

## **A World of Pains** (excerpt) by **Solly Kaplinski**



The Varnas home, New Jersey: June 8, 1996

Sandra and Jonathan have just returned home in the late afternoon following a visit to the cemetery. It is the Yahrzeit, of Sandra's mother – the twentieth anniversary of the day on which her mother, Sima, passed away.

As always on these memorial days, Sandra is weepy and fragile. Jonathan who was especially close to Sima also finds it difficult to contain himself.

As is the tradition in the Varnas household, a small group of family and friends are invited on these annual days of remembrance to their home to quietly reflect on and celebrate the life of Sima.

Normally on these occasions, the people who are present drink a toast to Sima's memory, eat a few snacks, engage in small talk, and then make their way home. This being the twentieth anniversary of Sima's passing, Sandra feels that this is a special milestone worthy of a few words from her.

"Sima, my dearly beloved mother of blessed memory", Sandra begins, "was a down to earth, uncomplicated lady who enjoyed the simple things in life. A sweet soul, Sima held the family together in the most trying and difficult of circumstances. She was always so generous in her praise of others and with a capacity for contentment with her lot in life not given to many.

I will not dwell on our past – the memory of the Shoah years and the degradation she suffered is too painful to contemplate, but suffice to say that when we came to America, all that my mother could think of was my wellbeing. She dedicated herself totally to my welfare and put me first at all times.

A promising concert pianist before the war, she was destined for a glorious career as a musician. Her late mother was a Professor of Music at the Jewish Music Institute in Vilnius. However, here in America, my mother made a decision that her only child – me, was the center of her universe.

My mother lived for and through me. Nothing else mattered and sadly, she never played the piano again - except on one occasion when she sat at the piano in our home next to Ruben who was six years old at the time. He was learning to play the piano and was painstakingly trying to string some notes together. It sounded like Chopsticks!

He asked my mother to show him how to play the piano. Could she say no to her grandchild with his beautiful, pleading eyes? She tickled the ivories for a few moments – perhaps for the first time

in almost forty years and voila, within seconds, the majestic beauty of Frederic Chopin was wafting through our home as if the master himself was seated at our piano!

'Mommy, you sacrificed your life totally for me! All that talent and creativity lost forever'.

I can still hear her saying, 'All I want is a tranquil existence and happiness for my daughter. Is it too much to ask for, too much to expect?'

Mommy used to say to all her friends with pride: 'I have no riches, no possessions, and no wealth at all. But Sandrineleh is my jewel, my shining diamond, my precious possession!'

The fact that I stand before you today as Mrs. Jonathan Varnas, wife of my soul mate Jonathan, whom I treasure so very much, mother of two wonderful sons, a Judge of the New York Supreme Court, is almost totally due to her selflessness and dedication – and her unconditional love.

I also want with your permission to take a moment to remember my father, my Daddy, who was taken from me, from us so violently. I can still hear the lilting lullabies you used to sing to me, the soft touch of your hand holding mine, your warm and loving kiss on my cheek.

Tateleh, Daddy, all... all that remains ...is a permanent scar on the heart."

Sandra takes out a Kleenex to wipe away the tears.

"Mameleh, my Mommy, I was always in awe of your indomitable spirit and your strength of character and how you rose above those harsh, painful, and humiliating experiences that were sent your way.

Perhaps the greatest lesson you taught me is that when all is said and done, how we are ultimately judged is not whether we put our minds in the way of great things, but rather our concern for 'everydayness' and how we managed the mundane; not whether we 'did it in style' but whether we were unheroic and 'inconspicuously pious'.

Mommy, what especially stays with me after all these years and I thank you so much for this insight is that in the final analysis, the finished portrait of ourselves should be admired not for its painstakingly hewed frame, however beautifully and exquisitely adorned, but for the concern, sense of loyalty and fair play we enacted on behalf of others.

I raise my glass to you and to your memory, I kiss you and I thank you and think of you as always with tears in my heart."

## **Solly Kaplinski -Excerpted from my novella, *A World of Pains-A Redemptive Parable?***

### **A word about me:**

My writing falls into 2 categories:

Feel good, sanitized, Hallmark – moments writing, which is normally posted on my fairly regular erev Shabbat Facebook page. This writing is also intended to convey a more positive picture of a life of meaning in the beautiful Eretz Yisrael that I know and love – as opposed to the media and social media anti – Israel screeds. This is not intended to put a band-aid on some of the serious challenges that Israel faces daily, but rather serves as an antidote to the ‘extreme noise’ out there which tends to drown out my reality. So, no politics nor ideological debates – no punditry! This writing is for sheer joy, for the fun of it – and for the weekly challenge of trying to meet a deadline with something attractive and catchy!

The second category is what I would call more darker writing and is influenced in the main by growing up in the home of Holocaust survivors who while barely speaking about their traumatic years, lived it emotionally every day of their lives. This writing which serves as a type of defense mechanism, expresses itself in response to harrowing experiences including the assassination of Rabin, participating on the March of the Living, the second intifada years and trying to come to terms via a novella parable on whether there can be forgiveness for crimes committed.

Two types of writing for myself reflecting different aspects of my on-going aspirations towards fulfillment and staying mentally healthy - in conflict with my periodic inner turbulence and volatility. At times, a combustible - but interesting mix.

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