



ZAHID SHAH

A BROWN BOY'S JOURNEY FROM BALOCHISTAN TO THE
WESTERN WORLD AND HIS OBSERVATIONS OF LIFE

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND OBSERVATION OF HUMAN LIFE

A Brown Boy's Journey in **his search of knowledge**

By

Syed Zahid Hussain Shah

.MBBS, MCPS (Pakistan) MD, FACP (USA).

Diplomate American Board of Internal Medicine. Fellow American College of Physicians

syedzshah.md@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

People love to read biographies of successful individuals. Every success brings insight and happiness. A success after a failure has its own unique taste. It enlightens our soul and opens up our hidden potentials. Such success provides us wings to fly ahead of the curve to explore new horizons. We hear a voice from our insides : I did it, I did it....” My life story will lay down a ground where a reader can find those successful events in their lives that came after unyielding efforts despite a few disappointments.

Questions about human life, religion and the universe have been circulating in my mind from my school days. My own ideas about the connection of humans to the universe may not be agreed by many. At the very least, I hope I’m not alone in this mindset. In scientific research, every piece of research is explored to identify a gap in understanding and possibly put forward a hypothesis. I just hope someone in the future can use this as a stepping stone for further frontiers. I am truthful to the best of my efforts to write only the facts observed by me. I am not against anyone. I am not against any religion. I have respect for all good humans regardless of their faith, ethnicity or the color of their skin

I believe humanity is the soul of a religion. A religion with spirituality is a live religion that unites humans. A religion full of rituals is a dead religion that divides humans.

I don't intend on hurting anyone by writing about my own life observations. The reader however, may not agree with some of the statements I will make.

Although I currently live in a luxurious home with beautiful roses in its backyard, I still smell the rusty door of the one-bedroom rented home made of clay in Balochistan. I do enjoy the freedom of every day of my life in the United States of America.. When I water my plants with a garden hose, I look into the flowing clear water and I remember standing in a queue to fill a single bucket from a municipal water supply in Balochistan. We used to pay 50 paisas (half of a rupee) for a pouch of water to use for the entire day.

The suffocation of my mind faded away when I was able to nurture my thoughts, sitting on the empty benches in the wide meadows with beautiful natural flowers and cool breeze in Edinburgh. Despite some social problems in the UK, my mind kept maturing and I kept embracing the depth and width of my thought process. I still feel the pain of suffering in my life. I keep feeling the pain of humans around me I observed in a third world country such as Pakistan more than my own. I believe my life journey and the journey of humanity have some parallels among them; both journeys have been victimized from time to time. Humanity has received a variety of wounds in different times in different parts of our beautiful blue planet. Wounds of race, color, ethnicity, religious conflicts, greed, famine, disease and wars that will never end (they only change their flavors).

MY FAMILY

Of my siblings, two brothers and six sisters, I am the oldest one.

My father is my hero. He belonged to a typical rural family living in a village Lakhi, Sindh Pakistan. Indeed, a majority of the Sindhi population lives in farms, villages and small towns. Few ever sought the opportunity to go to the big cities such as Sukkur, Hyderabad and Karachi. We lived in a male dominant Muslim culture. A father wishes his son to help him out with his work. After his son gets married, his wife contributes actively in family matters. My father, whom I call Babaa, was pulled out of school in the 7th grade to assist his father who was a Hakeem (a health provider practicing herbal medicine) in our native village, Lakhi Ghulam Shah. They opened a satellite clinic (dawakhana) in Kandioro district, Nawabshah; about 100 miles from Lakhi.

My father had an arranged marriage that unfortunately turned into a painful crisis, and my grandfather fired Babaa from his business. At that time, Babaa had only 200 rupees saved in the postal bank. He begged for help from every relative and friend with only lame excuses in return. Despite the hardships, he managed to open his own clinic in Khanpur, about 14 miles away from Lakhi, with help of a new friend. My maternal uncle Nazeer Khan used to help them out by bringing food on his bike 6 miles from his home in Shikarpur. Babaa was very courageous, resilient and physically strong; he never gave up easily in tough times. He picked back up slowly. While I was still in Amaa's womb, he decided to go on a one-month voyage to Karbala, Iraq for ziarah (pilgrimage). They travelled on the deck, as they could not afford a cabin, so they had to endure the rough weather of the seas. I was born in my grandmother's home in Shikarpur Sindh in 1956.

BALUCHISTAN

A few years after I was born in Khanpur Sindh, Babaa moved to Usta Mohammaed (Usta), a small town in Baluchistan, in 1959. This town is 75 miles from our native town Lakhi in Sindh. All three of us lived in a rented one-bedroom house made of clay. There was no electric power in the town, and the summers were very hot. We had a handmade fan attached to the ceiling that had ropes to be pulled by hand, back and forth. The thick, cloth curtain attached to the fan, then moved air into the room. In the hot summer nights I kept looking at the nearby berry tree, it was silent without any movements in its leaves. I could see mosquitos and could hear their buzzing sounds close to my ear. There was a pond close to our home that contained sewage from the whole town. The wind coming from that direction was very noxious of course, especially during the nights when we were sleeping under the open sky. After enduring these summers, we burned charcoal in a pit and covered ourselves with thick handmade blankets to avoid the icy breeze of the harsh winters.

The house had one room with a door made of tin taken from the used coal-tar drums. There was a small front yard, and on its corner we had a small toilet and an area for taking baths or washing clothes. On the second corner, my mother used to cook food for us. I cannot forget the very hot summer days in which she used to cook food under the blazing sun.

We paid 50 paisas for one goat-skin pouch (mushk) full of water for our daily use, as the electricity and public water supply of the town didn't become accessible until 1968. After that time, there were water supply stations in street corners for the public. I remember how people were standing in line to fill a bucket of free water two times a day for their homes. The people who could afford it, had water supply at their homes. I remember being excited and satisfied getting a free full bucket of water. Eventually, we obtained our own personal water supply connection at home after 6 months.

In 1960 my younger brother Shahid was born. I loved my younger brother, however he had smallpox and died when he was 4 years old.

Shortly after moving to Usta, Babaa rented a shop to open up a clinic. It is always very challenging to open a business in a new location. To make matters worse, there was already another clinic right across from Babaa's clinic. The owners were father and son and they were established in the town for a long time. They were very tough rivals for Babaa.

There were a few private buses operating between Usta Mohammed and Jacobabad city, a larger neighboring city in Sindh. The buses were very slow and took very frequent stops. I remember travelling from Usta to Lakhi by trains which ran on steam engines. Although not as bad as the buses, these trains were also quite slow and used to stop frequently, as the engine got its tanks refilled with water on each trip. The first train left Usta early in the morning, and finished its journey of 34 miles in 3 hours. We had to change to a second train to reach Shikarpur, which was 28 miles from Jacobabad, then had to take a bus to reach Lakhi, which is 8 miles from Shikarpur. Coming back from Lakhi we had to spend a night at the Jacobabad Railway station to take a train to Usta at 2 AM.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF BALOCHISTAN

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan. Due to the geographic location, however, it is less populated and the most underdeveloped province in terms of the quality of life, health, and education. It is full of natural reserves such as natural gas, coal, copper and other valuable minerals. Unfortunately there has been no investment to improve the quality of education and health care affordable to poor people.

It shares its western border with Iran and has a mountain range that goes northward, towards Afghanistan in its northwest. At the south is the coast bordering the Indian Ocean. Punjab province is on its northeast and Sindh on its east.

In Balochistan, about 52% are native Baloch, while 35% are Pathans and Pashtoon, and 12% include Brohi Hazara and others. Most people of Balochistan living in mountains share the culture and religion with Afghanistan. Lord Mountbatten, the last British Viceroy, studied the Indian subcontinent very closely. He knew that religion was the main reason for India and Pakistan to be considered as separate countries in 1947. He arranged meetings with Balochi and Pashtoon leaders, and convinced them that Balochistan and the Northwestern province should be included in Pakistan. The local lords were assured that their tribe customs and autonomy would not be interfered with. Pakistan had its first democratic election and the law of the Nation was written 23 years after its birth.

The old custom and tradition of Balochistan remained unchanged even in this DNA age. It is divided into many tribes. Each tribe lives under the rule of its ruler called "Sardar". They are good and very physically strong people. They carry handmade guns or hatchets with them as a traditional item.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

I remember my first day in school in 1962. Babaa took me to a Primary (elementary) School very close to his clinic. I carried a wooden slate called a "takhtee" which Amaa cleaned daily.

The teacher would write the alphabet like 'Alf, bey..., etc.', and we used to write below each letter on the slate. We recited numbers following the teacher in a loud voice all together with our fellow classmates. For the first several years, all the way until 5th grade, we sat on floor mats in our classroom.

There was punishment for a mistake. A wooden stick would hit hard over the palms of the student's hands. Unfortunately, I was one of the favorite victims of our elementary school teachers until 4th grade. I enjoyed the 5th grade. Not only were we sitting on benches, but our teacher Mr. Ibrahim was very polite and loving. He was an old man with a long white beard. I wrote a special exam to receive scholarship. I got 5 rupees every month. It encouraged me to work hard. At the end of a yearly exam, the teacher would verbally announce the result in class. One day while I was returning home after school I stopped in the street. I opened my note book and wrote "zahid passed". For a long time I used to laugh at it.

I used to have recurrent fevers and illnesses. Babaa tried different medicines. He sent me to Lakhi where I felt better with my grandparents. One day Babaa took me to Civil hospital in Usta Mohammed to see Dr. Anwer Shaikh. From that day I considered that doctor as my role model and I, as a 5th grader, made the decision to become a Doctor.

HIGH SCHOOL

I got admission in high school in 6th grade in 1967. I was very poor in studies and behind every classmate until the 8th grade. The High school was one mile far from our home. I remember in hot summers I used to walk while touching one side of my body against the clay walls, hoping I could keep myself away from the blazing hot sun.

Babaa's clinic slowly picked up and he bought a home made of clay when I was in 6th grade. After a couple of years, he bought another small home. He had 2 workers in his clinic and they stayed in that house. Electricity came to the town in 1968, which brought a new life into the town. Until then I used a flashlight to do my homework at night.

When I was in 8th grade, I had a teacher who came from Khanpur, the same town in Sindh that Babaa had his first clinic before he moved to Usta Mohammed. His name was Ghulam Ali. He was a very good teacher in English and Math. Babaa asked him if he could provide me after-school tuitions; in return he would have free food and live in our second home.

Ghulam Ali transformed my life from a boy; very poor student at first, to one who took off with speed and improved quickly. I took an examination for a scholarship in the 8th grade. I was able to be awarded 12.5 rupees every month.

I was leading in my class during my 9th year, especially in Mathematics and English, but generally improved in every subject. I received the top rank in the high school exams for the entire district. They put my name on the honor board of the school, which is still hanging on the wall to this day.

PRE MED COLLEGE IN HYDERABAD SINDH

I finished high school in 1972, and it was time to go to College. Hyderabad is the second largest city of Sindh and a historical hub of education.

At that time, uncle Jawad went to the UK on a university scholarship to get a PhD in Computer Science. Uncle Mubarak was in his 2nd year of college, uncle Sharaf was in his 3rd year of Medical College, and Abid Shah (my cousin) was going to college for a Bachelor's degree in Arts.

I got admission in Muslim College, in Hyderabad. The college was unfortunately very poor in academics because of Sindhi nationalist politics. I had to study on my own, as I had a vision to get admission to a Medical College on my own merit. There was a British Council and an American center very close to the college. These centers were facilities provided to us that included libraries and other community resources. I loved to spend some time in both libraries. The quality of books and the unique academic surroundings in these libraries inserted incentives into me to one day travel to the UK or USA for higher education.

I stayed in Jamshoro, Sindh for pre-medical college from 1972-1974. Uncle Mubarak was one year senior to me, but would still allow me to share his study table. He got the top marks of his class in the whole province. After finishing the 2nd year of college he got admission to an Engineering College in Karachi. After his classes, he spent most of his time in libraries. He was awarded a one year scholarship by Philips in Holland, and was subsequently offered a scholarship for a P.h.D at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Eventually, he got a job in the Central University of Florida, Orlando. Presently he is the director of Center for Research in Computer Vision. He travels all over the world to share his research at different conventions. I personally believe that he is the only one who proved the wishes of his mother right.

I witnessed and remember my grandmother saying “Education has power. People would pay respect to you.” Uncle Mubarak is not only enjoying a prosperous life with his loving family in Florida, he receives tons of respect from all over the world. I am sure his parents are watching him from the skies and are proud of his youngest son who represents the ‘Shah’ family name over the podiums of the topmost Universities in the whole world. I shared a study table with him in Jamshoro Sindh, I did not know at that time that after a couple of decades we would be both in the USA.

MBBS

I obtained a good score in the Pre-Med college exams in 1974. I got admission into Chandka Medical College Larkana in 1975. The college was brand new at the time, however my experience in that college was a nightmare. The teaching staff was very limited and not properly trained. The college became a magnet for political groups, which ruined the academic activities and discouraged senior skillful teaching staff. I found a dark future amongst the uncertain surroundings at that college..

Luckily, I joined LMC (Liaqat Medical College) Jamshoro in the 2nd year of MBBS in 1976. It was very challenging for me to get adjusted to a new college that had a higher standard for medical education and training. I had only 6 months to take the annual exam. I initially stayed at uncle Jawad's house, and I had to change two buses to reach the college. Fortunately, uncle Sharaf was in his final year in the same college at that time. He was living in a hostel, and he allowed me to stay with him in his room. I wasted one and a half years in Chandka Medical College, so I had to work very hard to study all the material and complete all the assignments to catch up during those final 6 months. I enjoyed what I considered to be the golden days of Medical College living in Nafees Hostel. Babaa used to send me 300 rupees through a bank draft. I had to pay for my food, books and everything for the whole month with that money. I had very nice friends; Idrees Siddiqui, Zahid Larik, Khaliq Jarwar, Rab dino Raaz, and Ghulam Nabi Depar. They used to help me out with notes and finishing assignments.

The college used to shut down frequently because of political riots. Our exam for the final year of MBBS was eventually held in August of 1981, when it was supposed to initially be held in 1979. I got the results and was awarded my MBBS Degree on January 1st, 1982.

REGISTRAR OF GENERAL SURGERY IN A TEACHING HOSPITAL

I passed the Public Service Commission exam with a good score. This exam was held to work at teaching hospitals. I found that I was good at teaching medical students, and Dr. Siddiqui asked me to apply for the post of registrar. I obtained his recommendation letter, which was required for this post.

I was appointed for the post of registrar by the Government of Sindh on April 10th, 1983. As part of the post, I was given a 3-bedroom home in Doctors Colony, which was a residential area for the employees of the hospital, in Jamshoro Sindh.

Emergency calls were very frequent and hectic in Jamshoro and Hyderabad. The Civil Hospital in Hyderabad had a huge jurisdiction for those calls. People used to travel from far distances to bring their sick loved ones. Dr. Siddiqui trained me to do emergency procedures. When I got overwhelmed or got stuck on a problem, he would come to help, even in the middle of night. I remember when I would be in these difficult situations, he would tell me "Let us do our best and make sure we do not miss any steps. The rest we leave to God". Even on his official letterhead, the top line says "**Man attempts and God heals**". Even to this day, I have been applying his teachings in my daily practice, and in difficult cases I follow his principles.

Every single day of my life in the Medical college was a golden day of my life. After finishing MBBS I loved my job as Registrar. I was in charge of organising and performing surgery procedures in the operating room, teaching to the medical students and training the new doctors. My boss doctor Siddiqui who always used to say "Zahid Shah is married with his job".

I earned respect and expanded my social circle among the doctors. I was attached with my job and stayed inside the Hospital most of the time.

ARRANGED MARRIAGE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY CONFLICTS

I got married in September 1983. It was an arranged marriage. Unfortunately The worst turmoil of my life began soon after the marriage. My marriage ignited a clash between two families.

There were too many factors responsible for such tension.

My family lived in Balochistan. Our socio-economic status was very poor in the beginning. We belonged to Shia sect of Islam. Babaa was pulled out of school in seventh grade by his father. He lived his life with people who were not/less educated. The culture of Balochistan was entirely different from the culture of sindh. Babaa was not a wealthy man. He travelled on trains and buses in his initial years of life in Balochistan. Babaa had a typical Balochi style of conversation. He used to be very bold and authoritative. He never cared whether it was the right time and right place for his words and how they may affect his relationship with the others. He was a typical man who belonged to a male dominant Islamic society of Balochistan. He had traditional expectations from his son and his daughter in-law to live with him in a joined family.

On the other side my wife's family was living in Sindh. Her family had a social and cultural status one step ahead of my family. Her family had their nice huge homes and cars. Her family belonged to sunnie sect of Islam. They were liberal as compared to typical conservative male dominant families of Balochistan.

I noticed an unexpected and abrupt change in my life. I was thrown into a hot battlefield between the two families. I never thought that the social, and cultural differences could affect the life of a new couple soon after a marriage in a muslim society of Pakistan where personal pride and ego dominates over the lives of their married children..

I found myself like a horse. I was turning the side where my reigns were being pulled.

I kept running and running without anyone saying, “ don’t worry it it will be alright”. .I tried to avoid showing my wife what I was fighting inside my mind.I did not want my wife who was new in my life about my split life. In the night I kept looking into the sky and just talking to myself,” Will my remaining life go like it” I was feeling I am put into a cage which was full of darkness and pain..

I kept blaming myself for my parents suffering,and for my wife, that she and her family were also suffering because of me. Except amma, I felt like everyone acted as a spectator and kept cursing on me.

Babaa always wanted me to work with him after finishing my MBBS. My plan was to do post graduation and work in a teaching hospital. Additionally Baabaa wanted my wife to live with them and help them at their home. Unfortunately it did not work for me and for my wife.

That was the main ingredient for Babaa’s anger. I already had a home in Jamshoro close to the hospital I was working at. Despite Babaa’s constant pressure My wife and I left Usta back to Jamshoro to resume my job. It was purely my decision, however babaa believed I made this decision under the influence of my wife.

GOODBYE TO THE GOLDEN DAYS

Soon after the marriage I found myself between my job, my marriage and my parents whom I left soon after my marriage against their wishes. I noticed my life shattered into pieces. It took a nosedive. Everyone would notice my constant gloomy face, and even Dr. Ghani was very much disappointed. I felt myself being pushed against a wall, and going downward.

I kept losing focus on my job that I loved, I noticed a change in my image in front of doctor Siddiqui, he found me like a dry leaf that was wandering in the air. One day during the Hospital rounds in front of the residents he said facing towards me, “ He is not the same Zahid Shah after his marriage. he is lost”

Babaa kept building his pressure on me by letters and phone calls showing his anger.

Amma remained neutral. She could feel my pain however she could not say a word against Babaa. It reminded me when Babaa got married he was asked to work with his dad and stay with his wife (my mom) in a family home in Lakhi. It did not work for Babaa and now he wanted to repeat the same with me after my marriage.

I was looking for a change, to find a place where I could breath in.

FRCS EDINBURGH UK

One day God sent an angel in the form of one of my house officers (resident) who asked me one day " Doctor Shah why don't you go to England for FRCS? You are a good Surgeon". I just dismissed it as a passing suggestion. Although I had a dream to go to the UK for FRCS but that was impossible for me to afford. One day he took me to his home and got me introduced to his dad Mr. Noorani. I saw his middle aged dad and mom living in a small 2 bedroom apartment in Hyderabad. His dad told me he was not sure but would ask his friends to assist me financially for FRCS in England. I believed it as just an empty promise to encourage me. I was not sure why they would be interested in my education.

After many years I came to a conclusion that there are a few good humans who regardless of their financial status carry a solid faith to help the deserving fellow humans around them.

With some effort, I got an admission letter from The Royal College of Edinburgh, an air ticket, and some cash. I left Pakistan in May 1985 and landed at Heathrow Airport in London.

Going for FRCS felt just like a miracle. I had to jump out of a cage where I felt trapped by the turmoil of the fiery relationship between Babaa and my wife and her parents. I was simply a football being hit and kicked from one corner to another, and could not share my pain with anyone.

Yes, it was an escape, and yes it was a decision made under a huge amount of stress and frustration. But I found I could get the hands off my neck so I could breathe.

Babaa did not come to the airport to see me off. Uncle Jawad joined PIA (Pakistan International Airlines), he called his station Manager in London to help me out at Heathrow airport

A BAD BEGINNING IN LONDON

When I got my passport stamped and came out of the airport in London, no one was there to receive me. I told myself " Very bad beginning, something bad is going to happen".

I had heavy suitcases full of books and clothes. I was looking up at the cloudy sky and thinking, "Oh God! where I will go?". I saw everyone leaving from the airport. I rushed to a car, and saw a person sitting on the driver seat who might have dropped his relative and was returning home. I looked through the window and said Salam alaikum. He was a middle-aged man who looked Pakistani, " are you Pakistani?" I said yes, and told him I was expecting someone to pick me up but unfortunately no one came. He looked at my gloomy face. He said, "it is getting dark, you can come with me and stay the night at my home". I felt like a fish scooped up suddenly out of the water, but then gently put back in. His home was in Luton, a town a couple of hours drive far from London. In the morning, he dropped me off at the nearest bus station in the town and told me the bus number that would take me close to a Bus station in London to then take a Bus to Edinburgh.

I always listen to my heart. Did I make the right decision to escape? I heard a lot about London. My mind was preoccupied from a bad start, and therefore the beauty of the city did not ease my tension. Is there something bad going to happen? I felt a fear of the unseen. Then I started to gather my courage and tried to take a positive approach. I think I got upset for no reason. Maybe it was just a coincidence that the person uncle Jawad requested could not come to receive me at the airport. Maybe he had an emergency. I am just thinking negatively.

I got money in coins to call my wife. You have to put 6 Pounds (UK currency) to make a phone call to Pakistan for the first minute and then 50 pence for each additional

minute. It was a bad connection. I could hear some voices and 6 pounds went down the drain after only shouting hello, hello, repeatedly.

MY FIRST DAY IN EDINBURGH

I took a bus to Edinburgh. While the bus was leaving the London area, I kept gathering my courage and trying to reassure myself. It was a whole day's journey before the bus stopped at the Edinburgh station.

I asked a Cab driver to drop me at a bed and breakfast near the Royal College of Surgeons. I stayed at Shalimar Bed and Breakfast owned by Pakistani family. I got into the room. My feet were numb and very painful, but I did not realize until then, and I saw blood all over my toes and blisters all over my soles. I laid down in bed. Either I fainted or went into a deep sleep, and did not wake until the next morning.

My suitcases were very heavy and the journey felt longer dragging them behind me. I walked to the Royal college and got my admission confirmed for the short course for FRCS part one. In Pakistan I was told to find a mosque near the Royal College to meet with Pakistani students. They would help me to find cheaper places to live. I paid 25 pounds for one night in Shalimar Bed and Breakfast. In my head, I was converting the amount in Rupees every time I was spending money, and growing very concerned.

I got the contact address of a place to live. I walked 1 and 1/2 miles on foot to find the place. It was a big house on the second floor. I met with the owner, Mr. Talib, a very nice man. I agreed to pay a weekly rent of 25 pounds.

FRCS COURSE IN THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEON. EDINBURGH

On the first day of the FRCS courses I was very excited to see a few of my classmates, Dr. Asghar Shaikh, Shazad Lagari and Jawaid Shaikh, who were using the College library for exam preparation.

It was only a two-hour course for part one FRCS every day, in the evening. One hour each for clinical sciences, Anatomy and Physiology. Dr. Haly, professor of Anatomy, was very polite and smiled often. Dr. M.O. Wright, professor of Physiology, was very active, and the most excellent teacher I remember in my life.

My general gloominess and self-doubt soon took a positive turn when I found myself interacting in the classes and answering questions. The six-week course removed the dark clouds over my mind, and I started to enjoy every day. Our exam for FRCS was in November, 1985. I was happy to pass the written test and got qualified for the oral exam. One of the most suspenseful days of my life was the evening that the results of part one FRCS were to be announced by the College President in the Garden area of the College. I saw a couple of my new friends from Punjab along with my friends from LMC. I did not know that you could judge by looking at the size of the envelope, if it looked heavy you failed, if it looked light you passed. When my envelope was handed to me, I heard a loud voice " Shah jee pass hogey ney...."

FINANCIAL CRISIS IN EDINBURGH

I brought 1000 British pounds from Mr. Noorani in Pakistan. I spent every single penny very carefully. it however kept emptying. The place I stayed as a paying guest was owned by a pakistani man named Mr. Talib, who was from Gujer Khan in Punjab province of Pakistan. We enjoyed having casual conversations and watching TV together after I returned from the College. The rent of a room was 25 pounds weekly. I used to walk on foot to go to the College and library and make my food. One day I saw Mr. Talib sitting in the drawing room quietly with tears in his eyes. I asked, "is everything ok brother?" He initially deflected, but slowly started to speak, and showed me pictures of his sons. He said his wife took his children after their divorce and he missed them all. He found me very friendly and consoling, and our friendship grew even stronger.

Mr. Talib felt very relaxed and at ease talking to me. All 6 of his available rooms were empty. I asked him if I could help him out by bringing new tenants to revitalize his business. He laughed and said, "ok, then in return you can stay rent free." I was so happy that I wanted to jump and shout but I responded instead with a stifled, "thank you very much". I posted on the College notice board with the address and contact number and the description of " cheap accommodation close to the Royal College".

Within a week all of his rooms were full. There were two students from Saudi who were studying at the University of Edinburgh very close to the Royal College. They offered to pay more money if they would be provided food as well. Talib asked me about what I thought about it. I told him not to worry. I would be more than willing to make great food for everyone. In return, my food was free as well.

Though my living and food accommodations were now taken care of, I still needed a part time job. I asked Talib if he knew about any opportunities, and he gave me a reference to a grocery shop that was on the way to the college, close to the Castle of

Edinburgh. The only downside was that it was an addition of an extra half mile to my commute, which I had to walk. I started working from 5AM to 9AM.

My job was to bring bundles of newspapers from the sidewalk into the shop, open the bundles up, and put all the newspapers in order. I would then stand by the register to check out customers. The shop was really busy in the mornings. The local Scottish people loved to buy newspapers, coffee, and chocolate on the way to their jobs.

The owner belonged to India; he was Sardar Jee, always laughing and friendly. He gave me 5 Pounds every day. It may not seem like much now, but at the time, that was a huge blessing for me.

Life is not monotonous. It has twists and turns, ups and downs. It is not straight and smooth. It is a bumpy road, or it would not be life. Life challenges you, and makes you stronger. Sometimes too much of a challenge at just the right time may make you feel distressed. You may go through painful days and long, dark nights. If you keep your feet firm and do not give up, you will see the light at the end of a tunnel. After the dark and rough beginnings of my time in Edinburgh, I was beginning to feel more positive.

PAINFUL DAYS BEGAN

One day I went to the Royal College office along with my FRCS part one certificate and the proof of the two years general surgery experience under an FRCS Surgeon at the level of Registrar in Pakistan. These used to be requirements to take the final FRCS exam.

I got very bad news. After evaluating my credentials the Clerk said that there were recent changes in the requirements for the foreign Medical graduates, to take the final FRCS. Since I came from another country, they could accept only 18 months out of my general surgery experience from Pakistan. As a result, I had to do 6 months specialty training as a paid job at the level of a senior house officer in the UK to be qualified for the Final FRCS exam.

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The other bad news for me was the new European countries alliance began to promote trade and business among the European countries. The policy was encouraging European doctors for jobs, as opposed to the doctors from countries outside of Europe.

It was very hard for the non-European doctors to find a job in the teaching Hospitals.

From November, 1985, after I passed part one FRCS, I continued free postgraduate clinical rotations based on my part one FRCS certificate to stay in touch with the patients and academic surroundings.

MY WIFE AND MY DAUGHTER COME TO EDINBURGH

The relationship of Babaa and my wife kept escalating. She stayed with her parents. My daughter was born in July, 1985.

When life pushes you towards darkness, one problem after another seems to appear. In a country like Pakistan, when a man leaves abroad without his wife, your worst enemies are your so called family friends. They keep pumping fear into your mind, with thoughts like, "Look, your husband is young and left you alone for more than a year. He must be after some white girls. You may hear one day some surprising news that he has married in England".

I arranged a trip for my wife and daughter, and went to Heathrow airport to receive them. I had to leave free rent and free food arrangement at Mr. Talib's house, because I had to find a place with a family where I could stay with my wife and child. My wife brought 640 pounds in currency from her father. The next day we went to the Royal Bank of Scotland on Nicolson Street to deposit her money. I kept going to the library and hospital, and at the same time took them for walks and bought food. I started to work in a Pakistani grocery shop. When Abida looked at me with dirty clothes in a grocery shop, she looked upset. "So, this is what you are doing in the UK!". I did not take offense. I believed it was just a spur of the moment reaction.

She had a good understanding of the problems I was going through. I am thankful to her because she maintained the trust in me in those very tough times. She stayed for 9 months and returned back to Pakistan with my daughter.

CONTINUING STUDIES WITH POVERTY

I was given privileges based on FRCS part one certification to do unpaid postgraduate clinical rotations in the local teaching hospitals in Edinburgh. I was given a free room to stay in the hospital dorms. In the evening hours I continued to work as a cashier at the grocery store to earn money to buy food. After my hospital rounds I used the library to continue my studies. I remember one teacher in the medical college who used to say, “When you study your aim should be focused not only to pass the exam, but to honestly understand what you read?” While I was looking at the doctors doing paid jobs I found my knowledge not inferior to them. They however had hands-on patients making decisions for the treatments.

One day I made an appointment with Sir James Baird, the chief advisor of the Royal College of Surgeon in Edinburgh. I asked him if there is any way I get a paid job in a teaching Hospital based on my part one FRCS certificate and on two years experience as a Registrar under a FRCS Professor in Pakistan. He tried to reassure me by saying, “your profile shows that you are an intelligent and hardworking post graduate medical student. You passed the FRCS exam of the basic clinical sciences in your first attempt. A few foreign medical graduates struggle to pass this exam, a few of them struggle to find jobs in this country to pursue their careers.” Despite his kind words, he was not able to grant me the job.

I had free access to join the team of any speciality in addition to surgery such as Medicine. I had my own flexible schedule to participate in the Hospital rounds to learn from bedside case discussions, attending medical conferences and going to the library. I could feel thrust and emptiness in myself while attending the morning rounds in the department of Medicine. I gradually kept feeling a comfort zone spending more time in the Medicine departments of the teaching Hospital as compared with the Surgery departments. On a few occasions I could listen to my heart, did I select surgery as a right speciality for my career?

I felt a growing desire to become a good Physician rather than a surgeon.

I kept my morale high, never thought to ask for a single penny from my family. I never wasted a single day without learning. I set up my goals, objectives such as learning, to keep my parents, my wife and my daughter in my mind.. I never thought about making any relationship with local girls in or outside the UK Hospitals. I saw a few people around me getting married to local girls to acquire a legal status to live in the UK and earn money to get rich.

FINDING A GOOD FRIEND IN CRISIS IS A BLESSING

I met with Zaihan Rashid who was preparing for his final FRCS exam. He was recently married to a Scottish nurse. Her name was Yevon Duncan. After marriage, her name became Rubina Rashid. They had a son, Imran.

They used to invite me to their apartment in Edinburgh. Zaihan started knowing me more during discussion sessions in surgery classes, as I had a solid work experience from Pakistan.

He was impressed with me and the fact that I passed my FRCS part one. Within a few days of meeting, we had a very warm friendly relationship. Rubina and Zaihan both treated me like a brother. We used to have daily discussions at their home.

One day Zaihan told me that he got a job in Southshield, near Newcastle, and they would be moving there. He told me that he would be very happy if I came and stayed there with them. It would be a great distance away from Edinburgh, but I could continue my studies and stay in touch with the hospital he was working at for clinical attachments. I thought it a great option.

Zaihan and Rubina were of great help. Zaihan trusted me. He used to go for night shifts and Rubina and I were at home. I thanked my parents who brought me up as a good human or else a young man like Zaihan could not leave me with her young Scottish wife at home while he was doing night duty at the hospital.

AMAA'S DETERIORATING HEALTH.

Amaa had Kidney stones. She underwent multiple surgeries on her both Kidneys. Her kidney function started to decline. Before I left for the UK I used to take her to nearby city Larkana then to Jamshoro. The health care in Usta was very poor. The water was contaminated. The air coming from the chimney of a Rice plant next to our home was always full of ash and smell. Amaa had very frequent diarrheas. The intense heat of summer leads to severe dehydration worsening her Kidney function. Shafqat lived in Karachi. My maternal uncle, Aftab Khan, was a Postmaster, and he was given a home above the Post office building in Defense Housing society in Karachi. Finding a place to live in Karachi was a true fortune. Aftab Khan would also work as part time at Sindh Labs, a medical laboratory.. Amaa kept getting sick more often in Usta Mohammad, which was 300 miles from Karachi.

. One day I got a letter from Shafqat about Amaa's illness. I cannot forget a sentence in that letter, " I wish we had a doctor in our family to help us in Pakistan".

It was just like a train ran over me, or someone pulled the earth beneath my feet. I was back in the dark tunnel, with no light in sight. I was in complete darkness, helpless and hopeless.

RETURN TO PAKISTAN WITH A WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE BUT AN EMPTY POCKET!

One day in the summer of 1989 I thought, “it is time for me to return home”. I was thinking to myself, “What will you tell your family? No one would care about the depth of knowledge in my brain, they would however look at how much wealth I brought with me after staying abroad.” I did not have any answers for the questions flowing through my mind, but I decided that I could not continue to live with a dilemma becoming a physician or surgeon, in the UK.

I returned back from South Shields to Edinburgh and stayed with Talib.. I told him that I was going back to Pakistan. I started packing.

FOLLOWING THE FOOTSTEPS OF MY FATHER. HISTORY REPEATS.

I remembered a story from Babaa's past, when he struggled to afford a single loaf of bread on his own, he did not give up. He was looking for a miracle, he felt an urge for spiritual support. He went to Karbala (Iraq) on a ship.. He made prayers with tears over his face that God blessed him with wealth and a son. That prayer for a son was indeed for me, he always said to me. Soon after he returned, his practice started picking up. The memory of his story rushed into my mind, as clear as if someone was whispering into my ears. Why shouldn't I go to Karbala (Iraq) before going to Karachi?

POWER OF SPIRITUALITY

It was the hot summer of 1989 I arrived in Baghdad. I took a taxi for Karbala. The night was very hot and humid. I kept looking out of the window. I was looking at tall trees of palm dates. Hardly any trucks or cars passed by. We reached Karbala just 20 minutes before they closed the doors of the shrines of Abbas and Hussain. It was just a dream. I could not believe where I was, I was visibly crying, and I did not care what the people beside me thought, as I did not know anyone anyway. "This is exactly the place my father made prayers for my birth, and here I am at this place 33 years later. I do not have enough money in my pocket for my family and I do not know how I would be able to find a job after a huge gap in Pakistan." I believe Allah listens to prayers of people with their eyes full of tears from this holy places of earth.

I felt like someone put a hand over my boiling mind. I found myself feeling like a child who is beaten very badly by someone, then calms down in the lap of his mother. I felt the power of spirituality for the first time in my life. This place felt like a different world, of tranquility and peace. After leaving the shrine, I stayed in a hotel nearby. It was the soundest sleep I ever had in my life.

It was the 2nd of Muharram (first month of a lunar year) and I was given permission to stay in Karbala and Najaf for only 6 days. I took a bus to Najaf. I slept the night on the floor in front of the shrine of Imam Ali. I was told that the doors open at the fajr azan, and whatever you wish, make a dua and Allah will make it happen at that time. My eyes opened and I rushed to the shrine. I felt as though I was in paradise.

REUNION WITH FAMILY

My reunion with the family came after a stressful roller coaster ride in Edinburgh. . We went to Usta together. People met with me with tears of happiness in their eyes. Babaa was very happy. At the time, I was just afraid he was not getting the wrong signal that I would be working with him as he wished for.

Babaa and I had very different objectives and goals. My goal was my children to be in the best schools. Babaa experienced extreme poverty. After he saw money in his hands who he earned with hard work and honesty, his priority was his business and property. There was nothing wrong with his wishes. He always expected that I would stay with him and worked in his Clinic at Usta, the same way his father asked him. Neither of us were wrong, but our best intentions were in opposition. There was a generational gap in the culture of Pakistan that contributed to this.

FIRST PERMANENT JOB IN PAKISTAN

I had never previously visited Kandhkot before going to take my post as surgeon. It was a busy town. It might simply be a coincidence; I was surprised this town was only 14 miles far from Khanpur, the town Babaa opened his first clinic with only 200 rupees in his pocket. Khanpur is the town I was born in. I came empty handed much like my father did before me, to start from scratch in a town very close to where my father's journey started. I thought to myself, "Does history repeat?"

I showed my documents to the Medical Superintendent, and was received with a warm welcome. I found Dr Nazir Bejarani who was a one-year senior to me from medical college, but the rest of the faces were new to me. Amaa told her cousin Fakhrunissa that I was coming to Kandhkot. Her husband was Lala Nisar pathan, who was very locally famous and social. He sent his son to bring me to their home. I stayed with them with tons of love and care. I was given a bungalow in the hospital to live in.

New patients started to see a new doctor who returned from the UK. I visited operation rooms that hadn't been used or opened for a very long time. The medical Superintendent said there had never been doctors to use them for any surgical procedures. I organized the equipment and started surgery in the Hospital for the first time in the Kandhkot Hospital history.

Babaa was partly happy, as I was not staying with him however closer to him. My patients from Usta requested that I come one day a week for consultation. We used to go to Usta, a 3 hours' drive from Kandhkot. My daughter got admission in a private Model School.

PRIVATE EVENING CLINIC

Babaa insisted that I would not survive on a Government job alone, as I was only getting 5000 rupees per month. He kept encouraging me to open my own private evening clinic.

I was initially hesitant, but Babaa kept insisting on the private clinic, finally I decided to set up my private clinic for evening hours. Business picked up fast and soon I was a leading physician in town. I noticed working in the rural area that if you are a good doctor people will come to you regardless of the speciality of medicine you belong to.

I was running a very busy clinic. Surprisingly more than 90% of patients had nonsurgical illnesses. This enhanced my appetite for Medicine.

I saw the money pouring into my pockets. I gained rising popularity. My wife was very happy. Our relatives started to visit us in Kandhkot. I believed it all started happening because my relationship with my parents was cooling down and I was receiving their blessings after my marriage. Secondly, Raza was coming into this world.

The day my wife was confirmed pregnant by a local female doctor. Our life took a lucky turn to the peak of happiness, wealth, honor, and dignity. In the coming months, I continued to gain popularity. One day in the Clinic I saw a few people with Kalashnikovs behind a chubby robust man with a beard and turban. My assistant told me, "sir! He is Sardaar (Chief of tribe) Sher Mohammad Khan Jakhrani." He met with me and told me that he had heard about me and that I was a good doctor. I assured him I would help him how I could, and he replied, "My blood pressure is not under control even though I am taking a bag full of medicine every day. " During a quick exam I found some signs of a brain tumor. I asked him to get an MRI of his brain, and I would prescribe him the medicine. The MRI unfortunately showed the same findings I explained to him. He got

treated by a Neurosurgeon in Karachi and he stopped all of his blood pressure medicine. This further boosted my image in Kandhkot.

At this point, I could hardly believe a man, who at one point was barely surviving with enough money to buy food and pay for his courses in Edinburgh, is now coming home every night with his pockets full of money. My wife was very happy, and she started speaking about buying a home in Kandhkot. People were very loving, and some used to bring gifts, goats, poultry, and fresh rice and wheat from their lands.

Dr. Agha Noor Ahmaed began to assist me with surgeries upon my request. I asked him if he could do anesthetic injections into my patients' spines and keep an eye on their blood pressure, pulse, and breathing with oxygen support during surgeries. I was determined to keep working, and I kept doing surgery almost every day. When people heard that it was free, many patients from the town and nearby villages started to come to Kandhkot.

Dr. Imtiaz shah and I were staying in Sindh University Colony Jamshoro during our college years, from 1972 to 1974. He was a year senior to me, and was very friendly and sincere. He was a medical officer in Ghouspur, a town just half an hour drive from Kandhkot. He got me introduced with Syed Yaqoob Shah and Syed Bashir Shah, a couple of very politically active and well known men from the area. They were very loving, powerful, and social.

BUREAUCRACY IN THE DYING HEALTH SYSTEM OF PAKISTAN

My increasing popularity was draining business out of the other local doctors. I used to finish my work at the Civil Hospital, and then spend the evening hours at the private clinic. The local Doctors approached the DHO (District Health Officer) Doctor Habib Shaikh to stop my evening private clinic. They finally went ahead to approach the Deputy Director of Health. Then a local MPA (Member Parliament Assembly) got a transfer order for me.

One day, a nice gentleman came to my clinic and requested for me to have a cup of tea with him at his home. He was the younger brother of doctor Shujrah, a very respected and beloved doctor of Kandhkot who died a few years before I came into the town. The younger brother told me that he personally went to the deputy director's office in Larkana and convinced him that I had started free surgery in the town. He got my transfer order cancelled without even asking me. I thanked him from the bottom of my heart.

MY FIRST SON BROUGHT GIFTS FROM HEAVEN

On a hot summer day in 1990, my wife had labor pains. I was really scared as she might end up delivering a premature child. It was the peak summer days of May, with bright sunlight and temperatures upwards of 115 F. I did not know how to take her to the nearby city Shikarpur, as I only had a small Suzuki car. Although it had air conditioning, the intensity of heat made it of no use. I called Yaqoob Shah; he had a black Mercedes, the only such car in the whole area. He said to get ready and he would be at our door shortly. There was a missionary hospital in Shikarpur run by a local church. I found it to be like any british hospital I had been in. We asked for and were given a private room, and the female doctor was very professional and friendly. She kept my wife under observation until she passed the critical days, to deliver a mature child.

When the delivery day came, the nurse came out of the labor room with a smiling face. "Doctor Shah, congratulations! You have a son". I started crying with extreme happiness, raising my hands to the sky. "Alhamdulillah, you have blessed me with a son!" I named my son Raza Hussain Shah. I could see Babaa and amaa and the rest of our family members happy faces.

My first son's birth opened the gates of fortune, unlimited happiness, and wealth. My wife and I decided to take our whole family and our aunts to Iran for Ziarah and celebrate Raza's birthday over there. There was a train going twice a week from Quetta (Balochistan) to Zahedan (Iran). I reserved a first-class sleeper car.

I booked a private bus from Zahedan to Mashhad. We made tons of duas in Imam Raza's harem (shrine) and happily celebrated Raza's birthday. I rented a house in Mashhad and visited the nearby Ziarahs. We went to Qum on a private Bus and stayed there for a few nights, and finally returned to Zahedan to catch the train back to Quetta.

UNFINISHED OLD DREAMS

Despite the hardships of Edinburgh, I did not give up and stood firm with my wishes to provide the best education I could for my children. Babaa did not agree with my plans, and my wife seemed more attached with Kandhkot every day, and to me that was more or less the same as Usta, and both weren't ideal for raising children the way I wished.

On one Eid occasion in 1991, my uncle Mubarak came to visit Pakistan from the USA where he was working and living. He suggested in a family gathering to send the children to the USA. Babaa agreed that it was a good idea. Uncle Sharaf asked Babaa from where he would arrange money as it is very costly to send the children to the USA. It seemed an unrealistic goal at the time.

After Raza, my second son Tashkeel was born. Tashkeel was a magnet for Babaa, he loved Tashkeel very much. Additionally, I kept gaining popularity in Kandhkot, becoming wealthier, and expanding my social circle. I did not see any future for my children to stay in Kandhkot. I was sure my dreams for my childrens' education would never come true. The only accessible city I could take my children to be properly educated was Karachi, which had very good private schools. I kept thinking, "do I have enough strength to take another risk and leave a successful running business to move to Karachi for my children's education?" Dark memories of the hardships I suffered the last time I took such a risk to travel to the UK came to mind constantly, filling me with indecision.

PLANNING TO GET SETTLED IN KARACHI FOR CHILDREN EDUCATION

In November 1992, I discussed with my wife that we had a good time in Kandhkot for four years, and it is time to move to Karachi so we can send our children to good private schools. However, I only had an MBBS degree and a certificate of FRCS. Therefore, I needed some degree/diploma in Medicine to survive the hot market for physicians in Karachi.

I applied for an MCPS (Member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons), a postgraduate degree of medicine in Karachi. I booked a room in the dorms for two weeks and moved to Karachi. I remember Amaa saying that my hard work would give me rewards at certain times. She was very happy and kept inspiring me with her strong prayers. Fortunately I passed the MCPS exam on November 24th 1992.

UNEXPECTED PLANNING FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In the same month during my stay in the dorms for MCPS prep, I saw one of my best friends, doctor Ghulam Nabi Depar. He told me he was writing FMGEM exams (American Licensure exam) and was attempting to go to the USA. He asked me, “why don’t you try to go for it as well?” Things were starting to line up, and I had a great gut feeling. I asked him how to apply. Unfortunately, the last attempt for the exam to be held in Karachi was coming soon, and the due date for registration was also very close. I sent the form along with the required fees and luckily, the application was accepted and I got registered to take the exam.

Once again, I made the decision to take an exam which I was not previously planning for, and of course had no time to do any real amount of preparation. Fortunately, I passed FMGEM part’s one and two on January 20th 1993. It was just unbelievable. I began to have a feeling of relief, that I did not waste my time in Edinburgh. I continued learning, maintaining my pride and integrity in tough financial years in the UK.

As Amaa used to say, my hard work did not betray me, and I passed MCPS and the American Licensure exams within two weeks! I finally saw the light at the end of the tunnel to make my sweet dreams true. I could see my childrens to be in American schools.

Baba was not angry, though he was also not happy. He knew I was taking a second risk to go to the USA after staying in the UK. I had to apply for a B1 visa based on the result of the licensure exams in the USA. I entered a very long queue at 5:00 AM at the American Embassy in Karachi. I got a 5-year multiple entry visa. Before I knew it, I was getting ready to go to the USA.

I was feeling that God had opened his skies to shower his blessings one after another. Initially my plan was to get settled in Karachi with an academic status higher than Kandhkot for my children's education. I asked for one, God blessed me with a MCPS degree in one hand and provided me wings to fly to the United States with an academic status even higher than Karachi for my children's education.

ENTERED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

I sent a letter to my friend doctor Zaihan Rashid about my plan to come to the United States. His wife Rubina sent me a reply that they were very happy to hear from me, and asked me to stay with them in Connecticut. Doctor Zaihan got 4 FRCS Degrees from the UK. He was offered a post for a research project at Yale University at Hartford, CT for two years.

In the summer of 1993 I took a flight from Karachi to JFK, New York, and stayed a night in the city. I called Zaihan first, then another friend Fazal Shah. There was no answer from both of them.

I thought I might be dialing the wrong number Rubina sent to me. Looking back now, I was dialing digit 6 while indeed it was 4. As I could not contact Zaihan I decided to go to Fazal Shah. I had his address in Haddington, a suburb near New York City.

I took a cab to Fazal Shah's home. It was a long drive and I paid \$100 to the cab driver. I was shocked to see an empty home. I rechecked the address to see if it was correct, and kept looking through glass windows. I asked the neighbors. They told me that they had left this home. "Wow!!", I thought. I just felt like I was falling toward earth from a plane crash!! What next?

I already checked out from the hotel paying \$100. The painful events of the past; my bad arrival and beginnings at Heathrow airport started hitting my mind like a bomber fighter jet hitting a target repeatedly. It was getting dark and I did not know any hotel except the one I checked out from in the morning. I got a cab and checked in for one night in the same hotel. My last hope was to call Uncle Mubarak. I called him. He was initially surprised as I did not inform him from Pakistan about my plan to come to the United States. He asked me to take the train to Orlando.

I went to Uncle Mubarak's home and met with Becky and their sons Sono and Faiz.

Uncle Mubarak helped me to share his computer table and taught me how to write on it.

This is of course the second time he allowed me to share his study table and advised me how to use a computer for writing.

I sent a letter to Zahian. After a couple of days Mubarak told me "you have a phone call". When I picked up the phone, I heard a loud shouting by Rubina, "Zahid are you crazy? You did not come to our home. Come right now and tell me which train you are coming to. We will pick you from Bridgeport train station."

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

I arrived at the Bridgeport station in Connecticut after a very long journey from Orlando. The whole family came to receive me with a very warm welcome. There were lots of hugs and love. Zaihan and Rubina were like angels for me while I was in Edinburgh during the years 1986 through 1989. They had Imran and Sophia. Both were entirely well-behaved kids and we enjoyed playing together. History was repeating itself.

Second time they happened to be in the United States to help me. God gives a second chance only to a very few lucky people. But if you fail the second chance the chapter is closed forever.

Zahian was really happy with my decision to come to the United States. He looked at the licensure exam scores. He was surprised at how I passed this exam while working at Kandhkot and with preparation in only two weeks.

Rubina as always was like an Angel to me. She kept encouraging me and praying for me to seek a residency in the USA. As we did not have the luxury of the internet to send the applications via email, I started to send application sets via UPS. I spent a big chunk of money to send 100 application sets to residency programs, picking addresses from the "Green Book" randomly, which was a record of addresses of all the teaching hospitals across the United States.

HUNTING FOR RESIDENCY

I got a total of 7 interview offers. In each interview the embarrassing comments were, “You already have a strong background in Surgery, including FRCS certificate for the clinical sciences in the UK and 2 years of experience in surgery as a Registrar in a teaching Hospital in Pakistan, now you are applying to get residency in Medicine. “You will be older than your companion residents”. I kept trying my best to present strongly in each interview, however my hope started fading. My last interview was at Wayne State University residency program in Detroit, Michigan. During my interview in Detroit I felt hopeless, and thought if I am not selected, it would strengthen the doubts of my father and would prove me wrong for a second time. The chairman of the interview committee, Dr. Bergsman MD, was a tall and strong looking man with a white beard and white hair. He looked at my MCPS degree in Medicine and looked at my resume for the clinical rotations in Edinburgh teaching hospitals. I answered tough questions from 8 faculty members while noticing Doctor Bergsman continue to look down and read through my resume while listening. At the end I could easily read the faces of the panel and I knew they had the same concerns as my previous interviewers because of my strong background in Surgery and my age. Just as I was about to leave the room with a gloomy face, Doctor Bergsman spoke, “Dr. Shah I knew Dr. Wilson in Edinburgh. You did clinical rotations in Medicine with him. If you survived with him, it shows you are a hard-working doctor. I like you. We are not supposed to declare our decision right away but I am going to offer you the residency”. Dr. Bergsman advised me that, as I had a surgery background and a postgraduate qualification in family Medicine, I should get enrolled in a Transitional program for one year. The earned credits would add onto Internal Medicine if I planned to pursue Internal Medicine thereafter.

Those words of advice and encouragement were like shower of flowers from the skies. I could not believe it was real. Just a few moments ago, I felt the hard punches from the questions and judgement by the panel of eight strong wrestlers in a ring, and now it felt

as though suddenly someone picked me up from the ground. I thought I must be watching a dream. Dr. Bergsman smiled and said, "Congratulations Doctor Shah, welcome to Wayne State University".

After leaving the room, I looked around for an area no one could see me so I could jump and shout, I was bursting out with enormous happiness.

A few people in our family already started making inflammatory comments regarding my second failure in the United States. Those comments made Babaa cry.

He told me that he was initially not happy with my decision to come to the United States to apply for residency. However after listening to those painful comments he prayed for me from the depth of his heart that I got the job done I was wishing for. On the top of it he hoped that his grandchildren could go to America without him spending a single penny.

FLEX (FEDERAL LICENSING EXAMINATION)

Just as the licensure exam was the last exam conducted in Karachi, the FLEX (Federal Licensing exam) was the last one conducted in the United States, which I took in September 1993. I took the exam one month into my stay in Bridgeport, CT. Rubina was like my guide, and she booked affordable hotels and transportation. I went to Pittsburgh, PA that same month, and stayed in a YMCA near the exam center. I passed FLEX in December 1993.

H-1 VISAS

At the time I wasn't quite aware of the many benefits of having passed the FLEX exam, which is currently called USMLE part 3. It qualifies you to apply for an H-1 visa that can be converted to a Green card and then US Citizenship. When Rubina saw my result she said, "Zahid, call Wayne State University and request them to sponsor you for an H-1 visa". I was scared that I got the commitment for the residency program and when I will ask them for this extra favor, they might cancel the offer.

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The Director for the Transitional program was Doctor Ernest Yoder, MD, who was in the interview panel. He was 7 feet tall and very healthy, like an olympian athlete. His secretary was an old lady named Barbara. Rubina gave me the phone and said, "either you dial the number or I can, Talk to them right now". I was very shaky and nervous. Regardless, I dialed the number, and Barbara picked up the phone. I told her that I passed my FLEX. She shouted, "Congratulations Dr. Shah! At that moment Dr. Yoder came by chance to her office and she told him, "hey Dr. Yoder, Dr. Shah passed his FLEX." He took the phone from Barbara. "Hey what's up, I heard you passed your FLEX! congratulations, and well done Doctor Shah". I gathered my courage and asked him, "Sir, would it be possible for you to sponsor me for an H-1 visa?" He said to Barbara, "give me Dr. Shah's folder". He asked Barbara for some forms while I waited, listening to the shuffling sounds of the papers. Finally, he said, "Ok I signed the documents for an H-1 visa for you." Rubina was excited and said after the phone call, "What did I tell you? I am glad you listened to me."

RETURNING BACK TO PAKISTAN WITH A LOTTERY TICKET IN MY POCKET

I booked my seat for Karachi and arrived at JFK. As the flight took off all the painful stories of my past kept rushing through my mind. I was just looking through the window at the Atlantic Ocean and a few clouds. "It is just a miracle", I thought. I believe someone is setting up all the events with his hands very precisely. The happiest people to hear the news that I got the residency were Baba and my wife. At the time, I felt that airplane was not flying, instead I was flying in the sky without an airplane and every spot I was looking with a bird's eye over the land and ocean I was waving my hands and kept saying, "I did it, I did it..."

FAMILY TRAVEL TO DETROIT, MICHIGAN

After the residency commitment we returned back to Kandhkot. My main concern was to arrange money to buy 5 air tickets from Karachi to New York. I sold my car and my well equipped clinic. I sent all the household stuff to Usta. Abida sold her jewelry. Even then we were short of money. I applied for a doctor's loan with a very high interest rate from Quetta Balochistan. Finally I bought the air tickets and clothes in Karachi to get ready to fly to the USA.

We reached Detroit on June 26th, 1994. 4 days later I was supposed to start my residency in Grace Hospital.

We took a cab and checked in at the Holiday Inn hotel close to the Hospital. We had 10 suitcases and I was the one to carry the luggage for the whole family.

Raza and Tashkeel were like close friends, they were very much excited. Raza was an explorer to begin with. He ran and stood up on the sofa and pulled the curtains to peek out. "Kakoo (Tashkeel) come on look at cars!". The hotel was beside I-75. We all saw the beautiful city of Detroit from our hotel. It was night time and we all were very exhausted. I ordered pizza, we ate, and had a nice sleep. It was our first family night in Detroit. We had our first breakfast in the hotel the next morning.

GETTING READY FOR RESIDENCY

I met with Dr. Yoder MD, the program Director of Translational Medicine. He asked his senior resident Dr. Karim to give me the orientation and talk about the call schedule. Dr. Karim was from Karachi, a very nice thin and short gentleman.

He gave me a full tour of Grace Hospital. I told him that I am paying \$50 per night for the hotel, and I needed an apartment and a car, as I was paying lots of money for cabs.

He gave me a referral for the apartments in Inkster, a city about an hour away from the hospital. He suggested that we avoid living in the downtown area with family, as it was not safe to live. He guided me to open an account in the Credit Union Bank that was in Harper Hospital and apply for a credit card. He told me "when you buy a car, I can cosign for you as you do not have any credit history."

I opened my first Bank account in the USA and got a credit card with a \$1000 limit. I rented a car and we went all together to find an apartment.

FIRST APARTMENT IN THE USA

We got a 3-bedroom apartment in Inkster city. It was about a 45 minute drive from our apartment to the Hospital. I had to leave very early to attend the morning hospital rounds and then attend the morning report.

We enjoyed our first breakfast in the new apartment, and for dinner we made rice with lentils (daal). The next day we had our dinner out at a Lebanese restaurant called "Al-Ameer". In those first days, we had to sleep on the floor as we did not have furniture. I had only a couple of days left before starting residency.

Next morning, we went to a nearby elementary school. I got everyone enrolled. My daughter started in 2nd grade, and they suggested that Raza and Tashkeel can go for a head start as they have to be 5 before getting admission in the 1st grade.

I met with Shahid Bashir. He was a very nice and friendly gentleman. He lived in Troy, a town 12 miles from our apartment.

SWEET MEMORIES OF THE RESIDENCY YEARS

Babaa was happy this time. He told everyone "Zahid burned his boats, he now has only one option left: to achieve his goal in the USA". This was very encouraging for me and provided me a boost of energy.

The call schedule at the residency in Detroit was very tough. We had to be in the Hospital for 36 hours on a call. I eventually got used to the routine events of the day. I got my first biweekly paycheck for \$850.

. We had good neighbors and we kept getting introduced to new families working in GM and Ford motors. We used to go to Shahid Bashir's house in Troy. His wife was German, and her name was Sonia. She was very nice and friendly. They had two sons, named Omer and Sohail. They were very intelligent and well behaved.

Our supervisor was Dr. Lackey, who was very friendly to me, being cheerful and used to chat with me during hospital rounds. Dr. Yoder, Dr. Siddique, and all other teaching staff were very happy with me.

In the morning reports I was getting actively involved in making comments on the case discussions. One day, Dr. Siddique, who was at the time the program director for Internal Medicine, called me into his office and asked me about my plan for my second year of residency. He told me that the demand for Internal Medicine would rise in the near future. "Dr. Shah, I am very much impressed with your academic knowledge in Internal Medicine. If you decide to continue pursuing internal Medicine, I will strongly recommend you." He was a short, thin gentleman, from Bangalore, India. He was full of energy and knowledge. He was very social and would invite all residents every year to his big house in Bloomfield. He had a huge backyard and we would have a lot of fun.

We had a positive experience living in the first year in Inkster, but we knew Canton Plymouth Schools were much better than Inkster schools. Although Canton was further

west of Inkster and would greatly increase my daily commute, my main concern was my children's education, and for them to be in the best schools.

I had a formal interview again at the end of the first year of the transitional program. I decided to get into an Internal Medicine program. I was feeling very comfortable with the Internal medicine teaching team, and kept in mind Dr. Siddique's previous advice.

We started looking for a new apartment in Canton. We were looking for a place nearby the school, and found a very nice two-story condo. The rent was, of course, higher than the one in Inkster. We moved to Canton in June 1995 and transferred the children to the Canton School.

My initial salary was \$28K in the first year of residency. It went up to \$30K in the second year, and then \$32K in the final year. During the final year, I applied for a license from Wisconsin, to enable me to do locum jobs as an additional source of income. My friend Dr. Zahid Zafar and I started doing locum work in the Veteran Hospital in Detroit. I used to get a couple of nights in a month.

From the very beginning, I insisted and kept encouraging my wife to learn to drive. I used to take her out and give her driving lessons. Initially she was very hesitant and scared, but eventually she started to drive.

She got a Michigan Driver's License. We leased a Nissan Sentra for her to take the children to school. We enjoyed every single day in Michigan. We drove to Toledo, OH and visited Cedar Point Park and an outlet mall. We drove to Mackinac Island.

AMIR JOINED US TO GET A BACHELOR DEGREE AND FIRST JOB IN THE USA

My uncle Zameer was working in Emirate airlines in Dubai during this period. He and his wife visited our home in Canton. Uncle Zameer shared with me that they wanted their older son Amir to come to the United States for College. He said, "I will pay his part of the rent and food he eats, so don't worry". I told him I was grateful that God had blessed me with an opportunity that I might be able to help anyone, and we would be happy to have him stay with us and we would take care of him like our children.

One day, I went to a nearby community college on Ford road and got the forms for admission and student visa, and sent them to Amir. He was granted the student visa and joined us in 1995. We gave him his own room, and I put my desktop computer in his room. We bought a bunk bed and a small bed to put in one room, and I had my all three children share a room together. He stayed with us for two years.

We had a next-door neighbor, Mr. Farid, who moved from Saudi. He was a CPA accountant. After Amir got his Bachelor's degree, I went to Mr. Farid's condo and asked him if he could keep Amir with him as an assistant. He happily agreed and asked Amir to come to his office the next day. This was Amir's first job in the United States. We treated him as we promised to his parents to the best of our efforts.

MY FIRST JOB AS AN INTERNIST

3 years of residency passed like a tough but beautiful dream. With a few months left to our graduation, I started to apply for the job of Internist. I got very good references from our Hospital teaching staff.

We had our graduation ceremony. I was looking at a few of my friends who had their relatives who came from other States, and a few from Pakistan, India, and the Middle East. I had my tiny loving family with me. I got my Residency diploma with the seal of the president of Wayne State University.

My main target was to accept the offer from the practice who would sponsor me and my family for Green cards. I had very encouraging responses from each interview, such as in Palm Beach Florida and New Jersey. I sent one application to Dr. Wajih Rizvi. He was working as an Endocrinologist in Dakota Clinic, Fargo, ND. He was very sincere and always loved to help. He gave my application to his HR and asked them if they could arrange an interview with me.

I had a formal interview in the Dakota Hospital Fargo. There were 4 staff members in the interview. We went through a detailed question and answer session. They looked satisfied, and told me I had to drive to Lisbon, a small town 70 miles from Fargo to meet Dr. Sheet, who was looking for a partner in Internal Medicine.

I met with Dr. Sheet, she gave me a tour of the clinic and Hospital. The Hospital belonged to the Marriott group . Both were business rivals. Lisbon was a small town

with a population of 5000. It had a wide catchment area, and doctors used to share calls for the emergency department of the Hospital.

Dr. Sheet told me that she easily managed the routine cases in an emergency.

She told me, "They (HR in Fargo) have been sending me new Doctors for the last 6 months. They were good at Medicine but not feeling comfortable to run the emergency department and perform surgical and life saving procedures on their own." She wanted to double check with me and asked, "looks like you have an enormous experience in surgery in Pakistan and Edinburgh, UK. What do you think?"

I suddenly remembered Amaa's words "keep doing hard work. It will help you any time, God will not waste anyone's hard work". My mind went back to Edinburgh where I kept learning under tough financial stress and did not give up. I believed this job would be a reward of learning in those tough years in my life

I gave her a smile, and I told her "Dr. Sheets, it would be like bread and butter for me, I am sure I would not let you down."

Dr. Sheets returned the smile. "I am sure you are the right candidate" She said, "Congratulations, we will be looking forward to adding you to the team".

LISBON, NORTH DAKOTA

After signing the contract in Lisbon went back to Detroit to start packing. I got a \$1000 bonus amount for moving. We put all our home belongings and two cars in a truck. I rented a minivan and left for Lisbon.

My wife and children liked a home on 505 Oak Street. It was built 7 years ago. It had a wide back yard. It was next to a grocery store and a restaurant, and was very close to the Clinic, Hospital, and School.

I started the clinic and Hospital emergency calls after every 4th night. I was in charge of a Veteran nursing home to take care of old retired army elderly people.

The School was a walking distance from our home. I got the children admitted in their classes. I met with the Principal, who was a very nice gentleman and he welcomed me.

The first emergency call was very tough as a new experience. My first night of managing the routine emergency cases, a few cases with injuries and one patient with a heart attack came late at night. The Hospital gave me the Radio phone connected with the ambulance crew. When the crew received the emergency call, they would call me about the patient they were going to bring in. I gave the crew orders to carry. The Ambulance crew and the nursing staff of ICU were very skillful and friendly.

The stressful moments started when I ordered a drip for the patient with a heart attack containing the medicine to break and dissolve the clots in their Heart arteries. I prayed to God and kept my eyes on the monitor and the patient. I got used to handling heart attack cases easily.

MY FIRST ABIM DIPLOMA IN 1997

The month of July, 1997 was really busy for me. I was working hard to gain a firm grasp as an Internist in a new town. The American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) exam, a certification exam that is highly regarded and recommended for doctors to have passed after residency, was scheduled in August, 1997. I was initially reluctant to take the exam, especially since the hectic schedule I was maintaining between the new job and settling into the new town did not allow for a lot of extra time for exam prep. However, my wife pushed me and encouraged me to write the exam anyway. There was only one motel in the town, a Motel 8, very close to our clinic. I booked a room in that motel for one week. I wrote the ABIM exam in Minneapolis in August, 1997. Thankfully, I passed, and was awarded the Diploma from the American Board of Internal Medicine.

A SUSPENSEFUL MOMENT

One day I got a call at midnight from the Veteran nursing home that a 92 year old gentleman choked and was having breathing problems. I rushed to the nursing home.

. I saw the gloomy faces of the family members who were notified and present, and I asked myself if I could save this old man laying in his bed gasping for air by passing a tube down his windpipe. I would save his life. I was very nervous, and felt like I couldn't breathe until he could breath.

If mistakenly you pass the tube into a food pipe, which is closely attached with the wind pipe down the throat, the game is over! Thankfully, I got into his windpipe successfully. I inserted the tube in and connected it to the ventilator. I could see his color turning from purple gradually to bright red, and I could see the relieved faces of the family, who were watching the entire procedure. With the tension over, I whispered a thanks to amaa in my heart. I always just remember her in my difficult times.

STRESSFUL DAY

After a couple of months, I came to find that the Dakota Clinic was conducting interviews for the current post I was working. I was really shocked to learn this and felt my heart sinking.

I thought, “My God what happened, did I do anything wrong? Are they going to fire me”? After all my hard work in achieving this position, was my job now in jeopardy?

I rushed to Dr. Sheet’s office as soon as I found out. She looked at my face and smiled. “Your application for a green card is in the process. We have to go through its requirements to prove you as the right candidate for this job. According to the naturalization requirements, we publish the post for the job and conduct formal interviews then send our final recommendations to our attorney”. Dr. Sheets continued to assure me, “don’t worry, I know no one can do the emergency job and surgery that you have been doing, and I am happy with you.” Three local candidates came for the interview. The next day, Dr. Sheets told me “I sent my decision to our attorney along with details of interviews, I am sticking with you.”

GREEN CARDS

Our applications for green cards were under process. I was staying in touch with a Hospital attorney. We got the approval letter for our green cards in November, 1997. We went to Fargo to get our Pakistani passports stamped. My daughter asked the officer, "Uncle, can we go to Canada now?", he said "yes, sure you can". On one weekend later we took I-29 straight north. We showed our passports with stamps of green cards on them to the Canadian Border Security officers, who stamped all our passports with an entry stamp and said, "welcome to Canada".

When I got my first paycheck in July, 1997, my mind went towards July, 1994 when I got a biweekly check of \$850. When my salary jumped from 32K to 120K, I found myself like a bird flying higher and looking at the world from a great height.

Raza and Tashkeel looked like twins, and they were close buddies. I decided to provide my daughter with some additional privacy. We built a third bedroom for her that cost us \$16000. One of my patients was a builder. He was very chubby. I put a Sindhi name on him as " watto", which means "big bowl". The day he got a check from me I could see him in the restaurant located just behind our backyard, eating a big meal.

SHAFQAT COMES TO THE USA

In 1998, there were concerns in the IT industry that when the year 1999 will end, the system will crash on the first day of year in 2000 (Y2K). They started hiring programmers from the United States and from all over the world. Shafqat appeared in an interview for a job as a programmer in the U.S.A. I was extremely happy as he is the only one brother I have. Growing up, we shared a room in our first home that Babaa bought in Usta. We stayed together for some time in Nafees Hostel (dorms). For the third time, we will be both staying in our home in America. I told him I would pick them up from the Fargo airport..

Shafqat, his wife Umraah, and his sons Safeer and Wazeer, stayed with us in Lisbon for a few months. I got Safeer admission for Kindergarten at Lisbon Elementary School in the Fall of 1998.

Babaa's two sons and all of his seven grandchildren (the third generation of Syed Hakim Ali Shah) put their feet over the soil of the United States of America together.

I asked him to just focus on finding his first job. And when he gets his first paychecks, to find a place to live and completely settle down.

Shafqat leased an apartment in NorthBrook, in a suburb close to his office. We drove 700 miles in our Windstar to meet Shafqat. His family saw their first sweet home in Chicago. We used to make several trips to Chicago and enjoy our family gatherings.

MY FIRST AMERICAN BORN SON

The winters in Lisbon were very tough. Snowfall starts from early October and goes all the way to April of the next year. We got used to it, however, and the children enjoyed playing in the snow. The winter's snow never melts down and turns black mixed with dirt.

My wife was expecting a baby. Her OB, my partner Dr. Sheet kept it a secret that the ultrasound showed a baby boy. I was on call seeing my patient and my wife had labor pains. Dr. Sheet admitted her. I was called in between my patients to see Shabeeh. Dr. Sheet just looked at my eyes filled with tears of happiness. The children were at school, so Dr. Sheet's mom was able to pick them up from school. Sonia held her newborn brother in her lap, while Raza and Tashkeel were just staring happily. She told them that he is our new baby brother. I named him Shabeeh (picture of) Hyder (Ali) in the hospital documents. We drove Shabeeh in our lucky WindStar van to our home. We called Babaa and Amma; they were extremely happy and praying for him. Shafqat and his family were in Chicago; they were very excited as well. They came the next day to see this young boy and we had the ceremony of " Chatthee" (sixth day) earlier because Shafqat had only two days off.

FIRST TRIP TO PAKISTAN WITH GREEN CARDS

In November of 1997, we received our green cards; it had been more than 4 years since we left Pakistan. I missed Amaa more than anyone, and my wife missed her family as well. I applied for 2 weeks off, and we bought air tickets for December of 1998, about six months after Shabeeh was born. We were allowed to carry 2 suitcases per passenger and the weight limit was 70 lbs per suitcase. This was great news, as we were then able to buy gifts for everyone.

Babaa, Amaa, and my sisters were very excited to see us. I bought domestic tickets from Karachi to Jacobabad. Babaa came to the airport to receive us, we then drove to Usta Mohammed.

Amaa immediately started hugging Sonia, Raza, Tashkeel, and Shabeeh. Then I said, "Amaa, I am here as well". She laughed at me and hugged me. I cannot forget her words, " When you will have grandchildren of your own, you will love them more than your children and then you will understand and remember me."

My sisters, brothers-in-law, and their children were already in Usta to welcome us. These were very sweet moments in my life. I was looking at the smiling faces full of joy, like everyone forgot my painful and dark days. Time is a good healer of all wounds; however, the scars never go away!

I had enough money with me, so we hired cars to go to Shikarpur, Lakhi, and Karachi.. My wife and the children enjoyed themselves and did a lot of shopping in Karachi. My wife bought a very nice hand-knitted carpet from Afghan Carpets near the Metro Hotel. Babaa, Amaa and my sisters were with us. Eventually, the time came for departing back to the USA. We left our family with some of the most happy and colorful memories of my life.

DALLAS, TEXAS

I was feeling happy and comfortable in Lisbon. There were two problems, however. We saw snow blizzards and 7 months of black ice. In addition to the weather factor, we were feeling isolated in Lisbon.

I applied for a vacation in May 1999. Our plan was to move to Texas as I heard good opportunities were there. Before I could apply, however, I needed a license to perform medicine in Texas. We stayed in Austin on the way to San Antonio in a Holiday Inn Hotel. I wrote the exam nearby at the Texas Medical Board. I passed and received a temporary license to practice in Texas.

I also booked an Internal Medicine conference in San Antonio. I applied for a couple of openings for Internal Medicine in Texas. I had one interview in San Antonio. As a matter of fact, the first impression is the last impression. The manager who came to pick me up from the hotel in San Antonio was a chain smoker. I get headaches if I sit close to a smoker talking to me. The Clinic set up and the salary package did not click my heart.

On the last day of the conference, I received a phone call from one of my classmates from Detroit, Dr. Ranaa MD. He moved to Texas, and he was surprised to know that I was also in Texas. He was practicing Radiation Oncology to treat cancer patients. He told me one of his friends, Abu Nasar, was looking for a partner in Internal Medicine. He asked if he could meet with me to gauge my interest.

It felt like something good was about to happen. I said definitely. We stayed with Dr. Raana in Arlington, Texas, and he let me speak with Dr. Abu Nasar. The next day, I had a formal interview. I met with Dr. Nazneen Talukder and her husband Jim Talukder and their staff. Abu Nasar told Jim that he liked me and asked him to give me a contract.

My wife loved Plano, Allen, and Richardson. She saw lots of Pakistani restaurants and Halal meat shops and groceries. We drove back to Lisbon. I sent a formal notice to quit my job in Lisbon in June 1999.

Soon after signing the contract in Allen Texas and sending formal notice to Dakota Clinic to quit, one day, I received a phone call from Dr. Abu Nasar, I found his anger against Jim Talukder. He asked me if I was willing to join him at his new practice in McKinney, instead of Jim. He offered me a better package as well. In tough situations as always, I listen to my heart not my brain. I had to respond to him on the phone as he was very pushy. I told him I apologize, but that I would not back out with the contract given to me with my signature on it. He warned me I would have a huge problem as he filed a lawsuit against Talukders, and that he will shut their business down.

This was followed by a series of phone calls coming from Dr. Ranaa, who gave me the reference for Dr. Abu Nasar. He went too far, using some bad comments against me.

MOVING FROM EXTREMELY COLD NORTH DAKOTA TO EXTREMELY HOT TEXAS

We started packing to move from Lisbon North Dakota to Allen Texas in July 1999. The time came for the final day in the Dakota Clinic Lisbon. Believe me or not, but it is 100% true: I saw tears in the eyes of people saying goodbye to me and my family. They gave us very nice gifts and best wishes. It was such an emotional moment I will never forget in my life. We waved our hands to them, “ love you, we love North Dakota”.

Jim already booked a leased home close to the Allen Clinic. We stopped over at his house in Allen and met with him and his wife Nazneen Talukder.

She gave me the keys to our home, a cell phone and a pager. As usual Raza gave us a nice tour of the new home. The next day, the moving truck arrived and we put the stuff in the children's rooms and master bedroom. It was fun to explore new grocery shops and restaurants. I got children admitted into their new schools.

. Jim took me to show the hospitals and nursing homes. One hospital is close to the Clinic, two hospitals in Plano and One in McKinney. One nursing home in Plano and the second one in Frisco. Jim showed me the clinic in Frisco. I was told to work at the Allen clinic from 8:00 AM to 12 noon, and then see the patients in Frisco from 2:00-5:00 PM. During lunch break, I had to see the patients in the hospitals.

Jim told me that this area was booming for business, so a lot of people were moving to this area, and lots of new doctors are pouring into this area. “We have very tough competition”. He then quoted an example. A few words that I listen to in my life get permanently imprinted in my mind. Jim said when a wolf runs to capture a deer, both are running, both are running fast. But there is a difference however. The deer runs faster as if he wins, he will get a new life, if he fails it will be the end of his life. The wolf keeps running fast but he has other options to try for other prey if he loses this one. Basically you have to have a killer incentive, otherwise you'll fail. Luckily this new area had many

opportunities. I reassured Jim that I will pour my blood into the practice and give him 100 out of 100 of my efforts.

I was looking at the hectic job hours and on other hand looking at my wife's cheers and happiness and looking at my children in very good schools. We expanded our social circle with very nice loving families. My wife at one stage was famous for having family get together dinners at our home almost every weekend.

Shabeeh was very acquainted with me. Like in Kandhkot, Raza kept standing at the door looking through the net to our car. He always welcomed me with his priceless smile with dimples over his face. Shabeeh and I played together and used to go to the nearby Allen Recreation Center. He loved Ducks and kept throwing pieces of bread that never reached the water. We used to go to a park named Hidden Cove park and enjoy BBQ with families near the lake.

WE BUILT OUR HOME IN ALLEN, TEXAS

We started to look for our new home, as our current lease was for only one year.. We kept looking at the models. Raza loved to see the new homes. We kept visiting one model very frequently, as all of us liked it: the Wingate model home of the Drees company. We finally selected a lot and applied for a mortgage. Unfortunately, in 2000, the 30-year rate was 8.5 % and the 15-year rate was 10.5%. Anyway we got approved. The most beautiful phase of enjoyment was almost every evening after I came from the clinic and the hospital rounds, we visited our home built in front of our eyes; It was fun.

At one stage, we were asked for upgrading just to add into the price as all builders convince you. Then we were told to select the material for our home from wall papers, bathrooms, to tiles etc. Raza selected an ocean scenic wallpaper with fishes, Tashkeel selected pictures of race cars, sports balls on the wall papers for his bedroom, and Sonia selected a golden designed wallpaper for her room. My wife selected flowers with golden rims for the wallpaper for our master bedroom.

We moved to our new home 310 Misty Meadow in Allen in August 2000. My work schedule was very hectic. Some on-call nights were very busy. Sonia's room was over the garage, and she used to get upset with the noise of the garage shutter in the middle of the night.

ABIM BOARD RECERTIFICATION AND FACP DEGREE

I always love to continue my education and study, even after I return home from the office. I do not want to be left behind by rapid advancements in the medical sciences and research. My academic mind was very fresh after the 3 years of tough residency training, so I did not have any problems passing my first Board exam in 1997.

I wanted to test my updated knowledge for the 10 years since then, whilst in a busy practice. I took the American Board of Internal Medicine exam in Dallas, and passed and was awarded its diploma for the 2nd time in 2007.

I was also awarded an FACP (Fellow of American College of Physicians) degree in 2010 in San Diego. I made arrangements for Babaa to participate in the convocation ceremony in San Diego, California. He stayed with Shafqat in Chicago, and both met with me and my family in Los Angeles. These were very memorable days to see Babaa who looked with his own eyes at me wearing the fellowship gown and listening to my name by the president of the American College of Physicians, as I missed his presence in Detroit at my graduation ceremony from Wayne State University. We brought him to Allen afterward to spend some time at our home. He was very happy to see my children going to school.

MY MOTHER: A BEACON OF BLESSINGS DURING AND AFTER HER LIFE

Amaa always had positive feelings about my original trip to London back in 1984, when I went to get my FRCS, of course she wasn't completely happy to see her son go away; however, she was not angry like Babaa. She had the same feelings about my trip to the USA in 1993.

She had a unique God-gifted humor, an innocent look and a polite personality. She used to play a pivotal role to ease off any tension between Baba and our family members. She always backed up Babaa no matter what, regardless of whether he was right or wrong. She served Babaa more than the most obedient and sincere wife. She always placed her husband next to God.

Amaa played a neutralizing role between Babaa and my wife. She was the only one who liked Abida before my engagement. During my stay in the UK, she prayed for me in each letter. She used to write a few lines in the free space of the paper written by Babaa. When Babaa wrote letters with tough language, she used to have it trashed without telling Babaa, instead of sending it to be delivered by post.

Amaa's health gradually deteriorated after multiple surgeries for kidney stones. The quality of drinking water in Usta was very poor. Diarrhea and dehydration are the main reasons for mortality among children and elderly in Balochistan. Amaa went into a coma after severe dehydration, and she had frequent hospitalizations while I was in Kandhkot. The quality of healthcare in Usta was very poor; I used to prescribe medicine on the phone after I moved to the United States. Amaa always tried to avoid making me concerned about her; she always used to reassure me that she will be fine.

She had her first dialysis while I was in Kandhkot in 1991. I took her in an ambulance from Usta and admitted her in the Liaquat National Hospital. She came out of a coma and her kidney functions improved. The second time she went into kidney failure was in 2000 just after we moved to Allen. She told me a couple of times that she did not want a

permanent dialysis. She kept talking to us from time to time when she was coming out of the coma.

One day in the month of february 2008 I received a phone call from my sister “Amaa is very sick. She had kidney failure. She did not come out of a coma after 3 days in the ICU”. Abida and I took the earliest flight for Karachi. Shafqat joined us as well, from Chicago.

When we arrived in Karachi, she was intubated in ICU, and I met with the doctors. She was coming out of comas back and forth. She saw us and gave us a light smile, “ With her hand movements she asked about the children, who will take care of them?” I saw in her labs that she had severe kidney failure and infection. The team of physicians were considering her as a mother of a doctor, so they provided her extra care. My wife and I stayed with her and we asked Babaa to sleep at his apartment. She started to show improvement after her breathing tube was taken out. We started planning on how to make arrangements for her discharge. She was happy when she learned that we helped Babaa take care of the expenses for her stay at the ICU.

I sat beside her and kept reciting the Quran. She kept asking me to say Qasidaas (religious poems), as she loved hearing my voice.

Around 5’clock in the morning of October 15th, 2008, I saw a flat line on her monitor. She was calm and stopped breathing without any movement, as if she continued her sleep. I called everyone I arranged the transportation from Karachi to Lakhi (approximately 325 miles).

I remember her old saying that she wished she was a lucky woman who died before the death of her husband and wished if her son kept her body in his arms to lay her down into grave. My sisters told me that Amma’s wish for me was to recite “ Sura Yasmine” on the way from home to the graveyard. I was very much surprised that she knew I would be at her funeral. I believe she is watching me. When I find myself in a difficult situation, I just close my eyes and ask for her blessings and I go through a tough time, smoothly.

POOR HEALTHCARE IN THE PRIVATE HOSPITALS OF PAKISTAN

One day, my wife made a couple of phone calls in Pakistan and then she asked me to buy a ticket for her for Pakistan. I went to our travel agent and bought the ticket. While she was away, I had to take care of the 4 kids, transportation to and from school, and their food.

I did not hear from Abida after she arrived in Pakistan. I called uncle Jawad in Karachi and asked about her arrival. He told me she was not with them, so then I called uncle Zameer. He told me that she was with her sister, and she had abdominal pain on her arrival in Karachi. She stayed with her cousin who is a doctor, working in one of the top teaching institutes of Pakistan at Karachi. She gave her a Voren injection (pain medicine) without examining her and let her travel to Lakhi at a distance 315 miles far from Karachi. Her condition continued to deteriorate. She was just being moved from one city to another city until a doctor suggested to them that her condition is very serious and advised them to take her back to Karachi. Karachi is 300 miles, 8 hours drive from Sukkur.

She ended up back in Karachi where she initially landed. Uncle Jawad took her to a nearby private hospital.

. Surprisingly not a single doctor in 3 cities put hands over her distended and tender tummy that was ready to burst! I was dying to know what on earth is happening to Abida. I then spoke with uncle Sharaf who is a Dermatologist in Karachi. He said " She has small bowel obstruction and her intestines have either perforated or are near to burst". I asked him "I don't care about money; can she be transferred to Agha Khan Hospital?" He said " Zahid, she is very serious, she may die on the way to another hospital". She underwent an emergency laparotomy (opening of abdomen) and repair of the strangulated loops of her small bowel. The surgery went fine.

I kept calling the RMO (Resident Medical Officer) on duty about her and every time I had to advise them to correct the so-called very minor lab abnormalities such as low potassium.

We have excellent physicians and surgeons in Pakistan. The problem is that they have patients in different private hospitals in a 50-mile radius. They do surgery and do rounds once every 24 hours. The patient is at the mercy of the RMO. These doctors are fresh graduates and want to survive to have some money in their pockets. One day I was told "I think you should come and take her back to the USA" I rushed to take the earliest flight and arrived in Karachi. I can't forget her sunken eyes, pale face with the dark halos around her eyes. She lost more than half of her body weight and she just looked at me like a dying person. I bought first-class tickets back home, and arranged for specialist doctors to look after her during her recovery in Allen.

A PAKISTANI HOUSE WIFE BECAME A TEACHER IN THE UNITED STATES

My wife has tons of good qualities. Of course, that is the reason I married her. She is very intelligent; I wish she was allowed by her parents to go to a college or university in Pakistan. She was brought up in a male dominant strict Sunni-Muslim household, living in Pakistan where generally educating a girl is believed as a sin. She finished high school in Pakistan. She is very friendly and social. The social circle around us in America is all because of her, not me. She is a good mother, grandmother and a good mother-in-law.

She inherited a habit of hesitancy, since her childhood life. Sometimes I struggled to get her out of it. In Detroit with constant positive reinforcement and encouragement she started driving. She drives better and safer than me now.

When we came to Allen, I suggested to her that she takes some college courses. I kept encouraging her and eventually got her admitted to a Community College in Plano to take English and Computer courses. Then I asked her to enroll for Montessori training and attend courses in the College. Montessori is an early childhood learning establishment and learning system. I used to sit with her and help her in the assignments and discussions. She got a teaching certificate in Montessori. Now she is running her own daycare at our home.

Her academic status is now much higher than the rest of her siblings. I remember her father wished his sons to be educated like his nephews. He tried to send his son Khalid Shah to America, but it did not work. I am sure he is watching his daughter running her own school in the United States of America, teaching American children.

SONIA'S ARRANGED MARRIAGE

Being a father of four children, I learned the experience of children's marriages.

Arranged marriages are still the most common way of the marriages in our culture in Pakistan. Sonia is my eldest child. She was married to my wife's nephew. I personally sensed a comfort level between Sonia and Kashif. Sonia sponsored her husband for an immigration status via an attorney. Unfortunately it did not work up and Sonia has been living with her husband in Karachi since 2007.

RAZA'S ARRANGED MARRIAGE

One day Abida asked me "What do you think, I like Nazish and wish that Raza gets married to her". It was just surprising for me when I heard her ask that, but I told her that I knew Nazish when she was a chubby and cute baby in Karachi. Her parents, Jawad Chacha and Chachi, loved her as she is their youngest child.

As usual, my wife wanted my mouth to speak for her words and wishes. I initially hesitated, but I saw Abida pushing behind me. I was dropping Raza off to an SAT prep tuition class, and before he left the car I asked him to stay for a few minutes. I told him "Your mom and I wish you to marry Nazish after you are done with your Degree". I explained who she was, in case he wasn't aware. He looked very surprised. I then explained that it takes time and told him how it goes in our culture. "We will talk to her parents. They will discuss it with her if they agree, then we will have a ring ceremony and then the marriage when you will have a job". Raza did not say no; he just said "Ok, I guess" after raising his eyebrows. I let Abida know the good news after I returned home.

Raza has a historical value in my life; he is my first son. Amaa had two sons and 6 daughters. In our culture, daughters are treated as second class citizens in a male-dominated, muslim society influenced by old arab cultural. Amaa always prayed for me, that I had sons after my daughter was born. Raza's birth brought fortune, wealth and happiness for us.

In May of 2008, after Nazish's parents agreed, we had a formal engagement ceremony in the Hilton Hotel in Allen with our friends, families and our relatives. This event also served as Raza's highschool graduation celebration. We had the Nikah ceremony two years later in August of 2010, and also a Walima ceremony (family dinner) in Sheraton of Karachi. Since Nazish had to go through the visa process and finish her studies, we delayed the Rukhsati ceremony, which is the formal ceremony in which the daughter leaves the home of her parents. The Rukhsati ceremony happened in July of 2012 in

Chicago, after she graduated and her green card was approved. We booked a resort for the new couple after the ceremony. Finally, after we arrived back in Dallas, I brought her back from the airport in a nice limousine to her new home in Allen. We had a Reception party for our friends and family, which included a live music program in Embassy Suites Frisco. We invited a professional singer from New Jersey who sang Sindhi and Urdu songs. I tried to pour every single item of happiness into Raza's marriage; I could not say I could have done better.

OUR MOVE FROM ALLEN TO PARKER, TEXAS

We had a couple of incidents that hurt me in our West Allen home. I bought a Suburban SUV for my wife. One night I heard its alarm go off. When I came down, I heard a couple of people running away from the noise of the opening of the garage door. I shouted to wake up the neighbors.

I saw the broken piece of handle on the driver side of the door. The Garage was always full of stuff and I did not have enough room to park it inside, so I would park it in the driveway instead, and we would park our other cars in front of the house.

Twice, we had our hot water pipes burst and leaked on the floor, which I still believe to be the fault of the Builders cheating. They used a copper pipe under the floor of the breakfast area, it leaked twice, and damaged the tiles and then costly wooden floors. It pissed us off. I submitted an insurance claim to All States Home insurance, but they declined to take care of the damage and in return raised my premium.

OUR DREAM HOME IN PARKER TEXAS

When we looked at the land in Parker being developed for building new homes. We found that it was very close to my clinic in Allen. We decided to build our new home on the new land. I gave the builder Robert Jones a check of \$1000 as initial earnest money. Our West Allen house was a mid-sized house. We spent \$35000 to completely renovate it. In the meantime, we rented a house close to the land in Parker, wishing to look at our new home being built.

. One day Robert Jones showed me the documents that the price of one acre had risen from 120K to 140K and the construction cost had also risen by 5%.

He told me that he was under a huge pressure from the corporate office and that I should arrange a down payment and loan approval, or else he would be forced to give the \$1000 earnest money back. Our old home was not sold yet at this point, even after changing realtors. I was paying both its mortgage and the monthly rent of the leased home at the same time. After making a few efforts we managed to arrange 98K and got the initial set of documents signed for our new home in Parker, Texas.

Next to Raza, I see my granddaughter Natasha as a token of my good fortune. I like to think her birth marked the time we got our new home in Parker. For a time, until he received a job in Las Vegas, Raza, his wife, and Natasha lived with us. These were the most beautiful and loving memories of my whole life.

I wanted to celebrate Natasha's first Birthday. I sponsored Babaa so that he could come to visit for the occasion, as well as see progress on the new home. I also sponsored my wife's older brother, Abdullah Shah not only to keep her happy and dissolve her tension with Babaa, but I wanted our families to participate in this happy occasion together. I booked a Banquet hall and we had a wonderful gathering with our relatives, friends and families.

THE LAST PRECIOUS MOMENTS IN MY LIFE I STAYED WITH MY HERO

During his last stay with us in 2016 Babaa looked very happy to see our new home in Parker. He was extremely joyful to see a big house being built over two acres of land..I would bring a chair for him and I sat on the floor beside him, as we watched the workers busy in their work and marvelled at the speed they were working. Babaa had a huge experience in building homes and putting properties up for rent.

.After dinner we used to sit together. He always wanted me as his oldest child to share his concerns. We recalled the old memories living in Usta from the days he had a rented shop for his clinic and rented a home for living. I told him about our first home, and the name of his first assistant, Rahim Bux Brohi. Babaa looked at my face in surprise and said, "you remember those days even though you were so little at the time". We talked a lot about our days of poverty, about his bravery and hard work. We recall old memories about his friends Sharif Shah, Ali Sher, Noor Mohammed Parwana, and many others. I told him about my memories of Amaa, the way she used to cook our food in hot summers under the blistering sun. We kept talking about our first home he bought and the zameen (land we owned) near the town.

I recalled some painful stories of his step brother Nazeer Shah, and Babaa's growing tension with his parents based on helping his step brother. My natural bluntness urged me to speak to everyone frankly, especially for Babaa's own sake. Babaa paid a huge price for losing his parents' love and blessings.

I showed my concerns and frustrations at how Babaa handled the care of Amaa, who went through illness after illness without any health care in Usta. For the times he got angry at my comments, however we got back to the usual talks happily.

I had my first and last Moharram with Babaa that same year in Dallas. We distributed food, called "Niyaz", with him at Iilm Center. He enjoyed talking to his grandsons and his daughter in-law.. One day he told me "I am happy and very thankful to Allah that my progeny is secured and is on the right path."

AN UNFINISHED WISH, A DISAPPOINTMENT BURIED ALONG WITH BABAA

During his last and final stay with us, Babaa talked about almost every problem and concern he had. He was like an open book. He wished to meet with uncle Zameer, with whom he had a falling out, with good intentions in Houston 4 hours' drive from Dallas.

Looking very gloomy, he asked me if he could see his youngest daughter Nadia after a long time.

Nadia is my sister and is the youngest child highly beloved by our parents. She had an arranged marriage with my cousin. It was a very hard decision taken by my parents to agree for this marriage as his to be husband was in the United States. After receiving reassurance from my wife and I her marriage took place.

Her husband got married to another woman. He stayed in San Francisco with his second wife and his step son. Nadia then stayed with her in-laws in Houston for some time and finally she returned back to Pakistan.

I tried to reassure Babaa that personally I never interfered with Nadia's marital relationship, but I was sure of Nadia's intelligence and responsibility, and that she had the right to accept any decision offered by her husband. Babaa took some deep breaths, put his hand over his face and looked over the window. "Regardless of what happened, I just want to talk to her face to face after so many years. Maybe she is hiding something from me, she is avoiding any conflict between her father and her in-laws. I am her father, and I feel something bad happened to her." I agreed to take him to Houston, which made him very excited, and he got ready the next day to make the trip. He received a call from Nadia, and initially looked very happy to tell her that he is just about to leave for Houston but then gradually I noticed his tone fading and the talk ended with his very gloomy face. "I don't understand why Nadia is avoiding me, I can't meet with her staying just 4 hours of drive away from her." These were his last words for Nadia I heard from Babaa.

BABAA'S FINAL JOURNEY

Babaa had been physically active and very strong. In 2002, on the occasion of Nadia's marriage in Lakhi, he told me he had been noticing pain and burning feelings in his leg after walking. I took him to Agha Khan labs, early one morning. A normal blood sugar level is usually below a maximum of 120. I was really stunned to see that even when fasting his blood sugar was at 573!

I then bought medicine for him while I was still there. On my return back to the US I kept sending him medicine to control his diabetes and prostate disease. He would always say to me very softly, "Zahid you are not only my oldest son, you are my Doctor as well."

Shortly after Babaa left our home in Allen he hit the age of 81. On January 29th 2017, we received a phone call, with the simple words, "Babaa died". We left that same day and arrived at night in Lakhi. There were a few people sitting outside the home. The next morning, we all went to the graveyard to see if I could find him. His body was under a huge layer of dust very close to Amaa's grave and under the feet of his parents.

There was a ceremony, as per tradition, where the oldest son is blessed with the family turban as a symbol that they will consider him in place of the father. As the oldest son, I wore the family turban in the ceremony, and then openly asked if Babaa owed any money. I let everyone know that I would take care of it. Then I requested, binding both my hands, "please forgive him, if any one got hurt because of him." Then I did the same with every family member, including some who had some conflicts with Babaa. Most people forgive those who died, but a few people never change their minds.

VISIT TO KANDHKOT AFTER A QUARTER OF CENTURY

On the occasion of Babaa's funeral, I had a chance to visit Kandhkot after 25 years.

We rented a car from Lakhi. I asked my cousin Abdullah Shah to go with us. I met with Dr. Imtiaz Shah at his house, and he invited the doctors I had worked with in Kandhkot Hospital. I found a couple of patients waiting for me outside his house, and I consulted them. On the way back I asked the driver to give me a tour of the hospital. The driver spoke to my cousin, and I heard him saying, "quite long ago there was a Shah Surgeon in this town. He was a good Surgeon. He did surgery on me free of cost. We all miss that surgeon." My cousin started laughing at him and told him "that Surgeon is sitting behind you".

I got tears of happiness in my eyes. People remembered me after a quarter of a century. Sometimes I miss that love and respect and ask my wife if I could occasionally go back to help those ignored poor people. They never forgot me. If I were really lucky, I could find a place close to the feet of my hero in our family graveyard.