



Dani and Akber with their three children, photographed in their Dubai home

# AKBER AND DANIELLE WILSON NAQVI

THE DYNAMIC DUO WHO TURNED THEIR OWN TRAGEDY INTO A LIFE-SAVING FOUNDATION

**T**he Naqvis, who met 10 years ago in Dubai and have been together ever since, are a truly inspirational couple. When what seemed like an opportunity of a lifetime didn't end up having the happy ending they so desperately wanted, they turned unimaginable personal tragedy into a crusade to ensure no other families go through their pain. Now the UAE-based Naqvis, 39-year-old Danielle and Akber, 40, the force behind The ZB Foundation, are taking baby steps in order to save the lives of newborns in Pakistan.

**Danielle, you're from Liverpool and Akber is Pakistani. How did your respective cultures blend in your nuptials?**

We had one traditional wedding in Lahore, Pakistan, which lasted two days and which both our families attended. Then we had a three-day celebration in Cyprus, at a stunning property up the side of a mountain called Columbia Beach Resort in Pissouri Bay. We had a few family members attend; otherwise it was all our best friends who flew in.

**What originally brought you both to Dubai?**

I have been in Dubai for nearly 20 years. I came from Liverpool with my father. Akber lived and worked in New York. After 9/11 all his close friends moved back to the Middle East, so a couple of years later he decided to move too.

**You're an enterprising couple; can you tell us a bit about your work?**

My husband is a fund manager for a company in DIFC and I run a boutique PR business called CSPR Group, which I have had for eight years. More recently I have launched sassymamadubai.com, an online magazine, with my two business partners. It's a go-to guide for the modern mum. And there are sister sites in Hong Kong, Singapore and Manila.

**You are, however, perhaps best known for The ZB Foundation...**

I have always longed to be a mother. Akber and I discussed having our own children when we got married, but we also had a dream to adopt. As Pakistan has over one million abandoned babies a year, we decided that we would adopt a baby girl from Pakistan as our first child.

It was more than a year before we finally received the phone call I had been longing for my whole life: saying a newborn baby was waiting for me.

We jumped on a plane and met our daughter, who we named Zahra Bano. She melted our hearts the second we met her. It sounds clichéd but I felt like I had given birth to her; I knew she was meant to be for us.

**Yet just three and a half months from her birth, having overcome so many**



**'I have always longed to be a mother. Akber and I discussed having our own children, but we always dreamed of adopting as well'**

**Dani and her husband Akber met 10 years ago and have been together ever since**

**obstacles, when you were finally back in Dubai with Zahra, she fell tragically ill.**

Zahra Bano Naqvi died on 18 February, 2012, four years ago, leaving behind heartbroken parents and a family and friend network deep in shock.

She fought for 16 days in the ICU in Dubai. She never gave up, we never gave up, until time eventually ran out on the fight. Just before she died we found out that she had a disease called Glutaric Acidemia Type 2.

**That isn't a condition most of us will have heard of...**

Zahra could have lived, had doctors performed a simple newborn screening – the heel-prick test. This would have raised enough red flags to warrant investigation, which

most likely would have led to the discovery of the metabolic disorder in her early days.

**You were determined that others wouldn't be affected by this, so you resolved to set up The ZB Foundation.**



**The three children show-off their play room**

Yes, we set it up in her memory and spirit. It is designed to give other babies the chance that Zahra never got herself. On the wings of an angel the charity is spreading and gaining momentum in Pakistan, a country that has never provided this life-saving screening even though it is done everywhere else in the world.

**Can you tell us a bit about what the foundation does?**

It's pioneering newborn screening in Pakistan. Babies are provided a heel-prick test within 72 hours of birth in order to screen for many diseases that can be managed at birth either by diet or medication.

One of our biggest challenges so far has been the bureaucracy. However, we kept our determination; the charity is licensed and registered.

We are now able to reach

important milestones such as having one of the first screening machines shipped into Pakistan without any customs duty, as a donation to ZBF. We also educate doctors and work with hospitals there to provide these free tests.

**All your jobs seem to be child-related; how do you manage to juggle so many roles with being a mother of three?**

I have great support at home! I enjoy working so I don't look at it as an issue. My eldest, Amara is three-and-a-half-years-old and I have twins; Rio and Sienna, who are almost three years-old.

They are in school in the morning, so I get a lot of my work done then. I always spend late afternoons with my kids and help with dinner, bath and bed, as I believe these are important for us.

**Top of your wanderlust list? For my husband's fortieth last month we left the kids at home and visited Japan. It was so cool, we loved it. Next on our list is travelling around the States, and maybe next December we'll visit Santa in Lapland!**

**What does your personal taste tend towards when it comes to clothes?**

I can't walk past Zara without popping in. In Dubai I love Bloomingdale's, Boutique 1, the shoe section in Harvey Nichols and Level Shoe District. I am a shoeaholic – as long as I'm wearing a nice pair, I'm happy!

**You worked with four UAE designers – Ayesha Depala, Mochi, Reema Ameer and Bambah Boutique to launch a line of T-shirts, with proceeds going towards your foundation.**

Launching the 'On The Wings Of An Angel' T-shirt was rather challenging for me, as I was entering the world of fashion. I was lucky enough to have been supported by some pretty incredible women.

**Best piece of advice you have ever received?**

My father told me to keep my feet on the ground, stay real and never take yourself too seriously. Life should be fun.

**Dream dinner-party guests? James Corden, Oprah, Adele and Angelina Jolie!**

**Something not many people would know about you is...**

I'm addicted to chocolate and UK TV.

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