

Tuesdays at Starbucks

When coffee tables listen



TONY FEGHALI

To the beautiful souls who have shared their
precious time with me.

CONTENTS

Introduction 9

SECTION TITLE

Tati, the Yogi.....	19
Laser-focused Ralph.....	25
All-in Corrine.....	31
Soul-Searching Ziad.....	37
Did you know how to plan your life at 18?.....	43
Gus: Son of Martha.....	49
9 lessons from a 12-year-old.....	57
She gave him 3 silver coins.....	65
A child of two teachers.....	73
Her ex lives next door.....	79
Man with four families.....	87
Music brought her back.....	95
One son of Maghdousheh.....	103
Cooperider around the world.....	111
Parish priest. Scouts chaplain. Teacher.....	119

Zyara sheds light on life's heroes.....	127
“No” is not an answer.....	135
My name is Josiane.....	143
The mom with no name.....	153
Helene southern girl.....	159
Her smiling eyes told it all.....	169
One way to help Mother Earth heal herself.....	177
A personal trainer.....	183
When everything is falling around you.....	189
She knows she was saved for a reason.....	197
If you have to leave, go.....	205
The man who lives on Center Cross.....	211
Everyone deserves a home.....	219
Talk to Yasmina.....	227
From a corporate desk to her children's.....	233
Man with the gas mask.....	241
Can we politely disagree?.....	249
Are you kind to yourself?.....	257
Radio got the video star.....	263
When tested go back to your roots.....	271
Give up on Lebanon!.....	279
Canaaite Lydia.....	287
Beirut 8: Celebrate life in bunches.....	295

The man who had to play mom 303
Chef Charbel from Qartaba 309
G.I. Jeanine 319
Because I can 327
a Ray of inspiration 335
Tinderella 343
Fr.Paul 351
A service taxi driver 359
“Why me?” she asked 365
Peace warrior. Daughter of one 373
The woman with the tattoo 381
The Saudi Uber Driver..... 385
Assaad: The happiest one 389

Introduction

Lebanon was in turmoil again. During these times, cafés became the go-to places for people to gather, discuss, and share laughs or frustrations. The Starbucks near my house was where I found myself most days, blending into the fabric of regulars.

There, memories of Mrs. Jundi, Istez Sayah, Sister Sheila, and other language and arts teachers came flooding back, rekindling the warmth and inspiration they had instilled in me during my teenage years. The itch to write came back. With it came the realization that it had therapeutic effects on me. (Along with shoe shining. Don't ask.)

Thank you, Tatiana; my first encounter. The one who helped me take my first step. Thank you all who came after "Tati the Yogi" and sat with me for a conversation. This human has a richer life because of you.

This book was not in my plans.

I resisted many suggestions to compile and publish it. It was the process that I enjoyed--the regularity of going to Starbucks, meeting new people, connecting with their souls, and the privilege of delving into their lives. My joy came from seeing the spark in their eyes as they spoke. From the happy or regretful smiles, from the gazes, as they looked through me and recalled their life stories, I gained my energy. The experience was endearing, respectful, and trusting. I looked forward to the surprises and twists and turns in their tales.

This book was not in my plans.

Still, my encounters leading to it brought me perspective. I learned to listen. Actively listen. I learned to write authentically and creatively. With every new person I met, I understood more deeply that we're all navigating our challenges, trying to figure things out, or simply surviving until the next sunrise.

Amid chaos, instability, and unpredictability, I enjoyed the regularity of publishing. Every Tuesday for a whole year and some, I made sure one blog post went online. Every Tuesday. Ah! The beauty of predictability and focus when in a storm. The reward of knowing one's anchor in an ever-shifting world.

Somehow, after many months of posting my last blog post, God and friends conspired to make it happen. The stories nudged me to do something. The collective human condition of forty-eight wonderful souls gently softened my coconut stance. The feeling of our shared connection as we spoke around a coffee table sweetly whispered in my ear to act.

Love waits until we're ready.

This book was not in my plans.

Love made it happen.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

COOPERIDER AROUND THE WORLD

MOTORCYCLING TO EXPERIENCE LIFE ABUNDANTLY.

I had seen him with a dog a few times. He'd grab a coffee, take a table on the outside terrace overlooking Beirut, and read. What brings this European-looking biker to Lebanon? These days, and to this Starbucks in particular? What's his story? I was intrigued.

This was as good a time as any. I approached him. The 5-minute conversation became a 3-hour excursion, including coffee, Lebanese red wine, spaghetti bolognese, family, and friends. Ginger, our dog, and Cooper, his "co-existed" during :-)!

He's been fascinated with people who traveled, discovered new cultures, and saw raw nature at its best. The photos they shared shaped who he is today. Traveling is part of his *raison d'être*. He wants to see the world and its people, to experience Earth in its purity.

MOTORBIKING

In France, taking the motorcycling test within five years of taking the one for cars was convenient.

**BEING RICH
IS NEEDING
NOTHING.**

So, he did, without planning on buying one.

Little decisions can take our lives on a long, impactful, and unexpected trajectory.

When Julien's parents saw his motorcycling license, they told him, "We don't want to see you on one." His mom, who works at the local hospital, has seen her share of biker casualties. His dad is a traveler, hiker, and bicyclist, and at 60, he continues to motorcycle. Biking kept creeping into his life as he traveled with his dad on three-wheeled scooters to France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Luxembourg, Amsterdam, and Corsica.

Time and bikes deepened the relationship with his father as they rode together for four consecutive years. He learned how to ride long distances on two wheels, appreciate risks and fatigue's impact, and understand his limits.

From a scooter at 22 to a BMW 1200 GS at 27. He never thought that his father would actually help him pick the bike up, and with 2000 euros in his name, his mom helped him take out a loan. She wanted to travel "with the boys" vicariously. Before having been in an accident, she traveled, took photographs, and created documentaries.

He takes it honestly, after his parents: travel, photography, and documentaries.

LESSONS FROM HIS SHARE OF ACCIDENTS

He got into a big accident after a trip to Corsica and Sardinia. Going too fast, his bike flipped several times and got a beating. He slid on the asphalt and lucked out. He learned that high speed can cause pain to the family he loves.

"We want to see our son have fun on his bike, but we do not want him to die because of his passion."

Smaller other slides taught him how to fall off and learn his limits. A 240-kg machine can become a weapon if not respected and used correctly.

"When I ride, I feel responsible for myself and everyone else."

His other accident was someone else's mistake. The car got bashed, the bike was fixable, and he stayed in one piece again.

THE CORALIE FACTOR

Coralie, his girlfriend and business partner, is a biker herself. She understands where he is today and where he's going. She works in France and tries to meet him once a month on the road.

Being two decades his senior and with more experience in life brings a certain comfort level to the relationship. She encourages him to self-fulfill, to seek his dreams, and to be fully alive. He enjoys the discussions, support, and spending time with her. Being a self-made woman, she encourages him to go into his own business. She continually smiles, wears the most likable temperament, enjoys a nothing-is-impossible attitude, and loves and supports Julien.

BIKING AS A CULTURE

To him, biking is an instrument of freedom, a tool to experience cultures and live abundantly.

"I cannot live without my bike anymore."

He's glad he got it now and before starting his own family. Fathers restrain themselves from getting one for the risk it

potentially puts on their families. He feels it's easier when kids grow up with a bike at home.

His travels help him develop self-reliance, humility, and sound judgment of character. He learned about the sport and techniques of gauging parameters such as weather, road conditions, and other vehicles. He lost 5 kg since he took off from France. Motorcycling has given him a ticket to a new community.

“It doesn't matter your background. The minute you ride, people are happy to share the road with you.”

AROUND THE WORLD, STARTING IN LYON

On Oct 3, 2019, he started his adventure from Lyon, crossing to Northern Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Albania. He drove straight to catch up with Coralie, who was meeting him in Athens. Four days of torrential rain made him stop at a 5-star hotel in Tirana. He was so drenched and cold that his hands lost their color. They had to put him in a room for service personnel, yet he still had his steak for dinner.

He felt unwelcomed crossing Albania as he was asked to leave restaurants on three occasions. Until today, he doesn't know why. He rode and did not eat for 24 hours until he reached the Albanian-Greek border. It wasn't easy. On average, he rode 500 km/day. On a couple of occasions, he had to lift his 400 kg bike and cargo off the ground (Cooper not included).

Julien felt relieved (aah!) as sunshine and smiling faces welcomed him in Greece. Laura and Bertrand, a French couple he met, helped him out, and they later took a mountain climbing excursion together.

In Athens, he spent a week with Coralie sailing before her leaving and meeting him in Istanbul. On his way south to Calamata, he slid on a patch of olive oil. Mechanics fixed his bike overnight, did a complete checkup, and even tended to Cooper's bag. He needed to slow down after this little accident. So, he met with one of his social media followers, relaxed, and enjoyed the food.

On Dec 25, he met up with Coralie again in Istanbul. “When you leave Europe, you feel it,” he said. Coralie rented a car, put Cooper with her, and followed Julien as they drove through Turkey.

He wanted to come to Lebanon but was not advised to drive through Syria. He put himself on a cargo boat from southern Turkey to Tripoli. This one Frenchman was taken advantage of. Overpaid, slept on the boat's deck, and 12 hours later, the Lebanese coast magically appeared to him on Jan 16, 2020.

THE START OF HIS LEBANESE EXPERIENCE

Joelle, whom he met in Greece, invited him to stay with her parents to get him started. walaw?

“It's not easy to find something affordable, Cooper-friendly, motorbike safe, and affordable,” he says.

“In Lebanon, cats are queens, and dogs are dogs.”

People are afraid of them. The Lebanese are the encouraging kind. Despite their problems — the Internet, power, drinking water, traffic, mobile pricing, and cost of living — they are people with big hearts, overflowing generosity, kindness, and hospitality like no other. Everyone is welcoming, people smile, and they're

genuinely interested in you.

“Lebanon is an important destination for me. I plan to stay here for a few months and prepare for my next step.”

It’s an incredible country with an extraordinary social and religious mix. Things just work in some organized chaos, but they work. It’s a good lesson for everyone around the world.

Given what Lebanon is currently going through, I’m trying hard not to be cynical, yet a big part of me has been and is still a ‘Julien.’

HIS PHILOSOPHY TAKES HIM FORWARD

Leave a system that might not be for you. Be it country, language, work, or culture. People have immigrated for centuries. Continents have literally moved over thousands of years.

“I believe that we are born to move.”

Need as little as possible: a motorbike and a dog. As long as he keeps meeting people, evolving, and learning new things, he’s good. He’s establishing a digital service company to be able to work from anywhere, get paid, and stay on his mission. He wants to work just enough to keep his bike rolling, to have enough food and water for himself, some meat for Cooper, and a place to pitch his tent.

“Being rich is needing nothing.”

WHAT’S NEXT FOR COOPERIDER?

Update: he took off to France for a break right before the lockdown. He’s launched his company and enjoying time with Coralie in the French countryside. When everything subsides, he will come back to Lebanon.

Then, Japan, Iran, Mongolia, China, and India. Once there,

Alaska, the US, and South America. He’ll go as far as his bike will take him, after which he’ll hitchhike. He believes that he’ll find the place that will become home. Maybe Lebanon?

THE LESSONS WE LEARNED

Eighty-eight years of life carry experience and wisdom. Some of the lessons we learned having been around him:

- Eat together.
- The freshest fish have sparkling eyes.
- The best sausages are Makanek (and the German ones).
- Attract grandchildren with donuts.
- Make friends around BBQ.
- Have your live-in house help join you at the family table.
- Solve issues over a meal.
- The best Arak is the one you distill yourself. And always one-third and two-thirds mix.
- Learn how to pick your vegetables.
- If you decide to go hunting, stop in Chtaura for sahlab.
- Buy the best you can afford (and everything German).
- Make education first and keep learning.
- Use every good occasion to teach your students outside the classroom.
- Mentor, support, and tirelessly teach the youth.
- Pick up hobbies: photography, cooking, sudoku, crosswords, ...
- Love God.
- Love Lebanon.
- Faith in family.
- Adore the Virgin Mary.
- Love your mom.
- Pamper your daughter.
- Spoil your granddaughters.

- Be a father. Play the mother. And succeed at both.
- Love again.
- Laugh.
- Smile.
- Be grateful.
- Be generous.
- Treat little children and giants with the same respect.
- Even fighting can be done with honor.
- Obsess with doing things “the right way.”
- Get up early to:
 - * work,
 - * pray,
 - * enjoy your coffee,
 - * go out and get breakfast for the ones still sleeping,
 - * get the best fishermen’s catch for lunch,
 - * prepare your theodolites and other surveying instruments for your class among Beirut’s pine trees.

WHEN HE FELL INTO THE POT OF SOUP

The little boy kept jumping on his uncle’s back and climbing on his shoulders until the rascal ended up in the massive soup pot. They developed a special bond, Assaad and Anis. Uncle Anis would repeatedly tell his nephew:

Before Anis passed away many decades ago, he had forgotten everyone and everything except Assaad and those four verses.

يا أُسْعِدِ الْإِخْلَاصَ أَحْلَى مِنْ الْمَدِيحِ
 بِطَيِّبِ الْأَنْفَاسِ وَبِيشْفِي الْجَرِيحِ
 مَحَبَّتِكَ عَمَّوَجْ عُمْرِي مُسَجَّلِي
 مِثْلَ الْأَمَانَةِ الثَّابِتَةِ بِيَدَيْنِ الْمَسِيحِ

Love: The best memory medicine.

NEW YEAR'S EVE 2023

On Dec 31, 2023, at 3:40 am, 51 years and a week after his late wife, he took his last breath. He did well with the cards that life handed him. It was time to stop running. He lived fully. He left peacefully. His family believes he parted content.

MEANWHILE IN HEAVEN

His earthly friends and family greeted him right outside the gates. I can hear the cracking of dice on the backgammon board. He's playing with the usual crowd and was able to recruit new contestants, angels included. The Arak is flowing. BBQ and Tabbouleh. Laughs and conversations.

You can see him sitting with former students, debating life and technology. He's reached out to some of his old students and started surveying heaven. You know, building something up (over) there. Or mapping out heaven? You have to build something. No?

