

ZAID ALSAFFARINI

What Actually HAPPENED

A long Journey of Struggling, Suffering ad Hope

Memoir of Safarini



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**"A Long Journey of Struggling,
Suffering and Hope"**

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جميع الحقوق

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Dedications:

This book is dedicated to the many people who have served as meanings in my life.

To my beautiful family, who, upon my being sentenced, had also received my sentence and endured my suffering. It's been almost thirty years. Perhaps the strength and inspiration you have depleted yourselves for me, can be restored by this book;

To the soul of my late father, who passed away while I was in prison; I miss you.

To my beloved 'grandma', who turned 98 years old this year and suffers from Alzheimer's, and who, according to my family, seems to always get her memory back whenever my name is mentioned in front of her;

To the memory of my true, true friend, Lewis Burtello – the Maltese-British man, whom I had endured so much with, for some time in prison. May you rest in peace LeWis. You wilt always be in my mind and heart;

To my soul mate, Maher Said, who was brought in front of me and hanged. What was done to you had caused a wound so deep in my heart that will never heal.

To my beloved second family in 'America': Father Michael Bryant and Brother Louis Schwartz, whom I have christened "My Two Saints;"

To my amazing attorneys -- who are even more remarkable human beings--Bob Tucker, David Bruck and 'the Great' Lisa Greenman. I never conceived that I would love someone in this land so much, until I met all of you. Thank you all for standing firmly beside me, for

your emotional and financial support and encouragement.

I love you all so much, so that, if I were to meet my passing this very moment, the love I have in my heart for you would be my paradise.

In my long journey there have been numerous others who have stood with me in their care and kindness. You are in my spirit and heart, and are not forgotten.

Bless you all

Author's Note

Aspects of some characters in this book have been changed solely to protect these individuals and out of respect to them and their families privacy at this late time of age. I extend my sincere apologies to them all for recounting some of our shared stories without their permission.



Introduction

For many, many years, and on various occasions, I have been advised by very close friends, as well as some acquaintances—whom I had trusted enough to bring into my life confidence of certain events and occurrences that had taken place in my life—to write a book. Not only would this particular book be a memoir comprising some of my most unimaginably captivating experiences, but it would also reveal some astonishing and highly incredible truths during my hard and torturous journey.

Despite being on death row, grumbling in the corner of my cell, waiting any minute for my executioner to escort me to the gallows of some horrid Pakistani backyard to hang me, I have always reasoned that the time wasn't yet ripe to be writing my story. It is now fifteen years later, and I find myself in nearly similar circumstances of sitting alone isolated inside another tiny hell of a cell at the 'ADX-SuperMax' in Florence, Colorado—where, allegedly, the nation's most vicious, despicable and notorious criminals are housed. I had undergone extreme difficulty and loneliness there, and felt as if I could succumb to a heart attack at any moment, given the intense stress I was under, along with other health complications. But still, there seemed to always be this feeling, from some inexplicable place that I had intuit, that made me feel I would live and make it. This naturally drew out my patience and assured me that I could worry about and focus on writing later.

Eventually, I was moved to the Communications Management Unit (CMU), in Terre Haute, IN, which is also known as "Guantanamo North", where I had spent another four years of my life before I was considered a reduced-risk prisoner and transferred to United States Penitentiary Terre Haute, Indiana—which is where I am now. Even here, new friends of mine, even a few kind officials, have also persisted in their encouragement for me to indict these extraordinary years of my life.

While considering whether I should write this book or not, I had to likewise consider the possible ramifications my written truths might instigate. This is why it is very important for me to mention that it is not my intention to use my knowledge and experiences as a weapon to frame or score points with anyone. Neither do I wish to place anyone in an 'accusation cage', whether they are individuals, groups or even highranking government officials. As you can see we are talking history, things are already past and gone. My only undertaking and pure purpose in telling my story is to release the psychological and emotional suppression I have suffered, seemingly, perpetually. A lot of lives have been lost, as well as many people have been hurt, including myself and I sincerely apologize for any extent of my involvement, directly or indirectly.

There are a Jot of people—powerful in their positions, wealth and influence—who are salivating wolves, masquerading around in the most cottony-fresh of sheep's clothing, waiting to gain the trust of unsuspecting young human beings so that they can attack and ravage them, chewing away the meat, and picking its teeth with the shattered bones.

So my decision to finally write this book has a lot to do with my earnest attempt to reach out to the impressionable young people, who are now around the tender age that I was when I joined the 'Abu Nidal Organization', or A.N.O. I hope to provide them with my story so that they may have the advantage of knowing and being aware of the unconscionable that can befall them, should they fail to protect their minds and hearts and question the motives of individuals who wish to use them for their innocence, ignorance and vulnerabilities. I wish to exemplify, as well as offer, the reasons as to why it is best to always weigh their options and make their decisions without haste.

Thus, it is now, September 19, 2015 that I render to the public and the world a shedding of light on 'What Actually Happened.'

(Quotation)

"Let nothing disturb you;
Let nothing frighten you;
All things are passing:
God never changes...
Patient endurance attains to all things"
St.

Theresa of Avila



Prologue

It was 3:00 in the morning when the phone started to ring. It seemed to scream incessantly for me to pick it up. It had taken me a moment to get my bearings and remember where I was, but it had done nothing to lessen the anger I was feeling toward the person who was calling me at this hour. However, upon hearing the voice of the hotel receptionist recounting my request to be awakened at 3:00 AM sharp, I groggily thanked him—having heavily drank the night before and having yet to recover.

"You're welcome, Mr. Boomer," he replied, addressing me with the last name that was on my fake Omani passport I was duty-bound to keep in my possession at every waken moment. I was to be known as 'Saeed Boomer', which I thought was the most important 'holding' in my life, for all of the reprieve it was allowing me from the living hell I had succumbed.

After hanging up, I thought, "I could really use a pot of that strong, black, Turkish coffee to steady my head", but decided against it because time was of an essence I had to keep. I also had four friends I had to meet up with, whom I was most certain would be waiting on me, if everything went smoothly and according to plan—something I justifiably presumed, since there were no urgent messages suddenly left at the front desk indicating some contingency. "I'll have my morning coffee on the hijacked Pan Am plane".

As I propelled myself into action preparing myself to leave, the most amazing thought had

occurred to me: That I was just a few steps away from having everything in my life dramatically changed forever. That, finally, my fate was in front of me, and that there would be an end to all the chaos, uncertainty and a life overwhelmed with fear, nightmares and continuous depression and insanity. There was such a tremendous joy dancing inside of me from realizing that, after a few more hours, I would be released a free man, tasting a freedom I had not known in years. And I was eager to meet it just as quickly as it was approaching.

"Just a few more hours away," I kept thinking. "Yes, within hours and I will be either dead or in a dreadful prison... that my soul or body would meet either of the two ultimate

freedoms I yearn for." I just wanted to commit myself to its company. Whether it would come in the form of my being physically displaced in some foreign land or the ultimate surrendering of my soul to my Creator, I simply had to escape these zealots—which I was not—and their extreme and stringent ideology.

Personally, I have never heard before, someone wishing and preferring death or prison on themselves, or seeing this one extreme and, the other, a dreaded under-path, as a sweet gift or a sort of freedom that can be celebrated. My imagination was everywhere, yet in the same place. And as I thought about my childhood, my friends and my beloved family, who I had never had the chance to see and say good-bye to, and how they would be affected when they hear about my tragic end, it was disheartening and very hard to bear.



Chapter 1

My Sweet Childhood

"A loving atmosphere in your home is the foundation for your life"

Be careful of the environment in which you choose to live and the friends whom you choose to keep, because they both can shape you into becoming just like them. Who I lived with, along with the company I kept, was not exactly a choice I had the pleasure of deciding, but it was still as lovely, exciting and as sweet as can be.

I was born in Kuwait City to a Palestinian family—a typically large one with nine brothers and a sister, and with parents who were barely educated, but whose warmth and love toward their kids was larger than life itself, and whose only goal in life was to educate, protect and take care of us.

As a young boy through my early teens, all I ever liked doing was enjoying fun and playing soccer, which was the popular sport at that time. And I played it as much as I could. Having been born in the month of July, where in the Persian Gulf states, it is extremely hot in the desert, to the point where you can see the steam rising from the earth beneath you. Even with the unbearably arid and scorching weather, I used to always go out with the new soccer ball my dad bought me for my birthday, and kick it around. Seldom would I have a playmate with me, because you rarely saw people out in the streets at this

blazing time of the day, with the sun sitting in the middle of the sky like an angry fireball. Almost everyone abandoned the streets at this hour to lie and take a nap in the air-conditioned rooms. And of course, I didn't care. I would be in the sweltering heat all alone, just kicking my soccer ball around. Years later, and on many occasions, close friends of mine would jokingly comment on my quick and hot temper and strong head, teasing me and saying how they finally understood that I had gotten it from having stored all that heat inside me for all those years.

The environment I was born and raised up in was purely Palestinian. All our neighborhoods, schools, shops, hospitals, restaurants and whatever other amenities had everything that made an environment livable and complete. All my friends and fellow schoolmates were Palestinians, and though Kuwait—my birthplace—is a tiny state, rich in resources, cozy and small, making up a population of about one million, half being Palestinians, this country had a big heart and had welcomed thousands of Palestinians who mostly migrated from the West Bank, looking for shelter and a better life after being expelled from their homes by the Israeli occupiers. This is exactly the atmosphere that I was shaped in and where I grew up. Palestine was everywhere to me. My homeland was in my house, in my school, in the street, and deeply in my tender heart. I was consumed and overwhelmed with love for my homeland and people.

I still remember and cherish the memories of my early years, especially every other year when my dad would gather and tell us that this summer, for our vacation from school; we were

going to go to our village, Safarin, in Palestine, to spend two months with our Grandparents and other relatives. And when dad would finish making these kinds of announcements, I would be so joyfully excited about visiting them that I would start jumping around to the point where my head would be close to hitting the ceiling. I would be so happy with anticipation in knowing that I'll soon be running and playing in the mountains and valleys with boys my age, that I was going to be eating the delicious summer fruits directly from the fig and peach trees itself. I would even eat from the cactus that our village is known for. Then of course, there are the olives and almonds; trees that had been standing like this with its roots having been deep in the earth for hundreds of years. But most importantly, I was going to enjoy riding my Grandpa's donkey. Today, I have grown passionately and crazy about cars. My favorite car has always been the German Mercedes. But if I had to choose, honestly, I would prefer the donkey, because it always takes me back to my Grandpa, to the innocent years of my age, and to my roots and the home that I so passionately love.

Another thing that's exciting about visiting Safarin this time of the year is that there is always a wedding. A lot of our villages young men come back home from all around the world just to get married and hold the wedding and celebration there, at home. These young Palestinian men had always insisted on this to us, the younger boys. That no matter where we are in the world, that when we fall in love and plan on marrying our special ladies, that we must always come back to Safarin to wed and celebrate.

And additional joy I used to always look forward to was snacking on a home-made candy, as we secretly smoked cigarettes we had taken from the guests' table without any of the adults knowing, along with the tremendous enjoyment of the traditional Palestinian songs and dancing.

And then, finally, there comes the most dreaded part of our summer vacation; where there's an ending to everything and it is time to go back. This had always caused me sadness and depression. A few times, I had even tried to hide behind Grandma, refusing to go. I love her a lot. Now it's been thirty years without having laid my eyes upon her, and I'm truly missing her. She's just turned ninety-eight this year, 2015, and I'm always praying for her wellbeing and for her to hold on as long as she can, so we might see each other again. I now pray that, when she eventually passes away, that she does so as peacefully as she had lived her simple life – at peace. I have a lot of sweet memories about her, one which is still ever present in my mind.

One day my Grandma decided to take me along with her to a large city not too far away from our village. We had to wait at the bus station for the bus to take us there. While we waited, my Grandma held my hand, as she sought inside her clothes for a coin of which she had tied tightly in the midst of her traditional Palestinian dress. She would do this in order that she would not cause a delay by not having her fare ready, thus holding up the bus-driver in the process. There was also another woman who had also secured her coins in her clothes in the same fashion, and it took her nearly ten minutes to unwind the garment that held her precious money. This caused a delay and

some frustration at the bus-station because the bus-driver would not continue until he received his payment for his services. I remember very vividly Grandma looking in my eyes and saying, "You must always stay ready and prepared... and very organized..." In her wisdom, she was trying to demonstrate to me that patience and planning were very important principles that I needed in my life. I would need these crucial principles as a young Palestinian man maneuvering through the turmoil of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of the 1960's and 70's. Who would believe that a simple coin tied into a battered dress could impart such lessons and parables. Again, merely thinking of leaving my Grandparent's home at the end of any summer vacation we had spent with them had always been painful and sad, and it is only now that I truly realize the many benefits I received when I was with them.

In going back to my school, my childhood friends, my neighborhood and my birthplace... and, though, I've always considered Kuwait as the second home that I love very much, my soul and heart have always favored Safarin, my village and real home in Palestine. I've always looked forward to returning there; always wishing for the next summer to hurry back around, in spite having seen how the Israeli border-patrol treated us. I felt very strongly against what we had to go through every time we passed it. It's hard to imagine and understand the horrendous treatment we were subjected to at the Israeli border and check-points once we had crossed the bridge from the East Bank of Jordan, to the West Bank of Palestine. It had been here, where a series of humiliations had begun. These demeaning

acts instigated by the Israeli soldiers included shakedowns to strip searches to the very hard, intimidating and totally unnecessary questions they would spew at Palestinian elders. Questions like "Why are you coming here?", "Who are you going to see?", "Is Yasir Arafat your hero?", or "Is there any member of your family in prison or with the P.L.O?"—the Palestine Liberation Organization, which was an organization who fought against Israeli occupation and sought the restoration of the state of Palestine. Then, finally, these soldiers would end their thinly-disguised interrogations by giving these Palestinian elders a foreboding and menacing warning: "Don't exceed your stay here!" There would be all kinds of degrading questions and statements against us that any human being would consider such blatant disrespect towards their very humanity, and would have even caused the most passive person's blood to boil in extreme anger.

Being very young, I was not able to ask my father why these dustily fatigued men, armed to the brim with Uzi submachine guns and holstered pistols, were doing all of these things to us. Maybe it was out of fear that I couldn't ask; however, such things have always remained embedded in my mind and conscious and have been exceedingly hard to forget, despite having taken place decades ago. Even if these things are still happening, I have a great urge to see my village, my ancestral home again, and all the malicious man-handling and interrogations would be absolutely worth it. I would be more than willing to contain my emotions and tolerate the debasement upon debasement of those soldiers stationed at the borders of my homeland.

I remember when I was going to school. There were about four-hundred students there who were Palestinians—including the teachers. Every morning there was a teacher who made us chant slogans and revolutionary songs regarding our beloved home—which wasn't much different from Israeli schools, whose teachers, till this very moment, propagate to their children hatred towards Arabs in general and against Palestinians in particular. And in this regard, I can never forget the math teacher I had when I was six years old. To this day I can still remember his name. This young man would ask very simple questions in math that was suitable for our age group, like what's two plus two or three times four and other similar rudimentary math equations. So one day, he had called on me to stand and answer one of the easy questions. I remember stammering, because I didn't know the answer, and was even about to cry when he immediately showed his understanding toward my plight. He approached and placed his strong hand on my shoulder for me to relax, and then said: "My son, Zaid...the question isn't as hard as you think, I'm going to ask you this question again, but in a different way..." I barely murmured something with a slow and careful nod of my head, afraid that I would even fail answering it the second time. He blandly asked, with no remorse or forethought: "If there were nine Jews in front of you, and you killed four of them, how many Jews will remain?" "Yes, sir...yes, sir!" I exclaimed immediately, suddenly finding my voice along with my courage. "There will remain five!" The teacher then smiled and asked all the students in my class to clap for me, before allowing me to sit down.

Indeed, I was relieved. And after all the years since this story had occurred, I have found the time to truly ponder and ask myself if either side—the Palestinians or the Israelis—is vindicated, justified or even minutely doing the right thing by teaching their children, at this delicate and fragile age, how to hate and kill each other? And my answer is an emphatic 'No!' I sincerely believe it is premature, unnecessary, and unhealthy mentally and outright wrong to poison their green and fertile minds with disaffection, malice and bad blood because of some political and ideological reason that isn't meant serve that child's positive growth and development.

This reflection leads me to ponder upon what is currently happening in the Gaza Strip, where most of the children have either lost one or both parents to Israeli bombs and shelling, who are the poorest kids upon the face of the earth, and who don't need a math teacher schooling and instructing them on how to hate! They are already consumed with hatred toward everyone, because they feel—as I once did—that no one in the world cares. There is no need to even consider the high probability of what they might become when they grow up, if they even live that long. Israeli bullets and white phosphorous are Hamas's and other resistance groups most effective recruiters. And this should be a warning signal to encourage and inspire everyone to, once and for all, seek a solution from which both sides can benefit and therefore prosper.

In the middle of the 70's, when I was about 13 years old, the brutal civil war in

Lebanon had just broken out between various Lebanese and international factions. The

Palestinians quickly became heavily embroiled in this foolish and unnecessary war. This senseless conflict had lasted for over 15 years, and Lebanon has remained an unstable country till this day. This particular war later became a major and earnest turning point in my life. It had carried a lot of publicity, saturating our homes, our schools, our streets, and every crevice through which the media could seep and spread. There was a pervasive call for young Palestinian men to enlist and deploy to Lebanon. I had known many of them who were either our neighbors or teachers who had participated in this war. I don't remember a day having gone by without hearing news that someone we knew had been killed or severely wounded and crippled. The grim posters of the martyrs, who smiled and glared at us surreally beyond the grave, were everywhere. Children my age had to pass them around and hang their pictures on the walls of our school. These men, and sometimes even women, displayed on these posters would receive admiration and praise for being our brave heroes, who made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of a liberated Palestine.

The PLO was playing a massive role in all the propaganda that was being fed and broadcasted over the radios and TVs, encouraging the young and old to enlist and join the raging battle. I still, and very clearly remember when two of my close buddies and I—the three of us barely being 14—had gone to the PLO headquarters after school that day. And the guards there, upon our insistence, ushered us into the commander's office. The commander received us with unclouded astonishment spread across his face, as if to ask, "What foolishness brings three little

boys here, into my office, undersuch an urgent request, while I'm looking to recruit able-bodied men?!" He was sitting behind a modest desk—with a picture of 'The Supreme Leader,' Yasir Arafat, among framed photos of other martyrs of the past hanging in the background—when he asked, "What can I do for you? And who are you, anyway?"

Though we were trembling from fear, we were determined very much to say exactly what it was that we had come to say. So I took the lead and bluntly told him: "We want to become 'those who sacrifice themselves'. The PLO had been dispatching small commando squads of heavily armed men across the border into occupied Palestine to attack Israeli settlements and military installations. I continued, "We want to be enlisted...we want you to send us to Lebanon, or even Palestine...to fight and die there. We insist on becoming martyrs." I was sincere and very emotional after I said those words, and my passions enflamed. However, the huge bulking commander stepped from behind his desk, walking toward us with an expression on his face that

was indicative of how touched he had been by our brash and reckless immaturity. He said, 'Sons...I'm very proud of you. But you're too young for this. Go. Stay in school until you've finished. An educated man with a gun in his hand is more of a benefit to our blessed revolution than an ignorant one."

I was really hurt by his words. I was disappointed, angry and on the verge of shedding tears. With my voice cracking to pieces, I had still managed to ask him: "But what if the war ended before we grow up and

complete our education? We want to fight and be a part of it now!"

. The commanders smile broadened as he started to chuckle at my audacious innocence and said, I'Son...I can assure you of one thing... which you will grow to live long enough to witness through many... that it will take hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of wars and conflicts to free Palestine, so there is no urgency for you to just stake your life in one. You, even your children and their children will, one day, participate in these wars against our Zionist enemies. As for now, you are the future leaders who will come to lead battles one glorious day. We will leave to you the future...so go, go home. Focus on your studies, at least for now. But in the meanwhile, I will give you a small but important role..."

Thus I had been formally introduced to various revolutionary ideas and statements, posters of martyrs, and other forms of expression and exhibits that served to bring about a certain desired inspiration and excuse for a protracted war and conflict. I am reminded of October 1973, three years earlier, when another phase of the Arab-Israeli war intensified. The Arabs had designated this war "The Ramadan War", since it had commenced during the holy month of Ramadan, which the Israelis refer to as "the Yom Kippur war." During these heated battles, at its very peak and intensity, one of our teachers walked into our class one day. He proclaimed that he needed five students among us to volunteer, starting that day, to go through the neighborhoods and collect contributions—money, clothes, blankets and canned goods—to send to our people who were fighting in this

war. And, of course, I had found myself among this group of five. I was full of energy to do so, and very excited that the teacher had chosen me. My parents were pleased and very encouraging.

Again, I found myself at the PLO office, but, this time, I didn't have the same feeling as I had had when I had first gone there with my two companions. I think I was surer of myself and what I wanted to do. I wasn't satisfied with this self-branded, mediocre

mission. I was looking for a bigger task, something more dangerous and risky. I was now 15, and therefore, old enough to do something of more importance. Nevertheless, I left the PLO office sad and frustrated and thinking about doing something on my own. The drum-beating of the war, the slogans, the conditioning in my school, with the spirit of revolution overwhelming me, made me feel I was going to explode. And that it was my duty to direct this unstable ball of energy into something cause-worthy, and to not waste time doing it.

From there, I, and a couple of friends, started planning on how we could cross the border, covering that expanse of dry Arabian land, and escape from Kuwait to Iraq, since the regime of the Iraqi Ba'ath had been hosting several Palestinian groups and their training camps. This was unlike Kuwait, whose political and executive leaders refused the idea of any militia in their land. But the problem for us was that we neither had nor knew how to get passports or any other travelling documents that would help us cross, so we had to cross the desert illegally, endangering ourselves to thirst and hunger, and to be shot and killed by the border-guards

or attacked and ravaged by wild animals. But we didn't care. Or, perhaps, we just didn't understand those dangers. We had tried to cross the border more than once unsuccessfully, and were always caught and sent back to our families.

Before I had first left Kuwait, by myself, I have found myself reflecting upon how this exciting and painful journey had started, and I wish to mention it. In December of '78, I met with one of the local leaders of the 'Fatah', or the 'Victory' movement, which was the largest and dominant faction among other Palestinian movements. This leader's job was to pay attention to and observe the young and to determine whether or not they were serious, dependable or had the potential of being skilled and obedient fighters. If they had proven themselves to be so, they would then be selected and eventually recruited and sent to the many battlefronts. This was what had happened to me and my dear friend and schoolmate, Raed Mustafa, who would later be killed while taking on a special mission in Palestine, in March of that same year. I should have died with him and the other three in that group, but, in this long journey, and for the first time, and within the last minute, my fate and destiny would be infringed upon, as intervention would clearly have something else in store for me.

I still very well remember when I had paid Raed's parents a visit—whose home wasn't that far from where my family was living in Kuwait. I remember all of their faces,

from his mother, father, sister and brother, when they searched upon my face with their tear-filled eyes, looking for answers, or for me to proclaim that the news of their

beloved wasn't true, and that Raed was still alive and well. But I couldn't. There was no strength in me to admit to an ineffable group of words. And it had shaken me to the point that it was an excruciating task to hold my emotions in and keep my composure in front of this deeply aggrieved family, especially after I had seen the tears in his shattered mother's eyes. That was too much for me. Immediately, I fell to my knees before her, taking her hands into mine, kissing them and pleading to her: "Don't cry, Mother-of-all... we are all your sons..." I had even gone further, telling her that I shouldn't be standing there before her, that it wasn't my place and that I should have been buried with her son, my brother, comrade and friend. I really felt I was supposed to have died with Raed on that day, but, for some reason, and despite how desperately I had been trying, my time to depart this world hadn't yet approached.

At the end of that painful visit, I left their home with my heart torn to pieces, never visiting or seeing them again. That was 36 years ago.

I met with the recruiter for the last time to hear his instructions before I left Kuwait. And they were brisk and straight to the point": 'Zaid, you're being sent to Syria to join an elite outfit, with very extraordinary training... You will be placed in a Fedayeen commando unit that will go specifically on missions to Palestine, with zero chance of survival." I was very excited and elated about being chosen for something with such serious implications and heavy responsibilities. He then handed me the address to where I was to go, along with money for the travel.



Chapter 2

My Journey to the Unknown

**"Remember that not getting what you want is
sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck"**

Two days later, I was on my way to Syria through Iraq. I was aware of the moment when I first crossed, that my life had completely changed irrevocably. There would be no more childhoods to remember, normal teenage things I should have been looking forward to, and no more soccer matches. I would now be on my own, traveling by myself as any independent person would, while in reality, I was one month shy of my 17th birthday. Whenever I go back and think about that specific day, there was a small incident that occurred from which I can't help but to smile every time I remember it. It had happened after we had crossed the border into Basra— one of the largest cities in southern Iraq—to rest for a couple hours before heading to Baghdad, the capital. I hadn't thought it a bad idea to roam around before continuing on with our journey, so I walked and spotted a small bar.

Witnessing people drinking alcohol was something I had never previously experienced in my life. Of course, I had seen many scenes in the cinema of drinking parties and drunken actors, but living nearly my whole life in Kuwait, the consumption of alcohol was strictly kept in the shadows. As a conservative country, alcohol was totally

prohibited, keeping in line with Islamic law. However, now free and on my own, I was the one who set my own boundaries as I saw fit, because now I was a man and it was my right to assert this manhood. So with that determination, I stepped in a local Basra bar for the very first time in my life.

The scene before my eyes was a total contradiction of all my expectations of what a bar was supposed to be like. All my perceptions had been shaped by the movies, and I expected the place to be the loudest and the most exciting place in the city. Yet, I found all these middle-aged Iraqi men in near total silence, like zombies wallowing in some self-imposed isolation as they lazily nursed their alcoholic drinks. The whole atmosphere was depressing and full of melancholy, with these working-class men drowning out their worries and concerns with their liquors and foreign-imported beers. The Iraqi people were known to have a more prosperous life than most of the Arab world, yet their frustrations and stresses hung like a dark cloud over them in competition with the thick cigarette smoke that permeated the air.

I wondered, what were their concerns, with their country full of natural resources and tremendous potential? With the wise leadership of Ahmed Hassan al Baker, Iraq had experienced a veritable golden-era. This prosperity predated the former and late dictator, Saddam Hussain, before he usurped power and ultimate authority during the summer of 1979. Saddam then proceeded to decimate the economy of Iraq and harm its honorable people by leading them into one disastrous war after another. And as if a wretched crown placed upon Saddam's corrupted ruler-ship to commemorate his final

achievement, the United States of America stepped in with its 'shock and awe', to finish the job that Saddam started, destroying and crushing Iraq to the point where it will never stand on its own two feet in peace and dignity for the next 100 years!

Despite observing this somber mood, I still was feeling a great sense of apprehension as I took my seat at the bar. The bartender almost leapt in astonishment as he approached to serve me, seeing how young I was in my appearance and demeanor. Being underage, he was in the midst of telling me to leave the establishment, but I cut him off mid-sentence to let him know I had money to spend, putting my hand in my pocket for added emphasis. He did not seem to be dissuaded but then suddenly asked me very harshly with a scowl on his face, "What do you want?" In a state of trembling uncertainty I just barely managed to utter: "Oh...please, I would like some 'arrack'! Arrack is a variety of alcohol that is very popular throughout the Middle East. It's usually brewed locally, from raisins and aniseed. With the glass of alcohol firmly in my grip, I could feel my palm begin to sweat as I mustered the courage to gulp the fiery liquid. Immediately, my whole throat and stomach was boiling, nearly to the extent that my very pupils were going to explode out of my head!

At this point I have no idea how I conjured the power to stand and bolt from my seat, racing out of the bar back to the bus-station as fast as I possibly could. I left with such speed that I didn't bother to even pay my tab; I didn't even look back to see if the bartender was behind me. That was my first experience with alcohol!

As I left without a second glance behind me, it was as if it was a reflection of my state of mind. I was hoping to leave everything behind me, and embark upon the new road ahead, leaving the past to embrace my new future, full of adventure and fresh, vibrant experiences.

Finally, after a substantial wait, I boarded the bus in Basra, to make my way to Baghdad. Nearly in the center of the country, the journey to one of the Middle East's most historic cities was almost 500 kilometers. With the bus full to capacity, I occupied a window seat, letting the dry cool desert air of December to run over my face and hair, enjoying the beautiful, expansive scenery. I used the images, sounds and the rhythmic movement of the bus to try to steady my head and thoughts.

Even with such a soothing journey, it was impossible for me to attain a second of sleep. My restless mind kept returning to constant, painful thoughts of my family, searching for me frantically at that very moment. From door to door, they aren't leaving one single home in our neighborhood unvisited without them asking helplessly if they have seen me. I see my father scouring the desolate Kuwaiti desert and my mother weeping incessantly, beseeching God Himself to bring me back alive and healthy.

All of these thoughts and emotions were compounded by the great sense of shame I harbored towards myself for what I had put my family through. I felt so much guilt because of what they had been enduring because of my decisions. However, in moments of tremendous zeal and an unending urgency inside of me to be my own man, would override any misgivings

about my family. On top of all of this, my young mind and spirit was saturated with the endless streams of propaganda and publicity that was encouraging the younger generation of men to join the battle, to the point of selfsacrifice, if that is what the revolution demanded.

Despite these strong convictions I held, which seemed to subjugate any other feelings or concerns, I still very much believed standing shoulder-to-shoulder with my late father, aiding him in raising and caring for our family, was just as much a heavy responsibility and duty as carrying the gun to free and defend our homeland. Both of those tasks were as equally honorable and noble! But it seemed that my journey to the battlefields of this international war was my dangerous and unpredictable fate, and my soul as if a helpless, lonely feather carried by the unforgiving winds of destiny.

. Finally, we arrived in the early dawn as the sun broke though the horizon at our destination, Baghdad. There is one important detail I must mention at this point in the stoly. My most beloved and cherished maternal uncle, who I idolized as my hero since childhood, resided in the Iraqi capital. At this period of time in the history of the resistance groups, the Abu Nidal Organization was based in Baghdad, with its official headquarters there. My uncle held a high-ranking position in that notorious organization. The ANO was a staunch opponent and enemy of Yasir Arafat and the PLO, because of the formers position on negotiating with the state of Israel.

Despite all of these rivalries and high-stakes politics, I was overjoyed to have the

opportunity to see my uncle and his family. This was my hope, before I would proceed to the mountains and valleys of Syria. The challenge was I have no clue where he lived in Baghdad or where to find any of the ANO's offices or official headquarters! With only my uncle's name, it would be nearly impossible to find him in the sprawling metropolis. With these considerations in mind, I decided I could not waste any time looking for my favorite uncle. I pushed forward to the Syrian border with an aching heart.

After what seemed like an endless trek to reach my intended goal, my ride approached the Iraqi-Syrian border. As Arabs belonging to different nations outside Syria, my fellow passengers and I were expecting a rough entry into the country, full of harassment and verbal vitriol. But how lucky and blessed we found ourselves! We seemed to be passing with ease and comfort through the border checkpoints. As Arab citizens of a variety of dictatorial and repressive regimes, we were anticipating harshness and cruelty, heaped upon suspicions and recriminations. With brute force, guards and soldiers would badger you with questions: "Why are you visiting here? Are you a member of the Muslim Brotherhood? Are you an Iraqi agent?" These endless questions would be coupled with abject humiliation, occasional beating and the possibility of arbitrary arrest and detention. Al! of these transgressions reminded me of the Israeli check-points and their hateful attitudes!

We all were pleasantly surprised however. All the border officers and soldiers were in an upbeat and relaxed mood and you could feel it in the air as much as you could see it upon

their faces. With broad smiles and gentle instructions, all the Arab travelers were easily gaining entry into the country.

Such courtesies, in reality, were rooted in a much more practical intention, with geopolitical dimensions. The Ba'ath regimes of Iraq and Syria, once fierce enemies of one another, seeking their rival's destruction, were now allies. The countries rapprochement was inspired by the unprecedented steps of Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat, to enter into peace with Israel. With Sadat's signature placed upon the Camp David Accords, his simple pen-strokes placed him into the camp of the enemy, bringing Iraq and Syria together in a single moment.

These once arch-enemies were compelled to join hands as allies, uniting with other Arab nations to form a political and military coalition in opposition to Egypt and Israel, dubbed "the Rejection Front". All these fast-moving developments and fresh alliances helped to facilitate our crossing the border unhumiliated and unmolested, thank God!

The very second I stepped foot upon the streets of Damascus, I instantly fell in love with the ancient city. We labeled her 'Al-Sham', and like a long lost love, she remains always in my heart of hearts. So many sweet memories were born in this place for me. Beforehand, I thought that maybe nothing could compare with monumental Baghdad, the seat of Arab civilization for centuries. Once the center of the known world, the city was very beautiful, decorated with its Abbasid architecture and mosques; its whole spirit was serene but carried a weighty, depressive energy.

This was the opposite of Damascus, being a vibrant, cheerful city. The very air and scents of the markets and coffee shops exuded life. The attractions were too tempting for me not to wander the streets and alleyways, wishing at moments to be lost and consumed by the city itself. I was shaken awake from my day-dreams the moment my fingers, pushed in my pockets, clutched the scrap of paper in which the location of the PLO's secret office was inscribed. This particular office was dedicated to coordinating the dispatching of commandos to raid targets inside occupied Palestine. These were literal suicide missions. The directions to the hidden location were simple, and I found my way there in no time.

Upon entering the rudimentary home which served as the PLO office, I was greeted by the local commander and several of his close aides. The traditional customary pleasantries were exchanged between us, soon followed by sugary Arabian tea, whose hot steam wafted through the room as the small tea glasses were filled, drank and filled again in honor of that ever present Arab generosity and hospitality. Brief questions accompanied our tea-drinking, like who had sent me, what was my desire for wanting to join them and did I have any family or relatives within the PLO or any other active resistance factions. In a polite, school-boy fashion, I answered all their questions dutifully, as if a student being tested by a teacher. The lessons they were preparing to impart to me were far beyond the realm of grade-school classrooms and playgrounds, however.

In spite of my honest intention to answer truthfully all their inquiries, I kept my

uncle and his ties with Abu Nidal a jealously guarded secret. I knew the implications of Abu Nidal's and Arafat's bitter rivalry, and my relation to my uncle could even possibly put my life in danger at any moment.

Shortly after the questions and the last of the tea, the commander proceeded to hand me some forms to fill out and I placed my signature upon the necessary paperwork. The scene was surreal, with its business-like formalities, because in reality I was signing my life away. I posed for some pictures, most likely to have a portrait for my martyrdom poster. "It is time for you to leave," the commander announced, gripping my young hand in his worn palm, uttering to me his best wishes. As he embraced me, I could sense his satisfaction that he had yet another youthful, energetic man before him, prepared for any missions or assignment, no questions asked.

With two of the PLO staff, I emerged from the safe house anxious with anticipation. Escorted to a vehicle, my imagination was running wild as to what I would expect at my destination. Who would be there amongst the revolutionary leadership, and how expansive must the training grounds be? I imagined huge obstacle courses, with large ropes to climb and rows of barbed wire to crawl under. Maybe Arafat would make an appearance himself! Despite my expectations, after nearly 45 minutes of winding backroads and dusty dirt tracks, the camp before my eyes defied my teenage fantasies.

The secluded camp only appeared to be a handful of small buildings, with some quarters for sleeping and other training purposes, like classes. I was warmly greeted by two dozen young trainees, all men, in their military-

style fatigues and loosely wrapped kaffiyehs draped upon their shoulders. As I hugged each man, I felt the metal of their Kalashnikovs brush against my skin, which they had secured against their backs. Some of their faces flashed in my memory with familiarity, acquaintances I knew from Kuwait. I was pleasantly surprised that my dear friend and classmate, Raed Mustafa, was also attending the camp.

The Palestinian fighters were not the only residents of the camp. The larger halls used for our daily lectures would also host many members of various revolutionary groups

from around the world, spanning almost every continent. After their brief training, they would be dispatched back to their homeland to rejoin their local struggles, better prepared and indoctrinated.

My reunion with old friends and our celebrations would be short-lived. The very next day, my intense and comprehensive training would commence. It would cover all fields of guerrilla and insurgent warfare and tactics. I was familiarized with numerous Russian light-arms, like the infamous AK-47, and taught how to strip and clean our rifles, to such proficiency, I could do it blindfolded. Explosives were also introduced to us, from the proper method of hurling a hand-grenade to the intricacies of wiring and detonating

Semtex, I would fire on my targets, with an iron determination to avenge my homeland.

Physical weapons' training was not our only preoccupation. The majority of evenings, we would also attend extensive lectures on ideological topics like the ideas and writings of Karl Marx. I feel it is necessary for me

to state here, that at that junction in history, the vast collection of Palestinian factions were of a far-leftist orientation politically and ideologically. There were no Islamically-inspired groups like Hamas, Jihad, al-Qaida, ISIS, Hizballah, or even what we know of the Muslim Brotherhood today. Almost exclusively, everything in our political thoughts and ideas revolved around the Soviet Union and its satellites. We would even joke that if it rained in Moscow, we would all open our umbrellas in solidarity.

We only read and consumed the works of Marx, Lenin, the Chinese leader Mao Zedong and Che Guevara, who we all idolized as the proper revolutionary, with his small band of Cuban fighters liberating their land of fascist oppression and capitalist exploitation. My comrades and I became disciples of the top Vietnamese military leader, Giap, dissecting all the books and manuals of the Vietcong guerilla tactics and strategies, hoping to bring the successes of the jungles of Vietnam to the orchards and plains of Palestine. We furthered our study in the political arena by learning about Ho Chi Minh and his stratagems. I must admit that in all this zeal and fervor, the ruthless and ironfisted dictator Josef Stalin was at the pinnacle of who I considered a true hero!

In actualizing this mentality and mindset, on many occasions we would gather and recite poetry and sing songs of a revolutionary and highly-idealized nature, instilling in us the importance of sacrifice and the subjugation of our own personal desires for a greater cause. We were to strip ourselves of any worldly pursuits such as love, material things and a comfortable life. Our lofty lyrics were not

preoccupied with romance, emotions and infatuation with fulfilling physical desires!

Despite this short period of time I spent in the Syrian camp, all these events put my exposure to so much in this small world on a fast-track. I was light-years away from the closed society that was Kuwait, with its religious mores and values. Having these ideas about how the world should function, and coming to the realization that any day, my comrades and I could be called upon to conduct a suicide mission, we developed an almost care-free notion about life. We felt that while we are still breathing, we should have some fun and enjoy ourselves, and being so young, our moments spent away from the camp were ones of indulgence. It was at this period of time that I had my first experiences with women on an intimate level, finding and visiting those so-called "illfamed houses".

In this short time, my world-view was also expanded by being introduced to so many different peoples and cultures, because of all the various revolutionary groups that would visit the camp for military training and instruction. My ears heard languages I never would have in Kuwait, or by just residing in Damascus itself. And my eyes witnessed before me a collection of the continents, with revolutionaries from Africa, Asia, Europe and South America. They all were some of the warmest and welcoming people I have ever encountered in my life. Finely educated and sophisticated, they were bounding with energy and filled with determination to fulfill their hopes and dreams for their peoples. I developed many good, solid friendships with them on a personal level.

To this very moment, I remember all their bright faces and their places of origin. Some had traveled all the way from Argentina, when it was controlled by the military junta during the 70's, which was similar to Chile at the time of Pinochet. Others were from the heart of Europe, like members of Baader-Meinhof in Germany. There was even a contingent of Filipino leftist guerillas who frequented the camp.

The majority of the visitors we hosted at that time, however, were from the nations of Iran and Turkey. The uprisings in their countries were in their infancy, whose brutal dictators had been oppressing them for decades, with seemingly no end in sight. These young students flocked to us from around the globe, from Europe and even the United States. Each group would consist of 15 to 20 individuals, and would stay on an average of 10 days of intensive training, before they proceeded to the airport and back to the struggles in their respective lands. Wave upon wave of these groups and collectives

would arrive from every corner and locality upon the earth, yet they always shared one common love and admiration. This admiration was for Palestine and its defiant people. Just as our revolution inspired them, they like wise inspired us and let us always remember that despite the tremendous odds against us, we had those who stood side by side with us in the struggle and hardship.

This burning camaraderie manifested itself in tears and heart-felt hugs when the moment had arrived for any of these groups to leave us. Despite our language barriers, I always understood their every "good-bye" and well-wishes!

The most breath-taking, earth-shaking event that transpired during this period was the monumental uprising and eventual success of the Iranian Revolution. In February 1979, the long-suffering people of Iran rose up in a mass-upon-mass of protestors and demonstrators, against the dictator Reza Pahlavi, the so-called "Shah". For too long, this Emperor of Evil had reduced his people to bondage, enslaving them with chains of oppression, poverty, humiliation, injustice, imprisonment and torture. But these proud people, in a veritable, violent sea of thousands in the streets of Tehran and elsewhere, shattered these chains with their overwhelming anger and frustration, their heated chants filling the streets, echoing to the clouds.

Who could forget their bravery and sacrifice, armed with only their will to be free, against the rifles and tanks of one of the most brutal regimes in the Middle East. Their chests openly welcomed the military's American-made bullets, and their bodies no longer feared the tortures of SAVAK, that most savage intelligence agency who was tutored by the CIA and Mossad. They welcomed all this with open arms, because death is much more appealing than a life of abject humiliation.

As Palestinians, we could relate with that struggle so intimately, and we were thrilled the day that the Shah fled with his wealth and life out of the country, leaving behind his palace with its gold and diamond encrusted throne. Never would he wear his despicable crown again on Iranian soil, and we sung and celebrated in honor of this historic achievement until the stars were bright and then faded again from the morning sun.

History is always shifting positions of power, continuously repeating itself. Careful observation will reveal that when a people of any nation want and crave something, like freedom and independence, they will achieve it in the end, with their triumphant determination and selfless sacrifices, no matter how daunting the obstacles or how mighty and powerful the oppressor. In the end, the sun of freedom will emerge and rise once more.

All the Iranians in our camp started to murmur that today it is Iran, and tomorrow belongs to Palestine. These beautiful expressions touched our very hearts and took our spirits to great heights, inspiring us to all chant and sing, to express our emotions against the Emperor of Evil, tyranny and all forms of oppression and oppressors. The beautiful song still rings clearly in my ears as if I can still hear it filling the valleys of our camp... "No matter how you slice into our life, like sharpened knives, Justice will always prevail..."

This was probably the largest celebration I ever witnessed in the camp. How much tea and candy was shared and passed around, not to mention how many bullets we fired from our machine guns; these were our revolutionary fireworks! The 1979 Iranian revolution was a huge inspiration for all of us, including any hopeful eyes around the world looking for real, genuine freedom and pained, scarred lungs searching for a breath of fresh air, which is every person's human right. This is what has been bestowed upon each of us, a natural right, a God-given right and a Universal right. It is just as vital for us

as human beings as the bread and water which sustains our very lives.

In contrast to all this, our celebrations were dampened somewhat by the parallel events transpiring inside Turkey. We were not frustrated by these set-backs however, because we sincerely believed that no matter how long it will take, the struggling people will achieve what they are striving for. The restless uprising of those revolutionaries and freedom-seekers was being cracked down on mercilessly by the ruthless Turkish army. This army had managed to rise to power through a bloodless military coup led by the later dictator and general, Kenan Evran.

Even though our lives and minds were enraptured by world-events and we took time for celebrations, our purpose in the camp was not forgotten, as our intensive training continued non-stop, even increasing in frequency as our exclusive mission was approaching very soon. During my stay, I personally witnessed three different groups, each consisting of four young men, who embarked on these missions, never to return again. It was a stark reminder of what we had dedicated ourselves to.

A month of training would climax in a short trip in small, cramped cars packed with weapons and equipment, to a hill called "Ain el-Sahib", outside Damascus. We would spend a week camping there, engaging in live-fire exercises, shooting hundreds of rounds of ammunition.

With vivid clarity I remember the very moment the commander of our camp entered the dirt entrance to our secluded location. The glint of the dusty car's windshield reflected the sun of the late February sky into our

expectant eyes. It was exactly 1979. We all wished to be the first to greet him at the moment he exited his car door. Shaking hands and exchanging compliments, the word was relayed that we all need to attend a meeting with the camp commander. It goes without saying, that when this particular commander arrives in our locality, that he is here to gather and select the troops for a mission.

With this eventuality in mind, it was always at the forefront of our thoughts to be prepared, and in the deepest of our sincere prayers that we will be selected over others for an operation. Before my very eyes I had witnessed tough, brave young men break down in tears, sobbing, that they have not been selected to plunge themselves into the depths of Israeli gunfire and body-shattering explosions!

Amidst all these charged emotions, the leader summoned us to the office of the camp commander. Following a brief, patriotic speech, he said he had arrived amongst us to select four of us for a 'very special mission'. These words reverberated with us, as we knew their significance exactly. It simply meant that this was a one-way ticket, with no turning back or surrender.

In an instant, all of our hands shot up to volunteer ourselves for such an honor. These scenes and images are seared in my memory, as if those young souls sheer determination alone has etched themselves into my mind and subconscious. Amongst these 15 youths, I stood, and that instant, with its very power, has engraved itself upon my chest, my heart, my soul, as my mouth opened to address the leader. I still vividly recall the extreme nervousness and the very sweat upon my palms

as I searched for my courage. At 17 years old, I was the youngest, yet the most audacious.

"Excuse me, dear comrade"—I addressed him—'t'if you choose me then you have to also choose my dear friend and brotheh, Raed Mustafa, and likewise, if you select him, then I must be with him." The stern commander looked me up and down, then, without a blink, smiling broadly, he pronounced, "Young comrade, you got your wish". This is how my friend Raed and I, along with two other friends were chosen for the upcoming mission, which was exactly one month away.

It goes without saying that we could hardly contain ourselves with our jubilant celebrations, as if we had won a contest of sorts, and received the 1st place prize. At the same moment, there were frustrated tears from those not selected for this assignment, but they too received the glad tidings of the prospect of a future mission.

Even though hand-picked to go into some unknown destination within Palestine, we continued our preparations as if we had arrived at the camp just yesterday. We rehearsed small-unit tactics and combat techniques on a constant basis, reviewing every aspect of our mission, from Syria, thru Jordan, to Palestine. The final steps, and it was the same with every group before us, was for us all to record a will. It was the responsibility of the camp commander to ensure that our wills were fulfilled after our deaths.

Our impending deaths, for us, were not a time for mourning, but ones of celebration and parties. The last nights was spent around the blazing camp fire, with the stars of the Syrian sky above us, singing and joking,

brewing pot after pot of tea. Our conversations would drift through the countryside until the sun's rays began breaching the horizon, ushering us forward to our fateful day.

Hardly would the morning have a chance to introduce itself to us, when the two-car convoy would arrive to initiate these four men into the first stages of their mission. Hugs and kisses would be exchanged as they are loaded with two backpacks stuffed with cans of tinned food, jugs of water and a handful of pistols for self-defense. No travel documents or money would be necessary on these unique journeys.

Next, the car-load of commandos would travel through the beautiful Syrian countryside a few hours, until arriving at Daraa, on the southern border with Jordan. At a discrete location, chosen ahead of time, the small group of men would disembark from their transportation and cross the Jordanian border illegally, with no regard for laws or proper procedures.

A local guide, totally well-versed in the whole border area, would conceal himself on the other side, awaiting the men. This man's crucial assignment, with his knowledge of every hill, sand-dune and hiding place, would be to guide the Fedayeen through the terrain, past roadblocks and military checkpoints. Most of the guides the PLO employed would be shepherds who blended in with the border area, as they consistently grazed their sheep there. They would be paid a handsome sum for their services, as our objective could not be reached without them.

Crossing into Jordan and rendezvousing with the guide would precede a long, arduous

journey to reach the flowing Jordan River, which was the demarcation line between the East and West Bank. Upon reaching a shallow point along the river, a member of the organization would be waiting, ready and prepared to equip the commandos with their assault rifles and grenades. Most of these weapons were carefully oiled so that they could be buried in the soil, waiting for the moment they would be unearthed for their special purpose. Arms-caches like these were scattered across the Jordanian countryside.

Rifles above their heads, the river would be breached and waded across as quickly as possible, as the group would be vulnerable and exposed in the open river. At this point, the guide would be freed of his obligations, but on many occasions they would help and assist the young commandos cross the river, trek to the possible nearest point of the target, and even point out the specific Jewish settlement which you would lay siege to, ambushing its occupants!

Keep in mind, every man and every guide understands deeply the seriousness of the matter, knowing that this is an absolutely one-way journey. There is no need for a guide after the moment we find our target, no assistance back across the river, and no directions back to Daraa or Damascus! Our chances of survival are zero.

During our groups continuing preparation, one of my close friends suggested to me that, before our impending mission and almost certain death, I should visit my family for one, final time. Of course, I was very much inclined to this idea, being young and attached to my family, missing them since the day I left home.

The following day, I made my way to the office of the camp commander. With the most polite of manners, I expressed to him that it was very important and dear to me if I would be able to visit my family, who I missed so much. My last desire and wish would be to say a final farewell to them before I departed from this life. The cramped office complimented the suffocation I suffered in my chest, anxiously awaiting the commander's reply. A strong man in his mid-50's, he was extremely tender and warmhearted, always expressing to us his affections. I considered him to be very traditional, what we call "old-school", someone who would ensure that Palestinian culture would endure and be passed on to the next generation. This was accentuated by the constant presence of his black and white checkered 'kofia' draped and wrapped around his shoulders, trailing down his back and sometimes across his chest.

Gripping the edges of his desk, he peered at me over his reading glasses, with a warm but subdued smile. He addressed me like he would his own son, and with nothing but sympathy and understanding, he explained he would recommend this for me to the superior officials in Damascus and draft an official letter of recommendation. I felt so elated to not only hear his approval but also because I now knew I could have a chance to see my dear family.

Meanwhile, in between, my friends and I continuing preparations, we would travel to Damascus every other day. Not only was it part of our celebrations, but also in recognition that time was short and our days were numbered. The city for me was like a diamond, its attractions, and pleasures sparkling,

lighting up my young heart and sprit. In another life, I could see myself there as a merchant or shop-owner, raising a family and enjoying a comfortable, mundane life. It seemed we left no sweet candies and snacks untouched or not tasted, sampling from every sellers stall and small café as we glided through the city's streets.

On numerous occasions we would make our way to the public saunas, the 'Turkish baths'. This was one of our favorite spots to relax and enjoy ourselves, laughing, joking and singing songs in an exaggerated fashion. Splashing until midnight, the hot steam would contrast itself against the cool, crisp air of winter, snowflakes sparkling from the full Damascus moon. Our favorite refreshment would be green tea, flavored with strong mint leaves, which flowed abundantly from teapot to fresh-brewed teapot. Soon, this other, simple life would be brought back to reality, with our departure back to the training camp.

A fresh, brand-new Jordanian passport and a two-way plane ticket to Kuwait arrived in short order a handful of days later, prompting me to leave for the Damascus airport. All this was accomplished under the cover of the darkness of early dawn, as our camp was under intense surveillance by the Syrian intelligence. The relationship between the PLO and Syrian regime was extremely strained at this point in time, after the dramatic entry of Assad's tanks and troops into Lebanon. There was no affinity between the two parties after they engaged in intense clashes with each other on Lebanese soil.

Ironically, I was intimidated by traveling by plane; this was my first time flying as a young adult. How comical this sometimes is for

me, because airports and planes would all become an integral part of my troubled life until the very moment of the Pan Am hijacking, 30 years ago. In fact, my first introduction to air-travel was when I was a toddler in my mother's arms, in 1965. It was Jerusalem Airport, where we boarded from Palestine, after a brief visit, back to Kuwait and my expectant father. It seems such a distant time, when Jerusalem was under the custody of Jordan, and the '67 war had yet to break-out, opening the door for the present Israeli occupation.

This somber journey to Kuwait was a combination of joy and pain—my family and friends were both oblivious to the fact that they may never lay eyes upon me again in this life. The second I stepped inside the house, it was filled with joyous screams; all of my family taking turns hugging and kissing me for what seemed like an eternity. This was the nature of my lovely family, who always showered me with loving affection and warmth. To my pleasant surprise, my family had hung a large portrait of me in the living room. I then realized at that very moment how much my family adored me. With all this adoration, my heart sunk in my chest, as I contemplated how they all would receive the heavy news of my death, just mere weeks away. I could not shatter their happiness by preparing them for that impending eventuality, so I dare not even verbalize it in their presence. I concocted for them a simple story of how I came on vacation for about a week before returning to where I came.

The remaining time was spent in a state of enjoyment mixed with a sense of distraction. Enjoyment from being in the presence of family

and friends on the one hand, and on the other, utilizing these moments to somehow distract my mind and conscious from what laid ahead for me in the near future. As I kicked soccer balls with my young relatives, the sound of the hollow ball would sometimes echo in my mind. later; would I ever see such care-free scenes again? At that young point in my life, it was difficult for me to conceive such a concept and idea.

Approaching the end of the week, my family exerted every effort to prevent me from leaving. My poor, sweet mother was so desperate to keep me that she even suggested i get married, despite me only being 17 years old. I hadn't even attended university yet so . in a way the suggestion was unusual in a normal situation. I still remember the searching in her eyes, hoping that maybe the prospect of a young bride would divert me from the path I was taking. This wasn't because she disagreed with the Palestinian cause; it was

just that natural motherly instinct to see her son have a normal,-prosperous life, like every mother. Maybe my mother felt she received some sort of reprieve when one of my relatives made a suggestion. Yet again, fate would intervene in my life that would change my course in totally different directions from which I had been upon. He suggested that since you plan on going to Damascus, you should also see your beloved uncle in Baghdad. They, my uncle and his family, would be delighted to see me as well; stay a few days and then I could take the long journey by highway from Baghdad to Damascus. In all honesty, I loved the idea, especially since I felt it would be for the last time; all these reunions, in my

mind, I considered my farewell visits before embarking on my suicide mission.

I made up my mind to travel to my uncles home and cancelled my return flight back to Syria. Booking a ride on a bus, I was back to Baghdad, taking the same route I had previously when I left from Basra. Strangely, I just decided to disappear, with no goodbyes and farewells to my family. I'm not sure why I felt I needed to do this, but at that point my family had adjusted to this behavior. All these years later, I now appreciate more proper goodbyes, as one may never know when they will see their loved ones again.

Arriving in Baghdad, I was again faced with the same dilemma of trying to locate my uncle's residence in such a massive city. However, I was steadfastly determined to find him, as this literally might be my last moments on earth with him. The Iraqi government was sheltering and supporting multiple Palestinian factions at this time, including both bitter rivals, the PLO and ANO. This not only made my search difficult but also potentially perilous. Being associated with the PLO could put me in danger with the

ANO, and looking for someone with the ANO might place me in the gun-sights of the PLO! This web of connections and relations would imperil the lives of many through the years, as extreme suspicion and accusations resulted in the torture and executions of countless amongst the Palestinian factions and groups.

A very careful search led me to the Abu Nidal office in central Baghdad, and after a brief question and answer session they were able to confirm the validity of my relation with my uncle. They were soon escorting me to my uncle's home, located in a very affluent

and resplendent neighborhood of Baghdad, which was inhabited by the elite of the Iraqi military officer corps. It was a luxurious mansion, and a very expensive home for that era. The family of my uncle was shocked and pleasantly surprised to see me; my eyes fell upon all the pricey furniture and beautiful staircases in the house as they took turns hugging and kissing my cheeks. Everyone couldn't stop smiling as my uncle urged me to take a seat and drink some refreshments as it was served small snacks. My uncle made it a priority to call my family; he had heard about my tendency to disappear, and wanted to assure them of my whereabouts and that I was somewhere safe and sound.

Due to my mission and waiting comrades in Syria, I made a firm decision within myself to only stay with my uncle five days at the most. Because of his hectic workschedule, I only had an opportunity to truly spend time with him in the late evening, when he would come home. As a top aide of Abu Nidal himself, my uncle's whole life revolved around the organization and the Palestinian cause in general.

It was during these late night conversations that my uncle exerted his efforts to convince me to switch my loyalties from the PLO to the Abu Nidal Organization. This would mean abandoning the mission I had been selected for, after all the striving I had made to assure my place in that commando unit. My uncle's rational and reason had been straightforward and easy to accept: all the Palestinian groups are fighting for a single objective in mind, namely, the liberation of our homeland and the end to our subjugation and humiliation. With the ANO, I would be

serving the same cause, regardless of my affiliations.

Quite naturally, I never doubted the sincerity of what my uncle was telling me. I felt like his advice was for my own best interest and he had no ulterior motives for what he was doing. I was a witness to his character, and deep commitment for Palestine and the welfare of its people. His every word and action was a manifestation of the deep feeling he had in his heart for the cause, for the land, for the people. His every waken moment was one of limitless sacrifice for what he believed. The cause was the very air he breathed. In fact, it was running through his blood, this blood that would sweat before perspiration, in his struggling for Palestine.

Even with this unbending loyalty and commitment, my uncle would wake up to the harsh and brutal reality that so much of these countless hours and days toiling, sacrificing his own personal life for the sake of the organization, would be in vain. Later, he would slip into a horrible, deep depression, his very soul aching from the state of the organization, until he made a momentous, life-altering decision to leave once and for all the insanity of the Abu Nidal Organization. Thus, my beloved uncle was the highest ranking member of the ANO to ever defect alive, without being assassinated and murdered.

This is how I found myself in this underground, shadowy world, in the depths of one of the ANO's most secret office, in which assassins and hit-squads were dispatched across the globe, from the rubble of Beirut to the crowded streets of London, to carry out their deadly assignments with the upmost proficiency and lethality.

I filled out some basic identification forms in the gloom of the darkened office, signing my signature to seal my acceptance into the organization. I was instructed to repeat some verbal affirmations of loyalty and this was the final step into their ranks. All of this was out of patriotic loyalty to my homeland and affinity towards my uncle. There was nothing treacherous for me in switching from one group to another, as I had come to the realization that they all had one objective, but maybe different methods from time to time. Unbeknownst to me, I had just entered into an alternate reality, joining hands and signing on with a paranoid-schizophrenic and psychopathic organization, which had no qualms in murdering its own members and disposing of them with no hesitation. My fate, in this moment, had been changed irrevocably from this point forward.



Chapter 3

Life in the Shadows

"All truths are easy to understand once they're discovered. The point is to discover them"

It was within a brief matter of days before I was on my way to the Abu Nidal Organization training camp. I had been informed that I must attend the camp by my uncle and numerous other leaders. This intensive training program was to run for a considerable amount of time, with extensive weapons courses and hours of lectures centered on ideology and politics. All this must take place before it could be assessed if I was fit and ready to be sent on assignments and missions.

After some short farewells under a bright Baghdad sun early one morning, a few recruits and I piled into a non-descript vehicle to head straight to the training facility. The driver took a back route to the small city of Hit, which took about three hours. The city itself was part of the larger city of Ramadi, a Sunni city which was the provincial capital of Anbar province, a province now with a famous reputation for strong, vicious resistance to any and all invaders. We also become acquainted with the city of Fallujah and its deliciously renowned kebabs and exquisite yogurt, on our way back and forth between the camp and Baghdad.

Upon arrival to the massive camp, which stretched for acres, I was customarily greeted by the commander in charge of the overall

affairs of the camp and his coterie. Reading the letter I was given in Baghdad, he gazed up at me and said, "Well, my young comrade, it seems that you are being recommended highly, so we will ensure you will be taken care of. From this point forward, your alias will be 'Abbas'. This name in Arabic carries many unique meanings, from 'the Lion', king of the jungle, to 'the frowning one'! To this very moment, I never understood why they gave me this unusual name. I carried this name with me to the extent that I forgot my own name and very identity.

My entry and introduction into the camp was simple and uneventful compared to the horror experienced by so many others. Abu Nidal and his organization was extremely paranoid and disturbed, so any newly recruited member, man or woman, is considered guilty of spying before being proven innocent. Whether this spying is for Israel, Jordan, Iraq or the PLO, it made no difference. Nearly 95% of any new recruit would have to be subjected to this anxiety and turmoil.

There was even a special prison within the camp, notoriously dedicated to this vetting process. These fresh recruits would be incarcerated there to be harshly questioned and physically tortured to confess whatever purpose they have at the camp, whether as a true spy or totally innocent, with nothing to confess whatsoever! I was personally very lucky, because of my uncle's and others recommendation, so I escaped this brutal treatment, I was only first made aware of this by hearing of it from other members who became close to me. They whispered these horrible stories to me in strict secrecy. At the beginning, I was incredulous, not able to

comprehend why these things were even transpiring with other comrades in the organization. If I only knew that this was just the beginning.

As a trusted member who was vouched for at the highest levels of the group, I was able to use my connections to roam and explore the expansive camp, frequently visiting the prison. By knowing friends who worked there, I was exposed to savage scenes of torture for the first time in my young life. This was unbelievable initially, but I became grimly familiar with these things, from Iraq, Syria to Lebanon. In so many grievous cases, people were tortured until their very life was bled out of them, then, with my own eyes, saw them buried unremorsefully in a shallow grave or thrown in a river like a gutted, lifeless fish.

I vaguely remember many of these tortured individuals, from a multitude of countries, organizations and intelligence agencies. There were always mostly accused of spying, whether from the PLO, Israel, Jordan and even the CIA. On one occasion a group of Moroccans was apprehended and brutally interrogated and tortured. After days of pain and suffering, they were shot point blank, one after the other. Morocco happened to find itself a staunch enemy of the Abu Nidal Organization, who Abu Nidal himself accused of operating a school dedicated to training spies on their own soil. They focused their training towards the Middle East arena and to infiltrate and collect information on Palestinian groups in particular.

It didn't take me long to discover how large and massive the ANO camp was! I have always loved running since my youth, yet I was

amazed that I was not able to run the breadth of the camp. There was a splendid theater stage where many special celebrations were held, and movies and documentaries were played as a part of our relaxation from training. It was even utilized for marriage ceremonies between members of the organization. There were large halls for eating and lecturing and a big, open field for firing weapons and explosives training.

For me, the most beautiful aspect of the camp itself was the fact that it resided on the banks of the Euphrates River, with the whole area surrounded by date-palm groves, making the local scenery appear like a painted masterpiece. Every day my friends and I would try to swim the amazing force of nature that was the Euphrates River. We definitely would take full advantage of the river in the summer months to cool us off. All this swimming helped me to develop very strong shoulders over time. I had previously learned how to swim as a young child in the Persian Gulf during my time in Kuwait. However the sea is much tamer and calmer than the powerful Euphrates. Swimming against its current is much more difficult and challenging. We did these river exercises primarily to strengthen and toughen our arms and shoulders.

So, this is how I spent my first few months in the camp on the outskirts of Hit; between intensive, complex physical and weapons training to attending evening lectures, based on the politics and history of the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Vietnam and other Communist experiments around the globe.

Experiencing first hand various Palestinian groups, I would like to highlight the difference between the PLO training I

attended in Syria and that of the ANO in Iraq. The PLO mainly focused on broad, guerilla warfare tactics and strategies. The Abu Nidal Organization trained in assassination techniques and 'execution style' ambushes with light arms and silenced weapons.

I had completed my training thoroughly in a few months and my trainers were very satisfied with me. I had an inherit skill to adapt and learn quickly. Not only do I contribute my abilities to absorb my training so efficiently to a natural skill, but also, and more importantly, because my heart was in this cause. I sincerely believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that what I was engaged in was my patriotic duty to my homeland. My every effort was motivated by this belief, and this made my leaders and trainers doubly proud of me.

After this short time of extreme exertion, my instructors, who from day one keenly observed my progress and took note of my potential, made a strong recommendation to their superiors that I be moved to an exclusive part of the camp for further elite training. This training, for security reasons, was conducted in a small, discrete building; only a select few were set aside for this, as they were deemed dedicated and trustworthy enough for special missions. Even the location itself was established to shield our identities from other members and potential spies.

Maybe a month later or so had passed, and I was briefed with a task to make my way to Baghdad to meet a specific leader in the ANO. I was delighted at the assignment because of the prospect of leaving the rigid seclusion of the camp. The isolation there had begun to

gnaw at me after being so accustomed to traveling hundreds of miles in one direction, and back again. I didn't care if I felt Baghdad was too gloomy or depressing; I would make the most of it with my glowing young enthusiasm and newfound purpose. Besides, I was very fond of living in the city, and Hit was nowhere close to Baghdad in its sights and sounds! It all reminded me of that famous book, 'IA thousand and one Arabian nights'.

The secret office in Baghdad I reported to was ducked away in a backstreet, its reclusive position and austere interior reminded me not only of the camp but of the ANO's philosophy and shadowy nature itself. I was greeted by the occupants and resided there with them for a few days. During our free time, we would make our way to the famous and renowned 'Abu Nawas' street, which was decorated and lined with bars and night clubs, keeping the city alive with entertainment well into the hours of the early morning. The streets chain of restaurants was known to have the most delicious fish dishes, which were freshly caught before your eyes and cooked on an open fire. You couldn't possibly enjoy the variety of seafood without a stout Iraqi beer or that flaming Lebanese Arrack liquor. The liquor was called 'Zahlewi', in homage to Zahle, a beautiful town, renowned for its professionally brewing of Araack, in the Bekaa valley. Zahle was a mostly Christian town with a Muslim minority population. This cozy, quiet place would be a repository for me of so many sweet and cherished memories; this place was where I was destined to meet a beautiful young girl who became the very first love of my life.

We spent these nights eating grilled fresh and sipping Zahlewi, relaxing from our

strenuous, secret lives, letting the ripples of the Tigris River hypnotize us into another existence. For me, it was the ultimate form of escape, where I could embrace a degree of freedom from my work. After a week of this, I was off to meet my uncle at his massive home, where I was to be briefed on my first mission assignment.

Sitting with the boss, he betrayed no stress or fatigue, in a state of total relaxation as he took his position on a small couch, opposite me, where I sat in an expensive, old-style European chair, which my uncle had a taste for. Softly blowing the steam from his freshly made Turkish coffee, he peered over the cup at me, about to speak. "Young comrade, everyone must take a set of necessary steps before they earn confidence and trust. This is like everything in life. So...in order to accomplish this, in your case, we will be tasking you with light, low-risk assignments and missions. We will begin you in a courier capacity, delivering messages back and forth between certain offices and members in different locations. Also, you will be entrusted to move substantial amounts of cash, internationally. Then, after you successfully complete these assignments, we will consider other, more important, missions for you."

In all honesty, I was thrilled at the prospect of these upcoming missions, and that I had earned their trust to this level to handle their business. I barely had a moment to thank them before they promptly handed me a large amount of cash, all American dollars. They also told me that along with this money that I was to deliver a few brief messages to some of the organization in Kuwait. One

specific reason they chose Kuwait as my first assignments destination was because I acquired a permanent visa for Kuwait on my passport, so it was not a problem for me to move in and out of the country at will. Besides, since Kuwait was my birthplace, I knew the country very well, inside and out.

The boss continued in his relaxed demeanor, "Comrade Abbas, you must understand fully, it is your duty to conceal both the money and the messages, in order that they are not discovered by airport security. Likewise, this will be a small test of your courage and your nerves, to see if you are capable of greater missions in the near future, like weapons smuggling across various borders and even airports. This cash is irrelevant compared to the importance and vital nature of these assignments".

These prospects of possible future assignments and prestige boosted my enthusiasm and excitement even further for what the organization wanted from me. I was on my way to Kuwait within two days' time, traveling by Iraqi Airways. It was this time back in Kuwait when I was made aware of the death of my close-friend and schoolmate, Raed

Mustafa. He had been killed along with 3 other commandos while assaulting a fortified Israeli settlement inside occupied Palestine. A short time later, I was informed further that my unit had waited on me for three weeks, and when I didn't turn up from my trip to Kuwait to see my family, my spot on the team was filled by another member of the PLO. They then launched the operation across the Jordanian border. It was during this assignment with the ANO that I visited and

grieved with Raed's proud parents and family.

After this simple task in Kuwait, I received from my superiors instructions to embark on almost non-stop missions to multiple countries throughout the Middle East, and on islands in the Mediterranean, like Cyprus.

In early 1979, an unexpected event transpired within the organization. Several disgruntled aides close to Abu Nidal defected from the organization, causing a split within the group. These were high-ranking members, and many lower level members followed their lead. It was mostly due to people seeking power for themselves, among other issues they had disagreements about. Many spectators to these power plays had expected Abu Nidal to capitulate and surrender himself due to the large amount of defections, especially from the upper-tier of the organization. However, due to Abu Nidal's political savvy and cunning, he somehow managed to sustain the integrity of the organization and keep the remaining members under control, amongst them the massive training ground in Hit, Iraq.

In fact, in June of '79, Abu Nidal personally traveled to the camp in secret. His purpose was to give us a motivational speech to rally the organization, and also, take questions regarding the sudden split of the group. All the camp attendees were ordered to assemble at the theater hall immediately. Once arriving, we were stunned, finding the head of the ANO, Abu Nidal, there, in person. He was accompanied by other top leaders. This was the very first time I had seen him, the most lethal and secretive man in the entire Middle East at that period in history. In fact, he was the whole world's most wanted man!

His physical appearance was very fragile and his skin was deathly pale; he had just endured a complicated open-heart surgery in Communist East Germany. Despite this, his tired eyes still burned with fiery determination, which until his very last day upon the earth, he carried inside himself, when he was assassinated by Saddam Hussain's security services in 2003, on the eve of the American invasion of Iraq.

Even though Abu Nidal was able to salvage the organization, the rift had caused a gap in manpower and resources. Because of this, my appeal to the organization was tremendously enhanced and I became for them an even more valuable asset, being young, capable and full of energy, ready for any and all assignments.

With all these developments, I found my mind racing like a freight train at incredible speed, like a bullet fired at its target with extreme precision. I felt like I was on an emotional rollercoaster, or never ending plane ride, my stress level rising and falling constantly. At such a high-altitude mentally, I sometimes felt I was going to collapse, exhausted, bouncing from mission to mission, with no time to even catch my breath.

I did find some form of relief and an alleviation from the constant pressure felt when I first started going to Europe on missions. I felt like it was in a dream the moment I stepped on European soil! I had a combination of feelings, from elation to feeling captivated by everything I experienced there. At that time, I had only known Europe, America and the West in general, from what I saw in the movies and watched on television, along with all the reading in books and magazines I did.

I felt a great sense of admiration for the liberty and freedom in these societies, and fascinated in every way with their values and cultures. Europe itself was, and still is, a dream come true for any young man who's full of life! Anyone who's craving knowledge of the world and its pleasures would be fully satisfied.

In the midst of all these fast moving events and new experiences, the whole state of affairs with the Abu Nidal organization began to become clearer for me, the brutal realities making themselves apparent despite the patriotic slogans. So many of my assignments weren't adding up; I began asking myself "What does this have to do with liberating Palestine and ending the suffering of its people?" These serious questions would only increase in frequency within my mind as time progressed.

These important questions and real concerns I harbored in my conscious were easily brushed aside, however. Being young and traveling around the world, seeing the most splendid and beautiful cities on earth, all on someone else money and expenses, was like a fantasy, which I lived every day. All these pleasurable distractions and world-wide sightseeing was enough for me to suppress all these misgivings I began to develop in my heart towards what I was involved in. I started to feel guilty, and was always considering

the great risk I was exposing myself to. I was constantly aware that one simple mistake could lead to imprisonment or my untimely death.

I would rationalize all this risk I was taking by telling myself it was worth it,

going on free vacations to Europe! Coming from a conservative society that emphasized modesty, being exposed to these open, liberal cultures was like placing a starving man in a room full of the most delicious foods and satisfying drinks! All the attractions made me forget that I was not a tourist but on life-threatening missions, sent by one of the most dangerous groups in the entire world. I must have used my time in Europe as some kind of drug that helped to numb my mind and heart to the true reality of my life,

My absolutely favorite city of all of Europe was the Spanish metropolis of Madrid. My trips there made me totally forget about all the danger I was exposing myself to. I would make frequent trips there, developing such a special flavor for me, despite my experience with many different cities like Paris, Rome and other large European cities. Madrid was its own unique place, with its own spot within my heart. To this day I ponder upon why it held this place within me, with its seeming magical energy and aura. Maybe my ancestors were treading its soil, since the Arabs ruled the Iberian Peninsula for centuries!

In a lapse of judgment, bordering on instantly, I fantasized about giving myself up to Spanish police, and becoming imprisoned, escaping my hectic life. There, in prison, I could stay in Spain much longer, learn the language and maybe, after serving my sentence, meet a beautiful Spanish lady and get married. Oh, how I dreamed and wished!

I can still now experience and feel the sheer enjoyment when I would indulge in a dish of delicious Paella, sipping a small glass of Sangria, as I gaze at a scantily dressed gypsy

woman skillfully moving her body as she dances the 'Flamenco', to the tune of guitar.

These care-free moments were far away from the prisons of Abu Nidal, which I first experienced at this period of time. Because of disputes with superior officers, my quick temper and other misconduct, I would become all too familiar with these horrible holding cells. For these violations, I could spend it in captivity for several weeks at a time.

I was always in the company there of alleged spies and agents, even though I myself was never accused of such terrible allegations. The punishment of these crimes was always death. There were even people killed for some of what I was punished for, like illicit relationships with women! In fact, because of my rash behavior, I almost faced the same fate, but my uncle and family would constantly intervene, sometimes at the last minute. Just a few years later, my dearest friends, Maher Said, would be executed by hanging right before my very eyes for the same infringements.

I must make it clear that the Abu Nidal Organization was not motivated by religion, seeking to implement Shari'ah law on its members. To the contrary, the organization was to the far left, with a Communist ideology. Abu Nidal himself was a staunch atheist. But, he strongly believed that behind every manifestation of treachery there is a woman. He wasn't concerned about the morality and the personal decisions of the members, rather, he believed adultery could sooner or later lead to blackmail, and eventually sinking into the swap of treachery, selling yourself to the enemy. A psychotic man like Abu Nidat was

extremely paranoid about anything related to or resembling espionage!

And I would become intimately familiar with the results of Abu Nidal's paranoia, sitting in his cramped, dark prison cells. All night I would have to endure the terror of listening to the brutal interrogations and torture, the horrible screams of the accused spies rattling the walls of my cell. They would be beat so savagely that I would hear some men begging for death, just to end the pain and suffering. Knowing they will die anyway, they wished for it sooner rather than later, to stop the torture.

According to my knowledge, and as far as I know, not one person accused of these crimes and tortured, were ever freed. Even if they were found to be innocent after all the torture, they were still killed. The interrogators rationale for this was that after being treated so viciously, they must surely will come back with a gun in revenge! The organization could not allow such a danger to exist or fester. The solution to so many problems for them was always death.

From this point forward, I began to suffer from severe depression and vivid nightmares, combined with extreme fear and paranoia. All these dark feelings would begin to take its psychological toll, culminating in my request to partake in a suicide mission that would finally put an end to my confused and troubled life, just a few short years later. I felt like this was the only way to escape this self-imposed hell.

The late Patrick Seale, a renowned British writer, wrote a book in the early 90's entitled, "Abu Nidal: Hired Gun". He outlined many key events and highlighted many details,

some that had occurred while others were not totally accurate and correct. But one important factor about Mr. Seale's work is that he had never been a member of that paranoid, deadly organization, so he had no idea whatsoever about what we had felt and experienced. In no way was any of this a laughing matter but a merciless and brutal reality! Our lives were truly devoid of compassion and a sense of peace; death was our only certain and guaranteed escape.

In September 1980, the terrible war between Iraq and Iran, two Muslim neighbors, broke out against each other just as I was in Baghdad preparing for yet another mission. Because of the commencement of hostilities, my mission was delayed because of the closure of all airports and the sealing of all Iraqi border areas. In light of these events, the organization asked me to travel to the camp in Hit and await further orders. It was such a boring and dull life in the camp compared to all the traveling I had become accustomed to! The unexpected down time led me to reflect on my family, who I was terribly out of touch with at this time. I would call them every so often, from various cities across the globe, but was always careful not to worry them about all the danger I was exposing myself to. Looking back all these years later causes me to feel remorse at how ignorant I acted towards my family in my misguided sense of independence.

I was summoned back to Baghdad in late March of 1981. Due to the closure of Iraq's airports, the organization was smuggling a few members across the border into Turkey every so often, and then they would proceed to Europe. I was informed after reaching the ANO

office that I would be dispatched along the same route. After normal routine preparations I made my way to a checkpoint located in Zakho, a historically Kurdish city in Northern Iraq. Upon reaching Turkish soil and taking refuge in an ANO safe-house, I was instructed to travel to Rome, Italy, find a safe location to lay low and await further orders. I was a bit perplexed because I didn't understand the nature of my assignment there. I spent some time waiting for a courier to bring my instructions and assigned weapon allocated for my mission. So in the meantime I toured the beautiful attractions in the city, living the life of a full-blown tourist.

I had assumed that my purpose for being in Rome was to find, locate and assassinate a PLO representative residing in Italy, a Mr. Nimer Hamad. He was a persona! rival of Abu Nidal, who tried on numerous occasions to kill him, every time failing in the attempt.

However, during the lull in receiving my exact mission details, some events transpired that turned the priorities of the ANO towards a different target. In May 1981, the French leader Franso Metteran ascended to the reins of power, immediately sending shock waves throughout the world. Leftist groups from a number of different affiliations condemned him and his political views as pro-Israel and staunchly Zionist. In response to these developments I had been made aware that the Abu Nidal Organization ordered the planning and execution of three attacks in three separate locations. All would focus on Jewish 'soft-targets', like synagogues and restaurants, in Paris, Rome and Vienna.

These operations were motivated by a desire to punish Metteran of France and

Bruno Kriski of Austria for their meddling in the Palestinian issue and cooperating with Israel, and Italian officials in their war against Abu Nidal, which was aided by the PLO itself. Also, the attacks were retaliation for these governments crackdown on groups allied with the ANO, specifically the Red Brigade and other like-minded Communist groups.

As all of these operations were being set in motion, the unexpected happened. In a brazen shooting in broad-daylight, the Pope of the Vatican was shot by a leftist of

Turkish origin, Ali Agha. The message he was sending with his bullets was apparent: the Pope needed to stay out of politics and remain a purely religious figure. This view was due to the fact that, as a Polish man, the Pope was heavily involved in much of the social and political unrest transpiring in Poland. Much of this was spearheaded by the 'Solidarity Movement', led by Lech Walesa.

I vividly recall stepping out into the bright streets from a movie theater after watching a film, and being jolted in surprise by fast moving police cars speeding down the streets in front of me. They called them 'Caribinnari', and they were hanging out of their windows with submachine guns barrels pointing menacingly at any passer-by. I was froze, mesmerized by the scene before me because I had never seen Rome like this. I could tell that something very serious must have happened. As discreetly as possible, I rushed back to my hotel in Via Veneto, and waited in the lobby for the evening newspapers to arrive.

I didn't have to wait long however for the news, because the whole city was abuzz with word that the Pope himself had been shot and

wounded. To make matters worse for me, the attempted murder was carried about by a Turkish Muslim man with alleged links to various Palestinian factions. Naturally, the news was disturbing, and many immigrants in the city feared a backlash against Arabs and Muslims despite the fact that at that time there was no constant stream of propaganda about 'Islamic terrorism' like the current media campaign around the globe.

The very next day, I rendezvoused with my overall boss, in a beautiful café located in central Rome. Nervously, as the steam of his cappuccino obscured his face, he whispered that the Italian police had begun a massive roundup operation of anyone suspicious, especially Arabs and Muslim in the city. Continuing in a very low tone of voice, he explained that because of the tense and unpredictable atmosphere, the coordinated attacks in Rome, Vienna and Paris would be immediately suspended until further notice. The ANO preferred high-visibility, simultaneous attacks in multiple locations to increase the shock value and chances of publicity. A delay in the operations was worth the wait from the organizations point of view. Later, the attacks would occur, with two synagogues attacked with light arms and grenades in Rome and Vienna. A restaurant in Paris frequented by French Jews suffered the same fate. The attack in Paris would be carried out by two of my friends in the group.

My cell leader told me that I must leave Italy as soon as possible to avoid any roundup by the Italian authorities and counter-terrorism operatives. He then asked me if I still had any funds, and I replied, yes, I still have \$3,000 American dollars. He

proceeded to give me \$5,000 more, instructing me to leave Rome immediately after our meeting. I suggested that that I will leave for Palermo, in Sicily. He responded emphatically, "NOI You must go even further than Sicily, we prefer you make your way to Malta, lay low, and await further instructions. As soon as you arrive, send us your address and phone number, and we will follow up with you. Just make sure you do as you're told with no delay."

Rising, finishing his cappuccino, he looked me in the eyes saying, "Be back here in an hour, I need to give you a gun to keep with you in Malta, for security reasons." To be honest, I was shocked at this order because moving through the city with a handgun, with every street crawling with black-masked police, frisking and searching any man resembling a Middle Eastern appearance, was totally insane! Hence my dilemma in the ANO; how could I refuse, it is an order with no option to disobey without extreme consequences.

My tongue not agreeing with my heart, I said, yes, of course, I'll be back in exactly an hour's time. I hurried to my hotel room, gathering and cramming my personal belongings in my handbag, and headed back to the small café within an hour. Sure enough he was waiting for me, and after a few moments he asked me to go to the restroom. Once alone there, he retrieved from his inner coat pocket a small Russian pistol, adding curtly, "You're now on your own, just make sure to contact Baghdad with your address and number... we will be waiting on you." I stashed the pistol and went back to my hotel, trying not to betray

my nervousness as I traversed the city streets.

I was left on my own how to figure out how I would get out of Italy. I definitely knew I couldn't get out by plane through the airport because of the increased security measures being erected after the Pope's attempted assassination. I then figured I could leave by sea, so I worked on concealing my handgun, burying it within the raw grains of a box of coffee, wrapping it up like a gift from Rome for a beloved relative!

Checking out of the hotel, I made my way to the train station and took a direct route to the southern city of Naples, struggling mentally to enjoy the scenery as I traveled a couple hours there. Finding a small motel, I waited for the early morning to arrive before I boarded a boat, paying a cheap fee, and thus sailing me to my next destination where my destiny awaited me, to a life unknown!



Chapter 4

The Knights of Malta and the Escape **"Where attention goes, energy and love flows** **and grows"**

After a tense but surprisingly mellow trip over the silent waves of the Mediterranean, I arrived in Malta the next morning. It was a shining, bright day near the end of May. Recalling the small island, I must express some of my emotions and intimate feelings about it here, before I move on.

Malta for me was like being reunited with a beloved bride who I had been separated from for ages. I was like an elegant seagull that had migrated for so long, too long, for years before he finally came back to the nest of his birth. I was instantly enamored by the tiny, cozy island that seemed to be perpetually covered in sunshine. It was established over a thousand years ago by the Phoenicians themselves, my ancient ancestors. I loved Malta so much I even learned their language within six months!

As soon as I reached its shores, I felt my heart start to swell and dance for some unknown reason! I was like a king, sailing alone in this life, enjoying my new found love like a spoiled child, who even though he was passed weaning age he can't leave his mother's breast! This is what Malta became to me, but so tragically it become a place of nightmares and a place where deep scars were cut upon the core of my heart! I was moving through life not realizing and unaware that the future is

concealing something which will break my heart forever.

Upon arrival, I sought out a flat to rent and a car as well. I soon began indulging in the beauty of Malta, even enrolling in a school to learn the language, becoming fluent in no time. I spent my time care-free like this until about early September when suddenly the organization dispatched a courier to me. He carried a message straight from Baghdad stating simply that an arch-enemy of Abu Nidat is hiding out in Malta and it is our sworn duty to find and eliminate him. He asked if I still had the pistol I received in Rome. I told him yes, I was able to smuggle it onto the island. He said that was good, but I would need to clean and oil it thoroughly and be prepared to use it. "When we find him, we will do the job and leave the country immediately." In my mind I was astonished, thinking how cold-blooded it all was!

I didn't even have a clue what our supposed target even looked like, with hardly any description of his appearance. To make matters even more complicated was the fact that we had no concrete plans of how we would leave the country after the mission, safely avoiding arrest by the authorities. All these concerns I raised didn't even move or faze my partner; he didn't want to hear anything of the sort. It was totally reckless and short-sighted.

A few weeks had passed after this conversation, when suddenly, as I was relaxing listening to the radio, I heard a loud, quick beating on my rented flats door. I could tell by the sound of the fist on the other end it was urgent. As soon as I opened, my excited partner burst into the room past me, breathing heavily as if he had just finished running a

marathon. He grabbed a glass of water off the table and drunk thirstily, looking at me as I watched him gulp down the water. "Listen young fellow..." he stated, wiping the water from the corners of his mouth and chin, "I have two great pieces of news for you!" I sat in a chair, listening and just staring at him in his excited state. "First! We have got word that the Pharaoh, that traitor, Sadat, has been shot and killed during a military parade." This was amazing news indeed; the fact that the President of Egypt was assassinated in front of his generals and military displayed the bravery that the attackers possessed. It would become known later that they were members of Sadat's own army.

"And second..." he talked more quietly now, "...the man we are here to find in Malta, has been located. So, we have no time to waste whatsoever; we must finish our assignment." I tried to argue with him that we have no contingency plan at all to leave the country and that we are moving too fast, we were not prepared. I didn't even possess a plane ticket to flee the country after finishing the job. But he refused to hear anything I had to say in this regard. It was like arguing with a brick wall.

So without a word, I followed him out the door. As I felt the cold steel of the pistol against my palm, my hand in my jacket pocket, I was oblivious to what awaited me.

Unbeknownst to me, trailing behind him out of the apartment, I was in reality following my destiny to another mysterious chapter in my young but confused life, turning the pages in a most dreadful way.

It was short walk down the quiet Maltese streets, but it seemed like I was counting every footstep. Soon, we both spotted who we were looking for. He was standing outside a local travel agency, waiting for something. From first sight, I could observe he was in his 30's, and I felt almost certain this couldn't be the man we are supposed to kill. In one last, futile attempt I tried to reason with the one who was appointed in charge over me, telling him in a pleading fashion that this mustn't be him. Before I could even articulate my point and speak my mind he cut me off, brutally stating, "And so what if it is not him?" His manner of speaking was like we were talking about a soulless thing or even an insect! It seemed this man we were looking for, that his humanity was not even considered or worth anything.

In a defeated tone I murmured "yes, you are the boss...the one who has the final say." And with that, the man's fate was sealed, and minutes later he was gunned down, attempting to get into his car. We both, my superior and I, attempted to flee the scene, but it was almost pointless, with poor preparation and absolutely no plan of attack or escape! With Malta being such a small island, it took the authorities no time to seal and blockade the roads, preventing any exit from the island itself. Within hours, I was apprehended, trying to make my way to any port to set sail, possibly to Libya or Tunisia. My boss was able to evade capture and arrest, escaping the island that very night unnoticed.

During my long and intense interrogation, I purposely threw off the investigators so that my boss could escape unhindered. It was also at this moment, under the bright light

of my questioning, that I was informed we killed the wrong man. This was not surprising to me at all but only confirmed what I knew in my heart and soul from the beginning.

At this moment, as you read these words, I'm not going to mention exactly how I felt that day the second the trigger was pulled, or how my emotions were moved or swayed. I say with all sincerity, that 34 years have passed and my very soul has not recovered from this incident. Yes, I did things before and after this transpired, but there has been nothing like this that truly shook me so hard to my core and being, what happened to this unfortunate man. In over 30 years, I have never been afforded the opportunity to apologize and express remorse to his young wife and newborn baby who were with him that day. As we pass through this life, in a state of sin, we continually ask the Almighty for His forgiveness and guidance.

Barely two weeks had passed, and I was summoned from my holding cell to appear before the judge to hear my plea. After some routine questions, I pled 'not guilty', and the judge ordered I be transferred to the sole and only jail on the island. There is no need at this point to even try to imagine how utterly shocked, down and extremely depressed I had become in this short amount of time. How did everything go so wrong, so fast? Now I am sitting in prison, facing a murder charge I earned with my own irresponsible, hasty and stupid hands! It is so true, that from the beginning I knew the fate and kind of life I was deciding for myself, either an early death or a life-time in prison, but not like this! I imagined that if anyone died, they would be mutual enemies in this global war; not an

innocent man. And on top of all of this tragedy, the man who put me in this whole horrible mess fled the country to Europe, leaving me to deal with all the consequences. Truly, Malta went from paradise to my own personal hell!

Contemplating all this, a vengeful, cold rage began to build inside me, feeling guilty and betrayed, all at the same moment. Nevertheless, I had to adapt to my new circumstances and soldier on despite my fate, caged in prison. I began to mix with other inmates and making friends, with both the staff and fellow prisoners. Knowing the language, communication was no obstacle for me, because I learned it rapidly. I made a decision to not contact my family and tell them where I was or what happened. I didn't want them worrying about me even more than they probably already were. I didn't even want my uncle letting them know, and he kept it from them.

I definitely had other problems on my hands, and I didn't want to stress over my family's grief. One of those problems was the warden of the prison. His name was Ronny Tom, and he was overly serious, harsh and terribly mean towards me. The very first day of my arrival, he had me brought to his small office. I could smell cigarette smoke throughout the whole room as I entered; everyone seemed to smoke amongst the guards to kill time and distract themselves from their mundane jobs.

The place was faintly lit but I could clearly see the ranks of the two officers flanking

Warden Tom as he sat squarely and upright in his upholstered chair, Sergeant and Major.

It was quite obvious that his motivation was to intimidate me. He launched into a stern lecture about how I was going to behave myself while in his prison, and there was going to be no room for any trouble out of me. I was to not associate with the wrong crowd or engage in any illicit activity. He said all of this with the most serious expression on his face. I responded likewise that he would not need to worry about me causing trouble and he could expect me to be a model prisoner. He seemed convinced enough and ordered a guard to escort me back to my cell.

Despite this seemingly civilized demeanor he portrayed towards me, I felt that in truth, he was threatening me. I could sense that something in his conscious was letting him know not to trust me for a second! A short passage of time would confirm for him the reason he should never have trusted me, and I also would be correct in my despising him from the very beginning and moment I set eyes on him.

He arranged himself that I would be sent to a unit, with individual cells and an open common area, which was populated by a good portion of Arab prisoners from many different nationalities. Most were from North Africa, like Morocco, Libya and Tunisia. Their charges ran the gamut of petty crime: burglary, theft, drugs and weapons possession. It was easy for me to settle in, as all the Arabs and even some local Maltese gave me a warm greeting, preparing for me hot tea and offering me cheap cigarettes. I was even given a comfortable cell to stay in. For the most part, they were all very courteous and full of generosity towards me.

However, mixed amongst these good-hearted prisoners, were the wardens personal spies whom he had sent to try to incite me or collect information about my activities. I always was fully aware of them the second they tried to befriend me. One made the comment to me that we would be in prison for so long, so why not formulate a plan to escape for good. They even would ask me my personal opinion about the warden, stating how they felt he was such a sinister man. They constantly would pepper me with questions and mischievous suggestions, trying to get my reaction. To their dismay, I would always disappoint them by politely letting them know I have no intentions whatsoever of escaping! And why would I, being a dedicated member of an influential and formidable organization that will strive diligently to secure my timely release by putting pressure on the Maltese government.

And I would always turn their comments about the warden on their head, proclaiming that the warden is really not that horrible of a man, he is just trying to do the best job he possibly can, considering the circumstances. Sometimes he must use rough and draconian measures to keep the prison under control and running smoothly as possible! Of course, I couldn't have been lying more than at those very moments! I can truly say I hated the warden with a passion, as he was neither a kind nor wise man.

The warden and I were continuously locked in a mental battle against each other, trying to outwit and deceive the other. It was truly a cat-and-mouse game we were playing! I vividly recall when I started a hunger-strike to protest many of the injustices that took place against me in the institution during his

tenure. It was a whole week of starvation and stinging hunger pains in the depth of my stomach before the warden even considered sending some of his officers to retrieve me from my cell. They literally carried me to his office due to the weakness that pervaded my whole body.

Once there, he began his whole charade again, trying to portray himself as totally oblivious and unaware of what was taking place all around the prison, of abuse and mistreatment to me and others. He innocently stated that he would never tolerate this kind of behavior by his officers and he would ensure that anyone of them who abused his authority would be severely punished. I felt a chill run through my body, watching him calmly lie without a conscious misgiving about anything he said. What a coldblooded bastard! Despite this smooth talk, he was personally behind every corruption and every violation of our rights.

With all the strength I could muster from my emaciated body, I responded back to him just as slyly, "I sincerely believe you sir...I'm sure if you knew about any of these things you would have done your upmost to put a stop to them." I promised to him that I would end my hunger strike. I could see the relief on his face when I spoke those words. He jumped at the chance to exploit this small victory of his and slowly opened his desk drawer, the sliding of the wooden drawer grinding against the desk the only noise filling the room, my eyes silently watching his every move. Nothing inside me even allowed myself to trust him, feeling I couldn't let my guard down for a single moment.

He placed a fresh pack of Marlboro cigarettes, my favorite brand, upon the desk and with the tips of his fingers, pushed them towards me. I definitely couldn't resist and almost snatched them off the table, but I consciously made sure I acted as a cool as possible in every moment I was in front of him. A small glass clanged against a half-full bottle as the warden then motioned for me to take a drink, some expensive kind of liquor shining inside the glass container. He poured a small shot and drank it swiftly. He kept all these small tokens of appreciation in his office for not only those who cooperated but for his own personal use as well.

"No thank you, Warden Tom, but my stomach could not handle a drink like that now; I've had nothing in it for a week..." I was amazed at his ability to manipulate people, studying their habits and using their weaknesses against them. During his many years working the prisons, he had become an expert at psychological warfare. He knew how to bring a man close to the breaking point of madness, and then bring him back from the brink with a smile, kind words and a cigarette!

I left his office feeling a sense of indignation building inside me. Sitting in my cell, the ill feelings that had been building within me were swelling up my chest, like I could physically feel the emotions of avarice I held towards the warden. I told myself that it is just a matter of time, and that I must wait patiently for the moment I can finally get the upper hand over this vicious wolf in sheep's clothing.

Like all prisons across the world, in every age, there is always a small, select group of the inmates who feel they are in charge. Tough

guys, with intimidating appearances, uninviting faces, covered in tattoos with their shaved heads, weaving through the crowds of prisoners, searching for their next unfortunate victim to harass, bully, exploit and extort. A lot of them will even have racist beliefs and tendencies. The prison in Malta was no exception.

A collection of these convicts were running everything in the prison, their hand in every illicit and lucrative activity on the compound. People's hearts were full of fear for them and would do their every bidding, some unwillingly and with contempt, but unable to resist them because of their power.

Fortunately for me, as soon as I stepped foot in the prison, they took me under their wing and adopted me. It was strange to me at first and I wondered why they would behave like this towards me, questioning in my mind their motives and intentions. I was much too young for them and not even Maltese for that matter! But as time passed, they revealed to me why they had taken an interest in helping and supporting me. They said, "First and foremost, your case is totally political, and your status as a political prisoner puts you above all these other foreigners and their petty theft and drug cases. And secondly, of all the nationalities among us, you are Palestinian, and we love the Palestinian people." In addition to that, they all believed I was a freedom fighter, which earned their respect for me even more so.

Naturally, because of this exclusive treatment and the status I was given amongst the shot-callers and leaders, people harbored jealousy and envy towards me, especially the other Arabs. It would truly bother me at times

because I never intended for things to be this way, it just happened that things were in my favor and that despite the conditions, destiny placed a special status upon me in the hearts and eyes of influential people. I can say however that most of the Arabs respected and honored me like a brother, going the extra mile to make me feel welcomed and comfortable.

Destiny would also have it that I would become so endeared and loved by a particular man amongst these important prisoners. The special interest he had for me would lead us to becoming the best and closest of friends, even though we were separated so much by age, heritage and culture. He was a Maltese man who also held British citizenship. His name was Lewis Burtello.

Lewis held an exclusive spot for me in his soul; he looked at me like a brother, true friend and even his own son. I always enjoyed my time with him, on every occasion. I will always remember the day we were sitting together, basking in the sun through an open window, sipping tea and lazily smoking cigarettes. He looked at me for moment than said, "You know Habib," 'Ahmed Habib' was the name inscribed on my false

Lebanese passport that I possessed in Malta, "I consider myself a true racist...I don't like Arabs, blacks, Jews or Muslims, and whatever else isn't like me. But there is something different about you Habib, which I didn't expect to find in someone like yourself." I looked at him in a stunned way, waiting expectantly for his next words. "And to prove to you what I'm saying and how much I really do love you, I'm going to do the unthinkable!" I looked him in the eyes and asked him politely, "What is that Lewis?"

"I'm going to have you marry one of my daughters..." Wow! I said loudly in mind but my face was shocked frozen and my mouth was silent. In fact I was so stunned at that moment my cigarette began burning my finger in neglect! For a white, Christian, racist man this was almost beyond belief. Finally a smile stretched across my face. "Lewis, if one day we can get out of this wretched prison and find each other, it would be a great honor for me to take your daughters hand in marriage."

Lewis and I's friendship did not escape the attention of the warden and his spies, and they even learned somehow about Lewis's marriage proposal. The warden was wary of our potential influence and he wanted to keep tabs on us at all times. He even arranged that I be moved to a cell right next to Lewis in order that he could monitor us both more efficiently and closely.

The winter of that year, 1982, an election nation-wide occurred in the country. There were two large competing parties in Malta at that time. One was far-right in political orientation, and Lewis himself was a member of this party. The other faction was leftist, led by the current Prime Minister at that time, Domintof, who happened to be Lewis's personal rival and enemy. I was actually fond of the prime minister, who was socialist and strongly pro-Palestinian, always displaying sympathy for our plight.

Lewis was following every minute detail of the election and its latest developments. His sincere hope was that if his party could win and gain power than they could weld their authority to free him from prison. If not, only God knows how long he would remain imprisoned. .

Much like myself, Lewis was also a political prisoner. He had been accused of murdering the adopted son of Domintof. At 54 years old, Lewis was facing a life sentence, so the elections and their outcome was like his last hope and chance of escaping a life, and ultimately death, in prison. I considered Lewis to be one of my best friends, who I loved dearly, and I prayed and wished things would go in his favor.

That very month, the election occurred, and unfortunately luck was not on Lewis's side. His party was defeated, handed a crushing loss by their opponents. Lewis became terribly depressed and it seemed all hope had drained from him; I could see it in his face. You could sense that he knew his last chance had been snatched from him unremorsefully, yet he never spoke a word about it.

Just days later, he approached me in the prison yard, where I happened to be all alone, enjoying the cool air blowing over the prison from the surrounding sea. From the moment I caught his eyes, I knew something serious was ruminating in his mind. I wanted to ask him what is the matter, but before I could utter anything, he gripped and squeezed my shoulder as he took a seat next to me. It was his way of telling me to be silent and wait for what he had to say.

"Habib..." he spoke in hushed tones, as his eyes searched the clouds above us. "You know what happened in regards to the elections." I nodded, studying his face, wondering what exactly would come next. "I felt like that was my last hope to get out of this place...I'm 54 years old, and I'm only coming close to the end of my life, and I've made a decision. I'm going to escape from here, and I want you to

come with me." He said all of that as calmly as I write this. But at the time I was excited and frightened all at the same instance. What would happen if we got caught? It seemed Lewis wasn't thinking about any of the possible negative outcomes that could occur if things didn't go according to plan.

Honestly, I had thoughts like this before but I never would dare vocalize them because we resided in a nest of spies and informants, who waited for any opportunity to get information so they could be rewarded some cigarettes or other gift from the warden. But Lewis wasn't just anyone; I trusted him as my best friend and companion and felt I could tell him anything I had in my thoughts or what was deep in my heart. That is why I searched for the right words for what was brewing in my mind of doubts and apprehensions, as I didn't want to hurt his feelings or offend him.

"Lewis, you know I care about you and hope just as much as you do that you get out of prison. I never want you to lose hope in that, whatever happens. But I have to tell you how I feel about escaping." I could see his eyes lighting up in anticipation of what I was about to say. "I have to tell you, no, I am not interested in escaping, and here is exactly why. I've seen what happens when someone does something in haste with no plans and no foresight, which is why I am in prison in front of you at this very moment! I'm not going to make that stupid mistake again, trust me. I might be young but I learn from my mistakes." I could see Lewis was hanging on my every word and sentence. I could also decipher from his silence that he respected my reservations.

I continued, "Look, let's say we did escape; where could I go? Who would help me? I would need cash, a place to go, travel documents and even food to eat. I'm not going to commit to escape just to be caught a few days later, and end up with even more time than what I am facing! And imagine the kind of torture the warden would subject me to if I was back in his evil hands. There's no way I will put myself in that kind of predicament." Lewis listened with his head hung low, eyes cast towards the ground.

"Plus, my comrades back in Baghdad would not want me to take a reckless action like this. I know they would prefer I just stay out of trouble, wait in the prison a few years, and allow them to pressure the Maltese government to release me. Considering all this, the risk and negative consequences is totally and absolutely unnecessary."

All in all, Lewis was clearly disappointed but he told me that he understood my concerns about what he suggested. I let him know, however, that my decision wasn't final and that I could change my mind about it. I knew 100% that Lewis didn't say anything about this to anyone else, and we both didn't speak about it again for weeks. We just carried on like we never even discussed something so drastic.

These mundane days and weeks were heralding something in the near future that would change my thoughts about escaping dramatically. On assignment by the warden, one of his select "rats" happened to come in to the knowledge that I had a large knife in my possession, somewhere in my cell. I still have no idea how he even found out about it; I always kept it well hidden in my assigned mattress. The spy feed the information to the prison guards, and

they waited until the opportune time to raid my cell. It was at midnight, as I was sound asleep. They forcefully stormed the cell, pulling me from under my blanket, flashlights blinding my eyes. As a couple guards tore through my belongings, in total disrespect to my property, another set of officers was patting me down, searching for any form of contraband I could have stashed on my body or in my clothes.

"Aha!" I heard one of the police yelp in satisfaction. I was pressed with my chest against the wall, but I watched the guard, smiling triumphantly, as he emerged from my cell, shank in hand. He flashed the sharpened steel in my face, the ceiling lights flashing off its shiny exterior. "Do you know anything about this Habib?" he asked me mockingly. "Take him to lock-up!" They handcuffed me so tight the bones of my wrists were on fire. Then I was forcefully shoved to the special area of the prison where people were held in solitary, giving them a bit of resistance along every step.

I was thrown inside the solitary cell, the guards calling me dirty and fowl names as I heard the lock slam tight on the steel door. They opened the slat of the door as I heard the wooden legs of a stool drag across the concrete floor. A guard took a seat in front of the door and shined a bright light in my face. "Habib! How'd you get that knife? Once you tell us, you won't be in trouble for too long." In classic convict fashion I told him I have no idea what you're talking about, and in fact, I believe the guards planted it there! The metal slat slammed shut as the guard left frustrated, cursing profusely in Maltese slang as he left. I remained in

solitary confinement for a month, stripped of several privileges, like cigarettes and tea.

During this period of isolation, I discovered something that tipped me over the edge in regards to how I felt towards the warden and my whole treatment during my imprisonment in general. I was informed by 'a very reliable source' that the warden had selected four officers and convened a meeting with them. At this meeting, in the secrecy of his office, he told them that he wanted them to go to my cell, at night and surprise me in a way were they are able to restrain me thoroughly. After doing so, they were to beat me as severely as possible, but not to the point of death.

Of course, all of this is absolutely illegal. But the officers have their own techniques to circumvent any legal niceties. They would prepare their uniforms by removing or obscuring their names and numbers, and use ski-masks or balaclavas to hide their identities. All of this is done so that no real legal action can be taken against them in the event that a prisoner would try to take them to court for their criminal actions.

Thankfully for me, one of the officers asked to perform this vile deed was a friend of Lewis and I, who was always respectful towards us. He flatly refused to participate whatsoever in what the warden was asking them to do. Because of his bravery of standing up to the warden and the peer pressure of his fellow officers, it forced the warden to cancel his plot to have me beaten out of fear of criminal prosecution for misconduct. If the officer was willing to challenge him, he definitely would testify in court on my behalf.

Learning about all of this ignited my anger to the upmost; it was like my blood was on fire. My heart was pounding in my chest with rage at his arrogance and savage nature. Everything became for me very personal between him and I, perceiving all his actions towards me as full of spite and malice. And for the most part, it was true. An incident a few days later would confirm all my feelings, and push me over the edge. It was the "straw that broke the camel's back", as they say.

I had to go to court for a routine hearing, as my trial was soon approaching. It was a formality I was glad to get over with because I was anxious about my trial, and wanted it concluded as soon as possible. After the brief hearing, I was waiting with a few other prisoners in the holding cell before being escorted back into the prison itself. It just so happened that the warden was coming back from playing lawn tennis on part of the prison ground reserved exclusively for the prison staff. Dressed in a tacky outfit, with mismatched shirt and shorts, I wanted to laugh at how ridiculous he looked if it wasn't for me being confined in the cell; he would be counted on to leave you there for days if you just happened to laugh at his expense!

As he gripped his tennis racquet, he motioned for me to come over to him, away from the other inmates. This immediately filled me with anxiety, not knowing what to expect from this psychopath. I attempted my best to smile and exchange some polite greetings with him, but he just snapped at me in an instant; with no 'hello' or 'how are you', he bluntly asked me why did I have that knife in my cell? I can still remember the ugly expression upon his face and the smell of his sweat due to the

day's excessive heat. I tried to brush his rude demeanor to the side and again ask him how he was, but he wanted nothing to do with any civilized conversation. He raised his voice above mine, shouting, "The next time we find something like that in your cell, Habib, I will personally take the knife and cut your head right off your body!" He raised the lawn tennis racquet and made a swift motion with it, demonstrating how he would behead me.

I can't describe exactly the emotions I felt at that moment in time. I used every fiber in my body to restrain myself from punching him square in the face. I looked him dead in the eye and told him in a polite fashion, "Thank you warden, I got you." How I was able to control myself in that split second, I will never truly know!

The very next day after this encounter, I went to Lewis as soon as the doors cracked. I found Lewis in his cell preparing his first cup of morning coffee and smoking a cigarette. "Lewis", I began, "I've made up my mind once and for all, and I'm ready to escape this place with you." I could see the surprise on his face but also some relief. Lewis wanted to leave but he needed help, and I knew he only trusted me to embark on something like this.

My situation at that point in time wasn't as urgent and dire as Lewis; I still had much hope in the future and plus I had more obligations because of the organization. I was expected to not take any unnecessary risks or rash actions. But my raw emotions had overridden any logical considerations I had or misgivings about escaping. My mind was on a single track. I desired nothing more than to humiliate this warden and crush his ego in the most serious way possible. I wanted to show

him how powerless he really was, and strip him of any authority or control he had over me. In fact, I will even cause him to lose his job and position. My whole being was consumed by seeking revenge against this arrogant tyrant. Freedom was one thing, but to come out victorious over him and at his expense was much sweeter!

From this point forward, Lewis and I began to put our plans in motion. We did our best, at every single instance, to keep all our activities as secret and concealed as

humanly possible. We could not afford to let anyone perceive there was something different or altered in our behavior or routines.

One of the first tasks that Lewis completed towards furthering our goal of escaping was that he instructed his family to leave Malta immediately. He did not want his wife and children to be caught up in the ensuing mayhem that might result from our escape. We both did not want them to be harassed or intimidated by the authorities due to our actions. They all made their way home to England shortly thereafter. Lewis did however give instructions for one of his daughters to stay behind on the island to act as a liaison and messenger between Lewis and I and some of his closest friends who would assist us on the outside in our escape.

In the midst of all this planning, my trial was on the verge of commencing. Because of the political undertones of my case and the murder, there was a lot of publicity surrounding it whenever something new developed in it. I was appointed by the court a lawyer who was employed by them, which was free of charge. But because my case was

connected to the Palestinian cause, there were other top-notch attorneys who were interested in representing me. A lot of the upper-class people in Maltese society, and Europe in general, were pro-Palestine, which was to my great advantage.

There was one elite lawyer in particular who I will never forget. His name was Mr. AlDimarco, and he was one of the best in the whole country; he was also a rising star on the Maltese political scene. At a court hearing, he just happened to catch my eye and I observed him as an entourage of people swarmed around him like he was a movie star. I could see from how he carried himself that he was an important person. I couldn't resist myself to not enquire about him, and I asked a guard nearby who exactly this man was. He appeared astonished, with a shocked expression upon his face. "Oh...you don't know who that is? He's one of the best attorneys in the whole court system, Al-Dimarco!"

Now the name was very familiar with me, as I had heard his name in the prison for months from fellow inmates and even some staff. It was said that his lawyer fees would tally into the millions once a case was over and done with! All this however did not dissuade me from attempting to speak with him. To the absolute horror and embarrassment of my court-appointed lawyer and the guards watching over me, I quickly moved over to the area of the court he occupied with his many aides and assistants, trying to introduce myself. I kept saying hello, but at first I got no response from him, it seemed he was too distracted or maybe even ignoring me. That didn't stop

me however and I kept insisting on talking to him. I even heard my lawyer asking me what

the hell am I doing, he was my lawyer! I ignored him and yelled out my name to AlDimarco, telling him I wanted him as my lawyer. Finally I got his attention when he recognized my name.

He looked at me surprised and sort of confused, and left his chair, along with his cluster of subordinates. Upon reaching me, he asked inquisitively, "Are you the Palestinian?" I said "Yes, of course!" He smiled instantly and grabbed my hand firmly, looking me compassionately in the eyes and saying how much he sympathizes with the Palestinian people and loves us dearly. In his excitement he told me that he even met with George Habbash, the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

I told him politely, "Look, I've heard the best things about you since I've been in Malta; I would love for you take my case". Surprisingly, he said yes, he would gladly and willingly take my case. I told him that I was humbled but at the same instance embarrassed because I had no money to pay him whatsoever. He seemed almost saddened I mentioned anything about money and replied warmly, will not take any money from you." What could I say; I was relieved and overcome with gratitude towards him, thanking him profusely for his generosity.

As all this was going on, I couldn't seem to take my eyes off a beautiful, young girl who was in the courtroom with him that day. Al-Dimarco introduced me to her; she was his only daughter who he was training to be a lawyer just like him. I'm sure she grew up to be just as successful as he was. Unfortunately, as fate would have it, I would never see him or his daughter again, except

one last final time in court, right before I escaped from the prison. It was only for a brief moment, and they vanished from my life forever, like so many others.

I did, however, still hear about him even after Lewis and I escaped. On the run and in hiding I read some of his comments in the paper about the two of us. He was speaking out on our behalf against the Maltese government. The authorities had issued orders that we were to be shot on sight because they deemed us armed and extremely dangerous. He argued with their twisted logic saying, "You ask them to surrender yet you will shoot them on sight; who would ever risk their life like that!" He basically was trying to point out their brutal tactics to the public.

Many years later I would once again run across Al-Dimarco, in the newspaper again, this time referring to his political achievements. He was the head of a political party which won the general elections, thus placing him in the position of the President of the Republic of Malta. Within the last couple years I read about his departure from this world at a very old age. May you rest in peace, Mr. Al-Dimarco. I will never forget your warm kindness and wisdom. I saw his death mentioned in countless papers and read about numerous leaders the world over issuing their condolences to his family and the Maltese people.

The whole entirety of our plan, to the day we successfully escaped, only two very trusted fellow prisoners knew about what Lewis and I were trying to do. In fact, they aided us in minor ways here and there, like going into the prison factory and securing tools for us that would help us cut metal, for instance. Just

as much as there were trustworthy inmates, we also had two officers who were particularly kind and compassionate towards us and most of the other prisoners in general. They never physically brought us anything or hid something on our behalf; they turned the other way, giving a blind eye to whatever we were doing, and that was the best thing they could do for us! We also considered their own situation as prisons guards, so we didn't ask much from them because they could get in serious trouble if they were directly involved in facilitating our escape. Our relationship was on such a level that when we got to Sicily, and later Rome, Lewis and I spoke to them on the phone!

The first major step we needed to accomplish in our plan was to acquire two keys:

one for our doors, and one for the prison factory. The first, initial key would be for Lewis and I's cell door. We would only need one key for that because all the cell doors had an identical, matching lock for one single key that the guards used to lock and unlock our cells. The second key was for the prison factory which was needed so that, after we snuck out of our cells, we could enter the locked door of the prison factory and proceed to gather the ropes and ladder we both would need to scale and descend down some of the prison walls and out windows.

The key for the prison factory was the easier of the two keys to procure. I had a good friend who worked in the factory as one of the clerks. He was always in contact with the staff in the factory, so he said he had a very good chance of finding the door key and stealing it. He had the ability to make a

rudimentary duplicate while still in the factory, then he would smuggle the copy out to us. From there we would handle the process of making the key, which I will mention soon.

Now the other key for our cell doors was more of a challenge. But, we had a daring plan that was highly risky, and if we were caught, it would expose everything we were planning. There was an officer who worked our unit that Lewis and I would talk to on a regular basis. I guess you could say he was our friend, The plan was to invite the guard to Lewis's cell on Sunday, when the doors of the cells would be unlocked almost all day, During the time he, the guard, is in the cell, I was to engage him in conversation and distract him as Lewis would try to get the right key. You see, we had been watching him for many months, and one particular habit I observed in him was that he would often set his keys down on the office desk or table. He would even carry them in his hand, instead of on his belt like other guards. Knowing about this carelessness, we hoped he would also thoughtlessly set them down in the cell!

So that beautiful Sunday morning arrived, and I invited the officer for some coffee and a cigarette. It was normal enough; the majority of the Maltese people were hospitable themselves and would respond to hospitality more often than not. It also helped that he felt comfortable with the both of us. I offered him a cigarette when he stepped into Lewis's cell, and just as we anticipated, he placed the keys clutched in his right hand squarely on Lewis's bed so he could receive my Marlboro cigarette! I could have almost shouted in celebration but I had to subdue all of my emotions at that critical moment.

Lewis's eyes met mine to reassure me to keep talking while he would grab the key from the large key ring. We had seen this key a million times, so Lewis knew exactly which one he was looking for. As I poured another shot of coffee for the officer, asking him about his family and things at home, Lewis swiftly unhooked the key in total silence. I felt my heart pounding as I watched the entire move unfold before me.

"Excuse me for a moment" Lewis told us before he left for his own cell next door. In his room, he had a bar of soap set aside for a special purpose. See, this is what we used to help duplicate the keys. We would press the key into the soap, in order that the shape of the key would be imprinted into it. This was done in order that the teeth of the keys could be reproduced. Lewis had an expert blacksmith he knew in the street who would be able to forge the keys out of metal by pouring the melted, hot liquid metal into the pattern for the key formed with the soap. When the steel hardened, he would then file down all the imperfections, making sure everything was as smooth as possible.

Next, we used the prison privileges to our own advantage. They allowed any prisoner with family to pass them laundry to return home when any family member would visit, so that they could wash your clothes and bring them back later. Lewis tightly wrapped and tied the soap with the key patterns into a specific set of clothes, and when his daughter came on visit, he would let her know which ones to find the soap bars. When she got home, she would deliver the soap to the key-maker, who would then fashion the keys from scratch.

Back in my cell, Lewis stealthily slipped the key back in place, just in time for the officer to return to his regular duties. I could have died with anxiety, as I had to distract the guard for what seemed like an eternity. I don't know what would have happened if he found the key was stolen!

This comprehensive planning and preparation occurred with Lewis and I doing our utmost to carry on as if nothing was out of the ordinary. My mind was racing with so many thoughts from day to day, but I had to act as if I didn't have a care in the world. I made sure not to alter one single part of my routine or habits. I would mix and mingle, relaxing with tea and cigarettes, engaging in mundane conversations as I portrayed myself as being totally complacent and satisfied with my situation and predicament. As a political prisoner, my organization will work to free me; all I have to do is spend a couple years playing soccer and handball! I made particular precaution to make sure that not even one of the Arab prisoners knew what was going on behind the scenes. This whole time we were working diligently to complete the finishing touches on our planned escape.

Christmas Eve arrived, which allowed for us a perfect opportunity. The prison authorities arranged for a huge party to be thrown for the prisoners. A band from the street was even permitted to come in and put on a show for all of us. It was a overwhelming scene of celebration, with dancing and singing. There were free cigarettes and even cups of wine provided by the prison chaplain!

This very day before Christmas, Lewis's daughter came to visit her father. She carried some special cake with her, homemade in

commemoration of the holiday season. The cake was beautifully wrapped and prepared with care. She innocently told the guards that it was Christmas and she wanted to celebrate with her dad; could they please make sure the cake would get to him? The officers were actually touched by her gesture and even hand-delivered the dessert to Lewis with no inspection or second thoughts even!

Lewis's daughter tightly hugged him in the visiting room, whispering in his ear that the two keys are baked inside! All this was done as the guards looked on, telling themselves how sweet a daughter she was. Lewis's daughter also informed him in the visit that everyone is ready on the outside and waiting for the final day, culminating in our escape once and for all.

An apartment had been rented in a quiet location that was always frequented by tourists. This was done for the dual purpose of throwing off the police who wouldn't suspect us seeking refuge there, and also my foreign appearance wouldn't be so out of place. The small flat was stocked with months' worth of food, drink and cigarettes, along with a television and books to read, because there was no way we could take the chance of venturing outside. All of this was arranged by an Australian friend who was not suspected of being connected with Lewis. We wanted someone who the authorities weren't aware of because we knew they would detain and interrogate many people in Lewis's circle to try to track us down.

After the visit with Lewis's daughter, he returned to the cell with the delicious looking cake, decked out in chocolate frosting and a rainbow of sprinkles. I arrived at his

cell to find the cake sitting on his writing desk, as Lewis was cleaning a cutting knife he had, preparing to dissect the cake to retrieve the special contents. Carefully slicing the cake, I could tell the moment the knife hit one of the keys by watching Lewis's reaction. One after the other, he removed and washed the keys, inspecting them in the light, looking for any imperfections. They were exact copies of the originals. I patted Lewis on the back as we both continued to inspect them. The key-maker was truly a professional. I checked the tier for anyone who might pass by as Lewis stashed the keys in his secret hiding place.

Soon after, we were having our own Christmas party, eating the chocolate covered cake and sipping hot tea with milk and sugar. It couldn't have been a more perfect moment; our first crucial step had been completed. The real celebration however would be the moment we breached the prisons perimeter, scoring the ultimate victory against the arrogant, ruthless scum that was the warden, on his home turf, his prison!

The keys were important, but we needed a couple more tools to complete our escape kit, putting the final touches on our plan, and setting sail for good. For one, we needed to obtain a small stop watch. According to the prison rules "all watches and electronic devices are strictly forbidden." The purpose behind having a watch was because of the night shift. Our plan was to time the rounds of the officers so that we would know precisely when to find cover and conceal ourselves as they passed by once we got out of our cells. I was able to determine that the night officers made their rounds every 30 minutes.

The next item on our list was a file for filing down metal. The purpose of this file was to use it to cut down some of the steel slat on the cell door, so that it could be pushed open. Then, Lewis would maneuver his arm through the opening and unlock his own door with the key we had duplicated, and then open my door right next to his cell. It's the warden in his craftiness who actually made it easier for us to escape by putting us as neighbors! The steel file would also be utilized to cut a bar from a window in the unit so that we could descend from there into the yard and then onto the factory. Once there, we would collect the rest of the equipment to escape we had stored there, namely the ropes and ladder, Within a week we had both the watch and the file.

Just as we were on the verge of preparing for the escape, Lewis and I both agreed to postpone our plans until the summer arrived. During the summer we could move around much easier because of the good weather, the country would be at the peak of its tourist season, and the sea itself would be easier to navigate. It was highly likely we would have to use a boat to flee Malta, instead of by air. Considering all these factors, summer was definitely more favorable conditions wise for the escape. Lewis cut a small hole in his cell wall to stash the keys and tools, painting over the plastered hole. All we needed now was a little patience.

Until then, I just continued my routine, working a simple prison job and chilling out with all my Arab and Maltese friends. One of my most memorable moments during this time was when I was smuggled a small transistor radio by an officer I was very close to. I wished

to be able to hear some of the news and maybe Arabic music. I couldn't have thanked him enough for such a coveted gift because radios were simply not allowed in the prison. I assured him that even if they threatened to cut my head off, I wouldn't let them know who gave it to me. I told him this in all sincerity because I knew he took a tremendous risk in bringing me the radio. He couldn't help but smile and quietly said, "Trust me, I know that."

At lock up time, after 8PM, I would wait an hour for them to turn off the lights, and then I would take out the radio from its hiding place, go under my blankets and listen to it at a low volume so the guards wouldn't catch me listening to it. I would flip the small dial, searching the channels for anything interesting and especially anything in Arabic. Many times I was able to pick up an Arabic station broadcasting from all the way in Cologne, Germany. I would fall asleep listening to the sweet voice of Umm Kalthoum on many occasions. Even when the batteries would get low, the same officer would provide me fresh ones. I still sometimes think and ponder, where is he and is he still even alive? He, along with other guards, were so kind-hearted and humane towards me. I always felt like they treated me like a genuine person and normal human being, just like one of them. I can say I loved and cared about them very much, and I never seen them ever again, always wishing I could thank them how they truly deserve to be thanked for everything they did.

At this period of time, three major events were taking place round the globe. The Falkland Islands war had just erupted between the arrogant power of England and the

dignified people of Argentina, who were asserting their right over their territorial waters, where the Falklands resided. The Arabs and some Latino prisoners were staunchly on the side of Argentina and their right to exercise control over their sovereign territory. We all used to tell the other prisoners to wait and see, it would be only a matter of time before all of South America would unite and consolidate themselves behind Argentina. Lewis on the other hand supported England in the conflict, and Margaret Thatcher, "the Iron Lady" happened to be his favorite conservative leader.

Shortly thereafter, another war exploded, with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in June of '82. The Israeli forces were led by the ruthless butcher, Ariel Sharon. They used the attempted assassination of their ambassador to England, Shlomo Argov, as a pretext to invade Lebanon and bombard Beirut mercilessly. The leader of the assassination operation, Al Russan, was actually a close friend of mine who I knew all the way from my time in the training camp in Hit.

The third event that transpired 10 days before our escape was the soccer World Cup finals, which were taking place in Spain during the middle of June. I told Lewis, this is our opportune time to escape as there were many distractions in the local media. The Maltese and Italians will be wrapped in following the soccer matches, while the news is concentrating on that, plus the wars. This will be a perfect cover for us as the media won't spend much time covering our escape. We needed to exploit this to the maximum. Lewis totally agreed.

The next day, Lewis's daughter came to the prison to pay her father her regular visit like always. This wasn't a normal visit however, because Lewis informed her that we are now ready and fully prepared to escape the prison. It would be three days from now, on a Thursday night. All the friends waiting for us must be prepped and informed immediately to get ready to be waiting at the agreed time and location.

Exactly three days later, she came for her final visit. She informed her dad that everything was arranged and in order as planned. The flat was stuffed with provisions, waiting, and that there will be a car parked at a gas station not far from the main prison gate. The car will remain there until 4 AM after arriving near 10 at night. Lewis made sure to let her know that she must show up for a regular visit the next morning, to make things appear everything is normal and that she has absolutely no clue about our plans to escape. This definitely would help her from getting in trouble with the authorities.

The rest of that day we were planning to escape on, we did our best to carry on as routinely as possible. In fact, a good portion of the day Lewis and I were separated, doing our own thing. I myself paid particular attention to one inmate. His name that we gave him was 'Fish', and everyone knew he was one of the warden's top spies. In the past, I always did my best to avoid him, despite the fact that he was constantly trying to befriend and come close to me. I would politely tell him I was too busy or another false excuse not to keep his company, making sure he didn't catch wind of how much I really knew about him.

This time was different. Before the escape, I wanted to play this vicious spy as close as possible so he wouldn't be able to perceive that something was afoot between Lewis and I. From out of nowhere I approached the Fish and started to chat him up, offering him a cigarette. He seemed to be shocked into a silence, not knowing how to react or what to say. It wasn't long before he snapped out of it, telling me to come to his cell so he could serve me some tea. I held conversation with him like an old friend, laughing and smoking for a couple of hours. He didn't seem to understand what was going on, but seemed overjoyed to finally, after so much effort, be gaining my confidence. Little did he realize that this was literally my last day in prison, and he isn't able to detect a hint of it. How foolish and incompetent he will appear before the warden, and how miserable he will be!

Actually, close to our escape, a very close friend offered to fight the Fish, so he would be nowhere around us, able to detect the plot to escape. An incident like that would put them in segregation for at least a month, giving Lewis and I more breathing room to construct our plans, away from the busy spy's prying eyes and ears. I declined however, telling him that even though we know about the Fish, there are still many "unknowns" amongst us! I wanted the Fish and the other spies as close as possible, to sow amongst them the ultimate deception, ensuring that the warden gains full confidence and assurance that he's in control of his domain!

My own fellow Arab prisoners themselves had no insight whatsoever about what I was planning, and suspected nothing. I spent my

last hour with them, giving away some of my property, telling them I had way too much property whenever they protested against my generosity. They had no idea it was my farewell gifts to them, which they would soon realize just a day later!

Lockdown occurred at its regularly scheduled time, 8PM. The lights in the unit would stay on for an hour, allowing us all some light to eat our dinner and prepare for bed, maybe read a book. At 9 PM, on the dot, they kill the lights, and most inmates quickly fall asleep. By 10 PM we felt it was safe to now commence the escape. With the prison enveloped in mass slumber around this time, the two night shift officers had just made their rounds, and Lewis and I waited patiently for them to pass by.

I could very faintly hear the metal file eating away at the last part of Lewis's slat that was needed to open it, but he did an excellent job of keeping it as quiet as possible. Finally, he removed the piece of slat that gave room for his hand to slip out. Holding the perfectly copied key, he slid it into the door lock. This whole time I was observing him from my cell with a small piece of mirror that I could maneuver near a crack in the door, allowing me to see him. I heard the lock click and slowly Lewis opened his door, avoiding any creaking from the door. I could really taste freedom now, almost!

Being the perfectionist he was, Lewis had stolen some industrial-strength glue so that he would be able to secure the piece of slat back like nothing had happened. There was a greater purpose behind this however that just fulfilling Lewis's knack for perfection.

He was aiming to drive the warden and the investigators crazy with trying to figure out how we got out of our cells, much less the prison! He wanted no trail and no evidence!

During my preparation, I quickly ate my dinner and began to dress myself properly. I especially concentrated on wearing protective-like clothing. On top of the prison walls were implanted sharp shards of glass, to cut into people's hands and bodies if they tried to scale the wall. I pulled on two pairs of pants and thick work-gloves. Next, I made my bed nicely, stuffing under the blankets extra pillows to give my bed the appearance of a sleeping body. This was to help fool any of the night-shift if they just so happened to look in my cell during their rounds.

This trick actually proved itself to work very well. I was informed about it later on from someone who was still in the prison at the time. At 6 AM sharp, the day officers were going around serving the breakfast to the inmates, from slat to slat. Upon reaching my cell, the guard banged on my metal door, thinking that would rouse me from my sleep. I couldn't help but laugh at the story as I listened to it being recounted. The officer started shouting, "Habib...Habib! Are you alive in there?!" He probably thought I had a heart attack and died in my sleep. Opening the door, he rushed in and pulled the blankets off, finding the neatly arranged pillows in place of my body. He soon was screaming about an escape and sirens soon were blaringly throughout the prison.

Back to the escape, Lewis was soon at my door, silently unlocking it and I slid from the barely cracked door. It was soon shut and locked again. Like two predatory cats in the

jungle, we slinked across the tier on all fours, below the level of all the cell windows, to reach a large window covered with bars. Lewis and I had previously weakened one bar in the weeks before the escape, so it would be easier to file through the remaining steel bar. After its removal, we crept out the window onto the large prison yard, which was being crisscrossed every so often with spotlights. We walked slowly and methodically along the wall, praying that no officers would come to the yard at that crucial moment.

Finally, we reached the factory where we had our equipment for the rest of the escape stashed away. Approaching the front door, Lewis tried to push in the key, but it wouldn't fit! We almost panicked for a second, and then realized that it must be for the other door of the factory, on the side near the outdoor bathrooms. The problem was that this door is blocked by a wall which housed the bathroom area before the side door was accessible.

Both Lewis and I realized the problem at the same moment, and he looked at me with a determination I had not witnessed before from him since I knew him. "Habib, pay attention" he uttered in a low but assertive, strong tone, 't'if we don't make it into the factory as soon as possible, and hide, we will be found by the officers who are about to make their rounds any minute now. You have to scale this wall, because if you don't make it, we will be caught out in the open, with no place to flee. The dogs will be released, and if they don't maul us to death, we will be thrown back in the prison in even worse conditions! We need the ladders for this wall and the others. You're younger and stronger than me; you can do it!"

After his motivational talk, I was ready to do it; there was no option for failure in the equation. I literally got a running start and tried to jump up the wall as far as possible. I was gripping the cracks of the wall, and clawing with my nails into the bricks. I never exerted this much energy in my life. Lewis came behind me so I could place my feet on his shoulders like human step-ladder. I was able to grip the top of the wall and pull myself up and over, landing on the other side. I came down with so much force and momentum I thought I broke my feet!

The soles of my feet were still in pain as I approached the door and inserted the key; it worked, and I quickly scrambled in. The factory was dark and I almost lost my cool when some of the spotlights shone thru the factory windows. I almost yelled, "Oh my God!" which would have certainly compromised our location. The light did help locate more than one ladder however. By sheer coincidence, the prison happened to be conducting some renovations just starting the day before. Because of this I was able to grab two ladders, which was exactly what we needed at the moment. I gathered both the ladders together and rushed out the factory. I pushed one over the wall to Lewis, allowing him to get over the wall, and I set up the other so he could come down the other side. We accomplished all this under three minutes.

That very instant Lewis made it over the wall, pulling the first ladder back over to the bathroom area, the two night patrol officers were approaching the factory on their assigned rounds. We crouched down on the other side of the wall, remaining deathly still and silent until they passed. I could smell their

cigarette smoke as they chatted back and forth, right past us.

We then used some of the factory ropes to tie the ladders together to scale taller walls, and also to rappel down walls. The ropes were a life-saver. This whole time we were using the stopwatch to time the officer patrols, concealing ourselves every time they passed by. To make long story short, we finally made it to the main roof of the prison by 3 AM. Not one tower guard or night patrol officer saw us at any time. We pulled off the most difficult part without a hitch, it was flawless. The clear summer sky matched our beautifully executed plan, the moon and stars illuminating the whole horizon. I took a huge, deep breath of free air, something I hadn't experienced in ages! "Lewis, we made it!" I exclaimed. "Not totally Habib; now help me with these ropes" Lewis replied.

Tightly tied to their most possible longest extent, we found a stable, secure metal rail and tied the ropes to them to aid our decent to the ground, and on to freedom, as we were now beyond the main walls that housed the units. I started first, sliding down the rope, but Lewis said to hold on and let him go first because he would need to go slower, I watched patiently, but just before the last ten feet, Lewis lost his grip; being older his strength was wearing thin after a long night of climbing and rappelling. I heard a snap, and I knew that his leg was broken. I was extremely furious when I saw this, thinking he might have even perished from the fall.

I instantly grabbed the rope and slide down like a true commando. I had discarded my gloves earlier and I soon regretted it; the skin of some of my fingers and palm was shaved

right off my hands from the friction of sliding down the rope so quickly. I could feel my hands getting slightly wet from blood. I helped Lewis up, his limp confirming what I thought about his leg being broken. I put his arm around my shoulder and helped him make it to the last final wall at the front of the prison building, which was of a small height, like decoration. We quickly made it over. Now we were officially out of the prison!

I don't remember saying anything to Lewis at that moment; we just knew we needed to reach the gas station adjacent from the prison grounds. A car parked in the shadows flashed its lights about three times to signal us and get our attention. Someone in the driver seat called out from his window, "Lewis! Lewis! Over here!" We made a mad dash for the open door and piled in, almost on top of each other in the backseat. The car began to speed out of the gas station before we could even shut the door, flying past the ominous prison gate. That was the very last moment I ever saw that prison in my life. We both were laughing, lighting cigarettes, amazed we had even made it.

The driver who picked us up told the both of us he was about to leave in half an hour before we showed up. If that time passed and we didn't make an appearance, he was going to leave the gas station. By the grace of God we made it just in time! If not, we would have been totally stranded and left out in the open and ultimately caught and imprisoned once again.

After a long drive which seemed like an eternity due to my paranoia, we finally arrived at the apartment building. It was around 3:30 AM. Our flat was all the way on the fifth floor, so we made sure to enter and

move through the building very quietly and in secrecy. Loud noises would definitely be out of place in the early dawn. I attempted to enter one of the elevators in the hallway but Lewis refused the idea vehemently. "Elevators are a trap; we must avoid them at all cost!" Despite his own leg being broken, he was adamant about taking the stairs to the safe-house flat. I had no choice but to help carry him up the five flights of stairs. I wasn't discouraged by this but happily did it as my duty to Lewis!

Making it to the flat door, we were greeted warmly by the young Australian man who was holding down the apartment until we arrived. He immediately began brewing tea for us and offering us snacks. Finally, real sweet tea, with real Chinese tea cups! No more nasty, cheap tea! No more dirty plastic prison cups!

Our loyal driver left the flat to inform Lewis's expectant friends about our successful escape. He also was going to fetch a doctor who would be able to tend to Lewis's fractured leg. In an hour he was back with the doctor, who warmly greeted everyone shaking our hands and exchanging hugs with everyone. The doctor initiated an examination of Lewis's leg, and confirmed for us all it was broken and incapacitated. Tomorrow, he said he would send medication and some cast. He then took me aside and instructed me on how to apply the cast on Lewis's leg and how to carefully remove it three weeks later.

Our friend, whose name I won't mention; a true, real man and hero, an unknown soldier in our struggle who I am proud to say he was my friend. One of the realest men I have ever known, while taking the keys from us said, smiling, "Even if they arrested you, I will

send the keys back once again to help you escape a second time! He continued, "In a mere two hours, the authorities will realize you have escaped and all hell will break loose. There will be sweeping round-ups and arrests, with detectives and police everywhere, plus mass surveillance of every major road and intersection." He said because of this, he wouldn't be back to see us for almost a month. He wanted to wait for things to settle down and the heat of the search to cool off. Even Lewis's daughter had no idea where we were living and hiding out at. She only was aware of some of Lewis's friends and associates who were helping us remain on the run.

Our friend's sincere advice was that we just needed to remain calm and relax to the best of our ability, and wait for his further instructions and guidance. A young man would be assigned to us who would visit and check on us on a fairly regular basis. He was very low profile, so he would be the ideal candidate for delivering to us food, drink and newspapers. He also would be tasked with passing us messages and notes.

At one in the afternoon, we finally witnessed the breaking news of our escape listening to the radio. shouted to Lewis to come and listen. It was describing how the prison officials seemed to be baffled at how these two men escaped. I started smiling thinking about the warden. We got even more details from the evening news on the television. Lewis and I's face were flashed upon the screen, describing us as extremely dangerous, and of course they mentioned my connection to terrorism. The prison was on lock-down, and there were multiple people detained and thoroughly questioned for hours on end.

Massive police search parties were combing the Maltese countryside; even the coastguard was patrolling the shores. Scenes of motorboats appeared on the black and white screen as Interpol was mentioned. They were tasked with trying to interdict us at any major airports and ports outside of Malta, like Italy or maybe Greece. Even from all this effort, they were not able to extract one piece of information from anyone they interrogated.

The next day, the Australian brought the material for the cast and pain medications for Lewis. I myself applied the cast to his leg as the doctor had demonstrated to me. My own personal injury was still bothering me intensely; it felt like my hands were on fire from using no gloves when I fast-roped from the prison roof. The blisters would take literally weeks to heal.

The flat was to become our home for the next two months. We did not step foot from there absolutely one time. It was like we almost ran from one form of prison to another! But it was well worth the price to pay, believe me! From the news we gathered from papers and television, the Maltese authorities were led to think that we had managed to flee the country by now.

We would pass the time conversing between ourselves and some of our visitors, especially the young message carrier. We played chess, watched TV and smoked packs of cigarettes while drinking cans upon cans of beer! Our escape was thankfully on time with the World Cup, because it certainly helped us escape the

agonizing boredom that plagued us staying in that tiny apartment! The soccer matches were being held in Spain.

The final match would take place with Italy versus West Germany. The Italian team was led by the legendary Paulo Rossi, while Germany's star player was the magician Romineca. We loved watching the matches; it really helped us realize and enjoy our new-found freedom. Most of the Maltese favored Italy, while I personally loved Germany. Italy ended up coming out victorious over the Germans.

With all this isolation, one of our friends brought up the bright idea of bringing over some prostitutes, so we could enjoy their company and party a little. He figured since we were in prison, we must have missed the unique touch of a woman! It seemed like a tantalizing idea at first but we both politely declined the offer. It was way too risky and dangerous. Lewis and I's picture were plastered all over the newspapers, I'm sure there were even "Wanted" posters on walls along the city streets of Malta. The prostitutes could recognize us and get a huge sum of money if they went to the police, which I'm sure they wouldn't have hesitated to do! One night of pleasure was not worth a possible 100 years of pain!

One boring day during all this waiting, we were relaxing in front of the TV when a newsflash broke across the screen. There was grainy footage of a police van which they used to transport prisoners, arriving in front of what looked like a court house. Once it stopped, the backdoors opened, with guards reaching into the back to pull someone out. Lewis and I were shocked and angered when the prisoner was a guard from the prison. They

were trying to tie him into our escape, saying he could have aided us. Lewis was furious, throwing things across the living room. The kid could have hardly been 22 years old. His name was Tony, and we were so incredulous at that they were trying to pin on him because he was totally innocent and not associated with us at all. The despicable warden just needed a convenient scape-goat to frame so that the blame for our escape wouldn't land on him. We never found out if he was convicted or what. The only reason they could have suspected him was he was one of the guards who locked our doors that night. They were insinuating that he might have left our doors unlocked on purpose.

Things like this were just another reason why I probably came up with the crazy idea I mentioned to Lewis during one of our long, tea fueled discussions. "Lewis, I have this joke I want to torture the warden with. Let's take a picture together, both giving our middle fingers to the camera then mail them to his house, with a letter of some thankful compliments." I said all of this with the biggest smile on my face. Lewis couldn't help himself but to laugh heartily at the idea. "I like it, but let's wait until we get out of Malta!" And that's exactly what happened nearly two years later, when I returned to Damascus. It was 1984, and I was making my way to the National Post Office building. It was also the location of "TeleSyria", where I needed to make an international call. This was a time before the magic of the internet, emails and pocket-sized cell phones.

After my call, from nowhere the warden popped into my mind. I quickly grabbed some paper and pen and began scribbling a few words, and when

I finished, I posted the card to him. To this day I have no idea if it ever reached his hands or not. Unfortunately, I couldn't include at that time my smiling face with an extended middle finger, the picture worth a thousand words. But what I wrote him was sure to slice his ego sharper than any knife, and far more insulting than a simple gesture like the finger.

I wrote to him in a seething, vindictive manner: 'I l have always enjoyed and love breaking those so called hard-asses and those who work so hard to portray themselves as so tough!' I then continued: "just because you are a warden, it doesn't give you the right to behave like some kind of god, who has the right to enslave others" I then gave him something to really reflect on. "We prisoners are also human beings, who were born free and will always remain free, in our soul and spirit, which flies like falcons, until our very last breath on earth!! I wish you good luck, Mr. Ronny, even though I know you're the most unlucky and miserable man in existence,."

I knew for certain that that blow was heavy on him and his very arrogant demeanor and character.

While in hiding, I took the opportunity to write a short, brief letter to the organizations headquarters in Baghdad. I informed them that I had successfully escaped the prison and evaded capture. I was with a good friend, and I soon would be making my way to Italy. J requested a valid passport and cash be sent to me as soon as possible. I knew Rome very well, like the back of my hand, so I gave them detailed instructions on where one of their operatives could meet me, a public place, and told them I would be at the train

station there in exactly one month's time from the date of my letter. I sealed it and gave it to the young man so he could travel to a post office and mail it. I still remembered the PO Box for the Baghdad office but I had no idea where they would receive it. And if they did, would they even try to help me?

It's worth me mentioning some of my other thoughts and concerns that were swirling in my head. The psychopathic nature of Abu Nidal was always paranoid and very suspicious of all the organizations members, more so than even his own true and real enemies! This is the exact reason why he had killed and murdered dozens upon dozens of them. Because of this mindset, it wasn't far-fetched for him to imagine I could be working and collaborating with the Maltese or some bigger intelligence agency, who allowed me to escape and make my way back to the organization, gaining their full trust and confidence. I decided to brush these concerns to the side for now and work on getting the ANO's help because I needed them more than ever.

By the time August of 1982 arrived, things had finally started to calm down after the brazen escape. The police and other authorities were totally under the impression that we must have left Malta by this time. One night, after 12, two of our friends and assistants arrived with some important updates. In two days' time, we would be leaving the flat once and for all; everything had been arranged for our journey to Italy. We were told to be prepared and get ready. Both Lewis and I shaved our beards off which we had been growing since our escape to hide our appearances, made sure to take a shower and changed into beach clothes that would be similar to all the tourists in the

area. With some leisure caps on our head, it appeared we were fully ready to enjoy the sun and warm weather! As we waited, we cleaned and scrubbed down the whole flat very well, trying to get rid of any trace of our existence, even making sure to get rid of fingerprints. I was growing in apprehension at what was going to transpire next.

A knock at the door startled us a bit, around 4 in the afternoon, one humid, sweaty, hot summer day. Cautiously I opened the door to find our young courier. Smiling softly, he whispered, "Well...you two ready?" The moment of truth had arrived. Lewis and I took a deep breath as the young man told us that the car is ready and waiting, it is just a matter of time. We both told him, "Yes" at nearly the same time. You could feel we were anxious to leave the apartment and I was almost jumping with raw anticipation.

Lewis followed out behind the young man, and I soon was hurrying behind him. As I fled, I peered back at the flat, with its simple door. So many memories would be residing there, and I was absolutely sure I would never lay eyes on it again.

Directly across from the apartment building was the waiting car. I had removed my shirt to appear like a normal beachgoer, feeling the humid air blowing against my chest and through my hair. We both hunkered down in the backseat, trying not to look so suspicious. The young lad was in the front, with another trusted friend behind the wheel. In front of us, there was another friend on a motorcycle who was in charge of directing us to our destination. He would use his hands and tail lights to signal which way for us to turn

before he changed directions along the road. Because of the heat, many people were indoors, sheltering themselves from the summer sun. This was good for us because it helped the chances of us being recognized decrease greatly.

The trip was very brief, maybe only about 15 minutes tops. We arrived at a secluded beach, where we found a man and young boy waiting for us, a boat floating in the water nearby. I could tell by its make and appearance that it was a speedboat capable of crossing distances in a short span of time. This man with his son was actually a professional smuggler who was hired by our friends to ferry us across the sea. He was paid a large sum of money to complete this task and was assured that he would not get in trouble for helping these runaway fugitives. He didn't seem too worried but we let him know that if the police do find out, we will tell them we threatened to kill you and your son and then hijacked your boat by force. ,

It was very emotional at this point in time as we prepared to board the boat. We were quickly saying goodbye, shaking hands and hugging all the friends who helped us so magnificently, hugs I felt like I had never given before. Envelopes stuffed with Italian currency notes were pressed into our hands, one last helpful hand to us before our departure. A British identity card was given to Lewis to facilitate his entrance into Britain and travel throughout Europe in general.

The roar of the speedboats engine intimated the end of our farewells, and we both jumped into the boat, preparing to begin our journey out of Malta, leaving it behind forever. The

boat picked up speed quickly, and as we traveled further out to sea, I made a point to watch the island fade into the horizon, this island I loved so much yet was also the domain of so many of my inner demons. The purple reflection of the sun upon the Mediterranean mixed with the clouds of dusk painted the most beautiful and scenic sight anyone could lay their eyes upon. I remember it so clearly, I wish I could paint it for the world to witness this miracle of nature that was bidding me farewell.

My last glance was a recognition that this is one more chapter closed in my life and now on to another. I would never forget the way Malta embedded itself with such love deep in my heart before that small island on the sea broke my heart, filling my nights with vivid nightmares and excruciating pains. The last lights of Malta glinted across the soft waves as I found myself speaking softly to the island itself, "Don't dare ask me to sustain and keep my love for you like I had once given to you." That sun-scorched place moved from my heart to my mind, taking its place there as a unique and special memory which I will keep and cherish forever, but forever removed from the deepest recesses of my heart where it used to be!

Since then, I have never had the chance to truly and properly thank all these amazing people who helped me reach beautiful freedom, all along treating us with the upmost kindness, serving us with the most valiant bravery, risking their own life and freedom at every moment. They even spent money from their own pockets so selflessly. These were real men, men who are so rare upon the face of the earth and even rarer to find and

befriend! I sincerely hope and wish that some of these brave men come across this book, read the story and hopefully get in touch with me after so many years.

It was a few hours and we began seeing the landscape of Sicily approaching rapidly beyond the waves. It was night by then and we had traveled there and up to the port unnoticed, despite some patrols of the Italian Navy. After docking, we all disgorged from the interior of the boat, the smuggler digging a large watermelon out of a large bucket of ice and preceded to carve it into pieces, sharing it with us as we sat cross-legged on the ground. After fishing, the smuggler and son said their goodbyes and they were off again, speeding back to Malta.

The same night, we began roaming around, as stealthy as humanly possible. In actuality, we didn't exactly know what to do at this early hour of the morning. As we walked, avoiding any contact with the population, we came across a lone car parked on the side of the road. It was a bit cold, and we both needed some rest, so Lewis and I decided to break into the car so we could spend the night inside and sleep. I wrapped my hand in a shirt and smashed the window with one blow, then unlocked the door. We slept in shifts, waking the other every 2 hours so the other could stand watch.

When the sun broke the mornings first light, we awoke and abandoned the car, moving to our next objective, the nearest bus station. Catching the first bus available, we traveled to Messina beach where we planned on meeting an old Italian friend who was with us in the prison in Malta. He told me that if I ever come to Italy, to stop by his home. He then

gave me his phone number and address. I always trusted him because he was a real man of his word. During the bus ride, we stopped at a small, local coffee shop to eat breakfast and take a rest from riding the bus. Lewis and I enjoyed some great brewed cappuccino, that was so sugary sweet and hot. It was absolutely delicious, along with the fresh Italian pastries straight from the blazing oven. Oh, how long it had been since we could start our day with such an amazing breakfast!

The bus ride was a relaxing couple of hours, with the windows down enjoying the breeze. We arrived at Messina beach around noon, which was a beautiful scene wherever we looked. For a moment we just walked around, observing the dozens of gorgeous European women walking around in their tight bikinis and swimsuits or lying on the beach sunbathing and tanning. We made our way to an outdoor restaurant to relax and eat lunch. Afterwards, Lewis called our Sicilian friend from one of the restaurants phones. His wife picked up and despite our friend not being there at the moment, she told us to come by and pay everyone a visit.

Leaving the restaurant, I flagged down a taxi and asked the driver to take us to this address as I read the street and number off a piece of paper. Upon our arrival, we were showered with greetings as truly honored guests. They treated us so nicely, we felt right at home instantly. They all had heard about our daring escape, and were happy we were free once again.

While there, we decided to call one of the prison guards who we both considered a loyal friend. With him over in Malta, Lewis told him we are now safely on Italian soil in Sicily.

Lewis handed me the receiver, and I remember being so happy, thinking how pleasurable it was to hear his voice. He had always called me "Palestinian friend", and I thanked him profusely in our short conversation, telling him how grateful I was for everything. I had even let him know how I wished to one day see him again, even though that never happened.

The rest of our day was spent with our friend's large Italian family, all the way until evening when he finally arrived back home. We embraced each other like long lost friends and continued our celebrations. The whole family really showed us their generosity, throwing a splendid party in our honor. We all enjoyed a huge dinner meal with plenty of drinks to go around. Soon after we were saying our goodbyes to that warm, old-fashioned Italian family, exchanging hugs and kisses on the cheeks.

Our next destination was Rome, which we made our way to by cab and then by train after arriving at the closest station. The train ride was a very scenic journey, which took about a day and a half to complete. We arrived in Rome on a wonderfully beautiful day, which I will never forget for as long as I live. That splendid city will always hold so many cherished memories for me, and every day amidst its streets and venues will remain embedded in my mind's eye, retaining every single detail.

At the Rome central train station, Lewis and I talked to each other for about 10 minutes. He told me, as the train passengers milled round us, that with his identification card, he had the ability to move from country to country unhindered and then slip into Britain where his wife and children live. He put his hand softly on my shoulder and said,

"Habib, we must part ways from here, everyone now is on his own. We have to fend for ourselves now." I was a bit stunned and feeling confused, thinking where do I go from here and how will I proceed? I was also very concerned for Lewis himself because of his age and his leg injury. He was still limping and not fully recovered from his fall from our escape rope.

All of this was his wish and desire, and I myself wanted him reunited with his family. I remember how he pressed a wad of cash into the palm of my hand; it was enough for about two days' worth of meals, but that didn't bother me; I would rather for him to have a full stomach and for myself to go hungry. We both hugged briefly, and I stepped back a bit and told Lewis, "Look, I don't know your address or phone number but you have the PO Box number for the Baghdad office, where you can reach me. So please, you can write me and keep in touch." "OK, Habib, I will always keep that in mind." And with those simple words, we both parted ways.

It is truly amazing, but I had no inclination, nor was I aware, that at that moment of our simple handshake, this was the last time I would lay eyes on Lewis again in my life! I have not seen him since that fateful day of late August 1982, until his departure from this world in late 2002. Look at all of this great friendship, amazing brotherhood, and untold adventures we experienced together and it is simply gone with the wind. Not a single thing remains of this except the memories. I never stopped desiring to see Lewis once again, to be reunited with the people who helped and aided us, to see those incredible police officers, those remarkable human beings

who stood with us like knights. I wish to extend heartfelt thanks to all of them.

These people allowed me to truly understand and strongly believe that in every person there is good and bad, and that all human beings can stand together, work together, regardless of the color of their skin, nationality, religion, culture or language. In the grand scheme of things, we are all travelers passing through this life!

A few years later, an ANO leader who I was close to and had his confidence, told me that Lewis did write me a letter to the Baghdad PO Box, but some of the leaders had the letter concealed from me because they were paranoid I would run away to England with Lewis due to my depression and many frustrations.

Years after all these events I also came to know what happened to Lewis after we separated in Rome. He successfully entered England and resided there with his family under an assumed name for years. Then, one of his hopes transpired and his party in Malta rose to power, and with a full guarantee he would not be prosecuted for the escape, returned home once again. I was even informed that he visited the prison with the authorities, this time as a sort of tour guide, demonstrating to them some details of how we escaped. Of course, he never exposed the names or identities of any of the brave individuals who helped us. Matter of fact, Lewis and I's cell remained locked since the day we escaped, as they considered it a permanent 'crime scene'. It was the year of 2004 when I was able to confirm that my real, true friend Lewis had passed away in 2002, because of complications due to cancer. Despite the fact that I had not seen him for so many years, and even though I

realize the cruel fact that there is a beginning and end for everything, and we will all become dust one day, the sad news still penetrated the depths of my heart and soul like I've never experienced. I implore anyone from Lewis's family who happens to read this book, among his wife, daughters, or even friends, and anyone from the Maltese embassy to contact me on humanitarian grounds. I wish to learn more about my dear friends Lewis' last days. I hope to also speak with his immediate family. This is one of my most sincere wishes before I myself depart this life. I say and express so many times over, rest in peace my friend and close companion Lewis, and I am so regretful and saddened that I wasn't able to see you for all those years. With Lewis gone, and finally gone from before my eyes, I began to wander through the streets of Rome almost aimlessly. It was as if I was some kind of homeless man, roaming the alley ways in some kind of near madness. I felt an exasperated sense of indecision and great vulnerability by suddenly being thrust into the whole world by myself. Psychologically, I was extremely nervous and paranoid, having just escaped prison and being aware that even Interpol itself is scouring the cities of Europe, desiring to apprehend me. They could pounce upon me at any street corner or from any alleyway. It felt like even the ordinary pedestrians were staring at me as they shuffled past me in the pursuit of the pleasures of Rome. I imagined them, with their tourist guidebooks and cameras around their necks, as the secret police and intelligence, covertly tracking and pursing me with all eagerness, eager to observe who I was going to meet, then snatching us all in one moment.

This level of paranoia was so stressful; it wore down my very body and left me feeling mentally broken.

My feet kept me walking in what felt like large circles throughout the train station, sometime stopping to sit and just watch the crowds and examine the scenery. It was the summer season, so thankfully this allowed me the ability to sleep outside when nightfall came, bathing the city in a serene glow of streetlights. I found a comfortable position on a park bench near the station and did my best to sleep despite the growls of my emptying stomach. I was hungry because most of the cash Lewis gave me for food was spent on phone calls to Baghdad trying to contact someone, anyone, in the organization. I never was able to get an answer. Despite the warm night air, my heart and mind was agitated to no end. I remember moving to the soft grass, feeling somehow this could give me some form of relief and ease my slumber.

After that desperate night spent searching for sleep, I was again wandering the streets early in the morning, moving with a combination of laziness and aimlessness through the shops, restaurants and coffee cafes. My boredom and purposeless journeying along the streets began to be overcome with intense hunger. It seemed my joy of being free from prison was now being overcome with both physical and emotional hardship.

Suddenly, in the midst of my hunger pains, I was struck like a thunder bolt by a sight I didn't expect. My eyes caught a man who was standing patiently in line at a money exchange. I realized that I knew this man very well; he was a relative and member of ANO! I was totally stunned, and the same expression

of surprise was all over his face as well. I could tell he recognized me too, and soon he was leaving the line without a hesitation in regards to what he was there to accomplish; he seemed to be intent on following me to speak and confirm for himself who I was.

I was confused and paranoid; was he there to locate and find me? Or did he just happen to be on a totally unrelated mission to Italy? The anxiety I was overcome with had my mind spinning. I was trying my best to avoid him but I couldn't shake him. When my cousin got close enough I would tell him not to be seen with me, it's possible I am under surveillance by the security services, but he wouldn't listen and instead insist that he speak with me. I was able to eventually get away from him; I couldn't stand the thought of him being arrested because of me, which would be highly likely if he was

with me if the police happened to apprehend me. Arrest and imprisonment could be behind any corner, at any moment.

This chance encounter was partly behind the reason I decided to leave Rome, making my way to the country side. I was gone for over ten days, roaming dirt back roads and barely paved streets, lined with shrubs and trees of endless forest. My feet were growing in blisters until the pain was extremely bothersome and excruciating. I constantly was on the hunt for any kind of food, finding things to eat here and there, and I mostly had the best luck with local churches and monasteries. The nuns and other church volunteers would have daily lunches for any and all homeless people who needed food, never turning anyone down who showed up to eat or quench their thirst.

At this period of time a very funny and humorous incident occurred with me during my trek through a small village outside of Rome. I was exhausted, hungry, and unshaven and hadn't taken a bath or shower for weeks. All in all I was very miserable. In my desperate search for nourishment I had stopped near an old farmer who was working on his farm. He was methodically tilling on some soil, in what appeared to be preparations for planting vegetable seeds. As I approached, he glanced up at me with my bizarre appearance. He stopped his work as I smiled, asking for some kind of food with my best broken Italian I could muster.

The kind, gentle man could tell I was famished, and with a genuine smile, he fetched three beautiful ripe peaches from a cloth bag he had on the ground near some other farm tools. My mouth was watering profusely as my hand felt the soft peach fuzz against my skin. I could even smell this delicious summer fruit it was so ready to be enjoyed! I thanked him abundantly as I made my way back to the village road, sinking my teeth into the juicy peach. I even licked the sweet liquid juice off my fingers. I stashed the other two delectable delights in my shirt for later, maybe dinner! I made my way all the way back to the train station, sitting in my confused state. I was still in a state of loss as to what to do or where to go. Suddenly, I was jolted from my heedless state by two speeding police cars screeching to a halt in front of me. I was almost blinded by the clouds of dirt and dust swirling around me, my nostrils filled with the stench of burned rubber from their tires. Before I could fully gain my bearings, the officers were bolting from their cars with

pistols drawn, aimed right at me. Out of pure instinct I automatically threw my hands in the air; I didn't know what to think or feel in this moment, completely shocked. I thought to myself that they must know who I am, that is why they are behaving in such fashion. I was engulfed in anger, envisioning myself being dragged into a jail cell once again, my flawless escape from Malta totally compromised.

Voices seemingly from out of nowhere started to build into a loud crescendo; I heard all their shouts before scores of local villagers began to congregate behind the police, their antique lamps flooding light across the train station walls, magnifying the intensely bright police flood and car lights. Angry fingers were all thrown up and pointing in my direction, as if this was some kind of modern-day witch-hunt. Automatically my mind started to put all the pieces of the puzzle together; the villagers, seeing me in my ragged clothes and unclean appearance must have become highly suspicious and concluded I was up to no good. Maybe they thought I was a thief out break into their houses. When I reflect on it, I don't even blame them for jumping to such conclusions.

So here I am, surrounded by a large crowd of people, including some of the train station staff and even train passengers. I was filled with panic, not knowing what to expect next. This was the most fright I had felt in some time and the pounding of my heart was matching my emotions. My whole being froze as I watched the police break from the cover of their cars and slowly approach me, their pistols trained right at my sweating face. Two other officers remained behind with semi-automatic rifles

ready, waiting for the wrong move so they could cut me in two with a fusillade of lead. The two young cops slowly closed the distance between us. When I looked at their faces, I could see they were just as frightened as I was! I must have looked so strange, my hands up, shirt tucked in, showing huge bulges underneath my shirt where the peaches were stashed on my body. The police began to pat me down methodically, but as one of them reached the peaches, he started to scream hysterically in Italian about a bomb! They must have thought they were some kind of grenades. I could feel all the blood rush from my head, turning my complexion pale. I thought now I am really a dead man, there will be no jail cell for me, just a cold slab in the local morgue! I wanted to tell them they were not feeling bombs but my tongue was paralyzed, unable to stammer one single word.

Their leading officers, rifle in hand, ordered the officers to retreat back to the police cars and take cover. With a stern, chopped command he yelled at me to use a single hand and un-tuck my shirt so that what he thought was grenades could call free from my shirt and on to the ground. He shouted in all seriousness that he would shoot me dead if I made any quick or swift movements. I barely nodded my head in recognition of what he instructed me to do. The crowds of onlookers were locked in almost a hypnotic state, watching my every breath, in anticipation of what might happen next. The whole scene was charged with tension and dreadful uncertainty. Slowly and methodically, I began to lower my right hand that was shaking with fear down to my waist line so could un-tuck my shirt. As my hand brushed across my body, I could feel

the cold wetness of perspiration against the skin of my hand. I could see some of the officers begin to wince as my shirt began to become un-tucked, thinking an explosion could occur at any given moment. Suddenly, the two fat, ripe peaches dropped from my shirt and began to roll haphazardly in the direction of one police car. I instantly raised my hands again out of fear of what rash actions the police might feel inspired to take next. An eerie silence consumed the whole area of the station, the eyes of every anxious onlooker observing the now bruised peaches.

One old man, holding his lamp up high to aid the police in spotting me, began to smile widely, grinning from ear to ear. Laughter soon followed from his mustached lips, and soon a whole chorus of laughing filled the train station. Everyone now realized that my potential grenades were summer peaches! Soon I was smiling and laughing along with them, my whole body being swept with a wave of relief, extinguishing all my anxiety and fear. The rifles pointed at me began to lower, the officers wiping sweat away from their foreheads, releasing sighs of pure relief. One soon approached me, clearly with a different attitude and demeanor, telling me I could put my hands down. "Thank you, sir" I told him; my arms were burning from the self-imposed stress positions. "Who are you sir, and what are doing in this area? You startled the villager's nearby so they called us. We had to respond" the lead officer told me a matter-of-fact way, a sliver of regret lingering in his mellow voice.

Jumping on the opportunity, I told him, lying of course, that I had been homeless for some time now because someone robbed me of my

passport and money, and all I'm trying to do is get back to Rome using the train, but obviously I can't because I have no way to pay for the ticket. I then proceeded to tell them about the "explosive" peaches, how they were given to me as I searched to quell my hunger by a generous old farmer, and stuffed them in my shirt to save what I hadn't ate. After my story, all the villagers now began to have pity on me and they raced each other in trying to get me to come to their homes and eat warm food and take a proper shower. It was like a competition for them to see who was the most generous; their hospitality reminded me of home and for a split second I felt like I could see my grandmother in the faces of some of the old village women, with their headscarves and long, plain-colored dresses.

I adamantly refused their kind offers and thanked them as they pulled at my shirt sleeve to follow them down the road back to their stone farm-houses. I almost was tempted but knew I needed to make my way back to Rome in haste, so I could contact the ANO again. It was my only reliable means to get back to the safe refuge of Syria. I solicited their help in a different request, telling them that if they truly desired to assist me, they could pay for my train ride to Rome so I could get to an embassy and request a new passport. Weathered, rough hands were promptly extended in my direction, full of Italian money notes. They were some of the most generous people I encountered in Italy and they continued to apologize to me until I finally left, the old farmers waving me off as I set out once again to try my luck at leaving the Italian mainland once and for all.

I used the train ride back to Rome to take a well needed nap; I hadn't had a proper rest for days on end, having to sleep outside since I departed the metropolis' streets for the countryside. I wondered to myself and hoped that my cousin was still there in the city because he would be my only life-line to once again set my feet upon the soil of AlSham.

Upon reaching the station, I set off into the busy thoroughfares and alleyways, blending in with the bustling traffic of cars and pedestrians. I began to visit all the major tourist attractions in the hope of maybe spotting him. After making my way to those sites, I would then search among more obscure locations like cafes and shops. To my upmost relief and surprise, I spotted him lounging on the steps of one of the grandest and most ancient church in all of central Rome. Only fate could have placed him at that right time and place!

I felt almost desperation as I made my way to him through the crowds of people milling around me, hoping that he would at least catch a glimpse of me and he wouldn't leave. Reaching him, I sat down right next to him, relieved to see his face and familiar smile I couldn't help myself but to hug him and ask him, "Why are you still waiting for me this whole time?" His sincere reply touched me at my very heart and soul: "How can I leave you? I can never even imagine that, despite the fact that our bosses in Baghdad told me to abandon looking for you and leave Rome." He took a great risk disobeying the leadership's orders, but he felt it was the right and honorable thing to do. He told me he would have waited 100 days!

We both agreed, because of the possibility of being followed, if we were arrested that we were both to say we had never known each other beforehand and that we initiated a friendship because we are both Arabs. He then proceeded to let me know about developments inside the organization in regards to me and my situation and circumstances.

The letter I sent from Lewis's and I's safe house in Malta had reached Baghdad approximately a month and a half ago. From the very beginning, the first inclination the organization had was suspicion, thinking it highly unlikely I could have escaped the prison. Some believed the 'escape' could only have been orchestrated by some kind of intelligence agency! This is classic Abu Nidal, never trusting anyone and always assuming lies and subterfuge is behind every word or action. However, they came to the conclusion-that-they-will-secure my escape-from Rome and then-investigate-my situation, and since I am among them, if I am found to be a double agent, it will be easy to execute-me-They sent my cousin to-find me because-they figured it would be more difficult for me to betray my own relative if indeed I was now in league with the enemy!

None of this really surprised me because I fully knew what the organization was capable and willing to perpetuate against anyone they deemed a threat. After this whole situation report from my cousin, he told me that he had with him a brand new Jordanian passport and exactly \$3,000 American dollars. He wanted us to both meet again in about two hours at a nearby coffee shop, which would allow him enough time to return to his hotel room and retrieve the passport and money.

I spent the next two hours roaming around that glorious city of Rome, trying to enjoy the sights and sounds, realizing maybe that I won't set foot in the city for a long time after my planned departure. I think I was early because I waited in the small café for maybe 20 minutes before my cousin arrived, dressed in a different, new suit and shoes. He discreetly passed me the freshly forged Jordanian passport and a small manila envelope bulging with cash. It definitely felt like \$3,000 when I gripped it in my palm, wondering exactly how I would conceal it in my pocket. We kept our conversation short and quickly said our sincere goodbyes and we both went our separate ways. I stayed behind and watched him disappear into the throngs of tourists, a flock of pigeons flapping up towards the afternoon sun as he swiftly crossed into a park across the street.

"Finally, money and a passport" thought to myself. I gulped down the last of a cup of coffee and made my way to the nearest money-changer I had spied earlier. I was starving, unshaven, needed a shower and a good set of clothes. \$500 of Italian notes in my pocket, I took care of all my needs that day. It felt so relieving to have a degree of independence again and able to exercise that at my own leisure. I decided to lay low in Rome for about a week to just relax and collect my thoughts and prepare to head back to Damascus and whatever that would hold in store for me.

It was the month of September, 1982. I had received news in these days that I heard the gang leader and ruthless killer, the Phalangist Bashir Gamayal had been assassinated. Soon after, the brutal massacre occurred, under Israeli eyes, in the

Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila near Beirut. These mass murders left my blood boiling, and only increased my desire to get back to the Middle East, feeling maybe something I could do could make a difference in ending the killing of my people.

What also spurred my desire to leave Rome was that I concluded that to stay there in the city any longer was not safe or secure. Because of Italy's proximity to the Middle East and North Africa, it was an excellent staging point and base of operations for many intelligence agencies and their spies. I knew the streets were crawling with various forms of informants and agents and, and as a double wanted man (for my membership in ANO and the escape) it was very high risk to remain there for an extended period of time. It was only a matter of time before I would be identified by someone. I mostly stayed indoors for the majority of my days there.

I was thoroughly convinced that I couldn't utilize any of the country's airports to leave Italy. I also would not go directly to Baghdad but rather to the city I loved so dearly, Damascus. Recently, the ANO was able to establish some offices and logistics hubs there after establishing relations with the Assad regime. As a security precaution I also strictly avoided making any phone calls to Baghdad or Iraq, period.

After making my mind up about how exactly I would leave and where I would go, I took the train from Rome to the beautiful city of Venice, with its canals of water and medieval architecture. I spent three days there soaking up all the elegance of the city .

before making a train ride all the way to Belgrade in the Balkans. At the time, that

region was at peace, not like what would later tragically transpire in the 90's. I knew Belgrade very well, from my time there briefly in 1980. Some Arabs who were students resided there who I had contact with and I spent a week there on a boat which served as some kind of floating hotel. Next, I left for Sofia, Bulgaria, then Istanbul and finally into Syria through the large city of Aleppo. I took a taxi all the way, using the major highway, to Damascus.

With instructions I received from my cousin in Rome, I located the secret ANO office in a Damascus backstreet. Knocking on its simple wooden door, I was greeted by a very familiar face I knew all the way from Baghdad. From the second I saw his eyes I felt a sense of relief, thinking to myself that after this short but terrible journey I am finally safe and under their secure protection. I had no idea how dead wrong I was. Reaching Al-Sham, the chapter of Malta and the escape was finally closed and a frightful chapter of confusion, fear and depression now opened.



Chapter 5

My Confused Life with ANO "When Life and Death becomes equal, the choice is easy: Death"

After this arrival in Damascus, I was once again back with the ANO and all their crazy and violent activities. Settling in to my new surroundings, I was summoned to meet a few leaders who convened to talk to me about everything that happened with me; basically a debriefing to see where my mind was at and if they could detect any deception on my part. Everything was structured around their heightened sense of paranoia that consumed them at all times.

The office was cramped and stuffy, a far cry from what I became accustomed to of hotels in Rome and Istanbul. I sat in a decrepit lounge chair as the organization superiors formed a semi-circle around me in various forms of furniture. We all seemed to be uptight and apprehensive, and the room was filled with smoke from our back to back cigarette smoking. I remember feeling like I didn't want tea to drink, I just wanted to get this over with, but knew it was a necessary inconvenience I had to endure. There was no way I would be permitted to remain among them without quelling some of their suspicions.

"So, Abbas...we are quite amazed at your story of escaping the prison in Malta..." one mid-level leader slowly spoke to me as he took a slow drag on a freshly lit cigarette. "We all would be very interested to know how you

managed such a feat; with not one of the organization members to help, inside or out? Please enlighten us!" Their skepticism towards my story hung over the office like an ominous, dark storm cloud. I could feel the tension and pressure in the room building, as their eyes searched my face and body language, seeking to detect any hint of manipulation or untruthfulness emanating from me. I had to try my best to push their doubts out of my mind and just be myself and tell the truth of my story.

I tried to start from the beginning; the process of gravitating towards the Arab prisoners, meeting Lewis and befriending him due to my political case, building rapport with some of the prison guards. "You mean to tell me your best friend there was a reactionary bigot who idolized the 'Iron Lady' and proudly hung the Union Jack on his wall? This is incredible" one leader commented after I explained who Lewis was. Clearly, my story might have been increasing their skepticism and disbelief. It was hard for them to fathom how someone like Lewis would want to help me. They couldn't understand the bond Lewis and I had formed; it transcended politics and racial divides. Our bond was forged by our common humanity and the camaraderie that develops among people in prison. Our friendship was between our very souls.

I guess they had a right to be suspicious; the organization was constantly dealing with spies and infiltrators. Combine this paranoia with the group's psychopathic tendencies, and it was a dangerous and volatile mixture. I continued to outline how the escape plan progressed, from stolen cell door keys

smuggled in Christmas cakes to the apartment safe house with our Australian courier. I watched the commanders give each other skeptical looks, but they never once told me verbally they didn't believe me.

After they excused me, I took some time to walk the streets of Damascus, alone with my thoughts, contemplating my whole situation. I was tortured by the fact that even though I desired in my heart to leave the organization, I was now indebted to them for helping me get to Syria and away from the reach of Interpol and Italian police. I was truly feeling trapped and hemmed in, beginning to realize and see clearly what was happening and what lay ahead for my future. It was looking grim to say the least, and I knew every bit of it. I was just barely 21 years old but I had traversed so much perilous ground with the ANO already in my young life, and it was all I really knew at that point. If I wanted to leave them, where would I go and who would I run to? This was a constant dilemma in my mind every time I contemplated escaping the organization.

I wouldn't be able to go to Kuwait, the place of my birth, because I no longer had a valid passport to travel there unhindered. Europe was totally out of the question because of what happened in Malta and my status as a wanted man. Nearby Jordan was also off limits because of that country's government's relentless war with Abu Nidal. Now it is easy to imagine my anxiety about what to do, where to go and how to even survive if I got away!

This only added to my overwhelming confusion and indecision that plagued me. And on top of all this, if they even got a hint

or even think that I am contemplating this kind of decision, they would execute me, after days of horrendous torture and humiliation.

Because of this incessant hurricane of swirling thoughts and emotions, I was spun into a major depression, which carried on for years. This mental anguish that kept even my happiness captive, I would only be relieved once I found myself behind the walls of prison in Pakistan. Imagine, had to be locked-up, with my physical body in shackles and confined to a concrete cell to find and taste true freedom! Even death itself was not striking fear in me; absolutely not, as I knew perfectly well that death could find me at any moment due to the types of missions I was a part of and assigned to. My hyperanxiety stemmed from the utter chaos of my life. Who could I really trust, who could I turn to? What do I even want in life?

Naturally, because of this state of mind, my mood was constantly fluctuating and unstable. I was perpetually angry and irritated; exploding at the slightest provocation and sometimes at imagined ones. To try to mask all these negative emotions I would be drinking alcohol nearly every day, the drunkenness allowing me to escape for a period of time, but it was always a short-term solution that never solved my problems.

Due to this combination of anger, anxiety, frustration drowned in alcohol, I was always mired and embroiled in trouble and making all kinds of mistakes. I was no longer making any good choices or wise decisions; I was always fighting with my superiors because of my extremely quick temper that could ignite at any second like dynamite. As time progressed

I could notice how my temper was increasing steadily. But the solution for my superior's problems with me was very easy for them to handle. They had plenty of make-shift prison cells for trouble makers like me!

I was constantly rotating out of their cramped jails, a week or maybe two, here and there. For any ordinary member, these short stints in the organizations prisons would end in a swift bullet to the head; the organization had no need to sit down and try to get to the root of all their members problems and trouble! Thankfully for me, some of my family would always intercede on my behalf, sparing me a death by pistol or machine gun.

Despite the leaderships lack of concern for most of the mental well-being of the organization, they actually attempted to help me on several occasions. This aid came in the form of them trying to get me married. Most believed marriage would help to calm me down and alleviate some of my depression. Because I realized what I was experiencing, I agreed to this proposal but for various reasons out of my control, things would never work or go well. And frankly, I'm very glad they didn't because it would have just exasperated and inflamed my problems. I could just envision the disaster it would have been, trying to satisfy my wife's demands, along with the organizations; this definitely would have been a conflict of interest. All this would have made my life even more unstable than it already was. Add in my lack of money and youthful immaturity, and it would have been a recipe for disaster.

All this eventually would have led to my personal destruction, increasing me in even

more serious mistakes and miscalculations, culminating in my bloody execution, with no possible intercession on my behalf. This was the very real fate of so many of my own friends! This propelled me to just live a single, lonely life, traveling through existence with no real purpose or meaning. My severe depression caused me to lose interest in nearly everything, My day to day life was consisting of moving from one event to another, with no concern of the outcome or consequences.

This mental and emotional turmoil led me to be shifted from one department after another within the organization. I would work in Lebanon, transfer into Syria, and then be sent on longer distance missions into Europe and islands in the Mediterranean Sea.

Of course, I would also have to visit the infamous prisons for extended periods of time. Some of my assignments there would be to monitor interrogations, witnessing the savage torture sessions followed by the executions. I could imagine that seeing all these disturbing things made my depression worse and affected me on a subconscious level that I wasn't even aware of, I know for certain that I suffered nightmares because of it.

The funny and amazing part of this whole surreal existence is that the top level leaders in the organization never once accused me of treachery or really even suspected me of espionage on behalf of any intelligence service. They experienced firsthand how loyal I was to the cause and the deep love I held for our homelands. There was so much I had endured for the movement and revolution already, and they all knew it

very well. I later learned that the number two in the whole Abu Nidal Organization mentioned in a high-level meeting that he knew me, Abbas, very well and that I was the bravest and most courageous man in the whole organization. He continued, saying that despite the organization not suspecting me of spying, I was a ticking-time bomb who was liable to explode at any provocation; totally unpredictable and prone to making serious mistakes if I carried on with my rash decision making.

Their all-encompassing trust extended to always employing me in the small prisons scattered throughout Lebanon. In actuality, their real purpose was to serve as sites for harsh interrogations typified by torture. This whole scenario was schizophrenic and disturbingly comical, because at one moment I am the jailer and the following week I am a prisoner! The other unfortunate souls there must have constantly wondered about my true status, prisoner or torturing interrogator! Whatever the case, I was always in the depths of the prisons one way or another.

In late 1980 through early '81, the ANO began to evacuate out of Iraq and on to Syria due to the political rifts developing between Abu Nidal and the regime of Saddam Hussain. Trying to court favor with the government of Hafez Assad, Abu Nidal took sides with the Islamic Republic of Iran against the Ba'aath regime in their vicious war of trenches and poison gas. Saddam himself began to come under increasing pressure from his financiers and weapons suppliers amongst the Gulf States, Jordan and the United States to shut down the ANO offices and eject the organization from Iraqi soil. If he didn't

comply, his millions of dollars in economic support and weapons shipments were on the line, at risk of being cut entirely. The choice was obvious.

Amongst the shifting sands of the political landscape, a hidden danger was lurking with the sudden influx of ANO members into Syria from Iraq. In Hit, along the banks of the Tigris, we were only a few hundred men, isolated from our surroundings, and close knit. We all knew who was who and what their intended purpose is. Moving into Syria and Lebanon exposed the ANO operatives to all sorts of vulnerabilities and pitfalls. The situation on the ground was totally opposite to Iraq, surrounded by different groups and in contact with scores of various people, civilian and military.

This ultimately fostered an ideal environment for all kinds of intelligence agencies working in the shadows to infiltrate and penetrate the numerous Palestinian factions. Operating like clandestine sleeper cells, they were serving as conduits to funnel information and intelligence to their handler's amongst the agencies. By all accounts, the Abu Nidal Organization had the lion's share of spies within its ranks, who were enlisting on a near daily basis as new recruits. This all was in order to monitor the group very closely. The intensified pace of executions directly correlated with this relocation to Syria and subsequent infiltration.

The majority of spies at this time were trained and dispatched by the Jordanian

Intelligence Agency, the GID, who was locked in a ruthless battle with the organization. Intelligence assets were also

deployed by Mossad, the PLO, from Morocco and even the CIA.

I must mention here some of my observations about the work of the intelligence services. Of all the above mentioned agencies, I assume, as I would about these professional groups, would utilize and employ their own specialized psychologists when they concoct and formulate their plans to attack and dismantle any organization. In order to achieve the maximum results, their specialists would study and identify the weakness of the enemy. Then, they would exploit that weak spot to penetrate a group and infest it with spies.

What exactly was transpiring within the ANO and what was the afflictions of the younger members never escaped the eyes and ears of these vicious agencies and networks. They knew exactly what we all were being deprived of. They masterfully manipulated the more open societies of Syria and sophisticated Lebanon, preying on our youthful lust for women and our pent up sexual tensions. This was one of the worst problems and predicaments especially when we would be exposed to so many women in the streets and markets, with their gorgeous looks and tight-fitting provocative clothes. And not one impulse can be acted on without extreme consequences, like accusations of espionage and certain death.

This excruciating dilemma was certainly a great source of our depression and anger problems; it is exactly what happened to me. My only real release and relief would come from the missions I would be sent on to Europe where I could relax, despite the danger and risk involved in my assignments. It was the

only place I could escape the organizations prying eyes and lethal suspicions. Europe was like a breath of life-saving oxygen after bouts of drowning in the stifling atmosphere of Beirut and Tripoli.

During this fatal period of time, I would like to note that the spy agencies, particularly the Jordanians, started to focus on and target me, especially through the means of women and their seductive power. They, the Jordanians, knew very well who I was and my connections. I was very close to the leadership and trusted by the whole ANO in general, allowing me exclusive access to so many different sections and locations within the framework of the organization.

More importantly however, is that they became aware I was in a deep state of depression, and totally drained emotionally. I was in a constant search for a long-term, sustained relationship with a woman, and the spy agencies were searching for ways to exploit this. How correct they were about me, as the burning desire I felt to get a woman was blazing inside me, making my existence sometimes unbearable. The soul itself is always seeking a soul-mate and special love to share life with.

Even though they understood and pinpointed my weakness, I wasn't dumb or naive either. I comprehended fully what they were up to, and was constantly on guard against their tactics and overarching strategy to target me. Any of the numerous women they sent to me, I was able to identify them straight away, always detecting the plots of the agencies. Most of the time I would play along with some of those 'honey-trap' women, a lot of instances out of pure weakness towards their

temptations, but I would never go fully all the way! I knew that it would just be a matter of time before the organization would discover some of my misconduct and I would be then subject to severe punishment. How could I even forget the horrible sights and sounds of the torture chambers; this alone would deter me and drive me insane with fear, causing me to flee from all these women despite how difficult it was to restrain myself.

This emotional tribulation I was experiencing was something I tried to avoid altogether. For a considerable period of my life I worked to keep women out of my personal life, especially when I become involved with the revolutionary Palestinian movements. I knew the distraction of a love life would deter me from putting my whole heart into what I committed myself to, the freedom and liberation of my homeland.

All of this was in vain however, as my desire for a genuine partner in my life was consistently at the center of it. As a man, this was inevitably what I sought out as I couldn't suppress my inherent human nature. I never have felt emotions of resentment towards women or an attitude of disrespect, but to shield and protect my heart, I, for so long, built a wall against anything that might hurt or damage it. Sometimes people as a defense mechanism lock all our feelings in a box and attempt to lock them away tightly.

Even if a person strives to cut himself off from his own passions and desires, and his own inclinations inside his heart, there are certain events or words that can move someone and penetrate through the emotional brick walls we build. This is exactly what

happened to me in the beginning of May, 1985 in Lebanon, during the beautiful spring season.

I know this was my destiny, as I felt that the light that was about to enter my life was as if it was from amongst the stars. I still don't understand exactly how it happened, or from where it came from, but a shared mutual friend introduced me to a young woman who was exactly one year younger than me. The most accurate way I could even describe her would be to say that she has been the most beautiful and gorgeous woman I have ever set my eyes upon in the entirety of my life. The second I laid my eyes upon her, I felt a physical electric jolt travel through my mind and body. A true chemistry and bond existed from the first meeting we shared together.

Deena was born in Zahle, Lebanon, in the depths of the splendid Bekaa valley. I and other always called her 'Diana' and that name still echoes in my soul, never forgetting how I felt about her. Our relationship was very strong and there were even marriage proposals between us. But because of circumstances beyond our control, our plans never materialized. These up and down emotions I experienced in my relationship with Deena were very frustrating for me, and helped to increase my depressive state.

Discussing the intelligence agencies use of women spies and informants made me want to recount this story about Deena, and all the feelings I had for her. Even after all these years, my heart still has an open wound that never has truly healed after forever being separated from her, and after the incident

that later happened in Karachi, I was confronted with insinuations about her.

During my long interrogation by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), they mentioned Deena several times, possibly hinting to her employment by the Jordanian intelligence. They seemed to know just too much, which made me suspicious and caused my mind to reflect on how we met, who introduced us, and where. To this day, I still try to piece the puzzle together of all these clues, wondering maybe if it would be possible. However, despite all the information the Pakistani intelligence was feeding me during these extended interviews, I never could believe this about Deena; my very heart was rejecting the whole idea outright!

This is why that at the very moment my pen touches the paper to recount these feelings, I am deeply cherishing all these memories. Diana, as I affectionately called her, was the first true love of my life. This genuine love I have been deprived of for decades, after the last time I was with her in Zahle, Lebanon. That fateful night was lit up by a beautiful, bright full moon, and the warm summer breeze was wafting through Deena's hair as we embraced in the shade of blooming cherry trees. The cherry blossoms scent

was accentuated by the sweet perfume that emanated off of Deena's skin, seductively applied on her petite neck, which I smelled as I embraced and hugged her tightly. Inside, I was torn as to what I should exactly tell her. I was on the verge of leaving for Pakistan on a suicide mission which I knew for certain would be my last day on earth due to the nature of what my team and I intended to do there.

There was no way I could bring myself to tell her, and for different reasons. I couldn't stand to break her heart with this kind of development in my life, but also because of the organizations security measures in which there was no way I could reveal to her what was planned. With a passionate, slow kiss on Deena's full, pink lips, I whispered to her that I would love to spend more time with her, but I have to go on a short trip to India, but would be back shortly. The lie was painful to even utter, and fate would prove it to be so, as that was our very last night, but not a journey to my expected demise.

Because of this, I am still very interested to hear from her, hoping she herself is still around. By this time she is probably a mother of beautiful children, or maybe even a grandmother, who knows. But despite this passage of time, she still holds in my mind an image of a youthful, fresh and sweet young lady who is overflowing with life and full of energy. I am always wishing her the very best in life and hope she has experienced nothing but happiness and joy since the day I departed.

The inner-depths of the secret world of the Abu Nidal Organization is not unlike, and very similar to, any of the vicious intelligence agencies spread across the globe. A world saturated in shadows, covered in secrecy and filled with murder, torture, maiming and assassination; a dark, cold world where there is no belief in sincere friendship, loyalty, love, compassion, mercy or anything that has to do with human nature. There is only interests; shallow, selfish interests buttressed and reinforced with

ruthless intimidation and pure power. Due to my vast, intimate experience with the ANO and its inner workings in the interrogation dept., I know about these vile, destructive 'interests' first hand and at close proximity. Out of dozens and dozens of personal experiences, I will mention two specific incidents that I have never forgotten.

As previously mentioned, there was a clandestine war being waged between Abu Nidal and a collection of spy agencies and intelligence branches around the world, especially the Jordanian GID and Israeli Mossad. Because of this, I was exposed to meeting many spies, accused and real, who were being detained and imprisoned by the organization when I was both employed there and as a prisoner myself, for 'disciplinary' infractions. So either way, I had witnessed many poor souls last days on earth!

There is one story in which, even after 31 years, I still remember so clearly due to its deep sadness and emotional nature. My shoulders still feel the heavy weight upon them because of what I witnessed.

It was 1984, and I was waiting in Paris for instructions on an upcoming mission, taking advantage of the time away from the volatile Middle East. Unexpectedly, I received an urgent message from one of the organizations leaders after I stayed patiently in an upscale hotel for weeks. I was instructed to abandon everything and immediately travel back to Damascus, no questions asked. I soon began arranging to book an airline ticket, made my way to the closest airport and was back in Damascus, Syria in less than two days.

The whole situation seemed suspicious to me, and I was highly agitated and worried at what could possibly be afoot. Being ordered to rush back to Damascus in such short order, while I waited for a mission, was not normal. I had to keep reminding myself that I was no spy or traitor so what do I have to worry about? And if I did happen to be an informant, such a strange phone call would have set me fleeing for my life!

As soon as I arrived in Damascus, another bad omen made an appearance, when I was requested to make my way directly to Lebanon. This definitely was fishy because Lebanon was where many ANO prisons were operated and functioning, and many unfortunate ones were lured into Lebanon to be murdered.

Sure enough, after barely an hour on Lebanese soil, I was arrested and detained by ANO security operatives. I was transported to a non-descript building, where a tiny room was serving as a temporary holding cell. When I was pushed in, I was greeted by four very familiar faces, all close friends and acquaintances. Small insects slowly crept across the walls, which were reinforced by some form of cheap concrete. A large spider had made a web in one far corner of the room, feasting on flies that flew haphazardly into the unsuspecting trap.

I took a seat against the wall, sliding my back against the cold surfaces, sitting down in a depressed state. We soon gathered from each other's stories that we had all been summoned back from various European cities on a variety of assignments and missions. After a few hours of conversation and cigarette smoking, we settled down to try to get what we could of sleep, which really was difficult

considering the conditions of the tiny cell and the circumstances we found ourselves in.

The next day, after lazily napping in our tiny prison, the interrogations commenced shortly after midnight. 12 midnight and the hours that followed were always the preferred time for these kinds of activities. Why exactly, I'm not totally sure but I figured dark acts took place most suitably in darkness. We all were interrogated separately and alone, but as vetted operatives, we were spared the most abusive treatment and physical torture. This kind of force needed approval at the higher levels in Damascus.

As usual, the routine accusations were leveled against us, principally womanizing, drinking and consuming narcotics. I personally never abused hard drugs, but on a few occasions smoked marijuana and when I felt extra depressed would indulge in certain kinds of pills, like pain-killers. But this particular instance was very peculiar, all the interrogators, who I knew so well, were focused like a laser-beam on one subject alone: Espionage!

Honestly, I was appalled and disgusted by these kinds of ugly accusations. All of us were well known operatives renowned for their patriotism and dedication to the organization and the cause in general. Our deviant behavior regarding drugs, alcohol and women was one thing, but spying and double-agents was something totally different all together. Not only was this a serious charge to bring against someone's character but it also carried deadly consequences if anyone of us was found guilty.

We all endured a week's worth of intense interrogations, combined with very stern

intimidation, that really put across to us all that something serious was transpiring, and soon enough the interrogation began to focus on one particular member of our group. This young man happened to be a friend of mine and acquaintance. I wouldn't consider him one of my closest friends, like my dear comrade Maher, but a trustworthy companion none the less. From the first day of his recruitment in the last months of 1979, I was familiar with him. He had traveled and made his way all the way from Palesttine, and I admired his youthful zeal for the cause; I can say I always liked him from the first day. So when the interrogators became suspicious of him, it really disturbed me as I didn't want to believe it.

On the fast, final day before he would disappear forever, he and I were alone, segregated from the others, in another tiny, cramped cell, with absolutely no electricity or heat. Our only other company was a small steel bucket which was used by us for the bathroom, tucked off in one corner of that lonely, depressing cell. The conditions were made worse by the fact that it was the summer, filling the claustrophobic room with the stench of our perspiration. This was 1984, and the temperature was extremely hot that year.

"Abbas..." my name was like a bell, suddenly echoing in the stark silence of the room. "Comrade...my friend..." he continued, his voice filled with a twinge of sadness. I looked up at him, woken from a half-conscious slumber. "Yes" I replied, feeling sort of relieved we could break the silence. Any kind of conversation helped to stave off the incessant boredom and the torturing effect of

not knowing if it was day or night. My friend sat upright, a grimly serious look etched across his face. The way he was appearing sent a shiver through my body that shook me awake, rustling me to sit rigidly, to pay close attention to what he was about to say.

"Listen, I feel like something very drastic is about to happen to me, so please, if I never see you again, tell my family the truth about what happened here, and the location of my grave..." These words were very shocking to me, sending chills to the core of my bones. I felt like I had to shake this young man out of this or get down to the bottom of what he might have done. "Man, you have to be truthful with me, did you do something serious?!" Why would they be so interested in you if you didn't do anything?" I didn't dare mention spying, but he knew exactly what I was implying from what I said and how sternly I said it; I made sure to directly look him in the eye to get my point across.

"NO..." he whispered in the dark, lowly but emphatically. I strained to watch his facial expressions, seeking to detect any lie on his part, but the dim light deflected my ability to fully see his face. Wishing to calm some of his anxiety, I told him how I believed he was a good guy at heart and because of his hard work for the organization, they would take all this in consideration when it came to his situation. The stark reality was that I knew this to be false; the organization never was known to appreciate anyone's sacrifice or commitment. If you were found guilty of their accusations, they would finish you off with no qualms or reservations whatsoever despite your services rendered.

I told him this to try to stave off his growing fear, despite what I felt in my heart about the inevitable outcomes. I wished to lighten the whole dark atmosphere, selecting one of my five cigarettes we were rationed per day to share with him. With the cheap tobacco taste seeping across my tongue, I motioned for him to light a match and spark up my smoke. As he struck the match, I saw his hands trembling, causing him to fail a couple times before he was finally successful, filling our small prison cell with light. "Listen man, you will probably live longer than anyone of us! I might have to be the one asking you to find my family!" I laughed, trying to get a smile out of him, passing him the lit cigarette as rings of smoke left my mouth in a hazy fashion. With no ventilation in the room, the smoke hung around us like a fog, giving a sort of surreal calming effect in the midst of all our worries and anxieties.

"Moreover, how am I supposed to find them or even know who they are? Hell, I don't even know your real name! You'll have me visiting a thousand villages in Palestine!" A small smile appeared briefly on his face as I finished the cigarette. "Listen here brother, I have a lot of experience with this, nothing bad is going to happen to you" With a voice filled with sadness, he answered me with a line of classical Arabic poetry, "Oh you who falls from the sky, the ground will certainly hold you." I had no response for what he said, falling silent as I looked deeply in his eyes in knowing sympathy.

Indeed, my true thoughts about his outcome were confirmed the next day. The cell door abruptly cracked open and two jailers roughly

grabbed the young man as we napped, swiftly ushering him out the room and slamming the door behind them. The noise of the metal door echoing in my mind, still laying on my back, staring into the ceiling, I listened for any clues as to what was in store for him next. The cell next door was opened and I could hear the shuffling of his feet as he was shoved in the room. I

could tell the room was empty, realizing they wanted to keep him isolated.

That same day, around midnight as usual, the young man's beating and torture commenced. This meant that the main office in Damascus suspected him of espionage and had given the green light on the physical tactics to force a confession. Knowing this really broke my heart, and for many days and nights I could not sleep, the halls and rooms filled with his blood-curdling screams and hopeless pleas for mercy. His voice was filled with utter agony. I could almost feel the pain physically in my own body, listening to the heinous acts being carried out against him just next door. I really can't fully describe the impact these things can have on an individual's mind, heart and soul. These screams seeped into my subconscious, haunting me in my sleep with ghastly nightmares for years afterwards.

Eventually, the pleas for mercy stopped, and I was once again alone in my thoughts, waiting out the long hours of intense boredom with cigarette smoking and day-time naps. About a week later, all my friends and I were released from our interrogations, cleared of any suspicions against us. Coincidentally, I was back working as an interrogator about four months later, because despite all my

disciplinary troubles within the organization I still retained their coveted trust.

Back in that exclusive department, I now had access, and also the permission, to review and read all kinds of documentation and files regarding suspects and prisoners who had been filtered through the web of prisons maintained by the organization through Lebanon. It never left my mind, that young friend of mine and what happened to him, and I remained curious and concerned as to what happened to him. Maybe I would be able to inform his family one day, to give them some peace of mind. I knew he was tortured and executed, then buried in a shallow excuse for a grave. I wanted the details and what he was accused of, even though it was possible he was innocent but that wouldn't prevent him from being executed, as I mentioned earlier about the organizations rationale eliminating people, guilty or innocent.

What I found amongst the documentation regarding him, is a vivid example of how amongst the shadowy, cruel world of the intelligence agencies, there is no sincere friendship and no authentic loyalties. Everything is a facade which covers and conceals each parties own selfish interests.

According to the detailed minutes of his confession from the interrogation, he was employed by the Mossad of Israel. He was recruited locally in Palestine, trained in the arts of espionage and then sent in the depths of Iraq to infiltrate the ANO. He then was to operate like a sleeper cell within the group, awaiting further instructions from his spymasters.

He recounted to the interrogators that he was sent to Athens, Greece in parallel with

another operative who was dispatched to India, both with the object of attacking and assassinating various British diplomats. The motivation of the organization in these operations was to retaliate against the British government for its stubborn refusal to release three ANO members imprisoned on English soil in their attempted assassination of the Israeli ambassador stationed in London. Because of these political actions the ANO decided to initiate a series of coordinated operations against British soft targets scattered across India, Greece, Cyprus and Lebanon, primarily.

When the young man, according to the confession, reached Athens, he used a liaison to contact the Mossad, informing them of what the ANO was planning for the British in Greece and beyond. Shortly thereafter the Israelis sent back word, through the liaison, to carry out the attacks for the organization to gain their trust and confidence. Of course, this was decided unilaterally by Mossad without warning or informing their British counterparts!

It might seem surprising to the uninitiated, but this is the reality of the intelligence services, a reality saturated in selfishness and mercilessness, towards 'friend' and foe alike.

There is actually another related story along the same lines which occurred at roughly the same time. The man went by the name 'Jawdat'. I knew him from the time he first arrived in Baghdad via Jordan, in 1980. After some rudimentary missions like cash deliveries and weapons smuggling, he was sent to Limassol, Cyprus. His task was to organize an attack against the British Airways office

in Cyprus, along with another mission. While an operative for ANO, he was also secretly working as an agent for the Jordanian GID intelligence agency. Just like the Israelis, Jawdat's handlers told him to continue with the operations to further his standing in the organization, without warning the British, protecting their source within the ANO was more important for them than potentially saving English lives.

Somehow the Cyprus authorities were able to capture Jawdat after the operation. After a brief stint in prison, he was released and he made his way back to Damascus, arriving to a hero's welcome in Syria. This is exactly what Jordanian intelligence was wishing and hoping for, so that he could penetrate the organization as far as possible.

Their plans for the ANO were foiled however when Jawdat was arrested and detained on charges of espionage. During the interrogation and torture of another suspected spy, this man gave up Jawdat's name as a Jordanian double-agent, and I myself was present when he was arrested. As one could imagine by now, 'Jawdat' was beat and tortured ruthlessly without a drop of mercy by his interrogating torturers. Their techniques were so horrendous that they even heated oil and poured it on his private parts as he was tied and restrained on the ground. Someone couldn't even come close to imagining the suffering he endured before was shot to death by multiple gunshots to his face and body. It was three weeks of this brutal treatment before he was condemned as a spy for the GID.

Back to my friend, who, despite the accusations he was with Mossad, I never heard

this confession. Even if the organizations paperwork and documentation claimed this, I'll continue to call him my friend, because to this day I'm still not sure about it. I still wish sincerely to come to know any of his close relatives, sometime in the remaining years of my life, despite the difficulty associated with this. I long to be able to narrate to them the events of his last days on earth, what he told me about his innocence, and where they could find his remains.

This is a true weight and burden on my shoulders, hoping one day I can relieve myself of it in the best way, helping his grieved family attain closure. There are so many numerous cases just like this, but the character and good manners of this young man I will always remember and will always call him my friend.

There is another short story of a man who I will never forget about and what tragedy struck him, as I witnessed every moment. He was young, handsome, and came from Greece. He had become a member of the ANO, but I only came to know him in the gloomy confines of one of the organizations vicious prisons in Lebanon. Like other times I was locked up in the groups prisons, it was due to being accused of adultery. The man was placed in a room right across from mine, so I was able to communicate with him and sometimes see him. This lasted for a few days before he was taken from his cell, never to return again.

The accusations against him were deadly serious, the ANO believing he worked for multiple agencies, including the Greeks themselves. Speaking to him, I could feel and deeply sense that he knew what was in store

for him in the near future. I was haunted by his screams of pain through many sleepless nights, forced to endure every sound of his torture, trapped in my cell.

When he had the opportunity, during lulls in the interrogations, I was able to communicate with him using our mutually broken English. For whatever reason, he felt like he could trust and confide in me, telling me his fears and worries about what lay ahead. My heart would ache when he would tell me over and over again about his small daughter, tears streaming from his sleep-deprived eyes. He would motion with his weak, shaking hand the little height of his daughter, demonstrating her young age of about three and a half years. I can still see these depressing images in my mind so clear and fresh like it was just yesterday.

One day, I heard a commotion outside my cell, like arguing back and forth. It was the Greek man, rejecting his daily food ration. At first I imagined he was too depressed to even eat any food, having lost all hope of ever escaping this situation alive and still breathing. But there was another reason for rejecting his plate of food: the chain which confined him in his cell, restraining him to the floor, was slowly being loosened. He had found a weak spot in one of the links and was doing his utmost to further degrade the deteriorating metal, worn away by years of use as a tool of bondage on behalf of Abu Nidal.

His plan was to eventually break the chain and escape, but to where? And I really thought it impossible to even make it out of the hall containing the cells. "Brother! I'm going to get back to my wife and daughter, I

can't stay here any longer..." he whispered, trying not to shout too loud. He came to the gruesome conclusion that his fate was sealed and he only had one chance to save his life, or fail miserably, never seeing his little girl again. He knew I could see what he was doing and I made sure to signal to him that I'm going to look the other way and allow him to try to escape. All I kept thinking about was his daughter and how much he really loved her. It's the only thing I cared about at that moment, not the organization or whatever they said about him.

I heard the moment the chain broke, hearing the rustling of the chain links moving across the floor. I held my breath, listening for the footsteps of the guards, hoping like hell that they didn't come into the hallway of cells. Before the last moment before he was able to escape his cell, I caught a glimpse of him and made sure to smile at him, reassuring him that I was going to keep his intentions a close secret.

Unfortunately, the poor man was not able to get far from the prison, re-arrested right in front of the small building that housed the organizations prison cells. If the treatment before was bad, what awaited him was a nightmare. He was severely and horrendously tortured for two days straight in a sadistic fashion. I was thankful that I didn't see with my own eyes what happened and was only subjected to having to listen for hours on end. After this two days that seemed to drag on for eternity, this man was executed, shot like a rabid dog and buried in a shallow-dug grave not even fit for an animal.

On humanitarian grounds, just like my friends family, I am ready and wishing to help his family, to help them find out exactly what transpired with him in those final hours, and to aid in locating his grave. If the family ever comes across this book, you are all free to try to contact me and initiate the process of closure.

In regards to a situation similar to this, I feel it is appropriate to mention it at this time. It was a few years ago, when the extended family of a British citizen, named Mr. Collet, was helped by me in this exact fashion. Mr. Collet was working for the United Nations in Lebanon, when he was kidnapped by the ANO and later hanged in front of my own eyes in late April of 1986. For over 20 years, his family and the British government, plus the U.N., had absolutely no concrete information about his status, whether he was alive or dead. Even if they were aware of his death, the exact place of his burial was a complete mystery.

After much contemplation and consideration, I met with one of the family's legal representatives to inform them of all the details of Mr. Collet's abduction and subsequent murder. I also gave them directions to his buried remains, Taking careful notes of all my detailed information, an investigative team made its way to Lebanon some months later. Just as I exactly informed them, they found his remains in the precise location I directed them to. While in my prison cell in the United States, I heard about the discovery of his corpse on the BBC world news service on my radio.

I really can't help but to mention one thing about this whole incident and it's

honestly out of spite and disappointment. But sadly, and to my surprise, I never, to this very day, received one proper thank you or even slight appreciation from the United Nations, the British government or the Collet family itself. I later was informed that they received millions in the form of compensation, which is their right and I do not contend whatsoever with that fact. What I did was totally free of pre-conditions with no selfish motivations; I wanted it sincerely to be a pure humanitarian gesture, knowing and feeling what it must be like for a family to endure that kind of pain, not knowing if their dear loved one is dead or alive! Despite the British government and Collet family's callous indifference and reckless action, I am not frustrated! I just hope that maybe I alleviated some of their suffering and anxiety.

Even though I experienced this, I will still help whoever needs to find the answer to any lingering questions about their loved ones, anyone and everyone. I will do this gladly and happily! Truly, the only thing I wished from Mr. Collet's family, or any other family for that matter, and the English government, was that they would understand and sympathize with my feelings as I did with theirs. Sadly, they didn't.

During this same time period, an American of Palestinian descent made his way to

Damascus to try to join the ANO; this is one story I will never forget. I was specially appointed to accompany him into Lebanon. When I read this instruction I knew exactly what the organization intended for this man.

Sure enough, as soon as we came to stop in Lebanon at a predetermined location, the

American was detained and accused of being a spy for the CIA. This was an extremely serious charge, and because of the sensitivity of his case, he was interrogated by two leaders of the organization stationed in and around Beirut and also the Bekka valley. They were constantly questioning him for hours and days on end in a small prison where they had him confined. I happened to see him there after he was arrested because I had been assigned to work there in a different duty besides as an interrogator.

The man, knowing he had been discovered regarding his intentions, began talking openly about everything he was involved in and that he was employed by the CIA. Because of this he was never beaten or tortured, like many others who tried to lie before intense pain prompted their confessions.

A humorous thing happened between the American-Palestinian spy and me during the course of this long interrogation. Whenever I had the opportunity to question him myself, I would ask him all kinds of different questions about life in America and its culture. I was inspired to ask him these things because of all the scenes I have seen in Hollywood movies depicting America. He answered everything I asked him, one after another. In fact I was really enjoying his company, sort of dreading when all this tighthearted conversation would come to a brutal end. Thinking about that sad fact, it was funny in a dark humor kind of way when he burst into smile proclaiming to me "If I make it out of here, one day you can come visit me in America!"

Of course, he didn't make it out of that small prison; he was shot in the head and

disposed of a few days later. What a twisted coincidence it is that I myself did come to

America, nearly 20 years after that brief encounter with him, It is a small world indeed.

Moving into the year of 1985, it was one of very hectic and fast-paced schedules. I was constantly shifting between many different ANO camps in Lebanon and Syria. I also was on duty in many of the prisons as an interrogator, and also in and out of their jail cells as a depressed prisoner. My feet were racing over multiple European countries on missions as well.

This era was one of increased intensity in the war between the ANO and several intelligence agencies leading to a flurry of arrests within the organization of suspected spies and informants. One could see daily executions and torture sessions throughout the secret prisons. The intelligence agencies were dispatching wave upon relentless wave of spies to the organization. In particular, they sent young women to try to infiltrate the iron-clad barriers of the ANO, knowing how easily men could be seduced and conned into what they believed to be an honest relationship. It couldn't be further from the truth.

Many of these ladies of deception were sent to me, and they were hitting on me hard, and resisting their acts flirtation was extremely difficult at times. These women had no problems morally or ethically with sleeping with their target if this meant that valuable information would be gleaned from the sexual encounter. Amidst all this carnal temptation, like what I mentioned earlier, the only thing that prevented me from having

relationships with these women was the visceral fear of the consequences of being accused of having a Mossad girlfriend!

So in summary, the whole of that year was like a disaster for me, which compounded and amplified the acute depression I had been afflicted with for some time before that. The depression was increasing steadily every week. The only real bright light for me in my life at that time was my passionate love affair with Diana. She was my very first love and it was like we were living a real life fairy tale love story. But just like some emotional soap opera script, my relationship with her wasn't working out, despite how much I desired it for the both of us.

The stark horror of life with the Abu Nidal Organization, along with all the stringent demands that came with that membership allowed no room whatsoever for love, romance, intimate human interaction or any emotional feelings. Mental hardship and emotional detachment went hand in hand with being a part of the organization. This kind of life was free of any form of normalcy or stability. It was as if Abu Nidal will tell you coldly, "No my good boy, there is no chance for love or family during my watch or in my backyard. If you desire to work for me, you must lock away your every emotion in a box and throw it into the deepest sea!" That sea was the alternate reality of Abu Nidal and the box was my very soul which I would have to sacrifice for the sake of the organization, no questions asked.

All of this only worsened my depression to the point that my drinking of alcohol became heavier than usual, mixing it with painkiller pills like Valium 10. This was on a near daily basis. I needed to consume all these drugs

and narcotics just to relax and even get a decent sleep. And the ANO even punished me for my drug use when they discovered that! It seemed like my depression was even exacerbated to the worst possible degree the moment that my beloved uncle himself was plunged into a deep depression. He stopped coming to the ANO offices and showing up to work entirely. He stayed at home for days on end not leaving his study, reflecting upon the dismal state of the organization, feeling it had totally lost its way and purpose. He was disgusted with the extreme actions of Abu Nidal, his paranoia, and how he was using the organization to achieve his own selfish ends, so much so that he wasn't just using the members to murder his own personal rivals, but executing his own foot soldiers for the slightest infractions, perceived or not! This is my uncle who put everything on the line for the cause of the revolution, out of his love for his people and his homeland. Now this same brave and strong man is reduced to languishing in his home, sad, depressed and extremely frustrated, trying to determine and pinpoint how everything went so bad and took a sharp turn for the absolute worst.

These events that were taking place within the organization were not escaping the vigilant eye of the Jordanian intelligence. Knowing this state of affairs from the information collected by their countless spies, they began to try to send my uncle indirect messages through a variety of channels. Their intention? They wished to make him contemplate possibly defecting to Jordan, and if he did take that bold decision, he would be safe and have nothing to worry about, coming under the Jordanian regimes

exclusive protection. From the events that followed, it is safe to say that he received the message loud and clear.

It is definitely worth mentioning that the intentions of the Jordanians were not humanitarian in nature or they are wishing to help my uncle out of the pure goodness of their hearts. This is absolutely not the case. Their motivation was purely a self-serving strategy, seeking to hit and severely cripple the organization on the inside. This was the nasty world of political warfare.

Observing my uncle, Abu Nidal and other high-ranking leaders became convinced that my uncle will not snap out of his disillusionment. Coming to this conclusion, they decided on their tried and true solution to many of their inconveniences: liquidating my uncle.

This was difficult however because my uncle was very popular amongst the rank-and-file of the organization, including top leaders. Abu Nidal knew this fact well, so he developed the perfect strategy to try to eliminate my uncle. He would give orders to my uncle to travel and settle outside Syria under the pretext that he would be the heard of all ANO external operations. However, this was a cunning ruse and trap; once out of the Middle East, a select hit-squad would murder my uncle. Then conveniently, the killing would be blamed on Israeli Mossad, thus turning my uncle into a celebrated martyr and simultaneously getting rid of a possible defector and traitor, in Abu Nidal's eyes.

But my uncle was a very intelligent and wise man, and he detected Abu Nidal's plot from the outset. He took himself and his family by plane to Athens, Greece, feigning

to adhere to the leaderships orders. Upon arrival however, he quickly boarded a plane straight to Amman, the heart and capital of Jordan.

That was in the first few months of 1987. His defection was like an earthquake, sending shockwaves through the entire Abu Nidal Organization. He was the highest ranking leader to ever escape without being killed in the attempt. Jordan welcomed him and his family with open arms, treating him very kindly and with respect. To this very day he lives in Amman with his children and grandchildren.

Similar to the Jordanians, the ANO leadership was also monitoring very closely the overall mood and morale of the organization as a whole. It was astutely observed that I myself was extremely depressed and mentally and emotionally unstable. I was teetering on the edge of a complete psychological meltdown, and this was not going unnoticed. I was beginning to be seen as a liability by some in the leadership despite my unwavering loyalty and commitment.

In the first weeks of November, 1985, I was summoned by some of the top cadre within the organization, two of them who I personally knew very well. Like all routine formalities, we all sat down to drink hot sweet tea and smoke cigarettes on the outskirts of one of the ANO training camps. It is sort of a running joke in the camps regarding our consumption of tea. From morning until we all fell fast asleep, a pot of tea was always brewing. We proclaimed that tea is the favored whiskey of the freedom fighters!

Anyway, it was a beautiful morning, which was always chosen for most meetings regarding affairs of the organization and mission briefings. One of the leaders began in a hushed tone after finishing his cup of tea and lighting a fresh cigarette. "Abbas... we have important news about impending operations." Things like this always peeked my interest and I was now listening with rapt attention. "In nearly two weeks' time, around the time of Christmas day, there is going to be three separate but coordinated attacks in several European airports spread across the continent." He continued in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, smoking a cigarette. "The kind of mission, comrade Abbas, will be highly dangerous for the operatives involved." At that moment both leaders began to observe how I would react; basically what they suggested was it would be an almost 100% guarantee of death for the ANO operatives, a suicide mission. The only outcome in front of them would be a grisly, violent demise.

They knew because of my mental state at that time, this kind of suggestion would not be hard for me to stomach, maybe they knew the suggestion would be appealing. Slamming back the rest of my tea before my answer I shouted enthusiastically, with no forethought whatsoever, "Yes! Of course comrades, I am ready for any assignment, and any mission!" With a smile, bearing all his teeth, the other previously silent leader said, "This is what we expected from a hero and courageous man like you, Abbas!" His stare into my eyes was almost frightening, not corresponding with the smile upon his weathered face. "So listen, pack all your bags and prepare to be picked up early in the morning tomorrow. The

car will then take you right away to Damascus. After arriving, you will receive the rest of the operational details." With a slight sigh of resignation I muttered, "Yes of course, why not...I'll be waiting tomorrow." At that point I can say I accepted my fate wholeheartedly, now just riding out the time patiently until my final moments. .

One month before this decisive meeting that would play a huge role in my future and destiny; I was in a camp, close to the Syrian border. I was there wasting idle time really, getting a suntan, relaxing, drinking tea and smoking lots of cigarettes. My favorite pass time would be to sit outside and listen to my favorite music station on the radio. I was waiting to receive orders for a number of missions into mainland Europe.

During this lull in assignments for me, a group of young men was sent by the organization to the camp to receive two weeks of extensive and intense training. A good portion of them were young students from universities throughout Europe. I was placed in charge of a significant number of their training lessons like weapons and physical fitness. Being charged with this responsibility, I was around them for the majority of any given day, like a shepherd over his coveted flock.

A week or so had passed of this training program, mixing with and getting to know these wonderful young men, who were full of energy and enthusiasm, when the unexpected in the form of tragedy happened. It was during the afternoon time and many instances during physical fitness sessions I would use a Kalashnikov to motivate them to run harder and faster, shooting it in the air over their

heads, into the open sky. When they would crawl on the ground I would also shoot near them as well, to try to simulate the conditions of combat.

A normal training exercise was taking place and while I was amongst a group of them, I raised my AK-47 and fired a short burst over the top of them, signaling that they needed to begin running. Suddenly, and without any ill-intent on my part, a freak accident occurred. One of the rifles deadly bullets deflected off the side of one of the large, flat rock formations that surrounded the camp, ricocheting back down into the group of young trainees. We all heard a loud shout of pain. The bullet struck one young man right on the nap of his neck, severely wounding him. It seemed he would have died instantly from such a wound but somehow he survived the initial impact of the AK round.

The wounded man collapsed, lying on the ground motionless. I knew instinctually what to do and told some other trainers to quickly call for an ambulance, a horrible accident had just transpired. ('You, you, and you, come on, pick him up and take him to the entrance of the camp" I barked to some of the stunned men circled around the mortally wounded body on the ground. I could see the dirt blackening from the man's flowing blood. Once the ambulance arrived, he was lifted into the vehicle and I rode with him in the back all the way to the largest hospital and medical center in the area.

It was a terribly long night; myself and some other members huddled in the waiting room outside the ward for serious surgeries. I was feeling restless, waiting impatiently to hear any good word from the doctors. I was

very upset at how this all happened. I made it a point to be the first one to donate some of my blood to him, to help in his surgery and recovery, Unfortunately, he succumbed to his wound early the next morning, his body no longer able to fight on.

Even though this event was a pure accident, the whole episode really hurt me tremendously and crushed my heart. It is certainly true that I had seen much killing, torturing and all kinds of violence as an operative in the organization, but my soul could never get used to such tragic mistakes and accidents. This is mainly and primarily because it is against unintended, innocent victims!

That young man was only about 21 years of age, and I helped bury him the very next day. I myself placed some of the cold dirt into his grave with my bare hands, watching his shrouded body be swallowed up by the earth, gone forever. The ANO issued a statement that he had been killed during an operation against the Israeli army in the depths of Palestine. An ornate martyrdom poster was created to honor him, his bright young face surrounded in a halo of white light.

I had to be detained in the camps holding cells for a brief period until the organization could conduct its formal investigation into the incident. I was released shortly thereafter because it was clear that it was just an accident on my part and not deliberate. Even though this was all a terrible mistake, this event only served to further and deepen my state of depression. So when I was approached with the prospect of participating in a suicide mission, it was like a welcome reprieve for me from this

crazed and out of control life I was living. Envisioning myself strapped with weapons and grenades, rushing into some airport in Europe, was like entering through a door to true, complete freedom and liberation from all this madness.

Coming into Damascus, I was greeted warmly and happily by a top boss and his aide after arriving at one of their offices housed in a drab apartment block in one of the sprawling suburbs of the city. It has always been my experience, through long observation that whenever the organization has decided on a set objective and mission for an individual, they will always shower that person with a cascade of smiles and generous compliments to help encourage and motivate that person to agree to and carry out that particular operation.

As I sat down to the usual compliments of tea and biscuits, I carefully listened to the complex attack that was being outlined before me. It was to transpire on Christmas Eve, utilizing submachine guns, various explosives and fragmentation grenades, at multiple airport terminals in Rome, Vienna and Frankfurt, Germany. Additionally, one of the airport assaults would be coordinated jointly with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), led by the veteran commander Ahmed Jibril.

Jibril and Abu Nidal had grown considerably closer since the beginning of the 1980's, with two important factors in common with each other. One was that they both were loyal and owed fealty to Hafez Assad of Syria. The other common cause was their shared enmity and opposition towards Yassir Arafat and the PLO as a whole. Ever since the

Abu Nidal Organization arrived in Syria, there was close cooperation between the ANO and PFLP-GC. This led to joint efforts being formulated for missions in both Lebanon and Europe.

The Frankfurt airport would be the only joint operation in the planned Christmas Eve attacks. I was asked to lead the commando contingent, with three ANO operatives and two from the Popular Front. The other two attacks in Italy and Austria would be conducted purely by Abu Nidal foot soldiers. After careful consideration on my part, I was requested to select two trainees from the camp in Lebanon to partake in the operation. We were then to make our way to a PFLP training compound on the outskirts of Damascus, spend a short amount of time there, preparing psychologically by attending lectures and hone our shooting skills before departing to Germany for the operation.

One particular aspect of this operation would be the fact that once inside Germany, a sleeper cell of the PFLP would provide for us all the weapons and ammunition we would need to attack the airport. Usually it was the opposite, with the ANO supplying everything required in joint operations, like when we would aid and support the Armenian "A.S.A.L.A" in operations against the Turkish government. We were their primary trainers and equippers in their war of revenge against the Turkish state in retaliation for the Armenian genocide.

I was chosen for the mission in Frankfurt because of my familiarization with the Popular Front in previous years in Lebanon, particularly in the middle of 1983. At that time I was residing in one of their camps with

two other members of the ANO, tucked away discreetly amongst the mountains of Lebanon. We were involved in kidnapping raids to capture Israeli soldiers in that specific vicinity. This was all part of the wider war against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon following their invasion in June of 1982, so I was very familiar with the majority of them from the PFLP.

I quickly named two ANO members to participate in the raid with me since I was intimately familiar with the vast majority of the fighters spread across Lebanon in our camps. Orders were given, and the two men I requested were dispatched to my location. I gave them a short synopsis of what lay ahead for us of the operation, gathered some personal equipment, and then made our way with the boss to the Popular Front camp near Damascus.

The training camp there was considerably massive, and upon our arrival we were greeted like true brothers, with plenty of tea to go along with the warm embraces and smiles we received from all in attendance. After the routine introductions, we were ushered in to our sleeping quarters, two rooms in a small building offset from the main hall in the camp. The same day the head instructors introduced us to the two operatives who would be joining us on the mission.

We spent the next hours and days exercising and running through combat drills, shooting targets. To pass a lot of the time I would clean the weapons in the camp that were used to train the camp attendants. As a group, we would gather in the camps lecture hall, to listen to speeches about the merits of martyrdom for the cause and the glory of

making the ultimate sacrifice. We were very surprised one day when Ahmed Jibril, the leader over the whole PFLP-GC organization made a visit to give a brief motivational speech to boost our morale and spirits. Even his son, Jihad, instructed us in some short training sessions. This same Jihad would later be assassinated in Beirut by the Jordanian intelligence service.

After so much anticipation and preparation for weeks on end for the impending operation, the leadership of the Popular Front decided to withdrawal completely from participating in the operations, seemingly out of nowhere; it was a complete surprise for me and others at the time. It became apparent that their organization did not want to be linked to any kind of brazen attacks that might hurt or damage the image of the Syrian regime. Surely after the operations that were planned on Christmas Eve, America and its Western allies would criticize Assad for giving shelter to the PFLP and aiding them logistically. By allowing the PFLP to operate with the ANO in this way, it would generate even more tension between the Syrians and other nations politically, and hence would lead to a conflict of interests between the Assad regime and Ahmed Jibril. This is the primary motivation behind why they suddenly got cold feet and declined to participate with the organization in the Frankfurt mission.

The boss summoned us back to our camp from the PFLP camp, and after assembling us in the main office building, explained to us everything that happened with the Popular Front's decision to cancel their participation in the joint operation. As I said before, it was all political. After that

brief explanation, I was ordered back to Lebanon, returning again to the mundane life of the camp, waiting for the next assignment.

In all actuality, the ANO could have still launched the operations without the joint participation of the PFLP by simply replacing the two-missing member's with our own. The danger of continuing on with the mission is that it was possible the Popular Front leaders could have informed the Syrian intelligence of the whole planned operation, and thus leading to the Germans being tipped off about the pending airport attacks. The Syrians would pursue this course of action to score political points with the German government. Because of these considerations, the ANO scrapped the plan for the Frankfurt airport assault.

The Rome and Vienna attacks were still given the green-light however, and orders were issued to continue the preparation. The Popular Front was never informed or even given a hint of these attacks in two different European locations. If they were, the organization would have taken the same precautions like Frankfurt, canceling the operations.

This brought me back to Lebanon and the boredom of running the camps, as I suffered in my depressive state, the winter season only exacerbating my dark mood. At this time of the year, there isn't as much to do like the summer months. Even though the sun was shining less, I loved the way the snow would turn the Lebanese landscape into a picturesque scene of white beauty with sparkingly trees from the snowflakes covering their outspread branches.

I would take the chance, when I didn't have as much to do, to go see Diana. Despite the relief of leaving the camp, these short visits would still carry sharp pains with them, listening to her recount to me how many men had approached her family to ask for her in marriage. It was hard for her, not knowing what to do because we had tried to keep our relationship a secret yet she couldn't use it as the reason to turn down all these proposals. Hearing about these things going on in her life would always crush my heart, leaving me suffocated and confused, not knowing exactly what to do or even say to her. Any quick, misguided decision or misjudgment about the whole situation could lead to a complete disaster culminating in my execution.

A few days had passed after the cancellation of the Frankfurt mission, and I was enjoying the cool December weather, watching a rare, visible sunrise as I enjoyed a hot glass of sweet tea. I would try to take advantage of this quiet time, listening intently to the radio, sometimes music and at other times the local and international news. Sipping my tea carefully, the radios programming was suddenly interrupted by a breaking news bulletin. The commentator, in a loud voice, was describing two, seemingly coordinated, attacks in Rome and Vienna, both targeting airports. Even though the wider world was shocked, I wasn't surprised as I was expecting these attacks for weeks.

It might seem strange and unimaginable, but I was saddened by the news, wishing I was there myself so I could be killed, ending all this misery and intense depression. I started cursing, complaining of my bad luck, that I

wasn't afforded the opportunity of escaping this living hell, once and for all.

Now that Christmas Eve passed, we entered the new year of 1986. In the beginning, nothing is really out of the ordinary for me, just the same routine, going through the emotions. Every now and then I would be given orders to travel to Damascus for a short, brief mission here and there. This always gave me the chance to enjoy some form of relaxation, as the city always was so endeared to my heart and soul. It never failed to breathe into my soul a breath of fresh air despite my gloomy circumstances. My respite would be over much too soon however, and it would be back into Lebanon.

The winter months had passed, bringing me into April, which for since I could remember was always one of my favorite months, especially after living in and experiencing Lebanon. This is when the most beautiful and vibrant Spring would bloom, after those freezing days of blowing mountain snows and darkness cast early over the horizon. I personally could always say I favored the cold and enjoyed the long nights, but April and spring time in Lebanon has its own special flavor and unique taste. Witnessing the first Cherry blossoms of the sweetest Cherries in the world, in the Bekka valley, with the budding Almond trees, would do something to enliven the spirit. Everything transforming into fresh life, with its green vibrancy was very powerful for me and gave me a boost of needed energy, like the joyous birds singing and chirping around me, celebrating the return of spring.

Regrettably, this moment of refreshment was short-lived, as April was shattered by

many distractions for me! It was this very month that the American President, Ronald Reagan, bombed Libya with his fleets of stealth bombers, hitting many locations, including one of the personal residences of Colonel Qaddafi. This set off a chain reaction of retaliation, prompting many of the Palestinian factions, including Abu Nidal Organization to increase the tempo of their attacks against Western targets, America and Israel in particular. This was done in order to please Qaddafi and display their

loyalty and unity with him. All of these plans were constructed without his knowledge or in coordination with him at all however. It was intended as a surprise gift to his regime.

Beyond this, April held an even more devastating blow for me; just barely a few days after the American bombs were dropped on Libyan soil. It was something that was always lurking in my thoughts and stalking me in my nightmares, but the way it came to me finally was more brutal and heart-wrenching than what I had even fathomed or imagined!

The sun was bright that late April day, betraying the dark, bleak moments that awaited me. I was taking advantage of the warm rays of light, lying on the smooth ground of the ANO camp tucked away in the depths of the Bekka valley. It was about 10 AM when I heard the crunching of rocks and pebbles under the tires of a dusty Range Rover pulling into the camp. A special messenger was occupying the seat of this truck, and I could see him through the dirt covered windows, sitting upright to get a better view. The driver parked not far from where I sat sprawled against the dirt ground on a cheap blanket.

The messenger emerged and I immediately sensed an urgency in his steps. I knew him and he greeted me as he passed by where I sat, wondering to myself what he must have come for. He motioned to me with his right hand that he was looking for the commander, pointing towards his office quarters. In some sort of apparent expectation, the commander had exited his office and met the courier halfway on the open grass of the camp. I observed all of this with some sort of nervous foreboding, like I could sense something vile brewing and permeating the air.

The camp commander embraced him half-heartedly, exchanging short greetings, then he was handed a plain sealed envelope, containing a written message. I heard the paper crackle as he opened it to view and read its special contents. As he read the message, I could see him peeking quick looks in my direction, at one point making eye contact with me before looking away.

He finished and immediately he yelled to me to come over. "Comrade Abbas, we have received an urgent message that states that your presence is required as soon as possible. You must depart to the headquarters; you will travel back with the messenger."

I was sort of stunned, not knowing exactly how to respond. In fact, I didn't, and just hustled to the car without changing my clothes or anything. At the moment I climbed into the passenger seat and slammed the door, the car was on the move, speeding hastily towards its destination and an unknown fate; from my years of personal experience, calls of this nature were extremely bad omens! It could possibly mean they have something on me

or perhaps a spy, under intense interrogation and torture, gave them my name in a false ploy to stop the abuse. In fact, this had happened to me in the past because my name was well known and spread over Lebanon amongst revolutionary circles. These calls usually always meant I was destined for prison once again.

To my horrible dismay, what I would be subjected to after reaching the camp from headquarters, would be a thousand times worse than anything I experience in Abu Nidal's prisons and holding cells.

Entering the camp, I could see two leaders who I knew very well, who came to greet us near the entrance. I got chills through my body the moment I set eyes on them; they had traveled all the way from Damascus to supervise the event in the camp. This made me even more suspicious of what exactly is going on and why I had to be there!

Stepping from the Range Rover, I met them half-way from the entrance, my feet feeling like they were filled with concrete, heavy with dread. I shook their hands, the skin felt cold and their eyes seemed even colder. Those were the commanders, and I proceeded to greet the other friendlier faces, people I considered good friends. Some of the guys in that camp I felt were like my family.

I followed them to a small building where hot cups of Turkish coffee was prepared, and passed around as we conversed for about 15 minutes. The commanders were amongst us, just sitting and listening to our small talk. I felt the weird sensation that they were observing me from some reason. Suddenly and abruptly, one of the two leaders raised his voice to speak over us, attempting to address

us. It seemed to be overly dramatic, and I then knew I was about to be thrust into something I had never quite experienced until this point in time.

"Pay attention, comrades!" We all fell silent in obedience, waiting for what was to come next. "You all have been gathered here at the camp today for one specific reason. We have uncovered a traitor and you will soon be witnesses to his execution." A deafening silence swept over the room, all the attendants trading glances with each other, secretly wondering to ourselves who it possibly could be. We were all aware that just because someone was accused of treachery, it didn't mean this was the whole truth and the real story.

The commander then continued with his announcement. "So please, comrades, before we make our way to the back of the camp where the execution is going to take place, we request that you all relinquish any weapons here, and it will be returned to you after the execution is concluded." This really set off alarm bells in my head; they must be worried about any adverse reactions from us in the audience why? He must be someone dear and close to us, announcing he is a traitor and then asking us for our weapons. This all led me to the conclusion that he must not be a spy or traitor, and this would prompt us to use our guns to defend and free him!

All these thoughts were rushing through my mind at a thousand miles per hour, making me even more confused and anxious. My mind was searching, trying to figure out who they possibly could mean. I could sense that I might myself know, even though I wanted to reject all these thoughts outright, wishing

sincerely for these conclusions to be false and untrue. I was really feeling shaken and totally distraught at that instance, just barely a minute before my worst fears would manifest themselves.

Standing at attention in the small backyard that was converted into the area of execution, the leader in the training camp gave a signal, and a man, cuffed and blindfolded was brought from a cell. The shuffling of his feet upon the ground betrayed his confusion and anxiety as he was guided towards the gallows that was propped up in the yard for the execution. The moment that shackled man was brought closer, I instantly was shocked, surprised and horrified. The man was my dearest friend and companion, Maher Said. I felt like I could have fainted, seeing him with unbelieving eyes, on the verge of almost spontaneous tears!

Maher, he was a proud son of the organization and he worked tirelessly in his duties as a member of the ANO. He accomplished many tasks on their behalf, and I personally knew of so many of his missions. We were extremely close friends and companions. We were both widely known to give the organization a hard time with our antics, chasing many women and acting in an undisciplined fashion. Of course, beyond a doubt, this is far beyond any reason to hang and execute someone!

Just barely a few days back, he and I were together in Damascus, traveling towards

Lebanon, in the same car, enjoying each other's company. Before we parted ways to separately assigned camps, Maher expressed something to me he never had in the past. It

was like he was sensing something on the horizon, and it wasn't right or good. He uttered totally surprising words, telling me that if anything had happened to him, he would like me to inform his family as soon as I could. With surprise I told him not to even think about things like this; he has nothing to worry about and nothing of the sort will happen to him. He looked at me with almost a sense of certainty, saying that this was just a feeling that had come over him and he had to express it and make it known to me.

And tragically, his instinct was correct. When he arrived in the camp of his assignment, after parting ways, he was arrested, handcuffed with a black hood pulled over his head. I can't even imagine the thoughts that ran through his mind at that treacherous moment. Shortly thereafter, in a few days, he was hanged to death. Why had fate decided that I would be chosen by more than one man to inform his family if something bad happens! It is a heavy burden to be the messenger of such grim news to grieving and distraught families. In the depths of my heart I feel I am glad to carry out this duty despite the fact it is almost overwhelming emotionally and mentally. One can only be in front of a broken, crying woman delivering the news of the death of her love so many times before it begins to scar you psychologically. At this moment I can't recall if I ever expressed this sentiment to any of these families, whether from a lack of opportunity or courage!

I remember feeling a volcano of rage beginning to build inside me at the sight of Maher being forced to ascend the gallows, my fists balling up as the heavy, dread-laden

rope was slipped over his head and onto his neck. He was forced to stand on a table, its small legs wobbling a bit as he struggled to get his footing. A member of the group was gripping his legs to keep him in place as a short statement was read by a hooded executioner.

"After a thorough investigation by the intelligence division of Abu Nidal Organization, it was concluded that one, Maher Said, was guilty of many acts, the most serious being that of treachery. He was presented before our court after his confession and a sentence of death was pronounced upon him. And this is the fate of the traitors."

Hearing those words generated an intense resentment and hatred inside me, because I knew they were falsely and slanderously placing the label of a traitor upon him just to give a valid reason for their cold-blooded murder. Not even fully able to process these words, one of the executioner's boots kicked the leg of the simple, wooden table, cracking it in the process, causing Maher to be strangled by the thick rope, a muffled grunt escaping his mouth before he began to struggle for air from being choked. It was hardly even three minutes and he had passed away, the executioner pronouncing his death to us all standing before the gallows.

It was like a part of my own life was snatched from me at that horrible moment, stolen from me forever in the blink of an eye, which at the same time felt like an excruciating eternity. The image of him will never be erased from my mind, hanging in front of me, murdered. Maher was just 29 years old, who was snatched from this world viciously,

leaving behind a young wife and a baby daughter just 10 months old. I was never able to get the heart to even tell his sweet wife exactly what happened, despite the fact of I and Maher's incredible friendship and bond. I just couldn't face her at that time, leaving it up to the organization to inform her of her husband's death.

I deeply pray that Almighty God liberate and give peace to your soul, as I sincerely apologize to you Maher, as I stood helpless before you, not able to aid you as you were in the grip of those killers. I was just like you defenseless, and I consider it such a mercy that you were unaware I was even before you. I know I would be haunted for the rest of my life by the look in your eyes, shouting out to me to help and assist you, yet I am not able to do anything, mercilessly shot down by their weapons the moment I attempted to come to your assistance.

That same camp became the site of Maher's grave, unmarked and shallow, his body buried with callous indifference and disdain. It was as if my heart and broken, shattered soul was covered in the cold dirt of al-Bekaa, accompanying Maher in his tomb. May the Most Merciful one day reunite us once again, in a state of serenity and true peace.

And as if the shock and pain couldn't have been more pronounced, the reaction of some of the leaders and members was like salt poured upon my open, bleeding wound. They were smiling like jackals, bearing their teeth, with vile jokes seething from their mouths, as if nothing had even happened. Like it was funny and a form of sick entertainment to see a man hung by his helpless neck, his body swinging left to right before the very life

is drained out of him with such pain and fear, his last sight on earth nothing but darkness drenching his vision from the hood put over his head like a criminal worthy of such profane treatment! And this very man is supposed to be your brother and comrade, who was truly never guilty of espionage and treachery, and your heart and mind knows it!

This is a complete tragedy for me, seeing my best of friends murdered in front of me; I felt all my energy and life just sucked out of me. I don't know how I even managed to stand, to walk, to even draw a breath at those very minutes and seconds. It was like a cold numbness overcame my mind; I think this was my body and minds way of being able to function, preventing me from completely shutting down. It was like my thoughts were detached from my mouth when I asked them to in a somber, polite way to please now take me back to my assigned camp, totally feeling uninterested or enthusiastic about anything in this life, even worse than anything I felt before.

The response I received were just one more blow against my shocked conscious, the words not even fully able to register, like it was some form of day-dream, but more akin to a dark nightmare. The words were like an echo, "Comrade Abbas!" one of the two camp leaders gleefully shouted "We are not done with today's events! There is one more execution for us to attend in a camp nearby, and you are also requested to be with us!"

It was incredible; the shock of the prospect of being forced to watch another execution was just too much. My whole being was frozen, mesmerized by their utter coldness and heartlessness. All I could

muster was a subdued UWhat?" You really have to be kidding me I was screaming to myself deep in my mind, but my face allowed me not to betray what was racing alike a hurricane in my most secret of thoughts. I slowly walked behind the camp leader, my head hanging like an obedient schoolboy, instructed to follow his stern teacher with no questions asked. You could imagine now my searching and wondering, who is next? I would be lying if I said I didn't think it possibly could even be me! Or is he another close friend who I would be coerced to watch, helplessly, his murder? My dear God, what a terrible, heart-rending day!

A short trip carried us to the confines of the other camp and the site of the expected execution. Upon arrival, the gallows were prepared and erected in short order, barely with enough time for us to hardly assembly properly. In all honesty, I felt like my feet were dragging me there in dread and fearful anticipation. The same scene was replayed like the one before, with Maher, a defenseless shackled man hustled from his small hole of a cell, in fact a cell that I myself had occupied during a few weeks of punishing imprisonment. My whole chest was strained, my heart pounding rapidly, painfully expecting to see yet another of my trusted friends to be emerging from that cramped

My eyes surprised my heart however when the hunched over, blindfolded man was appearing like he was at least 60 years old. Almost immediately, I recognized that this must be the aging British journalist, Mr. Collet. I had heard a lot of chatter from many

members of the ANO about how he had been kidnapped. It was rumored that the organization was trying to swap and trade Mr. Collet with three ANO members imprisoned in England. I witnessed him myself for a very short period of time before he was moved around to other camps and prisons to make sure he was not located and rescued by the British, or seen by the spies and informants amongst us.

Plans were even being considered by the organization to negotiate with Hizballah to take Collet and have him exchanged with hundreds of Palestinian and other Arabs held in Israeli jails. It was planned that maybe the British government would pressure Israel to engage in a deal with Hizballah to secure Collet's freedom once they became aware of the possibility through negotiations.

The attack on Libya by Reagan's bombers sealed Mr. Collet's fate however. The organization wanted to punish and humiliate Thatcher for standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Reagan in support of his aggressive actions and foreign policy. This execution was like a token of loyalty to Qaddafi on behalf of the organization, without any orders or request made on behalf of his regime; it was totally unknown to him and the rest of the Libyan government.

The execution was rushed and quick, with a short statement accompanying the death sentence, stating that Mr. Collet was indeed a British spy and so his punishment is certain death for this treacherous activity. I could see the confusion in Collet, his body language displaying the anxiety that pervaded over him. He was even oblivious to what was being said, not able to understand the Arabic

language. When he stepped upon the table and the rope was put over his head and fastened to his neck, he then understood fully what was taking place, in a split second comprehending exactly what was now transpiring. I could imagine how many sleepless nights he contemplated this kind of dreadful scenario. I still hear his words, clear as day in my memory, stuttering in sheer horror, "What? What?" when suddenly the small chair was kicked from beneath him and he plunged to his death, the tight rope snapping his neck in a grotesque fashion. It was over in a matter of minutes, his body, now stiffened with rigormortis, whisked away to the outskirts of the camp and buried. It would be 20 years before his remains would be discovered for a proper burial.

This extremely horrible, bloody day absolutely drained me. Once I received permission to travel back to my assigned camp, I felt as if I was mentally and physically exhausted to the core. I sat outside smoking cigarette after cigarette in a state of shock, utterly astonished by everything that had transpired that day. Was it the first time I had seen someone's death before my eyes? No, I already had seen too much of it by that point in my life. What really shocked me was the audacity and brutal nature of it all, in absolute broad daylight, before a crowd of many. Usually all the organizations work of this violent nature was conducted in the pitch black of midnight, with silenced pistols, one shot to the head to dispatch the victim and it's done and over. But by hanging with gallows for all to see, almost unheard of for me!

The second issue is the nature of the punishment which was to the extreme, and the innocence of the victims. It was known for certain that my friend was not an agent of anyone; he was just locked up for disciplinary issues, while the British journalist was not a spy either. Being in Lebanon at that time of turmoil and civil war, it was a simple matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Whether someone considers this bad luck or fate, either way it was tragic. I could say from experience that if he was involved in espionage he wouldn't have even been considered for an exchange with the Israelis through Hizballah. His affair would have ended with bullets after rounds of questioning coupled with torture, seeking to squeeze as much information out of him as possible.

The organization knew he was innocent of this dubious activity. In fact, I came to know later that out of the kindness of his heart he was helping young Palestinian children through the many refugee camps in Lebanon. Out of the desire for revenge against the British government the organization exacted their vengeance upon this innocent, defenseless man. This was the primary motivation behind why I wished to assist his family in finding his remains, as he involved himself personally in helping poor and destitute Palestinians.

Because of this I wish to express that, despite the fact I am not a leader, past or present, nor represent the Palestinians as a whole or any government, I want to apologize to Mr. Collet's family. Even though I am just a simple, ordinary man, on behalf of the Palestinian people, I am sincerely regretful

for what happened as it was a terrible mistake and miscalculation. I really wish and desire that his family will not hold a grudge against all Palestinians or condemn them all as bad people! I can say humbly that we all truly appreciate his noble and courageous job in helping our people.

I know that this apology might come too little, too late, and no one can be brought back by these simple words and sentiments, and that it also comes forth from one solitary man who truly means nothing, to nobody! But the least that can be said is that it came from a Palestinian man who is sincere in his apology.

What also is as traumatizing and shocking for me, was why would they call me to watch and see all of this? I was not working in this department of the organization, and I definitely was not a leader. It was apparent and obvious that they were wishing to scare and frighten me to death by sending this brutal but indirect message, that message being if you continue to make mistakes and cause-trouble you will be next and end up like them and so many others! With the way I was feeling so stressed and anxiety filled, it is only certain I would increase in making mistakes and miscalculations due to pent-up frustration and anger. This could only mean that my days are certainly numbered and my time is short!

Dealing with all these events and emotions, one can imagine what kind of life I was living, and even how my sleep was impacted, full of nightmares, awaking drenched in sweat. My slumber was a fatiguing experience in and of itself. I believe this is what helped to bring on hallucinations and

hearing voices, from my lack of sleep, along with consuming more and more amounts of alcohol. Diana herself, someone I care for and loved so much, even told me with all seriousness that if I continued in my drinking, that she would cease coming to see me altogether! This was a huge blow to me and really scared me deep down, as I didn't want to lose her from my life. She was my only joy, and her words were more than just a threat, it was like a promise!

Everything in my life was of little consequence to me at that point. I can really say that I had reached a state of mental breakdown, and even my body was feeling the physical effects, like I was about to just shut down and expire completely. Some days I do not even comprehend how I managed to crawl out of bed from a lack of hope and no desire to even breathe to continue life. My uncle, as I mentioned before was also experiencing a debilitating depression, which seemed to only magnify and augment my depressive, dejected state.

At every turn I was trapped, with no escape. What if my plans of trying to defect the organization were discovered? Certain death. Running to Jordan or Europe? All wanted me on various charges, along with the Interpol was well. Go to Kuwait with my family? Out of the question because I had no valid travel documents to get there in the first place, and I didn't want to be discovered trying to enter illegally. I tried to block all of this from my thoughts and contemplations because it really seemed too risky and I shouldn't waste my energy fantasizing about it, but in the same instance I do not wish to hang to death by

the same makeshift gallows, being killed most certainly for a mistake I am sure to make one way or another!

It was at this abominable junction that I made a final, decisive decision about the trajectory of my life, to escape this living hell once and for all, forever. Only one sure way to put an end to this endless cycle of depression would be death. The way I could achieve it, with no doubts, would be to volunteer for a suicide mission, one with zero guarantees of making it back alive in one piece. This would be the surest way to end all my worries, anxieties and sleepless nights full of horrific dreams. .

I made up my mind that I was basically a dead man walking, as the organization would murder me one way or another, so why not choose my own fate and embark on this final mission of self-sacrifice. It really served a dual purpose: I could escape my misery for good and at the same moment be labeled a heroic martyr for the revolution. Better than dying by the ANO's hands and being slandered in my unmarked grave as a traitor! I would rather my friends and colleagues look upon the face adorning the inevitable martyrdom poster manufactured in my memory, and remember me for my bravery and courage in the face of bombs and bullets! The choice in my mind was simple and obvious.

After making up my mind about this, I traveled to the apple of my eye, sweet Damascus, to try to find some way to relax and clear my head after everything I witnessed in the camps. I truly went there with a heavy and grieving heart. Searching for relaxation was in reality impossible and I was being eaten alive by anxiety and

frustration. It was nearly impossible for me to enjoy the beautiful cityscape and all its glorious attractions.

With this arrival I requested a special meeting with one of the top ANO leaders, he was basically the number two within the structure of the organization. I was familiar with him since the young age of 17, meeting him when I visited Baghdad in 1979. Since I met him I was always very fond of him and enjoyed his company. Regretfully he himself was killed by Abu Nidal himself in Libya towards the end of 1987.

The office I remember that day was filled with the noon day sun, shining through the windows. The commander I came to see was ready, and I was consumed with nervousness that whole day before even arriving at the office building. We all considered him a very important figure in the organization, with his hands on much of the reins of power within it. Stepping in, one of his young aides motioned for me to sit near a table with some water and a well-used ashtray. I immediately lit a cigarette due to my apprehension, attempting to stem the building tension throughout my body. The time for small talk was over however as I had reached the point where I wasn't trying to waste my own time or his. My mind was on a single track: preparing to escape this whole drama and dilemma that was my life. .

"Comrade, I came to request for something very serious. I want a real operation, a real mission. I am volunteering for an outright suicide mission. I'm totally committed and ready for that whatever the outcome may be." I felt like it must have been very dramatic, from my tone of voice and facial expressions,

but the leader hardly seemed to be even fazed or moved by what I said. He simply asked, "That's it?" with a blank stare on his face, a ring of smoke surrounding him from our cigarettes. I sort of stuttered "Yes", taken aback by his nonchalant attitude and demeanor considering the vast seriousness of our discussion.

"Put your specific request in writing, make your way to the comrade in charge of the external operations wing and submit your paperwork and request to him. You know all about the formalities, I will need to verify 'it once more then give my official OK, and that should be the final step." He ended with a brief but weak smile, not sure if he was happy or resigned to how far I had come and now where I seemed to be finalizing my journey with Abu Nidal. How many young men he had seen come before him, condemned to the same fate, I could only imagine. With a courteous thank you, I was leaving the office and gone.

The very next day I had filled out my request for a suicide operation and submitted it to the appropriate department, right into the hands of the man directly in charge over the whole wing. I personally knew him well, as I had been employed in that same department, working there in the past. I could sense and feel from some of their reactions, especially the head I am mentioning now, that they were pleased and happy

involved a high probability that I might survive, so I totally declined to lead these operations. The mission in Istanbul, Turkey was at the site of a historic synagogue in the city, in fact the oldest, and was to be like a hit-and-run attack with gunfire. This technically was not a suicide operation, so I might make it out alive as well. The tast option was the mission in Pakistan, which entailed the hijacking of an airliner. Since it was an operation that would transpire 1,000s of feet in the air, I felt this was the best guarantee I would not make it back alive. When I realized this, I immediately chose the mission in Pakistan. I had become firm in my decision to leave this world, now I had just needed the means.

Obviously they were very happy with this decision and were encouraging me to go forward. Their joy was even further increased when I mentioned that part of the operatives equipment in the mission needs to include specially fitted belts stuffed with explosives to ensure maximum damage and causalities. In reality, I was trying to make sure that there is no possible way to survive the hijacking. This addition of mine that I suggested wasn't entirely necessary to facilitate the hijacking of the aircraft, I really requested it for my own self, securing my demise I so hoped for.

As I said, the external operations department loved the idea and was enthusiastic about making sure it happened. They said they would submit the special order to the organization's weapons lab where all sorts of explosives and bombs were built and tested. Surely they could prepare the highly-

explosive suicide belts, and very soon! They said with a devious grin on their faces.

With that final, fateful business concluded, I left, making my way to go spend some last moments with my family. My grandparents had traveled from Palestine to Damascus to visit some of the extended family. It was really a change of pace, so welcomed to me in my heart, as I desired nothing more but to enjoy this kind of normal family life, which was a world apart from what I was usually doing day in and day out. It was for a few weeks, and I will never forget those moments because some of those family members I never saw again after they departed. I did my best to struggle against my depression and enjoy their company, smiling and conversing with everyone cheerfully. There was no way I was going to betray my horrible unhappiness and internal sufferings. I wanted to spare them from what afflicted my heart, as their worries about me would only heighten my sadness.

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about my request and choosing to sacrifice myself. Many in the top-tiers of leadership in the organization believed themselves that my days were numbered and the clock was ticking on my very life. Since they felt that my early demise was unavoidable, it is much more desirable that I die on a mission for the ANO, so it totally appears like they had no hand in it, unlike a mysterious disappearance due to a brutal execution for supposed misconduct! Conveniently for them they could now call me a hero and not have to grapple with the embarrassment of interacting with my family after liquidating me. My suicide mission was a perfect solution to an

annoying inconvenience on their part, which to them I had now become.

A few days later I was summoned back again to the office of the leader who was deputized to lead the external operations branch. When I entered through the office door there was another man who specialized in those operations with him as an advisor to the head leader. I was invited to indulge with them in some tea and cigarettes before they informed me that my request for a suicide operation had been granted. He then proceeded to lay out the details of the planned operation, along with others in conjunction with it.

The organization had decided under the direction of the wing for external operations, to strike in multiple cities around the world all on the same period exactly. Some young men had already been selected, all from a cadre at a single camp, which meant they already knew each other, making it easier for them to work as a cohesive team. The targets would be a collection of sites from around the globe, in Sudan, Turkey, Cyprus and Pakistan. The advisor during the briefing then stated, to my utmost surprise, to choose from amongst these different operations which one I preferred to lead! This was highly unusual because as a soldier in the organization it is not our right to pick and choose, but to simply follow orders to the letter and not question one single directive from your leaders. Their calculations were different with me however, because of my history of dedication to the ANO as well as their ardent desire to see me gotten rid of once and for all. Whether this was by death or life in prison was irrelevant!

I wasn't long in my considerations because the choice was fairly simple and straight forward, after learning about the details of each operation. The mission in Sudan involved small arms and grenades against a country club and five-star hotels frequented by many Westerners and British in particular. The operation on the island of Cyprus was basically a bombardment with mortars of a British military base. These two attacks

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Reality soon visited upon me its harsh circumstances, waking me up from the dream that it was to be in the company of my family, when I was summoned back to the ANO office. The purpose was to provide me with a fake Lebanese passport, stamped with a valid visa to be able to travel to Pakistan and remain there for up to a month. The department also gave me \$3,000 to cover all my expenses and of course a two-way ticket on Pakistan International Airways (PIA).

The purpose behind this was to serve as a reconnaissance mission, surveying the situation in the Karachi International Airport to assess the security measures there and observe how thoroughly they searched passengers and luggage. Also, I would be formulating, through my observations, how exactly we would board and hijack the plane. After these primary recon missions were completed, I was then going to find a hotel in Karachi where I and some of my close friends who would be part of my team, would stay until the day of the hijacking.

Three days later, I was on my way to Karachi, Pakistan for the first time in my whole life. I arrived at the airport in Damascus prepared to begin my journey. This

in fact was the beginning of my observations and assessment of the security situation in regards to the PIA. The security members of the airline personally searched and patted down the passengers at the entrance tunnel before entering PIA airliners. I came to find out that the reason behind this was because the PIA had been hit by a hijacking of one of its aircrafts in the past.

The hijacking occurred in the first few months of 1980 by a group entitled 'Zulfikar Bhutto', which was the name of the late prime minister of Pakistan who was overthrown in a coup and executed by hanging by the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq. The group had actually directed the plane to Damascus Airport, remaining there on the tarmac for close to two whole weeks, holding the passengers hostage. They were seeking to gain the freedom of scores of prisoners detained in prison by the Pakistani government. Eventually they succeeded and their demands were met. It was because of this hijacking that PIA personal began their routine searches and pat downs of all passengers wishing to board their planes.

All of this surveillance and preliminary planning would have me in Pakistan for about a month, but I can't say that I enjoyed my time away as I had on previous assignments. The country was made up of a Muslim majority, and in my experience the people are very courteous, respectful and humble, but it definitely was not like being in Europe.

Being a young man, I was yearning for the kinds of freedoms found in Rome and Paris. Compared to the easygoing, care-free lifestyle found in the clubs and bars of those cities, Karachi was a boring, cheerless place, along with Pakistan as a whole. There was no way I could attain total comfort in that hot, sweltering city on the Arabian Sea, overcrowded with nearly 11 million people. I truly could feel the congestion in the atmosphere, and combined with the extreme humidity, it was oppressive for me psychologically.

I found myself a decent hotel and for about the next two weeks, I went back and forth between there and the Karachi airport, surveying as much as I could. I was making mental notes about the security and snapping many pictures, like of the entrance, where planes were parked and other important details. This was nearly an everyday occurrence, and I began to formulate in my mind how the operation would take place and the best way to initiate it. I wouldn't have been able to achieve this without being on the ground and seeing the scene for myself.

It must be mentioned here that to complete the beginning phase of the hijacking, and gaining control of the plane, it is much easier if we could board the aircraft from an Indian airport. The ANO however wanted the hijacking to occur on Pakistani soil to send a political message. India at that period of time was aligned with the Soviet Union, while Pakistan was squarely in the camp of America. Also, as the Soviet-Afghan war raged, Pakistan was supporting and arming many factions of Afghans who were fighting

Soviet soldiers and their Communist benefactors.

Even maybe more importantly, the Palestinian factions as a whole would never forget or forgive the fact that Zia-ul-Haq himself was a willing participant during the volcanic conflict between Palestinian militias and King Hussein of Jordan. Before he was a highranking general and president of Pakistan, he led a contingent of Pakistani troops as an army officer, raising his rifle in solidarity with the Jordanians against the Palestinians. This savage conflict would go down in history with the Palestinians, calling that brutal time, "Black September". The ANO wished to give General Zia his own "Black

September" to remember, thus choosing to conduct the operation in Pakistan, not the easier Indian airports. Not only was it punishment, but symbolic.

Concluding many weeks of surveillance, I made my way to the old garrison city of Lahore, known for its antique forts and castles, her splendid architecture and mosques, along with the best tasting spicy food on the whole planet! After a beautiful week of sight-seeing, I then made my way to the capital city of Islamabad. The city impressed me very much, as it was more modernized, cleaner and quieter. Not to mention it was safe and secure compared to the volatile and sometimes dangerous Karachi. These would be my final steps before heading back to Syria and the ANO.

Arriving back in Damascus, I was surprised to find some relief in the faces of some of the leaders when I showed up at the organizations offices. They were always

paranoid and suspicious that I might take advantage of being so far from the organizations base of operations and escape their ranks once and for all. It was definitely in the back of my mind but I was always facing the dilemma of where exactly I would run to and take refuge.

Protocol dictated that while making the initial visit back to the office in Damascus I was to submit a full report of my activities in Karachi, if anything worthy of note transpired and what are my specific suggestions to help facilitate the impending operation. I remember vividly that the most important and crucial detail I pointed out in the report is that, since we would have Kalashnikov rifles and explosive belts it would be impossible for us to board the plane like a normal passenger. There would be no viable way to conceal them without detection, thus possibly botching the operation prematurely before it could even get started. The only true chance we would have would be to somehow force ourselves on the plane, boarding it directly from the tarmac. The best and surest way to achieve this would be to disguise ourselves as police or the special 'ASF', Air Security Force, which was stationed at the Karachi airport to provide military grade protection against incidents exactly like hijacking and shooting attacks. If we could successfully camouflage our appearances, it would increase our chances of boarding the plane exponentially.

The other great concern I noted in the report was an issue dealing with the explosive belts. Because of the extensive search procedures instituted by the Pakistan

International Airways, it will be both very challenging and risky operationally to board the plane without the belts being discovered by airport security. They were of considerable bulk, and could be felt for sure by a simple pat down. Our light summer clothes might not be enough to properly conceal them.

After two weeks from my return to Damascus, the three young men were chosen to accompany me on the mission. They were all selected for their dedication and proficiency in firearms, achieving high-marks at the training camps. I was intimately familiar with two of them, as they were handpicked by me personally to go along with me on the Frankfurt Airport operation.

The weapons themselves, AK-47 rifles, had already been procured and purchased. A member of the organization had been specifically assigned for this task, traveling all the way to the tribal areas of Pakistan, in the far north, to the border city of Peshawar. Close to the Durand Line with Afghanistan, Peshawar was renowned for its huge markets, bristling with arms. Everything and anything in regards to weapons and explosives could be found in the arms bazaars, at the cheapest, lowest price.

During this down time in Syria, I was just trying to enjoy my last moments on earth, doing my best to relax and finding time for friends and family. Of all people, I had to pay one last visit to Diana, across the border in Lebanon. She was my final piece of happiness on earth, and to gaze into her eyes, realizing the consequences of what I was preparing to embark upon, was heart-breaking. I felt sharp pains of sadness every time I heard her sweet voice, with her remarks of

love, care and concern. Embracing her, I desired to just disappear with her from this ugly world, to another kind of life, where all these problems and conflicts were non-existent. I will never forget those last moments, where nothing even seemed to matter except her and me, together.

After this depressing rendezvous with my only real love, I was crossing back into Syria, wallowing in the ANO safe-houses of Damascus, awaiting my forged passports, travel documents, plane tickets and a couple thousand in cash. Two of my superiors shortly thereafter delivered to me all the above mentioned items, a PIA ticket and \$6,000 in American currency. I was a bit astonished that they booked a flight using Pakistan International Airways, due to what I informed them about in regards to the difficulty that would come about from trying to conceal the explosive belts from airport security. When I mentioned this they explained to me not to worry because I would be flying to Bangkok, Thailand first, then into Pakistan. Another set of the team will be tasked with moving the explosives through a totally separate airline, so I would not have to be burdened by also moving the belts through multiple airports.

The stopover in Bangkok was an obvious recognition by the leadership that I was under extreme stress and living in a depressed state of despair, and that they were giving me some leeway to enjoy myself before I went to my death. If it would help to facilitate my mission in Pakistan, the organization was totally OK with a few moments spent letting my worries go and living care-free for a week or so.

It was a quick, brief goodbye with half-hearted hugs and feigned smiles. They tried to act saddened by my eternal departure, but in reality they were overjoyed, hurrying to get me out of their presence. Their facial expressions portrayed their true, sincere feelings that were buried in their hardened hearts.

I contemplated going to see my uncle but I couldn't bring myself to visit him, not wanting to further his deeply depressive state. I know my decisions would have just been another psychological blow to his fragile head and mind. Like I mentioned, the situation was boiling within the organization, the molten of much discontent bubbling to explode like an enraged volcano! It was only a matter time before the ANO would collapse under its own weight. Not only were the organization's enemies increasing the ferocity of their war against them and becoming vicious in their tactics, incrementally getting nastier and more underhanded, but the problems were amongst the leaders themselves. No longer were they agreeing with themselves on a plethora of divergent issues, increasing the chances of internal conflict and strife.

This whole toxic atmosphere made me worried about my uncle. Not only was the depression detrimental to his health but the affairs of the organization could very well possibly lead to him becoming a casualty in the ensuing war inside and outside the organization. Whether assassination by the Mossad or the Jordanians, or murdered by Abu Nidal's soldiers, death was a possibility every single minute of the day. Thankfully though he was able to escape with his family

unharmd, which was a great miracle in and of itself!

I left for the airport, departing the secret office in Damascus, carrying just a small handbag because there is no longer a need to have with me any personal belongings; the grave was a destination where none of these provisions were required. Because of that I left all my personal property in Damascus at my sister's home.

Knowing the grim circumstances of my departure in his heart, one of my friends wanted to accompany me to the airport. He didn't know the exact details of the mission but like I mentioned, he felt something was different about this assignment, and this might be his last chance to be in my presence. His feelings were confirmed, never seeing me again after that day at the Damascus passenger terminal.

I still remember heading straight for the bank in the airport, seeking to exchange \$US

100 for some Syrian currency to buy some alcohol and have a good drink in the bar. We

smoked cigarettes and were reminiscing about when we first met and some of the lighter-hearted events we experienced in the camps, all the way back in Hit. Finishing my glass, I sat it down and pulled the rest of the Syrian notes from my pocket, took his open hand and put the cash in his hands. Looking me in the eyes he immediately understood the gesture: I wasn't coming back, whether it was Syria or anywhere else. Softly a tear came from his eye, the gravity of the situation sinking in, realizing I was going to die on this mission, whatever it happened to be. I did my best to cheer him up, patting him on the back telling him, '[Well buddy! You never

know what will happen; we could one day see each other once again!"

That was in July of 1986. I boarded a PIA plane from Damascus to Pakistan, making my way to the fateful suicide mission I volunteered for. I had no idea how fate would play out in whatever way it desired.



Chapter 6

The Karachi Hijacking

**"Things are done, it is needless to speak
about things that are past, it is needless
to blame"**

The drinks were done, and after my friend's sorrowful tears were dry, I was off to catch my flight. I was feeling light headed from the shots of whiskey, helping to numb my mind as I carried myself forward towards my objective. It was like I floated through the terminal, through all the security pat-downs, until finally finding my assigned seat on the plane. I closed my eyes, and exhaled deeply, trying to process everything I was about to embark upon. It was only the acceleration of the jet engines and the takeoff which woke me from my state of meditation.

I peered from the window as the plane ascended over splendid Damascus, the sight of its buildings and streets bringing back for me so many coveted and cherished memories, like in a rush or wave of emotions sweeping over my mind and heart. Warm tears welled into my eyes as I thought of the Turkish baths and cups of mint tea, laughing with my young comrades, the cafes and markets, where I plucked from the open baskets the ripest of red apples and handfuls of dates and apricots. The flavors appeared instantly on my tongue, a form of phantom memories, the smell of hookah tobacco and Turkish coffee filling my nostrils. How could I forget you, Damascus? Your streets carried me to my sweet Deena on the way to beautiful Zahle, to

majestic Beirut. When my spirit was low, the heights of your minarets, like pillars of certainty, lifted my spirits and gave me desire to live and breathe another day. Damascus, at this moment you are beneath me, but my heart is in the depths of your glory, which stretches back into history. Forever I am a part of your legacy, and forever now I depart from you.

These were some of my whispered farewells as my flight arched across the sky, leaving Syria behind me on the horizon. I convinced myself, silent in my tears, to try to get some rest before arriving in Thailand.

My slumber was disturbed by the heavy airliner wheels impacting the tarmac. I had now reached Bangkok, the city of unbridled fun and limitless entertainment. Knowing I had finally arrived gave me an instant jolt of new found energy, this was the city of no resting, no sleep, constantly on the move. Being in Bangkok shattered my mood of sadness and frustration, filling me with excitement after existing on the edge of hopelessness for so long.

I allowed myself completely to turn myself over to her, willing to let my every desire be fulfilled by anything that the city had to offer. I started to indulge in the multitude of pleasures, day and night, like a mad dog, ravenous and driven insane by the fact that there is absolutely no tomorrow. This wasn't just a figure of speech, no, it was my stark reality; I had volunteered myself to have no tomorrow, no future, and no more hopes.

This apparent binge of every indulgence was far more than what it appeared; it was like I was trying to drown out my very life, numbing myself from the harshness of the

world by losing myself in the company of women, living in the moment, as if nothing else mattered, or in fact existed.

I carried on like this in a complete unrestraint until I was brought back down to earth, for about three weeks. In my routine phone calls back to Damascus, I was informed by one of the bosses to hurry up and make my way to Pakistan as soon as possible. The other members of the operations cell had assembled in Karachi and were awaiting my arrival. By the next morning I was waking early to make my way to the Bangkok International Airport to catch the first available flight to Karachi.

The date was now August 1986. I couldn't even possibly imagine that almost exactly

15 years later—September 29th, 2001—I would be kidnapped by forces of the United States in the very same airport. This would all transpire with the full help and cooperation of both Jordanian intelligence and the Thai government, who allowed this orchestrated kidnapping to happen on its soil. It truly is a small world with many twists and turns weaved by fate.

Approaching the smog-covered, pollution infested city of Karachi was not a good omen, after coming from a cheerful, joyous city like Bangkok. The whole atmosphere of the city was like one of suffocation and dimness, like it was a sort of black-hole where light itself was sucked away into oblivion. This just amplified for me that, yes, I am not here to enjoy myself whatsoever, but to carry out a deadly serious mission, with no intention of coming out alive.

Despite the energy of the city, I was quite familiar with the whole layout, after

spending time there two months earlier. I made my way to one of Karachi's most splendid hotels, the sprawling Taj Mahal, which was renowned around the city as one of the best in regards to comfort and room service. At times I wished I could have just kicked back on one of the couches in the lounge, smoking cigarettes, watching the beautiful women strolling by as I read the Arabic daily papers.

After settling in, I made sure to call the overall leader who was in charge of our operation, among others. I could hear some light conversation on the other end, in the main office in Damascus. I wanted to let them know I had arrived safely and was now in the preparation stages of the mission. I could actually hear his expressions of relief that I was actually still committed to carrying out the attack and not once again taking the opportunity to flee from the organization. They were constantly in a state of apprehension due to my severe depression. They always worried that after they murdered Maher, I would be disenchanted and fed up with remaining with the organization.

It must be noted here that this boss I was speaking with was known for his charisma and being somewhat of a playboy. He had a brazen nature and liked to be hands on when it came to planning and executing certain missions. The next year after this phone call, he was killed by a car-bomb, in an unintended accident as he was preparing to mastermind an attack on a tourist ferry that was based in Athens, Greece. A good portion of the dead in that attack were French citizens.

One of the first contingencies I went about accomplishing in Karachi was renting a

small car so that I would be able to travel easier throughout the city. I made it a habit to always carry with me the international driver license I was issued in Kuwait. This gave me the ability to operate any kind of car or truck in any country in the world. It was very convenient for me to possess, considering the line of work I was doing!

That same day J would later meet a man, whose name is 'Al-Turk'. His specific and sole duty was to obtain the weapons which would be used in the operation. He would also act in an advisory capacity, helping us to formulate the plans to penetrate the airport, via the tarmac, to the aircraft. Al-Turk was moving throughout Pakistan using a forged Libyan passport; this was done without the duplicity of the Libyan government, totally outside the realm of their cooperation.

So we convened our first meeting together in Karachi. After some preliminary discussions, we agreed to set out for the airport to begin the process of reconnaissance and collecting information about the various buildings, the security and other vital details. It took just about 20 minutes to reach the airport from the center of the city. From the moment we witnessed the layout of the airport, we both concluded that we would have to use a specific, single entrance to breach the tarmac, making it possible to hijack the airplane. These were just cursory observations, as there were further details we would need to work out and reach a conclusion about. We both agreed to meet the next morning,

Indeed, I saw Al-Turk the next day, but not in the place I was expecting him! Traveling to see my friends and fellow

operatives, I found Al-Turk with them. This was a grievous, fatal mistake on his part. The strict guidelines set down by Damascus was that Al-Turk was to play a strictly logistical role, solely dealing with me, and not mixing with or even coming to know the other operatives participating in the hijacking. After helping me acquire the AK-47s and grenades and help plan some of the mission, he was to flee Karachi and Pakistan altogether. Unfortunately for him, he did not heed what we agreed to. I believe it was out of overconfidence and unnecessary brashness, characteristics that would prove to be very detrimental, costing him over 20 years of his life in prison.

This meeting was our first gathering, all of us, in Karachi, and of course we spent it laughing, joking, smoking and drinking loads of tea. The biggest enjoyment I received all day was the amazement I felt at their story of the utterly risky antics they displayed by how they smuggled the explosive belts to Pakistan. They proceeded to narrate the whole process, beginning with their introduction to the belts, strapping them on their bodies in the office in Damascus. They then flew out from Damascus airport to Athens, their bodies laden with the explosive material, lounging in the terminal for hours; imagine if there was some kind of accident! They boarded an Olympia Airline flight, heading for Bangkok, Thailand. Once there, they stayed over for about two days, before having a pass once again through even more airport security with their deadly contraband. Boarding a KLM plane, they were now on their way to Karachi, finally.

All of this was amazing, and absolutely delighted me, how they braved the security of not one, but four major international airports, flying all these thousands of miles across the globe, strapped to the brim with lethal high-explosives! And these were not comfortable contraptions, but tight fitting and uncomfortable, the straps sometimes grating against the skin annoyingly. Add to that the fact that it was the hot summer months, where you are not wearing a lot of clothes, so this increases the chances of airport security feeling the belts during pat-downs. The fact that they went unnoticed was truly unbelievable and incredible!

The following days and weeks were spent purely casing the airport. We needed as much information and intelligence as humanly possible to ensure the greatest chances of success in the hijackings. We wanted to eliminate the possibility of failure to the upmost extent, covering all our bases and making sure to formulate many back-up plans in case of any unexpected events, especially in regards to the issue of the tarmac and the Air Security Force. In fact, we were going back and forth so much to the airport that Al-Turk and I would joke that our car knows exactly what to do, all we need is to sit and enjoy the ride; she knows the destination: Karachi International Airport! Some days we would frequent it almost 10 times at least!

During this period Al-Turk also had to make his way to the Punjab province, accompanied by one of the team to help him in the task of traveling to the weapons cache, which was buried in the ground in a discreet location. After finding the expertly hidden spot, they were to unearth the well-oiled and

sealed weapons, which he carefully prepared after purchasing them in Peshawar, in the depths of the lawless, tribal areas of the North West Frontier Province. He took good care to travel all the way to Lahore to conceal them there before they were to be brought to Karachi where they would be used for their deadly purpose. It was a collection of AK-47s, three pistols, and close to a dozen hand-grenades, all of Russian manufacturing. It was my personal belief at the time that Russian weapons were the absolute best in the world!

The two comrades finished their assignments and made their way back to us in about three days' time. They reported they had uncovered the weapons safely, during the night, successfully unearthing them from one of the main gardens in Lahore. The assault rifles were then stowed away in a large duffel bag, along with the other weapons. Covering their tracks, they filled the hole back with dirt to make the scene appear as normal as possible, before heading to the train station, and traveling back to Karachi.

This was a long journey by train, and I was again surprised to know that Al-Turk and my friend passed through at least three checkpoints without a single officer asking to inspect one piece of their luggage, despite the fact of their obvious foreign appearance.

With the arrival of the weapons, Al-Turk and I scheduled an outing outside the city to thoroughly clean and oil the AK's, making sure they were in proper working order. We left in our rented vehicle, stopping at a local gas station to purchase oil, and other cleaning liquids and supplies, along with a

tent. We would then go set up in a discreet location and clean and inspect the weapons, stripping them and reassembling them back into one piece again. The reason we used the tent outside so that the vehicle wouldn't be soiled and dirtied by oil. We completed all this in two hours and headed back to the hotel. The weapons were then stored in one of the group members hotel room.

One of the key details and essential ingredients of the whole hijacking was that we decided to use police uniforms as a ruse to gain entrance onto the tarmac then into the plane. Honestly I still don't know where I came up with this idea. I could guess that maybe I was influenced by some old Hollywood movie I had seen somewhere. It wasn't farfetched however because, as I mentioned previously, one of the most powerful police and security forces in the country was the Air Security Force, the ASF. They would be housed at the airport, their headquarters embedded inside the airport complex. They're charged exclusively with the security and protection of the airport and its aircraft.

Knowing this, we needed to secure both similar sets of clothes resembling that of the ASF, and the type of vehicle that is like what is employed by them. At the time of this stage of preparation, the leadership in Damascus was beginning to tell us to begin speeding up the planning process so that the operation can be launched. They did not want us spending too much time any longer.

I found and employed a local tailor not too far from the Taj Mahal hotel, explaining to him what I was looking for. I can't remember exactly what I told him I needed the clothes for but it must have been convincing

enough. I'm sure the extra money I gave him to speed it up probably helped! The uniforms were made up of three long sleeve shirts, of sky Blue color and dark blue pants. The tailor was in contact with us two days later and I traveled there personally to pick them up. I tipped the tailor a little more money and was on my way. To put the finishing touches on the uniforms, we found a small shop, which was common place in Karachi, that was selling some generic police caps and also name tags that we could attach to the long-sleeve shirts.

This time wasn't spent all in preparing for the mission, and we made sure to attempt to enjoy ourselves somehow. We found a business that would rent out boats, so we rented one and would take it out upon the warm Arabian Sea. We would sort of make it alike a picnic on the waves, taking snacks and drinks along with us. I really enjoyed the breeze out on the water. That pastime was more entertaining than most of the city itself for the most part. As I lamented before, Karachi had a depressive energy about it. There was one section in the city, beside the airport, where we spent most of our free-time called 'Clifton'. It ran along the seaside and was packed with various restaurants that served hamburgers, KFC chicken and pizza. This was really the only area of the city where Western food could be found and eaten, so we were always there eating and enjoying ourselves.

Again and again I emphasize how Karachi as a city was not appealing to me whatsoever. Instead of trying to get some enjoyment out of the place, it was only increasing me in depression. This pushed me to want to

accelerate the mission and even more, just to get it done and finished.

So we have the weapons, the guns and grenades. The police uniforms are tailored and ready to play their role in the deception, and the plan in a general, broad sense is now prepared, along with the whole team, plus Al-Turk. Everything is in place and the time for delays is over. We had secured the entire timetable for every flight that would enter and depart from the airport. Our target was the Pan Am airline and we knew when they would be there. Every Tuesday and Friday, early in the morning, they make their scheduled stop in Karachi. This stopover lasts about one hour, so this is the only window we have to storm and seize the aircraft. The last, missing piece of our plan is to acquire the car!

The original plan was calling for a carjacking before the hijacking; we thought it was a good idea because there were an abundance of PIA cars all over the airport. It would be a simple matter of surprising and subduing the driver, commandeer the vehicle and drive it to the tarmac to reach the plane, after breaching the security checkpoints, whether by force or not. This was quite risk however because the capturing of the PIA vehicle would have to be closely coordinated with the arrival of the plane. Any miscalculation on our part could lead to a total botch of the operation, resulting in failure.

We actually tried a dry rehearsal one night to see if it would be a viable option to help us reach the tarmac. At around 3 AM we took off for the airport in Al-Turks rental car. On the way there, myself and another

member changed into the false police uniforms. Al-Turk stopped so we could exit out onto the main thoroughfare, running near the airport. As we waited, something very funny took place that also could have ruined our plans inadvertently.

Out of nowhere a taxi car pulled up near us, and a young policeman exited the car, and made his way straight towards me. It obviously was because of our uniforms we wore so convincingly. The young man was even saluting me as he approached! He was speaking in a respectful tone even though I had no idea what he was saying or trying to tell me. From his hand gestures I could tell he was motioning us to come catch a ride with him, thinking we were maybe stranded somehow. This was done out of camaraderie towards us because we wore the same uniforms and I even happened to outrank him with my star patches emblazoned on my shoulders! Not able to speak Urdu, I was just nodding my head, trying to let him know that we did not need his help but he was much appreciated. I began to fear that he might begin to suspect something is not right with us, maybe noticing our foreign appearance or because of lack of verbal communication. It would be nothing for him to alert the ASF headquarters just down the road from our location. I began to wonder how exactly I will get us out of this sticky situation !

Spying Al-Turk, I signaled to him to come pick us up; they were waiting in the background, monitoring us, making sure nothing would go wrong, being nearby to assist us in quick succession if needed. He immediately started the car and headed in our direction, picking me and the other team

member up, speeding away from the airport towards the city. I'm sure the young officer was wondering exactly what had just happened!

Once safe and secure at the hotel, he began to analyze and assess the whole situation regarding the matter of our transportation to the tarmac. We all concluded, for a hundred and one reasons, that we would need our own vehicle from the beginning and not rely on trying to steal a car for reaching our objective and target. With the budget that was allotted to us by the organization for the operation we actually had enough money to purchase a car, much less rent one. I wanted to find a vehicle as similar to the police and ASF as possible, and it wasn't that difficult to find one that was almost matching.

I am actually smiling as I recall this episode of trying to rent this van, because the renter was very suspicious of me and was giving me a horrible time trying to rent it! I even remember from his facial expressions that he was feeling and sensing that something wasn't right about the whole situation. A foreigner trying to rent out a van that resembles a police vehicle? Something must be in the works! It seemed like all the conditions he was setting to rent the vehicle was to persuade me to say 'NO' and flatly refuse. One considerable obstacle he tried to throw in my way was that I needed to have not one, but two, guarantors from Karachi itself. He must have thought he had me at that moment but unbeknownst to him, I had made two local friends during my stay.

They were convinced I was a rich shaykh and I promised them one day in the near future I would take them to the Gulf to work. They

were overjoyed at the prospect and told me that they were at my service, ready to help me in anything I asked for them to do.

Those poor guys, after the hijacking was concluded, the investigators tracked them down, arrested them and were severely beaten during their lengthy interrogations. In reality, one thing truly saved them from a certain execution, and that was that I miraculously survived the hijacking, and was able to recount to the investigators that both those young men had absolutely nothing to do with the plot. I had used them as unwitting accomplices to secure the rental van.

The whole episode was really a close call for them, because they easily could have been done away with due to the fact that they were Christian, and in Pakistan this basically means they are second-class citizens. Possibly even more damning for them was the fact that one of the men, Jakob, his father was employed by the PIA as a driver! This fact alone would have been enough conclusive proof for the hijacking investigators that they must be involved with us. I personally avoided using Jakob's father, having met him when I would come visit Jakob's house from time to time. I actually made sure not to give one single hint to the father about the impending hijacking because he was an airport employee. Thank God I survived because they would have been executed for sure; there would have been no way they would have been able to convince their interrogators they were innocent.

Back to the car rental and the troublesome owner! Not only was he seeking someone to vouch for me, but he wanted a copy of my

passport, so I had a photocopy made and delivered to him. Then he wanted the location of where I was residing at in Karachi. At first he didn't believe me I was staying at the five-star Taj Mahal. Because of his suspicious nature, he picked up the phone in front of me and called straight to the hotel. This was really the point where he tried to pull out all the stops! He was now demanding not only 500 rupees Pakistani currency for every single day of the rental, but also a deposit of 20,000 rupees! This really was too much, especially at that time, but obviously he was trying to convince me that this van is not the one for me! The deal was that for every day of rental, the 500 rupees would be subtracted from the 20,000, and the remaining balance would be returned to me. I had no other option but to agree with all these conditions, the van itself was too important in regards to the completion and success of the mission.

I quickly hustled down to a local currency exchange to change out about \$2,000 American dollars for rupees, to cover the van rental and some other possible expenses. I was soon back at the car rental, and to the man's dismay and horror, I was there to give him his coveted 20,000 rupees! "May I please get a receipt for that?" I asked him innocently; now it was my turn to give him trouble and at the same time trick him into thinking that I am coming back with his precious van! Little does he know that he will probably never get it back because that was my true intention from the beginning. He then had one final check, as if he was looking for one more excuse not to give me the rental van, and that was making sure I had a valid international

license. It checked out, and with the greatest reluctance he gave me the car-keys. I couldn't help myself but to smile and tell him thank you!

Finally I had secured the last vital piece of the mission, the van, after so much trouble. Leaving with the two Pakistani friends, I couldn't help but to continue to smile as I left the rental car office. I couldn't resist the thought of imagining the man being arrested by the police, and seeing his true feelings about me were right all along, but he would be regretful, knowing that his greed is what overwhelmed him. So much for his 20,000 rupee deposit when the authorities now have his van for who knows how long, maybe for good! In fact he was so anxious over the van, he would call the Taj Mahal every single day to make sure I was still there! He had the money in his hand but his heart was telling him something must be seriously wrong.

Everything now is in place, and the mission will be ready to commence in a few days.

We just needed to tie up a few loose ends here and there. The day after the van rental,

Al-Turk and I traveled to the inner depths of Karachi, to a particular street called 'Fida Road'. On this street there is a multitude of shops where nearly every kind of accessory for cars and various car parts, along with decorative decals, etc. can be purchased. After a few minutes spent looking for the right place exactly, we found the perfect store a bit of the way down the street from the majority of the shops.

Upon entrance, we asked the store owner if he had any sirens, called a 'hooter', which

was like a flashing light that rotates, attached to a metal plate which made it easier to attach to the top of the vehicle. I also found in the shop a tall antenna that could be fixed to the car. All of this would help in disguising the van to make it appear like an ASF security van. The measurements would just have to be taken so the antenna would be the right size proportionally. These parts would be assembled and attached to the van just before riding to the airport the day of the operation. You would think that it might seem suspicious to some, purchasing all these car accessories, but the store owner didn't ask us one single question due to the good amount of money we were paying him, in cash.

We stumbled across one more accessory that would add to our deception as we left back to the hotel, and that was some realistic but fake walkie-talkies. Obviously this would help us appear like security personal for the airport, by holding them and also mock speaking into them at the moments we would come across and pass through checkpoints. At the same shop Al-Turk found some stickers with 'ASF' printed upon them, resembling the acronym for the Air Security Force. These would be emblazoned on the van to give it the final touch, the last moments before our fateful departure.

With the acquisition of these props for our disguise, there was nothing left but to proceed with the operation. This entire period, I was in constant contact with the leadership back at headquarters in Damascus, making sure to give them a full update of the preparations for the hijacking. At both ends, there were ingenious ways we could communicate in code, to throw off and confuse

any attempt to intercept and eavesdrop on our conversations. I also would take the time to call some of my family back in Kuwait, as a form of final farewells, despite the fact that I told them absolutely nothing about what was to transpire, or that I was even in Pakistan. I called them about two times, their voices on that day residing in my memory for a long time after. At times a feeling of guilt would pain me, hoping that my mother wouldn't be too distraught after getting the news of my death.

There is one phone call I will never forget, and that was the call I made to Damascus on Wednesday, September 3rd, 1986. This was the very last call that was made to headquarters, informing them, in coded language, that everything is now in order and the hijacking will be attempted two days later on Friday, September, 5th, 1986, around 6 in the morning. When I informed them of the date, the leadership desired that it should be moved to Saturday, to correspond with the planned attack on the Nev Shalom Synagogue in Istanbul, Turkey. I tried to make clear to them as discreetly as I could that it just wasn't feasible because there are absolutely no flights on Saturday for Pan Am, only twice a week on Tuesday and Friday. Since the operation in Istanbul could only occur on a Saturday, the leadership gave us the go ahead and cleared us to commence the operation. With their best wishes for success, this phone call was the very last one ever for me, now nearly 30 years ago!

Our last day was Thursday before the hijacking. Our last day of relaxation and normalcy before commencing upon something which would alter our lives forever; a day in

which we all thought would be our very final one on the face of the earth. Believing so, we all spent the day together, roaming around the city of Karachi trying to enjoy some food and drink for the last time, taking in all mundane sights and sounds of the people and places, coming to the realization that an experience as simple as this will be unattainable forever once we step foot on the entrance stairs of that Pan Am jetliner. There was one final casing done of the airport; we had become so accustomed to it over the last weeks that it was like our day would not be complete without visiting it! The anxious van owner even happened to ring me at the hotel, calling to make sure I was there, like he did every day since I rented it. As a twisted joke I told him with a bit of glee in my voice, "Oh, you will get your van back tomorrow, insha'Allah!" He was ecstatic to hear that bit of news, as his ordeal with me would finally be coming to an end. Little did he know that he would get his vehicle back, just not in the way he intended!

I didn't even attempt to call my family at that fateful moment, not wishing to even alert them or somehow make them upset. Sometimes I wish sincerely in my heart that I would have tried to call, to at least hear their voices one last time in my state of freedom before departing to a life full of restriction and prison cells.

The beautiful sunset greeted us as we made our way to the Clifton area, full of foreign cuisine and stalls for snacks. We all wished to have one last feast of food in our life before the decisive hour would ultimately arrive. The waves of the Arabian Sea crashed upon the large concrete erosion barriers that

served as much of the scenery around the restaurants we frequented. I remember just sitting mesmerized with the seas gentle motion, the sun's last rays glinting off the calm water. "Are you still here, Abbas?" Al-Turk asked me, noticing that my mind had wandered to another time and place for a brief moment. He offered me a slice of hot cheese pizza, American style, and I readily obliged, washing it down with a glass bottle of Coca-Cola. Al-Turk was supposed to depart from our company the very next day, the day of the operation. He would be heading back to Damascus, without any one of us in tow. "Make sure to give my regards to some of my friends when you get back...let them know I had them in my thoughts until the last moments..." I said to Al-Turk, who nodded in approval. "We will not forget about your sacrifice."

We all carried on like this, eating heaps of pizza, until about 10 PM, before finally making the decision to depart. Al-Turk and I drove the remaining three members to their hotels, wishing them a good night and telling them all to get as much rest as humanly possible, because the day ahead will be long and arduous. They were all notified that they would be picked up around 4 AM, so be prepared and ready beforehand.

My careful instructions to them were not what I had in mind for myself however. This was not time to sleep or rest; after tomorrow, I will find enough rest in my grave, eternally! These were my final moments in life, and I felt determined to try to make the most of it the best I could in Karachi. At that second I was definitely wishing to be in the streets and clubs of Bangkok! But Clifton would have to do for now, so I drove

back with Al-Turk to try to get the best of the last hours of the night. Finding another seaside restaurant, we made sure to order various alcoholic drinks, in fact whole bottles, which I started to gulp straight from the bottle. "Now! This is drinking..." I managed to sputter after just swallowing some cheap, harsh whiskey. I passed the bottle to Al-Turk, who faithfully reciprocated the gesture by taking his own large swig of the fiery drink. I kept a small hand-held radio in my pocket when I went out sometimes, and managed to find an Arabic music station, cranking up the volume. Al-Turk and I passed the rest of the night away chatting about nearly anything that came to mind, chain smoking packs of cigarettes. I even managed to try to flirt with some of the waitresses before we turned in for the night, at 1 AM.

At the Taj Mahal, I was barely able to get upstairs to my room; I was off-balance with a combination of exhaustion and drunkenness. Hardly a second through the door, I collapsed onto the king-sized bed. The clock on the nightstand let me know I wouldn't even get two hours of sleep before I would have to rise again to my appointed day with destiny. Not like I could sleep anyway; my mind was racing with so many scenarios of what could happen tomorrow. What if we couldn't even breach the tarmac? Would we have to shoot our way through? What if the plane was able to takeoff in the ensuing gun battle? I decided I couldn't worry about 'what ifs' and just do my best when the time comes. Either way, whatever happened, I was determined to die in the process, no matter what we planned for in the last tiresome three weeks.

I guess I did somehow manage to sleep, because I felt my whole body jump with a startle at the sound of the bedside telephone ringing off the hook. At that exact moment I was regretting telling the receptionist to wake me at 3 AM. My whole head was groggy with the effects of the alcohol I had consumed barely 4 hours ago. If I hadn't made that request I probably wouldn't have awoke until noon time! It was a struggle at first to pull my pants on but as my mind shifted to the mission now at hand, my heart began to race, feeling a pounding in my chest. My breathing began to quicken, along with my movements, as I finished dressing and started to grab my wallet. Grabbing the car keys I made one last stop in the small kitchen and grabbed a beer from the fridge, cracked it open and took one long gulp of the drink before rushing to the door to the hotel car garage. It was agreed by all of us to be ready at 4, waiting in the hotel lobby to be picked up by me with the van.

The day prior, before the long night out, I had stashed the duffel bag of assault rifles in the back of the van, under the rear seats, making sure everything was in place so I wouldn't be distracted by it in the morning. Al-Turk helped me to pick up some of the members with his own rented car and we met at a pre-determined site on the road, a few minutes from the airport. Gathering inside the van, I could feel the atmosphere charged with emotion. I know that in those moments our blood was coursing with pure adrenaline.

"OK, everyone, change out your clothes for the police uniforms. Al-Turk will help to fix the siren and the antenna while we prepare"

I said quickly, trying my best to keep everyone organized and calm at the same time. I could see Al-Turk in the darkness affixing the 'hooter' on the roof as one of my friends passed the bag of Kalashnikovs over the seats to my hands. "Check the receiver, clear the chamber, and make sure there is no obstruction in the magazines" I ordered like a true commander as I removed the AK-47s from the black bag and distributed them to each team member; it was like I was back in the camps, shouting instructions to a new, fresh cadre of trainees, all those months of instruction paying off at the right moment.

"My clip isn't full, pass me some bullets" a member of the operation yelled to me. I planned for this contingency, packing a couple boxes of ammunition in the duffel bag; I tried to make sure every magazine for the long guns were topped off, but somehow I missed it. Passing the package of AK rounds I continued, "There are grenades in the bag, take two of them and pass the bag to the next man." I heard the clank of the grenade pins against the metal bodies of the small baseball sized bombs as each man retrieved his issue. Al-Turk was attaching the antenna at the same instance, the whining of the electrical drill filling the morning air as he screwed into the side of the van to complete our ASF vehicle, fully equipped to secure the Karachi International Airport, except our purpose was the exact and total oppositel

Our final piece of gear was the explosive belts, their deadly contents waiting to be strapped to our bodies until the moment of detonation, sending waves of explosive heat and power in all directions, eviscerating

anything in the blast's radius. Because of the belts design, we each had to help each other slip on the expandable belts before covering them with white undershirts then buttoning up the blue police shirts. I felt the bars of Semtex against my stomach, remembering in my mind how to detonate the explosive puddy-like substance. "Pay attention comrades, don't forget that the battery has to make direct contact with the ignition wires in order for the bomb to explode; if its not done correctly, it will not detonate" I said, giving my last instructions about the operation's equipment.

The van door slid open, with Al-Turk hopping inside. "OK, the van is now ready...I need everyone's passport, and any remaining cash that happened to be left." We all dutifully dug in our pants pockets of the clothes we had removed, pulling out some loose rupees here and there. I handed him a stack of our false passports, the last semblance of a normal life leaving my hands, now to be filled with AK gun-handles and grenades, passing from one existence into the other. It was the point of no return, the world was no longer ours to hold on to; it was only a world now full of bullet fragments and explosive shrapnel, shouted demands through force of hijacking. This was the world of sacrifice, the moment where if security was not present in Palestine, we would not let security cover the rest of the globe. If our children were not safe, whose could be, in this cold, ruthless world? If life could not be ours, whose life would be secure? We would make all of this known on that early September morning.

"Everyone ready?" Al-Turk asked expectantly. He reached out to me and I gave him a tight hug, feeling his embrace for what I perceived to be the last. The rest of the team took their turns hugging Al-Turk and saying goodbye before he left the door of the van and proceeded to his small rental car, starting the engine and flashing the tail lights to let us know he was ready to take off. "OK, let's go, follow Al-Turk to the entrance of the airport" I instructed the young team member behind the wheel, prompting him to turn the keys, causing the van engine to roar; he had his foot on the gas, revving to go, but the vehicle remained in park making the vehicle growl in anticipation of taking off. Soon we were off, just a couple hundred feet from Karachi International airport.

My eyes steadily fixed on Al-Turk's taillights, almost hypnotized, my mind totally focused on the task at hand. Al-Turk then veered off towards the entrances for the airport terminals; he was to park his car and enter the buildings in order to monitor the large screen attached to the terminal wall which displayed and updated all the 'Arrivals and Departures' of flights in the whole airport, watching and waiting to confirm the presence of the expected Pan Am plane. As soon as he made that confirmation, he was to return to the car park to give us a positive signal to proceed with the operation.

"Brothers, be ready, we should be moving out in a few minutes, make sure all your equipment is secured and in order." The comrade driving was slowly making rounds around the car-park outside the terminals; we were staying on the move to avoid alarming the ASF, whose headquarters was at the center

of the airport complex. The seconds were seemingly like minutes, the minutes like hours, as we waited on Al-Turk to finally emerge. I could actually see him through the terminal windows, his head tilted upward in the direction of the electronic screen displaying every flight update. His attention transfixed like a hawk searching for its prey, waiting for Pan Am 73 from India to make an appearance.

As we made the rounds through the parking lot, Al-Turk eventually made an appearance after about 15 minutes which seemed to have lasted an eternity. He was watching our van, waiting to get a view of me through the passenger window. He stopped near the small rental car, and as we passed the van, he looked me directly in the eyes and gave a single affirmative nod, signaling to the team the confirmation that the operation was a go, the plane had now arrived. With that simple gesture he hopped in his car, shut the door and prepared to depart.

"Keep driving for a couple more minutes....' want to guarantee the stairs for the passengers are in place." I commanded to the driver. If those crucial stairs were not in place, it would be impossible for us to enter the plane. We would be caught out in the open upon the tarmac, with nowhere to go, the hijacking a complete failure.

Circling the parking lot for one final time, I had to ensure that our act was complete, portraying ourselves as ASF personal. With the fake officers stars placed on my shoulders, I needed one of the team to drive the car as I used my free hands to hold the walkie-talkie, to put up the appearance I was busy speaking with some superior

officer somewhere, unable to have time to speak with anyone at the checkpoints. All this show will make the airport guards believe I am myself a high-ranking officer and we need to be passed through the gates, no questions asked, with no time for us to be bothered.

The problem was that it seemed my partner who was driving was becoming too nervous to handle the assignment. I could see the tension of his hands tightening upon the weathered steering wheel. "Man, are you alright? You have to calm yourself!" I lightly shouted to my friend. "Stop the car...take my seat and use the radio like you're speaking in it so we can pass the checkpoints." I no longer was confident in his ability to drive properly under this pressure and quickly traded seats with him. We nearly had made another full circle around the car lot and it was now time to move toward the tarmac, fairly certain that the time was right for the passenger stairs to be fully in place. Kalashnikov resting in my lap, I pressed the gas pedal.

With that slight touch of my foot, propelling the van forward, I was now plunging myself towards destiny, towards the unknown. My life and the life of so many others was about to be altered radically, for the rest of time. It's like a tunnel vision overcame me, a total focus on objectives and preplanned steps to be accomplished, totally and completely oblivious to consequences, to the results of everything we set out to do that day. It was like being switched to autopilot, fate guiding me to the mysterious destination, almost like things had reached the giant proportions of a Greek tragedy,

that set of unalterable events laid down in century's old mythology. Like a puppet manipulated by the hands of time, marching forward in lock-step towards whatever was set in stone to be.

Right now I feel certain about not wishing to explain or explore all the multitude of feelings and emotions that were charging through my mind and heart like a stampede of unrestrained beasts as we came ever closer to the tarmac. There as a constant, internal battle raging inside my head, with competing feelings tugging me back and forth, grating against my exhausted heart. Feelings of overwhelming anger, unending frustrations and an all-encompassing despair that seemed to drown out any hopes and dreams of a normal, successful future. Anxieties were heaped, one upon another on my conscious, blotting out any semblance of peace and calm in my life. But let me refrain, and restrain myself! I'm afraid that maybe I have gone too far as it is with all this philosophical talk and psychological analysis, because I sincerely intend and wish not to justify what actually happened that day in September!

It is personally my sincere conviction that, at least at one point in every human beings life, they will be challenged and put against an event or set of circumstances where the choices and options are strictly limited, due to so many variables and complications. Despite this, a choice, a decision has to inevitably be made and carried out, even if what is about to be enacted is barely justifiable whatsoever. Yet, that person has to move forward and persevere, despite what he or she might have just done. There is no going back, and no

justifications, so no rationalization is necessary and there's no point in seeking to justify things; what is done is done and none of it can be justified despite our deepest desires that wish to do so!

I fastly but carefully was now maneuvering the van, full of the operations team, armed to the teeth, towards the first gate, around the location of the cargo area which was adjacent to the terminal. I wasn't particularly concerned about this first checkpoint, as I considered it the least of our obstacles. It was the second and last checkpoint which was the real make or break moment of the hijacking; if we could not pass this stage, the whole operation is botched completely. t'Try to appear as calm as possible, this is the

ASF checkpoint" I mentioned to the team as we passed the first gate and now had the 2nd in plain sight. It is strict protocol that the ASF officers must stop you and commence a thorough search of both the car and the passengers, regardless of any of the passenger's familiarity with the airport personal or security.

During the initial planning stages we believe it might be highly likely that to breach and overcome this ASF checkpoint, we would have to engage the officers in a gun battle if they attempted at any point to prevent us access to the tarmac. It would be an all-out struggle on our part to bludgeon with pure unrestrained force through the gate, not letting anything or man stand in our way of reaching the target. I was something that transpired before our guns had to be employed in that manner however that turned things in our favor, or maybe not, in

reality! From the pages that come after, the reader will have to decide if we are considered lucky or not!

At that exact moment, a Pakistan International Airways semi-van which transported airhostesses and pilots just barely had passed through, cleared by the ASF to proceed onto the tarmac. This was exactly the opportunity I was looking for. "Comrades, be prepared if they try to stop us or make any sudden, suspicious movements" I spoke coolly as my foot hit the pedal to accelerate, hoping to rush through the gate before it could be slammed shut again. I believe my quick thinking actually took them by surprise, not expecting this accelerating van swiftly approaching the checkpoint. The ASF officer manning the gate was frozen with indecision, knowing that if he attempted to close the gate it might be an accident on his hands, the van hurtling through the checkpoint gate. I certainly believe that the shiny ASF stickers adorning the exterior of the van helped to convince the officers not to try to prevent us from gaining entry to the tarmac. It was the smoothest possible outcome!

I peered back in the rear-view mirror and saw one of the ASF officers with a confused look on his face, almost like he didn't understand what just happened, but none of the officers attempted to stop or have someone try to interdict us on the tarmac. "Perfect!" my friend shouted in the passenger seat, slapping me on the shoulder. "Now keep your eyes open for the Pan Am" I replied back to him, trying to instill in him that the mission was now just getting ramped up. Keeping my adrenaline rush in check, I made

sure to concentrate on slowing my breathing, as I consciously slowed down the van. Groups of tarmac crew members were milling all around, working on airplane parts and driving what looked like some form of fuel trucks, which were utilized to fill up the planes with jet fuel before taking off on their next destination. We spotted a collection of a few planes scattered around before finally finding the Pan Am flight 73.

"There it is, right there" I pointed through the window towards the large jetliner parked a distance directly in front of us. As hoped, and planned, both sets of stairs were both positioned at their respective spots, one for the first class passengers and the other for economy. "Listen, I'm going to pull between both stairs; you two in the back, go to the right. I'm going for the set of stairs to the left of us" I quickly instructed the team as a whole. "Check your gear, and make sure all your weapons are in order...if the officers near the stairs give one bit of resistance, shoot them with no hesitation!" All the members' eyes were transfixed on me; I believe they had never seen me more deadly serious and determined than in that single moment. To demonstrate my point, I lifted my Kalashnikov and racked back the charging handle, the snapping of the metal receiver ringing throughout the van. "Let's go!" The words seemed like they had been journeying for an eternity to reach this single point in time. There was only room for action now.

Nearly simultaneously, both sides of the van were open, the doors flung with extra force, my foot kicking the door wide open after pulling the handle up. I seemed to emerge from the van in one motion, my arms

raising with the AK-47 almost robotically, with no forethought. I, along with my teammate, was making a beeline for the passenger stairs. Right in front was one of the assigned ASF officers. Later, I came to find out that the airport would only exclusively assign this kind of special security to Pan Am jets, because this period of time was one of increased targeting of American interests all over the globe. The ASF's job was to remain with the planes until they took off.

This day however they were put to the test. The ASF officer seemed to be frozen; he appeared to smile at us at first, thinking we are fellow security men but he was quickly snapped out of his hypnotic state the moment he realized my rifles barrel was aiming directly at his face. My finger started to put pressure on the cold, steel trigger, hearing a slight click from the small metal part moving back, ready to explode a stream of bullets at any target I chose to eradicate. The officer's smile evaporated and with his eyes widening in fright, he turned on his heels and fled in the opposite direction. He ran in a crouched fashion, like his slouched position would prevent his back from being shredded by a hail of machine gun rounds, if I so elected to do so. We weren't here for that.

Some passengers were actually ascending the mobile staircases, and I heard the screech of a woman as she saw my comrades and I begin to climb the steps, weapons clearly visible and threatening. All I was aiming for was the open aircraft door, the last, final obstacle to boarding and controlling the aircraft. As I approached the very last of

the upper steps, an airhostess peered through the opening, and was scared to death instantly the instance she saw my rifle aiming straight ahead. She tried to grab the door to somehow shut us out but I pushed her and her hand aside. "Close the door!" I shouted to my comrade behind me as I restrained and controlled the airhostess, my strong grip overpowering her. This was actually slowing us down because now our immediate concern was gaining access to the cockpit. At first it appeared as if we could take our time to reach the pilot, believing there is no way to leave the plane after closing and locking the access doors.

I'm not sure if we can say this was lucky or unlucky for us! As we worked to control and calm all the passengers, the pilot escaped through a small access hatch on the roof of the cabin, along with his co-pilot. Our plan was to get him to take off and get into the air; who knows, maybe I would have changed my mind about the mission and landed somewhere, and taken safely into custody. So now we are stranded with 300 passengers on the tarmac!

"Abbas! The pilot...he's gone, he escaped!" one of the team shouted to me from the front of the plane. I had sent him forward to specifically find the pilot. Surprise overcame me for a moment because now I really had to think fast and formulate a new strategy for this unexpected roadblock. One of the loyal airhostesses must have informed the pilot that a hijacking was transpiring at that exact moment.

It's been nearly 30 years since this event occurred and I still reflect upon whether the pilot made the correct decision or not to

escape the plane, leaving behind his personal responsibility, the passengers, to suffer whatever was about to unfold on the aircraft. All this was done on his part just to save his life. I believe that despite what we were intending to do that day, the pilot is the last one who should depart from the plane.

My eyes were scanning across the crowd of seated, panicked passengers arrayed before me. "Everyone, stay perfectly calm, and listen to everything we say...if you do so, there will be no problems" I shouted over the crying of some children and the sobs of frightened women. "Abbas...what are we going to do now?!" one of my comrades whispered closely into one of my ears. Due to the pilots bold escape, we were now all stranded on the tarmac of the Karachi International Airport. This was one scenario, of all the scenarios that were flashing through my mind for weeks, that I did not even think about or even fathom. It was very confusing for us and threw us totally off balance. We weren't even prepared to issue any demands in regards to our reason for taking the plane in the first place. I had to make sure to keep the rest of the team from panicking and at the same time controlling the throngs of agitated passengers as well.

I grabbed one of my friends by the arm, pulling him close. "Look, find an airhostess and tell her to establish contact with the air control tower...we need to do our best to get another pilot here." My plan was to somehow get Pan Am 73 off the ground, out of the trap of the tarmac. I directed the other two with me to watch over the passengers before heading off to the cockpit to work in establishing communication with the airport

authorities. The task at hand was difficult to say the least because of the language barrier; the only shared language between us, the airhostess and the control tower was English, which I hardly had any fluency in whatsoever. Much of the time I was resorting to sign language and hand signals to get across what I was trying to say.

Tragically it was within the confines of this first hour, amidst the confusion and panic, that one of the passengers was gunned down. I reiterate that there is no need for me to pause on this sad story and seek to give any of my rationale behind what transpired. I'm leaving no room for myself to give a hint of excuses. This young man was unfortunately at the wrong place at the wrong time. I can't even recall his name but what is more sacred than that was his innocence, a pure victim. We happened to be from two totally divergent parts of the world, in two totally different circumstances and environments, raised in completely different atmospheres. Our diverse existences were expressed physically by the massive ocean that separated us until destiny and fate brought us together in one single place, at one single moment, in this short, fleeting life. All praise belongs to the Almighty, the most Merciful, the most Forgiving.

After this truly lamentable event, the rest of this mournful day was spent talking back and forth between the control tower, trying to negotiate the return of the pilot or another pilot. Truly, within my heart of hearts, I felt once the pilot escaped, there was no way the authorities would send him back or any alternative pilot. I even began to try to convince them during the taxing

negotiations that we are wishing to fly to Cyprus to secure the freedom of many of our friends and comrades who are imprisoned there for political reasons. Truthfully, this was a false story that I concocted as the negotiating went along to try to somehow get us in the air and flying. I was also aiming to try to calm and relax the passengers as much as possible, who I know were extremely frightened and anxious with the whole situation. Being cramped and sedentary for long periods of time in a hot passenger jet cabin is a very uncomfortable condition to find oneself in, much less with 300 other people.

I completely and whole heartedly understand that every single passenger on Pan Am 73 was innocent and free from guilt in regards to the whole geo-political situation regarding Palestine, Israel and the West. Our intentions were not aimed in their direction whatsoever. I especially and strongly feel this way in particular about the women and children, who are totally absolved of any complicity in the current affairs at the time. Personally, I have always believed that whoever intentionally harms solely women and children is a coward and simply cannot be a man. During the whole hijacking I was constantly thinking about and contemplating releasing all the women, elderly and children but really the whole set of circumstances was covered with confusion, chaos and uncertainty. I also calculated that any contingent of commandos, whether Pakistani or American, would not embark on a fatally risky rescue attempt with a plane packed with hundreds of passengers, amongst them women and children. Until a solution was reached in

regards to this dilemma, it was more beneficial to keep the passengers on the plane to help speed up a resolution.

For the early morning until the very completion of this whole tragedy, these terrible hours were filled with our interaction with the flight attendants. They were involved a great deal, assisting us in numerous ways along with the passengers. They really did an important job helping to serve everyone and try to keep the multitude of people on the plane somewhat comfortable, and calming them with reassurances.

At this important moment in this whole episode, I want to highlight two airhostesses among the collection of hostesses on Pan Am 73 that day. They were two very different ladies, in every way and in everything they did. And because of that fact I still remember them so lucidly even after so much passage of time.

This first airhostess who I am so intimately aware of called herself 'Sunshine'. I can personally say that from the beginning of the hijacking, I can perceive there is something wrong and unusual with this young woman! From the way she even talks to how she moves and walks; I definitely could see that she desires to be the whole center of attention, strutting herself into the middle of everything and every activity on the plane. If she had the authority she would have placed herself as the head above all the other airhostesses; sometimes it even seemed like she would bully some of them from time to time, trying to assert herself over them.

Many times she was present, helping me establish contact with the tower. It was

during these moments when we would be more isolated and alone, she began to slightly try to seduce me, revealing to me her legs and parts of her upper thighs, putting on a show of pretending to want to display a scar she received as the result of a motorcycle accident. This was followed by other forms of sexual gestures, and to be honest I almost succumbed to her seductions due to my youth but this was definitely not the right time or place!

I can't help but to smile to myself when I reflect upon these events. I can certainly sympathize with and understand her motives and intentions behind why she was behaving in this way. She most likely believed she was in danger and that I was specifically intending on harming her (which I was not), and that by seducing me she would be able to avoid any harm on my part. It would be years later, and across oceans, when this same lady would speak, to my absolute surprise, about the virtues of honesty, morality and ethics. This sometimes occurred on these many occasions in an improper fashion. This all just makes me smile to myself, murmuring "Wow, look who's talking?!" I've held a strong conviction all my life that any kind of woman who behaves so cheaply has not a single right for one moment to lecture or even speak about ethics or any form of morality!

On the other end of the spectrum, there was a completely different airhostess. To this day I still don't recall her name but I certainly remember her as a person very well despite all these years. Even though her name remains a mystery to me, we will call her 'Butterfly'. She was so elegant in the way she even moved and carried herself; she was

selfless in the manner that she cared for all the passengers. She was even very cordial and accommodating to me and my other comrades despite what was taking place on the airliner that September day. There always was a sweet, beautiful smile adorning her face. It's like I can see her at this very moment moving down the aisle, calming a small child before moving to an elderly man to help him sip from a bottle of water to stave off the insistent Karachi humidity.

This is why I was personally devastated when I discovered some days later after the whole hijacking ordeal that she was amongst those who lost their lives that day. This beautiful angel, who was away from heaven for a time, returned back to where she belonged, but much before her due time. She was so young and like a delicacy in her sweetness. This only forces me to ponder upon the mysteries of life, and why, during such tragedies, that it seems the good amongst us are always taken away, leaving behind the seemingly unworthy.

All of this revisiting so vividly brings to mind a story, which I had come across years ago in all my avid reading while in prison. I discovered it reading the work of a Russian writer who had written a story based in the monumental events of the Second World War. I'm narrating it from memory so I hope to express it as accurately as possible.

The epic was based on the scene of a Russian warship, which was plying the waves, protecting the borders of the Soviet Union as it hunted German submarines. The whole ship crew was tight-knit, but it was stalked by the presence of a terribly mean and tyrannical naval commander, who was the bane of the entire collection of sailors upon the

vessel. To the contrary, there was a deputy under him who was beloved by the shipmates, from the cannon-gunners to the cooks. He was so accommodating and understanding with all the sailors, who made them feel like he was just like one of them, a soldier and dedicated combatant who could lose his life right along with them in this brutal war of titans between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. His manners were impeccable, never wishing for one moment to lord himself above his subordinates.

While this Soviet battleship was engaged in its faithful duty, it found itself locked in deadly combat with a German destroyer, trading volleys of cannon fire across the open waves. Bright yellow tracer rounds of anti-aircraft guns lit up the gloomy surroundings as both sides trained them on their adversaries' hulls and decks in a bid to wipe out as much of the enemy as possible before breaking contact.

Eventually the battle subsided, with no clear victor, as both sides took heavy casualties in the fiery skirmish. This was the moments where the sailors began the grim duty of collecting the dead and tending to the wounded. It was in this harvest of corpses that the crewmen discovered the body of their beloved superior, his remains bloody and soiled by the whistling shrapnel that had exploded around them from the German anti-aircraft batteries. His cheerful face was now lifeless and devoid of the radiant glow that had met each and every sailor upon their first waking moments on that loyal ship of Mother Russia.

In stark contrast, the naval commander who was so loathed by his entire crew remained

alive and untouched, without a single scratch etched across his pale skin. It appeared as if he spent the entire engagement hunkered down in the depths of the ship, cowering from injury and the likelihood of sudden death. To the astonishment of the sailors, this whole turn of events filled them with a mixture of seething rage and tears of sadness. The entire atmosphere on the ship was covered in a fog of depression and the sailors were completely demoralized. They all seemed lost in deep reflection, seeking some form of understanding and guidance in this time of confusion and seemingly unexplainable occurrences, that appeared to rob their whole existence of justice, leaving them grasping for an explanation to why things exactly happen the way they do.

One dutiful sailor couldn't restraint himself any longer, the mental questions running through his mind needing to be expressed, to be voiced, and to find some wisdom in the midst of such heart-break. He stood, addressing an older officer, a veteran of many battles, who had witnessed the grim realities of war for far too long. Of all people he must have an answer to the mysteries of life, to the tragedies that stretch out their wicked hands to snatch away the best and most undeserving of us in the blink of an eye. "Respected sir, comrade, I feel obliged on behalf of every one of us present to ask you a question which burns in the depths of my soul." The aged Soviet sailor, who stood, head downcast, contemplating silently the damaged bodies of his compatriots laid out before him, looked up slowly to gaze at the young sailor who now addressed him. "Tell me, tell us all, why is it that in the aftermath

of such calamities, the good amongst us are gone forever, taken from us, and the worst survive and are left to live another day?"

The veteran pondered for a while as the young sailors gathered on the deck waiting in expectation for his answer. Before speaking he looked the young man in the eyes and spoke in a slow, measured tone. The words he was about to utter were at once simple yet powerful in depth and meaning.

"My son, when a ship is sunk, it's most valuable content, its gold, gems, diamonds and extravagant jewelry, sinks with it, traveling like a trusted companion with the ship to the very bottom of the sea to remain there forever. Because of its quality, its weight, all those valuables must inevitably hasten on to its destination. While on the other hand, the worthless debris and scum, it always floats up to the surface, escaping the fate of treasures."

This is exactly the parable to express what happened with that majestic Butterfly and Sunshine.

At the end of this day, this long, terrible day, I was completely fatigued and exhausted. I was on the verge of collapse at any minute, from no rest or relaxation for hours on end, standing guard on my feet the entire hijacking. I know my comrades must have been feeling the same, our whole bodies wracked with extreme tension, our thoughts filled with anxiety. There was no way to find rest or proper sleep. It definitely didn't help that I had gotten drunk the night before, my whole head groggy from the effects of a horrible hangover. We had reached the point that rest would only transpire by either our

death or capture, with no middle-ground in between.

While the hijacking was being dragged out on the tarmac of Karachi International Airport, the American government and military were instructing their Pakistani counterparts to continue to engage us and keep us occupied in negotiations for as long as possible. This was requested in order to allow the American Special Forces time to mobilize at their base in Germany, which was strategically located there to reach and intervene in other locations in Europe and the Middle East. This elite detachment of commandos was known as 'Delta Force'.

But unfortunately for everyone involved on Pan Am flight 73, the Pakistani authorities were not willing to wait and wished to try their hand at storming the plane in a reckless fashion. I believe tactically this was a fatal mistake on their part for all those stranded on the aircraft. I really had sensed this for hours, almost from the moment after they informed me a pilot was not coming back to the airplane. This drove home the point for me that the Pakistanis were plotting something, like a raid on the aircraft; they were just using the auspices of the negotiations to bid their time in concocting their plans. In the back of my mind I was hoping against hope that maybe somehow a resolution could be reached that could end the whole siege and hijacking peacefully, and then we would end up in prison for ten years or so. Deep down I was actually desiring this, then being able to escape the Abu Nidal Organization legitimately. I knew in my heart of hearts that the organization was in a state of near collapse, and it was only a few more

years after the hijacking that it really happened. It was either caught up in the ensuing chaos or murdered by the organizations assassins; alive and in prison was far a better alternative!

I also wished that my young friends would somehow, some way, be able to survive this whole catastrophe. They were innocent in my eyes like the passengers; caught up in a revolutionary spirit as young teens, raised in an environment that fostered and encouraged sacrifice and fighting for their usurped homeland. Maybe they would be able to escape the clutches of the organization and strive for Palestine in a more productive, beneficial way. However, the above mentioned sentiments were of no consequence to the Pakistani authorities, and there was no patience on their part to wait for Delta Force.

Night was now upon us, the sun meeting its proverbial demise, dipping below the horizon. As darkness began to bathe our whole surroundings outside the plane in utter blackness, I told my comrades to try to be extra vigilant. "Brothers, if the Pakistanis try anything, it will be in these next hours...they might try to use the night to assault the plane..." I lectured to them silently after gathering them at the front of the aircraft, just outside the cockpit. Every single light spread across the tarmac was shut off, and even the interior of the control tower was pitch black. It's like the whole tarmac was being prepared as a complete theater of military operations. Even every single plane and vehicle had been cleared from the runways, leaving Pan Am 73 the lone, solitary aircraft upon the entire tarmac.

The energy in the cabin was charged with nervousness and complete uncertainty. I know that everyone's thoughts were occupied with just exactly how all of this would conclude. The zero visibility outside was a very ominous omen to what lay ahead. Suddenly, as if on cue, the lights on the plane began to dim, almost being cut, along with the air-conditioning. Was the plane out of fuel? I had no idea. Some women let out shrieks of panic from the abrupt change in lighting, not comprehending what exactly is going on. Simultaneously, as the lighting in the entire aircraft dimmed, the pilot's cockpit's light increased in intensity. There was an aircraft engineer who was on the plane with us and I asked him what was happening. "It's the emergency system of the plane; when things on the plane are losing power, more electricity is diverted to the cockpit to help the pilot to continue to navigate the aircraft."

It all was extremely suspicious and my comrades were all looking to me for guidance in these unexpected turn of events. I motioned to them to just keep on the lookout.

At exactly 9:30 PM, an airhostess got my attention, informing me the air-control tower was calling the cockpit, requesting that I come speak with them. I was soon about to discover that this was all a devious ploy on their part. Due to the extreme brightness of the cockpit and the darkness blanketing the outside, they were luring me to the cockpit to attempt to kill me with a sniper. In their sheer stupidity, they actually attempted to carry out their ambush with barely a minute of me entering the cockpit. Almost instantly with my first attempt to key up the radio to communicate with the tower, the cockpit glass

cracked, multiple fractures in the window spider-ing across the surface. There was not even the loud report of a rifle; it must have been a silenced weapon. By divine providence, the shot was deflected by the glass, the bullet not even passing near my head. It was an extremely dangerous move on their part because they took the treacherous shot with an airhostess and engineer right in front of me! Obviously the Pakistanis perceived their own citizens as clearly expendable in their efforts to kill me.

This of course was the point of no return. Their move drove me instantly crazy, enraging my notorious temper that I suffered with since childhood. What they attempted was completely unnecessary and unwarranted. If there was any hope of surrender before then, it was totally unthinkable and beyond the realm of possibilities now. This is the moment that pure chaos was about to erupt like a raging volcano that had been building up pressure for hours, but in reality, this volcano was years in the making, even before my own inception. It was the molten of Balfour, the war of 1948, the usurpation of '67, the fragmentation of the Palestinian people across the Middle

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East and the world. These seminal events gave birth to that tragic day of September, 5, 1986. This is no excuse, but rather recognition of the consequences of history, a history filled with stolen rights, oppression, terrorism, torture and massacres. It was the murdered citizens of Deir Yassin, screaming from the depths of their rocky graves, whose shouts now echoed and rippled through time, shattering the peace of far off

places like Karachi, like so many other places and locations. Our Palestine was engulfed in a proverbial hurricane, and Pan Am 73 was a victim of the storm, caught up in events much greater than its own, much greater than all of us.

The blast of machine gun fire and grenades shattered the silence of the aircraft, and within minutes the Pakistani commandos were storming the plane, their gunfire adding to the building crescendo of bullets and shrapnel flying through the aircraft cabin. At the conclusion of this terrible, unfortunate tragedy, passengers were killed and many more wounded, including my own self, almost to the point of near death. I remember the blood pouring from my body, at points, flowing out of my wounds like a grotesque fountain. I could barely move, just listening to the commandos making their way through the aircraft, random shots ringing out through the interior. Were they shooting my friends or the passengers? I had no idea but it didn't sound like gunfire was being exchanged, it just sounded one way with no response and counter-response.

I could hardly breathe, straining to even remain conscious. I felt my whole body covered in wetness, from the plasma leaking from my wounds, cut through me by AK bullets and grenade shrapnel. I heard the course shouts of Urdu wafting through the plane. Before I knew what was even happening, a Pakistani commando crept over top of me, squarely placing the tip of his Kalashnikov barrel against my forehead. I could hardly even talk, the only sound coming from my lips were groans of excruciating pain. My own AK-47 was still slung across my bare-chest atop

the explosives belt, and the commando could definitely see I was not a normal passenger. What prevented him from squeezing the trigger at that second, I still will never know; he could have easily killed me, with no accountability and no questions asked.

He slowly and methodically lifted my assault rifle off my body, using one hand to grasp the gun's sling, keeping his finger on the trigger at every second. Soon, more hands were being placed on my body, at every single slight movement of my bloodied frame, pain flashed through my body like I was being hit with a bolt of fiery lightening. I could only manage groans of tortured pain, the shock wearing off to be replaced by pure agony. I was placed on a hand-held stretcher and carted off the plane, my consciousness fading in and out until I was fully unconscious as I was transported to the hospital. I would remain at this military hospital for nearly two months, receiving the best possible care probably available in the whole of Pakistan. After that time passed, and I was declared fit to be discharged from the hospital, I was escorted shackled and chained by military soldiers and police to be transported to my interrogation. This happened in the dead of night, at about midnight. Some officers, appearing to be of high rank because of the different insignia adorning their uniforms, marched into my room to deliver the news of my relocations, and they were there to retrieve me.

Most obviously, they did not inform me one bit of where they were taking me, due to security precautions and strict operation procedures. This was a high-profile event and they were making a show of every second of

it. When all the hospital staff and guards were made aware of the news, they formed a line at the foot of my bed, taking their turns to come shake my hand, one by one, wishing me the best of luck as I embarked on my journey into the unknown. They all had become so intimately aware of my situation and familiar with me, nursing me back to health from the brink of death. When I finally gained consciousness, the guards, adorned with their weapons, would pull a chair close to my hospital bed, and help me take my own seat and play me in chess or a variety of card games. They were helping me pass the time, and every single one of them was very sympathetic to my plight. My God bless all of them.

I was now departing from their company, handed over to a cadre of special forces soldiers assigned specifically with the task of escorting me to my unknown destination. I could feel the nervous uncertainty setting in as the tight handcuffs and shackles were placed on my wrists and ankles, linked together with brand-new, sturdy chains. To complete their extra security measures, they fastened a blindfold around my head, covering my vision completely. This only heightened my sense of nervous anxiety.

All I could do now was obey their physical cues of pushes and prods in one direction or another. I really just had to walk as they gripped my arms like vises, escorting me to what sounded like a convoy of revved-up military vehicles, the smell of their exhaust fumes filling up my nose, the cheap diesel recognizable to my senses. I was pulled up into what appeared to be the back of an open lorry and fastened to a wooden bench with even

more chains attached to my ankle shackles. I was then transported to what I later learned was a military airport. The whirring of plane propellers had certainly made me aware that an aircraft was going to be part of my journey and before I knew it I was feeling that unmistakable sensation of taking off from the runway and flying through the air. I was being transported further north, to Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan.

Islamabad as a city was far more modern and up-to-date than Karachi, and it's clean, quiet atmosphere and scenery—once the blindfold came off—was a great relief to my low, wounded spirits. Even though I was in a horrible predicament, my energy and morale received a boost when I arrived there. The whole purpose of my transfer to Islamabad was so that I could be transferred into the custody of the notorious ISI, the

Inter-Services-Intelligence agency, which was basically the equivalent of the CIA for Pakistan. They hold huge power and influence in the country and were very well organized, with a massive budget and access to untold resources. As soon as I came into their custody I could sense I was dealing with a different caliber of people than what I was used to.

After passing through the entrance of their quarters in Islamabad, I was placed in a plain holding cell, devoid of any amenities except a simple mattress on the floor accompanied by a couple cheap blankets. As soon as I entered that cell, I was perpetually chained to one of the bars of the door, with just enough slack to move around slightly back and forth from my bed to the door to receive food and drink. To use the bathroom

I would have to request for it, as it was down the hall; however, I would never be able to use the toilet without being shackled and blindfolded!

I can say that my time with the ISI was not a bad one, because they treated me very well, and were respectful. They made every effort to feed me decent food, and made sure that the medical staff had easy access to me at all times. At that point my wounds were not totally healed and I needed to make sure that the healing process went as well as humanly possible. Due to the investigation, the ISI wanted to guarantee that I healed

100% because they needed as much information as possible out of me as they could get.

During this whole period of time, I still had no confirmation on the status of my friends. That last time I saw them was on Pan Am 73, and I was wounded before I saw what happened to them after the hijacking. I was constantly asking the investigators if they had been killed, arrested, or did they survive to escape? But they wouldn't tell me one single word about their status.

In fact, the only one I had any knowledge about, who was involved in the operation, was Al-Turk. I knew he had been arrested not too many days after the Pan Am operation. Unfortunately, it was totally his fault and his own misjudgments that led to his incarceration. He would pay dearly for not fleeing the country sooner than he actually did. He had ample time and opportunity to have crossed the border north into Afghanistan or head east into Iran. He mistakenly believed that his fake Libyan passport would have provided him a well enough cover to remain in

the country, but this turned out not to be the case. As he attempted to fly out of Pakistan, he was apprehended.

I can admit that from the first hours of this incident I was thinking about my family, fretting over how exactly they would handle and cope with the news of the hijacking and my involvement. I was tortured over the thought of them running across my picture in the newspaper, which it must have been splashed across the pages of so many Arabic daily's, maybe for days on end. And even worse, pictures of me wounded and bloodied splayed across the ground, hanging onto dear life. I know they would have absolutely gone crazy seeing images like that. I came to know later that one of my uncles had actually found some of my photos in the papers but made every effort to conceal them from my parents at all costs.

Surprisingly, as I endured the interrogations, I came to understand that the ISI had a considerable amount of information and details about the ANO that was not common or public knowledge. Mind you, these rounds upon rounds of questioning were going on day and night, but I made my best effort to study and observe them just as much as they did of me. I was logging in my mind all the specific details they were mentioning and soon the pictures became crystal clear in mind.

The Pakistanis themselves had little contact or experience with the organization. It became increasingly obvious to me that not only were they being feed information by third parties but that some of the questions themselves appeared to be emanating from foreign entities like the CIA, Jordanian GID, Mossad, and even the intelligence apparatus

of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the PLO. Most certainly were they not only offering their assistance and expertise to the Pakistanis but also fishing for more information of intelligence value. I definitely believe Mossad in particular was requesting that the Americans and Jordanians ask me questions on their behalf, to put a buffer between themselves and the ISI, as they might not be willing to cooperate as much with the Israelis. So we can see that it was a complete, total cooperation between one axis of evil to combat against another evil, Abu Nidal, as we were only mere pawns on the chessboard that was this treacherous war that spanned across the globe.

Their trust of each other did not extend so far however because the Pakistanis roundly refused to allow any foreign intelligence agencies to even see me much less question me personally or any of my comrades. But as I mentioned, they, the Pakistanis, were busied with the queries of the Israelis and Americans. Whenever I detected a hint of any foreign hand in the questions, I would flatly refuse to answer anyone of them, no matter how seemingly simple or mundane. It was fairly easy to detect these questions, for two primary reasons. One as that the specific information enquired into was a deadgive away. For instance, they would pull out some aerial photographs, clearly taken from a spy satellite, of what appeared to be training camps in Lebanon, and begin to ask a series of questions about the sites. Obviously this is the work of Israel or possibly a joint Mossad-CIA spy operation!

Secondly, the Pakistanis themselves were only fixated on two issues that were totally

domestic and beyond the sphere of the conflicts in the Middle East. Their primary concern was figuring out if we had any support of help from any of their own citizens inside Pakistan. In particular they wanted to know if we shared any connection with the 'Zulfikar Bhutto' organization, which was opposed to, and carried out attacks against, the ruling military junta in Pakistan. They also wanted to make sure we were not somehow sent by India, Pakistan's arch-enemy, to attack and damage their interests. Any questions outside of this would immediately raise my suspicions as to who is the source!

In the end, the ISI realized that as foot soldiers, our intelligence value only went so far. These long, intensive interrogations, sometimes by high-ranking operatives in that agency, were beginning to be concluded in about two months' time. There can only be so much of 'where did you get the weapons?' and 'where did you rent the van from?' before the questioning begins to become very redundant!

Finally, our first day in court arrived. I remember it clearly; it was a Sunday, with a cold chill cooling the air despite the bright morning sun filling up the horizon. I was escorted to a bathroom that included a shower, and I was instructed to prepare myself and get freshened up. So I took a refreshing hot shower, shaved and changed into some fresh clothes that the ISI provided. After, the last breakfast was shared with the interrogators in their local Islamabad quarters. I remember the excellent sugary sweet tea, mixed with buffalo milk and the fried eggs with several slices of thick buttered toast. It was a finely filling and

proper breakfast that was a mark of the quality treatment we received from the ISI.

With the meal concluded we were prepared for our trip to the court, being cuffed and shackled, with the final touch of the blindfold, like a cursed crown, placed over my head and eyes. My friends and I, still strictly separated, were packed into a heavily guarded convoy and driven to an Islamabad suburb that was the locale of the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court. There, we were to go before the most powerful judge in the entire judicial system, the Chief Justice. You would think that he would be a stern, strict, no-nonsense man, but he really had a likable demeanor and was very kind, who could empathize with us and our unique situation. He was so understanding that even after his retirement, years later, he would send us messages of his greetings and regards through various lawyers. Things like this truly demonstrate that the Pakistani people in general are extremely sympathetic towards the plight and struggle of the Palestinian people.

Even the Inter-Services-Intelligence, that most feared agency, who would sometimes use rough interrogation tactics with us, like shouting and tough language, would tell us that this is just our job to treat you like this; in reality, we are all very sympathetic towards you and Palestine as a whole! It goes to demonstrate that despite the personal feelings and opinions of the individuals, when an overriding government policy is in place, it trumps what anybody feels or wishes they could do and the policy must be enacted and enforced.

Immediately after feeling the motion of the moving vehicle come to an abrupt stop, I was hastily pulled from the vehicle and ushered into court. My blind fold was removed as I was just barely stepping through the ornate front door after ascending some large steps. I was astonished by the amount of police and the massive amounts of weapons that they carried. I wouldn't have been surprised if I saw someone armed with a rocket launcher! It was plainly obvious that they not only considered us high-profile but also extremely dangerous.

This would be the first time I got a glimpse of my friends since the hijacking. Their status, whether alive or dead, still a strictly guarded secret and mystery due to the silence of the interrogators on the subject. The police even continued to keep us segregated from each other, bringing us before the Chief Justice one at a time.

It was a quick, rushed appearance before the judge in which he was issuing a court order to have us relocated from the ISI custody to a formal prison to await our trial. This was ordered after the ISI officers testified to the fact that their interrogation of us was now thoroughly concluded and complete. At the moment the order came down from the Chief Justice, the blindfolds were once again shrouded over our faces, moving us back in to the dark realm of our uncertain fate. It was now our time to occupy a brand new prison that had recently been constructed, riding in our heavily-guarded convoy in

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that direction. The date was exactly January 4, 1987.

Chapter 7

My Tumultuous Life in Pakistani Prison "We only learn wisdom through suffering"

Rawalpindi was the location of our new 'home', a recently constructed, state-of-the-art prison, especially by Pakistani standards. The city of Rawalpindi is not far from the capital, so the ride in the convoy did not last for too long. After the normal routine of being shackled, handcuffed and blinded, into the prison compound, I was pleasantly surprised to find the interior of the prison to be super-clean, and virtually untouched. We were amongst the very first batch of prisoners to enter the prison. We were given the title of Ifftitah- 'The Openers'; basically the ones who opened and premiered the prison !

The sparkling clean interior was in stark contrast to how we were treated in that prison in the first couple years of our incarceration there. For us it was like a real living hell and nightmare. From the beginning, we were all isolated from each other 24/7, even though we were all housed in the same exact unit, in the same hallway. The problem was that we were each in our own individual cells, preventing us from even seeing each other but this didn't prevent us from speaking, which was a relief in and of itself. We were very constricted however because they would not let us leave the cells, not even for simple exercise. It was as complete lockdown, day and night.

On top of all this lack of movement, there was something even more punishing and restrictive. It was a kind of shackle that attached to the ankles, called a bar-fetter'. It was like two regular shackles but they were attached to the feet by two incredibly strong metal bars that arched up in a triangular shape towards our waist and held together by a strong steel ring at the tip of where the two metal bars met. They were fitted on our ankles by an especially skilled blacksmith, who not only attached them to our ankles but was required to one day break us free of them whenever the authorities so wished and desired, because of the unique tools destined to snap the metal apart.

Really it was like something medieval, straight out of the pages of the Inquisition, a tool of pure suffering and extreme annoyance. Sometime late, I came to learn that it was the British, in their quest of occupations and brutal colonialism, who introduced these fetters of submission to the Indian subcontinent to perfect their enslavement of the people in this region of the world!

The bar-fetters were on our ankles all day, and all night, from very waking moment until the second we fell asleep and still we are taking them with us even to our dreams! They are on our feet pacing the cell, showering and even when using the bathroom. It was like they had become another appendage of our body! These bars remained attached to our ankles for a whole two years. To this very day there are scars on my ankles due to the metal shackles grating against and gnawing on the skin. At this moment, in all my years of incarceration I have not experienced

something quite like that metal contraption of misery!

Another layer of frustration that blanketed our already dire circumstances was the vast language barrier that existed between us and the prison staff, whoever they were, from guards to the warden. It was very difficult to communicate because we did not understand the Urdu and Punjabi languages that they spoke. Years had to pass before we finally and fully grasped the language until we achieved conversational fluency. It might have helped that the Urdu alphabet was originally taken from Arabic script, so this might have aided us in learning how to read because the letters looked familiar and thus easier to memorize.

Some other factors that added to this horrible predicament was the absolute drab and dull diet they served us. It was beans, unflavored with no spices whatsoever, and only two times a day, lunch and dinner. It really did not take long to get sick of this food entirely. You could imagine how our stomachs felt eating beans every single day!

Now consider the extreme boredom that filled our days. We had not a single book, newspaper or magazine. There was a total blackout imposed upon us, our link to the outside world totally and completely severed, with no radio and no television. How we passed the time without something constructive to occupy our minds, I will never know. It really was a form of psychological torment.

The only real, true relief in all this deprivation and physical annoyances was the fact that we were now all finally united and able to speak with each other. The ability to communicate back and forth was a real life-

saver and something that helped our very sanity and mental health. You have to remember that before I saw them in court, I had no idea if they were alive or dead. Knowing they were still alive and breathing was a huge relief for me and it assuaged some of the guilt I had in my mind over bringing them along on this deadly mission. I guess now I had a new form of guilt to supplant that, knowing they are now incarcerated for who knows how long. I can say that it was good for them in one way and that was being free from the mental imprisonment of the organization and it almost guaranteed death or even outright murder!

We were all talking and enjoying each other's verbal company constantly. We even aided each other in learning the language, sharing ideas with one another about what exactly this Urdu phrase might mean or indicate. We were learning from the first day, our vocabulary growing with each passing week. This kind of cerebral stimulation helped stave off the miserable fact that we were not allowed any correspondence with the outside world whatsoever, not our families and certainly not with the organization. They would only know about our ultimate fate through media reports and news briefs. It would be months upon months before I would actually touch and hold a letter from my dear family.

These first six months were a tumultuous mixture of hunger, cold, uncertainty, anxiety and near total isolation. I didn't even take a proper shower for at least the first three months due to the extremely low temperatures and total absence of hot water inside our cells, which also lacked heating! We had one

another, but we all felt that we cannot continue in this fashion forever. We had and needed some form of relief from this mental and physical blockade that was imposed upon our minds and senses. We needed to take some kind of proactive steps to alter and improve our living conditions, our knowledge of outside events and also secure some form of legal representation. It was like we were existing in a black-hole, both communication wise and legally.

So our whole situation was very bizarre. For the most part the Pakistani people are very sympathetic towards us, especially considering the fact the vast majority of the people are Muslim, so they feel a connection to the issue of the Palestinians and Jerusalem. This would manifest itself in the way that some Pakistani prisoners in the same wing of the prison would smuggle food to us and sometimes reading material like outdated newspapers and magazines whenever they were able. But truthfully, this was not enough. We wanted these kinds of things on a consistent, regular basis for us; basically demanding it as more than a privilege but as a right!

We were demanding regular hot showers, and some time out of the cells for exercise and recreation, especially to get some exposure to the sun and fresh, natural air. We also wanted the bar-fetters taken off of us permanently, and to have proper access to legal counsel, to help defend ourselves in court.

But how could we secure these things, being the helpless prisoners that we were? There was only one real weapon in our possession and that was our ability to initiate a hunger strike until our demands

were fulfilled. This was the only way to combat the severe maltreatment that we were being subjected to. In fact, this first hunger strike was just the beginning in a continuing series of strikes that would go on and off for months from this point. The whole objective was to draw attention to the brutal and inhumane conditions we were being subjected to from the moment we stepped foot in that prison. Some of these hunger strikes would carry on for two months straight, which could be very dangerous; there is no force-feeding instituted in Pakistani prisons and they have no feeding-tubes with liquid nutrients or soluble vitamins, minerals or protein supplements. Many times we came close to the precipice of death itself! But before that crucial point we would always come to some form of resolution with the prison authorities to improve our conditions in some way or another.

The agreements we reached with them were not totally sufficient to address everything we were asking for. The warden himself was understanding of our plight and could empathize with us on several levels. He was a former captain in the Pakistani Army and knew about the pain of imprisonment; he was a prisoner of war in the hands of India during one of their military confrontations. The problem was that the military dictatorship was putting increasing amounts of pressure on him to remain tough on us no matter the circumstances or what kind of demands we made..

I readily admit that despite the fact we were enduring very harsh and taxing conditions within the confines of the prison, it was a place of real relief for me. Being

locked away there was like a huge release of pressure off my mind and heart. I began to suffer from nightmares less and less, and the anxiety and acute depression I was suffering from as a member of the organization was starting to subside. No longer was I looking over my shoulder in fear of Abu Nidal or his enemies! It's like being in prison actually opened up so much in my life, at least mentally and psychologically. No longer did I fear the torture of his prisons or the noose of his hangmen. So despite everything, prison in fact was like a new found freedom.

As I predicted, the ANO began to spiral out of control, spinning deeper into the abyss of chaos and internal strife, hardly even a year after the hijacking. Near the conclusion of 1987, many amongst the organization had been killed in insistent infighting that was engulfing Abu Nidal like a flaming hurricane. I definitely know in my heart that I would have been one of the first victims of this civil war! During this cruel spasm of internal purging, many of my close comrades had been eliminated, one by one.

I came into the knowledge of all these events when I began to receive news through correspondence by letters with some of my family in about the middle of 1987. Sometimes the news was hard to stomach at first; this organization I had been so intimately apart of since I was 17 years old was now totally losing its way, and what was even worse, it was not by the hands of the Jews or the Jordanians alone, but Abu Nidal was ripping it apart with his own hands! Learning of all my friends being murdered and assassinated was a real blow to my soul. The only solace

I could find was the fact that I realized I would be a survivor of this terrible era of self-destruction.

Around this same time, in '87, we launched our most brutal and vicious hunger strike we would ever endure in that prison. It lasted an excruciating three months, with the aim of achieving our most major demands we had been fighting for from the very beginning of our hunger strikes. We fed ourselves with only salt water and sometimes if we were lucky, some drops of lemon juice mixed with warm water. At the conclusion of this almost lethal strike we secured some of our most major demands and needs to date.

First and foremost, it was recognition of some of our legal demands, that being able to finally get our own attorneys. We had a list of names we submitted to the authorities of all the top lawyers from throughout the whole country. Fellow Pakistani inmates had collected these names for us and smuggled them to our secluded unit. We even demanded that the government pay our lawyer fees, and they conceded to these requests.

Secondly, our next hunger strike demand had to do with our lack of recreation and ability to get some exercise.

The authorities agreed to allow us out of our cells for about two hours every day, so we could stretch our legs and walk around the unit. We also would utilize that time to be together and enjoy each other's company, using the opportunity to eat lunch together before having to go back into our cells for the rest of the day and night.

Our final and third demand that was met had to do with some form of entertainment and that was our request for a radio. This was

like having a newspaper for current events and music all combined in one and this was part of our rationale behind demanding one for all of us. This radio was a tremendous relief for us because it allowed us to get back in touch with current events in the Middle East and also being able to listen to Arabic songs and music. We hadn't heard these things in ages, so we were very thrilled once we received it. Despite it only being a single radio, we all shared it amongst ourselves with no problem. We came to a unanimous agreement that we would rotate the radio, each man getting it in his cell for one day at a time. Most of the time we all would turn up the volume so we could hear the music anyway, so it was like we all had the radio. The lucky man with the radio would keep it through the night until about noon time the next day, then he would pass it over to the next cell.

There was one demand that we fought incessantly for that they would absolutely not budge on and that was regarding those vile restraints, the bar-fetters. Even if we died from the hunger strikes, they would let us go to the grave before they would have them removed! It was an absolute no-go area for them, that was totally non-negotiable. It's like they had reached the point in their mentality regarding us that it was like we possessed the ability to fly, as if we are some kind of supermen, with our special commando training. So they considered these restrains as essential in keeping us grounded and in one place. It actually was put across to us that we would be placed in our caskets and carried to the graveyard in these shackles!

So because of this red-line that they wouldn't cross, the issue of the bar-fetters, we decided to leave it, especially considering what we did achieve with our hunger strikes. Besides, it seemed impossible to convince the authorities we were just normal human beings and mortals like them, so we concluded that nagging them was utterly useless. All in all, it was only the passage of time that would alter this predicament, and eventually we were right; it was a whole two years before they made the decision to finally remove them.

It was during this period of constant, nearly 24 hour lockdown that I began my introduction to the English language. It was my real first, thorough exposure to books written in English, partly due to the fact that some people speak English in Pakistan. Since my childhood, reading, writing and literature as a whole have not only just been a hobby for me, but a true, sincere passion. Other subjects like math and science have never really interested me, only history, poetry, and studying biographies and just reading in general, along with learning languages have been something I've always pursued ardently. This was how I was even outside of school.

Due to this interest in reading, I asked my attorneys to negotiate with the prison authorities to start to bring in reading material, and soon a myriad of books and magazines were being made available to us. I began with some lightweight reading, like fiction novels, to help build my English vocabulary and comprehension, while enjoying the action and adventure found amidst the pages. Some of my favorites, which to this

day I still remember reading and internalizing to the point of memorization, is most of the works of Sidney Sheldon, Harold Robbins, Nora Roberts, Jacki Collins and other well renowned and famous fiction writers. Another subject I thoroughly enjoyed that was history related were the biographies of the Presidents of America, all the way from George Washington until the current president at that time, Ronald Reagan. Their lives were very intriguing and at times a source of inspiration, especially regarding how some of them dealt with crises.

Along with English language writers, I was also exposed to my beloved and venerated classical Russian writers, amongst them Tolstoy, Dostoyvsky, the renowned and great Pushkin, along with several others. It was the first time I was even made aware of this excellent literature. My previous reading about Russia primarily centered on the Bolshevik Revolution and many of Russia's political and military leaders. These Russian classics I came to adore and excessively enjoy; they were amongst the collection of books I would read cover to cover and then read again and again. One of those was the many biographies of Napoleon Bonaparte, who I really consider to be one of the greatest and complete men of our recent human history. My favorite bed time reading was the magnificent Gibran, who always put me in the best of moods before drifting off to sleep.

This time in prison was really the most ideal and perfect time to consume all this reading material and literature. I would spend countless hours of the day, getting lost in so many different worlds and eras, enraptured in the epics of history late into

the night. In my tiny cell, my worldview and personal knowledge was being expanded, and there was no limit to what I could consume, my own interests were my only boundaries. It was really like the world, in all its mysteries and deep heritage, was at my fingertips. And through my reading I was only exposed to more authors and subjects, my pursuit of knowledge branching off into so many various and diverse directions. In this way I was really exploiting time to my great advantage.

Alongside my exploration of the English language, I also began to study and learn the language of Pakistan and a vast majority of its people, Urdu. I would collect some books about it, especially ones regarding the alphabet, and other short stories; I even used picture books with Urdu descriptions and captions besides the images scattered throughout the book. Naturally, I was also picking up phrases by speaking to the guards who were constantly moving through our cellblock and stationed on guard-duty here and there. This was a great way to develop the language conversationally, and gain real life experience in utilizing Urdu in my daily interactions. With the radio I also would tune into the local and national radio stations, listening to the Urdu songs and news bulletins that were broadcasted across the airwaves. With all this constant contact with the language, my skills were advancing in no time.

Near the end of 1987, in the month of December, our scheduled trial was about to commence. Two months prior to that, we had pled 'not guilty' and prepared to dig in and put up the fight of our lives in the

courtroom. The Pakistani governments Justice Department had specially handpicked a session judge who was renowned for his rigidity and tough mannerisms and was obsessively concerned with establishing the so-called 'rule of law' even if that meant trampling on the rights of the individual. Likewise, the government also appointed the top prosecutors in the whole legal landscape throughout Pakistan. Conversely, our own legal team was an assortment of excellent and professional attorneys who were superbly cut out for the job of representing us on this extremely sensitive case. I could personally say I had a high degree of confidence in all of them, and felt like they were genuinely concerned with our case and wanted the best for us. They would be by our side through all our time in Pakistan.

Continuing in the same vein security wise, the government decided to confine the trial to the inside of the prison. Due to the modern design of the institution, it was actually constructed with a huge lecture hall inside its walls. The authorities considered this to be the perfect venue for the trial; it was at once large enough and also the best option when it came to security because we would not even have to be transported anywhere outside the prison. This fact cut down on much of the cost for transportation and hiring many more guards and soldiers for this specific guard-duty. In the scheme of things, security and money outweighs every other consideration, including transparency!

History just so decided that in the same month of this trial preparation being set in motion and pressed forward, a veritable earthquake and volcano shook and exploded,

igniting a much anticipated and yearned for event in the occupied land of Palestine. Years of unbearable pressure finally resulted in the first 'Intifada', the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation. It was December 27th, 1987, and this uprising was just a reaction, a natural response and reaction, against years and years, decades, of menacing oppression. Oppression that was delivered by the point of bullets from the rifles of occupiers, who never for one second hesitated to maim, torture and kill to impose their raw vision of colonization and usurpation upon the people of Palestine. Unlawful imprisonment and indefinite 'administrative' detention were some of their poisoned-tipped arrows in the quiver of their militant Zionism that left no room for coexistence, only subjugation and humiliation. At every checkpoint throughout the land, the soldiers of this imposed state of Israel would exert themselves, with their American M-16s, upon us, in the most brutal fashion. Their eyes would flash at us, shielded by helmets, "We are the conquerors; you have no right to a dignified life; you are below us; you are animals." And their actions would demonstrate every bit of their convictions.

But the Palestinian people are people of dignity and honor, people who despite the immeasurable odds, will not relinquish the rights of life and freedom, their right to live in the land of their ancestors who have resided in that land of Palestine for thousands of years. Even when so many believed that this sacred cause was buried and shattered forever by unrelenting repression, the proud Palestinians in their

uprising rose up from the ashes once again. Like a resurrecting Phoenix, the clouds of the dust of humiliation were dispersed, scattered with the blowing winds of victory from its magnificent outstretched wings. Let history itself be a witness that no matter how many hundreds of years the giant sleeps in his slumber, he will one day be rustled and awakened, escaping from the proverbial bottle, as the old Arabic proverb goes.

This land of Palestine, the venerated holy land that was tread upon by all the Prophets, and held sacred by all the monotheistic religions, lived and existed in peace and tranquility for thousands of years. This harmony is testified to by the synagogues, churches and mosques that have existed next to each other for centuries, this land of tolerance and mutual respect. However, this land is also the graveyard of any and all invaders who have come to violate its sanctity and people, with its most holy sites.

It is this same graveyard of empires and its unbowed people who fought, repulsed, and ultimately crushed the Crusaders who launched their so-called 'holy war' from the heart of Europe, in wave after wave, upon Palestine and environs. Who can ever forget the great honorable and beloved leader, Saladin, who resisted the Crusader onslaught, defeating and humiliating them in the epic battle of Hittin. These are the same people who struggled on for hundreds of years, culminating in the expulsion of the British and their vaunted mandate.

All these innocent Palestinian people who were forcibly pushed out of their towns and villages, as a sign of proud defiance, took

with them keys of their homes from the very beginning of this crime in 1948. In their symbolic act, they were sending a message, that yes, they will return, and they will reclaim their lives and their land one glorious day. These antique keys have been passed down, generation to generation, reminding them to never give up hope, to never give up the struggle, the struggle of their right to return and reclaim what had been theirs by birth and blood. The intifada was the bright hope, that blazing flame which illuminated the long, dark tunnel that was the occupation, lighting up the hopes of so many.

So because of these amazing events that exploded on the scene, nearly everyone was extending feelings and expressions of sympathy towards us, our attorneys, the prosecutor and even the judge himself. As I stated, our trial was starting in the same month of the Uprising, so the whole atmosphere was charged with burning energy that shone with empathy towards Palestine and its subjugated people. These feelings of support did not emanate from the office of Zia-ul-Haq, that bloody, oppressive dictator, however. He was personally asked by a journalist about us just days before the trial started, and he said, with no hesitation, those five Palestinian hijackers will be executed but I will always remain a staunch supporter of the Palestinian people and their honorable cause! Of course, any conscious observer will know this is one of his many sick jokes! He never had been a supporter of the Palestinians, demonstrated through his own actions. He was totally in the camp of the West, being both pro-America and Israel. As Palestinians we personally

felt that Rajav Gandhi and India as a whole is closer in sympathy and solidarity with us than the dictator Zia-ul-Haq ever was from the moment of his grip on power.

So in the whirlwind of these monumental events, our trial initiated, which moved along at a very fast pace, despite the fact it lasted up to three months. I can honestly say that all this legal proceedings were a show and sham; a nation ruled by the iron-fist of the military can never, ever deliver real, true justice or a fair verdict! From the moment of the ISI interrogation, it is quite clear that they have made up their minds about our guilt, with no deviation from this pre-judgment, even before they discovered all the facts and circumstances.

Really, our decision to pled 'not guilty' was a wholly political one, a statement to the world about why we exactly carried out this act, and secure a platform for our voices to be heard and recorded in the pages of history.

Naturally, the judge was going to try to give the impression that he was genuinely concerned about fairness and the honorable pursuit of justice. He made a show of trying to hear us out and deliver to us justice in the end, but he knows just as well as we do that military rulers who attained power through force of guns and tanks are the ones who are going to decide, in fact they already decided the day we were all taken into custody.

The whole three months of trial, there appeared before the court scores of witnesses and 'experts' giving their so-called testimony. It was a time of many shows and illusions put on by the prosecution, with all

their government backing and big money behind them. We exerted our best effort to try to get out story and motives across as to why things happened the way they did on September 5th, 1986. We even drafted a 17 page statement trying to explain the causes and effects behind the hijackings. We had lived lives full of Israeli terrorism and we were going to make sure the world heard us loud and clear.

But at the conclusion of things, and in the end, as we were expecting, we received a death sentence, handed to us by the so-called court of justice. We would all be executed by hanging, all five of us. Just to spice things up a bit, we received a few hundred years on top of our date with the hangman. It seems like gallows were pursing us even after escaping the snares of Abu Nidal. Having faced death so many times in my life, I can't say I met this news with shock but a sensation of numbness and maybe resignation. It's not that I would give up the fight but rather I was finding a bit of contentment in what I had been dealt by fate.

After the judge's gavel slammed down, singling the conclusion of this whole debacle, we were hastily escorted from the make-shift court. At this instance, a small anecdote occurred which I still clearly remember to this day, and I want to mention it here to demonstrate the overall sentiment of the people in Pakistan. The Chief Prosecutor, the one who was the top prosecutor in the land and also the attorney spearheading the case against us on behalf of the military junta, approached me at the end of the court proceedings.

. UAbbas, whenever you appeal these death sentences, I will personally defend you and your comrades, free of charge." It was incredible. This man was just trying to railroad us in this trial, all the way to the execution chamber, and now he was willing to spend his own time and money to be our loyal defender in the Highest Court in Pakistan. "You have to be joking? Just a minute ago you were on the other side of the aisle trying your upmost to give us the death penalty and now you want to work to get us out of it? What's the catch?!" For me it was completely illogical, almost to the point of schizophrenia.

He then spoke some words that totally surprised me and shook me to the core; not in a negative way but in the way of pure amazement. "Look, as a prosecutor, that was my job, and when I am assigned a case to prosecute, I divorce my feelings from my work. But in my heart and my own personal feelings, someone such as you is like my personal hero, really. And my soul is with the Palestinian people and their struggle. So please, take me as your lawyer to represent you."

I thanked him profusely for what he expressed to me at that moment, but in the end, I never hired him as my attorney because we never appealed our sentence in the first place. We truly felt it was useless as the cards were stacked against in every way possible legally. Before being taken to death row, we made a last ditch, concerted effort to petition the judge to have our bar-fetters removed from our tortured ankles. But no matter what kind of pleading we did to the judge to issue an order of removal, he said

it just was not possible because it was a security issue. He tried to explain that his authority did not extend to this issue.

Our whole imprisonment prior to, plus the trial, we had absolutely no contact with the Abu Nidal Organization, except for a few isolated cases here and there. On a couple occasions, we received some financial support from some of the members. Like I mentioned early, they all were too occupied with scoring points with each other, through treacherous ambushes and car-bombs, picking each other off one by one. The only activity that emanated from the organization regarding our situation was a statement of condemnation regarding our trial verdict of death.

The most important contact for me at that point was that of my family. After I was made aware that my family had found out about me being in prison because of the hijacking, I decided to write them a series of letters to at least assuage some of their worries and concerns about me. It was a source of relief to receive some letters from my family during this extremely distressful time. Soon, my euphoria over possibly facing death started to wind down and the harsh, brutal realities of death row began to set in. With this kind of sentence, there really is no chance for a future. These were some of the many thoughts that were racing through my mind and dwelling in my heart as I had laid on my stiff prison bunk, gazing into the dull, white ceiling. I was really waiting for one of two things, and that was either some kind of miracle that would free us from our looming death, or waiting for the moment that we would be marched, condemned, to the gallows.

As one can imagine, the entire atmosphere on death row is one of tremendous depression and anxiety; these feelings and saddened emotions are at an all-time high amongst all the condemned prisoners. To escape the mental anguish and heartwrenching uncertainty accompanied with this wretched place, most, if not all, the prisoners are consuming and smoking drugs, like painkiller pills and hashish. This is mostly to just calm their nerves and also to distract their minds from the predicament they are trapped and confined in. I myself would consume painkillers and Valium 10 just to be able to get to sleep at night, and most times that would just be a handful of hours of sleep at a time. I was filling my days with endless reading, not even leaving my bed, for hours on end. I was not even concentrating and retaining what I had read. I was also resorting to eating lots of food, not out of genuine hunger but from anxiety and depression, combined with boredom.

Was my anxiety caused by a fear of death? No, not at all, because I know that death will strike anyone, at any moment, sooner or later. This is an inevitability for every human being, and quite frankly, death by the executioner in Pakistan was easier for me to stomach than murdered by the ANO, whether by the gallows in al-Bekka or bullets in Beirut, shot in the head. It was actually the period of waiting before execution that was the pure agony behind all my feelings of anxiety. Sitting in a cold cell, waiting patiently for that day to arrive was an experience I will never forget, no matter the passage of time.

Reflecting in my prison cell, the first vision I had for recording my life in a book

occurred at this time. But I struggled with the decision to go forward or not, and that's for two primary decisions. One was that despite all the turmoil and struggle I had lived through, and all I had witnessed in my young life, still things aren't exactly ripe enough, as if I knew something more was on my personal horizon and in store for me. The second thing I considered was that I just did not have the concentration and right frame of mind to really focus on writing a memoir, especially because any thoughts were constantly scattered in so many directions. In the back of my mind the execution is looming, like a sword is squaring up against my neck to deliver the single, lethal blow that would extinguish my life forever. All this drove me to decide against recording my experiences, so helplessly I just resigned myself to the unknown fate ahead. I did however keep a notebook that I would sometimes record my thoughts and feelings in. Maybe one day it would serve as a rough manuscript if I ever did proceed with my desire to write.

Around the middle of August 1988, something momentous occurred, something that was both unbelievable yet expected due to the political climate in Pakistan; the ruthless, bloody dictator Zia-ul-Haq, the mastermind of the military coup that brought the Army to power, was killed in a plane crash while flying in Pakistan. Upon further investigation, it became apparent that somehow a bomb was smuggled aboard the military aircraft. And this is the end of such dictators; he initiated his career and leadership with blood and it was concluded with blood, it was only the natural course of

events. I say it was expected because of these essential facts. He played a horrible and disastrous role in the events playing out across the border with his neighbor Afghanistan, in fact just three months prior to his defeat, as the Soviet Union was withdrawing from that war-torn country, Soviet columns were attacked from behind by Afghan militias, with the aid of Islamabad. Knowing that Pakistan had a role in this treachery, Moscow responded strongly, from the very heights of its most senior officials with the warning: Islamabad will pay dearly for such cowardly acts. The astute observer will certainly understand that the dictator's days are numbered and the clock is ticking! And this is exactly what happened with his airplane.

Zia-ul-Haq was a very cunning and shrewd man, and this is a testament to the fact that he survived many years in power, until tyranny and oppression caught up with him in the end. It was said that he himself, in his last days, sensed and felt that something bad was going to happen with him. Because of this overwhelming paranoia, whenever he would travel long distances or out of the country, he would take all his top generals and aides with him, out of the fear that they might try to depose him in his absence with a military coup. Perhaps he was even creating a shield out of them to prevent or lessen the chance of him being killed by assassination with bombs or bullets. Sometimes he even had the audacity to take the American ambassador himself with him, believing that no one would even dare to try a thing against his life with such an important American diplomat in tow, sitting beside him on the plane!

How mistaken he was; every single one of this top generals, along with the ambassador of the United States, with the military attaché that was assigned to the American embassy in Islamabad were killed that fateful day! How totally wrong he had calculated. This dictator was not even safe with his masters amongst the Americans, as they failed to protect him with all their supposed power and might.

Once this news broke about his demise, the whole population was in a state of unbelieving shock and utter astonishment. For the Pakistanis, it was like a blow to them physically; this great leader, who they almost thought invincible, the way they venerated him, is now dead, so suddenly? I wouldn't say this veneration of his personality was out of love, no, but out of fear and respect of pure power and his unbridled ability to wield it against whomever he chose. In the beginning, the whole prisoner population is paralyzed with grim disbelief, the pale looks on their faces resembling death itself. But when reality set in, and people started to realize the true implications of this event, their continence began to brighten and light up, the first initial stages of celebrations starting to appear.

Within the passing of a few hours, the celebrations of the now jubilant prisoners were full blown, with a bonafide party engulfing the whole prison! Without question, we were among the first few to start and lead the celebrations, engaging in much singing of revolutionary songs and dancing at the same time, shouting and laughing almost nonstop. An abundance of staunch, strong tea, many

candies and sweets were distributed amongst everyone, along with very high-quality drugs, like hash and marijuana, being passed around to smoke and indulge in.

Someone might ask themselves the question, why the celebration and elated outbursts? Quite simply, so many of the people in Pakistan had felt under Zia-ul-Haq's rule the boot of reactionary oppression on their necks for years, and now in his demise there is the hope of relief! Specifically, he was very harsh on prisoners, for no other reason than that they had made some mistakes in life and now they found themselves in prison. It seemed he had made it his personal mission in his rule to increase the harsh conditions in prison to add to the prisoner's punishment. So cups of tea were definitely toasted in happiness at this unexpected, but welcomed, news.

Not only were we as prisoners pleased with the doing away of Zia-ul-Haq personally, but also the joy was produced by the prospect of reform that could lay ahead with those who might come to power. If a government would come into control democratically, a whole overhaul could occur, and that definitely would also affect the prison system. The political environment and bureaucracy had been filled with corruption, as the rule of military's always are, on top of their vicious tactics of repression against all forms of political expression in opposition to any wrongdoing of the junta. So as a whole, we were waiting for some kind of benefit to our conditions, and three months later, this is what happened.

With the departure of the dictator, and after so much hustle and bustle, hopeful

expectations of political change, skepticism surrounding the competency of the prospective future leaders and fears of retaliatory military coups and the resurrection of the 'deep state', free, fair and impartial elections took place in November of 1988. It was a very hopeful time, not just for us prisoners, but for the Pakistani people as a whole, because the elections gave the people the chance to express themselves politically after chafing for so long under military rule, which they had suffered under for so long.

So many bright expectations had been placed on one young, highly-educated woman, Benazir Bhutto, who along with her Pakistan People's Party, had secured a landslide victory, which went down in history, sweeping all the election ballots. She was a charismatic lady, who happened to be the young daughter of the late president of Pakistan, Zulfikar Bhutto, who was executed by hanging at the hand of Zia-ul-Haq, in a brutal act initiating the beginning of his power grab.

Always being politically aware and astute, we were observing the elections very closely. For the most part, we were always very pro-PPP, the Pakistan People's Party. Despite the rule of the dictator, Palestinians in general were always overflowing with respect and love for Zulfikar Bhutto, the founding father of the PPP, due to his strong support and sympathy for the Palestinian cause and our long-enduring plight. In a show of support, we drafted a letter of congratulations to Ms. Benazir Bhutto, sending it with a journalist we shared a friendship with, who delivered it for us. We had heard the news of her marriage

with Mr. Zardari and wanted to extend our well-wishes to her on that occasion, hoping it to be a blessing for them. It's extremely ironic due to the fact that Zardari himself would be a fellow inmate with us, his cell right next door to us! And in a role-reversal, he would become the President of Pakistan himself for half a decade.

With the conclusion of the successful elections victory, Benazir Bhutto was sworn into office two days later. Everyone in the prison tuned in for her very first speech to the nation as Pakistan's officially elected leader. We were all paying rapt attention, listening to every detail, searching for hints of what might lay ahead for Pakistan on a political and social level. Near the conclusion of her victorious speech, in honor and respect towards her late father who was hanged in prison, she announced that she was unilaterally pardoning every single prisoner in the whole of Pakistan who had been condemned to death. You could imagine how welcomed this joyous news was for not only the prisoners, but also their deprived, anxious families.

Huge celebrations were held on death row, larger than what transpired after Zia-ulHaq's plane tumbled to the earth. I don't even think we slept that night, with smoking and tea drinking carrying on into the next day. The two days after was filled with the emptying of the whole death row, everyone sending their greetings to us as they passed our cells. We were the very last inmates to leave, staying over a week, nearly two, because the warden was stubbornly refusing to accept the statements of the new Prime Minister, Benazir, and even ignoring the strict command

of the interior minister who sent an official letter demanding the release of all inmates from death row, their death sentences commuted to life sentences.

When it came to the 'Five Palestinians', the warden wanted specific, solid information verbatim, saying that we specifically could come out from death row. He was taking no chances himself without a complete confirmation about our status. Of course, these kind of overboard, unnecessary measures were driving us absolutely insane; the order was so crystal clear with no ambiguity, all the death row inmates would be granted immediate clemency and pardon from their date with the executioner!

Like everything else related to prison, all we could do was be forced to wait impatiently for the final word from the government. Eventually, a written confirmation was sent to the warden personally that yes, the five Palestinian prisoners are also included in this death row amnesty, with no discrepancies in the fulfillment of this decree. At this point the prison authorities had no choice but to obey the government's orders and release us from death row, transferring us to the general prison population.

I really can't even describe or put into words fully the whole situation at that time and what this all felt like, considering everything we had endured and been put through this entire period of time in the prison in Rawalpindi. The horrible first days, full of complete boredom, the introduction to the bar-fetters of agony and the complete isolation filled with nothing but bowls of beans to break the mundane cycle

of extreme boredom were incomparable. Add to this the ordeal of the show trial conducted by the military government, and all its hypocrisy, combined with the death sentences and being moved to death row, it is an outpouring of happiness and relief that occurred stepping out of that place. A place of dark depression filled with the stark uncertainty that stalks and haunts that doomed unit like a menacing vulture, waiting to pounce on any weakening, dejected victim. The death row was where souls were devoured, and now we were freed from its gaping jaws.

Of course, the most delightful and thrilling part of leaving death row was that when we were about to leave from there, the Assistant Warden called for the blacksmith to be brought, and he was summoned right away. So after five minutes time, the blacksmith was there with his special tools and he was ordered to finally remove our dreaded barfettters. One by one, we were arrayed before him, and with his expertise, he aimed his chisel right on the point of the bar-fetter he wanted to crack and break, and with one swift motion with his heavy metal hammer, he smashed apart some of the metal.

Instantly I can remember being so light and wanting to just walk freely and run like the wind! I was so accustomed to the metal attached to my ankles, I had trouble sleeping, so used to the contraption restraining my movements as I tossed and turned in my sleep. To this day the scars remain on my ankles from that vestige of colonial repression. However, I take it as just a part of this whole difficult journey and struggle of survival.

Now in population, I have a chance to carry on with my life, despite not fully knowing what exactly it has in store for me down the road, or even around the next corner. I tried to carry on with what I could of my restricted life, doing a lot of reading as usual, and also continuing my dairy writing and corresponding with a number of my family members with letters and beautiful postcards. I now had the ability to also get a proper exercise and recreation, constantly playing soccer and mastering the sport of Badminton.

This opportunity to be in the open, with less physical restriction also led to us being allowed many more basic, normal conveniences like access to a small, personal television set. We could hook it up to some basic cable, allowing us to view a handful of TV channels. This was definitely a great source of entertainment we had been deprived of for years and it was like a real novelty being able to watch TV again. Besides the entertainment value the TV provided, it also was an incredible asset in aiding us in strengthening our Urdu language skills. It was at this time that I also was receiving word from my family and other relatives that they wished to see me, traveling all the way from their far off homes just to visit me. I did not want this however because I still was waiting exactly to see what might happen to all of us; who knows, somehow maybe an amnesty for us was on the horizon somewhere? Anything was possible in the twists and turns of Pakistani politics.

Nearing the end of 1990, just a few months before the invasion and ransacking of Kuwait by the late dictator Saddam Hussein, I received some very bad news through my family

that devastated me tremendously, and that was the news that my father had passed away from a fatal heart attack. I experienced extreme guilt behind this because I felt like what happened to me increased the stress and tension in his life, and his very body could not take it anymore. For so long he had been dealing with all my troubles for years now, from the days of my forays into the Kuwaiti desert to the moment I truly ran away, to far off Damascus and Baghdad, lost to the revolution for good. My dear father was laid to rest in Kuwait, the land he so ardently loved, having resided there for so much of his life. It was indescribable, the feeling of losing a loved one, much less your own parent, while you are confined in prison, with no ability to send real, true condolences in person and attend the funeral; this is a one in a lifetime event and it was now gone forever, with me absent from it totally..

Shortly after this personal tragedy, Saddam's shock troops and tanks crossed the border, invading Kuwait. This generated so much anxiety and worry inside me because of my family living there. Things were beginning to intensify and heat up, with the West now calling for a war against the Iraqi regime for its so-called aggression, even though much of this crisis was due to a spill-over from the Iran-Iraq war—the first true 'Gulf War'. The West and the Gulf states had turned their back on Saddam, leaving him in massive debt amidst falling prices in the global oil market. This naturally led to an increase in tensions with Iraq's neighbors leading to this new outburst of hostilities.

Because of this, there was a disruption in my communication with my family due to the fighting, as even the mail itself was halted, with nothing leaving or entering Kuwait of letters, postcards or packages. This turn of events kept me in a constant state of intense anxiety for weeks on end, especially when America and its allies formally launched their grand war in January of 1991. I believed now this was an even greater opportunity for harm to befall my family as the coalition jets raided and bombed over tiny Kuwait and Scud missiles flew to bombard Tel Aviv.

It wouldn't be until about six months later that I discovered that a great portion of my family had evacuated Kuwait for the relative safety and security of Amman, the capital of Jordan. Because of the tensions and conflict in the whole Gulf region, Kuwait was no longer a place of peace for my family, leaving it behind for Amman, permanently and forever. This was the country we were born in and resided for the vast majority of our lives, a place of shelter and rest from the turmoil of Palestine. Many memories were there in Kuwait, for all of us, and for so many other displaced Palestinian families, it was like a second homeland for us. So much would be left behind there, our sweet recollections remaining to be engulfed by the desert sands of time.

Some months passed after this, and exactly in the month of August, the government of Benazir Bhutto was sacked in a political coup, removing her from power and authority. Unfortunately, things like this happen in Pakistan all the time, ever since the partition of India and Pakistan by the British. Every few years, a military coup

occurs or some other political crisis. So this turn of events, the toppling of Benazir's government, is not a surprise one bit, and actually it is sort of expected. It's like the Pakistani political scene is not complete without these kinds of happenings!

As foreigners, we really had nothing to do with these political changes but in fact, it had a huge, devastating impact on our own individual situation. Just a few months after the expulsion of Benazir Bhutto from the seat of power, another of those so called 'fair and free' elections was held and the head of the Muslim League party, Nawaz Sharif, secured victory, winning the election. This man had always been Benazir's political rival and this more than likely influenced the next decision he made that I am about to mention. At the time, we were taken by surprise but now looking back I can tell his decree was motivated by revenge and hostility towards Mrs. Bhutto.

He made a declaration that all the most major and decisive decisions that were made by the previous government are null and void, and on top of that, completely unconstitutional. One could then guess what this meant for us: that all the death row pardons no longer apply and are to be rescinded! Wow, it was incredible, like an earthquake, we were shaken to the core by this ominous decision. And it was as if the prison authorities were just waiting for a word like this to come down, because within two weeks' time they had us thrown back onto death row as if we had never been free from the execution chamber. What an incredibly harrowing experience that was, to go from the relative freedom of general population to the

depressive, constrictive gloominess of the infamous death row. To go from dreaming of one day being released from prison back to a death sentence in a matter of days is almost too much to bear! We are all now once again haunted by the hangman's approaching noose!

Instead of giving in however, we all made the decisive choice to be pro-active, filing an appeal to the Supreme Court with the help of a whole team of volunteer attorneys who took it upon themselves to help us, out of a humanitarian sentiment, to block the decision of the Sharif government to rescind our pardons. This was definitely serious, deadly business, with our very lives were on the line.

Most thankfully, the Supreme Court decided to hear our argument before then, and in the meantime they gave a strict order to the prison bureau to halt any planned execution, placing a complete moratorium on all death sentences until they made a ruling in this matter of our appeal of the current government's decree. This gave us a brief pause of relief, allowing us some time; now it was just a matter of waiting out the court process to see what would be our fate. And what a wait it was, like no other! When this happened, I kept it secret from my family, because they were so overjoyed by my escape from my death sentence, almost miraculously, and I didn't want to kill their joy and heart-felt relief at this event. There's no way I was going to tell them about this sinister development.

This whole period of turmoil and uncertainty plagued us for two years, every day awakening with a heavy heart. Finally, in 1992, the Supreme Court, presided over by a

panel of three judges, heard our motion. It did not take them long at all to make a decision, which was completely in our favor. In short, they stated that whatever decision Benazir Bhutto made during her tenure as Prime Minister, whether right or wrong, it is binding constitutionally and her office has the complete power to exercise that kind of authority. This meant our pardon was set in stone and no one has the authority to overturn it! It couldn't have been a better answer from the Supreme Court than this ruling.

With the appeal granted, the Bureau presiding over the prison system in Pakistan was notified to immediately release us from the cursed death row. I asked the warden on the way out, in a joking manner, will this be the last time for us on death row or will you be bringing us back for any reason that appears from here or there? He seemed to appreciate my sense of humor and told me, no, after the Supreme Court's decision, this will be the last!

Like the first time in population, it was a relief to be able to have a more open, normal routine, despite being in the prison. I carried on like before, taking advantage of being able to get fresh air and feel the rays of the sun in the open yard, unlike the suffocation of death row. Even though it wasn't new, it was a vast improvement in our conditions. .

At the onset of the New Year, 1993, I received my very first visit from my family since the year of my apprehension, 1986. A visit is normally a blissful experience for any prisoner, but it was heartbreaking to see my mother and brother. I can say I was thrilled, but this emotion was experienced

alongside great sadness and remorse, having to see my mother in such a dreadful situation. What made it even more agonizing was the fact that at that time of her first visit, I was being punished for a disciplinary infraction and was placed in solitary confinement. This meant that I had to conduct my visit with my mother from behind steel bars, in their blessed presence but still separated from them. Really, I did not even want to see them in this way, in prison, but they all kept on insisting to see me, whenever they could. A mother's heart is like a sweet rose that never withers or loses its petals; always rejuvenated and watered by the love for her child, love that is larger than life itself, and that is unmatched in its magnitude and epic proportions.

Besides this sadness, there was room to feel some degree of happiness due to the visit. My family came back and forth to the prison for a few days, my mother bringing with her all sorts of wonderfully cooked, home-made meals, very traditional Arab and Palestinian cuisine. This was one privilege of the Pakistani prisons I could really appreciate, unlike other prison systems I would experience in my life. My mother was doing all this cooking at the home of a local Palestinian family who resided in Pakistan, who generously hosted my mother and brother as honored guests. .

This family visit lasted about a week before they left from Pakistan; it was all a mixture of pain and bliss, joy and sadness. Knowing they would have to leave me in the end made the whole ordeal bittersweet. Unbeknownst to me, this would be the last time I would see my mother, which now has been over

two decades as I write this. I hope sincerely that one day I will see her again before she departs this world; being in prison, separated by oceans, it only increases the unfortunate likelihood that as we all get older, we might not have the opportunity to be re-united at least one last time.

One notable bit of information that they gave me on that visit was the news that the Abu Nidal Organization was in the process of breathing its last breath's, shattered and fragmented by internal violence, killings and also pressure from the outside continually and relentlessly, What a turn of events after so many high hopes; an organization that began with the stated goal of liberating Palestine from the suffocation of occupation and colonialism was not ultimately imploding upon its own self, with Palestinians carrying weapons against each other. Murders, imprisonment and desertion were now leading the ANO to the graveyard of history, all these chaotic events shaking the organization into its final death spasms. Maybe fate had decreed for me to survive this turmoil so that someone would be able to tell the story of the organization, serving as a warning and admonition for others.

Hope was now an element of our lives after the Supreme Court upheld our pardons. Death by execution was not a part of our daily concerns or calculations; we could actually envision some kind of future, some kind of reality, someday, beyond the brick and concrete walls of prison. No longer was I consigning myself to forever be ensnared by coils of razor wire and guard towers, with a life sentence in Pakistan. I had a real chance of walking out the front gate as a truly

freeman who served his time and was now ready to continue his life as an average man like any other. In Pakistan, a life sentence was 25 years, so with their system of good-time, in which you could receive time off your sentence for various things like good behavior, a life sentence could be completed in about 12 to 13 years at the maximum.

So with this very real possibility of release, my friends and I began to work toward that eventuality. The future beyond imprisonment was going to be a hardship all by itself, due to the harsh reality that we don't have a country of our own to call home, with no passports or any other official documents like residence papers or birth certificates, along with no substantial savings to support ourselves upon release. This was all a substantial obstacle for us, so we formulated a plan to try to reach out to as many people and nations as possible in the hopes that we would find at least someone to assist us in our efforts. This included contacting human rights organizations alongside Muslim nations beyond the boundaries of the traditional Arab world.

I can say from my personal experience that these people, organizations, institutions and embassies were all very kind and totally forthcoming with us, who I believe wanted to sincerely aid and assist us anyway they could, but held back for one reason or another. I know that this primary reason is due to worry and apprehension regarding the possible adverse reaction of America against them for aiding someone like us due to the events relating to Pan Am 73. I thank them for at least what was in their hearts.

In this cloud of uncertainty surrounding our release, we did have something that was of great favor to us, and we were truly lucky, and that was the fact that during our whole imprisonment in Pakistan, we were housed in the same exact prison from beginning to end. It was the vindictive habit of the prison authorities to ship prisoners all over Pakistan, to all sorts of various prisons. I believe this was done purely to frustrate inmates and increase the hardship in our lives. It seems sort of unbelievable to people but once someone actually sees for themselves the life of the prisoner, he or she will come to experience the vile and evil mentalities of some prison authorities and administrators.

The vast majority of wardens who occupied that position in the prison worked their hardest to try to separate the 'five Palestinians' during our confinement there, wishing to ship us here and there to different prisons scattered across the Punjab Province. In fact, there were about 27 prisons in that province alone. But thankfully for us, the central government always frustrated their plans, rejecting their intentions for us flat out, citing security precautions. We resided in the most secure and sophisticated prison in the whole nation of Pakistan; it would be completely illogical to send us somewhere else far from the watchful eye of the government to some backwater institution where the chances of escape are much easier to accomplish. This decision of the government was actually very convenient for us, because being moved to a new environment is a hassle and great annoyance, having established ourselves in the prison with a

whole daily routine that kept ourselves and our minds occupied, helping to pass the days away quickly.

In fact I was engaging myself in many positive activities in my last years of prison in Pakistan, constantly busy and networking across the globe. I increased the pace of my reading and writing, immersing myself in an all-consuming, intensive study of so many various subjects like biographies, history, poetry and current events. I grew in friendship with many new pen-pals, particularly from England, who until this very moment I still maintain a good relationship with. In my vast experience, the British people have always been extremely friendly with me and gushing with kindness and generosity. I also made numerous friends with many Pakistanis during my time there, who extended to me the courtesy of introducing their respected and honorable families to me. This initiated a series of continuous letters from them, their flowery writing sometimes extending into dozens of pages.

Around the late 90's, the husband of the late Mrs. Bhutto, Mr. Zardari, was our neighbor in the prison. This man would later become the future president of Pakistan. His cell was close to ours, but his space was separated from us a bit, due to his high status in society and his reported wealth. I remember him as being so nice, respectable, generous and highly educated. He loved to read a lot of Japanese literature, which was a testament to his elevated learning. On numerous occasions he sent us various kinds of gifts and food.

Along with Mr. Zardari was his future Prime Minister, Mr. Raja Ashraf Parviz, who also was in the same prison unit as me. I developed a great, long-lasting friendship with him that I cherish in my heart to this day. Ten years after leaving prison from that exact unit, he became Prime Minister over the whole of Pakistan, side by side with Mr. Zardari as President elect. As I recount this, they are now gone from the halls of power and authority, but it is my sincere wish and prayer, that I will one day sit with them again, sharing tea and reminiscing all our time together in Rawalpindi.

Owing to my personal friendship and attachment to Mr. Zardari and Parviz, I can't possibly fathom that there was anyone on the face of the earth more saddened and devastated than myself the moment I learned of the news of the untimely demise of our beloved Mrs. Benazir Bhutto, in 2007. She left this life in such a violent, sudden way, which I saw every moment of on the television, emblazoned across the screen as 'breaking news', sitting in my cell in the depths of ADX, in Florence, Colorado. I immediately slipped into a real depression because of this tragic event for a whole week, not able to grasp what really happened and how it transpired.

I didn't just feel these emotions because Benazir was personally responsible for getting us off death row, but also because she was a genuinely nice person, who overflowed with patriotic love for her country and for her people, to the greatest extent. Because of this, she sacrificed and gave her life for the people of her homeland, the 'land of the Pure', Pakistan. She truly

was the proud daughter of her father; may you rest in eternal, ever-abiding peace Benazir Bhutto.

Right now, in this moment, I pledge that if I live out my life, released from prison, marry and have a daughter, I will name her 'Benazir' in honor of that shining, bright moon, Benazir Bhutto.

Time began to accelerate at a faster pace as I moved into the late 90's and into the 2000's. This was when we received official confirmation from the prison authorities that as a technical matter we had completed our sentences. The catch was that as part of our sentence we were fined for our crime of conviction. However, at that point, we had no country to accept us after release and also we needed the money we did have access to for other matters, so we opted to spend time in prison in lieu of paying the fine, which was an alternative option available in the Pakistani prison system. This 'fine sentence' would run for about one year.

Right in the year 2000, the children of the stones rose in defiance once more, shattering the chains of occupation with their righteous Intifada. For the second time, after the passing of over ten years, they stood proudly, with absolute, firm bravery, bare chests exposed, simple sling shots in the their destitute hands to challenge the arrogance of F-16's, the brute force of Merkavas, and the pure cruelty of one of the most skilled and tested armies upon the face of the earth.

The proverbial giant exploded once again from his imposed bottle that was forced upon him by aggression and colonization, with a steeled determination that is far stronger

than any of those sophisticated weapons and bombs, more enduring than concrete watchtowers and brick-walled settlements.

One year prior, the inevitable once again transpired, with the army of Pakistan seizing power in a military coup led by the army chief Pervez Musharraf. Owing to Pakistan's turbulent history, this is not a surprise or shock to anyone like I mentioned before, but if conditions began to spiral out of control, it might jeopardize my comrades and I's release. This encouraged all of us to try to expedite the process of leaving the prison and the country was quickly as possible, utilizing any available means at our disposal. My family, knowing the dire situation, began to encourage and advise me to somehow open a channel of communication with the Jordanian government through their embassy in Islamabad to help hasten my release. They could help most especially by providing me with the necessary travel documents, like the all-important passport, along with other vital logistical support. Being a Jordanian citizen, my family believed this would be the best course of action, despite my troubled history with the Jordanian intelligence services. After this seemingly sound advice, I established contact with the Jordanian embassy. I was taken aback in surprise at their very prompt response. Later, I would come to know all too well why they were behaving in this fashion.

While I was busy contacting and establishing a relationship with the Jordanian embassy, my friends were conducting a joint effort to get ahold of the Palestinian embassy. This was the very first time this was attempted since we had been in Pakistan;

we know that this was the embassy of the Palestinian Authority—the PA—who was the arch-nemesis of the Abu Nidal Organization from the very beginning, with Abu Nidal personally involved in this epic feud between high-ranking PLO leaders and himself.

We put all of this behind us when we contacted them, with the hope that the PA embassy would just regard us as ordinary Palestinians, their fellow countrymen, who need the help and support of the official representatives of their people. I felt like these are the people, of all people, who would lend us a helping hand as her citizens, regardless of our affiliations with this or that organization or what our ideology was. All we were looking for was some guidance and aid in our desperate situation.

Honestly, once we got in contact with them, they really measured up to our expectations as an embassy. They were overwhelming in their hospitality and generosity, to the best of their ability considering the circumstances. With complete sympathy and understanding, the Palestinian ambassador and his staff did their best to accommodate us in our questions and requests, all the while treating us with the upmost respect. Courageously the ambassador himself even paid us a surprise visit to the prison. He sat with us, chatting and drinking tea for an hour. During the much appreciated visit, he informed us that this was an official visit approved and sanctioned by the PA in Ramallah, West Bank, and their express purpose was to help us all, as Palestinians, in solidarity with us. We all extended our most sincere thanks to him for his efforts and sentiments, also telling him to make sure

to convey our appreciation to the Authority as well. It is important to note that some years later it was the PA who worked to successfully secure the release of my friends from the prison in Pakistan, providing them with all the essential travel documents and paperwork necessary to enable them to make their way back home,

On the contrary, and unfortunately, I had a very different experience with the so-called Palestinian ambassador in Washington, D.C., Mr. Ma'aen Erakat, and his multitude of staff. I personally felt that they acted in a very cowardly, unprofessional, and in a way unbecoming of a Palestinian! Officially, they proclaim loudly that they're representing the Palestinian people and their interests, but their actions betray something quite different altogether. Many times they were scared to death to offer any real, substantial assistance to the Palestinians out of abject fear of their masters, America. In fact, the irrational fearfulness of Mr. Erakat to extend his hand in aid to his countrymen is unjustifiable. The American government and their Bureau of Prisons are always encouraging every foreign prisoner to contact their respective government, embassy and people in general, and foster relationships with their families on a continuous basis and as much as possible.

Regrettably, the fear of some kind of undue consequence overwhelmed and subdued our splendid ambassador, his excellency Mr. Erakat, overriding any sense of responsibility and duty towards his people in need of assistance, a responsibility that he should have upheld with the greatest honor as a man in his position, who in his every

statement and action is supposed to be representing his peoples interests.

Israel on the other hand is one who never abandoned, much less felt a sense of shame or acted cowardly, when it came to their master spy Jonathan Pollard, who was just released in the year 2015. Their hand was extended towards him in assistance in every manner. The Israelis have stood by Pollard loyally and steadfastly for 30 years as he served his sentence in American prison for stealing some of the US military's most sensitive secrets. Israel even offered to him their coveted citizenship, even after damaging their most trusted ally, the Americans. Through all their tireless efforts, for decades, they eventually secured his release using every available means, including US Congressmen, to bring pressure on the American government.

After citing this example of unwavering loyalty, I have one thing to say, and that is that I sincerely hope in my heart of hearts that his excellency, Mr. Erakat learn a lesson of ethics, morality and what it means to be loyal from the Jewish people, who have famously and historically been known for their upmost concern and loyalty to their people and co-religionists. I know his Excellency the ambassador does not truly comprehend these principles, so I will drop the subject, and good luck!

I would like to make mention here about my last years in prison in Pakistan, that I was very capable of escaping captivity entirely if I made the effort. Obviously because of my experience in Malta combined with my ability to freely roam the prison at my leisure by that point in time, with access to almost the whole institution. Besides this, I had a

multitude of friends among the staff and prisoners alike who could aid me, knowing their language fluently, which meant I could communicate effectively with people in the street as well. Plus with all my acquaintances, I had connections throughout Pakistan that could help me in hiding from the authorities.

But I decided against this course of action for several reasons. One was that the organization of Abu Nidal was no more, having been fragmented and scattered now into the dust bin of history, so there was no way to seek refuge and protection with them. At that point in time I had reached the firm conviction that I would not go back to them regardless of the organizations status anyway; that calculation of mine was than both practical and emotional in nature, having severed my ties with them in my heart. Secondly, and I believe more importantly, I just wanted to be released from prison legitimately and legally so that I can just move on with my life like any normal person, go home and live out the rest of my remaining years with my family. All I desired was to have peace and harmony until I passed away, to make up for the chaos and turmoil of my younger years. Feeling this way and developing a different mentality in my respects led me to the decision not to attempt an escape.

Having made up my mind in this way is why I reached out to the Jordanian embassy in the first place, seeking to reside in Jordan reunited with my family, despite all the misgivings and deep reservations I had towards the Jordanian Intelligence and their agents. So after that visit from the embassy

I began the process of preparation for my release, while my friends were coordinating with the Palestinian Authority. They were mainly relying on them because they didn't possess Jordanian citizenship like I did. Either way, we all as a whole were attaining our proper documentation and gearing up for our impending, imminent release; it wouldn't be long before we would walk out the prison gates and leave Pakistan behind us.

With all our waking hours consumed with preparation, time began to pass very rapidly without our even noticing it despite the fact that we know our release date was approaching. Usually when these kinds of events like release, comes upon a prisoner, time will begin to slow down for him due to the anticipation and nervousness consuming all his thoughts and emotions. That realization that I would be leaving shortly was confirmed for me when the prison authorities informed me that I would be leaving the prison in three weeks' time. This was in the first days of September, 2001. I was even informed of the specific route and stopovers from Pakistan to Bangkok, Thailand, then on to Jordan, my intended destination.

My mind immediately went into overdrive, alarmed and perplexed that I would be flying east to Bangkok and then back west to reach Jordan when I could head west from the very beginning! I even verbalized my extreme misgivings to the officer who told me about the travel plans of the Jordanian embassy, telling him I smell a rat, basically that this is too suspicious! I felt comfortable telling this officer how I felt because I considered him a friend, who I had known for years. "I can't understand myself Abbas. If you were

going to Jordan, you wouldn't fly in the opposite direction l" he replied, astonished. "There is definitely something not right in all of this..." my voice trailing off in a tone of quiet despair.

Knowing and feeling that something treacherous is brewing, I still made up my mind to proceed with my plans to utilize the Jordanians to leave Pakistan. Basically my theory was simple and straight forward: if the Jordanian intelligence is trying to set me up, handing me over to America, then at least, in the worst case scenario, I will find and receive justice in American courts. Surely they would see how much time I spent imprisoned in Pakistan, maybe sentence me to a few more years then release me finally after paying my debt to society, as they say. Hopefully that would be the end of this whole saga. If I was wrong, then I would be traveling to Amman, to live with my family and attempt to carry on a normal existence like any other man would. This would be the best I could expect from the situation. Whatever the case may be, it is far better than being confined in a Pakistani prison indefinitely, stuck in a state of legal limbo, with no country to receive me after release. All of these factors informed my decision to move forward despite the great likelihood that something was being conspired against me.

Making all these big plans for my release, I held off telling my family about them because I didn't want to put them in a state of worry or anxious anticipation. I couldn't imagine how they would feel, waiting for me patiently to arrive in Amman, then never showing up, disappearing only to resurface

half way across the world, who knows how long from the moment of my kidnapping! I did send word to the Palestinian Authority's embassy and they shared with me the same kind of feeling I had about the whole thing with the Jordanians and their very unusual detour. In so many words they told me to be very careful and wished me the best of luck considering the circumstances.

Waiting for my rapidly approaching release, something unthinkable transpired that would shake the foundations of the world and later history forever as we know it. The date was September 11th, 2001, and I was relaxing in my cell, preparing to get a good night's sleep, at about 9:30 at night. Suddenly, the news of a huge event broke across the airwaves and television stations. It was a complete shock and surprise, hearing word of something tremendous. Because of the great time difference, the news came in the evening time for us, Pakistan being 10 hours ahead of New York City. I was privy to what was happening because I had a personal television in my cell, which was constantly on all hours of the day until I slept at night. The reporting on the TV had actually been switched over to foreign stations like CNN, which was unheard of on Pakistani cable..I hadn't seen these kinds of news broadcasts from another country for years.

Airliners, just like Pan Am 73, had apparently been hijacked and crashed into the World Trade Center in New York and there were reports the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. had suffered the same fate. Something of this magnitude was unheard of in the modern history; I remained captivated by the news coverage, watching the breaking news all

night long, well into the morning hours. There was no way I could get proper sleep with new details coming out on a near minute-by-minute basis. I thought to myself that something on this massive scale might even jeopardize my own release. How prophetic my premonitions were, as this attack would affect even the conditions of my incarceration for years to come.

By the time the prison had awoken the next morning, the news of the attacks on New York and Washington had spread to every corner of the institution, with the exact details of what actually happened known to every single inmate and staff member. What I saw not soon after sort of astonished me: both the prisoners and the guards were passing around sweets and snacks in a sort of celebration at what had transpired on 9/11. There was a genuine feeling of jubilation in the air through the whole prison, which was easily discernible on everyone's faces. One has to understand, it is a much held perception amongst the common folk in Pakistan that much of the regions problems, along with the whole Middle East, is in part due to the excessive meddling and machinations of America with its expansionist, aggressive policies.

I was less surprised by what I saw later that day on CNN, and that was the images of the children celebrating and dancing in the open streets of the Gaza Strip and as well as the West Bank, because of what befall America. It was out of pure joy and happiness due to the simple fact that they know Israel bombs them and destroys their homes with American missiles, bought with American funding, with America's explicit, unwavering support and endorsement. So they know and

understand, just as their elders do, that America is truly responsible for all this abject misery and bloodshed, not Israel!

It is clearly illustrated with an example that every American can understand. If you are walking your dog with a leash, and the dog escapes the owners grip, attacking and biting a small child, who will be held responsible for such an event? Certainly the dog's owner is the one at fault. This is exactly how the people of the Middle East see and perceive these events, so it's very clear to them who are to blame! .

These last weeks in prison was the scene for a constant debate back and forth in my mind about whether to go forward with my plan or not. When I spoke to my friends about my apprehensions, they all concurred themselves that the Jordanians are not acting in good faith, and have something up their sleeves in terms of treachery. They told me not to go and wait it out. I considered their advice very much but to linger any longer in Pakistan, for who knows how long indefinitely, was just too much for me to bear. I wanted to move forward in my life, whatever the true outcome that awaited me. I was prepared to take the risk, because who knows what nation on earth would concede to accept any of us.

A couple weeks had passed since 9/11, and it was not my official release date. It was September 27th, 2001. It was an unbelievable feeling, walking to the main gate to walk out, the same gate I had entered 15 years earlier. Many of my friends, both my comrades and Pakistanis, along with guards, were walking with me helping to carry my luggage and other belongings. It felt like I couldn't exchange

enough goodbyes and wellwishes to my friends, hugging and embracing them for what would be the very last time in my life. It's a strange feeling, knowing I must leave but at the same time desiring ardently to take my friends with me; we had been together nearly every day since 1986, and now it was time to move forward, into the unknown without them, my team, who obeyed my every order and command down to the letter.

The aged police car was waiting, the back door open with the Jordanian consular sitting in the backseat to accompany me to the Lahore Airport. It was almost unreal, to step into a car and sit comfortably in the padded seats. "Everything good?

Congratulations to you on this day, it must be a relief" the consular said to me after an officer shut the car door from the outside. "Yes, I'm OK, just wishing to see my family after all this time" softly managed, not sure what to make of his demeanor as I sat next to him. Soon the car was moving down the road away from the prison.

I made sure to look out the back window to the prison, for one final moment, to capture the fleeting scene in my memory, to keep it there forever. This prison of steel and concrete walls which had been my home for the last 15 years of my life, who my friends and I personally opened as its very first, of many, inmates. How many memories would I have residing there, too many to recount; memories of pain and turmoil, of much fear and exasperation. So much of my youth was spent occupied in this place, being grown into a man within its walls, its walls who were a witness to so much in my life, and everything

I had patiently and courageously endured with forbearance.

An unflinching witness to the extreme isolation imposed on us from the moment we stepped foot in the prison, a witness to the bar-fetters that were placed on our ankles for two years, to enslave and constrict us, a witness to the extreme cold and freezing temperatures with hardly any source of shelter, a witness to the hunger strikes we conducted to combat the horrible conditions we were under, sometimes falling ill for long periods due to the neglect and inattention, while simultaneously on the brink of death. The cells and hallways were a witness to the same trial and conviction that occurred within it, and a witness to the moment I was thrown on death row as a condemned man, not just once, but twice, Subjected to the absolute psychological torture and torment that is combined with that experience. From that dire moment, the walls would be a witness to the months of sleepless nights, subjected to overwhelming anxiety and frustration, my own stomach which suffered from hunger and emptiness, telling her, darling this is prison, a prison of a most brutal, bloody dictator who's country is now ruled by the iron-fist of his army! But may these walls be a witness that I pled to no avail, the hunger, cold and blunt, heavy steel attached to my feet permanently eating me alive like an unrelenting fire which burns so fiercely, it consumes its own self! .

In spite of all this struggle and my ultimate survival and triumph through every obstacle and challenge, I was now saying goodbye, goodbye "Adiala Jail", tears flowing from my eyes, down my saddened cheeks,

knowing with absolute certainty that I will never set my eyes upon this place again, for the rest of my life. This memorable chapter was now closed and concluded, as I turned the page to begin yet another.



Chapter 8

Stabbed in the Back

**"I wish to have no connection with any ship
that does not sail"**

Hours had passed before finally arriving Lahore to go to the airport. The whole ride was full of so many thoughts racing through my mind about what exactly could be next, My heart was still full of suspicions toward the Jordanian embassy. I kept telling myself, "Who do they think they are fooling?" but I tried to brush these thoughts aside totally and just brace myself for every possibility and outcome.

Upon reaching the airport, two more Jordanian intelligence agents made an appearance, which only increased the suspicious atmosphere even further. The whole scenery and mood was one of darkness, there seemed to be no cheerfulness in any of them, like you would think there would be surrounding a man who just got out of prison and was now going to join his family. The way there was no sincere congratulations; you can smell a plot in the air with no second guessing. Everything I was observing was just increasing my suspicions to the upmost degree.

All this prompted me to actually voice my concern and ask the so-called consular, whose name was Ahmad al-Haajayh, what exactly was the matter? I can sense something is not right. This Mr. Haajayh I later learned was actually working for the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate, who used the cover

of the embassy to conduct his intelligence gathering. From the second of my questioning I knew in my heart of hearts that he will not be truthful with me one bit, but my strategy was to find the real truth in his eyes; I was an expert at reading peoples reactions in their eyes since my days in the ANO.

The spy gave away all his true intentions in the way he answered me, especially the exact moment he began to swear on the names and souls of his own children, swearing that there is absolutely nothing wrong or any plot against me. None of his words ever resonated with me or convinced me when I seen the lies and deception emanating from his eyes. There was no way he was able to hid and conceal what I was feeling about him. Men like him have no true honor, someone who could swear on their own children to cover for their lies don't truly care for their family or people. Their true loyalty is only invested towards their employers and their filthy paychecks that they earn through treachery and oath breaking.

As the reader is now intimately aware, the Jordanian intelligence services had been after me for years, trying to bait me with all their hired prostitutes masquerading as ladies, seeking to seduce me into their traps. They certainly believed they could flip me, employing me as a double agent against the ANO, or maybe simply to lure me into an ambush and eliminate me once and for all. I was always one step ahead of them, totally aware of their futile tactics and cheap tricks.

However, despite being aware of their back-stabbing nature, they really exerted themselves to go the extra mite, myself not

quite believing they would try to set me up just to hand me over to the Americans without any misgivings, when they knew this case could carry the death penalty. They didn't even blink or bat an eye, maybe making a deal with America not to give me the death penalty, if they aided America in betraying me, handing me right over to the US authorities. Not one single agreement like this was made or even considered.

The only thing I really have to say about all of this is that it was absolutely coldblooded, through and through, and it happened for only one reason and under one motivation: to please their masters in Washington and Tel Aviv.

I also firmly and strongly believe two things. The first being, as history has so vibrantly demonstrated, that the only one who can betray and stab a Muslim in the back is another fellow Muslim! Secondly, and just as important, this plot surely must have been conceived and carried out by Jordanian intelligence without the express knowledge or permission of our beloved King of Jordan. I'm absolutely sure that he would never allow for one of his country's citizens to be handed over to another nation in such a fashion!

Unfortunately for me and so many others, the Jordanian Embassy established in

Islamabad is not like any other formal embassy in Pakistan, or even around the world.

Embassies should strictly confine themselves to the realm of diplomatic work, serving as a liaison between different countries, trying to establish humanitarian projects in their host nations, and aiding

and facilitating the travel and movement of their fellow citizens. But the Jordanian embassy is not concerned with such docile and peace-building initiatives and activities.

From the early 1980's, this so-called embassy heavily invested itself in the business of espionage. During the Soviet-Afghan war, the Jordan services were spying on and tracking the very Arab fighters it was encouraging to fight against Russia, giving them free-rein to recruit in Jordan and move on to the battlefield. Feigning to be an ally in the war against Communism and atheism, the agents of this same agency were compiling databases of as many Arab foreign fighters as they could, so they would have the ability to neutralize them the minute they became a perceived threat to the Kingdom.

This same embassy in Islamabad was the nest where the plot and conspiracy was concocted and hatched against the late charismatic leader and preacher Abdullah Azzam, to assassinate and murder him. Not soon after, he was killed with his sons after leaving the mosque from prayers by a booby-trapped car bomb. Prior to this incident, Azzam's bodyguard discovered a bomb hidden in a pulpit from which he was to deliver the Friday sermon. For the Jordanian embassy, there appeared to be nothing holy or sanctified.

This is how they extended their thanks and appreciation towards this Palestinian leader who was regarded as the father of the Afghan war, who with his powerful influence rallied many Arab and Afghan fighters around him. Knowing this fact, the West and Jordanian GID used and manipulated him to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and as soon as the war

was over, they dispatched their spies and assassins to dispose of him. They felt they needed to extinguish his influence as quickly as they could, knowing and believing that someone with this many followers and devotees is too dangerous, too charismatic to let him remain alive. Before he could emerge as a potential threat they got rid of him, after he served their nefarious purposes. .

This is the same embassy years later who tried to weave a web of corruption and treachery around Humam al-Balawi, seeking to orchestrate his recruitment as a double agent. After their perceived success in his recruitment, they hurriedly introduced him to the CIA to do their dirty work in Afghanistan. This was the embassy's twisted gift to their masters. Unfortunately for them and their benefactors, everything did not go according to plan!

In summary, the Jordanian 'embassy' in Islamabad has played, and continues to play, a treacherous, dirty game of spying and vile machinations against a numerous variety of individuals, especially its very own citizens! That location had become nothing but a hive buzzing with the dark work of espionage and under-handed assassinations. I make it clear once again that I truly think that his Highness, the King, along with the Jordanian parliament and other government officials have no idea or have any knowledge of these activities.

Well, after a short wait in the terminal at Lahore airport, the plane from Thailand had landed to pick up the passengers headed to Bangkok. In a show of their supposed wellwishes, the spy disguised as consular Ahmed al- Haajayh and another intelligence

man with him, began shaking my hand, wishing through their lying teeth good luck and hope you have a good trip. When I gripped their hand I made sure to look them in the eyes one good moment to let them know that I am totally aware of their deception and conniving. In a sure sign to things to come, al- Haajayh didn't even hand to me any of the travel documents or plane ticket, instead giving it a teller at one of the ticket counters. This obviously was in order that he would get them back after I boarded the plane.

Reading about all this betrayal and treacherous behavior, I want the respective reader to know that the Pakistani government itself had nothing to do with this conspiracy to kidnap me; it was purely and solely an affair concocted by Jordanian intelligence from beginning to end. Pakistan was totally oblivious to what they had planned for me, thinking that they are helping the embassy to return me to the country of my personal choosing and that the consular accepted me out of genuine humanitarian and patriotic motives! In fact, Pakistan never even entertained the thought of extraditing any one of us to the United States. Even the brutal military dictator Zia-ul-Haq refused the multiple requests of the American government to send us to the U.S., along with Benazir Bhutto and every government after her, rejecting extradition requests in the strongest terms.

Their policy towards our special case firmly against extradition was despite the fact that Pakistan had a repeated history of turning over their own citizens and other wanted fugitives to the United States. The Pakistani authorities are the ones who

cooperated to set up Ramzi Yousef, who at this very moment is imprisoned in ADX serving a life sentence. They also helped to ensnare Amal Kansi who was later executed in Virginia.

And who can forget the famous case of Khalid Sheik Mohammed, Ramzi bin al-Shibh and Abu Zubaidah, who are now in Guantanamo Bay facing the death penalty, accused of direct involvement in the 9/11 attacks. All this is besides the dozens of Pakistani drug lords who have been extradited to the United States to face prosecution in the federal court system.

But the matter of turning over five Palestinians to America to possibly be executed is too much for the Pakistanis to fathom or stomach! Yes, they sentenced us to death, but they rationalized that this was a crime that transpired on their soil and they would handle it in their justice system, tried under Pakistani law. They considered handing us over to the Americans as a crime itself, a crime that would never be forgotten or forgiven by the Palestinian people as a whole! However, the Jordanian embassy in Islamabad and the intelligence services do not see it like this whatsoever. For them, their greatest priority is to please their masters with this kind of action, regardless of the outcomes or consequences of this horrible crime and travesty!

After their half-hearted handshakes, I began to board the Thai aircraft with a heavy, weighty heart, taking my seat, and attached the small safety belt, trying to drown out what I knew was soon approaching for me. I refused to look back, letting not one person see a hint of regret or second thoughts about

my decision registered upon my face. I knew that Pakistan was now a thing of my past and a place I would never see again for the rest of my days.

The plane ride to Bangkok 'lasted for about four hours. I was extremely restless, not able to get any sleep despite how much I struggled to do so. It was partly from apprehension but also because I wished to try to enjoy the trip as much as I could; it was the first time I had been on a plane in 15 years, since all the way back to the hijacking in

1986.

It was the early morning hours when we arrived at Bangkok International Airport. It instantly brought back many memories for me, remembering the very first time I arrived at this exact airport, bursting with energy and so excited to have the time of my life and enjoy myself in the streets and clubs of Thailand's glistening capital city. This time was markedly different however, the moment I realized that both the East and West were conspiring against me. Sitting in the aircraft, I felt like someone had been watching me throughout the whole trip, but I strove to override my misgivings. When I approached the exit of the plane like any normal passenger, I could spy through the window a car and some suited individuals who definitely looked out of place. Walking down the steps from the plane door, I now realized it was the FBI waiting at the bottom, ready to kidnap me from the airport.

Recent history has shown that Bangkok itself is the location of the largest CIA base in the whole of South Asia. But it is still astonishing that the Thai government would

allow a foreign agency like the FBI to utilize their airport, on their soil, to facilitate the kidnapping and transferring of prisoners. They themselves must realize that this kind of activity is a bold attack on their very sovereignty and independence as a nation! But it is apparent that the Thai government is similar to their counterparts in the Jordanian embassy, so willing and ready to compromise itself just to show their loyalty to the masters of the entire world!

At this point, I offered them no resistance, and in the scheme of things there was no need for that. I was not surprised at all by these turn of events and had been preparing myself for them now for some time. The complicity of the Thai government turned out to not be surprising as it became one of the very few countries to participate, playing a big role, in the extraordinary rendition program of the CIA after 9/11. They aided the Americans in running their network of secret prison 'black sites' and conduct torture and 'enhanced interrogation techniques' upon a countless number of individuals, sometimes which were wholly innocent.

After the FBI agents introduced themselves, they handcuffed me and slipped a black hood over my head. Here I was again in the darkness, being marched off to yet another unknown and unfathomable destination. They loaded me onto a small private jet that belonged to the FBI for just these purposes, and within minutes the plane was in the air. Not long after, they removed both my hood and cuffs. I was expecting some hostile attitude from them, but I received nothing of the sort, with no disrespect found in their demeanor

towards me. The FBI brought along with them a lady doctor who conducted a brief health examination of me then asked if I needed any medication.

Amongst this handful of agents, there was one more woman besides the doctor, and I have to take some time to mention her as I became a little familiar with her, during and after this brief meeting between us. She was an FBI agent and Arabic translator, being of Lebanese descent but an American citizen. From the very beginning I can tell from her character and manner of speaking that she is striving to go the extra mile, above and beyond the call of duty! In fact, she is trying to be more American than the Americans, born and raised, themselves. Like I mentioned I can sense and see something unusual about her from her actions during the whole plane ride, talking back and forth with her.

She had even accompanied the FBI the year before when they came all the way to Pakistan to try to talk to me and do a basic interview. From that exact point I had even felt the same things about her that I would seeresurfacing in her later on the plane.

I would later come to the conclusion about this so-called Arab American, Ms. Nada Ali, that she must be hiding something from her employer's, like something of an illegal nature, like many immigrants. They have this mentality that if they work in an overzealous manner, even more than their own American colleagues, and if their illegal activities, past or present, are discovered, it will give them some leeway and maybe a way out. She definitely had this trait about her, doing more than what was expected of her in many

instances. Or, on the other hand, she is a true infiltrator and double agent who was sent by some foreign agency to specifically penetrate the FBI as much as possible.

It just so happened that I would see this same woman on television, being interviewed on the program '60 Minutes'. She was doing her best to play the innocent lamb, claiming that the FBI and America had betrayed her and turned their backs on her. She followed this dramatic act up with some real streams of crocodile tears to help spice things up a bit. To bolster her image even more, she lied about me and our conversation on the plane, saying she tricked me into some kind of confession! I know that later she was fired by the FBI for her deceitful ways and I am glad that they did.

The plane ride was a very long journey, flying across the massive Pacific Ocean. We made a stop somewhere in between, maybe Midway Island or Hawaii, before finally arriving in Alaska. I spent time in some kind of jail for two days before being arraigned in front of a federal judge. This was my first experience in an American court room, the first of many. At this short hearing the judge ordered that I be sent to Washington, DC to stand trial there. As soon as that was concluded, I was ushered immediately back to the airport in a convoy of cars, to once again board the same jet with the FBI team. We were now destined for Washington, a flight which took about six hours one way.

It was September 30th, 2001 as I landed in Dulles International Airport at exactly 8:30 PM.

Chapter 9

Welcome to America — The Land of so-called Justice, Freedom and Human Rights "In God We Trust!"

Indeed, the entirety of the human race—the whole world—as a matter of our innate nature, has to and must trust and believe in something. This belief and conviction is in order for us to deal with and cope with the extreme difficulty and hardship of life.

America as a nation, well, she chose to believe in God, and to trust in Him. With their declared conviction, they put all their eggs in one basket with God, and of course it's a good choice and place to put your coveted, sacred trust.

Knowing this, we have to make mention of and remember the pirate Columbus who supposedly discovered the new world when he landed on its shores in the 15th century, this apparent dream world; a world of freedom overflowing with opportunities. It was years later that in the lands of this new world that the first genocide took place, committed against the original natives of America. It is this brave, new world which constantly meddled with its full force of arms, initiating atrocities against their neighbor South America, who through this brutal behavior, was treated like the new worlds trash bin where all means of garbage and waste was heaped there.

It is this same world of freedom and unbounded trust in God, centuries later, who

as human beings used the atomic bomb against other fellow human beings. For the very first but not last time, these weapons of mass destruction were welded to extinguish the lives of thousands of people in the span of mere minutes. This same new world who started the Vietnam War, imposing its will with burning napalm and 'agent orange', extinguishing the lives of two million proud Vietnamese people. They are fully responsible for this travesty, like the Korean War before it.

Decades later, this same new world launched their unjust and indefensible wars on the broken nations of Iraq and Afghanistan, engulfing the Middle East in further turmoil and bloodshed for decades to come. The same new world who respects international law and human rights yet established the second Auschwitz in our recent history at Guantanamo Bay, to house their hostages there indefinitely without charging them with a crime, putting them on trial or releasing them!

It is this same brave new world who perpetrated the horrors of slavery upon millions of people, enduring as an established institution for hundreds of years, which to this very day it is still suffering the consequences and effects of its horrendous legacy, afflicting this new world with a seemingly incurable disease of racism and discrimination to this very moment.

Historically, it is this same world that blindly supports and endorses Israel in every unjust action and policy it takes against the Palestinian people, reinforcing its illegal occupation with its new world millions and weapons.

This is the same world, the same America, in all these conscious decisions and actions, trusting in God and only God, at the same exact time! So let us see what is in store for me here.

After landing in Dulles airport, I was hastily driven to the jail located in a suburb of Washington, DC, which was a short distance away. Pulling up to the building, the jail was a sprawling complex, a couple stories high. I had never seen a building quite like this jail; other jails in Pakistan seemed less sophisticated. I could tell that much thought and money was invested in its construction! The SUV I was riding in pulled into the jail after a huge metal door retracted upwards toward the roof, and it closed behind us, bathing some of the interior car park in a bit of darkness. The whole garage was illuminated with artificial light, giving the inside of the jail an other-worldly, sanitized look. It wasn't quite a product of a compassionate group of people but rather for the purposes of some kind of business venture, as if this was an industry and I had just entered a warehouse.

A sliding, motorized door opened and I was grabbed on my arms by a federal marshal and ushered into the bowels of the jail. It seemed to be some kind of intake area for receiving prisoners, and some shouts were aimed in my direction, telling me to sign my name on some paperwork. I could hardly finish before my palms were held and my fingerprints taken. Like a lifeless object, I let them direct me from here to there; my photo being snapped to make sure my profile was now up to date and logged in their system.

This preliminary induction was completed and I was then promptly escorted to a large holding tank and told to step in. I was now completely astonished, seeing a sight I had never witnessed in all my time in prison, all over the world, Before my eyes, there was at least 50 men, totally stark naked with no clothes whatsoever, packed before me in this large cell. It was as if they were some kind of animals, like cattle, jammed into a slaughterhouse. Of course, to join this herd of helpless people, I too must strip myself of my garments. I had never seen in my whole life a group of people being humiliated in this way. I had never been ordered to strip naked in front of other men, much less what they were going to order us to do next.

"You! Step Forward!" a guard was yelling at one of the inmates crammed in the holding tank. "Turn around, bend over...now spread your cheeks—he was talking about his backside—turn around, lift your nuts!" I was in shock; not only did you have to strip naked, you had to expose yourself in ways I had never done in front of anyone in my whole life! What kind of country had I now arrived in and what kind of prison? I had never ever seen this kind of abject degradation in all my years; it was like a part of your humanity was being violated. At that moment I was now wondering, where are these human rights they always preach about, and where is this preservation of human dignity they claim to uphold to the highest, loftiest standard! If you believed their media, you would think that the country of America is full of saints and selfless humanitarians. The jail in Washington taught me something very different! I had only seen this massive

amount of nudity one time at a nude beach in Europe, and that was quite voluntary, unlike this coerced strip-down ! .

After the conclusion of this nude show, I was finally escorted through the many corridors to where I would be living for the near future. I wouldn't be housed in a regular cell or unit but I was taken to a segregation unit which is usually reserved for troublemakers and people who break the jail rules, like fighting with someone else for example. They called this collection of cells the 'SHU' or Special Housing Unit.

I had arrived at this jail about three weeks after 9/11, and I could feel the tension after I arrived there. The atmosphere and energy was very volatile and I could feel the hostility from both the staff and inmates towards me personally. There were instances of rudeness and dirty looks. I even saw from the guards an air of extreme caution around me, believing me to be highly dangerous!

It was a struggle against genuine ignorance for them to believe that I had nothing whatsoever to do with 9/11 or was I connected to or affiliated with al-Qaida, or any other group that had existed in the last 15 years! I was a part of something from the past, a relic of history; the Abu Nidal Organization was no more. I didn't get around to even mentioning the ANO because trying to even explain that would be a futile endeavor! Besides all that, I had been locked up for the last 15 years, being transferred from one prison to another.

As I mentioned, it was very difficult and taxing to try to even explain the basic nuances of my situation, to both the jail staff and the inmates. They had absolutely no

idea whatsoever what is transpiring beyond the oceans, world-wide, wherever that might be, especially the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I really got the impression that if you were not from America and happened to just look Arab, you, whoever you might be, is a member of al-Qaida or a disciple of Bin Laden himself!

Fortunately, common sense started to sink in with the majority of staff and inmates, and with the passage of time, they started to take a liking for me and understand a bit of my situation, even if maybe they didn't grasp the significance of every detail. Their treatment of me also improved along with their understanding. I can say with this growth in tolerance, I genuinely started to get along with them very well.

Sitting in my empty, bland cell that first night was a lonely one. I don't even think I slept hardly two hours. Thankfully I understood a lot of English from my time in

Pakistan, or the situation isolation-wise would have been even more difficult. After that long night in which it felt like I just barely closed my eyes to rest, I was no sooner being awakened. I considered the officer to be kinder than most, and he was courteous enough to offer me the opportunity to take a shower before making my first court appearance. It was 3 AM, and I was already being offered my breakfast. It seemed nothing could be too early when it came to going to court in America! During my preparations, the guard started a brief conversation with me, mentioning that he too had been to the Middle East; he was a soldier in the army and he had been stationed at a base in Turkey. It was nice that somehow, someway, he was trying to

relate to me on some level to make me feel more comfortable.

When 5 AM came around, it was now time for me to make my first appearance before a judge. I was being taken back to where I first entered the jail, what they call the R & D—Receiving and Departures—where everyone was stripped naked. We were not free of the search procedure and it had to be done every single time I or anyone would leave the jail for court. I remember steeling myself mentally, saying in my mind. "Wow, here we go again with the porn show!" There was no passing back and forth in and out of the jail without this entertainment!

I and some other inmates were then taken to the garage area where we entered the jail from the street. There was a small holding cell where we all were chained together like slaves, to wait for our transportation. I tried to take a nap sitting there, listening to all the other inmates chattering and laughing back and forth; despite the grim prospects of going to court it seemed everyone was sort of enjoying themselves, I could definitely tell that this was not these prisoners first time in this predicament! I had to wait with them like this for a whole two hours before the black SUV showed up that would drive us, crammed together, to the local district court for all our scheduled appearances before various judges, depending on the case and the charges. It was about a 15 minute ride to the court building, which was constructed with the same kind of garage like the jail; it seemed like all these government buildings were readily equipped to receive prisoners! We were all unloaded from the SUV and ushered to a holding pen, still

chained, to wait for our time in court. This was another few hours before my time finally came to see the judge. The judge I was about to see would be the presiding judge over my whole case, from beginning to end.

This day was also the moment I would meet for the first time my court appointed attorneys, who were all a part of the DC federal public defender's office. This basically means they were paid by the government to be my lawyers, because I had no financial means to pay for my own private attorney. I would not be regretful however, because every single one of them would prove to be so amazing, both as people and attorneys, who did not waver for one moment, standing proudly and firmly beside me, throughout this entire legal ordeal. To this day, they still help and assist me in any way they can and are able. They have never failed to be so incredibly warm and generous towards me through this trying time.

The courtroom was jammed packed with many people that day, and it's too much to even recall their respective faces, but I will certainly not forget one man in particular. He was young, and his family was from Morocco but I suspect he lived in America quite some time from how he behaved. He was employed by the court as a translator, and he was assigned to help me communicate back and forth with my attorneys, the judge and whoever else it might be necessary to do so with.

I will never forget this poor guy because of how absolutely frightened he appeared to be. Whatever I asked him, no matter how simple, he would turn to the closest American, whether my attorney, the prosecutor, or if he had the chance, maybe

the judge, and tell them exactly what I was saying. It's like it was his sacred duty to tell them every bit of information, even if I said a simple greeting like "hello!" He would immediately get scared and turn to tell them, "Oh, he just said this or that!" I couldn't believe that he could really be so scary because of these simple interactions. I really can't stop smiling to myself recalling these comedic moments. Later however, I would make a request to the court that I be assigned another translator; that young man just made me feel too uncomfortable with all his extra reporting on me!

Not soon after this request, the court obliged and gave me another translator to help me. She was a very sweet lady, about middle-aged, who had a humble character, with a good work ethic, and extremely professional in her translation efforts. She was an ArabAmerican of Egyptian descent, whose name was Ms. Siham.

The court appearance was very brief and concise, lasting just a few minutes. I was there to enter a plea, which I plead 'not guilty'. After that plea, the judge went about setting the date for the next court appearance, which would be a hearing on certain matters related to going to trial. Obviously this meant that I would be going back to jail for the period of waiting until the next court date. My attorneys informed me that they would be visiting me the next day to inform me of the future legal proceedings.

But something different was on my mind entirely, and I couldn't help myself but to ask them if my apprehension and arrival in America made it into the news. I was astonished to hear that President Bush

himself made a televised announcement, accompanied by John Ashcroft, that I had been apprehended. He gave his personal thanks of gratitude to the people who were directly responsible for setting me up and delivering me. The Attorney General Ashcroft, who shares the same ideology and mentality as his boss Bush, made haste in wishing to seek the death penalty against me in my case.

Truly, to hear about all this from my attorneys is not surprising to me one bit. I knew in my soul and believed that everyone in this land is dead-set against me in every conceivable way, and that all the participants in this cruel orchestra have a special role to play. Hearing that the President of the United States himself made sure to speak about my case let me know that I am in a no-win situation, with all the cards stacked against me 100%. This is what led me to the conclusion that I would just carry on with the proceedings and await patiently for what was in store for me. It definitely appeared to me that to try to fight this case would be nearly futile and an utterly fruitless pursuit. Hope itself was not being conceded but it is an honest assessment of the entire situation.

My sole concern at this point was my poor family, who, in what must have been an exciting day of celebration, were awaiting my arrival at Amman International Airport. The Jordanian intelligence services told them themselves that I am on the way, but I never showed up on that fateful day. Their only information about me had to be delivered by Mr. Bush through the means of a TV announcement that was displayed on an airport television. I couldn't image the feeling they

experienced at that exact moment, I know it was just one more devastating blow to their wounded hearts. All I can say to my family is that I am full of remorse and sincerely sorry for what I have put you all through for all these years and decades!

So here I am in my solitary bare cell in Washington DC. I can say with such vivid clarity that I am remembering every single incident and occurrence that happened from that day of my kidnapping to this very day that my simple pencil is touching the paper to record these thoughts. It's been nearly 15 years since that moment, and I describe all my true feelings of being in that jail and what it was really like is something I cannot totally fulfill, and it somewhat escapes me. This experience was so completely different and new to me. This place was not like Pakistan, not like European jails and prisons. This was a total foreign country to me, with a different language I wasn't used to hearing all the time, with completely alien traditions and customs. The vast majority of both the officers and inmates are in some way displaying hostility and mean attitudes towards me, especially in the beginning of my arrival in the DC jail. On top of all this I am suffering from the intense pain and frustration of what happened to me, being kidnapped by many treacherous hands all gathered together to conspire against me.

Here I am, about to stand trial for the second time, for a crime I served my time for starting all the way in the mid-80s! In other situations they call this "double jeopardy", but I was dealing with a parallel justice system that has no regard for the rulings and

laws of other nations, in fact the whole world! The entire atmosphere was dreadful, considering that the events of 9/11 are still very recent, like a fresh, open wound, making simple interactions felt like we are on some battlefield in this global war. And that kind of interaction is infrequent considering I was locked away in a cell for nearly 24 hours a day.

All these factors were leading me to feel depressed, with incredible amounts of stress building and compounding inside me. This started to affect me on a physical level, leading me to start to develop complicated health issues. The negative effects of stress were so great that it nearly led to a breakdown of my whole nervous system. This stress was partly due to the fact that at that specific time, I was not just totally frustrated but also very suspicious of all the staff in the prison, extending all the way to the medical staff, the nurses and doctors. Despite the neat, clean appearance of their white robes and their seemingly friendly demeanor, trying to help me, I looked at them like they were pure evil, hell-bent on harming me as much as they could, concealing their evil intentions with their white garments. For me they were not angels of mercy, but the angels of death, who delivered to me poison in the form of all manner of medications, intent on killing me. Their needles and syringes were like knives which they seek to jab and stab into me with vindictiveness.

I was even feeling paranoid of the chaplain, who they say is supposed to be a man of God; I was perceiving him as a real, pure devil, who had been dispatched to

torture my soul! If I could not even trust a chaplain, where could my trust be placed and with whom?

So all in all, the circumstances were extremely difficult and nearly unbearable. Coping with the intense pressure was like an insurmountable obstacle at some points. The stakes were high, and 9/11 just compounded and ,exacerbated the mounting pressure that I could feel even in my chest and upon my head, in the form of brutal headaches and migraines. I later would learn that they actually call these 'stress headaches'.

Thankfully, I started to adjust more to the entire situation after a short period of time. I began to get along better with others and open up more with many of the staff and fellow prisoners. This helped to relax me very much both on a mental and physical level, which led to a much improved mood and mindset. My disposition and my thoughts were much clear now, helping me to view things in a more positive light, with both people and situations in general. My paranoia and suspicion was lessening. True indeed, there will always be negative people who wish to abuse and harm others, but the vast majority of the people around me were very understanding and friendly.

Knowing about my extreme isolation, my most amazing attorneys worked to send a collection of books to me as soon as possible. The books were all interesting reads, and besides the fact that I personally loved to read, the material helped me to fight off the depressive, lonely feelings incurred upon me because of the isolation I faced in the SHI-J. Those books were like a trusted and loyal companion in that dire situation. Along with

these books, my attorneys also subscribed to me The Washington Post and New York Times newspapers, which I always thoroughly enjoyed, especially the weekend editions that was full of interesting articles and stories.

Another way they tried to help me break the monotony of my solitary confinement was by them scheduling attorney visits with me every other day, which for me was like a visit with friends. We used to spend long hours talking about all manner of things, engaging each other in so many various topics, especially regarding all the reading material I had been consuming on a constant, daily basis. It was also during these long discussions and conversations that I had a chance to ask them so many questions about America as it really is, from people who lived here all their lives. The only exposure I really had was from what I had seen on television and the cinema in Hollywood movies, and what I had read here and there over the years in novels and history books. This was my chance to get to know genuine Americans in a real way, an opportunity I had never been exposed to in my life before.

'My attorneys also helped me to arrange a few phone calls with my family, which was such a relief that I can't even describe. To hear their voices and also having the ability to tell them I was OK was phenomenal and a real life-saver. Despite the odds I tried my best to keep my family in good spirits and remaining optimistic. I never tried to talk to them about too many negative things or thoughts because I know they were suffering just as much as I was, especially my mother.

As anyone can see, my lawyers were a tremendous help to me, who without them, I

don't know how I would have handled that period of time in my life, with the massive amounts of stress and depression that was afflicting me like an inescapable plague. It's like I was a child, with the amount of aid and help I so desperately required, and they were there like ever-loving tender parents, helping their child deal with his coming into a brand new world.

There is one very important thing I must mention about this whole story that has had a great impact on my outlook on life and my worldview. Two of my attorneys happen to be Jewish, and I know to any ordinary person this is not a big deal, and would prompt them to say, "So what?" But you have to understand, that for a Palestinian man who was raised in a certain environment and circumstance where our two peoples have been at war with each other, like I had detailed in the beginning of this book, it is really something quite unbelievable and amazing! I never could have imagined in my wildest dreams that I would ever have a friendship with a Jewish person, but when I met these wonderful people my whole world and perceptions were turned upside down entirely. These amazing individuals are still standing by me and supporting me until this very day, offering me every possible help and assistance one could imagine in a situation such as the one I have found myself.

My friends have endeared themselves so much to me that when my family came to the United States that they even hosted them in their own homes. For this kind of hospitality and everything else I mentioned, I will always feel indebted to them to the highest extent, and will always be searching out the

opportunity to return the favor for the rest of my life.

This short but important interaction in my life is proof that if we as sincere human beings have the heart, stomach and strong inner-will, we can live with each other, not only as neighbors but as true friends, accepting each other for the common good. This truly is a testament to the possibility of peace and tolerance that can exist between us, despite our different directions and paths in life.

There was also two other people who became beloved to me that I met in the DC jail. They were the on-duty chaplain at the jail, father Michael Bryant, and a volunteer chaplain, brother Louis Schwartz. These men were some of the most splendid and caring people I have had the chance to meet in my entire life! I really consider them both saints, who so lovingly took me under their wing in care and unbounded compassion. It was because of them and their love that I never was truly alone and was never totally feeling hated and loathed in this land and by everybody in it. My relationship and friendship has endured so strongly to this day through all these years, sustained by thoughtful letters and cheerful greetings through cards. They continue to always encourage me and hope for the best, supporting me both emotionally and financially. Our friendship was so important to each other that Brother Lou had even mentioned me by name in his beautiful book, "Caged Bird—I know why he beats his wings", dedicating a whole chapter to me and our unforgettable moments together.

Father Bryant has always continued to keep me in his thoughts and remembrances from the

first moment of our memorable meeting in the DC jail. I became so endeared to him that he even spoke on my behalf at my sentencing hearing. Even though the first meeting was in late 2001, it seems like our friendship has just begun, fresh and untainted by time and distance.

I must say that, despite the fact I am residing in this gloomy, depressed place as a helpless and defenseless prisoner, with nothing to offer or give in return for such extreme gestures of kindness and selflessness—even though you had never asked, and never will, for something in return—the only thing I can offer is my feeble hands, raised in supplication and prayer to the Almighty. I pray for you both, that you both be blessed abundantly. You will always be in my thoughts, residing in my most sincere of prayers.

Mentioning all of this, I can't fail to make known all the most wonderful human beings who I interacted with in that prison, from all the doctors and nurses amongst the medical staff, to the psychologists in particular. They were always the most remarkable people who extended to me every kindness and generosity. They would ensure that I received any of the medications I had requested for my various needs and would seek to always give me the best and most professional treatment. I would see more than one psychologist a week, and they would always call me to play a game with them of friendly chess. I sat and played with both men and women psychologists, and whenever the game was concluded, whether I won or lost, they would always reward me with a candy bar.

They also let me use the phone to make private calls to my mother, which was a true godsend, and something I was so appreciative for. I even got the opportunity to use their computer to read online magazines and news articles; that was all new to me and it was a good time for me to get familiar with computers and technology. The psychologists were all so nice to me and helped me escape the loneliness that I was engulfed in on a constant basis. Sometimes it was like I was not even in prison during my time with them, enjoying their company. I still wonder myself where they are after all these years.

Even though my conditions were improving greatly on a personal and human level with much of the staff and inmates, the jail in DC was still not a good place to be whatsoever. It is not a place anyone would want to reside in for a long time or extended periods. The whole place was constantly filled with so much noise of people shouting, laughing and sometimes screaming for a whole slew of various reasons. Half the time I couldn't tell if this is some kind of celebration or is there a problem? A vast majority of the inmates were young, so a lot of them were filled with energy, all crammed into one building; it is a recipe for disaster! Because of all this, I was aching for the day I could be sent away to another prison!

So after spending 8 months in solitary, I needed a change of scenery very badly. It was about the middle of 2002, and I put in a request to the prison authorities to be moved from the SHU into general population. It was not like going to another prison but at least it was like going to a fresh, new atmosphere and environment; enough was enough and I

wanted to have more interaction with people. The prison staff was concerned to let me out, telling me I was there for my own safety. I wasn't held in solitary because they believed I was dangerous, but because of the events of 9/11, they wanted to protect me from the other inmates who might want to hurt or kill me in retaliation just because I'm Arab! I personally was neither concerned nor really believed in any of these excuses; at this point in my life I didn't have much to live for or worry about!

Still being fearful for my safety, they wanted me to sign a waiver, stating that if anything happens to me, it was not their responsibility and it was totally my decision to leave the SHU. It was my firm belief and conviction that I had nothing to lose so I signed that piece of paper with no hesitation. In fact, I can say that I didn't care one way or another if someone stabbed me, seeking to kill me, because I reached the point where life no longer had any real meaning for me, it was totally and absolutely meaningless for me. So seeing I was adamant about my decision, and with the aid of my attorneys, I was finally moved to general population. This wasn't done without a final, grim warning however from both the prison authorities and my lawyers: Be careful and always watch your back! I thanked them for this advice but in all honesty I could care less! I was willingly inviting death at that point in my dismal life!

Arriving in one of the units for the general population was anew, but no surprising experience. After being in different prison environments around the world, I knew how to maneuver and deal with

all manner of personalities and temperaments of so many various people. I was not feeling intimidated despite being in a total foreign culture, surrounded by unfamiliar people. Despite the misgivings and anxieties of the prison staff, so many of the inmates treated me with the upmost respect and with generosity, giving me all varieties of snacks, food and even shoes! I really received a warm welcome from them all. I was pleasantly surprised to even meet some Arab prisoners in population, who lived in the United States. They were there for various crimes, like drug offenses and fraud. didn't hesitate to befriend them, taking the golden opportunity to speak in our native language of Arabic and exchange heartfelt greetings with them.

Even though I had more interaction with people, I was really in a serious state of depression at that period of time, with my mood and feelings surging up and down like the waves of a stormy sea, with the winds of loneliness and uncertainty blowing fiercely.

Despite being surrounded by people, I sometimes felt like the loneliest man on earth. My attorneys could see all of this in me, so they took it upon themselves to hire a professional psychologist to visit and talk with me at least once a month. They did this out of genuine care and concern for me, paying for all the expenses out of their own funds. This was just one more brilliant example of all they did to help me at that time.

I couldn't have been assigned a better psychologist than the other wonderful lady I was about to meet. It has been 14 years ago but I still remember so much about her, my thoughts still drifting to her, prompting me

to write her short letter just to check on her and let her know I am still so appreciative towards her. Her name is Dr. Abudabhi, and she was an Arab American of Palestinian descent. Her demeanor was so pleasant and she was an absolute joy to be around and interact with. She had the nicest personality that left an impression on anyone she came in contact with. I can honestly say she was one of the kindest people I had ever met in my life, full of abundant empathy and positive energy that would have an impact on me for years to come. It was people like her that really reminded me there were still good people in this world who genuinely cared for others, even total strangers. In our long meetings and conversations she would even take the time out to bring me Middle Eastern food, straight from a local Lebanese restaurant in Washington, DC. May God bless you Dr. Abudabhi!

Despite the fact she had been living and working in the United States for nearly half a century, committed and loyal to her adopted country, she never forsook or forgot her people, her roots and her homeland! .

So this whole next year was spent with me engaged in the same routine, which was reading and writing constantly and nearly continuously, trying to fill all my time with something worth while and educational, like I had always done in Pakistan. My days were also full of attorney visits and trips to see the medical staff in the hospital wing of the jail. Obviously, I had to visit the court from time to time as well, making my scheduled court appearance for different hearings leading up to the trial phase, because I had pled guilty some time ago. It was really in

my mind all this time whether I should go all the way to trial or change my plea to guilty. I was in an all-consuming debate inside my head, wondering if I should go through the agony of another trial for the same charge, 15 years ago, or just take responsibility for everything that happened. Honestly I was feeling not sure what to do exactly! There was a lot of confusion in my mind about the right course of action, but there was one thing I was fairly certain about and that was the fact that I would not receive a fair trial whatsoever. One would have to just observe the fact that I was kidnapped, like I was playing a role in some kind of Hollywood movie, so how would I receive a normal, unbiased trial? The set of circumstances surrounding the whole case almost guaranteed I would have none of that!

Suddenly and unexpectedly, in the midst of all these confusing thoughts and emotions, the court made a momentous decision. For an unknown reason still a mystery to me, the court decided to take the death penalty off the table completely. Obviously they had their own reasons but they concealed it from me for whatever reason convenient to them. So with the possibility of death now out of the equation, there was only a life sentence to contend with. This turn of events is what really prompted me to pled guilty and get this whole process over with, and take the life sentence. What was the point of going to trial and ending up with a life sentence anyway? It was both illogical and a waste of both my time and energy. I did not inform my family about this decision, not wanting to further worsen the condition of their poor nerves! I just wanted to get away from the torturous

headache of DC, with the un-abating noise and ruckus, and off to a calmer, more relaxing environment where I could finally get on with my life, in whatever constricted form it would take. I was always on the verge of collapse and it was more than enough for me to handle. I was done with Washington DC!

I am now remembering with a broad smile on my face, the day I was summoned before the court of the federal judge on my case. He wanted me to stand before him and explain why I wanted to plea guilty. I remember his voice still, asking me, "Mr. Safarini, why is that you desire to plea guilty? There is absolutely no need to take this course of action. You have a team of excellent attorneys, there will be a jury of 12 men and women who will be impartial, and I will be here as well." Basically what he was trying to tell me in so many words was that I will be receiving a fair trial and justice will prevail in the end!

The only thing that came to my mind at that moment when he tried to utter these smooth but deceptive words to me was "Excuse me your honor, but what is this justice that you're referring to?" Suddenly my mind was swirling like a hurricane with the most powerful recriminations. Was it the highest form of justice to kidnap someone who was half way across the world, in some cowboy, outlaw fashion? Justice, after shipping him to the United States, to stand trial, again, for the same exact crime and charge that I had received a sentence for in a whole separate country, and on top of that, severely punished and threatened with the death penalty? And besides the issue of justice, where is the respect of international law and

the sovereignty of nations that the media incessantly refers to, always demanding for other people to meet those standards? If this honorable court considers kidnapping to be lawful, conducted by America all over the world, than the very same law and standard should be applied to everyone, including if it's perpetrated against Americans themselves! I guess this would be true justice! Nevertheless, in reality, his honor was unintentionally mistaking revenge and retaliation for justice; I don't blame him for such a lapse in judgment!

Personally, I have never even for one second believed, in the entirety of my life, that there is any degree of justice upon the whole face of the earth. There is nothing close to true justice! I believe that human beings are incapable of delivering fairness or justice to his fellow human beings; this is against the laws of nature and it simply can't happen ! The whole of the human mind and body is constructed out of flesh and blood. So this means that his feelings are much in charge of and guiding him. Accordingly, he will be making his decisions based off his strong feelings, not rationale and just logic.

So in light of this, how can one expect justice from a person who strongly and sincerely believes that you have not only hurt his or her feelings, but violated them on a level of great magnitude, thus generating bad blood between both parties and creating feelings of hostility to the point you consider each other mortal foes! And then this man is expected to pass fair judgment upon you, setting aside all his intense feelings and emotions? It is totally

impossible! Why? Because it is in our nature to take things deeply personal.

Anyway, I am now a man, middle aged, who has seen and experienced so many things, and my beliefs which I hold absolutely are based upon facts. Truly, if we are to find and experience any sort of justice, fairness, impartiality, and equality, we must hope to find it in Heaven. The Almighty is the only True One who can deliver absolute justice. No sham kangaroo court around the entire globe can do what only the Almighty can accomplish!

Due to my good luck, after I pled guilty things didn't take too much time, and a few weeks later I was back in the courtroom. I was there for a sentencing hearing, to hear about a sentence I already knew, and I had it written in plain black and white, on my official US Federal court paper. But knowing how courts and especially sentencing goes, I figured there must be a show in store for all of this, not to mention that the head prosecutor had requested and petitioned for a change of venue to a larger courtroom !

The hour of my sentencing, my feelings were dead right and totally confirmed, the moment I stepped foot in that courtroom. A massive seal of the United States, with an eagle clutching deadly arrows, was mounted on the wall behind the judge's seat. So many seats had been arrayed behind me, and it seemed that every single occupant in the court was staring me down, trying to pierce my heart with their eyes. I was consumed by their hateful glances; as if the opportunity arose they would eat me alive. There was this instantaneous feeling I got from everyone there—besides my party of attorneys—had made me their personal, despised enemy; all I had

to do was see the glances and stares of their eyes! I was carefully observing the very tension in their necks, the eyes which seemed ready to explode from their skulls and the open gaps of their jaws that their complete, entire focus was fixated on me!

At that moment I told myself, oh boy, what a horrible day! The judge, the prosecutor, the officers stationed in the room, witnesses and even the simple clerk, were'all sharpening their teeth, competing with each other to rip my corpse to shreds, so that every man and woman may get their allotted piece! I was completely alone and isolated, trapped amongst all these ravaged, starving people! The only thing that was missing was their boxing gloves in which they would use to jump on me!

Most thankfully, this show and circus was completed and concluded quickly, with my mind blanking out so much of what was being said. I received my life sentence; taking the piece of paper that now dictated my life, tucked it under my armpit and left the courtroom, resembling a good schoolboy. I was then shackled and restrained before I was transported back to the jail. That magnificent court of law, that court of justice, had now ruled, so now we can proclaim that justice has been served, it has triumphantly prevailed, so congratulations to everyone, and may God save the king!

And of course, in the true spirit of law and order, his honor did not forget to spice up the sentence he had pronounced upon me, he made his special recommendation to the Federal Bureau of Prisons to send me to the most secure prison in the whole of America, the Supermax ADX in Florence, Colorado. I'm

quite sure that this was done by him to show everyone that he is tough and he means absolute business to everyone in attendance. Again I say and wish him congratulations!

After I was handed my sentence, this meant that my days in the DC jail were numbered. Really, I was feeling happy about this prospect because the place had always been so noisy and high strung to me. At this exact period I had reached 42 years old and I just really wanted to relax and lie down. The only thing that I am really going to miss, and really be regretful about is that I will not be seeing and visiting my attorneys as hardly as often, along with all the medical staff and the chaplains. They had always been so nice to me, and their acts of kindness would remain with me forever in my memory. Knowing that my last days are approaching, Father Bryant made it possible for me to make a handful of free phone calls to my family in Jordan. They were all very stressed now, due to the harsh and merciless sentence passed on me. It was a great relief to be able to at least try to calm them down some how and reassure them that I will be OK, whatever happens or what they decide about me.

Many letters of support and encouragement were being sent to me at this time from people all over the world, from Pakistan, Britain, and even from the United States itself. Some were known friends to me while others just genuine supporters who had been informed about my legal situation. A lot of them were motivated by sincere feelings of sympathy for the Palestinian cause and people. I had even got word from my friends and comrades on my case with me who told me that after what happened to me they were worried that the

Pakistani government would hand them over to the United

States. The Palestinian Authority however had assured them that this kind of thing

would never transpire on their watch. In fact, fulfilling their duty as a proper embassy, the PA consular worked every diplomatic channel and avenue diligently to secure my comrades release, sending them to the proud and defiant people of Sudan, who along with their proud and our beloved leader, Omar Al Bashir, accepted to give refuge to them in the country. This is in stark contrast to the many Arab countries, overcome with treachery, which would refuse to take them flat out!

Needless to say, just mentioning SuperMax ADX to anyone, whether in the DC jail and I assume any other jail and prison in the country, would send shivers and chills through their body, straight to the bone! The reason being that this prison has one of the most notorious reputations not only in America itself, but the entire world, a prison that has been condemned by human rights groups all the way in Europe! Of course, I can say in all honesty that I am one of these people, who were very concerned; from all the multitude of stories that had heard about this place, it sounds completely horrible. I couldn't help but to whisper to myself, "Is it not enough, to serve 15 years in prison, some on death row, in Pakistan, then kidnapped and rendered to this noisy, overwhelming DC jail for three years! So now on top of all that I will be sent to serve my life sentence in this ill-famed prison, entitled 'SuperMax'?

I was really beginning to wonder if I could continue to handle all of this, knowing that I had reached the point that this is just too much. I had experienced the isolation of death row and now the SHU, and what I heard about ADX was that it specialized in extreme isolation, cutting you off from so many forms of human contact; it was even said that some of the prison is constructed down into the earth, essentially putting people underground, like a tomb! Surely this was a place where people lost their minds,

A month or so after the sentencing, all the arrangements had been put in place for me to be sent to Colorado, once and for all. It all happened in the early morning with an officer coming to instruct me to pack my bags; the time to leave the jail had finally arrived. I had about two hours before they would come to begin the process of traveling, and in fact I was on my way to the airport, in their SUV, within less than that short amount of time. There were some other inmates with me placed in to the vehicle, all on our way to the airport to fly to Oklahoma City, the main transportation hub of the whole Bureau of Prisons, where prisoners were dispatched to numerous prisons scattered across the nation.

As one could imagine, on this trip everyone was to be restrained by handcuffs, but I turned out to be a special case. Because I am designated to be 'warehoused' in ADX, because I'm 'High-Max' custody, because I'm a severe security threat, and a very dangerous man, who is like a superman Rambo-like figure in their eyes, I had to be extra secured and restrained by a number of chains, shackles and the infamous 'Black Box' which

locks your wrists and hands in place almost totally and very uncomfortably! And to think that you would have to fly on a plane for hours like this, trying to eat and drink the meager food they gave you!

After this flight, with many detours and stops to load and unload bunches of prisoners here and there, we finally arrived at the massive federal jail in Oklahoma, specially fitted with airport-like terminal tunnels to hook up to the sides of the transportation jets. Shuffling off the plane, I was instantly singled out by the officers to place me in a specially designated holding cell, which they kept me in for five hours, with no food, drink and no toilet, before moving me to the next step. That step would be the SHU, where they held me for 18 days straight, with no recreation, no newspapers, no radios and definitely no television. They just provided me with a few ragged paperback novels to help to pass the long hours, isolated and alone. All this was in preparation to ready me for my trip to ADX.

So now my time to sail to the SuperMax had arrived, which would be my new home for the next coming years. This nightmare that was ADX would just be one more dreaded ring on the long chain of torment I had now been suffering for over a decade and a half at that point. ADX itself was diametrically opposed to the any other prison I had experienced in my life, which I had gotten so intimately familiar with. This huge grave was where they just desired for you to lay down in your bed like a casket and relax as the years tick by slowly, with nearly every single thing coming to your cell, as if they are instructing you like a child, singing you to sleep! We will

bring all you need, your food, your pills, your freshly washed laundry, your reading material like books and newspapers. We will even come and pick up your trash! Not to mention you are provided with your own miniature, personal TV with all the channels you could desire. This is all available to you in your room, a room in which you must remain in for 23 out of 24 hours in a day! Not to mention a hot, steaming shower available all day and night long.

For some, at first glance, one might believe this is akin to some five-star hotel roomservice, where you are waited on hand and foot, but there definitely is a difference between a genuine five-star hotel in the normal world and the room service provided at 'Hotel ADX' I The royal treatment is meant to keep you comfortable and satisfied in their hotel, which in Florence, is in reality done to crush and destroy your very mentality and buries you alive at the same time, as you lay in your cell!

The ADX was built and constructed on one single foundation and principle, and that is to be a place of maximum punishment for inmates who do not live up to the expectations of the Federal Bureau of Prisons at other facilities, inmates who try to escape, or attempt to stab and kill other inmates or staff, or engage in drug trafficking inside the prison, amongst other serious infractions. So when they are caught, the prison authorities send them to ADX for a certain amount of time to punish them, trying to instill in them that this better be the last time you do what you did to get here in the first place! After this period of severe punishment and isolation, they then are run

through a psychological and rehabilitation program before being cleared to join the rest of the prison population once again.

But in all honesty, from what I witnessed there in ADX was that the vast portion of inmates there were not there for violence against other inmates or had any other disciplinary issues in other institutions. Yet, so maliciously, these men are kept in this hellish environment for years and years, with not one hope for some of them to ever make it out alive.

It was in this dark, gloomy place that I would later meet many Arab and Muslim prisoners who were rounded up, snatched from different prisons all over the continental United States, and sent to ADX after the attacks on 9/11. It was clear vindictiveness and retaliation. I grew in friendship with a lot of these brothers, and it was through my many hours of conversations with them that I began to hear many different stories about other prisons in the federal system and how prison life in general in America was. One thing gathered from the information they were giving me was that ADX was very different and abnormal compared to other places.

But in the scheme of things I felt like it was to my advantage, ADX being very restricted and our options limited, because that meant the whole prison was quiet. Being that I love to read and write, this environment was a perfect place for me and my temperament, a place where I could be alone with my thoughts and submerge myself in stories and history. On the other hand, this kind of isolation is not good for multiple years back to back, as it can have a negative

impact on the mind and be psychologically damaging, sometimes permanently.

So the isolation and solitary confinement of ADX was a great opportunity for me in the beginning of my time there to consume literally dozens upon dozens of books. A lot of them were some I had bought while others were sent to me by my attorney's, friends and relatives. I also took advantage of the loan system that was run by some libraries in Colorado that I would rent and check out books from them. With all this intense reading, day by day I became more acquainted with the English language, exploring it more and more, I surprised myself, because I came to love the English language.

Watching the TV in my cell all the time, constantly letting it run all day long, also helped to strengthen my language skills even further, like when I used to hear Urdu from the radio and television in Pakistan.

With all the free time, I was simultaneously increasing my proficiency in English as well as advancing my education by taking many courses made available to us over a channel used by the prison to broadcast these college lectures over the television. There were so many subjects and I enjoyed them all very much, especially the history lessons, covering a wide variety of events, people, and civilizations. You were then required to write a report on certain questions about the lectures content, and then you would receive a certificate for passing the exam. I received numerous certificates of accomplishment for my many hours of studying these courses, which I

enjoyed tremendously. I never felt it was some kind of work, but a beautiful opportunity to expand my mind and gain knowledge.

And just like in Pakistan, my interaction with many of the American inmates helped me to not only improve my language skills but to learn more about America as a nation itself. One particular fellow inmate who was always aiding me in practicing and correcting my English was Eric Rudolph. He would become one of my true, real friends who I grew to like very much. Eric had been accused of attacking abortion clinics and had been sentenced to life in prison and sent to ADX, because they considered him a high-risk prisoner. I could tell from my interactions with him that he was highly educated and was always very polite with the best of manners. We would spend many long hours talking and conversing about a wide array of subjects, like all sorts of literature and a lot of questions about America, its culture, history and of course more questions about English! I miss Eric, as I have never seen him again since I left ADX. I sincerely wish him the best of luck and hopefully soon he will get out of the ADX!

I would like to reiterate here again, about the fact that most of the Arab prisoners were imprisoned in the ADX on a purely retaliatory basis motivated by blatant revenge after 9/11. However, we did believe that we would make it out of that unjust punishment when the temperature in the country would inevitably cool down with the passage of time, even if this would take a couple years. Once this anger and white-hot fury would subside, our chances of finally leaving to a normal prison would increase.

But at that moment, the racism and prejudice was just too high for us to hope for that eventuality any time soon, because it was clearly taking its toll on us on an hourly and daily basis. I've always believed that time is the best healer of wounds, so we would just have to wait out this tough period of hate-fueled discrimination.

Even though we believed that time would be on our side, as a group we had decided that we would do our best and utmost to hasten getting out of that place. We had no time to just sit around, as if we were waiting for some miracle solution to fall out of the sky. Obviously as prisoners, our options were limited but we did have some procedures that we could follow, and that was in regards to using legal means to try to combat our unjust and inhumane punishment that was imposed upon us. So with this in mind, we began the process of drafting legal complaints, writing up motions and petitions, moving in the direction of filing a full-blown lawsuit against the Bureau of Prisons, due to their use of the ADX as a tool of torture and punishment against Arabs and Muslims.

In this noble endeavor, a veritable set of angels came down from the heavens to support us; I really don't consider them mere human beings! They were like true knights, standing firmly beside us, dedicating their every minute of time and precious resources on us, trying to help us in every single way they can. They pursued this honorable endeavor with no second thoughts about the adverse consequences this could have on them in their personal life, ignoring the harassment of the snooping, nosey FBI, invading their privacy,

spying on them and just making their life difficult by any means the agents are able.

They were driven by two factors that enabled them to ignore all these negative consequences, willing to sacrifice everything. First, this kind of work was their passion. As professional lawyers, the integrity of the law and the pursuit of justice for all was their personal, heart-felt conviction and they wished to fulfill their duties to the best of their ability, not concerned for money or material benefit. Secondly, and most importantly, is that the principles of empathy and common humanity is deeply inside their heart and souls. These sincere beliefs and true emotions is what drives them to strive their utmost in standing firmly, every day of their life, beside the oppressed in the face of the most obstinate oppressors.

All these heroic lawyers and human rights activists were mostly Jewish and Christian who stood by us, full of care, compassion and kindness, regardless of the fact that we held different religious beliefs, spoke different languages or came from nations separated by oceans, and whatever other divergent characteristics you could conjure up in your imagination. But despite all of this, we shared one thing in common, and that was the fact we are all human beings, all simple travelers in this passing, transient life. We are all human, who should care about the pain and suffering of other human beings. It is only in this genuine spirit of humanity that we will be able to help each other live in co-existence, despite the outward differences amongst us. .

Let me now mention those great people, amongst so many others, those magnificent human beings who are really making a difference in a world full of cruelty and oppression. They are Mrs. Lisa Greenman, Ms. Laura Rovner and Ms. Jennifer Daskal. They worked, and still work, going above and beyond their legal duties to improve conditions and circumstances of prisoners, helping them to live out a more bearable and dignified existence. Bless you all and may blessings be upon all of those courageous individuals who lived up to the highest standard of humanity that is inside every person. Extending a helping, caring hand to their fellow human beings in need is not a crime, but an act deserving of the highest recognition and appreciation, an act which displays the magnitude of the heart and spirit, and act which truly demonstrates the vast difference between the human beings and the wild beasts! In fact I had felt like every opportunity I had to speak with these wonderful ladies and human beings, it's like a shot of hot Scotch straight to my psyche, because it awakens my conscious to the fact that yes, there are still good people in this world and it hasn't totally succumbed to evil!

Through years of struggling like this against hostile attitudes and a system built upon collective, indiscriminate punishment, I was finally on my way out of ADX. This definitely was due in part to the aid and support of all these good people I had mentioned. These last couple of years was eased by the arrival of a new warden. This man had a lot of respect and veneration for the law, and it wasn't in his heart to be an

oppressor of defenseless people like prisoners. You can really perceive that he has a degree of genuine mercy held in his soul. So this sincere human being, both in word and deed, is the one who diligently worked and approved to have me get out of the SuperMax ADX once and for all.

So finally, and thankfully, in late 2011, I was on my way out after about eight full years of pure pain, suffering, as well as education, enlightened with hope. It was early morning, when I would be leaving for the next prison in my life, the CMU—the Communications Management Unit—located in Terre Haute, IN, another so-called secured and high-profile prison unit. Like all the trips in the BOP, I would have to first fly to Oklahoma before making the long journey to Indiana. At this point in time I had come out of the more isolated parts of the ADX and was now in a unit where I had more contact with other inmates on a daily basis, being allowed to mix and mingle in an open common area for some hours of the day.

Like all my departures from prison, it was time for me to say my goodbye's and shake hands with all the many inmates I had got to know over the years, some becoming my good, personal friends. Being in my unit, I had ample time to say a proper farewell to all of them, and I was thankful for that. I let each and every one of them know how much I had always appreciated their company and thoughtful conversations. All their smiling faces would be sorely missed and reminisced about!

I remember two medical personal specifically who were some of the best among all the doctors and nurses at ADX, who I

believed as a whole were a collection of some of the most amazing medical staff I had encountered in many of the prisons I was confined in. Their names were Dr. Walker and the nurse Ms. Trap, and they were both so pleasant to be around and extremely helpful. I recall them even telling me, when your book is published, we will be some of the first to buy it and read it! The last thing I had heard about these two wonderful people was that Dr. Walker was employed at an immigration center somewhere in California and Ms. Trap went to another federal prison facility in Massachusetts. I hope somehow they find out about my book and read it.

Shackled and 'black boxed', I was escorted to the bus to finally and unbelievably leave SuperMax ADX. As the heavily guarded bus began to move, I started to look all around, especially after the bus breached the whole complex. I was checking to see if this really was a reality and not some kind of dream. I was looking back at ADX, thinking to myself that yes, I am leaving this hellhole of a prison, and whatever is ahead of me has to be an improvement! Whatever the case may be, I still believe and know that prison in general is typically the most utterly depressed and desolate environments that human beings have concocted for themselves.

So the routine trip to Oklahoma occurred, and after a few days I was on to the CMU. This whole transportation process took about a week, which by the transportation standards of the BOP wasn't bad at all; sometimes it would take weeks on end just to get to one's intended destination in the prison system.

There are only two Communication Management Unit's in the whole federal system, and one of them was in Terra Haute where I was sent. The CMU was dubbed by the media as Guantanamo North because of its restrictive nature and also because the inmate population has always been disproportionately Muslim, so much that some in the legal profession have accused the BOP of making it a prison unit for Muslims! To try to challenge this perception, the prison authorities did begin to put some non-Muslim inmates there to balance the numbers somewhat.

Now once again I am going through a new experience, placed in a new environment, surrounded with brand new faces and personalities. Coming from a place such as ADX I definitely had some adjusting to do in this place. Really the CMU is in a category all its own, somewhere in-between the high security of ADX and a regular institution where the general population resides. It is not totally restricted like the SuperMax but not as laid back as much as the normal penitentiary, where movement from here to there, like on an outside yard, is a routine occurrence every couple of hours.

The history of this particular unit is that it used to be a housing unit for death row inmates for decades. Then, a brand new penitentiary was constructed, shifting the death row prisoners to a unit in the newly constructed prison, leaving the old unit open to become later the CMU. This wasn't their plan in the beginning, but when the special need arose, they converted it into that purpose. Now, it became a location where certain inmates they deemed some kind of

threat were kept there exclusively to watch all their forms of communication with the outside world, whether it is the phone, letters, emails with the computer and even personal visits. All these things are under real and strict control, coming in and going out, monitored by some specialists in an entire different state outside Indiana. Because this unit is decades old, there was absolutely no air-conditioning whatsoever, so it was very miserable in the summer months.

Because of these conditions, many of the fellow inmates I was with there were constantly complaining, the whole concept and idea of the place being completely unacceptable and draconian, but to me it was another story. Just coming out of ADX, a place of authentic torment, the CMU was like a kind of Paradise on earth! Here, I actually possessed the ability to be able to place two social phone calls per week—preapproved of course—while in the ADX it is only two every month. I am now surrounded by people all the time, while the situation in the SuperMax is constant lockdown in your own cell all the time. In the CMU common area I am cooking my own food in the microwave and sharing meals with other prisoners every day, while in isolation I have just to eat whatever they give me.

Mentioning this makes me remember back to the ADX and how I had to prepare my own cooked meals with no microwave, alone in my cell. You could imagine it was difficult but I always used to manage, sometimes using cooking methods akin to the Stone Age! One very memorable example is actually cultural for me; in Palestine, we love to eat and cook with all sorts of dairy products, like milk,

yogurt, and various creams like sour cream. So, having access to milk from breakfast, I wanted to try to make yogurt like back home. To convert it, I had to go through a number of particular steps to complete the process. I would take two milk containers they would give us, and place them in the sink, with the hot water running on them, for about a good 15 minutes, until the milk is warmed. Then I would open the container slightly and place inside the milk a small piece of bread, because of the yeast, which is required to begin the process of transforming the milk into the thicker yogurt. Sometimes I would also use either anti-acid pill due to the form of acid in the pills or crush up some Vitamin C pills and mix it in the milk. Then after that, I would wrap it in a blanket to try to warm up the milk a little more. The milk then has to sit for a few days before it can turn into yogurt.

To make sour cream, the process has to go a little further, by drying the yogurt of all the water. To do this, I have to dump all the yogurt into a sock and then hang it from my door by attaching it there so that the liquid can drip and leak from the sock all night long into a small cup to catch the water. By the morning, all the water is gone and now it is authentic sour cream, which I would love to use as a spread on pieces of bread, enjoying it so much with my morning coffee. I used to make my attorney Mrs. Greenman laugh so much about this when I told her. She said it was nasty to use your own socks to make the yogurt! But I would try to assuage her misgivings by telling her I only use new socks that I don't use for my feet!

One special thing about the CMU is that we have access to a row of computers in which we can compose and send emails. This was of course totally new to me as I had never had such access to a computer in my whole life, much less being in prison since 1986. When I was out at that time there was no such thing as the kind of technology that exists now in this day and age like 'smart phones' and 'tablets'. So personally it was very pleasing to being exposed to this and being able to communicate utilizing email. It actually took a fair amount of time to become accustomed to and proficient in the use of this technology.

Overall, the Communications Management Unit was a very good change of pace for me, allowing me a little bit more freedom than what I had been prevented from for years. Despite that, I can say it is not the best environment to try to spend many years there, because even though it is better than SuperMax, it's not like a place you can go outside and play soccer or make a couple phone calls in one day if you wanted. As I stated earlier, most of my fellow inmates, a lot them never had even stepped foot in a jail or prison, were always complaining about the restrictive nature of the place. Because of this, there was multiple complaints and lawsuits filed against the CMU in courts, challenging the very legality of the entire place itself. Many people had pointed out the fact that these units opened without the BOP following its own policy statements; in fact the unit wasn't officially recognized as existing for years in the beginning! Not only were they restricting many things regarding communication, but also restricting the practice of peoples religion by banning

Muslims and non-Muslims from congregational prayer! Lawsuits were also filed against this major violation of the prisoners' rights, not just as inmates, but as human beings! There was lots of gross negligence regarding medical care as well.

My own self went on hunger strike in the CMU to protest against these horrible violations of our basic rights. This happened about a year after I arrived there, on three separate occasions, to fight back against a lack in some of their medical care.

It was in Terre Haute, Indiana that I received my very first visit from my cousin who lived in the United States. This was my first social family visit in years, and it was extremely difficult for me to say the least. When I got incarcerated, they were just one year old, so hardly remember them at all! Now, they were grown men with family's and jobs, who've gone to college and graduated, amongst so many other things.

The second thing that made this visit so hard was the fact that it was from behind the glass, so I am separated from my cousins by a barrier. This entails that I have absolutely no contact with them, to the extent that I have to use a telephone to even hear their voice and speak to them! There are no hugs and no handshakes, making the visit totally devoid of normal human interaction. Still, it was better than nothing, and despite the imposed restrictions, it was a very emotional visit, seeing someone from my family after so long. Since I came to the United States my mother was actually trying to see me, but I was always refusing the idea outright because I didn't want to conduct the visit with the glass barrier in the way,

preventing us from a single simple hug. I was also concerned about a possible rejection after what happened to some of my brothers when they came to America some years earlier to visit me in the ADX. Because of the complicated procedures surrounding the visitation process in the SuperMax, they were prevented for whatever reason from seeing me.

However, after a year in the CMU, all the conditions we suffered there were starting to affect me, sinking deep into my heart, convincing me to ask myself, now what, and where do I go from here? There is no way I could stay like this forever, with all these suffocations and constrictions. Coming to this firm conclusion, I started the process of working with the prison authorities to work my way out of the CMU. They said I could achieve this by participation in various educational programs and also stay free of any trouble, receiving no disciplinary reports against me for any kind of rule infractions. If someone did this, it will definitely help them to one day be released from that place to somewhere more humane and suitable..

In 2013, I was scheduled to see the parole board for the first time since my incarceration in America. Being that my case transpired in 1986, I was eligible for parole; in 1987, the federal government changed the law, revoking the parole stipulation thus making anyone after that year unable to be released from prison on to parole if they were incarcerated in the federal system. They called anyone with a case before 1987 under the 'old law' and I just so happened to be one of these people. This being said, after a certain amount of

time passes, the parole board would examine my case to see if I would and could be fit for release back into the free world, this is of course, if I met certain sets of criteria. Some of these criteria could include my prison record and if I have had been serving productive and positive time in prison and if the prison authorities would vouch for that. The parole board would also want to know what kind of plans you have upon your release, like if you have a stable place to stay and if you have any potential job prospects.

Personally I felt like from the first day that this is going to be a long shot, being granted parole. Technically because I am serving a life sentence, they could hold me in prison for as long as they desire and never let me go. But, I feel that I have to do my part and hope for the best outcome possible. On my behalf, many very good-natured people wrote letters of support on my behalf, recommending my release back to society. The letters were addressed to the Parole Commission and they read as follows:

November 5, 2013

U.S. Parole Commission

90 K Street NE

Third Floor

Washington, DC 20530

Re: Zaid Safariri n ecristar No. 14361-006

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm writing to express my hope that the Parole Commission will give favorable consideration to Zaid Safarini.

I have known Mr. Safarini since I participated in defending him in federal district court in Washington, DC between 2001 and 2004. I met regularly with Mr Safarini at the District of Columbia Jail and, together with co-counsel, assisted him through his guilty plea and sentencing hearing. Following that, I made several legal visits to see him during his years at the prison in Florence, Colorado, and to this day we continue to maintain contact in writing and by phone. -I thus have had the opportunity to get to know Mr. Safarini well over a period of about 12 years, I also have had the chance to get to know several members of his family. I have worked as a public defender for over 25 years. I have never had a client who was as committed as Mr. Safarini is to living a life of meaning and self-improvement in custody..

I understand the gravity of the offenses to which Mr. Safarini pled guilty and I am familiar with the suffering that resulted from these crimes. I was present for the sentencing hearing in this case and heard the victims of the hijacking describe the horror of their experiences that day as well as the pain and loss they continue to feel. I believe Mr.

Safarini deeply and sincerely regrets his actions and their catastrophic cost. His views on life and on his own behavior have changed

dramatically. Based on our many discussions about these topics, I know that he rejects the choices he made as a teenager and young adult. He speaks openly about the misguided thinking that led him in such a terrible direction so many years ago.

From the time he arrived at the DC Jail in late 2001, Mr. Safarini has maintained consistently excellent conduct and has demonstrated in numerous ways that he can and

make better choices for the rest of his life. Upon his arrival in the United States, he had already survived 15 years in a Pakistani prison under a death sentence that was later commuted to a life term, and he had had ample time to reflect upon his offenses and what he hoped for in his future.

In this country, Mr. Safarini has experienced the most severe conditions of confinement known in our justice system, during his years at ADX Florence. He has also had continuing health challenges, due to injuries he received at the time of his offense: Nevertheless, he has spent his prison time as actively and constructively as possible and; except for some brief bouts of depression, he has succeeded in maintaining a remarkably healthy life and positive outlook. He has consistently developed successful relationships with prison staff and with other inmates. He has eagerly sought to improve his education in every way possible, as can be seen from the numerous certificates he has earned. He reads voluminously, from literary classics to biography to history to popular fiction. He maintains warm and close

relationships with members of his family, who continue to care deeply about him. And he has established enduring relationships with many who have worked with him, as evidenced by this letter and the letters of Father Michael Bryant and Brother Lou Schwartz, whom he met here in Washington and with whom he has maintained contact.

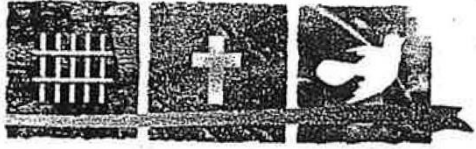
On a personal level, Mr. Safarini has demonstrated his values and good character in numerous ways. He has always shown the highest degree of appreciation for the work I've done for him. He is patient and respectful of my time and always considerate in the requests he makes. He shows thoughtfulness in all sorts of ways, and remembers me at every holiday with a card, a handwritten note, and occasionally a handmade gift.

After 27 years of incarceration, Mr. Safarini is a very different person than he was when he committed his crimes. He has renounced those actions, apologized, and been severely punished. If granted parole, I feel confident Mr. Safarini would live peacefully for his remaining years.

Please contact me if I can provide additional information to assist in your deliberations.

Sincerely,
Lisa Greenman





Prism outreach Mivustru

Serving the Imprisoned and Helping Them
Transition Home

Stephen Campbell President
Mary McGinnity October 21, 2013
Vice President
Rafael Roncal
Secretary TO: Members of the United
States Parole Board
Timothy Sawina
Treasurer RE: Zaid Safarini
14361-006
Rev. Michael Bryant Federal Bureau of
Prisons - CMU
Deacon Ronald Ealey P.O. Box 33
Michael T. Flynn Terre Haute, Indiana
47808

Most Reverend To Whom It May Concern:
Martin D. Holley
Russell Lacey I am wHting in behalfofZaid
Safarini who is to appear before the US Parole
Madeline Lacovara Board for consideration
of parole. I have known Zaid since he was an
inmate at .

Peter McGinnity the DC Detention Facility in Washington DC in 2001. Due to the length of time Zaid was at the jail during his trial, I had the opportunity to meet with him on

Susan Van BaaJen, O.P. several occasions on a professional basis for counseling.

Executive Director

I served as the full time Staff Chaplain at the Detention Center for twenty five years. My background in psychology and counseling provided me the required credentials needed to serve the men and women confined at the jail. I am a Catholic priest and I have Master degrees in theology and psychology and a Doctorate in Psychology and Counseling.

At the sentencing phase of his trial, I listened for three days to the families and

flight attendants who lost loved ones or who were victims themselves on the hijacked flight in Pakistan in 1986. I heard their anguish, their grief, and their anger at Zaid for his part in that horrible tragedy. With Zaid's permission I also gave testimony at the hearing offering the court insight in this man's life, sharing with the court my sense that Zaid's was deeply remorseful and contrite for what he had done, and desired to make amends realizing, however, that there was little he could do to change what had happened except deal with the consequences of his actions through imprisonment. I also expressed to the court that it was my belief that Zaid not only grieved his offenses, but was a changed person and regretted his extreme ideology that led him to his crimes.

I have maintained correspondence with Zaid of these past twelve years of his imprisonment, offering him encouragement and support during his years of isolation at Florence. Because of the demands of my own schedule, I manage to maintain correspondence with only a handful of former inmates who are serving long sentences. I also believe we stay in contact because of Zaid's exceptional remorseful attitude towards his victims and their families and his desire to be peace with God. Zaid from all reports is a model prisoner, fully cooperating with prison officials and maintaining a positive attitude during his imprisonment. Because of his positive record, the Bureau of Prisons views him as a reduced risk and transferred him Florence where he was in total isolation to Terre Haute, Indiana where he is able have social contact with others.

I offer these insights in the hope it will assist the Parole Board in making a decision regarding Zaid's petition for parole. My prayers are for you as a Parole Board members as you make weighty decisions for Zaid and so many others who come before you for a hearing.



Rev. Michael ryant, Ph.D.
Former Staff Chaplain DC Detention Center
CC: Lisa Greenman
Attorney.

ROBERT L TUCKER
ATTORNEY-AT-LAW
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November 8, 2013
U.S. Parole Commission
90 K st., N.E.
Third Floor .
Washington, D.C. 20530
Re: Parole Hearing for Zaid Safarini, #
14361-006

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my understanding that Zaid Safarini, # 14361-006 (.Zaid) has a parole hearing scheduled for November 14, 2013. I write in support of his application. By way of background, I represented Mr. Safarini in this case in the District Court of the . District of Columbia and have kept in r.egular contact with him by phone and written correspondence over the intervening years and visited him on occasion..

The Commission s regulations state that it must first determine whether the prisoner has substantially observed the rules of the institution(s) where he has been confined. It is my understanding that Zaid meets this prerequisite, as he was .initially housed at ADX for several years and then transferred to Terre Haute because of good behavior. While I understand that Zaid has had some depressions issues at some point in Terre Haute, I am unaware that he has ever presented

any substantial disciplinary problem or substantially violated institutional rules.

The regulations then direct the Commission to consider the nature and circumstances of the offense and history and characteristics of the prisoner and determine whether (1) his release would "depreciate the seriousness of the offense and oröf-nâte disrespect for the lawn and (2) his release would "jeopardize the public welfare" because it is likely that the prisoner Mould violate the law or conditions of his release.

As to the offense, there is no gainsaying its seriousness. But to add context, this offense took place over 27 years ago nd, with the exception of less than a day between his release from prison in Pakistan and his capture when he stepped off a)lan in Bangkok, Mr. Safarini has been incarcerated continually since his arrest on September 5, 1986. The record reflects that vlr. Safarini was tortured by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Pakistan, an agency well-known for its use of such methods. :urther, Mr. Safarini was initially sentenced to death by a Pakistani court and had to endure under this cloud for several years .)efore the sentence was eventually commuted to life. Thus, despite the admitted seriousness of Zaid offenses he has been ncarcerated under severe conditions for the vast majority of his life as a result thereof..

As to the second consideration, I believe there is little or no chance Mr. Safarini would violate the law or conditions of lis release if paroled either now or in the future. I have represented several defendants over the years who have committed timilar

offenses based on a misguided "causes," including more than one Palestinian. Zaid is unique in that he has always ejected the idea that these offenses were justified by the Palestinian cause which gave them birth and has shown little or no interest in the politics of Palestine. At that time of our first meeting he had already been incarcerated in Pakistan for some 17 years where for the first time he had been exposed to ideas and cultures outside the ambit of the violent-based Palestinian viewpoint. As a result of this and his general maturation Zaid had come to realize that violence in pursuit of that cause was

wrong and counterproductive. He has expressed these ideas to me over the years. In this context, it is worth noting that Zaid was born, nurtured and raised in an environment that encouraged the idea that the duty of every Palestinian young man was to enlist in the fight to regain the homeland and that violence was perfectly acceptable - even demanded - in pursuit of that goal. Prior to his arrest in Pakistan, Zaid had never really had an opportunity to fully escape this environment; During his incarceration in Pakistan he did. I recall Zaid telling me on more than one occasion that he now understood that he had been brainwashed and used by others.

In general, our conversations over the years center on books Zaid has read or intends to read. At times, he has sent me books to read. Zaid's primary interests appear to be literature and pop culture. He is also attempting to make the most of his incarceration by taking courses and learning new skills, such as playing guitar.

. Finally, I want to close by referencing Zaid s family in Jordan, members of which I have met more than once. Despite their recognition of the seriousness of Zaid s conduct, they continue to support and love him and Zaid s maintains consistent . contact with his family. None of the family members with whom I have spoken have attempted to justify Zaid s conduct. One of his. uncles was similarly involved with a violent Palestinian organization as a younger man, but came to realize, as Zaid now does, that he had been the victim of constant propaganda as a youngster and that violence is not the solution to the Palestinian issue. This uncle now has several children and grandchildren and is the patriarch of an extended family, some of which have now gone on to college. I have no doubt that Zaid s family will provide him significant moral and financial support when he is released from prison. While I understand the concern with the nature of the offense, I can t imagine that Zaid s release would pose any harm to the interests of the United States in the future or that he would likely violate the law or conditions of his release.

Few of us are the same person at age 50 as we are at 20. This is even more so when one spends the formative years of life continually and systematically exposed to propaganda that, once removed therefrom, the Individual recognizes as wrongheaded and misguided.

If I can answer any questions or provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. Until such time, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Robert L. Tucker .

Major(R) Paul Bergrin .

FGT, -THA, +16235-050

P.O. Box 33

Terre Haute, IN 47808

United States Parole Comission 90 K. Street
NE

Third Floor

Washington, DC 20530

Re: Zaid Safarini, #1.4361.-006 .

To The Honorable Manbers of the United
States Parole Commission

Although I am an inmate presently
designated to the Communications Management .
Unit, Terre Haute, Indiana and sentenced to
life in prison, I have vast experiance as a
. law abiding citizen and respepted manber of
the United States of America.

Prior to my incarceration, I served this
Country for well over twenty (20) years as an
officer in the Uniged . States Arny.. I
retired with the rank of Major having served
over fifteen (15) overseas tours including
but not linited to Panama, Honduras, El
Salvadore, Nicaragua, Kgwait, Genna.ny, Iraq,
six tines and a multitude of others. I am a
former Newark, New Jersey homicide
prosecutor, Assistant United . States
Attorney, United States Department of Justice
and criminal defense attorney, licensed to
practice Law. in New York, New Jersey,
Florida, Washington, D.C. and the highest
court in this country, the United States
Supreme Court. .

I was the lead cotnsel in Iraq on the Abu
Ghraib case and investigation, Objective Iron
Triangle mass murder case and Staff-u Sargent
Leon -Parker, tank battle hotlfffcide. I am
also a practicing Orthodox Jew.

I state my credentials only to make this board cognizant of my experience and ability to ascertain and scrutinize, character, rehabilitation and contriteness. I have made serious mistakes in my; life and errors in sound judgment, but I never alleviated nor dispelled' my ability to judge a man whom genuinely deserves a second chance..

Mr. Safarini has lost his youth and the majority of his life through the commission of a serious criminal offense. There is no justification nor defense to eviscerate the crime he committed, but' I firmly submit Your-seriously consider the fact that he has been deterred, he fully accepts responsibility for his actions and has been completely rehabilitated. His contriteness is immeasurable' and the grief he feels daily for any victims is beyond comprehension. He prays incessantly to God for forgiveness and knows the magnitude of his errors. I have never met a man more sorry.

The pain and anguish he has suffered, being confined for 15 years in a Pakistani prison, subjected to inhumane conditions, the maximum security prison at ADX in Colorado and now in this CMU unit will prevent any future recidivism. More importantly, what little he has left of life, he wants to be productive in society and ensure he proves his devotion to his remaining family. He

wants ~~the chance~~ to enjoy life, know love of children and make sure others don't make irrational mistakes as he ~~did~~. He has family and employment awaiting him. Moreover, he plans on making amends to society through teaching that crime, violence and hatred must be removed from one's thinking, to make the world better.

Please consider his immaturity, infancy, childhood, brain washing, and venzuous roots, to which he now completely rejects and knows that 'this was his motivation for the crime he committed. All of that has been eliminated from his life and the proof is his embracing me, a Jew and literally offering me the shirt off his back. I have never met a kinder and more gentle human being in my life.


He is a changed man. A good hearted, devout, kind and educated man, whom will make the parole board proud of his accomplishments and their decision to grant him parole.

Please rest assured that Zaid Safarini will make the cot-mtry of Jordan and the world a safer environment and do all he can to ensure that minds are broadened as to the sufferings endured by crime victims.

I emlore and plead for a positive finding by this board.

Godspeed,

Most respectfully,


Paul W. Bergin

On the day of my parole hearing before the board, the entire facility was locked down just for me. To be honest, I was not surprised by their behavior because wherever I have gone, they always consider me a security threat, even using my escape in Malta as an excuse, from decades ago!

The second I entered the parole hearing I could feel the hostile atmosphere almost overcoming me. I just told myself to be patient and bear this discomfort for a short while, and let it take its course; all I have to do is to take my seat and let the process proceed, not resisting anything as I close my eyes, listening to everything being said in that room, whether true or not. As I always have felt about these kinds of things, it's like the decision regarding me had already been decided before a single word was even uttered in that parole hearing, before it even commenced.

As was expected, I was overloaded with many chains and all kinds of metal restraints, wrapped and secured around my body. I was not appearing ready for a parole hearing but to be properly and securely marched to the hangman's gallows! It's not that I am being prepared for the streets but for a lonely graveyard! I had even requested two staff

members to be some representatives for me, who agreed to come on my behalf but they didn't show up to the parole hearing. I later came to find out that their appearance had been thwarted by higher authorities who threatened them with some unspoken consequences if they spoke in my favor! This kind of wretched behavior was not a surprise to me, and I really don't blame

the officers, as they have families to support and take care of.

After the testimony and opinions were spoken at the hearing that I had to sit at, I was informed that I could not be granted parole and that I would need to come back in two years' time for another hearing. The next day I sent a letter to the parole board's office, all the way to Washington D.C.:

ZAID SAFARINI..

FCI-THA, +14361-006 .P.O. Box 33

. Terre Haute, IN 47808.

November 15, 2013

T-Tnited States Parole C.Q!rrn-ission .
90 K Street NE

Third Floor

Washington., DC 20530 Dear Sir/Madam,

I have just seen the Parole Officer yestefday and it was a pleasure •and an honor to have the chance to visit with him.

What has motivated me to write this letter, however, is that with all due respect, L deeply feel that I am not being treated fairly in all respects; This certainly has nothing to• do with the parole officer, absolutely not: As a matter of fact, he was kind, understanding and he tried his best to be fair and patient with everyone concerned.

To be honestl I felt the circumstances and the atmosphere in general was against me all the way, including the prison officials which is a very sad attitude, The prison officials insisted in keeping me severely restrained throughout the entiaæ time of the hearing with all sorts of chains, cuffs, a black box, shackels, and of course, they were secured so tightly around

my wrist and ankles, I was in severe pain. Nothing was done to frustrate me and to make me totally uncomfortable.

This particular behavior was a true surprise to me as I have never been restrained like this before, even when I go to any meeting like a legal or social visit. Even when I appeared before the judge in the court of law. Of course, the honorable parole officer has the power to order these FBOP employees to unrestrain me before him out of respect for the parole proceedings but this did not happen,

I had been informed by the prison officials that under the law, I would be allowed to call two persons as representatives to be with me in this hearing and.

To speak on my behalf, whether they were family members, attorneys, FBOP staff members or otherwise, I had in-fact requested two FBOP staff members to be with me who were very nice, kind people. More over, they know me very well and they had agreed to be with me.

At the last minute, to my surprise, they did not show up. It was obvious that the prison officials here did not want anyone to show up to help and speak on my behalf. Again, this was a total surprise to me, a very bad, sad move which was extremely disappointing. I not taking things personally, so should they?

Until this very moment, my wrists and ankles continue to hurt and swell because of the cuffs being too tight and the uncomfortable sitting. In short, though, the hearing yesterday was very painful to me physically and mentally, I was not totally prepared for such an encounter, therefore I

think I did not get the real opportunity to fully express myself. Of course, I presented to the Board, my own statement in written form, but I did not get the real chance to comment or explain more eloquently and directly.

With all due respect, as far as I know, the Parole Commission is an independent department and the Parole Officer will not be intimidated or pressured by anyone, the government, the prosecutor, attorneys, judges, or me, etc. to play a role in their decision. As a result, I hope and pray that their fairness will be forthcoming, otherwise if the Parole Officer or the whole Parole Commission I feel do

not think so" has already made up their mind(s), made their decision what to do with me and what sentence they passed, then. there is really nothing I can say, because whatever I say will have no effect whatsoever to be no avail, I do, however, believe that the Parole Officer is not taking things personally or looking for revenge and retaliation, absolutely not. I am thus just going to comment on two more matters.

Firstly, what the prosecutors said is totally understandable. It is their job to be against me. In other words, they have no choice but to act the way they acted so I understand that it is not personal, it is only business.

Regarding the victims and families, again I understand very well their feelings and anger. If I were in their shoes, 'I would have the same feelings, but I would definitely be more polite and respectful than some of them. At least I would never use any language out of respect of myself and

respect for the Parole Commission. But again, in general, I understand.

What really bothered me and pained me were some of the lies and distortions as to what exactly what happened, It is difficult and hard for me to swallow and comprehend why somebody would insert lies and distort things which never took place We 're talking history, I have already pled guilty, taken responsibility, and sincerely apologized. Basically, I am not hiding anything though so why the lies!?

Here I mention in particular, Ms, Sunshine. She has been repeating her untire and false story again and again until she has reached the point she herself believed it. Well if the Ms. Sunshine believed her story and I think that is true, in this case she has to go all the way and state the other facts that happened that day. For three decades, I do not remember if I ever talked about these matters openly to anyone about her trying to seduce me all of the time when we were together in the airplane by revealing her legs to me exposing her upper thighs and other sorts of sexual gestures, To be honest, I almost fell to her temptations.. I was young, about 23 years of age, except that we were in the wrong place and time. I understand why she did that, Obviously she wanted me to spare her life while my intention was not to hurt her. In other words, I think any woman who acts so cheaply has no right to talk and lecture about morals, principles and honesty. Nevertheless, I harbor no ill feelings toward her or anybody else, thus we ask the Almighty for his guidance and forgiveness.

As I said in your presence, I do not mind at all to correspond with anyone of the victims or their family members. I would be more than glad to help them in any way I can, furnishing any kind of explanation or whatever, I have no problem with this whatsoever, I also have no objection if the victims or the prosecutors read this letter by obtaining their own copies.

Finally, implore your Honorable Parole Commission to look to things with a fair and open mind, trying to deal with the facts. You are truly dealing with a different man from what he was 28 years ago. A man who only wants to live his remaining days on earth peacefully as much as die peacefully as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Bless you all, Respectfully ,

This parole hearing was a kind of drain on my spirit, and I wanted to forget all about that infamous hearing, wishing for it to be banished from even my memories. I tried to distract myself, making my time occupied as much as possible, and staying busy. I wanted to just escape the whole mood of frustration that was smothering me since the hearing and it pursued me in the CMU unit. I started to watch a lot of television especially sports, which I always loved, particularly soccer. The unit also had a Ping-Pong table, and I always regarded it as my favorite, excelling as the uncontested champion in the whole prison, I was filling my days with hanging out with friends, cooking and sharing many dishes of different kinds of food, enjoying it sitting around the table, sipping coffee, chatting away the hours.

I had some very good friends among those brothers. My close companion and confidant was Al-Kassar, a Syrian businessman who had also been kidnapped, just like me, and snatched away from his lovely, loyal family. He was an older man, and now he was taken away from the people he loved, to spend years of his life in American prison. I hope sincerely that one day his family, especially his children, will one day be allowed to come and visit him!

Also there was the Somali youth who was accused of piracy, Muse. He was around me all the time, watching different TV programs and joking around. We had a nickname for him in the prison, which was 'Muse Hollywood' after the film 'Captain Philips' premiered in America, which was all about his case and the incident surrounding it. Muse had hardly reached 16 years old when he was apprehended and kidnapped, hastily brought to the United States to stand trial. He was eventually sentenced to many decades in prison.

I can say with confidence that one of the finest men I had ever met in my life was also there with me in the CMU, and that was John Walker Lindh, the so-called

"American Taliban". He was so polite, and very respectful, and a highly-educated person who I enjoyed to be around so much. I really wish him all the best in his life and a quick release back to his family.

Due to my diligent and constant efforts and good disciplinary conduct, I was finally approved for transfer out of the CMU in May 2015. When my close friends and acquaintances heard of the news they insisted on throwing a party, because everyone understands that to

get out of the CMU is a real victory that took a significant amount of

struggling and effort. You have no option and no choice as a man with a free spirit but to fight your way out of this horrible mess they call the 'CMU'.

Even though I managed to emerge from that place of restriction, I still am in Terre Haute, Indiana, for reasons only truly known to the prison authorities. Next door to the Communications Management Unit, there is a United States Penitentiary or what they call a 'USP', and this is where I was moved to. It is a larger prison ground with multiple units that are able to house over 100 prisoners each. The more open environment and residing in it, is labeled being in 'general population', because you are mixing with the normal prison population.

From the first day of arrival I can visibly see that the place is much bigger than what I am normally used to, with a lot more freedom of movement, despite the institution being considered 'maximum security'. By my standards it definitely was not! I even could use the phone at my own leisure, not having to pre-schedule my calls with the security people, and write an email basically whenever I desired. Another thing which pleasantly surprised me is that in the recreation center in the prison there was multiple pool tables. This has been my game since a teenager, playing it all the way since my days in Kuwait, playing and practicing in a large pool hall which I worked at. I had always been and still am the best of the best in this spectacular game. So from my first weeks in USP Terra Haute I was going to play pool every single day, gaining almost immediate

notoriety as one of the best players in the whole prison compound! I was even whipping some of the youngsters in Ping-Pong!

As usual, the dutiful prison authorities, from the first moment, were there to still remind me that I am a very dangerous inmate, a so-called Palestinian 'terrorist', and despite the fact of being incarcerated for 30 years, I still possess super human abilities to fly away, very easily, whenever I desire like a small sparrow! Because of this uncanny ability, the authorities decided to place me on 'two-hour watch', so called because every two hours from the moment they open the door until it's locked at night, I have to check in with the prison guards. This is of course to make sure I am still residing on planet earth and have not flown to the moon! This two-hour watch is still over my head at this very moment, and my status has to be reviewed every six months to evaluate whether I am still enough of a security risk to remain the two-hour watch program. In a way I am glad as this is an indication that many people think so highly of me; my confidence is

boosted, because this means I am still young and energetic, and will always remain so, congratulations to me!

Shortly after arriving at the institution, I was made aware of and applied for the Life Connections Program or L.C.P, which is the most superior and highly accredited program in the whole Bureau of Prisons. It is very spiritual, based around religious beliefs and principles, aimed to put a man finally at peace with himself and in his heart. The environment is relaxing and allows someone to take time to rest his mind and reflect on his life and what he intends for the future. The

teachers and instructors all come from the free world, four times a week, spending their time and effort to give us positive, character building lectures. There are also dedicated mentors who volunteer to come into the prison to talk to us, striving to help us become better and improved men, all in a very professional and talented manner.

After turning in my application, it wasn't long before I was approved to come to the program, personally signed off by the warden. Not long after, I was instructed to move from my unit into the LCP unit, finding myself in an amazing program. As I pen these words, I am in the program at this moment, preparing to embark on an 18 month journey, until successful completion and graduation, receiving a certificate from the Life Connections Program. So far I have been enjoying my time and the many spiritual and educational benefits.

Not long after my arrival to the LCP unit, another opportunity arrived for me to see the parole board. It was now November of 2015. This would be my second time in front of them, as I am scheduled automatically to see them every two years. Considering the circumstances, my expectations are never that high; what can one truly hope for when the one who is designated to decide your fate is at the same instance your opponent! It is my strong belief that anyone who chooses to be a parole official, whoever that is, must possess a stomach of iron, strong, and have immense courage to be able to deal with such complicated situations dealing with peoples very lives and futures. They must truly have those qualities in their heart to be able to proceed in fairness and justice, surrounded

and encompassed by so many competing conflicts of interest! Indeed, it is really only Prophets who could possess such sublime qualities of gentleness, mercy, courage and a humane spirit in the depths of their hearts!

I am continuing with my life now, as normal as it could, taking one day at a time. Each day I am trying to learn something new and expand my horizons, because this is what really makes life fresh and interesting, leaving it far from boring and mundane. Every morning, with the rising sun, the moment I awake, I take a deep breath, feeling more than blessed that I have an opportunity to live another day. Another opportunity in which I can try to squeeze out just a little bit more sweetness from this life, and do my best to appreciate it, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. I do this because just as a few drops of deadly poison can end your life, a few drops of sweetness can replenish you and bring your soul back alive!

I have been struggling with my life since I was a young teen of 15 years. And my struggling and striving will continue like any other dignified human being, for a better life and a brighter future. This is a right bestowed upon all of mankind, and when the hour arrives for me to depart this world, I will die standing proudly on my two feet, like the majestic olive trees of my homeland, Palestine, whose roots have embedded themselves in the earth for thousands of years, but they still live and they still are fruitful.

I now close here the journey, which is certainly not over and far from finished, with these beautiful words of 'Dorothy':

Never give up No one knows
What's going to Happen next.

Epilogue

The conclusion of this book, which took four months of writing, diligently day and night, exerting my best efforts to perfect it and make it acceptable to the present reader, and anyone else interested, is now a record of past history. I say this because this book was exclusively focusing on things which are now a thing of the past and done. More importantly, in my estimation, I have strove to answer all the questions that might have been in the readers mind regarding the above mentioned events. .

Besides this, letting all these multitude of facts come to light has been a tremendous relief to me, at least on the psychological level. I sincerely believe that the first and most important step towards healing the wounds of the heart and soul begin with mustering the courage to admit and let things come out in order for the spirit itself to be recharged and rejuvenated, in order to start fresh and anew.

I have committed many serious mistakes in my rich, full life and I have sincerely apologized for such horrible mistakes in a lapse of judgment, by using means and methods that shouldn't have been used in the first place. This especially is true in regards to innocent people.

Likewise, and in the same instance, I have never ceased to believe, as every dignified person believes, that every human being possesses the full right to defend ones homeland. Someone cannot even say they are a man, much less a human being, if you don't do

a thing to protect your own home. Even the animals defend their territory instinctively.

Nevertheless, after the passage of so many years, war, conflict, pure suffering, bloodshed and the pain that follows, has run its due course, which I sincerely believe is futile in this dire situation. A true, genuine and a lasting, holding peace is the only remaining option, which all concerned parties would benefit from—at least the coming future generations—and the hope is tremendous as well as the expectations.

During this period of writing this book, Mr. Jonathan Pollard and I both went before the parole board for the second time. We had both spent the same amount of time in prison at this junction in our lives. Not too long ago before writing these humble words, Mr. Pollard had just been granted parole and subsequently released—congratulations to him. This is despite the fact that the damage he has done—as testified to by US intelligence officials—would need at least 50 years to repair.

The defining difference between him and me however is Mr. Pollard's Jewish ethnicity. So because of this, the Israeli people, its government and the American Congress itself is completely behind him, rallying on his behalf! Unfortunately for my bad luck I am not Jewish! Otherwise, if I happened to be Jewish in America, or any other place for that matter in the entire world, I would definitely be more respected and my influence feared by others. Israel and Congress would be behind me with all their force and power. It happens to only be a matter of luck, as I have always considered myself to be an unlucky man!

A case in point of my argument would be what has transpired with Bradley Manning, an American-born white man (now known as Chelsea Manning) who was accused of 'espionage' on a much less significant level, doing hardly any damage against the US government or military, besides exposing evidence of some of their war crimes in Iraq. Yet his treatment was in stark contrast with Mr. Pollard, being subjected to the worst of solitary confinement and facing horrible amounts of time in prison, all the while being labeled as a 'traitor' and someone who helped al-Qaida's war efforts against the United States. If Mr. Manning was Jewish, would he have been treated differently? Recent history speaks for itself and I will let the reader decide.

Another glaring example is the case of Edward Snowden, who some Americans call a hero, while others label him a traitor, because he exposed the US government's expansive program of spying on millions of innocent Americans in their own homes. Those who accuse him of treachery say he should be punished for leaking government secrets, such as those in the mainstream of far-right politicians, Fox News and their satellites. Some of them have even called for him to receive the death penalty for these actions! Contrast that with Mr. Pollard, where not one American politician called for his execution despite the fact that the information he sold to America's enemies and allies alike, was highly-sensitive and dangerous military secrets! In reality, he is a hero for those on the far-right because his loyalty is more towards Israel than his home country of

America ! Again, I leave it to the reader to come to his or her own conclusions.

Despite the fact that I have now been moved to the general population, which of course is better than the hellish isolation of places like ADX and the CMU, I still have no illusion surrounding the fact that any prisons around the world, and especially the federal prisons in America, are places of rehabilitation and true reform. Even if all the worlds' mountains were collapsed upon them, nothing could bury the fetid of America's prisons and its methods of incarceration!

Even though many things have happened here and because of this 'new world', all the nations of the earth wish and want to see the real American spirit. They desire the America of those pillars of education, those great universities Harvard and Columbia. The America who used to spend its billions on medical research, the America who would jump to its feet, before any other country, to help and assist any unfortunate nation who's been afflicted with the tragedy of natural disasters and famine. The world does not desire the America of secret prisons, horrendous torture, water-boarding, indiscriminate drone attacks, supports of despots and wars founded upon lies and deception.

Finally, as I began this book with an apology to the people I have hurt in my life, directly and indirectly; I now close in the same spirit. I am sincerely extending my apology for any hurt or harm caused by me. I have taken full responsibility for those actions of ignorance and irresponsibility.

Thank You All-Bless You All

Acknowledgment

In fact, I can't conclude this incredible chapter of my life, which I put in the pages of this book, without a proper 'thank you'. I want to thank and show my gratitude to all the brothers and friends who stood with me like knights, assisting me in every way they could. I wish to especially mention my fellow inmates who aided me in this way, Reed Berry and Anthony Alexander, who were with me from the first day to the very end. They even would encourage me every time I started to get frustrated and felt like quitting the whole writing process altogether. I would sometimes feel like this due to the fact that as long as I am writing, I have to remember and recall so many traumatic memories and events, events I wish I could just forget about. Sometimes even reliving these experiences would get me sad to the point I am even losing the appetite for life itself, not wishing to live anymore.

But those amazing friends of mine would assure me over and over again that everything will be alright, and continue to persevere in remembering and writing no matter how painful and agonizing it might be, we are here by your side!

Authoring a book in prison is really not an easy task by any means, taking in account what I am going through in prison, my surroundings and its unpredictable nature. Because of this, I am so thankful and glad for those wonderful fellows who would sit with me for hours on a daily basis, reading my hand-written pages, and then re-reading it again for any mistake and lapses, helping me with the typing and so many other tasks. I'm so very grateful toward them and I am wishing them all the best in their efforts in striving

to be released from this hell that they call 'prison'.

I'm also extending my thanks to Mr. Kevin Davis, who is a real gentleman working for the magazine "The Washington Report for Middle East Affairs", who from the first day of my writing I approached him for help to find a publisher to help publish my book. He's never disappointed me and has offered me all the help he could muster.

Finally, my thanks go to my second family in America who has always been by my side, supporting and encouraging me. They are Father Bryant, brother Lou and Lisa Greenman. I also thank them for agreeing to write their respective forewords to my book.

I love you all and I owe it to all of you. Without your help and support, this book would not come out the way it was meant to be. Without you, life itself would be difficult.

Thank you all

Yours

Zaid Safarini

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'Z' followed by a series of loops and a final vertical stroke.

What Actually HAPPENED



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darbassma

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