

One In My Lap, One In The Womb



This photograph was taken in '54.. Sara was born in '53, 9 months later I was pregnant again. One was in my lap, the other in my womb. It is a photograph taken in Beyoglu Civil Marriage office, during the civil marriage ceremony of a friend of ours.

I had two children named Sara and Sami. There is 18 months between them. They were two very cute kids. My life was spent at home, working and raising children.

Sara's grades were always very good. She first attended St. Pulcherie, and then Notre Dame de Sion (two schools supported by the French, where the curriculum is completely in French, and run by nuns). She got engaged when she was a senior in highschool.

Sara was raised quite conservatively by her father. She was only allowed to the movies on Saturdays. Sundays were for homework. We used to go to Chinarcik in summers then. The mother and father of my son-in-law, Mordo Altaras were also there. Mordo Altaras was there too. He was dating a girl. The father-in-law knew my husband. He said this to his son: "You leave that girl, and see if you can arrange to go out with the girl downstairs". They started going out together. They exchanged phone numbers on our return from Chinarcik. They had bonded, Mordo started calling continuously. I tried to keep the peace despite the opposition of the father. Her father did not want his daughter's education to suffer. She had been accepted to Notre Dame de Sion Highschool without a test because of her high grade point average at St. Pulcherie. But that year, because of

Mordo's phone calls and going out, she failed her first year of highschool.

Dad did not know she was dating. If he knew, he would kill me first. One Saturday, she came a little late. Her father turned to me and said: "If this girl is seeing someone, I will first kill her, then myself". He was so rigid. He was a very good father, a very good husband, but he was very conservative. I acquiesced, I was raised in such an environment anyways. But when it came to Sara, we had to formalize this union. She was only 16 years old. Her father who was at Sara's engagement, unfortunately could not witness her wedding. The day Sara was married was a beautiful day, my brother-in-law and older sister held the thallis. In this way, my older sister happened to hold the thallis for me and my daughter.

Our happiness was sealed with the birth of Sami. His circumcision was done in the French Hospital. Cake and lemonade, chocolates and mint liquor was offered at circumcisions then. I was resting in my bed with the nightgown that Sara the embroiederer had prepared. Sami's bar-mitzvah lacked luster. Father and son went to the temple and put on tephillim, then there was a brunch. My son finished St. Benoit Highschool. He graduated from the electrical engineering department in the university. He worked in Netash, a big firm, for long years. He retired from that firm, now he continues in commerce.

One morning when I went to work, I left the siblings at home arguing. The two siblings got along well usually. That morning they started verbally arguing about an insignificant, small thing. In reality it was a period when my nerves were really wrought. I told my son noy to be lazy. When I returned home in the evening, I saw my son with a bundle of money in his hand. I asked "What is this money?". "I started working", he said. He decided to become a tourist guide. His first job was to take tourists to the Dardanelles (a city on the Aegean coast, where the Dardanelles strait connects the Marmara Sea to the Aegean. The Dardanelles strait divides Turkey into European and Asian sides just like the Bosphorus). The firm where he worked had given him the hotel and excursion money for the tourists. In this way he earned his living by being a guide for a long time and continued his studies. During this time he got engaged and broke up once. The girl he got engaged to had different expectations about life. The discord between them ended with separation. He married the granddaughter of my uncle Sami.

Sami's wife's name is Rachel. She had gone to Israel to study after finishing highschool in Adana. She had studied to be a preschool teacher. But she could not stay there, she missed her family too much. My son, when he was a tourist guide was changing girlfriends frequently. Just like captains who find a lover at every port, tourist guides return with a different girlfriend from every trip they take. This situation worried me of course. My uncle's granddaughter Rachel was a beautiful girl, she had come to Istanbul from Adana, and did not have much of a social circle. She and my son met. This was a type of matchmaking (proposition-families deciding first and the children marrying in a short time). But my son went out with Rachel for a while after meeting her, they did not decide within three days like in the old times. They got to know each other and fell in love.

They had a happy life. Rachel could have been a working woman, preschool teacher was an ideal career for a woman. But my son did not budge from the principle "I will not allow my wife to work" even though he was an open-minded person. His wife became a good homemaker.

My son had a very severe cold when he was 9 years old. He developed nephritis (kidney infection) after the cold. I encountered a lot of difficulty for his therapy. We went from doctor to doctor, the levels would not go down. A Greek doctor started a new therapy. This time the leukocytes (white blood cells-they fight the infection) went down, and the kid felt better. In reality, this doctor took a big risk, and gave my child cortisone without letting us know. Truthfully, if you think about the side effects of cortisone, the fact that a mother is kept in the dark about it could lead the patient to very dangerous directions. After this event, my son had to be raised with more care. I did everything I could until he got married.

After he was married, I did not concern myself with my son like I used to, so I would not be meddling in their lives. All of a sudden, it was found out that one of his kidneys was not functioning. We started going from doctor to doctor again, and it was decided that he needed dialysis. He contracted hepatitis during the dialysis. My son was in a very bad state. You could say he was on his deathbed. They called me to their home and said they were going to India. India has an abundance of donors and it is a country that is advancing technologically. When we reached India with ambulance, a Turkish doctor received us and took us to the barracks where the operation was going to be done. You might find the term barracks a bit of an exaggeration. But it was really a very dirty, primitive environment for such a surgery. All the preparations were done, and the kidney transplant operation took place.