

Wife's Sudden Death Means New Role for Single Dad

Family Spotlight: Haji, Arden and Chloe.

"My wife took her life in September, 2009," shared Haji, the father of Chloe, one of our Jill's House guests. "At the time Chloe was 11, and Arden, my other daughter, was 12. I was at work, so my daughters and their babysitter are the ones who found my wife. The girls and I never stepped foot in that condo again."

Haji said he shut down completely. A restaurateur, he lost all three of his businesses. "I didn't open the mail," Haji shared. "I wouldn't answer the phone. We moved to Fairfax, in a house across the street from my brother. The house soon went into foreclosure. It's not that I didn't have the money. I didn't have the will."



Arden, Haji, and Chloe all look forward to Chloe's regular Wednesday visits to Jill's House.

Coupled with this devastating loss was the sudden need for Haji to be the sole caregiver for Chloe, who has Down syndrome. "Caring for Chloe is a full time job," said Haji. "She's the sweetest little girl in the world, but she dictates our surroundings with her behaviors. She turns the TV volume up. She messes up Arden's bedroom. She tries to escape, so we deadbolt everything. And I get an average of three hours of sleep each night, because I am constantly worried."

"Chloe still doesn't understand that her mommy is gone," continued Haji. "She will sometimes ask 'Where's mommy?' and it breaks my heart. It is very confusing for her, and I wonder what must be going on in her head. I considered counseling for her, but it's hard to find counseling for a child with special needs such as Chloe's."

Haji did seek professional help for his daughter, Arden, who is now 15. "Arden has a lot to deal with," said Haji. "She lost her mother. She has a sister with Down syndrome. And she just started high school. It's overwhelming."

"I am Muslim, but since my wife was Christian, tradition dictates that the children will follow that faith. So Arden has been receiving Christian counseling and attending McLean Bible Church. She invited me to go with her, so while she attends The Rock, I go to church upstairs. This has helped Arden process the fact that she has lost her mother, but she is becoming more and more attached to me. When I go to the store for just 30 minutes, she will call me three times to find out when I'm coming home. It's just so difficult to give Arden the time she needs. Whenever she tries to sit next to me or get any attention, Chloe pushes her aside so that all of my attention is on her."

Haji learned of Jill's House through a caseworker. Thanks to our Weeknight Program, Chloe now visits Jill's House every Wednesday after school.

"Wednesday is 'our night' for Arden and me," continued Haji. "We go see movies, go shopping, or sometimes Arden just takes the time to do her homework without being disturbed. I honestly can't tell you what a blessing this is. It gives us a tremendous gift. I know Chloe is safe and having fun, and I can sleep through the night. We all look forward to Wednesdays! As much as we miss her, Arden and I get a breather. And when Chloe comes home from Jill's House, it looks like she's shining. I don't know how else to describe her joy. She is upbeat, happy, she learns new words, and loves swimming in the pool, which is excellent therapy for her muscle atrophy."

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-Haji

"I hope someday my financial situation changes because I want to give back to help Jill's House. You are angels. Every time I talk to anyone from Jill's House I just have to thank them over and over and over again."