



USMAA NEWSLETTER

*The official newsletter of United Sri Lankan
Muslim Association of Australia
Vol III - 2020/2021 - March 2021*

COVID VACCINATION: TO JAB OR NOT TO JAB?

It is our duty towards every other human being to get the best available treatment and help lower the risks from this global pandemic. We must also be mindful to not fall victim to misinformation. May Allah protect us all. Ameen!

WELCOME TO THE LATEST EDITION

Assalamu alaikum dear Brothers and Sisters,

What is it that inspires humans to push through adversity? Is it our basic survival instinct or is it our desire to challenge ourselves to be better? With the roll-out of the COVID vaccine, we humans have once again managed to launch a counter response to a catastrophic global event. Naturally, with all tragedies, there are those who survive and those who go under. Let's pray that we always fall into the former category.

What's in this issue?

Let's take a look at the events during the third quarter of the current financial year. Afterwards we dive into some news, notices and interesting topics. Next we have an inspirational story from one of our members who decided to advertise his business with us. We then have two amazing short stories from two young creative writers. To finish off, there will be some thoughts to reflect on. Enjoy!

PAST EVENTS

USMAA CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOPS FOR KIDS (09 & 10 JAN 2021)

Once again, USMAA made use of the school holidays to bring about an event for the kids. After the debating workshops late last year, we were inspired by the enthusiasm shown by both the kids and the parents, to come up with another kids' event.

The Creative Writing Workshops were held as two 1-hour sessions over two days with limited registrations on a first-come-first-served basis. The purpose of the workshops was to build and fine-tune our young writers' toolkit in order to spark some enthusiasm in writing. After the workshops, a Short Story Competition was held and it was evident that the kids had utilised some of the techniques that were taught at the workshops. It was tough to judge the winners, but Yarra Hammar's and Hamza Sharaf's stories in the 8-10 and 11-13 age categories respectively came out on top. Their masterpieces have been published in this newsletter and they truly are remarkable.

We wish all our young writers the very best in their future activities.

COVID VACCINATION INFORMATION SESSION (28 FEB 2021)

The Positive Aging Sub Committee organised an insightful virtual information session on the COVID vaccine, the roll-out and the religious perspective. Dr. Shahla Vilcassim graciously accepted the invitation to share her knowledge and experience to educate our members. In the process, Dr. Shahla also quashed some of the most common misconceptions relating to the vaccine.

Dr. Mohamed Mohideen (a.k.a. uncle Rizvi) clarified doubts that members had from a religious stand point about the vaccine.

The event was a tremendous success with many important questions being raised and our panelists were able to address them clearly and thoroughly. A link to the recording of the event was shared among the membership.

USMAA would like to once again thank Dr. Shahla and Dr. Rizvi for sharing their wisdom with us and helping us overcome any doubts we may have had. Also, our appreciation goes out to the USMAA Positive Aging Subcommittee for once again organising an important and timely session for the benefit of our members.

PREPARATION OF UMMAH PROCEEDING INTO RAMADAN - LECTURE BY SHEIKH ALAA (28 MAR 2021)

The customary lecture in the lead up to Ramadan was held virtually once again. We were privileged to hear from Sheikh Alaa to help get ourselves organised as the blessed month approaches.

Sheikh Alaa highlighted the importance of Ramadan and gave valuable tips on the do's and don'ts for the holy month. Several questions were raised by the audience and the Sheikh gave practical and logical advice to address the queries.

We look forward to more sessions with the Sheikh and hope that they will be at events where we can meet him and each other physically in sha Allah.

OTHER NEWS AND NOTICES

MOTOR PARADE PROTEST

The Melbourne Human Rights Forum organised a motor parade protest in the CBD on the 10th of January 2021. The aim was to raise the voice of minority groups against the forced cremation policy of the Sri Lankan Government, and to protect basic human rights of Muslim and Christian communities in Sri Lanka.

Several USMAA members participated in the protest and we were able to show our solidarity with our fellow Sri Lankans, as several non-Muslim Sri Lankan groups joined the protest as well.



CREMATION ISSUE - LETTERS TO MP'S

USMAA penned several letters to MPs both in the Victorian and Federal Government including Prime Minister Scott Morrison on the cremation issue in Sri Lanka. The MPs acknowledged the letters and promised to voice their concerns to the relevant authorities to generate diplomatic discussions between Australia and Sri Lanka.

CREMATION ISSUE - MEETINGS WITH POLITICIANS

Some of our senior members approached MPs Julian Hill, Andrew Giles and Senator Janet Rice to express our concerns with the Sri Lankan Government's policy on cremating all COVID19-related deaths. The politicians promised to raise the issue with other branches of the Australian Government in order to facilitate diplomatic discussions with Sri Lanka. Senator Janet Rice raised the issue in the Federal Parliament as well.

USMAA is grateful to our Trustees and other senior members for taking the initiative as well as Mr. Lionel Bopage from AAGGSL for the continued support provided at all times.



COMMUNITY AND SRI LANKAN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE

Given that the cremation issue and most other affairs pertaining to Sri Lanka require oversight from experienced USMAA members, the Management Committee decided to setup a new subcommittee to manage community and Sri Lankan affairs. Some of our senior members have volunteered for this venture and we thank Sis Sithy, Bro Nazeem, Bro Fahmi and Bro Eddie for once again answering the call to serve our community. May Allah guide them and reward them for their efforts. This subcommittee will need to be ratified at the next AGM in sha Allah.

OTHER NEWS AND NOTICES

MEDICARE AND IMMUNISATION REGISTER INFORMATION SESSIONS

Services Australia organised several information sessions between 9th and 23rd March on Medicare and Immunisation. The highlight of the program was the COVID vaccine rollout. Additionally, the sessions covered important topics such as enrolling people in Medicare, basics of the Medicare mobile app and helping people find their details on the Australian Immunisation Register. The Positive Aging subcommittee liaised with Services Australia to secure 4 timeslots for USMAA members to attend the program virtually. This was another great initiative by the Positive Aging Subcommittee and our appreciation goes out to them once again for delivering timely content that's beneficial to all.

USMAA MATRIMONY SUBCOMMITTEE

The USMAA Matrimony page is picking up the pace with a few new adverts rolling in. We kindly invite our members to visit our website and encourage friends and family to publish matrimonial adverts.

In order to manage the matrimony applications confidentially, a new subcommittee has been formed. This subcommittee will be headed by Sis Nizra Hanifa. Sis Ruzna Shums will assist as a committee member. This subcommittee will need to be ratified at the next AGM in sha Allah.

RETURN OF USMAA ASSETS

An email was circulated to the membership to kindly return any USMAA assets that were left in their care due to limited storage space at the Mulgrave Community Centre (MCC). A spring clean has been carried out and we can now

accommodate more USMAA assets at the MCC. Kindly get in touch with anyone from the Management Committee to arrange the handover.

HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR USMAA MEMBERSHIP FOR FY21?

Membership fees for the current financial year have been at an all-time low. Unfortunately although we did not host any physical events, USMAA still has certain fixed costs which we cannot avoid. The Management Committee once again requests the members to kindly renew their membership for the current financial year, in order to support this organisation that we love and cherish. Invoices have already been sent out to the members.

Account Name: USMAA

BSB: 063 121

Account Number: 10185803

JANAZA NOTICES (AUS)

Inna lillahi wa'inna ilaihi raji'un - "Surely we belong to Allah and to Him shall we return."

Sis Fouzul Ariffa Hamdoon passed away on the 11th of February. Janaza was held at the Bunurong Cemetary on 12th of February. She was the mother of Sis Yusra and mother-in-law of Bro Reza Jamal. May Allah forgive her sins and grant her Jannathul Firdous. Ameen!

USMAA WHATSAPP GROUP

If you haven't already, please join the USMAA WhatsApp group. Only admins can post in the group, so you can be relieved that there won't be constant forwards like those groups you can't seem to get out of. We use it to keep you updated on USMAA events, notices and activities. You can join the group using this [link](#).

OTHER NEWS AND NOTICES

CHANGES TO JANAZA NOTIFICATIONS

Back in the day, USMAA sent out text messages (SMS) when there was a janaza in Melbourne, so that the message could be communicated quickly. However, as this method comes at a cost, the Management Committee have now decided to retire the use of SMS to notify the membership of a janaza. As an alternative, the USMAA WhatsApp group will be utilised for this purpose as this is a cost-free option which is also quite prompt. In addition, emails will continue to be sent for janazas.

AZMEENA HUSSAIN CONFERRED MEDAL OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA (OAM)

USMAA is glad to announce that Sis Azmeena Hussain was conferred the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) on Australia Day 2021 for her services to the Community of Victoria and to the Law. This is a significant achievement by a member of our community and we wish her the very best in her future.

NEW MIGRANT AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

In keeping with USMAA's Mission Statement "Support new Sri Lankan migrants and students to establish themselves", we have launched the above mentioned program to lend a helping hand to new migrants and students from Sri Lanka. This includes airport pickups, assistance with basic setup and arranging accommodation. If anyone wishes to volunteer for this program, please let us know via info@usmaa.org.au. May Allah reward you for your efforts. Ameen!

MAMA BOYS PIZZA - AN INSPIRATION TO US ALL

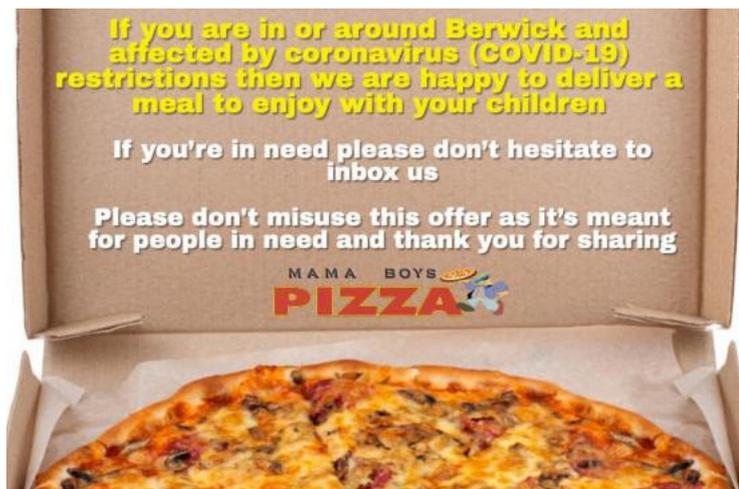
We caught up with the owners of Mama Boys Pizza in Berwick. The business has been advertised in the Trades Page of the USMAA website. Instead of the usual interview, we thought of sharing a story from the days of lockdown in 2020.

Mama Boys Pizza is owned by the 3 USMAA members pictured below - Bro Ishrath Batcha, Bro Fawaz Mohamed and Bro Faizal Izzedeem. Interestingly, all 3 are professionals and have found a passion for pizzas. Usually that would mean the consumption of pizza, but in this case, these 3 lads bake pizzas. The business has been thriving for a while now with plenty of positive reviews flooding in from patrons.



From left: Bro Ishrath, Bro Fawaz and Bro Faizal.

As everyone is aware, 2020 was a tough year for us all with many families losing their livelihoods and means to care for their families. It was during these tough times that these 3 gents took matters into their own hands and published the following notice.



The 3 owners empathised with the local community that was struggling to feed their families and provided free pizzas to those who needed it.

This act of kindness and generosity was well received by the public and many flocked to make use of the offer. The owners believe that their kindness was not misused by the community in general and are happy that their decision helped ease the worries of the people to an extent. They also hoped that this act would inspire others to become more generous as well.

With many small businesses fighting to stay afloat, it was remarkable that the owners of Mama Boys Pizza took a risk to help those in need. Their actions caught the eyes of influential people including some local members of parliament who have publicly acknowledged this charitable act. The lads also featured in the local community newspaper for this initiative.

It is incredible to see the good side of humanity in the midst of a crisis. Kindness, generosity and empathy are not a common sight in today's world and it is refreshing to see people giving what they have to help others with no expectation of a favour in return.

This is just one inspirational story to come out of the pandemic and we hope that Mama Boys Pizza and others who have initiated similar acts of kindness become an inspiration to us all. We are taught from a young age to be generous and that Allah will be pleased with us. It is also rewarding to have the satisfaction of helping someone out of the goodness of your heart.

The USMAA Management Committee wishes Mama Boys Pizza the best of luck in their journey ahead. May Allah reward you for your intentions and efforts to help others. Ameen!

Pizza fans, please visit the [USMAA Trades Page](#) to avail a special discount 😊

DRAGON TEACHER

BY YARRA HAMMARD
WINNER OF USMAA SHORT STORY COMPETITION 2021
(8-10 YEAR OLD CATEGORY).

BOOM! I duck behind a colossal boulder, the smoke threatening to choke me at any moment. The blazing dragon pounces onto the giant rock and immediately lunges for me, breathing flames around me.

“Fern. Fern?”

I bolt awake, half expecting the dragon of my daydream to be the one staring coldly at me, and the resemblance almost tricks me, but then I see the pale skin and the balding grey hair. Mr Austere.

“Fern! Please kindly tell me tell me what you were doing?” his posh voice echoes around the classroom.

“Daydreaming, Sir.”

“Whatever about?”

“Dragons, Sir.”

The class snickers. Mr Austere looks somewhat nervous before letting his mouth curl into a self-assured smirk- like he knows something I don't and while I'm on the topic of dreams, the thing I dread the most after each one happens, Mr Austere's beastly face turns red and it takes on the horrid appearance of the beast that my brain teases me with. It's not real, of course. I'm just letting my imagination run wild.

“So, you're saying you saw Mr. Austere's face turn into a dragon's head?” My friend Kayla frowns.

“I must be crazy, but yes.”

“I think that old bat's face has always been red. But dragon? His face looks more like a pig's. It's just your imagination, Fern.”

I guess I should be happy. But as Kayla says these words, I feel a tingle shoot down my spine. I strongly KNOW that there is something dragonish about our teacher.

I feel like a beach-lover, after surfing the internet for hours, building sandcastles of information about the legendary dragon in my brain, ones that will never fall. Mr Austere fits every one of the appearances to finding a real-life dragon. I found them off a mythical story website for 4-year-olds. It was the best I could find!

- A long, pointy nose perfect for sticking into other people's business.
- Small, piggy eyes, perfect for glaring at underperforming school children.
- Thin, black eyebrows forever pointing inwards.

“You're going to be late for school AGAIN!” My mother shouts from outside.

I grab my backpack, along with my, um.... “equipment”, which includes our fire extinguisher, my dad's builder helmet and a pair of scissors. I'm sure that if Mr. Austere is a dragon, he'll know by now that somebody has uncovered his secret. Which means today he must get rid of the evidence, me. So, today is the day we end this!

How can dragons be real? I climb into the car, embarrassed with myself. I'm insane. I quickly make a note to myself to throw my gear into the bin as soon as I walk into class.

I step out of the car. On this cold winter day, our grey school looks unusually subdued. There's no bad kid gang graffitiing the walls of the school

after the morning bell. The wind seems to have stopped blowing my hair back.

I push the doors and start to run to my classroom. “Weird...” I think. There is not one person in any class that I pass. When I get to 6A, I even hesitate to throw my dragon gear away. But I resist. Pulling myself together, I enter the classroom.

I can’t explain my horror. The tables and chairs had been pushed to the side, toppled in a heap. Eerie red fairy lights were strung on the ceiling, giving the room a creepy ruby look. The walls were completely bare, if you don’t count the children fastened to them with tape around their bodies.

“Fern.... you’re late!” Mr Austere cackles from the middle. He holds the appearance of the dragon I hate.

I don’t hesitate when I slam my equipment on, diving for him, making a neat cut in his wing with the scissors. As he yelps in pain, he blows fire and smoke towards me. I spray the gas from the extinguisher and it strikes him in the face.

“It’s not over yet!” he screams, making a hit for my head, but scraping my leg. He’s evidently been blinded.

Hopping around on my good leg, I start to free the other students and shout: “RUN!”

Just as I free Kayla, I know my next move, looking at the fireproof safe Mr. Austere keeps his treasures in. He never lets us go near it, its big enough to fit a human in. It opens with a fingerprint. Before Mr. Austere can regain his focus, I shove his finger into the slot, it opens.

Not delaying, I push him inside, press the lock button, grab his phone off the desk and call the police.

Well, what happened after all that? Mr. Austere was arrested and I got a new teacher. Her name is Miss Severe, and once I saw her face.... an Ogre?

AN UNEXPECTED MISSION

BY HAMZA SHARAF
WINNER OF USMAA SHORT STORY COMPETITION 2021
(11-13 YEAR OLD CATEGORY).

Two men entered the room, they were fully equipped with guns in their hands and snarls on their faces. Alex Rider was trapped. Once, being America's youngest Secret Service Agent, he could easily take them down, but instead he dropped his measly looking knife, put his hands up and surrendered...

It had all started early in the morning when Alex had decided to take his daily jog down at the beach. His golden hair swayed in the breeze as his light blue eyes glistened in the sun. To him it was a perfect day. The past few months had been a good break for him from his previous life as an ex-Agent. Although, the dreadful memories of being a spy would never leave him, being on the run, being hunted down by murderous men and even seeing his uncle being barbarically slaughtered.

Alex's memories faded as he was greeted by a man around his age. He had brown hair and black eyes. It was Christopher, his life-long best friend. They had begun to kick a beach ball that Chris had brought with him when suddenly, a mysterious looking man came running by dropping his wallet in the process.

"Hey you!" called Alex, but the man kept running.

Chris picked up the wallet and examined it, "Just the ordinary," informed Chris,

'Quick let's follow him!' Instructed Alex.

With the wallet in their hands they scurried after the man, who eventually hopped into a car driving off.

"Quick let's hop in my car!" growled Chris, before they rapidly dashed into the car and rode off following the mysterious identity.

From the safety of his lab stood a bulky man whose appearance was ghastly and his teeth discoloured due to smoking.

"Has the kid been trapped?" asked Sayle, who was the boss at the time.

"Don't worry boss, the fish is on the hook" confirmed one of his many henchmen.

"Bring him in!" ordered Sayle.

A thin, frail old man was brought into the lab. He sat with his knees on the floor while shivering.

"Your times almost up old man, but I'll use you one last time... to catch Alex Rider."

"No!!!!!!!" Alfred screamed of pain.

Alex and Chris pulled up to what looked like a worn down factory. The mysterious man ran in and the factory was protected by two guards. Alex walked to them before noticing something - it was a Scorpion tattoo. They were about to enter SCORPIA territory. Alex managed to easily take the guards down before grabbing their weapons as well as keys and heading in.

"Are you sure about this?" asked Chris pessimistically.

"Positive," replied Alex.

Suddenly they heard a voice, "Be ready to transport Alfred Rider back to sector 3802."

Alfred Rider. The name ringed in his ears, his father, one of America's greatest Secret Service Agents, everyone had known him to have died in a face off with SCORPIA. He was Alive. That's all that mattered to Alex now.

Suddenly, two soldiers entered the room, guns pointing towards them, they asked the two to surrender. Chris dropped his knife, Alex followed. Cautiously, one of the men came to collect their knives. Before he could bend down, Chris gave him a powerful kick that sent him flying. They both then grabbed their pistols which they had concealed behind their backs and sent bullets landing into the men's chests.

They then proceeded to open many doors, only to find empty rooms, it seemed like a perpetual cycle until they entered a room and big as a house. It contained guns, knives, axes and anything that could be used in military combat. Using the gillie suits, they concealed themselves among other camouflage gear. They waited and waited, until they saw a man being dragged by two guards.

"That's him," whispered Alex, "That's my Dad." Grabbing two axes of the wall, Alex threw them making both guards come crashing to the floor dead.

"Good job," complemented Chris as they took off their gillie suits and approached Alex's father.

"Trap," wheezed Alfred.

Suddenly, dozens of men surrounded them.

Sayle snarled, "I finally have you in my hands Alex Rider."

With as much as rage as a bull, Alex walked up to Sayle.

"Our business is not over yet!" He snarled.

Before proceeding to use his leg to trip Sayle over crashing him to the ground while pulling out his knife and holding it onto Sayle's throat.

"Let us go or else your boss dies!" threatened Alex.

"Don't!" Screamed Sayle.

The many soldiers dropped their weapons and with Alex's dagger at Sayles' throat, the three walked out unharmed. Finally, after escaping safely they let Sayle go before informing the Secret Service. Alex knew his business with SCORPIA was not over, but for now, he was glad to be reunited with his father.

EDITOR'S THOUGHTS

Time sure does fly. It feels like it was not too long ago that I was preparing the previous newsletter. With the first quarter of the year 2021 behind us, I reckon we should take a minute to look back at what transpired and what we achieved. Are we ahead in life? If not, then are we learning lessons to better ourselves? Being ahead in life does not necessarily mean you are doing great in your work or finances. Your connection to Allah, the time you spend with family, your contributions to charity, the efforts you take to better your physical and mental health, your efforts to help the community etc. are some of the important points when analysing your personal development.

With the initial chaos of the pandemic subsiding, we should now look to what the future brings. The vaccine roll-out has commenced and we are hopeful that our members will opt in to take the vaccine. We had experts from our own community explain the pros and cons as well as the religious aspect of the vaccine. One must remember that the vaccine will not eliminate the virus. It will however help our body put up a better fight and not cave into serious complications or lead to our demise.

In addition, in sha Allah the vaccine will allow us to host USMAA events at our favourite(?) venue. I'm sure everyone is looking forward to a physical meet and greet. Some of us have not met each other in over an year and it would be heart-warming to have the USMAA Family come together physically once again.

From what I recall from back in the day, the USMAA Ifthars and Eid functions were the hits. I'm guessing the scrumptious food had nothing to do with it....haha....☺ Given that Ramadan is almost upon us, it would be rewarding if we could kick-off our physical events with an Ifthar or Eid celebrations. We are working towards making that a possibility and let's hope that in sha Allah we will be fortunate enough to do so.

I also want to say a few words about our young writers. Masha Allah we have some amazing talent coming through the ranks. After reading their stories published in this newsletter, you will no doubt agree that the quality of writing from these youngsters is top notch. Even the other participants showed plenty of skill. I look forward to reading other content from them in the future in sha Allah.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for their patience and understanding during these times of uncertainty. We have received heaps of encouragement, support and constructive criticism to steer USMAA through these troubled waters. For this, we are extremely grateful to the membership. May Allah protect us all and guide us to success. Ameen!

Jzk.

Rizan Abdeen (Vice-President/Editor)