

# GENERATION



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## A Page from Ayesha's Story

### How APPNA continues its charitable mission most of which is unknown to even its members

She looked at him through the faint glow of the night light in the corner of the room. This would be the last look at him and perhaps she was never to see him again. He looked so peaceful and contented in his sleep. He lay there on his side still sucking his thumb his small chest heaved as he took tiny sips of air. She bent down to kiss him and felt his warm breath. A sudden surge of maternal instinct gripped her. It was an irresistible impulse, one she could not deny nor overcome. In a hurry she picked him in his blanket and hoping that he would not wake the household, she quietly opened the door of her apartment, tiptoed across the threshold and slipped out into the bitterly cold and dark night outside. She quietly closed the door behind her on her home and on a chapter in her life.

It was 2 am in Chicago. She checked his blanket and feared that he would be frostbitten by morning unless she could find a shelter, any shelter within the hour. Had she made the foolish decision endangering not only herself but the first born son she had borne? She feared for her own life and even more for her son. Would she be abducted by the criminals that roam the streets or freeze to death by morning still clutching one she had given life to? There in the middle of the dark and mean streets of Chicago stood a woman medical doctor with her precious cargo in the middle of now here with no where to go to, no one to turn to, no money to even hail a cab if one could be found.

Walking a few blocks and trying to be inconspicuous while at the same time hoping she would see a police car which she could hail was the most terrifying experience. Luckily she found a phone booth from where she called 911. "Take me to a shelter" she said to the police car that came to her rescue. They looked at her not knowing what to make of it. She looked different but spoke fluent English. What was she doing at this in-God's hour? They took her to a shelter for abused women.

"This will be your bed, Ayesha" said the matron of the shelter. "No smoking, no drinking and no boyfriends and no phones." The reality sunk in at this point. She had taken an irreversible step. She had walked out of an arranged marriage. She looked

around the room where some of the women were fast asleep while others were appearing to be dozed as the lights in the room were turned on to accommodate her. In another room cries of infants were audible. Not a single woman without children were sleeping in bunks. Strange sounds, smells and a world apart from one she had lived in just 40 minutes ago. Without being obvious she looked around. Not a single desk face. She was distracted by the crying of her son who had by now awoken from his sleep.

Thus begins the real life experience of a highly educated member of society, the pride of the family and the mother of an infant son becoming destitute, deserted and left like a derelict in a no name shelter, somewhere in the metropolis of Chicago teeming with millions but with no one to help her. She is penniless in the land of plenty where folklore paints it as streets paved with gold and milk and honey running in the streets. For her there was no one but her God and her son.

Just how things get this way is a long story. It starts in Karachi where she lived all of her life. Born in Pakistan to a middle socioeconomic class, there were few choices for careers especially for girls. Her father a career civil servant raised the family with the advice that education would serve her well. She never forgot that. She applied herself to books often shunning social engagements when her girl friends would chose to go to concerts or parties. Lying on the sparse bed with her son besides images of her past flashed before her as she could not sleep. She remembered the medical college days in Karachi, the morgue, the anatomy lectures, the clinical rounds and the night duties she did. She saw women in distress as they came to deliver their babies and the perinatal distress and often injuries. She remembered the day when she was awarded the M.B., B.S. degree at the convocation. She was young and full of hope. She would go out and serve the sick and bring succor and solace to those in pain. Here she was unable to help even herself and now a public charge in a foreign country. This was a steep fall from where she had expected to be. Gone were the carefree days of Karachi, the PICC pain, the class picnics at Sandspit beach and the social goings on that had she had been the participant of. Her ears heard the laughter of her setauleys (girl-friends) when they visited her at her house. She remembered their comments that she was so lucky to be going to US to settle in the new land. The only noise she heard as the morning approached was the outside

traffic that was beginning to rumble. Some in the room were still snoring loudly and asleep.

The next morning brought her sunshine but no ray of hope. At the very least she was alive and so was her son. Now she worried about the days and even months ahead. Was she going to spend the rest of her life here or she should catch the first flight home to Pakistan. She had no money, no job and no immediate prospects of finding herself out of the marriage she had just walked out of.

from her? Were they going to come and take her son away from her? How did they know she was here? Dr. Saima Zafar explained that her case had been brought to the attention of APPNA. The social welfare committee had discussed her case and felt that this matter deserved a hearing. The committee deliberated and came to the conclusion that this was an individual case and so could not help her as an organization in cases like this the funding is found by appealing to the membership to decide for themselves

needed to be helped to become financially independent. The checks came in many amounts from \$100 to \$500 and soon something could be planned for her. In time, an apartment was found and funding for her necessities was secured. Some members donated furniture other furnishings. She was given a computer to study and access the internet. The next was some means to help find gainful employment.

The first thought was that she should try to qualify for her medical exams prior to taking residency training. Thus she took to studying all over again. Ayesha was determined to succeed, gave her best effort but was unsuccessful in qualifying for medical admission to residency training programs. The years out of medical practice and the domestic situation had taken a toll.

Throughout this ordeal she was visited by Dr. Saima Zafar, Chair of the Social Welfare and Disaster Relief Committee of APPNA for 2007. Numerous telephone calls also ensued. Dr. Zafar would work a full day, come home then hold hour long SWRDC teleconferences late at night. Then she would receive calls from Ayesha. Dr. Zafar had become her big sister, her friend, her link to this unseen group who will never see her or meet her but were willing to help her. Many times the emotional calls would almost bring tears to Dr. Saima Zafar but she could not afford to let Ayesha's spirits down. She encouraged her to be more resilient and have hope. "She was always there for me. She is a wonderful, kind and a humble person. There were things that I could not discuss with my mother even but I did with Dr. Zafar. She loves to help other people. She would talk to me for hours. She was the only one I talked to in detail," says Ayesha.

APPNA supported Ayesha for two years in her apartment. Ayesha is studying to become a dental technician. Her goal is still to become a medical doctor. Her family has not given up hope of seeing her through to the fulfillment of her dreams. At this time she has a more stable environment and is well on her way to financial independence. "Without APPNA I would not be where I am today," says Ayesha.

Talking about the future Ayesha said "If my son grows up to be a doctor in this country he will join APPNA. He will be its President one day. I will be in the audience during the oath taking ceremonies."

P.S. Necessary changes have been made to protect the identity of Dr. Ayesha which is not her real name.



**Dr. Saima Zafar, Chair of the Social Welfare and Disaster Relief Committee of APPNA for 2007**

Minutes passed, hours and then days. She stayed in this shelter for a whole month thinking and finding no way out. She had few means to contact her family who were far away and could not come here. She had no relatives of her here in US so that they could take her in and find shelter in a home. Money that arrived at home could not give her all she needed to break out free of the shelter and carve out her dream of becoming a productive member of society, one she had thought she would be. By the fourth week she was down and out, financially drained and emotionally without hope. Just when she thought that things were never going to be better something happened that was forever going to change Ayesha's life.

"A phone for you ma'am" Said the matron of the shelter. On the other end was a pleasant voice. "I am Dr. Saima Zafar from APPNA". What was APPNA? She had never even heard of APPNA. What did they want

and write whatever amount they felt they could donate. This is then passed on to the recipient. APPNA had done similar funding for a number of cases in much similar cases as... If the case arose out of an alumni then that alumni was held for funding that case. That very year APPNA had funded for two unfortunate women in Pakistan, one belonging to Khyber Medical College and another belonging to Dow Medical College. Given that both of the female medical doctors in Pakistan suffered from terminal malignancies, even though sums were collected both died and the money could not be utilized. Just how were APPNA members going to deal with someone who is not physically ill but is involved in a marital matter?

Individual APPNA members began the check writing campaign. They felt that this was their cause, a colleague is in distress and living in a shelter. Ayesha became a rallying source of their nurturing instincts. She