

THE TAPESTRY OF LIFE

Biographies of My Grandparents

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Preface

Like most of us, I have always had the powerful desire to learn about my family history. Knowing about our past, our ancestors, and experiences that mould our lives can give us a deeper understanding of who we are and how we fit into the greater tapestry of life. I am very fortunate to have all four grandparents living near me, constantly in my life, guiding me and weaving their wisdom from generation to generation, not only through genes and family traditions, but their love, example and lessons.

An unknown author beautifully wrote:

“Grandparents are a family's greatest treasure, the founders of a loving legacy. The greatest storytellers, the keepers of traditions that linger on in cherished memory. Grandparents are the family's strong foundation. Their very special love sets them apart. Through happiness and sorrow, through their special love and caring, grandparents keep a family close at heart.”

I have been listening to the stories my grandparents told me since I was little. But now it was time that I started documenting. I started interviewing them, and writing down everything I could. That was hard, so then I started video recording them also. With this passion, this book was written. These are the stories of my grandparents. I hope that this book will inspire others to delve into the lives of their grandparents and great-grandparents to understand where they come from and have a greater appreciation of all the fibers that have contributed to their tapestry of life.

Introduction

According to Webster’s dictionary a tapestry is defined as: “a fabric consisting of a warp upon which colored threads are woven by hand to produce a design.” Our lives are like a tapestry. It is an interweaving of our experiences, brought up, culture, and faith. As we reflect on our past and anticipate our future, each moment along the way, each encounter, experience, and relationship we have formed is slowly and seamlessly weaving itself to create what we attribute to be our character, our fate, and most importantly our legacy. These memories and experiences are what form our individual tapestries. Soon enough this tapestry that contains the fiber of our being unfolds, and when it does, it appears to be nothing more than a bundle of thread- tangled up and random. But the truth is, though our life may seem to appear as a tangled mess of random events and relationships, these moments are what make us a work of art in progress, a masterpiece of impeccable detail and value, unique to each person and in due time it will reveal it’s astonishing beauty. My grandparents have played a big role in shaping my tapestry of life and have weaved much wisdom into my life.

The saying goes “It takes a village to raise a child.” This village may be composed of aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers, siblings, friends, and most importantly grandparents. The stories and wisdom that they bring are powerful enough to transcend generations and gear a family in any course of direction. It is this illuminating force that my grandparents carried with them in the form of their words and behaviors for the benefit of their progeny. Only by taking a leap into their lives can we understand how they came to acquire such confidence, wisdom, and peace of mind. After all, I learned that by associating with the wise, you too will become wise.

Dear Reader, This is the story of four of the most prominent people I have ever known—my grandparents. These are ordinary men and women like you and me, yet their potent stories serve as a message and example to us all.

It was during a time of extreme opposition and conflict within the continent of India, a time when Muslims and Hindus were at war with one another, nationalism was in question, and raids were as common as the 'paan' (betel leaf) sold on the street. This was the time in history when my grandparents were born...

CHAPTER ONE

The Story of Confidence and Character

The Story of Kalim Ullah Khan (Nana-maternal grandfather)

“Always be truthful to yourself and truthful to others-if you maintain good character and strength within yourself, nothing can divert you from your path”-Kalim Ullah Khan (Nana)

After saying the above quote, Nana proceeded to sip his chai¹, as if this was such an obvious fact.

I, being a naturally inquisitive person would always ponder over the “whys” and “how comes” of daily life and society as a whole, not really understanding the morals behind the troubles our modern world faced.

Nana, being very scholarly in both religious and secular matters is always the ideal person to discuss these issues with. I found that in most of our conversations, Nana always reverts to the importance of maintaining faith and integrity in all worldly pursuits. He seems so sure of himself and optimistic in his daily life, I often wonder what his journey was like to acquire such peace and fortitude. Thus began my mission to document the life history of the one and only Kalim Ullah Khan, my Nana.

Before the Partition:

In 1947 the Continent of India had divided itself due to political and religious tensions that took over the nation. Hindus and Muslims were in constant rivalry and in order to settle the madness, a new country was formed for Muslim Indians known as Pakistan. It was before the partition that most of Nana’s childhood was spent, in Hyderabad, India. And that is where his story begins, as a mischievous boy running into trouble in the streets of India.

¹Tea

Nana and his elder brother Karim Ullah Nasir, (called Nasir) could easily be spotted out as the two little boys that brought liveliness, adventure, and a lot of mischief to the streets of Hyderabad. One evening a goat had wandered into their house searching for food, Nana and his elder brother, Nasir, caught her and laid her on the ground and were about to slaughter the goat with a kitchen knife when their mother stepped in and rescued the goat. Once I heard this story, it began to make sense to me why Nana performed all of our aqeeqas².

Born in Mallapalli, (Hyderabad, India) on November 22, 1938 to Professor Habibullah Khan and Gulbano Begum, Nana was the fourth eldest out of 9 children. The family lived in a small home with three rooms, a kitchen, a bath, and a small yard situated in a newly established middle class area.

Their father, Habibullah Khan, would teach them swimming at a swimming pool at 'Fateh Maidan' across Nizam College (where he taught). He would tie a drum on his sons' backs and ask them to jump. Since then, they have always been good swimmers; Nana even became captain of his Law College Swimming team later in life. For some time, their father was appointed as a Warden in a Hostel (dormitory), which was very luxurious. The waiters served food three times a day and that was where the two brothers, both Nana and Nasir uncle learned how to use forks and knives along with other table manners and etiquettes.

They enjoyed a life of simplicity, playing mostly with a ball, wooden tops and flying kites in the streets or playground. On occasion they would pick up a fight with others and both Nana and his brother would give a good thrash to the other kids. They were notorious for being aggressive, and short-tempered.

Their school was about two miles from home, though they would usually ride with their father on his bike, sometimes they would walk. Many times they lost their satchels (book bags) while playing on the roadside. Sometimes they would pick up a stone and kick it until they reached the gate. This practice would

² The Islamic tradition of sacrificing a goat upon the birth of the child, during an aqeeqa 1/3 of the meat goes to relatives, 1/3 to the poor, and 1/3 for yourself.

wear out their shoes, so their father would buy them 'Naughty Boy Shoes' (very fitting), a product of a famous shoe company. Though they were expensive, they lasted longer.

While living in Hyderabad, Nana and his family were a well off middle class family. Their father was handsomely paid and the family was taken care of so much so that on every special occasion their father would purchase new clothing for them. As they attended one of the best schools-where children of prominent people such as executives and dignitaries used to go-their father used to dress them up very compatibly. In the same way, on special religious functions, he would make new clothes for them. He himself was one of the most well dressed teachers at Nizam College.

This all changed after the partition when the family migrated to Lahore...

Hearing Nana's story has always intrigued me because of the two very different lifestyles he lived through. For the majority of his childhood he lived in Hyderabad and moved to Pakistan at age 9. It seemed liked all of what once was theirs was never to be seen again. He and his family had to start fresh in a newly established country with little resources, little money, but a whole lot of faith.

They did not have enough to spend so Nana's mother would give Nana his father's tie to use as a belt, which he did for several years as he had over 100 ties that they brought from India.

From a very early age, their father instilled the love of God and faith in his children, as he would take Nana to Friday prayers and other community functions. Many times he would give his children money to pay their *chanda* (alms). This early training of giving that Nana's father had instilled in him is the same training that Nana has instilled in his children and grandchildren.

The love and attachment that Nana had with his father has resulted in many of Nana's traits today. Though he was rough and tough from the outside, within him was a caring young man. There was peace in their home. He never had a fight at home. One such

incident that reflected Nana's engrafted sense of compassion and justice can be seen even when he was a young boy:

Nana used to see a poor, sick, feeble and haggard old man on their neighborhood street. Kids would scold this man, curse him or even spit on him too. Upon seeing these disrespectful and nasty things, without hesitation he would fling himself at these children in full force and fight them. After the fight, he would feed this haggard old man or would give him a few 'annas'- (equivalent to a few cents). He continued to do this for a long time until the old man disappeared. Nana recalls that he felt a sense of "pain and sorrow for the man." This incident left a deep scar on his mind and left him wondering "Why people would do that to others?" This was the society that Nana grew up in. Especially in a time when everyone was adjusting to a new country, government, and way of life, helping strangers seemed like a task that was "out of the way" and therefore the idea of civic duty and exercising humanity was seen very rarely. Nana was such an individual who defied this norm and did not allow societal preconceptions about other people deter him from following his moral compass.

Though Nana and his brother were seen as notorious troublemakers at the time in the eyes of the neighborhood children, the truth is that Nana could never sit idle when he saw someone being taken advantage of. He, being a bold, confident boy would never hesitate to speak up for what he believed was right. It was experiences like these that developed his character and his belief in absolute justice, tolerance, and equality for mankind.

Despite the challenges of the day and the injustice that we all may face, we have a responsibility to serve our fellow brothers and sisters and be men and women of principle. Nana learned these life lessons at the mere age of 7 and continues to instill these ideals in us. He advised once *"no matter what you choose to pursue in life, as long as you are serving humanity, anything is okay."*

Perhaps this love of justice, tolerance, and equality is what encouraged him to study law in the future.

After Partition:

In 1948, at the mere age of 10, Nana and his family had no choice but to adjust to their new home in Pakistan. They travelled from South India to North Pakistan. They went from a middle class home suitable for a family of 11 to a home with 2 rooms situated in an upper story bungalow in Lahore. Nana's father once making 300-400 rupees a month in India was now making 30-40 rupees a month in Pakistan. The accessibility and abundance they received before their move could not match up to the limits imposed on them after their move to Pakistan. They realized that their way of life had changed drastically and they had no other option but to make the most of it. The innocence and simplicity of life found in Hyderabad, India pre-partition could not match the existing tension and intolerance faced by Nana in post-partition Lahore, Pakistan. Despite these challenges, they never complained. Their father advised the family to never run after pomp and show, and to be grateful for what God had provided them. This was a time to give and a time to be humbled.

Nana recalls:

"Time in Lahore after migration was not very pleasant. There was a scarcity of everything. We had to stand in lines to get 10 pounds of food (flour, rice or sugar) for 5-6 hours. People did not have enough money either. We would walk long distances to go to school on foot. After a year or so we got a bike. Our father would paddle five miles to go to T.I College (where he was a Lecturer in Chemistry) along with the two of us [nana and his elder brother, Nasir]. As a devotee he was not making enough; yet, he was thankful, steadfast, and patient and lived within the means." - Another trait inherited by Nana.

"Always choose to live a simple life- there is nothing like the simple life"

On a visit to Mumbai, India, Nana was asked to fetch a pail of water from the community water tap with his brother Nasir. Usually there would be a big line and a long wait. They heard that the Hindus wouldn't let you touch their utensils; if you do they will clean it again. So, once there was a big line and one Hindu lady had a couple of *Gharas* (buckets) to fill. She had filled one and kept it aside as she filled the next. Nana and his brother Nasir came close to it and dipped their fingers in its mouth. She got furious and started pouring out its water in anger, at that moment his brother put their bucket under it and got it filled without delay. Everyone around them saw this and did not like their behavior. The next time they came, everyone kept a close eye on them and did not let them move from the line.

Although this incident highlights Nana's light-heartedness and childhood play, it also narrates the attitude that most people had towards one another within the subcontinent-- resentment and constant suspicion towards one another.

This kind of animosity did not end here....

In 1953, when there was upheaval, agitation, and riots against Ahmadi Muslims³ all over the country, Nana's father was the

³ Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is the only Islamic organization to believe that the long-awaited Messiah has come in the person of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad(as) (1835-1908) of Qadian. Ahmad(as) claimed to be the metaphorical second coming of Jesus(as) of Nazareth and the divine guide, whose advent was foretold by the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad(sa). Ahmadiyya Muslim Community believes that God sent Ahmad(as), like Jesus(as), to end religious wars, condemn bloodshed and reinstitute morality, justice and peace. Ahmad's(as) advent has brought about an unprecedented era of Islamic revival. He divested Islam of fanatical beliefs and practices by vigorously championing Islam's true and essential teachings. He also recognized the noble teachings of the great religious founders and saints, including Zoroaster(as), Abraham(as), Moses(as), Jesus(as), Krishna(as), Buddha(as), Confucius(as), Lao Tzu and Guru Nanak, and explained how such teachings converged into the one true Islam.

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is the leading Islamic organization to categorically reject terrorism in any form. Over a century ago, Ahmad(as) emphatically declared that an aggressive "jihad by the sword" has no place in Islam. In its place, he taught his followers to wage a bloodless, intellectual "jihad of the pen" to defend Islam. To this end, Ahmad(as) penned over 80 books and tens of thousands of letters, delivered hundreds of lectures, and engaged in scores of public debates. His rigorous and rational defenses of Islam unsettled conventional Muslim thinking. As part of its effort to revive Islam, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community continues to spread Ahmad's(as) teachings of moderation and restraint in the face of bitter opposition from parts of the Muslim world.

president of the Jamaat⁴ in Lahore at the time. Opponents had decided to kill, loot, burn and destroy Ahmadi Muslim houses and had marked them as well. They had a plan to implement this heinous and brutal act after they offered Friday prayers. So, a few Ahmadi Muslim families were asked to gather in Nana's three-story house that was being protected by some Khuddam⁵. Martial Law was declared and General Muhammad Azam Khan became the Commanding Officer in Lahore and within an hour or so the Military was posted on each and every nook and corner. Fortunately, they had enough food for those taking refuge. It was all done in such a hurry that nobody could collect sufficient food to eat at one place. Going outside was dangerous as Military personnel had orders to shoot if they saw anybody out in the street. After praying during this entire time, and being trapped in their homes, on the second or third day, a miracle happened. In the evening a Military jeep with 4 or 5 personnel knocked at their door and asked about their father, Habibullah Khan. They were all fearful that the police may have come to arrest him but thank God, they had brought an 80 pound sack of flour for them and did not say why and by whom it was sent. Later they found that it was Sheikh Mahmudul Hassan, the Deputy Commissioner (who was related to Nana).

During these dangerous days, once their father got stuck in a mob while he was coming back from college and was very close to home. Someone recognized him and shouted at him and a few ran to catch him, but God gave him courage and strength to turn away from them and to paddle away in the other direction, thus he was saved from getting hurt.

In these circumstances when the family was confined in their home, Khuddam were on guard; few of the Atfal⁶ were also on the roof and had made mud-balls (i.e. marbles) to be used as slingshots. In those unpredictable days, once Nana and his

"Ahmadiyya Muslim Community: An Overview." An Overview. Al Islam, n.d. Web. 04 June 2014.

⁴ Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

⁵ Ahmadi Muslim boys ages 15-39

⁶ young Ahmadi Muslim boys ages 7-15

brother got stuck in school because the authorities did not allow them to go out by themselves. They contacted the T.I College. Hazrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad⁷ - (then Principal) sent his car and directed the driver Muhammad Ahmad to bring the boys safely home through a different route.

Nana and Nasir uncle would always do everything together. They were each other's best friends and each other's bodyguard. Once they got in a fight with other students in the class and one student had poked his pointed pencil in Nana's left cheek, blood gushed out; at this Nasir uncle gave such a heavy punch to that student that his front tooth fell out.

Life in Lahore was not of ease...

The family moved to Rabwah, Pakistan in 1954 when the Talim-ul-Islam College was shifted there. In college, Nana took part in sports and games and won a few prizes as well. He joined the college as a pre-engineering student, but could not pull on very well and eventually failed. He changed his subjects from the sciences to the arts. Hazrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad, was his Political Science teacher for two years.

During his school days, once a prominent writer and poet Hafeez Jalandhry (individual who wrote the Pakistan National Anthem) came and delivered a very inspiring, motivating and fiery speech that "the motherland needs young defenders." This motivated Nana to join the JCC (Junior Cadet Core-which was like training for youngster to prepare them for future military careers), he prepared himself mentally and physically. He appeared for ISSB (Inter Services Selection Board) exams and qualified all written and medical exams twice but unfortunately both times, was not selected by the board in the final interview.

He states, *"I was very much disappointed, disheartened, and dejected, but I went forward with my education. This was a turning point in my life."*

While in college, as a graduate student, he thought of striding

⁷ Third Khalifa (successor to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as))

in the footsteps of his grandfather's younger brothers (who were popularly known as "ALI BROTHERS"- and celebrated Muslim leaders in India in the 1930s).

He recalls, *"When I read about them and the thorny way one has to stride. I could relate it to the circumstances in which I was growing up in and this deterred me and subdued my desire to pursue that goal."*

In College Nana took part in various extracurricular activities:

- Sec. College Majlis-e-Irshad
- Sect. College Science Society
- Vice-President, College Tutorial Group "Musabiqat"
- Member Editorial Board, College Magazine 'Alminar'
- Member 1st T.I. College Basketball Team
- Representative of College 3rd year class in college Union Cabinet
- Member of College Rowing Team, Civil Defense Team, and Cricket Team
- Took part in College Debates
- Captain of Law College Swimming Team

After graduation Nana thought of becoming a Civil Servant, so he appeared for PCS-(Provincial Civil Services) examination but again was not selected. These setbacks are what taught him that we can't get whatever we hope for, but we should remain steadfast and thankful to God.

After receiving his B.A. in 1960, Nana went to Karachi and stayed with his uncle who was a missionary there. He joined the Law College, studied in the evenings, worked during the day as a Sub-Inspector for Excise and Taxation and received his Law Degree in 1962. He worked as a Sub-Inspector until he came to the USA in 1971 for better life.



Nana received his Law Degree in 1962



Nana was a Sub-Inspector for Excise and Taxation, mid-1960s

In Rabwah, he participated in many Jamaat activities (service projects by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community) such as helping build demolished houses in the villages and distributing medicines in the far flung areas after going through ankle or knee deep water and mud after floods. He would offer himself for duties like many other Khuddams, (young Ahmadi men) for the protection of Ahmadis living in Rabwah during the nighttime.

Before coming to America, his father, Habibullah Khan sat down with him and gave him a long lecture explaining the details of his family, and their place in history that should not be overlooked. He reminded Nana that the country, which he was heading to, was a hub of materialism, a kind of glitter that may easily distract you from your goal, or may become a cause for your slip or fall. He warned Nana not to be intimidated by the luxurious life style, but to do his utmost to lead and guide his future generation on the right path and remain attached with their faith.

His father had narrated an incident that is a part of Ahmadiyya history now and relates to their family.

In one Hadith (saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him) it is mentioned that... Messiah will descend on a white Minaret in the East of Damascus, wrapped in two yellow sheets, resting his hands on two angels...

(this is paraphrased. Not the exact translation of Hadith-Muslim-Kitabul Fatan-Bab Zikrul Dajjal...and Abu Daood-pg. 593 History of Ahmadiyyat-Volume 5, pg. 411-413 and Printed in Daily Alfazal-December 4, 1924, August 28, 1924)

Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra)(2nd Khalifa) left for London on July 12,1924 to attend the Wembley Conference, along with a few of his companions, on his way, after staying in Egypt and Bait-ul-Maqadas(Holy Land) for a few days he reached Damascus (Syria) on August 4, 1924 and stayed there till August 9, 1924.

He relates:

“There, whatever happened is also strange. When I inquired from Maulvi Abdul Qadir Al-Maghrabi, (who was a friend of Syed Waliullah Shah Sahib), about the location of the White Minaret where the Messiah has to descend? He said it was that of Umwia Mosque, another Maulvi said that it was located in the Christian township, yet another one said that Hazrat Isa might build it himself. Now, we were curious to find out which one is that Minaret after all.

After Dawn I led the morning prayers, at that time Zulfiqar Ali Khan Sahib and Dr. Hashmat Ullah Khan Sahib and I were present, meaning there were only two followers behind. When I said Salam, I saw the Minaret in front of me; the distance between us was only a street. Then I said that was the Minaret, which was east of us, and there is no other Minaret. The domes of Umwia Mosque were blue. **When I saw that white Minaret and only two followers behind me then I said that : that Hadith is fulfilled too....”** *(note: translated from Urdu)*

Nana’s grandfather, Zulfiqar Ali Khan Gowher, was the Chief Secretary of Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) (Hadrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad) during this tour. His father explained to Nana that this tells at least two things:

1. That the Khalifa’s visit to that Minaret is as good as a visit of Masih Maud (as) (promised messiah) himself as they are the representatives of Masih Maud (as)
2. The presence of only two followers behind the Khalifa indicates what the Hadith termed them to be two angels. In a way Nana’s grandfather became a fulfillment of that prophecy, his father advised never to lose the sight of this importance and not to get submerged in the worldly pursuit.

This again was a turning point for Nana which diminished his desire to run for glitter and to lead a very simple and calm life.

In response to this conversation, Nana changed his airline ticket and came via Damascus where he stayed for a few days then later came to the USA as a student and did his business Management courses.

During this time, Nana's father-in-law, Maulana Maqbool Ahmad Qureshi Sahib, who was in the US, sponsored his daughter Naseera (my Nani), who came after a year or so.

When first arriving to the United States, the first thing he bought was a packet of Pall Mall cigarettes for 32 cents, (Nana used to smoke) and a very small ("4x2") telephone diary. When he compared the cost in terms of rupees he realized how expensive America was in comparison to Pakistan. Even in those years when one gallon of gas was 36 cents, a dozen eggs were 53cents and milk was \$1.18!

He stayed at Fazl Mosque for a while and then shifted to an apartment building a few blocks away and became roommates with Nasser Mahmud (a Dentist, and class fellow of his younger brother Mujib Ullah Khan at Dental College, Lahore).

During this time he felt very lonely, he missed his wife and two daughters (Nabeela and Shameela.) However he kept himself busy attending school in the morning and worked in the evening. Nasser uncle (his roommate) would cook and Nana would clean, they both shared living expenses. At the time Nana did not get a license and was unable to drive so he mostly walked, so much so that his shoes would get worn out. When Nasser uncle bought a used car they would go around seeing different parts of Washington. After a few months Nana also bought a small used Chevrolet car from Virginia for \$600. While coming back as a new driver, he could not shift lanes quickly enough to take an exit and got lost, but eventually found his way after travelling some 40 miles.



From Left to Right: My Nana, then my two great grandfathers:
Nana's father, Professor Habibullah Khan and my Nani's father,
Maulana Maqbool Ahmad Qureshi . (1967)

His wife (Naseera, my Nani) and his two daughters, (Nabeela and Shameela) arrived on March 11, 1973 at National Airport Washington D.C after staying 2 days in Moscow. His daughters were somewhat hesitant to come to Nana, especially Shameela (who was only 3 years old.) Before their arrival he had rented an apartment in Washington D.C which was mostly occupied by Spanish people so it was hard to communicate. Nabeela and Shameela were admitted to Oyster Elementary School which was a bilingual school and as a result picked up both English and Spanish.

Involvement in Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya: (The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community)

During these early years, there were not too many Ahmadi families in the Washington Metropolitan area (about 45 including Virginia, Maryland, and Washington.) Nevertheless, Nana had a strong hold on faith and remained very active in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

He remained General Secretary for a few years in the beginning, he recalls *“I used to type letters on an old typewriter and used to make copies from outside (there was no copy machine then) and all the addresses had to be written by hand”*

He later served as:

Secretary Taleem (Education), Secretary Tarbiyat (Moral Training), Secretary Tabligh (Propagation), Secretary Ansarullah (Ahmadi Men over 40), Zaim Ansarullah, and President of the Laurel Jamaat. For many years he was Nazim-Decoration at the USA Jalsa Salana and occasionally was made in charge of the EXHIBITION arrangements.

For a few years he compiled reports of the USA Jalsa Salana (Peace Conference) for the Ahmadiyya Gazette and a few other various functions held in Maryland. During 1988-1989 (as Secretary Talim) he assisted in managing Talimul-Islam Academy for the training of young children as well!

Throughout his entire life, Nana has been a major advocate for education both secular and religious, especially for women. Even in Pakistan he wrote an article in favor of co-education under his pen name K.K Krishan. Nana often tells us:

“Education is the most important thing, it will make you strong and if you are strong then no one can touch you. You must be brave, bold and committed.”

My mother and aunts always tell me about the trips that they would regularly take with their father (my Nana) to the Mosque just so that their religious knowledge and their love for their Creator would increase. But the one memory which they now look back with fondness and can never forget is their discussions and talks about what was the news in Al-Fazl magazine, or any other religious literature. Nana would read to them with such tangible sincerity, that even if they did not know what he was talking about, which was seldom because Nana would explain himself in many different ways until he was understood, they would believe him and believe what he was saying because 'he' was saying it. To this day, my Nana continues to inspire and enlighten us with his vast knowledge both secular and religious and continues to motivate us to pursue great things so long as we serve humanity and live up to our beliefs as humble servants of God.

My Nana is the life of any party. You name it, any event or function we ever attended in which he is present, people naturally draw to him and are interested in what he has to share. He is jolly, happy, and fun to be around. He is highly motivating. He truly loves all the people he meets and sees and appreciates many qualities in each and every person, which many seem to overlook. Perhaps, that is why so many people love him and his company. His focus has always been on what his loved ones were doing, rather than himself. Also, his oratory style is very pleasing to listen to. That is why everywhere he goes, he easily strikes up a conversation, with everyone from the small boy in the elevator whom he encouraged and told that he can be the president when he grows up, to having discussions with the intellectuals about the present political situation.

My Nana has a big and kind heart as he tries to help anyone who is in need. His compassionate and caring character was evident as a small boy, and continuously exercised as an adult. When we went to India with Nana in 2008, I noticed his free hand in helping everyone. He encouraged me to do the same. It really hurt him deeply to see people laboring so hard and painfully to earn an income. Nana said very little about it, just "look Betey (dear daughter), they are working so hard," but his face and eyes show

the pain and agony as if he himself was suffering. He truly is an empathic individual who is able to put himself in other people's shoes and understand.

Nana is a very simple man who loves cleanliness and embodies a clean soul. His clothes are always starched and ironed. He doesn't have a large wardrobe, or the most recent fashions, but he always looks like a million bucks! He always looks younger than his age. It is true that Cleanliness is next to Godliness. Nana has always felt that no job was beneath him, as many men of our culture seem to feel, and happily scrubs the floors, scrubs the pots and pans until they shine, and always washes the dishes until they are sparkling clean.

He is a living role model for all of us. What you say does not matter as much as what you do. My Aunt Shameela put it nicely: "All of us are quite experienced in having kids now, know that what you say does not matter as much as what example you give to your children. If a child sees his parents giving, it will be easier for him to give. If he sees his parents cleaning and enjoying cleanliness, he will most likely do the same. If a person sees his father reciting the Holy Quran in a melodious voice, which we remember especially done constantly during every Ramadhan, we would be prone to read it as well. And if a person who has never lied or broken a promise to you or anyone else in all your life tells you something, most likely you will consider that thing with weight."

Nana has been a dynamic influence to those around him and he continues to touch many hearts through his love for humanity and his selfless pursuits. Once I asked him if he too believed he has been an agent of change to those around him.

He stated:

"I don't possess a charismatic character, I don't hold any position, nor do I have any wealth, power or skill to influence others. But it is human nature to follow, copy or adopt some good things from people whom you like, admire or associate with for a period of time. Usually, it is thought that traits are

relatively stable during one's life span, though it may vary from individual to individual, but they do influence to a great extent. Like a magnetic field you exert some attraction-good or bad. Your mannerism, behavior, attitude and communication or even your very presence does have some influence. That is why it is said: "that a man is known by the company he keeps." Islam also emphasizes to always be in the company of the righteous people. You don't have to hold any position, status or rank to influence others. In the same way, to some extent, few of my friends, close relatives and my blood relations may have picked up a few things worth enough to copy, follow, adopt or even recognize or mention. With the grace and mercy of God, my four wonderful daughters have learnt to be thankful to God, to be content with whatever they are, and not to be greedy and demanding. They are humble, dutiful, caring and sharing individuals."

Nana's life is a perfect embodiment of wisdom, compassion and love for humanity. From an early age this mischievous boy grew up to become a hero in the eyes of his loved ones and a testament to hard work and dedication. He strives to motivate and encourage each and every person around him. His charisma and kind-heartedness always leaves one uplifted and enlightened. He is a shining light to us all. Nana lived through adversity, witnessed political and religious injustice firsthand and dealt with the winds of change brought by the partition as well as his immigration to America all while embracing his responsibilities as a father, older son, a husband, and most of all a hero for his grandchildren.






Nana and Nani at my High School Graduation, 2013

Looking back,

People spend money seeing motivational speeches, and traveling across oceans to find inspiration and purpose in their lives. To think, how lucky I was to be blessed with a natural cheerleader, an individual who never missed the opportunity to educate, encourage, or excel us forward in the direction of our dreams, my Nana!



Playing with Nana after prayer time



*We don't accomplish anything
in this world alone...
and whatever happens
is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life
and all the weavings of individual threads
form one to another that creates something.*

Sandra Day O'Connor

CHAPTER TWO

The Story of Prayer and Perseverance

The Story of Ahmed Abdul Hameed (Paternal Grandfather-Dada)

"I feel the need to thank God Almighty as God Almighty helped this sinner and ungrateful human being, despite all weaknesses saved me from drowning and washing away from this world."-
Ahmed Abdul Hameed (Dada)

From an early age of 5, Dada would never hesitate to ask me if I had read my daily prayers and my Holy Book. He himself being very punctual in performing the obligatory 5 daily prayers would encourage his grandchildren to develop this habit from an early age as well. I am very blessed to have lived with my Dada and Dadi (paternal grandmother) from the time I was born until the age of 8. Every morning I would hear his footsteps to the bathroom at approximately 4:30 a.m, I would hear him perform the *wudhu* (ablution) and then make his way back to his room to pray. He would pray *tahajjud* (optional prayer before dawn) and then *fajr* (prayer at dawn) out loud so that whosoever would like to join him could do so. Often times, at the mere age of 4, I would hear this melodious voice in the middle of the night and would be immediately drawn to it. I did not know how to perform the prayers properly at the time, but seeing that my grandmother and grandfather were both taking part in prayer I simply copied their movements. The beauty of this was that we, his grandchildren, were able to see the importance of prayer and the spiritual effects it can bring upon a person simply by observing the behavior of our Dada. He never missed a prayer and to this day, at age 76 he continues to perform these prayers regularly and on time despite his age and health conditions. I recall he would blow air on our heads 3 times whenever we successfully completed our prayers exclaiming *shabaash!* (well done!)

Upon asking him for any kind of advice his response would always be the same, regardless of the question:

he would say *“always read Quran and offer the 5 daily prayers on time.”*

and my response would also be the same, *“I understand that Dada, but is there anything else that you would like to share with me, any advice about life in general and some of your experiences?”*

“Beta (Dear), doing these two things is more than enough, you must also study very hard, you must never leave your education, study and work very hard and pray just as hard.” He would say

“Yes Dada”, there wasn't much more to say after realizing that his answer would be the same answer he gave me 10 years ago at age 7.

I never really understood the emotion that Dada would exhibit as he would prostrate in prayer.

On November 26, 2011 Dada had survived his 3rd massive heart attack. We all began to pray for Dada for the 8 days he was in the Intensive Care Unit. Upon his arrival home the first thing I recall him telling me was,

“from the day I was born to now, God has not left my side, when you die all you will bring with you are your deeds. All of these things don't matter {he points to everything in the house} unless you do something good in this world. Everything will end in this world, but God is Everlasting, he will never leave your side.”



Dada with me in 2007- when I had completed the Holy Quran

Thus, I begin the story of my Dada... where did all this passion and prayer come from, was it innate or acquired? Let us begin the story of Ahmed Abdul Hameed...

Born in Hyderabad, India on January 6th, 1937. He was the eldest son (out of a total of 7) of Ahmed Abdullah Sahib Moulvi Fazil and Ahmedi Begum.

His father was a very simple man who didn't have many capabilities to work. It wasn't until there were 5 children in the household that he managed to attain temporary jobs. Dada's grandfather (his Nana- maternal grandfather) tried to fix him a job as a teacher and in other departments but his father was not interested.

Dada's paternal grandparents had not allowed his father's family to live with them because it would become a burden. Therefore their Nana was their main helper. He used to come every Friday each month and give Rs. 10 (rupees) for the family.

His mother would manage the entire house with the Rs. 10. Their Nana continued to pay for their family until their father was employed. Dada's father joined the service only after the birth of his 5th child. Meanwhile he did temporary jobs.

His mother used to cook in the same converted kitchen and all the brothers sat on the floor mat. She cooked chappatis (flat bread) and gave it to each of her children, one after one. Lunch and dinner was also served at the same place. There was no electricity, only water connection.

Upon asking Dada what he and his brothers did for fun, he states: *"We were so poor that my mother would take ripped up clothes and stitch it into balls for us to play with."*

He was admitted in primary school Station Dabeer Pura in KG class and completed primary school after four years, Then he met his first friend Abu Hussain Mohammed Sami Ullah Shafrieff. Afterwards he joined Chanchal Guda High School. His uncle Ahmed Abdul Basith was also his classmate. He used to call him Chicha, he was nick named as Chicha by others as well.

Dada tells me that he was not very interested in education growing up. He says that he was just an ordinary, average student passing all the examinations with above average marks. Dada has favored education more than anyone else in the family. He continuously tells us to study hard, study very hard. But as a youngster he didn't care too much about it, it wasn't until his adult years where he began to see the immense value in it and seized every opportunity to learn whatever he could; he even went back to college to take a few courses as well.

After receiving the HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) in 1951 he joined the City Science College. During his first year he failed, but passed in his 2nd year in ordinary classes, then joined Osmania University studying Geology, Mathematics and Physics. After completing his first year of school, he fell sick with Pleurisy (similar to tuberculosis) and had to discontinue his education. His father wanted him to graduate; meanwhile he got an entry level job working in the Railways. He joined Vivek Vardhani evening

college and studied Public Administration, Economics and Civics.

In 1974 Osmania University opened Post graduation courses in the evening college. He studied Public Administration and passed first division in merit and third position in marks.

Employment:

Dada's medium of instruction was Urdu/English, in 1948 Hyderabad state was merged with the Government of India, then Andhra Pradesh was formed basing on Telegu Language. Because he didn't know Telegu, getting a job was very difficult. His whole family was on government jobs, which also worried his father, understanding the struggle of being unemployed. Meanwhile there was a job opening in the Railway Department. He applied and was selected from Railway Service Commission as an Entry Clerk in Railway Lallaguda Workshop in Secunderabad on November 25, 1957. He took voluntarily retirement in April 1978 and got a pension and benefits of two yearly free passes for himself and his wife. During the Railway service, he was selected as an Urdu Translator, Guard, and Assistant Station Master. He continued as a senior clerk and was on the panel as an Urdu Translator. Sometimes Dada would have to ride his bicycle about 20 miles (as they had no car) just to go to school and work.

At that time he had no ambition to develop or to learn any skill for earning more.

He gave his entire salary to his mother and she used to manage the whole house.

Marriage:

Dada was sick for a good part of his life, suffering from pleurisy. Everyone in the Jamaat¹ knew about his sickness and no one was ready to marry him. Dada's mother asked everyone but they all refused. His mother was regularly praying, one day she saw a dream, the name Ismail Khan came up. There was only

¹ Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

one person by name Mohammed Ismail Khan, who was a Police Inspector in Parkal Taluqe, Warangal District. Dada's parents went there with a proposal for Ismail Khan's daughter and he accepted the marriage offer. The Marriage took place on June 12th, 1961.

The secret of this successful marriage, is his mother's prayer. This marriage was solely done by mutual parents, neither he nor his would be wife (my Dadi) had seen each other. They had not seen each other until the day they were married. On marriage day he and my Dadi read two nafal² prayers for the success. Dada says God has listened to their humble prayers; they have been happily married for 51 years.

Later on, his younger brother Ahmed Abdul Hakeem, who was in Saudi Arabia, arranged a work visa for Dada. Upon getting this, he submitted voluntarily retirement, without knowing the later problems. When he submitted the passport through the Agent Sheriff Travels, the Saudi Consulate refused it. They were under the impression that it was a Labor Profession visa but it was for an Air conditioning Engineer profession. The consulate demanded a University Degree and experience certificate. Also there were a few days leftover before it expired. Dada tried several ways to get it fixed but all failed. Dr. Haleem told him to go in person to Delhi and go to the consulate. While he was going to Delhi his uncle Ahmed Abdul Aziz sahib gave him a letter addressing to Nawab Rasheed Uddin Khan Sahib who was Member of Parliament and also member of Indian Mission in UNO.

It was January 1978, during a very cold time, Dada went to his MP Quarter, the man read the letter and asked him to come tomorrow so that they can draft a letter, he also told him that he doesn't know anyone at consulate, and coming in winter is not good, being an MP he will write a letter. The man wrote a letter by hand on a small pad 6-4". Next, Dada went to the embassy, that day the ambassador was not there, so he presented the letter to the counselor but he refused to accept it. He asked Dada to get the visa renewed and bring all the papers.

²optional prayers

When Dada sat on the lawn, the main gate opened all of a sudden and a fat man was entering, he was the Ambassador, again he ran into consulate and submitted the same letter, the counselor was annoyed, Dada told him that this is addressed to The Ambassador, now he has come.

Inside the office there was one more person waiting for his wife's visa to Jeddah. After half an hour the secretary came running asking "who is Ahmed Abdul Hameed, go and submit your passport for affixing the visa and bring me back the letter for filing." The man had gone to fix the visa. The next morning Dada went to the consulate to collect the visa. Now the job visa is done, Dada was on his way to Saudi Arabia!

Saudi Arabia:

He went to Bombay to go to Saudia, booked the seat, but now there was a problem of Immigration. An agent came to help Dada board the plane. He landed in Saudi, and stayed with his younger brother Ahmed Abdul Hakeem and Mohammed Ismail.

Here he joined the M/S Mohammed Awad al-Ahmary Trading Establishment a business company and was an Agent for DELSEY luggage items for the kingdom of Saudi-Arabia. During this time he would send money home for his wife and six children who were living in Hyderabad, India at the time.

After hearing about this experience of his I couldn't help but ask him,

"How was it like being on your own in Saudi Arabia, a new language, new culture and without your family? How did you deal with this?"

Dada took a minute to gather his thoughts.

As he cleared his throat upon answering the question, I could only wonder what he was about to tell me, but like most of the discussions I have had with Dada, I can never predict the direction of the conversation but I knew some way it would relate

to prayers (like it usually did).

With a deep look of gratitude, he began...

“When I was in Saudi Arabia, there was a mother of 3 kittens on its journey to find food for its young, on its way it was hit by a car and it died. I would work in the daytime in the office but upon my return the watchman told me what happened and said ‘what do we do, the three kittens are here and they don’t have a mother to help feed them milk.’ The kittens were about 1 or 2 days old, their eyes could hardly open. So we would bring them milk for 6 or 7 days, this way they got used to us and would follow us until we gave them milk. When they got older, we would give them keema (ground beef) to eat. They were so attached to us, they would come and stand up on their shins, they were so happy when we came they would play like anything. They would sometimes even sleep with us.”

“Okay Dada, that’s a very sweet memory but how does that relate to your personal experience working on your own, and having such a big responsibility to your family”?

Dada being the spiritual and philosophical man that he is always had a point. He would elaborate on these points so that a person could not only make some sense out of it but also relate to it. I should have known something was coming. But what can I say; he sensed my confusion and explained his message...

“The lesson is betta (dear) that God is looking after each and everyone. The mother is not there but God had arranged this kind of protection (for the kittens). God is not only the creator, he is the protector, he arranges EVERYTHING even for the animals. Remember that God has promised and given each and everything. Therefore we must be obedient to him.

God wants from you to pray 5 times, read Quran, be obedient to parents, be good to man, don’t tease the people, don’t harm the people, don’t talk ill things to people. If you do these things and seek the help from God you will be the most successful man. Help the poor people. Now it is the winter season, we are having

the heat, we are having the blankets, but the thing is this, do you think that all the human beings all the poor people have these facilities? The thing is you can't help the entire world but you can help a few. Whatever you can do from your resources, even if you can give a small sweater to the poor man he will be thankful to you, even if you give a small blanket to a boy he will pray for you. This circle is going on, one after one. Like this you have to do it."

Just like the kittens, regardless of the troubles he faced growing up in poverty and suffering from illness and rejection, he has always felt supported and protected by the Almighty God, perhaps this is what made his adjustment to Saudi Arabia not as daunting.

(I guess it runs in the family- my Aunt Zakia always feeds the squirrels in our yard. They are now domesticated!)

Dada understood that no matter what he said to us or no matter how he helped us the ultimate guidance he could leave with us so that we attain peace within ourselves and feel confident with our lives and futures is if our faith is hardened.

Dada explained how he had gone through many stages of life, successes and setbacks but his contentment with this exciting journey and perseverance to move forward with everything he was given stemmed from his faith and his confidence in God, *"he will never leave your side betta. One day everything will come to an end, that is when you will have to ask yourselves, did I even do anything in this world. This is why you must work very hard so you can help the people and pray just as hard."*

He retired and settled in Maryland in 1994 along with his eldest son Shukoor Ahmed (my father) and our family. When my father, Shukoor got married and settled in the United States, he called his family from India over.

Dada was working as an Office Assistant, looking after all/most clerical work, bank matters, importing, wholesale prices, retail prices, shipping opening of letter of credits etc after coming to America.

Throughout his life he has traveled to France/Paris yearly two or three times, and most of Europe, Italy, Romania, U.K several times, South East Asia, Singapore, Korea, and Taiwan / Hong Kong.

Health:

Dada was sick with pleurisy a type nearing to TB. His mother's prayers helped him a lot. In her dreams she saw the First Khalifa (ra), Upon questioning her son's sickness and asking for help, he wrote a paper or some prescription. After acting in accordance to that dream, Dada's health had improved. Because of this illness he had to leave his education early. In those days to get admission into TB Hospital Erragauda was a very big problem. There was a long wait list for more than 5 years. The Superintendent of the hospital named Dr. Kawal Chande had one very close friend Dr. at Ossmania Hospital. His friendship with him allowed Dada to get treatment.

Dada had open-heart surgery which was arranged by Dr. Mubashar Chaudhry and done by Dr. Naimath and his team in June 1993, when Dada had suffered a massive heart attack. Since then he has been under treatment. He was in the hospital for about 4-8 months after his second heart attack. He had undergone open-heart surgery, and received two stents.

Once again he became seriously ill on Nov 26, 2011. He was working at MTA (Muslim Television Ahmadiyya) when he developed heart trouble, called 911 they transferred to Montgomery county hospital. After boarding the ambulance, he fell unconscious. Doctors tried to treat him at the county hospital but they couldn't do anything. Then a helicopter had transferred Dada to Washington Adventist hospital.

They inserted a balloon in the body, gave him blood, and a lot of supporting equipment were attached to his body. He was kept in the ICU for 8 days, gradually all supporting equipment were removed. A "Defibrillator" was also fixed in his chest

After this incident Dada says that *God has given me a new life after this serious sickness. Thank God.*



My Dada playing Cricket in our back yard 2006

Jamaat Office held during this period:

Dada had been elected 4 years as Naib Qaid (community leader) and 4 years Qaid for Hyderabad Jamaat.

He served Two years as Secretary Taleem (education) and two years as Secretary Tabligh. During this period The famous Evangelist Dr. Billy Graham visited Secunderabad. All of Hyderabad and Secunderabad Jamaat, under the Amir Markaz Guidance, challenged Dr. Billy Graham and distributed the literature very successfully.

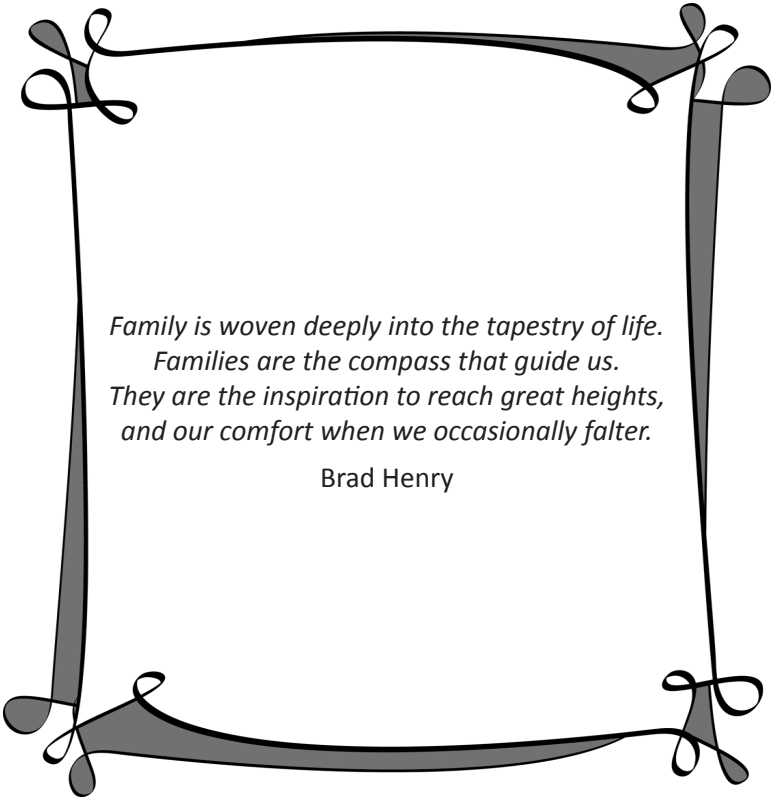
In Saudi-Arabia, he was nominated at Sadr (President), working for two years, then migrated to States, nominating Mr, Mansoor Pal.

Now I understand where this passion for prayer originates from, Dada has always said:

“God has helped {me at} every stage, I cannot enumerate, if you read my life at every stage of life God helped me and still helping me. Myself and my wife always praying for all the members of the family all grandchildren till the end of this world.”

Living in a time and a life of utter uncertainty, Dada grew up not knowing where the next meal would come from, not knowing who he would marry (if he would get married), and not knowing if he would even see tomorrow, as his health was always vacillating. Yet regardless of such uncertainty he would continue to move forward with Prayer and Perseverance.





*Family is woven deeply into the tapestry of life.
Families are the compass that guide us.
They are the inspiration to reach great heights,
and our comfort when we occasionally falter.*

Brad Henry



With Family in Las Vegas in route to see the Grand Canyon in 2005

CHAPTER THREE

The Story of Strength and Sacrifice

The Story of Sabiha Banu (Paternal Grandmother)

“It takes a special person to be an older sibling; God doesn’t just give that responsibility to anyone.”

My aunt would explain this fact to the children in our family every time someone was left in charge or given a task.

“It’s just another excuse for my sister to be bossy,” I used to think.

Of course this was before my aunts and uncles got married and had their own children. Before I knew it, half of my family was under the age of 12 and I was a *baji* (older sister). Boy did my perception change after that!

Now imagine...

Having that responsibility to look after 8 of your younger siblings who are each about 1 year apart from each other and sacrificing your personal aims in order to do so.

Imagine, leaving your formal education at the age of 11 and getting married at 17 to a man you have never met and then sacrificing the latter part of your life attending to 6 children and an entire family of in-laws, with a little recognition, or any time for yourself.

And now, being the grandmother of 14 grandchildren, it seems like the job never ends. Anyone would have been overwhelmed by such responsibilities.

But this was the life of my Dadi, Sabiha Banu- a woman who embodies great strength and sacrifice.

Growing up, both of my parents worked to support the family- (we had a joint family with many people living under one roof.) Alongside my mother, Dadi raised my sister and I during our early childhood years. I recall her walking me to the bus stop, singing me lullabies and yes most importantly, monitoring the food we ate as we had many allergies!

She knew everything about us- what we ate, what we liked, our hobbies, our tricks, my excuses for not wanting to go to school, EVERYTHING. She would sing poems with us, read our Holy Book with us, laugh with us and most importantly play with us!



I am giving Dadi a Mother's Day gift I made in Preschool, 1999

Being the baby of the family, I always had attachment issues. I always either wanted to be with my mom or Dadi everywhere I went. It didn't help that my older cousins would tell me scary stories and soon enough I was afraid to sleep on my own too. You would think they would at least get a break from me at night, right? Nope! Whenever I got scared or needed company, Dadi and Dada's room was right across from mine, and I knew I was always welcome. Soon enough Dadi realized I wasn't going to go anywhere anytime soon so she began to teach me a few prayers at night, which I still use today. She was such an integral part of my childhood and her guidance and teachings have guided me thus far and continue to inspire me today.

Born in Hyderabad, India on January 1, 1944 to Mohammad Ismail Khan Sidiqqi and Shams Unissa Begum. She was the 2nd child of originally 14 children.

Dadi's father was originally from Rampur but migrated to Hyderabad for a job, he had a tough life because his family was not with him. He was a Police Inspector in Hyderabad and his personality fit the position as well. Though they tend to be very harsh and strict while performing their duties, Dadi relates,

"he was strict when he needed to be, but he never took advantage of that. People would praise him much. Whenever we had any financial difficulties, because our father was the only one earning, he would say 'It's okay God will take care of you, your destiny will be taken care of by God.'"

Her maternal grandfather was from the village and moved to the city, as well. He had a law practice and was very educated. Among his children was Dadi's mother. Dadi's mother liked playing the harmony, with Ghazals (poetry) etc.

Dadi's mother didn't cook or clean, the servants would take care of that. But when Dadi and her siblings were around 7 or 8 years old, their mother was concerned with most of the help being male and seeing as though there were mostly daughters in the house. At this time, Dadi's mother got rid of the servants and assigned everyone duties, but kept some female helpers to assist.

This way, Dadi began to take care of household chores from a young age.

This quality has been imbedded in Dadi, she never sits idle, always working on something or taking care of something or someone.

She had the responsibility of looking after her younger siblings and taking care of the house while growing up.

Because her father was a Police Inspector, the family had to move when his job shifted. Dadi grew up around the city but later moved to the village because of this. Before the move, Dadi and her siblings all attended school and would go to school regularly on a *sawari* (carriage). But after their move to the village, the local school was very far away and transportation became an issue. The *sawari* was no longer available and their father was very cautious of their surroundings. He found it unsafe for his elder daughters to travel long distances alone or with any kind of public transportation.

Therefore after 7th grade, Dadi and a few of her sisters close in age stopped attending school because their father deemed it dangerous for girls their age to travel those distances. Instead he would teach them himself when he got home from work.

During that time, Dadi and her sisters would make breakfast and help their younger siblings get ready before the help would drop them off at school.

When they got older, Dadi's father was very careful of the village environment that they were living in. The children wouldn't go out very often unless their father accompanied them, but their neighborhood friends were more than welcome to visit their home nevertheless.

The Holy Quran and namaaz (prayers) along with moral and religious training were taught at a very young age. Dadi was 7 years old when she completed the Quran for the first time.

After age 11/12 they would begin to cook regularly (all of the sisters). But after Dadi's marriage, he father had written a letter to her mother-in-law stating that Dadi is an amateur cook and to please assist her in the beginning. After all, she was very young.

Cooking all by herself was a little daunting when she moved in with her in laws, nevertheless her mother in law had assisted her.

She said, "I didn't know anything about my marital responsibilities. There was only one person who got married in my family before me, my aunt. I didn't know what it was like to be married and have in laws."

At home she would teach her children and continue to take care of the family. Her husband, my Dada, was working in Saudi Arabia at the time and Dadi was living with her in laws. It was difficult because she was taking care of the house along with her own 6 children. She didn't have much help other than her mother in law.

Dadi often tells me that the lifestyle in India is very different to that of America, especially in that day and age. Its vibrant culture and hospitality make it a wonderful tourist destination, but the responsibilities a person has in relation to the not so wealthy lifestyle, may make it difficult for someone who has grown up with the comforts of this country to experience.

She tells me, *"deen aur duniya dono taraf se kaam karna,"* meaning serve your faith and serve your world. My Nana also had a similar approach to life; after all they are cousins since their fathers were half-brothers.

She also tells her granddaughters to *"take on a job which will enable you to have the best of both worlds, not one which will cause you to compromise your family. Don't put unnecessary pressure on yourself."*

The sacrifices that my grandmother made and the work that she had to do throughout her life does not even compare even in

the slightest bit to that of her grandchildren. Perhaps it is due to these sacrifices and her unwavering faith that have strengthened her family.

Dada, my grandfather relates, *“Our whole life was simple, she never demanded any thing in life no jewelry, simple food.”*

That’s Dadi, a simple woman who embodied strength throughout the various stages of her life. She continues to be that older sibling, that mother of 6 (her children are Abdul Shukoor Ahmed, Abdul Rafeeq Ahmed, Mansoor Shaheen, Abdul Noor Ahmed, Zakia Mubarika, and Abdul Hadi Ahmed) and a grandmother of 14.

She continues to move and work. Even after her knee-replacement surgeries, she refuses to slow down and settle for anything less than her best in any of her pursuits.

That my friend is one strong woman!



My Dadi at the Grand Canyon, Arizona 2005

CHAPTER FOUR

The Story of Hard work and Moral Training

The Story of Naseera Khan (Maternal Grandmother)

If there was any word I could use to describe my Nani it's 'Gentle.'

Nani is gentle with her words, her actions, and her care. She is a very cute woman who always had a concern for those around her. Whether that concern be as little as "do my children have enough food to eat for the day"- (which was a particularly funny concern because to this day, after a visit to Nani's house it always feels as if I had just gained a few pounds) to as prominent as "am I teaching my children what they need to know in life."

Nani's home is the ideal "grandmother's home"- upon entering her home we (us grandchildren) are welcomed to the smells of food and treats! Nani never hesitated to give me the Marriott chocolates that she brought home from work! We would run around the yard, catch fire flies in the summer, eat honeysuckles from her garden like there was no tomorrow and, of course, attempt to surprise our grandmother whenever possible, whether it be with a "clean home" or a "delicious" cake- I often wonder if these were pleasant surprises for her or if it was just in our head- well it's the thought that counts right?

But most importantly a visit to Nani's house was unlike any other, not only would I be blessed with chocolate and good company, I would be blessed with knowledge that I still turn to today- knowledge of my faith and moral values. I always wondered why my Nani had encouraged us to pray so much and ponder over stories of the Prophets; Sunday school had nothing on my grandma, she and my aunts would teach us every chance they got, whether we were driving in the car or on vacation, knowledge had no boundaries for my grandmother! Nani and Nana were and still are the "Dynamic Duo"- she would teach

us prayers and religious knowledge and my grandfather (Nana) would be the brilliant story teller, his charisma would excite an entire room and grab everyone's attention to the subject matter, he would highlight events, read excerpts of religious books out loud, ponder over key messages in the lives of important people and the meanings behind Quranic verses in such a way where it captivated everyone, ranging from age 4-40.

I really appreciate everything that they had taught me till this day, it's because of their training that I feel confident in my beliefs and my way of living life. That, and anyone who had to put up with my questions so patiently deserve some recognition!

My Nani's motivation in wanting to constantly educate her children, her grandchildren, and the community at large about the importance of faith and not only knowing what you believe, but understanding, pondering over, and ultimately feeling what you believe is a gift that she had given me ever since I was a young child. But at the time, it seemed more like a chore- having to read and discuss things with everyone (much like school) when we could be playing outside- after all, with the amount of people in our family, we were large enough to make 2 soccer teams- upon this request my grandmother would say that spiritual fitness was just as necessary as physical fitness.

But like all things in life, you never really appreciate the value of something until it is tested and your best option is to utilize what you know- only strengthening your beliefs.

For that, I have to give thanks to my Nani.

Another characteristic about her is her exceedingly calm and easygoing nature. Unexpected tragedies and unplanned course of events do not disturb her- she always remains in control of her situation. Partly it's because she wants to set an example for her children to remain calm and trust in God no matter what curve ball life throws at you. Once my Mom, Nabeela (her eldest daughter) put her finger under a needle in the sewing machine. Nani calmly took it out saying "kuch nahin hai"- (its nothing). She told me "If the mother is calm then the child will also be."

Ultimately children look to their parents for support and guidance, if the parent expresses certain emotions, the child will then only exaggerate such emotions within his/herself.

Teaching could be seen as a hobby, a skill, and for some even a passion. My Nani had a passion for teaching (and still does!). She would hold classes in her home. Her main objective was to make sure that she trains her children and those in her community so that they may be uplifted and given the means and understanding to walk this Earth faithfully and confidently.

Nani's name itself: Naseera, means "the helper, or one who helps." There is no doubt that she has lived up to her name! With all that she has done for her family, and the community at large, no amount of philanthropy could compare.

My Nani, Naseera Khan, (originally Naseera Qureshi) was born in Qadian, India

On February 20, 1946 to Naeema Khatoon Qureshi (mother) and Maulana Maqbool Ahmad Qureshi (father).

She has two siblings, Naseer Qureshi (brother) and Nayyirah Naseem (sister)

During her infant years, the havoc stirred by the partition had taken a toll on many lives, making it difficult for most to survive let alone get by.

In her town of Qadian, India, Hindus and Sikhs would bring swords with them and raid homes. Once a Hindu/Sikh struck her uncle in the neck and when his sisters came in to help him, they tied a scarf around his neck to stop the blood, but it was too late, his neck was practically separated from the body. Her elder uncle came to usher the family away so that they may be spared.

The family had no option but to leave their uncle and run.

Nani's mother took Nani in one hand and some clothes in the other. They had to get away from home and flee somewhere. Their best option was the local school, many families were taking

shelter there. For a few days they would sleep there and her mother would break the wooden benches so that she may start a fire and cook some food. In due time however, the spiritual leader for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community had organized a shuttle to transport those families to Rabwah, Pakistan from Qadian, India.

Nani's father was a Missionary for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and his work required him to travel to far off places spreading the word of Islam. He sacrificed a lot in his life, being away from family for extended periods of time and Nani grew up with her mother, grandparents, and respective uncles and aunts.

She met her father at age 6 when he came back from his mission trip.

Once a man who worked with her father came to Nani and told her, "I am going to your Dad what would you like to say", she rushed to get an orange, which she wanted to give to her father, instead the man took a picture of Nani with the orange to send to him.



My Nani as a little girl with an orange in her hand, hoping that the orange will reach her father, Maulana Maqbool Ahmad Qureshi, who was a missionary in the Ivory Coast, Africa.

She would tell me that as a small child she would see other children with their fathers and she would ask her mother where her father was as if a part of her life was missing, a bit of envy and sadness would overcome this little girl as she had not spent her early years with her father; upon this inquiry her mother would reply “he is doing God’s work”, and that would relax young Nani.

Having a Missionary Father resulted in her having a different kind of upbringing compared to the other girls her age.

A lot of girls her age had dolls and toys, but Nani was never provided those things. When she was in 7th and 8th grade there was no radio in her house. Her relatives and neighbors would say that a missionary’s daughter should not have such things. However Nani recalls that once she had a 104-degree fever. Her dad came and asked her what she wanted, that night her Dad traveled to Lahore to go get her a radio, she says *“I was so happy that my fever went away.”* She finally got her radio when she was 14.

Nani studied in Rabwah, Pakistan her entire school life. She was brilliant in science and would always come in first in her class. Most people would come to her for help as well. In addition to the conventional curriculum, her school also educated students in Religious Knowledge.

Her father was a teacher at T.I Islam College and at Jaamia (vocational school). Her dad knew 6 languages as he was a missionary and this came in very handy when dealing with a diverse group of students. We say that teaching is in Nani’s blood, she never misses an opportunity to educate us about our faith or about anything for that matter.

Her father was stationed to move to Ivory Coast, Africa as a part of his mission. Before his move he wanted to see his eldest daughter get married. Nani was married by the age of 21 to my Nana Kalim Ullah Khan.

Later on, her father became the missionary in charge of the Washington Metropolitan area and that is how the family

migrated to Maryland. After moving to Maryland, Nani made her mark in the community in Maryland by teaching classes at the Mosque and at home, converting young people, and educating everyone about their faith. Just like her father! Till this day people still call her with their questions as she is a very knowledgeable woman.



My Nani with her father (my great-grandfather) Maulana Maqbool Ahmad Qureshi in 2006

Nani and Nana have 4 daughters: (Nabeela Ahmed, Shameela Lughmani, Aaliya Ahmad, and Aatifa Khan.)

Lifestyle in America for a new immigrant family at that time was not very easy. There was much getting used to for them and their two eldest daughters Nabeela and Shameela which included: language, culture, and school.

Both Nani and Nana were working parents; my mother recalls that Nani would come home from her long days at work (she worked in the housekeeping department at the Hilton hotel and later at the Marriott, she worked full time until she retired for 35+ years), then would come make to make fresh food and proceeded to teach her kids the Quran and how to pray despite her exhausted condition, my mother never recalls of her complaining about ANYTHING. She was a full-time worker and rarely got weekends off, she would prefer getting off on Fridays if anything so that she may attend Friday Prayers.

Both Nani and Nana sacrificed a lot of their time and energy for the sake of their families. Nani recalls that her passion was to provide this kind of moral training to her children because then only will they be able to pass it down generations to come and this kind of training will come to use in everyone's daily life.

After learning about my Nani's journey of constant hard work, faith and dedication to her children and her community at large, I feel lucky to have such a patient, calm and gentle woman as my grandmother to serve as a guide for me throughout my life.



Final Message

Dear Reader,

Now having learned about four of the most prominent people in my life, I hope that their life stories have enlightened your hearts as it has mine. Although they have each lived very different lives, their Journey had one common facet: They each had a mission, a goal, and a principal that they followed which helped them conquer any fear, tackle any obstacle or overcome any uncertainty.

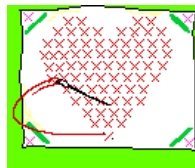
Perhaps you may have seen glimpses of your own life hidden in the midst of their stories.

Though they may be of a different generation, may come from different parts of the world and lived very different lives in comparison to ours, the reality is that somehow we all have had experiences and met people in our lives that have weaved our tapestry.

Now let us learn,

Like I said earlier, by associating with the wise, you too shall become wise. By dwelling on the words of the wise, the poor, the successful, the feeble, etc, you will realize that we all have a quest, a goal, a problem, a solution. We all have a story. Let us learn from each other so that we too can embrace the confidence, character, patience, fortitude, and courage that is a part of each and every one of us, especially our ancestors.

The tapestry of life includes threads that have been woven into our being through our grandparents' guidance and love. It is unique, strong, and beautiful!



About the Author:



Shabnam Ahmed is an ambitious student attending the University of Maryland, College Park. She strongly believes in the mantra, “be the change you wish to see in the world.” Whether that is through leadership, seizing the opportunity, or confidently walking in the direction of your dreams. She finds value in expanding her experiences and as a result this has driven her to serve her community as the former Student Board of Education Member and the National Honor Society President and has made her a recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal. She currently is involved in similar community service based and leadership organizations at the University of Maryland. Shabnam has one older sister (Raaheela Ahmed), and parents (Shukoore Ahmed)-father, and (Nabeela Ahmed)- mother. Shabnam can be reached at the following.

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