

Changing lanes

By Meera Jamal

Looking at the colourful display of my cakes, that represent beauty, colours, creativity and my passion for them, people who have known me from my journalist days, always ask, "But what about journalism?". My answer that, "I am happy making cakes", never seems to satisfy them. They would then go on explaining how well I use to write and how well-appreciated my articles were.

The truth is, making cakes is my escape from the reality around me. It kind of satisfy my innate wish to make things look beautiful, pleasant and appealing -- something, that I never achieved working as a journalist. I now help people celebrate their happiness, something, that I hardly did while being a journalist.

For those who have never stepped out in the conflict region, covered bomb blasts, walked over dear bodies, seen the utmost poverty that drives people to take their own lives, it is hard to understand. Journalism, is one of the biggest trauma in my life. The knowledge of knowing the truth, the effort you make to bring about a change, and then, sadly, after some time, shifting to whole new subject altogether. Although the subjects one writes, keep on changing, yet knowing that nothing really changed, gnaws on your soul little by little. People still die, lives still do not matter and we as a journalist get more and more praise for the work they did.

When I first joined a newspaper, I knew nothing about journalism except for the fact that my father was a journalist himself and he was very proud that I was going to follow his footsteps. Internally, hungry to prove myself as every youngest kid in the family, I dived right into it without stopping to grasp a breath.

My initial three years, sitting on a magazine and news desk, editing news stories and magazine cultural and entertainment articles, I thought I was a journalist.

It wasn't until stepping out meeting people, covering incidents and victims I realised the gravity of the matter. I remember, having many sleepless nights after meeting a 4 year old rape victim who was raped when she was TWO years old. That child was raped by her own brother-in-law, who then went on to break her bones and scar her with scissors, and also punctured one of her eye with a scissor. She survived the incident somehow and her mother under police pressure, pardoned the abuser for Rs25000 merely 200€. Imagine, meeting that girl, two years after the incident, with her scars telling the entire story, yet unable to recall anything. What can you possibly ask her or the mother? Yet, the card hanging around your neck, naming the media organisation you work for, compels you to do so. To ask, things that you know you would not really want to hear them say. And you have a pressure, to write "story" in beautiful way.

Or imagine, going to bomb blast victim's house. A young 26 year old man, who not knowing what was bound to happen, had just walked into his death. How inappropriate it feels being there. Barging into someone's most personal moments, and asking them to tell you how their son, husband or father died an unnatural death. I have to shamelessly admit, being a woman, I knew that the women could talk to me and they did.

Or going to burns ward and meeting young women, who had been burnt by their husbands, mother-in-laws, or self-proclaimed lovers, fighting for their lives. Yet, almost all of them, afraid for their future, knowing that their parents will not be able to feed them, refuse to name their husbands or in-laws responsible and claim that they caught fire while cooking. One of them, lying on a hospital bed, covered from head to toe with some cream and bandages, had a husband who had burnt his arm, while trying to make sure she was in flames and would not

get away alive. This she confessed only to the doctors, who knew the difference the burs of a woman who accidentally catches a fire as opposed to those who were burnt by someone. To the police, the man claimed that he was actually trying to save his wife and thus those burn injuries and the wife went with that story, not knowing, she would die in two days.

I come from a country where justice is unjust and laws can be custom-made. And I landed myself in a country, where though I am happy to be alive and well, yet I sometimes feel happy, not being able to write. Happy, that I won't be selling stories for a living anymore. What was even more painful in this entire process is when I came to Germany, and I was interviewed for what had happened to me. The meaning of being a victim, and sitting on the other side in the interview was just as painful. There came a point, when I would get a call a month at least, being asked if I was willing for an interview and to share my story with the world. There came a point that I wanted to hide, to myself behind some shield, not wanting to scratch my scars and the pain of leaving a family, friend and profession behind in Pakistan. It seemed that all my dreams and happiness froze and refuse to move on with me in the new place and life. Even working as a radio journalist for a few months, did not seem satisfying enough. I would wake up in the middle of the night with nightmares of all the things that I had been through.

Post childbirth, creating unusual cakes was such a refreshing and satisfying experience that I could not give it up. The process of how colour, texture, design and execution and can produce a product that brings happiness in the life of loved ones, is perhaps my new high at the moment. The trauma of not having a perfect cake, is believe me, not as bad as you might imagine.

Yet, a small part of me does miss having touch with the reality. Let's not forget that there are a lot of journalist, including myself, that have put their lives at risk in an attempt to change the existing system. Some, have even died in line of their duty. This is kind of a homage to all those, who are still out there in different conflict zones, working meticulously on the surface, but battered badly internally. Only the hope that may be what we write can bring about the change. That "May be" is what most journalist live for and fight for. The hope, that we all have in our hearts and rekindles the flame in all the journalists in exile or otherwise.