

## THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE

~ Helen Goleby

It was a glorious day in Christchurch this Friday 15 March as the muezzin summoned us to noon worship from the minaret of our mosque. My husband smiled at me, love in his eyes, a love that I deeply returned. Together we smiled at Abdul, our son, and the trust in his eyes warmed my heart. We'd found a new world of safety and thanked New Zealand for allowing us to live here. We didn't feel like refugees; we felt accepted and looked to the future with hope. Peacefully and silently, we entered our graceful mosque and faced the mihrab ready for prayer. However, our peace was soon to be shattered.

The staccato sound of gunshots erupted and we turned to see a shadowy figure in the doorway, indiscriminately spraying bullets and laughing hysterically. I could smell the worshippers' fear. I clutched my son, whose little body shook and whose eyes were round with terror. But I was unable to comfort him for I knew that this was beyond reassurance. My heart pounded painfully in my chest and my stomach clenched with horror. My ears rang from the loudness of the bullets, the shouting, and the terror that screamed inside my head.

So many of us were shot, so many tried to run, and fell screaming. My beloved husband stepped in front of Abdul and me as a human shield. I saw the gleam of hatred and triumph in the killer's eyes as he aimed the gun towards us. My husband's knees buckled and he groaned with pain as the bullet entered his stomach. I lay across him, trying to staunch the wound, pulling Abdul down with me. If we pretended to be dead he may leave us alone.

The blood seeped across the floor and brokenly I whispered, "Please live, my darling, please don't die."

We'd left hell. Now we were there again.