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“Stop Daddy, Mommy is good.” Those words became the catalyst for change. When my mother heard me speak these when I was only a year and half old. It made her realize that this was not the environment that she wanted to raise her daughter in. She thought what if years from now I asked her, “Mommy, why did you stay in an abusive relationship despite being educated and having the financial means?” She would not have an answer. It was at that moment that she grabbed her car keys, with my brother and I in tow and nothing else, she walked out of the home that she worked so hard to build. For years, my mother had suffered my father’s abuse simply because divorce is hated in the Islamic faith. Just as baby Jesus spoke during a difficult time for Mary, my mother needed to hear those words from me. It was divine love that had me speak those words because God knew that my mother would do anything to protect her daughter and break the cycle of abuse.

For years, family members and even Imams had told her to end the relationship but she endured for the sake of her children. However, the words spoken I spoke that day resonated with her and her next chapter of life began. God knew that she, due to her love for the divine, would never file for divorce as the dissolution of marriage is the most hated thing in the Islamic faith; my father would have to initiate the process. The divorce proceedings were tumultuous and my mother tried her hardest to shield my brother and me from the volatile environment. She held strong to her faith. In the *Quran*, Chapter 2, verse 216, states: “...though it is hateful unto you; but it may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knoweth, ye know not.” My

earliest childhood memory begins in divided households. Days turned into weeks, weeks turned into months and the shuffling back and forth from one house to another normalized.

Unexpectedly, my mother would face another challenge. My once strong and determined mother became frail and weak. She was fighting for her life after being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Once again she relied on her faith. Her favorite verse in the *Quran* is “Allah tasketh not a soul beyond its scope” (*Quran*, 2:286). She was grateful that at this delicate time of her life, she was out of the hostile marital environment as it would have been detrimental to her healing. The marriage was a tumor that had to be removed. She prayed for the best and prepared us for the worst case scenario.

My mother encouraged my brother and I to develop a relationship with my father, but he had no interest. He left us with his parents and went off to pursue other marriages. Our paternal grandparents saw us as my mother’s offspring and left us alone in our rooms. They showed no interest in us over the next few years. My brother graduated from college and my mother had him don his black cap and gown and drove him over to his paternal grandfather’s house so that they could see their grandson on the day of his graduation. My grandfather was too frail to travel, though I’m not sure if he would come to the ceremony if he could either.

Months later, my grandfather appeared to be on his death bed. My father left him and my paternal grandmother to visit his fourth wife in Canada. He asked my brother to keep an eye on them. While my father was away, my grandfather fell and my brother was there to take care of him. The woman who was instrumental in creating a rift between my father and mother, my paternal grandmother, told my brother, “tell your mom thanks.” My mother always told us to “overcome evil with good” (*Quran*, 13:22). It was my mother who was driving my brother back and forth to his father’s house since my brother’s visual disability prevents him from driving. My mother not only taught us to be kind but to live by her example. In the *Quran* it states in several chapters to return evil with kindness. In Chapter 13, verse 96 it states: “Repel evil with that which is better. We are best aware of that which they allege.”

My grandfather continues to be present in our lives. Recently, he was admitted into a rehabilitation facility which we thought was to live out the rest of his life. My mother, who had not seen

her ex-father-in-law for fifteen years, went to visit him one last time. My grandfather, upon seeing my mother, put his palms together and said, "Please forgive me, forget the past." He motioned her to come close and she obliged. He kissed her on the forehead. "Let them forgive and show indulgence. Yearn ye not that Allah may forgive you? Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" (*Quran 24:22*).

It took a lot of strength for my mother to go visit him. With every step towards his room a flood of memories filled her head. As she saw him lying in bed, she had a flashback to him pretending to have difficulty going up the one step on the witness stand during the domestic violence hearing; the lies he told on the stand were to save his son, and to cover up the way he treated us, his grandchildren. As she relayed the story to me, her proudest moment was not the apology, but the way my brother was taking care of his grandfather during their visit; it was then that she knew she raised him well.

My brother remembers everything that my paternal grandparents did to tear the family apart. However, our faith allows him to live his life with dignity as he embraces compassion rather than bitterness, affection rather than animosity, and love rather than hatred. My father's treatment of my brother and I is less than idealistic. His vitriolic verbiage continues to leave scars in our hearts. As hard as it is at times, I remain calm when he's yelling at me and patient during his lengthy rants badgering my loved ones. I always treat him with kindness. My father is set in his way of thinking.

Irrespective of how he treats me, I will fulfill my role as his child to take care of him in his old age. I stand by my religious teachings and moral values to respect my father despite his shortcomings and to forgive him. I will not fight hatred with hatred. My father's acrimonious behavior has taught me a valuable life skill. Given the current divisive political climate in this country, now more than ever darkness needs light and hatred needs divine love. Divine love is not just the love God bestows upon you but the love you have for God, which supersedes any hatred, brutality, and violence. "Those who spend (of that which Allah hath given them) in ease

and in adversity, those who control their wrath and are forgiving toward mankind; Allah loveth the good;” (*Quran* 3:134).