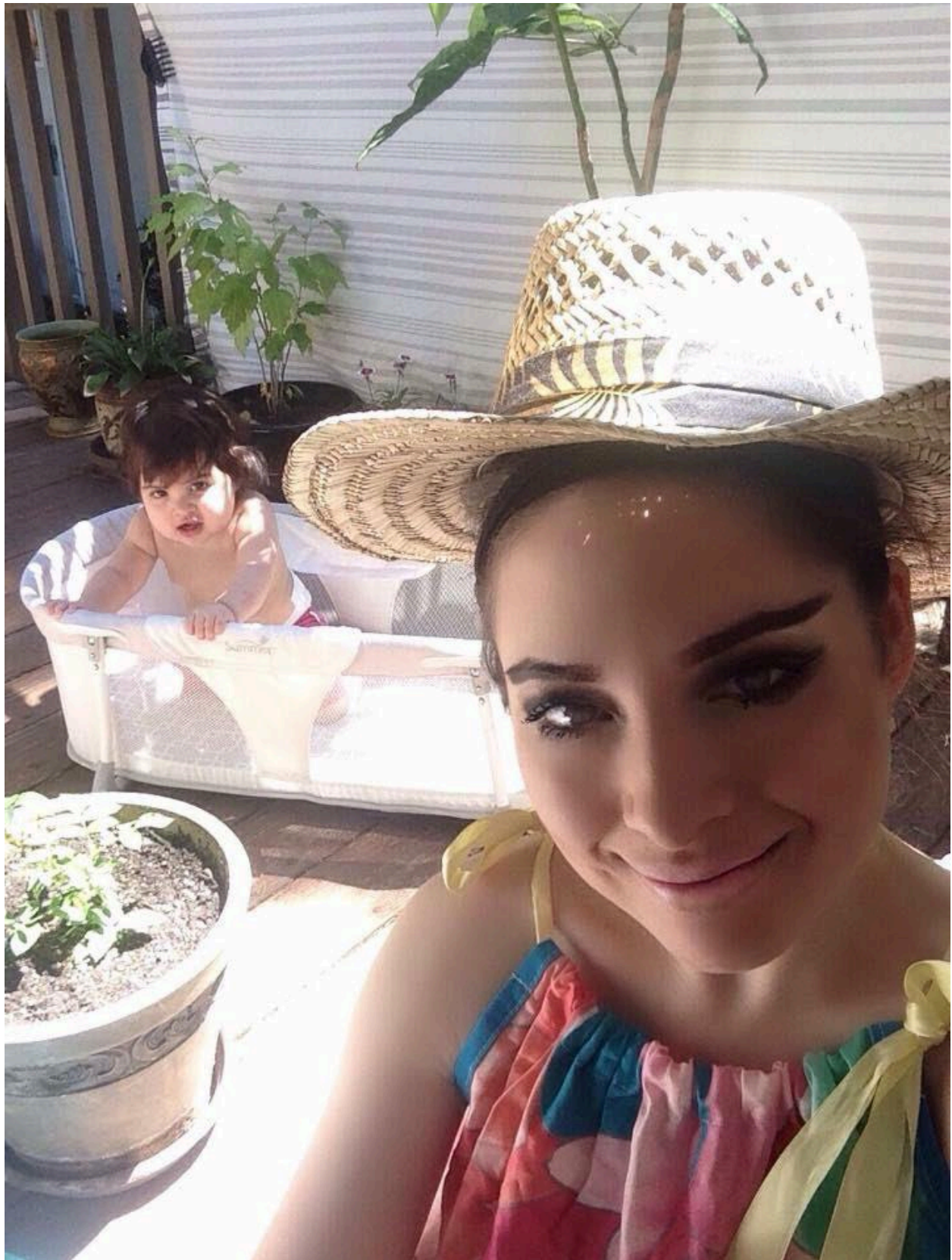


“How the Muslim Ban is Destroying My Life”



Like everyone else, I just wanted to be happy. I decided to turn the next chapter of my life and marry a longtime friend with whom I've known for many years. Both of us were already thirty years of age and we wanted to finally start a new life together. We originally met in a language exchange program and after time we eventually fell in love. Never before had I felt such happiness in my life!

The only obstacle was that we lived half way around the world. So I made the fateful decision to travel to Iran which is my spouse's home country to be with him. We got married in late 2014 and I was fortunate enough to stay there for several months and became acquainted with the sights and sounds of a nation that was deeply misunderstood.

As an American, I was truly struck by the kindness and generosity of the Persian people. The beauty of that country had inspired me in so many ways and had forever changed my perception of Iran. It simply wasn't the country you would expect to see in the mainstream media. It was a land that had rich history and prided itself on being one of the first democracies in human civilization under Cyrus the Great, which of course didn't mirror the current political atmosphere there. Despite that, I grew greater respect for my husband's heritage and his country.

Unfortunately, I never realized how politics would soon shape our destiny and how my husband's birth of origin would be used against him and our future.

After we married, I felt a deep sense of peace and contentment knowing that I would never be alone again. Unfortunately, I had to return to my state of California after living in Iran for several months. My husband and I had dreams of opening a business in the states but first I had to petition him to legally immigrate there. Soon after returning from Iran in late 2014, I found out we were expecting our first child together. The news had brought such joy, but I felt pain knowing that oceans had separated us and that my husband would not be here for our daughter's arrival.

As of now, my husband's immigrant visa process has taken over two years. We have spent a lot of resources, and have expended a lot of valuable time just so we could be reunited again. I became optimistic knowing that my husband's immigration process was at its final stages and that my daughter, "Alexandria," who is already seventeen months old would see her father for the very first time. He was expected to arrive between March and May of 2017. The strain of waiting had already taken an emotional toll on us but that was not enough to dampen our feelings of love for one another.

The Friday of January 27th, seemed like any ordinary day. The sun was shining brighter than previous days and I remember thinking how wonderful it would be to see my husband arrive here in spring. I instantly imagined the joy of seeing him at the airport and even thought of what it would have looked like as he saw our precious daughter for the first time!

Suddenly in a blink of an eye, my life and future had turned upside down. With just one signature, my prospects and dreams had fallen to the ground! As I started to read the executive order that the president had signed, I realized that the banning of nationals from Iran and six other countries would last for only ninety days. At first glance, I mistakenly thought that the ban was temporary and being used to increase stricter vetting measures for the nationals of those countries. For several minutes, I digested the concept of having our visa case delayed for ninety days. I thought since we already waited for two long years, a mere ninety days would pass very quickly.

As I resumed reading the executive order, my heart stopped for a split second and I gasped for air. The executive order stated that the ban would become permanent if the governments of those seven countries refused to comply with the giving of adequate information related to the procedural processes of visa applicants.

It became apparent that this so called security plan was not truly about security but was a method to reduce lawful immigration to satisfy a fascist ideology. For it was obvious that some of the seven countries in the executive order would almost certainly never comply, which would render a permanent ban on immigration from those nations.

A dark cloud had inevitably overtaken me as I realized that Iran would never comply to such orders, given our two countries volatile history and lack of diplomatic relations. I cried and stood in disbelief at the prospect of my husband being permanently banned from immigrating to the United States. I refused to accept that concept and tried in vain to comfort myself. I kept on reading the executive order over and over again, trying my best to find if I had made a mistake in my comprehension.

Suddenly, the reality had set in and I hesitated to tell my husband the horrible news. My husband comforted me and told me this ban was illegal and would be fought in court. My husband who is a lawyer had a clear understanding of the fundamental aspects of law and his years of studying in that subject had given him such wisdom. However, his words of encouragement had failed to bring me solace.

I tried to make sense of what was happening. It was very clear that this ban was not just any ordinary ban but was used to scapegoat Muslim majority countries to appease xenophobic elements of President Trump's fan base. As he had promised to implement a so called, "Muslim ban" in his pre-presidential campaign. Such acts reminded me of fascist dictators that used fear and division to demonize entire populations in the name of politics. Images of the holocaust, and Japanese internment camps settled in my mind. Thoughts of the separating of families, chaos and the loss of civil liberties constantly resonated.

Interestingly, no nationals from the seven countries implemented in the ban had never carried out a terrorist attack on U.S. soil nor were involved in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. While countries whose nationals were involved in terrorism against Americans were not included in the

executive order. I later realized that the president had conflicts of interests and had business ties with countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey and Kuwait in whose nationals had murdered Americans.

Unfortunately, people like my husband and the hundreds of thousands of lawful immigrants and nonimmigrants from the seven countries implemented in the ban, were simply being used for nothing more than a security guise. I often wondered how on Earth this could happen in this day of age when such discriminatory practices were taught in history classes, not just for educational purposes but as a deterrent to prevent the repeat of historical injustices.

After a week of depression and despair, hope finally emerged. A federal judge from Washington State struck down the ban and ruled it unconstitutional! After a series of victories and the later ruling by the 9th circuit court of appeals to continue to freeze the ban, my sadness soon lifted. Optimism had overtaken me but not for long! I realized that a second executive order was being created to avoid litigation. My nightmare had returned and the thoughts of hopelessness have taken hold again.

Will my marriage survive and will my husband ever see our daughter before the age of five? Those are just some of the thoughts that constantly plague my mind each day. Being in such an emotional roller coaster has been hell for me and the hundreds of thousands of people that are being impacted by this unjust and cruel ban. Families being torn apart, students forced to contemplate their future plans to abandon their studies or whether to reunite with their loved ones. Parents not sure if they'll be there to see their children grow up.

I sometimes can't comprehend how a person with such magnitude could lack basic empathy. When I think of a president, I think of someone with high morals and the dignity to adhere to our constitution. I think of someone that strives to protect people's liberties and honor their fundamental rights. Yet, this president has taken away the very rights that had always made America exceptional. After all, I was being denied the basic right of being legally united with my loved one and it has created irreparable damage to my life. He has clearly shown absolutely no regard for others except himself and his own interests. This man is merely the product of egocentrism gone array and will do anything to win popularity contests, even if that means destroying innocent lives in the process!

My worst fear is not that the ban may last forever. My worst fear is how long and in how many years will this ban be implemented? How many precious years do I have to delay my life and that of my daughters, in order to be reunited with my husband and live as a family again? I've already sacrificed so much precious time that I'll never get back. It's the uncertainty of one's future that causes the greatest pain and despair!

I still have hope though. I still imagine my husband at the airport and him seeing and holding our daughter for the very first time! With a smile, I often tell Alexandria that her daddy will be here

soon! Yet my smile is then replaced by deep sadness, unsure of what future lies ahead and unsure if our constitutional rights will be further taken away from us.

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