

# Taher and I

BY AUSTIN SWANSON

Some of our colleagues at UB referred to us as “the odd couple.” In many respects we were opposites. He was a liberal; I, a conservative. He had an intense Middle Eastern demeanor, while mine might be characterized as Nordic stoicism. Our ethnic backgrounds were obviously different, as were our religions. Taher was a devout Moslem; I, a practicing Christian (or at least that is my goal). Although different, it was our ardent commitment to our respective religious beliefs that was the foundation on which our friendship was built.

Taher and I first met in 1963 when we were newly appointed assistant professors at UB, shortly after the merger of the private University of Buffalo with the State University of New York. Taher was in the Curriculum Department in the School of Education and headed up the university’s Instructional Media Center. I was in the Department of Educational Administration. Both our offices were in Foster Hall on the South Campus—the only campus at the time.

Our friendship grew slowly, usually through interactions with students. Taher had a wonderful personal library covering the fields of comparative education and instructional media, which had only limited coverage in the university library at that time. When I had students doing research in either of those areas, I would refer them to Taher for his expertise, and with the subtle hope that he would give them access to his personal library. Taher frequently ended up serving as a member of their doctoral committees.

As the North Campus began to materialize, we moved into our new quarters in Baldy Hall. Then austerity hit. One response by the School of Education was to merge eight departments into three. Those in Taher’s Curriculum Department had the opportunity to choose an affiliation with the Department of

Instruction or with the Department of Educational Administration. Taher chose the latter and this led to many more opportunities for interaction between the two of us including co-teaching of courses, a four year project for improving the administrative skills of the deans of education and the chairs of the departments of English in all of the Egyptian universities, and co-authoring *Fundamental Concepts of Educational Leadership and Management*.

There was something exotic about Taher. How many people do you know who travel the world with three passports? How many people do you know who have designed complete universities and supervised their construction, curricular development, and recruiting of staff from the beginning? And then, a decade later, being invited back to evaluate the implementation of his design. He was a good and sincere colleague. He was a good teacher and held his students in high esteem. He set high standards for his students; but no higher than he set for himself. They responded with quality work; and in many cases, developed life-long professional relationships with him. When, in modesty, Taher declined a department sponsored retirement party, his students and graduates rallied to mark the occasion with a celebration worthy of his highly fruitful career. It was also my privilege to attend some of the annual backyard gatherings of his former students that he and his wife, Myra, hosted with their son, Ramsey, doing the cooking. They were jubilant affairs.

Knowing and working with Taher made my life much richer. What began as a professional relation also became a social relationship including our wives in dining out, attending theater and concerts, and relaxing at our cottage on Chautauqua Lake. ●

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