

significantly. My father stood in my mother's house surrounded by a group of his children. Each of us held up his or her school certificate and he gave ten dinars to every child that passed their classes that year. Unfortunately for me, I was the only one that didn't pass and his words are still engraved deeply in my memory: "You have failed, so I have nothing for you." My sister Laila Al Othman, the Kuwaiti novelist, intervened and asked him to forgive me this time. He did give me the ten dinars, but I wished he hadn't. It was a gift I didn't deserve. I have never tasted a failure more bitter than that day.

My father used to spend his summers in Lebanon where he had his own businesses, mosques, and local friends. On each visit, as his plane landed at the airport, he would be received by Lebanese politicians in a manner fit for presidents. On these trips, his family and his entourage would travel separately. One time I recall he booked an entire airplane with propeller engines and the trip took us about five hours. That year we were all enrolled in summer classes at a local school which bore my father's name in acknowledgment of the donations he made for it to be built. I received little benefit from studying there, however, and for one simple reason. There were a number of us Kuwaiti students there and we soon formed a naughty little gang, doing as we pleased, and thinking we would always be protected by the name of my father. I can still remember the name of the principal, KhairAllah. Eventually he became fed up with us and complained to my father. My father immediately came to the school and pulled us all out of our classes. He inflicted the most severe punishments on all of us, with the oldest ones getting their feet lashed. Nevertheless, we couldn't hide our happiness during that beautiful time we spent in a mixed school. Back home we would have never