

The Nau Bahar Electric Press
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As many of my friends know, I am one of five girls in my family. I have four sisters: three older, one younger, but no brothers.

It is safe to say my parents were really hoping for a boy. I think after the fifth girl, they were either pretty content or probably thought better of it.

Now, I know what you will say. “Five girls! Oh, your poor dad!” I am not sure if that was his reaction, but I know that from the very beginning, he has always been thinking about us: always considering about our education, always anticipating our challenges, and always envisioning our future.

The five of us were all born in the bustling city of Multan, Pakistan. Known as the City of Sufis, Multan remains a city blanketed with bazaars, mosques, shrines, and ornate tombs. Under the wings of my father’s hard work, we lived a comfortable life together –with a steady source of income, an affluent lifestyle, and the respect of friends, family, and acquaintances.

But then, rather unexpectedly, in the spring of 2001, my parents decided to move 7,000 miles from Multan to a small town in northern Virginia.

Why? I often asked myself that question. Why did we leave behind a life of contentment and comfort for a life of uncertainty and anxiety?

This story begins in 1972, the year my father turned 16. He was only in 10th grade when my grandfather unexpectedly passed away. Overnight he transformed from an eager, studious schoolboy, to a man hardened by his unlucky circumstances.

As the new head of his household, he needed to support his grieving mother, recently divorced sister, her three children, and three of his own younger siblings. And so, instead of continuing his own education, he focused his attention on operating the family business: the Nau Bahar Electric Press. Nau Bahar – a new spring, as it is translated – was the bread and butter for our family for generations. It was a printing press that published everything from business cards to schoolbooks to wedding invitations.

Through all these adversities, my father found solace [SAW-LIS] in learning and studying. Even though he could not attend school by day, he completed his bachelor’s degree by enrolling in late-night classes. Despite the uncertain future that he faced, he made sure that all of his siblings also received and completed their education.

In the years my father began to expand Nau Bahar, he also got married to my mother, a well-educated woman and the daughter of the Principal of the Lahore College for Women. After the fifth, and final daughter, my father started thinking. “What if something happened to me? Who would look after my family?” Although Multan was a vibrant city, it was not exactly a progressive environment or an accommodating place for career-oriented women. In a country where less than 20% of women were in the labor force, my father understood that in the future, his girls would have difficulty attaining economic independence.

Reflecting on his own difficult experience, he curtailed the expansion of Nau Bahar, sold the business, and decided to move his family to the U.S.

And that’s what we did. The 7 of us moved from a spacious home to a cramped apartment. My father went from being the CEO of his enterprise to a production worker at a manufacturing company. He went from working 40 hours a week to more than 80, from a 9-5 job to one that often ended at 2 in the morning. For the past 15 years, we have gone days without seeing him. There are weeks when we only see him on Sunday, when he asks us how we are doing, how we are adjusting.

As hopes of starting a business here dwindled, my parents decided to put their entire savings towards the down payment of our new home. My father found a quiet suburb on the outskirts of D.C., where the streets are lined with manicured lawns and tidy colonial houses. However, it wasn’t the beauty of the neighborhood that attracted him, but the neighborhood’s proximity to the best schools in the country.

Now from my own recent experiences, I have begun to understand the value my father continues to place on education. I stand in awe of all that he has done and the incredible strength he has shown time and again. He was willing to sacrifice his happiness and entire livelihood only to secure our education and independence. He knew it could have been possible in Pakistan, but he also knew we had a much better chance here.

Today I stand here because of him. He is not only my father, but also my role model, confidant, and my best friend. I hope that soon, his girls, can give back with the same selflessness with which we have always grown up.