

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

Paving a path to freedom in Lafayette



Photo provided

Sunita Shastri (left) is pictured with her colleague Yuliana Lopez outside of The Child Day School in Moraga. The pair teach pre-kindergarten children.

By Sharon K. Sobotta

When Sunita Shastri arrived in Lafayette four years ago in search of a better education for her boys, Shreyansh (9) and Hridhansh (6), she only dreamed of finding her own freedom.

Shastri had set aside her own aspirations of becoming a doctor in India to get married and move across the world to start a family. Once she got to California, Shastri's marriage began unraveling. As a stay-at-home mom who was financially dependent on her spouse, Shastri recalls feeling both isolated and trapped.

When her youngest child was old enough to start preschool, Shastri says she became relentless in her search for work.

"I was so desperate to find a job so I could get out of my abusive marriage," Shastri recalls. "I applied everywhere."

She applied for jobs as a dishwasher in restaurants, as a server in McDonald's and as a cashier in grocery stores.

"Everyone told me that because I was a stay-at-home mom and didn't have direct experience, I was not qualified."

Months before the pandemic lockdown began, Shastri found a new opportunity

that her direct life experience had prepared her for. She learned through a parent at Lafayette Elementary School that The Child Day School in Moraga was seeking an assistant teacher.

"I'd been caring for my own children and neighborhood children for years so it made sense for me to apply," Shastri says. "I got the job and began working on my preschool teaching certification right away."

Shastri began her assistant teaching career in September 2019, bringing her youngest child to The Child Day School, where she worked, while relying on the help of fellow parents from Lafayette Elementary School for her older son's after school care.

Six months later, the lockdown began and Shastri was temporarily out of work and back in the struggle.

"When the lockdown began, my boys went without breakfast for two weeks," Shastri recalls. "I was too afraid to go out and was running out of groceries."

Thankfully, Shastri had connected with the Contra Costa County Family Justice Center, a center that provides wrap-around services for families in need, and with Narika, an organization that

supports South Asian women impacted by domestic violence, months earlier as she began conceptualizing her way out of her marriage.

"(Through Narika) I was able to get a delivery of basic groceries to get us through," Shastri said. "And a few months later I was back at work."

Step by step, with a stable job that she loved, the help of community resources, a county attorney and a strong will, Shastri pieced her life in Lafayette together, claiming her independence for the sake of herself and her boys one bit at a time.

"I was in the U.S. for more than 12 years but never learned to drive," Shastri beamed as she pulled her license out of her wallet. "I decided to change that this summer. The joke is that I have no car, but I do have my driver's license. It was an important step for me becoming independent."

Shastri also filed for divorce earlier this year and is nearing the final stages.

"I'm happy with where I am today. I'm not aiming to be a millionaire, but I'm content. I have inner peace. I have my confidence back and I love my life."

Looking back, Shastri says the first step to finding freedom from an unhealthy relationship was about setting aside her own shame and pride and reaching out for help. She says she hopes other women, regardless of their socioeconomic situation or status will do the same.

"I was there once, feeling embarrassed to talk about the abuse. I was scared to leave, thinking I couldn't support my boys without money, but once I took my first step and then made up my mind, I learned it is possible," Shastri says.

Emile Delgado-Olsen, director of The Child Day School in Moraga, is Shastri's supervisor. Delgado-Olsen, who is also a parent of a fourth-grader at Lafayette Elementary School, says he knew when he interviewed Shastri in 2019 that she'd be a good fit for The Child Day School.

"She had the experience of caring for her own children and she was a person who had overcome her own struggles," Delgado-Olsen says. "I knew she could handle the job."

While Shastri says she'll always be grateful to Delgado-Olsen for taking a chance on hiring her for a job that gave her a purpose and a paycheck, Delgado-Olsen says watching Shastri's transformation over

the past two years has been equally rewarding for him.

"It was a great experience to watch her grow and open up. I've watched her self-

esteem build and it is fun to see that," Delgado-Olsen says.

"She's a part of the family at The Child Day School. We love her."

Lamorinda
Funeral & Cremation Services
1420 School St., Suite 104-A, Moraga, CA 94556 FD 2386 FDB 3143

Direct Cremations From \$799.00
Traditional Services From \$3999.00

FD2386 Notary Services Available (925) 490-1400

Bask in Summer Radiance

Pacific Chamber Orchestra
Lawrence Kohl conductor

Mendelssohn music to Shakespeare's fairy wit of a
MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM.

along with the gorgeous Brahms 2nd Symphony with a finale of unbridled joy.

September 11 7:30 pm
Campolindo Performing Arts Center
300 Moraga Way, Moraga

TICKETS on Sale Now
www.pacificchamberorchestra.org

Residents gather to bid plant farewell after spiky sign of its demise arrives



Lafayette residents Pam King Palitz and Dr. Albert Palitz have had a large agave plant in their front yard for the past 15 to 20 years, but when a small spike emerged from the plant's center core in May, they knew the end was near. Called an "asparagus death spear" because of its similar features to an asparagus stalk and the fact that once the spear appears and blooms, the plant dies shortly thereafter, the center stalk grows quickly. In the three months since the stalk first emerged it had reached beyond the height of the couple's second story roofline. The plant also began to shed spores that have quickly germinated near the plant's base. The Palitzes decided to commemorate the plant's demise with tacos and tequila for friends and family on Sept. 5, "since tequila is made from agave," Pam Palitz pointed out. "My neighbor asked for the stalk in the hopes to make tequila out of it."

- J. Wake

Pam King Palitz stands in her front yard next to the agave plant on Aug. 27 where the center stalk now towers over her second story roofline.

Photo J. Wake



Photo provided

The agave plant on May 26 shows first signs of the center spike-like stalk.

When I say "good," you say "neighbor."

Mike Rosa
Agent
925-376-2244
Insurance Lic. #: OF45583
346 Rheem Blvd., Suite 106
Moraga

Now that's teamwork.
CALL FOR A QUOTE 24/7

P097314.1 State Farm Home Office, Bloomington, IL

LeapFrog Plumbing

Got gas? Many people think plumbers deal only with water and sewage. Not true! We install and repair all types of gas lines and fixtures too.

Mo's sizzling summer specials...

- Outdoor kitchens
- New gas lines for cooktops and dryers
- Fire pits & patio heaters
- Pool heaters & hot tubs
- Natural gas barbecues

We're poly-pipe certified, (better than iron)
Approved vendors of PG&E

LeapFrog Loot
\$25 off
Any plumbing job*

LeapFrog Loot
\$100 off
Gas line installation over \$600*

LeapFrog Loot
\$100 off
Tankless water heater installation*

*1 coupon per service, exp. 9/15/21

We Hop To It!
Family-owned and serving Lamorinda since 1993

green solutions!

CA Lic 929641

(925) 377-6600

www.LeapFrogPlumbing.com