

Ali Yaqub: *An Autobiography*

ENG4A

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The beginning of the end all started on the early Tuesday morning of September 8, 1984 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. My brother Hassan was just heading out to his first day of Grade 1, my other brother Shiraz had a smelly diaper, A-Ha had the number one hit single in *Take On Me*, and Ralph Macchio was experiencing his first and last hit movie in *The Karate Kid*.

Then I was born.

My parents knew right away that I was a disaster. I was one of those abnormally obese babies, so my birth was quite a challenge, leaving my left arm with a horrific abnormality after the doctors had to tweeze me out with some giant forceps. Aside from being immediately handicap, the following two years went as expected; I cried constantly, largely due to the lack of left arm usage, as well as smelling a constant barrage of spices and seeing extremely dark savages picking me up or hovering over my baby carriage. Yes, I was born a Pakistani.

I'm guessing that my childhood was typical of most western-born Pakistanis living in a predominantly French hick village outside of Ottawa. If only my parents had remained true to the typical immigrant lifestyle of coming to Canada and settling in a large city like Ottawa or Toronto. But no, we ended up moving an hour east of Ottawa in a place called Limoges.

The most difficult aspect of my life was clearly the background culture I came from clashing with my Western values. My home was like a typical Pakistani house, where sautéed onions and curries are a staple of our diet. Hence they are left simmering on the stove for three quarters of a day. The other quarter of the stove's day is reserved for brewing chai.

I still remember going to school smelling like spices. Of course, to most French people who have never seen someone darker than Ernie from *Sesame Street*, I was considered a freak that never heard of a shower. So, obviously, I got severely harassed, most notably by a fat prick named Shawn Blair every lunch hour in junior kindergarten.

The beatings continued until Grade 1, when I adopted a better strategy of dealing with the racial tensions. You see, these were the days when it was suddenly hip to be dark. Kris-Kross was unusually popular, *Boyz in the Hood* was a blockbuster movie, and rap music took on a whole new meaning with people like DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince. So why bother being Pakistani when I could convince the children of Cambridge Public School that I was Black?

So I bought the Malcolm X shirts and baggy pants, and got the spiked box-cut hairdo. Sadly, it worked like a charm. I was suddenly cool in school. When the little white kids wanted any advice on rap music or black history, I was the one they looked to.

By Grade 5, and after being bombarded with scenes of the LA riots, Tupac's criminal negligence, and the media constantly associating blacks and crimes, I incorrectly assumed that being true to my newly adopted race required being a badass. The fondest memory of my "badassness" would have to be the senseless vandalism of a local park with my older brother Shiraz and younger brother Zishan, and three of our neighbours. Our goal was to cap off the demolished play structure with a fiery explosion in the garbage can. Unfortunately, we had no idea what we were doing, so after dumping two or three litres of gas into the can we attempted to ignite. Not realizing that the gas fumes themselves were flammable, the instant we struck the match was the same instant I had no facial hair and my younger brother was flying backwards through the air.

Fortunately no one was severely injured, but we were eventually caught and had to serve community service by repairing the exact play structure we destroyed. If only there was community service to allow someone to reinsert my eyebrows.

By the time I reached Grade 7, my parents finally realized that Limoges was not for Pakistani people, so we ended up moving to the east-end of Ottawa in a so-called "ghetto" where we blended in perfectly with the multicultural mosaic around us. From here I attended Hawthorne Public School, where I experienced a barrage of insults and humiliating experiences which have left me emotionally scarred and self-conscious forever. You see, it had nothing to do with the colour of my skin now, but instead had to do with my hyper-obesity and womanly breasts, or what my brother Hassan likes to call "Rocket Nips".

I contemplated applying my brother's technique (who suffers the same condition) of taping my nipples back before dressing every morning, but after watching the extra humiliation he still suffers after everyone discovered his solution, I decided against it.

Luckily, by the summer before Grade 9, my parents decided to move to the west-end of Ottawa and settle in the cozy suburbia of Nepean. This is where I decided to begin wearing baggy sweatshirts, and start making cool friends before people saw me with my shirt off. Surprisingly, it didn't work. Okay, that's not entirely true, it did work to some extent but sadly the high school culture is still very shallow and materialistic, which means that I still had to *look* cool to *be* cool.

During the summer after Grade 10 at Sir Robert Borden High School, I took a trip back to the homeland. My parents decided to deal with my brother Shiraz's alcoholism and criminal behaviour by arranging his marriage with a nice girl from my mother's hometown of Chichawatni. It was a bizarre way of dealing with the problem in my opinion, but it actually worked.

In Chichawatni I experienced the Pakistani culture to the full extent. My uncles pretty much own the little town they live in through corruption and extortion. If you don't vote for them in the city elections, you might as well be dead. The same goes for your spouse and children. This also had its drawbacks however, since our family has many enemies

for the same reasons. The advantage to this was that I got to hold a shotgun, AK-47, or small 9mm handgun every time we traveled in the car.

When I returned from Pakistan, I had lost a remarkable amount of weight, partly due to the 40 degree weather, but largely due to the malnutrition I experienced after eating rotten ice cream at a restaurant called *Bundhu Khan*. But this was a fantastic start to finally getting rid of the obesity I had experienced since the days of the forceps. So I started working out intensely, incorporating vigorous cardiovascular exercise with a weight training program. Now if only I stopped visiting the 24 hour Denny's Restaurant on a constant basis.

What the future holds for me is a mystery to everyone. My father seems to be pretty confident that I'll end up behind a Chinese restaurant, picking up scraps of half-eaten chicken balls for survival. Constable White of the Ottawa-Carleton police would also agree. But I don't think he likes chicken balls, which I once offered to him but he refused intently since he was more focused on the car stereo that I supposedly stole.

This brings us to the present, where I am now attending summer school at Merivale High School, which I personally feel should have been closed a long time ago due to its deteriorating walls and lack of air conditioning. What brings me to Merivale is interesting in itself, and it has to do with my exceptional academic record. Constable White would also agree.