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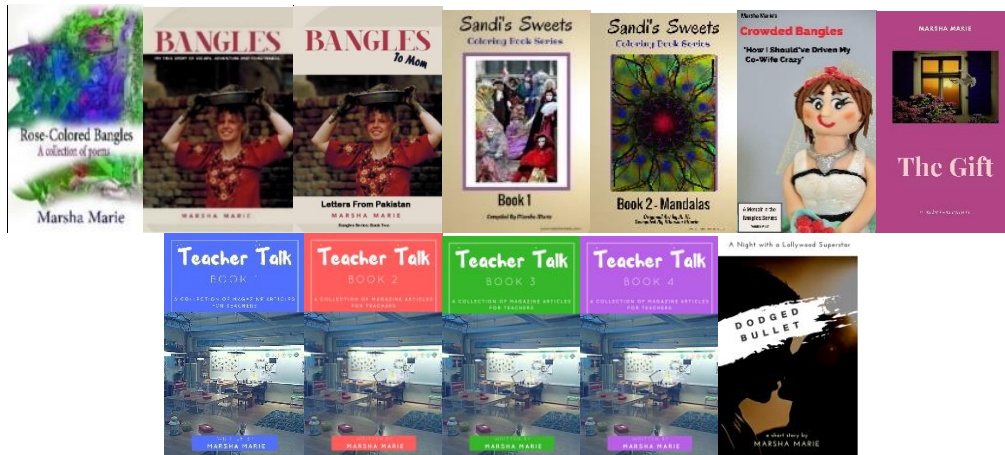


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Legally Blonde in UAE

Legally Blonde in UAE

A Mini-Memoir
By Marsha Marie

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This is a work of nonfiction.

Edited by Kimberly Linkletter and Marsha Marie.

Book cover by Marsha Marie.

This book is dedicated to all the lovely ladies I met while in UAE. I love you!

“A girl should be two things: classy and fabulous.”

– Coco Chanel

Introduction

Moving to the United Arab Emirates was probably one of the most exciting things that I have ever done. True, in 2008 I was still too scared to return to America, so I thought that Dubai would be a great second best. (I realize that some of you may not be familiar with my background at all, so please feel free to check out my website for details, and for your convenience, I have included chapter one of my memoir, *Bangles: My True Story of Escape, Adventure and Forgiveness*.)

So many exciting and delightful things happened to me in UAE. But in this book, *Legally Blonde in UAE*, I want to share just a few of the funniest stories from that period of my life between 2008 and 2014. Now being a natural blonde myself, means that I have heard nearly every blonde joke possible; and I have always taken the time to laugh with everyone else. But sometimes, I really believe that some things in life happened to me—*just because* I was blonde.

Contents:

MY POOFY HED

MR. PRESIDENT, HELP ME PLEASE!

EYEBROWS BE GONE

NO SALAD FOR YOU!

BUT YOU'RE WEARING THEM!

My Poofy Head

To me, the most beautiful thing in UAE is not the sand or the luxurious homes, but the Emirati women that live in that country; I simply adore them. They are graceful, sophisticated and confident. Their sense of fashion just seems to come to them so easily. Today, I want to share with you *my* journey of trying to become an Emirati beauty.

It all started with my first moments in Dubai. I stared in awe at the enormous buildings in all their splendor. However, that was only the beginning of my fascination with UAE. By far, the most intriguing thing to me was the Emirati woman and her traditional dress of the *abaya* (the long coat), the truncated hennin style *shayla* (the scarf) and the manner in which she walks (a strutting-stroll). I had never seen anything like it before. To me they looked like diamond-studded princesses.

As I wandered around the malls I couldn't help but observe these amazing ladies. *Look at how they glide when they walk. They have such confidence—even with how they carry their purses.* It was then I decided that I wanted to be a princess too. I just couldn't wait to look and walk just like an Emirati woman.

About two months after arriving in Al Ain--a small town where I had accepted a teaching position in a college, about an hour and a half from Dubai--I finally bought my first stunning black abaya. Now I have to admit, I really didn't walk like them, nor could I wear it as graceful as the native women. It seemed as if I were swallowed up in yards of heavy black material that flowed like the River Nile. My wrists and feet seemed to have just disappeared into thin air. "How do I walk in this thing?" I exclaimed. In order not to trip on myself, I would gather the front of it and lift it up to make sure my feet had a clear path. One day, my heel caught the back of the abaya and I almost went down a flight of stairs. (It scared me so badly; my heart was pounding; I thought for sure I was going down.)

Alas, it seemed my gracefulness was nowhere to be found, but I didn't give up. My next abaya I purchased was much narrower and seemed to fit much better; I mean, at least I could walk up the stairs without getting the attention of everyone around me. It took me a couple more experimental purchases before I finally found the perfect style just for me. It was stylish, yet professional; it was perfect to wear to class.

Having finally conquered the abaya, the next step in my quest to become a true *UAE princess* was mirroring their huge hennin hairstyles. I watched them in amazement and tried to understand what was under the veil. *Their hair must be meters long to make such a full-size bun on top of the head. How on Earth do they get their hair so long? What are these women eating--and somebody give me some of it!!*

The mystery of the enormous bulge was solved one day in the lady's washroom. I just happened to be in there when a woman was fixing her hair. I was astonished at what I saw. *What's this? Their hair is not making that big bun; they're wearing poofy-hair-claws! Bravo ladies! You had me fooled!* I rushed home to tell my family of my discovery; I couldn't wait to go shopping for my poofy-headpiece decoration.

The very next day, I bounced into a woman's accessories shop at my favorite mall and said, "I want a poofy head too." The salesladies were shocked to hear this request coming from an American, but quickly became excited to help me out. They showed me many varieties of hair claws which act as the base of my envied hennin-look; the colors and designs were endless. After a bunch of *oo-ohs* and *aa-ahs*, I finally decided on a black poofy-flowered claw and ask the saleslady to help me put it in. (How embarrassing, I didn't even know how to put the claw in myself.) She took my shoulder length hair, twisted it into a bun, opened the claw and applied it to the twisted spot on my head. "Ouch! Watch those teeth!" I squealed.

The sales lady just giggled. I know what she must have been thinking. *"Poofy-virgin!"*

Once my head was poofed-up and my scarf adjusted appropriately, my first thought was that I looked like a black-haired-Marge Simpson. *But this is what I wanted, right?* I left the shop and it felt like everyone in the mall was staring at me. It was as if they all knew that this was my poofy-hairdo debut.

After my initial shock, it was time to test my new headpiece fashion on my husband. I quickly and gleefully approached him in the mall. He was stunned. His only reply was, "Your head is so big." Then using his hands to demonstrate my new Marge-hairdo, he said "Your head is this wide!" I was amused at his perception of my new fashion statement, but the poof-claw was only ten Durhams, and it was defiantly here to stay.

Since then, my room has been filled with clips of all colors and sizes (the poofier the better!), abayas, shaylas and lots of Arabian perfumes. Honestly, I my collection. The only thing I have left to ‘Emirati-ize’ is my walk. Perhaps, one day I will sashay to my next English class. *I love you ladies!*

Mr. President, Help Me Please!

Of all my time in UAE, nothing was as funny as when I went to the president of Al Ain for help. “Why?” you may ask. Well, that’s a long story.

It all started with my move to UAE from Pakistan in 2008. As I mentioned earlier, my family and I had moved to Al Ain when I accepted a job as an English teacher. Arriving with just our clothes in our suitcases, we had to start a new life; part of which meant of course, getting a car. But I couldn’t get a car until I received my UAE driver’s license. Normally, Americans simply trade in their American license for a UAE one. But since I had lost my American driver’s license many years earlier in Pakistan, I had to start from the beginning—like that of an 18 year old—by taking the written and driving tests. I tried my best to get them to accept my Pakistani driver’s license, but to be honest, they almost laughed at the card. I really couldn’t blame them. My international driving license was nothing more than a laminated, type-written card with a really crappy picture of me hand-crafted into it. I had seen library cards that were more professional.

So since going to America to get a replacement was not an option for me, I had no choice but to start at the very beginning of the licensing process. I took the week of *required* classes and passed the paper test. (The adorable male instructor being the only real memorable thing I got from them.)

But then it was time for the road test...

For the road test you have to arrive early in the morning to get a number. If you are lucky enough to get your number, you are called to get on a bus with about 80 other women (segregated of course). The bus trails behind an official government vehicle for testing purposes. Inside the vehicle are two policemen that test your driving; one in the front, and one in the back. *No pressure, right?*

My number was called and I went into the bus with the others. Unfortunately, my number was 78. Now some of you may know, Al Ain is full of roundabouts; *full* of them. So by the time my number came up, I was absolutely green from whirling round and round for those four hours. They finally call my number, and I get in the front to begin driving.

“Go.” Said the policeman in the front seat. “Then turn left, then right.”

“Okay,” I said. I put the car into drive and made the left turn as he had instructed.

Suddenly, I hear, “Stop the car here. You are done.”

“What? That’s it?”

“Yes, go stand outside.”

I step out of the car; I was confused. The policeman calls me over to his side of the window.

“You failed.”

“What?”

“You failed. The reason is on the paper.”

I walked away with tears in my eyes. *How could I fail? I’ve been driving since I was 15 years old. This can’t be right.*

I got back on the bus heartbroken, knowing that I couldn’t retake the test for a couple of months.

The reason I failed was listed as: NOT DRIVING ACCORDING TO THE RULES OF THE ROAD. *Wow, is that vague, or what?*

So for the next two months, I was stuck using taxis. They were smelly and had obnoxious drivers. A really disheartening experience indeed.

The time finally came for me to re-take the test. You will not believe this, but I failed again. This time, I stood on the side of the road and cried like a baby. And then again, another two-month-wait.

It seems like I should just copy and paste the last paragraph here, because yes, I went again, and they failed me yet again. But this time, they only allowed me to drive three minutes, and told me to pull over. They even wrote on my paperwork that I was a *danger to society*.

Well, I had my many theories as to why they kept failing me; none of which I could prove though. Instead, I would talk—and cry—to anyone that would listen to me babble on about not getting my license. Finally, one day the answer came to me. I decided to take it up with someone in authority. I said, “I am going to go to the king of UAE, or the president of Al Ain, or whatever he is.” So I did some research and saw that the president of municipality was the brother of the Sheikh of UAE, and that his office was only two buildings down from the college where I was teaching. So I began my plan.

I wrote down all of the information that I would need, which was basically his name, which is like 52 letters long, and the speech that I was going to give him. First thing on Sunday morning (the week starts on Sundays there), I went to the president’s office which sat at the roundabout just down the street from the college. The building itself looked like a miniature football stadium. It is beautifully designed with brown and golden touches. I walked up to the front guard and with confidence, looked thru the small round opening in the glass window and said, “I would like to speak to Sheikh Tak-noor please.” (Of course, I knew I had messed up his name so badly.)

The Arab man in military uniform, with a look of obvious confusion, said, “What?”

“I would like to speak to the president of Al Ain please.” I look at my notes and try to pronounce his name again. “Sheikh Taknoor?”

“Oh Sheikh Tahnoun? No. You cannot talk to him.”

“But I have to.”

“Why do you need to talk to him?”

“Because I am having a problem with getting my driver’s license and I need to discuss it with him. Please. I am American. I need his help. Please can I talk with him? Is he here?”

“One minute.” He walks over a counter in the back of his *toll*-booth, and calls someone on the phone. The only word I could understand him say is *American*. “Bla bla bla, American. Bla bla bla, American.”

Oh man, this is not going to work. Why did you even think this was going to work Yasmine (everyone in UAE called me Yasmine), this has really got to be one of the dumbest things you ever thought of.

The man hangs up the phone and returns to the window. With no expression on his face, he says “109.”

“What?”

“109. Go to room 109.”

“Oh. Okay, room 109? Right?”

“Yes. Go to room 109. Go in door, go left to room 109.”

Okay. Now we are talking. I head toward an unmarked cave-like entrance and enter. I cannot say that I was scared, because, UAE has a great reputation for treating Americans nicely, so I was just more nervous about speaking to someone in the royal family, if anything. The inside was amazing; golden brown and black marble floors and beautiful wooden and glass paneled walls. No names on the doors, only numbers. I walked thru the small corridor to the track-like walkway. I didn't go left like I was supposed to; I went right. I kept walking all the way around the entire building until I finally reached room 109 (which was only two doors over from the main entrance, but I took the long way around.)

I entered the huge wooden door to find an empty L-shaped desk directly in front of me and a lovely couch and coffee table set to the left. I slowly walked in and stood quietly in front of the desk. No one came. After a few minutes or so, I said, “Hello?”

Suddenly a huge woman comes strutting out from one of the attached offices in the back of the room—a local woman in full black abaya and shayla, but no veil. She comes around the desk and sits in the chair.

“Asalam alakum.”

“Walakum asalam.”

“How can I help you?”

“I would like to speak to Sheikh Tahnoun.”

The woman softly chuckles. “No, no. You cannot see him.”

“But I have to. You don't understand.” I began pleading; it suddenly hit me that I was going to lose this driver's license battle and all of my emotions came flooding out. I had no control.

“You don’t understand. I have to see him. I am going to die if I have to keep taking taxis. They won’t give me my license.” Tears start streaming down my face. The woman listens very politely without saying a word. I continue babbling, “I just can’t do it anymore. I need help. Why do they keep failing me? I have been driving since I was a teenager. Please, you have to help me! That is why I want to speak to the president.”

“Oh this is not a problem,” she said.

“It is to me!” I said, almost insulted at her attitude.

“Oh no. this is easy. Hold on.”

She picks up the phone and makes a couple of phone calls, but since she is speaking Arabic, I have no idea what she is saying.

She hangs up the second call and writes a name on a piece of paper.

“Okay. It is all done. You go and take the test again. And you will pass this time.”

I am skeptical. I said, “Really? Just like that?”

“You go see this man, and tell him that Nura sent you.” Then she sat back and snickered.

“See I told you that you didn’t need to speak to Sheik Takhnoon and that I could help you. So what do you do here in UAE? Would you like some tea?”

“I am an English teacher and yes, I would love some.”

“Oh nice. I want to work on my English.”

“Really, you have nice English already.”

“Yes, but I want to do better with conversations.”And that was the beginning of a delightful relationship between me and Nura. The next day, I went down as she advised, and spoke to the man whose name she had written on the paper. I was sent to take the driving test one more time, and passed without so much as a bat of an eye from either of the police officers in the car. Matter of fact, they smiled and chatted with me this time around; I was so shocked. Nura had really taken care of my problem just as she said she would.

Ecstatic with my new license, I went and bought a brand new Nissan Altima from the dealership the very next day. I updated my status on my gmail account like this: *From Al Ain, the city where it takes 11 months to get a license and one day to buy a car.*

The next day, I stopped by Nura's office to say thank you. She was confident but gracious to accept my gratitude. We sat on the couch this time and had tea and cake and chatted for an hour. She then asked me if I could start tutoring her in the office and if some of the other ladies could join the class. Of course, I was more than happy to oblige--without any fees. Nura was my life-saver and I knew I would have a great time teaching them English anyway.

Once a week, I would stop in for my class and chat session with the Arabic ladies who worked for the president. They were so delightful. We shared stories of each others' customs and became great friends.

You might be wondering if I ever got to meet the Sheikh. Well no, I didn't; but as fate would have it, my daughter did. I had dropped her off with Nura and ran to do an errand around town. I came back and my daughter was bubbling over with excitement that she got to meet Sheikh Takhnoon.

"Mom, he was so polite and spoke English to me!"

Wow. So not fair! I was the one who started this whole thing and I missed it... darn it!

Eyebrows Be Gone

Throughout the years, I have colored my hair many times. *It's just what we do. Right ladies?* Most of the time the results were delightful. Sure, I have made some mistakes while self-coloring, but, there is one particular time that went totally off the charts.

One Saturday, in about 2010, I picked up a box of color to refresh my hair. I colored my hair, but for some reason, I didn't like the results. So I went to the store and got another box, perhaps a bit blonder. I went home, did my hair again, but it seemed even worse. So off to the store I went for box number three.

(Perhaps now is the time to mention that each time I was dying my hair, I was applying a small amount to my eyebrows too. You see, anyone that knows me, knows that my eyebrows are nearly invisible. They are the exact same color as my skin and when they are fashionably plucked,

they are actually even more difficult to see. So, I started the habit of coloring them each time that I do my hair—just to give them some texture. But something awful happened with the third box.)

I got home and colored my hair, and eyebrows, for the third time (really it's a wonder I didn't burn my hair off). But when I went to rinse my hair, my eyebrows turned a fluorescent pink color and not the purplish-brown that I was going for. I nearly had a heart attack.

“Oh my god! My eyebrows are pink!” I screamed from the bathroom. “I have class in the morning. I can't go to class with fluorescent pink eyebrows. What do I do now? I can't color my hair again!”

My hair was bearable—not perfect—but not fluorescent pink either. And since I wore head scarves in class anyway, the only hair that showed was my eyebrows—the pink eyebrows. I really didn't know what to do. *Maybe if I make them really thin, no one would be able to see them.* So I went into the bathroom, found a razor blade and started trimming away at the pink rainbows. I got them as thin as I could, but you could still see them from the space station. I had no other choice, but to shave them off.

I thought I looked hideous, but no one ever said anything about them missing; it took a couple weeks for them to grow back in. Funny thing, when I asked my daughter that day if I looked okay without any eyebrows, she said, “Mom, we never see your eyebrows anyway. You look normal.”

Okay. I guess that's good?

No Salad For You!

When travelling the world, nothing makes you feel more at home, than to visit food chains that come straight from your hometown. I remember the time I drove 8 hours in Pakistan from Islamabad to Karachi just to visit McDonalds—I just had to have a big mac. Then one time in UAE, I drove two hours to get a burrito at Taco Bell in Dubai. It was these little things that kept me connected to home (America) during my domestic exile. So as often as I could, I would go to the Pizza Hut

restaurant in Al Ain. It was one of my favorite hangouts, until one day, I bumped heads with the manager.

It was one of our regular mother and daughter lunch dates, and we decided that we were in the mood for pizza; so we went over to our neighborhood Pizza Hut. It was still early in the day, so the place was pretty empty. We chose our seat, ordered our pizza and headed to the salad bar. So far everything was normal.

Once our pizza came, our focus was diverted from our salad plates and onto our large cheese and pineapple delight. We chatted the hour away, enjoying the atmosphere. Soon, we decided it was time to leave.

“May I have a carry-out tub for my salad please?”

“No madam. I am sorry, I cannot,” she said as politely as possible.

“What do you mean?” I was shocked.

“You are not allowed to take the salad out of the restaurant,” she tried to explain.

“What? That’s ridiculous.” I was so stunned that I thought maybe English was not her first language and that I should start the whole conversation over again. “Please bring me a carryout tub for my salad.”

“No madam I cannot.”

“Again no? Why not?”

“Like I said, you are not allowed to take the salad out of the restaurant.”

After two more rounds of the same discussing, I became fed up with my waitress. I stood up and said, “I’d like to speak to the manager please.”

Gesturing to follow her, she said, “Yes ma’am, this way.” She led me to the register and went into the kitchen to get him.

I stood patiently at the counter. *This is just ridiculous.* Suddenly, a sweaty, balding, pudgy Middle-Eastern man with a noticeably long pinky nail, came out from the kitchen.

“Yes madam,” he said with really no expression on his face. Obviously the waitress has filled him in.

“I would like a carry out tub for my salad, and my waitress is refusing to give me one. She says that I cannot have one, and I want to know why.”

“She is correct ma’am. You cannot take out your salad. You have already eaten some of it. So you cannot take it with you. It is against our rules.”

“What rules?”

“Pizza Hut’s rules.”

“No, it’s not,” I argued. “I’m from America and I’ve been eating at Pizza Hut all of my life. I *am* allowed to take my pizza home.”

“Yes, the pizza; just not the salad,” he countered.

“What the hell?” I abruptly barked out with no remorse. The customers were now starting looking over at us. I began flapping my hands about. “That doesn’t even make sense. Why can I take the pizza and not the salad?!”

“Because you touched it while you are in the restaurant.”

“Okay, wait. So what you are saying is, that I cannot take the salad home with me because I have already touched it while I was *inside* the restaurant?”

“That is correct.”

“But you touched the salad in the kitchen; so you can touch my salad. But I can’t touch my own salad?”

“Correct.”

“That doesn’t even make sense! Are you hearing what you are saying?!” I argued. Just then a man walked in to the restaurant to pick up his order: pizza and salad. I glared at the manager and continued my argument. “So! *This* man can take *his* salad home, because he has *not* touched it yet. But I *cannot* because I sat at my table like a *good customer*, and took a bloody fork and ate a piece of it? He can take his, but I can’t take mine?”

“You could have done something to your salad.”

“What?! I could have done something to my own salad? Are you serious? You could have done something to my salad. Everyone in the kitchen could have done something to my salad.”

Again he starts his argument. “It is against our policy to let a customer take the salad out of the restaurant once they have eaten from it.”

“Oh my God! Where is this ridiculous policy written down?! I want to see it.”

“You want to see it?”

“Yes, I want to see it and to read it. Right now. Go get it. If it’s in your company’s policies, then they’re public and I have a right to read them. I’m an English teacher. I’ll read it myself and see if *you* understand it correctly or not.”

Suddenly the man reaches under the counter and pulls up a small aluminum tub and throws it on the counter at me. “Oh here! Just take your salad and go!”

“Thank you! I will. That’s all I wanted in the first place.”

Then as I turn to go, he said, “If you get sick, it is not our problem!”

Ignoring his final comment, I took my salad and stormed out of the restaurant.

But You’re Wearing Them!

As you see in the last story, *the customer is not always right*. I had to battle this mentality more than once.

This story began around the time I accepted a position as Head of the English Department at the American International School in Dubai. I had just moved from Al Ain to Dubai but was still teaching at a college in Al Ain—about an hour and a half drive away. Once I secured my new position, I put in my mandatory *30-day* notice at the college. (Anyone who doesn’t comply with this rule, risks a lengthy travel ban, so most comply with a heavy heart; nothing like the two-week notice one usually gives in America.) That meant I would be commuting between Dubai and Al Ain for the entire month to teach my English classes. The daily drive was excruciating, but, I faced it with courage, my mp3 player and *lots* of coffee.

Since my moving to Dubai, everything in my life was excitingly new—a new apartment, new people, new job, and even a new hair color (reddish-brown)—meaning that it was only obvious that I

needed new pair of shoes as well. (I am sure all the women reading this understand how I felt.) But I didn't need just any new shoe. I had some special requirements. Since my new school had clay tile floors, I needed a pair that were easy to walk in, weren't slippery, and most importantly, didn't make that annoying tuk-tuk noise that would echo thru the halls; all of this making rubber soles a must.

I shopped in all of my favorite shoe stores in Al Ain, but I just couldn't find the perfect shoe. Eventually, one day after class on my way back to Dubai, I decided to try out a new place on the edge of Al Ain. I had watched them build a new mall for some time, and they had just opened a big box supermarket in it a few weeks prior. I walked in, and they had dozens of lovely shoes. *Eureka!* Imagine how excited I was to finally find the perfect shoe in the new mall. They were black wedges with a nice rubber sole and a delicate bow on top; they were feminine, yet professional—and most importantly—no *tuk-tuk*. They were the perfect shoe (so I thought); I couldn't wait to try them out the next morning.

The next day, I got up too late and was rushing about to make up time. I got dressed, jumped into my adorable new shoes. I took a few steps around my room and stopped dead in my tracks—there was some kind of popping noise coming from one of the shoes. *Hmm. What's that?* Thinking at first that it was just something popping in my room, I shrugged it off and rushed to my car. I could still hear some popping noises, but I couldn't take the time to see exactly what the issue was.

When I arrived in Al Ain, the irritating popping noise continued and was really getting on my nerves. I tried to determine where the noise was coming from. I looked down at the front of the shoe; I looked down at the back of the shoe, and on both sides. I tried walking softly and I tried stomping. I had to determine where the bloody popping noise was coming from. It turned out that there was a manufacturer defect deep inside the right shoe under the arch. “Oh crap,” I said aloud. “Now what do I do? The left shoe is quiet, but the right shoe sounds like a damn popcorn popper. I can't wear these to my new job! I'll be damn tuk-tuking through the whole place!”

After class, I decided to go back to the store where I purchased them and exchange them for ones that *don't pop*. (That's logical thinking on my part, right?) I went up to customer service and politely explained that I needed to exchange my shoes. Noticing that I was empty-handed, the teenage girl at the desk asked me where the shoes were. Without hesitation, I said, “Well. They're on my

feet”. Her face went from a half-smile to confusion. I don’t know if it was the fact that I was wearing them, or that she couldn’t speak English well enough to argue, but she directed me to the next customer service counter upstairs. So off I went ...*step... pop...steppop...steppop*

“Excuse me,” I said. “I need to exchange these shoes.”

“What shoes?” the next customer service girl asked.

“These,” I said pointing at my right poppy-shoe. Then just like the previous young lady, her half-smile suddenly changed.

“But you’re wearing them,” she told me.

I smiled and proudly replied, “Yes, I know”.

She too seemed to be dumbstruck and sent me to what I will now call, supervisor number 1.

The supervisor and I, then replay the same exact dialogue as with the last two women.

“Hi. I want to return these shoes.”

“But you’re wearing them.”

“Yes. I know. But they’re defective, I don’t want them.”

“But you’re wearing them. We cannot clean them, so we can’t sell them again.”

“Yes, I know I’m wearing them. You won’t need to clean them; they’re defective.” We ended up repeating this same round of words three more times. I felt like I was stuck in some old Abbot and Costello comedy routine.

Suddenly, he concluded that there was not getting through to me, so he went and got supervisor number 2. I watched as the two of them huddled together working out their plan of attack.

They begin their approach—supervisor number 2 leads, with supervisor number 1 close behind. Number 2 began speaking, and yes, as you may have guessed by now, he says “But you’re wearing them.”

No hello? No may I help you? Just, but you’re wearing them? Really?

By this time my patience had run completely dry. I tried to explain one last time.

“I know I’m wearing them! I live in Dubai; I don’t have another pair of shoes with me right now! These shoes are defective! Do you understand the word, *defective*?!?” I raise my hands in

surrender. “Please just take the right one if you want, but just change the poppy-shoe! I can’t have a poppy shoe!” I was failing again. Alas, no resolution from Supervisor number 2.

Ultimately, supervisor number 3 was summoned to give a final judgment of the matter. By that time a crowd had started gathering around the shoe department. Like a wild woman, I was hysterically demonstrating how the shoe pops when I walk. (It was insane. All I wanted was a right shoe that didn’t pop. Am I not the customer?)

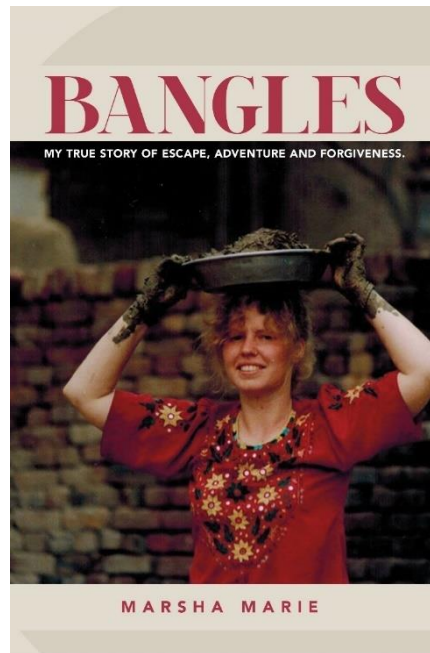
Finally, that the third supervisor gave his ruling and ordered the shoes to be exchanged (both right and left). “Thank God!” I bellowed. The Shakespearian drama had finally come to a close. Then to top off the day, they didn’t have the same shoes I needed, so I had to pick a new style all over again. Just imagine, there I was, walking barefoot in the store with five people helping to pick the perfect quiet shoes--again. In the end, I left that not-so-quiet-store justified, and most of all, stepping silently. I guess the customer is still *always right!*



Marsha 'Yasmine' Marie is a author, human rights activist, public speaker, radio personality, voice-over artist, blogger, vlogger and mom. She has also worked as an English department head, English instructor, American accent trainer, and communication lab designer. Marsha was born in Ohio, but then raised in Arizona; to escape and domestic abusive relationship, at 25, she moved to the Middle East---where she lived and taught for over 20 years.

She's now back in Arizona and lives with her children. She has joined forces with RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network), the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence and is currently a member of various speaking bureaus to share her story. She is also working on her upcoming radio show, The Izz Wow Radio Show---a show focusing on her love for Middle Eastern music and women's' issues around the world.

Check out www.MarshaMarie.com for updates, information and upcoming titles.



BANGLES: Chapter One: Surrender

by Marsha Marie

Twenty years of running ends today—March 1, 2014. As a result, I am sitting here on an international flight, wedged between my daughter and a young handsome Marine going home on his leave. I'm heading towards Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport to turn myself in.

The plane ride is long and tense. I've been chatting on and off since we left Dubai, trying to keep my mind busy. I can't believe I'm finally bringing this to an end. I've taken my head scarf off for the first time in years. I feel an unusual sense of freedom, but shyness at the same time.

Mona, now twenty-five, has been my greatest support and comfort. She calls Dubai her home and rejects the idea of returning to the States, most likely because she fears what lies ahead. Nevertheless, she stays positive.

"They are not going to take you," she says, reaffirming herself more than me. "You have to think positive, Mom."

"Okay, dear. I will," I say with a slight tremor in my voice.

Walking down the long carpeted hallway of the terminal, I feel as if everyone around me knows who I am—knows of what I have done. But in reality, each of the passengers is in their own world, clambering to see who can get to the immigration counter first. The lines are lengthy, but just as well for me.

Wait! Is that my heart pounding? Can everyone hear it? I feel as if I am in Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart." My booming chest will surely give me away.

I step up to the counter. This is it. The man asks for our passports, and I hand them over. I try to breathe, but I feel as if an elephant is sitting on my chest; it's just too heavy to bear. "Breathe, Marsha! Damn it," I scream to myself. "They'll know something's up!"

The immigration officer is wearing a typical black police uniform, safely tucked away in his little Pope-like glassed area. Tick, tick, tick on the keyboard. Each stroke—taking me closer to exposure. Will he discover in the system that I am wanted by FBI? Will he know that I have been eluding the authorities for the last twenty-two years?

Yes, he will. And he does. I see it in his eyes. I guess it's true; a criminal can always tell when they have been made.

He tries to make small talk with me about Dubai. But each stroke on the keyboard seems more urgent, more excited as he informs his colleagues on the other end of the intranet about me. I know on the inside that he is jumping up and down like a screaming little kid, "I have finally caught somebody! Come and get her!"

Suddenly, I see a large police officer standing to my right. "Can you go with this gentleman, ma'am?" the immigration officer says. Slowly and steadily we follow as I grasp Mona's hand. He leads us to a large deserted area in the terminal. About four other officers are huddled together, as if in a football game.

As I watch them discussing nausea sets in. After a minute or so, one of the four separates and comes towards us. "Ma'am. Are you aware that there are two arrest warrants out for you?" the officer inquires.

“Yes, I do,” I say. “Can I get my attorney’s letter out of my bag? I can show you that I am surrendering myself—to clear all of this up.” I continue as I reach in my purse for the letter, “My son should be right outside waiting for me. Can I call him?”

“No! No calls,” one officer from the desk area quickly snaps back. The officer standing near me takes the letter and returns to his group.

Mona starts to tear up; the pressure is now too much. This has just gotten real for both of us. I grab her hand again and hold tight—a feeble move to calm a young autistic lady who hasn't been separated from her mother in the last twenty-two years.

“Everything will be okay, sweetie. Don't worry, I have this all planned out. I have to turn myself in. They will let me out in a couple of hours. This is all part of the process.”

“Marsha, we have just spoken to your son outside. He is waiting for his sister,” the officer informs me. “Please stand up. You are under arrest; we have to take you into custody.” Like clanging church bells in my ears, the finality of it all has hammered down. I embrace my daughter and try to calm her tears.

“Why are they taking you? You have done nothing wrong!” she bursts, unable to bear silence any longer.

I try to calm her. “Sweetie,” I say, “your brother is just outside the airport. This officer will take you to him. Okay? I will be fine. This is what I came back to do. I have to do this. For all of us.”

The officer leads my precious Mona away from me—out of the terminal and towards her awaiting brother. She is sobbing. My heart is breaking. My legs go numb, and I have to sit down. A woman officer comes towards me and asks me to stand back up, then handcuffs both hands behind my back. The clasps of the cuffs echo through the empty terminal. I am escorted to the awaiting police vehicle outside.

The cuffs are cold and hard, making it difficult for me to sit in the back cab of this small pick-up truck. The escorting officer bizarrely asks me about Dubai. “Yeah,” he says, “I've always thought about

going there.”

“Really?” I reply, almost reminiscent, with a touch of regret for having just left. “It really is an amazing place.”

My holding cell. Could this be any smaller? But still, nothing like I had imagined. The walls are made of cement block, with a cement shelf built into the back of it. The shelf is about two and a half feet off the ground. The entire room is painted a shade shy of daisy-yellow, and the door is oversized and metal. A woman officer un-cuffs me and asks if I would like a drink of water. “Yes. Please,” I barely utter. “This room is awfully small. Can you leave the door open for me? I’m extremely claustrophobic.” The woman very politely—and surprisingly—agrees. (You never know when you’ll get what you ask for.)

I sit on the hard cool shelf, like an obedient child who has just been given a time-out, and watch them as they cluster around the desk reading and discussing my profile on two different computer screens. I eventually get tired of trying to eavesdrop, and look to the floor to size up the room. “Six feet by four. Yuck! Please God, don't let them shut the door.” I pray this under my breath with all sincerity.

“Is it true?” I hear suddenly. I look up and see one of the officers is slightly leaning against the metal door frame, with his arms crossed. “Are you really surrendering yourself after running for twenty-two years?”

“Yes,” I say, without even a touch of pride.

“That took a lot of courage,” he replies. “Well, I think you're doing the right thing by turning yourself in. Don't worry. This will all be just a memory in the morning.”

After a while the woman officer returns to me. We are going to transfer you to the main city jail now. I will have to put the handcuffs on you again. I stand up and go along without any kind of hesitation. One of the male officers escorts me out to the transporting wagon, or paddy wagon as

some call it. He opens the little cab area between the driver's seat and the back cage. He guides me in. It is cold and dark—almost black. The seats are hard plastic and my hands hurt pressing against them. I try to scoot over, but my long tight skirt is only complicating matters. I half lean over and my head rests on the side of the cab just behind the driver's side; my feet are still behind the passenger's side. I give up trying to move any further. The only light I can see is from the streetlights looking out the front windshield through the metal screen that separates me from the front. Suddenly, I feel true isolation for the first time in my life. Such intense loneliness I have never felt before. I begin to weep softly.

A few seconds later, I hear a voice coming from behind me. "Mom. Whadja do?" I'm a bit taken back. It's a young male's voice coming from sheer darkness. Not knowing if I am annoyed that someone is getting up in my business, or relieved to hear a human voice in my darkest moment, I barely give the effort to turn my head to see who is speaking to me.

Oh, what do I even say to THAT? I don't reply but continue to sob.

He says, "Oh Mom, don't worry. Everything's gonna be okay. You'll see the judge in the morning and you'll get to go home. Morning will be here before you know it." Then the voice goes silent again. A driver climbs in the front and we're off. I peer out my screened opening to see if I can recognize Phoenix. I recognize nothing.

We arrive at the main city jail, or "the matrix," as the streets call it. I continue through a rigorous and calloused check-in process, from one small holding cell to the next—all serving different functions: mouth swabbing, groping, finger-printing and of course the infamous mug shot. Like controlling cattle, the door opens to one of my holding cells. The officer calls my name and tells me to stand behind the podium for my picture to be taken—leaving me open for yet another opportunity of enquiry. "So-o," the officer says, all drawn out. "I hear that you have been hiding out for over twenty years. Is that true?"

"I am not proud of what I have done," I murmur.

With amazement in his voice and almost a chuckle, he says, "Well, you're either really good, or we're really bad?" It almost sounds like he wants me to answer the question, but then he quickly adds,

pointing at the card taped below the camera, "Go ahead and look at this card right here." Snap!
"Turn." Snap!

After the mug shot, the officer instructs me to go to the nurse's station. This main function area is now co-ed. The female nurse sits behind a huge desk. She is wearing a typical white nurse's uniform. She looks over at me and says, "I am going to ask you some questions and you just answer. Okay?" I shake my head, agreeing, another tear streaming down.

"Do you smoke?"

"No."

"Do you use marijuana?"

"No."

"Do you use heroine?"

"No."

"Have you ever shared a needle with anyone?"

"No. Really, are all of these questions necessary?"

"I'm sorry, but I have to ask them." She continues, "Have you ever been a prostitute?"

"No!"

"Have you... Have you... Have you...?" The questions keep coming.

"No...no...no..." I answer with mirroring rhythm.

Finally, the nurse says, "You know what? Looking down this list, I don't think we need to continue. I can already tell what the answers are..."

Suddenly, just as she was ending the sentence, a mammoth of a man inside the holding cell directly behind me starts slamming his fists on the metal doors and screaming profanities at the top of his lungs. I jump in surprise as fear strikes through me as lightening. I begin crying even harder—but now out of terror. The man keeps pounding and pounding on the door. Three officers bellow at him to calm down. He doesn't stop. The door flies open. They tackle the man and start tazing him.

My entire body is literally shaking by this point. "I don't belong here!" I sputter at the nurse, knowing very well she can't help me.

She leans in closer to me over the desk and says, "Do you want to know how to survive in here?"

I shake my head as if to say: yes.

"Just focus inward. Try to block out everything that is happening around you . Okay? You will make it through the night." (Again, a voice of reason comes to me when I most need it). She continues, "It's nice seeing someone that really doesn't belong in here—if you know what I mean."

I nod, wiping another tear away. "Thank you."

I get up and walk to the next process station. I take a seat at the beginning of the long bench. As we are called, we move down to the right. In due time, I make it to the end of the bench. My tears have dried for now. A young boy seats himself next to me. I continue looking forward. Suddenly, I hear him say, "Are you okay, Mom?"

With instant recognition, I look up towards the boy. It's the same voice I heard in the dark hole. With a half-smile, I reply, "Yeah. Yeah. I'm okay."

"Has anyone told you what will happen tonight?"

"No. No one."

"Once you're done here, you'll go out into the hall in the next room. They'll search you again and then take you to another cell for the rest of the night. Then in the morning you'll see the judge, and

then you'll get out. Don't worry. It'll go by fast."

"Thanks. What's your name?"

"Kevin."

"Thanks, Kevin."

Again they call my name and take me to the next hall just as Kevin had said. The beckoning officer politely instructs me. "Stand here, young lady. Remove your coat and shoes."

A woman officer heads over with surgical gloves on.

Oh my God. What is she gonna do?

She stands directly in front of me and says, "Bend over at the waist and hang your arms straight down."

I oblige without saying a word.

"I am sorry for doing this," she says. She runs her fingers along the bottom-inside of each cup in my bra. She then grabs the middle area where the cups are joined, and shakes it to and fro. Then she says, "Now put your hands against the wall." Another patting down.

Again? How many times are we gonna do this tonight?

"Alright, put your stuff back on and stand against that wall." The officer then leads me down the hall into my next holding tank. It's about 2 a.m., and there are about twenty-five women sprawled out like cats sleeping on the benches and the floor. The room has two phones on the wall to my right, and a u-shaped cement bench to the left. There is a toilet against the back wall and a green thirty gallon garbage can by the toilet. How odd. I find a narrow spot along the middle of the u-shaped bench and settle in—nothing to do but wait for my attorney to arrive.

As women often do, I carefully chose my wardrobe for the arrest. Unfortunately, I didn't consider

that I might have to sleep on the floor of the city jail. I'm wearing my favorite long Turkish black skirt with a black turtleneck shirt, my bluish-purple power-blazer, black high-heels, and—to top it off just right—a multi-colored long mini-stone necklace. Maybe I over-thought it just a bit—and by the looks of it, I am the only one who did. Some of the women have dirty jeans on, some shorts and tank tops. One lady even has her house slippers on. But the thing freaking me out the most is this young girl who's scratching and shaking. Forget her dirty clothes; she has scabs all over her body. What is wrong with her? I later found out that she was a Meth-addict. (This was my first encounter with someone who was on Meth. It was not pretty.)

The cement holding cell is chilly, with a dirty brown cement floor, and a pungent metallic smell. Suddenly, my claustrophobia kicks in. I find it harder and harder to breathe. My eyes begin dashing to and fro, looking for a passage for air. I lock onto the two-inch space under the steel door. I convince myself that the air coming from under the door is just for me. I can actually see it flowing towards me; it's invisible, but I can see it. "Okay, calm down. You can do this. Breathe... Breathe..." I say to myself, between each long gulp of air. I start to relax. My breathing stabilizes.

One of the girls gets up and uses the toilet. Oh my. Am I supposed to look the other way? After she finishes, she lies down in a different spot. I notice a depleted roll of toilet paper next to me. The other girls are using the rolls of paper as pillows. I had better take that and keep it with me for later. I slyly snatch the roll and press it flat, stuffing the roll into the left front facing of my blazer. Okay, now I'm ready just in case. (That stash of toilet paper came in very handy later that night, as the call of nature came to light in the most inappropriate way for public display. I tried to scrape up some self-respect by using the garbage can as a barrier. (Not one of my funner moments in life.)

Around 5 a.m., we are suddenly jarred alert by an officer at the door. He yells out that it is time to eat. Like a scene in a zombie movie, the women begin rising from the floor and take a spot on the bench. I wonder what they serve in jail. The officer leads a young man in an orange prisoner jumpsuit holding an open box with clear baggies spiking out the top; he couldn't be more than twenty-four years old. Without uttering a word, he walks around to each woman in the cell and offers them the three entrée items from the menu tonight: One small bottle of school cafeteria fruit juice, one hamburger bun, and one baggie with a few tablespoons of creamy peanut butter.

The two "waiters" leave the cell and the women begin devouring. I decide that it's best to ration. Who knows when my next meal will be? So I take a few bites of the bread, and suck some of the

peanut butter for flavor. I savor it slowly, and then down it with a small swish of juice. Once the women have finished, they return to their spots on the floor and benches, and drift back off to sleep again. I sit silently in the same spot, thinking. Keeping my food supply near—and just thinking.

Time crawls its way to morning. The sound of the keys rouse me. Finally. Maybe it's time to see the judge? They call out a list of names. Yes! Thank God! I wait anxiously for my next instruction. He tells us to line up against the wall outside in the hallway. With my peanut butter and juice bottle in tow, I accept my place in line and follow the lead. We walk slowly with no sudden movements into a small white room. Again they take my fingerprints. A lady officer looks at my food and says while pointing to a trash can, "You can't take that with you inside to see the judge. You need to dump it here."

There goes my food supply.

The officer leads us into the courtroom next door. It's cold, and much brighter compared to the holding block—mostly white floor and walls.

Hey, where's my lawyer? I look around and keep thinking that he will come into view at any minute, but he isn't. The proceedings begin anyway. A recorded male voice comes over the speaker: "You have a right to..." The words fade into the background. I whip my head to and fro. Where is my attorney? He is nowhere to be found.

A female judge, sitting on a circular brown platform, calls my name with authority. "Marsha Marcum." I walk to the marked spot as one does on a performance stage. "State your name and date of birth, please," the judge commands.

My voice crackles as I answer her.

The judge continues, and without any explanation announces, "Because of your record, you will remain in jail until your hearing."

What? My legs go numb. Oh my God! I'm going to jail? Where is my attorney? This was not supposed to happen like this.

Suddenly, I remember that my attorney had scheduled a quash warrant hearing for me. I finally muster the courage to speak to the judge. “But, Your Honor, I came to America for a quash hearing,” I say with great desperation. “I thought my attorney would be here for me right now, but he isn't, and I don't have his number with me. My purse went home with my children.”

“Okay. Let me look into it. Go back and sit down. The bench will call you up when I am ready.”

My mind is racing a thousand words a minute. I begin mumbling to myself, “I shouldn't have come back home. This was not supposed to happen like this. Where is my attorney? Oh God, what have I done?”

After what seems like hours, but in reality is only about thirty minutes, the judge calls me back to the bench again. “We looked into it, and yes, you do have a hearing set in a few days. I will go ahead and release you.”

Oh, thank God! “Thank you, ma'am,” I say.

I am transferred to one process room after another. Each room is getting smaller than the one before. I wait anxiously to be released. I am still trying to fathom what in the world happened with my attorney. Why didn't he show up? I replay it to myself over and over again. We had this planned out for well over a year.

The final process room has a phone in it. I try to call my son to let him know that I am being released. But I can't remember the bloody number. I think as hard as I can, but it's just not coming to me. Luckily, one of the other girls being released is calling her mother on the phone next to me. I ask her if her mother could go onto Facebook and let my son know what is happening—it's worth a shot, anyway. After twenty minutes, her mother has found him. “He is on his way,” she says.

Awesome!

At last, the final door of the matrix opens. I step outside with great anticipation, but nothing greets me except a light shower of rain. But I'm not sad. I'm back home. I made it to America. These cool refreshing drops are a welcome change from my former desert refuge. At last, appearing from

around the corner, I see my son and daughter on American soil. We embrace. This is the first day of a lengthy legal battle, but my two children are here beside me, to love me, to support me and my past decisions.

“Son,” I anxiously ask, “where's my attorney? Did you call him and tell him I was arrested at the airport?”

“Oh yeah...” he says, “I forgot.”

Books by Marsha Marie

www.MarshaMarie.com



- ***Rose-Colored Bangles: A Collection of Poems***, Indie Published, 2016. (Bangles Pre-Launch release.)
- ***Bangles: My True Story of Escape, Adventure and Forgiveness*** (Bangles Series, Book 1), Indie Published, 2016.
- ***Sandi's Sweets Coloring Book Series***, Books 1 and 2, Indie Published, 2016. Not for Sale: For Domestic Violence Shelter's only.
- ***Bangles to Mom: Letters from Pakistan***, (Bangles Series, Book 2) Indie Published, 2016
- ***Crowded Bangles: How I Should've Driven My Co-Wife Crazy***, Indie Published, 2016.
- ***The Gift: a mini-memoir***, Indie Published 2017
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