

The Daily Telegraph

The power of love in the arms of a stranger

- **By Clementine Cuneo**
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29 million hugs and counting

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Spiritual leader 'Amma', known as the hugging saint, brought her joy to Sydney.



Hugging saint ... Clementine Cuneo has her turn hugging Amma / Pic: Brad Hunter

Source: The Daily Telegraph

WITH the promise of a life-changing experience, I knelt down in front of the Indian spiritual leader, and I blushed.

I had just jumped a queue of hundreds of people who had been waiting patiently and I was about to be embraced at length by a complete stranger, while everyone looked on.

As the "Hugging Saint" wrapped her arms around me and nuzzled my head into her chest and held me tight, strangely, I felt quite at ease. She hummed softly into my ear, said a few words I didn't understand, smiled at me, then let me go.

I didn't have to hug Sri Mata Amritanandamayi in Sydney yesterday, but I chose to.

I needed to see why more than 29 million people worldwide have queued to hug this woman, and most of all, what might happen afterwards.

The Indian spiritual leader and humanitarian, who is known as Amma, promises to have divine powers.

She has no formal religion, insisting the only religion is love.

But people hug Amma and ask for divine intervention, sometime personal, perhaps on behalf of a relative or friend.

I didn't ask anything of Amma, I just hoped she may bestow something good, be it good health, fortune, love.

An older woman moved forward to be embraced. She told Amma her daughter had been diagnosed with a brain tumour.

Amma hummed in the crying woman's ear and smiled at her.

As the woman walked away, she looked relieved.

Amma gives people focus, comfort and instills a sense of goodness and confidence.

Amma has hugged 29 million people. That's a lot of good and confident people.