
Chapter 1

My childhood

My name is Saiid Rabiipour, and I was born in Tehran, Iran, on November 26, 1953 and this is a brief story of my childhood.

When my Dad was twenty-five years old, he married my Mom, who was only fourteen years of age at the time. According to the customs and traditions of that time, this age difference was allowed.

In those days you didn't fall in love in order to get married. All marriages were arranged by the parents, and that's the way it was for my mom as well. She was only thirteen years old when a woman knocked on the door of her home. My mom and dad lived in the same community, but didn't really know each other. They just knew of each other through other families in the community. The lady asked if she could come in, and proceeded to ask my mom's parents, my grandparents, if her son could have their daughter's hand in marriage.

Oh, what an exciting moment! Someone was asking for their daughter! (*I presume that those were the first few words that entered my grandmother's mind*) What a blessing from God who has shown favor toward our family!

In those days, most people thought that girls were born for others while the sons were meant for the family. Sooner or later, they needed to marry off their daughters, so the sooner was the better for the family! In the Islamic history, Prophet Mohammad was offered a six year old Aisha, daughter of Abu Bakr, when he was about 50 years of age. Three years later Mohammad married her. Abu Bakr was one of the closest companions and advisers to Mohammad. He became the first caliphate or ruler after Muhammad's death. So marrying young was not only okay it was considered a blessing.

This was how it began. One day my dad, Hosein, was walking on the street where my mom's house was and he saw this beautiful young girl standing at the door. She captured his attention and his heart; love at first sight! That's all it took, just one look!

He ran home that day and told his mom that he had seen the woman he wanted to marry and would she go ask for her. They didn't even know her name. What is her name?

Her name is Pari (meaning angel)

Pari's father was a butcher and her mother, of course, was a housewife. In those days women did not work outside of their homes. The husband was in charge and the bread winner of the family.

Pari's parents, of course, said yes. So about a year later, Pari and Hossain were married! At first, they lived in a room set aside for them in his parent's home. They were surrounded by his sister and brothers as well as his Mom and Dad. This was a good thing at first for my Mom since she

was so young. She learned many things by living among them, but living so close with the family soon became a hardship on her, and in time, my mom and dad were able to afford to move out and into their own place.

Their first child was a boy. They called him Mohsen. Everyone was happy since they considered it a blessing to have a boy. It was a sign of good measure from our God. So they continued and behold the second child was also a son. The family really believed that God was showering them with more blessings and favors. His name was called Parviz.

You see, having a son in those days translated to having social security at the older age for the parents. It wasn't that the girls were bad; they just belonged to others in their eyes. But the sons always belonged to the family no matter where they were.

Well, guess what? The third child was also a son. They called him Saiid, your humble servant. And the family continued to rejoice among the families and friends and in the community.

So the family grew larger and ended up with four sons and four daughters. Years later my mom lost one child on purpose. She first lied about it, telling me that she lost it accidentally. I took and buried him under some dirt right outside of our home. She later told me that if she knew he was going to be another boy she sure would have kept him. But at the time she was not willing to risk of having another girl, especially when she already ended up with four daughters. He was about the size of the palm of my hand, and you could see everything. He was a life.

I was very young and did not understand everything about life or death. Whatever anyone would tell me, I believed. My mom said that she lost the baby by picking up a bag of cement, heavy enough to cause her to lose the baby. But some years later she told me the truth. Don't mistake about it, I love my mom no matter what. She is and has always been our 'Angel'.

Everything was going good until a turn of the tide, which caused a change in our destiny and caused some turmoil within our family.

Years later I lost my two older brothers at a young age. Parviz, who was hit by a truck, lost his life while performing a good deed. He stopped to remove a bag of wheat from a curvy highway to prevent an accident for other travelers when a truck who could not see him in a timely manner killed him and his friend; and a few years later a knife stabbing, claimed the life of Mohsen, my oldest brother when three men attempted to steal his car after they were given a ride to their destination. I was away and did not have a clue of what was going on and was not there to wipe away the tears from the gentile faces of my mom Pari (our angel) and my dad. They were so gracious to me that they did not want me to feel their pain or hear the disappointed voices of their loss. They wanted me to focus on my school and dream without any distractions.

Then it was my oldest sister's family. Her husband got involved with illegal drugs. He ended up doing a few wrong things at the bank he was working at and ended up losing his job and eventually early death due to excessive drug use.

Though I was far away from the challenges my family was facing back home, I was facing my own with some unexpected events while going through my college years as I will discuss them at later chapters.

Then in the year 1980 the eight year war between Iran and Iraq began which crippled the economy of Iran, caused many things to go up in prices, and put more pressure on people. My youngest brother, Hamid had to serve his two year service in the military during those dreaded unwelcomed war. Fortunately and by the grace of God he finished his service without any bad consequences.

So, those beautiful memories and joyous times of having four sons which was the pride and joy of every family turned to an explosion by the turn of events in our world. Was it a blessing or cursing from the lord? That I can not answer. But I do know that what my parents were dreaming from the beginning was just a dream! And if God was up to something greater, that we could not tell or understand at that time.

My youngest brother, Hamid, lives in the USA now. He has a wonderful wife, Tina and two very fine children, Nicholas and Maggie. My four married sisters live in Iran with their respective husbands and families.

My parents loved all of us very much and saw to it that we had what we needed. We were not wealthy by any means but I do not remember lacking anything either. I went to a public school and participated in sports such as soccer and volleyball. These sports are very popular in most of the schools there.



Front row (left to right): me, cousin, Parviz, Mohsen holding my cousin
Back row (left to right) aunt holding cousin, mom holding sister, dad
(Center) grandmother, aunt and uncle in his army uniform

Education was very important to me, therefore I spent a good amount of my time studying and doing homework. My father had a sixth grade education and my mother had none; As a result they always encouraged us to seek a better education. I had to choose a major course of study by the time I reached the ninth grade. With the help of my good teachers and their recommendations, I chose mathematics.

These teachers were excellent in helping us and even though math was one of the toughest subjects, they helped me to understand and do well. As a result, math became my

friend and numbers turned out to be my game! Now, though it may sound strange, when I look back at my math note book that I kept from those days, they look like Greek to me!

The electricity was not very reliable in our home. At least twice a week we lost our power, but we were always prepared with oil lamps to light our home in order to continue our normal life. There were many nights when I had to study, and do my homework using an oil lamp as my only light. But, I was always happy and content even under those circumstances. Early on my mother used a kerosene stove to do all of her cooking, but later she graduated to a higher standard and used a propane gas stove when we were able to afford to buy one. She has always been a simple and loving mother!

My father worked as a photography lab technician where he would develop film. Everyone at his work loved him for his dedication and commitment to his work. Some of the key personnel that he worked with were Armenian Christians who were very kind to him. My father's boss gave him a piece of land as a bonus for being with his business for such a long time, and for his loyalty to his job. He later had a house built on that land. We moved into that house with much excitement since we were living in a multi-family and crowded house that we were renting. Our new community which was called "Tehran-Noe" was far away from the busy part of Tehran at that time.

At first, we had no city water in our new community; therefore, we had to purchase a tank of water to pour into our underground storage. We then used a hand pump to get the water we needed, which mostly was used for washing

and cleaning. It was my responsibility to get two buckets of fresh water from a public well every other day, which was about a quarter of a mile away from our home. This water was mainly used for cooking and drinking.

My father had many friends whom we grew up and spent lots of time with. During the summer we would go on picnics in the mountains, north of Tehran or by the rivers near Karaj. Sometimes we would travel by a chartered bus to as far away as the Caspian Sea for a whole week. We would sing songs; dance, play, walk, and mountain climb or put on a play for everyone. We would visit different friends or families at their homes during the winter seasons.

Since my dad had worked most of his life in the field of photography, he initially owned his own 8mm camera (without sound) and later advanced to a super-8mm movie projector and camera (with sound). In every outing, he would film the events and would later show them at our house on one of four huge white walls as a screen. We always had the largest group of friends in our house when it came to his turn to host a get together. I have many great and fond memories of my childhood growing up in Iran. Our family would orchestrate the biggest show as entertainment for the evening.

Radio was our only source of entertainment up until I was in high school. My brother, Parviz, quit school after finishing the ninth grade and got a job. I do not know why he chose to quit. Perhaps he felt the need to help my Dad since we were such a large family! Then at the first chance, when he had saved enough money, he was able to purchase our first black and white television set!

My life was very simple, yet our family led a content and happy life. We did not have any debts except for the house payment. We traveled by bus to many places we needed to go when they were not close enough to walk to. My high school was within the walking distance of less than two miles, which I did not mind to walk.

The state religion was Islam and most Iranians considered themselves as Muslims, but not by choice as Christians do. Christians choose their religion when they get to the age of accountability. But Muslims are born into it since parents are considered Muslims. We were taught religion studies in our school system and were expected to act accordingly in public.

We had little knowledge about other faiths and what we did know was distorted. Nevertheless I loved God and often talked with Him. Sometimes, I felt that He would answer my prayers, especially during school exams. Yet again, there were many things about God which were beyond my comprehension, and I did not dare question Him or the Quran! Later I will show you the Straight Path in the Quran as recorded in the Bible. It is fascinating!

My grandmother (from my mother's side) was an extremely religious woman. She was illiterate, yet she could recite the Quran as if she had her master's degree. She was a loving, caring and giving woman as well as kind and thoughtful. I never heard any negative words from my grandmother's mouth. We all loved and treasured her very much.

Growing up, it was my uncle (my mom's brother), who used to talk to me about God and the importance of

following the five pillars of Islam with emphasis on the daily prayers.

Five pillars of Islam are:

- 1. Faith in the Oneness of God and the finality of the Prophet Muhammad;*
- 2. Establishment of the daily prayers;*
- 3. Almsgiving to the needy;*
- 4. Self-purification through fasting;*
- 5. The pilgrimage to Mecca for those who are able;*

On the contrary, when I would ask my uncle about heaven, and how sure he was that we would get there by following these five pillars, he could not answer this question to my satisfaction. He would normally respond by saying that it would be better to be safe by obeying the five pillars of Islam just in case they were required for entry to paradise. If not, then you have not lost anything by performing them. He would talk with sincerity, but his actions toward his wife did not demonstrate charity or compassion. Instead, he would misuse his authority toward his wife by beating her when there were disagreements between them. It was hard for me to understand how he could be a Godly person on one hand and abusive to his own wife on the other. I did not have enough knowledge of the Quran to argue or question him, so I would only listen and remain polite as expected.

Five times a day you will hear the sound of the call to prayer from a nearby mosque or Radio. The sound of the call to prayer had a special effect on many souls, including me. Our home was only a few doors away from a mosque in our

neighborhood. The voice of the Muezzin (a mosque official), who calls Muslims to prayer from a minaret five times a day, rightfully asks for us to come together, and pray to the Almighty God. His appeal was with such a confidence and sincerity that makes one stop and think about nothing but God. It touches your soul and pulls you like a magnet to face Mecca to pray.

But the reality outside of those emotions is much different. My religious teachers at our school often told us not to get into any kind of religious discussions with Armenian Christians who were also there as students. They also drilled into our heads that Jews, Christians and those of the Baha'i faith were not "clean" at all, and encouraged us to keep our distance from them. The sad part of those teachings was that they were included in the holy Quran! I found out that the Quran confirms all of what my religious teachers at school and my uncle were saying or doing, and considered them the words of Allah! (1, 2)

Those strange and out of the ordinary teachings were being taught by our religious teachers, and Mullahs alike caused many, including myself, to remain ignorant from the real Truth of the Scriptures, which I will talk about as we go forward. However, because of my limited knowledge, I participated often in the mosques, praying and worshipping Allah as part of our obligatory duties and traditions, especially during the holy months of Ramadan and Muharram. Allah was a god I never questioned, who seemed distant and unknowable.

But now, as I look back, I cannot help to notice that God the Father saw me in a place where I could not see myself.

Notes:

1) Concerning women: *As for the women the book of Allah is emphatic that they are inferior to men and if they disobey their husbands they have the right to beat them.*

Quran: *“Sura 4:34 Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband’s) absence what Allah would have them guard.*

As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance)”

2) Concerning Friendship with non-Muslims

Quran: *Sura 3:28 “Let not the believers take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than believers: if any do that, in nothing will there be help from Allah: except by way of precaution, that ye may Guard yourselves from them. But Allah cautions you (To remember) Himself; for the final goal is to Allah.”*