

CHAPTER 8

Career Leap: Opportunity and Challenges

(1987-1997)

8.1 A Breath of Fresh Air and the Big Break

In August 1987, we flew to Cairo, with a transit in Amsterdam, officially closing the Saudi phase of my life, which I was eager to leave behind. My next experiences in Egypt and other Arab countries thereafter would prove to be vastly different from those in Saudi Arabia. Over the 30+ years I spent living and working in the region, I experienced less restrictive versions of Islamic culture and more open-minded people than those in Saudi Arabia, leading to rewarding and enlightening interactions. As I experienced life in Egypt, which I considered my dream job at the time, my perspective on Arabs evolved. Egypt, with its vibrant history and dynamic society, became a place where I genuinely appreciated the warmth and hospitality of its people, a stark contrast to my earlier impressions of people in Saudi Arabia. This transition marked the beginning of an exciting new chapter, filled with career opportunities and a deeper connection to the Arab world.

When we landed in Cairo, I noted the worn and dilapidated state of the arrival terminal. The peeling, faded paint, the tattered, stained carpets, and the overcrowded waiting areas gave the place a distinctly aged and neglected feel—a sharp contrast to the modern facilities I had grown accustomed to in Jeddah. After three years of seeing Saudis in traditional attire—men in their white thobes and women in flowing black abayas—it was a noticeable shift to see Egyptians in Western-style clothing. The mix of jeans, T-shirts, and dresses created a more cosmopolitan atmosphere, reflecting a distinct cultural vibe. While most educated Egyptians leaned toward Western fashion, traditional clothing was still prevalent, particularly in Cairo's poorer neighborhoods and rural areas. What was different though was that Egyptians were allowed a choice about how they dressed.

We were greeted at the airport by a facilitator who drove us through the congested, polluted streets of Cairo to the hotel where we would stay during my first week of orientation. The drive was a sensory overload—honking horns echoed incessantly, blending with the thick cloud of exhaust that hung heavily in the air. The streets were chaotic, filled with cars, motorcycles, and pedestrians darting in every direction, each one navigating the madness with an almost instinctual ease. The sidewalks were crowded with street vendors, their calls and the clattering of their goods adding to the cacophony. As we got closer to the hotel, I felt a mix of anxiety and excitement bubbling up inside me, unsure of what was to come but eager to embrace the adventure ahead.

During the orientation, I learned that this training project was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of a broader foreign aid package to Egypt in exchange for the 1979 peace agreement with Israel. This initiative aimed to strengthen educational ties through cultural exchanges and teacher training for future educators in Egypt.

USAID had awarded the project in the form of a direct grant to the Fulbright Commission in Egypt, led by American Executive Director Dr. Ann B. Radwan. This choice was likely due to the Commission's strong

reputation as a binational entity renowned for academic excellence and integrity. This partnership ensured effective management of the funding, directing resources toward meaningful educational outcomes. The Fulbright Commission's established connections and credibility in the country provided added assurance that the project would not only achieve its goals but also make a positive impact on the educational landscape in Egypt. As I absorbed this information, I felt a profound sense of responsibility, knowing that my role would contribute to this significant initiative.

The project, known as the English Teacher Training Project (ETTP), placed American teacher trainers in Egypt's universities to train third- and fourth-year education students. I was assigned to Alexandria University and its branch in the nearby city of Damanhour. There were 15 lecturers in the program, overseen by an academic director named Lynn McNamara. John Bagnole had held this position the previous year but had recently moved on to a tenured position at Ohio University. For me, this opportunity marked a significant shift from being an English teacher to becoming a teacher trainer. This was a higher-level role in the field of teaching English as a second or foreign language.

At the end of the week-long orientation, our group boarded a tour bus and headed to the Sinai for three days of rest and relaxation before the work at each university began the following week. The trip was unforgettable, as we stayed at three different places. At the first one, we hiked to the top of Mount Sinai, the site where Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments. The overnight hike took us six hours of trudging up a winding pathway to reach the summit in time for sunrise. With Miam, Patti and Joey ahead of me, I carried two-year-old Danny on my shoulders the entire way up that mountain, with fellow hikers passing us along the way. When we finally reached the top just before sunrise, I was met with a loud ovation for my efforts, as many had doubted, I'd make it to the summit. While I was proud of my accomplishment, I must admit that I had sore shoulders for days afterward! The walk down the mountain was considerably easier but suffice to say when we reached our room, I collapsed from exhaustion and slept

soundly for hours.

After the post-orientation trip, we travelled to a hotel in Alexandria where we would stay while searching for an apartment. It didn't take long before we found a spacious, furnished apartment on the top floor of a 12-story building, offering a stunning view of the Mediterranean Sea. Patti was thrilled to discover that one of the bedrooms was painted pink, which she eagerly claimed as her own. The apartment seemed perfect—at least at first. Below us, a beautiful beach was crowded with summer visitors and where I took the kids to enjoy the beach, reminding me of our time in Hawaii.

Three months later, however, we began to experience issues with our apartment and location. Unknown to us when we moved in, this part of Alexandria consisted of apartments owned by wealthy Egyptians from Cairo, who would visit during the summer months. By December, the lively streets we had enjoyed in August were largely deserted. To make matters worse, the winds and rain from the Mediterranean turned our beautiful view into a chilly nightmare. After one particularly harsh winter storm, wind swept rain seeped through the windows and soaked the ceramic floors, causing me to slip and fall flat on my backside when I walked out to make coffee one morning.

Frequent power outages forced us to trudge up the stairs of our 12-story building, and for Christmas 1987, we had to stay in a hotel because the apartment was so cold due to one of those frequent power outages. I learned an important first lesson about Egypt: what you initially see may not reflect the reality beneath the surface. After completing the first year of my two-year Fulbright contract and the end of the one-year lease for the apartment, we found new place to live located in the center of Alexandria, conveniently close to a British school where we enrolled Patti and Joey for 4th and 2nd grades, respectively. Incidentally, it was not on the beach, having learned our lesson about the living too close to the waterfront.

Another reality check during our first year was the struggling economy, which was in bad shape in 1987. While we could find fresh fruit and vegetables grown locally and sold at outdoor markets, there were no large supermarkets like the ones we had in Jeddah. The small grocery shops in our neighborhood offered little, if any, packaged goods. Strangely, the only canned items available were tuna from Thailand. Egypt simply couldn't afford to import foodstuffs the way the Saudis could. Rice, for instance, was rationed, and we had to pay under the table just to secure enough for Miam to cook.

Not everything on the home front was bleak, though. During our first year there, Patti and Joey were enrolled in an American school called Shultz, which had American teachers and a U.S. curriculum. They both seemed to like it, adapting well to a new school and making friends. Miam was her usual busy self, doing everything she could to keep the house running smoothly. Living in Alexandria itself was a delight. The locals were incredibly friendly and welcoming, often going out of their way to make us feel at home. It was common to strike up conversations with shopkeepers and neighbors, who were eager to share stories about their city and culture. Despite the calls to prayer echoing from nearby mosques, the atmosphere was lively, with shops staying open and a sense of tolerance that pleasantly defied my expectations.

One thing I noticed early on, and something that stood out in stark contrast to Saudi Arabia, was how easy it was to strike up a conversation with an Egyptian. It was not uncommon to start chatting with someone about almost anything—from the weather to the latest news—and before long, you'd find yourself learning something new about life in Egypt. It felt natural, and I quickly came to appreciate how open and welcoming people were. Egypt, with its rich history and deep cultural roots, was a fascinating place, brimming with stories and experiences that seemed to unfold at every corner. From the bustling markets to the quiet corners of cafes, I found the city filled with an energy that beckoned exploration.

However, there was another aspect of life in Egypt that I learned early on, and it was both curious and challenging. Egyptians, it seemed, rarely told me they didn't know something when I asked them. This became especially clear whenever I'd ask for directions. More often than not, I would be given an answer that sounded plausible, but when I set out to follow the instructions, I'd find myself going in the wrong direction or encountering landmarks that didn't match. After two or three of these misadventures, I quickly adapted. I learned to ask at least three different people the same question, and then I would base my decision on the consensus of their answers. This became a useful lesson in navigating the streets and understanding the cultural nuance that sometimes, politeness and a desire to help could lead to misleading information.

Historically, Alex—what the locals affectionately called it—and Cairo had a friendly rivalry, each city vying for the title of the best destination in Egypt. Alexandria, with its stunning Mediterranean coastline and rich history, offered a unique charm that set it apart. The city's architecture bore the marks of its storied past, with buildings showcasing both Italian and French influences. Elegant balconies adorned with intricate wrought iron, wide boulevards lined with palm trees, and cafes that showed a European flair all contributed to its distinctive character.

This vibrant blend of Arab and European elements created a captivating cultural backdrop to explore. The local cuisine was a delightful mix of traditional Egyptian dishes and Mediterranean flavors, with street vendors offering everything from fresh falafel to pastries filled with sweet cheese. Navigating the city was a breeze, as it essentially snaked along the coast, making it easy to discover new sights and experiences. Plus, when the weather wasn't chilly, the beach was close, providing a serene escape. Overall, the openness and easygoing nature of the people were a refreshing change from life in Jeddah, making our time in Alexandria truly enjoyable.

My job as a lecturer at the university was incredibly invigorating. I taught large mixed-gender classes of around 50 students, though, in this Muslim-

dominated society, the males sat separately from the females. One of the most rewarding aspects of my role was engaging with classes full of eager learners who were willing to work hard, quite a contrast from my reluctant, lazy Saudi students. They listened attentively as I discussed teaching methods and modeled techniques in class, with them stepping into the role of language students. It was gratifying to feel that I was making a tangible impact on their education and future careers.

Beyond the university setting, I also had the opportunity to engage in teaching practice at local schools, which proved to be an incredibly rewarding part of my experience. I worked closely with a group of five female students who were actively student-teaching their own classes. My role was to monitor their progress, offer guidance, and provide constructive feedback. This practical experience was invaluable, as it allowed them to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The skills they had learned in my teaching methods classes at the university were put to the test in real classroom environments, where they had to manage students, adapt their lessons on the fly, and navigate the complexities of teaching. Watching them grow and develop in this setting was not only fulfilling but also gave me a deeper understanding of the challenges and rewards of teaching in a dynamic, real-world context.

One memorable instance highlighted the contrast between my modern teaching approach and the more traditional methods of existing teachers. During one lesson, one of my student teachers wrote a word on the board incorrectly. A local school supervisor, who had stopped by for a visit, became visibly upset by the mistake but chose not to intervene, respecting my role as the mentor. After the lesson, I gathered with the student teacher to discuss her performance, where I pointed out the spelling error so she could correct it in future classes. The supervisor then expressed his belief that my decision not to reprimand her on the spot would lead the students to spell that word incorrectly forever. I respectfully disagreed, but this exchange served as an important reality check for me—one that would be particularly relevant the following year when I would be providing training courses for school

supervisors.

In addition to my classes in Alexandria, I traveled to a branch site in neighboring city called Damanhour, about an hour's drive away. There, I found the students displayed an even greater enthusiasm for learning. In this remote location, they rarely met foreigners, let alone someone showing them modern ways to teach. I genuinely enjoyed these trips; the satisfaction of helping these future educators grow and develop their skills was immensely fulfilling. Each class deepened my appreciation for the commitment of these Egyptian students. Honestly, I was on cloud nine professionally during that first year at Alexandria University.

Once a month, I traveled by train for a two-hour trip to the Fulbright office in Cairo, where the project was headquartered. These two-day meetings gave a valuable opportunity to all of us ETTP lecturers to discuss various aspects of our assignments, address administrative matters, and have one-on-one consultations with Lynn McNamara, the director. These meetings were not only productive but also invigorating, as they fostered a sense of community among us.

On these occasions, I also had the chance to meet with Dr. Radwan, an imposing figure both in stature and presence. Standing nearly six feet tall, she commanded a level of formal deference that transcended her physical appearance and extended into her interpersonal interactions. Despite my first apprehension around her, she always took the time to ask about my family, which added a personal touch to our exchanges. Her strong demeanor often left me feeling a bit cowed, but I was always deferential when interacting with her.

I mention this now as a prelude to an eventful fork-in-the-road experience that took place at the end of my second year when I was unexpectedly summoned to Cairo for a meeting with her. Before that experience, let me explain what occurred during my second year when my work situation in Alexandria underwent a significant change. The USAID-funded project

was set to expand beyond preservice training at universities. Two high-level consultants had joined the project during my first year, and their mandate was to design an in-service component for the project. In other words, the project would expand beyond the university sector into the Ministry of Education's (MoE) schools.

By the end of my first year, the Cairo-based consultants had recommended hiring two training advisors to work at the Ministry of Education's (MoE) In-Service Training Centers—one in Cairo and the other in Alexandria. Given that I was already based in Alexandria and had gained relevant experience working with student teachers at local schools, the ETTP Director, Lynne McNamara, offered me the advisor position at the Alexandria center. From a management standpoint, it made more sense to find a replacement for my job at the university, where the structure was already set up, than to fill the more specialized training advisor position at the center. I accepted the offer, excited for the new challenge, and made the transition to the regional center. A replacement was soon hired to take over my responsibilities at the university, allowing me to fully embrace this new opportunity.

Interestingly, the Cairo training advisor position was never filled, which would prove significant down the line. At that point, there were two consultants and me working in the in-service training sector, laying the groundwork for an expanded project. I was given the freedom to work independently, which suited me well as I had a wealth of ideas for training courses and seminars. At the in-service training center to which I was assigned, I quickly formed a strong working relationship with the center director and her staff. This collaborative dynamic made it considerably easier to design and implement non-traditional training methods, paving the way for innovative approaches to address the training needs of teachers in Alexandria. While nothing I was doing was on a large scale, it was giving me direct experience with the issues and constraints of training English teachers who were already in Egyptian government schools.

I quickly set to work designing training courses and seminars for English language supervisors at Alexandria's Ministry of Education schools. This task turned out to be a significant learning experience for me. I already understood that English language instruction in these schools was predominantly top-down and teacher-fronted, with a heavy emphasis on rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules. Unfortunately, this approach left little room for actual language skill development. Knowing verb tenses, for example, did not translate to language fluency since there was little or no practice or opportunities to use English in realistic contexts. My challenge was to persuade these supervisors to rethink these outdated methods when they were mentoring and training teachers at local schools. It was a daunting task, but one I tackled with enthusiasm and determination, eager to make a meaningful impact in this new role.

One noteworthy aspect of the job was that I had essentially become a trainer of trainers. The school supervisors I was working with were directly responsible for teacher training within their schools, meaning my efforts would ripple through to the teachers themselves. In this role, I had moved up another rung on the career ladder, transitioning from a direct instructor to someone shaping the way other educators were trained and mentored. Later, when I was engaged in designing a large-scale project, I would incorporate what I called a cascade approach to the training, something that I learned during this first year as a trainer of trainers at the Alexandria center.

At the start of the second year, a new colleague, Jim Grabowski, was assigned to a position in Alexandria, though not at the university where I worked. He joined an associated language center focused on teaching English for specific purposes. Jim and I quickly bonded over several interests, particularly our shared love of basketball. Having played in college, he was eager to find a place to play in Alexandria, which he eventually did. The US Consulate had a housing facility for marines that had a concrete outdoor court, and I soon found myself running up and down that hard surface, playing pickup games with Jim against younger, super-fit players. We held our own!

Our families also got along really well. Jim's wife, Suad, was from Yemen, and they had a young daughter named Nejla. We often gathered at our new home, which we moved into after that challenging first year by the sea. The house was spacious and pleasant, offering plenty of room for the kids to play and for us to unwind. However, there was one drawback: the owner of the house lived on the second floor and often complained when our boys, Joey and Danny, played too enthusiastically in his yard and disturbed his meticulously maintained grass and shrubbery. Despite his grumbling, we truly enjoyed living in Alexandria. The city had a special charm, and being able to experience life as expatriates in such a vibrant and historic place made it even more worthwhile.

Fortunately, the house was just a short walk from the British school that Patti and Joey attended for their second year in Alexandria. The school was unique, featuring only two classrooms. The British principal combined kindergarten and first grade in one room, while grades two through four shared the other. He employed a differentiated approach centered on project work. For instance, one project involved students building a compost heap outside and measuring its temperature over time, incorporating math and science. Afterwards, they would read about compost heaps and write about their experiences in building and keeping one, integrating language skills. This method proved effective, as the small class sizes allowed for individual guidance and support. It was also amusing when the principal occasionally complained about Patti and Joey's tendency to use words like "bunch" and "stuff" in their writing—terms that are considered taboo in British schools.

During a school break for the kids in April 1989, we took a one-week trip to Cyprus. From the very beginning, the trip took an unexpected turn. After arriving at Larnaca, a city on the southeast coast of Cyprus and the capital, we booked a car and driver to take us across the island to our hotel in a beach city called Paphos. Along the way, the driver suggested we take a short detour to a nearby village nestled in the hills. The village was charming, with narrow cobblestone streets lined by adobe buildings that seemed to carry the weight of history. As we made our way through the village, the driver

stopped at one of these buildings and mentioned that we could meet locals inside. Curious, the five of us stepped into what appeared to be a home, only to discover that in the back of the house there was a small workshop where they produced a variety of handmade tapestries. The rich textures and intricate designs were unlike anything we'd seen before. It felt like we had stumbled upon a hidden gem of local craftsmanship.

We were offered a glass of locally made wine, and it was delicious—smooth and flavorful, with a richness that spoke to the craftsmanship behind it. As we sipped the wine, I realized I was getting buzzed, and I could see that Miam was likely feeling the same. The inviting atmosphere of the small shop, with its colorful tapestries and friendly locals and the wine taking effect left us captivated by the embroidered products on display. We felt like we were in someone's home. We ended up buying a few items, feeling pleased with our choices, after a bit of haggling over the price. We didn't have cash, but interestingly they happily took a credit card, which in hindsight should have tipped me off. At any rate, we left the shop and continued to our hotel, although I couldn't shake the feeling that we might have overpaid. It now seems likely that the driver was in on the scheme, possibly receiving a commission for bringing unsuspecting tourists to this quaint shop.

The trip was incredibly enjoyable, with relaxing stays at hotels in three different cities: Paphos, Limassol, and Larnaca. Each location offered a wealth of places to explore, and we eagerly immersed ourselves in Cyprus' rich history and vibrant culture. One of the highlights was touring an ancient castle, where we navigated a narrow, spiral staircase. As we made our way down, Patti, wearing a long dress, tripped and tumbled down two or three steps before managing to catch herself. To this day, we still joke about her clumsiness, especially when we reminisce about that stumble on castle staircase!

The flight back to Alexandria was, like the flight there, a brief 30-minute journey. But the experience of immersing ourselves in a place where Greek culture was so deeply intertwined with the environment made the trip truly

memorable. It was well worth every penny—even the overpriced tablecloth we couldn't resist buying as a souvenir.

Towards the end of my second year, like my colleagues, I had heard that USAID was planning to expand the project, and I was expecting a contract extension. So, when I received word that the Executive Director wanted me to come to Cairo for an urgent meeting, I was taken aback. The timing was unsettling, especially since my boss, Lynne McNamara, had not contacted me. A request from the head of Fulbright felt ominous, and I couldn't shake the feeling that something significant was about to happen. The uncertainty left me anxious, unsure of what to expect, and with a growing sense of apprehension that maybe I was out of a job.

I took the next train to Cairo and went straight to the Fulbright office in the Garden City district. After exchanging pleasantries, Dr. Radwan delivered surprising news: the two consultants who had been hired to design the large-scale in-service training project had been fired. My first thought was: Why is she telling me this? But before I could process it, she dropped another bombshell—she informed me that the program's director, Lynne McNamara, would not be having her contract renewed. At that moment, I felt the weight of the situation begin to settle in. Then, with a tone that left little room for ambiguity, she told me that she wanted me to step in and take over for those two consultants.

I was stunned as she told me I would work with the USAID staff in the education office to design a new, large-scale teacher training project. The responsibility was overwhelming, and I could hardly process what she was asking me to do. I was initially speechless. This was a huge, national-level initiative, and I had no experience to take on such a monumental task. I weakly protested, explaining that I had never done anything like this before, but she brushed my concerns aside, insisting that I start preparing for my family's relocation to Cairo as soon as possible.

Since this was the end of my two-year contract, I was eligible for annual leave, which included airfare back to my home-of-record—Minneapolis. So, in July, we flew back to spend time with family. However, upon returning, we found ourselves in a familiar situation—packing and moving for the third time in three years! After searching, we finally found a lovely house in Maadi, an expat-friendly neighborhood in Cairo. This area was home to Cairo American College, a K-12 international school known for its excellent academic programs, diverse student body, and strong emphasis on extracurricular activities. It was the obvious choice for expatriate families like ours. Patti was set to start 5th grade there and would eventually graduate from the school eight years later, while Joey began in 3rd grade. With Danny just a year away from kindergarten, I knew that this move was crucial for their education. Alexandria didn't offer a quality Western education beyond 6th grade, meaning we would have had to relocate again if we stayed. So, from a family perspective, moving to Cairo felt like the perfect decision—it provided stability and a solid educational foundation for the kids.

Cairo American College offered a vibrant and enriching learning environment, with advanced placement courses complemented by a wide array of sports, arts, and extracurricular clubs. What made the move even more appealing was that my new job would continue to cover the tuition costs—\$10,000 per child per year—a significant financial relief. I was excited about the opportunities the school provided, from its committed and talented teachers to its strong commitment to fostering a global perspective among its students. It felt like the perfect fit for our family, both academically and financially.

As we settled into our new home, I quickly realized that the family-friendly aspect of this job was one of its greatest benefits. In recognition of my new role, I received a generous \$15,000 raise and the title of Senior Consultant—a significant boost to both my career and confidence. However, despite these positives, I was still apprehensive about the professional challenge that lay ahead. Taking on this new assignment felt like a daunting prospect, but one I accepted with a mix of cautious optimism and enthusiasm.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to collaborate closely with Peter Kresky, the education officer at the USAID office, who brought a wealth of experience from his background in the Peace Corps as a teacher of English as a second language (ESL). This collaboration proved invaluable as I set about designing the new project. While I was well-versed in contemporary approaches to program design, particularly in improving teachers' English and modern ESL pedagogy, Peter's guidance and input lent considerable credibility to my efforts. His informed perspective, combined with my firsthand knowledge of the local school system from my time at the In-service training center the previous year, was instrumental in grounding my ideas and ensuring they aligned with the realities on the ground.

After eight months of preparations, which included conducting a needs assessment and carefully crafting a program design, I developed a comprehensive plan to deliver training courses to 10,000 English teachers across the country. The final step in the process was to present this plan to a high-level steering committee, which included the Minister of Education, the head of the USAID education office, my boss at the Fulbright Commission, Dr. Radwan, and five other high-ranking ministry officials.

However, the evening before the meeting, Dr. Radwan unexpectedly called and instructed me not to attend, offering no explanation. This left me confused and uneasy, but it wasn't until later that I learned her decision was part of some high-level political maneuvering—something she was very skilled at. I confided in Peter about the situation, and after hearing my concerns, he insisted that I attend the meeting regardless of Dr. Radwan's directive. Caught in a dilemma and unsure of what to do, I found myself at a crossroads. Ultimately, I chose to defy my boss and present my plan, trusting in the value of my work and the importance of standing up for it.

When I arrived at the ministry, I took a seat outside the committee room, trying to calm my nerves. Moments later, Dr. Radwan stepped off the elevator of the imposing ten-story ministry building. As soon as she saw me, she shot me a glare—an intense look that conveyed I had crossed a line. Her

expression was a mixture of disbelief and anger, as if she couldn't fathom why I would ignore her directive. My heart raced. I knew I had taken a significant risk, but I also believed in the importance of my work and its potential to make a meaningful impact on teachers across the country.

I took a few deep breaths as I waited, reminding myself of the countless hours I had spent preparing the plan and the support I had received from Peter. Shortly after, I was ushered into the room. As I walked in, I felt a mixture of nervousness and determination. The committee members, including the Minister of Education and the head of the USAID education office, were all looking at me expectantly.

I distributed the documents and began my presentation, outlining the proposed training courses, the benefits for teachers, and the potential positive changes we could expect in the education system. As I spoke, I noticed Dr. Radwan staring down at her papers, her posture signaling she was seemingly ignoring me and my presentation. Despite her disengagement, the atmosphere in the room shifted. Once I finished my pitch, the committee members came to life, asking questions and discussing the feasibility of the proposal.

In the end, the Minister voiced strong support for the program and gave it his official approval. To me, this was the moment of validation—it confirmed that attending the meeting had been the right decision. Despite the initial tension, I felt a deep sense of accomplishment. I had stood my ground, trusting in the value of my work—and it seemed to have paid off. But as I left the meeting, I couldn't help but wonder: *Had it truly paid off?*

The next day, as I arrived at the entrance of the building where my office was located, the elevator doors opened right in front of me, and out stepped Dr. Radwan. Without a word, she took two deliberate steps toward me, her finger thrusting ominously close to my nose, and declared, "You and I have a problem!" Then, as abruptly as she appeared, she spun on her heel and stormed off toward her office. I stood there, speechless and stunned, unsure

of what had just happened.

Once I reached my office, it didn't take long for me to realize that I was being "dry-desked"—a term used to describe the awkward situation when your tenure in a job is effectively over, but no official termination has been issued yet. For the next few days, I found myself sitting at an empty desk, idly tapping my fingers, with some of my office colleagues keeping their distance. The tension in the air was palpable. The one person who continued to offer support was my friend Jim Grabowski. He understood the precariousness of my situation and the uncertainty I was facing but remained loyal and offered a steady hand during this uneasy time.

However, everything changed for the better once the sub-project I had designed secured donor funding. It became clear that I couldn't be sidelined, since I had positioned myself as the head of the upcoming program and still had the backing of USAID. Over time, Dr. Radwan softened, and our professional relationship improved—especially after my program expanded even further about a year later. In fact, she would later appoint me co-director, a surprising turn of events that showed I was back in her good graces. But for a few days after the meeting, I honestly believed my career there was finished.

With funding secured for a large expansion of the project into the in-service sector of Egypt's educational system, the management and administrative teams moved to a new office—aptly named the "project office." Situated on the top floor of a 30-story building, the space had been converted from a large apartment into a series of offices. Due to space limitations, I opted for a spacious balcony as my office. This decision required enclosing three open sides with large glass panels, which not only offered an incredible view of Tahrir Square in the heart of Cairo but also created a bright and open atmosphere. My computer station was set up against the remaining wall, and there was ample room for meetings with team members and visitors.

To support me in this new role, an Egyptian administrative officer named Maha was hired. She was exceptionally bright and quickly became indispensable, skillfully facilitating the day-to-day operations of the office and helping to navigate the complexities of our expanding project.

Not long after we settled into the project office, an unexpected event occurred. One morning, an earthquake struck the region, causing our building to sway. At first, I thought a nearby construction crane had crashed into the side of the structure. As I sat at my computer, I turned to look out the windowed front of the balcony and was startled to see people rushing out of the building below us. The tremors were so strong that the building bent visibly, allowing me to momentarily see the ground directly below before it continued to sway back and forth. In that moment, I realized we were in a serious and dangerous situation.

Once the rest of the office realized it was an earthquake, panic quickly set in. We scrambled to descend the 30 flights of stairs, pushing and shoving our way down in a frantic rush. I distinctly remember stepping over a pile of bodies in the chaos. Later, I learned that this was the worst thing we could have done. Had the building collapsed, we would have been caught in the middle, most likely crushed by falling slabs of concrete. The safer option would have been to stay inside the office and position ourselves under door frames, which are typically reinforced and offer better protection. Bathrooms, too, are a safer bet, as they often lie in the stronger parts of a building's structure.

Thankfully, our building held up and didn't collapse, unlike others in the city that weren't as well constructed. Reflecting on this experience in comparison to the hurricane I faced in Hawaii, I concluded that an earthquake is far worse. With an earthquake, there's no time to prepare. When it strikes, all you can do is hope you're in a secure part of the building and pray it holds up.

By the end of my third year with the Fulbright Commission, and with another contract extension secured, my family and I flew back to Minnesota during the summer of 1990, something we would be able to do every year since I was then getting one-year renewals that included a travel benefit. Because of a convenient connection to Minneapolis, we flew KLM, which required a layover in Amsterdam—a city famous for its lenient cannabis laws and the abundance of coffeehouses. We spent a couple of days exploring the city, and I took the opportunity to indulge in the local offerings.

One afternoon during that stopover, we went to a pizzeria for a typical local meal. When the time came to pay, I used my credit card without giving it a thought. Later, when I received my credit card statement back home, I was stunned to find that the charge for that meal was \$1,257. I hadn't scrutinized the receipt closely at the time since it was in local currency, but I had signed it, and the amount was clearly listed there. I disputed the charge with my credit card company, and thankfully, it was eventually cleared.

A year later, during another layover in Amsterdam, I returned to the same pizzeria, hoping to confront the owner and file a formal complaint. To my surprise, the restaurant was under new management. The new owners confessed that the previous ones had been scamming customers—me included. The lesson I learned from this? Always double-check your credit card receipts!

Another unforgettable incident took place at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport during a layover on our return trip to Cairo. As we disembarked from the plane and made our way into the terminal, I must have shifted the bags I was carrying, causing my passport to slip out without me noticing. Since we had a short, two-hour layover, I didn't think to check the contents of my bag right away. However, just before we headed to our connecting flight, I decided to open the bag to check our passports—and to my horror, I realized mine was missing.

In a panic, we rushed to the police station in the terminal, but they could do nothing since my passport hadn't been turned in. At that point, it seemed as though Miam and the kids would have to continue on without me while I tried to figure out how to obtain a new passport and visa for Egypt. Just as I began to feel completely overwhelmed, I heard someone calling out loudly, "Mr. Hoiring, Mr. Hoiring," with an exaggerated emphasis on the "H." Initially, I didn't pay much attention—my name is typically pronounced "Heuring" in American English. But then I noticed a woman in a KLM uniform waving at me, holding my passport. She had been pronouncing my name the way my ancestors would have said it in German.

It turned out that my passport had been found just outside the plane where I had fumbled with my bag. The woman was taking it to the airport police, and as luck would have it, she spotted me walking through the terminal. She recognized me from the photo in my passport and started calling my name. I was overjoyed, relieved, and profoundly grateful. The lesson here? Always keep your passport on you. Fortunately, the rest of the trip went smoothly, and I was just glad to be back in Egypt with my family.

8.2 Becoming an Effective Manager

Having previously worked at the regional in-service training center in Alexandria, I was already familiar with the Ministry of Education's in-service training system. This made it a natural step to collaborate closely with the Cairo-based department overseeing six regional centers across the country. This department, the General Department of In-Service Training, had the authority to implement training courses nationwide. I developed a strong working relationship with its director, Dr. Ahmed Gaafar. His involvement was essential not only for executing the training programs but also for managing the distribution of project funding to the regional centers. By that point in my career, and with the experience I had gained working in the Middle East, I had become quite adept at navigating the nuances of working with Arabs, understanding the cultural dynamics and expectations

that shaped these interactions.

One of my first priorities, besides working with the Ministry's department, was to hire training advisors who would be stationed at the six regional centers. These advisors would oversee and manage the training courses we were planning to fund and offer through the project. To recruit them, I attended professional conferences with job fairs where recruiters could interview candidates. This became a regular task for me, and I would continue recruiting at these conferences for many years. Over time, I became a well-known recruiter, eventually hiring hundreds of individuals for teaching positions in subsequent projects.

In the first year of the project, I hired two advisors: Roxanne Sylvester and Helena Simas. By the second year, the team expanded to five additional hires: Jon Phillips, Randall Martin, Lydia Kunliholm, Wendy LeBlanc, and Dale McCade, bringing the total to six, after Helena transferred to the pre-service sector. Each of these advisors was stationed at one of the regional centers. I held regular monthly meetings with the team at our project office, coordinating field training through the Ministry of Education's centralized department in Cairo. The training sessions were delivered by Egyptian supervisors, with my advisors closely monitoring the quality and effectiveness of the sessions, providing additional trainer training as necessary.

As for me, I was essentially learning to manage on-the-job, navigating my share of mistakes along the way. Nonetheless, I provided the leadership and management necessary to implement training across the country. The results were impressive, with both the donor agency and the host government acknowledging our success.

Over the five years I managed the in-service training part of the project, I hired a total of ten advisors. I also had to terminate the contracts of two of them due to performance issues. This five-year experience taught me not only how to recruit personnel but also how to manage effectively—and, when necessary, make the tough decision to end a contract. I quickly learned

the importance of developing a thick skin as a manager. Being everyone's friend can conflict with the responsibility of making difficult choices. This first experience supervising a team of advisors laid the foundation for my future management roles, which would involve significantly larger teams.

Fortunately, my contract included a professional development benefit, which I took advantage of by enrolling in management seminars and short-term training courses. At one of these seminars in Tampa, Florida, I found myself in a group of ten CEOs from private companies, who were intrigued by my non-profit, overseas background. While I gained much from these training sessions, it was the day-to-day interactions with team members and host country officials that helped me develop effective management skills.

My experience working in the Arab world proved to be an invaluable asset, especially when it came to navigating both interpersonal and intercultural dynamics. Understanding the complexities of Arab culture and communication styles helped me develop a deep sense of cultural sensitivity. This allowed me to approach every situation with empathy and respect. As I refined these skills, I realized that effective leadership wasn't just about applying management theories; it was about knowing the people I worked with and respecting the cultural landscape we shared. This understanding was crucial to my success in various management roles throughout my career.

At each training site, when cohorts of Egyptian teachers completed their training, we held graduation ceremonies where we distributed certificates and celebrated with a large gala dinner. During these events, I would often find myself seated at the center of the VIP table. It always felt a little strange to me, as I saw myself as just an average guy and found it odd to be in the company of such dignitaries. But there was no denying the reason for my place at that table—the project was progressing well. Egyptian officials were pleased with the training, and USAID acknowledged that the funding was being used effectively. Over the course of five years, we trained over ten thousand teachers, significantly improving their English language and teaching skills, which was a major accomplishment for the project and for

me personally.

Convinced of the program's value, USAID asked me to expand into a new sector of the Ministry: model schools, which were government-affiliated but charged tuition. In these private schools, we placed 20 American teachers specializing in math, science, and English to directly mentor their Egyptian counterparts. Additionally, we hired a mid-level manager to oversee and supervise the training in these schools. This expansion significantly broadened my management responsibilities, as I not only continued to supervise my team of advisors but also took on oversight of the mid-level manager and her team responsible for the model schools training. This experience greatly enhanced my management skills at this point in my career development.

In addition to managing the in-service sector of the project, I received a major promotion when I became co-director of the entire project, which had been renamed the Integrated English Language Program (IELP) following the 1990 expansion. I shared this new role with Jim Grabowski, who took on co-director responsibilities for the pre-service sector, overseeing two other sections. Having worked alongside Jim on the university side of the project and kept a close working relationship in Alexandria, it was a seamless transition to manage our respective parts of the IELP together. We found our partnership to be highly productive and effective, complementing each other's managerial styles. Given our personal rapport, there was always a lighthearted atmosphere between us, filled with banter and teasing.

To summarize my ten years with the USAID-funded project in Egypt, I advanced through a series of roles. I started as a lecturer and teacher trainer for a year, followed by another year as a trainer of trainers. After that, I transitioned to a consultant role, where I designed the in-service training sector of the project. The remaining seven years were spent in two key management positions: first as the head of the in-service sector, and later as co-director of the entire project.

Before joining the project, I spent the first 12 years of my career as a classroom teacher, until May 1989, when my career took an unexpected turn. Over the next 35 years, I moved into educational management, all thanks to an unexpected opportunity when Dr. Radwan called me to Cairo for that pivotal meeting, where she tasked me with designing the new project. It's fascinating how life works—what initially seemed like random timing and being in the right place at the right moment ended up being a transformative shift in my career. Karma, it seems, has a way of opening doors we never even saw coming.

During the eight years I spent in Cairo, my growth as a manager paralleled my family's journey in many ways. Both my professional and personal lives were evolving and improving, leading to significant changes. As I navigated the complexities of my role, I saw the positive transformation at home. Patti thrived during this time both in her school life and within our family environment. Our home became a place of support after years of frequent relocations—seven moves in ten years—which gave Patti the freedom to explore her interests and develop her skills.

She excelled academically, especially in language arts. In 7th grade, a Johns Hopkins assessment revealed that she was writing at a 12th-grade level, a clear testament to her talent and dedication. Despite my demanding work schedule, I made it a point to be home in the evenings to support her with homework and any challenges she faced.

When Patti entered her junior year of high school, she took on the rigorous International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Although the increased academic challenge initially lowered her GPA, the experience was invaluable. It sharpened her critical thinking skills, instilled a strong work ethic, and was pivotal in her acceptance to Macalester College, one of the top liberal arts schools in Minneapolis.

Alongside her academic growth, Patti enjoyed a balanced and relatively unsupervised social life, a trust we had in her that she consistently earned.

Toward the end of her senior year, she was introduced to Cairo's vibrant nightlife scene, giving us access to one of the city's top nightclubs. These experiences enriched her time in Cairo, allowing her to navigate diverse cultural landscapes while building lasting memories. Reflecting on those years, I see how our family dynamics and my professional growth intertwined, creating an environment where Patti could flourish both academically and personally.

It wasn't just Patti who thrived in Cairo—Joey also flourished in this new setting. He became an avid skateboarder, fully embracing the sport and its vibrant culture. His passion for skating not only kept him active but also helped him build a solid circle of friends. Through his connections with other young enthusiasts in the area, Joey found both a creative outlet and meaningful, supportive friendships.

However, there was one concerning incident when Joey took a fall while skating and ended up with a two-inch gash in his leg. When he got home, the wound was bleeding profusely, and my heart skipped a beat. I quickly blotted the blood and rushed him to a nearby hospital. Thankfully, the doctor was able to stitch him up and administer a tetanus shot. It was one of those trials and tribulations that come with having children—those moments when your heart races, especially when you realize you must rely on a health system in a foreign country that may not be up to par. Fortunately, all turned out okay.

I had another related incident at that same hospital that was a bit scary. For some reason, I don't recall now, I needed to have my blood drawn, which one would think would be straightforward. Once completed, I was walking out of the hospital when I noticed that the spot where the injection had been made was starting to rise. Soon, a growing bubble of blood began protruding from my arm. Instead of returning to the hospital for help, I simply pushed the bubble downward and held it tightly until it didn't rise anymore. I later learned that this was extremely careless and could have been fatal if an air bubble had been forced back into the vein. Not too smart on

my part, but fortunately, it worked out.

While Joey wasn't as academically focused as Patti, he still performed well in his studies. He consistently grasped the material and showed a strong commitment to his work. I don't recall ever having to help him with his homework. Quite honestly, both Patti and Joey were easy kids to raise. Perhaps living in a foreign country enhanced their awareness of how to behave. I'm sure the two-year age difference between them helped, as they were always there for each other.

Joey completed 10th grade at Cairo American College (CAC) before we moved to the UAE. During that time, he was able to balance his schoolwork with his love for skateboarding and hanging out with friends. Some of those friendships are still strong to this day, a testament to the special school experience he had.

One of the things I often chuckled at was the dynamic between Patti and Joey in the mornings as they made their way to school. Patti, ever the big sister, insisted that Joey stay behind her—keeping just enough distance to make it seem like he wasn't tagging along. Joey, ever the follower, didn't mind at all. It was a perfect example of their sibling relationship—playful, supportive, with occasional teasing and bickering that only strengthened their bond.

Of course, Joey wasn't without his rebellious moments. There was a time when he wanted to spend time with a friend Patti disapproved of, believing him to be a bad influence. When I told Joey he couldn't hang out with him, he decided to take matters into his own hands in a rather dramatic way. Climbing out of a second-floor window, he made his way onto the roof to escape my watchful eye. It was bold—and when I caught him up there, I was a mix of exasperated and concerned. I quickly ordered him back inside, which didn't sit well with him at the time.

These moments of rebellion were part of the typical challenges of adolescence. They captured the essence of sibling dynamics and the constant balancing act of parenting. Joey's journey was a unique blend of following in Patti's footsteps while carving out his own path. Those rebellious moments only highlighted his growth as he navigated the complexities of growing up.

Danny, who was four years younger than Joey, attended Cairo American College (CAC) through 6th grade. From an early age, it became clear that he might face challenges with learning. In 2nd grade, we were notified that he wasn't reading at grade level. Though he managed to progress through the grades, his difficulties became clearer as time went on. At one point, I was called into the school psychologist's office, where she discussed Danny's learning challenges with me. She explained that he struggled with test-taking and had difficulty processing what she referred to as "parts to whole." While I was concerned, I don't think I fully grasped the seriousness of the issue at the time.

Eventually, Danny faced a significant setback when he failed 6th grade. It was a tough moment for him, as he would have had to repeat the grade at CAC. But just when things seemed most difficult, my new job and our relocation to the UAE came at the perfect time. This move allowed Danny to start fresh—he could repeat 6th grade at a new school in a new country, giving him the chance to reset his academic journey. I hoped that this fresh start, coupled with a new environment, would provide him with the support and space he needed to overcome his challenges.

I highly doubt any of his new classmates in the UAE knew he was repeating the grade—Danny blended in well and made a positive impression right away. One thing I've always admired about him, despite his academic struggles, is his remarkable social nature. He was incredibly sociable, easily making friends and connecting with others. His ability to build relationships helped him navigate the school environment, even when academics didn't come as easily. His natural charm and personality made him a well-liked figure, regardless of the hurdles he faced in the classroom.

Looking back, I can say that all three kids were well-behaved and easy to parent. The most severe form of punishment for any behavioral missteps was the proverbial “corner” restriction. This happened in Cairo when the two boys were younger and had a small sibling spat; I would have them stand in opposite corners of the house for a specified period of time. Aside from that, there was never much need for reprimands during those childhood and teenage years.

Living in Maadi was also ideal for the kids. Though it wasn’t a compound per se, it functioned like a protected “enclave,” with safe streets and neighborhoods. There were plenty of local shops, and most of their classmates lived nearby, making it easy for them to hang out with friends. CAC offered after-school programs and facilities that the children took full advantage of, and they could easily get around by catching inexpensive, plentiful cabs.

We also made sure to take full advantage of the many tourist sites in the Cairo area. The National Museum near Tahrir Square was an absolute must-see, with its incredible collection of ancient relics and artifacts. There were the scenic Nile River boat rides on a traditional “Feluca” (Felucca) that gave us a unique perspective of the city. And, of course, no visit to Cairo would be complete without a trip to the Giza Pyramids and the Sphinx—a truly splendid excursion.

Back then, you could still enter one of the pyramids, which we did. We followed a single line of people down a narrow shaft that grew progressively smaller. By the time we reached the inner chamber, I was crouching, almost crawling, to make my way along the claustrophobic tunnel. The kids and Miam were with me, though we didn’t stay long inside. The air in that musty-smelling room at the center of the pyramid was scarce, and we quickly found ourselves huffing for breath. When we finally exited, it was such a relief to step back into the fresh air. Even so, it was all part of the unforgettable experience.

I've since learned that the passageway to that inner room is no longer open to visitors. Chalk that one up as an unforgettable, unrepeatable experience—one I'm glad we had while we could.

One amusing anecdote that the kids recently reminded me of was when I told them to boycott the local grocery store, Kimo. I honestly don't recall what specifically upset me about the store, but at the time, the kids found it quite amusing since Kimo was the grocery store they frequented the most, being just across the street from us. Fortunately, there were other shops, so not much was lost due to my "family boycott." These stores carried locally produced groceries, drinks, and sweets for the kids, but they didn't have much in the way of imported goods.

While Egypt was experiencing economic improvements during our time there, especially compared to when we first arrived, there was still a noticeable lack of foreign products in the stores. There were families though who had access to items that were out of reach for us—namely the kids of US Embassy personnel, whose parents could shop at the Embassy's commissary for American food products.

It was somewhat disheartening to hear our kids talk about the "commissary kids" and the American products in their lunches they brought to school. The stark differences between what those kids had and what ours were eating made our own lunches seem less appealing. I remember Patti and Joey discussing their classmates' sandwiches, snacks, and treats—things that felt like little slices of home compared to the local fare.

Every year, when we returned to the States for vacation, we would make a beeline for Cub Foods to stock up on American food products. We'd send an airfreight shipment of all the familiar items we could think of to last us as long as possible once we returned to Cairo. This became a regular practice, a chance to fill our pantry with the tastes and flavors we missed. However, no matter how much we brought back, we would inevitably run out. As the months passed, the excitement of our American stash would fade.

This experience highlighted the contrasts of our life in Cairo—the unique blend of excitement and challenge that came with living in a different culture, where the comforts of home often felt just out of reach. It also underscored the resilience and adaptability of our family, as we navigated not only the joys of living abroad but also the small struggles that came with it.

We did have one unfortunate incident while living in our ground-floor apartment in a four-story building. The building's owner, an elderly woman named Mrs. Fatma, lived on the top floor with her son and two teenage grandsons. After returning from one of our summer vacations, we were shocked to find yellow police tape surrounding our apartment. We checked with the owner's son, who informed us that our apartment had been broken into while we were away. He told us I needed to go to the local police station to complete paperwork before we could enter.

Once the paperwork was done, we were able to enter a ransacked apartment. The TV was gone, along with two-three other appliances. Interestingly, they left my desktop computer—perhaps because it was from the U.S. and required a transformer to convert from 120 to 220 volts. More frustrating, however, was the theft of my entire alcohol supply, which included ten cases of American beer and bottles of whiskey. The police were useless, so I eventually wrote it off as a bad experience.

A few years later, Patti told me about an interaction she had with one of Mrs. Fatma's grandsons, named Tarek. He had asked Patti to get him a transformer for a party. Bingo! There was no way he could have known about my transformer unless he had been the thief. By then, it didn't matter much, and I let it go—just like the time when someone from a balcony above ours apparently threw up, and the vomit landed on our own balcony. Maybe Tarek (or his brother Sherif) still too young to drink responsibly had overindulged from my stolen alcohol stash?

Then, there was the social scene in Cairo for adults. Miam and I were reveling in a vibrant social life. In Maadi, where many Westerners were married to Thais, it didn't take long for us to form a close-knit circle of friends through

these Thai connections. One of our closest friendships developed with the Rick Kennel family. His wife, Daeng, and Miam would meet during the day to prepare delicious Thai dishes. Their three daughters—Gina, Amanda, and Christa—though younger than Patti and Joey, were always a part of the weekend gatherings at our home.

I got along well with Rick, even though we were opposites. He worked as a regional salesperson for Nortel, a Canadian telecommunications distributor, and traveled often to neighboring countries. He was also Canadian, often ending his sentences with “Eh.” Our conversations were full of disagreements, usually followed by a willingness to “agree to disagree.” Then, we’d dive into some cutthroat games of cribbage and smoke some Cuban cigars he had purchased at duty free on one of his regional sales trips.

When Rick wasn’t travelling, the party routine was well established: we’d put the kids to bed and then head over to Rick’s place for drinks until midnight—just the warm-up for what would follow. After that, we’d venture out to a nightclub called the Meena House, located near the pyramids. There, we’d dance and drink until the early hours of the morning, often staying until 4 a.m. when the bar closed.

The drive back home was fast, as traffic was virtually nonexistent at that hour. Occasionally, we’d race through the “City of the Dead,” a fascinating area with narrow streets and high walls that shielded countless tombs of the deceased. We’d play a kind of hide-and-seek with our cars through the area, feeling like we had the whole place to ourselves. We’d end up at Rick’s place for a sunrise breakfast before heading home to crash for most of the morning. This routine was our weekend ritual for a couple of years.

There was one particularly memorable night when I found myself in a bar confrontation. A group of local Egyptians seemed to be mocking our group, and I confronted them, letting them know I didn’t appreciate their behavior. The bar management intervened, asking them to leave, but they later returned, ready for a fight. When they entered the bar, they charged at

our table where I stood up ready for a fist fight. Miam stepped between us as one of them reached past her and ripped my shirt in an effort to grab me. As tensions flared, the management once again escorted the aggressors out.

In a sense, I was leading two distinct lives: at work, I was the calm, steady manager, while on weekends, I transformed into a wild drinker, fully immersed in the revelry of my friends and the party scene. It's also important to note that, while Egypt is a Muslim country, it is considerably less conservative than Saudi Arabia, so public displays of this behavior was less of a problem. Alcohol was widely available, and bars were bustling with activity. Alongside the Muslim majority, there was a significant Christian minority known as the Copts, who follow an Eastern branch of Christianity. This diversity creates a vibrant social landscape where various cultural and religious traditions coexist. For me, it was fairly easy to live this dual existence.

These wild excursions occasionally led to behavior that was far from commendable. Without going into specifics, it's safe to say that when everyone is inebriated, mischief is often at play. I was no exception, and I had my share of experiences with female friends that definitely wouldn't have happened if alcohol hadn't clouded our judgment and morality. Simply put, this social scene was wild and largely unrestrained, reflecting the uninhibited atmosphere we found ourselves in. During those years in Cairo, work was rewarding, family life was stable, but the social life was, to put it succinctly, rather turbulent if not literally out of control.

In 1992, something special occurred: Mom and Dad came to visit us in Cairo, and then they flew with us to Jeddah to stay with Randy's family. Two-three years earlier, Randy had landed a teaching job with the ADFI and, like me before, was living in Rayville. He managed to secure visas for all of us, which, at that time, was no easy feat. Mom and Dad flew to Cairo and stayed with us first.

I'll never forget the ride from the airport to our place, with Dad sitting in the front seat of a large Mercedes taxi. It was after midnight, so there was little traffic. As our car approached an intersection at high speed, the driver never slowed down, much less braked for the red light, and sped right through it. This happened 2-3 times, and each time, Dad instinctively grabbed the dashboard, bracing for the driver to brake. Finally, he turned to me in the back seat and exclaimed, "What the hell are the red lights for?" I laughed and pointed out the traffic cop standing near the median. As we approached, he waved us through each time. It was just the beginning of an unusual adventure!

The following day, Mom and Dad went for a walk by themselves and came upon a small construction site where workers were mixing cement manually. Dad was intrigued by their method. At that point, a man approached Dad, claiming there was bird poop on the back of his shirt. He pulled out a handkerchief and began wiping it off. He positioned himself between Mom and Dad and then lifted Dad's wallet before handing him the handkerchief and jumping into a car that pulled up.

When Dad got home, he went upstairs to change, when I heard him exclaim, "That son of a bitch! He got my wallet!" What made it worse was that I had told Dad not to bother getting traveler's checks and to bring new \$100 bills instead. He never removed them from his wallet, and the thief got away with \$800. Talk about bad luck. We went to the police station to report the incident to the police, and when they handed me a blank piece of paper and told me to write up what had happened, Dad was unimpressed, saying, "What? They don't have forms?"

At any rate, Mom and Dad enjoyed their stay with us, and after a week we all took a short flight to Jeddah. There was a long line for immigration that moved slowly, and just when we were next, I heard the call to prayer and watched as the immigration guards left their counters to pray. "Welcome back to the Kingdom", I thought. We were back in a conservative Muslim country where everything closes down for prayer call, even immigration.

The visit with Randy and his family was a blast. They lived in a townhouse similar to the one we had when we were there. Rayville hadn't changed much, but it was enjoyable to see their daughter, Lo Ann, competing in swim meets, and their son, little Ben, starting to play T-ball, with Randy as both his dad and coach. I was flooded with memories, and it was great to catch up with some old friends still living in the compound. After a week, we said our goodbyes to Mom, Dad, and Randy's family, then headed back to the more liberal lifestyle of Maadi.

As we entered the last year of the training project in 1996, we received word from USAID that there would be a follow-on project. However, we learned that the funding mechanism would not be an outright grant or cooperative agreement given directly to Fulbright, as had been the case over the previous ten years for the ETTP and IELP programs. Instead, it would need to be competitively bid and awarded as a contract, meaning other organizations could compete for the award.

Jim and I were supremely confident that no one else had our field knowledge and connections, and we believed we would win the bid easily. We worked tirelessly over the summer months to prepare a comprehensive technical and financial proposal, ensuring we included all our local partners from the ministry and university sectors, as well as providing a thorough capability statement detailing our earlier accomplishments. In my opinion, it was an impressive proposal. So, when we submitted it on the deadline date, Jim and I walked back from the USAID office certain that we would secure another five-year project worth \$15,000,000.

Not long after the submission, we heard that a decision had been made, but we still had to wait for the formal notification from USAID. I remember the scene clearly, as if it were yesterday. A letter from USAID arrived at the main Fulbright office on Christmas Day, which, of course, isn't a holiday in a Muslim country. Dr. Radwan called Jim and me to her office, where she took out the letter and opened it. Jim and I peered over her shoulder at the opening sentence together. It read, "We regret to inform you that you have

not been selected, blah, blah, blah.”

We were stunned, in disbelief. It simply wasn't possible—it had to be a mistake. But it wasn't. We soon learned that none of the bidders had won the award, and the project would need to be rebid. A new deadline for submission was set in just a couple of months. As for me, I was devastated. My whole world had just fallen apart. Patti was a semester short of graduating from high school, and the tuition for her and her two siblings for that remaining semester would be \$20,000, plus I'd be responsible for our monthly rent. Worse yet, I had made no effort to line up another job, which meant a return to the States would be inevitable. While struggling to understand why we hadn't won the award, the reality was that I was now in a difficult financial situation.

Dr. Radwan, however, was determined to prepare another proposal for the rebid. During a meeting, she offered me a small stipend to lead the preparation of the in-service part of the proposal. In addition, she agreed to cover the last semester's tuition for the three kids if I would agree to take on the task. She extended the same offer to Jim, and both of us initially agreed. What we didn't know at the time, however, was that Fulbright was never going to win that award, due to some serious high-level politics.

Rumors began to circulate that our loss was tied to Dr. Radwan's involvement in Egyptian politics. It seemed that the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt had grown frustrated with her interference with high-level Egyptian government officials, as it was undermining his efforts to promote American foreign policy—at least, that's what we heard. Years later, we also learned that Dr. Radwan was allegedly embezzling USAID funds for personal use. Long after I left Egypt, an American auditor confided in Jim, saying that all indications were that Dr. Radwan and her chief financial officer had been inflating our salaries and benefits over the years, skimming off the excess for themselves. While these allegations were never proven, if you ask me, I suspect it was happening. While I can't confirm the truth of these claims, the unfolding situation ultimately presented me with an opportunity to exit gracefully. The rumors

about the American Ambassador's growing dissatisfaction with Dr. Radwan's involvement in Egyptian politics, combined with the looming uncertainty, made it clear that staying in that environment might not be in my best interest. It set the stage for another stroke of luck—one that provided a much-needed change in direction.

A couple of months after the fateful rejection letter, as I was preparing a new proposal, a potential management opportunity came up. I discovered an opening with Amideast, a nonprofit education and training organization, for the position of academic director for a new project in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Excited, I immediately submitted my application. Within two weeks, I learned that an interview had been scheduled in Cairo—no travel needed. Two senior vice presidents, Jim McCloud and Diane Kamal, were flown in from Washington, DC, to conduct the interview.

During the interview, I quickly realized I was answering the questions with confidence. I knew this job was a perfect fit, and I could sense that the interviewers felt the same way. By the end, my confidence got the best of me, and I asked them outright how I had performed. They responded positively, but Jim McCloud later told me they were surprised by my audacity in asking such a question. Regardless, they were supportive, and I was offered the role of academic director for a startup project Amideast was implementing for the UAE Armed Forces.

Ecstatic about the opportunity, I still had to inform Dr. Radwan. Her reputation for expressing displeasure swiftly made me nervous. I braced myself for what I imagined would be a reaction of anger and disappointment. To my surprise, when I met with her, she responded with unexpected grace. Instead of the expected wrath, she wished me well and acknowledged that she understood my decision to move on. Her supportive response eased my anxiety and made the transition smoother.

Interestingly, Jim also decided to pursue another job around the same time, adding to the sense of change in the air. Jim would land this job, which as it

turned out was in Cairo, so Dr. Radwan turned to other individuals who had worked from Jim and me to prepare the proposal. Months later, I learned that the proposal Dr. Radwan had prepared with the other consultants had not won the award, which further confirmed that both Jim and I had made the right choice. As I prepared for my next challenge, I felt a profound sense of relief about the future. The path ahead was filled with new possibilities, and I was ready to embrace them, knowing that I was no longer tied to an uncertain situation.

After signing a three-year contract with Amideast, I flew to Abu Dhabi in April 1997 for an introductory visit and preliminary discussions with officials, before finishing arrangements for my permanent relocation once the kids finished school in June. I'll share more about that visit in the next chapter, but suffice it to say, unlike the apprehension I felt years earlier when Dr. Radwan made me a Senior Consultant, this time I was confident in my ability to take on the new challenge in the UAE. My development as a manager had come a long way, and I felt prepared for the next step in my career.

Meanwhile, Patti's graduation was quickly approaching, and Mom, Dad, Randy, and Kim were planning to fly to Cairo to attend. Once again, I faced the excitement and challenge of packing up a household for the move while also hosting family and attending the graduation. After the graduation celebrations and once our guests had left, Miam, Joey, Danny, and I would fly to Abu Dhabi, leaving Patti to close the apartment and head to Minneapolis for her upcoming college studies.

Patti's graduation was a joyous occasion, and we were all in a festive mood, including Mom and Dad, who were now quite familiar with our home in Maadi. Late one night, we took them into the desert, where a lively celebration was underway, giving them a surreal experience of a desert party in a foreign land. Patti's own celebration, preceding the graduation, included an overnight stay at the infamous Meena House, which we had frequented for our late-night social fun. Evidently, the school wanted to make sure

everyone in the class made it to the ceremony on time, so the graduation the next day took place nearby, with the majestic pyramids as a backdrop. We started our day early, getting ready at 5:00 a.m. for the diploma ceremony, which had to be held by 8:00 a.m. to avoid the intense heat of the June sun. We did notice, however, that some of the graduates—though not Patti—were rather hungover from the previous night’s partying. I’m sure the searing heat wasn’t helping them.

The event itself was truly unforgettable, with Patti receiving her diploma in front of the awe-inspiring Giza pyramids and the Sphinx. The presence of family members—grandparents, her godfather Randy, Kim, best friend Jim Grabowski, and Suad and Nejla—made the occasion even more special. The photographs captured the nostalgic essence of the moment beautifully. I returned to that same spot 21 years later during a business trip to watch the sound and light show, and I felt an emotional rush as I reflected on that unforgettable day and the fond memories of our time in Egypt.

As we bid farewell to Egypt and our loved ones returned home, we boarded our short flight to Abu Dhabi, marking the beginning of a new chapter in my life. Reflecting on my ten years in Egypt, I can confidently say that those years had a profound impact on my career. They shaped and transformed me in ways I had never expected, both professionally and personally.



A Challenging Ascent: Holding Danny, I take in the breathtaking view from the summit of Mt. Sinai after a six-hour hike that began at midnight. Miam, Patti, and Joey led the way, and with plenty of rest stops, we finally reached the top, where we were greeted with a round of applause for our effort.



Double Humps: Camels in Saudi Arabia have one hump, while the ones in Egypt have two. Danny is snuggled up between the two humps of a camel at one of the stops on our Sinai trip in September 1987. I'm not sure where six-year-old Joey is unless he's the one taking the photo!



Raging Waves: After moving into our Mediterranean-view apartment, everything felt perfect—until December, when the area grew deserted and frequent power outages made life more challenging. With the arrival of winter and cold northern winds, the kids and I posed in front of the rising, turbulent waves.



Winter Visit: We flew home for Christmas and New Year's in the winter of 1995-96. This photo at Cindy's place captures a time when holiday reunions with sibling families were the norm. As our families grew, these gatherings evolved into a single event each summer: the annual Heuring reunion.



Jeddah Trip: In February 1992, it was a special experience to be back with Mom, Dad, Randy's family, and mine, all posing in front of the Safeway grocery store on the Rayville compound. It felt wonderful to return. Full credit to Randy for securing visas for all of us—no small feat in such a conservative country.



Amsterdam Charm: Our trips back home always included a stopover in Holland, where we explored Amsterdam and its surrounding countryside. We enjoyed the picturesque canals, vibrant tulip fields, and famous coffee shops, even taking a daytime stroll through the red-light district.



Cairo Museum: Before posing in front of a detailed wood-carved backdrop at the Cairo Museum, we explored ancient Egypt's well-preserved mummies and countless artifacts from the pyramids and tombs. With its vast collection and historical significance, the museum is a must-see for any traveler.



Christmas in Egypt: Patti's excitement is unmistakable as she opens a Christmas gift in 1993, with the boys and Miam sharing in the joy. As usual, Miam made American holiday celebrations extra special, no matter where we were. The handwoven embroidery on the table is from our trip to Cyprus.



Proud Papa: As proud as I am of my daughter, I know life won't always be easy, especially with the distance between us. This moment marks the beginning of her transition, not just in terms of independence, but also in her name—from childhood “Patti” to “Patricia,” and eventually, “Tricia.”



Desert Party: One of the highlights leading up to Patti's high school graduation was taking Mom and Dad to a desert party. They thoroughly enjoyed the experience, mingling with others and staying late into the night. The party was set in a dried oasis, surrounded by sand dunes and the stunning desert sky.



Graduation #1: Patti's graduation was memorable not only for her achievement but also for the stunning venue—at the foot of the Sphinx and the Giza pyramids. In this photo, you can see part of one of the three pyramids as Patti proudly accepts her diploma and congratulations. One down, two to go!



The Boss Lady: The notorious Dr. Ann B. Radwan was the toughest, most calculating, and intimidating boss I ever had. Ironically, I learned more about management from her by observing what not to do. In this rare lighter moment, cigarette and drink in hand, she leans in while I feign amusement.