

Chapter 1 – The End...

Before I get into the details of my life after my heart stopped, let me give you some background on what led to the end of the life I knew.

I attended Western University in London, Ontario, Canada, graduating with a degree in law when I was 25 years old. As I was graduating, I decided it was time to get married. My parents came from Pakistan and I decided to get married in the traditional way, by marrying a girl from Pakistan. My parents, obligated by tradition, would accompany me and help choose my bride.

They were not happy with the idea. “It will be very expensive to go to Pakistan and choose a bride – about \$15,000. We live in Canada,” they stated. “Why don’t you marry a nice Canadian girl?”

I told them that my mind was made up. I would marry a Muslim girl from Pakistan and my parents would help choose her. She would come back to Canada and live as my wife. End of negotiation.

There was a six week window between the time I graduated and when I would begin start Articling (the mandatory training) to become a lawyer. During that time, I would go to Pakistan, find a wife and get married. The first thing I did was talk to Immigration to find out how to speed up the process of bringing a new bride to Canada. I went to the Dean of Western Law School (the law school I was studying at) and asked him for a letter of reference. This I attached to the letter I wrote to Canadian Immigration in Pakistan explaining that I was coming to Pakistan to get married. I did not know who I would marry. I asked them to expedite the processing of my new wife, whoever she would be. We booked our flight to Pakistan.

My parents and I arrived in Karachi, Pakistan. Upon arrival I found that the Canadian Embassy had mailed me forms that my as yet unknown wife would fill in as soon as I knew who she was. My efforts had given me a little head start once I knew what I was doing.

As was the tradition, my parents contacted people and arranged meetings with the parents of eligible daughters. During the first three weeks in Karachi, we were interviewed by several families. It turned out that I was not an acceptable husband for their daughters.

Mostly because their fathers would not allow them to move to Canada. It was too far away. In most of the interviews they did not even allow me to meet the prospective brides.

Three weeks had gone by and I was getting concerned. Time was running out. Relatives recommended a young woman who lived a two hour flight away. I was not open to the idea because it meant flying with Pakistan Airlines, and I was uncomfortable with the safety of the planes. However, with time running out, I set aside my concerns about flying, boarded a plane and flew to the town to check out this latest prospect.

I met with her father and told him that I wanted to marry right away and take my bride back to Canada immediately. Surprisingly, he did not hesitate. He introduced me to his daughter, Nayyer, and left us alone to get to know one other. That did not take long. I had only one question for her. “Do you know your ABC’s?”

She looked at me strangely as she answered, “Of course!”

“Good!” I said. “If you know your ABC’s you will be able to learn English.”

Satisfied that she would make a suitable bride, I went to her father and we struck a deal.

“When do you want to marry?” he asked.

“Within five days.”

“Let me check with the rest of the family.”

When he asked the rest of the family how they felt about this match, they approved. He then went to Nayyer and asked her what she thought about me.

Only nineteen, Nayyer had been raised with the idea that her parents would choose her husband. She knew they would have her best interests in mind. She had learned that love comes after marriage and that it was something you worked at. With give and take, you made your marriage work. She also knew that even though the marriage was arranged by her parents, the decision to marry was hers. If she did not want this man for a husband her father would side with her.

Nayyer considered what she would be facing – getting

married so quickly then being taken far away from everything she knew. Something about me had touched her. She'd noticed that I knew my mind, that I was determined and that I was kind hearted. She would marry me. Five days later we married and twenty-nine days later we were in Canada. It did not go that smoothly, however.

Nayyer filled in the immigration papers on our wedding day. I immediately called the Canadian Embassy to tell them I had chosen my wife and that the papers were in that day's courier. The embassy received the papers the next day and called to set up an interview with Nayyer. The appointment was scheduled for the following morning. That created problem number one. How were we going to get to the embassy in time? Nayyer's father said he would take care of it. He made a couple of calls and then told us, "There's a train leaving in forty-five minutes. Get packed."

When we stepped outside I expected to see a taxi. Instead, what I saw was a small buggy attached to a horse. There was only enough room for Nayyer and me and our one suitcase. Nayyer's father and brother accompanied us alongside riding bicycles. We arrived at the station to discover that officials were holding the train for us.

The station was teeming with people. Porters in red turbans swarmed us, each wanting to carry our one small suitcase. At one point, four of them had their hands on the handle. It was very confusing. I didn't know how to deal with so many people grabbing at me and my suitcase. My father-in-law and brother-in-law were at the ticket counter paying for our tickets so they could not help. I took out some money and gave it to one porter, but that only made the others try harder to serve us. They offered to get us tea or food. Then, to add on to the mayhem, young boys ran up trying to sell us newspapers. Two other people with a large tank on their back, pushed glasses of lemonade poured from the tank with a water hose into my hands telling me how hot and thirsty I must be, insisting that I take a drink. All these experiences, the heat, the smell of the trains, the crush of the people, and the aroma of spicy food cooking on the platform, overwhelmed me. I thought I was going to pass out. Luckily, Nayyer's brother, Najeeb showed up. With a few choice words and waving of his arms, he managed to disperse the crushing crowd.

On the train, we rode first class in a special air conditioned car, which made the car very cold. Dressed only in shorts and a tee-shirt, I was so cold that I asked the conductors to turn off the air

conditioning. They could not. I asked for blankets. They had no blankets. We were freezing, so I walked through the train looking for a warmer spot.

Further down the train, in third class, people sat crammed on wooden benches with their belongings and, surprisingly, live chickens. They talked and laughed as they boiled tea on mini braziers on the floor of the car. It looked like they were having fun. I seriously considered moving to third class because it was warmer, friendlier and less isolated than first class. Moving was not permitted. Back in first class, it became so cold and uncomfortable that I finally bribed the conductor to bring us tablecloths from the dining car to wrap ourselves in as we rode the train through the night.

We arrived at the Canadian Embassy in plenty of time. When Nayyer completed the interview, she was told that she had passed but they could not issue her immigration papers until she had been given a medical – problem number two. There was only one doctor in town qualified to do the physical, and test results had to be sent to Rome to be processed. “Unfortunately, his office is closed for the day,” we were told.

“Who is the doctor?” I demanded. When they gave us his name, I called my uncle who was a senior military officer in Karachi. I asked him how could we get the medical physical and the tests required completed the same day despite the obstacle I was facing. He called a friend, a senior military officer in Rawalpindi, and arranged with his friend to have a number of soldiers available to me to facilitate matters. We tracked the doctor down at his home. Not wanting to argue with the Pakistani military, he agreed to open his office. This was good but it presented another problem. He could do the physical, but he could not perform the lab tests. The lab technician lived in a small village on the outskirts of town. Soldiers were sent to locate him and bring him back to the lab. Before day’s end, with the medical and tests complete, we took the medical report and the test samples to the Embassy where they were put into a diplomatic pouch and sent to Rome that same night. A few days later Nayyer received approval to move to Canada.

Coming to Canada was difficult for Nayyer. I was Articling in London, Ontario and the hours were long. Nayyer had no friends and she spoke English as a second language. She said it was like she was learning everything over again from birth. She was in a different country, with a different language, different culture, food

and people. The first two to three years were scary for her. She went to high school for two years to get her Canadian grade 11 and 12. That was good for her. It helped her with her English and she made friends. In order to fit in with the younger high school students, she did not tell them she was married, but rather that she was living with her boyfriend. The other girls were impressed.

She faced things in Canada that she could not even have imagined when she lived in Pakistan. Everything was different. The weather, the food, the people. Elevators, terrified her and at first, she insisted on walking up the nine flights to our apartment. When she was learning to drive, she could not see clearly. At the eye doctor, the doctor told me there was nothing wrong with her eyes. She was simply bedazzled by Canada.

Adjusting to the new country for the first three years she would live for letters from her father. She would cry as she read them and write back to him immediately. She missed her family and her home. After three years of longing she went home for a visit. There, she discovered that her home was now in Canada. This helped her to feel more peaceful and accepting.

I articulated in London for a year, then practiced law for another year in Windsor. We moved to the Niagara Peninsula and I worked at a law firm in St. Catharines for a year before opening my own practice. New to Niagara, I worked hard to make connections and build my practice.

When we first moved to Niagara we were so poor that for about eight months we lived in a tiny apartment with no heat, no hot water, no shower and no toilet. That's right – no toilet! We rented an apartment that needed renovating and the rent was very reasonable. While the landlord worked to make the apartment liveable, we had to use the bathroom in the house next door. It was winter. It was cold and Nayyer was pregnant with our first child, Leena.

With no heat we had to sleep in our winter coats to keep warm. The apartment did have a small two burner stove and a tiny refrigerator and Nayyer was helping the landlord make it liveable. When asked how and why did we do it there is only one answer. We were young, and when you are young, you can accept anything. Besides, I was very proud and I would not admit that I needed help. I would make it on my own.

Imagine the shock and horror when a relative came to visit and we told him he had to go down the street to use the bathroom. Realizing how bad it was for us he told my parents. They immediately took control. Their grandchild would not be born in that little apartment. They helped us apply for a government allowance to get a down payment on a house. Our daughter Leena was born in the house we bought in Thorold. We lived there for the next three years as I built a reputation for myself and my law firm in Niagara.

After the three years, we bought a larger home in St. Catharines to help build my image. My parents helped us with the down payment. They came from Winnipeg to help us move in and to spend the winter with us. Their help with the baby allowed Nayyer to go to work to add to our income. She got a job on Clifton Hill, the busiest tourist district in Niagara Falls. She enjoyed working with and meeting people from all over the world.

Unfortunately, even as we were moving into the new house, my health was deteriorating. I was slowly, slowly getting sicker and sicker but I kept on working. I couldn't stop. As I got sicker, I started getting sleepy while driving. This frightened Nayyer. "Go to the doctor," she insisted.

I refused. I kept working and working. My business was growing. Clients depended on me and I could not let them down. I did not realize it at the time, but I was becoming a workaholic. I would often work twenty-four hour days not taking time to eat, or even change my clothes. I was so focused on my work that I did not realize how ill I was. I started to fall asleep at the table because I was too tired to stay awake. That's when my parents said, enough is enough, and took me to the hospital.

With my pride front and centre, I insisted on walking in. The emergency room doctor did not know how I was even able to walk. Tests showed that the oxygen levels in my blood were so low that I should have been in a coma. A normal oxygen reading is somewhere around 98 pCO₂. Mine was significantly lower, around 40 pCO₂. Somehow my body had adjusted to the lower oxygen levels, but the doctors were worried. They sent me to a large hospital in Hamilton. There, I was treated by four doctors. Believing that something was wrong between my brain and my diaphragm they began an aggressive course of treatment. But, I felt like a guinea pig. It seemed to me that each of them was treating me differently. They were each giving me different medication. My speech was slurring. I was feeling worse. I

thought “They are killing me.” I didn’t know what they were doing and I didn’t think they did either, so I demanded to be released from the hospital. The doctors did not want me to leave. They warned me that I was very, very sick. I left anyway.

At home, I asked myself, “Why am I so tired all the time?” I looked at the work I was doing and the hours I was keeping. The logical answer to why I was so tired was that I was overworked. I reasoned that if I got some rest I would get better. I gave myself one month to rest. I stayed home and I rested. I was too sick to do anything. But when the month was up, I went back to working the same long hours.

I was not well. It did not take long before Nayyer noticed that I was getting worse. I was starting to hold fluids. My legs and body started to swell. Still I kept going to work; until one morning sitting at my desk in my office, my legs became so swollen that I couldn’t get up from my chair. In a panic, Nayyer ran across the hall to a doctor’s office. She begged him to see me immediately but he had patients to see. He agreed to come over at lunch time.

When he finally arrived, he took one look at me and called an ambulance. The swelling in my neck was throbbing. I couldn’t get

up. I couldn't walk. The ambulance came and the attendants wanted to take me to the St. Catharines General Hospital. I insisted they take me to the Hotel Dieu Hospital across the street from our office. It was closer and Nayyer could visit more easily.

At the Dieu, the emergency room doctor gave me a sedative to settle me and allow me to rest. That was not a good idea for someone in my condition they found out later. They settled me into the Intensive Care unit so they could monitor my condition. As the day drew to a close, Nayyer went home to sleep.

In the middle of the night, my condition worsened. I have no memory of what happened. I was told later that I went into cardiac arrest. My heart stopped beating... I stopped breathing... and... I died!

..... It was the End ... of life as I knew it.

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