



ALI ANTHONY BELL

IN THE
LION'S
DEN

In the Lion's Den

Ali Anthony Bell



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Preface – Before Entering the Den

“More bear hugs than the average bear”

It’s the end of October 2019. A month ago, September 28th, marked exactly a decade since I came to The Land of the Setting Sun. In these last 10 years I’ve changed and grown a lot. I was 49 when I arrived, and the first few years were very hard. I embraced Islam during my first year, I married during my second year, and my wife gave birth to our son Islam 3 years ago. We live in the White City, where I came in January 2011 after living the hardest year of my entire existence in The Red City the year before. In the last 8 years my reason and purpose in life has become crystal clear. I’m an English teacher; I love it and the world needs it, so it’s my mission, the world needs it and I’m paid for it, so it’s my vocation, I’m paid for it and I’m great at it, so it’s my profession, and most importantly, I’m great at it and I love it, so it’s my passion. Mission + Vocation + Profession + Passion = Purpose. (see graph following)



These last eighteen months have been hard as well. In April 2018 I had an interview with Oxford University Press for a position as the Educational Consultant for this country. It was a really good opportunity for me, the pay was good, I would have a company car, and I would be very autonomous. The only drawback was that I would spend a lot of time driving around the country and sleeping in hotels, so I wouldn't have a lot of time to spend with my family. I had had several Skype interviews since January, and when we met in April we signed a contract, to start July 1st. I knew that my boss in the language center where I was Head of Studies would not be happy about my decision to leave, so I decided to give just one month's notice, as required. When I gave notice on Friday, June 1st (in the middle of

Ramadan by the way so everyone was fasting), my thoughts about my boss were confirmed, she was not at all happy. As my new job would not be in conflict of interest, and could even be beneficial for the language center, I even proposed to continue working part time for them as they didn't have any other native speaking language coaches for the high-profile C-level coaching sessions. On top of that, I even offered to do teacher training for the center free of charge. Despite my efforts to keep a good relationship with my boss, she started waging war on both me and my wife, who worked as the coordinator for the center. Within a week, by Monday the 11th, she had taken away all of our work, and I had signed my departure. That's OK though, I thought to myself, it won't make any difference, I have a good job coming up!

On June 27th I got an e-mail from Oxford University Press. My contract was cancelled, only a few days before I was to start. They gave me two reasons; one, I didn't have any proof of my work as a teacher for the last 7 years as all of the jobs I had had, with the exception of my last job, were undeclared (even this job had only been declared for 2 of the last 4 years), and secondly, it was mandatory to have a positive reference from my last employer. This, of course, was *Impossible*.

As there is an enormous demand for good native speaking English teachers in this country, I didn't have any trouble finding a new job. I started the new school

year at a French private school, teaching to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades. I thanked Allah, as always, for providing work for me, and felt that it was a good thing that I could spend lots of time with my little family. No pay for the months of July and August had made life hard, but we got by. The pay was significantly lower than what I had been making but on the other hand, our son Islam had free day-care, and the day-care center was only 5 minutes' walk from my school. We would leave home together hand in hand in the morning, the school bus would pick us up in front of the house, we would sing "The wheels on the bus" together every day on the way to school, and the bus would drop us off at home every evening. Still, the school year was a very hard one. I was not at all used to teaching 6-, 7-, and 8-year-olds, and I had more than 300 students to follow as I had to go around to all of the classes. I didn't have my own class. I had some really difficult classes to manage, and for the first time in my life I knew stress related illness. For the first time also, I found myself not wanting to go to work! There was one class of 2nd graders, my most difficult class, which had about 12 troublemakers for 22 students, more than half the class. They would drive me up the wall with their screaming, yelling, fighting...and I wasn't the only teacher to complain about that class, even their own main teacher couldn't handle them. One day I picked up a small 7-year-old by the shoulders and put him into his chair, as he had been sitting on his desk

playing and I had already asked him twice to get into his seat. The next day I was summoned into the director's office. The child had told his parents that I had strangled him, putting my hands around his throat, and choking him! I told the director the truth; that it is unthinkable for me to even pretend to do such a thing. In fact, I'm known for giving hugs to all the students, even the difficult ones, or I should say *especially* the difficult ones, because they're often the ones who need the hugs the most! One day one of my French colleagues, a man in his mid 40s, saw me hugging students and declared magisterially (in French) "I never hug students!" as if I was doing something wrong. Nonetheless, even with all of the oxytocin I got from hundreds of daily hugs, it wasn't enough to battle the stress. By the way, a while after I was accused of choking the boy, the same boy came running up to me when I was with my wife and child in a shopping mall saying "Teacher Ali!" and throwing his arms out for a hug. "Who's he?" Asked my wife, to which I responded "You remember the boy that accused me of choking him? That's him."

In the Lion's Den

“Escaping the bear’s hugs and falling to the lion’s claws”

I started looking for a new job in February, and on March 8th, my 59th birthday, I had my first interview with the founder and Director of a new private school, “*The Lion’s Den*”. They describe themselves as a “smart” school because they focus on hi-tech, with use of technology in the classrooms as well as blended learning. They offer day-care through to the first year of university, which is done in collaboration with different universities in the UK, and all of the classes are taught in English (except French and Arabic of course). They’re established in a huge modern building on the outskirts of the White House, of which the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd floors are being used. There’s a 4th floor which is still under construction, and a basement with the canteen and gymnastics area. All together there is space for about 80 large classrooms. There’s a brand-new football field and basketball court as well as several playgrounds for children of different ages. The road leading up to the school is strewn with poor old country houses and trash everywhere, which contrasts sharply with the luxury of the school. It’s really only for the very rich, with tuition up to half a middle-classed man’s yearly salary per child, and then there’s also the cost of uniforms, supplies, and meal expenses on top of the tuition. Because of its

location outside of the city limits, the city taxi cabs aren't allowed to go there. In order to get there, I had to take a big common taxi that holds 6, and get off at the small road which leads to the school, then there was a short 15 minute walk.

Excited and ready for a new adventure, I had a second interview on March 21st, with the Director first and the Principle after. It was really positive, and my follow up e-mail sums up our discussions:

Dear Oussama, Dear Angelina,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. It was indeed an interesting and encouraging meeting.

I would like to take the occasion to express my admiration for your school and the work you are doing. It would be not only a pleasure, but also an excellent motivator for me to become a part of your team.

To recap the subjects which I feel comfortable teaching:

- EFL upgrading, all ages and levels
- English as a subject, including literature, reading circles, creative writing, journalism, communication, and oration (public speaking, debate) grammar, etc.
- Art and Art History, drawing, painting, printmaking, collage, calligraphy, mixed media, and photography.
- Social Sciences, History, Culture, Business

-Exam Preparation, IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC, BULATS, etc.

While I feel the most comfortable with High School or Middle School students, I am ready and willing to teach young learners as well.

In all cases I would also teach the skills which the emerging generations Z and A need to be able to deal with the ever increasingly challenging world they will be faced with, namely; problem-solving, critical thinking, creative thinking, and working collaboratively, all combined with digital competency.

You will find attached my resume and passport, as well as a copy of my TEFL/TESOL certification with the MEG, Midwest Education Group of Chicago. It is to be noted that I taught three groups for this same certificate in Casablanca as part of a partnership between my employer, BE2BE, and MEG. You may contact Dr. Tien Chau at MEG for verification and reference: (links)

Please also note that my previous employer, the BE2BE Center, decided to wage war against me (and my wife, who was the coordinator) as soon as I gave notice to leave last June. Alternatively, there are people in the references listed on my resume for whom I gave one-to-one coaching while working at BE2BE who will attest to my performance and reliability. (links)

I'm looking forward to the possibility of collaborating together and ready to undertake any training that may be required.

Thank you again.

Best regards,

Salam,

Ali Anthony Bell

Following this interview, the Director, Oussama, wanted me to have a final interview with the new Head of English Studies that he had just hired from Cambridge before confirming a positive outcome. Her name was Abra, a name I'd never heard of before, except for "Abra Kadabra". We scheduled our interview after she came to the school to assume her functions, for 6:30 pm, Monday May 6th, the last day before Ramadan. I got home from my work late because there were traffic jams everywhere. I had a last cigarette, because I had decided to quit for good that Ramadan. I'd stopped smoking for the entire month of Ramadan every year for the last 8 years, only to start again afterwards. My son had never seen me smoking, I always went out on the terrace of our apartment and closed the door. "*This time, it will really be my last cigarette!*" I told myself. (to this day I've kept true to it) By the time I finally got a taxi to take me to the stop where I could catch the big taxi to the outskirts of town, it was already 6:30. We rescheduled for Wednesday the 8th at 2 pm, because I only worked until noon on Wednesdays. I was fasting of course, and she was not, of course. The meeting went well, and she seemed glad to welcome me.

On Saturday May 18th I still hadn't received any news, so I sent a follow-up e-mail to Oussama to see if we could finalize a contract. He asked me if I had signed the offer letter, and I replied that I hadn't yet received it. It came by e-mail on Monday, so I got the photocopies of my required documents and the signed offer letter legalized and dropped all of it off at the school Wednesday the 29th, also having a short discussion with Oussama. The offer letter gave me a salary which was quite reasonable, 20000 dirhams net per month, almost twice the pay I had at the French private school, and I was to start on August 22nd, a week before the start of the school year. Oussama said that he might need me to start earlier, at the start of July, for their summer school program, and asked me when I finished my current job, which was Friday June 28th.

The month of June went by without any meetings with either Abra or Oussama, regardless of several reminders on my part until the last week. I had taken the last week on sick leave, and I was indeed really sick. I had gotten through Ramadan without smoking and was still hanging in, but I had a bad case of laryngitis, and my voice was gone. Abra e-mailed me saying that they needed me for the summer program starting the next Monday July 1st, and we set up meeting for Wednesday June 26th. She informed me that the pay was not the same as my offer for the school year and that it would be paid on a weekly basis. That was fine with me. I went to the

French school for the last day, and I only had a half day scheduled. Most of the kids were already gone, but I was able to get a few hugs, and a letter of reference from the Director of the school. I cleaned out my locker and said goodbye.

The summer program they called “Summer Camp” and the idea was to have fun. I was to teach English, and to have fun doing it, something that I know how to do well. When I came, I came prepared, but Abra had already decided that there would be a theme each week and that the theme of the first week was to be sports. I used some of the material she had prepared, as well as my own, including a lesson on Mohamed Ali, which they really liked, and we did online real time quizzes using their smart phones, which they loved. Three days in a row I had students come up to me after class to tell me “You’re a great teacher!” and “You’re the greatest!” (from the lesson on Ali of course). My reputation spread fast as I had two students who were children of the French teacher in my class. During all of the first week I took the big common taxis (6 people crammed in), and then discovered that there was transport available for the staff, so the next week I started catching their bus in the morning and taking it home in the afternoon.

The second week Abra didn’t give me either a theme or any material, but I did my own themes, the

second week was “Differences”, learning to respect differences, where we talked about dyslexia (I’m dyslexic by the way), Trisomy-21, and all kinds of differences. This was good, because there was a young autistic boy with the savant syndrome who I would have later in one of my classes in September. The third week we did the theme of “the Earth”, and the last week we did the theme of “Education”. We had a lot of fun, and I was sure that the coming school year would be a great one.

As I was sure to work for the *Lion’s Den* in August, we found an apartment in the outskirts of town near to the school starting at the beginning of August and gave notice that we would be leaving our apartment in the White House at the end of August. That meant paying rent for both apartments for the month of August, but I preferred this to trying to move at the same time that I would be starting my new job.

In the three weeks break before starting my new job, I worked on a new novel, based on one of the three major culture shocks in my life. I had written my first adult fiction novel the November before, based on real events that had happened to me in my first two years in this country, and had finished the draft with 52,555 words in the 30 days of November. Now I started working on the second novel, in the same style, but set in 1983 when I moved to France from the USA. During the

three weeks I wrote almost 30,000 words and got about halfway through the story.

I requested about the transportation to school for the start date of Thursday August 22nd, and Oussama told me that there was no transportation available and to be there at 8 AM. He also told me that neither Abra nor the HR manager were available. I arrived at 7:30 AM and had to wait until after 9 AM before anything started to happen. When I enquired if my contract had been made, because I was still waiting for it, to my great astonishment, I discovered that both Abra and the HR Manager had quit their jobs (or so I was told). I had to start work without a contract. There were a lot of new recruits, three American expats like me, a Palestinian couple, two Canadians, and several Moroccans. Almost none of the teachers from the last year were still at the school, they had all quit. I didn't think anything of it at the time though because there's a general difficulty with hiring "Native speakers" here in this country in that most of the time they don't stay long in the country. They can't adapt so they leave after a few months to a year. So, it seemed normal that most of the teachers had gone. We were given a general presentation, mostly info for expats in this country which I really didn't need, Oussama took us out for lunch, and we had some training. We were given the schedule for the next week, which was training, induction, and organization before the start of classes on Monday September 2nd, and we were given the day off

Friday to “discover the city”, which of course I didn’t need either. I still had no idea what levels or subjects I was to be teaching, but Oussama had indicated that I might be needed to teach year 5, the last year of primary school. Having Friday off, we moved house over the three-day weekend. I discovered that while I was much closer to my job, there was no direct public transportation, and as I didn’t have a car, I had to go back into the city and come back out. It was OK though; I only had a 45-minute commute (but I lived 15 minutes away).

Monday August 26th, we were all waiting in the staff room to start our meeting. Everyone from last Thursday was there, and some new faces as well, a few teachers from last year, and a few more expats. I met Tim, an English man, who was just starting as well, and who didn’t know what year(s) he’d be teaching to either. He told me that he was most comfortable teaching year 5, that he’d been teaching it for 20 years, and that he knew the UK curriculum for that year inside out. He’d been a consultant on the curriculum for other teachers, and was proud of it, he’d even had his photo on the cover of a magazine (but it wasn’t “*Rolling Stone*”). Oussama went on to assign Tim to teach years 7, 8, 9, and 10 for English and assigned me to take year 5 primary (although he knew that I prefer middle school and high school). I didn’t really care what years I would take, and I said so, but Tim was really upset. So, I suggested that Tim and I switch our teaching assignments so that everyone would

be happy. That's what we did, and I was finally relieved to be teaching Middle school and High School.

The week of induction and training went by in good humor, and I was anxious to start. On Friday we made last preparations and got our rooms ready. I had asked for class lists all week long and didn't get them. The Palestinian man, Aabad, was the math teacher for the middle school, and our rooms are next to each other. I had a smartboard, whereas he only had a whiteboard with two flaps that open outwards to use a green chalkboard inside (which had never been used and would probably never be used, no one uses chalk anymore!). Aabad told me that he absolutely had to work with a smartboard, and as I didn't really need it, even though it would have been nice to have, I traded rooms with him. I asked the materials manager if they could install a pull-down projection screen for use with the video projector, because the projector was aimed at the whiteboard, and there was a break right in the middle because of the flaps which folded out. Incredibly, the screen was installed straight away.

We got our schedules on Monday morning, and I was to teach not only English, but also Humanities for years 7,8,9, and 10, and Global Perspectives for years 7,8, and 9. This is because we were short staffed. So, I had the heaviest schedule of any of the teachers (28 teaching hours), no Head of Studies to help me, and no

preset curriculum. I had to make my own curriculum. I had sent lesson plans for English for all four years for the first week in advance the week before, with the theme “R-E-S-P-E-C-T” taken from an acronym and an article that I wrote many years ago: Respect means Responsibility, Esteem, Sensitivity, Patience, Empathy, Courtesy, and Tolerance. I made a crossword for vocabulary and lots of other work on the theme. Angelina sent an e-mail to all of the teachers after I sent her my lesson plans to announce that the theme for all the classes for the first week was to be “Respect”. It would seem that she had liked my idea.

Classes started and we didn’t have class lists to take attendance. Angelina sent me a screenshot of the class lists saying that they weren’t yet finalized. I shared the screenshot with my colleagues but answered saying that this was not professional as we needed the class lists to be able to do our work correctly. Furthermore, the fact that they could take a screenshot proved that they had digital lists which could have been shared. We took the first attendance on photocopies of the screenshot. Aabad typed out all of the names one by one, which I refused to do, I insisted on having excel spreadsheets or the equivalent, and I got them. Oussama came to me though and told me that my e-mail was unacceptable, that Angelina had a lot of work to do, and it wasn’t proper of me to qualify the lack of class lists as unprofessional. I got the message, that I had offended Angelina, so I went

straightaway and apologized. In fact, I hadn't been criticizing her, that wasn't my intention, and it was only about the situation. When I took attendance, I noticed that there were many less students in class than on the lists; all together I had 63 students in the 4 years whereas there were 82 on the lists. Upon speaking with the French teacher, Halima, one of the few teachers still there from last year, I discovered that she had told the administration to pre-register the students at the end of the school year. They hadn't, and they had lost about 20% of the students, who had not returned, which meant that the provisions of an increase of 30% in the headcount finally hadn't happened. The new students had only made up for the ones that were lost. To make matters worse, Halima said, the fact that the teachers had all changed meant that the parents weren't happy. Parents don't like to see the teachers change constantly, and they're right not to like it. She told me that if the teachers changed again this year, it would be a catastrophe for the school. I discovered also that Halima didn't live too far from me, and we started carpooling already for the second week of school. This meant that my son could also start attending the school because I didn't have to take the public transportation anymore. He was only in the nursery, but it was really good for him. He loved going to school again, and he was very advanced for his age, at 42 months he could already count to 30! School was free for him, but I had to get an authorization signed by Oussama. I was

also informed that I would have to pay for school supplies and lunch for the year, but that didn't amount to much; just 9000 dirhams for the year, which works out to only 900 dirhams a month, so it was still a great deal.

On the weekend of the 14th and 15th all the staff, both teaching and administrative, were invited to participate in a team building together in The Red City. At first, they had said that we would all be taking the train. Halima didn't agree, she said that she never takes the train. She was prepared to drive, but at the last minute, Friday afternoon, we were all informed that there would be a tourist bus that would take us all. I sang on the bus with the micro, and everyone appreciated it, a few old jazz songs (including one I translated to French that is mentioned at the end of my first novel, "Love Walked In"). The team building was a lot of fun, however, it lacked organization, and we ended up taking a very long unplanned hike because the bus was too big to go up the hills to the site where we did zip lining. Aabad was one of only two others with me to hike all the way down the hills again after the zip lining. I discovered that his wife had gone back to England with their 4 children. I couldn't understand how he could stay while she had gone.

During the next week I had a talk with the accountant, who told me that the HR manager had left suddenly, taking a large amount of cash with her! I spoke

to Halima, who knew the woman well, and she was adamant that the HR manager wouldn't have taken more than she was entitled to, that she was a good woman. On Friday we discovered that Aabad was gone as well. Apparently, he had just quit and left without giving any notice.

On the following Saturday, the 21st, we held a barbeque for the parents, to get to know them, and I brought my wife and my son. Halima drove all three of us with her children, and in the car, I mentioned how strange it was that Aabad had left so suddenly without having given notice, to which Halima responded "There are things that we don't know." The barbeque was nice, and we really felt that this was going to be a wonderful year.

When I came into my classroom Monday morning the pull-down projection screen wasn't there. I checked with the supplies and material manager, and she said that she would look into it, that she didn't know where it had gone.

The week before I had found out from the accountant that the cut-off date for calculating the pay was always the 26th, so I sent an e-mail to Oussama on Monday the 23rd, marked Urgent, proposing a payment schedule for the 9000 dirhams I had to pay for my son, as I didn't want to see the school suddenly deduct 9000

dirhams from my pay. I had already taken a 4000 dirham advance in order to pay my rent at the beginning of the month. I also told Oussama face-to-face that I had sent him an urgent e-mail, asking him to answer me.

Wednesday the 25th Oussama came to me to ask me to teach extra English Language Lab classes on Saturday mornings for students who had difficulty, of course I would be paid separately for the extra hours. I told him that I already had long standing private tutoring sessions every Saturday morning. He frowned and said “I already told you that we take priority.” So I agreed, and cancelled my private tutoring sessions so that I could start doing the extra hours from 9 am to noon every Saturday starting straight away.

Thursday the 26th, still having no answer to my e-mail concerning the 9000 dirhams I had to pay for my son, I checked with the Financial Manager, Bouchra, who prepared the pay, and she assured me that the payment for the staff’s children was never deducted directly from the pay and that I didn’t need to worry. She only needed a bank account number, and all the rest was in order. I would receive my pay. I gave her my bank details right away. The days went by the next week one after another with no sign of my pay. We were completely broke. I was eating pasta without any sauce; it was that bad. On Thursday October 3rd I was informed, as were all of the other teachers and administrative staff that had children,

that all of our pays had been blocked until we paid for our children's expenses. I was livid. I had done everything to avoid this situation, even sending an e-mail well before hand, an e-mail which had never been answered. I came to work Friday the 4th with my check book, but without my son. I wrote 3 checks, asking them to cash them at the end of October, November, and December. I was told that I had to see Oussama to have his OK. He gave his go ahead, but also said to me "Your son wasn't with you this morning, why?" to which I responded that I had not known how the day was going to go. He was irritated by this, and I asked him why he hadn't responded to my e-mail, because had he done so, my pay would never have been blocked. He responded that for urgent matters, I should send him a message par "WhatsApp". He assured me that my pay would be transferred the same day, and added that it wasn't late, that we're not in the USA here and that it was only the 4th of the month. The same afternoon, all of the teachers were summoned to a meeting at the end of the day, without any indication what it was about. It was to award "Teacher of the Month" certificates. While I really wasn't expecting it, I was awarded the "Teacher of the Month" for September. I felt better.

Monday my son came back to school with me. A new math teacher from Canada for the middle school started on Monday the 6th, so my schedule was lighter starting Tuesday. I was speaking with one of the local

teachers who had been taking the staff transport when she told me that she was no longer taking it. The school had informed all of the staff who were not expats that they would have to pay 1000 dirhams a month to take the school bus now (the expats still took it for free). Day after day passed with nothing arriving on my bank account. After checking with the Financial Manager, my pay finally arrived on my account the 10th. There were two other teachers who'd had the same difficulty. With hindsight, I'm almost sure that there were not enough funds on the school's account to cover the payments. On Friday the 11th we all learned that the P.E. teacher had quit, it was his last day, something having to do with his pay. On Saturday morning Oussama picked me up on the road as I was leaving the Language Lab class and said he could drop me off at a taxi stand. On the way I mentioned that I had had two tutoring sessions the night before because I had given priority to the school for Saturday morning and had rescheduled my private courses. Oussama was irritated and said that I shouldn't be working for anyone but the school. The next week was Holidays for a week, and when we were to come back Monday the 21st, it was staff training day, no classes.

I was extremely busy translating a screenplay from French to English, I had started while I still had my classes, but the deadline was for Wednesday the 16th at midnight. My wife took our son with her to visit her sister and their children, which left me alone in the house

to work. It was hard work, and the deadline was really tight, but I managed to do it with a few sleepless nights. On Wednesday morning I knew I would finish that afternoon, but I received an e-mail from my older brother in Utah saying that my mother had passed away the night before. My wife said that either she would come straight back, or that I should come and join her. I finished the translation, despite the fact that my PC crashed three times before I could finish and left to join her the next day. I sent a message to Oussama and Angelina to inform them of my mother's death and my possible absence for her funeral, and I started to look into flight schedules and tariffs but was informed quickly by my brother that my mother had left instructions to have her body cremated and not to have a service. So, I didn't go. I spent the next few days recuperating and messaged Oussama and Angelina that I would be at work Monday.

Monday the 21st, when we arrived, the new math teacher was already gone. He had lasted one week. All of the Middle and High School teachers also had a nice surprise waiting for us. During the holiday, the supplies and materials manager had convinced Oussama to change the whole organization of the classes. We no longer had our own classes; instead, the students were to stay in the same class all day, and we were to go from class to class. Practically, what would this mean: The students were not allowed to take the books or write in them (even though their parents had to pay for them) and they were to stay

in the classroom. With this new organization, at every change of class, I would have to get all the books from the newly created staff room and bring them to class with me (4 books per student) and then take them back to the staff room at the end of class and get the books for the next class. As it happened, the classrooms had been transformed during the holiday, and all the walls had been laid bare. We had a revolution on our hands. We all refused the new system. Even Angelina, who had been away to the USA for a death in her family, had not been informed of the change and came into it by surprise just as we had. With her support, we succeeded in turning the situation back around as it had been before. In speaking with a primary school teacher, I discovered that all her walls had been laid bare as well, and all of her students' work which had been on the walls had been trashed...all because of the supplies and materials manager.

The week was difficult. Thursday morning, tired of asking the supplies and materials manager to get me back my projection screen, I sent an e-mail and got results, it was reinstalled not an hour after I did the e-mail. In the afternoon I received an e-mail from Oussama's assistant, also addressed to all of the other expats, informing us that we were to be charged 10000 dirhams each in administrative expenses for doing our contract with the authorities. This was to be deducted from our pay starting immediately, 3000 dirhams, and again 3000 and 4000 for the next two months. We were

all to confirm immediately. As well, I already had my son's expenses to pay over the next three months. I replied very politely, saying that this did not concern me, as I had my residency status and the right to work already, so they just had to do the contract, which wasn't costly. She replied that I was concerned and that I had to pay. I did a second response, detailing exactly the costs of the contract, which did not amount to more than 2000 dirhams maximum, and stating that I was ready to pay the costs, but refused to pay the exorbitant amount they were asking. The assistant sent me a last e-mail stating that she had noted that I refused to pay. It was 4:25 (we finish work at 4:30) when I got a "WhatsApp" message from Oussama saying to come to his office. In less than 5 minutes I was fired. He said verbatim "You don't like working here, do you? (not a question). I loved my job and he knew it, I loved the kids, and I was doing a great job...I had just been awarded teacher of the month less than a month ago!

I tried to tell myself, as always, that everything happens for a reason. Still, I was heartbroken. All of the sudden it dawned on me why the turnover is so high. People don't just leave the Lion's Den; they're thrown out like rubbish.

I came back to add a few words. It's Thursday October 31st, Halloween night, and the students at the Lion's Den are having a party. I had finished writing this

story tonight after writing for two days, 7000 words. Today I wrote like a madman all day, only stopping to pray, not even to eat. *It's a true story*, of course written from my perspective with my personal bias. When I finished it was just after the call to the Evening prayer, so I invited my son to do the prayer with me, after which we started the regular evening ritual; he picks a story, we put on his pajamas, we read the story, and I go to bed with him until he falls asleep. I had just asked him what story he wanted (Peppa Pig) and put the book on the bed when my wife came into the bedroom and asked me if I wanted to eat anything for dinner. I replied that I was in a daze, and not sure if I wanted to eat anything. And I broke down, sobbing in her arms, all of the pain that I had held on to since my mother's death two weeks ago, multiplied by this incredible horror that I just lived. My son started to cry frantically, saying that his head hurt...it was the first time he had ever seen me cry, and he was scared. We did a "family hug" like he loves to do every day, I read him his bedtime story, and put him to bed. As soon as he slept, I had to add these last words.

I had had to get it on paper. It's done. The brick walls of the *Lion's Den* have more empathy than Oussama the lion. May Allah give him his just reward.

Thank you for reading this short story memoir. If you enjoyed it, won't you please take a moment to leave me a review at Goodreads.com?

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