

How Far Would You Go to Change Your Life?

Sharell Maharana is a happily-wed "white" Indian housewife living in a busy suburb of Mumbai, India. The former Melbourne girl has found true love, passion and a lot of meaning in life but only after a series of life-changing events.

Sharell was born and brought up in country Victoria. After completing her Bachelors in Business, she moved to Melbourne, working for 10 years in accounting for Victorian government.

December 2005 – At age 30, living a lavish life in Melbourne and just starting to feel like she was getting there when things turned and life threw her headfirst into a huge crisis. The marriage tragically ended and so did all her hopes for the future. She did have a high-powered, successful career in accounting, but something was definitely amiss.

Having done what was expected of her for 10 years and still ending up unsatisfied, Sharell decided to do her own thing by choosing the path less travelled. The breakup and personal crisis propelled her toward community work. This path would eventually lead her to India, where she currently lives.

"I arrived in Kolkata, not knowing anyone, for community work. Then I was thrown a chance to manage a guesthouse in Kerala, upon which I jumped. If you're in India, you cannot ignore Bollywood. I actually worked as an extra in one of the movies. It was fun!" she laughs.

Yet, the whole reinvention was not easy. There was a lot of confrontation, learning a new language, sitting on the floor to eat with her hands, adapting to a crazily fast-paced life, the mystical culture, the chaos and falling in love with a man — and his country.

After quitting her job, the future was like a dark, rolling tunnel with lights switched off at the end of it. . .

Until one night, when she bumped into her future husband, Pradeep Maharana, the resident DJ at one of the biggest nightclubs at The Park hotel in Kolkata.

Speaking of her man, she says, "Love found me unexpectedly in a bar in Kolkata. It was a classic case of me meeting someone who I clicked with, yet completely avoided because I wasn't interested in a relationship at that point; but I eventually spent more time with him and fell in love. Still, it took a couple of years for us to think seriously about having a future together. There were so many hurdles to overcome to make it seem feasible."

Henna for the Broken Hearted (Macmillan, 2011) is a true story about how Sharell took a huge leap of faith and reinvented her life, and herself, after a crisis.

"The book takes an in-depth look at Indian culture. One person who read it likened it to a manual for India! It doesn't focus on spirituality as much as many books written by foreigners who go to India. Rather it's about what life is really like in India, and how Indian society has reacted to me (and me to it)."

The transition was hard to persevere. Sharell consulted a psychotherapist and visited Australia a few times in the early years – but her heart's set in India at least for a long time to come.

"India's taught me that the rewards are there if you have faith and courage. There is incredible potential for life to work out even better if you take a leap of faith. There were so many moments when I was frustrated with life in India and wanted to give up and go back to Australia. But I decided to hang on."

Sharell is now looking forward to having her first child in Mumbai, and planning a sequel to the book.