

*Meet
the*

FAWZY FAMILY



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QUITE THE CHATTERBOX

BY FATHY FAWZY, MSc, FRCS, FRCOphth

My son, Nader, was born in Egypt in January 1983. I was 31 years old at the time; I was also born in January. After 3 years of marriage, he was our first child, and his younger sister joined us later. What was most notable about Nader as a child (Figures 1A and 1B) was that he liked to chat with people he did not know, and he made quick friendships with people regardless of their age.

His first social challenge was when the family relocated to the United Kingdom in 1986 so that I could perform a 3-year scholarship. Nader was 3 years old when we got there, and at that time Arabic was his only language. He was enrolled in school when he was just over 4 years old, and I suspected he would have a difficult time interacting with others due to the language barrier. However, when I went to pick him up, his teacher informed me that he was “quite the chatterbox.” It became obvious to me that he had high social skills even from an early age.

His first educational challenge was when we returned to Egypt in 1989, and he had to attend school in Cairo. One of the most popular schools was a German-speaking school; it was extremely competitive due to the high demand for the

available spots. Nader passed all the interviews with flying colors, further supporting my belief that he had a unique ability to overcome challenges. Moreover, he learned to speak fluent German at this school, and this eventually had a great impact on his career.

After our relocation from England back to Egypt, my reputation as an ophthalmologist grew quite fast; in a few years, I was busy seeing and operating on patients. During Nader’s final years of high school, he started mentioning that he wanted to be a computer engineer. I had hoped that he would grow up to be an ophthalmologist like his father, but I knew that he would be successful no matter what he did, and I told him as much.

FAMILY FIRST

In the summer of the year that Nader graduated from high school, I suffered a serious injury while diving into the sea and broke several vertebrae. I was hospitalized and bedridden for 2 months, and my prognosis was unpredictable. My career was at a high risk, as the doctors were unable to tell me if I would ever be able to work again. Fortunately, two great developments happened during that time.

First, Nader proved to me once again his extraordinary ability to face a challenge and make it appear an easy task.



Figure 1. Fathy with his son Nader as a child (A,B). Nader's graduation (C). Fathy and Nader outside the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow (D).

Only a teenager at the time, he abandoned his friends and put his family first, dedicating all his time and effort to being the man of the house, doing everything in his power to help me recuperate while also comforting our distraught family. Even my relentless back pain could not distract me from noticing the exceptional young man that he had become.

The second piece of good news during that difficult period was that Nader decided that he would like to study medicine. To make sure I did not get my hopes up, however, he added with a smile, "I will not necessarily pursue ophthalmology." Nevertheless, I was delighted to know that we would have another doctor in the family. The year ended with a miraculous recovery from my injury, and I was able to go back to my beloved profession in great shape.

MAKING THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION

In 2002, Nader decided to continue his medical training in Germany. While the idea of separation was difficult for me, I strongly encouraged him, knowing this would be an excellent chance for him to achieve a higher standard of education. When he graduated in 2006 (Figure 1C), he performed some of his optional training in Cairo, and it was during that time that he had to choose his specialty. He liked both neurosurgery and ophthalmology, and he spent time observing surgeries in both fields. Then the moment I had hoped for came, when Nader declared to me that he liked ophthalmology best. This meant the world to me, but I hid my excitement until I was certain that this was his own independent choice, as I did not want to pressure him into making this important life-altering decision.

Nader finished his internship training during 2007 (Figure 1D), got a residency post in Cologne, Germany, and was prepared to start what would hopefully become a long and successful career as an ophthalmologist in Germany. Unfortunately, he was unable to obtain a work permit in Germany without first completing some government documents back home. This meant a long delay, and, devastated, he had to give up his first job in Germany and return to Egypt for an entire year.

Trying to make the best of a bad situation, he and I both concentrated on work. He soon became my prime assistant. He did an enormous volume of work during that year, observing, assisting, and finally performing full intraocular surgeries on his own. In fact, the year ended up being a landmark in his career, and the skills he developed during that time helped him to quickly excel when he was able to return to Germany. It also meant a lot to me, as it gave me the chance to teach him and pass along my years of experience to my firstborn.

A WELCOME COMPETITOR

In the following years, Nader earned one degree after another: Facharzt für Augenheilkunde, FRCS, FICO, and

FEBO. He eventually moved back to Egypt with his family, but he still goes to Germany for a few days every month to see patients and perform surgeries.

At the beginning of 2015, a group of ophthalmologists and I opened a big new eye hospital, the Al Watany Eye Hospital. Nader works in my office and in the hospital, no longer as my assistant but as a welcome competitor and colleague. I have enjoyed watching him grow both in life and in his career, and I am enormously happy that I was able to share in the development of a fine professional who can help the people around him and bring great hope to his society. The only remaining piece of advice that I have left for him is, "Keep it up, son."

ANYTHING BUT A DOCTOR

BY NADER F. FAWZY, FRCS, FEBO

As a child, I was determined to become anything but a doctor, especially not an ophthalmologist. Seeing my father so successful in his career made me fear that, if I became an ophthalmologist, I would always be compared to him, and any achievement I attained would be attributed only to his support and established success, rather than to my own effort and perseverance.

When I was about 10 years old, we were on our way to a family trip to the beach when my father stopped at a hospital to see a few patients on whom he had performed surgery the previous day. At that time, cataracts were removed only when they had become very dense, and routinely a manual extracapsular cataract extraction technique was used. Patients waited until they were practically blind before having cataract surgery. I recall the moment when my father removed the bandage from an elderly woman. When she suddenly realized she could see again, her expression of overwhelming gratitude made a strong and lasting impression on me.

By the time I reached high school, I knew I wanted a career in which I could really help people. What better way to do that than to attend medical school? I left my hometown, Cairo, and set off to Germany to join the College of Medicine at the University of Cologne. I still maintained my strong determination to take on any specialty other than ophthalmology.

SHAPING OF IDEAS

While I studied medicine, I started shaping my ideas about what I wanted to do later on. I definitely wanted a surgical specialty, one that was not too messy but in which I could have a significant impact for my patients. I tried otolaryngology, neurosurgery, and I even performed pacemaker implantation surgeries with cardiologists dur-

ing my internship year. However, I found that ophthalmology fit my expectations better than any other field. With lasers developing, imaging modalities improving, and technology becoming an essential part of the practice of ophthalmology, I found that my passion for the specialty only increased.

After graduating, I had to go back to Egypt to finish some paperwork before I could continue my training in Germany. In that year of 2008, I learned all the basics of ophthalmology and what it meant to be an ethical, knowledgeable, and dedicated doctor for my patients. I had the perfect role model: my father. He tried not to show it, but I constantly appreciated his enthusiasm for my decision to train in ophthalmology. He put enormous efforts into teaching me as much as he could because he knew I would go back to Germany to continue training after only 1 year. Once, he even emptied a room in his office and had a full wet-lab installed so that I could gain valuable hands-on experience on cadaver eyes.

When I headed back to Europe in 2009, I was more experienced and better trained than any other second-year ophthalmic trainee. This gave me a definite advantage. My mentors appreciated my experience, and I found my responsibilities in the department evolving rapidly.

SO FAR FROM HOME

There I was in Germany, 2,000 miles away from where my father was practicing in Egypt, and yet I was able to enjoy the fact that, even from so far away, his attentions in the previous year were helping me to build a successful career. Now I appreciate that, without my father's enormous efforts in 2008, things would not have been so simple.

Today I practice mostly in Egypt, in the Al Watany Eye Hospital, a specialty hospital that my father and his partners founded in 2001 and expanded to a brand-new building in 2015. The hospital houses all of today's best technologies in ophthalmology under one roof. I am proud of what it has become and what we are able to offer our patients. I still travel to Germany to see patients and perform surgeries, and these trips help me stay updated.

I have to admit that working with my father around makes life a lot easier. He is always a wise and experienced adviser when patients come in with challenging situations. I plan my most difficult surgeries for the days when he is operating in the room next door.

TOWARD THE SAME GOAL

My father and I work separately, but toward the same goal. We aim always to offer global standard ophthalmic care in Egypt and to provide good examples of honest and ethical ophthalmic practice with the highest level of dedication to our patients. ■