

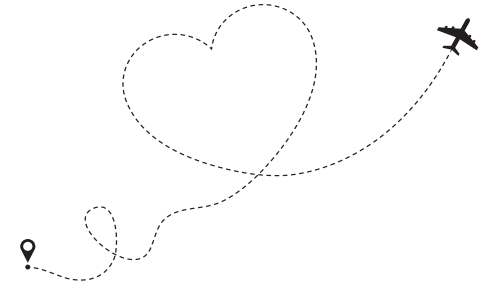


JOURNEY TO THE SKIES

Shaikha AL Marri

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Shaikha Al Marri



This book is dedicated to my family; my heart, my
inspiration, my wings.

Shaikha

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Daughter of a nation

Before I begin to share my journey with you, I would like to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude and deepest respect to Their Highnesses Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, President of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, and Sheikha Hind bint Maktoum. Their unwavering support, encouragement, and commitment to empowering the daughters of our nation have not only allowed me to pursue and achieve my dreams but have also profoundly shaped the woman I am today.

“The endeavours undertaken by women in the Emirates are important and honourable endeavours that are worthy of esteem.”

These words by our Founding Father Sheikh Zayed, resonate deeply, reflecting an ethos that permeates every aspect of Emirati life—where women are not only celebrated but are genuinely empowered to excel. They echo the collective respect and admiration for the women of our country in a nation that stands proudly on the enduring pillars of tradition and innovation.

I am eternally thankful for the myriad opportunities and recognition that Emirati women receive, enabling us to chase our dreams with passion and determination. We are not merely participants in our nation’s story; we are its co-authors, shaping a future where every Emirati woman can reach the pinnacle of her ambitions.

Every achievement we accomplished could not have been possible without the support and care of our noble leadership. So to them, I say, “Thank you with my sincerest love, gratitude and respect”.



T H E I N S P I R A T I O N



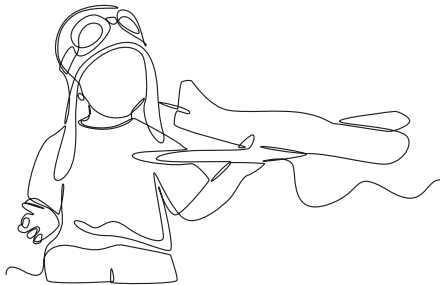
His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan
President of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Abu Dhabi



His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, Ruler of Dubai

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Hello



Hello. My name is Shaikha Al Marri. I'm a 23-year-old Emirati woman, and I'm a licensed commercial pilot.

Sometimes, I have to pinch myself when I say these words. Can you imagine? My childhood dream has become a reality, and I'm so humbled, thankful and honoured to share this story and achievement with you.

For starters, if you expect a tale of victory at every turn, you will be disappointed. This is not that type of story. You can find that stuff in superhero comics; there is no Ms. Marvel here. For the rest of you looking for something more real, a story of ups and downs, lessons learned, growth and reflection, welcome to my 'Journey to the Skies'. It is an honest and reflective memoir of a girl who had to work hard, fail, cry, change, and rise to the challenge to bring her dream into existence.

So, to the souls who dare to dream, to the courageous hearts that yearn to fly, you, dear reader, who has picked up this book, I extend the warmest of welcomes.

This is my story—a narrative drenched in ambition, personal growth, and the power of familial bonds. In these pages, you will discover

a record of events and a tale of enduring love, tenacious will, and the undying support of the people I cherish most.

You see, dreams, like flights, have destinations. However, it's the journey, with all its ascents, turbulence, and serenity beyond the clouds, that endows these dreams with meaning. This story is more than a recounting of milestones. It's an intimate invitation into the tribulations and triumphs of a young Emirati woman who dared to command the sky.

As you turn these pages, filled with my musings, snapshots of memories, and watercolour dreams, I hope you will find a fragment of your aspirations mirrored in mine. My tale is a testament to persistence, the embrace of a family, and the heritage of a nation that believes in the power of its daughters as much as its sons.

For every person with a dream yet to be fulfilled, for every female pilot who carved their path before me, for my dear father who taught me always to look up, my loving mother who inspires me, and my supportive brothers who lift me whenever I'm down, this journey also belongs to you.

Now, let us begin where every flight does: the moment of dreamy inception before the wheels lift off the ground. So, fasten your seatbelt and prepare for takeoff. Our destination? The heart of a dreamer, the height of ambition, and the joy of flight.

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Me, 6 years old, always climbing something :)

CHAPTER ONE



I have always looked up

As you can see from the image opposite, I've always had a fascination with the sky. Even at the tender age of five, with eyes wide and finger pointed upwards, I knew my dreams were not bound by the horizon but by the vast, uncharted blue above. This moment captures not just a child's curiosity but the beginning of a journey that would defy gravity and expectations, leading me to soar among the clouds as a proud Emirati female pilot.



EVERY SIGHTING WAS LIKE A PERSONAL SHOW—AN AERIAL PERFORMANCE WHERE THE SKY WAS THE STAGE, AND THE AEROPLANES, WITH THEIR POWERFUL ENGINES HUMMING AND WINGS GLISTENING IN THE SUN, WERE THE STARS.

There's something magical about airports; they are the crossroads of stories, the beginning and end of countless journeys. As a child, the Dubai Airport was a place of wonder. My earliest memories are enmeshed with the sights and sounds of this bustling world of travel. What can I say, some kids have their heads buried in comic books, and some in video games. For me, it was always about planes. I can't recall when I wasn't fascinated by the magic of aviation. My weekends started on Friday afternoons, driving to my grandmother's house in Deira. Instead of winding down for the weekend like everyone else, I'd spend the entire ride pressing my face against the car window, scanning the sky for aeroplanes, eyes tracking each takeoff and landing, my heart racing with every plane that thundered by. The heat haze that shimmered off the tarmac in the Dubai sun only added to the dreamlike quality of the airport's relentless activity. "How does it all work?" I would whisper, imagining the impossible physics that allowed these planes to cleave through the sky.

It's fair to say that Dubai's airport was my playground, and the planes were the main attractions. They were majestic "giant metal birds", as I liked to call them, slicing the horizon with powerful grace as they rose and fell from view.

Every sighting was like a personal show—an aerial performance where the sky was the stage and the aeroplanes, with their powerful engines humming and wings glistening in the sun, were the stars. I remember wondering about the pilots. For me, they were like mysterious figures who tamed the clouds and choreographed the dance of these hefty creatures with unseen threads of control.

They were the real magicians, and the aeroplanes were their trusted wands. I could only imagine the views they must've had from the cockpit, seeing the world sprawl beneath them, becoming part of the canvas of the blue yonder.

Fast forward to the tenth grade, I'm standing on the brink of adulthood, and those childhood dreams of flight start taking on the sharper edges of reality. My school's internship program offered a list of places to get a taste of the real world. One name that stood out to me, like it was lit in flashing runway lights, was

Emirates Airlines. Despite the shaky grades in science and maths, I knew I had to do my internship there. So, with a mix of dread and excitement, I applied, and to my sheer delight, I got in.

On my first day walking through the halls of Emirates, I felt a mix of intimidation and thrill. There I was, a high school kid stepping into the nerve centre of a global aviation leader. Everything seemed to hum with the energy of a thousand flights scheduled and dispatched, the culmination of countless dreams like mine.

As my supervisor escorted me through the intricate corridors, the sheer expanse of operations unfolded before me. It was like being given a key to a secret world.

The internship wasn't just about shadowing the pros but about touching my dream. It wasn't easy, facing my fears of failing at the subjects that formed the backbone of aviation. But the more I learned, the smaller those fears became. I poured over books and listened eagerly to every nugget of knowledge the trainers shared, letting my passion fuel my hard work.

At Emirates, every day was like a chapter from a thrilling novel written just for me. The terminals were buzzing hives of activity where everyone played a part in the symphony of operations. I saw planes being serviced like grand racehorses before a derby. I saw pilots and crew attending briefings, their faces a blend of seriousness and the calm of routine.

The flight training centre was an altar of modern technology. It had simulators that mimicked every conceivable flying condition. The crew training had the air of a collegiate fellowship, brimming with professionalism and camaraderie. Operations buzzed with strategic acumen. It was like watching a symphony conductor orchestrating the movements of each flight with a precision that mirrored the best of choreographed ballets. And then there was the security training - where the stakes of every flight were soberingly clear. Each module and drill, designed to prepare the crew for emergencies, including hijack scenarios, was a testament to every pilot's unspoken promise: to bring their passengers safely home.

My time there was a constant journey of discovery. I learned about the physics that kept planes aloft, the intricate flight paths crisscrossing the globe, and the relentless pursuit of safety that underpinned it all. The company's commitment to excellence wasn't just a slogan; it was the air everyone breathed. And it was contagious.

WATCHING THE GROUND CREW WORK WAS LIKE WATCHING A WELL- REHEARSED PLAY. EVERYONE MOVED PURPOSEFULLY AND PRECISELY, KNOWING THEIR ROLE AND MOMENT TO SHINE.

Watching the ground crew work was like watching a well-rehearsed play. Everyone moved purposefully and precisely, knowing their role and moment to shine. I was told that these were the unsung heroes, the ones who made sure that when a plane took off, it was ready in every possible way, just as reliant on these earthbound teams as on the pilots in the cockpit.

Just when I thought things couldn't get any better, they did. In the last days of my internship, my supervisor called me in for a chat. He spoke of potential, opportunity, and the Emirates Cadet Pilot Program. Here was my chance to not only be near planes but to be in the pilot's seat, guiding them across the sky. It was an overwhelming prospect, breaking through the glass ceiling of my doubts.

The program wasn't just about learning to fly; it was a career pathway, an opening into the world that had fascinated me since I was old enough to look up and dream. The Emirates team made it clear: this opportunity was for everyone with the passion and perseverance to pursue it, irrespective of their origin or gender. It was an egalitarian promise of the skies.

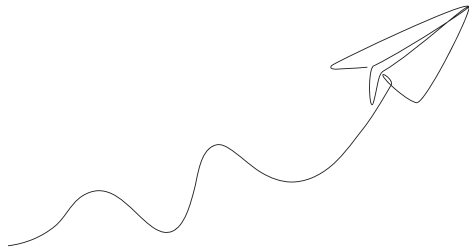
As I write it now, this journey isn't just my own. It's a shared dream with thousands of others, each with their own stories, looking

up and wanting to be part of something that defies gravity. My narrative is just beginning, with the skies above the UAE as my witness and the powerhouse of Emirates as my springboard. This isn't about a job or career; it's about an identity, a lifelong passion that has been given wings.

What started as a child's fascination with "giant metal birds" evolved into a vision for my future that I had never fully believed was possible. With the support I received, the learning and the moments of wonder and excitement, I found my calling. I found a path that felt laid out just for me.

My story is for anyone who's ever looked up and felt the pull of the sky. It's for every potential pilot, engineer, or dreamer who sees the aeroplane and thinks of the possibilities. It's a story that says your passion can be your future and that the childhood wonder doesn't have to fade—it can, in fact, become your life's work.

Emirates has given me more than just a glimpse into aviation; it has offered me a horizon that is wide and full of promise. As I stand ready to embrace this world, I do so, knowing that I am taking flight for myself and every young person who has ever dreamed of dancing with the winds.



Embroidered with dreams and aspirations, my journey was nurtured in the warmth of a loving home. It was nurtured under the watchful eyes of a family that believed in the boundless potential of its children. From a young age, my spirit was restless, constantly yearning to climb higher, to reach places that seemed just beyond grasp. This innate desire to ascend found me scaling trees in our backyard, much to my mother's annoyance, and clambering atop any surface that promised a new perspective on the world. My brothers, Saeed and Rashid, were my companions in adventure, always up for the challenge and ready to explore the heights with me.

Our home was a place of love and laughter, where dreams were encouraged and aspirations developed. My father, a towering figure of strength and wisdom, guided us through life's trials and tribulations. He instilled in us self-belief that the horizon was not a limit but a marker on the journey to greater achievements. His stories of adventure and success, often tinged with the wisdom of experience, were the seeds from which my dreams took root.

My relationship with my father was one of profound respect and deep affection. He was my mentor, guide, and the first man I looked up to—literally and figuratively. His belief in the power of perseverance and hard work was a constant undercurrent in our conversations. It shaped my worldview and my ambitions. To him, the sky was not merely a canopy over our heads but a canvas of opportunity waiting to be explored and cherished.

My mother, the heart of our home, was my champion and confidante. With her, I found an endless reservoir of support and understanding. She was the one who bandaged scraped knees when my climbs were less successful, who listened to my earliest declarations of wanting to fly with a smile that spoke of belief in even the most outlandish dreams. Her strength was in her gentleness, her power in her encouragement. She was my best friend, who taught me that to be vulnerable is to be strong and that to dream is to dare.

Saeed and Rashid were more than brothers; they were my protectors, challengers, and biggest fans. Rashid, my twin, shared

my features and curiosity for the world. Our bond was one of silent understanding and shared mischief, a connection beyond words. My older brother Saeed was the trailblazer, showing us what was possible with determination and hard work. His journey to academic excellence in London was a blueprint for my goals, a testament to the power of ambition and the importance of education. Together, we were a tapestry of dreams and determination, woven tight by family bonds.

My childhood was a landscape of love and learning, where every failure was seen as a stepping stone and every success was celebrated as a collective triumph. In this nurturing environment, my dream to fly found its launching pad.

In the laughter-filled rooms of our home and the shared adventures with my brothers, it was here that the foundation of my journey was laid—a journey not just towards the skies but towards becoming the person I was meant to be.



With my brothers on a European adventure

CHAPTER TWO



Dreams take wings

Emirates Flight Training Academy was established in 2017. Located at the edge of Dubai World Central Airport, the school is a dedicated training centre for the country's National Cadet Pilot Programme and international students. If you want a pilot's career with Emirates, then enrolling in the flight training academy is the best route to go.



As the sun of my high school years set, my anticipation for the future rose like the dawn. I immersed myself in preparing for the Emirates Cadet Programme, frequently visiting the website, reviewing the syllabus, and dissecting the course structure. The programme's allure was not merely in its content but in what it represented. It was a bridge to my dreams. It was everything I ever wanted. As graduation loomed, so did the thrill of application, a step closer to the cockpit I had revered since those airport drives to my grandmother's house.

Sharing my ambition with my family was a leap of faith. My mother, practical as ever, first saw my aspirations as a fleeting fancy, a childhood wish clutched too tightly. However, my resolve remained unshaken. In time, her scepticism turned into empowerment, encouraging my every step. My brothers didn't need convincing; they buoyed my dreams with unwavering support.

My father's reaction, though, was truly special. When I voiced my intention to become a pilot, the pride in his eyes was unmistakable. His own childhood dream, unbeknownst to me, had mirrored mine. This was a revelation that added layers of meaning to my own pursuit. I learned of his one-time ambition to navigate the skies. Still, God had grander designs for him, a more vital and meaningful purpose as the sentinel of Dubai's security; the Commander of Dubai police. His journey instilled in me a profound sense of purpose and a deeper connection to the city that fuelled my dreams.

Uncle Ahmed (affectionately called Bu Mattar by family and friends), an esteemed Captain and legend at Emirates Airlines, provided technical and inspirational guidance. As my mentor, he instilled in me the nuances of the aviation world with every shared conversation. His role as my advocate was a lighthouse, guiding me through the fog of waiting and the worry of what lay ahead. More on him later.

The months following my application to the programme were fraught with tension. Time, which I had once felt was infinite, now trickled past with excruciating slowness. While my peers ventured onto their chosen paths at university, I grappled with inertia, the weight of uncertainty anchoring me to a standstill. My twin,

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Rashid, began his journey at the American University of Sharjah. I was left behind, marking time with a restless energy that gnawed at me. I didn't wish to tread the well-worn path expected of many girls my age, settling into marriage after high school. My vision for myself was loftier—I craved the sky.

The Emirates selection process is rigorous, designed to distil only those who can rise to the company's high standards. I had prepared myself well for the assessments—maths, physics, English proficiency, medical examinations—all daunting hurdles that stood between me and my ambitions. Despite this, my confidence wavered on the precipice of doubt as I contemplated falling short in any of these domains. Is it possible that I won't make it? God, I hope not. "Have faith", I would tell myself.

In the midst of this, the words of my cousin echoed a reflection of traditional societal views, doubting whether someone "too girly" like me could ever become a pilot, especially at the world's premier airline. This wasn't just an external challenge but a test of who I was and what I stood for. I've always held that femininity and drive are not opposites and that true strength isn't about physical prowess but the resilience of one's spirit. And my spirit? It was steadfast, burning with the drive to dream, act, hope, and strive.

Finally, after eight months of jitters and nail-biting anxiety, I received the news that would shape my future forever. I was accepted into the Emirates Cadet Programme. That moment was epic, like the end of a feel-good movie where you can't help but cheer. It wasn't just a win for me; it was for every 'No' I'd ever heard, for every time someone said, 'You can't'. It was proof that perseverance bore fruit, that faith, no matter how faint, could move mountains.

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And so, with the acceptance letter in hand, my journey took a new flight—not towards a destination, but towards transformation. Holding it felt like holding a boarding pass to a new life. The wait had been hard, but it had imparted lessons of patience and resilience. The challenges had seemed insurmountable at times, but they had fostered in me a tenacity that would prove invaluable in the skies to come.

As this chapter of my life unfolded, I understood that this was more than a personal victory; it was a tribute to my family's legacy and a stepping stone for my community. It was an affirmation for every young girl who dared to dream beyond the conventional, who sought to carve her own path and redefine the sky as not the limit but the beginning. This was the commencement of a saga not just of flight but of breaking free from the gravity of expectations, an odyssey of a girl with her eyes on the stars and her feet on the runway, ready for takeoff.



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CHAPTER THREE



High hopes

Emirates Flight Training Academy is pivotal to nurturing top talent from around the world and realising Dubai's vision of being a sustainable aviation hub. Its graduates fly the Emirates flag globally, representing the UAE's ambitions and success, an honour I so desperately dreamed of being worthy of.



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Emirates Airlines is known for its luxury, innovation, and forward-thinking approach. Founded in 1985 with just two leased aircraft, Emirates has become a leading global airline and the jewel in the crown of the aviation world.

Its impressive fleet reflects Dubai's ambition and entrepreneurial spirit. The airline doesn't just connect cities; it links cultures, too, making the UAE an essential international travel and commerce hub. The airline's rapid growth showcases the bold and dynamic spirit of the nation.

The Emirates Flight Training Academy (EFTA) is part of this renowned airline. It maintains its high standards through a challenging curriculum, advanced facilities, and a commitment to excellence. The academy is crucial in training top-notch pilots, each carrying the Emirates quality into the skies. The academy isn't just a school; it's where the future of aviation is shaped, helping pilots from various backgrounds to grow and embrace the Emirates ethos.

Being accepted into such a prestigious program was an achievement I carried with pride. EFTA was where the abstracts of flight became the mechanics of reality. It was where the principles of aerodynamics were learned, lived, and breathed. Its graduates are the elite, stepping out with a licence to pilot aircraft and uphold the tradition of excellence that Emirates stands for. To join their ranks was to take part in a legacy of sky-bound explorers.

Yet, for all its accolades and the allure of joining such ranks, the academy was a proving ground of a different sort for me. Amid the gloss of achievement and the sheen of Emirates' silver birds, I grappled with the weight of my expectations and the stark reality of the difficulty of the journey I had embarked upon.

The gleaming reputation of Emirates and the provenance of its academy were what drew me to its doors. The academy's reputation was built on the achievements that made headlines: innovative training programmes, a multicultural learning environment, and a commitment to shaping the industry's future. I came filled with the hope and resolve to be part of a lineage of excellence. It was the allure of being aligned with the best—flying with the best, learning from the best, and eventually, becoming the best.

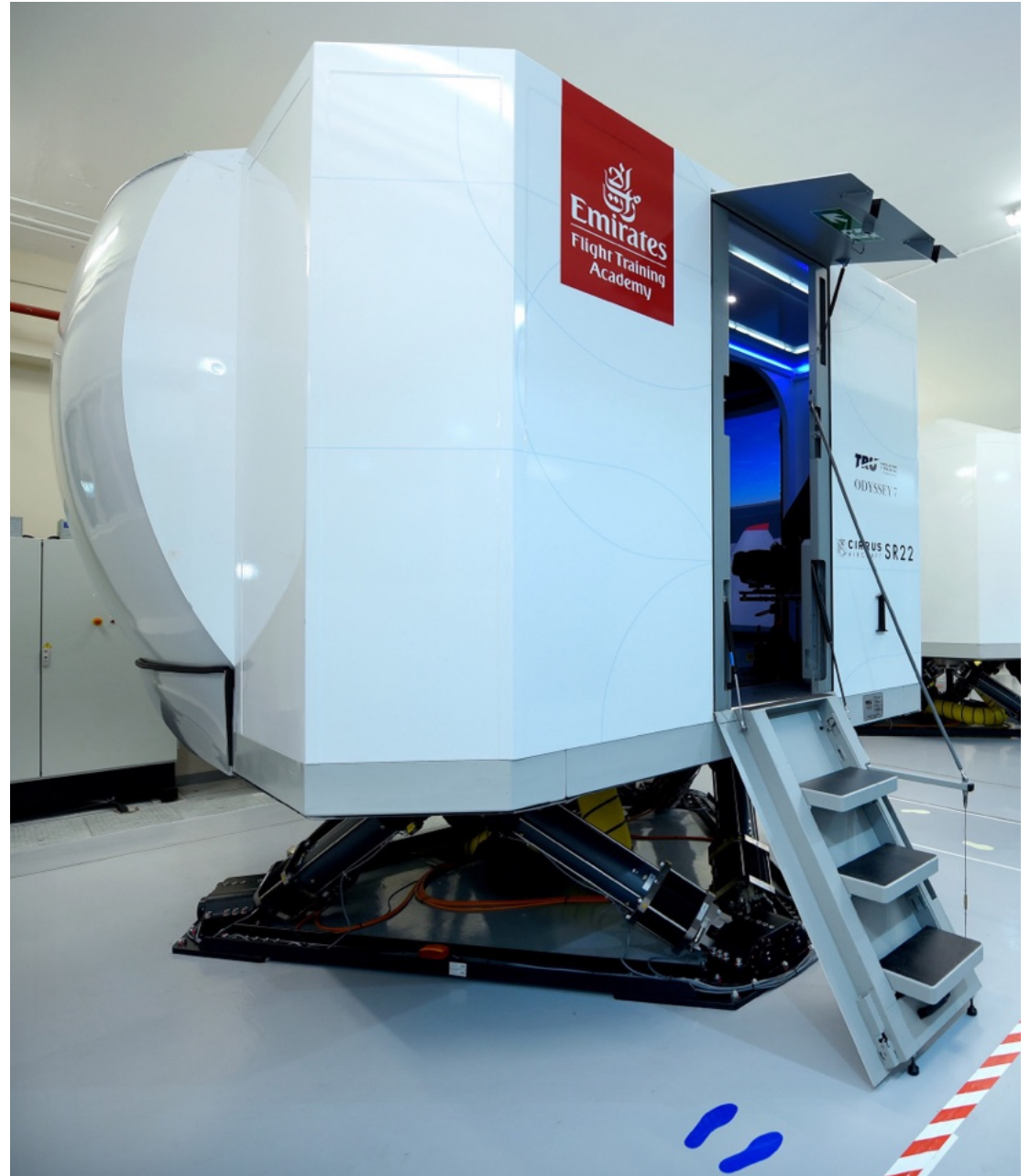
However, my reverence for the institution and its connection to the celebrated Emirates fleet did little to buffer the knowledge gap I experienced upon arrival. The academy's high-flying ideals, which seemed so thrilling from the outside, were a fortress of challenge and competition once inside. The transition from admiration to participation was jarring, to say the least.

The weight of the academy's prestige meant that expectations were sky-high, and the room for error was small. As one of the few women in the academy, these expectations took on an even greater intensity. It was not enough to be good; I had to be exceptional. The Emirates brand symbolises success; anything less than success was not an option. This added pressure only magnified the feeling of uncertainty and the sense that, as a woman, my presence was an anomaly rather than the norm. It's essential to add that these were my own insecurities. On the contrary, Emirates was for everyone willing to work hard and achieve regardless of gender, race or creed.

The struggle was not just with the rigorous academic requirements or the competitive atmosphere but also with an internal battle I was going through. A struggle of quiet confrontation with my own sense of belonging in this prestigious academy. It was a challenge to reconcile my personal aspirations with the institution's collective ethos, a daily exercise in proving my worth and earning my place among Emirates' esteemed ranks.

As the academy gates opened to me, a mosaic of emotions painted my every thought. Excitement for what lay ahead, the pride of donning the cadet's badge, and a hint of trepidation mingled within me. The journey I had envisioned was bright with the prospect of becoming a pilot. Still, like the shimmering mirage on a hot Dubai day, the path was more daunting than I had ever considered.

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My entry into the academy was not just a step into an institution; it was a leap into a world unknown, a cultural shift that would test the very fibres of my being. The academy walls were steeped in tradition and excellence, echoing the ambitions of those who, like me, dreamt of conquering the skies. Yet, my quiet and reserved nature stood out amid these hallowed halls. I had always been the silent observer whose voice was most vibrant within the comfort of family and close friends. But here, in this demanding elite academy of learning and growth, my silence became a barrier I had not expected.

The vibrancy of the academy's culture jolted my system. My naivety about what it would take to forge ahead in such an esteemed environment was as apparent as my reserved disposition.

I was not the typical leader, ready to assert my voice amidst a crowd. Perhaps growing up in the protective embrace of a loving family lulled me into complacency, or possibly witnessing my father's towering leadership made me content in his shadow, never entirely stepping out to cast my own.

The reality of being one of only four women among five hundred men was not just an exercise in gender dynamics but a profound personal challenge. In the UAE, the societal norms that celebrate the respect and value of women also maintain a clear demarcation between genders. This cultural understanding is deeply rooted, and while it shapes our values, it also impacted my academy experience. It was a daily reminder that my journey would not mirror that of my male peers.

You might assume that scarcity would breed solidarity, that the few women in the cadet programme would naturally band together. Instead, competitiveness took root, creating distance

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where there should have been bridges. We were all too busy trying to prove ourselves in a male-dominated industry, and we had forgotten to extend a hand of friendship to one another. It was, at times, disheartening, to say the least. Rather than the supportive sisterhood I had hoped for, there was a fierce rivalry.

My daily life's logistics added complexity to an already challenging situation. While my colleagues stayed on campus, bonding over late-night study sessions and mutual support, I was commuting. I would travel to and from the academy every day. The hour-long drive to the academy each way was a physical manifestation of the distance I felt from my peers. A gap in camaraderie and resource sharing seemed impossible to bridge.

The lack of equal study opportunities was stark. I missed out on the evening gatherings where knowledge was exchanged and understanding deepened through group learning. My shyness stopped me from asking for the help I needed, and cultural differences and my own issues prevented me from participating in these communal learning sessions. As a result, I felt increasingly isolated and faced a growing pile of academic pressure.

The academy was rigorous, with over forty modules that delved into the intricacies of aviation. The weight of these subjects bore down on me. Each module felt like a mountain that demanded to be conquered. As I navigated aerodynamics, meteorology, engineering, and more, the gaps in my understanding widened into chasms. I was falling behind, and the more I struggled, the more the reality of my situation set in.

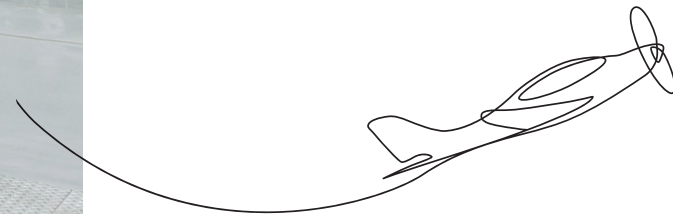
In retrospect, the academy was not just an institution for learning to fly; it was a crucible that refined my character. There, among Emirate's aspiring pilots, I confronted the full extent of my limitations and the daunting task of transcending them.

To the outside observer, I was a young cadet full of potential. However, inside, I was a storm of doubts and fears, wrestling with the idea of failure. With its relentless pace and towering expectations, the academy became my battleground. The stakes were high, the challenges multifaceted, and the journey ahead uncertain.



As I recount these early days at the Emirates Flight Training Academy, I do so not to dwell on the hardships. It is crucial to accurately paint a picture of the terrain I had to traverse due to my insecurities and shortcomings. It is a story not of immediate triumph but of enduring the struggle, facing difficulty, and of the quiet hope that whispered of skies yet to be claimed. It is a tale of finding my voice in a chorus of many, of learning to stand tall, and of the relentless pursuit of a dream that was mine to chase. In the pressure and the discomfort of growth, it was here that the foundations of my future were laid—one taxing day at a time.

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CHAPTER FOUR



Altering course

Sometimes you have to adapt to the conditions and change your flight plan to reach your destination. It became evident to me and my family that a reroute was required to achieve my dream of being a pilot.



MY UNCLE'S PRIDE IN MY AMBITIONS WAS UNWAVERING. I REMEMBER THE AWE AND EXCITEMENT OF STEPPING INTO THE AIRBUS A380 SIMULATOR UNDER HIS WATCHFUL EYE. HIS ENCOURAGEMENT WAS A GUST OF WIND THAT LIFTED ME HIGHER, PUSHING ME TO KEEP CLIMBING.

When the weight of my new reality at the Emirates Academy bore down on me, threatening to crush the dreams I held so dear, I turned to my family. In the taut silence of anxiety and in the creeping shadow of failure, my family's support was a lantern of hope. And in this time of trial, Uncle Ahmed's role as my mentor became the keystone in the arch of my journey.

My uncle's pride in my ambitions was unwavering. I remember the awe and excitement of stepping into the Airbus A380 simulator under his watchful eye. His encouragement was a gust of wind that lifted me higher, pushing me to keep climbing. In that simulator, surrounded by dials and screens, I felt my dream pulse with life. It was tangible, vivid, and within reach. It contrasted with my overwhelming uncertainty, where the dream seemed to slip like sand through my fingers.

The family meeting where Uncle Ahmed laid out a rescue plan was a turning point. In his wisdom, born of three decades of training and evaluating pilots, he saw not the end of a path but a divergence, an opportunity to tailor my journey to suit my strengths and the reality of my challenges. He suggested a private tutor who could bridge the gap in my knowledge and kindle the dwindling flame of my confidence.

Rehman's introduction to my life was like a breath of fresh air. He was a pilot whose love for aviation was a match for my own and whose understanding of the rigours of flight school was intimate and current. Under Rehman's tutelage, the abstractions of aerodynamics, navigation calculations, and flight physics formulas took on new meaning. I was learning in leaps and bounds, no longer fettered by social constraints or restricted by the shackles of my shyness.

Together with Rehman, I tackled the theoretical assessments with a newfound determination. Our study sessions were intense and productive, a synergy of his knowledge and my will to succeed. During these sessions, I discovered the value of shared learning, the benefit of discussion, and the power of collaboration.

The decision to go private for the practical component of my training was strategic, not just for personal reasons but for academic ones. The academy's high standards were non-negotiable. I knew that to meet them, I had to be in an environment where I could thrive, not just survive. My contract with Emirates and staff number remained my anchor to the end goal, but the journey there was now mine to chart.

Reflecting on my academic challenges made me smile as I recalled a poignant moment from my school years. On career day in grade twelve, standing before my classmates, I declared my dream to be a pilot. Laughter filled the room, a chorus of doubt and incredulity at such an audacious claim. But time changes perception. The same teacher who witnessed their mirth now invited me back, this time to speak as a testament to the power of perseverance and possibility. And it was the physics teacher, no less, who had seen me struggle with the subject that underpinned my chosen career.

I had always been practical, preferring the clarity of hands-on learning to theory. This preference shaped my approach to the rigorous modules at the academy. The reality of mastering maths and physics was a challenge I met with relentless revision and practice, supported by Rehman's expertise and my family's unyielding belief in me.

This journey through the thicket of learning and adaptation was a testament that one's path need not be linear or conventional to reach the desired destination. Unexpected detours and bespoke routes often lead to the most memorable and triumphant outcomes.

As I marched on, the memory of the laughter on career day became fuel for my resolve, a reminder that expectations are not the measure of one's capabilities. I was, and am, a pilot in the making—not bound by the traditional paths but blazing a trail of my own. With the layers of my past unfurled behind me, I looked forward to the skies ahead, ready to embrace the practical world where I naturally thrived. This chapter of my life, rife with challenges, was also rich with growth—a prelude to the journey that awaited me.

The expectations placed upon my shoulders were not merely to succeed but to outshine, to work twice as hard to prove a point

that seemed self-evident to me: that passion for the skies knows no gender. This relentless pressure was a crucible, forging within me a strength I was unaware I possessed. It was not something I had expected to face; this implicit demand for justification of my presence, my right to share the dream with my male counterparts.

Amidst this challenge, my parents' encouragement constantly pushed me to excel against the odds. They championed my cause with a fervour that inspired me to rise each day and face the academy anew. Their belief in my ability was unshaken. It was a steady rock amidst the swirling seas of doubt and the murky waters of uncertainty.

MY BROTHERS,
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RASHID, AS MY
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SILENT LANGUAGE
OF MY HEART...

My brothers, too, were pillars of support. Saeed and Saeed bu Naser were always a phone call away, comforting, reassuring and encouraging me to keep fighting. Rashid, as my twin, seemed to understand the silent language of my heart, the unvoiced struggles that I bore. His visit to the academy remains etched in my memory as a highlight of those days. He walked through the corridors curiously, taking in the environment shaping his sister's future. The simulator session was a chance for me to show my progress and to let him witness firsthand the skills I had learnt. His pride was visible, a mirror to my aspirations, reflecting our family's shared joy. Rashid did not need to see the turmoil within me; his intuition, honed by the bond only twins share, told him more than I ever could with words.



We have always been a tight unit

That day in the simulator, with Rashid by my side, I was not just a cadet but an aviator, showcasing the fruition of my work. It was a moment of pure triumph over my annoying doubt. In the flight simulation, as the virtual landscape rolled out beneath us and the control yoke responded to my touch, the flight was not just a procedure but a dance, and I was finally leading.

Yet, beyond the simulator's immersive bubble, the reality of the academy awaited with its unspoken challenges. There were hours of solitude and struggle for every moment of elation, where the quiet of my reserved nature was often mistaken for hesitation or reluctance. The camaraderie that came so quickly to others was a fortress I found difficult to penetrate, usually leaving me an observer in a world I was desperate to be a part of.

The journey continued to be an uphill climb, each day presenting a test of my resolve. But with my family's unyielding support, Uncle Ahmed's mentorship, and Rehman's assistance, I found the strength to persevere. They were my lifeline, pulling me through the fog of isolation that threatened to envelop me.

Their belief in me was a powerful force, teaching me that even amidst uncertainty and the chill of doubt, the courage to continue comes from within and the love surrounding us. This understanding lent me the fortitude to carry on, to prove not to the world, but to myself, that I belonged in the sky—just as much as any pilot who ever dared to dream of flight.

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Uncle Ahmed flanked by Hisham (to his right) and Rehman – three of the heroes who supported my journey to the skies



CHAPTER FIVE



Ciao bella

Bologna, the vibrant heart of Italy's Emilia-Romagna, is famed for its medieval architecture, extensive porticos, and the Two Towers. A culinary paradise of rich cuisine, the city combines historical depth with a lively academic and cultural scene, bustling with youthful energy. There was something about it that really appealed to me, it was a place begging to be explored and that excited me.





View seen through the "Hole in the wall" attraction in Bologna

THE TRANSITION FROM THE EMIRATES FLIGHT TRAINING ACADEMY HALLS TO THE SKIES OF BOLOGNA WAS A CHAPTER WRITTEN WITH ANTICIPATION AND APPREHENSION. THE DECISION TO MOVE MY TRAINING TO ITALY WAS BORN OUT OF THE NECESSITY OF GETTING SOME PRACTICAL HOUR-BUILDING, WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO EVERY PILOT'S JOURNEY.



My academic journey at Emirates Flight Training Academy, underpinned by the strategic blueprint Uncle Ahmed and my father laid out, would always lead me to a foreign adventure. The theoretical groundwork I laid there was intensive and comprehensive. Still, the practical application of flying was an entirely different discipline that required technical knowledge, tactile finesse, and aeronautical intuition. My path to being a pilot and mastery in the skies was destined to weave through different landscapes, and it was with this realisation that my quest for a suitable flight school began.

The initial foray took us to a flight school in Orlando, which, while reputable, fell short of the stringent benchmarks we sought. My family and I were searching for an institution that mirrored Emirates' high standards, one that boasted a fleet and training philosophy on par with the world's best. Our pursuit of excellence led us to Professional Aviation, an esteemed academy nestled in the historical richness of Bologna, Italy.

Italy was familiar to me in many ways. Its rich collage of culture, fashion, and gastronomy had always enchanted me, from the bustling streets of Milan to the historic grandeur of Rome and the countryside allure of Tuscany. Yet, Bologna was uncharted territory. Known more for its culinary heritage and less for aviation, the city was about to become the last testing ground for my transformation into a professional pilot.

The transition from the Emirates Flight Training Academy halls to the skies of Bologna was a chapter written with anticipation and apprehension. The decision to move my training to Italy was born out of the necessity of getting some practical hour-building, which is essential to every pilot's journey. Orlando's allure faded next to the promise of Professional Aviation, a European cradle of aeronautical prowess swiftly climbing the ranks of prestige.

Bologna was a revelation—a city steeped in the ancient lore of learning, where the modern pulse of student life merged with the timeless beat of scholarly pursuit. The town celebrated the old and nurtured the new, where terracotta rooftops met political ideologies as rich and complex as its renowned cuisine. Known affectionately

as ‘La Grassa’ or ‘The Fat’ for its culinary delights, Bologna was a far cry from Dubai’s sandy hues and futuristic skyline. It was here, among the revered corridors of the world’s oldest university and the bustling trattorias serving plates of tagliatelle al ragù, that my next phase of aviation training beckoned.

My arrival in Italy was a canvas of emotions painted with broad strokes of vibrant colour and subtle shades of homesickness. For a young Emirati woman, to live alone in a foreign land was a leap of faith, a test of independence on a scale I had never before experienced. The culture was as new to me as the language, and each day was a lesson in adaptation, in finding my footing in a dance that was both exhilarating and overwhelming.

The fanfare that accompanied my entry into Bologna was unexpected, to say the least. I was their first Emirati student, and I would later find out that they assumed I was royalty for some strange reason. If I were to guess, it’s probably because of my name, Shaikha, which is also an honorific title used before the name of a female royal. This, whilst being untrue, was also a stark contrast to the person at the heart of it all—me, who preferred the quiet corners of life over the blare of pomp and circumstance. Despite this, my peers gave me the nickname “Princess”, an affectionate moniker that, while well-intentioned, set a stage of preconceptions that I would spend my time at the academy attempting to dismantle. It cast a spotlight on me that I would have gladly dimmed had I the choice.

During this grand introduction to my new life, I found solace in the presence of Linda and Tatiana, the operational core of Professional Aviation.

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HOMESICKNESS.**





Linda Dolcetto, the operational heart of Professional Aviation



Tatiana Smaganovschi, Head of Administration



Linda, with her meticulous eye for detail and managerial acumen that seemed to foresee logistical challenges before they arose, was a linchpin in the seamless operation of Professional Aviation. Her tenure at the academy had endowed her with an unparalleled understanding of the intricacies involved in flight training, making her an invaluable guide for students navigating the complex path to becoming aviators. Beyond her professional expertise, Linda's approach was marked by a deep empathy and a genuine desire to see every student excel. Her laughter was infectious, and her office, adorned with photographs of graduating classes, stood as a testament to the countless pilots she had helped mould. She was not just an administrator but a mentor and a pillar of support, embodying the academy's ethos with every student interaction.

Tatiana brought a vibrant energy and a knack for communication that bridged any cultural or linguistic divide. She was a mother with a daughter my age, which made her advice even more relevant. Her role transcended that of merely coordinating training schedules; she was the academy's ambassador of culture, often the first to welcome international students into the fold of Bologna's rich heritage. Her familiarity with the city and an inexhaustible reserve of recommendations for the best dining or study spots made her an indispensable guide to the Italian experience. Tatiana's spirited demeanour and her ability to connect personally fostered a sense of community among the cadets. Her contributions went beyond administrative duties; she helped to craft a nurturing and inclusive environment that celebrated diversity and encouraged camaraderie among the students.

DURING THIS GRAND INTRODUCTION TO MY NEW LIFE, I FOUND SOLACE IN THE PRESENCE OF LINDA AND TATIANA, THE OPERATIONAL CORE OF PROFESSIONAL AVIATION.

Together, Linda and Tatiana represented the heart and soul of Professional Aviation. Their dedication and warmth comforted students far from home, providing a roadmap for aviation success and a sense of belonging in a foreign land. Their roles were pivotal in transforming the academy into more than a place of learning—it was a home away from home for many students, a family bound by the shared dream of flight.

They were the gracious architects behind the logistics of my training. These unsung heroines orchestrated the complex symphony of schedules and sessions shaping my days and every other student's. With an innate warmth and understanding, they reached across the cultural divide to make me feel genuinely welcomed and to help me navigate the unfamiliar waters of this new academic setting.

Linda and Tatiana became more than just facilitators of my education; they were kindred spirits who recognised the undercurrents of my struggle to acclimate. They managed the aircraft, the instructors, and the subtle nuances of nurturing a foreign student adjusting to a starkly unfamiliar environment. Their patience was steadfast, and their kindness was heartwarming.

They used to joke about my perfume—how it announced my presence long before I stepped into a room—this was a testament to their attention to detail and the personal touch they brought to their work. This anecdote became a shared joke, a lighthearted bond that eased the tension of rigorous flight schedules and the high pressure stakes of pilot training.

As days turned into weeks and weeks into months, my identity was reshaped from "Princess," the girl with the conspicuous arrival, to a regular cadet trying to make it through flight school. Linda and Tatiana's support was instrumental in this transformation. Their encouragement meant a lot as they guided me through the fog of my initial disorientation to the clarity of rhythm and routine.

With each flight booked and every lesson logged, they facilitated my assimilation into Professional Aviation. The reality of their impact

78 went beyond the administrative; they helped me chart a course through the complex interplay of academic rigour and personal evolution.

In Bologna, the city of deep reds and rich flavours, I was learning to blend independence with new experiences. It was a time of growth, of learning to fly and stand alone a thousand miles from the familiar and still feel rooted in pursuing my dreams. This chapter of my life was an aria in the opera of my education, a melody of high notes and sombre tones, ultimately composing a song of self-discovery and aspiration.

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FEEL ROOTED IN
PURSUING MY DREAMS.



“SHAIKHA WEARS VERY GOOD PERFUME, SHE WEARS A LOT OF IT. SOMETIMES WHEN I ENTER THE CARPARK 500 METRES FROM THE OFFICES, I STOP THE CAR AND SAY, HMM.. SHAIKHA’S HERE.”

– Tatiana Smaganovschi



I would often stroll down this pathway to clear my head



Nightlife in the old town of Bologna



Bologna's famous falling towers Asinelli and Garisenda



KNOWN AFFECTIONATELY AS 'LA GRASSA' OR 'THE FAT' FOR ITS CULINARY DELIGHTS, BOLOGNA WAS A FAR CRY FROM DUBAI'S SANDY HUES AND FUTURISTIC SKYLINE. IT WAS HERE, AMONG THE REVERED CORRIDORS OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST UNIVERSITY AND THE BUSTLING TRATTORIAS SERVING PLATES OF TAGLIATELLE AL RAGÙ, THAT MY NEXT PHASE OF AVIATION TRAINING BECKONED.



The beautiful alleyways of the city

CHAPTER SIX



Higher learning

Every trainee pilot will tell you that there is nothing more exciting than practical training as you go through the journey of becoming a pilot. The thrill of handling the controls, mastering manoeuvres, and making split-second decisions is electrifying. Each flight builds skill and confidence, transforming us from students of the sky to masters of the air. It's an unmatched adventure that fuels our dreams of flight.



AT THE HEART OF THIS PROMISE OF TRANSFORMATION WAS WHAT AWAITED ME AT PROFESSIONAL AVIATION. THE ACADEMY HAD A STELLAR REPUTATION AND WAS STEADILY DEVELOPING A NAME AS ONE OF THE LEADING FLIGHT SCHOOLS IN EUROPE.

The dawn of my journey at Professional Aviation marked a pivotal chapter in my life, one that I entitled 'Higher Learning'. This chapter wasn't just about the elevation I sought thousands of feet above the ground but also about the promise of the ascent of my very soul and spirit in a land so vibrant and distinct from my own.

Moving to Italy, away from the comforting embrace of my family, I found myself in a world brimming with passionate exclamations, where the air was as rich with culture as it was with the scent of espresso and freshly baked focaccia. With their lively gesticulations and expressive dialogue, Italians starkly contrasted my reserved demeanour. This was not merely a transition but a profound metamorphosis, challenging me to grow, adapt, and integrate into this lively culture and life in Italy. At the heart of this promise of transformation was what awaited me at Professional Aviation. The academy had a stellar reputation and was steadily developing a name as one of the leading flight schools in Europe. We came here for that reason; this respected institution promised to be the crucible for my aspirations of flight. Here, I was to be guided by an exclusive cadre of instructors, each selected for their unique compatibility with the rigorous standards of Emirates Airlines and the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority. Among these were General Amedeo Magnani, Gianluca Cevenini, Damiano Fachiri, Lorenzo Pizzi. Vito Preti and Massimo Kayed, the Directors and Cofounders of Professional Aviation, also oversaw my training.

General Amedeo, a former Italian Air Force Officer, was a Senior Flight Instructor and Safety Manager; he brought to the academy his extensive flight experience and a deep sense of responsibility towards the safety and well-being of his students. More than an instructor, he was a mentor and confidant, ready to lend an ear to personal problems that the students grappled with or professional dilemmas they faced in their training. His wisdom, encapsulated in the mantra, "The sky is the best office," served as a constant reminder of the joy and humility required in our chosen path.

With his welcoming presence, Gianluca swiftly transcended the role of an instructor to become a mentor and friend. His approach was like a breath of fresh air, infusing comfort and warmth into the

rigorous training routine and making the vast academy feel more friendly and welcoming.

Damiano's guidance was instrumental in the early stages of my training. His ability to demystify the complexities of aviation, paired with his engaging teaching style, provided a solid foundation upon which I could build my skills. Flying missions under his instruction, I began appreciating the nuanced art and science of piloting.

The Chief Flight Instructor, Lorenzo, commanded respect through his vast experience and knowledge. Under his exacting eye, precision was not just encouraged; it was expected. His influential presence in the academy underscored the seriousness of our undertaking. Of all my initial four instructors, flying with Lorenzo was the most challenging for me. I felt a lot of pressure, more so than usual, which sometimes resulted in a great degree of nervousness to the point of being sick while training. This was only in the first two months. Later, after my revival—more on that to follow—and as my confidence increased, flying with Lorenzo was a test that I looked forward to.

A routine crystallised as days turned into weeks, grounding me in new normalcy amidst the whirlwind of learning and adaptation. I was here for a reason; I needed to stay focused and motivated, so I forced myself to keep up with a schedule that was taking its toll on me slowly but surely. The routine was demanding, rigorous and very structured.

As a participant in the pilot training programmes, your presence on the campus was required six days a week. The structure of each day could vary based on your scheduled activities and the rating you were working towards. A typical day of training might look like this:

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SLOWLY BUT
SURELY.**

1. Arrive at your campus location and begin mission planning on your iPad or computer.
2. Meet with your designated Flight Instructor for a briefing session. This session is critical for reviewing the key aspects of your mission, ensuring the precision of flight planning, and grasping the mission's objectives.
3. Ramp-Out Procedure: Proceed to check out with the despatch, collect your flight 'tin', verify the flight documentation for accuracy, conduct a pre-flight inspection, and then taxi to the runway for takeoff.
4. In-Flight: The flight missions are tailored to your progress in the programme, aiming to cultivate the necessary skills for your current course rating. Each mission is an opportunity to further your piloting skills through incremental training.
5. Ramp-In and Debrief: Upon landing and securing the aircraft, a session is held with your Flight Instructor to debrief the mission, focusing on identifying your strengths and areas for improvement.
6. Independent study time is allocated daily, allowing you to utilise the flight simulator, engage with an advisor, collaborate with fellow cadets, or observe other flights and ground school sessions.

Beyond the days dedicated to flight missions, your schedule would incorporate ground school, simulator sessions, and obligatory rest days to rejuvenate and prepare for forthcoming missions. The initial 12-18 months comprised intensive, structured training designed to equip you for subsequent phases of your aviation career leading up to your final checkride.

Yet, beneath the surface of this seemingly ordered existence, the complexities of life in a foreign land and the demanding nature of pilot training began to weave their own narrative, challenging my resolve, testing my adaptability, and ultimately enriching my journey in ways I had never anticipated.



General Amedeo Magnani



Damiano Fachiri



Gianluca Cevenini



Lorenzo Pizzi



Vito Preti



Massimo Kayed



CHAPTER SEVEN



Cloudy skies

Ambition and dreams are like twin engines. Ambition propels you through rigorous training and challenging assessments one step at a time, whilst dreams elevate one's spirit to unimaginable heights, providing a vision of what could be. Together, they create a powerful synergy that fuels the journey towards success...or so I thought.



IMAGINE WAKING UP EVERY DAY TO A SILENCE THAT'S LOUD WITH ABSENCE. THE ABSENCE OF YOUR MUM'S MORNING HUSTLE, YOUR DAD'S NEWSPAPER RUSTLE AND PEARLS OF WISDOM, AND THE LAUGHTER OF SIBLINGS THAT USED TO BE YOUR WAKE-UP CALL.



loudy Skies aptly describes this chapter of my life, not just for the bumpy flight training I was undergoing but for the emotional turbulence more challenging than any air pocket or storm I've ever had to navigate. At 21, living miles away from home in a foreign country, the feeling of homesickness clouded my days like never before. I want to share with you what it's like to be alone in a place where even the air feels different, and words around you sound like a melody you can't quite hum along to.

Imagine waking up every day to a silence that's loud with absence. The absence of your mum's morning hustle, your dad's newspaper rustle and pearls of wisdom, and the laughter of siblings that used to be your wake-up call. Instead, it's just the quiet pulse of a new city—a city that's an adventure but also a reminder of how far you are from everything familiar. That was my morning, every morning. And with each sunrise, I missed not just my family but the very essence of home—the smells, the sounds, even the chaos of Deira traffic during rush hour.

Trying to adapt was like learning to fly in itself. Every day brought its own set of challenges, from understanding a new culture to trying to communicate in a language that twisted my tongue in knots. It felt like being a child again, making sense of the world, but with the added pressure of needing to succeed to prove that I could be a pilot and make it on my own.

The impact of this isolation on my performance was evident. In the cockpit, instead of just the sky and the instruments, my mind was crowded with memories of home, worries about not fitting in, and the struggle to keep up in a language I barely spoke. My instructors saw it as a lack of focus, but it was more than that. It was the weight of solitude, the longing for a familiar voice, a supportive hug, and the struggle to find my place in this new world.

Evenings were the hardest. The quiet of my apartment was a bleak contrast to the lively family dinners back home. Each meal reminded me of the distance, not just in miles but in the experiences I was missing out on—birthdays, anniversaries, or the everyday moments that make up a family's life. I would sit

at my table, laptop open, map on the table, and food in front of me, but my appetite was lost to nostalgia. I'd reach for my phone, scrolling through photos and messages, a digital bridge to the world I left behind.

This emotional toll wasn't just a phase; it was a constant companion that I had to learn to live with. But here's the thing—I also learned that feeling this way is okay. It's okay to miss home, to feel out of place, and to struggle. These feelings didn't make me weak; they made me human. They taught me resilience, the ability to find strength in vulnerability, and the importance of seeking connections, even in the most unlikely places.

The journey of flight training, which I had embarked upon with so much hope and enthusiasm, morphed into a series of struggles I hadn't expected. Each session in the cockpit, which should have been a step closer to my dream, turned into a glaring spotlight on my vulnerabilities and failures. It wasn't just the complexity of manoeuvres or the intricacies of navigation that challenged me; it was an internal battle, a turmoil that clouded my judgment, understanding, and ability to perform.

I knew I could follow the instructions, execute the manoeuvres precisely, and master the required skills. However, the disconnect between my capability and performance widened with each passing day. The simplest instructions began to confuse me, my reactions slowed, and my decisions were questioned. It was as if the language of flying, which once seemed so innate and thrilling, had become foreign, leaving me grappling for understanding in a sea of doubts and fears.

IT WAS AS IF THE LANGUAGE OF FLYING, WHICH ONCE SEEMED SO INNATE AND THRILLING, HAD BECOME FOREIGN, LEAVING ME GRAPPLING FOR UNDERSTANDING IN A SEA OF DOUBTS AND FEARS.

The weight of my emotions, the homesickness, the isolation, and the pressure to prove myself became a barrier I couldn't surmount. I felt trapped in a cycle of failure, each mistake a reminder of how far I had fallen from the expectations I had set for myself and those set by others. My confidence, once unshakeable, began to crumble under the weight of these unseen challenges.

In my attempts to maintain a facade of strength and composure, I kept my struggles to myself, believing that showing vulnerability, especially in an environment dominated by men, was a sign of weakness. This belief, perhaps a remnant of my all-girls school upbringing, where we were taught to be strong, independent, and resilient in the face of adversity, became my undoing. The very strength I prided myself on became my prison, locking away any chance of seeking help, of opening up about the internal chaos that was sabotaging my dream.

The culmination of these pressures often found its release in the most private of spaces. Once in the seclusion of the car park, I allowed the facade to fall away, letting out the pent-up emotions in torrents of tears. It was in one of these moments of vulnerability that Tatiana spotted me. The sight of her, a reminder that my pain had been witnessed, initially filled me with a sense of exposure, a fear of judgment. Yet, it also marked a turning point, a realisation that perhaps it was okay to not be okay, that the strength lies in acknowledging our struggles, in seeking support.

My failures, my inability to perform, were not due to a lack of skill or passion but were manifestations of my circumstances' emotional and mental toll. It was a cry for help, a silent plea for understanding and support in a journey that I had underestimated in its capacity to test my skills as a pilot and my resilience as a person.

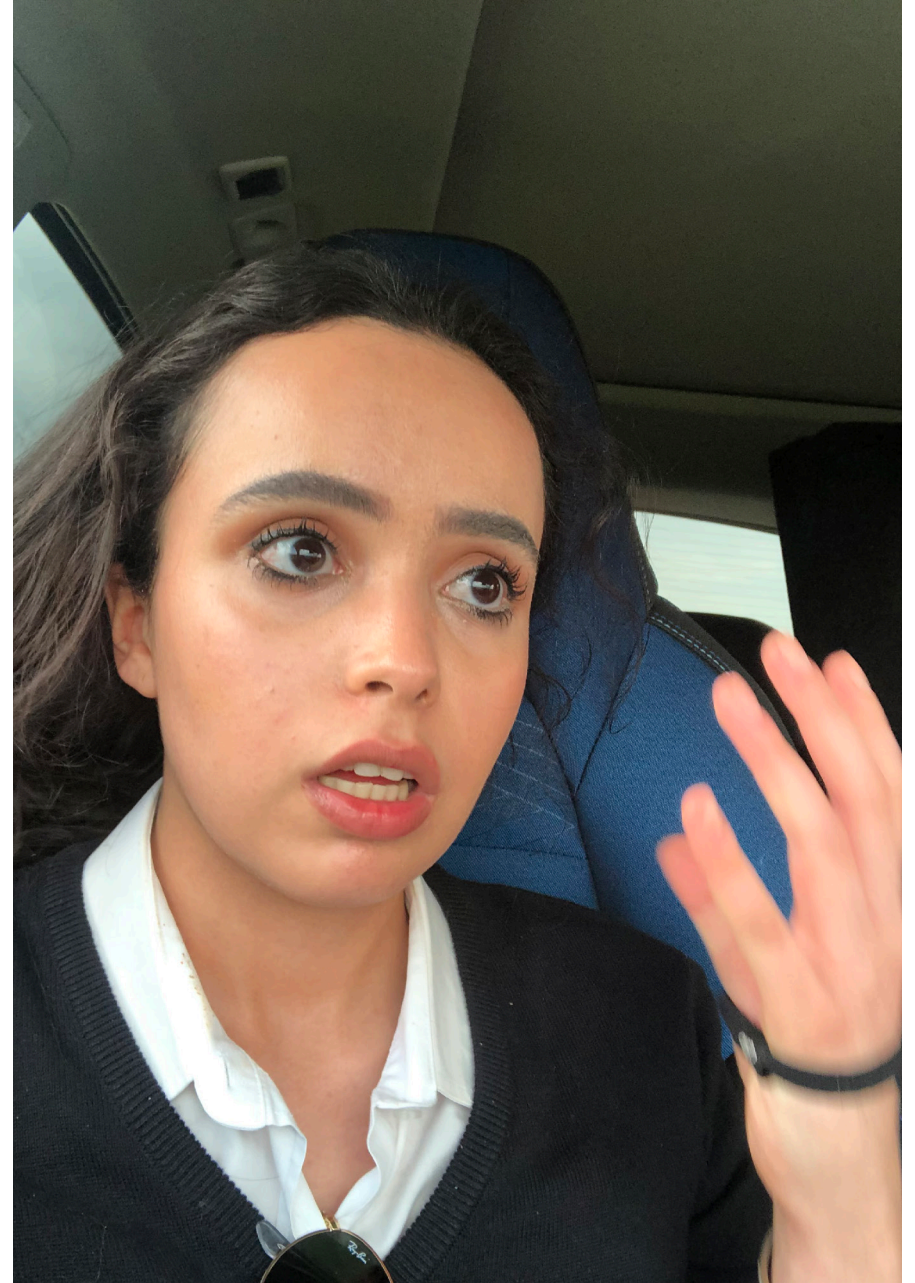
To those who may find themselves in similar struggles, know that it's okay to falter, to feel lost amidst the pressures and expectations. It's okay to cry, to feel vulnerable, and most importantly, it's okay to ask for help. Our journeys are often fraught with turbulence, both external and internal. Still, it's through acknowledging our vulnerabilities and seeking support that we find our way back to clarity, control, and, ultimately, the fulfilment of our dreams.

Those of you who might be facing your own “cloudy skies” know that it’s not just about the turbulence but also how you navigate it. It’s about finding your strength in the face of loneliness, learning to adapt without losing yourself, and holding onto the hope that the skies will eventually clear. Most importantly, it’s about understanding that homesickness, like any storm, is temporary, and what lies beyond it is the growth that comes from having weathered it.



Here I study, here I eat...here I sleep

MY FAILURES, MY INABILITY TO PERFORM, WERE NOT DUE TO A LACK OF SKILL OR PASSION BUT WERE MANIFESTATIONS OF MY CIRCUMSTANCES' EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL TOLL. IT WAS A CRY FOR HELP, A SILENT PLEA FOR UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT IN A JOURNEY THAT I HAD UNDERESTIMATED IN ITS CAPACITY TO TEST MY SKILLS AS A PILOT AND MY RESILIENCE AS A PERSON.





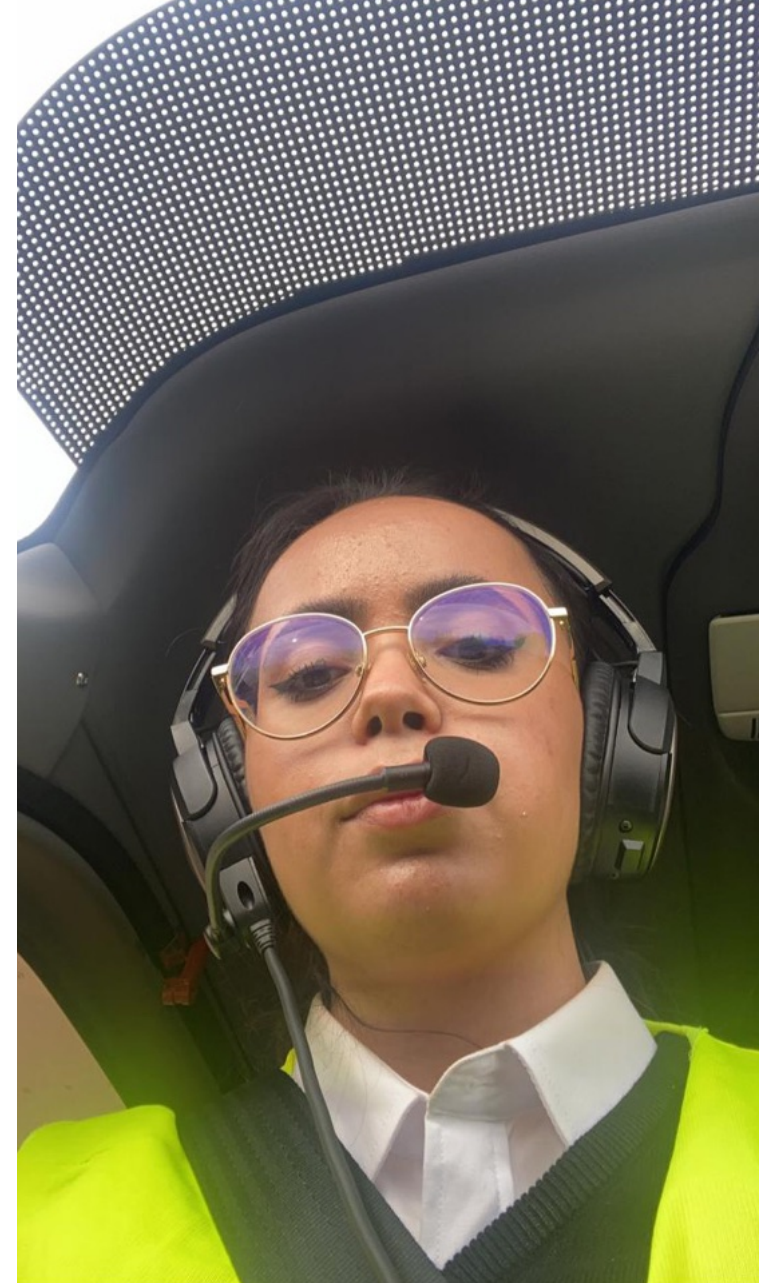
Sometimes I would come here to cry quietly away from prying eyes

“SHAIKHA WOULD CANCEL HER LESSONS AT THE VERY LAST MINUTE. SOMETIMES, SHE WAS HERE FOR THE MORNING FLIGHT AND THEN DIDN’T SHOW UP IN THE AFTERNOON WITHOUT TELLING ANYONE. SHE WOULD ARRIVE EITHER WITH HER HOMEWORK DONE IN A VERY SUPERFICIAL WAY OR WITHOUT HOMEWORK AT ALL. THIS FRUSTRATED MANY OF THE INSTRUCTORS.”

– Massimo Kayed

“AT FIRST, WE DID NOT CLICK, AND SHE WAS NOT PERFORMING. MOST OF THE TIME WE FLEW TOGETHER, SHE WOULD GET SICK ON THE FLIGHT. IT WAS A PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTION DUE TO SOME TYPE OF STRESS WHILE FLYING. IT’S A COMMON THING STUDENTS GET WHEN UNDER PRESSURE. SO WHEN I REALISED THIS, I ASKED VITO TO CHANGE INSTRUCTORS.”

–Lorenzo Pizzi





“IN THE BEGINNING, SHAIKHA FLEW NORMALLY; THERE WERE NO PROBLEMS. AS THE WEEKS PASSED, I HAD SOME DOUBTS BECAUSE SHE WOULD ARRIVE UNPREPARED, AND SOMETIMES, SHE DID NOT WANT TO FLY WITH HER INSTRUCTOR; SHE BECAME UNINTERESTED AND SEEMED VERY SAD. SOMETHING WAS NOT RIGHT WITH HER.”

– Amedeo Magnani

“SHE WAS PROGRESSING SLOWLY, SO I ASKED WHAT WAS ON HER MIND. SHE SAID SHE HAD BEEN AWAY FROM HOME FOR ALMOST TWO MONTHS AND MISSED HER FAMILY. SHE WAS STAYING IN A HOTEL, WHICH DIDN'T HELP. SHE HAD TO STUDY FROM THE MORNING TO THE EVENING IN AN UNFAMILIAR CITY, ALL ALONE. SHE BECAME DEMOTIVATED.”

– Gianluca Cevenini



CHAPTER EIGHT



Vito'ed

My world started unravelling. It was like seeing a crash in slow motion, and you could do nothing about it but brace yourself for the inevitable. How did I get here? Each decision, each missed warning sign, seemed to flash before my eyes. When I should have spoken, I stayed quiet. When I should have asked for help, I let my pride and insecurities get in the way.



“SHE WAS MAKING THE SAME ERRORS OVER AND OVER AGAIN, DAY AFTER DAY. SO I TALKED TO HER AND SAID: WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOU? IS THERE SOMETHING YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND? WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?”

AND SHE WOULD ALWAYS SAY, IT’S NOTHING; EVERYTHING IS GOOD. SHE WAS ALWAYS SMILING. SO I THOUGHT, TO MYSELF, OKAY, SHE DOESN’T WANT TO BE A PILOT. MAYBE THE FAMILY IS PUSHING HER, AND SHE’S FAILING ON PURPOSE. SO, I DECIDED TO DISMISS HER.”

– Vito Preti



The events that led to the suspension of my pilot training program were a whirlwind that seemed to snatch away the very essence of my dreams, leaving me in a void of despair and disbelief. From the outset, the struggles I faced were internal battles, emotions, and pressures that I couldn't articulate, let alone overcome in the environment I found myself in. The culmination of these challenges came to a head when Vito Preti, the cofounder and head of Professional Aviation, intervened directly in my training.

The narrative that had reached Vito through my instructors was a tale of repeated mistakes, missed sessions, and a perceived lack of discipline that painted a picture of a student who seemed to not only lack the commitment to her training but, more critically, the desire to be part of it at all. Vito's decision to take to the skies with me was the last attempt to see the issues his staff had reported for himself. After our flight, Vito was convinced that the root of the problem was not just a lack of understanding or skill but a deeper issue. He felt strongly that I didn't honestly want to be there, that my heart wasn't in flying, and that this dream of being a pilot was not mine but someone else's—imposed upon me by family expectations. “Who are you doing this for Shaikha? This is not your dream,” he said to me. I wanted to scream; his words hurt in ways that I could not even begin to explain. I tried to tell him, “You are wrong; you don't know me or know what I'm going through” I wanted to shout at the top of my lungs, but all I could do was sit there quietly, struggling to breathe because of the effort of holding my emotions in. His belief that I lacked the intrinsic passion for aviation weighed heavily in his decision to suspend me. It was a conclusion that couldn't be further from the truth but underlined the profound miscommunication and misinterpretation of my struggles.

The reality of my situation was far from this interpretation. The missed sessions and sudden departures from the campus were not acts of rebellion but a cry for help from someone too overwhelmed to articulate her needs, too lost in the throes of emotional turmoil to find a way forward. The academy's rules, expectations, and culture were aspects I was still grappling with, not out of disrespect but out of a sheer inability to adjust.

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The decision to suspend me was a blow that echoed the very fears and insecurities I had been battling. Returning home, I found myself in a state of desolation, my room a sanctuary where I could mourn the loss of my dream in solitude. The walls adorned with Emirates Boeing 777 posters were a testament to a passion that felt now like a distant memory. I was down, grieving the loss of the promise I had clung to since childhood. I thought that a part of me was lost forever. My family tried their best to lift my spirits. Everyone tried their best to console me: my father, my mother, my brothers, my extended family and my friends. But there I stayed in my room, crying into a pillow every night, wishing this nightmare would end.

It was in this darkest hour that my father, Uncle Ahmed, and Hisham became unexpected sparks of hope. Their unwavering belief in me and their understanding of the depth of my dream to become a pilot propelled them into action. Hisham's patience, waiting for six hours just to speak to Vito, was the first step in a series of efforts that would eventually lead to a glimmer of hope.

The conversation between my father and Vito was pivotal, not just for my future in aviation but for the understanding it fostered. My father's ability to convey the depth of my passion and insights into the cultural and personal challenges I faced offered Vito a new perspective on the situation. The comparison to his own challenging experiences whilst training abroad provided a common ground, a realisation that adaptation to such intense environments is not merely a matter of discipline but also of overcoming significant personal and cultural hurdles.

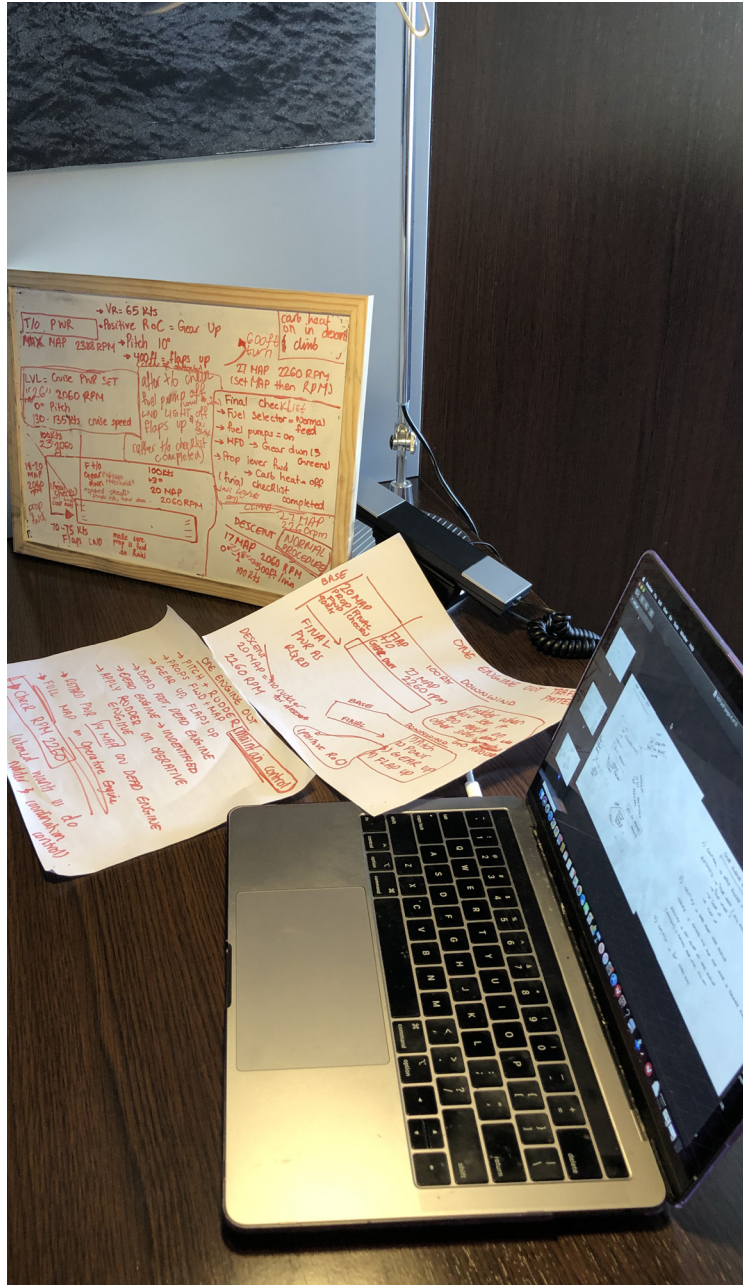
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“SHAIKHA, I WILL LET YOU FLY WITH AN INSTRUCTOR, BUT YOU CANNOT PROCEED WITH THE PILOT’S PROGRAMME. THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES THAT YOUR TRAINING WILL RESUME. IF THERE IS A CHANGE AND YOU PROVE YOURSELF, WE WILL RESUME THE PROGRAMME; OTHERWISE, WE WILL NOT. IT’S UP TO YOU. YOU NEED TO CHANGE YOUR ATTITUDE. YOU NEED TO ASK FOR HELP IF YOU NEED HELP. YOU NEED TO SAY THAT YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND SOMETHING IF YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND IT. THAT’S WHY WE ARE HERE.”

– Vito Preti





“A REAL TEACHER WILL NEVER GIVE UP ON A STUDENT. VITO UNDERSTOOD THAT AND DID WHAT WAS NEEDED TO GET THE BEST OUT OF SHAIKHA.

EVERYONE HAS UPS AND DOWNS. THAT’S JUST LIFE. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS HOW WE REACT WHEN WE ARE FACED WITH ADVERSITY. IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT OBSTACLES SLOW YOU DOWN AS LONG AS YOU HAVE THE DRIVE AND PASSION TO KEEP GOING. SHAIKHA HAD DRIVE AND PASSION IN ABUNDANCE; SHE JUST NEEDED TO COMMUNICATE BETTER AND LET PEOPLE IN. VITO RECOGNISED THAT AND JOLTED HER BACK ON TRACK. THAT’S PROPER MENTORSHIP.”

– Ahmed Al Muhairi (Bu Mattar)

The agreement that allowed my return under strict conditions was a compromise that bore the weight of countless emotions and expectations. My family could finance as many flying sessions as necessary. Still, my readmission to the formal pilot training programme hinged on apparent, demonstrable changes in my commitment, performance, and attitude. This condition, while daunting, was a spark of hope. It underscored the opportunity to return to the skies and to do so with a renewed focus and determination to prove my dedication and love for flying. This passion had been mine since childhood but had been lost in translation and misunderstood amidst my trials. This was my chance to show the world and myself what I was truly capable of.

This chapter of my journey, aptly named 'Vito'ed', was not just about the suspension and the conditions of my return. It was about the realisation that sometimes, our most significant trials come not from external challenges but from the need to confront and overcome our internal struggles. The support of my family and the understanding reached with Vito, and the second chance I was given was not just about proving my ability to fly. They were about learning to navigate the turbulent skies of my doubts and fears, to emerge not just as a pilot but as a person strengthened by adversity, ready to soar.

THE SUPPORT OF MY FAMILY AND THE UNDERSTANDING REACHED WITH VITO, AND THE SECOND CHANCE I WAS GIVEN WAS NOT JUST ABOUT PROVING MY ABILITY TO FLY. THEY WERE ABOUT LEARNING TO NAVIGATE THE TURBULENT SKIES OF MY DOUBTS AND FEARS, TO EMERGE NOT JUST AS A PILOT BUT AS A PERSON STRENGTHENED BY ADVERSITY, READY TO SOAR.





My father was always there for me to lift my spirits when needed



CHAPTER NINE



The Recovery

The feeling of failure is one of the most horrible things one can ever experience. It's like a haunting of your soul, echoing through your thoughts and darkening your spirit. Yet, it is also a powerful teacher, offering stark lessons in resilience and growth. Each setback serves as a stepping stone, pushing us to redefine our strategies and strengthen our resolve, turning pain into progress.



My eldest brother Saeed Bu Naser, Hisham, Shama and my Uncle Ahmed

ONCE, BABA SENT ME A VIDEO OF THE LATE DIEGO MARADONA TRAINING IN FRONT OF THE CROWD BEFORE A CRUCIAL NAPOLI GAME. THE CROWD WAS SINGING THE ICONIC OPUS SONG 'LIVE IS LIFE', BELTING IT OUT ACROSS THE STADIUM, AND MARADONA WAS DOING KICK-UPS AND DANCING AS IF HE DIDN'T HAVE A CARE IN THE WORLD, ENJOYING THE MOMENT. I MUST ADMIT, ALTHOUGH I'M NOT A HUGE FOOTBALL FAN, IT WAS HARD TO DENY HOW INSPIRING THAT VIDEO WAS.

After I was suspended and I returned home to Dubai, my family gave me the space I needed. They understood the importance of privacy during such a pivotal time, but their support was unwavering. Everyone contributed in their own way to help lift my spirits. Rashid kept the laughter flowing with his jokes, Mama filled the kitchen with the aroma of my favourite dishes, and my brothers, Saeed and Saeed Bu Naser, were relentless in their calls, encouraging me to keep fighting and never give up. Uncle Ahmed regularly visited, each time bringing with him words of wisdom that seemed to fortify my resolve. The constant message from everyone was clear: this isn't the end.

I remember those long talks with my father. With every word steeped in love, empathy, and encouragement, he reinforced his belief in me. "You can do great things," he would say, urging me to stand up, dust myself off, and face the challenge head-on. He reminded me that it was up to me to roll up my sleeves and figure out how to keep my dream alive despite the setback. This was Baba, through and through. The word 'problem' was not in his vocabulary. He would say, "Don't say problem, say challenge. We don't believe in problems". He always passed on his wisdom and experience whenever he got the chance and sometimes in the most creative ways possible.

There was one incident that remains fresh in my memory. Once, Baba sent me a video of the late Diego Maradona training in front of the crowd before a crucial Napoli game. The crowd was singing the iconic Opus song 'Live is Life', belting it out across the stadium, and Maradona was doing kick-ups and dancing as if he didn't have a care in the world, enjoying the moment. I must admit, although I'm not a huge football fan, it was hard to deny how inspiring that video was. Baba, in his own way, was trying to tell me not to overthink the pressure, to enjoy the journey, and just to do the best that I could. That is all that matters. Moments like these will always resonate deeply with me. My father is my champion and my hero. He has a way about him that is hard to express in words; those who know him will tell you that he is a remarkable man who always brings out the best in people. He was instrumental in putting my dream back on course.

All together now
Live, live is life
Live, live is life
When we all give the power
We all give the best
Every minute of an hour
Don't think about a rest
Then you all get the power
You all get the best
And everyone gives everything
And every song everybody sings
Then it's life
Live is life
Live is life, live
La la la la

Song and lyrics by Opus

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RU2\]4057cZw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RU2]4057cZw)



My Father, Uncle Ahmed and Hisham had already laid the groundwork for my potential return. The rest was up to me. I needed to dig deeper than ever before to return to Bologna with a renewed mindset, new expectations, and an ironclad resolve. It was now or never; the dream was mine to either realise or relinquish. No one else could fight this battle for me; only I could prove myself worthy of a Commercial Pilot Licence. This time, I would go back to Bologna armed with a very clear plan of action, ready to make my dream a reality.

Upon my return to Professional Aviation, I faced a considerable challenge: I needed to prove myself before I could resume my Pilot Training. Vito made this crystal clear—it was a non-negotiable condition. I was allowed to fly as often as I could afford, but these flights wouldn't count towards my hour-building since I wasn't officially part of the training programme anymore. More importantly, unless my instructors were convinced of my commitment and capability, rejoining the pilot training programme was off the table. So there I was, back at the academy, tasked with the monumental goal of proving to all my instructors that I deserved this second chance and that this dream was unequivocally mine alone.

Strangely, this situation felt liberating in a way. I had the freedom to fly without the immediate pressures of evaluations and instructions looming over each session. Vito's directive to the instructors was clear: "Do not intervene unless it's a critical situation, about 5 seconds from death." This autonomy allowed me to take the controls as the pilot in command, truly immersing myself in what I was meant to do. And I loved every minute of it. I must have flown at least 15 different missions with nearly all the instructors at

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Professional Aviation, yet not a minute of those flights contributed to my official log. Nonetheless, I was in my element, rediscovering my love for flying with a renewed vigour and passion.

It's fair to say that this change in me—this revived enthusiasm—didn't go unnoticed. Everything I had learned seemed to come back to me naturally, as if flying was indeed second nature to me. It took about two months from my return to Italy for my instructors to recognise my progress and advocate for my reinstatement into the pilot programme. General Amedeo and Gianluca were particularly vocal, supported strongly by voices like Damiano and Pasqualino.

Of course, both Vito and Massimo needed to see this transformation for themselves. This time, I was fully prepared to demonstrate that flying was not just my dream but truly my calling. My readiness to show that I belonged in the skies was evident, and I was determined to seize this opportunity to not just return to the program but to excel within it. After proving myself, I was finally allowed to return to official pilot training. The dream was back on track, and I was more ready than I had ever been.

Throughout this challenging phase, where I was proving myself and earning back my place in the pilot training programme, there were some incredibly pivotal people who truly helped me find balance and the will to keep pushing forward. I remember the phone calls from Uncle Ahmed (Bu Mattar), the frequent visits from Hisham, and the heartening messages from Rehman—all sharing their wisdom, support, and experiences to help me navigate the journey ahead. The support of my family was my backbone during these times, and it was evident how much I also meant to them.

Despite Rashid being unable to visit Bologna regularly due to his studies, he never missed a chance to check on me, sharing jokes and words of encouragement that bridged the physical distance between us. Indeed, the bond between twins is something uniquely special. I was also incredibly grateful that my older brother, Saeed, and half-brother, Saeed bu Naser, were both in Europe—Saeed pursuing his Doctorate in Humanitarian Studies and Saeed Bu Naser working in Rome. They were always ready to jump on a plane at a moment's notice and frequently took the opportunity to visit.



The love and support of my three brothers means the world to me



On one special occasion, I had invited them to Bologna under the pretence of a simple visit, but I had a surprise planned. Upon their arrival, I revealed that I was flying us to Venice for lunch. Imagine, how many people get to say, “My little sister flew me to Venice for lunch?” It was a day filled with laughter and joy—a true family day out. I wished Rashid was with us to complete the pack and make this day even better, but his university schedule was a challenge; he, too, had his dreams to chase. I understood, but I sorely missed him that day.

Venice from the sky is simply magical. Flying over, you see the city spread below—a mosaic of history and romance. We soared over the Rialto Bridge, with its sweeping views of the Grand Canal, glided past the majestic Basilica San Marco, and admired the bustling Piazza San Marco, once described by Napoleon as ‘the finest drawing room in Europe.’ The gothic splendor of Palazzo Ducale added to the spectacle. It was an unforgettable experience, leaving me swollen with pride to share this with my brothers.

Throughout my recovery and return to flight school, the two Saeeds, along with Shama (more on her later) and occasionally Hisham, were constants in my support network. They were present for my first solo flight, my Private Pilot Licence, my Commercial Pilot Licence, and my graduation. They made sure that on the significant days, I never had to look around to find them missing; they were always there. Saeed, in particular, was a rock I could always lean on, embodying everything an older brother should be: comforting, encouraging, loving, inspiring, protective, and strong.

I HAD A SURPRISE PLANNED. UPON THEIR ARRIVAL, I REVEALED THAT I WAS FLYING US TO VENICE FOR LUNCH. IMAGINE, HOW MANY PEOPLE GET TO SAY, “MY LITTLE SISTER FLEW ME TO VENICE FOR LUNCH?”





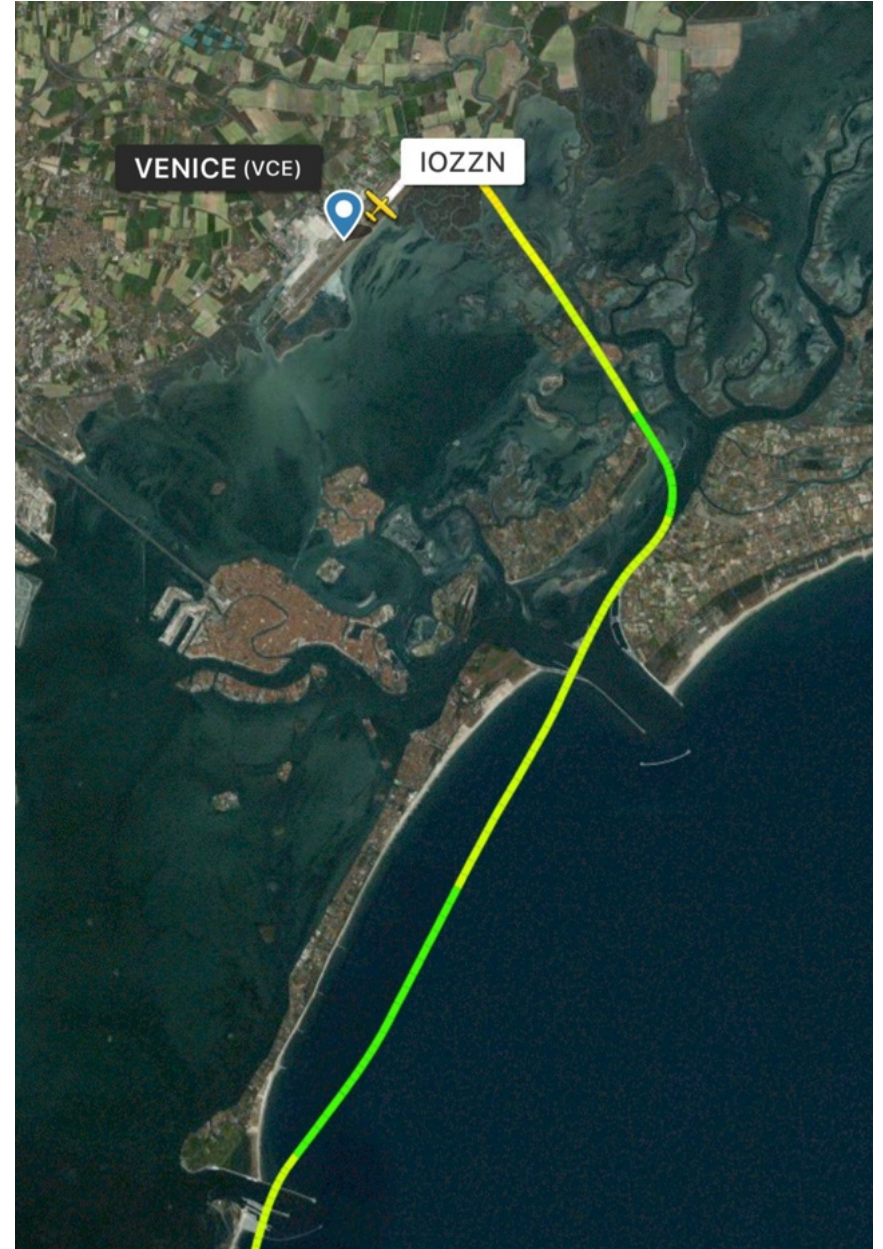
SAEED, IN PARTICULAR, WAS A ROCK I COULD ALWAYS LEAN ON, EMBODYING EVERYTHING AN OLDER BROTHER SHOULD BE: COMFORTING, ENCOURAGING, LOVING, INSPIRING, PROTECTIVE, AND STRONG.



Flying to Venice with Gianluca and my brothers; Saeed and Saeed Bu Naser



Marco Polo Airport, Venice



Our flight path to Venice

Occasionally, my parents would surprise me with visits, which were incredibly heartwarming. I remember one time, Mama flew all the way to Bologna, bringing with her a plastic food box filled with peeled pomegranates from our garden back home. I've always loved pomegranates, and she wanted to make sure I had a taste of home. How cute was that!

Such gestures and those unexpected visits from Baba during my intense study periods made all the difference. He used to show up out of the blue, sometimes during my busiest periods. I used to tell him that he was distracting me, but deep down, I was elated that he visited. We used to take walks together down the quaint streets of Bologna, sharing gelato and chatting the evenings away. These little things, these slices of home, have been monumental in my journey. I am truly blessed to have such a loving family and am deeply grateful for their unwavering care and support.

Understanding the lessons from my failure and suspension has been one of the most humbling and transformative experiences of my life. From it, I've had to embrace several crucial points.

Firstly, resilience is vital. I'm going to be homesick, but that's life. Deal with it. The journey so far has been anything but smooth. Facing suspension could have been the end of my dream, but instead, I saw it as a temporary setback. It has required an immense amount of mental and emotional strength to bounce back, ready to face the rigorous demands of flight training with renewed vigour.

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Enjoying my time with Baba

I also needed to acknowledge my own mistakes. This was a pivotal step in my journey. It was essential for me to take a hard look at what went wrong and to own up to my faults without hiding behind excuses. This self-reflection was not just about identifying the mistakes I made but also about understanding the underlying reasons behind them, ensuring they were not repeated. I needed to see every challenge as an opportunity to grow; to succeed, I had to step out of my comfort zone.

The path wasn't easy; it was fraught with challenges that often seemed insurmountable. But I had to dig deep; I had to find the resolve or else give up on my dream. The thought alone scared me and fuelled my passion, pushing me to fight harder than I ever had to prove my worth. It meant that I had to communicate better and ask questions. It meant that I had to be open about my weaknesses if I wanted to overcome them and ask for help when I needed it.

My recovery strategy included taking strategic actions and maintaining a positive outlook. My first step was to develop a detailed plan of action. I outlined clear, actionable steps to address the reasons behind my suspension, including enhancing my academic performance and conduct. I became a stickler for time, showing up half an hour before my appointments, a discipline I maintain now. The plan also incorporated additional training hours, study sessions, and more active engagement with everyone in the academy.

Building a strong support network was also crucial. I've leant on mentors, instructors, and peers who've provided not just guidance but emotional support as well. Opening up to them helped me gain valuable insights, and they've become advocates for my readmission.

It is important for me to acknowledge my wonderful Shama here. Her role in my journey from my suspension to a fully-fledged pilot can't be overstated. More than just a companion, Shama became the sister I never had, weaving her way into every aspect of my life with a warmth and energy that was nothing short of transformative. She came with me from Dubai to ensure that I had the support I needed during this critical juncture in my journey.

FROM THE MOMENT SHAMA STEPPED INTO THE FLIGHT ACADEMY, HER INFECTIOUS POSITIVITY AND BRIGHT SMILE BEGAN TO WORK THEIR MAGIC ON EVERYONE AROUND US.

From the moment Shama stepped into the flight academy, her infectious positivity and bright smile began to work their magic on everyone around us. She was the kind of person who could light up a room simply by walking into it, her laughter echoing down the halls, drawing people to her with an effortless charm. With Shama, it felt like the sun was always just a little bit brighter.

Her character was a medley of kindness, humour, and unwavering positivity that saw the silver lining in every cloud. She didn't just see the

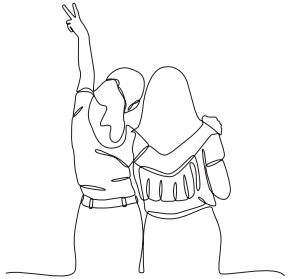
good in things and people—she brought it out. Whether it was her knack for making friends effortlessly or her ability to defuse tense situations with her quick wit and easy laugh, Shama was a bundle of joy in the often high-pressure environment of flight school.

Despite knowing very little about aviation initially, Shama dove headfirst into my world. She became my study partner, pouring over flight manuals and navigation charts with a determination that matched my own. She listened intently, learning just enough to throw out questions and suggestions that challenged me and deepened my understanding. Her perspective was always fresh, often pointing out solutions or ideas that I might have missed, emboldened by her outsider's view.

Her impact wasn't limited to just being there for me. Shama had this remarkable ability to connect people. I still remember the day I returned from a particularly challenging flight, feeling isolated and unsure, only to find that Shama had not only made a slew of new friends but had also compiled a list of fellow students for me to connect with, highlighting their strengths and how they could help me in my studies.



My dear friend Shama, always by my side.



A beautiful day with Shama and Olga



Her initiative opened doors to new friendships with peers like Alessandro, Hajir and Olga and even helped bridge the gap between me and my instructors, Pasqualino and Gianluca, which was a task I had found intimidating at first.

But it was during the milestones of my training that Shama's presence felt most poignant. She was there for every significant moment: cheering the loudest when I completed my first solo flight, hugging me tight when I earned my first stripe, and holding back tears of pride as I received my Private Pilot Licence and subsequent stripes when I did my final checkride and earned my Commercial Pilots Licence. Each achievement was as much hers as it was mine; her support was a constant, her belief in me unshakeable.

When I flew to Cannes with Alessandro, my first flight outside Italy without an instructor, Shama's anxiety mirrored that of a protective older sister. She was restless until I landed safely, her relief palpable over the phone when I called to tell her we'd arrived. That concern, that deep care for my well-being, underscored the depth of our bond.

I cannot earnestly share my story without talking about my Shama. She has been more than just a pillar of support; she has been a crucial part of my growth both as a pilot and as a person. Her positivity, her encouragement, and her ability to see the best in people have not only shaped my experience at flight school but have also left a lasting imprint on my life. Through her, I've learned the power of unwavering friendship and the strength that comes from having someone who believes in you unconditionally.

Shama's impact on my life extends beyond the confines of the academy. She has

AS THE MONTHS PASSED, SHAMA, PASQUALINO, AND I BECAME QUITE A UNIT. SURE, HE WAS MY INSTRUCTOR, BUT MORE THAN THAT, WE BECAME CLOSE FRIENDS.

been a sister, a confidante, and a source of joy and positivity, helping me navigate not just the skies but the ups and downs of life with grace and laughter. Her role in my journey is irreplaceable, and her friendship, a treasure I'll hold dear forever.

As the months passed, Shama, Pasqualino, and I became quite a unit. Sure, he was my instructor, but more than that, we became close friends. He was a student when I first joined Professional Aviation, a lawyer with a passion for flying, so I knew him first as a student and saw him develop into an accomplished flight instructor.

During my recovery and training period, there was one flight with Pasqualino that remains vividly etched in my memory—a defining moment that truly tested my mettle as an aviator. We were mid-flight on a routine training mission when Pasqualino's phone began to incessantly ping with incoming messages. Glancing over, I saw the urgent updates instructing us to divert to Rome due to deteriorating weather conditions back in Bologna.

Pasqualino, ever the calm and collected instructor, turned to me with a choice. The conditions in Bologna were tough, he explained, but manageable. He laid out the options: we could either divert to Rome, taking the safer route, or continue to Bologna and face the challenging conditions. His voice carried a subtle hint of a test, a challenge laid before me. Something stirred within me at that moment—an unyielding desire to not just face the challenge but conquer it. I responded with a decisive, "Let's land in Bologna." My choice brought a proud smile to Pasqualino's face, affirming my decision.

As we continued our course towards Bologna, Pasqualino, perhaps sensing my heightened nerves, began to share his and his fiancée's wedding plans. The casual conversation about flower arrangements and guest lists was his way of distracting me, a tactic to ease my tension and sharpen my focus under the guise of casual chatter. Surprisingly, discussing his upcoming nuptials while piloting the plane did more than just relax me; it was genuinely enjoyable, intertwining the responsibilities of piloting with the light-hearted task of wedding planning for a friend.



Like I said, the three of us, Pasqualino, Shama and I became a tight unit

As Bologna's runway approached, Pasqualino's crisp and professional voice cut through the noise. He detailed the landing manoeuvre, considering the 17 knots of crosswind we were facing—a daunting task for any pilot, especially in a light aircraft. "The wind is coming from the right, so left rudder and right stick," he instructed clearly.

I acknowledged with a simple "Okay," my focus narrowing to the task at hand.

EXECUTING THE LANDING UNDER THOSE CONDITIONS FELT LIKE I WAS WRESTLING WITH THE WIND, EACH MOVEMENT OF THE RUDDER AND STICK A CALCULATED COUNTER TO THE GUSTS THAT SOUGHT TO PUSH US OFF COURSE.

Executing the landing under those conditions felt like I was wrestling with the wind, each movement of the rudder and stick a calculated counter to the gusts that sought to push us off course. Pasqualino's calm reassurances were a steady presence in the cockpit, guiding me through the turbulence. "Don't worry, just as we briefed," he kept saying, reinforcing the steps as we aligned with the runway.

The moment the wheels touched down smoothly on the tarmac, a wave of relief and triumph washed over me.

I had managed to land the plane safely, navigating the challenging crosswinds with precision. It was a personal victory that marked significant growth from just a year ago, where I might have hesitated or faltered under similar conditions.

Reflecting on the flight later, I couldn't help but feel a surge of pride. Messages from other instructors had suggested diverting to Rome due to the strong winds, yet here we were, safely landed in Bologna. This experience wasn't just about handling tough flying conditions; it was a testament to my development as a pilot, to the trust Pasqualino placed in my abilities, and to the confidence I had cultivated over many months of rigorous training.

“I RECEIVED A MESSAGE ENCOURAGING US TO DIVERT TO ROME DUE TO HARSH WEATHER CONDITIONS. SO, I ASKED HER IF SHE FELT CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO ATTEMPT THE LANDING AT OZZANO OR IF SHE WOULD PREFER TO FLY TO ROME. SHE CHOSE THE MORE CHALLENGING PATH. FEARLESS, SHE MADE A PERFECT LANDING.

I WAS VERY IMPRESSED WITH HER. I REMEMBER THINKING THAT I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO LAND LAST YEAR IN SUCH A CHALLENGING SITUATION.”

– Pasqualino Marsico





CHAPTER TEN



My solo flight

The first solo flight marks a significant milestone for new pilots, where they independently handle takeoff, a brief flight, and a safe landing. This event, known as “soloing,” requires pilots to navigate and operate the aircraft proficiently while also managing unexpected challenges like mechanical issues or adverse weather. Unlike other situations, solo pilots must rely solely on their own skills and judgment, tackling these challenges without external guidance or support.



SOLOING, AS IT'S AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN IN THE AVIATION COMMUNITY, REPRESENTS MORE THAN JUST FLYING AN AIRCRAFT ALONE. IT EMBODIES THE TRANSITION FROM STUDENT TO PILOT, LIKE WHEN THE TRAINING WHEELS COME OFF YOUR BIKE.

This chapter of my aviation journey, called 'My Solo Flight', begins at a juncture where dreams intersect with reality, where the culmination of rigorous training and the essence of freedom converge in a singular, breathtaking experience.

By the time General Amedeo deemed me ready for my solo flight, I had amassed over 15 hours of flight training at Professional Aviation alone—time I had spent mastering the controls, understanding air laws, and rehearsing for every conceivable scenario, from engine failures to navigating through changeable weather patterns.

Soloing, as it's affectionately known in the aviation community, represents more than just flying an aircraft alone. It embodies the transition from student to pilot, like when the training wheels come off your bike. You are now the commander, the one in complete control. It's a rite of passage that demands not only a deep understanding of aviation mechanics and laws but also an unshakeable confidence in one's ability to face and overcome the unpredictable.

On that pivotal day, under the watchful eye of the sky and the silent approval of General Amedeo, I was to take off, navigate, and land—all by myself. This chapter isn't just the recounting of a flight; it's the story of every heartbeat, every breath, and every moment of quiet resolve that got me here and carried me through the skies. This was my initiation into the brotherhood and sisterhood of pilots, a testament to my readiness to claim the sky as my domain, armed with knowledge, skill, and a spirit that yearns for the freedom only the sky can offer. For me, Shaikha, a young Emirati woman who dared to dream, this was the culmination of years of determination, learning, and overcoming. It was a dance with destiny, choreographed by countless hours of study, practice, and the invaluable guidance of my family and mentors. The anticipation of this flight carried the weight of all I had learned, the expectations I had set for myself, and the aspirations I harboured to inspire others and make my family and nation proud.

"Shaikha, you are cleared for takeoff!" Hearing these words echo through my headset was so special. Can you imagine, from a young

girl of ten dreaming under the vast skies of Dubai to the cockpit of my very own aircraft, ready to command the skies solo? My journey, encapsulated in this monumental moment, was a testament to the power of dreams and their relentless pursuit. I will now recount the day for you in as much detail and colour as possible.

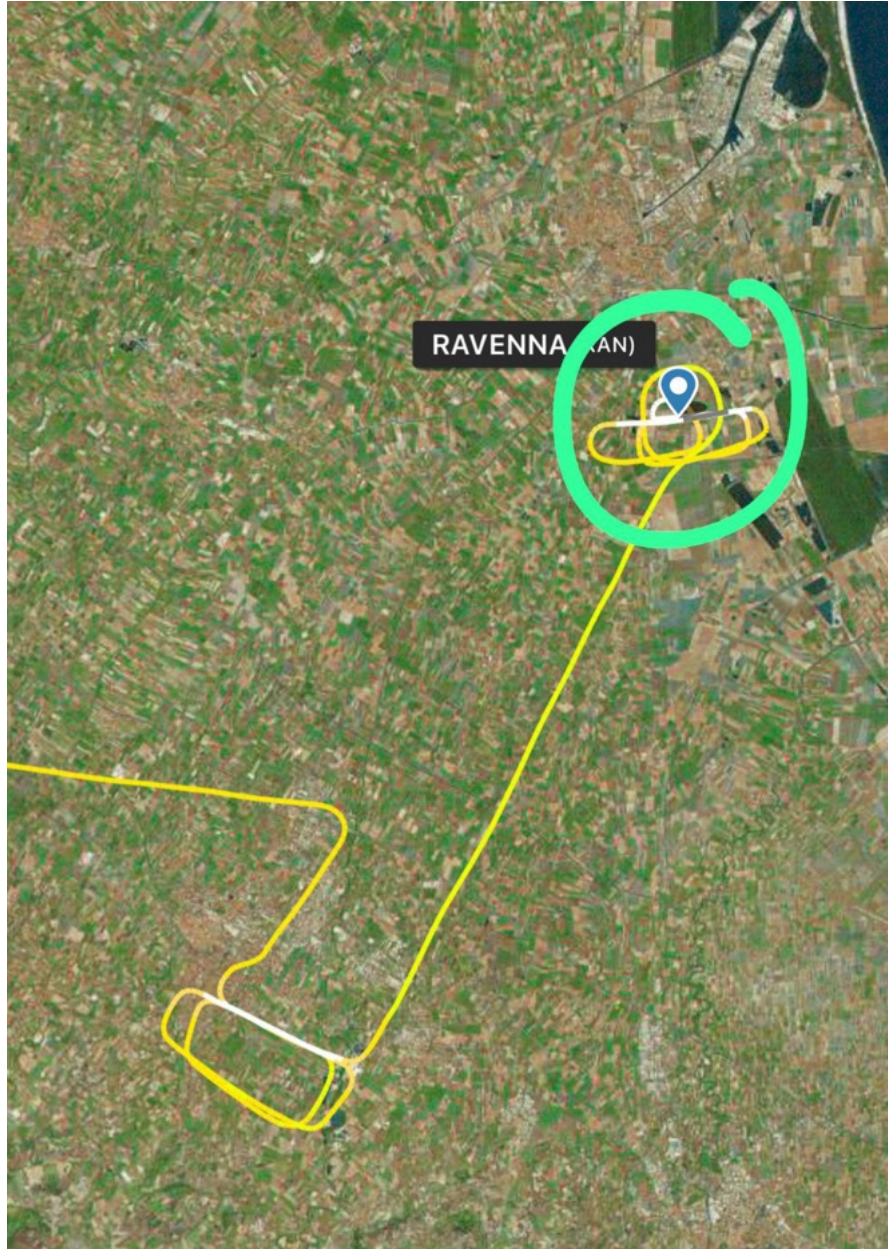
It was a Saturday morning, and I remember it as if it were yesterday. It did not feel like a typical day. It was filled with a whirlwind of emotions—nervousness tangled with excitement, anxiety shadowed by determination, and perhaps a hint of too much caffeine.

I had just completed a short flight with General Amedeo, who had been observing me on my last three missions, always by my side, diligently assessing everything. So, as much as this appeared to be routine, something about that day gave me a nervous knot in the pit of my stomach.

Sure enough, after we landed and the aircraft stopped, General Amedeo stepped out, looked at me with a smile, and then placed his hand on my shoulder and said, “Shaikha, you can go solo”. I cannot begin to describe my joy at hearing those words. I couldn’t believe it and replied, “Really, I can go?” “Yes, you can go. Are you happy?” he said. “Of course”, I blurted out, worried that any delay in my response might show hesitation and take this moment away. The day had finally come, and I was ready. I knew it, they knew it, and now it was my chance to show everyone who believed in my dream that their faith had not been misplaced.

IT WAS A SATURDAY MORNING, AND I REMEMBER IT AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY. IT DID NOT FEEL LIKE A TYPICAL DAY. IT WAS FILLED WITH A WHIRLWIND OF EMOTIONS—NERVOUSNESS TANGLED WITH EXCITEMENT, ANXIETY SHADOWED BY DETERMINATION, AND PERHAPS A HINT OF TOO MUCH CAFFEINE.





My solo flight path to Ravenna

AS I SAT IN THE AIRCRAFT, THE FAMILIARITY OF THE PRE-FLIGHT CHECKS, THE INSTRUMENT INFORMATION, AND THE RADIO COMMUNICATIONS COULDN'T MASK THE SINGULAR TRUTH: TODAY, AT THIS MOMENT, I WAS ALONE IN THE COCKPIT.

As I sat in the aircraft, the familiarity of the pre-flight checks, the instrument information, and the radio communications couldn't mask the singular truth: today, at this moment, I was alone in the cockpit. The ritual of preparation took on a new weight. Every pilot knows that the proper foundation of flight success is laid well before takeoff, on solid ground, so I double-checked everything. The safety net was gone, leaving a space filled with daunting responsibility and exhilarating freedom. The absence of my instructor, General Amedeo, felt oddly liberating.

Lining up on the runway, I was unexpectedly greeted by the sight of my brothers, Uncle Ahmed, Hisham and Shama. They had been here for a few days; their unplanned and surprising presence was a poignant reminder of the support and love that had carried me to this threshold. It was as if fate and General Amedeo had conspired to choose this perfect day for my inaugural solo flight.

With clearance granted, I responded with a confident readback, applied full power, and navigated the crosswinds with the surety and balance required. The aircraft responded with a lightness I'd never felt before, a vivid reminder of my solo status. As the wheels lifted from the runway, a surge of exhilaration and a profound sense of responsibility washed over me. The dream was real; I was flying solo, but the immediate task was clear: I had to ensure a safe return.

As I ascended, leaving the embrace of the runway behind, the world unfolded beneath me like a meticulously detailed map. Cruising at 1500 feet earlier than usual because of the lighter load, I was alone with my thoughts and the unspoken advice of my checklists.

The experience of flying solo brought with it a unique perspective, not just in the physical sense but emotionally and spiritually as well. From up here, the world seemed simultaneously vast and intimate. The landscapes below, from the rolling hills to the intricate patterns of the roads and buildings, appeared as delicate brushstrokes on the earth's canvas. This bird's-eye view was a stark reminder of the smallness of our existence in the grandness of life. Yet, it underscored the profound impact of pursuing one's dreams with courage. The isolation of the cockpit, rather than feeling confining, expanded my world, connecting me to the earth in a way I had never experienced before. Each landmark, each familiar sight below, was a testament to my journey—not just across the skies but within myself. The sensation of flying solo, of being a solitary figure against the world's vastness, was both humbling and empowering. It was a moment of pure freedom, a celebration of independence and the realisation of a dream that had been years in the making. This wasn't just about piloting an aircraft; it was about navigating the currents of life with determination, resilience, and a heart open to the endless possibilities that lay beyond the horizon.

The descent, turn onto base, and final approach happened in a blur of focus and anticipation. The tower's clearance to land was my cue to master the crosswind and make a landing that would make my instructors proud. My family's presence added an extra layer of determination, capturing the moment of a surprisingly smooth touchdown.

There's unparalleled magic in your first solo flight, a milestone that marks a pilot's journey more profoundly than any other. It's a memory that stays vivid and cherished, a reminder of where passion can take you if you dare to chase it. As I prepare for new challenges, the excitement of solo flying remains undiminished. The sky has always been my passion, and flying solo is the ultimate expression of freedom and achievement. I will never forget that day.





A great moment on a clear and sunny day with Valentina Mascherucci, one of the instructors at Professional Aviation

CHAPTER ELEVEN



My first licence

A Private Pilot Licence (PPL) permits the holder to serve as the pilot in command of an aircraft for private, non-commercial purposes. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) sets the fundamental requirements, though each country adapts its implementation. Per ICAO guidelines, applicants must be at least 17 years old, possess the necessary knowledge and skills, and hold a minimum Class 3 medical certificate.



AS THE MORNING OF THE EVALUATION DAWNED, THE AIR AT THE FLIGHT SCHOOL WAS CHARGED WITH A CONSUMING SENSE OF ANTICIPATION. I HAD FLOWN COUNTLESS HOURS, EACH ONE PREPARING ME FOR THIS DAY, YET THE BUTTERFLIES IN MY STOMACH FLUTTERED AS FIERCELY AS EVER.

The day of my Private Pilot Licence (PPL) evaluation represented a pivotal milestone in my journey as an aspiring pilot. It was a culmination of countless hours of theoretical study, practical training, and personal reflection, all converging into a single, defining flight. The importance of obtaining my PPL cannot be overstated—it was the critical stepping stone towards achieving my ultimate goal of becoming a commercially licensed pilot. This licence was not just a permit to fly; it was an affirmation of my skills, my resilience, and my unwavering commitment to my dream.

As the morning of the evaluation dawned, the air at the flight school was charged with a consuming sense of anticipation. I had flown countless hours, each one preparing me for this day, yet the butterflies in my stomach fluttered as fiercely as ever. This was it—the day I would prove to myself and to the world that I had what it took to command the skies.

Massimo Kayed, known for his rigorous standards and a keen eye for detail, was to conduct my assessment. The gravity of the situation weighed heavily on me as I prepared for the flight. I meticulously checked every chart, reviewed every manoeuvre in my mind, and visualised every sequence I would perform. Success today meant more than just passing a test; it meant crossing a threshold from which there was no turning back.

The flight preparation was methodical. I walked around the aircraft, inspecting every inch, ensuring that everything was in perfect working order. As I climbed into the cockpit, a familiar sense of calm settled over me. This was my domain, where I felt most at home, where all the chaos of the world fell away, and it was just me and the aircraft.

Massimo's presence in the co-pilot seat was both reassuring and daunting. His reputation for precision made me doubly cautious, yet his occasional nods of approval as we went through the pre-flight checklist, bolstered my confidence. We took off smoothly, and as the ground fell away, so did my nerves. I was in my element, doing what I loved, and every minute up in the air reinforced my passion for flying.

The test covered everything from basic manoeuvres to complex emergency procedures. My hands were steady on the controls, each movement precise and deliberate. We navigated through various scenarios, and I demonstrated not just my flying skills but also my ability to remain composed under pressure. Massimo's occasional questions were sharp, testing my knowledge and situational awareness, but I answered them with the confidence of someone who had dedicated every moment of the past months to learning.

As we performed a particularly challenging navigation exercise, I could sense Massimo's scrutiny. I focused on every readout and every sound of the aircraft, ensuring that all was as it should be. The silence in the cockpit was filled with unspoken communication, a mutual understanding of the seriousness of the task at hand.

Landing back at the academy, I felt a mixture of relief and anticipation. We taxied to the hangar, and the silence as Massimo scribbled notes was almost unbearable. Then, he turned to me, a smile breaking through his usually stern demeanour, and extended his hand. "Congratulations," he said, his voice imbued with respect. "You've passed." The relief and joy that washed over me were indescribable. I did it—I earned my Private Pilot Licence and two stripes, marking me as a pilot who was not only competent but capable of handling the responsibilities of the cockpit.

The significance of this achievement was monumental. In the world of aviation, the PPL is more than just a licence; it is a symbol of trust and capability. It meant that I could now fly light aircraft independently, without an instructor's oversight, and was one step closer to my goal of a commercial pilot's licence. This was not just a personal victory; it was a professional endorsement of my skills and a testament to the countless hours of hard work and dedication.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE
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MONUMENTAL.
IN THE WORLD
OF AVIATION, THE
PPL IS MORE THAN
JUST A LICENCE;
IT IS A SYMBOL
OF TRUST AND
CAPABILITY.**

Licence Number: [REDACTED]

Candidate Name: **SHAIKHA [REDACTED] ALMARRI**

Date of Birth: [REDACTED]

Nationality: **UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

Issue Date: **14-NOV-2022**

Expiry Date: **13-NOV-2030**

Issuing Authority: **GENERAL CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

Address of Holder: **EMIRATES AIRLINE, P.O.BOX 92, DUBAI, UAE.**

Holder's Signature

II. LICENCE TITLE
PPL-A

X. INITIAL ISSUE
14 Nov 2022

IX. VALIDITY
13 Nov 2030

XIII. REMARKS
ELP Level-6


XII. RATINGS, CERTIFICATES AND PRIVILEGES:
CLASS/TYPE/INSTRUMENT
MEP Land
SEP Land

INSTRUCTOR:
NIL

EXAMINER:
NIL

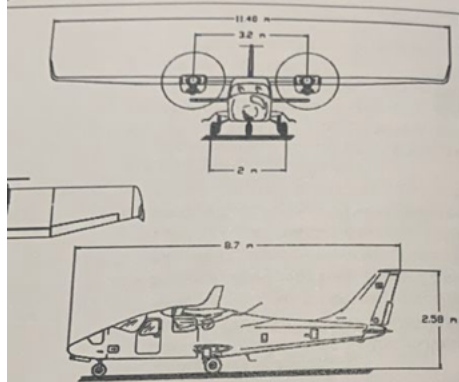
Ratings/ Endorsement Revalidation	Test Date dd/mm/yy	Valid Until dd/mm/yy	Examiner Number	Exam Signal
MEP Land	05/04/23	30/04/24	GCAA-ID-805	GCAA
SEP Land	09/11/22	30/11/24	GCAA-ID-805	GCAA

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STUDY CARD TECNAM P2006T

complete list always refer to AFM section 2



2 Engines: Rotax 912 S3
 Max T.O. Power 98.6 CV at 2388 Prop RPM above 2265.....(TL 5 Minutes)
 Max Cont Power: 92.5 at 2265 Prop

Powerplant Limit:
 Max CHT.....135°C
 MAX CT120°C
 MIN/max oil temp.....50°C /130°C

Speed Limitations:
 VNE.....
 VNO.....
 VA.....
 VO.....
 VLE.....
 VLO.....
 VFE FULL.....
 VFE T.O.....
 VMC.....
 VR.....
 VX.....
 VY.....
 VXse.....
 VYse.....
 VSSE (Safe simulated OEI speed)
 Blue Line.....
 Flap Up Approach speed.....
 Flap T.O approach speed.....
 Flap Land approach speed.....
 Short field approach speed.....

Oil Level max/min.....3/2
 Gear Accumulator min pressure.....20 BAR
 Maximum number of occupant 4 people (included pilot)
 Baggage compartment Capacity 80 KGS
Maximum Crosswind comp. 17 kt

Acrobatic Maneuvers, included turns above 60° are not approved.
 Stall With one engine inoperative are forbidden.



Celebrating with my family and friends, I shared not just the joy of my success but also the stories of the challenges I had overcome to get here. Each congratulation, each hug, was a reminder of the support network that had buoyed me through the tough times.

For me, this achievement was not just about passing a test. It was about overcoming the doubts, setbacks, and failures that had, at times, seemed impossible. It was a validation that I had developed, that I was growing, learning, improving, and getting closer each day to realising my ambitions. I felt ready and was looking forward to the additional training and licences I needed to obtain. With my PPL in hand, the path to becoming a commercial pilot was clearer and filled with promise. This was more than just a step forward in my career—it was a leap towards fulfilling a lifelong dream, towards not just flying, but soaring.

In the coming month, my focus shifted to the next crucial milestone: preparing for my Commercial Pilot's License (CPL), the final stage in my programme at Professional Aviation. I had travelled thousands of miles, endured long stretches of separation from my loved ones, and made countless sacrifices—all for this singular goal. This was my ticket back to my dream role at Emirates Airline, and everything I had done so far had led to this moment. My determination was razor-sharp; I immersed myself in my studies and preparation, visualising the day I would face my final checkride. The dream was now within my grasp, palpable in every fibre of my being. It pushed me forward with a force beyond words. I was in fight mode, fully committed, and nothing—absolutely nothing—was going to stand in my way. I felt like a warrior on the brink of an epic victory, ready to claim the sky as my spoils.

CELEBRATING WITH MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS, I SHARED NOT JUST THE JOY OF MY SUCCESS BUT ALSO THE STORIES OF THE CHALLENGES I HAD OVERCOME TO GET HERE.





CHAPTER TWELVE



The landing

A Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL) allows the holder to pilot an aircraft professionally and receive payment. While the licence usually has no expiration date, a valid type, class rating, and current medical certificate are necessary for its use. The licence often lists various ratings, such as aircraft types (single-engine or multi-engine), instrument ratings (for instrument flight rules), and instructor or examiner ratings for teaching or assessing trainee pilots.



TODAY WAS MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER DAY; IT WAS THE DAY I WOULD EARN MY COMMERCIAL PILOT LICENCE AND MY THIRD STRIPE, MARKING THE ZENITH OF YEARS OF RELENTLESS DEDICATION, CHALLENGES SURMOUNTED, AND DREAMS PURSUED AGAINST ALL ODDS.

The morning dawned bright and clear, a perfect mirror for the culmination of my transformative journey at the Professional Aviation Academy. Today was more than just another day; it was the day I would earn my Commercial Pilot Licence and my third stripe, marking the zenith of years of relentless dedication, challenges surmounted, and dreams pursued against all odds.

As I prepared for my final checkride with Vito, the weight of this moment sat heavily on my shoulders. Vito, a man who had once doubted my commitment to this path, was now the one who would oversee my final test. His decision months ago to suspend me from the academy had been a critical turning point, pushing me to not only prove my dedication but also to introspect deeply about my aspirations and abilities. His tough, yet fair approach had undeniably shaped me into not just a better pilot, but a stronger individual.

As we ascended into the sky for the test, the calmness of the cockpit contrasted sharply with the turbulence of emotions within me. My hands were steady, my heart determined. Every manoeuvre and response during the flight felt like a dance I had rehearsed a thousand times, each step executed with precision and grace. As we levelled off, Vito's voice crackled over the radio, his usual stern tone replaced by one of approval. "Tatiana, Linda, prepare her pilot's stripes," he broadcasted for the academy to hear. The words were simple, yet they reverberated through me like a thunderous applause.

Landing back at the academy felt surreal. As the wheels touched down, a profound sense of achievement washed over me. I did it—I turned my dream into reality. Vito's nod of respect as we taxied back was more rewarding than any accolade I had ever received. He stepped out of the aircraft and, with a ceremonial gravitas, pinned the three pilot stripes onto my uniform. As he did, a barrel of water was joyously poured over my head—an academy tradition marking significant milestones.

The cheers and applause from everyone gathered—my instructors, my peers, and especially my family—filled the air. My mother,

Saeed, Saeed Bu Naser, Shama, and Hisham were all there, their faces brimming with pride and joy. The emotional gravity of the moment pulled me towards my mother, and we embraced tightly, our tears mingling in a silent testament to the journey we had endured together. My mother, who is my best friend, cheerleader, and confidante, shared in this victory deeply. Her strength, love, and unwavering support had been my anchor through every storm. The bond between us, strengthened through years of shared dreams and challenges, was a light that had guided me home.

Though my heart ached due to the absence of my father and Rashid, whose commitments had kept them away, I felt their presence throughout. Their love and lessons continued to inspire and guide me, echoing in my achievements as if they were standing right beside me.

In the days that followed, the graduation ceremony was a festive and poignant event. It was a vibrant celebration of joy, pride, and a little bit of sorrow at the impending farewells. My brothers, including Rashid were all present. Uncle Ahmed, Shama, Hisham, Rehman, and the rest of my family, were all there too, filling the day with laughter and warmth. Although my father's duties kept him away again, he was with me in spirit. Not just today but every day throughout my journey to the skies. He is in my heart, filling it with love; he's in my head, spurring me on and telling me I can achieve anything I set my mind to. It was his wisdom that led me here to this wonderful flight school.

MY MOTHER, WHO IS MY BEST FRIEND, CHEERLEADER, AND CONFIDANTE, SHARED IN THIS VICTORY DEEPLY. HER STRENGTH, LOVE, AND UNWAVERING SUPPORT HAD BEEN MY ANCHOR THROUGH EVERY STORM.



After years of hard work, I finally earned my stripes...yay!



**In my soul, her warmth's
eternal flame**

**In my journey, her love
guides my aim**

**In her eyes, I see my future
bright**

**In our bond, the wings that
give me flight...**

My mother

My friend

My heart.



Professional Aviation had become more than just an academy; it was a second family, a community that had nurtured my growth from a tentative student pilot into a confident commercial aviator. The bonds I formed there were not just professional ties but deep, personal connections that had transformed this place into a home. As we celebrated, my heart overflowed with gratitude towards this community that believed in me, even when sometimes I struggled to believe in myself.

To anyone dreaming of the skies, considering where to forge their path in aviation, I could wholeheartedly recommend Professional Aviation. It's more than an academy; it's a place where dreams take flight, where challenges are met with courage and resilience, and where every student leaves a little stronger, a little higher.

As I stood there among my peers, my instructors, and my loved ones, I realised that this was not just the end of a chapter but the beginning of a new journey. The skies awaited, vast and inviting, and I was ready to soar. With my pilot licence in hand and a heart full of dreams, I step into the future, ready to embrace whatever adventures lay ahead. The final landing was just the beginning. Emirates Boeing 777, here I come.

THE SKIES
AWAITED, VAST
AND INVITING,
AND I WAS READY
TO SOAR. WITH
MY PILOT LICENCE
IN HAND AND
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WHATEVER
ADVENTURES LAY
AHEAD. THE FINAL
LANDING WAS JUST
THE BEGINNING.
EMIRATES BOEING
777, HERE I COME.



Seems like I have been rehearsing for this moment since I was a kid :)









Celebrating graduation with my peers and friends



Me on the screen with General Amedeo



With General Amedeo, an instructor, mentor, and one of the warmest and most supportive people you could ever meet



I was so happy on the day of my graduation, I was living the dream



From a shy, reserved girl to public speaking at my graduation



Sharing a moment with Gianluca, a mentor and a friend who has always supported me during my journey at Professional Aviation





MY FLIGHT TRAINING:
15 CITIES
3 COUNTRIES

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



My office in the sky

Being a pilot isn't just about the technical skills – it's about passion, dedication, and the absolute fulfilment that comes from doing something you truly love. The view from the cockpit is a constant reminder that I'm part of something bigger, connecting people and places across the globe. It's more than a career; it's a privilege and a calling that fuels my soul with every journey.



It's hard to believe that nearly eighteen months have passed since I earned my CPL at Professional Aviation. In that time, my life has been nothing short of eventful—both personally and professionally. If you've read this far, you should now have a clear sense of who I am and what this journey has meant to me. So, let me share a few anecdotes from the perspective of a young pilot in her dream job, reporting from her office in the sky.

I'm thrilled to announce that I've recently taken a significant step forward in my career—I am now a First Officer with Emirates Airlines. Even now, saying it aloud feels surreal. The transition from flight school to piloting commercial jets for one of the world's premier airlines has been everything I dreamed of and more. Yes, the challenges have been immense, but with each obstacle, my passion for this career has only deepened, and my determination to refine my skills has grown stronger.

The pinnacle of this journey came during my final checkride to earn my two stripes as First Officer—a moment I will always cherish. It was monsoon season, and we were bound for Mumbai, a city vibrant with life but unpredictable during torrential rains. The captain piloted us there through turbulent skies, while I sat beside him, focused and calm despite the weight of my impending test. The cabin buzzed with passengers as I mentally prepared for the return leg, which would serve as my test flight.

Once we began the journey back, it was my turn at the controls. I could describe flight EK503 for days, but I'll spare you the technical details. Suffice it to say, no matter how many times I've done a final checkride—whether in flight school or with Emirates—the nerves are always there. These assessments hold so much at stake: personal validation, career growth, and self-improvement. I had that familiar knot in my stomach, a physical reminder of how much I wanted this. My heart raced, but I trusted my training. Every movement was deliberate, every decision calculated. I could feel the captain's gaze as he monitored my performance, but instead of unsettling me, it sharpened my focus. When we finally touched down, I knew—I had flown well. The captain's congratulations confirmed it. I had passed, I had earned my two stripes and the sense of achievement that followed was indescribable.

FOR ME, IT IS THE UNWAVERING LOVE AND SUPPORT OF MY FAMILY THAT HAS BEEN MY GREATEST STRENGTH.

What made this moment even more special was having my family waiting for me at the airport when I returned to Dubai. Their faces were lit with pride—my father, mother, brothers, and uncle—all of whom had been part of this journey, watching as my dream became reality. They were there doing what they do best: cheering, encouraging, celebrating, and loving unconditionally.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: beyond dreams and determination, there's an even greater force that sustains and empowers us—love. For me, it is the unwavering love and support of my family that has been my greatest strength. Their belief in me, even when my faith wavered, has been the guiding light through the darkest times. Their love fuels my passion and lifts me higher than I ever imagined possible. With their love, I know there's nothing I cannot achieve. If there's one thing I wish for everyone, it is to experience that kind of love.

There they stood—my family, my heart—surrounded by flowers and cheers, their love radiating for all to see. Having them there meant more than words can express. In that moment, I realised the deeper significance of this journey. It wasn't just about achieving my own ambitions; it was about what this path could represent for others. As I recounted a moment from the flight, emotion welled up inside me. A flight attendant approached with his young daughter, who had heard the announcement and realised that an Emirati woman was flying the plane. With wide eyes and a heart full of dreams, she asked to meet me. "I want to be a pilot, just like you," she said softly. The wonder in her gaze took me back to my own childhood, to the spark that ignited my love for aviation. In that instant, I understood that my journey was about more than personal success—it was about inspiring the next generation and paving the way for young girls like her. It was about the legacy I hope to leave behind. "You'll be better than me," I told her as I hugged her.



Cockpit of an Emirates Boeing 777....my office in the sky :)



An amazing place to work

There is a memory that is very dear to me that I would like to share with you before I say my goodbyes. When we were kids, our parents decided to take us on a family holiday to Walt Disney World Resort. This was my first time travelling to another country, my first time on a plane. I cannot begin to tell you how happy I was when Baba shared the surprise.

As a young girl, my heart pounded with excitement on the day we were to embark on our holiday. The trip itself was magical, but for me, the true enchantment began the moment we stepped into Dubai International Airport. We were flying Emirates, and for a girl fascinated by aeroplanes and the magic of aviation, the anticipation was almost too much to bear.

I vividly remember the gleaming terminal, the hustle and bustle of travellers, and the sleek Emirates aircraft waiting at the gate. It was the start of what was meant to be a journey to the world's greatest ride attraction, yet my excitement was firmly rooted in the ride to get there. The irony was not lost on me even then. While most kids dreamt of roller coasters and Mickey Mouse, I was mesmerised by the idea of soaring through the skies.

As we boarded the aircraft, the cabin felt like a palace in the clouds. The seats were plush, the air filled with a faint scent of exotic destinations. Flight attendants moved with grace, their uniforms adding to the allure of the experience. My eyes darted everywhere, taking in the overhead bins, the seat-back screens, and the cockpit door that, to me, was the gateway to another world.

Takeoff was the pinnacle of my excitement. As the engines roared to life, I felt a thrill unlike any other. The sheer power as we accelerated down the runway, the lift as we broke free from the ground, and the smooth climb into the sky—it was pure joy. Landing was equally exhilarating, the descent into a new place, the anticipation of arrival. Each moment was imprinted on my heart, fuelling my dreams of one day being at the controls.

Fast forward all these years, and here I am, a First Officer at Emirates Airlines working her way to Captain. The very airline that once carried me as a starry-eyed child now employs me as a

professional pilot. Pursuing a career at the world's greatest airline is nothing short of a dream realised. The journey from passenger to pilot has been arduous and filled with challenges, but it has shaped me into who I am today.

Being a pilot is a far cry from being a passenger. It is a role imbued with a profound sense of duty, responsibility, and accountability. The thrill of takeoff and landing is still there, but it is now accompanied by the knowledge that I am responsible for the safety and comfort of every soul onboard. It is a weighty responsibility, but one that I embrace with pride and dedication.

As a pilot, I am a facilitator of connections and experiences. I carry loved ones back to their families, help curious minds explore new destinations and cultures, and enable people to chase new opportunities—be it for business, education, or adventure. Every flight is a story, a journey that I am honoured to be a part of. None of this would be possible without aviation, without aeroplanes, and without the pilots and crew who make it all happen.

I EXTEND MY DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO HIS HIGHNESS SHEIKH AHMED BIN SAEED AL MAKTOUM, CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF EMIRATES AIRLINES...

Being a pilot of an Emirates Boeing 777 was always the dream, and by the grace of God, I am now living it. I extend my deepest gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Airlines, and the leadership team at Emirates. Their vision and dedication have made Emirates not just a world-class airline but also an extraordinary place to learn, train, and work. Their unwavering commitment to excellence has provided me and countless others with the opportunity to turn our dreams into reality.



THERE IS ONE PERSON WHOSE INFLUENCE IN OUR LIVES HAS MADE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE: OUR LEADER, OUR FATHER, OUR ENABLER, SUPPORTER, AND UNWAVERING SOURCE OF INSPIRATION, HIS HIGHNESS SHEIKH MOHAMMED BIN RASHID AL MAKTOUM...

YOUR HIGHNESS... FOR ALL THAT I HAVE ACHIEVED, I OWE MY DEEPEST THANKS TO GOD, TO MY FAITH, TO MY FAMILY, AND TO YOU.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN



Ciao ancora, bella

I have a confession to make. This chapter shouldn't really be here. It wasn't planned, in fact, it is the reason for the delay in publishing this memoir. I thought I was done and that my memoir was ready to print, but when I saw a Bologna flight on my roster, I knew I had to include it. After all, what could be a more fitting tribute to a city that has given me so much?



October 14, 2024, was a day that meant more to me than I could have anticipated. It felt like arriving at the end of a path carved from years of hard work, countless hurdles, and personal growth. This time, I was coming back to Bologna not as the eager cadet I once was but as a First Officer flying an Emirates Boeing 777. A city that had once welcomed me as a student, a dreamer with lofty dreams of conquering the skies, now saw me return as someone who had turned those dreams into reality, a dream-maker.

The journey to this moment wasn't a straight road; it was filled with learning, challenges, and a lot of self-discovery. When I first set out for Bologna, I was still finding my way—curious, excited, and perhaps a little intimidated. It was here that I got my first taste of independence and took my first real step into a career that would mean everything to me. Bologna taught me what it meant to be a pilot—not just in the technical sense, but in the essence of courage, commitment, and resilience. And now, after all those years, I was back, seated in the cockpit, carrying with me every lesson and memory made along the way.

Landing here on that October day was surreal—a full-circle moment. I remembered that wide-eyed cadet stepping off the plane for the first time, feeling a mix of ambition and nerves, all directed at one goal: becoming a commercial pilot. Training at Professional Aviation, being away from home for the first time, and daring to believe that maybe, just maybe, I could make this dream come true—all of these experiences made Bologna a place where those dreams took root.

But this time was different. This time, I was a First Officer on my dream airliner and I had Mama and Shama with me, sharing in a milestone that felt deeply personal. Having them on board as I piloted this flight was beyond words—a surreal blend of pride, love, and gratitude. My mother, who had nurtured me, loved me, and believed in me unconditionally, was now seated in the cabin of a plane I was flying. She had been my constant supporter, the one who quietly fueled my courage and resilience, and now she was there to witness what all those years of hard work had led to. And Shama, who had been my rock in Bologna, sharing the ups and

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all there to celebrate. These were the people who had been with me from the start, supporting and encouraging me through each phase. We gathered for dinner that evening, and it was nothing short of magical—so much laughter, reminiscing, and stories about the shared dreams and hard work that had brought us all here.

As I sat with these people—my friends, my extended family, those who had seen my first steps, offered me guidance, and watched me grow in this home away from home—I realised just how much Bologna had come to mean to me. It wasn't just a part of my past; it was where my dreams truly took flight. Now, I was back, not just as a visitor, but as a pilot, a friend, and a colleague. This trip wasn't just a flight on my work schedule; it was a tribute to the journey, to dreams fulfilled, and to everyone who helped make them possible. It was a homecoming...of sorts.

downs of this journey, was right there too. Flying with them both on board was a rare and precious gift—a symbol of everything this journey had meant, not only to me but to all of us together. It was a moment when dreams and reality met, carrying them on this flight not just as passengers, but as an inseparable part of my success and my story.

Looking out over the city that had once been so full of unknowns, I felt a surge of appreciation and fulfillment. Coming back to Bologna no longer as a cadet but as the pilot I had always hoped to become made everything feel complete. Once we touched down and made it through security, my heart was full as I spotted familiar faces waiting for me. Friends, mentors, and the team from Professional Aviation were



With my EK family: Captain Enrico, Paola, Jaafar, and Sebastian



A lovely dinner to celebrate with my Professional Aviation family



Shama and I catching up with Gianluca's and Pasqualino's wives



Flight EK93 in BLQ Airport: Our Emirates Boeing 777 in beautiful Bologna

EPILOGUE



Eternally grateful

Being eternally grateful as a young pilot means appreciating every opportunity that has brought me to the cockpit. It's recognising the support of our noble leadership. The support of my family, friends and mentors, who believed in my dream even when turbulence struck. Each takeoff, landing, and lesson learned feels like a gift, pushing me further into the skies I love.





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My journey has been both exhilarating and transformative, and as I write this, I am filled with an immense sense of gratefulness. This book, a chronicle of my journey to the skies, is also a testament to the incredible individuals who have supported, guided, and believed in me every step of the way.

As I bring this memoir—and this journey—to a close, I would first like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to Their Highnesses Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

Your Highnesses, I offer my deepest gratitude for the belief you have placed in us, for your boundless support, and for the opportunities you have created that allow us to pursue our dreams. You have not only led us but empowered us to thrive, to aspire beyond our limits, and to realise our fullest potential. Your words of encouragement will forever echo in my heart, a constant reminder of the path you have paved for us all.

To my family—my inspiring father, my loving mother, my supportive brothers Saeed, Rashid and Saeed Bu Naser, and my Uncle Ahmed (Bu Matter)—each of you has been my foundation and my guide. Your unwavering love and belief in my dreams have been my anchor and my sail. You celebrated my triumphs and cushioned my falls, always pushing me to reach higher and dream bigger. I am because you are.

To Shama—my sister in spirit—your companionship and cheer were like light through my darkest trials. You made the rigorous journey enjoyable and worth every challenge. Your laughter and encouragement have been a source of joy and resilience, reminding me that the journey is as important as the destination.

To Rehman and Hisham, I am eternally grateful for your unconditional support and friendship. You have made this journey special with your care and kindness, a debt I will carry in my heart forever.

To my instructors and mentors at Professional Aviation, Vito and Massimo, whose tough love proved invaluable, and to Tatiana,

Linda, Gianluca, Pasqualino, General Amedeo, Dimitri, and Damiani, who not only taught me how to fly but also how to weather the storms—thank you. Your guidance was critical, not just in mastering the mechanics of flight but in understanding the deeper calling of a pilot's duty.

To my fellow students and friends Hajir, Alessandro, and Olga, thank you for making Italy a home away from home with your friendship and companionship. And to all those at Professional Aviation, from my peers to the ground staff, your camaraderie and support have enriched my experience beyond measure. You are part of my extended family, integral to my story, and cherished more than words can express.

Finally, to all of you reading this book, thank you for joining me on this ride and for allowing me to share the chapters of my story—my journey to the skies.



Thank you all for helping me get here

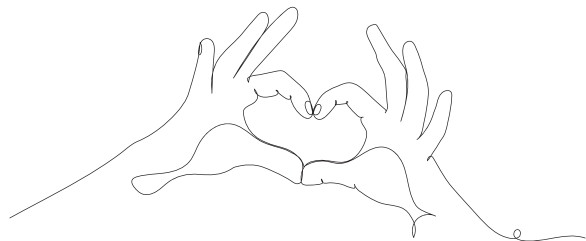
As I bring this memoir to a close, I am reminded of the power of dreams. Dreams compel us to strive, to reach, to persevere. They are the visions that fuel our spirit and propel us into realms we once thought unattainable. Yet, the path to realising these dreams is often fraught with challenges. It is how we respond to these challenges that defines us, moulds us into stronger, more resilient individuals. Each obstacle overcome is a testament to the human spirit's capacity to grow and triumph.

To those who dream of the skies, of the seas, or any path less trodden—embrace your journey with heart and tenacity. Remember, the road will be demanding, the setbacks many, but the rewards of pursuing a deeply held passion are immeasurable and profoundly fulfilling. Let each difficulty refine you, each failure teach you, and each success inspire you further.

Never give up on your dreams. They are the whispers of your soul, guiding you towards your true path. They are the echoes of your deepest desires, calling you to venture beyond the horizon. Pursue them with courage, for in them lies your greatest growth, your deepest joy, and your most genuine fulfilment.

Here's to the sky, not the limit, but the beginning. So, keep dreaming, keep striving, and perhaps one day, I will see you onboard, chasing your own dreams among the clouds, and it would be my absolute honour to fly you.

May your journey be bold, may your flights be steady, and may your spirit soar ever upward.





**Thank
you for
your
kind
words:**



“There are no words to express how proud I am of Shaikha. She inspires me every day with her kindness, resilience, and courage. I have learnt so much from her. She is a truly special soul, and I say this not just because she’s my daughter, but because she genuinely touches the lives of everyone around her. Watching her pursue and achieve her dreams with such determination and passion has been one of the greatest joys of my life.”

BABA



“The first time Shaikha told me she wanted to be a pilot, I thought she was joking. But when she persisted, I realised she was very serious. From that moment, I was 100% behind her. She is a very shy and modest girl, but she is also fearless and very driven. I can’t speak about her without getting emotional. She has shown everyone what she is capable of and made her family and country proud. The love and respect I have for her are immeasurable. My baby girl is now a pilot; very few mothers can say that.”

mama



*In my heart, her warmth's eternal flame,
 In my journey, her love guides my aim.
 In her eyes, I see my future bright,
 In our bond, the wings that give me flight.*

My mother, my friend, my heart!

“How many brothers in the world get to say my sister flew me to Venice for lunch and then flew me back!

I’m so happy for Shaikha. She has dealt with this challenge in a way that fills me with immense pride. She’s never been away from home before this. It’s tough for guys, let alone a girl like her, who is naturally shy and quiet. Distance from family and friends can sometimes be really tough, but she has adapted and matured wonderfully. How she communicates and socialises with so much confidence now is truly amazing.”

SARF



“Shaikha and I have natural twin chemistry. It’s a good balance. Either my energy is too high, and hers is low or vice versa. We complement each other. When we were younger, she sometimes looked up to the clouds and said, “It’s a good day to fly a plane.” Seeing her on this journey was like waiting for the sunrise; you knew it was coming. It was inevitable. I wasn’t surprised.”

RASHID



“Shaikha is one of the sweetest and kindest people you will ever meet. Honestly, she has the biggest heart. How many little sisters are motherly towards their older brothers? When she was going through her struggles, she always checked up on me to ensure I was okay. She had her own issues to deal with, yet she was constantly checking up on her family. She is an inspiration; I am so proud of her.”

SAEED
BU NASER



“She was still in grade ten, hadn’t yet finished school, and wanted to be a pilot. This did not surprise me. Even though she has a quiet demeanour, she is persistent and always fights for what she wants. Shaikha is extremely resilient. She is tougher than most people think; a lot underestimate her because of her shyness, but Shaikha is a warrior.”

BU MAṬṬAR

UNCLE AHMED



“Shaikha is full of life and ambition. Honestly, the fact that she has chosen to be a pilot and succeed in such a male-dominated industry tells you so much about her character. She is so cool and chilled in every situation that it’s hard sometimes to see how much drive she has. I’m so proud of her and her achievements, more than just a friend, she is like my little sister.”

SHAMA



“I always say there is a fine line between a pilot and a driver. A flight instructor can make you a good driver, but he can't make you a good pilot, and Shaikha is a good pilot. When she went through her suspension she felt very rejected and dejected. She felt like her dream was about to disappear. They say smooth seas never made good sailors, and she grappled with the challenge and fought tooth and nail for her dream. I have mentored Shaikha from the start, and through this journey, she inspired me. She is a fighter. She taught me to fight like her to get what I want. The key that drove me to fight for my own dreams was Shaikha.”

REHMAN



“The first time her father came to the flight school in Bologna, Shaikha was showing him how she could fly in the simulator and he was amazed. I saw both of their faces. There was a sense of excitement, as if they were in Disney World just having fun. It was an unforgettable, heart-warming moment.

Shaikha belongs in the skies. Give her a plane and she’s the happiest girl in the world.”

HISHAM



“In the end she was more and more self-confident. She started flying to Cannes and cross-country herself. She made friendships with some of the students and with some of the instructors.

When I gave her the final exam and checkride, she handled the aircraft perfectly. When I came back, everybody asked me how it went, and I told them she flew great.

I don't know if she grew more as a pilot or as a person but I believe she grew a lot in both. Today, I flew with a good pilot and a stronger girl, and I was proud we could make this happen.

You know they say that dreams are important to start with, but persistence is important to achieve. And Shaikha is persistent, so she will achieve.”

VITO



“Taking off and landing a plane is a skill. Piloting a plane is a behaviour. You need to change the behaviour of a student in order for them to safely operate an aeroplane. She changed her behaviour, and she was able to learn a new way of living and this allowed her to master the skill that is needed to have the mindset of a professional pilot. I think that she has what it takes to become a captain for sure, and also a flight instructor.”

massimo



“When Shaikha flew, she was calm every time. She had no fear, and I noticed she was very determined to achieve her targets. I would give her little tips like the best office is in the sky, not on the ground but in the cockpit, and she would understand and smile. I have absolutely no doubts about her career. She is so polite and sincere. She can also be a good instructor. An instructor must be courteous, understanding, calm, and helpful. You cannot work as an instructor if you don’t want to help people. She is polite. She smiles. She always wants to help people so she can do it. I always say that inside every pilot, there must be a bit of humility and a lot of passion. She has both.”

AMPERO



“I always knew Shaikha would succeed and become a pilot because she loves flying and she’s motivated.

And when you have these two elements, you can be a pilot. If I were to sum up her character in three words, I would say she is gentle, ambitious and motivated. She is always growing and I have no doubt she will achieve her dream of being a captain on an Emirates Boeing 777. I think that she will also fly different range aircrafts. I’m pretty sure that she will fly the A380 or the Airbus A350.

I also see her in a managerial role in the future. But for sure, for the first few years, she will fly. And perhaps she will even fly as a type rating instructor. I told her to let me see the cockpit once she comes here on the Dubai-Bologna flight.”

GIANLUCA



“One day, we were flying to Genova, and she was on the radio to the Milan air traffic controller, but he didn’t understand. I remember she tried and re-tried and re-tried a third time, and in the end, the controller understood. For me, this was another indication of her determination. She could have asked me to transmit the message, but she continued to transmit herself, and in the end, the controller understood. She had tenacity.

She’s like a sword, direct and to the point. She is also fearless like when she flew through the wind and fog instead of diverting to Rome for the safer option. She accepted my challenge and made the perfect landing in very tough weather conditions. She was incredible.

Shaikha is a kind person with a lovely personality. She is friendly, good-natured and generous and I have no doubt she will achieve her goal of being a Captain of an Emirates Boeing 777.”

PASQUALINO



“She’s a young girl with a good soul and determination. Honestly, I don’t know how she managed. If I left my country tomorrow and went to a place with a different culture, way of life, dress code, and language, I think I would be in a very disadvantaged position. At the beginning, she was very alone and she struggled. But at the end of the period, she did a sort of acceleration. She came in every day, she studied hard, and she recovered.

I think a big part of her success is thanks to her education and the principles instilled in her by her beautiful and supportive family. Being surrounded by positive people who believe in you is very important. You can see straight away if someone is well educated, well brought up, and has solid principles, even though they may be shy and reserved. When she first joined, she was very quiet and kept to herself, but by the end, she transformed, and everybody got to see and know the real Shaikha. She joined us as a caterpillar and left as a butterfly.”

LINDA



“I remember one time she flew to Cannes and when she returned, she came back with a lot of sweets for both students and staff. It wasn’t to show off but to show her appreciation. She was very thoughtful and generous. We have a lot of students who have daily flights, but nobody ever came back with sweets.

I think with Shaikha we all had a special connection. When a student has an exam, their mother and father may come to watch, nobody else. But for Shaikha it was her family, friends, the students and the instructors. Everybody was rooting for her. Everybody wanted her to succeed. It was very special.

I hope she flies safe and enjoys the view. Because sometimes you know the pilots fly but they don’t see outside and I hope she achieves her dream but enjoys the view.”

Tatiana



“I was one of Shaikha’s first assigned instructors. I flew with her rarely, but I always saw growth.

Initially, she had some difficulties during her training, but after that, everything was normal. Despite these difficulties, she achieved her goal, which I was pleased to see. I congratulate her also because, in addition to the difficulties that other students have, she had to stay away from her family and her country for a long time in a place with very different traditions and customs.”

Damiani



“Shaikha really transformed. She became very skilled at handling the plane. She was always calm and constantly aware of everything around her. She maintained a good attitude during her flights, was never nervous or stressed, and was always prepared.

Her character is the thing that surprised me a lot, and I think that is the key to her success.”

LORENZO



“Charlie Chaplin once said that “simplicity is not a simple thing.” I would say it’s much more. This quote reminds me of Shaikha. She is a simple girl but full of qualities. Shaikha is generous, respectful, friendly, kind, and ambitious. I have known her for almost two years. We met thanks to our shared passion for aviation. We shared a truly exciting and unforgettable day, the graduation ceremony. It was a unique moment that I will never forget!”

Haqir



“It was my great pleasure to meet Shaikha at Professional Aviation. I’ve had the privilege of witnessing her outstanding character, strong dedication and exceptional abilities. She conquered my heart from the first moment I met her, and I have been given the opportunity to discover a person with a big, kind heart who cares for others and is open-minded, sweet and funny.

Shaikha embodies optimism, empathy and resilience. She possesses an innate ability to see the best in people and situations, making her a joy to be around. She listens attentively because she cares. Her kindness and warmth extend beyond words. She is a very supportive friend and has always been there when I needed it, something I will never forget and always cherish.”

OLGA



“Shaikha was a bit like me, very reserved, quiet and detached from everyone. She was doing her flights here and then just leaving. And bit by bit she became more open towards everyone. It didn’t take us long to get to know each other and get along. I truly believe she can achieve her dreams. She was very determined to reach her goal. If she keeps the determination that she had when she was here, I’m positive she will reach the final goal as well. Every time I see a coffee shop, I think of her because she loved her cup of coffee.”

ALESSANDRO





**I dream, I try
I fall, I cry
I rise, I fly
I soar...
my journey
to the skies**



