

**A TRUE, REAL AND UNFORGETTBABLE LOVE  
STORY**

**THE STORY OF A WOMAN WHO GAVE  
UNCONDITIONSL LOVE AND LOVED EVERYONE  
WITHOUT EXCEPTION. HER LOVE AND FAITH  
GAVE HER THE STRENGTH TO FIGHT BREAST  
CANCER FOR 12 YEARS.**

**SALWA WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN AND SHE  
LIVES IN THE HEARTS OF EACH AND EVERY  
PERSON WHO MET HER.**

**SHE WAS 'THE IRON-WOMAN'**



## **My Life in Cairo - Egypt where I was born - A few pictures**

Born September 14, 1946 from Jamil and Beatrice Choueifati. Live in Heliopolis - Cairo until 1957. Had two Uncles Jean and George and Two aunts Philomena and Olga. My grandfather (mother side) Joseph and grandmother Marie were Armenians born in Turkey and flee the Ottoman-Armenian Genocide to Egypt where they settled under the British occupation for safety..

My grandfather ( father side) Matta served in WW I and was declared MIA as he never returned after the war ended. My grandmother Farida raised me while my mother worked as a seamstress at 'Celly' a major custom made outfit.

My mother designed and sew for queen Nariman King Farouk's wife and other Egyptian officials and high ranks.

During WW II my father worked for 'Averino' another major factory for men clothing. During the war and under my father supervision 'Averino' manufactured parachutes for the British army. After the war he

opened his own small factory and a store for custom made shirts only. My father had several dozens of shirts custom made for President Abdel Nasser until his departure to Lebanon in 1957.

My uncle George was a Naval Engineer with the sole responsibility to maintain depth in the Suez Canal allowing barges to cross the Canal.

My aunt's Olga husband also worked as an executive in the management of the Suez Canal.

Both uncles lived in Ismailia where the Suez Canal Headquarters was located then run by the French.

My uncle George and his wife Yvonne had three children Solange, Hani and Michel and my aunt Olga had four children Marie-Therese, Marie-Rose, Waguih, and Joseph.

My uncle Jean and his wife Marie had four sons Renee (drowned young), Andre, Pierre, and Tony.

All my uncles and aunt and their children permanently migrated to Montreal, Canada in the late 50's.

I was reunited with them in 1973 when I migrated to Canada.



**1956 Left to right: Cecile - Dad - Mom - Me - Lucie**



**1953 First Communion**



Me baby - Me with my Dad - Me with my cat 'Pussy'  
1956



## **My Life Growing Up in Lebanon**

I remember in 1957 and I was 11 years old taking the plane from Cairo – Egypt flight to Beirut – Lebanon on board of a DC-4 a plane with four propellers. On the flight was my mother, me and my two sisters Lucie and Cecile and my father was to join us at a later date.

The flight took a few hours and we arrived to Beirut Airport late Friday evening. We were greeted by an Armenian family (Mavian family) along the Armenian priest father Pabouchian. When we arrived to their apartment in Clemenceau, they had dinner ready for

all of us to dine. I remember there was meat in the food and since we abstained from eating meat on Fridays, father Pabouchian said the blessings and allowed the consumption of the meat.

Our sojourn at the Mavian was temporary until my mother found a job as First Seamstress at an 'Haute-Couture' company called Venderelst. This allowed us to find an apartment in Zeytouneh (Where today lies Hotel Phoenicia) and moved in after being very thankful to the Mavian family hospitality.

I was enrolled in an English school since this was my father's desire as he had always had a distant view of the future and believed English will be the main language across the whole world even in French-speaking countries and he turned to be right. English was not foreign to me as I had already attended an English school in Cairo St. George College run by Irish priests.

I remember my sister Cecile used to walk with me up a steep road (uphill) for me to catch the school bus



and was there in the afternoon when I was dropped off after school.

I was 11 years old and remember having fast heart beats (palpitations) at night and my mom used to lay my head on her lap until I fell asleep. (Later and after 57 years it was discovered that I was born with a defective heart valve which I will talk about later in this 'Our Life Story' document.

The first indications of Lebanon's first civil war came in 1958. When on an early afternoon and being at school we were told we have to ride the school bus and be driven home early. We did not know why but we could see burning tires and burnt down stores and businesses along the way to our safety.

My father being still away, my mom used to go to the Mayor's office to claim our Lebanese Identity Card. The office was located in Achrafieh, El-Sayyar next to Beirut museum and the Unknown Soldier monument.

On the way, a new building was under construction and was unique as each apartment had a balcony with a different color. Every time we came to the

Mayor's office my mom would tell me 'One day we will move here to this building' and she would ask me which color I preferred, my answer was always the same 'Yellow' and apparently yellow is my Zodiac color.

In 1958 my mom was promoted to General Manager and had a good raise so she decided to fulfill her promise. We moved to the colorful building, second floor and had a yellow balcony.



*From our house 2d floor and by the entrance of the building 1963*



In July of 1958 the civil war broke out and Beirut was divided to two sectors, the Muslim sector and the Christian sector where our residence lied on the demarcation line between the two sectors. We were well protected as the Internal Security Forces loyal to the Christian Maronite president Camille

Chamoun seized our building as a strategic building because of its location and were camped on the roof of this six story building.

I remember my grandmother cooking for the ISF and I enjoyed delivering the food to them on the roof and was amazed by their weaponry and their long range rifles used by their professional snipers.

I also remember the US Marines landing in Beirut sent by President Eisenhower to protect the Christian president and they were camped within less than one kilometer from our house. Me and a few boys of my age used to walk to their tents and they would treat us with chewing gum and chocolate.

The civil war ended and I had made many friends. My father had joined us and we were all together again. My two sisters found good jobs as secretaries and our life was stable and we were happy being in Lebanon our home. I attended another English school during my elementary years called Merry Land School and had passed two main government required certificates which was required for continue education and into college.

## **Maturing as a Young Adult:**

1962 I was now sixteen and had to attend a High School (8 grade to 12 grade). My parents decided to enroll me in an American boarding school, Middle-East College a Seventh Day Adventist College where students can graduate with a Bachelor Degree in Business Administration, Theology, and other limited degrees.

Middle-East College was the beginning of my maturity as a young man. The College had a very nice program in helping students pay their own tuition by working in the college compound. Masonry, Baking, Gardening, in the laundry room, and other work opportunities. I chose gardening and was paid one Lebanese pound per hour.

My responsibilities were to keep the pine trees free of worms, picking strawberries from the field, clean chicken poop (They raised hundreds of poultry in chicken coops), milk the cows, mow the grass, and at night and according to a rotation guard and patrol the college fenced borders. This was not an easy task as the college was built on top of a mountain

and had acres and acres of grounds to cover. I am proud to say that after two years and when I decided to move to another college I had paid off all my tuitions and had collected a 200 pounds check.

Other experiences were: joining the baseball team which was not a known sport in Lebanon. The college was a mixed college boys and girls and found myself experiencing my first love with a student called Samia. Since it was a Seventh Day Adventist, meat was not allowed nor any stimulus such as Coke or Coffee. Therefore, when I visited my parents once a weekend per month I would sneak in with me canned food such as Corned beef, Tuna, and Sardines. Learned how to deal and manage snakes, learned Christian hymnals such as 'Onward Christian Soldiers marching as to war with the Cross of Jesus going on before' On Fridays sundown and until Saturday sundown we were not allowed to work, study, or shower and it was all praying and attending sermons.

In 1964 I decided to leave Middle-East College and enrolled at National Protestant College where I graduated from with a High School in 1965.



My High School Graduation June 12, 1965

My sister Lucie got married and I shared the bedroom with my other sister Cecile.

My brother-in-law George was like a big brother to me and he used to take me hunting and other interesting places and we had fun. This picture was taken in the snow of Dahr El-Baidar in 1961 with our suits as we were heading to Chtaura in the Bekaa Valley for lunch. George resembled Rock Hudson. George also taught me how to drive. George is from Maaser El-Chouf in the Chouf Mountains of Lebanon where the largest Cedars forest in the world exist.



### **My Political Career:**

My political career started at the age of 18 when I joined the Socialist Party of Kamal Jumblat and I remember a very interesting incident.

Tunisia president Habib Bourguiba visited Lebanon and his pictures were hanging in all major building in Beirut. One of the buildings was a 10 story building in downtown Beirut and I was assigned the task to take down this huge picture hanging off the roof. The reason was Bourguiba in his famous speech called for the recognition of Israel which would lead to the destruction of Israel from within. Unfortunately his speech was misunderstood by angry Lebanese and

I had to carry on my task. A firetruck was brought in and I climbed to the top of the ladder which then extended to the roof allowing me to clip cut the wires of the picture which stumbled 10 floors down. Next day my picture was on every paper main front page and I remember being yelled at by my brother-in-law George for my so called hostility.

My first deception which will set the course of my future was when I applied at the American University of Beirut to continue my college education. I passed the exams but was not accepted for ridiculous reasons since AUB had a quota of only 15% in accepting Lebanese students and the other 85% were for Arab students from the Middle East. AUB at the time was the only English college education available in Lebanon and all the other colleges were French speaking. I was put on a waiting list and waited forever.

I found my life spinning in the wrong direction and had no choice but to find a job. To find a decent job in Lebanon you have to have a special recommendation from a well-known politician and I had none since I had quit the socialist party and



joined the National Liberal Party a Christian political party created by previous president Camille Chamoun who was not popular because of the 1958 civil war.

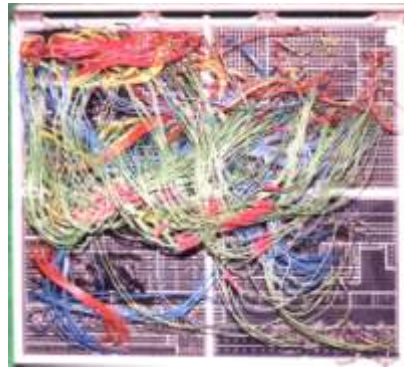
### **My Working Experience:**



*Me in the heart of the Cedar.*

My first job experience was in computer programming.

My mother had a friend whose daughter worked for a marketing company and this company had IBM accounting machines equipment. I was hired and was trained on programming the IBM 444 tabulator; a predecessor to what became mainframe computers.



The Panel I used to program the IBM 444 Tabulator

I was content and happy and bought a car MG British made.



Things were looking up for me as after a few months ABC (Associated Business Consultants) the company I worked for purchased IBM first scientific

computer the 1130. I was sent to IBM for a three-weeks training in FORTRAN and Assembler programming. I was happy and thought my future was set but unfortunately bad luck struck again.

One morning I came to work and was not allowed to enter the office and there were Lebanese police investigators blocking the entrance. I was summoned for a meeting with the owner and he explained to me that the company had experienced a sabotage of their computer equipment and management had opted not to pursue purchasing new equipment and they will be leasing time from IBM for running their business. One more time I have found myself struggling for survival and saw my future go up in flames.

Now and this time I decided I have to rely on myself and do it all by myself with no help as there was no help available to me. I checked the Sunday papers hunting for a job and one Sunday one classified drew my attention. It was a marketing and sales job at a magazine and it pays a low salary plus commission and I decided to apply. I was hired at “Le Commerce Du Levant” an economy and trade

magazine and started selling advertisements to banks and other financial and insurance institutions when one day I had an idea and ran it by my supervisor Mr. Rizkallah Tabakh I proposed a special edition every three months for a specific industry such as tourism, banking, insurance, hotels and other interested businesses in reaching the public and investors. I did very well and was very successful and now bought a new car, this time a “Cooper S”.



Now 1967 a new opportunity was presented to me. I was approached by Lebanon’s most prestigious newspaper “An-Nahar” for a position as a reporter. I accepted and my first mission was to travel to South Lebanon and cover the 1967 6-Days war between Israel and the Arab countries. I was there for two

weeks and to our biggest surprise there was no war activities on the Lebanese-Israeli border as Lebanon did not engage in this war where the Arab nations were badly beaten as they lost the West Bank from Jordan to Israel, Sinai from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

I had nothing to report except our sojourn in South Lebanon and how we spent nights eating good food, drinking Lebanese traditional drink 'Arak' and play poker.

Now 1969 I had bought a nice 1967 MK2 Jaguar and had saved enough money until I decide what to do with my life.



From 1969 and through 1973 when my future totally took a turn to the best I decided to be partner in a magazine similar to “Le Commerce Du Levant” but in

English “Middle East Commerce” and implemented the same ideas in special editions and was now in direct competition with “Le Commerce Du Levant”.

Being aggressive and ambitious, I also decided to open a night club. I found a partner Mr. Fouad George and together we rented an old shutdown night club “Le Tonneau” located at Hotel Comfort in Hazmieh. We had a great Grand Opening Night and with time we became THE PLACE for young adults to have fun on weekends enjoying one of the greatest bands “The Greg Sebastian Session” and relish the best steaks and Escargots in Beirut during the weeknights.



I enjoyed the lavish nightlife, and the cute and beautiful young women, and expensive scotch and wines, and delicious food.

Will this last long? No, again bad luck kept haunting me. The Lebanese government had a conservative Druze minister Kamal Jumblat who implemented new laws on night clubs and night entertainment and severe restrictions on selling alcohol and curfews after midnight for young adults and other restraints which caused unease with the public during their nightlife entertainment. “Le Tonneau” had to shut down and I had once again re-plan my future.

1972, I was becoming famous in the media circle and decided to exploit this situation to my advantage. I approached the Largest Advertising agency in Lebanon “Pharaon Advertising” for a position as a Jr. Accountant interim to the Chief Accountant who had given his notice. I soon was promoted to his position and became Pharaon Advertising Chief Accountant with zero knowledge of accounting. Pharaon Advertising had an accountant who came a couple of hours a day to maintain the books. I was hired because my connection with the media and my influence on them to keep the wolves away from demanding payments of Ads Pharaon Advertising ran for international customers. I found

that Pharaon Advertising was suffering from financial deficiency and later filed for bankruptcy.

The last car I bought was a Barracuda before leaving my beloved country seeking opportunities not knowing this will be the last time I will ever see Lebanon again.



*It was a white Barracuda*

### **My Relationship with Women Experience:**

My life at Pharaon Advertising was fun and fulfilling. I had the power to hire and fire. I hired a young beautiful young woman (F.H) as an advertising designer whom I had a loving affair with. My relationship with her ended when she met a rich guy



and I started a new relationship with the daughter of the agency (L.P). **This relationship was also cut short when I met the love of my life who became my soulmate, my whole life, my last and biggest love, and the mother of my two wonderful and beautiful children, she was Salwa Chaar from Zahle-Lebanon.**

The relationship with Salwa started when one of my closest friends Nabil Haj told me he would like to introduce me to a 23 years old beautiful young woman, a relative of his. Our click was made of Nabil Haj, Nasr Daou, Jack Khoueiry, Elie Eid, Samir Farran, and Camille Chehade, and Edward Yaghi and we were inseparable, we were like the Musketeers, all for one and one for all. We used to meet more than once daily in this sidewalk Café in the neighborhood sitting and sipping espresso coffee and plan for the night entertainment and where are we going to play poker that night.

One evening and as I was waiting for the group to assemble at the Café, I saw Nabil's Ford Taunus car pull up and beside him was this beautiful young girl. They dismounted and approached my table with

Nabil giving me a friendly hug while introducing Salwa to me. Salwa was from a very well off and known family in Zahle. When my eyes met hers I felt energy and warmth like I have never experienced before. She was beautiful and elegant and very smart, a very well educated strong-will young woman. I felt like taking her in my arms and hug her for hours.

I offered them one of Dagher's famous espresso and we chatted. I soon realized I had already met Salwa's two brothers and her father too. I told her I knew her brother Boulos (Paul) and Fayez and told her the story on how I met her father in Zahle a year ago.



At Dagher's Cafe the where I met Salwa for the first time.

The story goes as such: We often went hunting during the bird's season in the Bekaa Valley. I owned a 5-shot semi-automatic Herstal shotgun and we used to stop early morning at 5 am on our way to hunting at Chtaura for 'Sahlab' (A specially prepared Lebanese pudding) for breakfast. That day we decided to stop by Zahle for coffee before heading to the valley. Nabil suggested Salwa's family house the Chaar house. We stopped there for coffee and Salwa's mother rushed offering us sour (no sugar) Turkish coffee. Before we say thank you and leave, I saw this tall, strong, handsome man walking into the living room and introduced himself as 'Chehade' Salwa's father and asked us to stay a little longer as he was curious in meeting me as he had heard of me from his sons and Nabil.



Salwa's sibling left to right back row: Boulos, Jean (passed away), George, Pedro,

Front row left to right: Fayez, Josephine, Salwa, and Saad

We chatted freely and honestly about me and my experiences and I believe we had somehow connected. We then asked to be excused but he told us to wait a couple of minutes and he disappeared for a few minutes then appeared with a side-by-side beautiful shotgun. He told me with a very precise voice to give my Herstal to Nabil and he handed me

the shotgun and told me to use his shotgun for good luck and better aim.

As we continued our drive to the hunting field, Nabil looked at me and said 'Your father-in-law likes you' I was blown away by what he said and took it as a joke not knowing that Nabil had a future plan for me. I asked Nabil why he said that and his answer came fast saying 'He never trust his shotgun to anyone not even his sons'

I laughed and felt proud but did not know that this was my destiny; this day will be the beginning of my 42 (Forty-Two) years life with my beloved Salwa.

Salwa excused herself after drinking the espresso and asked Nabil if he can drop her off at Pigier (French College) as she was attending night classes for her business diploma. The word Pigier caught my ears and I decided to pursue her as she had captured my heart and soul.

I could not wait till the next day and drove to 'Gemmayze' where 'Pigier' was located and patiently waited by the school entrance. There was neither cell phones nor internet to kill time so I read the

newspaper when suddenly she appeared heading towards the exit. I exited from the car (My beautiful white Barracuda) and walked to her. She did not seem surprised as I had the feeling she was expecting me. I believe in ESP (extrasensory perception) or even better, our souls communicated since we were destined to be together no matter what the circumstances might be presented as you will realize by continue reading.

That night we drove across town and stopped for coffee and then drove again for hours and our conversation revolved around her and me. My experiences and hers, her ambitions and mine, and what did we expect from life. It was a very honest and clean conversation and the respect of each other dominated this exchange. I then drove her to her home in 'Hadath' where she lived with her sister 'Josephine' and her brother in-law 'Jean' and their two sons 'Tony and Nadra' and their daughter 'Maguy'. I remember not wanting to leave so we sat in the car till early dawn talking and the conversation was flowing non-stop touching every aspect of our lives. I remember well she was wearing a brown

Pantacourt made of Chamois leather and a yellow top blouse. This became our daily evening encounter. I will pick her up from 'Pigier' drove across the night streets of Beirut then to 'Hadath' and talk in the car till dawn. We noticed neighbors would peek at us through the windows and one of the neighbors reported it to Josephine asking her if she had noticed a phantom white car parking by the building door with a couple inside till dawn. Josephine might have known but her reply was that she did not notice.

Our secret meetings and relationship did not last long. One Sunday afternoon I was supposed to pick her up and as I drove closer to the house I heard a car honking behind me and through the visor I was able to recognize the driver and his wife, they were her brother Fayeze and his wife Ferial. I was exposed and could not but park by the house entrance and step out of the car greeting Fayeze and Ferial who asked me where am I heading and who did I know in this building. I could not but tell the truth. They invited me up and to my surprise her father Chehade and mother Rose were there having lunch at

Josephine. Her father and mother recognized me and Fayeze introduced me to the rest of the family and they invited me to have lunch with them but I politely declined and waited in the living room.

When they finished eating lunch they came to the living room and we chatted for a while when suddenly her father told us that we can go ahead with our plans for this Sunday afternoon ( I knew he liked me and respected me). We told them we were planning on going to the movies. We were excused and left. I felt good as this experience went very well considering they were a very conservative family.

We stopped for a good cup of coffee at a Café in the 'Hamra' district and then drove to the movie theatre The Grand Concord





The movie Salwa had chosen was 'Love Story' and we sat quietly watching the sad ending of the movie. When ended, we stopped at another Café and had dinner at 'Blimpie' known for their delicious hamburgers (Not like the one in Houston known for sub sandwiches). It was now eight in the evening and we parked at our regular location and talked for hours. Now it was past midnight and she had to leave but before she did she told me this: 'What do you think if we chose a motto for our relationship?' I approved. She said: 'How about from the Love Story movie? ***Love means never to have to say you are sorry***' this was the beginning of our love story!

Our acquaintanceship was blessed by the Chaar family and we started openly dating. Our relationship grew stronger by the day and we could not stay away from each other for more than a couple of hours. Again there was neither cell phones nor text messaging nor emails but we stayed connected through our thoughts and souls.

We went out every evening and spent quality time laughing enjoying each other company. One night as

I was driving back with her from a dinner in 'Broumanna'



a very nice mountain resort. I was cut off by a crazy driver and had to swirl and went over the median and crashed the bottom end of the car. We had to have it towed away and I called Nabil to pick us up and drive us each to our homes. Though it was a bad experience, I felt Okay because together we were able to survive our first bad experience. We loved each other and nothing will stop us from loving each other.

At Pharaon Advertising and in my office was a window overlooking the stairs, Salwa almost daily will stop by for a quick visit and we had a very primitive way in ordering coffee. I will open the window, clap my hands and yell 'Ahmad two coffees' He will then bring down the coffee and we would sip

the coffee over a few Marlboro cigarettes. In the evening I would pick her up from Pigier and went out painting Beirut night life.

My job at Pharaon Advertising was approaching to an end as they had filed for bankruptcy. One day as Salwa was visiting me, she suggested we take a trip to Damascus, Syria. Ferial Fayez wife was Syrian and had relatives in Damascus. Salwa suggested we drove Ferial's sister Laure with Nabil for a visit to her brother. I thought it was a great idea. This Saturday we packed a quick suitcase and we picked up Laure and Ferial youngest daughter. Nabil drove to Damascus (a two hours drive from Zahle). Salwa later revealed to me that Laure told her that we will be married one day and that we physically looked alike. We spent the night at Ferial's and Laure's brother and we had a blast visiting Damascus restaurants and popular markets like 'Khan Khalil' where you could buy pure gold jewelry for almost nothing. We returned the next day Sunday after a delicious lunch of 'Aleppo Kafta'. And I remember buying more than a couple of good scotch from the free zone as we exited Syria back to Zahle.

Pharaon Advertising folded and closed doors with several lawsuits for unpaid bills. I found myself caught in these lawsuits and was summoned to testify against Mrs. Margaret Pharaon as the Chief Accountant for money mismanagement. We were all cleared from any wrong doing.

Once again I found myself in this horrible circle of bad luck. After giving my testimonials to the lawyers clearing Mrs. Pharaon from any wrong doing, I decided it was time for me to leave Lebanon and migrate to a country where I can build my future, a future I had lost in a circle of damnation.

I questioned myself how can I do it? How can I leave my love, my soul behind? I asked my mother to contact my aunt 'Olga' and her husband 'Fawzi' if they can sponsor me to migrate to Canada and the answer came with a surprising Yes, as I have not seen them for many years and they did not know me nor I knew them except for a short time while living in Egypt.

I did not tell Salwa about my plan until my application was approved and had obtained my immigration visa.

I sold everything I owned, my Herstal shotgun, a nice Colliers encyclopedia, and my beautiful white Barracuda and other personal effects.

Salwa felt that I was miserable and she knew I have a plan because her feelings were mine and one evening she contacted me through Nabil with a message that she had to see me urgently.

My life now in shamble like a see-saw with a much unknown destiny, I borrowed my sister Cecile Renault car and drove to pick Salwa up from her home.

We drove for a couple of hours and Salwa had so many questions which I had no answers and finally I remember we were driving by Beirut airport,



### *Old 1973 Beirut Airport*

I decided to tell her that in three days I am leaving the country for good and our future together at this point is unknown.

Salwa being who she is was not at all shocked, she told me that this is a wise decision on one condition that I will continue my higher education and build a solid future for myself. I looked at her and I saw joy in her eyes rather than sadness. I asked her how she can be happy by me being away and not being together anymore. Her reply came without hesitation as she was such a religious person, she said: 'Hayati (her favorite word which meant *my life*) I am sure destiny will take its course and if God wants us to be together it will happen' I felt tears rolling down my cheeks knowing well that I will miss this strong

energy, this strong person, this strong loving and caring person.

Three days later, it was evening and I was ready to head to the airport. All my friends came to visit and say goodbye and I knew I will not see any of them again.

### **My life in Montreal – Canada:**

Now 1973, I arrived to 'Dorval' Airport in Montreal on a Saturday evening and was greeted by my aunt Olga and her husband Fawzi. The drive to their apartment on Decarie took 40 minutes. Once arrived I met my two cousins 'Joseph' and 'Waguhi' and they welcomed me and we all sat for dinner. They had two bedrooms, one for the boys and one for the parents. They had a hide-a-bed sofa for me in the living room and made room in a closet for my clothes.

I was blown away by their hospitality especially I have not seen them since 1957 (sixteen years) and I was 11 when I left them and now a 27 years old grown up adult. They enjoyed me in the evenings while I went through my past 16 years life and

experiences. And so I did listening to whom I called 'uncle' Fawzi telling stories about my mother and dad and the good old days and also his experience as a Jesuit non-ordained yet priest while being in a Lebanese convent. Uncle Fawzi was a Psychologist working for the government as a marriage counselor and he had learned a new treatment based on Bio-Feedback. In their apartment he had a clinic where he saw patients in the evenings after work. Joseph attended college and Waguhi was in his first year at Medical school.

In Montreal I got re-acquainted with all my other cousins and their spouses and I was not very comfortable around them as they were all doctors and very well set with their future while I was struggling. They considered me a Mustang and they enjoyed my stories while being in political parties, my job as a reporter and other wild experiences I had.

After one week of getting familiarized with the city and the transportation system, metro, busses, etc, it was time for me to start the journey of my new life, my future.



Uncle Fawzi one day told me that I will need a car for transportation in searching for a job and attending school. Uncle Fawzi took me to his bank and after finding a good car ( a 1969 Cougar) he put down the first payment and the rest installment payments when I find and start a job (He had clout with the banker).



*Mine was yellow*

First I had to find a job before enrolling in college to be able to pay the tuition. Finding a job? How and where without a diploma. My Lebanese job experiences had no ground to stand on, I had nothing to offer. One of my cousins worked as a manager in a clothing outfit owned by a Jewish family. 'George' told me he can hire me as a manual data entry clerk. I met the owner "Lazar Lapidus" and after he warned me that he will not hire me if I

will attend school, I accepted and of course I lied just to get the job.

A few months past and I had saved enough money allowing me to enroll for night classes at Sir George Williams University (today Concordia University). They had a special program for students of my age called MSQP (Mature Student Qualifying Program). I enrolled in the Psychology program as my major and my minor was Sociology.

Next was to move on and move out and have my own apartment. I found a nice affordable one bedroom apartment across from the Jewish main hospital on 'Cote St. Catherine' and 'Cote Des Neiges'.



*Cote Des Neiges next to Oratoire St. Joseph.*

The apartment was occupied by a young British Canadian female and she accepted to share it with me. I moved and lived with her until she moved out and left for Vancouver.

My life seemed to be on the right track. I left work at five and when I left, I was reminded by Lazar Lapidus who stood by the elevator reminding me not to attend school or I will be fired, I nodded and rode the elevator to the car and drove to college which ended at 11:00 PM and I will be home by 11:30. When 'Linda' my roommate still lived with me, she would prepare dinner for me. I will quickly eat and go to the living room where I had my desk and sat doing my homework while watching a replay of the 'Canadians' Hockey game.

In 1974 my sister Cecile decided to also migrate to Canada and try her luck in what may be a better future. Cecile arrived to Montreal and stayed with me. Uncle Fawzi got her a good job at one of the government division where he worked and she seemed to be doing okay. One weekend and as I was walking in the park (There are many parks in Montreal) I thought why not switching my major to

computer science. Monday I left work early with an excuse of being ill and stopped by the school registration office and discussed my desire with a counselor. He advised me to pursue it as computer science was in demand but also said that I should complete my psychology credits as I had a few left and reduce my weekly hours and attend their computer science programming academy. I took his advice and started attending computer programming languages for mainframes such as Assembler, RPG II, and COBOL.

I had 11 months to complete the programming course in computer science and 9 months in completing my psychology credits and graduate.

Cecile did not last long in Canada as she could not cope with the harsh cold and icy weather and decided to go back to Lebanon. Here I would like to stop and thank her for helping me pay my computer science tuition in full. I owe Cecile my computer expertise and my success later in Houston and my jobs in the computer industry.

Now all alone again, Cecile left and Linda gone it was tough on me handling my day-to-day obligations.

To my great and delight and happy surprise, in my mailbox one day was a letter from Salwa. I could not wait to get to the apartment to open the letter. I opened it as I was climbing the stairs to the second floor where I lived. I read it and read it again and did not know what to think and what to say and what to do, I was blown away with fullness of happiness and no longer felt alone.

Correspondence continued between Salwa and me with a letter written and received almost every day from far away from Lebanon using snail mail.

One night and as I was writing her, I realized that my life is destined to be with her and it was like the Holy Spirit descended over me and my fingers wrote while my brain was thinking of her and I proposed to her and explained to her that we should get married tonight and not tomorrow but I could not leave Montreal and leave everything I worked for behind, I had to graduate and I needed those two diplomas

and I was a few months away from fulfilling my dreams.

Soon enough I received her YES answer and not to worry about coming to Lebanon and she will find a way to come and we will marry in Montreal. She told me that my parents had to go to Zahle and officially ask her for marriage from her parents. I did not wait for the next day morning, I picked up the phone and called my mother and told her that I am marrying Salwa but they will have to go to Zahle and have the blessings of her parents.

My parents did not know her family but my brother-in-law George have heard of them and his brother-in-law was an officer in the Lebanese internal security forces. So they tacked together, my father, mother, Cecile, Lucie and her husband George and George's brother-in-law (also named George) all drove to Zahle after Nabil had paved the way for this meeting. The two families met and it was a very nice reunion and they all agreed on a date to have the engagement celebration to make it official without me being present in body but in spirit.



### *My Engagement*

There was one tactical problem, what after the engagement? Salwa pressed the matter with her parents that she should travel to Montreal and marry me. Even though they trusted me, it was still a matter of being conservative and having her travel alone was met with objection from her brothers and sister Josephine. But, her father knowing me very well told his son Fayez to accompany her and if Fayez cannot, then he will allow her to travel by herself.

It was Thursday January 9, 1975 when I drove to the airport to meet my bride to be Salwa and her brother Fayez. I hugged Fayez first followed by a kiss on Salwa's cheek and drove to the apartment in one of the fiercest cold blizzard and snow storm of the year. Salwa had the bedroom, Fayez and I shared the living room. The next day Friday January 10, 1975 I called the Maronite priest father Elie Najjar and told him about the wedding. He told me that he will be out of town on Sunday leaving for Toronto where he celebrated mass every other week and that we should go and see him right now and have the wedding on Saturday January 11, 1975.

We immediately got ready and had our official papers all ready and drove to Saint-Maroun Church and met the priest.

A funny thing happened as he was examining our papers. He looked at my baptism document and looked at me and said 'Who is this ass (donkey) who signed this document?' I had no answer as apparently the signature was not very clear and net. He examined again and burst with a loud non-ending laugh then asked me are you the son of



Jamil Choueifati? I answered yes and why? he replied 'This is my signature I baptized you in 1946 and now I am wedding you' Father Najjar asked me if I had a best man, I pointed at Fayez, then he asked Salwa if she had a Maid of Honor, unfortunately she did not have any but Father Najjar told us not to worry and he called a parishioner Laura Karam and asked her to come over.

A little later, Laura arrived and we were introduced. She was divorced with two daughters and a son and had to raise her children. Laura was a very beautiful woman from the outside and the inside. Laura since that day made Salwa a priority in her life and promised to teach her all she needed to know in being a housewife especially at cooking and housekeeping.

Since that day Salwa found in Laura a big sister and Laura filled the void what Josephine was to be for Salwa.



Saturday January 11, 1975 was the beginning of a unique partnership with the sad days and the happy days, the good and the bad until **death do as apart on July 31st, 2014**. The four of us arrived to the church. Salwa wore a very elegant dress and not a wedding dress, and I wore a navy suit and we received the blessings of marriage from Father Najjar. No one had a camera, so we never had a wedding photo and Salwa always wanted to have one and we planned on renewing our vows after 25 years of marriage and she could then have her wedding dress and the photo. This never happened because we then had received the most devastating

news that altered our life forever. Salwa was diagnose with breast cancer.

Following the wedding, the priest invited us to what was then a small hall for a drink and Laura had prepared her favorite snacks. Since that day Laura became all who and what we had in Montreal even though my large family there.

It was time for Fayez to leave and go back to Lebanon. It was a Saturday when we drove Fayez to the airport and we said our goodbyes and I knew that moment that I will have to be not only a husband to Salwa but also a brother, a friend, a protector, as she had no family in this so far country with new customs, culture, and traditions.

Next for us was go to the Canadian immigration office and register Salwa for her to obtain permanent residency. We applied and met with immigration officers and waited for the approval to be granted.

In the meanwhile, I was getting ready for my finals and I used to leave my work and on my way to college I will drive by our apartment and here she was Salwa at the balcony waiting to get a glance of

me while I drove and I would just bring down the window and wave at her. When I got home by 11:00 pm, Salwa was there to greet me with a hug and a kiss as we had really missed each other. She had prepared dinner and cooked a recipe she had learned from Laura. Salwa had never cooked before but I could tell she will be a great Cordon Bleu Chef, her cooking tasted great!

Days went by and it was now 1976 and I was getting ready to graduate as I had taken all the exams and was about to obtain my Bachelor Degree and my Computer programming certificate.

A few days separated us from packing up and leaving back to my beloved country Lebanon. We visited my aunt Olga and Fawzi and they were shocked by my marriage and they blamed us for not telling them earlier. I explained to them that I could not afford a traditional wedding and invite all my family who were nearly over 50 people. I had two uncles and two aunts with each having a number of children who were married with their own children plus my mother's cousins and their family.

We left everything behind and boarded the plane on the way to Lebanon.

### **Our short sojourn to Lebanon:**

We arrived to Beirut International Airport and were greeted by Fayez and my sister Lucie and her husband George. I was surprised by such a small greeting group as I was not aware that Lebanon was on the verge of another civil war.

Arriving to my old home at El-Sayar a larger group was there to greet us. My father-in-law Chehade, my mother-in-law Rose, Fayez wife Ferial, Salwa's sister Josephine without her husband Jean and when I asked where is Jean, the answer was that he was afraid from going to the Airport which was in an area under the Rebels and their Palestinian allies because he was kidnapped and was released by a miracle after the intervention of contacts who knew the kidnappers.

The plan was to spend the night and then leave to Zahle the next day.

After spending a week or so in Zahle, we returned to Beirut and spent a few nights at Josephine's house

in Haddath and a couple of nights at Salwa's brother Boulos (Paul). Then we returned to my house with my parents.

I was visited by all the friends from past years, now all in military outfits and fully geared with M-16 ready to fight and defend the Christian enclave of Achrafieh. I was asked to join but declined as I was the only one married from the group but told them that I will take turn in nightly patrols watching for any intruders from across the demarcation line which was a few hundred meters away. After nightly patrolling, Salwa and I sat at the balcony listening to music while sipping on Lebanese national drink 'Arak' and nibbling on Lebanese cold-cut delights 'Mezza'.

The civil war had not yet fully started but there were skirmishes here and there across the demarcation lines extending throughout all the capital Beirut and we could hear explosions every now then, the sound of mortars falling across the lines.

I still had hope that the civil war will cease and all parties will come to their senses. I decided to apply

for a job at 'Dar El-Handasa' an architecture and engineering company. I was granted an interview and was hired with a project to write a computer inventory system tracking building materials. Unfortunately the company was located in the Islamic area of West Beirut occupied by the Muslim rebels and their Palestinian allies. It was a scary experience to cross the line between East Beirut (Christian sector) into West Beirut (Islamic sector) twice a day until something really scary happened.

A common problem was the kidnapping of citizens from both sides based on their religion. They will set barricades and stop drivers checking their ID which included the holder religion. Kidnapping happened in and from both sides across the whole country.

That afternoon and as I was about to cross the line from West to East I was stuck in a traffic with long lines of cars trying to cross the line and I was able to see people pulled out of their cars who were Christians being kidnapped by the Muslim rebels. I was quickly approaching the barricade and was ready to meet my fate when suddenly a burst of gunfire started between the rebels and the

Palestinians in a power-play on who will control the barricade. I found myself forced to drive over the median behind the barricade and while the rebels were firing at each other I was able to flee and cross the line safely to East Beirut. When arrived to the house I saw Salwa, my mom, and father on the balcony all anxiously waiting my arrival as they could see the barricade a few hundred meters away.

I decided to quit my job and look for another in the East area but unfortunately all major businesses were located in the West as the West was the attraction area for foreigners with all the fancy restaurants, hotels, and night clubs. That same night and after I returned from patrolling, an explosion shook the house as a mortar was fired across the line towards our house followed by an attack from the rebels with a couple of tanks attempting the penetration to the East. Fortunately the guys in the neighborhood were on alert and were successful in destroying the two tanks and abort the attempt.

Salwa fainted fearing of what might happen and I had to comfort her. The next morning my mother and father told me to flee and leave the country back to



Canada where it will be safe for Salwa and me as I really did not belong anymore to the group I once led.

A week later we purchased our tickets. The problem was getting to the airport in West Beirut. Therefore our airline tickets were boarding from Cyprus. Cecile had a friend who lived in Jounieh. Jounieh is a Christian strong-hold port and Christians leaving the country had to leave by boats via Jounieh to Cyprus. Cecile, my mom, Salwa and me drove to Jounieh and after settling at Cecile's friend house, we contacted a person who sold tickets on a boat the next day to Cyprus. We were told it is a nice boat sent by the Vatican helping Christians flee the country. We spent the night and the next day we drove to the port. To our surprise the government had presence in the port with an Internal Security office where they would stamp our passports for legal exit.

We said our goodbyes to my mother and Cecile and prayed for their safety in this crazy bloody war and they prayed for our safe voyage. It was lunch time and mom had an apple in her purse and she insisted

on giving it to me. I reluctantly accepted saying to her that we will buy lunch on the boat.

The plan was to ride a speed boat to the main ship resting a Km or so away from the shore fearing the guns of the rebels. After a few minutes and to our shock the speed boat settled next to a huge cargo ship. This was not the ship promised to us. We wondered how will we board the ship when suddenly a ladder made of strong rope dangled down the side of the ship and we were supposed to climb it along our luggage, can you just imagine this? A twenty meters high cargo ship and climbing with suitcases? We made it after a struggle.

This was only the tip of the iceberg of our voyage. The Cargo ship was transporting cattle and the smell was horrible. There was neither benches nor chairs to sit, we sat on our suitcases. There was no food to eat and it was now after 6 pm and we were starving. I remembered the apple. Here is a demonstrating of Salwa's love to me and how she put her loved ones ahead of herself. Salwa refused to share the apple with me knowing that this small apple will not be enough to satisfy my hunger. She chose to stay

hungry over sharing this apple. This is Salwa, this is what this wonderful person was a person full of love and compassion.

Salwa was this woman who never complain and accepted everything that came to her as she believed God has a plan for every person and that His plan for us was a plan of mutual love and success but also filled with pain and suffering. Salwa knew what was planned for her as she always talked to me about how her life will end and her fear was always that she might not see her grandchildren.



*On the Cargo Ship (Left: Ship, my mom in Jounieh with us, me, and Salwa)*

After 18 hours (Should take less than 1 hour by plane) on this filthy cargo ship, we arrived to Cyprus and once again we had to carry our own suitcases. Cyprus customs was a nightmare as thousands of Lebanese were fleeing and they had us all packed in a warehouse waiting to be processed.

Cyprus like Lebanon, had their own civil war which ended by dividing the country into two sectors the Greek and the Turkish. The ship landed in Limasol in the Greek sector. Cyprus and because of the civil war their currency was not worldwide recognized, they did not deal with any foreign currency either so we had to convert all our dollars to Cyprus pounds which was worth nothing (the conversion was \$8 per pound) . What was even worst was that on our exit we had to sell the Cyprus pounds we had bought back to dollars since their currency was not being recognized by the world financial institutions. Here I need to say that the conversion of the money crushed our financial situation as we had only

\$1,500 with us but after all the conversions we left Cyprus with only \$300.

Cyprus had no public transportation and all our commute was done by taxis which was metered and very expensive. We first had to eat so we bought a couple of sandwiches for two pounds each (\$16) then we had to stop by KLM Airlines to pick up our tickets to Montreal, then to the Canadian embassy to validate Salwa's entrance visa as immigrant and this took hours as the embassy was full of Lebanese fleeing Lebanon. It was now late and we had to take a taxi to our hotel which was a one hour drive from the Canadian embassy. It was a new experience for us riding the taxi as they drove on the left side of the road. From far we could see the demarcation line separating the Turkish sector. After a sleepless night, in the morning we called a taxi to the airport. We were very happy to leave Cyprus and this bad experience behind us.

### **Our life in Canada (1976 to 1978):**

Once again we were greeted by Fawzi at Dorval airport and we were driven to their home on Decarie.

Salwa and I settled once again and took my aunt's home as our refuge until we decide the next step.

Now that I am a Canadian graduate, I started applying for a position as a computer programming trainee. After a few weeks I received a call for an interview at the Royal Trust of Canada a major mortgage and finance company and I was offered a position as an IBM computer operator with the possibility of advancing to a Jr. Programmer position and I accepted. The job required me to work a rotational shift hours. Two weeks from 8 to 4 and two weeks from 4 to midnight and two weeks from midnight to 8 am. In the meanwhile Salwa also found a job at Banque Provinciale as a secretary.

It was time for us to move and build our nest all over again. We decided to live in an English neighborhood in Montreal. We found a nice apartment located off of Sherbrooke (A major street like Main Street) at Benny Crescent subdivision in an eight story building. We furnished it by putting a down payment and financing the rest. A living room and a bedroom set and a small dining set. Kitchen

appliances were bought from Canadian Tire (similar to target).

You can have a view of where we lived:

<https://www.google.com/maps/@45.4634906,-73.6252856,3a,75y,146.2h,86.39t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sOGmd6AVEpN3G5QFIHwEB1g!2e0!7i13312!8i6656!6m1!1e1>

We lived our days happily and peacefully. We had Laura as a friend who introduced us to other Lebanese friends and had a nice active social life.

I would like to tell a story about two incidents we had.

The first one came as one day we had decided I will drive to her bank after my afternoon shift ended and go and have dinner in the busy area of Cote Des Neiges. When I arrived a few hundred yards away from the bank I stopped at a police blockade and when I inquired on what is going on, I was told that the bank received a bomb threat and the manager decided to take shelter along with the staff in the bank safe.

While they were hiding in the safe two robbers came in and robbed the bank clean. After a one hour ordeal the staff were released and Salwa was really shaken by this incident but a nice dinner made her overcome this bad experience. It was a well known fact that every day several banks were robbed in Montreal to the point that the police no longer responded to bank robbery calls allowing the robbers get away as long as no one was harmed.

The second experience came on an afternoon of a cold snowy day. I was already at work on the 4 to midnight shift. It was now past five and Salwa had to leave the bank and she used to ride two buses to get home. The second bus did not quite make it and got stuck in snow about one kilometer from our apartment. Poor Salwa had to walk one kilometer to the house in a knee-deep snow. Remember there was no cell phones so I was really worried for her and most of phone lines were down. Now midnight we were told that the shift manager had reserved a few rooms for us in a hotel for our safety. I decided to drive home anyway. I walked out of the building and could not spot my car as everything was under



feet of snow. I saw a man digging out his VW and I remembered I had parked beside his car. I proposed helping him if he then helped me dig out my Ford Galaxy out from under the pile of snow. The drive from Royal Trust to Benny Crescent was close to ten kilometers. I drove on Sherbrook all alone, there was not one soul on the road and under the street lights everything looked deep dark brown. I drove those kilometers without stepping on the break not even once and arrived home safe but shaken up. I was happy to find Salwa waiting for me and had prepared a delicious hot peas soup and chicken.



*Sherbrooke in a snowy day.*

It was time for us to plan for having a larger family and we worked on this plan hoping Salwa will get

pregnant but this did not happen for a few months. We decided to see a doctor and after long and lengthy and painful tests we were told Salwa had to have a surgery to remove a benign tumor from her pituitary gland which prevented her from being pregnant.

The thought of such surgery scared us thinking that they will have to cut through the skull to reach the gland. Royal Victoria Hospital had an approved new surgery procedure invented by Dr. Bertrand where the surgery was invasive. The procedure was inserting a probe through the pallet then piercing through nose then the forehead reaching the gland and scrubbing and sucking the tumor. The in and out procedure took seven hours until most of the tumor was removed and the surgery was declared successful Dr. Bertrand said this was his 17 surgery and he had never seen such a successful operation as there was no swelling in the face and her smell and taste senses remained intact.

During her two weeks stay at the hospital, I did not go home but to shower and change as I went to the hospital and by eight pm I was supposed to leave as

visitors were not allowed after eight. I had chosen the night shift and will drive from the hospital to work and go up to the cafeteria and have a quick nap till my shift started at midnight.

After Salwa discharge, we decided she will not go back to work as I was now earning a decent salary and we could survive on my salary.

This surgery shook us up badly as we were exhausted and desperate in overcoming the fear of what we went through and my shift hours and the weather and Salwa not having any family forced us to decide do something about it, but what? Lebanon was now deep into the civil war.

Salwa had two brothers in Houston, Texas George and Saad. Salwa called them and asked if there will be any opportunity of work for us and whether we can live and work in the US and if we can obtain permanent residency.

Salwa was encouraged by both brothers to leave Canada and go to Houston and they will do whatever possible to keep us there.

I resigned from Royal Trust and we stopped by Royal Victoria Hospital and got a referral letter from her oncologist Dr. Tolis who referred her to an Oncologist at MD Anderson, Dr. Semaan for continuance monitoring. We sold everything we could and said goodbye to my aunt and Fawzi and all the cousins and took a taxi to the airport.

### **The beginning of our life in Houston, Texas 1977**

We landed at Houston International Airport Terminal 'A' and George and Saad were waiting for us and we stayed with Saad at his apartment located on Westcott and Memorial Drive.

Over the next few weeks we spent most of our time learning and getting acquainted with Houston streets and other necessities. Saad owned a clothing store on Westheimer in the Montrose area and George a clothing store on Fondren and Richmond. The lack of a public transportation system in Houston made it hard for us to roam the city and freely move, so we relied on taxis to drive us to Saad's store which was not too far.

I was beginning to feel anxious in finding a job but did not know how to proceed in applying for jobs until one day I was examining the Sunday paper and found an Ad by an employment agency 'Head Hunter'. I called him on Monday and went to meet him. He referred me to Schepps Grocery and I was hired as a programmer reporting to the Data Processing Manager Richard Bawcum. Richard mentored me and I excelled in my new job.

A year later Richard resigned and formed a computer service company called Data Call and asked me to join him and I did. Through Data Call I was able to expand my knowledge in computer programming. Data Call signed a contract with the Texas Railroad Commission to write a computer system to track Texas trains activities and I was assigned as the lead project manager. I remember working nights and Salwa used to come and spend the evening with me at work.

In 1978 we received the best and happiest news ever, Salwa was pregnant with Anthony and she was working at Saad's store on Westheimer in the Montrose area.

Anthony was born on April 14, 1979 at Rosewood General Hospital back then located on Westheimer and Fondren. Dr. Boutros delivered him and Dr. Smith was his Pediatrician.

At the time we lived at Parkgate Apartments on Memorial Drive so did Saad and Richard Bawcum. My mother came to visit and to help Salwa. At the time Houston had a very strange law that children were not allowed in adult apartment complexes. My mother used to wrap the diapers in bags and walk to the dumpster in order to prevent management from finding out about Anthony the baby. Later and a few months later, they did find out and gave us three months to move out.

We searched for apartments accepting families and found one strange enough on Richmond and Walnut Bend the same area we bought our house on Overbrook in the Walnut Bend subdivision five years later.

While Josephine and her husband Jean were visiting Houston they discovered our next door neighbors were Syrian from Lebanon and had a son Tarek one

year older than Anthony. We were introduced and became friends ever since and until this current date.

By then Data Call closed their doors and I found a job as a Sr. Programmer then promoted to Project Manager and last as the Data Processing Manager at Goldrus Drilling - Goldking Production in 1980 an oil and gas company.



### *Management Team Board Picture*

Anthony was attending Montessori School on Richmond and Fondren.

Now April 1981 we received another great and very happy news Salwa was pregnant with Angie. January 21, 1982 Angie was born at Rosewood

General Hospital delivered by Dr. Boutros and her Pediatrician was also Dr. Smith.

Ralda and her husband Rushdi decided to buy a house and moved to their new house on Westpark Drive and Synott. Tarek was Anthony's best friend so were Ralda and Rushdi to me and Salwa so we decided to rent a house next to Ralda and we moved to 12731 Westpark Drive.

Over the next two years we had many visitors from Lebanon and Canada. My father and mother and Salwa's mother Rose.

Now 1983 it was the worst year ever for Houston. The oil business crashed and oil companies laid off many employees and many businesses shutdown including Goldrus Drilling. Thanks to my IBM Systems Engineer Irene Gonzales assigned to our account I was able to get a job with IBM as a Sr. Systems Engineer as a professional hire. This year IBM hired two more professional hires Ralph Best and Bob Aubrecht.

August 1983 Houston was ravaged by Hurricane Alicia it was the costliest tropical cyclone in the



Atlantic since Hurricane Agnes in 1972. Alicia was the third depression, the first tropical storm, and the only major hurricane of the 1983 Atlantic hurricane season.

I remember we used to have a cat called Josh and it was at the vet to be declawed. The vet called and informed us that he is closing his clinic and I had to go and pick it up. It was a very dangerous drive as we were being hit by so many Tornadoes touch downs. Poles and wires and glass were flying all over the way and back.

Now 1984 we decided to buy a house and Salwa and me and John from Daugherty Real Estate went house shopping. We found a house we liked located at 10717 Overbrook Ln. in Houston. The house was listed for \$140,000 we made an offer and we ended buying for \$117,000.

The house had a unique backyard that looked like a wild jungle with huge trees and had a pool. We did not move until a fence was installed around the pool as Anthony and Angie were still too young and could not swim.

We settled in our new home and we were proud as all Americans would be when owning their first home.

Over the next 16 years this home had experienced many happy events. I will try to briefly describe a few of these events as I remember them without any chronological sequence.

Anthony and Angie are now attending school at Second Baptist School and are involved in all sports activities.

Anthony is in T-Ball, Dad's pitch, Baseball, soccer, and basketball.

Angie in T-Ball, Dad's pitch, Softball, soccer, basketball, and tennis

Anthony and Angie now good swimmers participated in Walnut Bend swim teams and they both had won several medals.

Anthony left Second Baptist and attended Strake Jesuit from 8th grade and graduated in 1997.

Angie graduated High School from Second Baptist in year 2000.

We hosted 4 consecutive years New Years Eve celebration. One year we even had two DJ's playing the music and dancing with the guests. We had over 50 guests and we used to go all the way in decorations. Hanging stars, disco dancing ball, vapor fog and dancing lights projection. The evening started with drinks, then seated dinner (yes we used

to set folding tables and chairs for everyone) followed by hours of Arabic, Lebanese, and western dancing music and songs. By dawn Salwa will offer black beans as breakfast for the guests who are still celebrating.

Salwa and I along with Sam Habayeb, Michel Ziegler, and our friend Scott took bridge lessons taught by Najwa Khawli. We then started holding bridge games in different homes and once we got to be good at the game we joined the French Alliance Bridge team and hosted several tournaments in our house. Ralda being a Bridge Master was our mentor and taught us how to be better in the game.



*Bridge at our house Left to right: John St. Pierre, me, Salwa, Michel Ziegler*

Ralda volunteered to teach Bridge lessons to our parish at Our Lady of the Cedars - Catholic Maronite Church over a six-weeks period. Father Pierre Khoury was in the group.

Besides hosting New Year's Eve celebration it was a tradition to have every Christmas in our house. This continued to this day even after the passing of my loving Salwa. Salwa would cook delicious Christmas food. Raw Kibbi, Turkey, Stuffed grape leaves, spicy chicken wings, Kibbi rolls, beef crown roast, escargots as appetizer, and other assortment of Lebanese delight. All our family in Houston attended the dinner, her brother Saad and his wife Jeanette and her two children Chad and Dominique, Katie and Dr. Gabriel Habib and their son Gaby, Nadra Maakaroun and his wife Lillian and his three children Johnny, Annabelle and Samantha and our close friends Ralda and John and her daughter Danielle (Tarek lives overseas), Elie and Hiam Abou Khalil and their three children, George, Joelle, and Nathalie. We were joined by our parish priest Fr. Andre Estephan who played the Keyboard and we will all sing Christmas Hymnals. Anthony and Angie invited their friends and we will have over 30 guests.

They were very nice times and I still live those memories.



## *Christmas tree old pictures*

We celebrated Christmas Evening for the first time without Salwa Christmas 2014 to commemorate her memory and we all felt her presence.

During those years we took several summer vacations. I used to own a Toyota van and we drove to Florida twice of which once my father came with us. We visited Disney Land Magic Kingdom and Epcot Center, Hollywood Studios and Animal Kingdom. One year we flew along with Saad and his family and stayed at the Disney Land resort. We also took a trip to Disney World in California and visited Salwa's aunt "Barbara" who lived there. One of the nice trips was Cancun in Mexico where Anthony and Angie went snorkeling, and Angie had her hair braided. The stay at the hotel was all inclusive and Salwa and I would stay late by the pool listening to music and enjoy nice cocktails.

Life was beautiful and we were a very happy family regardless of the financial burden we encountered in meeting our mortgage payment and provide our children the best education in private schools and have them deprived of nothing without going the extreme. Nice clothes and brand shoes and anything they needed in a very demanding society.

It was time to buy Anthony his own car in 9th grade at Strake Jesuit. One Saturday I asked Anthony if he would like to go car shopping. The four of us went on a car shopping spree. One car drew his attention and he test drove it and I saw it in his eyes that he liked the car and wanted it. It was a white Ford Escort with a Mazda engine. It was one of his happiest moments when I told him he can have it. I paid for the car and he drove it back to the house.

Anthony graduated from Strake Jesuit and applied at UT University in Austin. It was time for us to drive to Austin and check out his residence. Anthony attended two years at UT before returning back to Houston and attended University of Houston where he graduated with a Bachelor degree in Psychology. Anthony being ambition as he has always been, enrolled at South Texas Law school and graduated and passed the bar exam from the first try.





Continuing on the path of ambition, Anthony moved to Austin and established his own Law business from his home. He continued to grow the business and was very successful until the right opportunity was presented to him. A law office in Houston made him an offer he could not resist. He moved back to Houston and joined this law firm as a Jr. Partner at Cook Legal Group, LLP. Now Anthony has been practicing law for over nine years. Anthony is a very successful lawyer and business man and also a handy man. After the passing of my dear Salwa, I decided to give up the house on Overbrook for him and Angie. Anthony invested his own money in buying a nice condo on Memorial Drive and Tully and this condo became my residence since February 2015. Being a handy man, he redesigned the backyard at Overbrook and made it look much nicer and clean and well pampered. He himself built an outdoor fire place that can also be used as a BBQ pit. He also had the old pool removed and installed a new beautiful pool. As of this date Anthony remains single.

Angie graduated from Second Baptist in year 2000, the year of the second millennium and her graduation gift was a red Ford Focus 2000.





### *Angie High School Graduation 2000 Second Baptist*

She then enrolled at University of Houston and graduated with a Bachelor degree in Psychology. Angie courageously faced the devastating news of Salwa having breast cancer in 2001 but struggled throughout her years at University of Houston. During her High school years, Angie took over Anthony's Escort and I remember Salwa driving behind her every morning on her way to school and will follow her back home after school dismissal. Salwa continued doing so for a while until she felt comfortable with Angie's driving. Salwa's habit was to escort Anthony or Angie to the door as they were about to leave for school and will bless them with the sign of the cross as they drove away.

Angie had several working experiences after graduation. She moved to Austin to be with her

brother and she held a few jobs in Austin she worked for Texas Public Policy and the Boys and Girls Clubs and then when she returned to Houston she went back to specialize as a lab technician at Coleman. Angie then worked for Baylor as a molecular technologist and now she works for MD Anderson as a molecular technologist as well.

Angie is a very active young woman and for a while she was involved with the Fair Tax movement and Gulf Coast Fishers of Men..

On October 3d, 2014 Angie married Aaron Clark and has a seven months old boy Carson and she is currently pregnant with another baby boy.

During her life Salwa attended several weddings. Najwa to John Sweeney after her husband Edward passed away. Nadra Maakaroun (her nephew) wedding to Lillian Mouanes after he divorced his previous wife Beatrice mother to Johnny and Annabelle. The wedding of Jenny Arslan to Adonis Raphael. Dominique Shaar (her niece) to Jeff. Sam and Claude Habayeb son Michael to Sarah. Katie Stylianidis to Dr. Gabriel Habib. Paula to Stephen and her daughter Natasha. Ralda Antaki to John St. Pierre after Rushdi passed away.



Jenny's wedding

During my 25 years at IBM I was consistently top rank in my positions. I started as a Sr. Systems Engineer and enjoyed several awards and trips along with Salwa. I was then transferred to the marketing team reporting to IBM Headquarter with the responsibility in helping with the design the first IBM Air Cooled mainframe. I was very successful and earned several awards and many trips along with my loving wife Salwa.

On those fun trips, IBM had us stay in the best and most expensive hotels. All expenses were paid for and including transportation and entertainment.

One of those trips was New York and we decided to take Angie with us. We stayed at the Plaza hotel in the center of Manhattan. We had a blast visiting many interesting places such as outfits and museums, and theatres. We dined in the best and most expensive restaurants and took a carriage ride

in Central Park. We had dinner at the Russian Tea Room. We also dined at Tavern on the Green before they closed down. In New York the three of us enjoyed a delicious pizza for lunch at Little Italy.



*New York Little Italy and Russian Restaurant*

The following year Salwa and Angie took another trip to New York and stayed at the same hotel 'The Plaza' and received a Royal Treatment:

Salwa enjoyed traveling with Angie and to go shopping every Saturday throughout Houston followed by a nice lunch.

Salwa used to tell me these hours were the most fun hours for her spending time with Angie.

Angie energized Salwa and gave her hope and the reason to fight harder.



We had two different trips to Miami Florida and stayed at the Loews Miami Beach Hotel and enjoyed the best restaurants and night clubs in Miami. We

drove to South West beach and had the best seafood and crab legs ever.

One of the most fun trips was in San Francisco. We stayed at the Fisherman Warf close to Pier 39. We dined at the most expensive restaurants such as Gary Danko and Jardiniere. We rode the Cable Car and visited the Hanging Gardens. We took a tour through China Town and the main attraction sites. We mostly enjoyed the food and especially Clams Chowder.

Another trip was to New Orleans Louisiana on January 17, 2002. This was a perfect trip because both of us Salwa and me love to gamble. We stayed at the Ritz Carlton one block away from Harrah's casino. We had a great time in New Orleans enjoying the

French Quarter and dining in the most expensive and luxurious restaurants such as Gautreau's, Commander Palace, and Clancy's.

We enjoyed being around friends especially Ralda and John, Claude and Sam, Jackie and Sami, Renee and Ghaleb. We used to organize trips with one couple at a time.

With Ralda and John when my sister Cecile was visiting, we took a trip to San Antonio Schlitterbahn New Braunfels. We stayed in cabins and it was fun in having our children with us, Anthony, Angie, Tarek, and Danielle. With Ralda and John and Tarek and Danielle and Anthony and Angie we took a trip to Las Vegas. With Ralda and both families we took another trip to Vegas and this time Saad and Jeanette and Nadra (Salwa's nephew) came with us.

With Claude and Sam we took a couple of trips to San Antonio and spent quality time on the River Walk and stayed in five starts hotels. In another trip we went to San Antonio to play golf at La Cantera. We also took a trip and Jackie and Sami came along driving to San Antonio Hill Country to the Enchanted Rock. We owned a Suburban at the time.

With Renee and Ghaleb we took a couple of trips to Las Vegas as we all enjoyed gambling and we stayed at Paris Hotel.





*Vegas at Paris Hotel*

We also took a trip to attend Najwa's wedding after Edouard had passed away in Bernie a few hours away driving. We then played golf at Tapatio Spring Hills Golf and Country Club.

With Jackie and Sami we took a trip once to visit their daughter Nayla in Little Rock Arkansas. We spent the weekend in a hotel and we visited Sulphur Springs before heading back to Houston on Monday. We used to alternate houses in playing bridge the four of us.

One happy incident worth mentioning is about a birthday gift we exchanged. Salwa's Birthday was on August 15 the feast of the Virgin Mary and mine September 14 the feast of the Cross. On August 13 I stopped by Foley's today Macy's in the afternoon not knowing Salwa had been there in the morning. I



bought her a nice Raymond Weil watch and on her birthday I surprised her with this expensive beautiful watch. Salwa could not resist hiding her shock and I wondered why? She asked to wait a minute while she ran upstairs and came down with what is supposed to be my birthday early gift. I unwrapped the small box and what I saw sent goose bumps throughout my body. She had bought me a Raymond Weil watch too. Salwa and I had a very special relationship and sometimes this association was governed by telepathy.

### **Special Events:**

Salwa and I were very much involved in American and Lebanese politics.

I created an organization called Lebanese American Coalition of Texas (LACT) and registered it as an American non-connected Political Action Committee and it is the only Lebanese PAC in the United States. ([www.lacoftexas.com](http://www.lacoftexas.com))

The LACT grew very fast and held several political events. The first one was a presentation on Tax Reforms given by the Fair Tax organization which

was and still is supported by the former governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee. Salwa was very instrumental in organizing the event at a Lebanese restaurant called 'Skewers' now sold and bought out by another owner.

The second event was at 'Shimako' an upscale Sushi restaurant owned by a Lebanese. The event was to introduce the LACT to US officials and House of Representatives. The event witnessed the presence of several Texas Representatives such as Sheila Jackson Lee and Al Green who gave a nice speech. Salwa hand-picked the Sushi menu and the decoration of the restaurant.

The third event was inviting May Akl from the Free Patriotic Movement of Lebanon to update us on the most current activities of the movement. Salwa picked the location at a hotel owned by a third generation American-Lebanese owner The Embassy Suite.

The fourth event was at Byblos Restaurant. The event was in honor of Houston Mayor Bill White who was planning on running as Governor of Texas. Salwa's involvement in this event was inviting prominent Lebanese personalities in Houston.

The fifth event was a Christmas dinner honoring Harris County Sherriff Adrian Garcia. The dinner was catered by Petit Café and was held at Salim Abou Jaoude's home.

The sixth event was a dinner catered by Fadi's Restaurant held at Wadih El Hajj home in support of Annise Parker who was running as Mayor of Houston. Annise Parker was elected for three consecutive terms ending in November of 2015. Salwa acted as a host to the event which also included George Brown who endorsed Annise for the Mayor position.

The seventh and eighth events were held at Bear Creek Park as a LACT family picnic event. The guest of Honor in both events was current Lebanese Minister Jubran Basil the son-in-law of General Michel Aoun who today has the largest Christian block in the Lebanese Parliament

The ninth event was held at Fadi's Restaurant in Sugar Land. The event hosted one more time Minister Jubran Basil who was minister of Energy at the time. Salwa with other women from the LACT board created the dinner menu for the event. Salwa

was very much involved in this event as she was a big fan of the Free Patriotic Movement and its leader General Michel Aoun and especially Minister Jubran Basil.



With Minister Basil at Fadi's

The tenth event was at Fadi's Restaurant on Westheimer and Dairy Ashford. I had created another non-political organization called Lebanese Secular and Cultural Club and I was elected president. The event was to launch the LSCC and introduce it to the invited guests.



ALSCC event at Fadi's



With May Akl from the FPM  
Adrian Garcia



With Sheriff



and Angie

With Mayor Bill White

Honestly speaking, I could not have been successful in those events if it was not for the involvement of Salwa.

Another event was when a local Lebanese magazine celebrated their anniversary at Chateau Crystale where I used to be the English editor. In this event Salwa was honored for her courage and her fierce fight against breast cancer with a trophy and was named the 'Iron-Woman'



Salwa receiving the plaque  
check to the Cancer Society

\$2,500

Another event was at the ADS - American Druze Society in their annual banquet. This picture was taken while waiting to be seated.



Salwa at the American Druze Society  
Event

There were two more events one in San Francisco and the other at San Antonio. I was then assigned by the Maronite Patriarch Sfeir as territory manager for four states with Project Roots. My responsibility was to run campaigns and presentations on why all Christian Lebanese in the Diaspora need to register. Once a year we will all meet in a convention and Salwa was very helpful in helping me with this hard task. Here are two pictures one in San Francisco and the other in San Antonio.

Salwa and I used to travel and visit Maronite churches and make presentations and register as many Lebanese from first to third generations. My



territories were Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas.



*San Francisco*



*San Antonio*

One other event we attended was in support of Tony Noun running for Texas house representative. The event took place at Byblos Restaurant.





Rafka, Tony, Salwa,

me

In 2011 we celebrated New Year's Eve at a friend's restaurant at Shisha Express and this is one of the pictures.



Two other major events were the first visit of Lebanon Maronite Patriarch to our church in Houston Our Lady of the Cedars Cardinal Sfeir and the second visit of Cardinal Raii.



With Maronite Cardinal -

Patriarch Raii

### **Back to Lebanon visiting:**

It was in March 2002 when we finally decided we should visit Lebanon. I had been away since 1976 a very long 26 years away from my home country. We planned our trip very carefully. We decided to go to Lebanon first and then stop by Rome for a week. This was a life-time trip full of fun and happy days. We stayed at my sister's Lucie place with my big brother my brother-in-law George and Patrick my nephew. Our visit to Lebanon started with a dinner at Tony Maakaroun's home (Salwa's nephew - Josephine older son) who married Yvette Maakaroun here in Houston when they visited us and stayed with us when we were staying at Parkgate Apartments on Memorial Drive. By the way, Yvette is Anthony's Godmother. They have three beautiful daughters, Nathalie, Stephanie, and Eliana. Next Tony invited us to a couple of nice restaurants one was 'Mandaloun', 'Zaatar we Zeit' and nightclubs and of course Casino of Lebanon

where we gambled and I won a lot of money playing poker.

We then went and visited Zahle, Salwa's hometown and saw Fayez and his family, George and his family and then we spent the night at Jospehine's house also in Zahle.

Back to Beirut we visited Lillian Maakaroun (Nadra's wife) mother 'Halime' in Hadath and had a wonderful lunch at Bouols Salwa's brother in Hadath. He knew I liked fried fish and that is what we had with the presence of other family members and relatives. Next was the time to visit my brother-in-law hometown in 'Maaser El-Chouf' in the Chouf home to the largest Cedars forest in the world. It was still winter time and the mountain was covered with snow. We took several pictures and it is noted to say that 'Maaser' is 2000 meters above sea level and Salwa was bothered by the heights and sometimes had trouble breathing. George and Patrick were such wonderful hosts. The next days were dedicated to visiting the holy places. We visited 'Harrisa', St. Charbel, and St. 'Hardini' amongst other holy places. We also visited 'Beit El-Din' and 'Deir El-Kamar' wax museum and met the owner of the museum who lived in Houston before moving back to Lebanon. It

was time now to leave Lebanon and experience a wonderful stay in Rome.



*Night Club Dancing  
Boulos*



*AT Salwa's brother*



Cedars of Lebanon in  
Maaser El-Chouf

We arrived to Rome and it was April and in a couple of days we will celebrate Easter. We did not take a break except to go to bed late every day. We walked and walked and visited every single historical church and museums. We had dinner in the most luxurious

restaurants and when tired from walking we would grab a taxi.

It was Easter evening and we decided to spend Easter mass with pope Benedict XVI. The mass was celebrated in the Coliseum and we went early and had front row standing and we hanged on to the rail for three hours before the mass started in the meanwhile a flock of people of thousands of believers had ramped up behind us and around us. It was cold and we were shivering and we held each other close to stay warm. It was impressive to attend such a beautiful mass celebrated by the pope and we did not believe it that we have actually done it. After mass, I held Salwa's hand and pushed the crowd behind us to make way for our exit. We were lucky enough to find an available taxi to drive us to the hotel.

The next day was as impressive as last night mass. We stood for hours in line waiting to enter the Vatican. The Vatican is beyond anyone's imagination and I believe everyone should visit the Vatican Christian or non-Christian. With all this mass of people you could still hear the sound of a dropping pin except for the click of the cameras. Outside the Vatican we lined up listening to another mass celebration. We were impressed by how every

single person of the thousands attending got to have communion by priests who served communion. Finally our visit to Rome came to an end after we visited 'Fontana de Trevi' and threw coins with our wishes for Salwa to get well.





### *Tourism in Italy*

The period between 2001 and 2011 and Salwa's breast cancer:

The years of pain and agony but also with hope and happy days. Most of the trips mentioned above with friends happened between the years of 2001 and 2011.

Here are some dates I can remember:

March 27, 2001 Salwa had her breasts biopsy

April 4, 2001 We met with the Surgeon Dr. Ricardo

April 5, 2001 We met with Dr. Conlon the Oncologist



April 9, 2001 We met with Dr. Baldwin the Plastic Surgeon

April 12, 2001 We met with Dr. Shaddle For possibly radiation

April 23, 2001 Salwa's mastectomy surgery week preparation

April 26, 2011 Salwa's surgery

April 29, 2001 Salwa discharged

June 8, 2001 We met with Dr. Conlon and started chemo pills Tamoxifen

June 13, 2011 Salwa starts rehab in using her arms

Now 2003 tests have shown the cancer has metastases to the liver. On March 3d, 2003 Salwa had a biopsy of the liver and on April 14, 2003 Salwa started chemotherapy with Dr. Conlon.

From then on it was a progression towards a decline of Salwa's health and the fight of her survival had begun.

The chemo she was taking was not effective and Dr. Conlon switched her to a different chemo and this time another type of pills. This regimen has caused more damage than helping, the tumors had grew larger and more tumors popped up on the liver.

Dr. Conlon caused major damage with his new treatment and we had to find another Oncologist so

we went and visited a Lebanese Oncologist whom we knew. Dr. Peter Farha started Salwa on a new Chemo regimen and we were hopeful this will help shrink the tumors.

Once again we were disappointed, the chemo regimen did not have any effect on shrinking the tumors. We went through regimen after regimen until Dr. Farha ran out of options.

Our only choice left was to pursue MD Anderson. On March 23, 2003 Salwa registered with MD Anderson and we met with Dr. Nuhad Ibrahim Oncologist Professor at MD Anderson. Dr. Ibrahim was very positive and supportive since MD Anderson is the largest cancer hospital in the world and has all the capabilities in research and development and trials.

Salwa went through several chemo regimen with Dr. Ibrahim with no positive results as the tumors continued to grow and more appeared. Dr. Ibrahim suggested her transfer to the trial division of MD Anderson.

Salwa went through several trials in the targeted therapy division with the last one being a HAI (Hepatic Artery Infusion) where a Catheter is introduced through the groin and targeting the

tumors under the supervision of Dr. Apostolia Tsimberidou.

In 2014, and after a HAI procedure Salwa caught a severe Pneumonia caused by a contaminated catheter. Since then her immune system was totally compromised and she was unable to continue the HAI treatment and this was the beginning of her end.

In July of 2014 Salwa was transported to the ER at MD Anderson and her condition began to quickly worsen and was admitted to the Palliative Care where she left us on July 31st, 2014 at 3:00 am.

During her stay at MD Anderson Palliative Care, Salwa underwent a very bad experience and abuse and unethical behavior from the Physicians team. On the website you will find a link which will include a full detail report about her stay at the Palliative Care Unit.

The last few years of her life witnessed several happy days and memorable moments. She had the chance to meet Aaron Angie's husband and his parents Wendy and Brian. And the wedding of Dominique one month (June 2014) before her succumb.

In June of 2014 one month before her admittance to MD Anderson Palliative Care Unit and for the few times Salwa would ask for anything, she asked me if we can have a weekend in Galveston. We booked a room for two nights at Hotel Galvez. Salwa and I had a great time unaware of what is ahead. Salwa looked tired but insisted on having a good time. We dined at the best restaurants in Galveston and Salwa had her favorite Bloody Mary at The Pelican Clubhouse. We also dined at Gaido's and Miller's Grill. Before finishing the evenings we drove around Galveston Island.



May 2014 two months before her passing

There was also sad days. The passing of Edward Khawli, Joe Karkabi, Joe Karkabi sister, Sami Fakhouri, and her brother-in-law Jean Maakaroun.

Salwa was a very strong woman and I never knew where she gets her power from until one day I realized the source of this strength. It was her **FAITH**. Salwa was a very religious person and everyone admired her way of praying at church during mass. She prayed from her heart and from all her being. She prayed for others and not for herself because she knew she will be called upon by God to be on His side.

I would like to demonstrate her strength through those two accounts.

The first is when in 2011 our church Our Lady of the Cedars organized a pilgrimage trip to Medjugorje. Međugorje, or Medjugorje, is a town located in the Herzegovina region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, around 25 km southwest of Mostar and close to the border of Croatia.



Since 1981, in a small village called Medjugorje, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Blessed Virgin Mary has been appearing and giving messages to the world. And that these years She is spending with us are a time of special Grace granted by God. In Her own words She tells us, *"I have come to tell the world that God exists. He is the fullness of life, and to enjoy this fullness and peace, you must return to God"*.

Since the apparitions began in 1981, over 40 million people of all faiths, from all over the world, have

visited Medjugorje and have left spiritually strengthened and renewed. Countless unbelievers and physically or mentally afflicted, have been converted and healed.

Salwa took the trip alone as I could not go. And the road to the Virgin Mary statue and the cross is beyond anybody's imagination. A climb of a ragged non-paved road where a person have to climb rocks with nothing to hold on to. Salwa climbed this ragged path without the help of anyone as she held on to her faith to be her support in providing her the strength and power to take this road believing in the presence of the blessed Virgin Mary. You can find out more by visiting the official website at [www.medjugorge.org](http://www.medjugorge.org).

The second incident that demonstrate Salwa's strength came in June 2013 when one evening I collapsed and died for 2 minutes and 14 seconds. Salwa and Angie immediately called 911 and a few minutes later they arrived and as they were about to shock my heart with defibrillators, I woke up by a miracle of which later on I knew why God brought me back to life. I was destined to survive so as to one year later walk the road of pain and death along with my love Salwa.

I was transported to West Houston Medical Center where my primary physician Dr. Italia practiced. A heart scan was performed and showed an abnormality in my main heart valve which required an immediate surgery to replace the valve.

Dr. Karr at Memorial Hermann Hospital where I was transferred for surgery performed a catheterization and it was determined that I was born with a defective heart valve and should have died at the age of 40 but God had a plan for me and survived to be 67 and to march along Salwa's destiny.

Salwa stood by my side day and night with all her pain and ignored her own health and stopped the HAI just to be with me. The surgery was successful and I had to start therapy to regain strength and be able to walk. One day as I was in therapy I collapsed and rushed to surgery again and a pacemaker was installed to help the heart pumping blood through the valve made of pig's skin.





After my surgery

I was discharged and Salwa had bought a car convenient for me as the Tahoe requires a person to climb to get seated. It was VW and the seats rotates to enable me an easy access to the back seats. I needed Physical Therapy and had to walk daily. Salwa drove me to Memorial City where she walked with me 5 miles daily. I also had to go to a Physical Therapy Treadmill sessions daily to raise my heart beats. Salwa took on a Treadmill beside me and ran along encouraging me to continue me rehabilitation.

To my big surprise she had set a surprise birthday party for me at Fadi's Restaurant and she had invited all my friends from church and Fr. Milad and the men club The Knights of the Cedars and the Parish Council where I had served for more than 8 years. This party was also to celebrate my recovery.

The party was secretly organized. I was not aware that Salwa had prepared this event as a surprise to me.

I was told it was a birthday celebration of my friend Samih and when I told Salwa to buy a gift she replied that Dolly Samih wife has requested no gifts.

When I arrived I was blown away by this large group of friends and the so well organized dinner with abundant alcohol.

I was pleased to see Father Milad and Father Eid (whom I will ask for help a year later) present to celebrate my birthday and recovery.

Salwa did all this for me not knowing she will be leaving us one year later.



Now June 2014 and one month before her admittance to MD Anderson Palliative Care Unit, she attended Dominique wedding and she was radiant and full of life and happy as she has always been.



No one can tell she will leave us in 6 weeks.

Through this website you can continue reading our experience at MD Anderson Palliative Care Unit until her gracious departure to be with God, the God she loved and prayed daily for all of us.

Salwa today is in a much better place. She is free from pain and chemotherapy and the pain and sadness of life but also enjoying being with all of us at the same time watching over us. I look forward to see her again and hope this will be very soon.

The mass celebration was held at Our Lady of the Cedars with an unbelievable attendance. The condolences line was almost half a mile long and the

shake hands and hugging by loving parishioners lasted for more than one hour.

The funeral took place the second day and Salwa was laid to rest at Forest Park cemeteries.

Salwa did not leave us and her presence was felt for two months. How you ask? The story goes as such:

After Salwa passed on, my sister and I who were beside her during her last hours were asked to pack her belongings and clear the room. Salwa had the habit of having a lit candle throughout the day in our bedroom. Since we were not allowed to have live candles, we had tea-candles ran by batteries. I picked up the candle still on and packed it away with the rest of her belongings. Once home, I unpacked and found the candle still on and I laid it facing the Blessed Virgin Mary.

A week and now ten days have gone by and the candle was still on. It was impossible, so I called the manufacturer of the battery and inquired on the life of the battery and was told five (5) days at the most. I was blown away. I waited two more weeks before having to make a decision about what to do next. I approached our Catholic priest and al he told me was that all is possible and told me to pray for her. I

was not satisfied with this answer so I seek out and reached an Orthodox priest I knew. The priest showed a lot of interest and told me he was once involved in a similar case. asked me if he can come and see it and of course I agreed.

An evening Father Eid came to visit and asked me to see the candle. I asked him to follow me upstairs. As soon as he entered our bedroom and saw the candle, his demeanor completely changed and he started sweating. This priest is huge more than six foot tall and more than 300 pounds for sure. He knelt facing the candle and the Blessed Virgin Mary and started praying as he now was sweating even more. He then rose and reached for blessed water from his pocket and started spraying the statue of Mary and the candle while singing Orthodox hymnals. Once over he told me that he felt Salwa's presence and was sure she was there to make sure I am doing okay.



I would like to ask the reader of this document if he or she had experienced what I experienced moments of Salwa's passing to a better world. If they did please email me at [tchoufati@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tchoufati@sbcglobal.net) and tell me your experience.

This is my experience: 9:00 PM July 30, 2014 all visitors had now gone and it was only me and my sister Cecile beside her with Cecile holding her hand



while Salwa was in an unconscious state. I told Cecile I will lay down for a while and rest. I must have felt asleep.

It was now 10:50 and I heard Salwa moaning so I woke up and approached her and kissed her and wiped her forehead then went back to my seat and in a few minutes I fell asleep again. At 2:30 AM July 31st, 2014 I was awoken by a cold wind swirling through and around the room. I was so called and had shivers that we more than just shivers, I was shaking like a tree branch caught in a tornado. I looked at Cecile in trying to reach her but could not speak, my tongue and mouth were unable to say one word. I could see Cecile through the swirling wind and she was also sleeping. I was shaking so bad that I held on to the couch's arm trying to calm down my shivers while covering myself with more blankets with the other hand.

This went on till 3:00 AM when suddenly the wind stopped and I know was warm and sweaty. I rose from the couch and approached Salwa. She had her eyes semi open and she was murmuring something. I had my ear next to her lips and was able to listen to



her prayer of our Father prayer. Cecile woke up and held her hand and we started praying with Salwa but could not keep up with her fast praying pace. Her eyes seemed to be looking and watching something or someone in the room and her hand I was holding, was trying to extend as if she was trying to reach someone's hand.

I stopped praying and kissed her I don't remember how many times, then started telling her 'Salwa please go' 'Salwa go with them, go' 'Salwa please go'.

Salwa breathed her last breath at 3:30 AM July 31, 2014 and was declared officially dead by 3:50 when she was checked by the attending doctor.

I would like to end this history of her life with one of the most exciting trips we ever had during her life. It was trip to France Lourdes and what made it more exciting and unforgettable was this trip included Anthony and Angie two years in 2012 before her passing to be with God.

The trip started by traveling to a small airport in France 100 Km from Lourdes. We rented a car and

using the GPS we brought with us Anthony drove us to Lourdes and we stayed in a very nice convenient hotel a few minutes away from the main gathering of the cave where the Blessed Virgin Mary apparitions took place.

During our stay in Lourdes, we visited the cave several times and in one evening we walked the procession along and around the grounds of Lourdes holding lit candles and singing hymnals such as 'Ave Maria' and we also attended an open door mass under the beautiful sky of Lourdes. Salwa was confined to a wheel chair and thanks to Anthony who was the main support in pushing Salwa in the wheel chair.

Lourdes is known to be a nice resort with many nice restaurants and we enjoyed sitting and dining in the evenings in many of the side-walk restaurants.

On one of Lourdes Hills a huge Cross stood proud on top of this hill. To reach the top of the hill to the cross visitors have to go up hill walking a very ragged non-paved path. Anthony decided to push Salwa's wheel chair up the hill through this

antagonizing road. Amazingly hey made it to the top of the hill with the help of Salwa's prayers. I had to get back after a few minutes climbing the hill as I ran out of breath (A year later in June 2013 I realized I had a defective heart valve).



Lourdes night procession

Our next stop was Paris. In Paris we had lots of fun the four of us. I will do my best in remembering our sojourn. In Paris we were joined by Tarek and his beautiful wife Sue Ellen and Stephanie Maakaroun and Michel and Therese Ziegler and our relative George Stylianidis.



In Paris we split in two groups, women group with Salwa, Sue Ellen, and Angie and me and Anthony and Tarek and the men went walking the streets of the Champs Elysees and frequently stopping for a cold beer. We also visited the Sorbonne while the women went shopping. Tarek suggested a Chinese restaurant and we had a delicious lunch made out of duck and other Chinese delights. We then all met again at a restaurant at the Champs Elysees and relaxed at a side-walk.



Stephanie knew of a great restaurant and we all went for a fabulous dinner. At this restaurant for dessert they serve chocolate mousse in a bowl and all share the mousse from the same bowl.

George owns a taxi and the first night of our arrival he invited us to dinner at a famous Lebanese restaurant and the food was of the best quality and taste I have had in a Lebanese restaurant for a long time. George also invited us to lunch in the Latin Quarter and we had Moroccan food. George really spent time helping us. One day he drove us to Notre

Dame Cathedral. He also invited us one night to dine in his home and meet his beautiful family.

We spent every day with Tarek and Sue Ellen and Stephanie whenever possible for her to come like the day we went to the Eiffel tower. We did not go up the tower because that day only one elevator was functioning.

Anthony and Angie had to leave to Houston and back to work. Salwa and me stayed in Paris for a little longer.

Although it was tough for me to push Salwa on the wheel chair, I enjoyed being with her in Paris. We went to Le Moulin Rouge and walked through the Champs Elysees and stopped by a few boutiques and she wanted to visit the Nespresso shop to buy coffee cups as she had a weakness for buying coffee cups. Salwa wanted to walk to the Arc de Triomphe and she got off the wheel chair and walked and when she got tired we sat at a side-walk cafe and had the best French dessert ever.

Across from our hotel was a small breakfast cafe where we had breakfast every morning and one day

we were joined by Stephanie. This small cafe served dinner in the evening. One evening Michel and Therese came to visit us and we had dinner in this restaurant as it was close to the hotel. We enjoyed their presence and we spent a couple of hours reminiscing about our old friendship.

Our visit to Paris was approaching the end and our French couple Florence Jouhet and her husband called and suggested they will drive us to the airport. The day before our departure they came to our hotel and picked us up and helped us with our luggage as the plan was to spend the night at their home in the suburbs of Paris. On the way to their home we stopped by a very fancy seafood restaurant on a lake and they invited us to a very special dinner. We spent the night and the next morning they drove us to the airport and we said our goodbyes unaware that this will be the last time Salwa and Florence will ever talk to each other. Here I would like to add that it is amazing that most of the times while driving to MD Anderson for a chemotherapy session, Salwa will receive a call on her cell from Florence telling her she was thinking of her.



With Florence

In Memory of our dear loving Salwa:





## LOVE NEVER DIES

Challenging pain and defying death Salwa Chair Choueifat silently departed while centering her attention on her family to forever see the faces of her children and the face of her beloved husband and the love ones.

Strange O' Death, you take the benevolent righteous and safeguard the sinful and prolong their life with abundance.

Salwa Choueifat is an institution in steadfastness and loyalty in the face of trouble and difficulty, she left and took with her the love, and life permanence, and courage, as well as confrontational and smile and love, and faith that embraced her over the years of her illness, she frequently said: "Thank God for all your mercy and gifts", "O God let your wishes be done," and "Who are we to judge?"

Salwa Choueifat was the torch that lit up the home, and her presence was the rays of the rainbow hope, she was a woman not to be iterated twice in life.

No, no, Salwa has not died.

We will always see her in the eyes of her brother Saad Shuar, on the face of her daughter Angie, and in the looks of her son Anthony and in every sigh of her husband Tony.

Our only consolation in your absence Salwa is that love never dies because people like you their legacy never dies off.

Until resurrection day, we say Salwa did not die!

Lebanon Times Magazine family extends heartfelt condolences to the family of the deceased including her brother Saad Shuar and sister in law Janet and their children Shad and Dominique, and the Habib family Dr. Gabriel, Katy and Gaby, and two she considered her own children Tarek and Danielle Antaki, and the Maakaroun family and especially Anthony and Angie her dear to her heart children, and to the most loving and faithful husband Tony, and her family in Montreal, Canada specially Lucie and Cecile Choueifat her closest sister.



One of her last kisses



Walking for the Cure.. every year the Komen Walk.

Her mission was to tell every breast cancer patient "If I can beat cancer for 12 years, you can and will beat cancer forever but you need FAITH and need to PRAY. God has a plan for you and if you can be more helpful with Him, then let it be".



من آمن بي وإن مات فسيحيا

تتقدم أسرة جريدة "الأخبار"  
من عائلة الصديق أنطوان شويقاتي  
وعموم عائلتي الشويري وشعار  
في كندا والولايات المتحدة الأميركية  
ودول الاغتراب  
بأحر التعازي القلبية

لوفاة زوجته المأسوف على شبابها  
**سلوى شعار شويقاتي**  
المتوفاة في هيوستن - تكساس

راجية من الله أن يتغمد الفقيدة بواسع رحمته  
وأن يلهم عائلتها وأهلها وأصدقاءها الصبر والسلوان

بنة اب  
م الى  
٢٠١  
بيتش

**SALWA's LOVE WILL NEVER FADE NOR DIE!**