

Professor Naguib Pasha Mahfouz, 1882-1974, Thirty Years After The Father of Egyptian Obstetrics and Gynaecology is Remembered with Gratitude

Naguib Mahfouz: The Man Who Dedicated His Life to the Betterment of Women's Health

By Samir Mahfouz Simaika and Youssef Simaika

"My mother had a long and tedious labour which lasted for three full days. I was born in a state of asphyxia... I was breathless when I was born and did not meet life with screams as most babies do... The midwife and doctor who attended my mother took me for dead. They told the family that I was stillborn. Half an hour later my aunt Hana noticed I was breathing feebly every few minutes whereupon the midwife wrapped me up, cut the cord and did what she could to resuscitate me."

This is how Naguib Mahfouz describes his own birth in his autobiography, *The Life of an Egyptian Doctor*. For a man who dedicated his life to the provision of safe childbirth and the promotion of women's wellbeing, it is rather hard to miss the irony of it all!

Naguib Mikhail Mahfouz was born on the fifth of January 1882 in the city of Mansoura in the delta of Egypt. He attended the American Mission School, then the Government Primary School in Mansoura. He then moved to Cairo where he attended the Tewfikieh Secondary School. Bright and well determined, he completed the five-year secondary school curriculum in three years and came out nineteenth on the whole country in the Baccalaureate exam. Years later, it was discovered that had Mahfouz's mathematics marks been added up properly, he would have actually come out top of the country and not nineteenth!

At Kasr El Aini Medical School

Naguib Mahfouz entered Kasr El Aini Medical School in 1898 where teaching was predominantly undertaken by eminent European Professors. Of particular relevance is the fact that at this time, Kasr El Aini hospital had no department of obstetrics and gynaecology, and the only case of labour he attended "ended fatally for both mother and child." In June 1902, as he was about to take his final year exams, there was an outbreak of cholera in Egypt and medical students were recruited to help combat the epidemic. The medical school was closed and exams were postponed.

The cholera epidemic

Naguib Mahfouz was initially assigned to the Cairo railway station to examine suspected cholera patients coming from Upper Egypt. Not a man who would shy away from the call of duty, Mahfouz paid a visit to the Health Department Director General and demanded to be sent to Mousha, a village in Upper Egypt near Assiut which was particularly hard-hit by the deadly disease and where a doctor had just succumbed to the same disease he had been sent to fight. A bewildered Director General could only agree to his request. In Mousha, young Mahfouz traced the cholera deaths to an infected well in a farmer's house. Within a week of the discovery of the well, the Mousha cholera epidemic had come to an end. It is ironic that a nineteen-year-old medical student succeeded where a body of the ablest and most experienced British Public Health Department experts had failed. Mahfouz subsequently had similar success in fighting cholera in each of Deirout (in Upper Egypt) and Alexandria.

Why he specialised in obstetrics and gynaecology

During his time in Alexandria, a particular incident affected Naguib Mahfouz so much that he decided to become an obstetrician and gynaecologist.

"One day... Dr. Shoukry... asked me to help him in a difficult case of labour... I went with him to his clinic and there found on the operating table a lady whom (he and his assistant) had tried, unsuccessfully, to deliver... They went on pulling the baby's shoulders until the body of the foetus was severed from the head. I suggested taking the patient to the Government hospital or else calling an obstetric surgeon into consultation. They replied that among all the Egyptian and foreign doctors in Alexandria there was not one who was an Obstetrician. In the morning... I was told that she (the patient) had died during the night with the baby's head still in her uterus... I knelt down and fervently prayed to God to help me to devote my life to the relief of patients in difficult la-

bour".

Establishment of the first department of obstetrics and gynaecology in Egypt

Naguib Mahfouz qualified as a doctor in December 1902 graduating first in his class. In 1904, after a two-year spell at Suez hospital, he was appointed as an anaesthetist at Kasr El Aini hospital. As there was no such thing as a department of obstetrics or gynaecol-

ogy at Kasr El Aini hospital, Mahfouz started a weekly gynaecological outpatient clinic. This turned out to be such a success that two whole wards were soon dedicated to obstetrical and gynaecological patients. This is how the first department of obstetrics and gynaecology in Egypt came into existence.



President Gamal Abdel Nasser conferring on Professor Naguib Mahfouz the First Class Order of Merit and the State Prize of Distinction for Science on 15 December 1960. Minister of Education Kamal Eddin Hussein to the left.

Much of the experience that Mahfouz acquired in dealing with difficult labour came from an agreement that he had struck with the medical officers who delivered women at home. Whenever these medical officers were faced with a difficult labour, they would call him into attendance. For his part, Mahfouz would attend to the patient's



From left to right: Prince Paul (later King Paul of Greece), Prime Minister Mostafa El Nahas Pasha, and Professor Naguib Mahfouz at a reception held at El Zaafaran Palace on 23 March 1942.

house and help deal with the most complicated cases at no fee whatsoever for himself. During the subsequent fifteen years, Mahfouz attended about two thousand women with difficult labour in their own homes. During this time, he recalls sleeping no more than two nights a week in the comfort of his own home.

Career progression

Naguib Mahfouz was appointed as Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Kasr El Aini Medical School in January 1929, a post he occupied until he reached the age of retirement in January 1942. His term of service at Kasr El Aini was extended by five years at the unanimous request of his colleagues at the department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Mahfouz was also obstetrician and gynaecologist to the Egyptian Royal Family. His pioneering work on the surgical repair of urinary and faecal fistulae brought him and Kasr El Aini hospital international acclaim. Such was his reputation that the leading lights in his specialty came all the way to Egypt to watch him repair fistulae at Kasr El Aini and the Coptic Hospitals. Such was his fame and international acclaim that he was invited to

Mother and child welfare services

A great handicap to Naguib Mahfouz's work was the absence of a maternity unit at Kasr El Aini hospital. Thanks to his efforts and unrelenting campaigning, the first maternity centre in Egypt came into existence at Kasr El Aini.

Mahfouz reorganised the School of

lecture and show films of his operations at the Universities of London, Oxford, Edinburgh, Geneva and Lausanne, to name a few.

His publications

Naguib Mahfouz was a prolific author on a wide variety of subjects ranging from urinary and faecal fistulae, spinal analgesia, fibroids, ectopic pregnancy, gynaecological malignancies, pelvic infections and caesarean sections. One of his greatest achievements was the *Atlas of Mahfouz's Obstetric and Gynaecological Museum* which he published in three volumes in 1949. The atlas contained pictures and slides of all the specimens found at the Mahfouz Museum of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. The atlas was described by Sir Eardley Holland as, "no doubt the best book that has appeared in obstetrics and gynaecology." Other books include

the celebrated *History of Medical Education in Egypt*, which he wrote in 1935. He also wrote *Principles of Gynaecology and the Art of Obstetrics*, both in Arabic.

Honours conferred upon him

In 1919, Naguib Mahfouz was granted the Order of the Nile. In 1935, he was elected Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of England, an honour only bestowed on five eminent doctors at any one time. In 1937, he became a Fellow of each of the Royal College of Physicians of England and of the Academy of Medicine of New York. During that same year, he was granted the title of Pasha, the highest honour bestowed on a civilian in Egypt.

In 1943, the Royal College of Surgeons of England elected Sir Winston Churchill, Mrs Chiang Kai-Shek and Professor Naguib Mahfouz as Honorary Fellows of the College, the highest honour the Royal College can bestow. As Mahfouz could not make it to London due to a lack of transport during World War II, the Royal College of Surgeons Council, in an unprecedented move, conferred the degree on Naguib Mahfouz in Cairo.

On July 1st 1947, the Royal Society of Medicine of England bestowed its Honorary Fellowship upon Professor Naguib Mahfouz and its Gold Medal upon the discoverer of penicillin, Sir Alexander Fleming. During the same year, Mahfouz was also granted the Honorary Fellowship of the Royal Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics of Edinburgh.

Naguib Mahfouz was granted the Medal of Education as well as the King Farouk Prize for Medical Sciences in 1951.

In 1956, The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists invited Mahfouz to deliver the Fletcher Shaw Memorial Lecture, an honour only conferred on Fellows of the College "whose research would have contributed to noticeable progress in obstetrics and gynaecology." So overwhelming was the demand for applications to attend, far beyond the College's lecture hall capacity, that the venue of the lecture had to be moved to the Royal Society of Medicine in London.

In 1959, President Gamal Abdel Nasser granted Mahfouz the First Class Order of Merit and the State Prize of Distinction for Science. President Anwar Sadat subsequently granted him the highest accolade posthumously.

Naguib Mahfouz was married to Fayka Azmi in 1911. They had a son and four daughters. He passed away at the age of 92 on 25th July 1974.

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Foundation of the Mahfouz Museum of Obstetrics and Gynaecology

By 1930, Naguib Mahfouz had managed to collect three thousand of the rarest specimens in obstetrics and gynaecology, obtained from his operations. That same year, he offered the museum which housed them and which was named after him, as a gift to the Kasr El Aini Medical School. The Naguib Mahfouz Museum of Obstetrics and Gynaecology still exists to date at Kasr El Aini Medical School. In 1945, the museum was described by the then President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of England, Sir Eardley Holland, as "a remarkable collection" and, "a wonderful monument to the name of its founder." Mahfouz provided specimens to the museums of each of the Universities of Ein Shams, Alexandria, Assiut and Khartoum.

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Naguib Pasha Mahfouz: A Grandson Remembers

By Amin Makram Ebeid

It has been thirty years since my grandfather died at the age of 92, and yet Dr. Mahfouz continues to be an example to emulate and an educator to heed. This is not only because he was a person of exceptional genius, who has been honored nationally and internationally like few ever were, and who bequeathed to his people unparalleled

Rawhaya, and, in 1952, the loss of his life's companion and sharer of his grief, my grandmother Fayka. Overcome by grief at each heartbreaking event he only whispered in total abandonment "Thy Will be done," because he knew like few people ever did, that even though our bodies may be eaten by disease and crushed into dust, authentic believers will be reunited after the dissolution of time, in an Eternal Now, in which "God will wipe away every tear"



In his official visit to the Coptic Hospital in Cairo on 26 January 1953, General Mohamed Naguib (right), first President of Egypt, was welcomed by Professor Naguib Mahfouz (centre), who co-founded the hospital in 1926.

academic and institutional achievements, but mostly because of his character. Thus, in spite of all his accomplishments and success, my grandfather was one of the humblest persons I have had the privilege to know.

The reason I put so much emphasis on the humility of the great man that was Professor Mahfouz, is because it is the quality implicit in the famous Socratic aphorism: "All that I know is that I know not" which many historians believe is the basis of western civilization. And yet that particular virtue would be sterile, if it was not attached to another quality that my grandfather possessed and used passionately, a hunger for truth.

His Christian faith was deep and unassuming. For instance, he made it a habit to read a Biblical passage before operating. But he was never a fanatic, because for him religion was a search for truth, which took him beyond tolerance into a reverential study of non-Christian creeds, associated with love of other believers. For instance, my grandfather recounted in his autobiography how impressed he was as a child by the broad-mindedness and tolerance he found in the proceedings of a religious congress held in India between Christians and Muslims. That is why he firmly believed in the concept of creedal blindness in the running of secular institutions.

But nothing revealed his deep Christian faith as the loss of his 19 years old son Sammy, his 20 years old daughter

(Rev.17:7).

My grandfather was also intimately involved in the charitable, Christian activities of his beloved wife, and used to insist with his Redeemer, "unless you've given yourself, you've given nothing."

It is now almost thirty years since I last saw my grandfather alive, and I still miss him all the more. For how could an ageing grandson forget the frail, unassuming, almost brittle elderly grandfather, whose whole being seemed to have been only heart and brain illumined by the peaceful smile of the believer, who never stopped seeing the love of God, even through the agony of tragedies? How could I forget a man whose life illustrated so well what it is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt.5: 13-14)? And finally how could I forget a man who discovered the spiritual truth that rendered him impervious to worldly success, and who could affirm with Pascal that "anyone who does not see the vanity of life must be very vain indeed."

Dr. Amin Makram Ebeid, FRCS, FACS. Certified by the American Board of Surgery, Research Fellow and Clinical Assistant in Surgery at the MGH (Harvard Medical School, 1975-77). From 1982, Consulting Surgeon in private practice and co-founder of Coastal Surgical Group in Houston Texas. After returning to Egypt, joined Shaalan One Day Surgery Center in May 2004.

Thank You Dr. Mahfouz for Delivering Such A Precious Baby

By Laila Farid

On 11 December 1911, the young obstetrician, Naguib Mahfouz, was called to attend to a lady suffering from a difficult labour. Under Dr. Mahfouz's care, the delivery went

well and a healthy baby boy was born.

In appreciation of the doctor's competence, compassion and dedication, the parents named the baby after him.

This baby grew up to become the great Nobel Laureate, novelist Naguib Mahfouz.

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