

# **A Walking Miracle**

**A journey into metamorphosis  
and heart healing**

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I dedicate this book to my late father,  
Fathi Abdallah Kadid,  
who gave me the greatest gift  
anyone could give another person:  
he believed in me.

A heartfelt thank you to  
my husband Ghassan Sayegh  
and my children Moussa Alexander,  
Mary and Dimitri. I love you.

This book is first and foremost  
dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ. My God,  
of whom I love to serve and praise.  
Without Jesus I could do nothing.  
I have felt his loving care and hands of protection,  
all my life. Thank you Lord Jesus. I love You.

“Give the ones you love wings to fly,  
roots to come back, and reasons to stay.”

**The Dalai Lama**

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## My Life, Challenges, & Triumphs

**A Walking Miracle**  
A journey into metamorphosis  
and heart healing



It all began on the morning of 13 April 1975. What does a five-year old remember beside the paralyzing sound of military bombardment and the unforgettably scary word: "War"? 1985, ten years later, she turned 15, and the horrible sounds remained seared in her memory. Yet a deeper war within herself did not end. She became a driven teenager who worked tirelessly to excel in school, but found all her hard work was of no significance. Growing in Lebanon was not like living in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Syria. She had no psychological or mental support. Her body grew tense and she would cover her ears with the sound of every loud noise. There was often no electricity, she had to study on candlelight. In 1988, she was not accepted at the university of her choice, because she did not have a Lebanese passport. She attended another university, where unfortunately they did not have the faculty of her choice either, so she had to choose another faculty. 28 April 1991, she was married and left to South Africa, via Cyprus, two weeks later with her husband on a boat under the continuous attack with bombs and other missiles. She was saved and lifted from all her struggles. She closed her eyes, waved goodbye to old wounds and fear, then opened her heart to new beginnings.

*Who was this woman who escaped?*

My name is Eugenie Fathi Kadid, but I have always had the nickname, "Gino". I was born in Beirut on a hot summer afternoon on Friday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1970. I weighed 4.5 kilograms. I was named after my aunt, my father's sister, a typical and traditional Arab mentality. It is convention to name your daughter after your mother's name or your sister. The same applies when a son is born; he will often be named after his grandfather or his uncle. My Syrian Armenian father, Fathi, passed away from a heart attack at the age of 40, while my Lebanese Maronite mother, Aida Zeiter



Farah, watched afterward. I have one brother, Abdallah; he and his wife, Annmarie, have two children: Aidan and Evelyne. They live in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the United States of America.

I do not recall much of my early childhood, aside from the horrible incident that cost me a vicious punishment. I placed my brother in the oven to bake him, then I also tried to put him in the washing machine to wash him. I was jealous from the moment they brought the beautiful blonde baby, weighing 5.5 kilograms, home from the hospital. I was a five-year old who wanted to get rid of him. Everyone shifted all their attention to him and I no longer existed. I became a shadow in my own family, but was disciplined and monitored constantly.

My parents said that I was a very active, curious, and communicative child. My father distracted me with a steady supply of books to read and keep me away from my brother. My brother was three years old and I was eight when I received the gift of the whole series of the French edition, "Oui Oui", "Noddy". This was the best gift I received. My father promised me that he would buy me the whole series of "Martine", every girl's dream books, if I completed the series. This was my introduction to the joy of reading. My brother mocked me every time he saw me immersed in a book. I just looked at him and smiled: *what did he know?* He only knew about being pampered by everyone, because he was a very cute baby. And just like that, my collection of books grew larger and larger. I took breaks between reading to ask the questions that confounded me. I was very nosy and impatient. I needed immediate answers.

I married Ghassan (Gus) Moussa Sayegh twenty-seven years ago. It was an arranged marriage; I was 20 years old. We currently have three beautiful children: Moussa Alexander (26), Mary (24), and Dimitri (19). I lived most of my life in Johannesburg, South Africa. My married life was rarely easy. Like many other marriages in a Lebanese or Arab community, I knew nothing about Ghassan before our departure to South Africa after the wedding. It was difficult to imagine life away from my family and what was my home since childhood.

As a child, I always felt compelled to take care of myself, particularly after the loss of my father, when I was seventeen years old. At the time, my thirteen-year old brother was a teenager who just lost his father and, in turn, lost himself. My 34-year old mother was a complete wreck, a lost soul uncertain what to do or where to start in building a new life. This loss left us with no money, as he was the sole breadwinner for the family, and she was not educated.

The passing of my father placed tremendous pressure on me that went beyond words. A boyfriend came into my life not long after the loss of my father. My mother made his life a living hell, because she wanted us to be engaged. Unfortunately, he was unable to take such strides as he was still

a student. It was a difficult time for both of us. *My “ex-boyfriend”, Jean, please forgive me if I hurt you.*

I grew up in a tiny “radar” Metn-District village called Dik El Mehdi, at 325 metres elevation. The village was akin to Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon: everyone was under constant surveillance. Every move I made was watched and judged by immediate family and neighbours alike, twenty-four hours a day. It felt like an espionage movie. The village was comprised of mostly uneducated suburbanites who tended to find any way to look down upon everyone else. It was true that education was not the highest priority; life may educate you well beyond what one would learn from books or in a classroom. However, the people in my village were notoriously stubborn and judgmental.

I did not choose to be born in Dik El Mehdi; that was where God wanted me, it was my destiny. Like everyone, I did not choose my parents either. I was not given a choice. Now that I am 47, I could totally understand my father’s frustration with us. He fought with my mother day in and day out. My life has been a never-ending drama, but that was what made it special!

My father was my hero. He was an educated man with a zest for life. He was funny, handsome, an extrovert, protective, loving, caring beyond words, obsessive compulsive, and extremely generous. He was also a champion in ping pong. He taught me to believe that nothing was impossible in life. He encouraged me to swim. At the age of 6, I swam like a fish without concern for the depth of the sea. I just learned how to relax and float. A year later and through practice, largely inspired by my father’s diving skills, I dove from a height of 10 metres. I couldn’t wait for summer season to arrive so that I could swim. The butterfly stroke became one of my favourite swimming styles. It did require a lot of practice to perfect it, though. Best of all, my daddy’s applause at my butterfly stroke instilled a sense of accomplishment and pride.

At my old school, “Collège des Frères Maristes Champville”, I learned how to make it on my own. The school used a tough French curriculum that pushed me to the limit. It was located upon a large green hill of roughly 22 hectares in Dik El Mehdi. Nevertheless, to cope with this rigor, I tended to be quite cheeky. Some would say I was born naughty. Some teachers and other students referred to me as “Crazy Gino,” but I was one tough cookie through all the struggles. I had to be strong-willed to handle the male-dominated school.

*I would like to mention a few teachers who affected me and enlivened me as an ex-Marist: Frère Jarjour – the walking teddy bear with a heart of gold, Frère Robert – the knowledgeable brother, Mr. Etien – the hysterical secretary, who always put a smile on my face, and Mr. Roger – best English teacher to whom I owe my strong English proficiency. I would also like*



*to note Mrs. Fadia Aboujaoudé, the classiest and most inspiring French teacher filled with joie de vivre. Thank you Fadia for boosting my reading skills. Mr. Armen Kaloustian, thank you! You were hands-down the best math teacher, even though I had a difficult time in your course. Also, Frère Dominique, may his soul rest in peace, and his secretary, Ms. Sylvie, were the best combination in the junior section. While they were polar opposites, they always demonstrated a kind of love-hate relationship that I always appreciated. As for Mr. Henri Moubayed, my father's best friend, seeing you after almost thirty-five years meant the world to me. Your long tight caring hug was all I needed to feel my dad's presence. Everyone at Champville was special in their own way.*

I remember becoming obsessed with running and basketball, despite the best efforts of my parents. My father registered me for a twice-a-week ballet class to distract me from playing sports with boys. I was a typical tom boy. I hated ballet classes, because the teacher was so strict and classes were held inside. I craved the outdoors! I loved to run around the "Grand Terrain"; I longed to be free, be wild, and to simply be "me".

I salute everyone at my school and every Marist student scattered throughout the world. I will forever cherish those memories and all whom I had the pleasure of learning with and from.

The loss of my father brought difficult times for me. I remember how petrified I was when they brought his body for us to say our last goodbye. I slept next to his frozen body, waiting for him to be put into a coffin, where he was to become a memory and for his tomb to become a place to visit. It was difficult to reconcile with the fact that he was no longer with us. I held his hand, pressed it tight, and he pressed back. For sure, my father's soul at that time had left, it was just his body. I sobbed thinking this was the end, I needed to go on without him.

I whispered in his ear and told him: "I am going to make you proud one day. Do not forget about me wherever you will be. I heard it was a better place, but let me know. Give me signs, stay at my side, and be my guide. I will never forget how heavy my breath was when I said: "I love you Daddy, rest in peace."

People flowed in and out of our humble apartment to express condolences. Most likely thought I lacked spirituality, but they simply did not know how spiritual I was nor how deeply I felt the energies of those around me. My mother sat on a chair in the corner of our living room crying at times and quiet at others. She exhibited a combination of self-pity and pitied by those around her. Looking at my young mom saddened by the loss of her husband, gave me strength to not collapse. My darling brother, a split image of my father, was in shock. He could not believe our father left at such a young age. His solemn face was heart-breaking.

The death of my father marked a tough turn in my life. The best memory I shared with my dad was the time between our first hello and our last goodbye that will never be forgotten. I completed my matriculation exams and I needed to go to university in the aftermath of his passing. Some nosy, cruel human encouraged my mother to send me to work as a saleswoman. They told her, "Your daughter doesn't need to study."

I explained to my mother a plan to ask the Armenian Catholic Church for tuition assistance. Fortunately, my plan came to fruition. The church provided the requisite support, given my brother was still young and my father was an ex-Marist and secretary general of Marists Brothers at the time of his passing. My mother finally listened to me – for once in her life. The Armenian Catholic Church was happy to take me under their wing. The church gave me a chance to shine. I completed two and a half years as a pedagogy student at Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK). I was hungry for education, eager to learn, and maintained a passion to excel in life. I wanted to make myself proud, but mostly, I wanted to make my father proud.

I came into my own as a university student. I preoccupied myself with books of any sort, such as fiction novels and my university texts books. My bedroom became my haven removed from distractions and surrounding issues in times of trouble. I loved reading; reading became my passion. Reading was a way for me to make contact with a new reality removed from the difficulties that loomed over my life. Learning gave me some place to go when I had little choice to do anything, but to stay where I was.

I met Ghassan on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April in 1991. He proposed six days later, then we were married on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April. It was an arranged marriage orchestrated by Gus's sister, Maguy Sayegh Zaatar. Although Gus was madly in love with another woman for over six years, he turned his back on her to be wedded to me, because as the eldest son, he had no choice. I was chosen and he had to accept. He did not want to let his family down. *What a load of crap! Gus, my man, leaving her so easily meant you did not love her enough. Honestly, until this day I think often of this woman.*

Gus is the most generous man I have ever met. He is an excellent provider and a wonderful father. Despite the challenges he faced in the lead up to our union, he always exhibited the kindest heart and most caring nature. He never liked to upset anyone, especially when it came to members of his family. Now imagine what it was like for me to adjust from the many difficulties I faced to living with a supportive and helpful husband, who made everyone happy. In turn, it meant that the happiness of others came at the expense of my own happiness, because he rarely considered how I felt when he chose to put everyone ahead of me. This was a difficult transition for me. While the change seemed like it would make life much easier, this was not always to be the case.



I was young, naïve, and polite. My father raised me “by the book”, and taught me to always have respect and courtesy to others, particularly family members. I was bombarded with constant challenges to my marriage, but I had to keep quiet. Those challenges poured at me like the bombs in the Middle-East. I used to feel that I was about to explode, but I had no choice but to implode. The “war” came back to my life. When you were raised in a Lebanese home, you were taught to always be lady-like, gracious, and refined. How could you fight back? From a very young age, you were taught to shut your mouth and to never talk back. I told myself that this must be my fate; the fate of learning, accepting, and punishment.

I went through a mid-life crisis at the age of 38. I lost the meaning of my life completely. I did not want to be married anymore. I craved my independence and freedom. I longed to break free from the attachments of my family except for my children – I always wanted them with me, despite that I wanted to gain a better sense of myself.

I found myself thinking: *Who is Eugenie Fathi Kadid? I missed the old me, the happy me, the smiling me.* I felt a desperate pull to live the life I wanted to live, not the one I was obliged to live in constantly pleasing others.

Gus being wiser and 11 years elder handled the situation with understanding, care, and wisdom. He asked me what I wanted. I wanted out, I no longer wanted to be there, so I told him. I did not know if I belonged in that location. I was lost, I was tired, and had enough of the life I lived with Gus. I was not able to cope with it, and most of all, I was confused, and did not want to hurt anyone. I felt neglected, lonely, and not appreciated by anyone around me.

I travelled the world with my gay friend *Joao Fernandes*. We visited Argentina, India, New York, Turkey, Frankfurt, Italy, London, and back and forth to Lebanon. I had the best time. I became a free-spirited soul! *Thank you for coming into my life, Joao. I miss you!*

I did not care what anyone thought of me. I knew that the wild behaviour at my age was probably inappropriate. Yet I was so happy, a great mid-life transformation. I did not want to die one day without any scars. I blocked my ears refusing to hear improper comments from family members around me. Transformation was what happened when I lived my life rather than analysed it. That was the first time I became selfish, unavailable and independent. Life carried on, my old habits did not open new doors. I had to change my attitude and stop drowning for the wrong manipulative people who would never even give a helping hand when needed. It was time for the renewal and the rejuvenation of my body, mind, and soul.

My antics did not stop there. I became a Bikram Yoga Instructor a year after my best friend, Anthea Potter, introduced me to the practice. I told

Gus of the exciting decision as I stood in front of him in the living room: "I want to become a Bikram Yoga Instructor." He nearly fell off his chair. "For sure you are joking", he replied. I glared at him, "I am going to! When I put my mind to something I won't give up until I achieve it."

My mid-life crisis was a frightful time. I always wanted to escape to anywhere, but the place where I was at that moment. I craved constant movement, I wanted to be in perpetual motion. On my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2010, I was given an open ticket to Los Angeles to go ahead with my plans. I lived in the USA for eleven weeks, from April to July 2011. I spent the longest time away from my family and I finally became a Bikram Yoga Instructor.

Galina Ilieva was my roommate in Los Angeles. We had our ups and downs, but we made it. Galina and I were the only two obsessive compulsive members of our training cohort in the yoga instructor training program. Our bedroom was our oasis, our door was never closed, welcoming every yogi and yogini. The powerful smell of Dettol, a cleaning solution, welcomed every student who passed our bedroom. I don't know how we didn't kill one another, a stubborn Taurus and a wild Leo. Yes, we did fight, but we rose above it as real friends do in a true friendship. I learned a lot from Galina; she was my mentor, as she was a few years older, so she would put me in my place.

Sally Flanagan, the owner of Yoga Jozi where I began Bikram Yoga, was the teacher in my first class. She shouted at me for fidgeting in the middle of the class, and always wanting to speak to Anthea. I thought, "What the fuck! What a tough and rude teacher!" Once the class was over, I asked her why she embarrassed me. She replied that this was just the way it goes: "if you don't like it, don't come back." Believe me, I was there the following day, and was addicted from that moment.

*Thank you, Sally, for being who you are. Thank you for teaching me to be a good Bikram Yoga instructor. You only learn from the best. Namaste.*

*I would also like to express thanks to all the Bikram teachers I taught with and I learned from. Specifically, I would like to send a special thank you to Neil Joss, you are and will always be my favourite teacher. To my Guru Bikram Choudhury, I love you, Boss, and I'm sorry for the hard time I gave you at the training. I am still a "Big Mouth" as you labelled me but in different ways. Most importantly, today, I stand up for myself.*

Gus surprised me and came to my graduation, he stayed with us the last week, practising and living the Bikram Yoga life. Bikram Yoga was a non-negotiable part of my life. I used to practice 6 days a week and teach at least 14 classes between 3 studios. And it wasn't just me who was obsessed. I even managed to convince my husband and my children to give it a go. I can't stop raving about the benefits of Bikram Yoga to anyone

I meet! It does amazing things for your mind and your body. Bikram Yoga changed my life. It gave me inner strength to find new hope, resilience, and happiness. When I practised Bikram Yoga, it was the lifeline that connected me with that power within. My life was incredibly rich and purposeful when I stood on the podium leading my inspiring students through this amazing practice.

I salute the teachers who respect this yoga for what it is, the teachers who are also students and never lost their lack of vanity, those who are in all likelihood practising for ten, fifteen, twenty years and to this day if they are running late for class, they will be running around like a child running late for school. The teachers who also find a moment to explain the benefits of this yoga, the ones who don't say bad things about this yoga, the teachers who do this and only this for a living, those who practice the way they teach and the teachers who deeply believe we are a Bikram family.

*To all the graduate Bikram teachers of spring 2011, I miss you all, near and far, long live Bikram yoga teachers.*



-2-

Foundation for a Blessed Life:  
My Sickness

**A Walking Miracle**

A journey into metamorphosis  
and heart healing

*Saint Charbel I need you. Please help me.*

I was diagnosed with systemic diffuse scleroderma disease while in Beirut in May 2013. I did not take the diagnosis seriously. In fact, I placed all my blood results in a drawer and pretended to forget about them upon my return to South Africa. I lived in a state of denial. I was a typical A-type personality driven by a goal-oriented mind-set and an intense desire to succeed. I never wanted to slow down, I always wanted to get a lot of things done. I was deeply annoyed by anything that slowed me down. I was constantly on the go and always in a rush. My family referred to me as: “Gino, the flying eagle”.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2013, I suffered from a myocardial infarction and was admitted to Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Luckily, I survived the attack. In the blink of an eye, my precious and hectic life was transformed. My brain, once frequently in overdrive, was shocked. I changed from ADHD Gino, who was always filled with life and energy to a weak, fragile, and disoriented woman. I was constantly exhausted and lacked physical strength to fight a chronic systemic autoimmune disease. It affected my lungs, heart muscles, left diaphragm, and oesophagus.

For the first time in my life, I felt useless, worn out, and immobile. Needless to say, I was calm, motionless, and quiet. I felt disoriented and unlike myself. In July 2014, after a long year of pain and suffering, my auntie Elham Assaf, from Canada, suggested I visit Saint Charbel in Lebanon. I am not sure what made me take her advice, but I left on a pilgrimage to visit Saint Charbel Annaya at the Monastery of Saint Maroun. As a child, I was terrified of Saint Charbel, because of his flowing black robe and long white beard. I just followed my own inner compass. Saint Charbel was a Maronite monk and priest from



Lebanon. During his lifetime, he was held in the highest regards throughout the church. He was canonised by the Eastern and Roman Catholic Church, in the Vatican City by Pope Paul VI on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1977.

It was a difficult journey in my condition. My health deteriorated, and I was hardly able to walk. Before I left Johannesburg, a Lebanese friend of mine, Souleima Germanos suggested I leave my medical file in front of Saint Charbel's tomb.

Once I arrived at this blessed pilgrimage spot of the Middle East with my husband who gladly accompanied me, I bent on my knees. My face crumpled and I started to cry. I pleaded for divine assistance with my autoimmune disease. I was scared and confused, but believed so deeply that Saint Charbel could help me. Afterwards, I went up to the monastery office. I explained my story and informed the priest in charge, Father Louis Matar that I was not a person who prayed or went to church every Sunday. I asked for Saint Charbel's robe as an item that would give me strength. He gave me several prayers books and taught me how to do the novena in each book. Father Matar taught me as well how to meditate with God during my prayers and to make time every day for at least one hour of prayers.

That was the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2014. Before I shed tears when wrapping Saint Charbel's robe around my shoulders in the morning of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, I felt overwhelmed and shaken by my decision, but trusted my instincts. I felt that I was doing the right thing in my heart and my soul. I asked Saint Charbel to forgive me for all those I ever hurt unintentionally and to forgive those who have hurt me. I departed Lebanon for Johannesburg clothed in my special black robe. I travelled this time with my daughter Mary, Gus had to stay in Lebanon for another week. Some people thought I was a monk. I must admit, a powerful feeling of gratitude embraced me being dressed as a monk.

DAY 16  
Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> of May  
*Carrión de Los Condes to San Nicolás del Real*  
*Camino: 34 Kilometres*





**DAY 01** – Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, Saint Jean Pied de Port to Hunto, 8 Kilometres



**DAY 02** – Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> of May, Roncesvalles to Akerreta, 27 Kilometres







**DAY 03** – Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> of May,  
Akerreta to Pamplona, 15 Kilometres



**DAY 04** – Friday 6<sup>th</sup> of May, Pamplona  
to Puente La Reina, 25 Kilometres

**DAY 05** – Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> of May,  
Puente La Reina to Estella, 22 kilometres

