

## Leave Everything Behind (Working Title) – ‘Hidden Histories’ Draft 1

In my extended family where members are generally in touch with each other, there have always been mysteries about my grandfather on my mum’s side, my Nanaji. My grandparents from my dad’s side live in Hong Kong, while those from my mum’s side live in the mysterious sub-continent of India. The country with the largest population in the world, seems to have a world on its own... I realised I don’t know much about my heritage; I have only ever experienced India through what I see in the media and in Bollywood films.

During a visit to Pune, India (the hometown of my grandparents), I found out that my Nanaji has no real teeth, enjoys playing solitaire on his low powered Windows XP computer, and loves watching American wrestling on TV; that was all I could gather as he is a man of few words. So I decided to use this assignment to learn more about my Nanaji and perhaps more about my heritage.

My grandmother on my mum’s side, my Naniji, is a talkative soul. She still maintains contact with me and the rest of her family, despite being on the other side of the world. I only ever hear news about my Nanaji through updates from her. So I approached her with my assignment brief and wanted to speak with my Nanaji, but, unsurprisingly, he was uncomfortable communicating through the phone and wanted to present his thoughts through his preferred method of communication: email.

His life was more eventful than I could have ever imagined.

Ganga-ram Alwani was born in Hyderabad, a city located in a country that used to be a part of India, but is now Pakistan. He had a peaceful childhood until mid-1947, when there were riots in his city. His family decided to leave everything behind and migrate to Jodhpur, India, the nearest place out of the newly formed nation of Pakistan. He was only thirteen at the time, so times were tough for him. His family was surviving on a low amounts of income, so he couldn't continue his education until over a year later.

Nanaji started working when he was seventeen. In 1951 he got his first job working with the government in Pune, India. Two years later, he took up employment in Accra, Ghana, where he was working with relatives who didn't pay him well. He worked there for six years.

He wasn't very happy until 1963, when he got married to my Naniji. He also got a better job working with his brother's exporting business in Hong Kong. This was the job that suited him best as he got to travel to African and Arab countries; according to him, all the travelling he did was thrilling and boosted his spirits.

After my Nanaji's company had established a garment business in Dubai, he moved over there to manage it. Perhaps he stopped travelling and decided to settle down because of his three children (my mum and her two older brothers).

Nanaji received a lot of experience in managing and retail after his move to Dubai, but presumably, he missed travelling and was ambitious enough to branch out on his own so he went to Muscat, in Oman, to set up a wholesale business there. His main problem there was debtors who bought garments on credit and didn't settle their accounts with him. Then, he tried setting up businesses in areas like Maldives and Cochin but none of them ended well either. It landed

him many hardships, not only were his multiple start-ups failing, but his level of hope and ambition was lowering.

Finally an opportunity seemed to present itself. With the experience he got over the years, he decided to start a business with his brothers-in-law, my Nanaji's younger brothers. They were going to sell polyurethane leather couches in India. Hopeful after a long time, my Nanaji decided to move his entire family over. But unfortunately, the business didn't go as planned because of certain external circumstances that weren't considered. The leather that was supposed to last for two years (as researched and marketed) only lasted six months before it started peeling; this was because of India's hot climate.

This was the last of many of my Nanaji's failed businesses. While his brothers-in-law went on to make it big in other business ventures, Nanaji ended up retiring at the age of sixty-three with a limited amount of money.

While having faced many disappointments in his life, he miraculously managed to never get affected mentally, or get his spirits down. Perhaps the reason he talks so little is because he likes to deal with what he has been through on his own, selflessly keeping his problems to himself. From the little I hear my Nanaji speak, he is a respectful and kind individual. I find it amazing how, even after being through so much, he is able to keep a good attitude and outlook on life; I have definitely learnt how to act based on the story of his life.