

**REAL
LIFE
STORY**



*From the death bed to a **lover of life***

Rasheda Khatun, philanthropist, public speaker and life planner, was not always celebrating her life, but something made her change

RASHEDA KHATUN'S PASSION FOR celebrating life derives from her experience of facing death. She has experienced firsthand the gift of life and now lives each moment with joy. It is her daily mission to motivate everyone else to do the same.

From an early age Rasheda discovered that life is what you make it. Her enquiring mind and curiosity about the world meant she always wanted to know why things were the way they were. In 2006, in the midst of her successes, Rasheda was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma – a cancer in its final stage.

Her chances of survival were slim and treatment offered a 50/50 chance of cure. If unsuccessful, Rasheda was looking at a possible lifespan of around six months. Her mind was preoccupied with thoughts about how her family – especially her parents – would deal with her death and how this would impact them. Hearing the grim diagnosis, her family could not help but mourn at the thought of losing their daughter and sibling.

Soon after Rasheda was diagnosed, her entire family came flooding through the door to see her, most of them wailing and mourning. People were entering the house and rooms and did not even acknowledge her. She began to freak out. She jumped up to make sure they could see her and reminded them that she was still alive. She was upset that her family had placed her in the grave already and in that moment she decided she would not mourn her death today, as today she was still alive. She would also not let anyone else mourn her while she was kicking and breathing. She decided that she would live fully every day, even if she only had six months to live, for you can live a whole life in just one day. That's what she did and what she continues to do today.

Chemo was aggressive and Rasheda was too weak to even open a bottle of water. She became reliant on friends and family to take care of her. She explains with great detail that the extreme physical and emotional pain is just like you see in the movies – you vomit, you're tired, your taste buds malfunction, your hair falls out and your body hurts. In fact, you can't even touch your body without it hurting. The only thing you can rely on is your mental strength.

Rasheda lost all of her hair. For a girl who takes her appearance seriously, that was a big deal and she tortured herself about it daily. She was in denial and kept postponing shaving it all

off until it reached the point where it became comical. So, she simply combed it over, just like the old men who are going bald. When she finally did shave off her hair she vomited through the whole process. The anxiety was just too much.

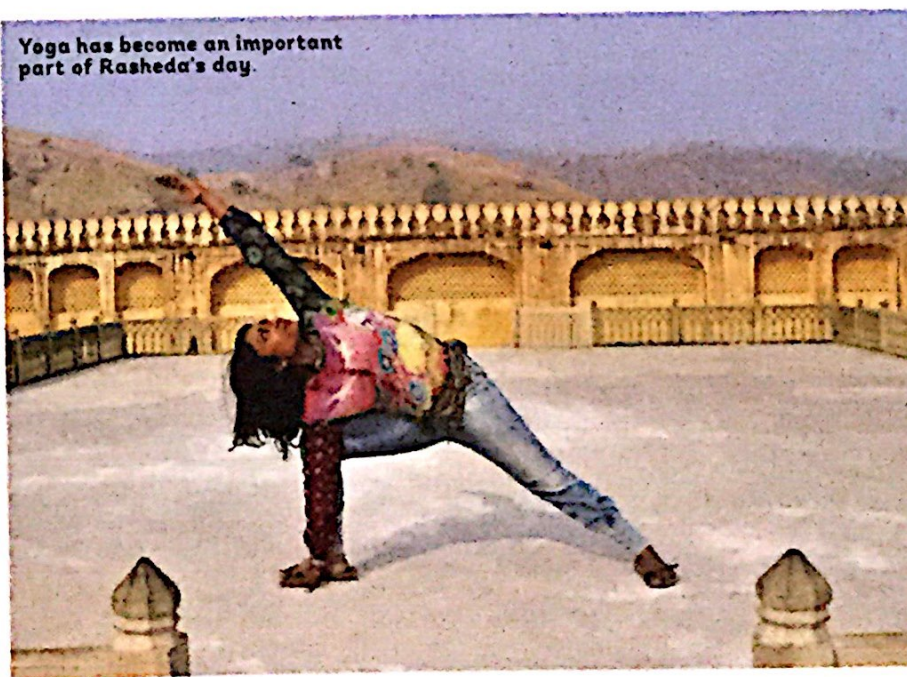
Her family suffered a lot as well. Rasheda knows now more than ever that cancer can be harder for the family than the patient. She knew she was in pain and could mentally train herself to handle it, however her family could do nothing but watch her suffer, not knowing what to do most of the time but worry.

It was months after the initial shock that she began to engage the knowledge she already had – positive thinking, focus and intention to help her heal. Having the right body condition became increasingly important. She knew if her body was to endure such strong medication, it would need to be in the best condition possible. She was unable to physically exercise, so prayer and meditation became key. She found yoga and body balance (a mix of yoga, Pilates and tai chi) as well as laughter and humour.

Rasheda made a real effort to work with her thoughts and calm her mind through meditation, prayer and stretching. She would find a place of stillness and focus. In a place of clarity she decided what she wanted – her life back.

Throughout her treatment she lived in celebration. She let go of her faith and simply lived in joy every day she was alive. Her family and friends embraced her way of living and became an integral part of her recovery. »

Yoga has become an important part of Rasheda's day.



She questioned why it took this life-threatening illness to see the true value and preciousness of life. As a result, she vowed to advocate for people not to wait for death to come knocking before seeing true living.

She wondered what happened to those who had no family and friends to support and love them, and of those who lived in poverty, or where treatment was not affordable or available.

After eight months of aggressive chemotherapy and to the surprise of her doctors, the cancer was successfully treated and eventually disappeared. Rasheda began to fundraise with friends to provide medical care for cancer patients so she could help them live fully, even if they had only one day to live.

She began working on her own life purpose after wondering why she was given a second chance. She found her life purpose – to help people live in celebration of who they are every day. She learnt that education gave life-long awareness and awareness gave freedom. It is the feeling of freedom that allows you to celebrate.

'Celebration of Life' became her mantra, which then became the name of her foundation – a philanthropy project spreading celebration as a way of life, helping cancer patients and those with life-threatening illnesses live fully. Celebration of Life also brings education to those living in poverty so they

CHRISTINA NOBLE CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION VIETNAM is one of many worthy causes Rasheda has helped through 'Celebration of Life'.



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— Rasheda Khatur

too can build something of their lives and live in freedom. "Celebration of Life is a behaviour. It lives and breathes inside us. It is a reminder for us to celebrate everything that happens in our life," she explains.

"Please don't wait till you lose a loved one, or face cancer, or have an accident or any other illness before you see the value in yourself. Embrace all your life events whether it's joy or sorrow, because it is when we celebrate everything that we feel the preciousness of our life. Today you are alive and you can live a whole life in one day."

Rasheda has organised several masquerade balls, a carnival of colour and an angelic ball in the UAE. All were attended by hundreds and raised millions of dirhams for worthy causes, such as Cancer Research UK and Friends of Cancer Patients UAE, Harmony House India, CNCF Vietnam and Mother Teresa Mission India.

Rasheda meets cancer sufferers through the organisation and shares her philosophy with them. "Believe in yourself. Don't think about the future; just celebrate everything in your life at present. Focus your mind on joy and love. Allow yourself to be taken care of by your family and friends. Sharing the experience will lighten the burden, so join a support group. Make a choice to live every day and when you're feeling blue call on those you love and share," she explains.

Rasheda believes that cancer did not come into her life to take it away, but rather to give her life. In June 2012, she completed five years in remission. Rasheda continues to celebrate her life with even more zest and urges everyone to "live every day in your own celebration, sharing with loved ones and strangers. Spread this energy and your world will be a fulfilling one." *

For more information on the Celebration of Life visit www.celebrationoflife.org or www.facebook.com/RKCelebrationOfLife