

BANGLES

To Mom



Letters From Pakistan

MARSHA MARIE

Bangles Series: Book Two

Books by Marsha Marie



☒ *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*, Book 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*, (Bangles Series, Book 3) Indie Published 2016.

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Bangles to Mom



Me with my new home and new family, in Kalu Kalan,
Pakistan, January 1992.

Bangles to Mom:
Letters from Pakistan, 1992
Bangles Series, Book 2

A Memoir by
Marsha Marie

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First Edition

This is a work of nonfiction. The events are portrayed to the best of Y. K.’s, a.k.a. Marsha Marie, memory. While all of the stories in this book are true, most names have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.

Edited [Erin Prenovost](#).

Book cover by Word-2-kindle.com and revised by S. H.

I dedicate this book to the fading art of letter writing.

“More than kisses, letters mingle souls.”

— [John Donne](#)

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank those who made this second book of the Bangles Series possible, particularly the Sweet family, of which I would not have had these precious letters in my hands today. If it were not for them saving these items and giving them to me at just the right time, this book would never have been written and shared with the world. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for saving these items that meant so much to my mother, Sandi Sweet.

Bangles to Mom

Introduction

January 5, 1992, I boarded a plane with my two small children (Mona, aged 5, and Shedi, aged 3) a new name and my second husband, Zain; we had one-way tickets to Pakistan and a plan. Our destination: Zain's birthplace in the remote farming village of Kalu Kalan, Pakistan. Our reason: to escape the toxic influence and control of my abusive ex-husband, David. Our goal: to join Zain's relatives and live free from David's domineering interference.

But in doing so I became the subject of an international hunt. Then within the first year after our arrival in Kalu Kalan, Zain unexpectedly decided to return to the States, leaving me and the children behind with his family; all of our plans went up in smoke. Immersed in an unfamiliar country, I was forced to do what I know best—adapt and survive. With the help of Zain's family, I assimilated to the local culture and created a new existence for myself and my children.

Throughout the years following that time, I wrote extensive letters home to my mother and family—never imagining that I would ever see these letters again. But as fate would have it, the letters from my first year of living in Pakistan—1992—were found in a relative's home during the writing of my first book: *Bangles: My True Story of Escape, Adventure and Forgiveness*. These letters were a testimony to my journey to this new land; an honest, hand-written account of exactly what I was feeling and thinking that first year of my self-exile. I knew instantly that these letters deserved to be in a book all of their own.

The letters are arranged in chronological order (although some of the letters I wrote during that time are still missing). I

have changed the names of those involved to protect their privacy, and have edited the letters to be more presentable for public view (for instance, horrific grammar and spelling issues); I have tried my best to keep the letters as close to the original writings as possible.

This book is meant to accompany the first book in the Bangles Series: *Bangles: My True Story of Escape, Adventure and Forgiveness*.

As you read this book, you will discover never-before revealed details about me and my life. I was just as surprised when reading them again over twenty years after which they were penned. I am thankful to say that I have changed over the years, and have developed to become a better, less self-centered human being.

I hope that you enjoy this latest edition to the Bangles Series. For those who have not yet read *Bangles: My True Story of Escape, Adventure and Forgiveness*, I have added chapter one to the end of this book for enjoyment.

January 30, 1992

At least I think it is January 30; honestly, I have lost track of the days now.

Dearest Mom,

All is doing really well here in Pakistan. I am living in a small farming village called Kalu Kalan. Everyone calls it Kalu for short. It is peaceful and quiet, and very cold right now. I pray things are fine over there on the other side of the world. I wish it was easy to call you up and say “hi” and that I love you all very much, but it is not. I have to go the nearest town to call you. I hope we get a phone soon.

The cassette tape that I am sending you in this letter is for everyone in the family to hear. I know that the way I describe things here might sound pretty bad, but actually we are all having *the time of our life*. I feel like I have stepped back in time; and life is actually fun again; I am not scared about anything at all. Granted, the way of life here is nothing like I thought it was going to be like, or how I thought that Zain explained it to me on the plane coming out here, but I am getting used to it. I cannot believe how relaxed I am—knowing that I am so far away from David and his control. It’s like he no longer exists.

I was wondering if you could send me some stuff from Phoenix. I really only need a few things. Please send me some cheese in little wax balls, Massengill medicated douche powder, a few cassette tapes and some legal size envelopes; oh, and maybe some Kool-aid for me and the kids (cherry and fruit punch, of course). That’s basically the only thing they do not have here in the nearest town.

I forgot to tell you on the tape about the beautiful shawl Zain bought for me yesterday in the bazaar. They wanted 300 rupees for it but Zain's mom got them down to 200 rupees. She is a very good shopper. Can you believe it, nothing in the bazaar has price tags on them; you have to haggle with the shop owners for everything. Anyway, my shawl is blue and has mirrors sewn into it. You would love it. It is a winter shawl and is a bit heavy because of the mirrors that are sewn into it. Zain's family told me that it is an Afghani style of stitching. How cool is that? Everything here is so authentic and new to me.

Guess what? We have your high school graduation picture up on the wall and everyone in the village thinks you are so beautiful. I do too. It's still my favorite picture of you.

Can you believe it, we have been here for a month and the people in the village are still coming over to kiss my hand and hope that I will touch their babies. I guess that I'm the only white American woman within miles and miles. I hope the crowds slow down soon. I'm kind of getting tired of being such a celebrity already.

Shedi has a new nick-name again. He's now called "devil child" because he drives everyone crazy. They spoil him to the point that it's sickening. His every whim is fulfilled. People come from miles around just to give him money and candy. I wish that I was three years old again; it must be nice.

One more thing, Zain says that he has decided not to sell me off to the highest bidder, because he likes me too much; just kidding. He likes to make fun of what Auntie told me before I left Phoenix—you remember—not to be sold off. Actually, whenever Zain walks down the street people say, "Oh look. He's the one the godi belongs to." (Godi is what they call a white girl.) He's enjoying the popularity for sure.

Your grandchildren are getting popular with the kids around the village too now. Children come in groups of ten to play with them. They sing and dance around the open courtyard and play

with the chickens and rabbits. They miss you very much and send you hugs and kisses too.

The houses here are nothing like in America. The houses are made of only one room; no kitchen or bathroom (they are outside) with a huge front yard that's all dirt, and no back yard. Everything is done in this open courtyard.

Mona and I picked some leaves for you and Grandpa. This way you can have a piece of Pakistan with you at all times. Mona picked the long skinny one especially for Grandpa. Please be sure he gets it. She also included a gum wrapper, and said that she wanted you to have it; don't ask me why; who can figure out five-year-olds anyway. What's really amazing is that Mona and I have gotten so close since we got to Pakistan. It was worth coming here just for that alone. Neither one of us are stressed like we used to be.

We talk to each other all the time and are together all day long until afternoon comes—that's when her auntie comes home from school—then she hangs out with her for a while. The kids call her *Poopi*. Zain says that *Poopi* means *aunt* here. That is just too funny; it took the kids weeks before they could say her name without giggling.

In the three weeks we have been here, I've lost about 5-10 lbs. It's probably from having diarrhea. It can't be from not eating, that's for sure, because I eat all of the time. The food is just amazing! The fruit is so delicious and fresh too. I love the oranges. The kids get some diarrhea every once in a while, but not bad like mine.

Sorry that this letter is so sloppy, but seven people are watching me right now, and trying to talk to me while I am writing. This scene is very typical these days. People come all times of the day and night to look at me. They even stand on the rooftops and watch me over the wall. I wonder how long this will go on.

Mom, do me a favor: I want you to go outside tonight and take a long look at the big and small dippers. And I want you to know that I am looking at them every night too. Though we are so far apart we actually share the same stars. God is so great isn't he?! And here's an interesting fact to know: The big dipper is in a different spot than it is in Phoenix. I still don't get why.

Everyone in the village loves the crocheted blankets you made. We use them all the time. The people are always touching them and talking about how you and how you made them. I don't understand what they are saying, but they are smiling, so it looks like it is something good.

I hope my last paycheck from work came in the mail. If it did come, don't send me any money yet. Hang on to it until I ask you for it. That way you can use the money if you need it, or use it for the things I asked you to send me (you know, for the items and the postage). And by the way, please send a couple sleepers for kids, and some socks for all of us—if you find them on sale that is.

We would also love it if you would surprise us with some videos. Maybe every couple of weeks send us one. For example, videos for the kids: some cartoons (Simpsons, Ninja Turtles, Winnie the Pooh, Sesame Street, Disney classics). And videos for Zain and myself: 60 minutes, Married with Children, In Living Color, 48 Hours (stuff like that); I would love that. I really miss TV sometimes.

I am sorry it took so long to put this package together. I hope you enjoy the kids' coloring book colorings. Mona said the smiley face coloring is you, and she wants you to hang it up on the wall. They both miss you and want to hear from you soon. Mona said she wants to see you and talk to you, so maybe she would like it if you sent a tape of yourself and everyone else. (I would like that too.)

Shedi went back to the farm again today with his uncles to play in the fields. Mona and I are just here at the house piddling

around. Mona's feeding the chickens again and singing at the top of her lungs. Can you just imagine what a cute sight she is? She has no stress at all and she is sleeping so peaceful at night too.

Mom, I'm going to close for now. I will write to you each week and tell you all about my new life here in Pakistan. I hope to hear from you soon.

I love you all and miss you. I love you. Look for my letter each week!!!

Love you forever, Marsha

P.S. Let me know how everything is going in Phoenix. Have the police been there looking for me? Has David tried to call you looking for me? Love ya. Tata for now.

February 9, 1992

Dearest Mom,

It's time again for my weekly letter to you. Today is Saturday, and the sky is clear and the sun is beautiful and warm,.....and I started my period. Yuck!

So far this week has been pretty good actually. No one is sick except for a little diarrhea.

Guess what? Zain bought me five more solid gold bangles. They are so beautiful. They are 24k gold and are a little bit wider than the one I gave you on your birthday. They have leaves and circles etched around them; you should see them sparkle. I love them so much. They cost around 4.5 thousand rupees a piece, which equals \$1,000.00 US dollars; so all of them together are totaling a quarter of a million rupees; a good investment just in case I need some quick cash. Don't worry; I know where to go to get money for them just in case I need to.

Mom, really, Zain's taking good care of us here in Pakistan. He is making good progress on the new house that he is building for us at the farm property, but I'll tell you more about that on a tape.

The kids still reign as king and queen around here and in the whole village. The queen herself was wearing a sleeper the other night and one of her glass bangles broke and went into the bottom of her foot. She came to me crying, saying her foot was hurting. I took her sleeper off to have a look and there it was—a broken piece of bangle poking out the bottom of her heel. I knew it must have been so painful, so I knew what I had to do. Being very calm with Mona screaming in my ear, I began to pull it out. It just kept going and going; it seemed to not stop. It was in an

inch or more deep. Do you remember when Shedi slammed the door on Little Tiff's finger and the whole top of her finger was hanging off to the side with the bone exposed? Well, it was like that all over again. Blood was gushing out everywhere and no one around me could understand that I needed a towel. So finally I started yelling for Zain to come help. They finally understood that I needed some assistance and went and got him. Zain brought a towel and peroxide, and I cleaned her all up. No stitches were needed, just a lot of tender loving care.

It wasn't until after she fell asleep that night that I actually broke down; I nearly fainted. It was one of the grossest things I ever had to do. It's healing just fine now. We keep antibiotic suave on it to help it heal, but now she refuses to wear any glass bangles. She said to give all of them to the other kids. She only wants metal ones from now on. I really don't blame her; I know how painful that was for her.

Today Mona caused a bicycle accident out on the main village road. She was walking home with Zain and Shedi, and some lady was looking at Mona and not paying attention to where she was walking; then a guy on a bike was also looking at Mona and smacked right into the lady. It's like this drama each time any of us go anywhere. The people around here stare so much. I cannot believe it. I have never seen it like *that* anywhere before.

Zain and I are going to get our driver's license once we get some photos taken to put on the cards. They don't take our pictures at the DMV like what I am used to. It's not that I really want to drive anyway, with these maniacs on the road, but just in case of an emergency it might come in handy.

Shedi's speech therapy is doing just fine. He won't sit down for five minutes to work on it, but his speech is actually improving on his own just like his therapist said he would; and he is learning a second language to boot. You can hardly tell that he even had a partial cleft palate. I am so proud of him.

Mona has learned several new words too. They are not even trying to learn it; it's just coming to them; it's amazing. The language here is called Hindko. I try to learn at least one word a day, but the kids have already passed me up by miles.

Zain's mother and sister still won't let me do any work around the house. They said that I'll get dirty if I touch anything. But sometimes I still do some cooking whenever it strikes me. Yesterday, I had bread and gravy for breakfast. It was so great! But today I failed miserably at pancakes. I still do not understand why they turned out so bad. They were too flat, with no fluff whatsoever. So I made some French toast, and *they* actually turned out really good. Oh, and that reminds me, can you send me some cinnamon? I cannot find any here.

It sure is different here cooking with raw milk, homemade butter and open fires. It reminds me of the time you told me about those years you lived in Kentucky, and how you used the wood-burning stove to make biscuits and gravy. How prehistoric, right?

It's now Sunday; I'm so excited that I got to talk to you and Cliffy last night (I still think he is the greatest step-father in the world). You all sound so great. Don't forget that 4 am to 6 am Phoenix time is the easiest time to arrange phone calls for us to talk; we are exactly 12 hours ahead of Phoenix.

Mona just got out her "Water Baby" that you got her for Christmas. This is the first time she has played with it since we've been here, and everyone is freaking out. They have never seen such a baby doll that felt so real.

Oh yeah, Mona is starting to ask lots of questions. (Kids say the darndest things don't they?) Last night after talking to you on the phone, we were coming home from the phone call on the horse-buggy, the sun was going down and she wanted to know why. I told her we used the sun all day and that it's now Grandma's turn to use it.

Then she said, “So when Grandma’s done with it, will she send it back to us?”

I said, “Yes, we share it with her. Okay?”

She said, “Ok.” She is so sweet.

Well, I’m going to close for now and let Mona do some writing for you; she wants to write to Grandma too. Shedi is at the farm with his Abujohn (that is what the kids call Zain, remember?). Shedi likes to watch the men work on the building of the new house.

Oh by the way, Zain is doing well and growing an adorable beard. We are going to get some family pictures soon, and then you will be able to see it. Oh! And I totally forgot to tell you. Zain bought a truck—a little red Suzuki for 27,000 rupees. It’s cute and is coming in some good use.

I saw a mouse in the house yesterday. Yikes!! I also forgot to ask you to please send some mosquito repellent with Deet; we have got lots of mosquitoes here. You can hear them buzzing around your head. It’s freaky!

I love you all and will write to you again next week! Remember that I pray for you always.

Love, Marsha

February 15, 1992

Dear Mom, Auntie, Cliffy, and All,

Happy Valentine's Day to everyone! Today's the day for my weekly letter, and what an eventful week it has been.

Remember that in my last letter I told you we bought a truck? It's so cute and very useful for hauling materials and the family. It's a three cylinder Suzuki something. Well, the battery went dead, so Zain got a new battery. Then some kid flattened a tire. After that everything's been fine with it.

Everyone has been healthy, except the kids got head lice (gross!). They got it from the chickens I guess; they haven't started school yet so I can only assume it came from the chickens. Mona had it the worst. Poor thing scratched all night long. I was very upset about it, because I remember when I got lice. I remember the medicated shampoo burnt so badly when you put it on my head.

Well, we had no choice; we got the medicated shampoo for them, and I had to cut their hair—both of them. Mona cried about cutting her hair, but I told her it was the only way to get all of the bugs and eggs out.

She finally agreed, but was sad about it. Now, she has a cute bobbed haircut like mine. Now we really look like twins. She likes her hair now because it's all curled up, and she thinks it looks so cute.

I didn't cut Shedi's hair myself. I sent him to town with Zain. Well, he came back with half an inch of hair; I just about had a hernia. On top it's an inch long, and it stands straight up. I think that he looks cute now; the haircut kind of grows on you after a while. Shedi loves it. He thinks it's cool.

Luckily, the lice shampoo didn't burn at all. So it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. All the bugs are gone now and Mona hasn't scratched one time. Thank God. Now the whole family has fresh haircuts; Zain even shaved his beard. Thank God again. I wasn't a big fan of it anyway.

Well, of course I've got six people watching me write this letter. This constant stream of people coming over to look at me is really starting to get on my nerves. And Zain's family is getting tired of it too. Dozens come by each day to see us, and it's just starting to get downright old. True, I still haven't met any other Americans, or Chinese, or Mexicans, or Africans, (Hahaha, I think you get the point.) so I can understand why they want to see me, but what happened to "It's rude to stare"?

Last night Zain surprised me by taking me to a restaurant and a having steak dinner. It was such a nice evening, the moon was so bright and the sky was so clear. On the way there, I sat in the front of our new little truck and got a stomachache because of the maniac drivers; I have never in my life seen anything like this. There are no rules to the road at all. It's every man for himself. I was terrified! The vehicles were swerving in and out all over the place. And they were driving so fast. (Every day in the newspaper I see pictures of head-on collisions.) Tell Cliffy that he would love driving his truck in LA if he drove here for a while.

Anyway, on the way back, I rode in the back of the truck and actually felt much safer. Your chances of surviving a head-on collision are increased greatly by not riding in the front. I worry for Zain when he is out driving, so I nag him to please drive slow and not to pass anyone, not even the horse buggy. He just laughs at me.

Omijon, Zain's mom, just said to tell you "hi." (Just wanted to throw that in there.)

The kids are still having a great time. They are free and so happy. Shedi is constantly chasing the girls. All the girls love him.

I got an ABC book of Urdu and am learning to read the language. I can read slowly, but I just don't know what the words mean. The Arabic class I took in Phoenix was very beneficial, because Urdu is quite a bit like Arabic, except it has an additional eight letters or more.

I can't believe I am almost out of writing space already; these little postcards are so small. I look forward to you sending me some empty cassette tapes so I can tell you all the little details here. There are so many that there is no way for them to fit on this postcard.

Guess what? Mona lost one of my diamond earrings. It must have fallen out of her ear while she was playing. So I had to wait till she fell asleep to put my blue stud in the empty ear. Remember when we pierced her ears on her birthday and she screamed like we were killing her? Well, when I tried to put the blue stud in during the day, it happened all over again, that's why I had to wait till she was asleep. Now she is wearing one diamond and one blue stud. I later found the diamond earring in the foot of her sleeper, and to avoid another traumatic scene, I went ahead and just put it in my ear instead; so now I have one diamond and one blue.

I pray all is well and Auntie's surgery went successful. I still haven't received your letter and am anxiously waiting for it. Please send some chocolate candy bars. A variety is fine, but make sure there is some Snickers in there somewhere. And a bunch of fat marshmallows in each shipment would be great for roasting at the fire.

I love you all and can't wait to talk to you on the phone again. Everyone says *Salam* (god's peace to you) to all of you.

Love,

Your Pakistani family.

February 21, 1992

Dear Mom and everyone,

Time for my weekly letter, and, of course, it was an eventful week indeed. I am going to use notebook paper this week instead of the regular postcards that I have been using, because the postcards are just too small. I received your letters this week and was so thrilled to read them. I am sorry to hear about your boss. I cannot ever imagine the pain of losing a son.

You won't believe this, but you're not the only one who has planted rose bushes this week. Zain planted 20 rose bushes for me on our farm property surrounding our new house. I knew nothing about it. It was a total surprise for me, and I even more thrilled to find out that they were all red rose bushes. (Yeah, I think he likes me. Hahaha.)

The kids are doing great. Mona says she misses you and wants to see you. I told her you would come to visit us after the new house is finished. Guess what? She has a tooth loose (her first one)—her front, top, right hand. I told her all about the tooth fairy, and she can't wait to get the money so she can go to the store for some candy. But at first, she cried for an hour. "I don't want to lose a tooth. I don't want to grow up," she said. I had to show her that her friends' teeth fall out too and that God wants it that way. She doesn't like it but accepts it.

Both of the kids are picking up so much Hindko. They come to me every day saying new words I haven't taught them, or even know myself for that matter.

Our truck is doing really good. But unfortunately we've run over a couple things. First of all, we ran over a chicken's leg. It died as a result of getting run over, so the owners ate it for dinner.

Then they ran over a little girl. Yes, I said girl, as in human. It's quite a miracle that she is alive actually. It was a horrible scene, and happened right in front of me while I was in the back of the truck. I was only in an arm's reach of her but could not grab her fast enough. I will tell you all about what happened.

It all started on the day we (all the family women) went to go see the progress of the new house on the farm property. We piled into the back of the little truck and two young girls (cousins) stood on the back pumper. The truck is so narrow that in order to turn around, you have to back up to find a place to do so. Farooq (Zain's brother) was driving good and slow backing up to turn the truck around. I thought he was coming to a stop because one of the girls named Touba jumped off. Well, he didn't stop the truck, and Touba tripped, and Farooq backed up right over her.

When I saw her trip and realized the truck was not stopping and I screamed "Stop!"...but no one understood me. I was sitting in the bed of the truck right next to the tailgate with Mona on my lap, so she saw the whole thing. I reached for Touba, but I missed, and as I saw her disappearing under the truck I screamed in horror. "STOP THE TRUCK! STOP THE TRUCK!!" But with no avail. By the time Farooq understood to stop the truck she was under the front wheels.

As the little girl was screaming I just couldn't get myself to look. They were able to pull her out, and amazingly Touba was fine, except the truck had run over her arm, and she received only a hairline fracture. She's wearing a cast now, and we are paying all expenses of the doctor.

As if running over her was not bad enough, the thing that enraged me was when they pulled her out everyone started screaming at her—telling her it was her own fault for hanging on the truck in the first place. I was the only one who went to her, brushed her off and hugged her. Imagine 20 people screaming at a child about eight years old. She is crying and in pain; I was so

upset. Then Farooq started yelling at me to come back and get in the truck. I refused and insisted that I was taking her home to her mother. I tried to carry her, but she said she could walk. So I began walking her home.

Touba's mom came out and I let the girl go to her mom. Don't you know, when I saw Zain at the property I gave him an earful. How can these people be so cold to a child? I know she made a mistake, but don't you think she learned her lesson? I think so too! That little girl is so sweet; she's over at our house all the time, and she helps me with my Urdu studies. I feel so bad about what happened to her. Now whenever we go anywhere, we all watch extra close to kids around the truck.

Well, we have three new additions to the family—one husky-looking puppy (pure white) and two cute little rabbits, Buckle and Dumbo. Buckle is Shedi's and Dumbo is Mona's. The puppy stays on the roof, and the two rabbits have become the latest hunting sport for the kids. They are constantly trying to catch them. They chase them all around the courtyard and set old-fashioned rabbit traps for them. The rabbits don't get hurt, but they get plenty of exercise; and building better traps teaches the kids to be creative at the same time. The kids love their new pets.

Oh yeah, we still don't have a clothes washing machine. The duty-free shop wants \$700 US dollars, for a machine that doesn't even spin. What a bummer. So we're looking around different stores in Islamabad for one. I hope we get one soon; it looks so hard to wash clothes by hand. I don't think I can do that.

The kids just left for the farm again with AbuJohn. They are such brats! So far this morning they have driven me to four more gray hairs just trying to catch the rabbits and torturing the chickens.

That reminds me. I have never been around chickens, so this is all a new experience for me. My first thought of the rooster is, "What a wimp; he is so hen-pecked." The hens take food right out of his mouth and he just goes on with life and doesn't mind a

bit. I guess with five wives, he's a bit safer being a little henpecked. He seems happy being a total pushover.

Until one day a different rooster came into the yard and tried jumping one of his chickens. The chicken started screaming, and then faster than a speeding bullet he came from nowhere with fire shooting out of his eyes. He turned into *SUPER ROOSTER*! I was in shock; what happened to the wimp? He chased the invading rooster over a wall, as if to say, "Don't touch my woman." Then after that, he strutted around the yard with his feathers all fluffed up and neck all stretched out. A few minutes later, he went back from *SUPER ROOSTER* to super wimp again. But, nonetheless, I now have a greater respect for him. He's totally protective of his little chick-a-dees.

Wednesday it rained like usual. It has rained every Wednesday since we've gotten here. It didn't rain too badly this time so we went to a holy shrine on Thursday. We invited the family, and this was an experience I will not forget. It took us three truck loads to carry all the people, and I'm talking 30 people a load. It is amazing to watch them pack the people in like sardines. I was going to go the first load but said, "No, I'll wait till the next one," not realizing how many people were going.

During the second load, I was going to sit up front with my husband; that was until they crammed Mona and an older, much bigger lady too. It was too crowded for me so I said, "Let me out; I want in the back." I went in the back and ended up being squished with what turned out to be 30 people—again. Mona and Shedi were sitting on my legs. Then somehow my sister-in-law with her new baby was sitting on my leg too; it was okay at first.

We started our journey to the shrine. The seating was cramped and the road was bumpy. My left leg started falling asleep. It went numb starting at the toes going up my leg. I kept telling myself, "We are almost there; you can take it." But then the top of my leg started hurting so bad from being twisted that I

was trying to hold back the tears. Shedi had fallen asleep on my lap, and to keep my mind busy, I decided to talk to Mona since she's the only one who understands me anyway. I couldn't hold back any longer and I began to cry; then suddenly my leg felt like it was on fire. I started crying even harder and jerking my leg. I didn't know if something from the truck bed was burning me or not.

Mona started crying too and screaming, "Mommy, Mommy." No one understood us. They told me later that they thought I was cold (possibly from the wind).

Finally, they got Zain to stop the truck because I was freaking out. Zain came rushing back to me. I could barely talk. I was crying so hard that all I could say was, "My leg. Fire." Zain began yanking everyone away from my leg, and once the blood started flowing again the burning sensation instantly stopped. It took me a minute to stop crying and calm down for the journey to continue.

Once we got to the shrine, we all had to be peeled out of the truck. The women gathered around me and were rubbing my leg to make sure I was okay. We all had a good laugh after that was all over.

The scene at the shrine was as it always is whenever we go anywhere. There were about three hundred people at the shrine hovering around me, wanting to see the *godī* (the white lady). I could hear little whispers all over the place. "Godi. Godi."

Things finally settled down and we had a nice time eating and walking around the shrine. On the way back Zain made sure we sat up front with him—so it was Zain, myself, and the two kids. Zain had a great time being with his family he has missed so much.

Of course, no family get-together of nearly 100 people would be any good without an old-fashioned family fight. And sure enough there was one. Nothing serious, just a little yelling. Zain and I had a good chuckle watching them go at it.

It's now Sunday. I had to stop writing yesterday because Zain brought home a casualty from the farm. Mona had somehow ripped half of her toenail from her second toe; it was not a pretty sight. But you can't keep her down for a minute anymore. I cleaned her up and then off she ran with the kids again. I told her that if she doesn't keep that toe clean that it will fall off; so at least she's wearing shoes now.

Last week my sister-in-law Wafa took off to her mom's home in Rawalpindi. No one really knows why she took off the way she did, not even Farooq, her husband. It happened when her mom came by the house to visit, then Wafa grabbed her coat, and it's the last we've seen or heard from her since. As she was walking out the door, she said to tell her husband she'd be back in six days. No one could believe that she didn't tell Farooq before leaving or at the very least go by the farm to say good-bye to him.

Zain told him that if he was any kind of man he'd go over and get her from her mom's instead of sleeping over with his *mommy*; like he did the first night she was gone. We've been teasing him ever since she left. He's now known as the "whiney-butt *chacha*." (Chacha means uncle.) Farooq teases Zain all the time that Zain fusses over me too much (peels my carrots for me, gets me Cokes whenever I want, holds my hand to walk over mud—well, you know how Zain babies me). I told Farooq maybe he should fuss over his wife a little more and then just maybe she wouldn't go home to her momma's like she did. "I would never leave Zain like that," I said. Farooq agreed.

At least her being gone has given me a chance to do more things around the house; and that has been refreshing and fun. Amijon (Zain's Mom) and Roni (Zain's youngest sister) usually won't let me do dishes or wash clothes, but they will let me rinse and hang the clothes on the wire across the yard, which is still a big help for them. I will sometimes sweep the yard and do a little cooking for myself whenever I want something that I miss from home, but that is it. They insisted I don't get dirty and that I

wear nice clean clothes at all times. I'm such a china doll to them, I guess.

You should see all the sparrows flying around here. Hundreds every day are fighting with each other and sing such pretty songs. Sometimes it sounds like I live in a jungle. It's so soothing to sit outside in the sun and listen to all the animals with no worries, no bills, no pressure of any kind. Life is pretty much kickback now. What a change, huh?

Shedi's been driving us crazy again. You see, there's a beggar that comes by each night and makes a certain plea for food. Shedi has got that cry down pat and likes to holler it while he is playing in the yard. I tried telling him not to do that because it might hurt the guy's feelings if he heard Shedi. At first he said okay, but then he started making a game of it. He knows he can get everyone's attention by yelling that special phrase.

And our dear, sweet, innocent Mona, has learned the Hindko word for dirty (which is *gundy*), then while we were at someone's house she said, "Mommy, that lady's *gundy*." I was so embarrassed. Now if I can only teach her when is the right time to say certain things and in which language. God help me!

*****Attention: News Bulletin (insert typing sound here)
***** Mona just lost her whole toenail. Poor thing. She took off her shoes and started torturing the chickens again and wham, "Mommy!!!!!!!" Blood pouring out everywhere—gross!!!! I had to play nurse again.

The footings of the new house at the property will be finished today and construction should begin soon. Zain said we should be moved in the house within the next two months. How exciting (indoor plumbing!).

I guess I should get this letter closed for now.

Love you so much and miss you too.

Marsha

February 28, 1992

Dear Mom and family,

Time already for my weekly letter. Let me start by saying “Happy Birthday” to Auntie. I hope you have a good one.

Guess what? Wafa and Farooq are expecting a baby. I told Zain the day we got here she was pregnant, and ever since she’s been acting it too. They finally admitted that she was yesterday. I can’t wait to have a baby around the house. But I do know one thing—that baby will wear diapers in my house! And luckily Zain agrees with me. None of the babies around here wear diapers, and they pee and stinky all over the place—how disgusting!! Well, not in my house!!

More good news: two baby goats were born next door. They are so cute, and the kids are always over playing with them. *My kids*, not the goat’s kids... get it? The people weren’t home so Zain’s mom went over and helped the mother goat deliver the babies. You should have heard our cow mooing and stomping about it. It seems that the cow knew what was going on before I did. I looked over the fence to see what was happening, and one of the babies was on the ground and the other one had its hoof sticking out the back of the mother. I didn’t let the kids watch because I was afraid they would upset her. I think our rabbits are going to have babies too. It seems the theme of this letter is reproduction, as you might have noticed by now. Everyone is having babies but me (boo hoo).

We got word the other day that a lady is mad at me for not shaking her daughter’s hand. Like what am I, some holy person or something? She said I can pick up other people’s ugly kids but I can’t shake her daughter’s hand. Gee! Good thing not everyone

has that stuck up attitude around here. I guess out of the nearly 1,000 people that I have met—and of whose hands I shook and didn't shake—one mad is not bad odds at all. You can't please everyone all the time.

News flash—it didn't rain on Wednesday this week; it was Thursday instead. Now there's a refreshing change. Haha!!

I pray all is well with you and everyone in Phoenix. I am still waiting for your letters; hope I get them soon. I miss you all very much. Zain may be coming to America soon. I'll give you more details as I know them. I'll give him a list of things I need, and I'd like for you to shop with him if you would. Some things he doesn't understand, being a man, like cloth diapers, pins, perfume for me, etc.

Love you as always,

Marsha

P.S. The kids are doing great. Had to spank Shedi today; he peed right in the next door neighbor's water well (how embarrassing!!). Crazy kid! So far today he has peed on Grandma's bed (on purpose by the way; he was not sleeping), then on the bedroom door, then in the well. And that is just today, not the past week; or the list would be much longer. And of course he thinks it is funny and takes off running. What a brat!!

March 6, 1992

Dear Mom and family,

It's Friday already and time for another letter, and of course I have a ton of things to write about. Let's start by saying I hope all is well in Phoenix. I have a cold right now, so it may take me a while to write this letter because I have to keep stopping and blowing my nose. All four of us have colds this week.

Guess what? Last Saturday, Mona went to school for the first time with her cousin. She went over to her cousin's house first thing Saturday morning and just left for school with her without telling me. I was frantic! I was so worried about her. I had always dreamt her first day would be a lot different than me panicking like that. Zain hurried to the school to check on her. She was having a good time, but said "yes" when he asked if she wanted to go home. For the rest of the day, she was strutting around like Mrs. Big Shot, "I went to school today."

Another news bulletin... Mona has two more loose teeth!! She woke up one morning and said, "Mommy, my tooth hurts." It is her front, right bottom tooth this time. I felt it, and it's looser than the top one. I think she'll actually lose that one first. Of course, she cried again, when I told her that her tooth was loose. She is such a sensitive child.

I received your letters this week and was so pleased. Just bummed that you hadn't received my letter by the time you had written. I get to talk to you tomorrow afternoon, and I hope that you receive something by then. I'm so glad you seem to all be doing well. Everyone loved the pictures you sent. Mona started crying, saying she wanted to see all of you.

Yesterday was a very interesting day. We rented a van and went to Rawalpindi and Islamabad (about 50 miles from Kalu Kalan), and we dropped the kids off at Zain's aunt's house in Rawalpindi. His mom and I, Zain, and Farooq went on to Islamabad. We met some friends at the US AID/UN building. I was so looking forward to having an American lunch with American Coke. I got a great lunch—a steak sandwich with cheese and onions, with a side order of fries—but all the American Coke was gone. Zain was very disappointed. A lunch for four people cost 150 rupees. That sounds expensive doesn't it?

Then for dessert I had two donuts. There were several white people there but no one talked to me, but two Pakistani women talked to me and asked me if I was American. I couldn't understand her question. I thought to myself, *if she knows I came from America why is she asking if I'm American.* I told her I couldn't understand what she meant.

She said, "You don't dress at all like an American, so I thought you were originally from Germany." (I had my head covered and no make-up on.)

I laughed and said, "No, I was born in Ohio." She laughed too.

The funny thing is that, she was Pakistani but she didn't have her hair covered, and people stared at me because I had all of my hair covered. Zain teases me, and says, "I want you to wear a sign that says 'It's my choice to cover my head,'" because he gets looks as if they are saying, "Look at that tyrant, making her cover her head, and she's an American."

When we first went to the UN building they searched my purse (a first for me ever!! I felt so violated) and inside my purse I had cough medicine, aspirin, children's aspirin, nose spray, Vaseline (for my dried out nose of course) and wash cloths. I was so embarrassed. They probably thought I was a weirdo or something. Then my purse was searched again through another

security check. Inside the building it was very nice and clean, and they even had American toilets.

In Islamabad, we saw several Americans. One guy was actually jogging in shorts. Zain was too slow with the camera or we would have taken a picture of him. Zain's brother in his innocence asked Zain, "Isn't he going to get tired running around like that?" We had a good laugh from that.

We took some pictures of the army marching in the street and down the middle of the street. Don't know why they were doing that—it was not a special holiday or anything like that.

We went to several stores in Islamabad, and you can find just about anything you need if you are willing to pay for it. For example: small jar of peanut butter Rs. (rupees) 135, Snickers bar (Zain got one for me.) Rs. 15, sliced cheese (12 slices) Rs. 55, conditioner trial size Rs. 35, conditioner small size Rs. 65, Delmont pineapple 2lbs Rs. 50, small box of Tide Rs. 75, off-brand dish soap Rs. 32.

None of this is too bad when you compare US \$1 = Rs. 27. The part that hurts is the average man only makes Rs. 8 per hour. Inflation here is outrageous. Can you imagine paying \$100.00 for one medium pizza and two Cokes, which is what we did for the ride back to Kalu Kalan. Rs. 100 for one pizza, they wanted 22 rupees for imported Coke. Man, that's too much!!! Imagine working four hours for a can of Coke.

We saw some Kellogg's cereal in the store too, but they changed the name for Asian countries: Raisin Bran to Sultan Bran, Honey Cheerios to Honey-dipped Oats. I found a place that sells bras and perfume too. While we were here, we went and checked out the washing machines, (like the one I told you about in the newspaper clippings) but it was a piece of crap. And they wanted 12,000 rupees. NO WAY! I'd rather wash by hand the rest of my life. My only hope is to have it shipped from the States. Bummer!!!!

After shopping we went to the biggest mosque in Islamabad. We took several pictures. It was so beautiful and so big. Saudi Arabia gave it to Pakistan as a gift. It cost 32 million American dollars to build. I'll send you the pictures. We walked all over it, and by the time we left I was getting pretty tired. After that we headed back to Zain's aunt's house to pick up the kids.

We walked around Rawalpindi and visited about 12 different houses, and I met another 100 people, including Zain's brother-in-law's father. The old man is so sweet.

It started getting late and we finally headed home. It began to rain pretty hard (on Thursday this time again) and don't you know I was praying all the way home. The mixture of bad drivers and rain was more than I could bear. Thankfully, we make it home safe, just in time to find out that Ramadan was to begin that very next morning.

Well, dead tired from the cold weather, playing politician (shaking hands in Rawalpindi), and the long walk from shopping in Islamabad, I finally made it to bed. What a day! Zain spent nearly 1,000 rupees on this trip just for me. He bought me lunch, pizza, three cans of pineapple, Snickers bar, post cards, a Reader's Digest (Rs. 55) and some cheese. He spent 450 Rs. on the rental van alone. Oh, how I love to be spoiled.

It's now morning, and I'm not having much luck on Ramada so far. I couldn't do fast with the rest of the family today because of my cold. I was going to go ahead and start tomorrow, but I'm sure I am starting my period tomorrow, so that's a total of 8 days off the fasting schedule already. What a bummer!

Oh yeah, last night when I went to bed, me and the kids were laying there when we heard sirens. Loud sirens—like bomb sirens. My first thought was they are probably letting everyone know for sure Ramadan has started. But then again, maybe we're under attack like Pearl Harbor was attacked. Well, I had better go check. So I went to Zain, who was eating dinner in the middle

house, and I said “Are those sirens to let everyone know Ramadan has begun?”

He said, “Yes, did you think we were in a war?” I just laughed. He knows me too well.

Well, I still haven’t finished this letter yet. I need to get it finished today so I can get it out to you; but it has been a crazy couple of days.

Yesterday, I had to go on a hunger strike because of pregnant Wafa—she just wasn’t eating properly. It upset me so badly that I started a hunger strike for the baby. I refused to eat anything until it was agreed that Wafa would start eating proper portions. I just couldn’t see myself eat all that I want while an infant suffered inside. I caused such a ruckus with the family that they finally agreed; so I broke my hunger strike.

Mom, I wasn’t trying to change the people and their beliefs; I just wanted the baby to get its proper nutrition. I think it’s so sad how they treat pregnancy here in the village. They keep the pregnancy hush-hush for as long as they can, and then when it’s obvious that the woman is pregnant they almost give you the feeling that she is dirty somehow.

I tried to tell them that that type of thinking is just wrong. Farooq should be proud of Wafa and cherish her for carrying life inside of her body. The baby is a baby *now*, at this very moment, not just after it is born. Everyone was shocked when I told them that Shedi weighed 10 pounds at birth. Here in the village, 6-month-old babies are lucky if they weigh 15 pounds. Apparently, pregnant women eat less on purpose so that they have easier deliveries. Have you ever heard of such a thing? How tragic.

Well enough of that. Mona is so sweet. She saw the moon last night and said, “Look mommy, a smile.” How precious. The moon really did look like a smile, just like she said. She also says the phrase, “Oh, that’s just too gross.” Well I know right where she gets that from. Haha.

I didn't know if you could understand what Shedi said to you on the phone. He said, "I eat chicken stinky." He says that all the time now. And then I tell him, "Oh son, that is just too gross!!" Haha.

Shedi and Zain were teasing each other the other day, and Zain said, "Your momma's ugly."

Then Shedi said, "Your momma's ugly."

Well, this went on a couple of times back and forth until my "Ricky Ricardo" husband said, "Your momma wears Army shoes!"

I said, "That's army boots, not shoes." Then I thought about it for a second and said, "Wait a minute, that's combat boots, not army boots." We had a good laugh. I'm starting to forget little things about English. Have you noticed my spelling has really gotten bad? How funny. I was told that it would happen after being here for a while, you know, that I would slip up on little things of English. I guess they were right.

I am going to wrap this letter up now. It was so great talking to you last night. I just wish Mona wasn't so shy on the phone at the very last minute.

Love you all bunches and bunches. I love you and can't wait until I receive your next letter.

Marsha

P.S. I forgot to tell you that I finally had enough nerve to do a cow poopi (when they take cow poop, hay, and water and mix it altogether then it is dried and used for the fire. Oh, that is just toooo gross!!! But I still had a great time doing it.)

March 12, 1992

Dearest Mom and all,

It's only Thursday, but I have plenty to write about, so I might as well get started now. First of all, thank you for the lovely card with the poem about the stars inside. I think that poem was written just for us. What a coincidence that you should find it after what I told Mona about the stars. Where did you get it? And thanks for the envelopes. Send a couple of them each time for me, okay?

I'm pretty tired today because Mona was up most of the night vomiting and feverish. We got her some vomiting medicine and she hasn't thrown-up again since she took it. Just a little fever and a headache. I sure hope it's nothing serious. She didn't eat most of the day yesterday and had complained of a headache and of not feeling good since she woke up yesterday morning.

She only ate a half of an orange so far today (it's now 3:30 pm). She woke up while Zain was at the farm and began crying for him, "I need my Abujohn." When he came home he immediately picked her up and has been babying her since then.

It was pretty exciting here last night (Wednesday night). It rained like usual, but this time it hailed, and they were the size of moth balls. Zain put a pan on his head and was dancing around like a maniac until a big boom of thunder and a strike of lightning hit at the same time. He came running inside the house like a coward. What an idiot. Haha.

Monday, I took a ton of pictures of the kids and the animals in the front courtyard. They were so cute. Zain's mom took me across the street to see this lady's house, and it was so beautiful. It was the prettiest house I've seen since we've been here. I took a

couple pictures of it for you. I hope they turned out okay. I can't wait to get them developed and send them to you.

Then, much to my surprise, a baby was born at that very same house that I took the pictures in. I didn't even know the girl was pregnant. I thought she was just on the chunky side. I didn't find out until the next morning. You remember in my last letter how I explained how they treat pregnant women poorly? Well, I was pretty upset because I was dying to see how they do the birthing thing here. Our family has already had a discussion about the Pakistani tradition of the women and not taking a bath for 40 days and stinking up the whole house. I told Zain that in my house Wafa will take a bath when she has that baby.

Anyway, I went over to observe all of this for myself. I walked in the room where the mom and baby were. (The baby was born 9:00 pm; I went over about 4:00 pm the next day.) And she was lying flat on a bed with her head wrapped tightly with a scarf (a custom in this country showing a headache). The baby was in swaddling with head bound tight also. (There was a distinct stench in the air but not too bad. Oh my goodness, I shun to think what it is going to be like in 40 days.) The mother laid in complete silence until she tried to lift her head up to drink some *chai* (tea with milk). Then she began to moan like she was dying. Good grief! Give me a break!!

They were giving the mom tea and super sweet cream of wheat. Apparently, the midwife will come each day for 6 or 7 days to wipe her down (not shower, just sponge-bath-type) and massage her with some oil. Oh well. Different country—much different customs. The people here believe so many unusual superstitions. For instance:

- The new mother cannot take a shower, touch meat or milk products, leave the house or her room for that matter, for 40 days, or else she will die. Zain told them that I took a bath after I had the kids and I didn't die.

Their response was that I was in a different “wind,” since I was from the United States.

- The new mother can't shew a cat or dog out of her room or else the evil spirits will jump into the new baby.
- Up to a couple-months-old, the baby cannot hear onions frying or else he will go blind; so someone has to either ring a bell or rattle a chain to cover the noise.
- The baby cannot be carried over any kind of water outside the house in the 40-day period or else evil spirits will jump in it.
- You can't drink cold drinks in the winter or else your tonsils will stick together.
- Don't wash your hair in the morning or else you will die. Especially me, because I'm from *different wind*.
- You can't drink hot *chai* (tea) after you wash your hair or else you'll catch pneumonia.

And anyway, the list goes on. The people here truly believe them. These beliefs run rampant here. I hear something new every day. I'll write some more later. I find these things very interesting to know. They are constantly gasping and shaking their heads at me because I refuse to live by their many superstitions, nor am I going to let my children believe in such things, but I still love hearing about them.

I finally stopped my period today, so I will begin my fast tomorrow. I seem to have lost more weight, although I don't know exactly how much. Anyway, just today, my sister-in-law commented on how skinny I was getting and that I looked really weak. Us being so white, they think we're too pale all the time anyway, so don't worry. I haven't lost that much weight. I really didn't realize I had lost any at all until I saw Mona's birthday pictures. I would estimate 25 lbs at the most, but I would expect that anyway because the change in food and eating habits. I think

I look good, but I will probably lose a little bit more anyway due to fasting.

I finally get to open my pineapple cans I have been saving for Ramadan. Yeah! Pineapple! Mona finally eat something last night, a few French fries, but threw them up about one hour later. So far today she has only eaten one scrambled egg and some candy. She is still feverish and complains of a headache and says she feels like throwing up. Tomorrow we will take her to the doctor's if symptoms still persist.

The kids colored some pictures for you. They will be in the letter. I hope you like them.

You should see some of the things these kids play with here in the village. Yesterday it was a helium balloon and a long thread. And then today they had a butterfly tied to a string. My cousin ought to try it for her kids; they would get such a kick out of it. It is so freaky. One second it plays dead, then the string goes straight out as the butterfly is trying to fly. It's too cool to see.

I've only had two people that came over to see me that spoke some English. The first was a girl who lived in England for 11 years. We could hold a decent conversation, but not what I had hoped we could. Then this 15-year-old girl walked in with some other people—all Pakistani. I thought, "*Oh great, more people to just come and watch me.*" Then I told Zain out loud (not thinking any of them spoke English; no one ever does), "I don't want to go over there and talk to them; all they are going to do is sit and watch me, not try to talk to me back, just watch." I was starting to get an attitude after two months of every move I made being watched by 100's of people.

Well, it turns out that one of the girls was born in England to her Pakistani parents. She lived in England all of her life and was here on a visit with her father; so of course, she understood every word I had said about her and her friends. I thought, "*Boy is my face red.*" I went to her and apologized immediately, explaining how it starts to get tiresome being the object that everyone in

town wants to just sit and look at all day. She said that she understood, and that she would feel the same way. We talked a little about the toilets and not having any hot water. She said she hated it here and wanted to go back to England as soon as possible. She didn't have much else to say; I had to keep asking the questions. Finally I gave up the conversation and told her thanks for coming over. "*Well, it was nice talking to you too,*" I thought.

One thing I have learned is those here who can speak English all seem to have an attitude problem. Anyway, I definitely learned my lesson that day. Now whenever someone new comes over, I treat them as if they speak English; once I know for sure that they don't speak English, I start to have some fun; I can comment all day and they don't understand one word I say. Hahaha. But I always remember what you taught me Mom, "God don't like the ugly." So I still watch what I say anyways.

News bulletin: Mona just vomited the egg she had, so tomorrow, if not tonight, we will take her to the hospital in Hazro (the nearest major city). The poor thing. All she wants to do is sleep. I will keep you posted.

Also, another news bulletin: Remember the rain I told you we had Wednesday night? Well, it rained last night too, and together they ruined our crop of cucumbers. All of them. What a bummer. That was 800 rupees' worth of seeds. The men in the family went to go plant some lettuce in place of what was lost.

My roses bushes at the farm property are starting to bloom now, and I'm not even in my house yet. Zain saw them and was going to bring some home to me, but some little girls got to them first. I said that was all right, there will be lots more for me.

Shedi is driving us crazy these days. Someone taught him to say mother-fucker in Hindko, and so now he yells it at people. (Like mother, like son I guess. I can still remember doing that on my bike when I was a kid.) We are having a tough time to get him to say something else. The little brat! He doesn't understand

what it means, so I'm trying to have patience. Sometimes he gets mad at me and says, "I'm not talking to you anymore Mommy," and he says it very clear. He is talking so well you all would be so proud to hear him.

Mona went to her first tutoring class on Monday. I got a picture of her before she left. She learned some Arabic letters, and she got to see a ton of kids. She got some candy and came home and asked me, "Mommy, why do all the kids call me godi?" So I had to explain to her why, and she seemed to understand, but it doesn't bother her that she is a different color. She knows everyone thinks she is beautiful, and she loves being the spotlight everywhere she goes.

Today is Saturday; I am going to wrap up this letter and get it mailed out. Mona did okay through the day but began throwing up towards the evening last night three times. We took her to the doctor's house in Hazro about 15 miles away. He looked at her there and he was a very gracious man. He spoke English and Mona instantly fell in love with him. She told me on the way home, "Mommy, I love the doctor, he stopped my puking, and he talks English like Mommy and me and Abujohn." He said that her symptoms are showing that she has either drunken water that hasn't been boiled or ate some fruit that had some bacteria on it. Apparently, that is very common for travelers and newcomers to Pakistan. He prescribed three medications: one for vomiting, one for diarrhea, one for the intestinal upsetness (to stop the pains and to kill the bacteria). She is also taking fever reducer. She is doing better today. She hasn't thrown up since last night, and she's smiling much more today. The doctor said she will probably be sick for 2 or 3 more days, then she should drastically be better.

Well, guess who else is having a baby? Not me of course. Our cow. They took her today to have her bred. I asked Zain's mom how she knew it was time for her to have another baby. She said, "I can tell by her mooing and her utters."

I said, "Okay, that's good enough for me." The cow seems to be the same to me. But then again, I'm definitely not farm-girl material.

I think that covers everything today. I love you all and miss you very much. Oh yeah, did you call Debra at the Children's Rehabilitation Services clinic to tell her Shedi is doing great now with his speaking? If you think of it, please do, and if not, that's okay too. I think she knows I will keep working with my little pumpkin.

I still haven't received your package yet. I'm sure it will be soon. Next time send a thing or two of Monistat 7. I had two and had to use one of them already. I would like to keep one in emergency supply. Thanks.

I had some pineapple last night. Oh man was it good!!

How do you like the Urdu baby book that I sent you today? Zain bought me a couple more reading books, so I thought you might like to have my first reader. I can read the whole book now. Aren't you proud of your little girl who is back in kindergarten again? (Wait a minute, I never went to kindergarten, did I? I guess there is a first time for everything. Haha.)

I love you, and write to me soon, okay?

Love,

Marsha

P.S. And oh my god, I have forgotten to tell you this; last month an 18-year-old guy got beat up by his parents. "Sad" you may say. Well, once I tell you why they beat the crap out of him, you will more than likely agree. We are all adults who are reading this letter, but I will be as tactful as possible. Some lady caught him having sex with the family cow. The lady immediately told his parents and of course they freaked out. How gross to have it happen just a couple blocks away.

March 21, 1992

Dearest Mom and All,

Time again for my weekly letter. It's Saturday; Zain and Shedi are at the farm working. Me and Mona are just hanging around the house. We're getting ready to go to Roni's school tomorrow. You know, worrying about girl things, like what clothes to wear, what shoes, what veil, how to do our hair. Mona refuses to take a bath, so I told her she can't go. She insisted that she is clean and doesn't need one. Well, I am sure I will win this argument in the end. Haha.

We received your envelope with Zain's mail and Auntie's letter. We are still waiting for a wire from you. Thank you so much for the envelopes again, and the Kool-aid. And I loved your picture in your work's magazine advertisement.

Oh, and thanks for the cassette tapes. Hopefully, next week I will mail out a tape. That gives me a whole week to work on it. You would not believe how hard it is to get the kids to sit down for five minutes.

Not too much has happened this week. Ramadan seems to be slowing things up. Mona finally quit throwing up after about three more days but still has a little bit of diarrhea. Shedi threw up three times during one night but hasn't since. Zain threw up for a couple days, but I think his nausea is more from a weak stomach, because of the sore on his leg. He gets sick when he sees a lot of blood. Let me start from the beginning.

One day my hand was hurting. I looked and there was a sore on my left index finger knuckle. By the end of the day it swelled with puss so bad that I took a needle to it to relieve the pain. The next morning my whole finger had swelled to nearly twice its

normal size. The sore finally busted wide open to about a ½ inch wide, puss oozing out. It was very gross and much more painful than it looked. I was in misery!

At the same time Zain said he was getting some kind of pimple on his knee. I looked at it and sure enough, it looked like a pimple. Well, same as my finger, it progressed rather quickly. The next day it swelled up to the size of a silver dollar, and his whole knee swelled up too. Then the sore got even bigger. Zain couldn't walk, and the pain was more than he could bear. He went to the hospital and they popped it open and blood and puss both just oozed out it. I think he nearly lost ½ pint of blood; from what started at a ¼ of an inch hole, to be what has become the grossest thing (besides Tiffy's finger) I have ever seen. It's an open flesh wound about the size of a silver dollar, with three small holes the size of bb's inside that one, and they just bleed—like some kind of horror movie. That's why Zain keeps vomiting; the pain is unbearable for him. His brother, who works as a medical assistant at the hospital, has to continually relieve the pressure by squeezing and pressing the area, allowing the blood and puss to pour out of the three holes. The doctor has given him antibiotics. I sure hope it goes away soon.

I can't stand seeing him in so much pain. His aunt had two of them just like it, and they lasted about 17 days; and they left scars. I have never seen this before.

The doctor gave me some suave for my finger, which seems to be helping quite a bit. My first experience to the hospital was something else. Give me Maricopa County Hospital anytime. The beds were like the old metal beds the ones that were used in military hospitals in WWI, and the floors and walls were filthy. There was blood on the beds and all in the trash cans, and dirty needles thrown under the bed. The stench was an indescribable odor; it was like, dirty sterilizing medicine, for lack of a better way to describe it. Needless to say, I took a bath as soon as I got home.

I hope everyone is doing great there. I'm still waiting to hear how Auntie's surgery went. How's Cliffy-poo doing? How's your work going?

I'm going to close for now and get started on the tape. Please write soon. Drop me a line each week, if only to just say "howdy." I miss talking to you so much.

Love ya always,

Marsha

P.S. I still haven't received the box of goodies. Oooo I cannot wait. I hope you enjoy the newspaper clippings. I'll send them as I get them. You can start a scrapbook.

News Bulletin We have a new addition to the family—a bright hot pink baby chick. The kids are going bonkers. He's so cute, very noisy and very pink. I'll get a picture of it for you.

April 19, 1992

Dear Mom and All,

Salam to everyone. I have an infected finger again, so I'm sorry right now for the sloppy writing. I hope you received my tape along with Mona's tooth. She is so cute with a tooth missing. Her other bottom tooth and one of the top ones are also loose. Her new one is already coming in.

We had to wait to put Mona in school because she had some diarrhea. Shedi can't go because the pre-K class was full and he's too young for kindergarten. He is upset that he couldn't go to school, so I told him we would have school here at home. He accepted that okay.

The principal wasn't going to let Mona join class because she doesn't know the Urdu alphabet. All kids must know the Urdu and English alphabet and be able to count up to 50 in English before they start kindergarten. Zain argued with them that that's why we send kids to school—to learn these things. One of my brothers-in-law went down and convinced them to let her go for two weeks, then they would test her to see if she could stay in longer or not. So we'll just have to see how she does. They were afraid she wouldn't do well because she's new in the country and doesn't speak Urdu. But she's picking it up so well, I think she'll do fine.

Everyone here is doing fine. Thank you for all of the stuff you sent; we all loved them. Tell Dougie I said "hi" and congrats on becoming grandpa #3!!

Oh yeah, we had another earthquake. That is two since we've been here. I don't know how big this one was but it knocked some dishes down off of the shelves. It was about 3 pm and I was

outside playing with Shedi. I was holding him and dancing around when it hit. (But maybe I am still a little too fat. Haha.) I didn't even realize the earthquake because of my dancing. Roni started yelling at me to sit down. I had no idea what was going on, so I didn't freak out like the last time.

The house at the farm property is coming along just fine. It is so beautiful. Nobody around the village understands the layout of the house at all. They have never seen indoor plumbing or indoor kitchens. We are definitely the talk-of-the-town.

I haven't got to see the tape you sent to me yet because our voltage converter broke down, and the VCR will not work without it. But we will get a new one soon.

Please tell my cousin that I love her very much. I wish I knew what she was feeling. The hard part is not knowing what she feels about me leaving America. Please assure her we are very happy here, and I have found peace at last. No David, and none of his control. The only thing that could make me happier is if all of you were here with me. Not only does Zain's family treat me as royalty, I am considered royalty and literally have the key of this part of the country.

The other day, some lady brought me a chicken as a gift. Isn't that cute? By the way, they really do give live chickens as gifts here. "Vat a country!" ...hahahahaha

I love you all very much and look so forward to your next letter and phone call. Hope you don't get laid off Mom. Auntie, don't push yourself too much too soon. Cliffy, drive carefully. Cuz, please write to me and give the babies kisses from us. We are taking some good pictures for all of you. I hope that you enjoy them and see how happy we are now.

Love always,
Marsha

P.S. I milked the cow for the first time. OOOOOO! Got a good picture of it, and got a good picture of super rooster, too.

Thanks to Aunt Lilly for the shampoo and bath salts that she sent, and let her know that I am sorry to hear of her mother.

April 22, 1992

“This is a special news report”

Due to lack of space in the last letter, we present to you this special mother-in-law report. So have a seat and a Pepsi, but no cigarette (I hope), and enjoy.

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW in PAKISTAN
BY MARSHA

Well Mom, you asked me to tell you about Zain’s mother. I’ll try to paint a close enough picture for you with words. She is 45 years old, very short, about 4’10” to 4’11”. She’s not fat, but has a plump round face. When she smiles her whole face smiles too. She has semi-long hair with gray making its way through it.

She’s a very humble woman who has had nine children. Eight are living and one she had to bury when the child was only a year old. I’m told she (the daughter) was a beautiful little girl—so she too knows the pain of losing a daughter.

She had all nine children at home, and Zain’s dad passed away while she was pregnant with Roni. She is very used to being by herself—without a husband that is.

Her feet are roughed and cracked badly, and her hands are calloused from the outdoor lifestyle. She has three earring holes in each ear; which were empty when we got here because her husband took the gold earrings she had and exchanged them for money. She wears no gold at all—no necklace, no bangles, no earrings. She doesn’t wear any make-up except some *surma* (powdered black eye liner) and shampoos her hair with the same soap that clothes and the dishes are washed with. Oh yeah, she does have one gold band on her finger, although I don’t know what it is from or the meaning behind it.

I've seen every emotion—from joy, to cussing a lady out, to protecting the kids. I even watched her hold her oldest boy (Zain) as he wept and she wept right along with him. She is a very caring person. Amijon is a very good cook and has the patience of Job.

Since I still don't know the language yet, we can't talk too much, but we do communicate nonetheless.

I don't know much as far as what she likes or dislikes, but I do know she cherishes me and the kids; I can feel it. She said it's okay for herself to wear her clothes for three days and do cow poopies, but it's not okay me to do that. She said she is used to being in the dirt. And I have to admit, she has a definite talent for making dirt look good. The yard is a yard to me, but it's her living room and she sees things about it that I don't.

She is a very gracious hostess to her company, and every once in a while I hear her whispering with a neighbor; I bet she's gossiping.

I know I haven't painted a very pretty picture about her, but it is a truthful one. I'm here to take care of her, and I have one heck of a job to do.

I gave her my golden necklace and Zain bought her some earrings. We gave her some hair shampoo and I'm putting *prandis* (that decorative thing that all the women wear) in her hair, and I make her change her clothes as often as possible. She says she's too old to look pretty and it doesn't matter anyway because her husband is dead now. Zain told her that he is here to take care of her and he wants her to look nice. We plan to get you and her some bangles one day after the house is finished.

She is also a good price haggler and tailor; she can literally reconstruct any piece of clothing; it is amazing to watch her do these things.

I hope you now have a better insight on my mother-in-law in Pakistan. She's a sweetheart, but she will never replace you.

I miss you and love you very much.

Marsha

April 26, 1992

Dear Mom and All,

Time again for my weekly letter. This has been an exciting week. We got the farm property documented in Zain's name, so the house is legally Zain's and mine. If something should happen to Zain, the house and property become mine and the kids. No one can take it from us. Shedi is the legal heir to the house and all of the property. That makes me feel confident, to know that the children now have a future.

Zain took me on our 2nd honeymoon for a couple of days to Islamabad. We had a wonderful time. Did some shopping, some sightseeing, some eating and visiting people. Not too much honeymooning though because Zain has been sick! Bummer.

He weighed himself and he weighs 140 pounds. I hope he doesn't lose any more weight. I weighed in at 150 pounds. The doctor warned me to watch my weight because women here have a tendency to forget their weight and get too plump. Anyway, the hotel was great—sheets, TV, cable, phone, American toilet and a shower with hot water. I loved it! Each day I spent an hour in the shower just letting the water run over my body. It felt so amazing. I really didn't realize how much I missed a good hot shower until I took one again.

We went up to the top of the mountain at night and watched the city lights. It looked like Phoenix but was missing Central Avenue.

Both days of the honeymoon, we hired drivers to take us around the city. We were high-class in high-class cars. I loved having a chauffeur. The trip totaled up to 4,000 rupees. We had a blast but we missed the babies, and the babies missed us. It was

only one day and two nights, but it seemed like weeks away from the kids.

There was a wedding at the hotel and they even had a marching band leading the parade of the wedding. Good grief! What a show! The band was made of bag pipes. How cool is that!! I loved it!!

Mona still hasn't started school because Zain is just too busy with the new house. So we agreed we wouldn't push her or ourselves; she's still young and I can teach her basics at home.

The latest health update in the family is as follows. My finger is finally healing from that sore. Mona has a pimple on her arm (but nothing like the one that Zain had on his knee), Shedi has something like the mumps but he refuses to stay in bed or take a bath. (He is definitely a boy.) Zain's feeling a little better, just real occupied with the house project. But overall everyone is fine.

I hope things there are great. By the way, I finally saw the video you sent. It was fantastic. I laughed and cried. I loved seeing you all very much. I hope we are able to get a camera and tape for you too. I love the new bathroom that you decorated; it's so beautiful. But, I couldn't believe how fat everyone was on the tape. Good thing we know we are not that fat in real life, right? And Cliffy, you took some great shots at the birthday party; we had a great laugh.

Right now, I've got to get ready for a wedding. They want the godi to be there, so I'll close this letter for now.

I love you all very much and I hope to hear more from you soon. I can't wait till Saturday to talk to you. I miss you all very much!

Love,
Marsha

P.S. I got cheered at by a bus load of men in Islamabad. (Oh yeah. They like me here. Hahaha.) And then Zain almost got into a fight with some college kids who made a sexual remark at me. He was really pissed off. The kids didn't realize that my husband

was standing right there. That's the second time he has defended me like that.

We were really bummed to hear about Benny Hill's death.

And I hope Los Angeles doesn't get "the big one" (of course referring to the earthquake). Peshawar had another earthquake a couple days ago, 5.7 on the Richter scale. That makes three earthquakes since we got here. Zain said we never had them before now. He's waiting for the tornado to hit next. Hahaha. Seems I'm bad luck everywhere I go.

May 15, 1992

Dearest Mom and All,

Friday again and it's been pretty busy this week. Frank got off okay and I sure hope you enjoyed all of the gifts. I was very upset to hear they couldn't find the hats for the guys that you wanted. As soon as we find them we will mail them to you.

Mom, I hope you liked your birthday gift, and I hope you have a great birthday. Thank you so much for the birthday cards you sent me. I kid you not when I tell you that, I totally forgot I had a birthday coming up until I opened the cards. Both of them were so beautiful that I cried. Good thing no one was around or they would've thought something was wrong.

Please give Aunt Lilly my sympathy. I really loved Grandmama. It seems like just yesterday we went to their home in Indiana and played with fireflies.

I'm glad to hear that you quick your job. Now they can't pick on you anymore there. How are things at Revlon? Do you like working there now?

I start visiting the kids' school this week. I'm very excited. I can't wait to see what it is like.

Guess what? Zain's mom gave me the baby cow. I named her Erma. She's six months old and is very heavy; I know this because she's stepped on my foot twice already. I give her water and grass and clean up her poopies. She's very affectionate and loves for me to show her attention. This morning I got up and a chicken was sitting on her and stinkied all down the side of her. Well, since she's my cow, it was my mess to clean up. Her hair is kind of long and wiry. It feels really rough when you pet her. I just love her.

Can you guess what I named Erma's mom? Bessie. (That's original, isn't it?). She knows I'm scared of her and she pushes me around because of it. I never knew cows could even have a personality. This is all too shocking for me.

I did the tortilla dough for the first time this week and I've been using my own fireplace to cook on. It is so cool cooking on firewood. Of course everyone uses my fireplace too, because the small pots they use fit better on mine, and it makes it easier to use than theirs.

The kids are fine; Shedi goes riding with his uncle on his new motorcycle, so that is his latest thing for him. Mona and Shedi both play with frogs each night. One night Mona tried to get a frog to jump but it just sat there. In her sweet innocence she said, "Mommy, he's not working!!" Well, I just laughed.

Mona's second tooth is coming in really nicely. Oh, yeah, she washes her own hair and takes her own bath now. She also dresses herself and goes to the bathroom by herself. She's so grown. Shedi still needs mommy in the bathroom but just refused to take a bath whatsoever. He keeps telling me that he will take one tomorrow. "I take a bath tomorrow, okay Mommy?" Well, who can argue with those baby blue eyes. So I tell him to go to the pump and just wash his face and brush his teeth. He'll do that for me but just as long as I don't call it a bath. Okay, Shedi, I won't call it a bath.

I have to close for now. I hope you like all the pictures. I love all of you and miss you very much.

Marsha

May 15, 1992

Special Bulletin Edition

This is a special report; just for your information!!

Tidbits of stuff I forget to mention in letters.

- We have more baby birds in our rooms, and wasps are building a nest in the doorway. That's just great! I am so scared of getting stung.
- The loaves of bread here really suck. They are very sweet because they put way too much sugar in it. I do not understand that at all.
- Zain talked to the post master about some of my letters being opened before I get them at home. The reason some of them were opened is because any letter that enters the country that appears to have anything in it gets opened and checked for pornography, so I'm not mad anymore. I get it now.
- Marijuana is growing rampant on my farm property, and everywhere else for that matter. It's not illegal to have or smoke it here; you just can't sell it or take it out of the country. The women use it for firewood and it is very common to smell it lingering in the air around mealtimes.
- The most common cuss words in Hinkdo used by Shedi and Mona are m-f-er, son of a B., and jack-A., and Shedi's English cussing is now "I'll beat your A....." The little brats. You know they don't get any of it from me, right? Haha

- Mona is carrying babies around now. Her bad habit is bringing them over and playing with them until she is too tired to take them back home. Then I have to take the babies home for her. (I can't believe the baby I carried on my hip is now carrying six-month-old babies on hers. Where does the time go?)
- The TV station here sucks, considering there is only one channel. English news comes on at 7:00 pm for 15 minutes. It's all Pakistani news, and then the only time world news comes on is if something major happens—like Los Angeles' violence or Paris' bleachers crashing down, or the Afghanistani war is over.
- Speaking of Afghanistan, we have a lot of refugees from Afghanistan who are going back home. They have been living in tents on people's property who had enough compassion to let them stay. I've seen many since I have been here and it would bring tears to your eyes. They had nothing but a tent (some not even beds). At least I have a house with a water pump and plenty of food. If this experience has been anything to me, it has been one of learning compassion on those who only truly have two sets of clothes and don't know for sure where their next meal will come from. They will clean up after the cow just for some flour to take home to the family. I never realized before as I do now, how well you provided for me throughout the years of raising me. Thank you, Mom!!
- Anyway, I got way off the subject of TV. There are mostly sports and music on. Some of the sports specials they show would crack you up. Like the other day, a volleyball championship from 1986. Yes, I said 1986. (oooooo! I have been waiting to watch that one.) And table tennis? Oh, come on! They are just too embarrassed to say ping pong. Hahaha. Oh yes, and for someone who

wants the real violent man-killer sport, there is always a badminton match for your entertainment. (Oh how I long for a good football game, American football that is. Hahaha). Late at nights there are usually cricket matches on in English, but it's British English, so I only understand some of what they are saying.

- My favorite TV show is a Chinese series that comes on Saturday nights. It's dubbed in English so it's almost like watching Godzilla movies. I laughed at first but then I really got into the series. Zain still laughs every show. It's about a little Chinese girl that the parents had to send off to work for a bag of rice for the family. Poor kid! But I really love the costumes they wear; so authentic.

It looks like I have to start another letter; I have run out of space on this one again. Don't I rattle on and on and on? But I still have so much more to tell you. I miss you very much. You are my best friend, and I miss our rap sessions so much.

I love you, Mom.

Marsha

May 22, 1992

Dear Mom and All,

Funny thing, I was going to write to you today anyway and then found out it is Friday, time for me to write my weekly letter anyway. Good thing, because as usual it has been an eventful week.

Let me start by giving my sympathy to all fellow Indy 500 fans regarding the death of the rookie driver from the Philippines. Sad news indeed.

Sadly, there was another earthquake that hit Pakistan. Thank God it was only 36 people that were killed; by now you have seen the clippings from the newspaper that I put in the letter. (Oh, that's right Zain!!! We don't have earthquakes in Pakistan, do we dear??) Anyway, the pictures are pretty self-explanatory. Zain and the kids were home when it hit.

It was Wednesday morning. Zain and I had just walked in the house when the earthquake hit our area. My mind was just not quick enough to register what was going on. Zain said that it's an earthquake and to go back outside and told Mona to get out too. Shedi, Zain's mom, and Roni were already outside. I thought I was just losing my balance. None of dishes fell down this time but Mona's medicine fell off the table. Mona asked me "Mommy, why was everything shaking?" So she had her first experience of an earthquake. I told her God was doing it. So she went over and tried to move the wall, like God. I told her "Baby, you're not near as strong as God," but she persisted and kept pushing and kicking the wall. Please God don't send a tornado my way!! I can't even imagine how she will try to do that.

Anyway, the new house is coming along just great. The walls are up to scaffolding height now and you can walk through the house and see the windows and walk through doors. How exciting!

Mona has been sick for three days—fever, stomach pains, and headache. Her fever finally broke but she still sleeps a lot and cries. The doctor said it was an intestinal infection. She is taking three medicines. It is almost a repeat of what I went through a couple weeks ago. Shedi is just fine. He just has a bunch of growing pains. Somehow he got a bad cut on his chin (I think he should've gotten stitches; Zain said it was not necessary). We still don't know how it happened. He also has several cuts on his feet, one cut on his finger, one scratch on his stomach, and a sore. Yes, our son is definitely a typical boy. Just today he was playing with his uncle's bike and it fell over on him and nearly broke his foot, and it reopened his chin. Well, between him and Mona, I keep pretty busy as a full-time nurse.

I have been working very hard with Shedi on his speech, and in just two weeks he has improved so much. He's not stuttering as much and his sounds are so clear now. But now along with the intense speech therapy, I have to teach him to quit lying. Our son is a chronic liar. He drives us crazy with his stories. He has a very active imagination, but unfortunately he feels he can replace the truth with it. Mona seldom lies, but Shedi is a daily storyteller. Any suggestions on how to curve it? If I can just teach him that it's okay to tell stories in a story setting, and not as an answer for every question.

He's so cute; one day he got mad at me and said, "Aright Mommy, I not go to the coo anymore and get flowers for you. And Abujohn not gonna build you a house, and I'm gonna cut your neck, and I'm not talking to you anymore cause you die." Is that incredible or what? He is so much fun to talk to now. Unfortunately, he just won't talk on tape for you.

Well, school has turned out to be quite an experience. Let me tell you about my day at the elementary school. We decided that it would be best if I went ahead and started working at the elementary school so Mona and Shedi could go with me and then actually be in the class to learn and work on their language skills. Well, the day I went was awful.

The night before, I had gone to the principal's house to explain to her that we wanted to go to school to learn—including myself. So I thought it was well understood by her and that there would be no issues with us being there. Anyway, I got the kids all dressed, spiffed and ready. They both looked so handsome. I got thermos bottles of water ready and my Urdu books all together. We finally got to the school; of course that was after Shedi threw up and all of the other typical morning's crap. The little kids came crowding around and ended up being hit by a big stick because they wouldn't go back to their seats. Yes, hit. I saw it. I felt so bad.

They sat me and the kids in a special chair. I asked where Mona's class was and they basically didn't care and never gave me an answer. They let her and Shedi do what they wanted. Mona went to the store three times to get candy. Then they made me go to the teacher's house and sit in a living room with other adults. I was so upset. That was not why I went to the school.

To try to make this long story a little shorter, I finally got tired of being told to go in the room and eat stuff they were bringing me, so I left the school and went home. I was very discouraged. No one took me seriously. They just want us to be around to look at. It was aggravating.

And I haven't even told you of the condition of the school yet. There were two rooms about the size of your living room, an ancient-looking ruin, no electricity, no tables or chairs, no papers or colors or toys for the kids, there was not even a toilet. At first I tried to reason with myself, that all of this is fine as long as the kids are learning, but there was no organization of the teachers at

all. They didn't teach the class; there was just a lot of yelling and trying to get 300 kids to be quiet and study their books. I didn't see one single time any of the teachers talk to a child in a teaching way.

Well, that half day experience at a government school was good enough for me. I decided that Mona and Shedi will definitely be going to a private school—when they are ready and can get in. Then at that point I will donate some time at the high school or something. So in the meantime, I'm starting school at my home. Zain suggested I start my own English class. The ones that want to learn will come. So not only is Zain building me a house, he also promised to build me a classroom. I have already completed a chart with the English/Urdu alphabet and English/Urdu numbers.

Now each day the kids have to say each letter and number real loud. Then we study the letter of the day. Everyone loves the chart, and even Zain's younger brother and sister refer to it for the English. So I automatically have four pupils right at home. I've gotten together all of my teaching books that I had gotten before I came and have started studying them. I also know a good bookstore in Islamabad that I can get further materials.

Oh by the way, ew watched Sesame Street yesterday on Pakistan TV, and can you believe they actually censored a part out? Yep, out of Sesame Street. Shocking, right?

(Shedi just said the word octopus; he said, "Poctopus" very clear! How cute. I just had to throw that in.)

Oh yeah, remember how Zain said in the summertime the whole town takes a nap from 1 pm to 3 pm? Well, it is true—all except Zain and the men in construction working on the house. (But one day it was just so hot outside that they did take a nap right at the construction site.) Since all of the work is done outside, you just can't do anything in the heat in these high temperatures. So now I understand why they take naps like this.

Well, we hired a girl to come a couple times a week to do laundry (still by hand), there is just so much laundry with nine people. I think they are paying her 250 rupees a month to come in twice a week.

Oh yeah, I finally got to meet Sahid's dad—the one in the picture with President Bush. He came over to meet me; he lives about six hours away in a city named Sailkot. He was so nice and spoke better English than most people I know in Phoenix. He was also very well mannered. I can see why he worked for the government for so many years. And Guess what, he's also an American citizen with an American passport. It is interesting to me that he chooses to live in Pakistan. We are going to go spend about two weeks with him as soon as our house is at a certain point.

Zain is doing okay, but the poor thing has eight more pimples on his behind. He is really starting to think that he is cursed. You remember how disgusting one of them is, imagine having eight on your butt. I shudder at the thought; I can't even look at them because they gross me out so bad.

Well, I can't believe I have rattled on so much. Please forgive the sloppiness of my writing again. I just read the letter, and even I had trouble reading some parts of it. I just get started thinking and my pen can't keep up with my brain.

Well, I hope this finds all well and happy. Happy birthday again Mom, I love you very much and miss you terribly. Everyone asks about my mother and send their love, and wants you to come to Pakistan for a visit. They all want to meet you. Have you got your passport yet? Please get that taken care of and then get your visa. Have you stopped smoking yet? I hope so. Don't forget, May 31st is smoke-out day, along with blowing out the candles, blow out the habit of cigarettes.

I am going to close for now. I love you and await your letter. Happy Birthday!

Marsha

P.S. Erma says happy moooo-irtthday too!!

May 31, 1992

Dearest Mom,

Happy Birthday!! I hope I can get through on the phone to wish you a happy birthday, but just in case I don't get through, I want you to know I was thinking of you today. I hope you enjoy the tape; I can't believe how quickly an hour goes by for me. But you know I have definitely got the gift of gab. I ran out of tape with me and Shedi singing, but I didn't want to re-tape over it just to say good- bye. I think you would much rather hear Shedi sing. Isn't he talking so great now?

Besides, you all know I love you and miss you very much and think of you often. Everyone says "hi" and they are all saying to get your passport and your visa. On the next tape, if you have anything you want to say to Zain's mom, go ahead, and Zain will translate, and then she'll tape to you. Okay?

Oh man; have I got a good one for you. Zain threw his back out today and some construction worker guy that was working here at the house went over and put his foot on Zain's back and said, "It will be all right now."

I asked Zain if he was a witch doctor or something. Zain said, "No, he was born backwards, butt first; that means he has healing of the back."

Well, I just about lost it; I started cracking up. I said, "I was a breech baby too. It's no wonder people come to me to crack their back." Well, don't you know that I don't let him live that one down now? So that means, that now I am an English teacher/back healer. No kidding, if the word gets out that I was born backwards it would be terrible for me. As if not enough people come just to see the white person now, the sick are going

to start flocking in too; please God, don't bring them for healing next!

I better close so I can get this letter out. I love you and loved your tape. I hope you had some tea in your birthday china.

I love you.

Marsha

P.S. As you can see by the articles from our newspaper, no smoking *is* promoted worldwide. I think that it's interesting to see what they say about it on our side of the planet. A quick note, they advertise cigarettes on TV here, then after the advertisements they announce that smoking is hazardous to your health. Then they have ads on TV to stop smoking... Please, someone should make up their mind at PTV.

Oh yeah, call Danny for me; tell him he'll be my friend forever. See, I'm clear around the world and I still wish him a happy birthday. (Danny, I'll love you as my best friend forever.)

June 12, 1992

Dear Mom and All,

Time to write again. I hope you enjoy each of these letters as much as I enjoy writing them. Well, Eid Mubarak to all. Today is Eid and we all dressed up and sacrificed a cow and fed the poor.

Boy have I got some news for you. I think you might turn red in the face. Well, you know how much I loved Lucille Ball. And how I teased you all the time that me and Zain are a true-life Lucy and Ricky Ricardo from the I Love Lucy Show.

Well, you might have guessed by now that I figured I might as well look like Lucy, just once in my life. Yes. My hair is bright red-orange. I put a ton of henna in it and slept overnight. I love it!! We got a couple of pictures of it, and you would freak if you saw it. It took Zain a whole day to get used to it, and he says it grows on him after a while. Mona stared at me for twenty minutes when she woke up and found me a Lucille-Ball-look-alike. She loves it and wants her hair red too. (I knew that was going to happen.) Shedi didn't say or do anything at first, then all of a sudden he spurts out, "Mommy, your hair is pretty."

I always wanted to be a red-head just once in my life but never had enough nerve in the states. Here it is very common for people to put henna in their hair, so like usual, I fit right in. It's not a dull red, but a very bright orangey one. I love it!!

How is everyone there? I hope this letter finds all well. I enjoyed so much talking to you on the phone; you sound very good.

As of yet, I still haven't gotten any letters from anyone. Oh yeah, we got our Garfield card. Thank you for that. I love it. (Yes, Zain tells me all the time I'm beautiful, but he stands by my

decision to cover up. He's already had to tell several men to quit looking so hard. Just think if I didn't cover. It would be disastrous. A fight every time I leave my yard. Haha.)

Well, my most shocking news of all since my arrival here in Pakistan, was that I saw a UFO. It was late at night, maybe around 11 pm, and I had to go to the bathroom, so I woke Zain up and told him to take me outside to go. After I went, I came out of the bathroom and looked up to the sky—as I always do. You know how much I love looking at the stars. Well, I noticed a strange set of lights. They were the same color and size and made a triangle shape. Hmm, that's different, I thought.

Zain and I stood and looked at it for a few minutes, and then suddenly the set of lights dropped in the sky about three inches downward (if you were to hold your finger up to the sky and measure) and then just stayed there.

We were both really shocked and really wondered what they were. Planes or satellites don't move like that. Then after about five minutes, the set of lights darted to the right, about the same amount of length, and just sat there again. It was crazy!

Still shocked, we called his mother out to see it. She started saying *toba toba* (which means "forgive us" in Hindko). Then while we were standing there, the set of lights darted again, this time in the original spot where we first spotted it. By this time, we were freaking out. I finally got kind of scared and thought I was safer inside, so we went in. I still do not know what they were or what they were doing; but at least I can say that, yes, I have seen a real UFO. Well, don't worry, I haven't been abducted by aliens.....yet anyway.

I love you all and miss you all very much. Write soon.

Your long-distance, English teacher, red-headed, UFO-
watching daughter,

Marsha.

June 13, 1992

Hi Mom again,

There was a lot I didn't get in yesterday's letter. Zain's butt is finally healing up. No more new pimples. The total number of them was in the 20's, and they all left a scar. But that's all right; at least the pain has finally stopped.

We still haven't got any cash. We have been waiting for it to come in. Zain called the bank and they said they haven't received any fax at all. So we had no choice but to fed express a letter, releasing some cash. The federal express costs 850 rupees to send the letter to the States. OUCH! I sure hope they act fast and get us the cash so Zain doesn't worry anymore.

Zain isn't as bad as he sounded on the phone. I think he looks good; he lost all the fat, now he's just trimmed up. You know how skinny his uncle is? Well, that's how all the men in this family is, so now he looks like one of them.

You ought to see one of the rented Hindi videos in this country; they have on-screen ads through the entire movie. The ads take up half the screen. They're silent ads, but they get on your nerves so badly with moving pictures and words constantly flashing on half the screen. Everyone here is used to it, but it drives me and Zain crazy.

Mona's cute sayings for this week: "Mommy, flies are pinching me on my face!" And while we were eating some plums, she told me, "Mommy, don't eat the bone inside, okay?"

Shedi's saying for this week: (on my birthday) "Mommy, I love you; you're my friend-mommy."

Zain took me out for my birthday to our favorite restaurant in Faisia City. While we were there, one of the workers said they

noticed we weren't in for a while. Now that we are regulars, we get the VIP treatment whenever we go. This time, one of the waiters wanted to know if we knew the white person he had heard about that was living in Hazro (Hazro is where we make the phone calls to you from).

We had asked around before to see if there were any other Americans that I could be friends with, and it turned out that I'm the only white woman in Hazro, so we assumed the he was referring to me but he didn't realize it. How funny, huh?

Shedi's bike broke this week, so while no one was looking he took Mona's bike apart and took the pieces he needed to fix his own. Pretty smart, huh? But now we have two broken bikes instead. The little turd! Shedi's favorite letter is "A" and "T", so he decided to write them in charcoal on the bedroom wall. I guess he figures since the walls were coming down anyway it was okay. Oh, and did I mention the letters were three feet tall?

As always, I love you and miss you very much.

Your new redhead,

Marsha

June 19, 1992

Dear Mom and All,

I hope this letter finds all fine. We're doing just fine. We finally got our cash, and work on the house is going smoothly. Next week they start putting the roof on.

The weather has been hot, and very humid, which makes it miserable, especially when the electricity goes out. Yesterday it went out five times. It's not even 9:00 am yet this morning and it's already gone out once. I guess the temperature's been up to 44 degrees Celsius, which tells me absolutely nothing, by the way. I don't mentally register Celsius at all; give me 120 degrees Fahrenheit anytime. Zain said he read somewhere that 41 C is equal to 110 F, so you can image how hot 44 C is. I listen to the radio, TV, and look in the paper and all they give is Celsius too. It figures. They use all metric systems in the country.

In the last letter I told you Zain's butt was better, well, poor thing has 3 more this week. He's taking more antibiotics. The doctor thought maybe he had diabetes, so they did a blood test. The test was negative, so they said that he just has some kind of virus in his blood. It's one creepy virus for sure. Thank God, I haven't had one.

Yesterday I did the ironing for the family. I did about 12 Pakistani two-piece suits and my knees were killing me by the time I was done with them. They iron on the ground here, and I had to squat up and down, and up and down. That is crazy!! I guess they have never heard of ironing boards. I hope I get one soon.

Yesterday, I heard about another white lady that was here for two months and couldn't take the lifestyle here and so she left.

She was here before I got here, so I didn't get to meet her. I wish I could've got to meet her. I wonder why she came to Pakistan? I was told she didn't like the clothes and she would hang out with the men. She didn't speak the language so you know the men were probably saying some vulgar things but she didn't realize it. A person like that wouldn't be able to live here for too long, that is for sure.

So that makes three women who have come and gone that I heard about. I guess my childhood really did prepare me for this move. Mom, I told you I could adjust to any place I live, thanks to you. You taught me how to be flexible and adjust to anything new. I hope that I can instill this same quality into my children.

Zain said that Shedi was clear up on the scaffolding working with the other men. He thinks he is such a big man now. And yes, he is still cussing everyone out, and he is such a bully. To beat the heat, he is now (thank God) taking three or four baths a day at the water pump. He loves to wash his hair and play in the water. I have to change his clothes three times a day, but at least he stays clean now. He goes to the pump himself and next thing I know, he comes to me saying, "Mommy, change my clothes."

He is such a little devil child and is living up to his new nick name. You should see some of the things he does. He peed on the dirty dishes yesterday. He walks by the big cow and gives it a swift kick in the butt when it's lying down. Then he chases the chickens. (By the way, we ate Super Rooster, and so the baby rooster has taken over as super wimp.) Anyway, Shedi also peed in some cumin seeds that Zain's mom was drying out; he ruined the entire batch of them.

Mona is no angel either. Yesterday, Roni got whipped. I didn't understand what was going on. All of a sudden there was a lot of yelling and Zain's mom picked up a stick and started hitting Roni. Then she started slapping her face and head. The kids started crying and I had to take them in the house and try to explain why Poopi was getting spanked. Of course I didn't even

know why; but I had to explain that even Poopi sometimes does things wrong and her mommy has to correct her. They just kept saying, "Poor Poopi."

Well, come to find out, she got a spanking cause Mona was doing dishes, and she saw the silver teapot, that was ready to go to the construction site for the workers, was full of tea. She decided she wanted to wash that too, so she took the tea and dumped it in the cow food.

So you're probably wondering why Roni got the beating? That's a good question. I asked Zain the very same thing. Well, Zain's mom said Roni was outside with Mona and that she should have been watching her and making sure that she didn't do anything wrong.

Roni didn't tell anyone about the tea being poured out until Zain's brother came home to pick it up. Suddenly Roni blurts out there is no tea. He starts screaming, Zain's mom finds out what happened, she got mad cause that was the last of the milk in the house, and if Roni had just told her she could've gotten some more milk to make some more tea in time before the brother got home to pick it up. Well, that's when the beating began. I felt really bad when I found out it was something Mona had done.

Well, both Mona and Shedi are spoiled little brats. Shedi is so spoiled and cries at a drop of a hat. He cries and you think he is really crying...tears and all. But if I fake cry along with him, he instantly stops and says, "I'm not talking to you anymore." Then we start laughing at the little faker.

Mona has started sewing. She practices on the sewing machine with no thread, and then I go ahead and thread a needle for her and let her sew by hand on scrap pieces of material. I told Zain I wanted to get her some embroidering stuff, because she is showing talent and interest at such an early age that we should encourage her interest. I'm going to get her thread, needles, and one of those wooden frames. I'll help her make her own little bag to carry her stuff in, and then let her take it from there. We have

plenty of material around for her to go crazy with. So don't be surprised to find little surprises in the mail from the little seamstress of mine.

About their school work—Shedi loves school; he loves to learn and do his alphabets (both Urdu and English). He brings papers to me and picks out letters for me—both English and Urdu. Mona is a total different story. She gives me trouble every time. I try to teach her, but she whines and says she is too tired. She is starting to write her name on things: “Arzoo” (that's what Abujohn calls her). She'll write Arzoo but doesn't have enough patience to write Mona; go figure.

Mona is thrilled that her hair is getting long again, and she tells everyone she's going to eat and eat, so she'll grow up and be big like Mommy. Now keep in mind, she tells me and Zain in English and tells her uncles and grandma in Hindko. Everyone comments on how well the children are speaking the language now. Both of them can hold their own in conversations.

Their favorite thing to eat now is watermelon. They eat it three times a day. And Zain is just as bad.

The wasps here are just getting out of hand. We have a nest in the door (the entrance door of all places). At one time I counted eight of them flying around in the doorway. No telling how many are in and out of there all day. Mona's been bit twice, Zain once, and Roni twice. Zain is just going to have to do something about it. I'm scared of them and so are the kids. After Mona got bit twice at night—two nights in a row—both kids sleep outside in the fan. The fan keeps all the bugs away. Me and Zain usually sleep inside the house; let me explain why.

There is one ceiling fan inside the room, and one stand up fan for everyone outside, so outside they have all of the beds filed in a row directly in front of the fan. By the time the air gets to me and Zain, there isn't much, so we sleep inside the room, directly under the ceiling fan. The ceiling fan is pretty old and doesn't put

out much air, but it's better than getting bit outside. But when the electric goes out, then we go outside too.

Well, last night it was so hot that I crawled in bed with Mona and Shedi. Mona was crying for me to sleep with her cause her tummy was hurting. I was cramped, but it was a lot cooler than inside. The inside room is smoldering when the fan is not on at all. Have you ever known a crazy bed system as this? Needless to say, I cannot wait till my house is finished and we get the generator and I get my own room. I'm just not used to sharing my bedroom with eight other people.

I taught the kids two new games: London Bridges and Red Rover. Mona loves London Bridges, and Shedi loves Red Rover. If you can think of any songs or children's games, write them down and let me know. I'm drawing complete blanks on them. You know what would be good is maybe a cassette with children's songs if you happen to find one. The songs we sing together are: Video Killed the Radio Star (Shedi's favorite); Bare Necessities (Shedi's favorite); Building Blocks (Shedi's favorite); Hey Good Lookin, Whatcha Ya Got Cookin (Mona and Shedi's favorite); and Cheep Cheep Chirp Chirp, (Shedi's favorite). As you can see, Shedi is quite the little song bird. I use it as part of his speech therapy.

Well, the time is now 12:30 pm and the electric has gone out three times already. I guess the electric company is shooting for a record of shut-offs today.

Boy have I got a news flash for you. I was sitting here writing to you and I heard Mona talking to Poopi in Hindko, saying when she gets big, she is going to have a baby. Then she'll get to hold it and put pretty clothes on it, put a prandi in her hair and make-up on her face, and she's going to be so happy. Then Mona came and asked me, "Mommy, were you happy when you got me? Did I kick you in your tummy? Will I have a girl baby?" Oh my god, we all just about busted. I could not believe the conversation I just had with my five-year-old daughter. Then she said,

“Mommy, when my baby gets big and big, and she has a baby, and then can I carry that baby?”

I told her, “Of course you can.”

Well, today is Tuesday; I waited till today because I talked to my sister-in-law in Arizona yesterday. Zain’s mom told her to give you the clothes and the prandas. I hope she does.

Later that day, I was upset about something that was said. Then Zain told me to cheer up and gave me 700 rupees and said to go shopping. So I did. Who can argue with logic like that? Several of us women went to Hazro, and in four hours we got me and Mona matching dress shoes and a ton of material for clothes—matching of course. I also got me another over-sized shawl, like a bed sheet. It is called *chadur*. A gigantic 6 meter duputta used to cover the whole body when out walking around.

I also got myself some glass bangles and the most beautiful ready-made outfit. I saw it hanging and I just wanted to tell the owner that I liked it. Well, he wanted 500 rupees for it, so I walked away down to the next cloth store. Next thing I know Amijon came up to me with the outfit in a bag. I almost had a heart attack. She talked them down to 400 rupees instead. It’s red and black with mirrors sewn on it and gold thread on the clothes and dupatta. I put on my new outfit when I got home, and Zain loved it. Of course he was a little shocked when he found out the price, and then he went into convulsion when he found out about that the rest of the shopping spree; the grand total was 1800 rupees. He jokingly told Shedi to get a stick, so that I could get a beating. We all had a good laugh, then me and Zain snuck off to our favorite restaurant and had dinner. What a great day we had. The weather was nice—it rained overnight, so it wasn’t so hot, and it made it tolerable to go shopping. Of course I probably won’t go shopping again for the rest of the summer, but I had my fill of it yesterday for a while.

I guess I should wrap this letter up for now and get it sent off. I am sure you have been waiting for it. I pray all is well, and I

anxiously wait for your next letter. I love you all and miss you very much, and wish all of you could be in my world for one week (one day just wouldn't be long enough –there is too much to see).

I love you and miss you.

Marsha

P.S. Mona's new song is "Stop! In the Name of Love." We sing it together and do the hand motions with it. Someday, the kids and I just might go on tour.

July 9, 1992

Dear Mom and All,

I hope you all had great parties, marriages, and birthdays. What a time for celebrations in Arizona! I'm so happy for all of you! Everyone here sends their congratulations.

Well, I'm just sitting here watching our version of 'Good Morning, America'; we (Zain and myself) call it Good Morning, Pakistan. They have news, sports, exercise, and a cartoon (usually Pink Panther, sometimes they have Disney cartoons), the weather, and some music. The show's pretty popular; of course we must consider that it's the only morning show in the country, but it's interesting nonetheless.

Yesterday was pretty exciting around here. Zain went to take a letter to Federal Express, and on the way back he got jumped by seven men. Thank God he didn't get hurt! Parts of the story is pretty funny, but they still shook him down for all of his money.

Man, it is so hot and humid these days. Phoenix is hot, but thank god at least it's dry heat! I feel like I'm in Florida right now. At 6:00 am I went to the bathroom and was pouring down sweat. A person almost wants to give up bathing altogether because when you take a bath you start sweating while putting your clothes back on. Just that quick. It is miserable.

Oh yeah Mom, I was talking with Mona again about babies, when she told me that she wanted to have a baby now. I said, "Oh no, not now; after you get married then you have babies." Well, after the little chat, I remembered to tell her about you and Cliff getting married. I said, "Oh yeah Mona, that reminds me, Grandma and Grandpa got married last week."

Mona replies with her eyes lit up as the sky, "Is Grandma going to have babies now?" I was rolling on the floor!

The house construction is going along just great. They finally started on the roof and the pillars in the front and the wall around the front. So much work is going on day and night. I know you all have a lot of questions about the new house, so this letter will be dedicated to the design of it.

I'm sure you've seen the maps by now. Well, let me elaborate on them. Let's start with the first level and the verandas. Don't ask me why, but there are more windows on one side of the veranda than the other. I think it has something to do with the positioning of the doors on each side the house. The side that has five windows, the windows are 6 feet wide. The side with six windows, the windows are 5 feet wide. So it evens out somehow. The outside windows will have bars, but all windows in the house will open up (including hall windows).

The house alone without the covered patio sits on a complete acre. So that gives you an idea of how big it is.

And yes, you read the diagram correctly, it does say servants' quarters. We will have two men working for us to take complete care of the cows and to act as guards. We will have an intercom system hooked between houses to let us know when someone is outside. Only the rich in America have this kind of set-up, but here in Pakistan it is very common. They will get room and board plus an additional 800 rupees a month each. The reason it is so common here is because labor is fairly cheap and people who can afford it are more than willing to; simply so they can say, they have a house boy or two.

So if people know you can afford it, then it is kind of expected, especially true for the town godi. It's a wonder I don't have body guards now the way people have put me on such a pedestal. So Zain said we will definitely have a guard at the gate. In Islamabad, at the military officials' homes, I've seen armed guards. We are talking AK47-looking guns standing guard 24

hours a day. But I don't think I need an armed guard—yet anyway.

The ground level of the house is 3 feet above the ground outside, so you have to step up to get in the house. There will be three doors you will have to pass through before getting to the living room. There is a roll down metal door on the outside layer that will be closed only at night. Next is French doors with mirrors. Then at the end of the corridor are beautiful wooden doors with glass sides. Then, finally, the living room with the dining room. We will put a curtain type of partition up to separate the living room from the kitchen. This way when there are guests they won't see the women working in the kitchen.

The way the house is designed we can have official business taking place in the living room and shut down portions of the house. I can be in my room, go up on the roof, or even leave the house, and never see the people in the living room, and vice versa.

The reason for the fireplace in the halls of the verandas are for when we have weddings and need to cook for 500-600 people; we have plenty of cooking spots.

Well, this gives you an idea of my house on the ground level. On the roof will be the laundry room, sewing room, water heater, laundry lines to dry, and a couple of fireplaces for those late night cookouts. And then later in the future we will put the second level up and it will include my master bedroom. Then everything that is currently on the roof will be moved up a notch to the next level.

There's is a catwalk that will go around the entire house on the second level. Zain drew a frontal view for you with the pillars and the pitch roof.

So what do you think? Wouldn't you want to stay in a palace like this, too? I'm so thankful I have a husband with dreams and ambition. So many people have told him he is crazy for building such a house; only because they can't grasp the lifestyle, unless they themselves had seen it in America too. It even took a while

to convince Zain's mom to move in with us. At first, she said there was no way was she leaving the house she got married in; but now she is just as excited as everyone else. She takes her girlfriends to the house and is giving tours already. I guess sometimes it is hard to change.

Interesting news: Farooq and Wafa have separated from the family unit and said they won't live in our new house. Instead they did some remodeling in the one room they are in. Whenever I look at them I can't understand why they want to live in this filth, but I told Zain that his brother just wants to be his own man, so that's fine with me.

Farooq has hated Zain ever since he got rejected on his American visa. I told Zain that Farooq just hates him for what he's done in his life—things that Farooq will never get a chance to do. Such as go to America (which every Pakistani man wants to do), and go to Hollywood and direct a movie (which even a lot of American men wish they could do). So I told Zain that when Farooq looks at him, he doesn't see the man who has been sending him money to live on all of these years, and who came here to Pakistan to help him better himself; instead, he sees a constant reminder of "See what I have done that you will never do." Quite sad actually.

Well, Sunday I'm going to Rawalpindi to a gynecologist. It's two women doctors from the United Kingdom. Zain went to the office and said it was very clean and professional, so I will go and get my six-month check-up. I'll let you know how it goes.

I am going to finish this letter for now and get it mailed out tomorrow. I love you all and miss you very much, but I love my new home, my new world, my new life, and I guess I like the kids and Zain, too. Hahaha.

Love forever,
Marsha

July 26, 1992

Hi Mom and All,

This week has been crazy. I can't believe I get to talk to you on Saturday; boy this month sure went fast. So how is everything there? I hope everyone is in good health. The kids are doing great. Zain's fine but has a toothache. I'm fine, but just have a bit of a cold.

I went to the ob gyn doctor, and I like her very much. She studied in England and speaks excellent English. She did a pap and pelvic. I have to go back for my test results this Thursday. I'll keep you posted. I did have a little yeast infection again, so she gave me some medicine for that.

The house is going along great. It's monsoons so we've lost a couple days of work. They finally got all the shuttering up, and now they are ready to place the rebar for the cement roof. The wall surrounding the property was stopped because Zain fired the two brick layers for goofing off too much on the job. The three new ones start Saturday. Thank God, now maybe we'll get the wall done.

The weather has just been crazy here. One minute it's lightning and thunder and pouring down rain, and then it just stops and the sun comes out and makes it miserably hot and humid. It's very unpredictable.

Zain finally got the transformer for the VCR, so we've been able to watch some videos. We can't watch them all the time cause the electric current goes strong at times, and then goes weak again. When it does that, all we see are x-rays with no sound at all. We find that late at night, and first thing in the morning,

are the best times for a picture. I finally got to see the HAPPY DAYS' REUNION show; I loved it.

Wafa and Farooq have publicly announced they are not speaking to us anymore. No one can understand them. Frankly, I do not even try anymore. I have had so much to deal with from her since I got here. Stealing money, and even a pair of my underwear. That is just gross!

Shedi chased someone's ducks into our yard. We had a heck of a time rounding them up and getting them out. My son is such a brat!!

Mona decided that she liked one of Zain's mom's clothes so much, that she wanted to sew her baby doll something with the material. So she got the scissors and cut pieces out to make clothes for her doll. Well, we all got a big laugh out of that. She's becoming quite independent. Now I just have to teach her that you can't just chop up people's clothes just anytime you feel like it. Good thing they weren't Amijon's dress up clothes.

Well, I miss you all very much and wish I could just pick up the phone and call. I hope you got your passport done.

I love you and miss you.

Marsha

By the way, what did disability social security say? I hope you don't have to go back to work now.

August 1, 1992

Dear Mom,

I'm sorry I haven't written lately, but I've been waiting for Zain to get these air-grams. How is everyone doing? I've got quite a bit to write about.

Today is Tuesday, and Wafa had her baby. She had a boy. Probably about five pounds and about yeaaaa long; the midwife doesn't take down these kind of stats. The baby is about three days old now. It all started Wednesday night about 11 pm when Zain and I went to the bathroom. I saw Wafa outside with a strange look on her face. Zain went to bed, and I went over to her and asked what was the matter with her. She told me she was hurting and that she was losing water. She is very ignorant and didn't know what was going on. I told her she was having the baby. She said no, she wasn't, and that she was fine. I told her to wake up Farooq, but again she refused and went inside to lay down.

I went back into our room and told Zain that she was in labor but the poor thing doesn't realize it. No one talks about babies here, so her mother probably never told her anything either. Well, I couldn't sleep knowing she might need help, considering she's delivering at home, so I went outside and paced a while, knowing it was only a matter of time that she would holler for help.

And it was. About ten minutes later she started crying for Farooq to wake up. They came outside and she laid down on the bed and I went and got some pillows and began rubbing her lower back. I then got a watch to time her contractions. She was four minutes apart with contractions. I told Farooq to get

someone; that it's time. The contractions soon went to three minutes apart.

One of my sisters-in-law came over and basically did nothing, just rubbed her back too. Farooq and her weren't doing anything, and I was wondering why. So I said, "Where is the midwife?"

Farooq said, "In Hazro." I said, "I think you should go get her; it's not going to be too much longer." Then he finally left to go get the midwife.

While he was gone her contractions went to 2 minutes apart, and she began to bleed. I was really pacing by this time. "*Where's the midwife?*"

Well, she finally got here and I waited outside. The other sister-in-law had to leave to get something from home, so I ended up in the delivery room. I had to wipe her head and push on her stomach and hold her legs open (she kept closing them together). Finally, the baby comes out with a ton of hair, then finally the shoulders and the butt. Good news is that the baby's fine and the mamma's fine, too.

Everyone is still wondering in amazement how I knew the baby was coming that night. I can't believe how uneducated these people are sometimes. They don't pay attention to signs or keep time of contractions. All they say is, "When God says it's time, the baby will come." Don't they understand that God gave us a science to baby delivering? Hahaha.

All in all, it was quite an experience. I have to admit I was all choked up when the baby finally came out. Now, here are some interesting facts of village no-doctor-delivery method:

- Melted butter warmed up and is rubbed on the stomach and vagina area.
- The umbilical cord is cut with string or a piece of thread. It's like they pinch it off, instead of cutting it.

- Baby and afterbirth is laid on the floor while the midwife cleans the mom. And by the way, the baby still attached to the afterbirth.
- They take the afterbirth and bury it in the same room (if it is a dirt floor) before cleaning the baby. I still do not understand that.
- Mother doesn't hold baby for the first five hours.
- Mom and baby doesn't come out of the house for five days.
- Mom takes no shower for 40 days. Only sponge baths.

Why they do all of these strange things: Just traditions past on for generations; I am sure there are some interesting stories how they got started. Nonetheless, totally different from America. I'll write some more in a couple days.

I love you.

Marsha

P.S. The baby's name is Amar.

August 1, 1992

Dearest Mom,

It was so great talking to you today. I am so excited about you coming to visit me. Mona was upset that she didn't get to talk to you. She said she wants you to bring her a Barbie doll, some clothes, make-up, jewelry, nail polish, and all of that stuff when you come. Shedi wants a big car and a plane. Now don't my children have their sex roles picked out or what... hahaha.

I was talking to Zain about setting up my school. There are so many things to get for the kids. Well, I had some ideas if you would be willing to help me, and I'm sure you would. I'd like for you to do some fund-raising for my "Phoenix School." Nothing on a big scale, just whatever people can donate. For each dollar, I can get 27 rupees. That can help me make tables and chairs. And I would love to have a chalkboard and a marker board. I will accept any kind of teaching material, books, posters, utensils, pens, chalk, anything to do with school. You could take some of that money and hit used bookstores to get me dictionaries, used school books, any kind of teaching materials that you can. Kiddy tapes would be excellent too. I even thought you could call up schools and see if they have any books to donate. Grades K-4th would be acceptable.

Surely with all your connections with investors you could raise some money. Zain will put the wall and the roof up, but that's all he can afford right now. He has to start his business and finish the house, so I understand. Any type of donation: new, used, or money will be greatly appreciated. I will make a plaque with all the names of donors to put on the school, and I will send them all thank-you letters personally. So please be sure to get

name and addresses for me. If you could collect the material and keep them at your house, Zain can see that they get here either with the two of you on the plane, or just ship them out. Of course money is great and easier; just send an international money order by registered mail. Valley National Bank has international money orders for \$1.50 Zain said.

Thank you so much, I know you'll do your best for these kids and me.

Love you.

Marsha

P.S. Change of plans! Zain will be there in Phoenix the 1st week in September due to some changes. Get your passport as soon as possible and send it off for the visa as soon as you get it.

The building of the school will start when you and Zain get back. Zain is too stressed right now, so I postponed construction on the school and told him to get away and take care of things in America. So, a couple things are rescheduled. Zain will leave within a week of moving into the house, which should be the 1st week in September.

August 25, 1992

Hi Mom,

Well, what a bummer, I thought I would get to talk to you this Saturday, but it's the Saturday after that. I pray things are all fine in Phoenix. I haven't received any letters lately. Last thing I got was the video and the song tapes. They were wonderful. I loved the video. You looked like you guys were enjoying the sun and the pool.

I love what you did with the pictures in the house. It looked so good. Zain's mom sure was delighted to see her daughter's message on the tape too. I actually understood 75% of what she said to everyone. That even shocked me. I guess I'm picking up more of the language than I give myself credit. I just can't talk and express myself like the kids.

Well, the baby Amar is doing just fine. Mona and Shedi are fine too and growing up so fast. I can't wait till you come and see them. Zain's uncle in America finally wrote to him. He sent some money and a letter. The letter stated that the money was to settle things between them. He also made a proposal to settle the long family dispute regarding the properties in both America and Pakistan. Of course Zain disagrees with his ideas. It seems that this family feud will go on for a long time.

Well, the rain has been terrible again and has delayed the house so much. But I can't complain. Hundreds of families have lost their homes and are living in tents, and worse yet, 81 people have died as a result of the bad storms we've had. So I don't dare complain when I see what it has done to others.

The roof is finally ready to be poured within the next couple of days. That's if it doesn't rain more. We went to Rawalpindi for

a couple of days and went shopping, got some books for my school, clothes for me, and a gorgeous three-piece suit for Zain. Saw a beautiful jewelry box that I wanted to get for you. It was a hand-made wooden box; you will love it. I love going to Islamabad and Rawalpindi, but unfortunately, I always get diarrhea when I go. Yuck!! It must be the change in water.

This time, we found the most wonderful French restaurant; I will take you when you come and visit. Man, the food was so delicious.

We also went to the American Embassy and American Center. They have a library there, so I'm going to check out books on teaching skills. I have some books on reserve already, until I get my library card.

I rode the city buses for the first time, and that was an experience in itself. You do not get to choose your seat—they tell you where to sit. They ended up separating us (me and Zain). Zain was nervous, but it turned out okay. I was fine, I just kept looking back to make sure he didn't jump off without me. The bus was crowded and noisy. They kept blaring the horn to warn people to get out of the way. We'll ride the bus one time when you're here. It is something to talk about; that is for sure.

The whole village is buzzing about your coming, they can't wait. You are going to be treated like royalty visiting. Don't think it's all going to be fun; I am going to put you to work; that is for sure. I've got 36 windows I have to cover at the new house.

So Mom, I need you here with me. So I hope you got your passport. Bye for now.

Love you,
Marsha

P.S. We opened a quaint little general store, and so far it's a great success. And I love having my own store; I can get everything at wholesale prices. You'll love it when you see it. And please don't tell anyone about Zain and his problems with his uncle. These things are highly confidential.

October 28, 1992

Dear Mom, (and Zain, *medy budia*—I am not talking to you anymore!!)

How are you doing? I bet by now you are pretty tired of your visiting foreign exchange student, named Zain? So much has gone on since Zain left that it is hard to pick a place to start to even write about.

Well, my life changed instantly today, Farooq's thief/liar wife Wafa just got back today from her mother's. She was gone for ten wonderful short days. Unfortunately, that means that now I'm back to her constant yapping, lying, stealing self again; having to watch my stuff like a hawk. She even went as far as to steal some cookies I had hid from the kids in the kitchen. She left the wrapper of the cookies and stole the bubble gum I had saved for the kids. Who does that? When I asked her about it, of course she denied it all the way.

Anyway, work is going steady on the house. I go tomorrow to inspect it.

Shedi is such a bald little turd. I can't believe how mean he is. Thank God his hair is finally growing back. Mona is such a fashion fanatic that she drives me crazy. She's got to have new clothes sewn it seems like every day. She goes to her tutoring every morning faithfully. Shedi is the opposite; he screamed and screamed about going this morning; he just doesn't want to go.

All three of us have had colds again. Actually, most of the people we know have colds, probably because of the weather change.

Tonight I'm going to put earrings in Mona's ears; I had one in today and she wouldn't let me put the second one in, so I'll just wait until tonight when she is asleep again.

Today is Saturday and there are 13 people working at the construction site. Anyway, I went there yesterday, and the house is so beautiful, especially with windows and a stucco job. Mom, you're just going to faint when you see it in person. With the windows in the verandas it looks so massive. I just couldn't believe my eyes. I fell in love with the house all over again. The guest bathroom is simply magnificent. After seeing the short walls in the brothers' rooms I want mine and Zain's room the same way. I think I'm going to have my door moved too. It's my room, so I can if I want, right?

Mona and Zain's mom went to Rawalpindi to Amijon's sister's house yesterday. We call this aunt Peachy Massy; I really like her. They came back and brought with them a pregnant goat and Peachy Massy's son. The boy will go home soon, but the goat is ours. She's due to have the kid in about a week or so. Mona says she's going to milk her each day so we can drink chai. (She is so grown up now.) Zain's mom had to pay 30 rupees for the goat to ride home on the bus with them. Yes, those things don't only happen in the movies, like "Romancing the Stone". Remember the scene when the heroine is on the bus and how it was so crowded—there's Pakistan for ya.

Shedi hit Roni today with a stick in her face. When I went to spank him for it, he took off running out the yard. About half an hour later he comes back with 15 marigolds that he had picked from someone's house, and said, "Here Mommy, these are for you." My anger instantly melted. How do you spank a little fuzzi-headed brat who has a way of hitting your soft spot in your heart?

And then Shedi almost burnt his Aunt Zenith today. I had to spank him for playing in the fire. Then he came in and I caught him drinking the cough medicine. I nearly had a heart attack, but I guess it's my fault for leaving the stuff in his reach. So now it has

a padlock on it too. Thank God he only took a swallow, and that it was only the cough medicine and not the peroxide that was kept in the same box. I remember I had told him I was going to give him some medicine; I guess he just took it upon himself.

Today someone that Zain's mom knows passed away. I don't know her name, but everyone around here seems to know who she was.

Oh my god. It seems I just started a fight between Wafa and Zain's mom, something about some stupid cookies being passed out to the villagers when she got back from Rawalpindi. (Well, this is a real dinger.)

It all started when I caught Wafa outside eavesdropping on us again. So I boldly told her to come in and sit down instead of standing in the shadows lurking and listening. Words began to fly and now the whole neighborhood is here to see what all of the fighting is about, and it's getting pretty crowded now. I am really pissed because they keep bringing me into it; like it's all my fault somehow.

Zain's mom started crying and Wafa pretended to cry—with her all fake-ass tears. Then me and Farooq got into a screaming match, then I followed them into their room and we stood there screaming for a couple more minutes. (Good thing he didn't cuss at me because I would have jumped him for sure.) Farooq kept saying, "Go sit down; you don't understand." I told him that many times I sat and listened to him cuss his mother out, that they're not going to bring me into this, and I am going to talk and stand up for myself. Too bad he doesn't understand English cussing.

Well, the fight didn't last too long, but I'm sure it will pick up tonight around dinnertime. Now maybe they'll think twice about using my gas cylinder to cook with, and I bet you it will be a while before Wafa eavesdrops again; with me knowing about it anyway.

All the neighbors have left now, hopefully I can get this letter done. Poor Wafa's not in a good mood now. Awww. What a shame!

I didn't tell you that Wafa broke my fireplace today too, the one that I made myself. She says she didn't break it, but after so many lies, it's hard to believe anything she says anymore. Then she left her baby outside, and it almost got trampled by the pregnant goat. She's a smart cookie, isn't she?

Oh yeah, last night on TV, there was a white lady that has lived here for 37 years. She speaks excellent Urdu and still mixes in English like I do. She was a teacher who married to a Pakistani man 40 years ago, and moved here with him. It might be interesting to know that her husband passed away a couple of years ago, and she is still staying here with her co-wife and their kids. I will never understand that. To each his own, I guess.

I hope to see you all very soon; I miss both of you terribly.

Marsha

P.S. Tell everyone I said "hi," and don't forget to start taking your medicine, and get your Gamma-Globulin shot.

Mom, please give this note to Zain:

Dear Zain,

Happy birthday! It's Sunday night and thank God your brother got the money. Thanks doll for sending it. Thanks for your letters. And thanks for the blonde jokes, just what I needed to hear, being the only blonde within miles and miles.

Well, how is your butt? Why didn't you tell me about the pimple gone nuclear on you again? Why is it a secret? Why did you tell your brother and not me? I thought you could tell me anything; haven't I proved that by now?

Aslam is sick; so he no longer sleeps at the construction site. Matter of fact, no one is sleeping there now. Your one brother is still sleeping with the wood, but the new house is unguarded. And Mamood, I guess is his name, is not getting married for a

while. The girl's parents never came back to say yes. Poor guy. I know it was his mother who blew it this time.

Oh yeah, your favorite show, Guest House, is no longer on the air. They had a special good-bye show. Why no more Guest House? I don't know, but we will miss it.

Well, today is Sunday, and just this morning I wrote in this letter that Aslam is not at the construction site at night. Then your brother (who has an attitude problem these days) came home to get the morning tea; he said someone had broken the lock off the little house. We don't know if anything was stolen as of yet. Zain, you really need to come home and take control of the situation.

You just received your 3rd request to come for a test on the freeway job in Attock on Nov. 8, 1992. I'll make sure your brother goes in your place.

I love you both and miss you both very much. I can't wait until I can count down the days till you come home. I've been sad since you left, and your mother doesn't know what to do with me. Poor thing. She tries to keep me happy, but seeing the two of you will be the one thing that turns my tears to smiles again.

November 2, 1992

Dearest Mom,

I received your letter first thing this morning. I have to admit that I am having very mixed emotions. I guess I really don't know how to act finding out that my molester has just recently died; and then to find out my picture was still in his wallet after all of these years? That is just creepy. That really is all I can say. I don't know what more I could say. I am sure the entire ordeal has been difficult for you too. As far as his sons are concerned, I am not surprised at all how they acted so callused towards you; you were always just the step-mother in their eyes.

Receiving your letter today made me realize how far away I am. I feel very helpless. There's absolutely nothing I can do in these types of situations. I am sorry I couldn't be there to support you. It is rather strange having to deal with all of those people after all of these years.

Okay, changing the subject now. Like yourself, I am anxiously awaiting your visit. Although your letter had some bad news, I was more than thrilled to have received a letter from my mommy today. Why didn't you tell me all of this on the phone? Oh well, I still love getting your letters.

I told Zain's mom that you said "hi" and you'll see her in a short while. She said "hi" back and started rattling off something way too fast for me to understand, but she was smiling from ear to ear. She can't wait for you to get out here and show you off to all of her friends and family and take you shopping. Real soon we are going to kill a goat for your and Zain's safe journey. Don't worry, you won't have to step over it like in the movie, *Not Without My Daughter*. Hahaha.

We'll kill the goat and feed the children in the neighborhood.

And about Zain not eating the dinner you cooked at home, don't worry about that at all. He is very picky, and even when we lived in America, he did his own cooking, so it sounds like Zain is just being my honey-bunny-Zain-self. Cooking is one of his favorite things; he gets a lot of pleasure out of cooking, so don't worry about him, and don't feel as if you're letting him down. You didn't. You and Zain's mom are the greatest mothers-in-law in the world.

Mona wants you to bring her some more of this kind of notebook paper that I am now writing on, the kind with cartoons on the front flap. You know, spiral notebooks.

I am going to close for now. I can't wait to see you soon. I love you very much. Tell Zain I said hi and that I love him. The kids talk about the two of you all the time. When they catch me crying they say, "Don't cry Mommy. Abujon and Grandma will be here soon." Sometimes they talk so grown-up.

All of my love,

Marsha

P.S. Mona wants another water baby, and Shedi still wants a gun.

end of letters

Various items which were found inside the letters:

- Lock of my hair from the time that I had dyed it red with henna.
- A paper bird cut out by Mona.
- Entire letters full with drawings and coloring book pages done by the kids.
- Newspaper clippings (some funny, some showing landmarks). Most of them have comical things written all over them. (I guess I thought I was a comedian.)
- A pressed flower (possibly a marigold).
- Various origami done by kids.

Photo Gallery



My very first Urdu reader.



The sketch of the alphabet chart that I did. (From the original letter.)



Me making my own fireplace.



The kids playing in the courtyard.



Mona watering Erma.



The first time that I ever milked a cow.



Our little red truck. We are going to the hospital in this picture.



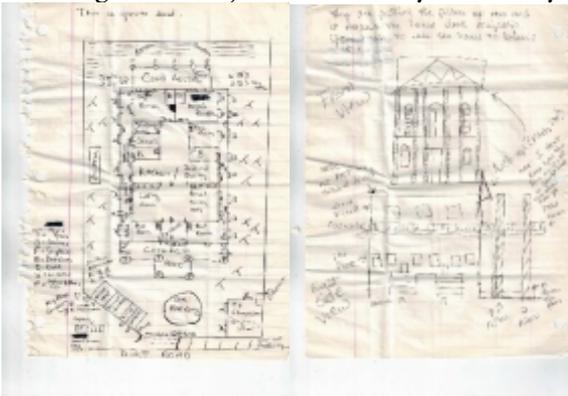
The kids with the little girl whose arm got broken.



Me with my Lucille Ball hair.



Showing off a marijuana leaf on my 2nd honeymoon.



Scans of the actual letters with the sketches of the new house.



A family blessing on the new house.



The family the day of the blessing on the new house. This is the front door to the main hall.





Front and side views of the new house during construction.



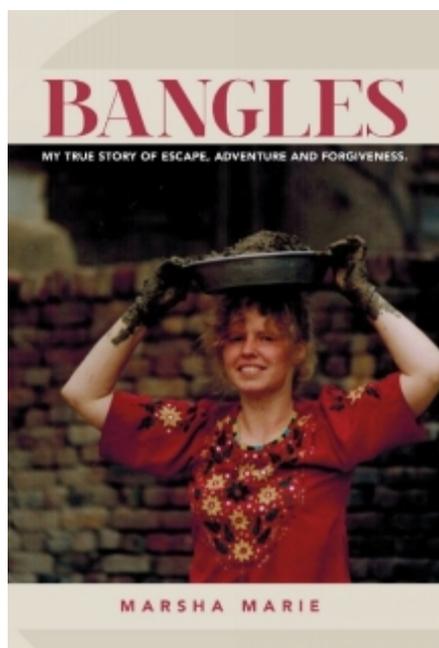
Me and the kids at our new house. We finally made it; but that was only the beginning of our journey in Pakistan.



Scan of a few of the original letters.



Marsha 'Marsha' Marie has been a writer, human rights activist, English instructor and department head, American accent trainer, communication lab designer, voice-over talent, blogger, administrative assistant and mom. Born in Ohio, but raised in Arizona; Marsha lived and taught in Asia for over two decades. She has now returned to Arizona and lives with her children. *BANGLES* is her self-publishing debut. Check out www.marshamarie.com for updates on upcoming titles in the BANGLES Series.



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."

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