



## AUSTRALIA

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I was born in *Vacoas* and, at the age of 8, moved to *La Caverne*. I spent around 12 years of my life at *La Caverne* before moving to Australia just before my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. *La Caverne* was an incredible place to grow up. If Mauritius is a microcosm of the world, *La Caverne* is a microcosm in Mauritius. The street I grew up in, *Pudaruth Lane*, was as multicultural as any Mauritian street could be and that's where I believe I developed a sense of harmonious living and learning deeply about one another.

I attended *Aryan Vedic* Primary School then *Swami Sivananda* State Secondary School in *Bambous* and finished my year 12 at St Andrews Anglican College. I am the middle child in a family of three. My elder sister, younger brother and parents are all in Mauritius. As a middle child, I certainly felt the full force of the 'middle child syndrome'. When I was 4, my little brother whom I love dearly was born. My mother told me that following his birth, I felt lost, since my caregiver, the person I was closest to, had to move on to look after my little brother. That feeling of 'loss' is a very common experience for middle children, and unless there is greater awareness of its impact, it can be discounted as a myth, but the reality is that it's a very real experience for children. The flip side of this is that middle children tend to grow into adults who have a natural ability to empathise. They are highly attuned to people's pains. They can have a strong sense of fairness, since they had to fight for it growing up, and they pick their fights carefully.

I left Mauritius in 2002, after wishing to further expand my horizons. After finishing my higher school certificate, I felt a bit disillusioned by life and wanted to grow out.





My parents agreed to send me to Melbourne to study and, here, I met Simla, my spouse and a fellow Mauritian student at the same university and we got married in 2007. We have three gorgeous daughters, aged 14, 12 and 7. Australia has been a godsend for me as I was able to move away from the societal expectations of Mauritius and really explore possibilities free of pressures and judgement. I started university life to study towards an Advanced Diploma in International Trade. My aim was to get away from what I considered ‘limiting disciplines’ such as Accounting and Economics. I wanted to do something that would allow me to expand my mind, and International Trade was great in that sense. Learning about cultural differences, global trade and being close to a discipline that would allow me to dream big when it comes to business ticked all the right boxes. After my Diploma, I moved onto a Bachelor of Business specialising in Logistics and Supply Chain Management. It was a relatively new and developing field and one that would finally receive recognition later, during the Covid-19 pandemic, when global supply chains collapsed.

In 2003, I started my own courier business. I bought an ex-postal van, took a six-months’ break from university and started making a very decent income. Unfortunately, the joy was short-lived as my van met with an accident. I lost the van. That was a very hard knock early on and I decided to undertake odd student jobs. I became a pizza delivery driver, a car washer, a telemarketer, a waiter, a dishwasher and so on. While these jobs can be very unrewarding, they add incredible value to a person’s experience as well as building work ethic in my view. When I came back to Mauritius on holidays in 2006 and found that my 20-year-old younger brother, who had just started university in Mauritius was still living life like a collegian, relying on my parents for his monthly allowance, I forced him to start a car-washing business where we would wash people’s, mostly family’s, cars over the weekend. While he reluctantly agreed, he started making over Rs 5000 monthly and started fully funding his living expenses. That opened other doors for him as well as allowing him to develop that sense of self-pride and self-worth.

After finishing university, I joined work as an inventory coordinator for Australia’s largest automotive aftermarket distributor. I rose through the ranks and was feeling quite fulfilled. However, in 2012, we decided to start bringing Mauritian foods to Australia after an incident in which we could not obtain the ones we were seeking. That’s when we started *Lakaz Mama* as a wholesaling business. In 2014, as the business started growing and becoming more demanding, I quit my job to join Simla on full-time basis. We have been very committed to this path ever since, growing the number of outlets selling Mauritian groceries from 10 to 80 Australia-wide. We also started a *café* selling hot Mauritian foods at the Dandenong market, located in one of the most multicultural suburbs in Australia. The *café* sells more than 2000 pairs of *dholl puri* monthly to Mauritians and non-Mauritians alike. We also started a factory in Mauritius that manufactures

some of the foods we import, employing around 20 people, mostly women from a disadvantaged background.

We import more than 120 products from more than 30 suppliers in Mauritius. While this has been a very rewarding experience, as first-generation entrepreneurs, it has also been a journey of some very hard knocks. When you are away from home and don't have the kind of social support that you would otherwise have, it can take its toll. We are amongst the lucky ones, as even though it can get tough managing three businesses, as well as raising a young family in a foreign land, Simla and I work as a team, and that helps us overcome some of those challenges less bruised. Today, our mission is to take Mauritian cuisine, as an identifiable brand, global.

As a brand and food business, *LaKaz Mama* has maintained significant popular support. The company started celebrating the Mauritian Independence Day at the Dandenong market in 2016. Over the years, the celebrations have attracted larger crowds, to the extent it became a noticeable event to the suburb's council. As from 2022, the council took over funding and promotion of the National Day of Mauritius, inscribing in its annual event calendar.

My connection with "Mauritius" is very deep as it provides me with my daily bread to this day. The business we run ensures—to my great pleasure and satisfaction—that I am in touch with Mauritius almost every day, talking to suppliers and other partners, planning improvements together and also ensures that I travel back home more often than I may otherwise. My Dad heads the Mauritian manufacturing unit, which helps me avoid having to travel too often but I am very deeply connected. I also have a keen interest in Mauritian politics. So, every day, I read Mauritian newspapers online to ensure I am up to date.

To the Mauritian youth, I want you to know that I grew up as a very predictable "underachiever". As a child, I was overly corrected and overly criticised. I was always compared to my siblings and cousins and made to believe that I would achieve very little in my life. During my first four years of primary school, I was always among the last in class. My Dad asked my teacher to move me to the front of the class so I would spend less time daydreaming. For my second term of grade five, I came out second in class, for the first time ever. I received hearty congratulations from all quarters but the following trimester, I finished among the last again.

In grade 6 (the important Certificate of Primary Education—CPE), I was ranked 1363<sup>rd</sup>, which was calamitous by my family's standards. I obtained admission at Bambous State Secondary School. I remained an underachiever, always missing classes and troublemaking. After my School Certificate, I moved to St Andrews Secondary School, to complete my Higher School Certificate, but still nothing changed.

I hated the Mauritian schooling system and always felt like a fish being judged on its ability to climb a tree. When I look back, I realise that after my second trimester of





year five, I rejected the feelings and emotions associated with success. I was so used and so comfortable with “failure”, that instead of embracing success, I turned my back on it. I realised that I developed a fear of success. When that realisation dawned on me, I also remembered that in my CPE year, 33,000 students had taken part. The first 200 were the elites, the gold medal winners, those ranked between 200 and 500 were the ‘silver medalists’, between 500 and 1000, the ‘Bronze medallists’, between 1000 and 2000, it was like you got a ribbon for participating, and those ranked after 2000, were not even afforded a rank—as if they were invisible. I thought about the 31,000 students who were potentially told that they were “unworthy”, were “scum”, just at the end of their primary year alone.

If I had not obtained the opportunity to come to Australia and start afresh, outside of the constraints and expectations at home, I would not have been able to add the kind of value I do today. While I am very grateful for having been afforded the opportunity to be the co-founder with Simla, and leader of three businesses, employing twenty people directly and around two hundred indirectly, I still feel that I am held back by the fear of success. This quote by Marianne Williamson, cited by Nelson Mandela comes to mind.

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”*

My message to the youth of Mauritius is this. Do not succumb to anyone telling you that you are inadequate or that you are unworthy. Don’t succumb when someone judges you by their standards. Mauritian society can be cruel and unforgiving and it’s the one thing that I reproach my motherland but do not ever let anyone tell you that you are unworthy. Do your thing. Believe in yourself—deeply. Give yourself love and acceptance and seek to add value and to lift others. You understand the pains of those who are not as fortunate therefore, seek ways to reduce the suffering. Don’t let the bitterness of the land make you bitter, as it is when you will decide to awaken and move up, that you will create space on the ladder for those under you to also move up. Your moving up, your self-belief, your desire to unlock value where it’s trapped, will be what decides the future of this land and potentially the world.

I try to add value and contribute to the direction of my motherland by continuing the work that we have begun, by being more vocal about our mission to take the

cuisine of my motherland to more kitchens around the world. I am also working on a *Lakaz Mama* foundation, a foundation with a purpose of ‘Improving economic opportunities through education’. I am saddened by the inequality of Mauritian society and would like to assist in strengthening the weakest links, the kind that would help make the whole chain stronger. I will continue advocating and working for a more equal, more inclusive, more united, stronger, more prosperous, more loving, more caring and more supportive society in Mauritius.

