
Chapter 3

A new page in my life

Lackland Air Force Base

In the spring of 1973, our group left Iran for the United States of America. We had a lengthy layover in London, England. When we first arrived in London, the weather was very foggy and hard to see things. But as the time passed it became much clearer to see this beautiful city. Couple of my friends and I took a short sightseeing trip through the city. It sure felt strange seeing all the cars driving on the wrong side of the road but the city was so neat and clean as you were in a cute, but giant ‘doll house’.

Soon we boarded another plane and continued our journey to the U.S. We had brought along lots of dried fruit and nuts to munch on, and we did not mind to show our hospitality to other passengers and flight attendants by sharing them. Everyone seemed to enjoy the pistachios the most. The trip was long, but we kept ourselves busy playing cards or watching movies.

Our first stop in the U.S. was New York JFK airport. We were all very excited about our journey and proud of our country and who we were. Everywhere we went we were well received by everyone. Iran was one of the closest allies to the United States at that time, and as a result, we would go through every checkpoint without anyone questioning or searching us or our luggage. (*Good old days!*)

Our next stop was Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio Texas, where we stayed and continued our English education for fifteen weeks. We were the first large group of midshipmen who were entering a U.S. air force base for this transitional training. There were many activities already prepared for other Iranian airmen, but not for us. We stayed there for the duration of schooling, and focused our time and energy on preparing for our university education. We passed our “Test of English as a Foreign Language” (TOEFL) and entrance exams for our assigned university.

I was part of the group of twenty-five cadets that were chosen to attend the Citadel, a military college in Charleston, South Carolina. Our group was selected by the Iranian Navy to study Business Administration. Once more, I had very little military experience up to this point, and did not know what lay ahead. No one told me about the expectations of the Citadel, a tough and highly respected school. As far as I knew and was concerned about, I was going to a university to earn a degree and that was all. Boy was I in for a surprise! (I’ll elaborate more on this, in chapter four.)

There were many nationalities at Lackland AFB that were there for various training, but our group was there for English comprehension and passage of the entrance exams to the university. For the short time that we were there, we had a great time meeting people who came to the base for different reasons, such as shopping, swimming, playing sports, and even going to church. It was there that I met some families who were nice to us and invited us into their homes and churches. They made us feel like as we were a part of them. I remember one occasion when a group of us were invited to someone's home for lunch after a church service. We played cards, chess, and did many other activities already planned for us. It was at this house that one of the guys in our group walked right through a glass door! The door was large and so clean that you could not tell if there was a door there at all. It made us all feel bad, but the owner was so nice, understanding, and compassionate toward the guy who did it, and the rest of us as well.

A friend of mine in Iran, who had already been to Lackland AFB, had told me about a group of people who came to the base every Sunday morning. They would invite foreign exchange students to their church for worship and fellowship. He also told me that I should go with them when they came to our barracks if I wanted to meet some good people. This would also help with my English and communication skills as well. That was another reason why I chose to go places to meet people without hesitation.

I recall on one particular Sunday morning when someone came with their church-van to our barracks, and invited as many students as he could to their church. I went along as well as some other students. When we arrived at their

church, we were taken to a class where they taught us about God and Christianity. The classroom was full to capacity with mostly foreign exchange students. We understood and agreed with most of his teachings concerning God and His messengers, until he spoke about us being “sinners” and in need of Jesus Christ who was also being called “The Son of God”! Suddenly, many hands would go up with objections and questions.

“Why do you call Jesus Christ, who is a man, the Son of God?” We asked.

Referring to us as “sinners” and to Jesus Christ as “the Son of God”, was unfamiliar in our religious teachings, growing up as Muslims. We associated the word “sin” to those who may have done something terrible such as killing someone or having done something immoral which has great punishment and consequences. But since I had never killed anyone or done anything as terrible as that, I never thought of myself as a sinner!

I knew that we had made mistakes, made bad judgments and simply made bad decisions in our daily lives, but at the same time we believed that God would forgive us. This is why we recited these words from the holy Quran that “Allah, being the most beneficial and the most merciful” in our daily prayers.

Second, in the phrase “The Son of God” we understood that the word “son” was as a result of a physical intimacy between two persons and in this case, God and Mary. Since Mary was known as the “Virgin Mary”, to the Muslims, therefore the idea of using the phrase “the Son of God” to us was false and wrong. In our eyes this phrase was also

degrading God, and brought Him down to the level of a human being.

Anyway, we could neither understand nor accept what the teacher was trying to convey to us, so naturally the teacher had a hard time communicating this portion of the Bible to us. When we finally left the church, we were a bit confused.

Growing up under the influence of Islamic religion in Iran, no one ever tried to teach anything like this to me. Nevertheless, the people were very nice and good to us, never making us feel bad about not understanding what they were trying to teach.

On another occasion while walking around the base, I heard loud music and excitement coming out of a building nearby. It made me curious, so I approached the building and observed a large group of people playing music. Some were playing their guitars and drums, while others were singing and clapping their hands. They appeared to be very happy about what they were singing. But, when I learned that the singing and loud music was coming from inside a religious chapel, I was really surprised and could not grasp the meaning of the celebration!

As I was analyzing this situation in my head, thinking and questioning the reason for such excitement, I thought perhaps there was a wedding about to take place, or perhaps this was not really a church. You see, in the mosque that I used to go to in Iran, I was accustomed to hearing the sound of mourning, crying and reverence for those who died for the cause of Islam, as the Mullahs (teachers of Islam) articulated to us concerning Muhammad and his disciples.

These challenges intrigued my curiosity and I wanted to learn more about those issues in question and was not satisfied until I discovered them on my own.

Later on I did learn that Christian church services were more like a celebration where those who wished to worship, gathered together to celebrate the risen savior Jesus Christ, who took away their sins once and for all. Their worship was not out of obligation or duty, but out of gratitude and love for Jesus Christ.

Also, when I learned more about “sin” and Jesus as “the Son of God”, it became much more clear to me about the real truth of God. In fact the truth about us being sinners and Jesus as the Son of God is recorded in the Quran! Here is a Sura 20:121 which talks about man’s first sin:

*“Then they (Adam and his wife) both ate of it, so their shame became apparent unto them, and they began to hide by heaping on themselves some of the leaves of the garden, and Adam disobeyed his Lord and **his nature became evil.**”*

“Most certainly, all of us are children of Adam except one – his name is Jesus Masih (Messiah). Apple trees produce only apples! Can an apple tree produce oranges? All humans born in Adam’s family inherit Adam’s nature. The curse of sin in Adam is being passed down among his decedents. Jesus is the only man who never sinned. He did not sin because he was not born in the bloodline of Adam. He did not inherit Adam’s sin nature.

Sura 3:45 (And remember) when the angels said: "O Maryam! Verily, Allah gives you the glad tidings of a Word from Him, whose name Jesus Masih (Jesus Messiah), the

son of Maryam, held in honor in this world and in the Hereafter, and one of those brought near to Allah."

Ayah 45 is the announcement to Mary that she had been chosen to give birth to the Prophet Jesus. Muslims around the world have two names for Jesus. They call him "Jesus or Isa Kalumullah" (Word of God) and "Jesus or Isa Ruhullah" (Spirit of God). Why do they call Jesus or Isa by these two names?

The answers are in Sura Al-Imran 3:45 and Sura Ambiyaa 21:91. God said that He would put his Word into Mary. What or who is God's "Word?" To better understand this, read Sura Ambiyaa 21:91 "...and she (Maryam) guarded her chastity, therefore We breathed into her of our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for all people."

Why do they refer to Jesus as "Isa Kalumullah" and "Isa Ruhullah"? The Quran makes it clear; Jesus is the Word (Kalum) and Spirit (Ruh) of Allah. No other person or Prophet carries these titles.

God's "Word" and "Spirit" that was placed inside Mary became flesh in the form of a baby. He told Mary to name the baby Jesus Masih. Masih or Messiah means "the anointed or promised one." 758 years before the birth of Jesus, the Prophet Isaiah wrote, "...a virgin will conceive and his name will be called, 'Immanuel' (Isaiah 7:14). "Immanuel" is a Hebrew word meaning, "God with us."

Jesus would be honored by all people in this world and forever in heaven and he would be one of those nearest to God Himself. The Quran paints a picture of Jesus for us. He is God's Kalum, Ruh, promised anointed one, and "a sign for (all) the nations" (Ambiyaa 21:91). When we want to go

somewhere that we have never gone before, we look for a sign to guide us. Where will we go if we follow Jesus?

3:46 "He will speak to the people in the cradle and in manhood, and he will be one of the righteous."

Jesus' birth was to be a message to the entire world and he was to be one of the righteous. How righteous was Jesus? God told Mary, in Sura Maryam 19:19, that Jesus would be "a faultless son."

The Bible teaches us that Jesus never killed anyone; he did not have a love for money; he never married; he spoke out against corruption among the religious leaders; he prayed every day; he fasted for 40 days and nights in which he did not eat anything at all; and he taught us to love our enemies. If Jesus ever committed a sin, then he would have ceased to be God's Kalumullah or Ruhullah and he could not have gone to heaven to be with God. Through Jesus, God showed the world how "complete" Muslims should live their lives. This would be a wonderful world if we all lived our lives like Jesus. Now I hope that the title Jesus as the "Son of God" is much clearer for my Muslim friends."

(A complete Muslim by Kevin Greeson and Quran)

During our stay at Lackland AFB, which is close to San Antonio, Texas, I had some good and bad experiences. I met many nice people who would make us feel welcome. An example of this was a retired Air Force Colonel who would come to the base on a regular basis to meet and invite a few foreign exchange students from the same country to his home. His wife would attempt to cook the traditional food based on the culture of the invited guests. We would eat and

fellowship with each other while they made every effort to make us feel welcome. I think it was an attempt to keep us from feeling homesick.

I remember that in the Colonel's home there was a small round table filled with miniature flags of the whole world. He would take the flag of the United States and the flag of the invited guest's home country and put them in the middle of the table in order to make us feel special, with the other flags of the world surrounding them. The food was great, the fellowship was awesome, and we surely felt the love and unselfish generosity this family, as well as many others like them showed us.

On another occasion, the Colonel took us to the historic Alamo, where we dressed up like cowboys. He supplied the clothes and fake guns for us and took a few photo shots. Everyone had brought their own cameras and the Colonel took pictures of us Iranian 'cowboys' so we could send the photos to our families back home. That was so thoughtful of him. Giving up his time and money for the people he did not know or may not see again! I wish I knew his name.

I also met another family, Mel and June Curtis, also an Air Force family, who treated me like their own son, welcoming me into their home. I spent much of my time with them. They treated me like part



of their family, and when I got married June was there at my wedding representing my side of the family! To this day, we still communicate with each other.

The city of San Antonio was a lively city with lots of lights at night, fireworks and carnivals. I enjoyed the music on the river walk while being among people who seemed to be happy all the time. It was during one of those happy occasions when I ran into one of my English teachers from Lackland AFB. She invited me to a dinner at a nearby restaurant. We were sitting at a table to be served. After we ordered our food, the waitress asked us the kind of dressing we would like to have?

I waited for my teacher to say something.

She replied “French” would be fine.

Then the waitress turned to me and asked the same question. Our dining table was small, and I was perplexed by the same question as to how she was going to ‘dress-up’ our table! I really did not understand the question, and at the same time did not want to act dumb in front of my English teacher. All I knew of the word ‘dressing’ referred to “a dressing table”. So, I was amazed by the question and responded, ‘Make it Persian!’

I was anxious to see how she was going to ‘dress-up’ the dining table to our taste! She immediately responded that they did not have “Persian”. I said okay then make it “French” since I heard the teacher asking for the same.

I had my eyes glued to the waitress with the expectation of seeing what type of “table-cloth” or “flowers” she was going to decorate our table with. I waited and waited and

waited; the food came; we ate but I was still waiting to see what the waitress was going to do with our table. Finally we left the restaurant, but nothing was ever done to our table. I was really confused! Of course, later I learned the meaning of “salad dressing” for she failed to mention the word “salad” in front of “dressing”. Lesson learned.

My only negative experience in San Antonio was that we heard gunfire and fights almost every week and there were always clashes between the Mexicans and Blacks in the city especially late at night, which made it uneasy for us when we stayed there late at night.

Well, our time had come and gone at Lackland AFB, and we had to move on. A prestigious and well known college was waiting for us, but little did we know what we had coming! Thus we passed all of our exams and prepared ourselves for departure to a military school that would surely change our lives. That school which you about to read in the next chapter is called “**The Citadel**”.