

Passion Self-Discovery Expanding Horizons

A collection of one girl's journey through the writing minor at UC Davis

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Gary:

The writing minor has been the best thing I've done in my undergraduate career. It helped me to write better, and allowed me to venture into a field I wasn't completely comfortable with. After many months of classes and internships, my confidence in writing has blossomed and I feel confident in my skills moving forward.

When I first started at Davis, I knew I needed to take a writing class as part of the upper division and university writing program requirements. I also knew that I wanted to take something that would be useful for me in the future or at least be fun while enrolled, because that is, of course, what college is for. That class ended up being UWP 104c – Journalism. I don't remember the grade I received in the class (I'm scared to even take a glance at my transcripts, anyways), but I remember thinking, 'if I can improve my writing, in style and tone, I could do this for the rest of my life!'

In the very same class, the writing minor was introduced as a new program, and I was thrilled. I could minor in something useful and interesting, and something unique to UC Davis. Since then, I've grown through creative non-fiction, investigative journalism, and two internships.

The internships were definitely the greatest experiences because I was getting real-world experience and exposure that I could only taste from a classroom. I met and interviewed people much older than I, published articles in The California Aggie for my peers and community to read as well as articles in State Net Capitol Journal for American politicians across the country to read. Seeing my name on the paper (or computer screen) made me feel like I actually accomplished something worth mentioning; that one day my name would mean something – not for fame or pure recognition, but for being able to convey information or stories in ways that people would feel more connected to each other and better informed about the world around them.

I hope that as many students as possible take advantage of such an amazing opportunity and are as inspired as I am with the endless possibilities that lay in store for them.

Thank you,

Dina Morcos

[In a creative non-fiction class, we worked on a story that connected our past with our present, one that required interviewing family members to get the whole story, and have it flow as a story rather than an article. This story hits closer to home for me than a lot of other things that I have written solely because it is about a family member I never met and accidentally related back to my own childhood memories.]

Faded Words

I am Cleopatra, the beautiful queen of the Nile, with a slender, olive-toned, body, big, brown, almond shaped eyes, and long curly black hair. I carry the mystique of a hidden garden, the power of a gladiator, the praise of a goddess.

September 1993 - September 10th, 2001: California

A gold crown adorned with rubies and emeralds lay invisibly upon my head, ready to finally be shown to the rest of the world.

“I’m Egyptian,” I answered the age-old question smiling widely, knowing that in a room full of children of various European and Asian descents, my crown would finally shine in all its glory, with all my glory.

“Whoa, that’s so cool!! Do you live in the pyramids?” one kid asked with his brown and blue eyes bulging.

Are we in Egypt or does he think we just build them wherever we go? “No, I live in a normal house.”

“Is King Tut your great, great, great, great grandfather?!” another asked.

Yes, in fact as I trace my ancestry back a million years, his name shows up on my family tree. “Well, King Tut could be related to me... that would be awesome!”

“Do you ride a camel to school?”

Did you see a camel strolling up the driveway? “No, my mom drives a Volkswagen.”

My crown was growing with me, its beautiful exterior never cracking under the harsh conditions. But then one day, I took it off my head and stuck it in a box in the back of my mind, intent on never returning to that crevice again.

1961: Egypt

Traveling back home, to the land commonly known for the sphinx and the oldest pyramids in the world, a young man finishing his Master’s degree in Germany decided to tell his father he was emigrating to Canada.

Throughout the years, my Uncle Nabil had seen enough discrimination and harassment towards his fellow Copts (Egyptian Christians) and refused to raise his own family there. Little did he know that his father, Tawfik, had been discriminated against more outwardly than usual while Nabil was in Germany.

Tawfik Morcos, Nabil’s middle-aged father and my grandfather, had grown accustomed to the harsh treatment towards Christians by Muslims since his birth, a seemingly normal occurrence since the Arabs invaded Egypt in 639 AD. By the 1960’s, the hate was so common and one had to know the right people in the right places to do anything.

A few months prior to Nabil’s return home, Tawfik was offered a job to be the manager of all the supermarkets in Egypt, a position that had to be approved by the “communist president” of that time, Gamal Abdel-Nasser. Because Tawfik had friends in high places in the government, he was told after applying for the position that his name

was circled on the document Nasser had reviewed, with a note saying, “why, you couldn’t find anyone else?”

“If you’re Christian, you can’t find a good job and even if you do, you’d get paid less than a Moslem person would in the same position,” Ashraf, Tawfik’s youngest son, and my father, says. “They wouldn’t help you in anything; they’d take you to court and make up things to say against you, all because you’re an infidel in their eyes.”

Tawfik got the job, but the initial salary offer was cut severely, and to a family of ten mouths to feed, this was a large neon sign reading LEAVE.

“We had to have a plan for the whole family; we are a big family. Because Nabil had been in Germany for over two years, he was able to emigrate from there to Canada in 1965. And the rest of us were close behind, but in stages.”

As Nabil traveled over the Atlantic Ocean, seeking religious freedom and peace, Maher, the next eldest of the eight, was applying for medical school at the University of Toronto. A few weeks after Maher opened his acceptance letter from University of Toronto, he and Violet, the oldest of the three sisters, left for Canada as well. Violet went to work as a computer operator at an insurance company to help support Maher while he studied medicine.

Meanwhile, Tawfik still had six family members, not including him, stuck in Egypt impatiently waiting to rejoin their blood.

“In Egypt, everything is done with *baksheesh* (tips or bribes),” my dad said. “That’s how people make money to survive, but this time it just wasn’t enough. Because we’re Christians, the immigration officer gave my father a hard time. Every

few days my dad would take [a day] off from work to bring the next document they asked for. One day it was the birth certificate, then his degree, then passport, until he got fed up.”

Tawfik requested that the immigration officer give him a list of documents he needed so that the process would not continue this long.

“You’ll never see your children again if you don’t do things my way,” the immigration officer instigated.

“My father was so angry! He somehow got the strength to pick up this man, with his chair, and throw him out the window,” Ashraf says, laughing at the thought; “It was a first story window but, still, this was a criminal offense. Just *saying* something against a government official would land you in jail.”

Tawfik noticed right away that he would be carted off to jail if he did not do something quickly, so he asked to use the phone and called an old friend from High School and Lieutenant in the Army, Fahim Armaneous. Lieutenants were of high stature in Egypt and Fahim was known throughout Egypt as a very powerful man. When Tawfik asked for him, he did not use his title, signifying how close they were to anyone within earshot.

“Give me Fahim Armaneous.”

“No, don’t. We can take care of this,” the immigration officer’s boss panicked, hearing the Lieutenant’s name.

“Tawfik, what’s the matter?” Fahim was on the line.

“I need you to come down to the immigration office. This idiot officer just threatened that I’d never see my kids again.”

“I’m in a meeting…”

“So?”

“So, it will be over an hour by the time I’m able to get out of this meeting with everyone saluting me.”

“Take the back door!!”

Ten minutes later, Fahim walked in just as a dull thud came from near Tawfik’s feet. The immigration officer fell at Tawfik’s feet, looking like he couldn’t breathe, red blotches covering his face, and begged my grandfather to forgive him, stating that he too had kids and couldn’t lose his job.

Within minutes and without Fahim saying a word, the officer stamped Tawfik’s visa. Two weeks later all ten members of the family reunited in Toronto.

September 11, 2001: California

The innocence and naïveté of childhood had to end at some point, and the crude reality set in. Merely days after the attack on the United States by its own airplanes, the comments changed. No longer was it “so cool” to be Egyptian in their eyes, after family members and friends had died.

One day, a sign, as bright as the neon sign my grandfather had received to leave Egypt, told me to run. I had become so good at hiding my emotions from prying eyes and ears of insensitive boys and girls throughout elementary school, that by the time my last year of middle school had come, I was a pro.

But one sentence threw my whole world under a loaded truck to be run over.

“You’re Egyptian, right? So, are you going to hijack a plane and crash it into the school?” the boy with frazzled blonde hair said with such disdain in his voice.

I ran.

I ran until I couldn't breathe and found myself in the middle of the football field, gasping and sweating, my mind racing with fear and frustration. *How could someone say something that mean?*

I went home early that day and cried myself to sleep, unable to speak even though my parents asked me what was wrong repeatedly. When I finally told them, they looked so calm, like they had expected it.

My father told me of Tawfik, my grandfather who passed away when I was just two years old, and the discrimination he got just for being Christian.

Immediately I connected the dots.

"The Muslims are the ones doing these horrible things!! Not Copts..." I exclaimed with great fury.

"Yes, but no one understands that right now. We know that because of what we went through in Egypt. One day the people will understand that they are infidels in the eyes of the terrorists also, but until then, you have to carry your head up high. Your ancestors created one of the Seven Wonders of the World, in addition to geometry, bowling, make-up...basically anything you can think of."

I returned to school the next day with glares flying at my face like darts, but I avoided them. Comments were whispered amongst friends behind my back with cackled laughter, Ursula and Cruela's voices suddenly filled my mind.

The simple fact that I was Egyptian automatically associated my thirteen-year-old, never-even-been-to-the-motherland, self with terrorists. I countered as many comments as I could, trying to tell them that my family had felt their pain;

maybe the incidents were not nearly as grand in scale, but the foundation was there. But no one listened. They were too young, too naïve, too unaware of the world that existed on the other side of the ocean, farther than most people had traveled in their lives.

Summer, 1970: Egypt

A woman of slender physique and pale beige skin walked along a sandy road by four story apartment buildings. Her short-sleeved red dress billowed out at the ends in the light breeze, a break from the warm stifling air that hung in her short and curly black hair. It seemed unusually quiet that day, but she ignored the nagging feeling that something was wrong.

My mother left New York during her twenties to make a visit back to the motherland. She wore her gold Jerusalem cross around her neck, the cross that she still wears daily.

From the 2nd story window of the sand-blown buildings, the forty-something year old Arab man spotted my mother's cross and spit on her. When I asked her why she kept wearing the cross, especially in a place where it is obviously looked down upon, she stared at me with concern etched into her pupils, as if looking for the right words to say.

"My cousins told me not to wear it, they knew it was going to happen. I was shocked only because I had left Egypt at such a young age that I couldn't remember what it was like, and obviously it got worse year after year.

“But I kept wearing it to show that I’m not afraid of them. Saints of our church went through torture and even death for Christ. The least I can do is be proud of my faith, be proud of the truth.”

2002 - 2009: California

It had been years since I had worn my gold crown. It lay in a box in my memories, the shine stifled by layers of dust and grime. After September 11th, it became harder to speak the truth to people who were inundated with lies, most of which were formed in their own minds. People would ask what my nationality was, and I’d mumble “Egyptian,” monotonously, already expecting a cynical response, the innate pride in my culture fading with the ancient hieroglyphics my ancestors wrote on walls.

As the pain of September 11th faded, only a minute given to remembering those who had passed away each year, the layers of dust began to fade away as well. The gold reflections and multi-faceted jewels lit up my face as I spoke of my past again; the courage of my grandfather, my mother, the saints of the church that risked their lives, shot through my blood.

I am Cleopatra, the beautiful queen of the Nile; as calm as a dove and as clever as a serpent; stronger than ever.

End

[I wrote this story during my internship at The California Aggie. It was one of the only articles I wrote where I felt connected to the people I interviewed and whose stories were read by thousands of students and faculty alike. I just hope that everyone can feel connected to others through stories the way I am when writing them.]

Members of Colleges Against Cancer share cancer stories: “Celebrate. Remember. Fight back!”

Although the stories behind those that participate in this event are endless, The California Aggie sat down with some members of Colleges Against Cancer - and those who helped organize it - at UC Davis to see why they relay for life.

Celebrate: "So basically I have some dead guy's bone in me."

"It all started when I was nine years old," said Kirollos "Cookie" Gendi, a junior neurobiology, physiology and behavior and Spanish double major. "I was playing on the cart turn and I slipped and bumped my leg. I complained that my leg was fractured but my dad said that because I could walk I was probably fine."

After complaining some more, Gendi's mother took him to the doctor to "just get it over with." After examining his leg, the doctor found nothing wrong but thought that doing an x-ray couldn't hurt - a move that ended up saving Gendi's leg.

"I ended up in the pediatric oncologist's office with Dr. Yim and Dr. Jolly. Unfortunately, Dr. Jolly didn't look too jolly. He had to break the news to me and my family that I had Ewing's Sarcoma, which is cancer of the bone," Gendi said.

"Everyone was crushed but I was okay; I never really thought I was going to die even though we spent New Year's in the ICU. It definitely gave me a positive attitude."

A fairly new surgery called Limb Salvage and chemotherapy saved Gendi from having to get his leg amputated.

"They cut out a big chunk of tibia and replaced it with a cadaver's tibia, so basically I have some dead guy's bone in me."

Now as co-president of Colleges Against Cancer, Gendi speaks honestly about the Relay for Life event.

"Relay has a special culture; everyone is united under one cause. There's a common connection because you know someone who's been touched by cancer and it's affected your life somehow," Gendi said.

Remember: "He was my best friend."

"When I was eight, my adoptive father was diagnosed with a brain tumor, stage four grade four, which was inoperable," said Ashley Wyrick, senior sociology major. "They told him he had six weeks to live and ended up living another six months."

Wyrick said she became different after learning of her father's brain tumor.

"I became really shy after that and didn't know how to handle it. He wasn't just my father, he was my best friend," she said.

After Wyrick's father passed, his daughter from a previous marriage took guardianship of her until today. Although she is technically her adoptive stepsister, Ashley calls her "mom."

As fate would have it, yet another battle with cancer would ensue barely a decade later. Wyrick's mom was diagnosed with breast cancer seven years ago, when Wyrick was just 15 years old.

"She went through chemotherapy and radiation. I was the one who took her to her appointments," Wyrick said. "The difference was that it was stage one and there was a chance to fight it out."

Although she witnessed multiple family members' battles with cancer, she feels that she has gained insight into a world where most would be lost.

"Everyone needs support in different ways and I learned how to deal with people in delicate situations," she said.

Becoming involved in Relay for Life has offered more insight into that world for Wyrick. "I feel even more connected to Davis: I realize that I'm probably helping people out in ways that I probably couldn't have done before," she said.

Fight Back: "It's why I'm involved in cancer research."

On the other side of the world in Bulgaria, Neda Mitkova, now a senior neurobiology, physiology and behavior major, was just a little girl when her grandmother was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"The medication then wasn't as good; they weren't going to accomplish much so she got a house up in the mountains and lived there for the last two or three years of her life," she said.

"Not until the very last couple weeks of her life did we notice that she wasn't able to get up and do things; I remember because I'd help her get up and go to the bathroom. I was seven and not very strong but she had gotten really weak."

Over time, Mitkova said she understood the importance of her experience with her grandmother, even after many years since her passing.

"I realized the need for support and importance of having effective treatments," Mitkova said. "It's why I got involved in cancer research of different treatments and their effects on cancer patients."

Mitkova said Relay for Life and the American Cancer Society have been great resources for cancer victims and their families.

"There's so much great information through ACS that people don't know about," Mitkova said. "Maybe if my grandma had known about it she could have fought another 10 years instead of the two or three that she did."

Global Warming



[I wrote this story as part of my internship at State Net Capitol Journal, a political newspaper that is sent to politicians throughout the country. It's goal is to track and report on national political trends. Rich Ehsen, Managing Editor and my supervisor, told me to write a news story that would be the feature article that week about greenhouse gas legislation efforts. I think that this article in particular encouraged me to pursue a career in journalism.]

SNCJ Spotlight (http://statenet.com/capitol_journal/09-07-2009/html#sncj_spotlight)

Despite economy, states gear up greenhouse gas reduction efforts

It has been three years since CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) signed AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act. A host of other states and Congress have since followed suit with measures of their own. But now, with the economy in the most turmoil since the Great Depression, supporters and opponents alike are struggling to come to

grips with how much these measures will cost.

On the surface, AB 32's directive is fairly straightforward: reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1995 levels by 2020 — about a 25 percent decrease. What it will take to achieve that, however, is much more complicated and, to many critics, far too expensive.

But to staunch supporters like CALIFORNIA Air Resources Board (CARB) Chairman Mary Nichols, the person tasked with ensuring AB 32's implementation, the issue of greenhouse gas reduction is about much more than just dollars and cents.

"Our coastline will be under water in 100 years; this is fact, not theory," Nichols said at a July Sacramento Press Club luncheon, adding that the changes currently going on in the atmosphere are "subtle, slow and complicated." Moving forward with AB 32 implementation, she contends, is a preemptive measure against disaster.

That implementation process involves a variety of methods, including direct regulations on many industries, monetary and non-monetary incentives for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and a controversial "cap-and-trade" mechanism. CARB has also developed a Low Carbon Fuel Standard — issued in January of 2007 — which requires a 10 percent reduction in the carbon intensity of the Golden State's transportation fuels by 2020.

Other states have also developed their own plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, several of which mimic CALIFORNIA's efforts to decrease its carbon footprint.

According to the Center for Climate Strategies, a non-profit, non-partisan organization in Washington D.C. that helps governments develop comprehensive plans for dealing with climate change, at least 30 states have completed greenhouse gas reduction plans since 2006. Many others, including COLORADO, GEORGIA, and ILLINOIS, have plans under construction. More are likely to come on board, as State Net reports that lawmakers considered over 200 similar bills this year alone.

The whole process, however, is not without skeptics, particularly where it concerns the fiscal impact of putting such measures into action. With state budgets bleeding red ink everywhere, many observers contend these measures are simply too expensive.

The most controversial issue revolves around the proposed cap-and-trade programs, which limit the emissions a company may release while also permitting the most efficient companies or governments to sell their pollution "allowances" to others for a profit. Trying to meet those standards is expected to require many industries to make significant changes, including expensive equipment upgrades. Business groups say this could have a devastating impact on already-reeling state economies, particularly by driving much-needed jobs to cheaper and much less regulated labor markets overseas.

According to one recent study from the CALIFORNIA Chamber of Commerce, "The average annual loss in gross state output from small businesses alone would be \$182.6 billion, approximately a 10 percent loss in total gross state output. This will translate into

nearly 1.1 million lost jobs in CALIFORNIA." The report's authors say individuals will also feel the financial pinch, noting that "CALIFORNIA families will be facing increased annual costs of \$3,857 and consumers will be forced to cut discretionary spending by 26.2 percent in order to cope with the increased costs generated" by AB 32 implementation.

But Glen Anderson, an alternative energy and fuel specialist with the National Conference of State Legislatures, disagrees, contending that many of the negative projections surrounding measures like AB 32 are based on bad information.

"There are huge assumptions being made about where energy comes from," Anderson says. "Obviously, burning coal is very cheap, but there are other efficient energy sources; they may be more expensive in the short term, but one would use less of it, decreasing the net amount spent."

Center for Climate Strategies President and CEO Tom Peterson also believes that the recession should not greatly affect the movement toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions. "I don't think we should say, 'Gosh, we've got a recession, let's think of this differently.'" The stakeholders are very focused on low-cost, high-benefit plans and have seen the rollercoaster of economic times and changes among federal administrations."

While state governments are moving forward, Congress is attempting to implement its own clean energy measure, complete with a cap-and-trade component, authored by Reps. Henry Waxman (D-CALIFORNIA) and Edward Markey (D-MASSACHUSETTS). The measure — HR 2454, dubbed the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009, or "ACES" — enlists a variety of clean energy mandates designed to reduce nationwide greenhouse gases 17 percent by 2020, 42 percent by 2030 and 83 percent by 2050. It cleared the House in June but is so far languishing in the Senate.

Although the bill's fate is unclear, Peterson believes "it is only matter of time before congressional action takes place and the role of the states is to gear up." The success or demise of the bill may depend on resolving or reforming President Obama's health care proposal, which Peterson notes has occupied the bulk of lawmakers' time and energy in recent weeks, and will likely continue to do so. But even with the health care bill dominating the scene at the moment, Peterson notes that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NEVADA) has indicated he is ready to make sure the cap-and-trade proposal is resolved by October.

Although most state leaders are loathe to see federal laws pre-empt what are usually much stronger state standards, CARB's Nichols says she is not overly concerned about the possibility of the Waxman-Markey bill taking precedence over AB 32. Nichols notes that while she does have "concerns about whether it's the most efficient, most cost effective way to do what they're trying to accomplish," the federal statute will simply push the states toward their initial goal.

"If the Senate includes the same provisions on cap-and-trade as contained in the

Waxman-Markey House version, it's likely that there would be a moratorium on states enforcing their own programs for five years. States that already had a program would be able to turn in their allowances for federal allowances, so we would basically become part of the federal system," Nichols says.

States, however, are not waiting around for that to happen. Most are gearing up on their own, albeit with less money than usual, and supporters still think this is the best time to do it.

"State budgets are challenging," Peterson says. "However, building the capacity [for a greener environment] is important and essential."