

Saga Seeds

poems by
Patricia Maria de Souza



FOREWORD

What moves me most about this collection by Patricia Maria de Souza (she had previously published other titles under the name Patricia M Tan) is its treasure of memories drawn from a life-time's reflection and observation. From the very personal and domestic, the reflections on relationships with parents, siblings, family and friends take us to wider realisations about society, human behaviour and predilections, and all of these presented with the quiet and forthright tone of one used to mulling over the day-to-day experiences and encounters that make up so large a part of our lives.

Much of what is fleeting, momentarily noticed and forgotten is captured here in the many little ruminations that words can record and render with the nuances of wry discovery or appreciative delight. Indeed this collection exudes a sense of the author's appreciation of the gifts of life and living; of work, of friends and neighbours, of a world of refreshment always waiting at the edges of a more mundane existence.

It is something of a relief to come to writing as down to earth as this. There is little here to frustrate the reader already wary of the high-flown and esoteric that is no stranger to Singapore writing, and which is richer in stylistic flourish than substance. Making one's way through *Saga Seeds* (originally entitled *I Remember, I Remember*) is to have a walk through an authentic life lived thoughtfully and reflectively, and finally finding a voice to tell of its discoveries and questing, all of which resonate with this reader as I am sure it will with many.

Anne Lee Tzu Pheng
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CONTENTS

Touching Pulse

I Remember	10
Prisoners	12
The Beast	13
Flag Day	14
Simple Folk	15
Vegetable Seller	16
Bus 167	18
Diamonds	19
Hunchbacks	20
Discord	22
Generation Gap	23
On Looking at Your Photograph	24
To Dad	26
To Mum	28
To Rev. Fr. J. Gueterres	29
Mother Teresa	31
Success	32
Moods	33

Nature's Smile

Saga Tree	36
Haiku	37
Teachers' Estate	38
Plants	40
Creation	41
Heliconia	42
Black-naped Oriole	43
Mimosa	44
Cherry Tree	45
The Leaf	46
After the Rain	47
Stranger on the Road	48
Night Safari	49

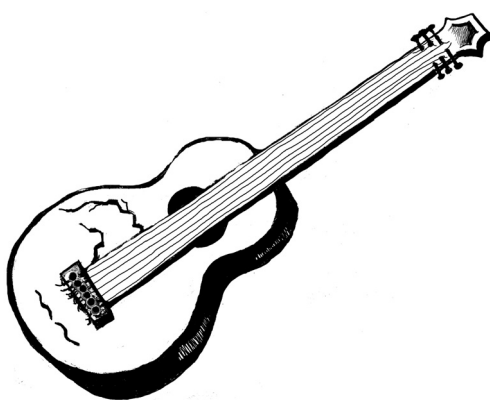
In Quiet Moments

Reflection	52
Changi Beach	54
The Difference	55
The Door (Bukit Timah Campus)	56
Time	57
On Reaching Forty	58
But I Do Not Mourn	60
Death Photographed	61
Cancer	62
Migraine	64
Life's Brevity	65
Perfect Imperfection	66
Cool Attire	67
C.H.I.J. Victoria Street	68
Singapore's First 25 Years	70
Distance	72

Wandering

Changi Airport Highway	74
Framed in the Library Window (NUS Admin. Block)	75
December Morn	76
The Lighthouse	77
Nightmare or Reality?	78
Le Morne (Mauritius)	80
Paradise Discovered — Hanauma Bay (Hawaii)	81
12, Clissold Street (New Zealand)	82
Indian Summer (Ireland)	84
Night Walk (Pokhara, Nepal)	85
It's Snowing!	86
Rush Hour	87
Hazy Singapore	88
May Road Memories	90
Search	93

Touching Pulse



I Remember

I remember, I remember...

The Primary One teacher
Who used her clean handkerchief
To wipe my bleeding nose
Then gave it to me;
A little gesture
Only a frightened child
Can fully appreciate.

My mother patiently putting
The finishing touches to my sewing
Without a word of reproach
The day before it was due.
It would amuse you to know
I did the same for my daughter
Remembering you.

Your face when it lighted up
As we ran to kiss you
When you returned late at night,
And the serenity of
Sweeping up the leaves while you
Mowed the undisciplined grass
During my rebellious years, Dad.

The Secondary One teacher
With piercing eyes
Who made us shiver in fear.
She demanded obedience and a straight face
When improper jokes were made
Yet advised us on skin care and
Gave tips on improving eyesight.

The heated discussions of problems
When you presided as Chaplain.
We talked of domineering bosses
Who couldn't understand us.
You smiled and told us gently
To remember our discussions
When we became employers.

The principal who helped
To discipline my class
During my Trainee years.
Her fierce exterior seldom betrayed
The heart of gold she had.
Her understanding of youth
Is hard to emulate.

The brother who guided me
On what to wear and how
For my first grown-up dance
And generously allowed me to romp
Freely through great Literature
From Shakespearean plays to poems
And novels and the Diary of Anne Frank.

I remember how these shaped
my thoughts and me.

Prisoners

Self-condemned prisoners
Enclosed within
A flying cage
Strapped to seats.
Submitting meekly
To limitation of movement
Fed at intervals
Eyes glued to screens
Or ears to earphones.

Lights go off unannounced
To induce sleep
Then go on again to awaken
All for breakfast.
Finally, we touch down
And released,
Burden ourselves with bags
And disperse quickly
In different directions.

Flag Day

I remember when charity
Was more than just a check-off form.
We spent the best part of Saturdays
Waiting at strategic places
In the heart of the city
With smiles, flags and a tin.
After much practice we learnt
To differentiate the generous from the rest.

They came in various disguises
Like the elderly man in khaki shorts,
A young girl with a shy smile,
An Indian man from a roadside stall,
The van driver waiting to load his van,
An expectant mother with a dreamy gaze,
A samfoo-clad matron with paper bags,
The perspiring salesman with a weighty briefcase,
A songkok-topped, sarong-clad Malay man
And a bespectacled, library-bound student
With ten cents to spare.

I remember when charity meant greater effort
Than merely signing a form.

Simple Folk

The simple folk
That I love
Are full of joy
For what they've got,
A driver's job,
A hawker's stall
Or a provision shop.

They go about
Their daily chores
With calm acceptance
Of their lot.
Willingness to work
Masking worries
That they've got.

They fill my heart
With tranquility
Dispense smiles, laughter
And advice freely
With wholehearted sincerity.
From them I learn
The balm of peace.

Vegetable Seller

She's almost hidden behind her wares
As she bends to stack her stall with
Cabbages,
 Lettuce,
 Cucumbers,
Turnips,
 Tomatoes,
 Long beans,
 French beans,
 Sweet potatoes
And other vegetables.

Her face shiny with perspiration
Lights up in a smile
As a regular customer approaches.
"Yes, what you want?" she enquires.
"Apa mau?" she asks a Malay matron
As her customers select vegetables
According to their needs.
She dashes out and returns
With a heavy box of carrots.
"Just came," she says to me
Knowing that I always buy carrots.

Ever alert to her customer's needs
She deftly selects chillies for the Malay woman,
Unripe mangoes for an expectant Indian lady
And cabbage, "*from China*", for an elderly Chinese.

She shares her recipe for corn soup
And other vegetable dishes with me,
Advice on what to take for a sore throat
And ensures the freshness of vegetables
That I buy from her.

Businesslike though she is,
Her smiles are bountiful
For all who pass or stop,
A simple act but priceless.