



ALL IN THE FAMILY

By all rights there should be an echo in the room when you talk to siblings Nada, Nabeel and Shermeen Memon (MAY-mon) — their individual stories start so much the same way.

Tuscaloosa public schools. University of Alabama: biology major, Computer-Based Honors (CBH) minor. Prolific awards and accolades. UAB School of Medicine. Even their chosen field of cardiology. Check, check and check.

But listen carefully. Each Dr. Memon has followed a separate route and heeded a distinct calling. A major inspiration comes from their parents, Bashir and Feroza Memon. Early teachers figure in too; so does the Computer-Based Honors Program, a pivotal stop on the journey to today.

“I had several options when it came to choosing

a university,” begins Nada, the oldest. “But I was intrigued by the Computer-Based Honors program and that was a big part of why I chose the University of Alabama.” Nada remembers the fall of 1994 when she and 19 others learned BASIC, binary, Pascal and other computer languages, sometimes working until 3 a.m. on their final projects. “There was camaraderie in that room and I was glad to be there,” she adds.

Following the CBH pattern of computer knowledge first and research applications next, Nada worked with Capstone Medical Center pediatrician Dr. Michael Taylor to document child abuse cases in Alabama. The project resulted in her big win in USA Today’s the “Top College Students in the US” competition and a trip to Washington, D.C.

*Shermeen, Nabeel, and
Nada Memon.*

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While brother Nabeel watched his sister's experiences closely, he says “I made my own path. The three of us are very different and unique individuals and our paths took us very different places with different mentors.

“Even in cardiology,” he continues, “Nada [founder of the electrophysiology program at Tuscaloosa's DCH Regional Medical Center] is an electrician of the heart, I'm the plumber for the heart [structural interventional cardiologist in St. Petersburg, Florida] and Shermeen is an advanced imaging cardiologist [a cardiac MRI and CT specialist in Chicago].”

Entering UA in 1999, Nabeel quickly took to the CBH program. “You're doing things that aren't part of the norm,” he says. “The norm is sitting in classes and taking exams. I knew that in CBH I'd be doing things that were impactful outside of the classroom.” After his own first year of long hours and late nights, learning Fortran 90, C++ and other languages, Nabeel moved on to projects. “I remember being a key part of the transition from paper records to electronic medical records and training physicians how to access medical resources online.” Using CBH's skill sets, he also co-created JOSHUA (Journal of Science Health at the University of Alabama) which continues to give undergraduates an outlet for publishing their research papers.

CBH set the tempo for Nabeel's future.

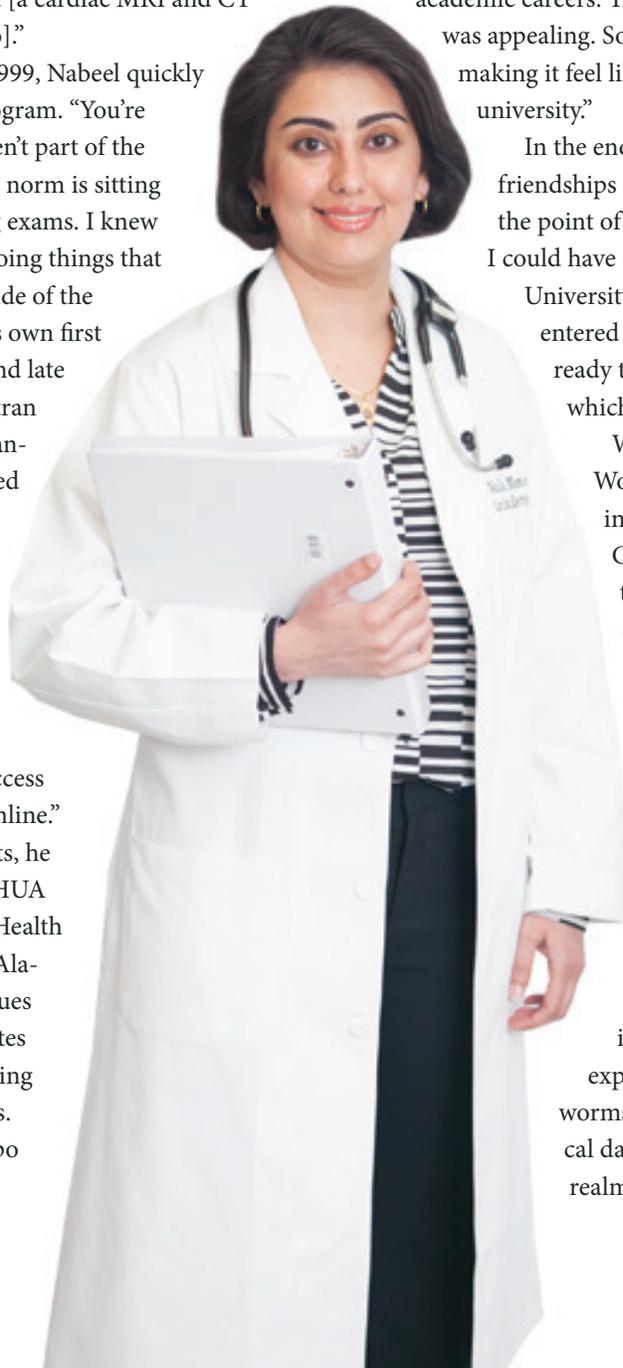
“There weren't any boundaries,” he says. “You could step out of your comfort zone. When you make yourself uncomfortable that's when you learn who you really are. CBH prepared me to redefine myself and try new things — and that's what I've done my whole career.”

Shermeen looked beyond UA before following her siblings' footsteps. “The University was one of my top choices but not a guarantee,” she admits. “I'd seen how my brother and sister had both successfully gone through CBH and how it shaped their academic careers. The problem solving aspect was appealing. So was the component of making it feel like a family within a large university.”

In the end, “I saw their long lasting friendships in CBH and thought ‘What's the point of finding a new place when I could have everything I needed at the University?’” Thus the third Memon entered UA (and CBH) in 2002 ready to make her own mark — which she did.

Working with Dr. Felicia Wood at the School of Nursing, Shermeen and another CBHer designed a program to assist nurses in educating diabetic patients by using hand-held electronic devices. “We were in particular looking at patients' literacy levels to determine how to best communicate important medical information,” she says.

Apart from CBH, but using its skills, Shermeen conducted research involving environmental exposures to microscopic worms that can cause neurological damage — particularly in the realm of Parkinson's disease. “It



was a CBH approach of challenging yourself and problem solving,” she says. The paper was subsequently published in *Chemical Communications*, a rare achievement for an undergraduate.

At this point Shermeen was leaning towards computer science and away from the medical profession. “I tried to fight medicine every step of the way,” she admits. “Then I realized that I could apply the problem solving skills I enjoyed from CBH to biology — and do medicine.” It was the perfect fit. “Every time I interpret a cardiac MRI, I’m fascinated. You’re able to see the heart in real time and determine what’s going on with the cardiac structure and function.”

The term “problem solving” comes up again and again — but for each Memon, perhaps the biggest problem to solve was deciding a specialty and direction. Nada considered many fields before pursuing a career in cardiology — and more specifically electrophysiology. A residency, two fellowships, and an academic career ensued in St. Louis, Dallas and Houston before she returned home to start the cardiac electrophysiology program.

For Nabeel the post-UAB stops included Philadelphia for residency, then Los Angeles where he trained as a structural interventional cardiologist. In 2016 he joined The Heart Institute in St. Petersburg which services five hospitals. “All three of us chose facets of cardiology that intrigue us,” Nabeel says. “When you’re touching a life, it’s not just a job — it’s a calling.”

During her medical training, Shermeen found herself loving the critical care component of cardiology. “It’s a good blend of problem solving and patient care.” She went from Birmingham to Dallas, and on to a fellowship in Chicago where she is beginning her career in cardiology and advanced cardiac imaging.

The three agree that CBH was the cornerstone of their UA experience. Memories include the academic and research side; the base of friends they still treasure; Director Dr. Cathy Randall’s leadership (and, for Shermeen, Dr. Shane Sharpe’s arrival); and Darren Evans-Young’s instruction during the first hands-on year. “CBH differentiates you from everyone else,” says Nabeel. “You get lost in the moment and don’t even think about the workload. You meet new people and become innovative.”

The well-heeded and still-remembered parental lessons linger. “‘You have to create your own future’ is one thing they told us,” says Shermeen. “And ‘If you want something to happen you have to go and get it.’ I think that’s why we’ve been driven to do what we have done. So much of my pride in the University is CBH. I learned that no question is too hard to answer — you can find the resources and solve it.”

“I’ve always been a big CBH advocate,” says Nada, also recalling Homecoming projects and events at the Randall home to bond and socialize with the other hard-working CBHers. “Other programs in the country don’t do what CBH does. It’s learning how to apply complex concepts to one’s own field of study.

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Shermeen Memon

