
75+ THINGS
I LEARNED LIVING
22 YEARS ABROAD
A MEMOIR BY
MARSHA MARIE

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75+ Things I Learned Living 22 Years Abroad

By Marsha Marie

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This is a work of nonfiction.

Edited by Kerrie Irish.

Book cover by Marsha Marie.

This book is dedicated to learning lessons all our lives.

“It is better to live your own destiny imperfectly than to live an imitation of somebody else's life with perfection.”

— Anonymous, The Bhagavad Gita

From the author:

Dear Reader,

Thank you so much for taking the time to get to know me and (as the title suggests, reading about the lessons that I have learned while living abroad for 22 years.) I know your first question will be: “Where did she go and why?”

Well, I was born in Ohio, but was raised in Phoenix, Arizona. At 25, I found myself trapped in a difficult and abusive marriage. Out of desperation, I went against court orders and threw myself into a 22-year-long self-exile in Asia and Middle East. Firstly, I ended up in a remote farming village in Pakistan with my two small children in tow---ages three and five. I lived in that incredibly modest farming village for the next 14 years; knowing that I could not return to my homeland in the States.

Although the 14 years in the village was lived out surprisingly pleasant, I yearned for a change of scenery and lifestyle. I then packed up and moved to the ‘big city’ of Islamabad. Once there, I gained invaluable life experience. For instance, I joined the faculty of one of the most popular universities---teaching English and communication skills. I also trained American Accent to call center agents. I volunteered as a member of a human rights committee monitoring jail conditions, and I did lots of voice-over work for local radio. Surprisingly enough, one of the local TV stations even decided to make me the topic of a mini-documentary. (Too funny to watch, really!)

Two years later, I was off spreading my wings again—this time to the United Arab Emirates. It was an amazing experience indeed. There, I continued my English teaching studies and received an influential CELTA certification from the University of Cambridge in London. After which, I was given the opportunities to teach in a college, university, in private homes, royal palaces (training sheikhs and princesses). I was also invited to hold classes for the President's staff at his office in Al Ain. The most challenging of all was when I worked as Head of English Department for a year at a K-12 school with over 1,000 students. (Now that was a handful!) Altogether, I taught English writing and communication skills in UAE for about seven amazing years—loving every minutes of it! (Okay…almost every minute of it.)

After doing upkeep for a few websites and blogs for my students as part of my teaching toolbox, I was asked to do some article writing for a couple of local magazines. They were mainly about English language development and mini-memoir pieces. It was during this time of my life that I fell deeply in love with writing and with its process, and I longed to continue with it. Recognizing that my life's story was unique, I knew that I would eventually write a book; but just didn’t know when. I would tell myself, “Not yet Marsha."

It was the latter part of my time in UAE that a doctor suggested I return to the States for my young adult daughter---for her particular educational needs. But of course that meant facing the awaiting authorities and arrest warrants back home.

I did.

After the legal issues were settled, in 2016, I finally published, *Bangles: My True Story of Escape, Adventure and Forgiveness*, in which ten percent of the proceeds goes toward Domestic Violence Awareness and Support programs. I have since continued to write mini-memoirs and share my story hoping that others will benefit from it.

In this book, I want to share some of the most important lessons that I learned about life and the world around me during those years. When I first went into exile, I was grown with two children, and thought I had already experienced all life had to offer; but in actuality, I was clueless.

(How to read this book: The book is sectioned out into three different parts. Lessons from living in Pakistan between 1991-2008, then lessons from living in UAE between 2008-2014, then lessons living in Asia and the Middle East in general.)

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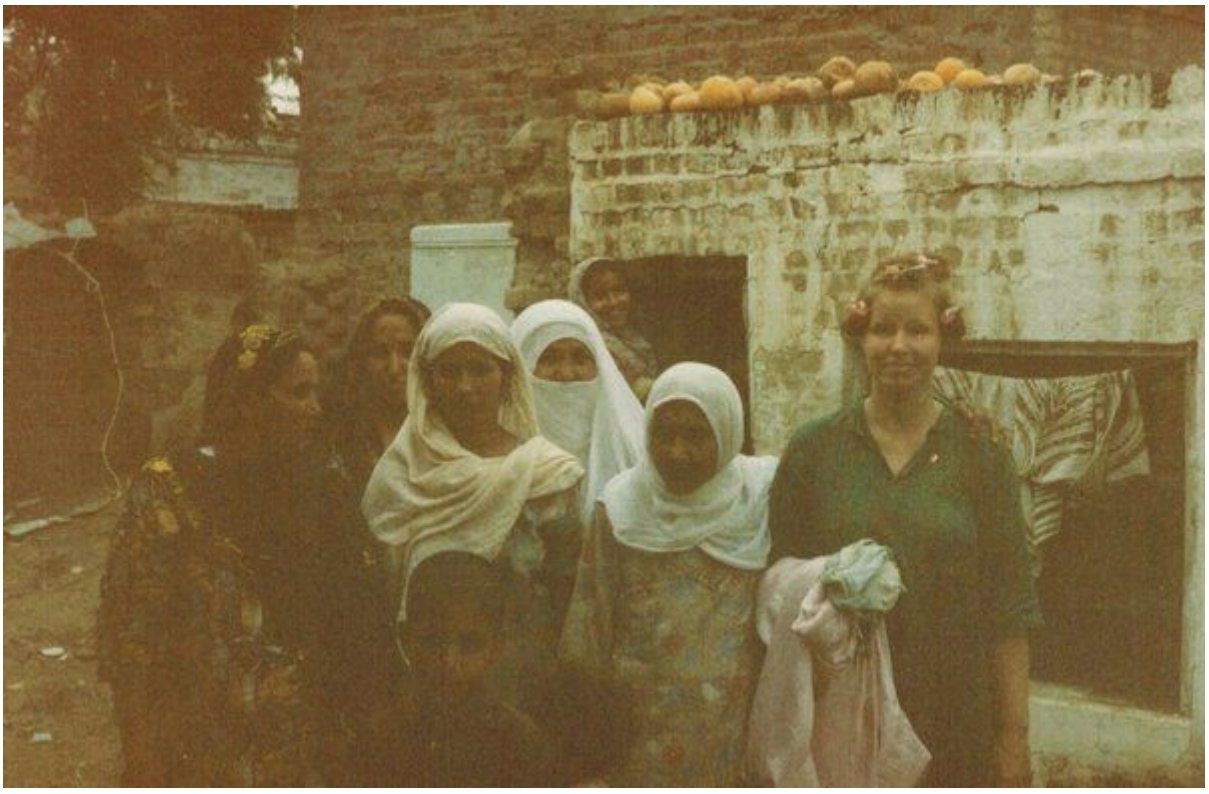


(My first month with my new Pakistani family. Pakistan)

Lessons from Living in Pakistan

Timeframe: 1991-2008

1. ***Don't mind not understanding what's going on around you***.

My first year of living in the Pakistani village I couldn't understand anyone or anything around me. It seemed like everyone was arguing. They were loud and using excessive hand gestures. One time I asked my husband, "What are they arguing about?"

He said, "They are discussing what to have for dinner."

2. ***Visas are a pain in the ass***.

Absolutely! Just imagine in my 22 years abroad, how many times I had to renew my visa. I have paid thousands of dollars for visas. I've fought with visa agents. I've cried about visa agents and their asinine decisions. But there is one thing that I learned for sure, and that is visas are necessary. I really do not have a problem requiring someone to have a visa when they visit or work in other countries. All countries have a right to protect their borders---America included.

3. ***Learn to be patient with others.***

There is nothing more delightful than when you are living in a strange land to run into someone that speaks your native language. I met lots of people that tried to speak English, and I would lovingly wait and let them finish their bumpy sentences.

Not only that, I also learned that my personal needs did not necessarily come first. I had to learn to wait in lines; I had to wait for others to simply understand basic things that I was asking for. Patience became my superpower. While I was there, I started teaching English, which takes a lot of patience, by the way. Just for fun, watch a few episodes of the 70's British comedy, *Mind Your Language*, and you'll see exactly what I mean.

4. ***Old people are not as scary as I thought they were.***

For some reason, I had always been scared of the elderly; apparently, I suffered from a mild form of gerontophobia; something about the wrinkles kept me away. Thankfully, living in the village has helped me overcome such feelings and now I *love* talking to aged folks. I love letting them tell me stories about *their time*. You automatically know it is going to be interesting if they start a conversation with, "Well, back in my day…"

It wasn't even until my stay in Pakistan that I actually talked to somebody that was over 60 years old. (I think the oldest I got to converse with was centenarian.) I loved hearing about the myriad of stories, like war, the India/Pakistan division, etc. They were truly a wealth of knowledge and a pure delight to be around.

5. ***The elderly do not suffer from loneliness like they do in America.***

An interesting fact about that side of the planet is that you can basically find an old person in every home you visit. They live at home with family up until their very last day. They have purpose. It's called family. They love babies, they love taking care of the family and they love gossiping <cough> with the old person that lives next door (and there is always an old person that lives next door). Retirement homes are not as popular in that part of the world, because old people usually only leave the family when they die. That is it. Why can't we do this in America?

6. ***To downsize.***

When I left the country in the 90's, I knew it was for good. I had to pick and choose what were the most important items to keep with me. When I lived in the village with my husband's family in Pakistan, we had 8 people living in one room, which meant space was extremely limited. I had two twin-sized beds that I kept my suitcases on. My whole life was in those bags, mostly clothes and American food. And surprisingly enough, I got used to it very quickly.

It's true that over the years I became quite the packrat; I eventually moved into a two-story home, and my belongings centupled² (I just created this term. haha). But when it came time to return to the States after my 22 years of self-exile, I was forced to choose what were the most important items to take back with me. I ended up sending home only 20 boxes of mostly keepsakes. That is it. Twenty-two years tied up in 20 2ft-cubed-boxes. Such as, school records, baby teeth, wooden carvings, native clothes, dishes from India, old notebooks and diaries, etc. The items inside those boxes were much different than the ones I took at the *beginning* of my journey.

7. ***It's all in how you hear things, so be careful of the words that you use.***

Language is a funny thing, a roaring river that bends and shapes all that it touches. I discovered that several words can spill over into different languages, *but* not have the same meaning.

Two of my favorite examples of this are first the word *friendship*. Now to someone in America, this just means that you have peeps, either next door, at school, or on Facebook, but in Pakistan, the word *friendship* brings on a whole new meaning when you become an adult. Suddenly this innocent word brings on sexual indications; so beware if some dude comes up to you in a market and says, "Want to have friendship?"

And then there was the time in the village that I was standing in the street talking to my children; I kept saying the word *people*. Harmless, right? After all, I was speaking English. But then my sister-in-law came outside to me and said, "What are you doing?"

"Nothing I am talking to the kids."

"Why do you keep saying *people*?" She said. I really didn't know how to respond to her; I was confused. Then she said, "Well I don't know what you are saying to them, but here *people* means *vagina*, so all I hear is you saying the word vagina, over and over again in the street. What if the neighbors hear you?"

We had a good laugh that day, and needless to say from that day forward, I controlled saying the P-word--*or the V-word*--in public.

8. ***When submerged in a foreign language, you pick it up, whether you like it or not.***

True that! I think that the very first word that I absorbed was *dog* in Hindko (the language of our village). The longer I lived there, the more I picked up---without even trying. As the days went on, I noticed I understood at least three or four more words each day, and that was without any real effort at all. It was truly an incredible experience.

As it was, even more so for my children, it was also doing the reverse on the people around me. (Oops, there is that word again) Other family members started picking up English words too, and not always the most polite ones; they could basically understand everything I was

saying to my kids but yet they refused to speak in English. The only words that they would say, is *pillow*, *potato*, *no*, *yes*, *go*. One day my sister-in-law made it a point to tell me, "I no like the word that word, *cut it out!* Don't say anymore."

9. ***Electricity is a privilege.***

In all of my childhood, I can only remember the electricity going out maybe a total of 5 times. When I living in Pakistan, it was about 500 times. Pakistan practices load shedding, where they would shut off the electric to chunks of the country at scheduled and unscheduled times in order to not overwork the generating stations. I had never heard of such a thing before. Some black outs would be as long as 8 hours--in the summer! Only for survival, I learned not to be so dependant on electricity. I learned how to get along without a fridge or an air conditioner. Let me say this, I really respect this learning experience. If ever something happens to our power grids, let me tell you, I *am* ready for it!!

10. ***Hot water is the greatest gift of all and if you ever had to take a bath in a bucket of cold water, you would agree.***

Just like electricity, I never appreciated the ever-so-popular water heater, until I didn't have one for 14 years in the village. When it came time to take a bath, one had to put out great effort to do so. You had to get the water tin (which was usually an empty old cooking oil 16 liter tin), carry to the pump, fill it up, get the firewood, start the fire, and wait for the water to heat up. Once heated, then carry the hot water to the bathroom, pour it in the bucket and hope that you finish rinsing off before the water cools down. I have to admit that I took a cold bath on more than one occasion. Talk about water conservation; I became a master at taking a bath with a single bucket of water (and that is including the washing of my hair). Any volunteers to try this at home?

11. ***Bags of ice are a luxury.***

Really, they are. When I lived in the village, we would make our own ice with two silver cups or silver bowls. The cups of ice were handy because you could just dump the cup straight into the jugs of water and then refill them after the meal. But the bowls of ice were a bit trickier. We would have to wrap them in our scarves and then bang them on the bedpost of the bed, or slam them against the floor to break it into pieces.

Not everyone in the village was so lucky to have a freezer. So many of the neighbors would come and ask for ice when the weather warmed up. Sometimes it was annoying but you kind of just got used to it. I'm really thankful that I can now run down to store and just grab a bag of ice and chomp as much as I want. Amazingly convenient! I feel so spoiled.

12. ***Water is the best way to clean your butt.***

When I first arrived in Pakistan, going to the bathroom was such a daily chore for me. I would have to undress from the waist down, use the toilet, wash everything down and get dressed all over again--twenty times a day. I thought that this was such a nuisance, but as

humans always learn to adjust, it became customary for me, and to this day, I still use water to clean with. I have tried to go without and just use toilet paper, but it just feels nasty to me now. Besides, when you use water, you get cleaner, you feel fresher, and you just feel happier. Ask any baby; a clean booty is a happy booty.

Now that I know the secret, I will probably continue to use water the rest of my life.

13. ***You can sleep on the floor of a hospital, and survive.***

How many times have we heard our moms say, “Get off the floor it’s dirty!”? Only thousands. So, it’s no wonder that I grew up parroting the same thought: floors are nasty, and they should never be sat on, and definitely not slept on. That was until I experienced village life. We sat on the floor everywhere; at people's homes, in the yard, in the kitchen, even at the hospital (I know, the first thought is: *ewww!*).

When my mother came for a second visit to see me in Pakistan, she sadly suffered a heart attack and was in the hospital overnight. I stayed at her side, and ended up lying on the floor to sleep, and I survived just fine. Another time, the kids and I had a long layover at the Karachi airport and we all had to sit on the floor and wait for 11 hours. So what can I say? You just get used to it after a while. Floors are not the *killers* moms say they are.

14. ***One man's definition of sterile is not the same as others around the world.***

Continuing about hospitals, I remember my first visit to the hospital after arriving in Pakistan. I was so repulsed by the filth, so much so, that as soon as we got home, I made everyone take bath and change their clothes. What would cause me to react like that? Let me create the picture for you. First off, the smell was a stinch mixture of alcohol, chloroform, bleach, ethanol, blood and vomit. The walls were browned from dirt and grime just as were the floors, the beds were at least 100 years old and the ones that *had* mattresses were stained beyond belief, there was blood splattered on the walls and on the beds, dirty needles just laying around, dirty bandages, people flinging snot. (Oh god, I am getting all grossed out just typing this.) As I sat there, I felt like I should be hearing the cries of torture going on down the hall. But anyway you get the point; standards vary from country to country, my friends.

15. ***Burlap is an invaluable tool around the home.***

Again, my preconceptions of potato sacks were that they were just dirty items that we used in picnic races; but Pakistan showed me just how valuable they could be. Yes, their main purpose was for vegetables being brought home from the fields, but they were also used for doorway coverings, floor mats for wet shoes, sitting mats for in the kitchen to sit around the fireplace or any cold ground in the winter. (By the way, they really did keep the bum warm). They were also very handy for keeping collections of things like tools, cow dung for the fire or hay for the cow. What an amazing versatile tool---that good old-fashioned potato sack.

16. ***Flat roofs are so much more practical than pitched roofs.***

I loved our flat roof in Pakistan. When you have a flat roof, it is like having a whole separate story to your home. They are awesome for hanging laundry (especially in the winter when sun is limited), drying fruit or beef, taking summer and winter naps, flying kites, and just hiding from relatives that come over for the holidays (which is what I did *a lot*). Now that I am back in Arizona, I really miss my flat roof. If I were to build a home for myself here in the States, you can bet it will have a flat roof on it, and an Arizona room for us to sleep outside in.

17. ***Rules on the road are a blessing.***

I know that as I write this I am *not* revealing some big kept secret here. The roads in Pakistan are well known for how dangerous and intensely harrowing they are. I finally got to the point where I had to just stop looking out the front window while others were driving. We would have so many near-misses that I would have a stomach ache by the time we got to our destination. It was crazy! There are no rules to drive by, and the road belongs to everyone; cars, trucks, buses, goats, cows, bikes, camels, chickens, donkeys...you name it. You have to see it to believe it. (And do not even get me started about the driving in UAE; between the thousands of roundabouts and people who do not know how to make a left turn properly, one has to be on their toes at all times.)

18. ***Corporal punishment is defined differently.***

Not only did my children attend school while we were living abroad, but I also began working in them as an assistant *and* a teacher; which means I am well experienced with how the schools, teachers and the education system works in that country. Among many other lessons from this experience, was that corporal punishment is still very much alive in that region. I heard many horrible punishment stories and even witnessed a few first-hand. The normal punishment for a naughty student would be bending over and grabbing the ears and holding that position for however long they were told-to. Other common punishments are slaps across the face or upside the head, things being thrown at the kid, thrashing with the teacher's shoe, and even rulers cracking down on the knuckles.

Hands down, the worst story of punishment that I heard about actually happened in my son's classroom. One of the boys had lied to the teacher about something and so she pulled out a razor and cut his tongue down the middle; right in front of the class. My son was horrified. He relayed the story to me, "Mom, there was blood everywhere!" And can you believe, the parents of that child actually thanked the teacher for curing the boy of lying. *Still shocking to me!*

19. ***Valentine's day is the hottest topic for debate.***

Religion and politics may be the most argued topics around the world--but as I found out teaching my English classes--*Valentine's Day Debating* can rip a class in two. Some of my students just went crazy with this topic; they either loved it or hated it. Whenever I felt the urge to spunk-up a boring class day, I would say, "Hey, who likes Valentine's Day?" and then sit back and referee the fight.

20. ***An egg and curry powder cures everything.***

Homeopathic medicine is the norm in that area, especially with older folks. I feel that it is my duty to share these ancient proven cures with the rest of the world. Among some of the most common I learned from my mother-in-law was that the egg and curry powder can cure almost every ailment known to man. Or so the rumor has it.

“My head hurts.” I said.

“Eat an egg.”

“I feel sick.” I said.

“Eat an egg.”

“I have an ingrown toenail.” I said.

“Eat an egg, but also put warm mustard oil and curry powder on your toe. Wrap it for two days and it will come out.”

“I burnt myself. Should I eat an egg?” I said.

“No silly; what’s an egg going to do? You should put toothpaste on it. You still don’t get it do you Marsha? *Toothpaste* goes on burns!”

“Oh! Go it.” I said.

21. ***Bikini waxing was not created in Brazil.***

In actuality, women in this part of the world have been doing that for centuries. Instead of using hot wax, they pull out the pubic hair by mixing cow dung ashes (ash leftover from the open fire) with a minimal amount of water to create a paste. The paste is smeared to the desired area, allowed to dry, and then they rip it off. OUCH!!! (I love trying new things, but this one, I never had the desire to experiment with. *Just sayin.*)

22. ***Cow dung ash is a great absorbent.***

And speaking of cow dung, I wrote an entire chapter about it in my book, *Bangles: My True Story of Escape, Adventure and Forgiveness*. I fell in love with cow dung while I was there. It burns nicely, makes starting a fire so much easier, and it also leaves an incredible amount of ash that can be used for so many different things, like cleaning up cow urine, cleaning up baby poop, or any other liquid that needs to be cleaned up, or as I mentioned above---pulling out pubic hair.

23. ***Life doesn’t need to be spotless---just less dirty.***

I found out living in the village that there was no way to get everything completely clean. I would work for hours polishing and cleaning, but then my son would open the door and dirt would just fly right in again; not to mention the limestone that was used to paint the walls was constantly flaking off. After about two years of fighting this battle, I convinced myself that if I were to survive, the word *spotless* had to leave my vocabulary altogether. Any day that I was able to get the house just a bit *less dirty*, made me feel like I was ahead of the game. I guess what I really learned was dirt is just part of life. And let me tell you a secret, it really took a lot of stress away from me once I stopped trying to be *the spotless housewife*.

24. ***Dishes are not always done in the sink, or even the kitchen for that matter.***

Home is where the heart is, but the heart of the home is the kitchen. And the heart of the kitchen is the dishes. But the kitchen is not the only place to do dishes. In the village, you do the dishes wherever the water is located. Over the years, I had to wash dishes in many different places; outside by the water pump on the ground, on the kitchen floor or just in the corner of the yard. I have seen kitchens that are not even equipped for washing dishes; so each day they had to carry them outside to the water pump area, wash them and bring them back. The old-style kitchens had windows with shelves for the dishes (a great place to let them dry). *Loved it!!*

25. ***Sand works just as good as comet cleaner.***

And since we are discussing dishes, let's talk a bit about how they are washed. Normally, when doing dishes you would have an old sock, a bar of soap, and some sand in small bowl (or on the ground next to you). Soap up the old sock; dip it into the sand and scrub away on pots and pans. Sand worked just as good as any abrasive cleaner I used in America. As a matter of fact, I think sand just might be their secret active ingredient.

26. ***Drinking water takes work.***

There was no delivered water for me in Pakistan. And as a matter of fact, I knew families that didn't even have a motor to pump water from the well. To get a drink of water, they had to drop the bucket down the well and pull it up the old-fashioned way; and hope they didn't find a surprise at the end of the rope. Once the water is pulled, pour into a glass, wait for the sand to settle at the bottom and then drink the top half.

So next time you go in the kitchen and turn on the faucet, just maybe say a little prayer of thanks for it, because not everyone around the world has drinking water that easily.

27. ***Water tastes better in clay pots.***

I know it sounds crazy but water really does taste better when you drink it from a clay bowl; it’s cooler and cleaner somehow. I don't know the science behind it, but it works.

28. ***I missed my microwave.***

There was give-and-take with my decision to leave America, no doubt, but one of the things I really missed was the microwave. If I had to heat things up, I would have to use a silver plate on the stove or embers left over from cooking on wood. This method took time, the plates were so hot and it was just not convenient. Oh, how I missed that little metal box with the ding at the end of cooking!

29. ***Cream is a miracle.***

As do so many people, I took milk for granted most of my life; I just never gave it much thought. Amazing products like yogurt and butter, I just bought from the store. It wasn't until my village life that I met a real cow. She was amazing; smelly, but amazing. And that cow gave me an incredible gift each morning. Cream! *OMG! I love that stuff.* After the cow was milked, we would put the fresh milk into the fridge at night, and in the morning I had this glorious thick creaminess skin on top. At first I was so confused. I asked, "What is this? Why is it so thick." I had never seen milk do that before. I thought it went bad or something. Then I tasted it. Once I got that taste of cream, it became my morning addiction. I couldn't wait to be the first one to the refrigerator in the morning. This is really one of the things I miss most about Pakistan; I have not had cream like that since I left in 2008.

30. ***Peas don't come in cans***.

Just like milk, I never knew where peas came from. That is until the day my mother-in-law asked me to help her prepare lunch while holding a bowl full of slender green pods. I looked confused and said, "These are peas? How do you open them?"

Well, it took me a while but I finally got the hang of it. *Wow! Talk about boring!* If you're ever stuck shucking peas, make sure that there is a TV close by---something to keep your mind busy while your hands do the cracking and the scooping.

31. ***Clothes are not as dirty when you have to wash them by hand.***

In 1991, I was so totally green about what life was *really* about. As you can see from above, I didn't even know where milk or peas came from, let alone the really serious stuff in life. And as most, I grew up with a washing machine for laundry. I honestly thought that only those who lived in the jungle washed clothes by hand. But I was in for a rude awakening.

When I first arrived in Pakistan, all of my laundry was done for me. I would wear a piece of clothing for only a few hours and throw it to be washed. I kept this arrogance up until my mother-in-law informed me that I was to start washing my own clothes. Oh did I mention that we did *not* have a wash machine? That's right, no machine! I had to sit on the ground and wash by hand for my kids and I. It didn't take very long before I started looking at my clothes and thought, *hmmm, I could wear this one more day.*

32. ***Heat production is the most important thing in life.***

Once again, my naive childlike-self never really thought about heat. But let me tell you something, when you *do not have* heat, you tend to think about it quite a lot. The fireplace was the center of life, for cooking, and for heating water. Obviously, we didn't have central heating so in winter you would catch me hanging out by some source of heat, either the fireplace or a small gas cylinder. Unfortunately, I had a bad habit of sitting too close to the flame; I set my clothes on fire more than once. Luckily I never went totally up in flames; I always caught it in time, but if you skimmed my wardrobe, you could see burn marks here and there.

Cold weather and myself have never been compatible; as a result, I tended to adorn myself with all kinds of odds and ends clothing to keep warm, which leads us to the next lesson that I learned.

33. ***Fashion doesn't matter when you're freezing.***

I spent about 13 winters in the village. Summers were freaking hot and winters were freaking cold. When I got just a little bit chilly, my fingers would turn green and go numb. On top of that, I'm not able to think or sleep when I get cold; so whenever that happened I would start stacking on clothing, no matter the color or fashion; my only goal was to get warm. I wish I had a picture for each day of winter. I would put any *bag lady* to shame.

34. ***Air conditioners are not necessary for daily survival.***

Since we talked about winters, let me put a quick note here that I survived just fine without an a/c for 14 years. People who knew me back in 1991 used to bet on how long I would last in Pakistan because of the intense summers; but hey, I'm from Phoenix, summers were okay for me. Was it hot without an a/c or cooler? You bet. But I learned how to survive. I learned that the floor is the coolest spot in the house, especially a cement or marble floor. At night, we would wet our sheet and lay it over us (under a ceiling fan, that was an *instant cooler).*

35. ***Sharing the same plate is not as gross as I once thought.***

In Asia and the Middle East many families sit together for meals and share plates and the same water bowl. At first this really freaked me out. But then I guess I just got used to it. It was tradition and none of us seemed to get sick from it. I have to admit though, that since I have gotten back to the States, I'm back to loving my separate plate again; but as they say, when in Rome……...

36. ***Cows have personalities.***

One of the most amazing things to me was watching my mother-in-law talking to her cow. And the cow actually understanding and communicating back. The cow had so much emotion, that she would start mooing whenever my mother-in-law left the home for more than two hours, as if she was missing her. The cow would continue bellowing until her friend returned home.

(Me and our cow I called Bessy. Pakistan)

37. ***The Himalayas are full of monkeys.***

One thing that I just loved about living in Islamabad was that there were monkeys running free all over the Margalla Hills---the hill range part of the Himalaya foothills. If we were bored, we would just take a drive up the hills and pull over to the side of the road and watch them play. They were adorable and entertaining. Offer them something to eat and they were all over it.

38. ***Seeds are the lifeline to farmers.***

Living in a farming community really put me in touch about the basics of life. Water, heat, family, and seeds. I learned how farmers would plant, harvest, and let a portion of the crop grow to seed. The men in the family would bring home the over-sized plants and then women would help get the seeds ready for the next harvest. The only thing that *I* knew about seeds was how to buy them in little packets at the local hardware store. By the way, potatoes don't have seeds, they have eyes. So I got to learn how to cut the potatoes up into sections for planting. *Cool!*

39. ***Sewing is both a necessity and an art.***

Not only did I learn to cook with farm fresh ingredients on an open fire, but I learned to cut and sew my own clothes, too. Salwar Kameez is a tradition and simple design that I just fell

in love with. They are so lovely and fashionable; this staple clothing has such a wide spectrum of detail and beauty that it just blows the mind. The trim and embroidery can range from simple and inexpensive to massively intricate and costly. (And since we are on the subject, let me state that I think salwar kameez are also the greatest designed clothing in history. They are practical, modest, easy to work in, comfortable and lovely for both men and women.)

When I first got there, my family had all of my clothes made for me. But after ending up wearing several outfits that I tagged as *clownish*, I decided to take control of my wardrobe by learning to sew my own designs. And what better way to take control than to start manufacturing them yourselves, *right?*

40. ***Not everyone uses trash cans.***

Dealing with trash is a worldwide issue. In the village, we didn't have trash cans. We simply let it pile up in a round tray by the front gate and then took it out and dumped in the field once a day. As a result we would end up with a big huge, smelly piles of compost. Unfortunately, some things made it to the trash heap that should have been dealt with in a totally different manner---like used syringes and needles, nasty sanitary napkins and unused medicine.

41. ***Foreign languages open doors I didn't even know existed.***

Seriously, I used to think that it was just my blue eyes and flashy smile that brought on my good luck, but I guess I have to give my English language some credit, too. Take the time I was offered a job in a government-run university for example; I was there for a meeting with the Dean about an upcoming police function, but left with a job offer. They hired me on the spot to create and run an English Language Communication Lab for the students. It's safe to say that this amazing turn of events would not have happened at all, had I not been a native-English-speaker.

42. ***Some beliefs you just cannot argue with.***

For years, every Thursday at dusk, I watched my mother-in-law complete an unusual ritual. (Unusual for me, that is.) Just before dusk, she would prepare a meal, set it on the ground, turn on the outside light sit down behind the meal and pray. When I questioned her about it, she told me that her husband comes home for dinner every Thursday at dusk. I knew that he had passed away in the 80's, but I didn't question it.

43. ***Maybe I should have respected my teachers more.***

I began teaching while living in Pakistan, and I was amazed at the respect that the students showed towards their teachers. Religious beliefs dictate that they revere teachers as equals to their mother. It often made me ponder how I treated my teachers when I was younger---I never listened, I talked behind their backs, and I was very disrespectful. (Dear Teachers, please accept this formal apology; I have finally learned my lesson.)

44. ***It is possible to forget where the man in the mirror came from.***

I would have to say that after a few years of living in Pakistan, I kind of forgot that I was a white American female. The only time that I really noticed was when I looked in the mirror, after that, it just slipped my mind. It even got to the point that whenever we were out shopping in Islamabad and happen to see some other Americans, I would actually stare, and think to myself, *oooooo. White people! Look how white they are.*

45. ***Twenty people* can *fit into one car.***

Yep. I saw it with my own eyes.

46. ***Bill Gates must have gotten the icon idea from Rawalpindi, Pakistan.***

When you go down any bazaar in Pakistan, you will see little icons, for the various shops, business trades, and even political parties. *Hmmm, should I vote for the umbrella or the hockey stick?* I used to think that it was genius to use little icons on Windows Desktop, but I discovered that the use of icons is as old as time.

47. ***Consensus is not the same as truth.***

Just because my mother-in-law and the entire village believed my throat would close up if I drank hot tea just after eating an orange, doesn't mean it's true. *I am eating that orange!*

48. ***Sweep the mud when the time is right.***

I used to watch my mother-in-law stand out in the rain and sweep the mud with a short stiff broom. Honestly, I thought she was crazy. Why would anyone stand in the rain and be sweeping mud in a dirt courtyard? I discovered the reason why soon after I moved into my own home.

In my new home, our back yard had huge patches of dirt areas. Whenever it rained, water would sit and create huge mud puddle for days. Then of course, my son would trample all over it, just as any kid would do. When it finally dried, it would be bumpy and difficult to walk on. That's when I realized what my mother-in-law was doing. She would sweep off the excess water to help it dry earlier, and smooth it out so that when it dried it was easier to walk on.

Moral of this story? Well, number one, watch older people; they have been around longer than us, and know how to work life. Number two, nip things in the bud when you can, it will save you time and difficulties later. (Who would have thunk that I would have learned so much about life just by watching an old lady sweeping mud in the rain?)

(My mother-in-law out in the rain. Pakistan)

49. ***Hard work feels amazing.***

I did a lot of hard labor while I was living in the village, like carrying firewood, moving bricks, mixing mud and hay for the adobe roofing, and doing laundry by hand. I survived just fine; as a matter of fact, it kept me in pretty good shape and I learned a lot. I now know how to work and pace myself in the heat, and if there is ever a natural disaster, I am ready for it!

50. ***Haggling is not one of my strong points.***

When I first stepped into the bazaar, I was totally mesmerized. I had literally walked into a different world. the colors were bright and dazzling (especially the gold markets). The sounds were loud and exciting. The problem happened when it actually came to purchasing something. Because I had blue eyes and spoke English, the price of any item was instantly sextupled. This would send my mother-in-law into a pricing wars with vendors. But just between you and me, I think that the women there enjoy the adrenaline of the fight.

51. ***Fasting is possible after all. (I probably fasted for 17 Ramadans)***

When I first became aware of the Muslim tradition of fasting, I thought it would be impossible for me; I knew there was no way I could go without eating and drinking for 30 days straight. But, I'm here to say, that I successfully completed at least seventeen fasts; that means no

eating or drinking during daylight hours (usually from 3-4 AM thru 7-8 PM) for a full lunar month.

Now I can admit that I was not always a happy-faster. I was grouchy, hungry and *really* thirsty (especially in the summer months). Because Ramadan works on a lunar calendar, the timing of the fast varied each year, which means, in the 17 years of my fasting I experienced a variety of seasons with it. (Note: 17 years multiplied by 30 years, equals approximately 510 days of fasting.)

The great thing about all of those fasting days is that I learned a lot of lessons about life and others around me.

- I learned how to pace myself throughout the day and keep busy. (A trick I used: I would take-on major projects around the home and try to complete them within 7 days.)
- I learned how deal with pangs of hunger.
- I learned that drinking water is actually far more important than eating food.
- I learned that food and water taste 100 times better when you're really hungry.
- I learned to not breath on people when I talk to them. (The breath gets pretty gnarly when you haven't eaten all day.)
- I learned the true meaning of being weak, not just wimpy.
- I noticed that I felt more apt to talk to God during the fast.
- I developed a new respect for the poor around me.
- I experienced a strong feeling of togetherness with an entire nation, because nearly everyone else was fasting too.
- I realized that I'm much stronger than I thought I was; I never believed that I could fast like that, but I did, and survived. It was not easy to do, but definitely worth the experience.

Lessons from Living in United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Timeframe: 2008-2014

(Me in my classroom. UAE)

1. ***Salaries are not always paid weekly around the world.***

One thing I had to get used to was not being paid every week. Moving abroad was the first time that I had to get used to getting my salary once a month. *Wow!* What an adjustment! And let me say this, I made three times as much salary in Dubai, too. Big shocker when I returned to the States and found only a sliver amount in my paycheck.

2. ***Having a dirty car is a privilege.***

Did you know that you can actually get a automobile violation in UAE for having a dirty car? Or even a scratched car door? I had friends who were ticketed for it. Personally, I really felt that this was just too much *Big Brother* for my liking. If I didn't want to wash my car while I was living in a *desert*, then I should've had that right. *Right?*

3. ***One should be aware of the labor laws that they're working under.***

There was one time in UAE that, I was complaining about having to work a Saturday shift. I was so upset that I called a friend of mine and proceeded to dump all over him about it. He

swiftly dampened my fire when he explained that labor laws in UAE state that an employer has the right work their employees 10-hour-days *and* 6 days a week if desired. Moreover, if an employee refuses to work, their employer has the right to cancel their work-visa. In that case, not only will he lose his job, but possibly get deported, along with receiving a six-month travel ban. After hearing this, I shut up about my requested Saturday really quick.

4. ***Prejudice is painful.***

One week, I had a severe toothache that really needed some attention. I was still fairly new to UAE, so I stopped off at a dental hospital that I saw on my way to work. I went inside and asked to see a dentist. The man behind the counter told me with great boldness, "No."

I was taken back. "What do you mean, no?" I asked.

"We do not treat Americans in this hospital. We only see *locals*." He said. (*Locals* is the term they call Arab nationals.)

"What?" Look, I'm in a lot of pain. The dentist won't care if I am a local or American. Can I see a dentist, please?"

"No. We do not see Americans in this hospital; it is for Emiratis only!" He said, this time, with a sterner raised voice, reaching for the phone to call security.

I was stunned. I left the hospital totally livid. "So this is what prejudice feels like. I don't like it at all."

Lessons from Living in Asia and the Middle East in General

(Me and my daughter on an outing to Emirates Mall. UAE)

1. ***Moms are awesome!***

Just kidding. I already knew that before I left. (Hi Mom!)

2. ***Family is everything.***

The whole reason I left the States in the first place was for *family*; I needed to protect my young children from their abusive father. But what I didn't expect to learn was just how important family relationships are. I noticed that Asian and Middle Eastern families are so tightly knit that it's very difficult to come between them. As I mingled with these families I wished that I had learned such values as a child.

Thankfully, I've instilled these values into my own children today. I wish I could shout from the rooftops: "Be one with your family! They are more important than any fly-by-night relationships that you may have. Do whatever it takes to keep your families together! Time is too short."

3. ***Human rights are not innate.***

I now realize that when I was 25, I was pretty ignorant about life and the world around me. I honestly believed that human rights were something that we were born understanding. For example: It only makes sense to know that you don't walk around being cruel to others. *So I thought.*

Well, I'm now in my mid 50's and see the world totally different. During this time, I have seen far too many human rights violations to list. I now wonder, how many of us can actually list the most basic of *human rights*? My guess, very few.

Let's examine only 30 basic human rights together, shall we? (*List provided by Youth For Human Rights International, adapted and simplified from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Here is a url to the original list: http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

a. We are all free and equal. We are all born free. We all have our own thoughts and ideas. We should all be treated in the same way.
b. Don't discriminate. These rights belong to everybody, whatever our differences.
c. The right to life. We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.
d. No slavery – past and present. Nobody has any right to make us a slave. We cannot make anyone our slave.
e. No Torture. Nobody has any right to hurt us or to torture us.
f. We all have the same right to use the law. I am a person just like you!
g. We are all protected by the law. The law is the same for everyone. It must treat us all fairly.
h. Fair treatment by fair courts. We can all ask for the law to help us when we are not treated fairly.

i. No unfair detainment. Nobody has the right to put us in prison without a good reason and keep us there, or to send us away from our country.
j. The right to trial. If we are put on trial this should be in public. The people who try us should not let anyone tell them what to do.
k. Innocent until proven guilty. Nobody should be blamed for doing something until it is proven. When people say we did a bad thing we have the right to show it is not true.
l. The right to privacy. Nobody should try to harm our good name. Nobody has the right to come into our home, open our letters or bother us or our family without a good reason.
m. Freedom to move. We all have the right to go where we want in our own country and to travel as we wish.
n. The right to asylum. If we are frightened of being badly treated in our own country, we all have the right to run away to another country to be safe.
o. The right to a nationality. We all have the right to belong to a country.
p. Marriage and family. Every grown-up has the right to marry and have a family if they want to. Men and women have the same rights when they are married, and when they are separated.
q. Your own things. Everyone has the right to own things or share them. Nobody should take our things from us without a good reason.
r. Freedom of thought. We all have the right to believe in what we want to believe, to have a religion, or to change it if we want.
s. Free to say what you want. We all have the right to make up our own minds, to think what we like, to say what we think, and to share our ideas with other people.
t. Meet where you like. We all have the right to meet our friends and to work together in peace to defend our rights. Nobody can make us join a group if we don't want to.
u. The right to democracy. We all have the right to take part in the government of our country. Every grown-up should be allowed to choose their own leaders.
v. The right to social security. We all have the right to affordable housing, medicine, education, and child care, enough money to live on and medical help if we are ill or old.
w. Workers' rights. Every grown-up has the right to do a job, to a fair wage for their work, and to join a trade union.
x. The right to play. We all have the right to rest from work and to relax.
y. A bed and some food. We all have the right to a good life. Mothers and children, people who are old, unemployed or disabled, and all people have the right to be cared for.
z. The right to education. Education is a right. Primary school should be free. We should learn about the United Nations and how to get on with others. Our parents can choose what we learn.
aa. Culture and copyright. Copyright is a special law that protects one's own artistic creations and writings; others cannot make copies without permission.

We all have the right to our own way of life and to enjoy the good things that "art," science and learning bring.

bb. A free and fair world. There must be proper order so we can all enjoy rights and freedoms in our own country and all over the world.

cc. Our responsibilities. We have a duty to other people, and we should protect their rights and freedoms.

dd. Nobody can take away these rights and freedoms from us.

4. ***Not everyone gets a chance to live out their dreams.***

Following on the previous lesson, not everyone in this world gets the love and encouragement needed from their families to accomplish what they have burning inside their heart. Suppression dominates many talented people in Asia and the Middle East. They are told, "We don't do things like that. You need to get married. That type of work is for prostitutes only. Are you a prostitute?" As a result there's a wealth of talent that is just passed by. Singers, artists, writers, doctors, dancers, etc. Unfortunately, I saw this first hand.

5. ***I'm lucky to have been born in America.***

You would not believe how many people have asked me this question: Can you help me get an American visa? I would have to tell them that there is really nothing that I can do to help them. Then, the next popular question was: Can we have your daughter in marriage? People thought that marriage was their easy ticket to America.Of course, I would refuse.

So many families give up all of their life-savings just to have it squandered on some fraudulent visa agents; they make promises to help families get to America, England or Dubai, just to turn around and use the money on their own visa. This incident happened in our own family, so I know for a fact that it happens. We never got the money back and the guy just ran off and started his own new-life, without caring squat that he defrauded others out of thousands.

Were we alone? No. I heard this story over-and-over. I feel so fortunate to be able to country-hop without the painstaking problems of trying to find a *way*. Like I said, I am so lucky and thankful to have been born in America.

6. ***Health insurance varies with demographics.***

Before I left America, I had medical insurance, but never really paid too much attention to it. I paid the $10.00 copay and then the $5.00 for prescription---not a big deal.

I then went to Pakistan and had no medical insurance for 17 years. Didn't miss it at all. I honestly don't think they even had it available in the country. Whenever we went to the doctor, we paid on the spot. So, according to how much you could afford, that is the doctor you went to. Simple system.

Then I moved to UAE; a totally different ball game altogether. In order for my visa to be stamped I had to show that my health insurance was paid in full for one year. (And that was for everyone in the family.) *Big chunks of change right there.* I got used to it after a few years, and I have to say, it was great not having to pay anything else the rest of the year. We had awesome doctors, amazing hospitals and white-glove-treatment. For example, my daughter had major intestinal surgery, and I paid nothing out of pocket. They even paid for *my* food and brought in a bed for me to sleep right next to her. It was an incredible experience. (In that part of the world, they expect a female relative to stay with the patient at all times. I love that system!)

Then came the day I returned to the States. *Oh wow... what a difference!* Premiums are divvied up between employers and employees, but nothing seems to be covered. I recently lost my health insurance when I changed employers, and the back-up insurance option--COBRA--wanted as much as my rent payment per month just to stay insured. WTF?!? *Welcome home, Marsha!*

7. ***One wife is more than enough.***

I am still in shock over having to learn this lesson. Not too many people you meet in America have to deal with this situation; but in Asia and the Middle East, it is a very common problem for women. My third husband married his cousin one year into our marriage, and kept it a secret from his new bride (I found out the day before his marriage to her.) Talk about drama? We put day-time-soaps to shame. After I had cried a river of tears and consumed a bucket of depression meds, I decided enough was enough and ended the whole fiasco.I texted the woman and let her in on the family secret.

Later, I wrote a comical piece about it in my book, *Crowded Bangles: How I Should Have Driven My Co-Wife Crazy* (available for free download, by the way).

8. ***Modesty is fashionable; and it's beautiful.***

Never in my life had I seen such gracious and lovely women as I did living in Asia and the Middle East. Their clothing flowed with grace and modesty. I simply fell in love with the fashion over there. Long skirts, salwar kameez and graceful head coverings are still my favorites.

I am sure that this next statement just may offend people, but I did *not* miss seeing women half naked or in jeans.....not at all! Ladies, we do not have to be scantily clothed or wear skin-tight clothing to be beautiful. And yoga pants in public? Really?? No. No. No. (Okay, I will get off of my soapbox now.)

9. ***I'm a princess and too good to pump my own gas.***

I love other people filling up the gasoline in my car. Outside America, I never had to touch a gas pump. It wasn't until my return in 2014 that I was once again faced with this nasty chore.

I remember first time after I got back, the gas tank light came on. I was at a total loss of what to do. I actually called my son on the phone and said, "I need gas. What do I do?"

He said, “Get some gas.”

“But I forgot how.”

"Mom, you have to go to a gas station. Get out of the car and pump your gas." My first reaction was to crinkle my nose. *Me pump my own gas?* I chucked that chore out of my to do list many years ago.

Now that I think about it, it’s almost worth going back just so someone else can put my gas in for me again.

10. ***Words are not near as important as the rhythm.***

I have always been a big music lover. And the fact that I was surrounded by music in other languages didn't matter to me at all. What can I say? I fell in love with Bollywood Bhangra. Besides, I think that it's more the melody and rhythm that people fall in love with anyway.

11. ***Fancy homes are not necessary to have a happy life. Happiness is a choice.***

I met many of different families during my 22 years of travel. Some of them extremely wealthy, like those in the royal family in UAE. I visited homes that had a bathroom with gold fixtures and gawkiness everywhere.

But I *also* visited many poor families; like the ones in the mountains of Pakistan. Some of them only had one room to house the entire family of 10. The only eggs eaten were from the few chickens they owned. Because money was scarce, they would recycle old clothing to make bedding and baby clothes. They would use laundry soap for shampoo because it was cheaper, and borrow ice each summer day from willing neighbors who were lucky enough to have a freezer. True, they were poor as compared to some standards, but what I noticed was that they were happy. Just as happy as those who lived in mansions.

Now that I have returned to my county, I no longer have the desire for a big house and fancy things. I have learned that material things do not bring you lasting happiness; family is the key for that.

12. ***Let go of past oppressions and transgressions.***

I had someone very close to me that was always brooding about the past. He could never let go and live for today. Sadly, he never realized how much this hurt those around him; but it did teach me an important lesson for sure.

13. ***Let the small things in life go. Don't be bothered by things that do not matter.***

With a similar thought, I guess everything is prospective. I've learned that what may seem like a big deal to other people, are not such a big deal to me anymore. It could be the result of my travels and my age combined, but one thing's for sure, I feel so much freer than before.

14. ***There's enough time to do what matters***.

I have made so many mistakes that have affected my children's lives, and have hindered me from doing things I want to do; but if there is one that thing I had to say that I learned from leaving the country the way that I did and being able to come back home, is that it's never too late to make a change. As long as you have hope and life, you have time to make the efforts. Of course, some things cannot be reserved, but we always have plan "B".

15. ***To abandon any idea, I ever had about what is called normal, and embrace ambiguity.***

Such an understatement really. I think for anyone to be able to survive and thrive in a different society--other than their own--has to be able to open up to a whole new way of life and change the definition of what is *normal*. I am very fortunate that by nature, I am open to discovery and trying new things. Flexibility is vital!

16. ***Love knows no language***.

(No way! I never kiss and tell.)

17. ***To ask for help.***

Unlike most men we know, I am so quick to ask for help or directions. I must have gotten lost in Dubai 200 times alone; not to mention the whole learning-to-live-in-a-farming-village-thing I did. When you are in a strange land, you absolutely have to ask for help over-and-over again.

18. ***Respecting a culture does not mean liking it or agreeing with* every *part of it.***

I could not emphasize this point enough. I lived outside of America for 22 years. Do I agree with everything I saw? Absolutely not. But, do I respect the cultures that I visited? Yes indeed! It's a big world out there, and everyone has their own ideas and ways of doing things. Observing and learning from others helped me to understand who I am today. So, do I regret going. No way!

19. ***Politics is just as boring in any language.***

(Oh, I'm sorry. I just fell asleep writing that sentence.)

20. ***Family abnormalities is everywhere, but how it's dealt with, varies drastically.***

Everyone has a strange uncle, crazy aunt, obnoxious cousin and delirious grandma. We laugh about craziness in our families because, let's face it, some of it is just funny.

But on the other hand, some of us have some very serious illnesses to deal with, like physical ailments, or mental disabilities. Throughout the years, I couldn't help but notice that not every society deals with the more serious aspects of illness in the same manner. For example, I actually witnessed a man in Pakistan that was chained up like an animal in a storage room because he was mentally unstable and had attacked his mother.

When they showed him to me, I had difficulty looking him in the eye. It was dark like a dungeon. I wanted to free him, but I knew I was helpless. The family had said that his medication was not helping him anymore, and that they had no choice but to keep him in chains because he was so strong and a danger to society. He lived there for several years until he died. I was almost happy to hear that he had passed away because his suffering had finally ended.

21. ***Domestic and sexual violence is dealt with differently worldwide.***

Sadly I learned--and experienced--that the definitions and tolerance levels of domestic and sexual violence vary with each culture. I don't even know where to begin on this subject. From abused sisters, forced marriages, battered women, honor killings, child brides, underage boy-rape and beastiality, I ran across it all; truly it is an epidemic is destroying people's lives, and too many abuse cases are just being swept under the rug.

22. ***The world is big enough for all of us.***

I never thought that I would be totally free from my abuser. But I am. There is more than enough room for all of us to live a happy and productive life.

23. ***There's no replacement for motivation and discipline.***

If it weren't for both, my life would have turned out so different.

24. ***To bloom where I'm planted; wherever you go, there you are.***

This was especially true in my case. Since I was in self-exile from my country and my family, I had no choice but to push forward and create a new life. I never knew if I would be able to return to my country or not, so I lived my life as if I weren't going to.

25. ***My nose triggers memories.***

Over the years, I would occasionally run across a scent that would throw me into a memory frenzy and literally stop me in my tracks. Like the smell of a rose, the scent of a certain perfume or a favorite childhood food.

26. ***Dinner at 8pm doesn't necessarily mean dinner at 8pm.***

If you ever have a dinner party in region, make sure that you move the time back at least two hours. No matter what time that you give the invited guests, they *will* come two hours later. Every time! I promise you. It's just their custom to do so.

27. ***Customer service is just an American cliché.***

I've worked several customer service jobs in my time in the workplace, so I think I know what it means to have good customer service skills. All of that knowledge was crushed when I went I started going shopping in Pakistan. More often than not, the storekeepers were impatient and far less friendly that I had expected; at times they were downright rude. If I asked for a red shoe, they gave me blue and told me that it looked better. Then they have a habit of spreading out twenty outfits in front of you faster than your eyes can focus, and then if you do not purchase one, they become angry. I had one guy actually told me that I was wasting his time; I couldn't believe it.

But this behaviour wasn't just in Pakistan. One of my favorite stories is the time I got into a fight with a manager of a *Pizza Hut*. Let me tell you what happened.

We were living in Al Ain, UAE and 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 onto our large cheese and pineapple delight pizza. We chatted the hour away, enjoying the atmosphere. Soon, we decided it was time to leave. The waitress brought us our check and I said, "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 that English was not her first language and so 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 discussion, 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, you can take 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 into 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?"

"No, because you could have done *something* to your salad."

"What?! I could have done something to my own salad? What does that mean? 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." I yelled.

"You want to see it?"

"Yes, I want to see it and 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!"

I snatch up the tub. "Thank you! I will. That's all I wanted in the first place."

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

Ignoring his final comment, I took my salad and stormed out of the restaurant. (Customer service at it's finest.)

28. ***Appreciate the awe moments.***

Some awe moments are once in a lifetime. Not like my insane salad drama, but like when I went ski-lifting high over the mountains in Murree, Pakistan. Or the time when I went to visit the earthquake-stricken area of the Indus Valley and stood there stunned as I looked at how majestic the mountains are. Or the time I helped deliver a baby in the village. Or the first time that my 2-year-old son spoke his first clear word after his cleft-palate surgery. Or the time I saw a grown man cry when he gazed upon a painting done by my daughter. And the list goes on.

29. ***Learning* how to learn *is life's most important skill.***

Sadly, I didn't learn this until I started teaching myself. The more I taught others, the more I taught myself.

30. ***Wisdom is a product of knowledge and experience.***

I think that because of my hardships and travels that I am much wiser of a person, more rounded, much more colorful and fruitful than before.

31. ***There's no place like home.***

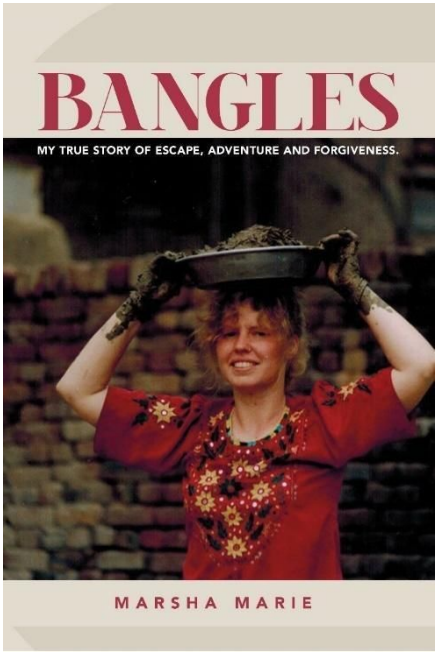
Not to sound cheesy, but Dorothy was right. "There's no place like home." (Wherever that may be.)

****

Marsha 'Yasmine' Marie is an author, human rights activist, public speaker, voice-over artist, blogger, meditator and mom. She was born in Ohio, but then raised in Arizona. To escape a domestic abusive relationship, at 25, she moved to Asia and 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.



Bonus Chapter from *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 toward 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 headscarf 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 am,” 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 doorframe, 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 heroin?"

"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 lightning. 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 sounds 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."

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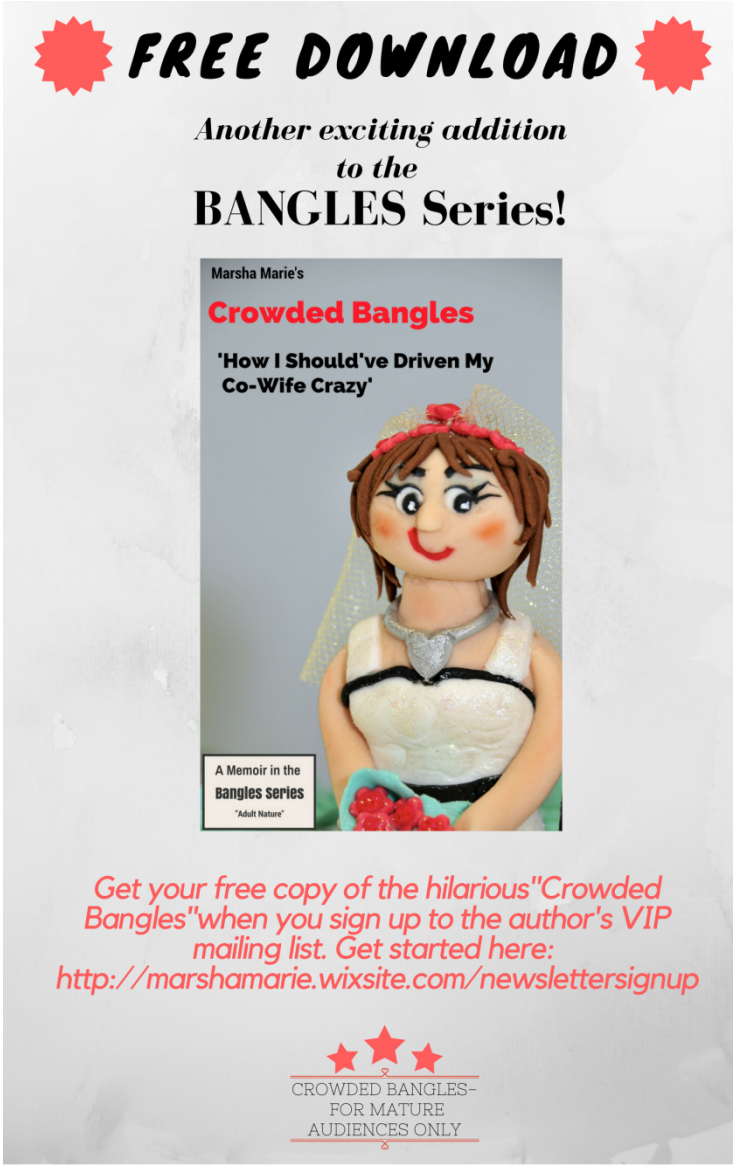
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