



*By Farida Jivamala Ibrahim*

THE first time Naori entered my home, she also entered my heart and found a snug corner in there for herself. That was some six years ago when she was five, very cute, doll-like and extremely shy.

About two weeks ago, Naori was at my doorstep again with her elder sister, her Mum and her uncle.

I was amazed for both sisters had blossomed in their looks, gained poise and spoke perfect English, more so Naori, for when we last met, she could hardly speak the language.

A few inquiries of the mother and it struck me that Indonesia was doing something remarkable with its education system and Malaysia was lagging far behind in terms of quality education.

In the midst of my asking the girls what they did in school and how they fared, Naori asked me a

question which spoke volumes about her expectation of me.

“Do you still have the picture I drew for you?” she asked. She and her sister had spent an afternoon with me then and had drawn and coloured and crafted a number of things. And she had given me a drawing to keep.

I felt stricken, wondering how to answer this child who remembered too well her gift and her labour of love.

The last thing I wanted to do was hurt her feelings. But I knew truth must prevail, no matter what. There should be no other way but to speak it and then deal with what came along.

“Naori,” I said gently, “I have the drawing. I did not throw it away. It is somewhere in this house but I do not know where.”

She looked at me and said nothing, and for the life of me I could not fathom what was going on in that precious little head of hers.

A while later, after expressing boredom, she asked me for paper, eraser, ruler and a pencil. We all adjourned to the dining table and while Naori sat at one end and proceeded to draw, her sister and Mum busied themselves making costume jewellery, jewellery boxes and decorating eggshells.

By late afternoon we were all exhausted and headed for bed – except for Naori. Boundless with energy, she got my maid to play games with her and help her finish her own craft work.

When we awoke, she showed me her drawing. It bowled me over.

She had actually captured the earlier scene at the dining table – us, cupboard, doors, ornaments, our names, date etc. She had given her all to this scene.

Just before her uncle came to take them home, Naori handed me the drawing and yet another of herself, her sister and her Mum.

“I want you to have these drawings from me,” she said. “ Please make sure you keep them carefully.”

Our roles had reversed. She was the teacher and I, the student. She was teaching me to value a gift not for a moment, not for a while but for all time.

I learnt even more about this little lady. She exercised sound judgment in the face of what she saw as a problem – my lack of appreciation for something she had done specially for me. There had been no reproach whatsoever, no asking why.

In a most practical way she had determined to solve a problem by giving yet again of what she gave best – love.

All that I could do then was take her into my arms, hold her close and ache with the knowledge that I had failed her.

And then I made that promise she dearly wanted to hear:

“Naori,” I said, “I will keep these carefully. I will put them up so I can see them.”

She gave me her beautiful smile and said, "Aunty, I will never forget you."

I felt shame because really, I did not deserve this.

"I will never forget you, Naori," I said emphatically.

As she walked towards the car, she turned more than once to say, "Bye, Aunty. See you again."



One of Naori's pictures hangs on my living room wall. The other is on the side of my computer, always in my view.

For me, they are a beautiful reminder that a child can love and trust and ask nothing more in return than to be remembered.

And sometimes in life, it is a child who will lead and wisely too, and it would be well for me, an adult, to follow.

Naori gave me two drawings as a parting gift. Little did she know that she herself was the greater gift to me.