

Wings of a Dove. It is my autobiography. I believe that Storytelling has been art, and art is always meant to be shared and inspire. I decided to share my story with everyone.

Wings of a Dove

By Yasser Bassam

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YASSER BASSAM

Wings
of a
Dove

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Print ISBN: 978-1-64719-164-1

Epub ISBN: 978-1-64719-165-8

Mobi ISBN: 978-1-64719-166-5

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2021

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Chapter 1: Childhood

1.1 Birth

Some have luck in terms of wealth while some are just born into a lucky family. They say that you cannot choose your children but I feel that you cannot choose your parents as well. If such choice was given to me, I would have chosen my parents over and over again. My luck and life are everything that I owe to them. Born on March 11, 2000 in Dubai, UAE, I was the middle child out of the four children born to my parents. My mother has been a part of Emirates family while my father was a Palestinian man. Now that I think of, I feel that they both suffered hardships all their life. They worked hard for us to make sure that we have an ideal childhood like most of the children in UAE have. There may have been times which would have been hard but our parents never let us bear the brunt of it.

Being the youngest I was adored by everyone in the family. Yasser, they named me. The name held a lot of significance to my father since it belonged to one of his uncles whom he loved dearly. His loss left a big dent in my father's life. Naming me after his uncle was something that always reminded my father of his uncle. He paid a homage to him through naming his son after great Uncle Yasser.

Yasser means Rich in Arabic. I have always felt that my father always felt that I was rich in some way. It was not money that he expected me to be rich in. It was always something else. Something more from the heart and soul, he said. Now that I am old enough, I feel that my name and its meaning hold a lot

more significance for my life to come. It's not the world riches that I want to possess. It is the earthly and soulful riches that I seek. My name has given me a lot more perspective.

Being born into a stable family always means that you will have a wonderful childhood if not wonderful, you will still be saved from the harsh realities of life. My childhood was such that. My parents made sure that I have everything. They both worked hard. They both had jobs. My mother never left everything on my father to provide for. Most of my childhood memories with my parents are of the weekends that we spent together.

My elder brother and I used to fight a lot. I guess that's what brother do. They fight each other all the time but would not forsake anyone else to mistreat their brother. Ahmed and I have been thick as thieves. My younger sister is the one who is possessed about the most. As brother, we are protective of her. She grins a little and we are worried about her.

My first friend in the childhood other than my brother was Nayef. The curly haired boy with the flashiest plastic bicycle. Sahib, his mother brought him a bicycle long before he could ride it. He started crawling and that's when our mothers decided to arrange playdates for us. Grandma would gladly babysit us both since we played together without fighting and Ahmed went to his nursery so there was no one to disturb us to fight with us.

I have fond memories of my childhood. The photographs that my father has captured always show me and Nayef clinging to one toy and trying to snatch it from each other. Sharing and caring was the first lesson that Grandma taught us both. I learned to share my toys and my candies with Nayef long before we entered the nursery together. My early memories are

filled with my grandmother, her stories, my playtime with Nayef and napping.

1.2 Early memories

I grew up in a house next door to the house where my mother lived when she was a little girl. Her mother, Grandma Sheikh, my grandmother, babysat me while my mother and father were at work.

My grandmother has been the integral part of my early memories. While I wasn't going to school or nursery, she was the one with whom I spent the most part of my days. She can be regarded as the first friend and the first teacher that I had in my life. Her patience, kindness, attitude towards life,

Grandma never looked like a grandmother. She had long black hair which she wore up in little, braided, spiky towers and plaits. She had large blue eyes. She was taller than my father. She looked like a spy or ballerina or a lady pirate or a rock star. She acted like one too. For example, she never drove anywhere. She rode a bike. It drove my mother crazy. "Why can't you act your age?" she'd say, and Grandma would just laugh.

Grandma and I played Scrabble all the time. Grandma always won, even though her English wasn't all that great, because we'd decided that she was allowed to use Osmania vocabulary. Turkey is where Grandma was born, over two hundred years ago. That's what Grandma said. (My grandmother claimed to be over two hundred years old. Or maybe even older. Sometimes she claimed that she'd even met Genghis Khan. He was much shorter than her. I probably don't have time to tell that story.) Osmania is also an incredibly valuable word in

Scrabble points, even though it doesn't exactly fit on the board. Grandma put it down the first time we played. I was feeling pretty good because I'd gotten forty-one points for "zipper" on my turn.

Grandma kept rearranging her letters on her tray. Then she looked over at me, as if daring me to stop her, and put down "mania", after "man." She used "delicious," "zipper," "wishes," "kismet", and "needle," and made "to" into "toe". "Osmania" went all the way across the board and then trailed off down the right-hand side.

I started laughing.

"I used up all my letters," Grandma said. She licked her pencil and started adding up points.

"That's not a word," I said. "Osmania is not a word. Besides, you can't do that. You can't put a 6-letter word on a board which is not even English."

"Why not? It's a country," Grandma said. "It's where I was born, little darling."

"Challenge," I said. I went and got the dictionary and looked it up. "There's no such place."

"Of course, there isn't nowadays," Grandma said. "It wasn't a very big place, even when it was a place. But you've heard of Turkey, and Uzbekistan and the Silk Road and Genghis Khan. Haven't I told you about meeting Genghis Khan?"

I looked up Osmania. "Okay," I said. "Ottoman is a real place. A real word. But Osmania isn't. You were born in Turkey during Ottoman empire period"

“They call it something else now,” Grandma said. “But I think it’s important to remember where we come from. I think it’s only fair that I get to use Osmania words. Your English is so much better than me. Promise me something, mouthful of dumpling, a small, small thing. You’ll remember its real name. Osmania. Now when I add it up, I get three hundred and sixty-eight points. Could that be right?”

If you called the faery handbag by its right name, it would be something like “el fantasy,” which means the “bag of skin where the world lives,” only Grandma never spelled that word the same way twice. She said you had to spell it a little differently each time. You never wanted to spell it exactly the right way, because that would be dangerous.

1.3 My grandmother, her handbag and the 5-year-old me

My grandmother Grandma always had stores to tell. Her handbag story is one of those stories which a year old I believed until I was about 12. The story of a handbag keeping an entire world inside enchanted me all my life. I once have a dream that my friend Nayef entered that handbag and never came back. I told Grandma the story when I woke up and she told me that it was true. For a few days during the summer, I was actually afraid that Nayef might never come back even though I knew he had gone to Sharjah to visit his grandparents. The story goes down below.

I called it the faery handbag because I put “faery” down on the Scrabble board once. Grandma said that you spelled it with an “I,” not an “e”. She looked it up in the dictionary, and lost a turn.

Grandma said that in Turkey they used a board and tiles for divination, prognostication, and sometimes even just for fun. She said it was a little like playing Scrabble. That's probably why she turned out to be so good at Scrabble. The Turkish used their tiles and board to communicate with the people who lived under the hill. The people who lived under the hill knew the future. The Turkish gave them fermented milk and honey, and the young women of the village used to go and lie out on the hill and sleep under the stars. Apparently, the people under the hill were pretty cute. The important thing was that you never went down into the hill and spent the night there, no matter how cute the guy from under the hill was. If you did, even if you only spent a single night under the hill, when you came out again a hundred years might have passed. "Remember that," Grandma said to me. "It doesn't matter how cute a girl is. If she wants you to come back to that place, it isn't a good idea. It's okay to fool around, but don't spend the night."

Every once in a while, a woman from under the hill would marry a man from the village, even though it never ended well. The problem was that the women under the hill were terrible cooks. They couldn't get used to the way time worked in the village, which meant that supper always got burnt, or else it wasn't cooked long enough. But they couldn't stand to be criticized. It hurt their feelings. If their village husband complained, or even if he looked like he wanted to complain, that was it. The woman from under the hill went back to her home, and even if her husband went and begged and pleaded and apologized, it might be three years or thirty years or a few generations before she came back out.

Even the best, happiest marriages between the Turks and the people under the hill fell apart when the children got old

enough to complain about dinner. But everyone in the village had some hill blood in them.

“It’s in you,” Grandma said, and kissed me on the nose. “Passed down from my grandmother and her mother. It’s why we’re so beautiful.”

When Grandma was nineteen, the Mullah in her village threw the tiles and discovered that something bad was going to happen. A raiding party was coming. There was no point in fighting them. They would burn down everyone’s houses and take the young men and women for slaves. And it was even worse than that. There was going to be an earthquake as well, which was bad news because usually, when raiders showed up, the village went down under the hill for a night and when they came out again the raiders would have been gone for months or decades or even a hundred years. But this earthquake was going to split the hill right open.

The people under the hill were in trouble. Their home would be destroyed, and they would be doomed to roam the face of the earth, weeping and lamenting their fate until the sun blew out and the sky cracked and the seas boiled and the people dried up and turned to dust and blew away. So, the shaman-priestess went and divined some more, and the people under the hill told her to kill a black dog and skin it and use the skin to make a purse big enough to hold a chicken, an egg, and a cooking pot. So she did, and then the people under the hill made the inside of the purse big enough to hold all of the village and all of the people under the hill and mountains and forests and seas and rivers and lakes and orchards and a sky and stars and spirits and fabulous monsters and sirens and dragons and dryads and mermaids and beasties and all the little gods that the Turks and the people under the hill worshipped.

“Your purse is made out of dog skin?” I said. “That’s disgusting!”

Before the raiding party arrived, the village packed up all of their belongings and moved into the handbag. The clasp was made out of bone. If you opened it one way, then it was just a purse big enough to hold a chicken and an egg and a clay cooking pot, or else a pair of reading glasses and a library book and a pillbox. If you opened the clasp another way, then you found yourself in a little boat floating at the mouth of a river. On either side of you was forest, where the Turk villagers and the people under the hill made their new settlement.

If you opened the handbag the wrong way, though, you found yourself in a dark land that smelled like blood. That’s where the guardian of the purse (the dog whose skin had been sewn into a purse) lived. The guardian had no skin. Its howl made blood come out of your ears and nose. It tore apart anyone who turned the clasp in the opposite direction and opened the purse in the wrong way.

“Here is the wrong way to open the handbag,” Grandma said. She twisted the clasp, showing me how she did it. She opened the mouth of the purse, but not very wide and held it up to me. “Go ahead, darling, and listen for a second.”

I put my head near the handbag, but not too near. I didn’t hear anything. “I don’t hear anything,” I said.

“The poor dog is probably asleep,” Grandma said. “Even nightmares have to sleep now and then.”

So, anyway, the village and the people under the hill lived happily ever after for a few weeks in the handbag, which they had tied around a rock in a dry well which the people under the hill had determined would survive the earthquake. But some of

the Turks wanted to come out again and see what was going on in the world. Grandma was one of them. It had been summer when they went into the bag, but when they came out again, and climbed out of the well, snow was falling and their village was ruins and crumbly old rubble. They walked through the snow, Grandma carrying the handbag, until they came to another village, one that they'd never seen before. Everyone in that village was packing up their belongings and leaving, which gave Grandma and her friends a bad feeling. It seemed to be just the same as when they went into the handbag.

They followed the refugees, who seemed to know where they were going, and finally everyone came to a city. Grandma had ever seen such a place. There were trains and electric lights and movie theaters, and there were people shooting each other. Bombs were falling. A war going on. Most of the villagers decided to climb right back inside the handbag, but Grandma volunteered to stay in the world and look after the handbag. She had fallen in love with movies and silk stockings and with a young man, an Emirati deserter.

Grandma and the Emirati deserter married and had many adventures and finally came to UAE, where my mother was born. Now and then Grandma would consult the tiles and talk to the people who lived in the handbag and they would tell her how best to avoid trouble and how she and her husband could make some money. Every now and then one of the Turks, or one of the people from under the hill came out of the handbag and wanted to go grocery shopping, or to a movie or an amusement park to ride on roller coasters, or to the library.

The more advice Grandma gave her husband, the more money they made. Her husband became curious about Grandma's handbag, because he could see that there was something odd about it, but Grandma told him to mind his own business. He

began to spy on Grandma, and saw that strange men and women were coming in and out of the house. He became convinced that either Grandma was a spy for the Communists, or maybe that she was having affairs. They fought and he drank more and more, and finally he threw away her divination tiles.

“I thought he’d left me,” Grandma said. “For almost twenty years I thought he’d left me and your mother and taken off for California. Not that I minded. I was tired of being married and cooking dinners and cleaning house for someone else. It’s better to cook what I want to eat, and clean up when I decide to clean up. It was harder on your mother, not having a father. That was the part that I minded most.

“Then it turned out that he hadn’t run away after all. He’d spent one night in the handbag and then come out again twenty years later, exactly as handsome as I remembered, and enough time had passed that I had forgiven him all the quarrels. We made up and it was all very romantic and then when we had another fight the next morning, he went and kissed your mother, who had slept right through his visit, on the cheek, and then he climbed right back inside the handbag. I didn’t see him again for another twenty years. The last time he showed up, we went to see “Star Wars” and he liked it so much that he went back inside the handbag to tell everyone else about it. In a couple of years, they’ll all show up and want to see it on video and all of the sequels too.”

“Tell them not to bother with the prequels,” I said.

The thing about Grandma and libraries is that she’s always losing library books. She says that she hasn’t lost them, and in fact that they aren’t even overdue, really. It’s just that even one week inside the faery handbag is a lot longer in library-world time. So, what is she supposed to do about it? The librarians all

hate Grandma. She's banned from using any of the branches in our area. When I was eight, she got me to go to the library for her and check out a bunch of biographies and science books and some Georgette Hoyer romance novels. My mother was livid when she found out, but it was too late. Grandma had already misplaced most of them.

It's really hard to write about somebody as if they're really dead. I still think Grandma must be sitting in her living room, in her house, watching some old horror movie, dropping popcorn into her handbag. She's waiting for me to come over and play Scrabble.

Nobody is ever going to return those library books now.

My mother used to come home from work and roll her eyes. "Have you been telling them your fairy stories?" she'd say. "Yasser, your grandmother is a horrible liar."

Grandma would fold up the Scrabble board and shrug at me and Nayef. "I'm a wonderful liar," she'd say. "I'm the best liar in the world. Promise me you won't believe a single word."

But she wouldn't tell the story of the faery handbag to Nayef. Only the old Osmania folktales and fairytales about the people under the hill. She told him about how she and her husband made it all the way across Middle East, hiding in haystacks and in barns, and how once, when her husband went off to find food, a farmer found her hiding in his chicken coop and tried to rape her. But she opened up the faery handbag in the way she showed me, and the dog came out and ate the farmer and all his chickens too.

She was teaching Nayef and me how to curse in Osmania. I also know how to say I love you, but I'm not going to ever say it to anyone again. I shared Grandma's stories with Nayef and he actually believed them. So, I guess you can figure out what happened next. The problem is that Nayef believed me about the handbag. We spent a lot of time over at Grandma's, playing Scrabble. Grandma never let the faery handbag out of her sight. She even took it with her when she went to the bathroom. I think she even slept with it under her pillow.

I didn't tell her that I'd said anything to Nayef. I wouldn't ever have told anybody else about it. Not even Ahmed, who is the most responsible person in all of the world. Now, of course, if the handbag turns up and Nayef still hasn't come back, I'll have to tell Ahmed. Somebody has to keep an eye on the stupid thing while I go find Nayef.

What worries me is that maybe one of the Turks or one of the people under the hill or maybe even Sultan popped out of the handbag to run an errand and got worried when Grandma wasn't there. Maybe they'll come looking for her and bring it back. Maybe they know I'm supposed to look after it now. Or maybe they took it and hid it somewhere. Maybe someone turned it in at the lost-and-found at the library and that stupid librarian called the F.B.I. Maybe scientists at the Pentagon are examining the handbag right now. Testing it. If Nayef comes out, they'll think he's a spy or a super weapon or an alien or something. They're not going to just let him go.

Everyone thought that Nayef ran away, except for my mother, who is convinced that he was trying out another Houdini escape and is probably lying at the bottom of a lake somewhere. She hasn't said that to me, but I can see her thinking it. She keeps making cookies for me.

What happened is that Nayef said, “Can I see that for just a second?”

He said it so casually that I think he caught Grandma off guard. She was reaching into the purse for her wallet. We were standing in the lobby of the movie theater on a Monday morning. Nayef was behind the snack counter. He’d gotten a job there. He was wearing this stupid red paper hat and some kind of apron-bib thing. He was supposed to ask us if we wanted to supersize our drinks.

He reached over the counter and took Grandma’s handbag right out of her hand. He closed it and then he opened it again. I think he opened it the right way. I don’t think he ended up in the dark place. He said to me and Grandma, “I’ll be right back.” And then he wasn’t there anymore. It was just me and Grandma and the handbag, lying there on the counter where he’d dropped it.

If I’d been fast enough, I think I could have followed him. But Grandma had been guardian of the faery handbag for a lot longer. She snatched the bag back and glared at me. “He’s a very bad boy,” she said. She was absolutely furious. “You’re better off without him, Yasser, I think.”

“Give me the handbag,” I said. “I have to go get him.”

“It isn’t a toy, Yasser,” she said. “It isn’t a game. This isn’t Scrabble. He comes back when he comes back. If he comes back.”

“Give me the handbag,” I said. “Or I’ll take it from you.”

She held the handbag up high over her head, so that I couldn’t reach it. I hate people who are taller than me. “What are you going to do now,” Grandma said. “Are you going to knock me

down? Are you going to steal the handbag? Are you going to go away and leave me here to explain to your parents where you've gone? Are you going to say goodbye to your friends? When you come out again, they will have gone to college. They'll have jobs and babies and houses and they won't even recognize you. Your mother will be an old woman and I will be dead."

"I don't care," I said. I sat down on the sticky red carpet in the lobby and started to cry. Someone wearing a little metal name tag came over and asked if we were okay. His name was Missy. Or maybe he was wearing someone else's tag.

"We're fine," Grandma said. "My grandson has the flu."

She took my hand and pulled me up. She put her arm around me and we walked out of the theater. We never even got to see the stupid movie. We never even got to see another movie together. I don't ever want to go see another movie. The problem is, I don't want to see unhappy endings. And I don't know if I believe in the happy ones.

"I have a plan," Grandma said. "I will go find Nayef. You will stay here and look after the handbag."

"You won't come back either," I said. I cried even harder. Or if you do, I'll be like a hundred years old and Nayef will still be sixteen."

"Everything will be okay," Grandma said. I wish I could tell you how beautiful she looked right then. It didn't matter if she was lying or if she actually knew that everything was going to be okay. The important thing was how she looked when she said it. She said, with absolute certainty, or maybe with all the skill of a very skillful liar, "My plan will work. First, we go to the library, though. One of the people under the hill just

brought back an Agatha Christie mystery, and I need to return it.”

“We’re going to the library?” I said. “Why don’t we just go home and play Scrabble for a while.” You probably think I was just being sarcastic here, and I was being sarcastic. But Grandma gave me a sharp look. She knew that if I was being sarcastic that my brain was working again. She knew that I knew she was stalling for time. She knew that I was coming up with my own plan, which was a lot like Grandma’s plan, except that I was the one who went into the handbag. How was the part I was working on?

“We could do that,” she said. “Remember, when you don’t know what to do, it never hurts to play Scrabble. It’s like reading the I Ching or tea leaves.”

“Can we please just hurry?” I said.

Grandma just looked at me. “Yasser, we have plenty of time. If you’re going to look after the handbag, you have to remember that. You have to be patient. Can you be patient?”

“I can try,” I told her. I’m trying, Grandma. I’m trying really hard. But it isn’t fair. Nayef is off having adventures and talking to talking animals, and who knows, learning how to fly and some beautiful three-thousand-year-old girl from under the hill is teaching him how to speak fluent Turkish. I bet she lives in a house that runs around on chicken legs, and she tells Nayef that she’d love to hear him play something on the guitar. Maybe you’ll kiss her, Nayef, because she’s put a spell on you. But whatever you do, don’t go up into her house. Don’t fall asleep in her bed. Come back soon, Nayef, and bring the handbag with you.

We hadn't been in the library for five minutes before Grandma picked up a biography of Carl Sagan and dropped it in her purse. She was definitely stalling for time. She was trying to come up with a plan that would counteract the plan that she knew I was planning. I wondered what she thought I was planning. It was probably much better than anything I'd come up with.

"Don't do that!" I said.

"Don't worry," Grandma said. "Nobody was watching."

"I don't care if nobody saw! What if Nayef's sitting there in the boat, or what if he was coming back and you just dropped it on his head!"

"It doesn't work that way," Grandma said. Then she said, "It would serve him right, anyway."

That was when the librarian came up to us. She had a nametag on as well. I was so sick of people and their stupid nametags. I'm not even going to tell you what her name was. "I saw that," the librarian said.

"Saw what?" Grandma said. She smiled down at the librarian, like she was Queen of the Library, and the librarian were a petitioner.

The librarian stared hard at her. "I know you," she said, almost sounding awed, like she was a weekend birdwatcher who just seen Bigfoot. "We have your picture on the office wall. You're Ms. Sheikh. You aren't allowed to check out books here."

"That's ridiculous," Grandma said. She was at least two feet taller than the librarian. I felt a bit sorry for the librarian. After all, Grandma had just stolen a seven-day book. She probably wouldn't return it for a hundred years. My mother has always

made it clear that it's my job to protect other people from Grandma. I guess I was Grandma's guardian before I became the guardian of the handbag.

The librarian reached up and grabbed Grandma's handbag. She was small but she was strong. She jerked the handbag and Grandma stumbled and fell back against a work desk. I couldn't believe it. Everyone except for me was getting a look at Grandma's handbag. What kind of guardian was I going to be?

"Yasser," Grandma said. She held my hand very tightly, and I looked at her. She looked wobbly and pale. She said, "I feel very bad about all of this. Tell your mother I said so."

Then she said one last thing, but I think it was in Osmania.

The librarian said, "I saw you put a book in here. Right here." She opened the handbag and peered inside. Out of the handbag came a long, lonely, ferocious, utterly hopeless scream of rage. I don't ever want to hear that noise again. Everyone in the library looked up. The librarian made a choking noise and threw Grandma's handbag away from her. A little trickle of blood came out of her nose and a drop fell on the floor. What I thought at first was that it was just plain luck that the handbag was closed when it landed. Later on, I was trying to figure out what Grandma said.

My Turkish isn't very good, but I think she was saying something like "Figures. Stupid librarian. I have to go take care of that damn dog." So maybe that's what happened. Maybe Grandma sent part of herself in there with the skinless dog. Maybe she fought it and won and closed the handbag. Maybe she made friends with it. I mean, she used to feed it popcorn at the movies. Maybe she's still in there.

What happened in the library was Grandma sighed a little and closed her eyes. I helped her sit down in a chair, but I don't think she was really there anymore. I rode with her in the ambulance, when the ambulance finally showed up, and I swear I didn't even think about the handbag until my mother showed up. I didn't say a word. I just left her there in the hospital with Grandma, who was on a respirator, and I ran all the way back to the library. But it was closed. So, I ran all the way back again, to the hospital, but you already know what happened, right? Grandma died. I hate writing that. My tall, funny, beautiful, book-stealing, Scrabble-playing, story-telling grandmother died.

But you never met her. You're probably wondering about the handbag. What happened to it? I put up signs all over town, like Grandma's handbag was some kind of lost dog, but nobody ever called.

So that's the story so far. Not that I expect you to believe any of it. Later that night, Hossam and Ahmed came over and we played Scrabble. They don't really like Scrabble, but they feel like it's their job to cheer me up. I won. After they went home, I flipped all the tiles upside-down and then I started picking them up in groups of seven. I tried to ask a question, but it was hard to pick just one. The words I got weren't so great either, so I decided that they weren't English words. They were Turkish words.

Once I decided that, everything became perfectly clear. First I put down "kefir" which means "happy news", and then I got a "b," an "o," an "l," an "e," a "f," another "l," an "s," and a "z." So then I could make "kefir" into "bolekirifisz," which could mean "the happy result of a combination of diligent effort and patience."

I would find the faery handbag. The tiles said so. I would work the clasp and go into the handbag and have my own adventures and would rescue Nayef. Hardly any time would have gone by before we came back out of the handbag. Maybe I'd even make friends with that poor dog and get to say goodbye, for real, to Grandma. Sultan would show up again and be really sorry that he'd missed Grandma's funeral and this time he would be brave enough to tell my mother the whole story. He would tell her that he was her father. Not that she would believe him. Not that you should believe this story. Promise me that you won't believe a word.

Well, it was a dream and it was probably the longest night of the year that I was able to see that dream and to complete it. It still sends shivers down my spine. Grandma had a fortune of laughed when Nayef came back and she saw me looking at him in disbelief. My early memories of childhood are dreamy and full of imagination owing to Grandma. She made sure that I learn how to imagine and be creative. A few of the skills as a psychic that I learnt found their base in Grandma's lap when I was still a child.

She was my mother's mother but she was my friend my teacher and my inspiration as a psychic. She taught me how to feel and understand the souls and how to respond to the signs that a person gives.

1.4 Parents, mischiefs and everything that shaped me

My parents and my grandmother were the only few people who shaped me to what I am today. The stories that were told, the experiences that were shared, the memories that were made had a deep impact on my personality. I have always felt that

grandparents are our first institution. You lose them, you love your institution and your base.

Grandma, my grandmother made my childhood most wonderful. She made sure that I was properly taken care off. While my parents were at work, she took care of me like her own child despite her health. Her stories, her struggle throughout life, the idea of love and care, compassion and everything are something that I learned from her. She passed on the idea that live know no age and no boundaries.

When I was eight, I believed everything Grandma told me. By the time I was thirteen, I didn't believe a single word. When I was fifteen, I saw a man come out of her house and get on Grandma's three-speed bicycle and ride down the street. His clothes looked funny. He was a lot younger than my mother and father, and even though I'd never seen him before, he was familiar. I followed him on my bike, all the way to the grocery store. I waited just past the checkout lanes while he bought peanut butter, Jack Daniels, half a dozen instant cameras, and at least sixty packs of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, three bags of Hershey's kisses, a handful of Milky Way bars and other stuff from the rack of checkout candy. While the checkout clerk was helping him bag up all of that chocolate, he looked up and saw me. "Yasser?" he said. "That's your name, right?"

I turned and ran out of the store. He grabbed up the bags and ran after me. I don't even think he got his change back. I was still running away, and then one of the straps on my flip flops popped out of the sole, the way they do, and that made me really angry so I just stopped. I turned around.

"Who are you?" I said.

But I already knew. He looked like he could have been my mom's younger brother. He was really cute. I could see why Grandma had fallen in love with him.

His name was Sultan. Grandma told my parents that he was an expert in Osmania (Ottoman) folklore who would be staying with her for a few days. She brought him over for dinner. Nayef was there too, and I could tell that Nayef knew something was up. Everybody except my dad knew something was going on.

"You mean Ottoman is a real place?" my mother asked Sultan. "My mother is telling the truth?"

I could see that Sultan was having a hard time with that one. He obviously wanted to say that his wife was a horrible liar, but then where would he be? Then he couldn't be the person that he was supposed to be.

There were probably a lot of things that he wanted to say. What he said was, "This is really good pizza."

Sultan took a lot of pictures at dinner. The next day I went with him to get the pictures developed. He'd brought back some film with him, with pictures he'd taken inside the faery handbag, but those didn't come out well. Maybe the film was too old. We got doubles of the pictures from dinner so that I could have some too. There's a great picture of Nayef, sitting outside on the porch. He's laughing, and he has his hand up to his mouth, like he's going to catch the laugh. I have that picture up on my computer, and also up on my wall over my bed.

I bought a Cadbury Cream Egg for Sultan. Then we shook hands and he kissed me once on each cheek. "Give one of

those kisses to your mother,” he said, and I thought about how the next time I saw him, I might be Grandma’s age, and he would only be a few days older. The next time I saw him, Grandma would be dead. Nayef and I might have kids. That was too weird. I actually believed in my grandmother’s handbag.

Childhood was awesome due to Grandma, Sultan, Nayef, my brother and my parents since they told me life was fun and bright despite all the audacities that it has to offer.

Sultan tried to get Grandma to go with him back to Turkey, to live, but she wouldn’t.

“It makes me dizzy in there,” she used to tell me. “And they don’t have movie theaters. And I have to look after your mother and you. Maybe when you’re old enough to look after the handbag, I’ll poke my head inside, just long enough for a little visit.” Sultan was the person with whom Grandma spent her last days. He used to take both of us to the movies and to the Play land even when we were grownups.

My mischiefs with them knew no bounds. I was the kind of child that needs his guardian to keep a strong eye on him all the time. You look the other way and in a blink of any eye, hey would mess up something. That was me. Yasser, as a kid, was rich with mischiefs. Together with Nayef and my sister, I would turn the house upside down. Grandma used to babysit us and she wasn’t much strict so you can imagine the horrors she could have seen.

Once we were on a family holiday, we went to a city located at the edge of my country, United Arab Emirates, and the town called Ras Al Khaimah. We were so excited, so we went to the top of the mountains. We were with our cousins from my mom

side, and all of us went on a motorbikes trip to the top of the mountains.

Honestly, I was kind of freaking out because my youngest sister and I shared one motorbike then imagine with me that we were at the top of the hills. The weather was foggy then my sister whom I missed and I flipped from the motorbike from the top of the mountain. She took off the motorcycle from me. Then I helped her to get out of the ground, then finally we went to our home and got cleaned up.

Grandma was so angry at us all the time since we brought all the sand on her Ottoman rugs which she adored more than her children and grandchildren. As children, it was fun to make her upset and watch her yell at us. The yelling was always compensated with ice-creams and chocolate by her so we did not bother her yelling at us at all.

This time of leisure soon took its end since my mother felt that its time that I start going to a nursery. I was a fast learner although I had my own hurdles. So, nursery took most of the time I used to spend with Grandma. Nursery paved the way for all the schools that I had to attend in my lifetime.

Family time is something that is still miss since I have been away from my family in North Cyprus. I miss my grandma's talks and store and the world wisdom that was offered to me by my grandfather. There are times when I cherish the childhood that I had spent. There were days when there was no care and no worries. My grandparents and parents made sure that I have the family foundation to grow into a better human being. If they would not have been there to teach me what is right from wrong, I think I would have easily dwelled into wrong paths.

The mischiefs have always been a part of my life and I still do a few of them to amuse my parents and siblings. This is a part

of my personality that I seek what others feel. My grandma has the psychic abilities. Spending time with her allowed me to get some of her abilities as a psychic. From mischiefs at home in the yard to the mischiefs in the nursery home are about to be followed. This was the golden period in so many ways.

Life will always be cheerful and colorful was the only thought that I had in those times.

Life has taken turns but it has taught me a lot, my childhood was a just a trailer of the whole adventure which was about to follow.

Chapter 2: Nursery

Childhood was and will always be the best phase of our life. Because we didn't have any such responsibilities that bend our back with the heavy load of work, which makes us silently cry sometimes. We weren't supposed to make money and neither did we have any dreams, whether small or big.

But as we mature, we are thrown into a world that demands hustle. Go hard or go home, that's the biggest challenge. Office goers reading this would understand this on a deeper level. Nursery was actually the start of all the adult life that I was about to start living. I feel that the day we leave home for school, the childhood period of no responsibilities is more or less over. Everyone who is in their primary schools or in their elementary or high schools are responsible for their homework or assignment or class works. The responsibilities keep on piling up as we grow older. The older we get, the more used to me get to them.

There are some people who love to live this mundane life and then there are some of us who choose not live it like everyone else is living. I was a wild spirit even when I was entering my school on the first day of Nursery. My journey to school and university began in baby steps to the nursery like every other child. However, I was able to develop a few side hobbies to make sure that the mundane and bring routine of school life does not scare the wild spirit out of me.

2.1. The first day to the endless days of school

Believe it or not but the first day of nursery is actually the first day of the countless days that we all spend on our education. It holds a lot of significance to me. Whether I was happy on that or was I crying my heart out to make sure that mom does not leave, are some of the signs which follow us in our adult years. I believe that most children cry on their first days of schools and nurseries because somehow, they know the kind of ordeal that is going to follow them for years. On a lighter note, it's a dilemma that most of us don't remember our first day of the nursery schools. We always have pictures of our nursery days when we are happier.

Luckily enough my father brought this old Nikon camera to nursery on my first day. I was lucky to get shot with the video camera so I can actually watch myself waving my hand off to my parents and grandmother while entering the gate of the nursery. I was not crying at all. But my mother and grandmother were. My dad thinks that it was the funniest part of the 1st day to nursery. It was the parents crying not the child. I still wonder why they were crying. I have asked my mom and she only said that it was probably the fear that I might hurt myself or do any mischief while no one was watching me. I still laugh about it. Nayef was there with me that day. We had a blast. The school was decorated with all the shiny stuff that the management could find. There were colorful charts with spellings, vegetables, fruits and shapes pasted on them. Everything was made colorful to attract our attention. The nursery and teachers made sure that they make us fall in love with the place on the first day.

Nursery teacher had cookies for us in the jars. No matter where our teacher hid the cookie jar. We somehow managed to find it, even if it was hidden under the rock. We would check when

our teacher was gone on a break. So, we could sneak into the room to steal the cookies. However, we made sure to leave the jar half full. Otherwise, she would treat us with a broomstick. And it was a nightmare for us. Nayef and I always had the wildest ideas. The teacher always knew that it was us since she always gave 2 cookies to the rest of the class while we had one to our share in the lunch. It was her way of punishing us to never steal. We stopped one day since stealing was not fun in reality. That nursery teacher never yelled at us or pushed her. Her patience and understanding made us realize our mistake on our own.

2.2. Learning and plays

There are always a lot of firsts in life. The first time you start crawling the first time you take a step, the first day to nursery, the first letter you learn or the first friend you made. Nursery was all about the firsts in life. A lot of things that I am doing right now are definitely owed to the teachers and the staff in my nursery school. I was a fast learner but definitely an easily distracted one. I feel that people who are hardworking are fun for teachers to teach. It is the other ones, the distracted ones, who are the most difficult to teach. They do learn fast but they make you go the harder way for them.

In nursery, I was the sort of student who needed a teacher to keep an eye on him. Nayef and I had a blast in Nursery. We were the only ones who knew each other prior to entering school so it was easy for us to adjust. Presence of Ahmed and Nayef actually made sure that I do not recline into my zone. I was not good at making friends from the start.

Birthday in Nursery as probably my favorite memory of that time. To me, birthday was our “D day” and nobody could scold

us on that occasion. Mum and dad would gulp their anger on our birthday, even if we created menace. Teachers could not scold me on that day. Everyone wanted to make us feel special and loved. Adorning our new dress with a shiny pair of bellies would put a million-dollar smile on our face. I remember I dressed up as a mickey mouse on my first birthday in nursery. Everyone has to dress up on their birthday in some fancy cartoon character. Mickey Mouse was my favorite cartoon at that time. Mum asked me what I wanted to be on my birthday. I answered without blinking my eyes: “Mickey”. As a friendly gesture, I asked Nayef to dress up as well. He wore a Spiderman costume and almost stole the show from me.

My classmates treated me as his Highness. I bathed in popularity. Gave two more extra sweets to our favorite pals and invited them to the evening birthday bash. What fun it was! I might have given a full packet of sweets to Jasmin who was the only girl I adored in Nursery. I still wonder where she is nowadays. She left Dubai after primary school. Her dad was in some business where he had to travel a lot so she had to move with him.

Nursery was more about patience. I loved the outdoor time in the yard. We had tons of swings. I used to take the slide the most. Nayef and I would play around the yard all the time, chasing each other and running wildly like no one in the world would catch us. My free and wild spirit was awakened during the nursery times. Looking back at those times make me wonder the fact that children start learning and adapting to their environments from such a young age. A lot of what I am today is because of what I learnt in those times.

Learning curriculum was easy for us in those days. Mom used to home tutor me so I was all relaxed about my homework. Life was easy. However, the indoor classes were still like a

prison to me. I remember that I used to long for the school bell to ring. Kids have a short attention span and they like to engage in one activity after another. I was one of those kids who just cannot sit around. My ears were stuck to the school bell and I would eagerly wait for it to ring. When we were in class, I wanted to be at the playground, when we were on the playground I wanted to go home.

The excitement during the 3rd period would make me jump to the playfield. While the last few seconds of the 6th period would beckon us to pack our bags and leave for home. My happiness knew no bounds at the off time every day. As much as I enjoyed school, I still wanted to be home in my pajamas watching Mickey Mouse and eating Grandma's chicken sandwich with milkshake.

2.3. Nursery was my happy place

Friends were the reason that Nursery became my happy place. I met Nayef there. He is my best mate till now. Another friend had a fallout with Nayef but Nayef and I are thick as thieves. Our mischiefs the memories we shared and everything that we did together is still close to my heart. Nayef had a special place in my family too. He is a brother to me. I was not friends with Nayef because he was smart. I'm pretty smart myself. I know that smart doesn't mean nice, or even mean that you have a lot of common sense. Look at all the trouble smart people get themselves into.

I was not friends with Nayef because he could make maki rolls and had a black belt in fencing, or whatever it is that you get if you're good in fencing. I was not friends with Nayef because he plays guitar. He's a better soccer player than he is a guitar player.

Those were the reasons why I was friends with Nayef. That, and because he asked me to be a part of his family after his mother passed away. He asked if I wanted to go see a movie with him after his mother passed, and I asked if I could bring my grandmother and Ahmed. He said sure and so all four of us sat and watched “Bring It On” and every once in a while, Grandma dropped a couple of milk duds or some popcorn into her purse. I don’t know if she was feeding the dog, or if she’d opened the purse the right way, and was throwing food at her husband.

I was friends with Nayef because he told stupid knock-knock jokes to Ahmed and was respectful to everyone. He took us home and walked up to the front door.

I was the one to whom Nayef first confessed his liking for a neighborhood girl. His respect and admiration for her was paramount. He never tried to objectify her in any manner. I guess the loss of his mother taught him a lot. Once he just gave me this really big hug and told me that I am the brother that he never had and I am more his family than his dad and new mom.

That made me feel weird, but in a good way. We stood there and hugged each other and I felt so good. I felt so happy.

Although Nursery sounded all fun and games, a part of me was still shy. I was a very naughty kid in front of my parents and my friends. Other than that, it was hard to even know who I was. I was a shy kid and shyness took a long time to go away.

Chapter 3: Primary school

Nursery is a different world from school. You can wear whatever you want. You can eat anytime you like. You can cry whenever you want and you are given proper attention. However, school is a big upscale from Nursery. You are on our own. You have to act and present yourself in a perfect manner. The first day at the primary school is a story worth to tell.

3.1. Nightmares of the 1st day

I was shy when I was young and when it came to talking to people who were unfamiliar to me, I was a disaster. I only liked two places — my home and the sweet shop on my street.

One day, my father woke me up early in the morning and asked me to dress up. My mother gave me very different clothes to wear. I became confused, so I asked my father about it. He said that we were going to a shop, a place I would love to go. I smiled, but I did not understand why I was wearing those clothes. I thought it was not the right time to ask such a question as my father was in a hurry. I quickly sat in the car and my father drove away.

During the drive, I wondered, ‘My favorite shop is not that far, so what kind of shop is papa taking me to and that also so early in the morning?’

After half an hour, the car came to a halt. As I peered from the window, I saw an unfamiliar place. Before I could think more, I heard my father’s voice, “Let’s go son.”

I held my father's hand and walked along him. It seemed like a house, and not like a shop. I saw many other kids wearing the same dress as I was wearing, I looked at my father in astonishment and he knew what I was thinking, so he said, "You will see and learn wonderful things from now on!"

Well I didn't understand that. So, when I walked a few more steps, my father said, "Go son! It's your day, enjoy!"

Tears started welling in my eyes as I had never had a moment in life when I was away from both my parents. I saw my father smiling and standing still as he urged me to move towards a gate.

Before I could run back to him, I heard a sweet voice, "Come on, dear. There's no need to cry, there are lots and lots of your friends waiting for you inside!"

It was my teacher but I didn't know it at that time of course. She held my hand and took me to a room where there were many other kids wearing the same clothes as I was, and they all looked bewildered too. But this wasn't what I was worried about, I was worrying about my father. Where was he and where was I?

The next few hours went by and I did nothing but cry and yes, many other kids also cried. Then, the same teacher who had taken me to the classroom came and assembled us all and took us out. I again started to cry but once I saw my father, my tears dried, I ran towards him and hugged him tight.

"So, how was your day, son?" my father asked while smiling. I was silent as I didn't know what to answer. But somewhere deep inside my heart, there was a thrill, a thrill to know a new place, meet new kids, all the things I experienced there, thus I

promised myself that I would come back to this shop every day!

The life after the first day sort of started to fall in the right place. I was able to find my friend Nayef who made sure that primary school does not seem new to me. I was able to go into my comfort zone as the school went into its normal proceedings. Going back from school to home and then back to school the next morning stayed to be my life for many years. I was able to discover my love for science in those years. There were times when it had to wait for dad to come back from work to help me with mathematics since that subject was beyond my grandma and a little above me too. I was always dreadful at mathematics. As much as I loved science, I never made myself to love mathematics.

In primary, I was actually involved in doing debates and quizzes. Science quizzes always motivated me to learn more. Even my teachers in the school saw that. The project designing competition was the yearly annual festival in the school that I always waited for. One year while we were learning about the water cycle, I decided to make the entire model for water cycle for the competition. Nayef and I were able to get the first prize for that. The trouble and the hard work that went into it from both of us and our parents was paramount.

3.2. How I fell in love with my school

Here we go, I can't describe the smile I got on my face when I decided to share this with every single one of you. Speaking of school, the first day of going to school was terrible and messed up for me because I didn't accept the idea of going to the school at all, I forced my father to spend the two months with me at the school just because I couldn't feel safe with too many

people. I remember getting zero marks in everything I do in my first grade. I used to pretend to get sick every day just to stay away from school and spend the morning in my mom's lap crying. I was only a child; you can't blame me.

To be honest, I feel I will never be able to act big and strong in front of my mom; I just can't handle it. Let's get back to where we were; I accepted going to school alone in my second grade. I got used to my friends there but I was the type that you don't see me outside much. When the days passed, I start playing and hanging out with my friends outside the school. One day, I woke up to be the most famous guy in my school because that day, I was going to my first class in the morning I was grade six that day, and the school principal was calling out my name loudly in the school microphone to come to him, but I did not. From that day until now, I don't know why I didn't reply to my school principal when he called out my name. School time was great for me because I had a lot of fun with my friends. My school was beautiful. There are lovely, lush gardens with beautiful plants and trees and it wasn't that much far from my home it was like 10 to 15 kilometers away. And I go by bus to school every morning. Then I owned a car in my grade 10. High school was a lot of work and study, so I was studying a lot until I graduated with excellent marks. I never expected that one day would come for me to say it, but here I am saying it. I miss school a lot. I miss the olden days.

My mischiefs in school actually made me a lot more popular than my other skills. I was a big WWE fan. Nayef and Ahmed had the same ideas. We used to practice it with each other at home. For us, it wasn't harmful in any manner. Back in the heydays of childhood. We immersed ourselves in watching all sort of shows from cartoons, melodramatic soap operas, music channels to fight shows. The most popular among them was

WWE. It got so much hype that kids used to collect Trump cards of the Top WWE wrestlers.

We would glue our eyes to the WrestleMania match and learn their moves, only to revise them. A budget WWE was held at home with pillows tucked on all four corners of the bed. And the quilt was placed on the edge of the bed for safety purposes. We would choke slam our siblings and enjoy the Junior WWE, that we held at home. However, one such event was held in the school during the lunch break where I and Nayef were trying to scare off a few other boys from the other 2nd grade. The Junior WWE took some bad turns. One of the other boys from 2nd grade gave me a big blow on the face which could have knocked me out. I survived and attacked back which resulted in a head bang in the wall. The boy had a huge bump over his head. What followed next was a visit to the principal's office and warning letters to our parents. Since the idea of Junior WWE came from me and Nayef, the school management had to put us under scrutiny. It wasn't even the hard part. I got a pretty good treatment in the form of smacking from my mother. That day is still in my mind like it happened yesterday. A pretty good beat up from your mother can actually kill the ghost of WWE in you.

My only look out for the hot summers during school was the ice cream time. Summers were terrible for me. It made me sweat and scratch my back. The only relief was seeing the ice-cream man emerging from the street far away, screaming, "ice-cream, ice-cream" on top of his voice. The school canteen offered ice-cream as well.

I would request to my parents to give me a dirham or two. So, I could have my favorite Mango bar. Licking the fruity ice-cream bar was like a treat to my jaded palates. However, one bar was never enough. I always made sure that I keep a couple

of Dirham hidden somewhere which I would take from Grandma by doing simple chores for her. Those dirhams made sure that I had an ice cream treat every day.

3.3. How primary school shaped me

I don't think me or anyone could be flawless because we human are always making mistakes. I don't see myself as the ultimate person because I simply made too many mistakes in my life, and I still might make many other mistakes, which I don't even know about yet, but I know when to do something about it. I am trying to do my best to not get in any mistakes in this life, but I ended up being in the same box but different levels, experience has taught me is making mistakes is very beneficial for my own sake because it shows me new lessons and I won't hesitate to accept that fact there are mistakes that we all make. It takes a brave heart to admit those mistakes and amend them.

Primary school was full of mischiefs, fun and banter of all sorts. I played sports and took active part in curricular activities. It was the extracurricular like drama classes that scared me. I was not good at presenting myself since I was always a shy person. It was the next phase of my life where that problem was solved. Primary actually taught me that I was a lot more confident person that I ever thought I was. Sports and quizzes brought the best out of me. Once on a Parents-Teachers meeting, one of my teachers told my mother that he believes that I am in my nutshell right now. It will take me some time to get out of it. That gave me a lot of confidence that there is latest someone how noticed me and how I am trying a lot harder to break the shell and grow more as a person.

By far the most emotional day of school I've ever experienced was the last day of year 6. I came to school thinking it would just be another normal last day of school. It turned out to be the complete opposite.

The thought of not seeing friends and teachers again was very saddening. This caused an endless number of tears to come out of everybody's eyes, including the year six teachers! We were all an emotional wreck. This went on from about an hour after recess til the start of lunch and even during lunch there were still innumerable people crying. After lunch was assembly. All the year 6's were meant to do a flash mob for the last part of the assembly, but I didn't know how we were possibly going to do it in the state we were all in. All of a sudden, the music started and everybody's face just lit up and we sprang into action. It was perfect. The entire assembly loved it.

The bell rang and that's when all the crying started again except this time it was twice as bad. There were probably only a handful of kids, including myself, whose faces didn't look like a river was flowing through it. Even though I wasn't crying I still felt very sad because two of my best friends were moving out of Dubai and my other three best friends weren't even going to the same middle school as me. However, my best mate Nayef was still there to accompany me.

All the crying had eventually stopped at around 3 'o' clock and everybody went home.

I always loved and hated primary school at the same time, but now I wish I was back there with all my friends playing rugby with not a worry in the world.

Primary school prepared me for the best big step. I was aware of the challenges that would come. I was fully aware of the fact that I had to shape myself into a more confident and better

being to be able to face the world. It was during that time that I got interested in music, shooting and psychic evaluations. Sports and dramatics came a bit later.

The elementary school took the young mold of the primary school and shaped it into a semi solid one for the elementary school. My life has been an amalgam of adventures, learnings and hard work.

Chapter 4: Elementary School

4.1. New Beginnings

Elementary school was a huge step up for me in so many ways. Not only I had to get out of my comfort zone way too much, I had to be more expressive and confident in many ways. This was an ordeal for me in the first six months. As much as I was in love with primary school, I always felt that there was always something missing from me in elementary school.

I felt stressed out and distracted all the time. However, I feel that God has His own ways to help us. My aid came in the form of a dog. When I was 8 years old my parents made all of us siblings to help out back to clear out the weeds that had taken over our backyard. It was going to take a while because how crazy it was, but I was taking even longer to help because I was so distracted by the cute puppy our next-door neighbor had.

I found out that his parents were going to take him back to the shelter because their son wasn't taking good care of him like he promised. They offered to sell him to me for 20 dirham and I had that saved up, so I went back and forth begging my parents if we could get him. They finally caved and he became our pet.

I named him Snoopy and have never been as happy as I was that day. I was an only child, so I looked so much forward to having a dog to play with and go on adventures with. It's definitely my favorite memory, because he meant too much to me in the almost 17 years, he was a part of my life. Snoopy brought a lot more belonging in my life. He was the one I

shared my deepest worries and concerns. I was able to tell him about my anxieties. It helped me in voicing my opinions in the perfect manner.

Snoop's inclusion in life actually settled the storm in my elementary school life. I was the sort of person who was hard to reach. Nobody knows me entirely because I am the type of person who could disappear in a second, and no one in the world would know where I am; I've been self-isolating for two years, so the word isolated expresses the meaning of my life. Can you tell me that you truly know me! Never because I never say a word without knowing where it comes. This was something that became a big part of my personality in the Elementary School. I spoke less, I kept everything to myself.

4.2. My quite corner

Elementary school was a period where I was able to discover myself as a person who values personal growth and time more than anything. We used to play this game called 'Shark Attack' when I was in elementary. It was a big deal for the kids in our cul-de-sac. We got around 20 to 30 players for each game. The faster (usually older kid) would be the shark. Anyway, it was basically the most intense game of tag ever. Kids would climb on roofs, hop fences, and hide in sewers to escape the shark. Whenever the shark tagged another player, they too would become a shark, and hunt the remaining players. I usually got caught right away because I was pretty slow, and my brother and his friends would go out of the way to find me first.

Well one game I decided to hide in my neighbor's shed. It was unlocked and you could lock it from the inside. It would have been the perfect hiding spot if it wasn't for the heat. As I was waiting for the sharks to find the remaining players, I decided

to look around the shed. There were quite a few bins, and I was super curious to see what was inside being a noisy little eight year and all.

I took a bin down and opened one. They were full of Ninjas. Not your everyday generic Plastic Ninjas but event Ninjas. Ninjas from the '60s, '70s, '80s, holiday Ninjas, and rare limited-edition ones too. I wasn't a fan of Ninjas when I was kid. They kind of made me feel insecure. I preferred stuff like Mickey and Tom, but these Ninjas were beautiful. So powerful. Colorful, classic, and great.

I won the game, and that she became my club house. I'd go there every day and just look at the Ninjas. Read the stories. Pretend. Well anyway, one day the owner caught me. I was tearing up in fear. I begged her not to call my parents. I told her it was my hiding spot. She didn't call my folks. Instead, she invited me inside. Her house was magical. She didn't have kids, but her house was full of toys. Her husband collected Legos and Hot Wheels, and she collected Ninjas and Barbies. Their basement was insane. Lego models everywhere. We ended up talking about Ninjas for hours, and she let me keep two. It is a really nice memory. Her kindness was something I still admire today.

4.3. Elementary school and the adventures it followed

The Graffiti artist in me was awake in my elementary school years. The adventures of elementary school taught me a lot about the psychic part of my personality. I learned about the perception one has about others, how people feel and perceive how they respond to you and how one has to be on his own. Sports and plays were an integral part of my elementary life.

Nayef and I had hard time in coping up with the life at school but with each other, we did. Since I was little and innocent, I usually owned a crazy imagination, conjuring up imaginary events which cause other things to happen, events that can be absolutely discombobulating to adults. Thinking back, the stories I had in my mind are almost impossible for me to conceive now!

At Elementary school there was a fenced forest on the north-eastern side of the yard of the school playground, and we would make cubbies with leaves, branches and palm fronds. In the yard, the majority of the trees had initials etched onto them. Now, of course, we knew they were graffiti, but no, that was too much of a boring story for some humble grade sevens. Instead, the etchings were letters of an anagram which were to be jumbled to spell the name of another place where there were more etchings to be jumbled, and so on.

Every recess and lunch for nearly five weeks we would pop out of class with pencils, paper and dictionaries (The dictionaries were for trying to find words that fit, so don't think we were idiots) and try to solve the mysterious riddle of the tree etchings. Now, although our teacher was awesome, we still did not have a great vocabulary. So, recess became "puzzle solving class number one", lunch evolved to be "puzzle solving class number two," and sadly, most of the time we didn't reveal anything interesting at all.

I now shall brand into your brains the story of the last lunchtime we ventured into the yard, where the good and the bad united to make quite a peculiar lunch. Nayef and few others and I were, well, in the forest of course.

I opened our dictionary (or magnificently useful invention, as an English teacher would say) to a random page and stared at an eighteen-letter word I hadn't seen before, to see if it fit.

"No," I said to them, opening another page. I counted the letters out loud this time. "F... yeah... E... yep..." and...

"FER-RO-MAG-MI-DI... FERROMAGNE-TIB... FERROMAGNETISM! Eureka! (I'd been studying the gold rush, so I knew what eureka meant) Yay! Yay! Yay!"

"We should check if they're right to make sure" Nayef pointed out.

Now, I was tired and aggravated, so I didn't want to check, but they stipulated, so I endured the task... drum roll... and... "NO!" There were two more letters on a different tree. "The person who did this is a silly Billy! Hoof" I stormed out.

Having an amazing imagination is usually great, but on occasions it can drive you up the wall like a supercar. So, the letters on the trees were initials of people who hardly made any sense but at that time we made sure that we lose a lot of our precious playing time in trying to make sense of those graffiti's. Not that we tried our own versions but the time lost still makes me angry.

4.4. Elementary and the life lessons

School plays were always a nightmare for me. It took me a lot of time to make sure that I am ready for them beforehand since I always had to participate as per the school curriculum. Since I was always a shy child school plays were not my major. I always tried to sneak out of them. One summer in elementary school was actually memorable. It changed my perspective

about being confident and why one should never bother what people think of them. There is more to life than being subjected to judgments.

We had just got back from holiday break and it was time to audition for the Lower School play. This year we were putting on Robin Hood. I was in fourth grade, so I had to audition for one of the lead roles. I didn't want to audition but I had to, so I auditioned for the role of Robin. I practiced and practiced. My drama teacher even gave me a red hood to play so that it would sound like I was actually in the character. I kept practicing and practicing and I soon felt good about the role and my gestures and acting. I wasn't scared or nervous for the auditions because I knew I was good.

Soon, the day was here for the auditions. When it was my turn, I walked slowly down the stairs to the music room. As I got closer to the classroom, my heart started to pound and my lips started to shake. I realized that I was terrified and I knew something bad was going to happen. I had to enter the room even though I was dreading it. As soon as I walked in, I saw all of my teachers smiling at me and waiting for me to act. I was afraid to act or even talk! I couldn't get a single word to come out of my mouth and it seemed like talking and singing were against the rules. This wasn't a surprise, though. I don't like to be the center of attention and I've always had stage fright. I realized I had to do something, so I tried to sing the first two or three measures of the song, but I couldn't. I got so scared that I started to cry. I told the teachers I couldn't do it but they kept telling me to keep going. After a few minutes, the teachers told me it was okay and they let me go. I wasn't happy with myself and I knew I blew my chances of getting the part.

The principal stayed by my side for the rest of the day. I knew I couldn't change what had happened in the past but I could try

again. During recess, I asked him if I could have a second try. He told me it was okay with him but I had to ask my drama teacher first. She told me I could try again! This time I acted loudly and with pride. I was proud of myself and so were my parents. I got the lead part and I had a great time.

Looking back at that day, I am proud of myself and I'm happy that I went back and tried again. I bet that if I hadn't, I would have never auditioned for the Middle School plays and I wouldn't be the person I am today.

My acting stint never ended there. I explored more plays in the coming years of the elementary school. The next summer we thought that we should have a bit of fun. We had prepared a little play and we put up a show for the parents: Peter Pan. Everybody had a costume with guns, crowns, big moustaches, colorful clown clothes. I was different! I was dressed like a captain, with a graceful yet sleek dress, with a hook because I was Captain Hook. I wore shiny white shoes and had all the gears of a ship captain. Can you imagine how special I felt that day? I think I strutted a little as I was walking around.

I remember I had to take care of the rest of the characters and treat them like a leader. I had to act serious and responsible and so I did. Everybody who saw me said I was serious and confident and I knew that. But when I was there, on stage, I knew I was more than that: I was the most special of all!

After that day, I used to wear my special captain hat almost every day. It made me so happy, it just reminded me how special I felt and how magic the day had been.

This installed confidence in me to aim for bigger. I was finally realizing that people's opinion of you does not matter much if you are confident. My family supported me in all of this. My friend was there with me to support me. I gained the

confidence to enter high school which was a big and scary place to me in those years. I always thought that high school was all about bullying and get beaten up as shown in the Hollywood movies. No positive thing entered my mind in the summer break that year. Everything that I thought of as a teenager to enter high school was self-defense and the coping mechanisms.

I think people who think a lot develop a connection with the place long before they e actually there. I actually developed a connection with high school long before I was actually there. The connection was based on survival instincts and defense. All I wanted to do in high school was to make sure that I don't get bullied and get back into myself. I was confident enough to give back what was offered to me. My grandpa was the person who instilled that confidence in me. He was the sort of person who would conquer any room the moment he would enter in it. Such was his confidence. I hardly had alone time with him during his life except for one night during the summers. I woke up and I saw him in the kitchen munching on his midnight snacks. He offered me Doritos and dates which he loved to eat during the night. We sat in his bedroom and talked till the Far prayer. He talked about his life and what made him to give back and take thing as they come rather than overthinking about them.

That was one of those nights where he actually told me to get over my fears. He told me that growth is always time taking. It will take time for me to grow into the person that aspire to be one day. He asked me to find a perfect role model for life and shape myself to be like that. I don't have to be a carbon copy of that person. I can aspire to become like one while staying and holding my ground.

He asked me to never lose my confidence for anything for anyone. He told me his life struggle and how he is content now. The main reason he told me was the efforts that he had put into himself throughout his life. I talked to him about my fears for the high school. I opened up to him like a kid is opening up to his guardian angel. He listened to all my concerns and answered them. He told me that he has been proud of me for the efforts I have been putting in making myself more confident.

He gave me the valuable insights into life especially about carrying myself in high school. “No matter what, your confidence will carry you to places that you never thought you would go to. Wear your confidence like an armor and fight out that worries you”, he told me. The advice stayed me all the time until now. He asked me to be aggressive if aggression was offered to me. “Yasser, remember that you have to stand out and be aggressive if there is anything wrong happening. Not saying a complete No is actually saying yes to it”, he said in an affirmative tone.

That was the final lesson that I got in my elementary school prior to high school. I had to stand up for myself and for others if there was anything working happening at any point. High school seemed pretty easy after that night.

Chapter 5: High school

For most of us, high school is always a milestone that we remember for the rest of our lives. You will probably have the most of your photos from that period of your life. That is because high school actually offers a lot more experience. The age of children in high school is such that new experiences are always a temptation to them. However, the fun banter of the primary school can easily lead to an ugly fight in high school. There is more rage and aggressiveness in the high school than in any other premises in the world. The young minds want to topple each other in every way. The competition, the aggressive, the rawness of emotions and the temptations of the high school are not a hype at all. They are real and everyone has to go through them at some point of his life. My first day at high school was big leap that I had to take.

In my opinion, the big leap is the right world to use. You take a huge leap and a jump from your childhood to the early adolescent years in high school. There is a lot more responsibility that comes with this leap. Here is how it went for me in high school. The rollercoaster ride of emotions and drama was something high school was all about.

5.1. The big leap

The big leap was the first day high school. It is hard to tell you the way I felt about my first day of high school but if I tell how it all it went then maybe you will understand. I woke up this morning excited but, nervous as today was the day, I would begin my journey of high school. Thousands of

though it's rushed through my mind. Will I fit in? Will I make new friends? Will I have nice teachers? Will I have bullied? That's when I panicked but my mum assured me, I would be fine if I followed school rules and did what was asked. I had my best mate with me so there was a little to worry. High school seemed like a place where I was going get changed for the better.

So, I went in my uniform and smile hoping for best outcome possible. My bag weighed me down but, I stood up tall and proud. Ahmed, Nayef and I met at the school hall with welcoming smiles and sat in our classes. I could feel the tension the air then I knew I was not the only one feeling this way.

We then had a tour of the school and were shown everything would be. I just hoped I could remember it all when I needed to. Then we headed off to our first class to meet our fellow class mates. I was happy with my class as not one kid in my class was mean or nasty to one or another. As the lunch bell rang chaos arose kids running and screaming ever where dashing to tuck shop hoping not to get caught in the line-up of course. I went and sat down with Nayef year we chatted about our holidays and what their first lesson of high school was like. Before we knew it, we were back in class.

We got to know our teachers a bit more my prayers had been answers we had the best teachers of all. The teachers weren't strict nor grumpy or mean. They were friendly and nice how all teachers should be.

Before I knew the day was over. I don't know why I panicked or was scared at all. High school may seem scary but it's just like primary or kindergarten. My first day of high school taught me, I shouldn't be so quick judge about something, I haven't

even tried. As high school was not lame; scary or bad as thought it would be but, the funniest thing I have done in the last 13 years.

The class room adventures of the high school can be based on a whole new book. The students were always up to something. They had something up their sleeves all the time.

5.2. High school and the early days

The early days of high school were an amalgam of confusion and excitement. There were countless times when we entered the wrong class or even forgot which room to go to for the next class. This confusion lead to a lot of dramatic events which still make me laugh my heart out.

One such involves me in the most hilarious manner. Having spent 11 years being solidly uncool, I was determined to keep my head down and make it to start of summers. When the bell rang at the end of the first day, I realized I really needed to pee. The only problem? I didn't know where any of the bathrooms were. Soon I was lost, winding in big, panicky loops around the building as crowds of teens pushed by. I tried to look confident. I didn't get up at 7 a.m. that morning to take a bath and get all dressed up. But inside I was thinking, so this is how it all ends for me.

Finally, bingo! Spotting the universal "men's washroom" stick-figure symbol, I rushed inside. It wasn't until I stepped out of the stall to wash my hands that I realized every other person in the room seemed older than me. That's weird, I thought. Do students and teachers share bathrooms at this school?

"You're not supposed to be in here," one of the faculty members said. Muttering an apology, I left, drying my hands

on my jeans. Sure enough, on the door outside, big letters spelled out “TEACHERS ONLY.” My hopes of keeping a low profile were instantly dashed: the halls were still crowded and everyone saw me coming out. Their looks seemed to say, Ugh, what a teacher’s pet. He even whizzes with the faculty.

That’s what happens when you are too busy trying to keep yourself on the right path. My friends including Nayef has a blast that day when they came to know of the whole incident. Our Economics teacher saw me in the washroom that day and funnily enough, he cracked a joke in the class which even made me laugh.

5.3. Lessons amid education and sports

High school was all about sports and education. You hardly have time to think about anything else in those times. Summers was the time when we actually had the time to put our feet down. The summers in UAE are particularly harsh so those days were spent at home. Sports played a key role in shaping me to be a more athletic and stronger headed person. There are countless stories of the sports field which I can tell. I was a part of the school shooting team. I played soccer as well. My coach was particularly impressed with my shooting skills.

It was one hot day in Dubai in in early September. I walked over to the high school with my heavy book bag slung over my shoulder,

Filled with excitement, filled with anticipation, filled with curiosity, I walked past the football field of the school.

By using the shortcut through a hedge, I walked over the football field, dew leaping from the toes of his shoes, grasshoppers jumping out of my path. I saw a couple of boys

playing at the distant corner of the ground. I heard someone calling me and the moment I turned back, I was down on the ground with a punch right to my face. It was the Grade 8 midfielder Asim who thought of me as an intruder. I was completely baffled. Right there, the Sports Coach intervened and gave Asim the warning and he walked away.

Coach stepped forward, pulled me away and asked me why I was on the field. I told him about my aspiration to play football. The coach then helped me up and surveyed the damage to my face. The man said, "First the nurse, but I'm afraid you're going to the principal too, Yasser."

"Yasser?" he asked.

"You want to know what I think the biggest difference is between being a child and being an adult?"

"What's that?"

"Knowing the difference between the times you have to fight and the times you should walk away. You know what I'm saying?"

I nodded.

"Good. Now go see the nurse. Get that cut cleaned up."

As I walked sullenly toward the door, Coach called, "Oh, Yasser?"

I turned. "About those times you do have to fight?" The man pointed a stubby finger at me. "You better learn to watch out for left hooks. Or you're going to lose some teeth."

"I'll do that, coach." That was my first introduction to sports and the Sports Coach.

Now, this hot, hot day of school, trudging through the dewy grass, I shifted my heavy book bag to the other shoulder, and thought about how the coach's words had really made a difference in the way I looked at life. High school was definitely worth a lot of life lessons.

I thought about the time our English teacher had given the class a writing assignment. "Write about summer vacation," she said. "Be as creative as you can. But," the stern woman added, as she always did, "make sure you use proper spelling and grammar."

Well, that night I sat at his desk at home and stared unhappily at a blank sheet of paper. I didn't want to write a stupid essay about my summer vacation. For one thing it'd been a dog. A water park, two weeks of camp, his paper route. Boring . . . I had actually been happy to get back to school.

So, I gave up on the assignment and wrote what I wanted to. Not an essay at all but a short story. Science fiction. It was about a distant planet that didn't have summer—it was spring all the time. And it didn't have vacations either. The aliens on the planet worked 24 four hours a day.

The next morning, I handed in the story but that night I lay awake until three a.m., thinking, why did I do that? I totally ignored the assignment. What the heck was I thinking of? And here English was his favorite class. Maybe it'd take my English Teacher a few days to grade the essays. I'd beg her for a chance to write another one, the sort she wanted.

But when I got to class the next morning it turned out that she had read and graded the essays.

And when I saw the way she glanced at me with a strange look in her stern, psychic eyes, I wished I'd stayed home sick.

The teacher said, “I’m going to pass back your summer vacation essays in a minute, but I want to say something first. When you write, when you put your words out for other people to read, you have to learn to take criticism. You have to remember that a critic’s words aren’t attacking you as human beings; they’re only an opinion about something you’ve created, no matter how harsh the opinion seems. . . . And in this case, I’m afraid I’ve got some rather harsh words to say.”

I’m in trouble, I thought, blushing already. Staring at the floor.

She continued, “Almost everyone in class wrote an essay about his or her summer vacation Almost everyone.”

This’s bad, I thought. I’m getting an F, I know it.

“But,” the teacher said, “One student decided he didn’t feel like doing that.”

I glanced up long enough to see her eyes focused on him.

This’s worse than an F. I’m in note-to-the-parents territory now.

Then she looked away from me and studied the rest of the class. “All of your essays read as if they were written in your sleep. It’s clear to me that you didn’t take the assignment seriously and none of you spent more than ten minutes on it. Just one of you had the courage to be as imaginative as I asked you to be. Yasser is only one who got an A on the assignment. Now I’m going to ask him to come up here and read his story to you as an example of thinking independently and being creative.” She added sternly, “Though he should’ve a little more attention to proper spelling and grammar.”

I walked to the front of the classroom in triumph, as if he were climbing to the summit of Mount Everest or were the first person to step onto the surface of Mars.

What a small thing really, I reflected as I dodged through the crowded hallway, just a single assignment. But what a difference that moment had made to me.

It taught me that I can be imagined in the right manner and still convey my message. It was a triumph that I would be seeking for the rest of my life.

5.4. Adulthood and all its perks

Adulthood came with a lot of perks in terms of friends and all the energy and the madness that came in life. Dubai has all the charm that a young mind would love to adapt to. The High school in Dubai has endless memories and stories to tell. As far as my story goes, I dwelled in madness and mischief all my life. My friends' group was the sort of group which everyone in the school wanted to join. We went through the nursery to high school together. Watching each other grow up right in front of our eyes allowed us to know one another from the core. Adulthood came with the freedom from the parents. The pocket money was always enough to go on some crazy ideas back then. The stores of high school still make me smile. It was a time that was both entertaining and learning. We learnt some lessons the easy way while some came to us the harder

I used to go to thrift stores with my friends. We'd take the train into Sharjah, and go to Textile Souk, which is this huge vintage clothing warehouse. Everything is arranged by color, and somehow that makes all of the clothes beautiful. It's kind of like if you went through the wardrobe in the Narnia books,

only instead of finding Aslan and the White Witch and horrible Eustace, you found this magic clothing world—instead of talking animals, there were feather boas and wedding dresses and bowling shoes, and paisley shirts and Doc Martens and everything hung up on racks so that first you have black dresses, all together, like the world’s largest indoor funeral, and then blue dresses—all the blues you can imagine—and then red dresses and so on. Pink-reds and orangey reds and purple-reds and exit-light reds and candy reds. Sometimes I would close my eyes and Nayef would drag me over to a rack, and rub a dress against my hand. “Guess what color this is.”

We had this theory that you could learn how to tell, just by feeling, what color something was. For example, if you’re sitting on a lawn, you can tell what color green the grass is, with your eyes closed, depending on how silky-rubbery it feels. With clothing, stretchy velvet stuff always feels red when your eyes are closed, even if it’s not red. Nayef was always best at guessing colors, but Nayef is also best at cheating at games and not getting caught.

One time we were looking through kid’s t-shirts and we found a Muppets t-shirt that had belonged to me in third grade. We knew it belonged to me, because it still had my name inside, where my mother had written it in permanent marker, when I went to summer camp. Nayef bought it back for me, because he was the only one who had money that weekend. He was the only one who had a job.

Maybe you’re wondering what a guy like Nayef is doing in Textile Souk with a bunch of boys. The thing about Nayef is that he always has a good time, no matter what he’s doing. He likes everything, and he likes everyone, but he likes me best of

all. Wherever he is now, I bet he's having a great time and wondering when I'm going to show up. I'm always running late. But he knows that.

We had this theory that things have life cycles, the way that people do. The life cycle of wedding dresses and feather boas and t-shirts and shoes and handbags involves the Textile Souk. If clothes are good, or even if they're bad in an interesting way, the Textile Souk is where they go when they die. You can tell that they're dead, because of the way that they smell. When you buy them, and wash them, and start wearing them again, and they start to smell like you, that's when they reincarnate. But the point is, if you're looking for a particular thing, you just have to keep looking for it. You have to look hard.

Down in the basement at the Textile Souk they sell clothing and beat-up suitcases and teacups by the pound. You can get eight pounds worth of prom dresses—a slinky black dress, a poufy lavender dress, a swirly pink dress, a silvery, starry lame dress so fine you could pass it through a key ring— for 5 dirhams. I go there every week, hunting for Grandmother Grandma's faery handbag.

The faery handbag: It's huge and black and kind of hairy. Even when your eyes are closed, it feels black. As black as black ever gets, like if you touch it, your hand might get stuck in it, like tar or black quicksand or when you stretch out your hand at night, to turn on a light, but all you feel is darkness.

Fairies live inside it. I know what that sounds like, but it's true.

Grandma said it was a family heirloom. She said that it was over two hundred years old. She said that when she died, I had to look after it. Be its guardian. She said that it would be my responsibility.

I said that it didn't look that old, and that they didn't have handbag two hundred years ago, but that just made her cross. She said, "So then tell me, Yasser, darling, where do you think old ladies used to put their reading glasses and their heart medicine and their knitting needles?"

I know that no one is going to believe any of this. That's okay. If I thought you would, then I couldn't tell you. Promise me that you won't believe a word. That's what Grandma used to say to me when she told me stories. At the funeral, my mother said, half-laughing and half-crying, that her mother was the world's best liar. I think she thought maybe Grandma wasn't really dead. But I went up to Grandma's coffin, and I looked her right in the eyes. They were closed. The funeral parlor had made her up with blue eye shadow, and blue eyeliner. She looked like she was going to be a news anchor on Fox television, instead of dead. It was creepy and it made me even sadder than I already was. But I didn't let that distract me.

"Okay, Grandma," I whispered. "I know you're dead, but this is important. You know exactly how important this is. Where's the handbag? What did you do with it? How do I find it? What am I supposed to do now?"

Of course, she didn't say a word. She just lay there, this little smile on her face, as if she thought the whole thing—death, blue eye shadow, Nayef, the handbag, faeries, Scrabble, all of it—was a joke. She always did have a weird sense of humor. That's why she and Nayef got along so well.

After he got expelled, everybody at school called him Nayef the helpless instead of Nayef. Everybody except for me. I'll explain why, but you have to be patient. It's hard work telling everything in the right order.

Nayef was smarter and also taller than most of our teachers. Not quite as tall as me. We've known each other since childhood. He has always been in love with some girl in his neighborhood. He says he was in love with her even before third grade, even before they ever met. It took me a while to fall in love with that joke of Nayef and his brotherly support and wisdom.

In third grade, Nayef knew everything already, except how to make friends. He used to follow me around all day long. It made me so mad that I kicked him in the knee. When that didn't work, I threw his backpack out of the window of the school bus. That didn't work either, but the next year Nayef took some tests and the school decided that he could skip fourth and fifth grade. Even I felt sorry for Nayef then. Sixth grade didn't work out. When the sixth graders wouldn't stop flushing his head down the toilet, he went out and caught a skunk and set it loose in the boy's locker room.

The school was going to suspend him for the rest of the year, but instead Nayef took two years off while his mother home-schooled him. He learned Latin and Hebrew and English, how to write sestinas, how to make sushi, how to play bridge, and even how to knit. He learned fencing and ballroom dancing. He worked in a soup kitchen and made a Super Eight movie about Civil War reactors who play extreme croquet in full costume instead of firing off cannons. He started learning how to play guitar. He even wrote a novel. I've never read it—he says it was awful.

When he came back two years later, because his mother had cancer for the first time, the school put him back with our year, in seventh grade. He was still way too smart, but he was finally smart enough to figure out how to fit in. Plus, he was good at soccer and he was really cute. Did I mention that he played

guitar? Every girl in school had a crush on Nayef, but he used to come home after school with me and Ahmed and play Scrabble with Grandpa and ask her about her home and Turkey.

Nayef's mom was named Sahib. She collected ceramic frogs and knock-knock jokes. When we were in ninth grade, she had cancer again. When she died, Nayef smashed all of her frogs. That was the first funeral I ever went to. A few months later, Nayef's father asked Nayef's fencing teacher out on a date. They got married right after the school expelled Nayef for his AP project on Houdini. That was the first wedding I ever went to. Nayef and I stole a bottle of wine and drank it, and I threw up in the swimming pool at the country club. Nayef threw up all over my shoes.

The experiences of adulthood including the first taste of liquor, the first visit to a funeral, the first sense of pain and loss came all through Nayef who was my best mate in school.

5.5. How High School changed my perception about life

The crazy me in high school has been one of the versions of my life where I experimented the most. I was naïve and uncertain of a lot of things so I explored almost everything. I tried to drive a vehicle. I had an accident once in grade 9 while I wasn't having a driver License. I did not have the license to drive on the road. I crashed a truck but nothing happened to it so I told my instructor that it is no big deal. I parked the car in my garage after coming back without letting anyone in the family know. My brother Ahmed found about it then he came yelling at me. I was scared of him a lot that day. He lectured about being responsible and all.

The things never ended there. Once I was out and about with my cousin while I was in high school. We were driving and we were easily crossing the speed limit. The car flipped on me and my cousin while we were drifting and we made a big accident and the entire car got ruined. That was the breaking point for my parents since I was injured and they had to make sure that we do not do this again.

Nayef's life and mine collided in various ways. We were both almost expelled from high school. A simple mischief almost made us lose his life. It still gives me shivers to this day. He was called Nayef Houdini in High school for a very odd reason. The deal with Houdini is that Nayef got interested in him during Advanced Placement American History. He and I were both put in tenth grade history. We were doing biography projects. I was studying Joseph McCarthy. My grandmother had all sorts of stories about McCarthy. She hated him for what he did to Hollywood.

Nayef didn't turn in his project—instead he told everyone in our AP class except for Mr. Streep (we call him Meryl) to meet him at the gym on Saturday. When we showed up, Nayef reenacted one of Houdini's escapes with a laundry bag, handcuffs, a gym locker, bicycle chains, and the school's swimming pool. It took him three and a half minutes to get free, and this guy named Farad took a bunch of photos and then put the photos online. One of the photos ended up in the School magazine, and Nayef got expelled. The really ironic thing was that while his mom was in the hospital, Nayef had applied to M.I.T. in the US. He did it for his mom. He thought that way she'd have to stay alive. She was so excited about M.I.T. A couple of days after he'd been expelled, right after the wedding, while his dad and the fencing instructor were in Bermuda, he got an acceptance letter in the mail and a phone

call from this guy in the admissions office who explained why they had to withdraw the acceptance.

My mother wanted to know why I let Nayef wrap himself up in bicycle chains and then watched while Musa and Adam pushed him into the deep end of the school pool. I said that Nayef had a backup plan. Ten more seconds and we were all going to jump into the pool and open the locker and get him out of there. I was crying when I said that. Even before he got in the locker, I knew how stupid Nayef was being. Afterwards, he promised me that he'd never do anything like that again. My mom went hysterical that day. I had never seen her so much worried in her life. She was not only worried about me. She was worried about Nayef as well who had put his life under risk.

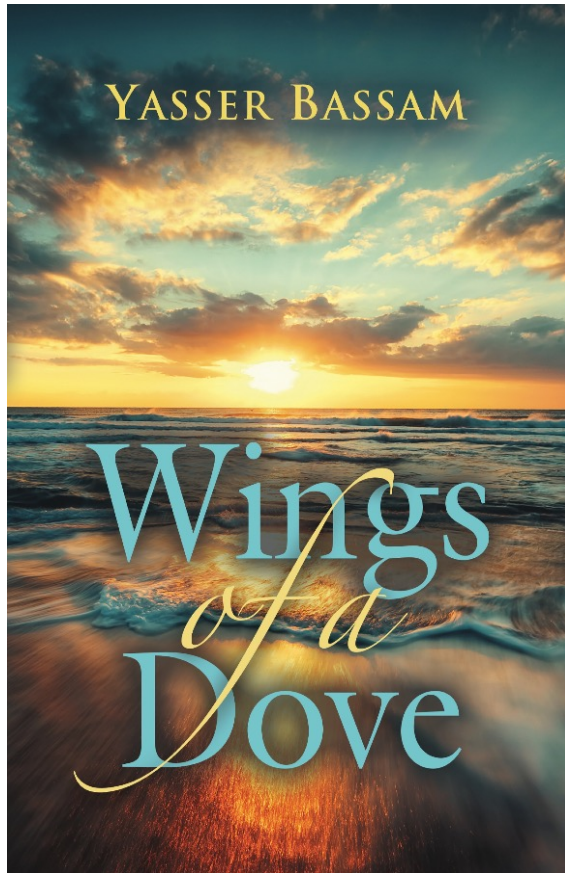
That made me realize the seriousness of things. There was a time when everything was taken for granted. That incident made me realize how important life is and how easy it is to mess it up with mischiefs and blunders in the name of fun. Life is a lot more valuable than any fun and games that can actually harm you. I realized that people can easily fall into temptations at this age. It is your life and you can direct it the way you want it to. You can be a mess and destroy your life, your goals and the hopes of your parents. Or you can actually get a grip and build a better life for yourself and your parents. This was the time I thought about being actually rich. I wanted to be rich and for that I figured that studying was the only way. Becoming better at everything has been my motto since then.

Taking risk and ensuring that I was on the right track has been motto until now. I took tons of risks in my academic career. My life from here followed a whole new set of rules and adventures.

Wings of a Dove

High school taught me that no one is perfect. I make mistakes, which I do daily. I always have been in a hard time treating people kindly and generously after all the dirt that they are hiding from me. I know everything but don't come here to me and expect to find me the same way you are because I've been following my principles since I was a little boy that's why I feel proud of myself every day. Unfortunately, people take advantage of this mistake of mine, but you all should know I tried my best to stop treating people more than they deserve, but I ended up being the same me.

I will be learning a lot as a teenager once I will be going to the college. I will make sure that I understand people in a better way and treat them like they are meant to be treated. Life will always allow the brave ones to take matters in their own hands and make the right decisions.



Wings of a Dove. It is my autobiography. I believe that Storytelling has been art, and art is always meant to be shared and inspire. I decided to share my story with everyone.

Wings of a Dove

By Yasser Bassam

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