Britain for Sri Lanka, however, the Sri Lankans have been using the name Sri Lanka since 1972 (Ferdinands, 2002). Sinhalese are the major ethnic group of Sri Lanka and other ethnic groups include Tamils, Muslims and Burghers. These ethnic groups are different from each other on the basis of the language they speak and their affiliated religion. While the majority of Sinhalese are Buddhists, some practice Christianity (Ferdinands).

The Sinhalese population is scattered throughout the island except in the Northern and Eastern provinces where the Sinhalese population is limited. The Sinhalese constitute approximately 75% of Sri Lankan population (Abraham, 1999 as cited in Ferdinands, 2002, p. 19). They live in both rural and urban areas on the island.

#### *The Sinhalese community in Canada.*

There are some factors that compel Sinhalese to immigrate to Canada from their homeland. Intermittent political instability, high unemployment, and poverty are major factors amongst these (Abrahams & Steven, 1990). The political situation and policies in Sri Lankan government regarding national security and law enforcement have considerably influenced Sinhalese to emigrate. The ongoing civil conflicts between the government and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramua (J.V.P.), an opposition political party in Sri Lanka, further motivated Sri Lankans to immigrate to foreign countries. More and more Sinhalese began to migrate to other countries such as Canada as opportunities in the homeland became restricted with unstable situations in the

country (Ferdinands, 2002). During the second phase of immigration (i.e., after 1980s), especially following the Sinhalese-Tamil riots in 1983 and subsequent civil war, many Sinhalese left the homeland to seek political safety and refugee status in Canada (even though the Tamils were the most affected by the war) (Abraham 1999 as cited in Ferdinands, 2002). While many Sinhalese migrated directly from Sri Lanka to Canada, some Sinhalese arrived from Great Britain to Canada through their secondary migration (Abrahams, 1999 as cited in Ferdinands, 2002).

In terms of geographical dispersion, the majority of Sinhalese immigrants have settled in Ontario and Quebec, mainly in metropolitan areas such as Toronto and Montreal. There are few Buddhist temples in Ontario. Participation in religious activities among Sinhalese immigrants varies from family to family.

Earlier Sinhalese immigrants have become more successful in finding employment as the majority of them had professional qualifications and good English language skills (Ferdinands, 2002). Comparatively, recent immigrants, those who arrived after the 1980s, have been less successful in finding job opportunities because of their relatively low level of education (Ferdinands). In addition, there has been a general difficulty in getting Canadian employers to recognize/accept their professional qualifications (Abraham, 1999 as cited in Ferdinands, 2002).

It is difficult to estimate the number of Sinhalese in Canada but the community is small enough for most Sinhalese to get to know each other even though they live in different parts of the country (Ferdinands, 2002). They maintain informal social networks, which allow them to facilitate their social activities. Their social organizations tend to be established in main cities. Canada Sri Lanka Association, for example, provides their support for social activities such as social gatherings, sport events, and cultural and religious festivals. Social organizations in the

Sinhalese community have primarily been developed as sports clubs and later evolved as formal voluntary organizations. These organizations provide the basis for networking in the Sinhalese community.

The majority Sinhalese in Canada are from the middle class and, therefore, they are well aware of available community, health and social services in the Canadian social context (Ferdinands, 2002). Some persons in the community are considered as leaders based on the specific abilities they possess, their age, services rendered to the association, and level of education or professional status.

In terms of kinship and family relations, the husband and the father is considered as the head of the household in Sinhalese communities both in Canada and Sri Lanka. Traditionally, senior members are revered and respected. Elders in the Sinhalese community believe that the younger generation is lacking an interest and respect of the formal customs (Ferdinands, 2002). Most Sinhalese immigrants' children are given less freedom than their Canadian born-counterparts.

Earlier Sinhalese who immigrated to Canada before the 1980s do not widely use the Sinhala language. But recently there has been a resurgence in Sinhala language use in community celebrations such as cultural and religious activities. Although there were no Sri Lankan foods available prior to the mid 1980s, with the increasing number of Sinhalese and Tamil immigrants in Canada, many Sri Lankan restaurants have been opened in Toronto, Montreal and other urban areas where Sinhalese live (Ferdinands, 2002).

#### *Sinhalese women.*

After getting married the Sinhalese woman usually lives with her husband and his family members. But in some occasions some move to a separate household. In their family life, the

Sinhalese women take on all the responsibilities of home-front affairs while contributing to the family income. However, this may vary with generational, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. Family solidarity is a highly valued concept among Sinhalese people. In extended families, mothers and grandmothers are revered. Their instructions and advice are expected by family members, and elders are valued for their experience and wisdom. Mothers are given strong support from extended family to manage their primary responsibility of child rearing. Therefore, Sinhalese women have strong relations within their families. On some occasions they extend their roles out of their families as most of them take part in social activities in the society in home country. Therefore, they have considerable access to social networks and supports. When these women migrate to another country, they leave behind such networks.

As noted earlier, there is minimal literature on the health of Sinhalese women in the post-migration context in Canada (Guruge & Malone, 2007). There is no health science literature at all on the older Sinhalese immigrant women in Canada.

### *The Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to uncover the experience of loneliness among older Sinhalese immigrant women in Toronto.

### *Research Question*

This study explored the following research question: How do older Sinhalese immigrant women experience loneliness in the post migration context of Canada?

### *Theoretical Consideration*

My study is underpinned by the Theory of Relational Loneliness developed by Weiss (1973). The theory describes the psychological and relational mechanisms underlying the adjustment process. The theory explains the adjustment process relating to loss and recovery.

Weiss (1973), in his Theory of Relational Loneliness, describes two types of loneliness namely social loneliness and emotional loneliness. According to Weiss, social loneliness is a response to social isolation and the social isolation is described as the absence of an accessible social network. This state may cause feelings of marginality, aimlessness, meaninglessness and boredom. Loss of meaningful friendships or loss of the sense of community results in social loneliness which, in turn, leads to the experience of boredom (Weiss). This type of loneliness may be experienced following relocation such as immigration to another country. According to Weiss, social loneliness can be relieved by making new contacts.

Weiss (1973) describes emotional loneliness as a result of emotional isolation, a condition attributed by the absence of an attachment figure such as spouse or close relatives. Emotional loneliness is not simply a desire for company, but is a desire for a very specific form of relationship (Weiss) and not prevented by social activity because social activities cannot provide the individual with a way to feel and engage in individual emotions. According to this theory, a partner's death has a greater impact on emotional loneliness than it does on social loneliness. Therefore, a woman whose husband has died may be at a risk of experiencing emotional loneliness.

According to Weiss's Relational Loneliness theory, development of a new self-concept is one crucial and important process in adjusting to losses. The theory explains the role of social support as a one relational function in relationships. Sermat (1978) in expanding Weiss' idea has explained that loneliness is an experienced discrepancy between the actual interpersonal relationship individuals have at the time and the kind of relationship individuals would like to have.

Weiss (1973) believed that there is a link between loneliness and the Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. Attachment theory suggests that the type of deprivation experienced by lonely individuals is an objective absence of an attachment figure rather than subjective discrepancy. Based on this notion, Weiss directed his observations towards individuals who experienced loneliness due to loss of romantic partners. He identified that once they found another romantic partner, their loneliness is disappeared. In terms of adolescents, Weiss theorized that they relinquish their parent's attachment during their transitional period and find another attachment figure, a romantic partner.

However as Weiss (1973) explained, the intensity and the frequency of loneliness are underestimated. As a result, the image of loneliness is often rejected and lonely people labelled as unattractive, shy, intentionally reclusive, and undignified in their complaints.

Weiss (1973), in his Theory of Relational Loneliness, describe loneliness in connection with some other terms. For example, loneliness is described in relation to depression and grief. But loneliness is different from what is described as depression. Not like in depression, in loneliness, there is an intrinsic drive to rid the stress felt by oneself by regaining the lost one or integrating a new relationship. Lonely people are driven to find others and once they find who they want, they are no longer lonely. In terms of depressed people, their feelings cannot be replaced by any relationship. Weiss describes the distinction between loneliness and grief saying that the condition of grief may be the syndrome of protest, anger, shock and painful sadness. Whereas the loneliness is a component of this condition and it is a reaction to the absence of a closely attached figure rather than its loss. In another example, loneliness is described by Weiss as one's feeling of separateness from others and a way back to oneself. In another instance, Weiss describes loneliness as being separated from parents and others to develop a separate self.

Hence, loneliness is caused not only by being alone but also by being without important needed relationships. The feeling of loneliness can be intensified under certain circumstances. For example, someone who is unmarried or widowed may feel like an outsider of settled family life and marginalized by married couples.

As argued by Weiss (1973), loneliness seems to be a response to the absence of specific relationship or particularly a response to the absence of intimate attachment. These attachments may probably be a meaningful friendship or collegial relationship. According to Weiss, all situations above, explain that the loneliness is a response to relational deficit. Weiss further describe that although different responses to loneliness can emerge, some common manifestations of loneliness can be seen. Different manifestations of loneliness might require different solutions/strategies. For example, the form of loneliness that appears in the absence of a close relational attachment (loneliness of emotional isolation) can be addressed by integrating another emotional bond or reintegrating the one that was lost. Conversely, Weiss explains that the loneliness emerged from the absence of an engaging social network called social isolation and can be remedied by getting access to a social network. For example, the loneliness one experiences after migration might be addressed by introducing into like-ethnic community networks.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology I used in this study.

### Chapter III: Methodology

#### *Narrative Inquiry*

I carried out this study on the exploration of the experience among older immigrant Sinhalese women using a qualitative research approach. As this undertaking is of an in-depth speculative and probing nature, a qualitative approach is well suited to this inquiry about the phenomenon of loneliness (Polit & Beck, 2007). A qualitative approach in research provides rich data about human experiences that cannot be captured using the standardized measurements typical of quantitative research methods (Stommel & Wills, 2004). More specifically, the study was shaped through the use of narrative inquiry research design to understand the phenomenon being studied. The focus of the narrative inquiry approach is exploring the life experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2007). The essence of the narrative approach relies on accessing the primary experience as presented by the individual.

Narratives are comprised of characters, action incidents, happenings and settings and may be presented in a variety of ways such as written, painted, told, and performed format/manner. Therefore narratives may be heard, seen and read (Sandelowski, 1991). Narratives are one of many ways to transform knowing into telling so that they are generally understood as stories that consist of temporal order of events (Sandelowski).

Because of the ability of narrative approach to show different aspects of an individual's life, researchers derive this approach from many fields such as social sciences and psychology to gain a deeper understanding of the human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Narrative inquiry has evolved over the last two decades more generally as an approach in educational research and more specifically as a novice research methodology (Mertova & Webster, 2007). Narrative inquiry can be useful for research in many disciplines such as theology, philosophy,

psychology, economics, biology, medicine and environmental science (Mertova & Webster). As an example, “social sciences are concerned with humans and their relations with themselves and, as such, the social sciences are founded on the study of experience. Experience is therefore the starting point and key term for all social science inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 413). Narrative inquiry has also been used in nursing discipline. For example, in exploring the lived experiences of ovarian cancer among women in the U.S.A., (Guenther, 2008) and in eliciting diabetes self-care experience in an Aboriginal population in Canada (Barton, 2008).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, narrative inquiry involves a process of understanding human experience. Narrative inquiry can be described as a method and is a part or aspect of the phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly). Narrative inquiry begins with trying to gain an understanding of the experiences of individuals through their lived and told stories. They further propose that “it is collaboration between researcher and participants over time in a place or series of places and in social interaction within milieus” (p. 20).

### *Dimensions of Narrative Inquiry*

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narratives are three dimensional, namely they are internal, existential and temporal. The internal dimension includes the individual’s internal conditions of feelings, emotions, hopes and aesthetic reactions. The existential dimension refers to the environment and social relations. The temporal dimension refers to the time frame of past, present and future (Clandinin & Connelly). When people experience their life events, they do so in relation to these dimensions. Researchers strive to elicit hidden aspects of events pertaining to these dimensions that come through individual stories through a reflective process. In other words, narrative inquiry is a reflective process through which the researcher

scrutinizes the stories told by storytellers in order to attain a deeper understanding about the significant events in their lives.

### *Steps of Narrative Inquiry*

The relationship between the researcher and the participant is critical in narrative inquiry method because the information and the data collected are shaped by this relationship. Therefore, the researcher has to capture pertinent information through field texts regarding researcher participant interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly propose a general procedural guide to be followed by researchers when they engage in narrative inquiry. This guide consists of five steps: 1) determine if the narrative approach best fits the identified phenomenon; 2) select one or more individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and spend enough time with them to collect rich data; 3) collect information regarding the context in which they experience the phenomenon relating to cultural and historical background; 4) analyze the stories or narratives told by participants or other data collected in the field (known as field text); and 5) deconstruct them into key elements and reflect upon them to make sense and rewrite a story (Creswell, 2007). I have further outlined these steps below.

In the first step, the researcher determines the appropriateness of the method to capture the comprehensive stories of the lives of people or a single life. In the second step, the researcher selects one or two individuals who have life experiences relevant to the phenomenon of study interest and spends considerable time listening to the participants to gather information using multiple strategies. The researcher may record participants' stories and also observe the participants and write field notes based on those observations. In addition, the researcher may collect letters, memory boxes, photographs, keepsakes, and other artefacts relating to their stories. In the third step, the researcher collects information related to the context of these stories

to posit the individual stories within their personal experience. This information may relate to participants' ethnic, cultural, social, and historical contexts. The fourth step involves analyzing the created field texts and deconstructing the story to identify its key elements and put them into an organized framework. During this process, the researcher reflects upon the deconstructed information and relies upon the researcher's experiential knowledge in order to restory the told narratives. In the final step, the researcher works with participants and their stories to create a new reconstruction where deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006 as cited in Creswell, 2007). In this relationship, both the researcher and the participant negotiate the meaning of stories and validate the analysis. In the end, the story will unfold in a framework in chronological order with new meaning in place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

#### *Co-participant Selection*

A purposive sampling strategy was used in this study because this study requires participants who can tell their stories in an elaborative way so that the required data could be collected. This sampling strategy was based on the belief that the researcher has the knowledge about the population to hand pick the participants who have experienced the phenomenon so that they would best contribute to the information needed (Loiselle & McGrath, 2007). In general, one or two individuals are preferred in narrative research (Creswell, 2007). Accordingly, two older immigrant Sinhalese women who currently live in Canada were selected for this study. They met the following inclusion criteria: Sinhalese, female, older than 65 years, currently living in Canada, and able to use verbal and written communication to understand the intent of the study.

The chief incumbent of the Buddhist temple and the president of the "Dayaka Sabhawa" (committee of devotees in Buddhist temple) were approached as community leaders in order to

gain access to the community and possible co-participants. These community leaders were given an information letter about the study and asked to use them to inform potential participants about the study. After chief incumbent spoke about my study at a meeting in the temple, three participants who were interested in hearing more about the study contacted me by themselves. However, one of the three participants did not take part because of the pressure from her son and daughter-in-law. I met with other two participants at a time and location convenient to them to interview them.

### *Ethical Consideration*

Those interested in participating in the study were given information about the study both orally and via written consent form. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point or refuse to participate in the study without any penalty to them. Privacy and confidentiality was assured throughout the study. Following their written consent to participate in the study, I began a series of interviews with the two selected co- participants with the plan to complete a total of at least two interviews with each.

### *Data Collection*

While the primary tool for data collection in narrative inquiry approach is the interview (Thornburg, 2007), other tools can be used to obtain participants' thoughts, feelings and opinions. Data triangulation would increase the reliability and validity of the study (Patton, 2002). In data triangulation, researchers use more than one method to collect data so that potential weaknesses in any single approach can be minimized. In this particular study, I used in-depth, open-ended interviews to encourage participants to tell their stories and wrote field notes including observations during the interviews. I also asked them to draw pictures of their

experience of loneliness in the post-migration context, and when I met with them, they explained their pictures to me in terms of what they tried to capture in their drawings.

In this collaborative work, as a co-participant, I shared, as appropriate, with the co-participants, my own experience of being a newcomer to Canada. All interviews were conducted in Sinhalese, and were tape-recorded. In addition, I inquired about any keepsakes that could be used as prompts to assist with the unfolding of the stories. Keepsakes may give the stories more emphasis and help to ensure the stories in supportive way to capture participants' feelings and thoughts that might not be expressed by words alone and to elicit historical context of their experiences. Once I opened myself up with my own keepsakes, co-participants felt safe with me to share their stories.

### *Data Analysis*

The data collected in form of interviews, keepsakes, drawings, and field notes were analysed together using the approach explained by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), in order for the co-participants' stories to be re-constructed and re-told. In this process, I followed the three dimensional space framework. This approach involves analysing the data through the three elements of temporality, personal and social aspect, and environment. First, I translated and transcribed the tape recorded stories and read and re-read them. I then deconstructed the field texts and analyzed the key narrative threads in relation to the three dimensions of temporality, personal and social significance, and environment (Clandinin & Connelly). In this process, the key elements and turning points of the stories were identified and situated within relevant time frames, social or personal context as well as environmental situations of the story teller. These key elements would be the critical events of the story teller's life as these specific events might have influenced their past lives and brought them prior experiences to adapt and shape

subsequent happenings in their lives for the future (Mertova & Webster, 2007). Reflecting upon these key events while using them as a main focus is therefore important in understanding the co-participants' whole story. Upon reflection, the stories were re-organized by identifying the elements that had an impact on their individual lives. In this restorying process, I used my own experiences in relating to their key events to reflect upon and determine the possible meanings of their shared stories. Then I re-wrote the story while merging the co-participants' stories with my own experiences to give an insight and make a general sense of their experiences so that readers will find how older Sinhalese immigrant women experience loneliness in the post migration context in Canada. Also, I checked the new story with co-participants to see if the new story makes sense to them and to ensure they would understand/see their story within the re-constructed/re-told story.

## Chapter IV – Senarath’s Story of Migration and Loneliness

After I met with my co-participants for the first time at the Buddhist temple, we used to talk each other once in a while before we began the interviews. We talked about my study, their day-to-day life etc. Meanwhile, we discussed about choosing pseudonyms for the study. So “Senarath” is the pseudonym one of my co-participants chose to represent herself in her story. I will use this name from now onwards when referring to her. I had three meetings with Senarath and our first two meetings were two hours long. But the last meeting was about an hour. I crafted her story to shape my study and to be able to find answers for my research question. I will use italic font in her crafted story to represent her own voice in the following section while my researcher voice represented by Times New Roman font. And also I use Corbel font to present my co-participant voice through out the study.

### *Senarath’s Lament Compiled Through Three Meetings*

One morning, Senarath talked to me over the phone and discussed my study. She wanted to ask permission from her daughter and son-in-law. Two days later, she called and said that her daughter and son-in-law did not want her to participate in the study but that she had not changed her decision to participate. In a third telephone call, she let me know the date and time of our first meeting and gave me the directions to her home.

On the day of the meeting, I took the road map and the schedule of the bus service as I was not familiar with the area where she lived and left home as early as possible. It was early in the morning. I walked to the bus stop in the dark. Even though it was spring I still felt cold. I could see a few people on my way but I could not see them clearly as they were covered from head to toe due to the cold weather. So I showed the bus driver the address of the place where I needed to go and asked him to drop me close to the place. After 20 minutes the driver announced my

stop, but I was 45 minutes too early for the meeting. I drank a cup of coffee at a coffee shop and waited until it was 8 am. At 8 o'clock, I started walking towards Senarath's house. On the way I met her taking her granddaughter to the nursery. She had a smile on her face and we greeted each other. But her non-verbal eye movements asked me not to come with her. So I stopped there. A few minutes later she came back and both of us started to walk towards her home.

Their front garden was well arranged and clean. There were flower pots along the side of the front wall of the house. Beside the garden there was a bird nesting box on a post. The grass in the garden made it feel cool. While I was looking at the external environment, Senarath asked me to come inside. There was a flower vas on the dining table with a bunch of artificial flowers. A few paintings hung on the wall. Toys belonging to children were piled up in a corner of the living room. Senarath's daughter's wedding photo was lying beside a dark brown sofa. For me, at a glance the sofa seemed withered looking and gave an odd feeling to the living room.

When I was going to set up my tape recorder Senarath begged me to go out with her into the backyard:- "In case my daughter or son-in-law comes....because they do not know that I have decided to participate in this study. Also I am not permitted to let anyone inside." The backyard was also well organized. There was a flower bed with tulips along the wooden fence and a big cherry tree sheltered us. The surrounding environment was very silent. I set up my tape recorder on the plastic table I found in the backyard and we sat on opposite sides of the table. Senarath began her story with her journey to Canada. In the following pages, I present this first conversation we had in her own voice.

*I came to Canada as my daughter came here. Before I came, I knew that I would be asked to come. It is really related to occult sciences (smiling). I knew that I would spend my later life with her. I practiced Astrology as a hobby and I wanted to do a degree in Astrology. So I studied*

*it in India. Before I sit for the exam I was asked to come to Canada by my daughter and son-in-law. My daughter found a job and they did not have anybody to baby sit their kid. The job she found is a good one too. Actually since my early retirement I was teaching in an international school. Later, I resigned and came. Actually everybody asked me why you would go giving up this house and all the stuff. Because two sons are living in Colombo and nobody is at my home. I decided to close every thing and come. Because as our time is actually going to finish, we need to help our next generation. So I gave up every thing and came here.*

*My parents were teachers and we had a good life. I have three brothers and one younger sister and we were very happy. I did not much like to study in such a mixed school. So my mother arranged me to go to another school. I did my Ordinary Level examination in that school. We studied in English medium. Because there no advance level science classes in my school I went to another school. Actually I wanted to be a doctor, I want to do medicine. If I did my exam one more time I would have done it. (She has very thoughtful facial expressions). But my mummy would have thought that she can't keep a girl in home such a long time. However.....*

Pramuditha: Does it mean that Mrs Senarath's mother would think like that?

*Yes, because, my mother was the one who manage my home and make decisions. So after that I couldn't do that. I went to teaching school to teach science. Next.....after that I was appointed to teach at a Central College. Actually it was a very good period too. I was too young I mean I was at the age of like 21 years I went to Central College. I was given senior classes to teach like grade 9 and 10. I communicate with some of my students through e-mail even now. I met my old students of Central College at many places*

Pramuditha: Then you feel happy?

*Yes I feel so happy (said in high pitch). I have a good satisfaction with my students' results. Our School was in such a good position.*

*During this period, a marriage proposal was brought to me. My mother mostly involved with that. To me....actually he was not a type of man I thought. Anyways I agreed and it happened. (Slight smile on her face) So I cannot say he was bad. He was from teaching profession and worked as a principal. Later on he studied law and became a lawyer. So, however actually he was not just physically active that mean let say some activities like gardening.... As he was not physically active but I don't know for sure, .....he got diabetes later. After that he died at the age of 62 years. That was in 2001. Actually as I am aware of Astrology, I knew that he would not be alive any more. So, I could therefore control my mind. Because, he got seriously sick in another time before. At that time he became paralysed. At that time my children were little. When he becomes sick for the second time I knew that. He died. The only thing I have to tell is I did not have the social status I supposed to have by then, at that time. I had to struggle so hard to achieve the status which I wanted to achieve. I mean as teachers my parents had many properties like lands and vehicles. They did not have that level. I have never gone to school by a bus (she has a proud look on her face). But after I got married, I happened to travel by bus to go to school and to many other things. I had to subject to such a change with marriage (mild smile on her face).*

Pramuditha: Mrs Senarath, after your husband died, how did you spend your life in Sri Lanka?

*Hmm....after he died mean... although he was alive we did not have that long conversations between us. He used to work with his files relating to his profession and talked with his clients. He did not that much talk with others. I did not feel big difference with his death. It was not a big loss. Because I have actually adjusted my mind. I said to you that I knew the*

situation ahead of time. After that hmm....but I regularly tended to learn and practice Astrology. I couldn't tell you that before I got my retirement, not only as a teacher but I worked as also a teaching instructor for science teachers for 11 years. Although any body who was at home did not talk with me, I did not have a pain in my mind, as I had involved with my professional activities.

Pramuditha: That means you coped with those hurdles because of your professional activities?

*Yes I coped with because of my profession. Because, I had.....teachers.....not only me there were other persons to conduct instruction classes to teachers. We had several districts in about 11 areas. Later, I was working in the curriculum development center and National education institute, when I worked there we meet with so many people and talk to them. We did lectures to train teaching instructors in Island wide. So like that. Actually in a very joyful good society.*

Pramuditha: Mrs. Senarath, you had a very busy life with social relationships?

*Yes. Busy life. Actually I wanted a busy life like that (smile). I don't like to limit in a one place. So time spent in that ways. Some times I used to conduct educational programmes in Broad casting Corporation. I worked with the minister of education at that time and deputy minister. I happened to go throughout the Sri Lanka. Ultimately the only person remained was me because we were not paid properly at that time. In my case, as I did not follow the money..... However I went. So I was engaged with activities like those*

Pramuditha: Did you enjoy the life in that way?

*Yes actually I enjoyed the life. Enjoyed the life while working and with working. As time went on. I got a promotion (describe courageously) a grade III principle. I did not like actually to work as principle. I wanted to involve with subject wise activities. But I agreed and went to school for some time. I could realize that the principal post was a one that had to involve with*

*others problems. It was not a one which could use our subject knowledge on behalf of others benefits. So I do not like that. Later I joined with the environmental authority after get retired. I worked there for 4 years. After I finished that contract I stayed at home to take care of my husband. I had servants to cook and to do other stuff. But my husband like me to do his things rather than done by others.*

*So, while I was doing like that, my younger son is a lawyer, he was in law college at that time. He told me that "mummy, don't get older to the kitchen go and find a job." Later I just thought of that too. Later I went to look for an opportunity in an International School. There were some teachers who known to me in that school too. Later, I was appointed there to teach science. Actually I was there for 11 years. They did not like me to resign. They left my vacancy until I went back from here after one year. They gave me a farewell only after I told them that I want to go back.*

Pramuditha: Only after that you decided to say good bye to life in Sri Lanka?

*Ye...s, yes, yes*

Pramuditha: Then... just after you came to Canada, how you feel first? I mean after that, how did you feel when you came here after having such a busy life and many social interactions?

*As soon as I came here actually we all have restricted to a room. I did not come even for a job. So therefore just I felt like obstructed.*

*Actually, at the time of my daughter get married, my younger son and my husband did not like that affair. Because they thought that the level of their family was not suit to our family. However I agreed because I knew that I would spend my life with the daughter. Therefore, I did not against her. I was told by a popular astrologist that your daughter will look after you. Then*

*she was about 10 years old. He told me that she will have an affair, let her to do that. So, as it was stuck in my mind, I agreed her. Anyways ultimately we decided to get them marry. After that we did it. Anyways he loved me very much those days. For every thing he asked for my permission. So as he was like that, I expected him to treat me like to a mother. He is like my child no? I had such a feeling. So that was why I decided to come here. To me...the other thing is I can't say that I can't come. Other thing is they have a difficult time too.*

Pramuditha: What is that difficult time?

*That mean she couldn't go to the job as they did not have any body to take care of the baby. It was a assistant manager post in a good company. So, to give -up such a good position is a big loss. Therefore, I came. So after I came actually my son-in-law cared me well. He went to pick me up too. He did every thing for me, took care of me. So actually I look after the baby and I cook when they come from work. I did every thing like that. After that, I happened to go after one year. That I told you before about my degree...to do that. To do that and come. Then as I can do it as a hobby here too. Therefore I went to get it done and come. When I went, I can remember he packed my stuff and told me that "here mummy, please you need to come back don't stay there" he said like that. After I came for the second time, we were stayed here with good will for some time (said it very thoughtfully and reflected very sorrowful feelings on her face). But later he started to impose rules very strictly. That means, he yelled at me even to cross the road. He blamed me strictly. He doesn't like to accept even one word from me. He said that who is going to bother about those and this thing and that thing. That means, you know? In case, if some thing happens, he has to take responsibility and take care of me no? So there were so many incidents have happened like this. I do not remember to tell you every single one.*

*Now after that even though we came here, actually I write to papers regarding Astrology. When I was in Sri Lanka too, not Astrology but I wrote articles relating to science, environment and things like those to popular papers. Later, as I write to papers I had opportunities to meet with people. At the beginning, when my daughter was going to arrange me to go to the temple to observe "Sill", he did not like that too. Because he thought that he would have to pick me up and drop me. For even very simple things he talks in stern way.*

*To me just, then feel a big pain. When I stay in my village, people care me most respectful way. Where ever I go even in a shop, they call me "madam". Like that. I had a prestige and I was respected. But after I came here it's nothing. So, the people I know here are the same young people who known to them. So even if I call to one of them, he asks me why I called them, for what reason, and this thing and that thing. He needs me to tell him all the details. So, few incidents happened like that. Actually he was helpful to me before. He arranged a web site to me. He helped me like that. Even though he helped me I do not like some body to control me. I don't like that because it was not happened before.*

*Next, now no body talk with me at home. So as I work with my documents, books and stuff, I am able to little bit adapt my mind. Otherwise I will have to suffer more than that. Last night after daughter came I heard that they talked. She was to make some thing to kid. So I went there too and I stood up near to her. I was not cared not even looked at me, so talked with others not with me. After that I went back to the room. I was about to cry. I wanted to cry lying down on the bed (very sorrowful feelings on her face). But I did not cry actually (smile). So I begin to do some other work. But it was not good my mental status to do some thing like Astrology. You must have a clear mind to do things like that.*

*There is another one... we all went to meet the doctor. Then doctor checked my pressure. It was never raised up my pressure for life time. Nothing any thing like diabetes, did not increase sugar.....nothing. So, he was a Sri Lankan doctor. After he checked my pressure and asked me "Aunty why does your blood pressure has raised up? After that, I said that I am not in a good mood these days. My son in law was there. Daughter was there too. Then he said that "no, I do not tolerate the things aunty...mummy do" me.....me...he told a story about our incompatibility of each other.*

Pramuditha: While we were talking I could observe that Senarath was in some discomfort and I could see that she was shivering. At the same time she proposed to get in to house and she said that "now I feel bit cold". Actually it was very cold at that time. She had put a brown colour jacket and talked with me leaving her both hands crossed on her chest. So we both went inside and I arranged my tape recorder on the table at the side of the living room. But Senarath was seemed not to be in relaxed mind. It was obvious in her anxious behaviours like going back and forth telling some thing not to the point and watching the clock to make sure the time. Little later she sat on the chair beside me and again we started our conversation.

Pramuditha: However you need to go to the doctor to make sure whether you have high blood pressure. Otherwise it is not good for you.

*Yes. It is true. So, I can't say to them that let's go to the doctor. I thought now.....So I will go to Sri Lanka in the near future. Then I will do it back there. I think to do it in Sri Lanka. Any ways I will try before I leave if possible.*

Pramuditha: But, Mrs. Senarath, you have to tell it. If your pressure goes high without knowing, you know what might happen? Things can happen like stroke. After that you have to totally be dependant. So to maintain your health in this level you have to think about it. Your health

is important isn't it? So go back to the doctor and check your pressure. If the doctor would tell take medicine. You have to do like that.

*Yes I know*

Pramuditha: How has it been changing your first impression you had at your first arrival or is it still the same?

*What happen is now actually, once I came to this country, I love the environment and every thing in this country. But I cannot live like being restricted within the country. Not within the country, actually I am being restricted in to a room. I cannot live like that (high pitch sound)*

*After two, three incidents like that, I told them that I can't do this and make some arrangement me to leave.*

*So.....after that, bought a ticket too. It was in January. Later, both of them finally told me to wait to go with them in May. Because they going to go in May. So a thing happened like that. Therefore I have not decided yet whether I come back.*

Pramuditha: Could you explain your lonely feeling you have, when you are being restricted to your limited environment

*Loneliness. I feel so lonely. No body talk to me. Do not have that much chances to go out. At that time feel like I am being restricted to this room. It is very hard to suffer with loneliness. I feel so sorry. You cannot work with the mind at such a time isn't it? Hmm...either watching TV or....that is how....But I did not try in that ways. I engage with some other thing like cooking or what ever to forget it.*

*So, at that time in Sri Lanka, my husband was alive, he is a certain type of person too. At the time when I was with him, I have faced situations like this. But then I had social relations. So I could cope with. Here, I do not have any way even to go out (reflect the feeling of frustration)*

*Even though I would go, they don't like for that too. If they would know it they don't like. I do not have any opportunity to regularly meet with friends or to talk to them. When there are some dramas, plays or some thing, now he doesn't accompany me. Anybody at home doesn't go. S daughter says me that "some times that person might go or the other person might go". Then I ask that whether I can call them. After that I call somebody and go with them. Like that, I need their permission to go somewhere. I had to crouch to them. (Mild smile but looks like frustrated)*

*Here...actually I like to stay here. People come to get examine their horoscopes, I write to papers. When I told with the editor in certain paper that I decided to go back, he told me that "Are you crazy? You don't go, you are a resource to this country" He stressed me like that. He explained me in detail and asked how they could bring up their children without me. But I have no permission to talk with other people other than who are in the home. They do not talk with me too. Then here I feel so lonely.*

Pramuditha: Yes, yes. For me, there are things like that. Even though I have been here only for 2 years, I have this lonely feeling that is very deep. I have never left my country here before. So even to study, when I left the country, I had a feeling that I lost everybody and that feeling has become deeper now. Now, at least, this is my keepsake. This is my boarding pass I received when I left my country. Even this....after I left the country, I have a feeling that I have some relationship with my country because of this. That is how I feel. Therefore I keep this with me. Now....when my husband was with me, this piece of paper with his hand writing. Then, I did not feel that much lonely when I was with him. So when I see this I feel like I have some relationship with him. Like that, these are my souvenirs in my life. Because, I feel so lonely. Even though it is suppressed with studies, as a new comer to this country I have a strong feeling of loneliness too.

During our conversation she was very vigilant about the time. Because she had to take her grand daughter from the nursery by 11.15am. So she was looking at the clock on and off and when closing to 11o'clock she was very anxious. So we stopped our conversation for the day. On my way back she came with me up to the bus stop because the nursery school was just opposite to the bus stop.

After few days, in one morning around 11o'clock I called her over the phone to get another appointment. At that time I heard her voice was very sorrowful and desperate. And also she talked with me in trepidation. On the same day she talked to me again at 3.30 in the afternoon and said that she would have to withdraw from the study because her daughter and son in-law are not willing to let her be involved in the study. She asked her daughter but did not get a direct answer from her. Later, the daughter and her husband discussed and told her that she could not participate. She told me all these details with frustration. Still she had the desire to continue her participation. Because she said to me "Anyways we will see another way may be another place I mean". I told her not to worry. Then she quickly hung up the phone as somebody came to visit her.

It was 28<sup>th</sup> April, in the morning when I was sleeping that my cell phone rang. When I picked up, I heard Senarath's voice.

*"My daughter did not talk with me today too. She was at the kitchen to cook something for her. Then I too went there as I need to cook my meals. She did not talk to me for a bit. As she was leaving, she said to me "I am going keep the door closed" like that. I was there although did not tell me. That means son-in-law said "Mummy doesn't know the problems we have. If you know*

*you would cry" like that." What solutions can I give them here in Canada? Oh ! I did every thing in Sri Lanka no? I cannot do anything in Canada*

(A telephone conversation with Senarath on April 28, 2009)

During our telephone conversation I told Senarath to draw some pictures to reflect her lonely feelings and how she feels about herself.

After this conversation I got another short message from Senarath to meet her on May 4 at 9.30 a.m. at the bus stop where I usually got off. So I got ready as usual and left my home but not so early because by then I knew the direction to get to the place. When I reached the place, Senarath was waiting there for me. We greeted each other, saying "Good morning." She had selected the Children's Park for that day's meeting. She said that she had selected this place as she wanted to meet me without her daughter and son in law's knowledge. The park was close to both the bus stop and her granddaughter's nursery school. So while talking we walked there. It was a very beautiful place. Some children were playing there while their parents were watching them beside some flowering trees. We walked to a bench in the park. By our path were small yellow flowers that looked like a yellow cloth on the green grass. While we were walking to the bench Senarath started to talk. "In case they call me, I have already made up a story to tell: I can say that as I was sleeping, I could not hear the phone ringing." Then she said that today she had brought some drawings for me as I had requested. There were a few vacant benches in the park. We sat on one, a little away from where small children were playing. It was a little cold, I could stand it without warm clothing. However Senarath had put on a jacket to be warm. She took out her drawings and some keepsakes while I was setting up my tape recorder. The following section presents the second conversation I had with Senarath.

*I am hanging there. Today I brought you my drawing. I have a copy. So you can have this.*

She started to explain her drawings

*I started to teach at the age of 21 years for the first time at a Central College. So I became a so popular teacher (smile). This reflects my class room. After that, this.....now, this is a one which was continued before that. I have studied oriental dancing and Indian dancing. At teaching college, I did a main role of a drama which was showed at teaching college. I trained students and presented them for dancing at concerts. Later, after I got my retirement I used to teach in an international school. At there too I presented a dance by students at each annual concert. So actually I happen to demonstrate them by dancing when they were trained (smile). So this is me (pointing the drawing).*

Pramuditha: Then, did you spend joyfully and independent in that time?

*Yes I like such things very much (responds courageously and with smiley face). That means artistic things. Before that I worked as an instructor in environmental authority. I have drawn here an awareness programme for parents which I did. Here is a one for parents (pointing her drawings). This is a one, when I worked as an instructor in education department; I conducted educational programmes in radio. I depicted here is an occasion that I did such a programme. Here....that is usually we did as a-discussion (proud look with smile on her face). After that, when I meet people on and off they said that "madam, we heard your program one day" and this thing and that thing. Next here this is.....I did this when I worked as teaching instructor. Island wide competition called as "Denuma Weduma". I conduct this programme for news in one television channel. So, later, when I went to my sister's house, like few weeks later my sister said that "we need to watch TV to see you" (smile). Like that.*

*I can remember that many people used to come to meet me and get instructions for different things, make requests for different things like that.... Then after that I was away from all those things and stayed at home after I get retired. Then my youngest son came and screamed at me that " Go, go and find a job. Don't get older to kitchen." That means he knows my value (mild smile). So as I told you before I used to work in an international school again.*

*I happened to come to Canada as requested by daughter. When I came here, actually they warmly welcome me. I...mm...actually I was to buy a small car to go to town in Sri Lanka. I can drive. I learned in my young age. Then later when I told that, as I think, they thought that they would not be able to take me from there (smile). Therefore they asked me to come. After that I gave up every thing and came. But I went back for the exam. I came for second time after I finished that exam. But when I came back for the second time, my son in law's sister asked me that "didn't my brother yell at you? I said that "No he did not yell at me." Then she said that "Oh! My god he yells you see". So now I really experience it. I think that he doesn't like me to close with people through different things. I am really alone now (high pitch). They don't get me to attend any talk at the home. Children love me very much. That little boy...when he came to me ...I understand since very recently he came and take him away from me. So I really disgusted on that. If I talk with their friends over the phone, after that they ask why I talked with them. Then I say that for this reason and that reason. Then they said "they are busy do not go to talk to them" like that. Said like that few times. So after that even in my problem, I have no way to tell to anybody of them. I receive telephone calls on and off. In that calls, son-in-law listen this discussion with the other telephone. After that he came and yelled at me saying that "unless it finish why you try to get others problems in to your head" like that. There were few occasions like that. So now I am feeling so lonely.*

*I show in this picture.....other thing is I am prohibited to tell any thing, to open the mouth. Here the mouth has tied up. That means I can't talk. I am a person who talked much in the past (stressed with high tone). I continued my job by talking. Actually I need it in my life. But I can't now. So I have mentally fed up. Next here...I have nobody to talk too. These people are far away from me. A big gap. Actually*

Pramuditha: When you were in Sri Lanka, as a person who used to talk to whole country, to many generations, how you feel now after you came to this country when compared to the situation here? How you experience this?

*I am mentally suffering very much. It's a pain. That means actually I am more than enough to being here. Now I hope to leave recently. When I go back I don't suppose to come back. But here, I said to the editor of certain paper that I am going to leave. Then he said that "Oh! Don't go you are a resource for this country." He directly said me not to go and stay here. But I think now that I have less ability to do things even in Sri Lanka too as I am old now. Like before by a bus or a taxi.....if it is too far I can't in that way too. So I can't go like that now. I need somebody to pick me up. So they are busy too. So, therefore....even though the situation may be the same where ever I will be, this mental breakdown....I think I will get rid of this there. Here I am alone.....I am here with them but their..... The pressure exert on me from them. I think it will go off when I go Sri Lanka. I came with a pleasurable feeling that I am going to come to my daughter. After two three years, it has collapsed. I can remember, since long time ago normally I used to write particular incident on a piece of paper to get rid of my suffering.*

*I can remember some times there are some problems with husbands too no? (Smile). Let's say that there was an argument or quarrel with husband. That means I did not answered him or like that. He was very rude. So I had to suffer with some thing and it was a big pain for me. So I*

*hadn't any way to do any thing. So I couldn't hold it. After that what I did was there was a good film. (smile) I went with servant girl to see that.*

*Here too.....So I tried to go for a show like that in such occasions. When there are Sri Lankan shows, any ways we love it to see. But I have nobody to take me there. There is a boy who close to me that mean they are a family. I talked to them and go with them. A lady called me last night. She was known to me after I came here. She said that this is a good opportunity for me to sing a song and asked whether I can come. After that son-in-law and daughter did not tell me even a word so far regarding that. Later he (son in law) asked that "have you a relationship with her? Don't you that much close to them? Like that. What I want is not the relationship (High tone) but this opportunity. I can be satisfied very much by participating to a programme like that. I like very much to go for those kinds of shows. When I came home after a show like that, son in law doesn't talk with me. One day, after I came from a show, I asked two three questions. He did not answer. Daughter was sleeping at that time. So then I ate and slept. So actually I have become like a servant (crying). If they treat me well now I can stay here so longer. If they treat me well I won't feel this lonely feelings.*

**Pramudiha:** Before I left Sri Lanka, actually I have met few persons in Sri Lanka who experience

loneliness like this. Because of that actually I thought to explore about this lonely feelings.

Meanwhile I happened to come to Canada to do my degree. When I was thinking about how older people experience these lonely feelings, I too became a lonely person in this country. Now lonely feeling is intense. I became alone here. I can remember at the Airport, at the time of my leaving I felt so sorry. I lived with my mother for longer period. I thought the bond I have with my mother. Mrs Senarath, I actually now compare with the relationship between you and your daughter. Me and my mother... there is a strong bond

between us. Just like in your daughter I am the only daughter in my family. So yet I looked at my mother at the Airport when I left to see whether she was crying because of my leaving. Because I was very sad. But I couldn't see that my mother was crying. So after I arrived here I was wondering why my mother didn't cry (smile). As a daughter I don't like to see my mother is crying.

*Yes, yes.*

Pramuditha: Now at that time what I wanted to see is my mother is crying. Reason for that was to know whether my mother feels dole with my departure as I started to feel lonely. That is why I looked for whether my mother is crying. When I called my mother just after I arrived here, I asked my mother why not she cried when I left and why didn't she feel sorry for that. After that she said to me..... (She called me son) "why do you ask like that? Do you necessarily have to see if any body is crying? If a person cries, is it essentially needed to see? You don' know the wail I had in my inner mind at that time. That lament would be loud enough to hear by whole world. I tried to hide my tears because you would feel sorry about that."

*Yes, yes that is quite right.*

Pramuditha: I wondered now I am experiencing that. Although I came here I have to go to the university, attend to each lecture. I have to face a new environment and everybody. With all these things I am alone. I am crying in my inside. So I wondered that what a truthful my mother's expression was. When we are crying it doesn't have to see with tears. Like a silent lament. After that I thought that how many women like me who have come from my country might be living here with their silent lament. So this is my journey to find such

women. After that only I meet you. Because like me you are another partner of this story of experiencing loneliness. Before my husband was with me for little period. Like your husband he is also getting angry little bit. Some times, for the things he says when he is getting angry I feel like I am lonelier. Then I think that I have separated from my all loved ones and the only one I have here is he. Then I feel so sorry. Then he talks back to me later after he came back to normal. Yet my mind is still very painful. It is not yet come back to normal. Have such a feeling no? To take it back to normal others do not know how much we cry.

*That is true no? (High tone) painful? (We both smile)*

Pramuditha: They expel their pressure. Then we cry silently with this lonely feeling. Actually me too....That is why I said you that I am a partner of this story too. Like that I am going to write the story of three of us. My story, your one and somebody else's. We all experience this similar situation. We all feel lonely. Nobody to relate with. To suppress these, to cope with we seek measures.

*We don't have measures no? In my situation, ..... This silver spoon is a wedding present I got at my wedding. Daughter loves this too. Therefore she asked to bring it here so I brought it. This was presented to me by a BSc graduate who worked with me at the central college. He was in the boy's hostel. I think we both had thought in our inner mind that it is ok to get marry (smile). But my mummy was rude. So, he wouldn't have asked that. Therefore it did not happen. So I selected some other person and got married. Because I had hurdles from home. They brought proposals and things. He asked me after my wedding " what do you think about the silver spoon I gave you?". I did not care about that and smiled. So that there is a saying that " person with a silver spoon...mm..." now I can't remember it actually. He might have said that*

*thinking about that saying. That means I don't know whether he would have thought that he is not suit for me or I don't really know. So, therefore.... Yet I love this very much. (Very pleasant facial expression). I left it as a souvenir.*

For our third meeting, it was very hard to book a date. But Senarath had a strong desire to continue her participation and complete it. She tried to contact me whenever she could and discussed with me how we were going to meet. One morning I got the familiar call from Senarath asking me to come by at 10 o'clock May 19 to our familiar place, the children's park. As usual I got ready and left home to catch my bus. I got the bus on time as I had got used to the time table and reached the place without delay. It was a sunny day. We did not have to wear warm clothes. But still Senarath had put on a wind breaker. It was not her usual jacket. For me, with new jacket she looked different. As our place was much closer to the nursery, we could hear the noise of small children. They were shouting and, singing songs. But it was not a problem for us. We enjoyed it, especially Senarath who loved to be close to small children. She told me "I can forget every thing when I hear their noise." We set our things on our usual bench and we started our conversation as follows.

*I was bit late. I feel my mentality is going down with this pressure. I can't talk with anybody. Actually I am not allowed to do that. What a life is this? Today I brought my other drawing and this card. Yes here is now..... here this part I mentioned as "today" at left side of that. Such.....mm.....doesn't go any where. At home just me.... That I showed here in the car the "spare wheel." Yes, not an essential wheel in the car. Unnecessary just.....become like the 5<sup>th</sup> wheel. Then this is having a glass of water in hand. It finished water very little is there. That means now I am very worthless. People cannot get any use from me. They have less importance of me now. I have become a very minor person. Right side of that, in the part showed as "that*

day", first wheel of the car. That means front wheel, an essential part of the car. Then here it was very essential to go any where. There was full of water in the glass in hand. It overflows.

Pramuditha: Mrs Senarath, you have used bright colours to your clothes. What do you mean by that?

*Those days... I mean I was essential, popular and always very forward character. Here I showed that there are children surround me and they were looking at so lovely. Now here in first picture there is nobody there. Spend the time very lonely. My son-in-law does not like even little children come to me. He tells some thing and takes away. Daughter is silent. I do not know if it might be because of she can't be bias or some times she might think that there may be create some family hassles. She is silent. Anyways she talks less. One day when I gave her a phone call and tell some thing she said that "mummy think about only you your self." I don't understand it yet. I suppose to discuss with both of them to get clarify this before I leave.*

*If we engage in collective activities....I think we can forget things. I was to go with some people for a celebration to sing. I love that. Anyways actually I had no way to go. I was not allowed to go. Actually they said that they cannot let me to go (hi pitch).*

*Actually I feel so sorry to leave two children. But I am alone in the house. They leave me alone in the house. When they go out they did not tell me that they are going to go. I don't know that where they did go. I had nothing to do. My mentality is not clear. That means... otherwise I engage with another thing. Relating to my books. Yet to engage with that kind of thing, I am not clear enough in my mind.*

*One day I cried through out the day as I can't leave two children. Then daughter said that "what a thing. PR (Permanent Residence) will come in another few days then you can come back no". Son in law did not talk even a one word.*

*When I came here I was very happy to come. Son-in-law picked me up. Then he took me here and we lived peacefully. I was taken to see Niagara falls and here and there. Went on trips like Montreal and Quebec. Then we were lived in harmony. Situation has changed since recently. Actually I don't know what happened. Actually before I leave I want to know bit about that. Now become changed. Some times he talks very rude. These days we watch TV to know what is happening in Sri Lanka, Some times they wake up in the night and watch TV with out asking me to watch the TV. So while I work and just listen. Then I lose both. That means I cannot properly do what I do and I can't hear that too. That means no any friendly situation. It is lost.*

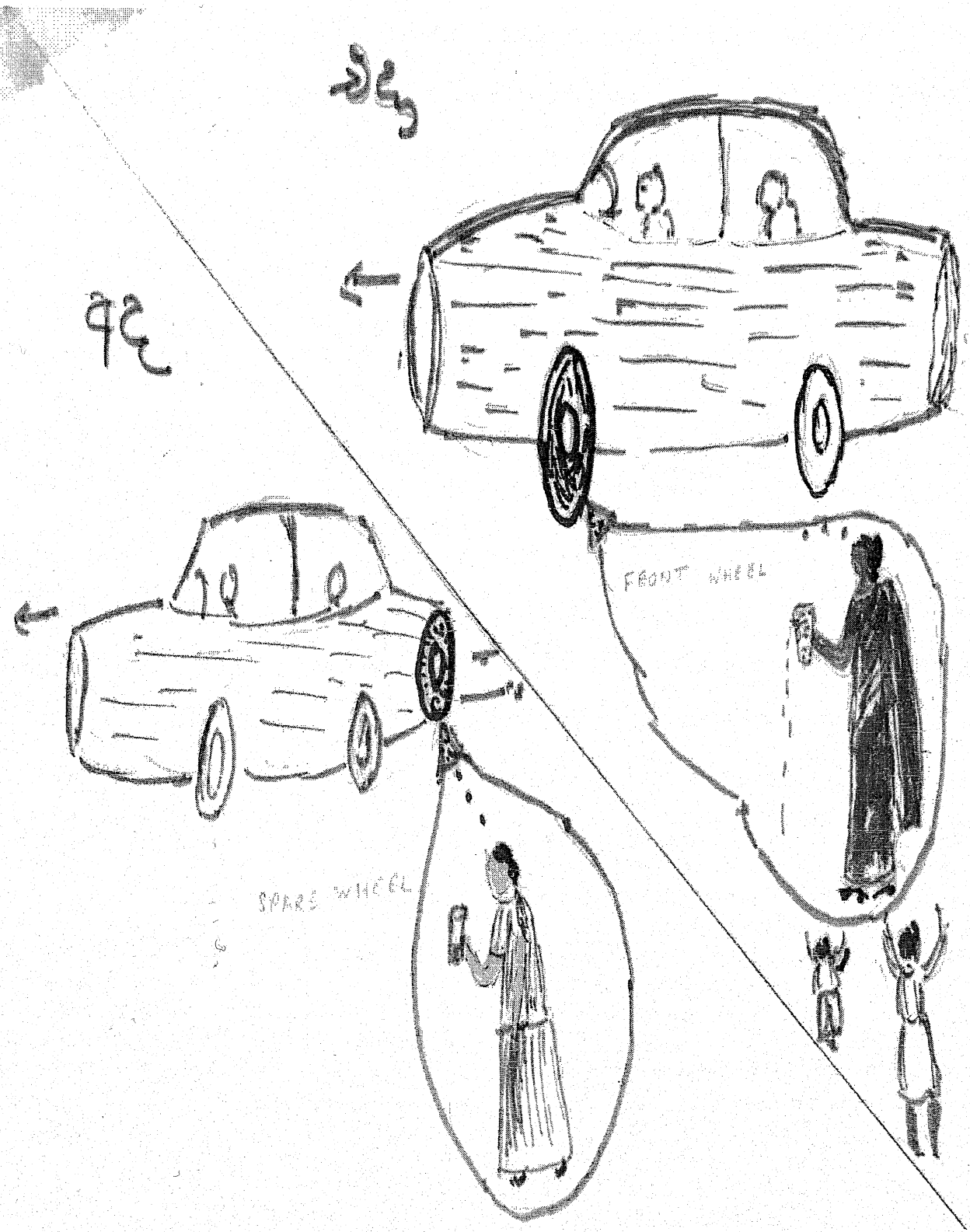
*Actually I want to think about coming back after I go there. I do not think that I will face the same situation there. Two daughters in laws are very good. They love me very much. So it will not happen like that. Still I think that there will be certain constraints.*

*Even if I come back, I think I have no idea to stay here for 2, 3 years all the way. (stressed that). If I get Permanent Resident, I will come and go back like in 6 months. That is how I think. Yes. As the attitudes now they have, I have very frustrated. Some times I will not be coming I think. Not to stay permanently. But everybody who closes to me says that, " don't go permanently, come back. " I have an idea to resume my active life I had before, after I go to Sri Lanka. But I don't know. Now I am bit older. Therefore, I am not sure whether I will be able to be that much active. But I will try and see. Yes If I can in that way, I will be there. Otherwise I will come for few months and go like that. Anyways I hope to write to papers from there to here. I am more satisfied with that.*

*Lonely life, I think it is common for all of us when we get older. We feel it immensely as we are not in our country. Because now the only people I know are ones in this home. I have no*

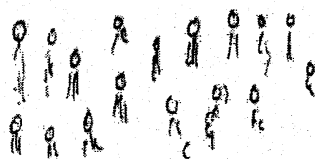
*permission to talk with other people other than who are in the home. They do not talk with me too. Then here I feel so lonely.*

*Pictorial Reflection of Senarath's Lonely Experience*



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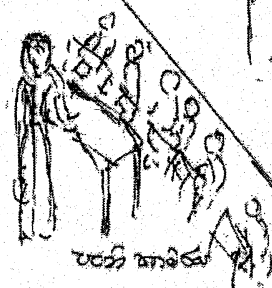
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### *My Reflection on Senarath's Story through a Letter to the Mother Nature*

I read and reread Senarath's stories of loneliness to gain an in-depth understanding of her story about loneliness and to answer my research question: how do older immigrant women experience their loneliness in the post-migration context? I scrutinized her story to explore its unexpressed aspects. As Clandinin and Connelly (1990) described multiple "selves" or multiple "I"s in narrative inquiry, when reflect on stories we have different ways of seeing them. While living within the story we can give it different meanings as a participant, as a researcher, as a person or in your professional way as a teacher or nurse etc. Based on this multiple "I", while my "researcher self" reflected on Senarath's story my personal self became a co-participant in the story plot.

Narrative inquiry takes place best in the relationship between researcher and co-participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). During my meetings with Senarath I established a mutual relationship with her as the stage for our evolving story. The relationship between Senarath and me extended beyond the boundaries of my researcher self over time and developed a daughter-like quality and Senarath asked me to call her "Aunty." This relationship helped me to engage in inquiry process in collaborative way and did not interfere with my researcher-co-participant relationship. Her story, can be positioned in the three dimensional space of narrative inquiry, in its time, environment, and personal and social aspects. Her earlier life events and experiences influenced her feelings of loneliness in her later life. In other words, her story continued from her past to the current moment and will continue into the future. This story was influenced by the interactions between her mind and her external social environment in the context of her life in Sri Lanka and now in Canada, and created a situation in which she

experienced loneliness. My reflection on Senarath's story is presented next as a letter to Mother Nature.

Dear Mother Nature,

In my journey to find other immigrant women like me who suffer from loneliness, I came across this woman (Senarath) who appears to be in a similar situation. As I always write my grievances to you, I would like to let you know about this woman's silent crying and some hidden aspects about her story. Although nobody else can hear our silent crying, you hear it as you are capable of hearing us and understanding our worlds. Although people cannot change you, I strongly believe that you can change people and their world. So, we might benefit from writing to you in this way.

As I listened to her story of loneliness after immigrating to Canada, her adroit and clear explanations remind me of a skilful announcer. I felt as if I was listening to a radio or television programme. She was very skilful in explaining her experiences to me. This skill showed me a shadow of her professional self as a teacher that still exists within her even after many years of retirement. This point of her story reminds me that my professional self as a teacher still exists within me after I have experienced a role transition from teacher to student in the post temporary migration context. When I had an unpleasant or a positive experience as a student in my culturally and socially isolated environment, I reflected on my teacher self. Through this reflection I came to an understanding that my professional self still existed even though I thought that my identity as a teacher had been lost with my role transition from the teacher to student role. This is an evidence of my multilayered self.

Senarath came to Canada to answer her daughter's need. I believe she is still striving to play this role, because mothers want their children to achieve their fullest potential in any

circumstances. Senarath gave up everything she had and her home country for her daughter. She has lost her way of life and achievements after coming to this new cultural and social context. Senarath started her career as a teacher and had assumed different roles since then. Prior to immigrating to Canada, she was a professional who engaged with people island-wide to share her knowledge. But what is her fate today? She cannot even talk with anybody. As Wylie (1996) described, everyone faces changes and these changes always lead to losses. Not only that Senarath has lost her professional status, she has lost her lifestyle and the status of her role as a mother. She is facing problems with her son-in-law. Troubles with in-laws produce a remarkable level of stress. On the stress score between 11 and 100 produced by Holmes and Rahe (1967), troubles with in-laws as a life event have a unit value of 29. Based on this, I believe Senarath experiences considerable stress that negatively influences her life. According to the cognitive theory of stress and coping (Folkman, 1984), stress is the relationship between person and environment which is understood by the person as beyond his or her resources and threatening his or her well-being. Senarath experiences feelings of powerlessness against her son-in-law's pressure and feels that she cannot counteract his pressure. For example, she said he imposes rules very strictly and that he yells at her and blames her for small things. As a result of such interaction between Senarath and her family environment she becomes stressed. She has lost her professional roles, a loss which influences her both personally and socially. Through her professional roles she contributed considerably to the society, and most people benefited from her service. She was an excellent resource for school children through her teaching role. As an instructor for teachers she was an excellent role model to other teachers. But crossing the geographical boundary to a new context, she has lost all these things. At the same time her motherland lost a fruitful human resource.

At this narrative thread of her story, I could revisit some point of my own story. With my arrival in Canada, I faced many changes and challenges. My limited multicultural experiences exerted pressure on me in understanding new people and their behaviour, way of talking, and their social values and norms. While becoming immersed in the process of integration into a new cultural context, and grasping the changes in the university education and health care systems, I could not relate to people in a meaningful way or the way I expected. As a result of these interactions between me and my environment (Folkman, 1984) I felt very lonely and became stressed.

Although she still has capacity to work, Senarath is being prohibited by the family from even talking to people. She said, "I cannot go out without my daughter's and son in-law's permission." This means she has lost even her human rights. In terms of the family environment in which she lives with her daughter, she has lost her mother's position and role. Her son-in-law does not like their small children to keep their grand mother company. She told me:

*"...the only people I know are ones in this home. I have no permission to talk with other people other than who are in the home. They do not talk with me too. Then here I feel so lonely. . . I feel my mentality is going down with this pressure. I can't talk with anybody. Actually I am not allowed to do that . . . My daughter did not talk with me today too."*

These utterances indicate that she has lost her sense of respect and dignity, and is experiencing loss of self esteem, feelings of rejection, and a self-perceived lack of disclosure to others, which according to Gierveld (1998) are considered as risk factors of loneliness.

Wylie (1996) has said that "every loss is accompanied by a gain" (p.9). She notes: to gain something we have to lose some thing, and loss of self is a considerable step to creating a new

self. However, as far as Senarath's situation is concerned, I wonder what she has gained from her losses.

My attention has also been drawn to another different plotline in her story. That concerns the emotional bond between Senarath and her daughter. I am puzzled as to how this bond has changed. Her daughter appears to be silent in terms of what her husband is doing to her mother. Is this a result of patriarchal power within the family structure? Is Senarath's daughter being "silent" for the sake of family harmony? Or is there a reason for Senarath's daughter's disregard for her mother's suffering? I can remember a telephone conversation I had with Senarath: *"My daughter did not talk with me today too.....When she left all she said was, 'I am going, keep the door closed.'"* Senarath asked: "If I am no longer my daughter's mother, who I am?" She lives with her daughter in the same house but feels very far from her daughter and feels frustrated because the daughter does not talk to her. So she has lost her position as a mother, and experiences psychological discomfort which is one of the critical attributes of loneliness (ElSadr, Kelly, & Nouredine, 2009). As Wylie (1996) states, one's self committed to the care and well-being of others must be recovered. Can Senarath find a path through the haze to recover her lost self?

This tension between Senarath and her daughter has pushed me to revisit my experience when I left my mother. My situation is different from Senarath's, as I still have a strong bond with my mother. Being away from family and being alone in the new country, I felt as if I did not connect with any body in a meaningful way. When I was in Sri Lanka, I was with them in the way I wanted to be. I could say or do anything that I wanted. Even though I am physically separated from my mother, I try to have at least a sense of being close to her. When I see the moon in the sky I tell myself "If I can see the same moon that my mother sees, then we cannot be

that far from each other.” That provided emotional proximity to my mother despite our physical distance, while Senarath experiences an emotional distance from her daughter even with their physical proximity.

During our conversation, Senarath said with a smile, “I knew for a long time that I would spend my later life with my daughter. It is related to occult science.” She had built her hopes on her daughter. People build assumptive worlds based on their beliefs about their own world. As Parkes (2006) describe assumptive world is the way we view the world and it includes our beliefs and assumptions about people, objects, ourselves, and our expectations towards others. But when they face losses, their assumptive worlds are shattered (Scott & Swan, 2009). Senarath’s lonely feelings are shaped by her shattered assumptive world. I believe Senarath is striving to respond and adapt to the changes in her assumptive world that has become her current reality, and make a psychosocial transition. Her psychological reactions to her shattering assumptions include anxiety, grief, and stress, which is affecting her physical health as well (for example, by increased blood pressure). In other words, when we face such situations the will we have to restore our past reacts against the changes and against our physical, psychological and our spiritual selves. In Senarath’s situation, most of the changes are negative and she oscillates in the space between her fervent expectations and dismal reality. In the new cultural context, being helpless in terms of family support and restricted social access, she feels marginalized, and disconnected from others and lonely. In this way all life events are fortified by her lonely feelings.

This point of her story mirrored a certain point of my own story at which I was informed by the doctor at the medical clinic that my blood pressure had gone up. I went to the university medical clinic to get some treatment for pain I had in my right hand. At my routine physical

examination, doctor checked my blood pressure three times and asked me if I had a history of hypertension. I asked her back, "Do I have high blood pressure?" Her answer was "Don't worry. We will check. You have to get these investigations done." Faced with my shattering assumptions I felt lonely and powerless, and stressed, a consequence of which was increase in my blood pressure.

At one point during our conversation, Senarath said, "*Anyways I hope to write for news papers. I am more satisfied with that. I hope to write different things.*" I believe that in her frustrated world she tries to satisfy herself with activities like writing. In one way this may be an effort she makes to cope with her stress and lonely feelings. As Folkman and Lazarus (1985) claim, coping is a cognitive and behavioural endeavour to handle, reduce or tolerate some troublesome situations arising from a person-environment relationship. In this sense Senarath tries to convert her cognition into writing behaviour to cope with her stress feelings and mitigate the lonely feelings raised from her unpleasant environment.

I remember she showed me one of her souvenirs, a greetings card she had received from her daughter's family right after she came to Canada. She read to me what was written on it. "***For a special mom and grandma with our love. The bond of family is created in the thousands of day-to-day things that add up to a life time of shared memories and love.***" The words I have put in bold here were more special to her. When she showed this to me, she stressed and repeated these words. Based on these specific words, she had built up expectations for her daughter and son in-law that she would have a close intimacy with them. Instead, Senarath now feels distant from her and her daughter and son-in-law, which has lead to her disappointment.

I believe that her keepsakes tell us hidden facets of her story. For example, the painting she has which depicts a lady with a group of children, which might relate to her unexpressed

feelings. "I love this very much." she said pointing to the painting. It appears to symbolize the adoration she has for small children and at times also her frustration with the adult world. The painting she has might symbolize her hope to revisit her own children's childhood. Perhaps this is the reason for the location she selected for our meetings, a children's park. She believes that she loves her grandchildren more than her own daughter, and as she contemplates of returning to Sri Lanka she feels sorry to leave the small children behind.

Another keepsake was a silver spoon. For me it symbolizes a tool that she used for her knowledge distribution. But in her situation now, it has become a mere souvenir, an abandoned object in her life. Even though it is silver, it has lost its brightness and Senanrath has not used it for a long time. The appearance of the spoon mirrored her current situation. She does not have an opportunity to share her knowledge with others. This is also reflected in her pictorial depiction of herself and her current situation. In one of the pictures she drew of her past she has drawn herself in a brightly coloured sari and with a glass full of water in her hand, she is like the bright silver spoon. The picture that depicts how she feels about herself now is like the appearance of her silver spoon tarnished: her clothing is dark, her appearance has faded, and her glass is half full. This picture she drew shows herself as someone who is no longer useful.

She has emphasized this frustration through another picture she drew about her situation and feelings. In it the main wheel of a car has become a spare wheel. In other words, she has become a spare wheel. But I believe that a spare wheel cannot be thrown away. This means she has value. But she does not feel that she has a value in her current situation. In the same picture she has drawn herself far away from other people. This suggests her experience of social loneliness. How can one experience loneliness when one lives with one's daughter in the same house? It is possible that while both of them are under the same roof they are emotionally

distanced. I believe that, for a mother, her daughter is one of the closest figures. As Weiss (1973) claims, withdrawing from one's closest figure can lead to the feeling of emotional loneliness. In this sense, Senarath is emotionally lonely.

Based on my reflection on Senarath's story, I believe Senarath is experiencing loss of identity, loss of self-worth, and a negative role transition all of which are factors in loneliness in her life. My dear Mother Nature, after listening to my reflection on Senarath's story, you might come up with a concession that might help us move on from where we are. Therefore until I come back to you with another person's story, please let the echo of this woman's silent cry resonate in your ears.

Thank you

Pramuditha

## Chapter V – Mary’s Story of Migration and Loneliness

When I talked with my other co-participant over the phone, in one discussion I asked her to select a pseudonym for her story. She selected “Mary” as her pseudonym and I use it in the story to represent her and also I use Arial font to present you her own voice through crafted story in the study. As before I use Times New Roman font for my researcher voice and Corbel font for my co-participant voice. I had two meetings with her. Our first meeting was more than two hours but the second one was less than an hour. In the following section I present these two conversations

### *Mary’s Story of New Becoming Compiled through Two Meetings*

As I did with Senarath, after Mary agreed to participate in the study on the very first day at the Buddhist temple, I spoke with Mary over the phone to see how she was doing. During my first telephone call to Mary she talked to me about her life in brief and how she had lost her social status after coming to Canada. Our first conversation was not very long, she asked me to call again to book a time for a meeting. When we spoke again, she gave me a time to meet. Although it was April, I felt cold. At the bus terminal I asked a man if there were any other busses that I could take. He told me right away “Look at the map and time table.” I was surprised by his behaviour. If this had happened in my country, he would definitely have given me the information himself rather than referring me to some other resource. Even though he did not help me, he gave me something to think about on my way. I wondered about this example of human relationship. How far are we from each other in this strange culture? His behaviours triggered feelings of loneliness for me.

Within five minutes I was at the front entrance of Mary’s house. A big pot with orange coloured flowers was at the door step. I rang the bell at the front door. Mary appeared in front of

me with a smile. I entered her home at her invitation. When I took my jacket off she helped me to hang it in the walk-in closet. She invited me to have a seat and went to make coffee. I got ready my cassette on the coffee table in front of the chesterfield. It was a very calm and quiet environment. The living room was artistically furnished. It was organized well. This environment inside her living room suggested the peaceful lives of the people who lived there. Within a few minutes she brought me a coffee and a piece of cake and sat on the chair near me with her coffee cup. I gave her the consent form to read. She read it twice and signed it.

The following is the first conversation I had with Mary.

*Mary's Story of Loneliness and How Becoming*

In Sri Lanka, I was born in down south. Our parents had good properties. My mother was a teacher. Then when we were live there, the cost of led has gone down. It was my father's business. My father looked after and treated his servants well as much as he can. Then he served for temples, helped the village. My father had taken care of all the people who work under him for a year after he stopped the business. But, after price of led has gone down, he couldn't keep that position. So after that he came to Colombo with us. Then I was about 7 years and we studied at schools in Colombo. Then, after I finished my high school, I wanted to study further. Then my brothers were not happy about that. I had three elder brothers. I am the youngest and the only girl in the family. Then they were not happy and said "for what reason are you doing a job? It is enough you to study" like that. Then I was in the home (laugh). I got a marriage proposal when I was in my twenties about 21 years... about 22 years....then in that period I meet my husband and we got married (laughing). However he had seen me

somewhere else may be at the temple and he proposed by himself. By that time he has applied for the army and when we got married he was in the army. At officer training. We got married after he came from the training. After that I had the "officer life" then. All things after that will be in this paper.

She read what she has written on a piece of paper

*I got married to army officer, who was at the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war.*

*He represented Alma-Ata, rugby and athletics. He served in World War II as a captain of Engineers and then after that he join the first batch of officers selected for Sri Lankan army and then we had not a Sri Lankan army.*

*First time they formed the Sri Lankan army after the world war II. He has retired from the army in the rank of colonel having commander of two*

*regiments. He was the only officer who commands two regiments. He was a sportsman and vice president of the cycling federation. He was in subcommittee for testing and grading athletic official. He was a senior referee of the A.A.A. Athletic association. He was a juror.*

*Athletic Association. From that only he select the officers and the sports run by...mm... that is the main one mm...He was the member of the jury in South Asian Federation Games leading Sri Lanka mm....He was the founder of the Tract Master of the Athletic club and the tract field. He was the chief referee of the tour of Lanka cyclic traffic and marathon. He was also a senior member of lion International movement and also he was the honouree secretary of the Scout Association of Sri Lanka*

(From Mary's journal April 22, 2009)

He was busy throughout. So I used to go with him very often for all the parties. We had a good time. I had five children four daughters and one son. Son is the youngest. I did not do a job. My parents were with me. Then I did not have any problem with my children. I had servants too. Then I didn't bother for ever. I used to go for all the parties with my husband. Then my parents are with my children to take care of them. Then we have officer's parties monthly. We used to go for sports meets when there are and help them with refreshments. We get together with all the officers and help the others. Then we enjoyed the life. The period after that, later children were given good education and found them jobs. After that we had a better life with out any hard time. No any hard time at all. My children came here due to political situation in Sri Lanka. As my children live in Canada we came. My second daughter came first. Now she has been here for thirty years. Then others were also sponsored and came. They came here during the period of terrorist problems and JVP problems. There were no ways to give children education. As they faced so many problems on their way to school, they came here. After all the children came, then we both came too (laugh).

Otherwise we would never come. They were there with very good positions and prestige with a very luxury house in our land. I gave them that. It was very beautiful two storied house and hadn't any problem (laugh). Then now here Canada is not that much comfortable like in Sri Lanka

Pramuditha: Yes, how did you feel at the beginning here? When you come from Sri Lanka to Canada, how did you feel right away?

I feel like this. We were in very good and comfortable houses in Sri Lanka. All children were given individual rooms (laugh) after we came here, we are in a small house. We were very upset for that and stood it. Meanwhile my husband got sick when we were here. After that he died. He died in 1994. After he died so it is no point me to go back to Sri Lanka no? No body at our home. All children are here. My brothers' children are there. My brother was also died recently. Then when I go there I can stay there because my brother's children are there no? One of my children died about 4 years ago. She became sick after certain operation. What could we do? She would finish her time she brought. It says in our Buddhism no? I go to the temple and do merits. I go with daughters and son in laws. I feel lonely. After children leave, I am alone here no? Then I feel sorry about that. The way I am being here is not the way I used to be. Now then our lives have totally changed. It is not the way we used to be in Sri Lanka. I meditate to cope with that. In the morning I worship Lord Buddha and perform "pirith chanting" and finish all the things. When I was Sri Lanka, I felt lonely after children left the country. Then my elder daughter was next to my home. She used to visit me with her children. So I did not feel lonely then. After they came here, I felt lonely when I was Sri Lanka. Then I used to do some thing like sewing or some thing. I sew my dresses. Relations used to visit me. I have many relations there. My brothers' children and have many relations. Then they visit me. Then I don't feel that loneliness there. Then my husband's army circle, sports circle, lion circle. I can't do any thing here (high pitch). We can't go out alone here to do things. Even with a car....If I would drive, I can. I am still a lion (Lion's club). However I do not do that many activities now. I did some. Here I did some Canadian volunteer work. That is two years before. I stopped it after I got sick.... In my

body... you know? Doctors said like "heart", stones in the kidney, gall bladder and ... So I did not go for operations and this thing and that thing. I said that "let me to die better than doing the operation" like that. No points no?

I have no my friends here no? Children's friends are there. Then I meet children's friends. Then we go to visit them they accompany me too. Children don't let me go alone at all. They accompany me to that lions club and drop me. (laugh). I have some friends there. Then we worked with them. But later after my husband died, I became alone. Feelings so, feel like lonely... What I do for lonely feeling is I do some thing like knitting or otherwise sewing some thing like my jerseys.

Life is like that. So I know now anyways life is ending soon (laugh). Then I meditate and observe sill. In the morning I worship Lord Buddha and I finish by about 10 o'clock. However children call me on and off. To get rid of my loneliness, they call me. Some times they contact me through internet too. Some days children take me to their houses. So this is my life what can I do? I adjusted to the way here and stay. Going to temple is a big help for me, Children take me to temple.

Pramuditha: That means do you have opportunities to go to temple when ever you need to go?

No, actually do not. If they are on duty there is no way to go no? If they have some thing it is not good to disturb them no? (sorrowfully) But I have a strong will to go to temple.

But I don't like to tell children. We need to allow them to take their life in the way they want no? If we said them that "I need to got the temple today, there is a meditation programme" like that, they have to miss their programmes to drop me there and pick me up. Then it might be a big problem for me than that. So I don't make them bother.

I was hospitalized a lady keep coming to give me a company. They gave me her. Because they know that I am alone in the home. So I got a lady who was so good. She used to visit me for about two years. She used to visit me like twice a week. I taught her knitting (laugh). It was a pleasant memory.

Pramuditha Yea, Is it a pleasant memories? We live with them no? Do you have some souvenirs or any keepsakes in your life? Actually in my life, it is going to be two years that I have been here. Even though I came to study, when I left the country, to me it was peculiar feeling. Lonely and stressed.

Yes daughter, some thing peculiar. For us not like Sri Lanka no? What a good country is Sri Lanka? So we feel so sorry. We can't see that children, we can't see our relations can't see my brothers' children. I went there only one time after came here. Because after my husband died I did not want to go. To me I have never gone abroad without my husband. Then I feel so bizarre to go. If I go I would feel so lonely that is why. My brother has died about 5 years ago. When recall those children I feel so sorry. I do not have them to see no? They loved me so much. When we were in Sri Lanka those days, they used to visit us on their vacations

When we were in army bungalows it was very..... It was good. All the bungalows were built up in that land. When we were residing there, all these children came to see us for their vacation. So then it was so please all the children my brothers' children, my husband's brother's children. I am so happy. House is full of with them (laugh)

Now, here I feel big difference. I have nobody of them here. When I went to Sri Lanka in 1999, my husband was a commander for 2 regiments. In mechanical

engineers and some other regiment. Officers from those two regiments came and took me for dinner and again at the officers' mess. We had lunch. I had a photograph of that with me.

Look at here there are lot of photos here (laugh). This is me with army officers (pointing a photograpa). They wanted to come with their uniform to have lunch with me. I think there were about 10 or 15 officers came to have lunch with me. Commanding officer came to picked me up. Yes then the commanding officer in the Mechanical Engineering and his wife came to take me to their dinner. They took me all the round and showed me my husband's name in that board saying that "here is your husband's name". Then when I looking at that I feel so sorry thinking that husband is not any more to see this.

More people came all who came to see me are officers. I was invited for their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sri Lankan Army. I was there by then. I might have photos I will show you. Here at schools we visited. And giving them prizes. These are the children who sponsored by us through lions club. There we did lots of things. Here our home. (Pointing photographs)

This is an army photograph ....could you find me in this photo if possible. I happen to meditate (laugh). That is why I said it happen me to meditate looking at my photo. Here this is when I went this time. That one I said to you about that. It is with army officers. All these are officers all captain and above. This one was the commanding officer then. He came to my home and took me for lunch. We do not have these things here no? Then how much lonely I am no? So quite a different life time

going through now. Yes, what to do that is the life. Yes that is the life and who can say that this is me now? (Pointing her old photograph).

These are the souvenirs that I keep with me. No point to keep any other things no? I have my husband's ties and some medals. Going to temple is the thing for me now. When you go, leave every thing and go no? Life is like that darling, go to the temple and meditate. Now I am not worried about the things I lost. Anyways we leave those and go no? I have come to that certain advance now. I do meditate in home too to get rid of lonely feelings. When I do meditation, some times I recall my past memories. Then I stop and worship again and start to meditate (laugh). My past memories like how we were in the past, and how we are now after we came to this country like that. I have no sorrowful feelings now. No desires to this thing and that thing. Go to the temple once a month and observing sill is a big help for my lonely feelings.

When we had finished our conversation, Mary's son-in-law came home from work. My prior experience with Senarath's son-in-law gave me some anxiety. But this disappeared, when he talked with me in very pleasant way and directed me to take another bus to go back in shorter way. On my way back I kept thinking that how different he was from Senarath's son-in-law. In that way Mary is very fortunate. While I was listening to our conversation again and again, I wanted to meet Mary again to make some clarifications. So I called her. But Mary was not at home and her daughter picked up the phone. Thinking of the obstacles Senarath faced from her family when she wanted to participate in the study, I trembled a little when she picked up the phone. I thought there might be trouble continuing Mary's participation in the study. My prior experiences influenced my fearful thoughts, but my preconceptions were not the reality. Mary's daughter talked to me in very familiar way even though she had never met me. So I was inspired

and decided that there would be no hurdles to prevent Mary's participation. Her daughter gave me another contact number where Mary was at that time. That was Mary's son's house. She had gone there for her grandson's birthday party. I called her there but she told me to call her in another couple of days at her daughter's place where she usually lives. I gave her another call a few days later. I asked her to draw some pictures to depict how she felt about herself in relating to her lonely feelings in Canada and to show what she was experiencing in Canada. She said to me with a smile, "Oh, my God! I cannot draw, I am not an artist." But I told her that she did not have to do a big painting, just to draw how she feel and thought. And I told her that we could draw together when we met.

As we had arranged in our last contact over the phone I got ready to meet her on June 16, 2009. I had to meet her in the late afternoon at 4 o'clock. So I left home at 2.45 in the afternoon with my usual equipment for their meetings. As I was becoming familiar with the road directions, I got to her house without any inconvenience by 3.45 pm. When I got to the path leading to her home from the main road I could see that there was a green coloured car parked in the driveway and another white coloured car in the garage. So I decided that today somebody was at home as well as Mary, though at our first meeting nobody was at home other than Mary. When I got to her home, I could see that there were drops of water on the floor along the veranda at the front entrance. I thought that somebody might be watering the plants. There was a bushy plant beside the garage door with a few flowers on it. Because of my unfamiliarity with the Canadian environment I did not know the name of that flowering plant. As far as I could remember when I came there last time that flowering plant was not there. In the front yard, there was a bag of soil. I thought Mary and her guest might be getting ready for summer gardening. I buzzed the bell. In a minute Mary opened the door and I was warmly welcomed. I entered to the

living room. There were some newspapers on the table. I heard a sound of a television coming from another room. Mary noticed that I was listening. So she said, "My first daughter is watching T.V. in my room." Mary wanted to make a coffee for me. But I told her that I would prefer to have it later. She told me that she had drawn something to show how she felt about her lonely feelings. We discussed her drawings. This is the conversation we had during this second meeting.

My son took me to my grandson's birthday party. So, the party was ok. Everybody came. But happiness is not long lasting daughter. Our Buddhist philosophy is true no? When I live with children I have to listen to them. Unless I stay listen them, it may create family problems (laugh). Therefore when they tell "let us go" I go with them. When they are going I am going with them too. So I live as they tell. I live in the way I want too. But I have to be little crouch for the children. Otherwise, we can't live together in families no? When you come here, in this cold weather, like house bounded, we have to be inside the house in this cold. Can't go out (laugh). If I was in Sri Lanka, we can go when ever we want no? In this cold, hanging there in the house and in the way as children say, obediently for them.

Pramuditha: Then when you feel lonely how do you think about yourself?

I feel that "Oh! I became alone I don't have my husband we were so happy and live harmoniously" like that. Now I live alone in the home like hanging there. I go to the temple and observe sill. Those are the things...When my husband was alive, I did everything with him went everywhere with him. I don't have those things now. I am alone. I feel like that. Doctors said to me to have an operation for my kidney stones. But I don't. As I never undergone any operation, let rest of the life also to be in rest. Why

should I let cut my body to suffer? I will be suffered then more than now. I know that I will die. Now so I have come to the last step. Therefore leave everything to go no? Everything we have collected...leave all those things and go. Then therefore I don't feel to collect. Now I feel to give my things to others.

I don't feel such sorrow. As I get used to meditate. When I go to temple, it is a good atmosphere. You can see the statue of Lord Buddha, people, priests and religious customs like "Buddha puja" when I see and hear those things nothing comes to my mind. Every thing is relieved.

When I was with husband I go with my husband in the way I wanted here and there. So now I do not have my husband no? Children accompany me where they go. No question about that. Yet not like that I go with him. That means with my husband. Some times I have to be obedient to children. That is ok. So absence of my husband is my loss. Otherwise I do not have any hurdle from my children. They look after me very well. Then my sadness is that I do not have my husband. After that become lonely no? Become lonely in that way no? When become lonely with out husband..... Then.... so I do not have my husband no? Nobody can replace it.

Our conversation came to a close in this way. Then Mary served me a glass of orange juice with a piece of cake. She brought the piece of cake from her grand-son's birthday party to serve me. When I told her that I did not much like cake, she told me that she had brought it especially for me. So I thanked her and ate it with orange juice. While I was having the orange juice Mary again started to talk with me about my studies. She talked about one of her relatives who was known to me. He was a physician where I was trained as a student nurse. She was very pleased when she knew that I knew him. So she talked a little bit about him until I left her place. I started

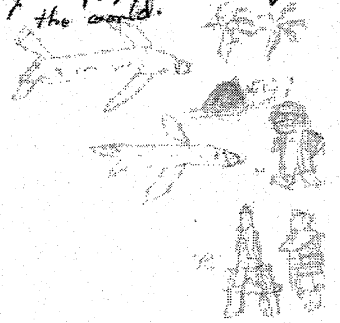
my way home thinking about Senarath's and Mary's lives, their similarities, differences, and comparing both to my own story.

***Pictorial Reflection of Mary's Lonely Experience***

Believe it or not, my good old days.

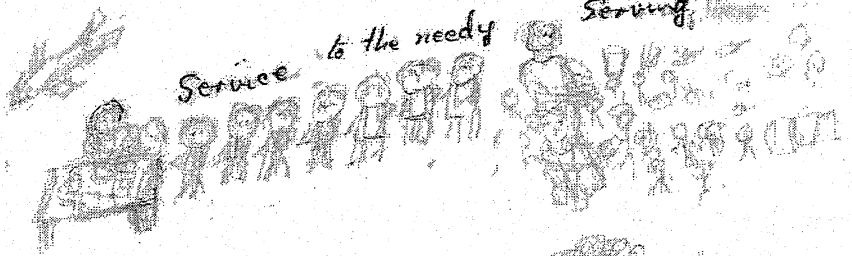


My happy traveling in the world.

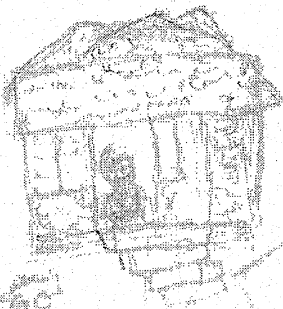


Service to the needy

Serving



Now in Canada



A Temple in Canada

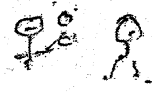
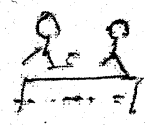
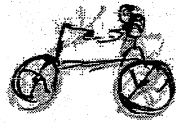


Then

Cycle Federation

Sports

Badminton



Now

Nothing

~~Then~~ - My memories of the past of my husband.



Now.



nothing to do

### *My Reflection on Mary's Story through a Letter to Mother Nature*

As the study of narrative is a way of learning how humans experience the world (Clandinin & Clonnelly, 1990), I studied Mary's story about her loneliness to learn how she experiences her lonely world. As I did with Senarath, I established a mutual relationship with Mary as well as to setting context for continuing the conversation in a meaningful way.

Mary used to offer me a cup of tea or glass of juice with some snack each time we met. It is a custom of our Sinhalese culture. It brings a caring dimension to our relationship which is an important issue for a research relationship in narrative inquiry (Hogan, 1988 as cited in ElSadr, Kelley, & Nourddine, 2009). Her story as a narrative can be placed in the three dimensional space of time, environment, and social and personal significance (Clandinin & Clannelly, 1990). Mary's lonely story evolved after her husband's death in Canada. But her memories move back and forth from the Canadian context of her current situation to the past events of the Sri Lankan environment when she lived there with the husband. Therefore Mary has an etiological history which supports her current lonely feelings and it is clear that her story has evolved over a time. The interaction between the physical environment which Mary appraised as empty after her husband's death and her emotionally isolated feelings provides the space for her loneliness to evolve. As she is motivated by her lonely feelings to find a new spiritual path to understand her life and accept its uncertainty, her story is both personally and socially significant.

In the following section, I reflect on Mary's story about loneliness while considering Senarath's and my experiences of loneliness in Canada. I return to Mother Nature through my reflection in the form of a letter.

Dear Mother Nature,

As I wrote you about Senarath's story, now I am going to tell you about my other co-traveller Mary's story. I believe that you will not be depressed by her story though you might get a different picture comparing her experiences to Senarath's. When I think deeply about Mary's story, I find she represents another different aspect of the loneliness phenomenon. All of her story is built up around the memories of her dead husband. I could remember when I met her at our first meeting she had prepared for our discussion with a piece of writing. In the middle of our meeting she read it to me. It was all about her husband. That was how she had prepared for our meeting to talk about her "self."

In listening to her story, I could see that her self had been hidden at almost all the significant times of her life journey. So I am so curious whether Mary's self was overshadowed by past memories of her husband because throughout our conversation she talked with me unobtrusively. Instead of talking about herself, she always expressed her grief in memories of her husband. So in one way I saw Mary as a bereaved woman who was suffering from the loss of her spouse. Loss of a partner is one of the most frequent bereavements which result in grief, social isolation and loneliness (Parkes, 2006). As Parkes further explains, grief that arises after the loss of a spouse is more related to loneliness than in other types of losses. I believe that Mary has experienced this situation. Her loneliness has been exclusively triggered by her husband's death. So she gives a meaning to loneliness through her lens, the separation of her spousal attachment; her husband's death. Weiss (1973) describe this situation in his theory as emotional loneliness, that is deprivation of one's close attachment like spouse. As Weiss describes, Mary is mostly suffering from emotional loneliness as she has lost the most intimate figure in her life. She described the relationship she had with her husband as mutually interdependent and intense.

When we were there we could go here and there. I go with my husband in the way how I want. We had officers' parties monthly. I used to go with him very often for all the parties. We had a good time. Now I do not have my husband. Children accompany me when ever they go. No question about that. Yet not like that I go with him. That means my husband. Absence of my husband is my loss. Otherwise I do not have any hurdle from my children

When listening to Mary's story, and paying attention to her drawings, I realized that throughout her married life she had closely bonded with her husband to the point where she could not tolerate separation from her husband. As human beings we have our own assumptive worlds built up based on our social world (Parkes, 2006). Mary has built her own assumptive world around her marriage. But it was shattered when she was 65 years of age by her husband's death. By then Mary's children were married and had left home so that her family has disintegrated leaving her in a position where the role she and her husband used to perform was no longer required. As a result Mary thought that she had become unneeded and unwanted. Since then she has been feeling emotionally isolated and lonely. As Wylie (1996) suggested, the feeling of belonging to loved ones or to a family provides us with a sense of hopes and purpose and so, when any one of these roots is pulled out from us we feel hopeless. In this sense, I believe Mary has become hopeless and helpless in terms of the loss of her husband. Her own utterance "let me die." clearly reflects her feeling of hopelessness.

Although I am not a bereaved woman, this narrative plot of Mary's story urged me to reflect on a certain point of my own story where I feel that I am disconnected from the world after being away from the close attachments of my parents and husband. Even though my separation from my parents and husband is temporary, as compared to Mary's situation, I feel as

if I simply exist in the new land instead of living in it. When I was deprived of my close relationship with my parents and husband I became objectified by my surrounding without live meaningful interactions with them. I had very few friends in the university at the beginning and I did not connect with them in a close way. So I became hopeless and helpless even to the extent that my studies were threatened. I felt very weak as if I were a tree pulled out from the earth by its roots with only minor roots surviving.

Although for some people, the adjustment period might not seem be too long after bereavement, for others it may be for few years or forever (Wylie, 1996). In that sense Mary is still suffering in adjusting to her miserable change. She lost her husband when she was in her sixties so she would not probably have had to take over additional responsibilities and roles as the bread winner or in rearing her children because all her children had already grown up and were living independent lives by then. In that way her husband's loss did not bring her an extra burden for life. Still she felt as if she had lost her source of protection. "*Nobody can replace the absence of my husband*" she tells us. That is true even though she has three daughters and a son in Canada who take care of her very well. Compared to Senarath and me, she has a relatively broader social network to interact with. Still she feels that she has no replacement for her husband's loss. Weiss (1973) in his theory of relational loneliness describe this situation very clearly. According to Weiss, absence or loss of a close attachment cannot be replaced by other supportive environment or friendship and it can only be compensated by another close bond. It is not only the protection she believes that with the loss of her husband she has lost also her joyful life, her intimate companionship and the reciprocal privilege she had through the social connections related to her husband. This is supported by these statements.

"When we were in Army bungalows in Sri Lanka, actually it was very....you know?. . .The commanding officer of mechanical engineering and his wife took me to their house for the dinner. Because my husband was a commanding officer for two regiments. In this photograph, with me all these army officers. All captain and above. They took me to the lunch. I think about 10 or 15 officers came with me for the lunch. The Commanding officer came to pick me up from my home for the lunch. So I don't have these here no? Then how lonely I am you know?

From this her own words another thing that is explicit is that her loneliness is influenced by her qualitatively deficient social relationships (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). This deficient social relationships as Weiss (1973) describe in his theory lead to social loneliness. As he further explains, because of the absence of desired social relationships people feel social loneliness. And therefore, I believe that Mary is suffering from social loneliness too. All her lonely feelings are coloured by the past events of her memories of her husband. That is her silent crying.

At another point during our conversation, Mary said to me,

"Actually after we came here, we became you know...like just a person called by first or last name. But when we were back there, our people called us as "hamu" or "madam" you know? How our people respected us. Oh! We lost everything here."

From her own words, it is evident that Mary believes that she lost the identity she acquired from her parental background in the pre-migration context. With losing her prestige she lost her mutual social network after she arrived. This plotline of Mary's story prods me to look back to the similar point in my story when I experienced loss of my identity. In the new cultural context

where I struggled to integrate with the new environment, I could not position myself to a place where it should belong. I feel I became destitute. Crossing the geographical boundary, I had to go through a role transition from my teaching to a student role. So my multilayered self became thinner, leaving my professional self submissive. When I was in Sri Lanka, I was respected as a teacher by my students and as a nurse by my patients. So I had a strong sense of self worth in my professional self. In the post-migration context I became “just a student.” Even within the student role, I did not have access to a clinical setting to accomplish my learning goals. When I was told by my supervisor, “You cannot go onto wards in hospitals here. You cannot meet with patients.” I could not imagine who I was. I became just another “SIN” (Social Insurance Number). If I could not access patients in the clinical setting for clinical practice but only for my study purpose, who was I? Where had my professional self gone? Was I a nurse any more? I felt I had lost my identity as a professional. Further, my family name on my student identity card was also distorted giving me the feeling that I was disconnected from my family. I wondered “Am I my father’s daughter any more?” When my colleagues called me by my name, they could not pronounce it in its proper way with the result that I became a different person called by my name from time to time. I did not even have a close friend to call me by my proper name. So I felt I lost my personal identity and that my self was just a physical body.

If I think of Mary’s drawings, I cannot see her image in her drawing immediately. She has hidden herself, become submissive or otherwise passive. In that way, I think she still lives in the assumptive world of her husband and she represented herself by her husband’s memorial world. I might be empathizing that Mary is experiencing loss of self or becoming a bereaved widow losing her identity. But, our identity is multidimensional comprised of multiple selves determined by our physical characteristics, sex and gender, social and professional roles as well

as our behaviours (Parkes, 1986). Therefore, I believe that Mary could not have lost all of her selves with her husband's death. She might have lost a certain aspect of herself as her husband's dear and near wife leaving her with a lasting feeling of loneliness. But as Wylie (1996) explains, Mary might have some other means than her marital partnership to cope with her loneliness. As per her story, it seems to me her loneliness is due in large part to the loss of her husband. As Wylie further explained some people find another activity or occupy themselves with good works to keep them busy so that they do not have time to be lonely. Supporting this idea Chodron (2000), a Buddhist nun suggests that although loneliness is seen as a negative state, one can get rid of it through meditation. I assume that Mary's remaining self might understand this alternative way she has to mitigate her lonely feelings. In her own words,

"This priest in the temple is very good to teach meditation. To go to the temple once a month, observing sill, and do meditation is a big help. . . go to the temple and meditate. I do meditate in home too to get rid of lonely feelings. When I do meditation, some time I recall my past memories.

Then I stop and worship again and start to meditate."

Mary tries to face these changes by adapting to a new life in spiritual way to relieve her lonely feelings and unhappy memories. Her strong desire to engage in religious activities and do good work, and her desire to spend more time in the temple environment are explicit evidences that she is driven to change her path to have a different identity and to make up her loss in a spiritual way. She strongly believes that spiritualism will help to relieve the lonely feelings triggered by her husband's loss.

Chodron (2000) further states that human beings need to be aware of the uncertainty and contentment of their lives to get rid of their lonely feelings. I believe that Mary has come to this position.

“Now I do not feel sorrow as I used to meditate. I am not worried about the things I lost. No desire to this thing and that thing. Happiness is not long lasting. Our Buddhist philosophy is true you know.” I have come to that certain advance. I do meditate in home to get rid of loneliness . . . that is life what to do.”

Her words tell us that she has achieved a kind of acceptance and the spiritual propensity to anticipate her life changes and make the required changes in her expectations. Without this Mary would have thought that no one can go back in time and move beyond a loss. We cannot get our yesterdays back. The only thing we can do is move on to tomorrow. Therefore I believe that Mary has set up a new path to turn from her lonely world through a spiritual pattern of behaviours. In this way Mary's lonely feelings are a path finder for her shedding light on her new becoming.

Mary's story of becoming through a spiritual way challenges the argument that elderly bereaved women do not possess the same pliability or strength to build a new life for them (Wylie, 1996). Mary has a certain strength to deflect her path from lonely and empty world to a new way to understand the life with the help of her religious faith. It supports the idea that religion is a very supportive resource for people when they are lonely (ElSadr, Kelley & Nouredine, 2009).

In Mary's first drawing, she went over in her mind the events of her past life in which her lost husband took part and the objects he used. For me, her keepsake, her husband's ties,

symbolizes the emotional bond they had between them. I think for her, his ties, and medals, the close personal possessions were most evocative and brought back her husband's presence. On the other hand, these memories would be very painful and have brought dreadful feelings. But our memories are not painful all the time. In her second drawing, Mary showed her "good old days" and her "happy travelling in the world." The drawings showed her happy memories. We believe that our happier memories can replace our painful past as time goes on (Parkes, 1986). Therefore, I think that the second drawing with her happier memories is an effort Mary has made to overcome her tendency to recall painful memories. In another way I feel that Mary is treading a meandering path having painful and happier memories on both sides. Both memories converged in Mary's self to sensitize her to feelings of loneliness.

I am puzzled at one point. While Mary is making an effort to live with evocative objects close to her husband, she tries to avoid things and places that would remind her of her husband's loss. In the 17 years after she came to Canada, she has gone back home only once. As she said, that is to avoid seeing the places where she and her husband were happy together.

*"He died in 1994. After he died so it is no point me to go back to Sri Lanka you know?"; "Yes my husband died. I went there only one time after came here. Only one time. Because after my husband died, I did not want to go. I have never gone abroad without my husband. Then I feel so bizarre to go. If I go I would feel so lonely. That is why."*

Although her religious faith helps Mary to achieve a sort of acceptance and to understand her life, to give up some expectations in our assumptive worlds and alter our views is really a painful process (Parkes, 1986). Therefore it is clear that Mary still finds her memories so painful that she tries to get healing in a spiritual way to mitigate her loneliness. My dear Mother Nature,

until I come to you with my own story, think about what message you could give Mary in terms of her situation.

Thank you,

Pramuditha

## Chapter VI – My Story of Migration and Loneliness

### My Lament through a Letter to the Mother Nature

Dear Mother Nature,

I hope you are not exhausted by my co-travellers' stories that I have sent to you in the last few days. In one way, they are just hard-luck stories. In another way, they show great sensitivity as well as raise some interesting points. I would like to present my story also to you so that you can consider it and come up with your own interpretation of our three stories. I do not think I am using your time in a frivolous way because we will all benefit from your understanding of our stories in our desperate attempt to find relief from loneliness. Therefore, dear Mother Nature, please listen to my story that I tell you in my participant voice.

As a middle class woman born in Sri Lanka, I chose my career path to become a nurse. I did this in a very random way. I believed that I had the knack of being sensitive to others' feelings, which is a required quality for a nurse. I think this sensitivity carried me a long way on my professional journey. On my way from my starting point as a registered nurse to my current role as a nursing teacher in a university, I had a few positions each of which inspired me to go forward. Being the charge-nurse in the In Vitro Fertilization Lab, the first National Unit in Sri Lanka, moving to nursing education and assuming the roles of clinical nursing instructor and the nursing tutor inspired my professional life, giving me satisfaction and fresh enthusiasm. Meanwhile the ambition I had since I was a student nurse, urged me to drive myself to be eligible to finally assume a nurse-teacher role in a university. After I joined the university with my Bachelors degree in Nursing, I needed to do my Master of Science degree to pursue my

career. As there are no graduate programs in nursing in Sri Lanka, I decided to come to Canada to get my training to qualify for a Master's degree in Nursing.

During my last few weeks in Sri Lanka before leaving, I was very busy concluding my assigned duties and responsibilities. Therefore, I did not have any room in my mind even to think of my family relations and especially of my parents. As time passed, I became so stressed that I went home from university three days before I was due to leave Sri Lanka. My parents were waiting for me with my favourite foods as a treat. My brother had arranged a vehicle to get me to the airport. For me, during that last three days in my home, felt as if I was going to have a serious illness. I could not eat. My mother forced me to eat. I had my last meal at home on September 13, 2007. After dinner, I left home with my parents, my younger brother and his 3 year old son (he is my world) for the airport. We reached the air port within 3 hours. My older brother joined me at the airport to say good bye. After a short conversation they all left me after I entered the airport. Even now I can visualize my brothers' and my nephew's faces when they saw the hundreds of thousands of bulbs lighting the airport: they were so bright. My brother's son, wearing a green-coloured baby shirt and short pants, was waving his little hand to say good bye. In a minute they had disappeared as I entered through the glass-walled room to finish my baggage-checking. Being away from my loved ones, I started to feel the shock of leaving my country for the first time. I was immersed in my own world and kept thinking of the weary life ahead of me. I felt as if my mind was detached from my body. I behaved like a puppet who is given instructions by the staff in the airport. After boarding the plane, I fell into a deep sleep until the flight landed at the Heathrow airport in England. During the hour I had to wait for the next flight, I called my home. I felt very strange and disconnected from my

homeland when I used foreign currency for the first time to make the call. Having a few words with my father, mother and my brother was a moment of solace for me at that time. An hour later, I got onto an Air Canada flight. As I remember it took about 6 hours to reach Pearson airport in Canada.

Upon arrival at Pearson airport, I felt as though I was displaced. I had a very strange feeling and even now I am not able to put the feelings I had at that time into words. It was an evening about 7 o'clock. The whole environment of the airport was illuminated with thousands of light bulbs. I couldn't see anybody who was known to me in my vicinity. I waited at a corner of terminal until my cousin came to pick me up. Moment by moment the people who were in the waiting area disappeared as their relatives or friends came for them. I felt very anxious because, by then I felt I would never see the cousin who was supposed to come to pick me up. I had such a bizarre feeling. Originally, my husband was to come from the U.S. to pick me up. But due to unavoidable circumstances he could not come. All these things together made me very uncomfortable. I felt that I was not me who had left my country with these peculiar happenings around me. Meanwhile my cousin came to pick me up. He took me to his home and others who were at home welcomed me. But it was the first time I had seen them and been with them. My unfamiliarity with this family made me very uncomfortable. The little cold I could feel in the air reminded me that it was already fall and that winter would come next. My new relations talked to me about snow falling and Canadian weather. They also asked me whether I had brought winter boots or winter clothes. All these were very strange for me. It was a weekend, so I was at my cousin's home. I kept wondering what changes would occur. I thought how far away I was from my parents, husband and my brothers. I did not have any

intimate person to talk to. For the first time I understood that I was experiencing loneliness. I sat in my room alone.

On Saturday to my great surprise, all of a sudden my husband arrived. I felt as if I had come out of a dark cavern. We talked for a few hours about the past and the future. Still I could not come out of the cavern completely. I felt as if I have had a shock. Even with my husband, I was experiencing strong anxiety about this new environment and my upcoming studies. The next day my husband accompanied me to buy winter clothes. I bought a winter jacket and a pair of winter boots. It was a novel experience for me. I had never put on such a thick jacket and such high boots. I just wondered how I could adjust my body to wear this unfamiliar clothing. Every strange new happening brought me intolerable anxiety. On our way home, I saw many people belonging to different cultures and different ethnic groups. I heard different languages all the times. Faced with all these new experiences, I became nervous and shrank within myself.

Next Monday was an unforgettable day in my life. For the first time I went to a university outside my own country. Luckily I was with my husband. Otherwise I would have gotten lost. I was so confused among unaccustomed people. I can vividly remember how anxious I was about my upcoming studies in the new environment. Meanwhile we got to the correct place with the help of a university map and I got registered for the program. "You are the first and the only international student in our program," my program administrator said to me. Again I felt as if I had thrown myself into another and very different world. Yet I could not put into words what I was experiencing. I felt as if my heart was going to stop beating. I cried to Lord Buddha in my mind. Then I stepped into my class. It was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the library building

at the university. My husband came with me up to the door of my class. He was a source of strength for me who was trembling and feeling helpless. Again the program administrator's words resonated in my ears. "You are the only international student in our program." I wondered what was going to become of me. However, right after I entered the class, the teacher came over and talked to me in a pleasant way. She gave me a card and asked me to write my name on it and leave it on the arm of my chair. I looked at the class to see what others were doing. Everybody had a name card on the arms of their chairs. I did the same.

Every thing was very different. New country! New society! New culture! New way of talking. Every thing was new to me. Every thing had to be learnt. This is how I felt on my very first day on campus. Since then, day by day I experienced new situations most of which were unbearable to me. Among these new people who did not show me any friendship, I became isolated and this new situation made me feel very lonely. Faced with their different way of talking and different behaviour I felt I was marginalized. While listening to lectures I kept trying to find anybody in the class who was at least a little similar to me in any way. At such times I was very disappointed and felt that I was not the only international student in my class but I was the only student in my class. My world was empty. My lonely feelings coloured all my thoughts. While struggling to survive in this "empty world," I was not sure if I could complete the four required co-courses in my programme preceding my thesis work because, like relapses in some disease conditions, lonely feelings triggered on and off to suppress my enthusiasm when I tried to stand on my own feet. When I was back home, if I came across any difficult situation, I could talk with my mother about my difficulty. Her intuition and experience helped me to be successful all the time. But now I did not have her with me. I longed so many times for

a close friend to talk with, to release me from the pressure I was experiencing. When I was immersed in my misery, sometimes my ambition woke me up telling me to stay on the path. So my entire lonely life for almost a two year period oscillated between ambition and disappointment.

Dear Mother Nature, when you listen to my story, I believe that you would be sensitizing to see it to give your own interpretation. Not only my story, please listen to all three stories and help us to give a voice to our silent crying. Use your power on behalf of us.

Thank you

Pramuditha

*Pictorial Reflection of My Lonely Experience*



My self before migration  
when I was not alone

My self after migration  
When I am lonely



How I experience lonely feeling



## *My Reflection on My Own Story through a Letter to the Mother Nature*

Dear Mother Nature,

Here I am, writing to you again to let you know my perception of my own immigration story. I believe that it might be useful for you to get a clear picture about my background, and to hear it in my own voice (my researcher voice). In reflecting on my own story, I might be able to understand the “hidden selves” that exist within me, which might leads me to my own greater wisdom.

My story is about the worries, difficulties, frustrations, uncertainties, challenges, and complexities I have gone through faced with the feelings of loneliness in my life after coming to Canada. My feelings are multidimensional in nature (Gierveld, 1998) and have emerged because of the new cultural and social context I was faced with confusing and frustrating situations as a new student in a new country. As Hunley (2008) says, students experience completely new and different environmental situations when they study abroad and some students experience anxiety, culture stress, depression, and loneliness. I have come to realize that I have faced cultural shock, anxiety, and separation from my loved ones. Different values and customs, language, food, and new social etiquette were parts of my new environment (Hunley, 2008) which triggered my cultural shock, isolation, and loneliness.

As an international student from Sri Lanka who has been here in Canada for two years, I have gone through many different stages. When I struggle to overcome hurdles, I feel like a train meandering stealthily in a hilly area. My lack of multicultural experiences and experience of crossing the geographical boundaries led to lethargy and loneliness. I vividly remember how I felt once away from my country. While I was flying over the Indian Ocean on a Sri Lankan plane, I felt I was still connected to my mother land. Air hostesses who wore Kandyan saris with

our familiar symbols made me feel very loyal to my country. But after I got my transfer to Air Canada, I felt as if I had lost my connection to Sri Lanka. I felt disconnected from my country and in from my loved ones. The Canadian foods I was served during my flight were unfamiliar. Before my mind started to react, my body started to react to the changes I faced. I understood that I had embarked upon unfamiliarity and I was not able to easily fix this new situation.

When I left Sri Lanka to reach Canada I brought with me enthusiasm and curiosity to pursue my studies in a new country. But I did not know that I had also brought fear and anxiety, and resulting stress. Upon arrival at Pearson airport, I can remember how peculiar and weird everything looked to me, and seeing different people everywhere, and hearing different languages made me feel displaced. I felt very nervous at the unfamiliar and unfriendly way in which customs and Immigration officials talked to me. When I was questioned I felt as if I was in police custody. It was my very first time to talking to foreign people out of my country. Their expressionless statue-like faces and the way they treated me like a thief who had been taken into police custody made me feel as if I was far away from the warm human interactions that I was accustomed to in Sri Lanka. I felt socially isolated. This was my first impression of Canada.

Reflecting on my first day on the campus reminded me that my transition to the student role in a new environment and in a new country was not as easy as I thought.

New country! New society! New culture! Oh! Every thing is new to me. Not many things but every thing has to be learnt. This is how I felt on my very first day at the campus. "You are the first and the only international student in our program" my program administrator said me. Is that so? I asked. My mind was filled with strange feelings, and my mind started to tell me some thing. But I could not hear or understand myself. I did not feel that I belonged. I am not here, I am not there.

I was very uncertain and ambivalent about my life situation in the new land as the people in my environment behaved and responded differently. As Hunley (2008) describes, it is difficult for students who study abroad to make judgements prospectively, as people in the new environment act differently than to what immigrant students are accustomed. As I appraised the uncertain situations that I faced I became stressed in the new cultural context.

I can still remember my first day in class. All of my fellow-students were Canadians. Although some of their families were originally from other countries, they had been used to western culture for years. Use of the language also created a tension within me because of the unfamiliar accent. Except for a very few, the students in my class did not talk to me. Was I marginalized? I felt for the first time I was. I was very much stressed. They did not establish friendly relationships with me. This painful feeling challenged my assumptive world. This was a serious threat. I had to pull myself together: "Pramuditha! Do not let your personality go down. Do not regret that you chose to come here! I know that you do not have anybody here to close to you and to tell how you feel. But you are a teacher. Be strong! Keep on track and stay focused. Keep in mind the purpose for which you left the country." The voice in my mind tried to make me strong. Yes I knew I was a teacher but all that was back in Sri Lanka. My professional life was imperceptible to the outer world. I believe professional and personal lives are two different entities, but they do influence one another. I had to remind myself that this was true for me too. Meanwhile, my inner self reminded me that I had to achieve my goal under any circumstance. When I was faced with any difficulty or any problem, I found some solace by remembering my situation back at home. I thought to my self "People need to have a certain stress to gain their achievements. Some people become successful if they are being threatened. Then why should not I? I shall stand on my two feet and be strong." The only voice I could hear then was only my

mind's voice. No one talked to me. And I had no one to talk to. As Weiss (1973) in his theory of relational loneliness describes, being without important needed relationships leads to social loneliness. Being consistent with this notion, at this point I understand that I am suffering from social loneliness. On some occasions when I tried to talk to the students in my class, they pretended they were very busy and ignored me. Sometimes I could see some tried to smile at me but it seemed as if the smile did not come from the heart. I thought "what do you have to lose when you smile at somebody?" The way they behaved with me hurt me. In similar situation in Sri Lanka, we would talk face to face to newcomers to make them feel more comfortable and welcomed. In that way I felt that I was treated disrespectfully

My academic life did not start as easy as I had hoped. I felt as if some unseen force was limiting my capacities to engage in my academic activities. My perceived failure to meet the academic standards precipitated stress and frustration within me. What was this unseen force? I felt as if I was like a fish out of water. As Hunley (2008) suggests students abroad face challenges in discovering their self identity and keeping up with social relationships while in the university. I agree with her as I struggled to adapt to Canadian university life, and the cultural incompatibilities. For example, I was brought up in a culture where teachers are called madam, Dr. X. or Mrs or Miss, and, I was unaccustomed to call them by their first name. This created a barrier to communicating with them. I avoided the moments to talk to them and I lost opportunities to make my social network broader.

I can remember my attempts to find anybody who was similar to me to relate to in Canada. As Greenstone (1975) says, immigrants' personal identification with their own ethnic group members and establishing close socio-cultural bonds with them is ethnic attachment. But as the only immigrant student from a different country in my program, it was not an easy task for me to

find even one Sinhalese student. So I felt I was culturally lonely as I had lost my own cultural inheritance (Sadler & Johnson, 1980 as cited in Kim, 1999). I felt many differences between me and my fellow students. These cultural differences prevented me from social and interpersonal communication (Kim).

While struggling to survive in this “empty world” and by my inability to predict events in the new environment (Hunley, 2008) I was not sure if I could complete four required core courses in my programme preceding my thesis work. At the end of the Fall in 2008, I said to myself “Nature, you are getting ready to bring the cold winter. What a bad experience I had last winter.” I hoped that all my grievances would be covered by snow and my conflicting emotions would also be cooled down. But I did not feel this. I felt hot inside my body, and I felt my heart rate was some times very fast. What was the difference? I feel as if I was floating in the dark. I recalled my programme administrator’s words “you are the first and the only international student.” I always became stressed when I thought about this. In this stressful situation I did not have any guidance and reassurance. As Weiss (1973) describes, absence of guidance in stressful situation and lack of reassurance lead people to loneliness. In that sense my new environment mostly contributed to my lonely feelings, and I lacked guidance from significant attachment figures.

Like Senanrath, my body had started to react to the feelings of loneliness which emerged in my new environment. As Floyd (2002) stated, loneliness is a risk factor for morbidity and mortality. She further explained that vigilantly searching for help and increased arousal experienced as a result of loneliness might result in physiological problems related to the cardiovascular system. Therefore, my physiological response in the form of elevated blood pressure as a result of my feelings of loneliness might be another alarm sign of morbidity. Over

the period of time I have been in the host environment, I have constantly striven to adapt to the new society seeking supportive social networks to mitigate my loneliness, as social support can play a big role in giving emotional support (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985) to mitigate my loneliness. As I previously explained, sometimes I experienced my heart rate increased when I suffered from the disappointment of loneliness. This might be an indication of increased sensitivity variability in the body associated with the exhaustion of seeking but not finding social support (Floyd, 2002). My world had become very small, and in order to cope with the loneliness my mind ran back to my home. I felt my life had no value without my parents. When I heard that my cousin's sister calls her daughter I felt so sorry for myself. Nobody was here to call me in that lovely way. I was thirsty for parental love. For me, their love was like a drop of water in a desert. I was hungry for my husband's love and company. His company is like a bit of food when I was starving. I tried to relate to my parents and my husband in my imagination seeking a sense of home and belongingness. Loss of close attachment with them made me feel emotionally lonely (Weiss, 1973). Weiss further explains that because of the absence of close attachment, people feel anxiety and restlessness. From this point I understood my anxiety and restlessness that I am being constantly suffered is result of my emotional isolation (Weiss). As if gasping for air I tried to broaden my social networks in this new migration context.

Sometimes my mind wondered for hours and hours, when I should have been using that time for my studies. At these times I did not feel that I had emotions. I felt numb. This numbness of my emotions brought me to the point where I was unable to convert my ideas and feelings into words so I felt as if I was dumb in front of my teachers

I still had an instinctive desire to pursue my studies. But I could not imagine where my interest had gone. What had happened to me? Who was I? Was I the same person I was before I

came to Canada? I was in a puzzle. Suffering from lonely experiences I could not tolerate the role transition from teacher to novice student in Canada. We, as adults are accustomed to autonomy (Fiorentino, 2009). Getting into a new environment diminishes our sense of autonomy and independence, and having to focus on new learning can be a threatening experience (Bradely, 1980 as cited in Fiorentino, 2009). I experienced the threat in my role transition and it was compounded by my feelings of loneliness. When I was back in Sri Lanka as a teacher, I helped my students, and, as a nurse, I felt myself like a tree offering a shelter for thousands of my patients.

The tension of meeting new people all the time, of being deprived of benevolent relationships, and the sense of being marginalized by the effort of cultural adaptation kept me away from my classmates forcing me into loneliness. When I was intensely lonely I felt as if I was going to drown in a river and I did not know how to swim. At such times, I heard my mind talking to me "You have to learn how to swim. Not only to survive but to teach others how to swim. Pramuditha, face the challenge! So I comforted myself by thinking "I am not drowning, waves are not very strong. This river is shallow enough for me to float." I willed myself to finish my studies successfully as this would help me to go back to Sri Lanka as quickly as possible and get rid of my lonely feelings. This puzzles me. Do my lonely feelings act on me as a motivation to expedite my way back to relieve loneliness. The obligations I had in my professional life, and my strong desire to be dutiful to my parents in my personal life have given me strength to swim across over the river to Sri Lanka leaving my lonely feelings at the river bank in Canada.

My dear Mother Nature, I have placed our three stories before you and hope you will consider them and give us your own judgement, which will be important for us in the future.

Thank you,



## Chapter VII – Reconstruction of the Stories

One might think that being an immigrant is just an experience of geographical movement. Most people who have never been immigrants cannot perceive the internal understanding of being an immigrant (Disman, 1985). Although there are many different aspects to consider in relation to the uprooting and resettlement processes of immigrants, our stories in this paper are all about our experiences of loneliness as immigrant women in Canada post migration.

Geographically, Senarath, Mary, and I lived in similar contexts, both prior to and after migration and we all experienced the similar phenomenon of loneliness. Therefore, one could say that our stories paralleled one another. However, our lonely feelings were triggered by several factors often distinct from one another. We also experienced loneliness in different ways because of our unique lives.

Reflection on our three individual stories of immigration and loneliness makes clear that loneliness is a multidimensional phenomenon (Gierveld, 1998) characterized by different life situations. As Gierveld further explains, this multidimensionality of loneliness is characterized by three main components: deprivation, defence mechanism, and emotional aspect. She notes that at least two of these components need to come together for people to feel lonely. These dimensions can be seen in the three stories. For example, Mary's lonely feelings appear to have begun with her husband's death, which has made her feel her world is "empty" and that she has "nothing to do." This loss of an intimate attachment (i.e., deprivation) is one dimension of loneliness (Gierveld, 1998). According to Weiss' (1973) theory, this deprivation leads to emotional loneliness. As another example, in my situation, my lonely feelings were triggered by deprivation of close bonds with my parents and other social relations, including my husband. The second dimension of loneliness refers to the defence mechanisms each of us has used including

blaming others or ourselves for our lonely feelings and interpreting our situations as hopeless and cannot be changed. For example, Senarath's story exemplifies this dimension as she interprets her loneliness as arising from oppression by her daughter's family yet believes that the situation can be mitigated if she involves herself in social activities or leaves the country to be with other children. The third dimension of loneliness (Gierveld) is the emotional aspect including sorrow, feelings of shame, sadness, frustration, and desperation. This dimension is exemplified in all three stories. In my case, sometimes I become frustrated and sad but at other times, I was emotionally numb. Senarath also felt sad and desperate when she feels housebound and isolated in her daughter's house. Mary explains the shame she feels because she has lost her reciprocal privileges and identity as a respected person in the society. These are some of the negative emotions we experienced during our journey in Canada. Other authors have noted that being an immigrant is a risk factor for loneliness which may trigger some psychological disturbances (Joiner, 1997; Boeke, Deeg, Eijk, Kriegsman, Pennix, & Tilburg, 1997) that ultimately results in illnesses.

People leave their homelands for various reasons including better employment, further education, and/or owing to unexpected disasters. My migration to Canada, for example, was to pursue further studies. This was a fortunate and constructive reason for me. Senarath came to Canada to help her daughter. This also can be perceived as a constructive reason because, for a mother, it is pleasant to join to help her daughter in raising her children. Mary's move to Canada was another hopeful journey, to live with her children. Thus, all three of us had constructive reasons for coming to Canada. In these ways our individual uprootings have some similarity.

On the other hand I left my country temporarily and hope to go back after completing my studies. Therefore my feelings about being in Canada are different from those of Senarath and

Mary, as their moving was relatively permanent. Although there are some similarities and some differences in our uprooting and in our lives in Canada, we have all experienced loneliness. Therefore, it is clear that people in different circumstances can feel lonely and that loneliness has different roots, and is coloured by individual life situations. If our stories are thought of as three drawings, loneliness is the shared background and the individual life events that triggered our lonely feelings are the different designs that differentiate the drawings from one another.

As far as my post-migration story is concerned, I felt lonely among the thousands of people in the university and my feelings were triggered by the reactions between my external environment that consists of new people, new culture, and strange weather and my own self, which is comprised of my personal and professional selves. In terms of my professional self, in the new context I faced a role transition being a teacher in Nursing to being a student in Nursing. In the unfamiliar environment, I was surrounded by feelings of being marginalized in the context of loss of familiar social networks and supports. Therefore as Weiss (1973) describes in his theory, I was suffering from social loneliness. On the other hand, being away from all my relatives, I felt deprived of my close attachments. This deprivation led me to feel emotionally lonely (Weiss). If I had been in my familiar society and with my family in Sri Lanka, I imagine I would have accepted this transitional process much more easily. What this makes explicit for me is that both social and emotional loneliness can make people less able to accept the changes or new experiences. However, being focused on the goals can make people cope with their feelings of loneliness or to overcome it. Loneliness can also be used to achieve (new) personal goals. For example, the only way I could get a relief from loneliness was to finish my studies and leave Canada, and so I was motivated to pursue my studies. In that way loneliness was a motivator for me.

When we look at Senarath's story, we find that she felt loneliness within the housebound environment of her daughter's home. Her social network was narrowed to her daughter's family members. Senarath did not have the opportunity to maintain social interactions in the way she desired and felt socially isolated. In Sri Lanka, not only was her social network broad, she also played a key role there. Her lonely feelings were compounded by the deterioration and deprivation of her relationship with her daughter to the point that the daughter did not talk with her except for a few words. As Weiss (1973) described, Senarath suffers from both emotional and social loneliness.

Mary's story reflected yet another aspect of loneliness. She has been living in this environment for 17 years. Therefore, we can assume that she has become somewhat accustomed to this new environment. She also has her four children and their families in Canada making her social network broader than mine and Senarath's. In contrast to Senarath's situation, Mary has a caring and loving relationship with her daughters and son. Given this supportive environment one might assume that she would not be lonely. Still, she too is suffering from loneliness because of her husband's death. Her intense attachment to her husband has made her emotionally lonely (Weiss, 1973) despite her relatively broader social network. More explicitly missing from her life is the companionship, the emotional security, and the opportunities for interactions that she received from her husband.

As far as our three stories are concerned, we all are struggling to face some changes caused by particular events in our lives. These changes challenged our assumptive worlds leading us to feel lonely and as a result feel restless, anxious, and tense. When I think of Senarath's situation and my own situation, the psychological conditions which we suffered threatened our physical health (for example raised blood pressure, in my case). The three stories show that the

phenomenon of loneliness is a psychological condition that has a major impact on physical health. This understanding is supported by Floyd (2002) who explains that as a result of experiencing loneliness and anxiously seeking help for over a period of time could result in cardiovascular health problems.

Our assumptive worlds are built upon our early life experiences about the world and ourselves. As Parkes (2006) describe our assumptive world as the way we come to view the world based on our previous experiences and it include our hopes, as well as assumptions about people around us like our parents and ourselves. As such the loneliness we feel, when our assumptive worlds are shattered, is influenced by our early life experiences. Thinking about Mary's story, we find that since her childhood she had to be amenable to her brothers and she had to be submissive to patriarchal power. At a certain point, she had to stop her education because her brothers' wished it, despite her desire to pursue her studies. The way she was brought up under patriarchal power in her early life, influenced her to share most of her life with her husband to the point where she was dependant on her husband for emotional security. The death of her husband made her feel deprived of this emotional bond. According to Weiss' (1973) Theory of Relational Loneliness, this deprivation has lead Mary to be emotionally lonely. I was brought up with a close relationship with my parents. As the only girl in my family, I received love and affection from all my relatives. I had never left my parents for more than a month before I came to Canada. In Sri Lanka, I was very outgoing and had a broader social network with my friends and with the staff in my workplace. I had built my assumptive world based on these personal and social experiences since my childhood. As Weiss describes in his theory, when I was deprived of these close bonds and social acceptance in the new context, I suffered from both emotional and social loneliness.

However what is explicit here in our stories is that we can mitigate our loneliness if we can change the expectations we have in our assumptive world. Human beings often have this ability to change their expectations. Mary chose a new spiritual path in striving to mitigate her loneliness. She started to change her expectations giving her life a new meaning with the help of the philosophy of Buddhism. She set up new patterns of behaviour and was busy with religious performances, observing “sill” and meditation, leaving no room in her life to be lonely. Religious beliefs also helped her to understand that nothing is everlasting and losses to be anticipated. However, in my journey of sharing my own and my co-participants’ loneliness experiences I envisioned that if we can become more aware of our inner strength and if we can use our will power, we can become stronger at facing the challenges in our lives. Moreover, I learned that if we can modify our assumptive worlds which are essentially subjective, we can better anticipate and deal with the changes in our lives.

In our immigrant stories, we all had feelings of being estranged, not being rooted in our new context, and of being distant and remote as a result of some kind of loss, which triggered our lonely feelings. So, as immigrant women, our interpretations of our own experiences about loneliness can be quite different from the experience of women who had never been immigrants. Even though many people face changes and experience transitions resulting in loneliness, the impact of such changes can be compounded by the unfamiliarity and the cultural shock that immigrants face in a new country

## Chapter VIII – Helping to overcome loneliness

### *Lessons Learned*

My study has contributed to an understanding of what it means to be an immigrant woman through the stories of loneliness in the post-migration context of Canada. All three stories, Senarath's, Mary's and my own illustrate the multidimensional nature of the loneliness phenomenon through the reality we are presently living. These stories express our sense of loneliness as experienced by being stressed, marginalized, and displaced, as well as by the loss of identity, role transition, and deprivation of close attachments, and by the challenges of integration into new social networks in the new land.

Our stories represent our individual experiences and internal understanding of what it means to be an immigrant and lonely. A more analytical understanding of the reality of our loneliness would add to professional nursing knowledge and thus would be socially significant. Our three stories, however, are not meant to represent a single truth but rather aspects of a complex reality.

Unlike me, both Senarath and Mary immigrated to Canada when they were over 60 years old and they came to join their adult children. Senarath's situation exemplified the specific types of loneliness that are raised when someone loses a significant relationship. Senarath became house-bound because her daughter and son-in-law put obstacles in the way of her social integration which lead to her experiences of social loneliness.

Even though Senarath was knowledgeable enough to manage herself in the new country, she could not have predicted the changes she would have to face in the foreign land. She relied heavily on her daughter and son-in-law and to accept the life they offered her even if it failed to fulfil her personal, social, and spiritual needs in the unfamiliar environment. Despite all

Senarath's intentions to put the goals and desires of her daughter's family first when she lost the emotional bond with her daughter, Senarath felt as if she had lost her role as a mother. This situation shattered the assumptive world she had built around her daughter. As a result of this loss of close attachment (Weiss, 1973), Senarath experienced emotional loneliness. Not only did she feel loneliness she also felt worthless and relegated to an inferior position in her daughter's family instead of being honoured as a mother. Her feelings of loss of power and the authority which she felt she had when she was in Sri Lanka in turn triggered more lonely feelings. As Lee (1994) states, older immigrants who live with their adult children are subjected to individualistic orientation of their adult children in particular regarding the individual needs of the nuclear family. Senarath's story shows that the individualistic orientation that adult children may take on the post-migration context can lead older people to become more vulnerable to loneliness both socially and emotionally.

Mary's account conveys a different dimension of the loneliness phenomenon – a story about her becoming emotionally lonely even when she was socially integrated in to a social network in the post-migration. As Dewey (1963) explains, past experiences of human life relate to their subsequent happenings and influence their future experiences. In this manner, Mary's past life events including her strong attachment to her husband and the important role he appeared to have played in her life almost left no room for her own self to develop more independently. As Weiss (1973) describes in his theory of relational loneliness, people become emotionally lonely because of the absence of a close bond with other people, and in adult life, this bond may take the form of a romantic attachment. Weiss further describes how widows/widowers suffer from emotional loneliness once they lose this close attachment with the spouse, and this loss could not be consoled by anyone else. Dykstra and Fokkema (2007)

concur that strong partner orientation may predispose a person to emotional loneliness when a partnership is terminated. This notion is relevant to Mary's situation. Her story indicates that her own self is overshadowed by memories of her husband.

However, Mary's story is one that shows her strength and resilience in finding a path for herself towards liberation from her suffering from loneliness. Her story challenges Wylie's (1996) idea that the "elderly bereaved do not have the same resilience or the energy to make a new life for themselves" (p.137). As Weiss (1973) describes in his theory, the development of a new self concept is one important aspect of adjusting to losses. In line with this notion, Mary has developed her spiritual self through religious faith and meditation to deal with the loneliness produced by bereavement. As Chodron (2009) explains, meditation helps to produce acceptance of ourselves as we are, and guides us to transform our stressful emotions and difficulties into more creative life opportunities.

In my own story of loneliness, uncovering and paying attention to my multiple "I"s (professional self and personal self) (Clandinnin & Clonnelly, 2000) helped me to address some aspects of loneliness. I became a different person not only because of my experience of crossing the geographical boundaries but also because of crossing the cultural boundaries along with crossing the boundary between being a teacher to being a full-time student. The struggles I faced in mitigating my feelings of loneliness helped me to uncover my multiple selves as a teacher, a student, a family member, and an immigrant woman. These multiple selves were sensitized by the different experiences I encountered, and enabled me to see the world in a different way than I used to. During my two year educational experience in the university, most of my colleagues seemed to disregard my cultural experiences as I did not fit into their ideas (i.e., those that are based on western cultural values). I felt disconnected from them. Often I felt excluded from the

class discussions and group work for assignment specifically made it difficult for me when some of my peers purposely excluded me from such activities with them. As such, my lonely experience as an immigrant woman was influenced by the primarily negative treatment I received from my professional colleagues.

My story is also about my obligations and responsibilities. As a student funded by a scholarship, I was under professional obligations to complete the degree and return to my homeland. But as the only daughter and the oldest child in my family, I also have a responsibility to take care of my parents, and I found myself worrying about my missed duties. I often oscillated between my obligations, responsibilities, and my emotions. I had to suppress my personal self to continue the obligations of my professional self. As Weiss (1973) describes in his relational theory of loneliness, I suffered from both emotional and social loneliness. But this experience helped me to reshape my philosophy of life as a person, as a daughter, and as a wife, by understanding the nature of my feelings of being away from my parents and husband and the responsibilities I could not undertake for/on behalf of them during this two year period.

Before I started this study, I believed that the reason for my loneliness was being an immigrant who, possessing a monocultural experience was unable to gain a sense of belonging in a multicultural context. But later I understood that it was only a part of my story of loneliness and my overdependence on, and strong attachment to, my parents and husband has brought me to a point where I could not bear the separation from them resulting in my extreme emotional loneliness. The temporal nature of my being in this new land and the hope of returning to my country soon also shape my experience of loneliness. During the process of using narrative inquiry method to the study harsh reality of being older immigrant women in Canada, I learned the harsh reality of being the first and only foreign student in the program, as well as being

constantly judged by standards derived exclusively from the western systems. I felt as if my real “I” was hidden by a mask. I perceived that my voice, my values and beliefs, and my contribution were of no value to my fellow students. In the Canadian education system that claims to promote cultural diversity, there was no room for me in my student community. Multiculturalism was merely an exhibition of foreign costumes and food which relates to a superficial view does not require educational system to address the needs of immigrant students who suffer from loneliness and experience marginalization in the classroom. Nor is it set up to instil love and compassion to one another irrespective of our cultural differences, ethnicity, race or nationality to make this global village a better place to live.

Looking at the struggles and conflicts I, Senarath, and Mary have faced with our loneliness in this foreign land, it is obvious that loneliness is not a suddenly emerging phenomenon but is the ultimate result of sequences of life events evolved over a period of time. All our struggles have been centered on deprivation or lack of human inter-relations. Through our self-explorations and reflections, we can learn the importance of human relationships and to identify our multi-layered self and to re-organize it in open and flexible ways towards the new becoming. In addition to these lessons, I learned the power of researching, rethinking, and rewriting that narrative inquiry as a research methodology can offer to Nursing

#### *Where to from Here*

Upon reflection on our three stories and their meanings, I wonder how I can contribute to the development of Nursing. The three stories suggest that being an immigrant is a life change predisposing one to be more vulnerable to loneliness. Some authors such as Gierveld (1998), Kim (1999), and Ponizovsky and Ritsner (2004) also have discussed the concept of loneliness as a result of immigration experience. Loneliness can in turn predispose people to illness. Nurses

can initiate appropriate interventions by assessing patients in-depth by paying attention to their stories to both identify those who are at risk to be lonely and working with them using a wide range of strategies and options to address social and emotional loneliness. Strengthening and expanding older immigrant women's social networks can lead to their psycho-social well-being. In particular, understanding the critical role religious faith and the spiritual needs play in mitigating the lonely feelings of older immigrant women would be helpful in planning necessary interventions and services to facilitate their psycho-social well-being

Furthermore, understanding how their exclusion leads to loneliness which in turn triggers stress and tension in immigrant students might generate a sense of compassion and sensitivity among their Canadian counterparts and to change their perspective towards students from other countries. Gaining mutual understanding and establishing caring relationships with students from other cultures rather than adding extra burden on them (as foreigners or strangers) should be fostered within the programs in universities. Self-directed learning and small group-based discussions might be used to facilitate Canadian-born students' understanding about immigrant students' experiences of pursuing studies in universities in the new land.

In-depth understanding of loneliness among older Sinhalese immigrant women within the context of family oppression from adult children, changing family relationships, and loss of social access in the new land, and potential conflicts and abuse within families, is necessary for developing interventions to help support older immigrant women. In addition, a perceptual change in the individualistic orientation of adult children who sponsor their parents would be an important step helping adult children to better support their older parents. Such interventions might include awareness programmes regarding their parents' social, spiritual, and psychological needs and can be implemented and/or funded by the Ministries of Health and the Department of

Immigration. They have a collaborative responsibility in planning healthy public policies and providing additional health care services for this particular population.

Health care professionals can work with immigrant women to build and act upon the inner power and strength they possess. By going through this journey I came to realize that we have inner strength to stand on our own feet and to find ways to relieve our lonely feelings. As social isolation can be relieved by making new contacts (Weiss, 1973), women must be encouraged to build coalitions, and to attend social and cultural organizations to broaden their social network rather than relying on their family, friends or peers to help them

In addition, more research has to be conducted to understand the complex phenomenon of loneliness. Accordingly, replicating the study with immigrant women from different cultures, exploring the adult children's perception of their immigrant mothers, and the coping mechanisms immigrant mothers used to cope with their loneliness, and strategies health care professionals can do to address these experiences and their health consequences should be the focus on further research.

## Epilogue

Dear Mother Nature,

I am writing my final letter to you asking your help in sharing the wisdom that I gained by going through my own experience of loneliness in this new land as well as through the other two women's stories of loneliness. During the past two years my life you were my travel companion. With your help, I discovered my inner strength to cope with my lonely feelings and proceed with my studies. Thousands of other students who might be in similar situations might come to you in the future. Please help them to discover their own inner strength and empower them to broaden their social network and to find new friendships so that their experiences of loneliness will be less intense or they might not be lonely at all.

Discovery of my inner strength helped me to gain self awareness on my thought process, and to become more conscious of my struggles with my feelings of loneliness. My feelings of loneliness at times made me feel emotionally numb and I could not think in a meaningful way about my studies. Sometimes I could not hear what people said to me and I could not think what I should do. I felt as if I had lost my mind-body coordination and connection. Instead of living, I existed as just a physical body. But by gaining self awareness through self-reflection during my talks and letters to you and understanding my own strength, I was able to face the reality of our lives and realize how to cope with various challenges that I faced during my journey. In this manner, I was able to regain my body-mind coordination and feel embodied. I came to understand the importance of warmth in human relationships for human survival, but also learned about the power of my inner strength to overcome the unpleasant experiences such as feelings of loneliness and its impact on my health.

My dear Mother Nature, you reminded me that as human beings we all have our own inner strength although at times we forget this. I would like to pass this message to the three couples in Sri Lanka that I met at the beginning of my journey. I want to ask them to become aware of their inner strength to challenge their feelings. People can feel lonely regardless of whether they are alone or not. Having children may not necessarily be helpful to prevent parents' loneliness. My co-participants' experiences show that even with physical presence of their children, some suffer from loneliness and strive to find other ways to relieve it. So my dear Mother Nature, please remind the three couples that I met in Sri Lanka to use their inner strength rather than depending on others to overcome their loneliness.

As a devoted Buddhist, I found solace in my religious faith when I struggled with my lonely feelings. One of my co-participants, Mary, also became more spiritual in struggling with her lonely feelings. Therefore, I am pleased to pass her this message. "Dear Mary, you have chosen a path that is beneficial to you in relieving your loneliness after your husband's death. Please accompany others who might benefit from similar strategies to cope with their feelings of loneliness and to adjust to life changes." Also, my dear Mother Nature, please help me to pass this message to my other co-participant. "Dear Senarath, as you plan to return to Sri Lanka, I am curious as to whether a change in your environment will help you overcome your feelings of loneliness. Leaving behind your daughter and grand-children in Canada and being with your son and daughter-in-law in Sri Lanka might or might not relieve your loneliness. Wherever you live, be mindful of your inner strength and let your own power to control yourself and your feelings of loneliness. Do not let others control you.

Reflecting upon my lonely experience as a student in a new country, I am reminded of the kind and generous relationships I had with my teachers. My struggle with feelings of

loneliness was eased somewhat because of their support to finish my studies Therefore, as a nurse teacher, I have another message to you, dear Mother Nature, to pass on to my colleagues. “Do not leave your students alone. Be close to them in need and try to touch their feelings. Make them feel the warmth in human relationships because students who finish their studies and move on to work with patients will share similar warm human relationships with their patients. Therefore, go beyond the book knowledge to pass them the tangible humanism. This might be more important than the physical care or the treatment the patients need.”

My dear Mother Nature, I used to write to you for months. You have patiently listened to me. Your companionship helped me to change myself and to rely on my strength to overcome the challenges. I hope that we will meet again because as I end this journey, I will be embarking on another. The changes we face in our lives can lead to losses and gains, and I am sure I will have new messages to give to you as I begin my next journey. Until then good bye!

Thank you.

Pramuditha

## Appendix - A

### Participant Recruitment Form

## **Are you interested in participating in a study that explores the experience of loneliness among older immigrant Sinhalese women in Canada?**

Dear Potential Participant:

I am Pramuditha Ahangama Vidanagei and working on my Master's Degree in Nursing at the Ryerson University Toronto. I am currently planning to conduct a research for my thesis and looking for some individuals who would be willing to participate in my research. The topic of this research is **“exploring the experiences of loneliness experience among older immigrant Sinhalese women in Canada.”** My goal for conducting this research is to uncover lonely experience of older Sinhalese immigrant women living in Canada.

**You are invited to participate in the study if you:**

1. are Sinhalese woman over the age of 65, presently living in Canada
2. experienced loneliness since coming to Canada
3. would be interested in sharing your stories of coming to and living in Canada, and your experience of feeling lonely

**If you are willing to participate in the study:**

1. You will be asked to meet with me for an individual meeting (or two)
2. You will be asked to share your stories about your life and lonely feelings
3. If it is OK with you, you will be asked to share your keepsakes, memory boxes or any other artefacts relating to your life story

**Where would be the interviews take place?**

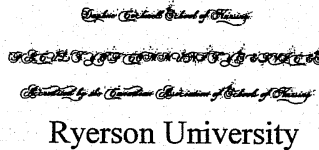
You can negotiate the place with me as you prefer. However, it will have to be a place where your privacy and the confidentiality can be maintained.

If you are interested to hear more about the study, feel free to contact me to this number:  
416 979 5000 (1) 6323.

An honorarium/compensation will be provided for participation

## Appendix - B

RYERSON UNIVERSITY



### Consent to Participate in a Research Study

#### **Exploring the experience of loneliness among older Sinhalese immigrant women In Canada**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer in the study, please read the following information about the study. You can ask as much question as you need to make sure you understand your role in the study.

**Investigator:** This study will be conducted by Pramuditha Ahangama Vidanagei, a graduate student in the School of Nursing at Ryerson University. The thesis committee members are Drs. Sepali Guruge, Jasna Schwind, and Lori Schindel-Martin.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to uncover the experience of loneliness in an anticipated sample of 2 older Sinhalese immigrant women in Toronto in the post migration context.

**Description of the Study:** I am inviting 2 Sinhalese women who are older than 65 years and are experiencing or have experienced loneliness following their immigration to Canada. You are being asked to meet with me to tell your story about feeling lonely. An interview may last approximately 2 hours and you may be asked to meet with me more than one time, if this is OK with you. At the most you will be asked to complete 2 interviews. Your story will be tape recorded with your permission to be typed it later word-for-word so that I can listen to it again later. While you are being interviewed, I will also share with you my experience as a newcomer to Canada so that you may feel free to reveal your experience. In addition, you will be asked to talk about your experience of immigration to and settlement in Canada, your experience with the social contacts available to you and the family relationships you have after you have come to Canada, and what kind of strategies you use to cope with feeling lonely. Further, with your permission, I hope to look at and take a few photos of any artefacts or keepsakes that you might have related to your story. In case if you do not like to share with me any of your keepsakes, this is OK, and you may still take part in the study. It is entirely up to you whether or not you would

like to share your keep sakes/ artefacts with me. Also, you can meet with me at a place of convenience and safe to you.

**Benefits of the Study:** Although this study will not be directly beneficial to you, an in-depth understanding of how you experience loneliness in Canada can inform the health care professionals to strengthen their work towards all other immigrant women's health and psychosocial well being. This understanding might help policy makers to create healthy policies to facilitate older immigrant women's resettlement process and reduce its occurrence in the post migration context. By participating in the study you will have someone to share your experience at length so that you might get some consolation.

**Risks or Discomforts:** No physical, economic or social harm will be caused to you as a result of your participation in this study. But your participation may cause some emotional discomfort to you as you may recall your past memories during the story telling process. You have the right to refuse to participate in the study or leave the interview if you feel any discomfort or you can shift to a different topic and continue the interview.

**Confidentiality:** All records pertaining to your participation will only be accessible by me, the researcher and her thesis committee who oversee the thesis work. When reporting the results or presenting the findings, imaginary names will be used instead of true names and confidentiality will be maintained. All study information will be stored in a locked cabinet in the university which will only be accessible by me and the thesis committee as necessary.

**Cost and/or Compensation for Participants:** You will be offered \$20 for each meeting with me.

**Voluntary Nature of Participants:** Your participation is voluntary. Your desire to participate or not will not be revealed to anyone.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any question about the study, please do not hesitate to ask me. Even after the first interview, you have the right to withdraw from the study until data analysis at the end of March. If this happens and if you request to do so, the researcher will destroy all interview material. However, after March 30, 2009 I will have written and submitted my study report to my thesis committee and your comments may not be removed from the report.

Please feel free to contact me and my thesis committee members at Ryerson University to following numbers:

Pramuditha Ahangama Vidanagei	416 979 5000 (1) 6323
Dr. Sepali Guruge	416-979-5000 (1) 4964
Dr. Lori Schindel Martin	416-979-5000 ext. 4257
Dr. Jasna K. Schwind	416-979-5000 ext. 6321

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Ethics Review Board at the office of Research Service at Ryerson University:

Research Ethics Board  
VP Research Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
416-979-5042

**Agreement:**

My signature below indicates that I have read the information in this agreement, I have had a chance to ask questions about the study, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. My signature also indicates that I agree to take part in the study with the understanding I may change my mind and withdraw my consent to participate at any time without any repercussion. I have been given a signed copy of this agreement. I voluntarily consent to participate in the study.

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Name of the participant	Signature of Participant	Date

I confirm that I have explained the nature and purpose of the study to the subject named above. I have answered all questions.

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Name of the Person obtaining consent	Signature	Date

**Agreement to Audio-tape Interview:**

My signature below indicates that I voluntarily agree to audio taping of my interview.

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Name of the Participant (please print)	Signature of Participant	Date

I confirm that I have explained the nature and purpose of the study to the subject named above. I have answered all questions.

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Name of Person Obtaining Consent	Signature	

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