



Rana Hadi

My name is Rana Hadi and I am 24 years old. I am in my fourth year of study at the Science College in Baghdad. I have always known that a human being has only one life, never more. As for me, I have two, and I will share them with you.

My first life:

It was a day like any other; I woke up in the morning to start a new school day. I got ready to go to college, and as I left, I cast a farewell glance, caused by the challenges residing inside us, which we confront daily. As we go to our colleges, we know that we may never return, especially after the tragic bombing of Mustansiriyah University, which shortly preceded the events I will narrate.

After we got out from the university, me and my friend Huda, who is 23 years old, a student in fourth grade, chemistry faculty of Science College, Baghdad University and Mais, who is 22 years old, a student in the faculty of biology, Science College were waiting for the car to take us home. When the clock struck 12.45 on Thursday the 15th of April 2007, just 10 minutes before the car that usually takes us home arrived, we heard a loud explosion that threw us on the ground. I shut my eyes involuntarily, grinded my teeth and clenched my fists so hard that they bled. The pressure was so strong that I was trembling and quivering violently. My ears were buzzing.

At first, I thought that the explosion was far from us. Then I opened my eyes, and what a horrific scene it was. Nothing or no one was in its place... scattered rubble and body parts were lying everywhere. Deafening terrifying screams were heard ... screams of goodbyes were mingled with screams for help...clouds of dust raised in the sky, and oh that infernal heat. I had not yet grasped the situation. What happened to us? Am I alright? Where are Mais and Huda? All these questions were swivelling in my head. In a terrifying moment, I started to feel my body...my hair was burned, both my face and chest were bleeding ... there was blood everywhere..my hands... Where are Mais and Huda? I did not see their faces. What I was seeing were body parts and broken branches impaled in my chest. I tried with all my might to move, yet I was helpless.

Suddenly, I heard a familiar voice, it was Huda. She was crying "Help! Help!" I could not speak back. I saw her feet pointing towards me, I could not see her face, so I shook her feet and then I turned my face in agony in an attempt to see her. And when I turned my head I found that Huda had turned her whole body towards me and started to crawl in my direction... The poor girl...my good friend...she was all burned. Her insides were hanging out and sticking to the ground.

Then I mustered my courage as I saw her sprawling herself alongside next to me as if she was saying 'Come on let's die together.' The stare of fear and farewell were fixed in her eyes. I started to speak with effort, uttering 'I witness that there is no God but God, and Muhammed is the messenger of God.' All that she did was give me a serene peaceful look, as if telling me that she was ready to leave.

Minutes ago she was brimming with hope and life, and now all that was gone... There she was, brimming with death. That was the last I was to see of her. Later on I heard that Huda died of bleeding. As for Mais, she was divided in two halves, a half which remained sitting and the other half was thrown on the ground.

We were transferred to the hospital in trucks and we were covered with blankets instead of ambulances. The number was high and most of the wounded died eventually of bleeding, and the lack of equipment and medical care. I was the only survivor from that blast.

Today, and after all this time has passed, I still relive the disaster minute by minute. The echoes of our giggles preceding the screams are still resonating in my ears whenever I immerse in my thoughts ... And whenever I wake up I find my fist clenched in a bloody fist.

My second life, with hope:

Injuries from the terrible explosion had almost killed me. My legs were particularly badly injured. At one point, the doctors considered amputating one of my legs. I got many surgeries done, hoping to be able to walk again, to return to my university and complete my studies. However, all what I got was a wheelchair. I used this chair to go to the university to extend my sick leave. I went to the Ministry of Health and several humanitarian organizations to allow me to travel outside the country for treatment. But all I got out were unanswered demands, and promises which could not alleviate my pain or heal my wounds.

All that changed when I met Ms. Hana Adwar, from the Iraqi Al-Amal Association. She exerted great efforts in order to get my case to those who could help...from her to the Red Crescent Association to the International Relief and World Development organization. I travelled to Amman and there, an operation that took four hours was performed on my knee joint. A four cm long sliver was removed from my right eye. I stayed in Amman for 28 days and after they removed my stitches, the very next day, I returned to Baghdad. And this time, I was pushing the wheelchair in front of me.

It was a tough, cruel and painful experience. I thank God I emerged from it strong. But I still had a lot of thinking to do, return to my life and reality, and go on. But where do I start? How do I start? I was frustrated. Then I resumed contact with Iraqi Al-Amal Association, and IAA continued its endless support to me. They offered me a free seat in the Women in Technology (WIT) classes for computer and professional skills training. Here I regained my interaction with others and feelings for people around me. I noticed my self confidence was gradually coming back. After I finished my training, the WIT program offered to hire me as a part time training assistant in the next WIT classes starting in September, in addition to my voluntary work with the Iftar distribution project (distribution of meals to widows, orphans and immigrants) of IAA.

I intend to pursue my voluntary work in the future. Even through part time commitment, it is through the civil society, that I found myself, where I had the reward of sharing my experience and learning at the same time. And, that is not where it ends. I have applied to University again, and I am awaiting the start of a new academic year, with more hope and aspiration than ever.

Rana Hadi
19/8/2008