

## Bu Abeer

In the previous article I wrote about Paris and the love I have had for this city for more than thirty-six years of studies, business, and tourism. The first time I brought my daughter Iman was when she was no more than six months old. As she grew up, I continued taking her along with her siblings, and later her children; my grandchildren. Unfortunately, I don't think any of them adored the city the same way I did.

I'll return to the tale of my first visit and meeting my Baathist friend, Bu Abeer. Of course, the first time I got to Paris I hardly knew left from right and not a single word in French. Our language school was in the suburbs in an area called Rueil-Malmaison, and because of my ignorance I stayed in an area close to the Eiffel Tower. Every day, I'd walk for half an hour to reach *Bir-Hakeim* metro station, and from there to *Étoile* station in *Champs-Élysées*, then taking a train to *La Défense*, and finally taking a bus with another half an hour walk, not to forget that the returning trip is exactly the same. Bu Abeer said laughing: "They've tricked you! Whoever talked you into that place must be getting a commission." At that moment, an unlikely friendship was established between me and that man in his fifties. We became friends and enemies at the same time. He was a generous and kind person, and I learned a lot from him, especially about the old history of the Baath Party; how it was founded, and the ways they put an end to their opposition. My friend used to brag about these things over dinner at his home near the Bois de Boulogne. Um Abeer, his wife, did an amazing job cooking something different every evening, and I was there for them whenever they needed. However, one disagreement remained between us, causing a conflict more than once, and leading me to the decision that I should end my friendship with him. I always changed my