

Unwanted I Was Born

Anna Rarasea

Unwanted I was born in Levuka but I hail from Narikoso village, Ono, Kadavu. How did I know I was unwelcomed? Well my mother told me so during one of our mutual sharing.

'Why did you want to abort me?'

'Because I was tired! Tired of having children, but it was your Father who still wanted more.'

'What do you mean by tired of having children?'

'I was tired of the many *ogas*, tired of the frequent *vulagis* because your father likes to *vakasotamata*. I was just tired of being tired.'

I had no idea what all the arguments meant until much later. You see, I am the ninth child of ten children in my family. I had seven brothers, Tu Lili, Tu Cagi, Tu Manu, Tu Simi, Tu Sai, Tu Tai, Tu Agi. Mum had a miscarriage with her seventh child. When I asked if he were a boy or a girl she said that it was not possible to identify whether it was a boy or a girl since it was only several weeks old. But I couldn't bear not to give it a name and so over the years I have always referred to it as Tu Agi, short for Agilosu. In my heart I refer to him as my brother, the Angel. Why do I want another brother when I have so many already? Well, if you had brothers like mine you wouldn't mind having another one because they are all so loving. I think they are all replicas of my mother and father who were love personified. Each one of us has always counted it a blessing that they were our parents for they were the best of parents that anyone could ever wish for on this earth.

My brothers were all born two years apart and the three of us girls came at the tail end. They loved one another well and when we girls came into their lives they cared for us dearly. As a child I do not ever remember being bullied or being unfairly treated by any of them. Perhaps it was because we were the babies and so they really treasured us for being their sisters. I have wonderful memories of my brothers. Humour was so much

part of their living which was intoxicating! They laughed a lot and they loved life!

As a result of all the loving, I grew up feeling very important and I have always felt I was somebody very special because I counted for just being me. This stood by me in my adulthood in all the seasons of my life. No matter how hurtful life was, I always felt rooted because I always had loving friends in my life who are primarily my family members. This is the reason I am very loyal to my family.

My older sister, Bulou Seini Sekirewa Serafina (Fina, for short), and I were only one year apart. When she was born, there was great rejoicing in the village principally because Fina was the first girl and my father was thrilled. There was great feasting and I'm told the elderly women in the village took turns rocking her to sleep for three months. Fina was so special. She was stunningly beautiful and I worshipped the grounds she walked. She was my kindred spirit and my best friend. We were so close to the extent that I would feel her pain if she were suffering in any way no matter how far apart we were. We thought alike and often times we would say exactly the same sentence. Whenever that happens we would gasp and look at each other strangely! Sometimes we would break out into laughter and other times it was scary! Whenever I did anything wrong I would keep very quiet because I knew she already knew and vice versa. But for some unknown reason if either of us did something wrong there would be absolute silence and neither of us would speak until one of us found the opportune time to bridge the gap. Close as we were, we did not, however, intrude upon each other because we respected each other a lot. In fact we were very loyal to each other throughout our lives. When Fina died, I hit rock bottom and that is another story.

But our youngest sister was a pain! She was called Bulou Katarina Radininitasiri was a tomboy at that. She was strong, stubborn and had a mind of her own. She bore a lot of opposition because she was just so different from all of us. Perhaps she was also an unwanted child. I often thought that she was different for a lot of reasons and I have pondered these reasons over the years. As a little girl, she preferred boys' company and was on the roof flying kites during the kite season. Often she would come home with several kites because she had managed to cut them off in the air and then ran for them when they fell. There were no books in her school bag but *maja* (mixture of sand, glass) and more kites and strings. If it were the marble season the marbles would replace the off-kite season and she would surely win most of the marbles from the boys in the neighbourhood or from St Anne's playgrounds. She was a champ in playing tops. During the *pani* games she would give you a good *damu*

and she excelled in the *zuru* games and in the jackstones or in the double-dutch and during the jamun season the white top of her St Anne's uniform would be soiled with jamun sap. I don't remember her doing house chores like Fina and me. She was hardly home because she was always involved with all kinds of seasonal activities and so she was often in trouble either at school or in the neighbourhood. My brother, 'Tu Sai tried to be firm with her but she would find a way to get her own way out. Finally she ran away from school and she regrets that today.

My mother and I were also very close. I could ask her any question. So when she confessed that she tried to abort me, I was surprised.

'What do you mean?'

'I meant that I wanted to abort you and I purposely tried to do it.'

'You mean you wanted to get rid of me?'

'That's right.'

'But why? I can't believe what I'm hearing. Why are you saying all this?'

'Because I was just fed up of having another child! You see, I had my younger sister, Bulou Elesi with me. She came to Narikoso for refuge because she had a mental break-down and my parents thought being with me would do her the world of good and also Narikoso was a good distance from Nabouwalu. However, when she got to Narikoso, she got involved with a young man, called Qiri from *Vunikavika* household and she gave birth to a beautiful and healthy little girl. She was called after me but was baptized Maria'.

Maria was Nau lailai's daughter. And Nau lailai never recovered. I remember her as being tall and beautiful. She had high cheek bones, big black almond eyes with lovely inherited Tongan legs. She often talked to herself and I think I was a little scared of her.

I also remember Nau lailai collecting all of Mum's dirty pots to clean. And the strange thing was that she took them far away from the village and when she found a preferable spot, she sat there and cleaned and cleaned till they shone like silver dishes! The transformation was amazing and when she returned home we would all stare in fascination at how new these pots looked and Mum did have big pots because we had a big family. And how often I wished the pots would be left alone just as decoration but in no time the silver pots were back sitting between the hot and burning *sue* with loads of *dalo*, or *tapioca* or whatever root-crops in season there were. These pots did their jobs faithfully and grew black by the seconds.

'So who took care of Maria?'

'Since Nau lailai was unwell to take care of her daughter I had to

breast-feed Maria from day one. At that time I was still breastfeeding 'Tu Tai, my sixth child. Your father and I decided that he would take our child to the *baravi* at Navolau (our family land) to wean him so that I could breastfeed the new-born. It was not easy for any of us. Your father alone with our son and I had to be nurtured again by the women of the village so that my breast would be full again to feed. Initially little Maria suffered because my milk was unsuitable. Finally the nurturing paid off and Maria became a happy child.'

I persisted.

'So how did you try to abort me?'

'Everyday I went to the sea under the pretext of going fishing. Instead I swam and swam till I was blue with the cold hoping that one day when I came out I would have a miscarriage.'

'But I clung on to life? Then why did you stop trying to abort me?'

'I remembered my father's words *Tubuna, kakua ni tarova na lewa ni Kalou*. When my father saw me having children one after another, he was very concerned. That's why he advised me never to interfere with God's Will. I knew abortion would be wrong. That is why I stopped trying.'

My grandfather, Josua Raisele, was a Methodist Minister and he was a loving and holy man but my grandmother was a holy terror! They called her 'the witch'. Ironically the *witch* was tall, elegant and arrogant. She often boasted about the fact that she was *lakovi* with ten *vulos* of *tabua*. When we were naughty she would turn on us and say:

'Look here! How many of you will have a *lakovi* for a hundred *tabua*?'

Everyone in the family did not want to name their children after grandmother and my parents named me after her. Grandmother's name was Bulou Wanaseini Kadivuka. 'Kadivuka' was deleted from my name and I received Maramanilevuka as my middle name. Metaphorically 'Kadivuka' means the 'stinging, flying, soldier, big-headed ant'. It was a descriptive version of my namesake. The family wondered and feared what would become of me. But grandmother took me under her wings and I became her favourite. I remember being lavished with gifts. I remember being cuddled and then she would untie the end bit of her sulu and would secretly give me money. If the other grandchildren asked for money she would say that there was no money. And no one would ever challenge her because the answer was always negative. I remember her whispering words into my ears:

'This is only for you.'

I became very fond of her. So my relationship with my namesake became a joke among the family members. But it didn't bother me because I

was at the receiving end. The fact she favoured me more than the other grandchildren drew her away even more from her other grandchildren. But that did not seem to worry her and I grew fond of exploiting her generosity.

When I became aware of 'sin' I remembered asking grandma if I could baptize her because I wanted her to go to heaven. She always answered yes, but we never performed the deed. Maybe she prayed I would forget and soon I stopped asking her. But what stood out in my mind were the many times I snuggled in beside her and I smothered her with kisses as my mother would with all of us her children for she was very loving.

After Mum revealed her secret she asked me for forgiveness, but I saw no reason to forgive her. Instead I was in awe that she saved me and that I am alive! I was silent for some time and I have never forgotten the initial feeling of gratitude that overwhelmed me and my mind started racing! Just imagine if I weren't born, I would never have known God. I stood there before mum speechless!! I remembered I was just so grateful that I was born. How can I be angry? I was standing right there before mum and it was an un-forgetful experience. I was in awe of the fact that I was born even-though I was unwanted.

'Thank you for saving me,' I remember saying.

I once shared this story with one of my spiritual directors and he was surprised that I shared this story without resentment. But I can't find it in my heart to be angry because if I weren't born I wouldn't have known God. That was my initial reaction. And I wouldn't have known what it is to love and be loved. I wouldn't have known all the 1000s of students I have taught. I wouldn't have known the smell of the flowers, the taste of fresh spring water I drank in the village piped into every home in our village by my father. I wouldn't have been challenged by the horizon that inspired me at seven years old when I watched the sun rise and the sun set on our 'matanaruarua' village. I wouldn't have had the chance to watch with my naked eyes the countless multi-coloured fish swimming in and out of the corals. I was in wonderland without knowing. The world around me was one of fascination. I wouldn't have known the panoramic view of Uluisolo Mountain where I accompanied my Father to his plantation. I wouldn't have known the beauty of the lagoon situated adjacent to our home built before the beach front. I wouldn't have reviewed all the knowledge and all the aesthetic beauty it would bring and all that I have enjoyed. Yes, I just wouldn't have enjoyed living in this world. How could I be angry? I was just grateful that I was born. But once born my mother loved me and she became my best counsellor, mentor, friend and above all the best of mothers! How can I be angry when I have known so

much love and loving and most of all I know my brothers and two sisters think I am Christmas and they just love me to bits for being myself.

Now I know that each one of us has a shadow and mine is *fear*. As far back as I can remember I have always had nightmares. I remember the countless number of nights when someone tried to smother me to death. When I woke up I usually found myself soaking with perspiration and feeling so guilty as if I had done something terrible. Then because I had learned to talk to God since I was five years old I would turn to Him for comfort and say: 'I haven't done anything wrong. Why is this happening to me?' The nightmares got worse as I advanced in years. Sometimes I would confide to members of my family and while they would listen with compassion, they did not solve the problem and the fear grew stronger each year to the extent that I was beginning to be fanatic about it and the more I prayed the more I had the nightmares.

It was in 2001 that I was given a sabbatical and I went to the Mother House in Paris. During one of our lectures I was given a passage from Holy Scripture to reflect on. The word *womb* began to thunder in my head. The more I tried to control it the more the word compounded in my head. Finally I said: 'Lord what do you want to tell me?' But there was no reply. However, a gentle voice whispered in my head. Finally I pulled myself together and said: 'What does this word mean?' Calmly I began to process the word by writing poetry:

Bedroom: Paris
 Tuesday 7th August, 2001
 Time: 9:55 pm
 Paris: Mother House
 'All scriptures are God breathed'

The Womb: My womb is moving that you may be reborn, that is God is allowing you to be reborn. Divine compassion of God - God has compassion for us: God has spoken. These are the words that inspired me to write this poem in Paris in my bedroom at 9:55 pm.

Mum's womb

The moment of my conception
 My parents' relationship
 Whether I was conceived in love or
 otherwise
 I do not know
 But Mother did not want me
 She said she has had enough!
 But my Father desired her
 I was the result
 Of that desire
 You see I am the 9th child of ten
 children
 No wonder she was fed up!
 Mum tried very hard to get rid of
 me
 But stubbornly I clung to dear life
 For as far as I can remember
 I have always suffered
 From excessive fear
 And for no reason at all!
 Sometimes I would get up
 At dawn and find myself trembling
 With fear.

In my fear I feel
 I have done something
 Terribly wrong
 I confess I feel
 God will abandon me
 I feel very vulnerable
 I get these attacks in the
 Very early hours of the morning
 My body would freeze with fear
 But my soul would cling to God
 Because I know intellectually
 And through faith
 That God is my only salvation
 I make acts of faith
 I put out my hands
 I focus on his eyes

I cling to him
 And demand
 That he leaves me not
 Then I feel comforted
 And lie very still
 Slowly my fear subsides
 And I go back to sleep
 Unfortunately for me
 My sleep is disturbed
 So I awake
 To follow the routines
 Of my holy rules

I'm only 23
 But I'm so tired!
 My body is tired
 My mind is tired
 My spirit is tired
 My being is tired
 I drag myself along
 Still I have peace

But in Paris today
 I dwelt on the word
 -WOMB-

Then I remembered
 I dreamed of my Mother
 I can't remember the details
 But I saw her face
 After our first talk
 The word 'womb'
 Kept thundering in my head
 I decided it would be
 My word for the day
 With inspiration
 I began from my Mother
 With her relationship with my Fa-
 ther
 With all my relationships

I have tried to please others
 I never felt good enough
 To be loved
 And yet I know and believe
 Always that my family
 Loved me and loves me still
 And love me always
 Been proud of me
 They have trusted me
 They have affirmed me
 They have praised me
 They have been supportive
 They have looked up to me
 And speak of me
 With affection
 They love me always
 They respect me so
 And give e gifts galore
 They tell me I'm clever
 They tell me I'm beautiful
 They tell me I'm talented
 They tell me I'm gifted
 They tell me I'm a blessing
 And somebody very important

All the years of my life
 I stood tall
 I stood firm
 I stood with pride
 Because I have identity
 These held me together
 In all of my crises
 So I carry myself
 With pride
 Because I believe
 I am somebody
 I am loved
 I have roots
 I am wanted
 I have identity
 But I cannot understand
 Why I am so fearful!

Today
 I understood
 That this came from
 My mother in her womb

I know now
 The fear cannot continue
 I want to forgive my
 Mother when she tried
 To kill me in her womb
 This she confessed
 But now I can understand
 She said:
 She went out fishing
 Pretending to be fishing
 When all she wanted
 Was to swim and swim
 Till I would die of cold
 Then she could have
 A mis-carriage
 Then she remembered
 Her Father's word
 'Tubuna kua ni tarova
 Na vakaluvani nai solisoli
 Ni Turaga'
 That is never interfere
 With God's plan
 Accept all your children
 They are God's gift to you.
 These words she often recalled...
 And thus I was spared

When I nursed her
 When she was bed-ridden
 She often looked up to heaven
 And gave thanks to God
 For being obedient
 So I was born

I didn't think this had
 Anything to do
 With my character
 Now I know

*And found a common
Thread...
I was and am fearful
I felt not good enough
But I took refuge
In God and my family
Because I am certain
Of their love*

*Today I am blessed
With special friends
Who are kind, loving and gentle
I can talk to them
Tell them of my feelings
Speak about my doubts
Discuss all my problems
Ask them for advice
Tell them how much
I mean to them
They look and smile
And take it all
In their stride
For the first time*

*I put no conditions
In my relationships
We talk about things
We agree on setting
One another and each other free
We only agree
To love each and one another
To energize and give life
To love others
Who cross our path*

*Daily I hold them
In the silence of my heart
In the healing and comforting
Presence of our Lover-God
The only ONE
TRUE friend.*

*Now
I am FREE at last!*