1-1-2013

Champion of Choice

Cathleen Miller

Praise for Cathleen Miller's *Champion of Choice*

"Cathleen Miller's *Champion of Choice* is a rigorous yet eloquent account of Dr. Sadik's inspirational career and a beautiful and long-awaited tribute to one of the greatest women's advocates of the twentieth century. The issues to which Dr. Sadik has so passionately dedicated her life are becoming only more salient as our global community strives to protect both our people and our planet, and Dr. Sadik will certainly remain an invaluable and unequaled leader in this field for years to come."**—TED TURNER**, UN Foundation founder and chairman and founder of CNN

"Nafis Sadik is one of the most courageous women of our time. She has bravely confronted all opponents of women's reproductive rights from Pope John Paul II to Islamic fundamentalists. Her story will inspire human rights defenders worldwide."**—FRANCES KISSLING,** former president of Catholics for a Free Choice

"I think now the things that Nafis stands for, most women would say absolutely right—good woman—but that's to underestimate how brave she had to be starting off thirty years ago when most people weren't saying any such thing."**—CLARE SHORT**, former member of Parliament, United Kingdom

"Nafis has been the scourge of the men in robes."**—NICOLAAS BIEGMAN**, ambassador to the United Nations from the Netherlands

"A strong believer in women's equality, the articulate and forthright Sadik has guided policy on improving the status of women in the developing countries while fighting to contain the population explosion."**—MARY ANN SIEGHART**, political columnist, *London Times*

"Here's a woman who has a very clear sense of what she wants to do. I would not like to be on the other side of the table negotiating with her." **—TIMOTHY E. WIRTH**, president of the UN Foundation

"Nafis Sadik was a remarkable manager who was focused and possessed charm, wit, and strength. Most importantly, she delivered in an area of tremendous difficulty."**—MECHAI VIRAVAIDYA**, former cabinet minister, Thailand

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THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF WOMEN'S ADVOCATE NAFIS SADIK

Cathleen Miller

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS | LINCOLN AND LONDON

Manufactured in the United States of America

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Publication of this volume was assisted by the Virginia Faulkner Fund, established in memory of Virginia Faulkner, editor in chief of the University of Nebraska Press.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Miller, Cathleen.
Champion of choice : the life and legacy of women's advocate Nafis Sadik / Cathleen Miller.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8032-1104-9 (cloth: alk. paper)
1. Sadik, Nafis. 2. Women social reformers—Pakistan—Biography. 3. Women physicians—Pakistan—Biography. 4. Family planning—Developing countries. 5. Reproductive rights—Developing countries. 6. Women's health services—Developing countries. I. Title.
HQ1745.5.Z7S236 2013
305.42092—dc23 [B] 2012035075

Set in Garamond Premier Pro by Laura Wellington.
Designed by A. Shahan.

This book on courageous and smart women,
a tribute to the power of sisterhood,
is dedicated to my sister, Susan Miller Vollmer.

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INTRODUCTION

The first time I ever saw Nafis Sadik, I had the same reaction countless others have probably had: *who on earth is that woman*? I was in Manhattan working on *Desert Flower* when I noticed this older Pakistani lady, around sixty; she stood at the front of the room at a United Nations reception wearing a colorful blue print sari, its fabric draped gracefully over one shoulder. Diamond pavé earrings the size of dimes peeked from beneath her dark pageboy. I watched her receiving guests, and she seemed to know everyone. When it was my turn to be introduced, I remember being transfixed by her eyes, the likes of which I'd never seen before—enormous black pupils surrounded by a pale blue ring—all the more outstanding for being set in her dark complexion. The eyes stared back at me with a type of unflinching scrutiny that made me squirm.

Never did I dream that within a few years I would be writing about those eyes and scrutinizing every aspect of *her*. When Dr. Sadik retired from the United Nations, I took the opportunity to write her biography, the tale of how she became what the London *Times* calls "one of the most powerful women in the world." The year I embarked on this journey was 2001, and little did I know that yoking myself to Nafis Sadik's life was a bit like handcuffing myself to a racing fire engine.

Throughout the book I have sought to fulfill what I believe are the innate desires of readers of biography: to learn about the lives of others so we may solve the problems of our own lives. By emulating the success of the subject, we hope to skip the painful trial-and-error lessons and jump to the head of the class where we can build on what we have learned from the hero or heroine's path. In the case of Nafis I identified one powerful lesson as her upbringing, and one of the subtexts to this work is what I call "the primer on how to raise your daughter to be a world leader." Also in recounting Nafis's story I've taken special effort to transmit the "how-to," just in case you yourself have aspirations to change history.

Two challenges that emerged as I delved into the project were (1) by virtue of what Dr. Sadik does for a living, her colleagues are scattered throughout the galaxy; and (2) much of the work she and her colleagues do is abstract to most of us. Certainly in the United States we have a blissfully limited knowledge of problems like obstetric fistula. To kill both these birds with a single shotgun blast, I organized a trip around the world to interview Nafis's family, friends and professional associates, an amazing experience that afforded me the opportunity to meet some of the great minds of our time.

During this trip I also sought out women and girls who could speak firsthand about the issues on which Nafis has worked her entire life, and have included brief profiles of them. These accounts are the Vignettes that I have sandwiched between the chapters of Sadik's life. In their design I chose to give the reader a peek into what goes on while getting these stories, to take you into the moment with me so you are able to visit with these women as I did.

A word on some of the other stylistic elements I've used in the writing of this book. The information contained herein is predominantly from interviews I conducted with individuals; in many cases the sources have recounted tales that I have passed along for the reader. I have not created stories, but I have cleaned up the dialogue to make it more palatable for a literary work. The only artistic license

I've taken is in a few instances I have imagined what went on in an individual's mind, and these portions I've rendered in italics. In a few cases I have indicated where I changed an individual's name to protect her privacy.

When I launched into this project, the United Nations was under attack for a variety of reasons: George Bush had just defunded the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for aiding coercive abortions in China, the UN weapons inspectors were vilified as inept for locating no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and an assortment of wags were calling the UN irrelevant for being incapable of solving the planet's ills. As these claims mounted, I admit to being quite concerned about what I would find during the course of researching Nafis's career, and if it was horrible, wondering how I would deal with that reality. What would I do if I discovered the agency's work was a sham—or worse yet, UNFPA was involved in eugenics, ethnic cleansing and forced sterilizations as some critics claimed? I decided I would just have to keep an open mind and do the legwork to find out the truth.

As I embarked on this mission and collected stories for the Vignettes, I noticed a pattern, a sort of narrative arc that would begin in the women's victimization, and then they would transform that experience into advocacy. I have let this pattern of transition come through in the book's structure. All but one of these resilient females have soldiered on and have made a decision to rise above their circumstances to better their own lives. Many have chosen to use their energy to benefit the lives of others as well.

Another phenomenon emerged during my travels. I would land in a different country each week, and through the web of connections—UN contacts, Nafis's associates, nongovernmental organizations, the media, and friends of my own—the word would spread about my book and the research I came to do. Then even when I wasn't working—that is, recording interviews—women began to tell me their

stories. Whether I was talking to the cream of Karachi society at a cocktail party or chatting with a fellow traveler at my Buenos Aires hotel, when they learned what I was writing about they voluntarily opened up and shared their own tales of violence, rape, incest, abortion. With a growing dread I began to wonder if every female on earth carried a cruel secret of abuse. The profound importance of Nafis Sadik's work came into focus: her insistence that governments address the plight of women and stop accepting their suffering as the inescapable lot of "the weaker sex."

CHAMPION OF CHOICE

1 BIRTH

On a table, in the lantern light, a mother writhed in labor. She was an Indian housewife in her thirties, and she was surrounded by other women, some relatives, some strangers, who tried to assist in the birth of her baby. As she strained, the helpers crushed into the room in the oppressive August heat, sealing off the small servants' quarters that had been turned into a delivery room.

On the other side of the door another type of birth was taking place—but this delivery involved millions. The year was 1947 and the creation of a new republic, Pakistan, was tearing the British Raj in two as the friction raged into a civil war. As the subcontinent was divided into two nations based on religion, the rioting in the Indian capital forced Muslims to flee to the Pakistani High Commissioner's home for safety. This estate, located in a fashionable district of New Delhi, sheltered around five thousand people as the siege outside the garden walls continued.

The baby—oblivious, of course, to the war that had brought his mother into this stranger's home, and to the timing of thousands of people dying outside its protective confines—chose this moment to be born. As he struggled through the birth canal, one of the women called out, "Where is that chit of a girl, the one who's studying to be a doctor?"

They were referring to Nafis Shoaib, the self-appointed bathroom monitor, who had taken it upon herself to stand outside the toilet door and limit how long each woman spent inside. She cut off chunks of soap and parceled them out, rationed the toilet paper, and insisted that each user clean the facilities before her exit. During her

introduction to medical school, Nafis had learned some things about creating a sanitary environment; now she seized an opportunity to put this knowledge into practice. Her rationale was that one must impose some order in this time of chaos. Otherwise, conditions in this private home, which was never designed to accommodate thousands of people, would quickly devolve from unpleasant to unsanitary, and shortly they would have an internal health crisis on their hands to accompany the calamity on the streets created by warring factions of politics and religion.

Nafis hailed from an upper-class Indian family; they had arrived in Delhi the week before when her father, Mohammad Shoaib, was summoned from Calcutta to assist in the formation of the fledgling Islamic state. Mohammad had planned to relocate his family to Delhi as he represented Pakistan on the Joint Properties Commission. He would help the commission cleave the subcontinent into two separate nations.

The economist was respected as an intellect and an independent thinker, and yet family members felt there was one area where he required their counsel: they had advised Mohammad not to let his daughter become a doctor. He had ignored this warning, and at eighteen she had already completed one year of medical school. However, Nafis's studies to date had been textbook theories of physiology and anatomy, and her patient examinations had been confined to the dead. Dissecting frogs and memorizing cell structures had not prepared her for the messy reality of delivering a baby in the sweltering confines of this estate-turned-refugee-shelter.

The pregnant woman's sister went to fetch the medical student, and the crowd of attendants parted to let Nafis enter the room. The doctor-to-be was slender, with short wavy black hair combed back from her face and smooth caramel-colored skin. A black mole created a punctuation mark on the right side of her strong nose. But upon meeting Nafis, all these traits receded into the background because

the viewer was mesmerized by the cobra-like quality of her hooded eyes. The black pupils were the size of dimes, surrounded by a ring of icy blue—the type of heavy-lidded eyes suggesting mystery and veiled seduction, the type of eyes that had gazed from the images of goddesses in Indian art for millennia. The eyes Radha used to lure the god Krishna. Needless to say, on any given day Nafis was quite sure of herself, but on this particular night she faced a challenge about which even she had misgivings.

When she entered the room, the patient was in the advanced stages of labor, breathing hard. One group of women set about to boil a pot of water, which became its own production; someone brought the liquid in a small container, and to heat it another attendant located wood to build a fire. During this lengthy process Nafis didn't have the heart to ask what the boiled water was for. She knew that in the movies a helpful soul always shouted, "Boil some water!" whenever a woman went into labor, but she had never understood why. However, her attention was drawn away from this quandary by her patient, who lay moaning on the table.

On August 15, 1947, after nearly two hundred years of colonial rule, the British had relinquished their control of the subcontinent. At midnight in New Delhi, the nation's capital, a member of the Constituent Assembly blew a conch shell in the traditional Hindu salute to the dawn, signaling a free India. Later that morning ceremonies took place at the Red Fort, an ancient red sandstone fortress where Lord Mountbatten, King George's cousin and the colony's last viceroy, handed Prime Minister Nehru the reins of government. Outside, the half million citizens jamming the streets of a newly independent India went wild in celebration. The colors of the nation's freshly minted flag—orange, white, and green—painted the city, adorning everything from bullock's horns to tricolored saris to horses' legs.

As part of the process to vacate India, the British had created a separate Muslim nation called Pakistan, hoping this solution would

assure order after their departure. In Delhi a provisional government gathered to handle the difficult task of apportioning the land and assets of one of the world's most populous nations into two individual states. A line running north to south through the Punjab would divide the Asian subcontinent: west of the border Muslims would reside; to the east, Hindus and Sikhs. But when independence was trumpeted that August morning, the process of sorting the masses based on religion had just begun.

As millions of people looked at being displaced, tensions between the factions exploded. Feelings were exacerbated by the forced uprooting of millions from ancestral homes and the loss of their livelihoods and entire way of life. Rioting swept through the capital like the summer monsoon rains, as Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims murdered one another.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the newly appointed Indian prime minister, sequestered the Muslims inside the High Commissioner's walled estate in an attempt to protect them from violence. Armed soldiers guarded the perimeter of the post–art deco house on Harding Avenue, a white boxy structure fronted by mullioned windows that emphasized the rigid angles of the facade. The men slept on the manicured grounds, catnapping under the lush tropical foliage while they prepared to ward off attack. Inside the house every inch of floor space—from the foyer, rising up the grand spiral staircase to the attic—was covered by blankets where the women and children slept, and more Islamic refugees continued to arrive each day. Rumors of impending raids swirled through the frightened island of Muslims trapped in the rioting city.

However, that evening the women in the servants' quarters had other concerns to occupy their attention, as their patient's labor advanced. At age thirty, the woman had already borne several children, and as she pushed, she instructed Nafis on the delivery, calling directions from the table. Soon blood and amniotic fluid flooded the floor of the cramped space. An elder assisted by holding the lantern

at the foot of the table so the light shown between the mother's legs, and Nafis could see the baby's crowning head. Within the hour an infant had made his debut into the world, and Nafis held a straight razor in the lantern flame to sterilize the blade. The yellow light glinted off the steel as she sliced the umbilical cord, thereby parting mother and child.

Eighteen years before this night Nafis herself had been born into a privileged family outside Varanasi. At the time her mother, Iffat Shoaib, was still a mere girl, with a waterfall of flowing black hair and sad doe eyes rimmed by thick lashes. She had returned to her husband's ancestral estate at Jaunpur to have her baby—a pattern she would repeat for future deliveries.

The tradition in India was to return to your own *amma*, the Urdu term for "mother," when your due date was near, so that she could act as midwife. But Iffat's mother had died giving birth to her, so the girl was already familiar with the shared pain and joy of childbirth. Instead of returning to her own home in the United Provinces for her delivery, she came to stay with her father-in-law, Mohammed Abdulla, the patriarch of the Shoaibs. He had built an estate where several generations lived together, and this is where his granddaughter Nafis entered a family formerly devoid of girls. And where she immediately became the darling of the entire clan.

Later her father was posted with the Indian Civil Service in Calcutta, and as she matured there, the precocious child knew that she wanted "to do something." This vague notion was unusual for a female of her era, including the Shoaibs' social circle, where it was assumed that all girls would become wives and mothers. Her brother, Kemal, could recall no precedents; in this early stage there were no role models for Nafis's goals. "We didn't know any women who were professionals, let alone doctors."

Nevertheless, in Nafis this fantasy "to do something" gradually solidified into a formidable ambition. "I considered many

professions: becoming a tennis pro, a singer, an engineer. This last option prompted me to take advanced math and physics courses, until I decided that this career choice wasn't very exciting. Engineering wasn't going to change the world," she concluded matter-of-factly. "I didn't know what I was going to do. In those times I remember vaguely thinking, 'I'm going to help the poor.'" Then after much consideration, she determined medicine was her true calling.

But when she began to seriously consider becoming a physician, Kemal remembered that their extended family was "amazed that any woman would want to be anything other than a housewife. You grew up, got married, and you had your life through your husband—not any other way. That's the way our family and most families here on the subcontinent were. And when Nafis declared that wasn't her way, it created a real furor." However, while her father thought the plan unusual, he was quite pleased at the news that his daughter had ambitious goals for her education, and he became her strongest supporter.

The nuns at Loretto College, her convent school, became the next obstacle when they advised her father against this career path. "Nafis should study literature," Sister John the Baptist informed Mr. Shoaib. However, once his decision had been made, the sisters acquiesced. And although they had been opposed to the idea of Nafis becoming a physician, they readily set about to prepare her with the requisite science courses, even bringing in a biology professor from outside the school, as they didn't have anyone on staff qualified to prepare Nafis for this challenge.

When the sisters awarded their star pupil a scholarship, Nafis's father in turn gave the money directly to his daughter. "You earned it," he explained. With so much cash in her purse, the girl suddenly felt quite important, and being a sports aficionado, she used her windfall to buy tennis rackets for the entire family.

The young Nafis's energy bubbled up like an artesian well, fueling her academic and athletic prowess, her preternatural curiosity, and her numerous rebellions and intrigues. It seems the girl's desire

for experimenting with new things extended beyond the classroom. When Mohammed and Iffat's oldest child announced that she was volunteering to teach English and poetry at the orphanage, her parents readily agreed. They were astounded by her commitment to get up at 5:00 a.m. and report for this duty each morning before school. The plan was that the Shoaibs' chauffeur would drive their daughter to the orphanage, wait for Nafis to finish her work with the children, and then take her on to the convent for her own classes. But what her parents didn't know was that their daughter conducted a daily assignation with their driver.

Once the car was out of sight of the family home, the thirteen-year-old would instruct him to pull over, and she would slide behind the wheel. It was rare for women to drive a car in India, and certainly unheard of for a teenage girl. But Nafis convinced the chauffeur to teach her how to negotiate the early-morning traffic and swore him to secrecy about her plot. Years later these clandestine driving lessons would be put to good use as she maneuvered her Jeep along rutted dirt roads, providing health care to women in remote mountain villages.

As she matured, Nafis formed other schemes beyond learning how to drive. Through her father's role in the creation of Pakistan, his daughter was familiar with the great optimism surrounding the formation of the Islamic state. There was a lot of excitement in the air about the new nation, and so Nafis, ever the instigator, informed her Muslim friends that they must also contribute. How they were going to contribute at the age of fifteen or sixteen remained to be seen. But in order to participate in the action, she evolved a plan: "We must teach all the women first aid in case of emergency." Problem: none of the girls knew any first aid, so they had to learn it themselves before they could impart this wisdom. Admittedly this step slowed down their momentum, but undaunted, Nafis followed with another directive: "And we must do exercise, and become physically fit." This phase lasted for about a month; every morning PT—physical training—was

attended by about ten or fifteen women. Some participants were quite obese and out of shape, but during the jumping jacks their ebullient leader shouted to them all the same: "We've got to be fit—fit for Pakistan!"

Familiar with her pattern of fierce yet fleeting passions, Nafis's extended family hoped that one casualty would be her plan to become an obstetrician. They were appalled by the notion of the girl becoming a doctor. "What's this—you expect her to work?!" the aunts and uncles exclaimed to her parents, a degrading consideration for women of their class. "You know in medical school she's going to learn *everything*," they whispered, a reference to what would surely be an encyclopedic knowledge of sexual matters. Friends and relatives also warned that the long years of study would place the girl in a terrible predicament. Tradition held that brides married at sixteen or seventeen, and by the time she finished her training at twenty, who would want her? Her father informed his advisers: "Nafis is not your daughter, and it's not your decision. It's mine." During this time he fielded numerous marriage proposals for his determined teenager, and to all of these offers he replied, "Certainly not."

But in the process of these repeated discussions, Nafis's mother grew concerned. She didn't want her daughter to become an old maid by waiting until twenty to accept a husband, and appealing to the girl's weakness, she cajoled her with a promise: "Now give up this medical school business and I'll buy you lots of clothes and jewelry."

But Nafis still insisted she wanted "to do something," and she was quite unconcerned about her prospects for marriage. "Amma, I'll become a doctor and buy my own clothes and jewelry," she reasoned to her mother.

At fifteen Nafis took the examinations at the convent to graduate from high school. As was the tradition, the nuns sent the tests back to Cambridge University to be graded, and their pupil waited nervously for the results. Several weeks went by and they didn't come,

but since the year was 1944 and World War II dominated daily life back in England, some delays were to be expected. Nafis was convinced, however, that there was another explanation: "I felt sure I'd failed and the nuns couldn't bear to break the news to me." Eventually even her father became concerned. When the scores finally arrived, Nafis learned she'd ranked as one of the top students in India, no small feat in a country of its size, and jubilation at the news spread through her parents' social circle.

But unbeknownst to her, while Nafis planned for college, her uncle was busy matchmaking. He had decided her academic triumph provided the perfect opportunity to arrange a marriage for her. When the Shoaibs went to visit Mohammed's brother for the holidays, Nafis overheard her uncle saying that a promising matrimonial prospect was coming from out of town to meet her parents. Furious that after years of effort to achieve her goals, her success was now being used as fuel on the pyre to immolate her dreams, Nafis created such a scene that it left her entire family speechless. Her father announced it would be best for them to leave, much to the shock of his brother and sister-in-law; and with that the family departed and returned to Calcutta. There was no more talk of finding a husband for Nafis.

Her best friend, Shamsa Ahmed, was a fellow student at Loretto College, and her father was an ophthalmologist at the local Muslim hospital, Islamia. There were very few Muslim children in the convent school, and the two girls had become fast friends. Besides their religion, they shared being the eldest sibling in their family.

The two girls graduated from the convent together and took their Cambridge exams. Nafis was fifteen at the time. While she and Shamsa awaited their test results, they embarked on a course of typing and shorthand—skills they calculated would help them at medical school. Two other students joined them, and a fifth young woman, the niece of Mirza Abol Hassan Isphahani, was their teacher. Mr. Isphahani was a great friend of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a pivotal figure in world

history. The two men had become acquainted at law school in London when they became involved in a political party called the Muslim League, a group that advocated the creation of an Islamic nation separate from India. When Jinnah later became the first president of that nation, he would earn the epitaph Quaid-e-Azam, a term that means "great leader." But at this point, a fragile, tubercular Jinnah traveled throughout India to raise support for his plan for an independent Pakistan. Tall, skeletally thin, with a gaunt, alert face, he wore his signature karakul hat fashioned from tightly curled lamb's wool and cut a striking figure as he toured the country in an open white Packard. He arrived in Calcutta to great fanfare and was staying at the home of Isphahani when the determined shorthand/typing crew learned of his arrival. Eager for an introduction to Jinnah, they pestered their teacher until she arranged the meeting at her uncle's home.

The five girls trooped in to meet the leader, and as Shamsa recalled: "So, we went in and Mr. Jinnah said, 'Nice to meet you young ladies. What are you planning to do in the future?' He told us that he had visited an Islamic hospital that morning, but had only found one Muslim doctor. He was unaware that he was referencing my father, who was the superintendent of Islamia. Then Mr. Jinnah asked us, 'If tomorrow we get Pakistan, who will care for our ladies?' You know, he was so dignified, and the way he spoke was so convincing, that when we came out, my sister, Nafis, and myself, all three of us agreed about the importance of going into medicine."

What the political leader knew was that Muslim women would not want to be attended by a male physician. Whatever doubt had remained in the minds of these girls was gone, as they now saw their professional calling linked to the future success of their new Islamic nation.

While the rest of their friends talked of getting married, Nafis and Shamsa talked of becoming doctors. However, the next stumbling block was the exams for admission to get into medical school, particularly the requirement to write an essay for intermediate science

in Urdu. While Nafis spoke the language at home, most of her formal schooling had been conducted in English. She worried that her Urdu wasn't sophisticated enough to live up to the family tradition of excelling on exams. She decided plagiarism was the solution, and she found four general essays that could be used to answer a variety of possible test questions. Then she memorized them in Urdu, word for word. This trick won her an honors distinction on her scores.

Armed with these results, Nafis and Shamsa anxiously applied to Calcutta Medical College, a large academy with hundreds of students. "It wasn't easy to get into this school," Nafis remembered. As part of the application process, Mr. Shoaib accompanied his daughter to interviews, to make sure she was treated fairly. Thanks to her glowing exam results, she was readily accepted. Nafis and Shamsa continued to live at home under the watchful eyes of their parents, matriculating together at seventeen.

Shamsa recalled their reaction at visiting the cadaver room for the first time: "We went in and were so—I won't say horrified, but stupefied—that there were these dead bodies lying on the table. They didn't look human, because you know they were shrunken and blackened and they had dye injected into them to make it easy for our dissection classes. Then I got the shock of my life on the first day of our dissection. I found the senior students kept their sandwich boxes on the same table as the cadavers. I just didn't understand how they could dream of eating while they were doing their work."

Being two of ten females enrolled in medical school (versus two hundred men), and the only Muslim women, Shamsa and Nafis stuck together on all things—including their disinterest in a male population that seemed exceedingly interested in examining them.

During that first year at Calcutta Medical College, while Nafis focused on her studies with a laser-like intensity, she learned that not all the other incoming students were equally suited for the rigors of this institution's training. For example, in histology class one of the other female students fainted every time she tried to prick her own

finger to provide blood for a lab assignment. Her fingertip never even came into contact with the needle; she just passed out at the mere approach. Some of the boys keeled over during their first time in the operating room. Other students got queasy at the rumors that circulated on the history of the cadavers they dissected. The pranksters concocted macabre stories as they split open an abdomen or poked about a skull. Nafis took it all in stride.

She was simply grateful that her parents had been progressive enough to let her become a doctor. Whenever friends and family asked, "Is Nafis settled?" (a common question in this part of the world meaning "Is she married with children?"), Nafis would think impatiently: "Of course I'm settled. I'm settled at school." This sentiment demonstrates a character trait that would serve the doctor all her life: an ability to bore into the task at hand with a singular diamond-tipped devotion, while she ignored distractions and criticism. The opinions of others bounced off the protective armor of her self-assurance like inconsequential flotsam offered up by an interfering world. She earned the admiration of many and a reputation for hubris among others; however, she scarcely noticed. Nafis was too busy forging ahead to pause and wait for approval.

Back at the Pakistani High Commissioner's crowded home on that hot August night in Delhi, the budding obstetrician's first delivery was a success. Both mother and child were healthy, living to worry about surviving in a city in the throes of a civil war.

Along with their fellow Muslim refugees, Nafis, her parents, and younger siblings remained under siege at the estate. Until they could be safely dispersed, Prime Minister Nehru sent rations into the compound to feed the amassed thousands. Meanwhile, the family's baggage and furniture gathered dust at the airport; although their belongings had arrived safely, it was unsafe for the Shoaibs to collect them.

After two weeks Nafis's father was able to move the family into

their own home and attempted to return to his work with the Joint Properties Commission. But throughout August and into September, rioting in the Hindu capital continued to escalate.

As the monsoon clouds gathered overhead, gangs roamed the streets, sprayed machine-gun fire through courtyards, and set buildings ablaze. They worked themselves into such a frenzy that they were soon ripping doors off hinges, then hacking and beating to death the children and old people inside as they ran for their lives.

The violence was not one-sided. Muslims retaliated in kind; having lost their homes, businesses, and loved ones, many had nothing left to live for. While the torrential monsoons flooded the subcontinent, a growing tidal wave of brutality spread outward from Delhi, providing a man-made counterpart to the natural disaster. Within a matter of months, an estimated one million people were murdered during Partition.

By October Nehru felt that the only safe course was for all Muslims to evacuate India; he could no longer guarantee protection, even to the diplomatic corps charged with creating the Pakistani government. Up until this chapter of her life, Nafis's personal history had been one of doting relatives and individual accomplishment. But this period provided the teenager's first exposure to violence and the influence it had on women and children, who became its greatest victims. Muslim refugees reported how Sikhs had stripped and paraded their wives and daughters through the crowds, raped them, and then killed them. The women's naked bodies littered village streets.

At the time Nafis and her younger siblings looked on the siege and their ensuing escape as an adventure, albeit one they were quite happy to survive. As one observer noted, the Shoaibs had a reputation for being level-headed in times of crisis, a type of unemotional practicality. But decades later the memories of the violence in Delhi lingered, as the diplomat struggled to protect women in war-ravaged societies like Bosnia and Somalia from crimes perpetrated by their enemies—and even their own governments and families.

In October of 1947, after two months in the war-torn capital, the Shoaib clan left Delhi, taking the train to Bombay. The ancestral home in Jaunpur that Mohammed Abdulla had built—the place where Iffat had given birth to her children—was lost to them now, as it was on the Hindu side of the border.

The family began a voyage into the great unknown, leaving behind all that was familiar, to set sail for Karachi, where they would land in the newly formed capital of Pakistan, their newly formed republic, and begin a new life.