

The Making of a Veterinarian

I graduated from Cairo University in June of 1973, Cairo Veterinary School. Everything happens for a reason. I was asked to visit my sister in Saudi Arabia. I had intended to join her there only a few days, but instead stayed on. The Saudi Royal Family in the Ministry of Agriculture offered me a job. The Faisal Settlement Organization was formed by international effort to settle the Bedouin people with their sheep and goats in a city in the desert. The United States, a long time friend of Saudi Arabia, supported the project.

It was an international effort, which included Germany, France and Canada. I spent two years on this project with the Bedouin people. There were more than 60,000 sheep and goats. The team administered medicine and treatment to this vast herd. We were also involved in preventative medicine. We were in a war against a vicious disease that can be transmitted from sheep and goats to human beings, called Brucellosis. I came down with the disease, diagnosed by my brother-in-law, who has a Ph.D in microbiology in the United States. He caught the disease also and we gave injections to each other for three weeks. Finally we were able to bring the disease under control.

Dealing with the Nomadic Bedouin was a religious experience for me to immigrate to them. They spoke the Arabic of the Prophet Mohammed, a dialect entirely different from my Egyptian Arabic. I was involved in trying to assist them to settle down and deal with an entirely different lifestyle. My supervisor, who was from Edinburgh, Scotland called the profession of veterinary medicine, the 'profession of the Prophets,' as Abraham, Moses and the Prophet Mohammed all were, in my opinion, doctors without a license. They made their living by dealing with sheep, goats and other animals.

After two years, I was advised by my supervisor to go into post-graduate work in Scotland. I traveled to Edinburgh to study tropical and sub-tropical medicine. I did research and study for a full year there. I visited many farms and delivered countless sheep and goats, administering medicines and building my store of knowledge. The College there was called "Royal Dick Veterinary College." It was a great experience to meet and study with other students from all over the world.

I returned to Egypt for eleven months. I was longing to immigrate to the United States. At that time, the U.S. Embassy was looking for veterinarians. I was accepted. While in Egypt, I worked with dairy cows and received the first nine dairy cows from Switzerland. I was living in Ismallea, where I supervised the dairy farm. I also was working with the poor and advising them in methods of

animal husbandry. I moved from one community to another, explaining how to control and eradicate disease and prevent the spread of disease from animals to people.

After the arrival of my first born son, I began my journey to the United States in June of 1977. I had \$1,000 in my pocket. I was alone and searching for a job. Several months went by. I received word that the United States Army was looking for veterinarians, so I joined the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps. I was sent to Oklahoma to take basic training. Then, I was assigned to Kansas, where I took my first boards in Veterinary Medicine. Once again, I met many people from different countries who had enlisted in the Army and made lasting friendships. In Kansas, I dealt with exotics, other small animals and horses from the base. We also treated the American Indian Bison. I passed my National Boards and embarked upon my Residency. My Residency Program brought me to the great state of California. My Residency in Los Angeles was with small animals, birds and wildlife. I also spent six months with horses there. After my Residency, I was offered a job with the U.S. Government, Department of Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services. I was sent on a two-year tour to Puerto Rico. I was selected, due to my background in Scotland, to work with cows. While in Puerto Rico I traveled all over the island implementing programs to destroy

the tick population, which had caused havoc and disease among the island's population. Ticks are known carriers of the dreaded Lyme disease as well as other blood pathogens.

After two years there, I was promoted and returned to Florida in the United States. We were in a war to destroy the Brucellosis disease in cows. While in Okeechobee, I received an invitation to journey to the Island of Haiti. There was an outbreak of African Swine Fever in the population of pigs there. It had already destroyed the entire population of swine in the Dominican Republic and now was raging in Haiti. The United States was concerned that the disease would make its way to American soil. My two-month stay turned into six months and stretched into two years. It was one of the most astounding times in my life. I became the Chief of Animal Health in Haiti. The terrible poverty only one and one half hours from the shores of the richest country in the world (America) affected me deeply. I had seen poverty in Egypt and even in Saudi Arabia, but nothing compared to this. The misery and helplessness of these people burns, even now, in my memory. At first, I wanted to run back to Florida to escape the sorrow and deep misery. My inability to make everyone happy which is a part of my personality, caused depression, and I wanted to run away. I was quite young at that time and politically unseasoned.

It was an enormous project that required international involvement. We had to destroy the entire population of pigs in Haiti, and then replace them with imported pigs from Canada, United States, Dominican Republic, and Mexico.

Before my tour in Haiti, I was assigned to New York. The facility is called Plum Island Laboratory, one of the largest labs of its kind in the world. It is a high security area and closed to all except those with top secret security clearance. It is reach from Green Port, Long Island, via a ferry. One has to shower upon entry and shower again on exit. The U.S. Department of Agriculture selects one Veterinary Surgeon to be a foreign disease expert. This person is called upon in the event of an outbreak of foreign animal disease. For instance, I worked on Foot and Mouth Disease. This disease attacked the animal population in England a few years ago and devastated their dairy and beef industry. I worked in research, studying viruses and trained other veterinarians who came to Plum Island Laboratory for two weeks to study and causes and effects of foreign animal diseases.

At that time, I translated a manual on diagnosing Foreign Animal Diseases into Arabic. The Department of Agriculture published this manual and it was later distributed to twenty-three Arabic speaking countries.

Since then, the book has been translated into French, Spanish and Japanese.

I have an insatiable appetite for knowledge. The emptiness within my soul seeks always to be filled with more and more knowledge. So my quest for wisdom led me to become the import/export veterinarian for Miami International Airport. I inspected and quarantined horses, birds and exotics in an effort to prevent the spread of disease from foreign countries to our shores.

At that time we were on the alert, aware of the possibility of bio-terrorism, even though in those days, the threat was considered low. After one year I became restless again. On July 4, 1987 I resigned from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

I remember teasing my boss then by saying: “Sir, I am now a free bird!”

The joke was on me. Instead of one boss, I now have thousands of bosses. My clients now boss me twenty-four hours!

A few years later, I had the dream of connecting people with pets and plants. I went back to school at Nova Southeastern University and earned two Master’s degrees;

one is in Health Administration and the other Public Health. My goal is to teach at Nova, setting up a program to instruct medical students in the danger of transmitted diseases from pets to people.

Another goal is to build a facility dedicated to aged people in nursing homes. There will be a great difference. These fortunate people will be allowed to care for and have pets. This will improve their mental, physical and emotional health. The facility would have an organic garden where they could learn the importance of healthy living, as well as beautiful gardens with flowers for them to enjoy.

I formed a new corporation called “Triple P” Veterinary Consultants. We hope to encompass the dream of having people, pets and plants together. Our goal is to help people young and old, have great understanding of the animal kingdom.

My small animal practice in Davie, Florida is thriving. My store of knowledge is now being used to help people with the companions of their hearts, their beloved pets.

I sold my animal practice in June 2004. I started traveling and consulting in Ecuador, Egypt, and Dubai. I

enjoyed training other veterinary professionals in different parts of the world. Teaching Zoonoses is a thrill for me...I volunteered with the World Health Organization for 3 months, to control and eradicate Polio and measles in the Phillipines.

As for now, I was selected as a backfill veterinarian with the U.S. Army in Ft. Eustis, Virginia (Chief Officer, Public Health Consultant) filling in for a captains, majors or Leitenants who have to travel on duty. I am still searching for the guiding light...please, join me...