

Mufeed Mousa

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for University of Florida

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Alhadi: Thank you, Mr. Mufeed Mousa, for being with us this morning. My name is Esam

Alhadi. I am a lecturer here at the University of Florida in the Arabic Language Program.

It is a great honor to have you here with us this morning to give us this interview. Today is Friday, November, 11, 2011, and it is now 10:00 AM. Thanks again for accepting our request to come here for this interview. I want to ask you to introduce yourself by telling us anything about your early life such as where you were born, your early stages of education, and anything else about your early life.

Mousa: My name is Mufeed Abdulazeez Mousa. I was born in Egypt on December 1, 1928. I had my elementary, high school, and university education there. I joined the College of Agriculture at the University of Cairo. I graduated with an honors degree and I was the youngest graduate in the history of the college at that time. After graduation, I worked as a TA in the same college for two years. I was granted a scholarship to continue my education abroad. I spent one year in England, but didn't like it there because I have always dreamed of coming to America. I was lucky because I got to know some politicians who helped me transfer my scholarship to America. I applied to about five universities, and the first to offer me admission was the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. I studied entomology and received my M.A. in 1953. Two years later [in 1955], I received my Ph.D. I went back to Egypt, and instead of going back to

teach at the university, I was offered a job at the Plants Protection unit of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Alhadi: After going back to Cairo, how many years did you spend in Cairo?

Mousa: I remained in Cairo for four and a half years working for the Plants Protection Unit. I worked on a huge number of projects there, but I wasn't truly happy with work there. The unit administration there wasn't ready to offer facilities to help me do my work and achieve more success. There was a feeling of hatred in Egypt against those who had their education abroad. As a result of that, I decided to leave the country. It wasn't easy to leave the country because of a government rule [i.e., legislation] at that time that prohibited graduates from leaving the country on the grounds that the government feared losing all their experienced and qualified personnel. I was lucky that I knew some people in the American Embassy in addition to knowing others in the American Navy who graduated from the same university that I studied at. They helped me to obtain an immigration visa and to come back to America.

Alhadi: What year did you come to America for the first time?

Mousa: It was in 1951 when I came to Illinois.

Alhadi: We want to have a bit of history now. You mentioned earlier that you knew some politicians in Egypt and that they offered you some help. Would you please mention some names and what positions they may have held?

Mousa: One of them was El-Badrawi Ashour. He was one of the big farmers and his daughter was married to Fuad Siraj Eldin who was then the prime minister in Egypt. Mr. Ashour was also a member of the senate. He was in London, and because of his weak command of English, I offered him the help he needed. I acted like a secretary for him. He wanted

to return the favor. I asked him if he would be willing to help me by transferring my scholarship. He took my application with him to Egypt, and only a few days later he contacted me and confirmed that everything went as I requested.

Alhadi: Dr. Mousa, what do you remember about the political life in Egypt before your coming to America? You said that you came here before the revolution and before the coming of President Nasser.

Mousa: We were enjoying plenty of freedom. We had freedom of the press, freedom of movement, freedom of gatherings, and freedom of speech. No one was scared and no one was complaining of aggression. The situation changed completely after the revolution. I wasn't home when the revolution broke out, but after I arrived there I faced many problems. This is basically because I am married to an American lady that I met when I was doing my studies in Illinois. She accompanied me to Egypt. The society at that time under President Nasser was very suspicious about foreigners. The fact that I was married to an American lady put me under doubt and suspicion. This is in addition to the fact that I was very active in the association of the students who graduated from American universities. We used to have frequent meetings with the Americans who were living in Egypt at that time. I served as the treasurer of this association and I was responsible for all the account balances, and other financial affairs. These activities made them have more doubts about me. They thought I might have been acting as an American agent. I was very careful about everything I did. It was really scary. I and the other friends who graduated from American universities used to meet in our own houses whenever there was a need for a meeting. This was because we trusted each other, and that would make it possible for us to talk more freely. We heard about a case of another

colleague who graduated from an American university economic program that completely vanished in Egypt. This was because he was always talking about the capitalism system in a time that President Nasser was a strong advocate of the socialist ideology. Nobody knew what happened to that colleague. This incident made it more fearful for us and pushed every one of us to think about leaving the country.

Alhadi: I want to ask you about the University of Cairo. You mentioned that you studied in the College of Agriculture at the University of Cairo. I believe that the College of Agriculture is located outside the main campus of Cairo University. I, by the way, am also a graduate of the University of Cairo, but that might be a little later, after you graduated. I know the College of Agriculture very well and I have been there many times. Since we are making this interview for the documentation purpose, I want you to tell us about the university at that time, the relations between the students and their relations with the professors and also about the academic system in the university in general.

Mousa: Joining a university in my days required having high grades. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case for the College of Agriculture where students who left high school with lower grades were also admitted. We had very distinguished teachers who graduated from universities all over the world. I was lucky because I was taught by professors who studied in America, England, Holland, and France. They gave us the best of their knowledge. Politics never interfered in our studies and students didn't care too much about being politically active, apart from very few cases.

Alhadi: Was the medium of instruction in Arabic or English?

Mousa: It was in Arabic in the College of Agriculture, but they taught us the English terminologies besides the Arabic ones. Study in the College of Engineering was in English, and the same for the College of Sciences. They had a Department of Languages in the College of Arts. It all depended on the curriculum and the field of study.

Alhadi: Do you remember the names of the university president and the dean of the college in your days there?

Mousa: The dean of the college was Dr. Saleem, but I can't remember the name in full.

Alhadi: Do you remember some of your colleagues from your study days, and are you still in touch with them?

Mousa: Yes, I am. One of my colleagues is named Abdulaziz Zahir. He earned his Ph.D. from England. He is retired now. He came to visit here when he was a professor at the College of Agriculture. He was one of the top scholars in his field. I am still in touch with him and I always contact him whenever I go to Egypt. He always reminds me of the colleagues who were with us in the college. Some of them passed away and others are still alive. I also know many Ph.D. holders and many of them came and visited me here in America.

Alhadi: Good. These are sweet memories. I want to know after you came to America for the second time, where did you reside and what work did you do?

Mousa: I arrived in America in October on Columbus Day. It was an unforgettable day. Unfortunately, when I came here I didn't have work because I was unable to do my communications from Egypt ahead of my coming here. During the President Nasser period, it was extremely hard to have correspondence with people outside the country. As a result, it was impossible for me to arrange for a grant or work before my arrival

here. I arrived with my family. It was my good luck that my arrival here coincided with the annual meeting of the Entomological Society of America which took place in Atlantic City in New Jersey that year. It was a good opportunity to meet with many colleagues and other people who may have employment opportunities. I had a number of interviews for many of the government research positions, but I failed to get any of them because I didn't have U.S. citizenship at the time. I was a bit disappointed. I heard about another position opening, but I was unable to meet the people who were advertising for it. I got their phone number and called them. I gave them a summary of my education, research, and experience. They turned out to be the Department of Conservation in Indiana and they were looking for someone who is specialized in entomology. They called me back and offered me a position. I accepted and moved to Indianapolis, which became my new home.

Alhadi: How long did you stay in Indianapolis?

Mousa: Two years. I worked as field inspector. My work was to tour the farms to make sure that the plants were not infected by any disease or pests. I realized that this work would have a very limited future for my growth. I thought I should make better use of my Ph.D. I quit my position. I talked to my former Ph.D. supervisor at the University of Illinois who, besides his work as a university professor, was also an army reserve officer. I asked for his advice and he suggested I should join the American Army. I told him that I wasn't sure what I could do in the American Army. He gave me a lot of details and told me that the American Army accepts individuals for research and scientist positions. I applied to the army and I was accepted. They offered me the rank of captain. I was the first in the history of the American Army to start off with a captain's rank. I was lucky.

Alhadi: Where was your work station?

Mousa: I did my basic training in San Antonio, Texas. After finishing my basic training, I was appointed as a researcher in the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research of the Walter Reed Army Hospital. I worked with the research staff in the preventive medicine section. When my boss was transferred to Bangkok in Thailand, he asked his leaders to allow me to go and work with him. They agreed, and I took my family and went there. We were doing research in support of the army in Vietnam at that time. I remained in Thailand for three years. While in Thailand, I went to Malaysia many times to do research there.

Alhadi: These are very good memories. I want to ask you about your move to Florida. When did you come to Florida, and why did you pick this state to be your next home?

Mousa: Florida, and more specifically Gainesville, are very important for the American Army. There is a research institute that belonged to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This institute was charged with conducting many research projects for the U.S. Army when it was fighting in Europe during World War II. The army wanted to stay in constant contact with this research institute in order to communicate their defense needs. I was selected to be the communication officer here in Gainesville. I remained here for four years. Before coming to Gainesville, I also served as an advisor for the chief medical officer in the Pentagon for five years. My job was to offer advice and information to the chief medical officer about any medical problems the U.S. Army may be facing in any spot in the world where they may be fighting. The purpose was to provide medical protection for these armies. This position qualified me to be selected for the communication officer here in Florida.

Alhadi: When did you come to Florida?

Mousa: In 1983.

Alhadi: Have you being constantly residing here since that date?

Mousa: I remained here for four years. Army personnel are constantly moving. At that time, the army was looking for a high-ranking officer to be in charge of preventive medicine for the army in Europe. I got selected for this position. We had troops in sixteen European countries. This was a very big task. We had a big division with many doctors and engineers in every field you may think of. We also had many specialized physicians.

Alhadi: Where did you go to work in Europe?

Mousa: I was in Landstuhl in Germany where we had a military hospital. We also had a number of laboratories for tests and analysis to help the hospital in providing treatment for the troops. I was responsible for the preventive medicine department. My job was to provide protection, not only to the troops, but also to their families who were with them in Europe.

Alhadi: What happened after that? Did you come back to live in Florida?

Mousa: I retired and came back to live in Florida. I started thinking of doing something else. I wanted to do something different from my original field of specialty. I thought of doing something that helps me make money because I was depending only on my pension. I thought of doing income tax work. I took a course with H&R Block and earned a diploma from them. I became certified to work in the tax field. They offered me a job and I worked with them for one year. During this year, I learned a whole lot and gained a lot of experience from my colleagues who had been doing this work for many years. I didn't like the work schedule, but I liked the idea that through this work I was able to help many people. I decided to quit because I felt that my pension was actually enough

to give me a good living standard. I started doing something for the community. I volunteered with the IRS to help with tax filing for those who need help, such as widowed or divorced women, and other poor or non-English speaking individuals. I felt personally pleased that I was offering help to the people of my community who originally gave me the opportunity to earn my living. This was my turn to give something back. Thanks to God, I've been doing this work for fifteen years now and we have about thirty-five volunteers here in Gainesville. I became the lead inspector and later became the trouble-shooter. I go to any place where they have a problem and help them to solve it. It is a lovely thing to do.

Alhadi: This is excellent Dr. Mufeed. This is certainly a great experience and also a great contribution towards the local community. We wanted to know about such contributions by Arab members to the American society. This is one of the excellent contributions. I want to move on to ask you about your family. You mentioned your family more than one time during this interview. You said that you had your family with you in Egypt and then all of you came here to America. Would you please share a few words with us about your family and family members, either those who are here or your family back in Egypt?

Mousa: I had my wife with me in Egypt. Two of our children were born there. When my wife arrived in Egypt, I thought I should find an area with a population of mixed Egyptian and non-Egyptian nationalities and mainly Americans. We lived in a suburb called Al-Maadi where a huge number of Americans were living. I thought such a setting will give my wife a feeling that she is not totally a stranger there. It would also give her the chance to gradually integrate into the Egyptian society. My children started to learn Arabic and my wife felt very happy there. I took her many times to visit and see the villages in the

countryside of Egypt. One time, she had her picture taken during the cotton harvest season and it ended up on a magazine cover. They dressed her like a peasant woman and made her up and put a scarf on her head. It was, indeed, beautiful.

I came to America with my family and we lived in Indiana for a short period of time. Because of the nature of army work, we had to move a lot. This wasn't easy for the children. They always left their friends and moved to another location. At the same time, it gave them good experiences because of the different living standards, traditions and customs they got to experience in many countries.

I have three children. Tariq owns a ceramic company called "Tile and Design" in Petaluma, California. My daughter Dina is a manager of "Women Boutique" in California also. My younger daughter is named Suzan. She served in the medical laboratories in the U.S. Army. She is retired now. She joined Santa Fe Community College and became a certified nurse. She is currently working as a nurse and she lives here in Gainesville.

Alhadi: This is a wonderful interview. I wish we could keep going, but unfortunately we are out of time. Thank you very much, Dr. Mufeed, for a very informative interview. We hope to get another chance to meet with you, and also hope that you come to visit us again.

Thank you.

Mousa: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]