

The family tree



Her doctor didn't understand why, in what would be the last weeks of her life, Rose had wanted to have her bed in the lounge room rather than in her bedroom.

The lounge room looked out onto the front yard, which was often filled with the noise of playing children and sound of cars passing by. Rose's bedroom, on the other hand, was at the far end of the house where she could sleep quietly and peacefully as the morphine worked its magic. The lounge room had the large picture window which framed a beautiful frangipani tree as a perfect creation of nature. As her body and mind were slowly weakening through the final stages of a hideous disease, Rose could focus on the frangipani tree, disconnecting from the pain, and reconnecting with the tree and all that had been beautiful in her life. The day that Rose's parents had the pregnancy confirmed, they bought a young frangipani tree to plant in the front garden. It was one of the less common ones, with peach at the throat and fuchsia on the petals, the colour fading to ivory at the lip.

When they bought the fresh, young tree, they imagined that their unborn child would also thrive and be strong and beautiful, just like it. They wanted a tree that would reach out to touch the lives of others in what they hoped would be a long and significant life for their child. The tree was a symbol of new life, growth, and love.

Rose's parents had bought a house in a new part of town on a one acre block with plenty of room for a garden. Rose's father planted the tree in the centre of their front yard, surrounded by a magnificent bed of daisies

and pansies. The earliest photos of Rose were of her parents holding her in the hospital, with a vase of small but perfectly formed frangipani flowers in the background. The tree flourished all through the warmer months and was well developed by Rose??™s first birthday. This tree grew to become a symbol of their family life and as Rose grew older, the more connections and attachments she developed with the tree. On Roses first day of kindergarten, her mother picked the freshest, most sweetly scented flower, and placed it in Rose??™s soft, honey coloured hair, before taking the many photos that were needed to reflect this most significant day in both their lives. Her mother made sure she took at least twenty photos of Rose in, next to, under and in front of the frangipani tree.

Rose would often bundle together all her favourite dolls and toys into a basket and take them out to the tree to play. She would place each one on a different branch as she could see them all and could talk to them in her own special way with no-one else around; just Rose, the tree and her favourite belongings. She would enjoy tea parties with friends, and sometimes nap in the shade of the tree; it was a place of stability, where Rose always felt safe and secure. As the years went by, and as Rose grew, so did the tree.

It blossomed in summer, and grew stark and bare in winter. When fully grown, it had wide outstretched branches, covered in vivid emerald green leaves with the most beautiful clusters of flowers you could imagine. In every photo album, it had become a tradition to have the tree as the backdrop for special occasion snapshots, whether it was Christmas, another birthday or a family reunion.

Yes, it was the family tree. When Rose was preparing to move out of home to go the city to attend university, she knew she would miss living in her small, quiet town, where everyone knew everyone; where everyone was someone. Before she left, she needed to smell the fresh aroma of the flowers one more time. She knew she would miss the feelings that the tree invoked in her. It made her feel safe, content and able to enjoy the peace and quiet of her home, without a worry on her mind. The tree gave her a sense of identity and an understanding of who she was.

Sitting beside the tree listening to the rustling of the fallen, crusty brown leaves as the wind brushed them by, taking in the sweet scent of the petals, feeling the beauty and that she belonged. She knew this would be a place she would visit time and time again in her own mind. Eventually, Rose returned to live in the town that held so many special memories for her. She could still picture Rob with the vivid fuschia flower in his lapel on their wedding day, beneath the shade of the frangipani tree.

Rose's bouquet was also had frangipanis dotted through it, with the biggest, most intense flower saved for her hair. She had always known she would have her wedding there, as nowhere else would ever provide the same sense of attachment and belonging.. As the years progressed and both her parents passed on, Rose inherited the family home. The frangipani tree held an even greater significance for her once her parents' ashes were scattered under the trunk.

Selling the house was not something Rose could ever contemplate. She wanted to keep and preserve all the things that she and her family had

nurtured and been connected to and that included the frangipani tree. Rose, her husband and their three children spent many fulfilling years enjoying a lifestyle rich in experiences, provided by the house and its surrounds. There were special traditions, memories and much laughter that needed to be remembered and shared often. These were the memories that Rose liked to ponder as she sat looking out to the garden, with the vibrant colours reflecting back onto her face, and the tree that had, for so long, provided the emotional connections which were such an important part of her life. She could just make out the quickening of the breeze moving the branches of the frangipani tree.

Though she was no longer able to move, Rose could in fact feel she was moving. The last thing she saw before her eyes closed for the last time was a perfect, full bloomed frangipani flower picked up and carried away by the breeze.