

## Success Stories Questions

- Your Name: Aneeta Sundararaj
- What would you say is your life's purpose?

To live my life in balance, be it emotionally, financially or physically.

- On a scale of 1-10, and your full potential is 10, having wasted your life is 1, how would you score yourself now?



9 – I have achieved most of what I set out to do. During my school years in Malaysia, the greatest achievement was actually passing the final exams; I had long given up hope of doing well because of the bias teachers in my school showed. All I wanted was to pass the exams. I know that I only had a proper education only when I went to boarding school. When my father asked me what I wanted to do thereafter, I decided to read law. Even from the very first year in University I knew I wanted to specialise in Medico-Legal work and proceeded to complete a Masters in Legal Aspects of Medical Practice some five years later. Then, I came back home and it was a struggle to practice here but still, I achieved the dream of practising in my area of speciality. Only, I did not think that my dream of practising law would become a living nightmare when I had to deal not only with a difficult legal system but also ridiculously stupid office politics. After 4 ½ years, I could take no more. So, I left, and gave up practice altogether. I started to work for myself and learned (am still learning) the craft of writing and the art of publishing. This gives me the freedom to be there for my family when they need me; this alone, I think is testament to me having fulfilled my full potential.

- If not 10, when and how?

It'll be 10 when I'm an internationally published author.

- If you can think of one person, one piece of advice, or an experience that happened to you when you were young [less than 6], that helped you get to where you are now who and what would they or that be?

I can tell you of 3 people, though one person came into my life when I was in my late teens. The first two are my parents – they never stopped me from pursuing my dreams at any one time. My mother used to read to me every single night when I was much younger. Then, as I grew older, I picked up the habit and my parents gave me all the necessary support in terms of books that were available for me to read.. When I went to boarding school, I met Anna Abbott – she was the Principal of my school at the time. In hindsight, I see her more as my kindred spirit. She taught me that there was absolutely nothing a person could not do.

Three incidents in particular stand out in my memory. The first happened when I was I was staying with a family close to fifteen years ago now. Their son was about to enter University. He was a gifted musician but his parents insisted he become a 'professional' and in particular, a civil engineer (just like his father). Being the dutiful son, he joined engineering college and I have yet to meet a

more miserable man than this one. Today, at 40, he is frustrated man and he has all but lost his musical talent.

The second incident involved a lady partner in the firm I worked in. She had her first child rather late in life and yet, her biggest worry was that her child had started to identify the maid as the mother and not her. That horrified me for I thought of this complete lack of balance in her life. Yes, she was filthy rich by virtue of having a successful career; she was stunningly beautiful and when she travelled, she travelled first class all the way. But, what was the point of all this when her child did not even know she was its mother? I never wanted that, ever.

The third also occurred when I was in practice. I was seated at the Bar table in a provincial court and there was a lady seated next to me. She looked about 45 years old and her entire persona can be described in one word – despondent. Her hair was dishevelled, her clothes were too big and her shoes were worn out. Just to make conversation, I casually asked her, “How long have you been in practice?”

She answered, “Over fifteen years now.”

“Do you enjoy it?” I asked a moment later.

It took her some time for her to reply in a tone that had such a tinge of sadness in it. She said, “Well, what else can I do?”

My whole body froze at hearing her reply. I was petrified that I would become her. I would end up having nothing else to do but practise law. I think it was then, that I subconsciously decide that law was not for me.

- What advice would you give to a young person or child who wanted to realise their dream?

I’ll share with you the motto of my school – *Whatsoever You Do, Do It Heartily As Unto God*. Whatever your dream is, do it heartily as unto God and you will never fail. The path you take may be difficult and filled with obstacles but when you have God on your side, how can you fail?

- What advice would you give to their parent, guardian or carer?

Let me start by saying what advice I think parents should *not* give their child. One of things I hate listening is this: “My child is a straight ‘As’ student and he/she is going to do medicine.”

During my years as a medico-legal lawyer, I met some of the richest but most unhappy lawyers and doctors. They all had one thing in common – they became doctors/lawyers because their parents told them to, because their parents insisted it would secure their financial future. I even came across a parent who stipulated in his Will that his child would only inherit his vast property if the child became a doctor.

Yes, I agree that these professions do provide the firmer basis than most but I can guarantee you, just by virtue of qualifying as a lawyer does not guarantee success. Certainly, my training as a lawyer has given me a confidence that I doubt I would have had if I had not pursued law. I do not, for one minute, regret the fact that I studied law. It was my choice to read law and I enjoyed every minute of University. However, the study of law and the practice is totally

different and frankly, the practice of law did not make me one bit happy. They were the most miserable years of my life.

I was very fortunate because by the time I left, my parents saw how miserable I was and they gave me unparalleled support. Without this I do not think I could have completed all the projects I have taken on – my self-published novel, *The Banana Leaf Men* and most recently *Snapshots! A Write Vibes Collection of Short Stories* (Oak Publication). You can read about all of these on my website 'How To Tell A Great Story' (<http://www.howtotellagreatstory.com>). I have now also created a new website (launched in November 2006) called 'Batik For Beginners' (<http://www.batikforbeginners.com>).

I think one of the ways in which parents can help is to encourage children to embark on work experience – Parents can help their children when they help a child figure this out and not imposing on the child what will make the parent happy. I sometimes wished I had done more of this and I would have seen for myself just how lawyers worked. It might have changed the course of my life but ... c'est la vie.

In conclusion, I will share the story of one person I've always kept in my mind when I go through the infrequent Oh-why-did-I-give-up-law-phase. It is the story of Tchaikovsky. He trained as lawyer at the insistence of his father. Then, he gave up the practice of law to pursue his dream or composing music. Now just look at what beautiful music he wrote from 1812 Overture, the Nutcracker Suite, Swan Lake and Sleeping Beauty. Now imagine if he had not had the courage to pursue his dream?