



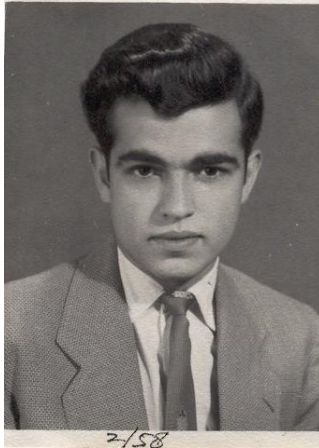
HDF-THANKS SCHOLARSHIP

20

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DR. SHAIKH GHAZANFAR



An Odyssey

Whenever I reflect on my past, I feel as though it was the mercy of God Almighty that kept me alive, for the worldly odds were heavily against my survival. Now, during my twilight years, I thank Almighty that my wife and I can establish a scholarship fund for children's education, in the name of my late father and my 91-years old sister; both were once educators. Born on April 1, 1937, in Phillaur, East Punjab, British India, I was the only son of my father, the cultural jackpot in life's lottery, born after four daughters. Four years later, on March 18, 1941, my father suddenly died. Then a step-father entered our lives. Those two events marked the beginning of our misfortunes. He gobbled up my father's assets; and he was our monstrous abuser. Aside from regular beatings, I can distinctly remember when he would hang me to the upper frame of a door and then beat me mercilessly. The traumas linger. Then, in August 1947, partition happened and Pakistan as a nation emerged. Massive communal riots followed and we had to migrate to Pakistan. As we traveled, I recall, as a youngster, seeing dead bodies lying around the roadside. Once in Lahore, Pakistan, we slept on roadsides for several days, till the elders found shelter somewhere. Soon after, another trauma happened.

I was abandoned; step-father could not take care of me. Mother had no choice but seek help from relatives. I shifted around with relatives (foster-homes) during the next few years--last, in Karachi. Having jumped 2-3

grades, I matriculated (10th-grade, high-school) in 1951. There were challenges; the prodigal son often felt like a servant--baby-sitting, doing errands, etc. Yet, in retrospect, I am most grateful. Missing my late father, however, was a constant heartache; now I was also removed from my mother.

Higher education was unthinkable; and there were other demands on life, including pressure from step-father that I should take a job and help. I learnt some clerical skills (typing, etc.) and at age 15, I was working and earning a very meager income, to be shared with step-father. Hard-work and dedication rewarded me with more lucrative opportunities; my last job was a well-paying position at the U.S. Embassy in Karachi. During this period, I also had to finance a sister's marriage. Throughout, however, I lived a "double-life"-- obedient to the step-father, yet I despised him intensely. At age 20, I resumed focus on my own future--higher education abroad. With just 10th-grade education, admission at a U.S. university was almost impossible. But my persistence helped, along with assistance from my U.S. Embassy friends; Washington State University (Pullman, Wash.) gave me admission as a freshman, plus a tuition-fee scholarship. Having saved enough for one-way travel, plus about a \$100 cash, I landed in New York on Sept.9, 1958; and then traveled for five days-nights by bus and reached Pullman, Wash., on Sept.14, 1958. Soon I was a freshman student. Student visa required being a full-time student; I could only work part-time (up to 20 hrs.), which I did throughout the undergraduate years—janitor, dishwasher, cleaning pig/chicken/turkey pens, paper-grader, typist, etc. During summers, I worked as laborer at fruit-orchards, paper-mill, grocery-stores, etc. Of course, during these years, while I could barely manage my survival, I would frequently send money to the step-father.

Thankfully, diligence, hard-work, and determination paid off, and in 1962, I graduated with honors. Now the door was open for more ambitious goals. Several universities extended financial assistance for graduate studies. However, I chose to stay at Washington State University and completed master's degree in 1964. Briefly, a Brown University fellowship enabled me to join that university for doctoral program—but then some health issues handicapped me. Also, I needed a respite, having been away from my loved ones in Pakistan for seven years. During summer 1965, I went to connect with my roots—to see my mother, sisters, and friends. That's when I also married my lovely wife, Rukhsana. Before that, finally, I confronted the step-father and told him that I could no longer live my "double-life," and he didn't exist for me—thank you.

Accompanied by my wife, I returned to the U.S. in September 1965 and joined Washington State University to resume doctoral studies (economics). After completing the doctorate in 1968, I took a faculty position at the

University of Idaho, Moscow, within 8 miles of my alma-mater, Washington State University. While there were opportunities to move elsewhere, the area became our home till 2013 when, having retired from UI in 2002 (taught part-time till 2008), we moved to Atlanta, Georgia, to be closer to our children (Farah, Asif, and Kashif).

Thankfully, I have been blessed with a respectable academic career, the profession that I deeply loved and enjoyed. I have published some books and nearly two hundred research papers. I have received numerous honors and awards—Pride of Pakistan Award (UK), Idaho Treasure Award, Distinguished/ Honored Faculty Awards, Faculty-Excellence Awards, Lifetime Contributions Award, Human-Rights Commissioner Award, Community UNITY Award, MLK Distinguished Service Award, Washington State University Distinguished Alumnus Achievement Award and Hall of Fame induction, listing in numerous International/National Who's Who's. And always involved in community service—interfaith, human-rights, volunteering, etc.

In February 2000, I undertook my long-cherished sentimental journey to my birthplace (Phillaur, India) and visited the house where I was born and visited the room where I still remembered the glimpse of my father's dead body, laid on a bed. I found out that his grave was no more—washed away in river floods. I also stood by the door to which I used to be hung and beaten. My hosts understood why I was constantly in tears.

I recall a quote from late Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), the German philosopher and 1952 Nobel-Laureate: "In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being." In my case, the inner fire simmered down with the death of my father and then almost extinguished with the brutalities of a step-father. But, as I matured, the fire burst into a shining flame, with the ever-present inspiration from the memory of my late father. Plus, I encountered so many sincere friends throughout my life who encouraged with their kind words, supportive gestures, friendly smiles, and warmth of a handshake; and I am ever so grateful.

Almighty God has been most kind and merciful; and I am most grateful for His blessings.



Honoring my late father

Shaikh Mehboob Bakhsh

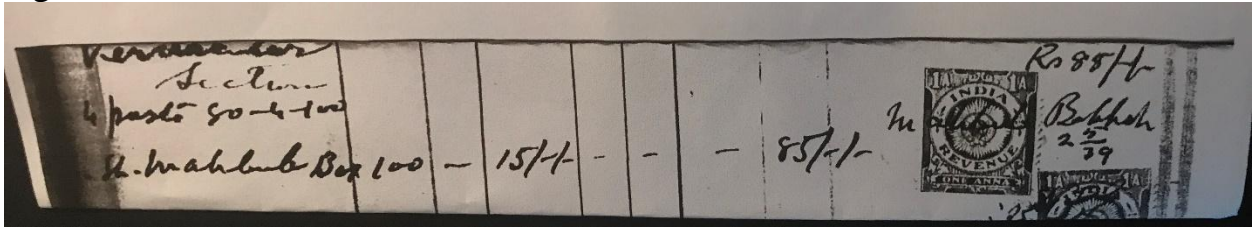
My late father passed away, rather suddenly, on Tuesday, March 18, 1941, at the young age of about 39. I was four years old at the time and I only have a very faint memory--his dead body on a bed, with a wrap around his face.

My dearest Abba-ji, your death left such a huge gap in the life of your only son who knows that you prayed so much for a son. I am told that even when I had learned to walk, you won't let me down from your shoulders, for you were my "horse." And then fate took you away--and I have been lonely for you ever since. My sense of abandonment multiplied when, at age 10, circumstances also separated me from my mother. At that age, and throughout, I couldn't call anyone 'Abba-ji.'

Yet, while God Almighty is our ultimate guide, you have always been my supreme inspiration. Indeed, your death gave me life—to always want to do the 'right' thing, so you will be proud. At every step, I always sought your blessings, your approval. I survived, despite heavy odds, and, by the grace of God Almighty, I have been able to achieve some success in life. I have had a good professional life—yes, in the same profession as yours. I have a wonderful family--my dearest wife, Rukhsana, and our dearest children--daughter, Farah, and our sons, Asif and Kashif. Once there was a painful episode that you would want to know. It happened one evening, in 1977, when Asif, about five, came to me, hugged me tightly; and he was crying uncontrollably --why? He said he was missing his grandfather. Soon my wife joined us; and then there was a flood of tears, till your grandson went to sleep in my embrace.

At the time of his death, my father was a high-school teacher in Phillaur, East Punjab, British India. After partition, the family migrated to Pakistan, with about everything left behind. My lifelong search for a picture of him has been in vain. I traveled to Phillaur (also my birthplace) in February 2000 to visit the house where we lived, where we suffered so many hardships. I vicariously experienced the location in the room where my Abba-ji's dead body laid; I wept and I screamed—and explained to my hosts why. Obviously, I was anxious to say prayers at my Abba-ji grave, but I found the floods had obliterated the graves. I visited my old school where my father was once a teacher. I was overwhelmed and burst with tears, when, for the first time, I discovered my Abba-ji's handwriting: his signature in one of the school's 1930s

registers.



Abba-ji, I remember you every day. But that is easy--missing you is the heartache that never goes away. And in your memory and in your honor, my wife and I establish this scholarship for children's education.

And honoring my dear sister
Mohtarama Shagufta Akhtar



My dearest sister, Apa Shagufta, is the eldest sibling of my immediate family, born on December 26, 1926, at Phillaur, East Punjab, pre-partitioned British India, a little over ten years older than me.

Having experienced so much in my own life, I can honestly say that I do not know of anyone who has struggled and endured so much in life as my Apa has and yet survived to eventually live an honorable life. Our father passed away at an early age (Tuesday, March 18, 1941; about 39 years old). He and our mother had five children: Apa Shagufta, Shaista (died at about age 11), Firoza (died at age 13, about 1945), Ghazanfar, and Nasreen (born 1940). Perhaps there was another sister before Shaista.

Not long after, our mother married a man in the neighborhood, previously known to the family. His presence in our lives was the beginning of our misfortunes. A monster of a man, he was most brutal and abusive toward all

of us, including our mother. He also gobbled up whatever resources our late father had left behind. Life became a most tedious struggle for our survival. Not long after partition, and after having survived through some calamities, my Apa ended up in Sharaqpur (near Lahore) for training to be a school teacher. At this time, circumstances evolved such that the step-father's abuse forced my mother to send me to various relatives so that I could somehow complete matriculation, which I did in 1951. Soon after, Apa and I lived briefly with some relatives in Lahore. She worked as a school teacher and took care of me about like a mother. Then, we moved to Karachi and lived with other relatives while she worked as a teacher; again, she was also my proxy mother. Meantime, I was learning some skills to be employable, despite my young age.

Around 1953 or so, my Apa married a man who was part of the larger family clan and they lived in Karachi; I lived with them. Her husband worked sporadically, while Apa, as a school teacher, was the main breadwinner. By 1965, they had five children (three girls, two boys), and during all these years, they all lived in one-two room quarters. Apa wanted to make sure the children were well-educated. Somehow, in 1958, I had traveled to the USA for education. Later, it was also time for me to 'payback' my proxy 'mother;' for several years, my wife and I provided assistance for the family and children's education. Thanks Almighty, all five children are well-educated and living a comfortable life. My dearest Apa lives with one of her sons in Lahore.

This scholarship is also a payback on my Apa's behalf for children's education.

Coordinator's note: What an inspiring story!

I heard the longer version of Dr. Ghazanfar's story during our many conversations regarding this scholarship. He is an excellent story teller and I was an eager listener. It was partly because I felt that I was reliving my own story in many ways. One major exception was that I did not have to endure the harsh treatment from anyone like he did from his stepfather. I did become teary eyed many times. It is amazing that he succeeded in spite of all the odds against him. I requested him to write his story and I hope he will write the longer version one day. He is indeed among my heroes.

The love and affection for his father is still so apparent in his conversations and writings though it has been 76 years since his father's death. He dedicated his 2006 book, "Islamic Civilization: History, Contributions and Influence" to his father with the caption of "To my late father who gave me so much in so little time."

This scholarship will provide 15-and Influence18 awards to the first three students in each of the primary classes of the HDF Secondary School at Karolwar-Lahore. These awards will serve as incentives to work hard and succeed in spite of the difficulties that life may deal you. "I can do anything; no mountain is too high, no trouble too difficult to overcome" Bashir Chaudhary