

Autobiography report



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I am Mariam Hanafi, and I plan to keep it that way even after I marry, although that's not going to happen for a while. I'm now fifteen, doing my GCSE's and preparing frantically to go to college next year. I don't know yet where I want to study, or what I want to study, but there are a lot of doors open...

I was born on the 19th of May, in 1985, into an Egyptian family. I have two sisters, much older than myself, whom I have often thought of as my second and third mothers. I was born in Dubai, where I've been brought up and consider home. I do visit Egypt often, but always as a tourist or a guest. If I end up going to university there, it should be one big independent adventure. A lot of people tell me it's scary for young girls like me, and that nobody is to be trusted there, but I believe life's about experiences and trying things out for yourself, not just taking the wiser's word for them.

Up until I was around six, my family and I lived in a two-bedroom apartment in Karama, in a compound which also accommodated my favorite cousins and fellow playmates -two boys, one older and one younger than me, and a girl my age. We spent long afternoons playing out the roles of our favorite animated heroes: the Ninja Turtles. We would jump on the couches and wave around imaginary weapons and fight the enemies in our heads. I had been attending kindergarten and lower school at the same school my sisters went to: Dubai Gem Private School.

On the last day of an academic year, some years ago, my father decided to treat us by promising to pick us up and take us out for lunch, instead of us having to ride the big, crowded, and terribly stuffy school bus home. It wasn't

usual to be going home by car because of our parents' clashing work timings. Consequently we stood at the front of school, shaking with excitement, and I recall being ever so happy - I felt like I didn't care if I had to give away all my chocolates - when daddy arrived in a brand new car: a spacious dark blue Dodge.

My father has a love for ostentatious American cars; I personally think they're quite unsightly. In my fifteen years, our family has owned two Buicks, a Dodge and, most recently, a Dodge-Chrysler, alongside a gray Mercedes and a Fiat. My favorite out of the list was a small white Toyota Corolla, new and flashy in its time - I've always been the type to prefer being in a cozy, comfortable corners rather than roomy, open spaces. Despite this, that summer my father informed us we were to move to a bigger, better part of town into a bigger, better apartment. I was excited at first, as all kiddies are when anything new comes along, but when the actual moving was to be one I'd have given anything to stay close to my fellow Ninja Turtles.

Along with changing residences, we had to change schools for complicated reasons that went something like this: the highest year at Dubai Gem was year 6, and by then my eldest sister Heba had graduated and was ready for senior school. Marwa and I had to move too because - somehow, for some reason - it was best if all three of us were together. Maybe it happened for financial reasons, maybe just because there would only be one PTA meeting and one open day for my parents to attend, maybe I would have been less lonely if I had my mummies with me in school. So, accordingly, I started junior 2 at Arab Unity School, coming home everyday to a new apartment, having to face new classmates, teachers, and naturally, neighbors.

I remember a boy, Aneesh, to whom I was quite attracted. He was Pakistani, the nationality that seemed to rule the new school. We rushed to be partners on every possible occasion, whether for schoolwork, sports class or the little skits we did for assembly. Aneesh and his parents welcomed me almost every weekend at their place, and vice versa. I vividly remember the last day of school that year: my parents and I dropped by his house, and he presented me with an enormous box wrapped in gift paper. The parents had been having coffee and chatting while we sneaked to his room to open the present together: it was a Barbie gift set, consisting of slippers, a hand bag, a small umbrella, a hat and accessories, all in a brilliant shade of plastic pink. I remember loving that present so much, I think I hugged it tighter than I had hugged Aneesh that day. I put everything on and pranced around the room for a while, promising him I'd buy him an equally precious gift the next academic year. Little did I know then that that was the last time I'd ever see Aneesh.

For junior 3, I was moved to Rosary School in Sharjah. This time, I didn't bother trying to figure out why - I was too busy being torn between eagerness and depression. Moving to Rosary meant I'd have to change friends again, and I knew I would miss Aneesh for life, but then Rosary was the school for the Lebanese part of our community. My 7-year-old mind couldn't help stop thinking of all the dressing-up tips I'd learn, all the cute Lebanese guys I'd meet. It was going to be heaven... once I got used to the change.

In fact, far from my immature imagination, Rosary School was not a pretty sight. It was a Catholic school, where the headmistress and a substantial

fraction of the staff were Sisters, and the majority of the students were Lebanese - yes, true. I got that part right. I spent four years there and by then I had developed a Lebanese accent and snobbish qualities. I recall nothing of significance during that time, except that I was a Brownie for one year, my last. I had started to have more adult opinions of the school then, liking it more and more, appreciating the actual academic side of it. I believe that happened because I was the senior of the juniors, the oldest of the children. I felt mature and responsible during school hours, which was a contrast to how I felt at home, being the youngest -by far- in a family of five.

Rosary, like Dubai Gem, only offered education up to junior 6. By the end of my last year I applied for Latifa School for Girls, which hyped me up while contradictorily depressing me (as change always does to me). I could not imagine being in an all-girls school, and I felt I could never learn to like locals, who in my eleven-year-old mind always seemed rich, conceited, and powerful. The reason for this would be that I had never learned to deal with new people, and that I myself had grown to be arrogant and selfish.

However, my mom had convinced me that the school was reputed and that it was for smart, rich girls. Naturally, I felt quite smart and rich myself the day she informed me of my acceptance at the all-mighty Latifa School. (It so happened that my sisters have many a time applied but got rejected, which added to my pride and ego.)

I had had many problems settling down at my new school. I was not used to the impossibly small number of girls in each grade, the locker system, the luxurious lifestyles my classmates had, and worst of all, the attention the

teachers and staff paid each individual student. I found it awkward and uncomfortable that I was the only one who was not either local or western, the only one who lived in 'just an apartment', the only one who didn't have straight, attractive, easy-to-manage hair; I did not speak fluent English like classmates who came from DESS and JESS... And the list goes on.

At home, my sisters had finished their senior years and went off to college in Egypt. It had been peaceful at home, and I didn't need to fight for my independence as much, for I didn't feel like the baby of the house now my adult sisters weren't around. I was able to live my teenage years without being compared to or looked down upon by anybody. And eventually the beginning of my attendance at Latifa School started to seem friendlier and more graceful...

Diverting from school and change - which is prominently what I've been talking about - this is to describe my experience with the internet. I was introduced to the web over two years ago. Unsurprisingly, I started constantly chatting to people all over the world, as internet broke out as the latest fad. I had even chatted to one girl in the US of A enough to believe that she was my best friend at the time. We made many friends, my sister Marz and I, one of whom Marz ended up marrying and is now my brother-in-law. I had also met a young man online, who for a long time was my steady. I traveled to Egypt three times that year, on every occasion - usually the random weeks off school - just to be with him. Admittedly, seeing my sister marry somebody who started off as an e-friend, I had high hopes that my long-distance relationship would work if I tried hard enough... evidently, I couldn't have been more wrong. Nonetheless, I did learn a lot of good,

traditional traits from this conservative, conventional Egyptian person who is now my ex-boyfriend.

To sum up: I live in the same apartment in Deira that was so unfriendly when offered to my father by his company in 1992; I attend the same school that made me feel queer and inferior in the beginning. All the different qualities and characteristics I have picked up from the many different communities in which I've participated are the foundations to what I am today, and the way I behave... and, consequently, what I'm going to study next year.