

# Reminiscing

Article by Farida Fahmy, Oct 2016

Many Times throughout my career, I was asked, "When was it that you first knew that you wanted to be a dancer?" I always answered, "Since I was very young," and I would leave it at that.

Usually, as one advances in years, one is prone to reminisce. Recently, I have been thinking about this question and began to gradually recall memories from my early childhood. What started me on this trip down memory lane was when I sat for hours, going through a great amount of old pictures. I sorted out my family, the Reda Troupe, and the post Reda Troupe periods. This brought back, to the forefront of my mind, so many memories. Some were quite vivid and others were rather vague.



Looking at very old pictures of my early childhood, I remembered how my mother was always telling me when I was very young to "stop fidgeting", "sit still" or "stop moving around." My sister who was six years older than me, many a time, refused to share a bed with me, complaining that I kicked all night. How true, I often woke up with my head at the foot of my bed.

These days I have been talking often with my cousin who is one year older than me. We were very close growing up. She reminded me of so much. Obviously they were good times for here, and I am surprised at the amount of details she has retained in her memory. So much of that period came back to me. I had, really, a wonderful childhood. I am grateful to my parents.



I recalled the time when I was five or six years old, when I would stand on my mother's feet and hug her waist as she danced the Fox trot or the Waltz. In the same token, I remember my paternal grand mother sitting cross-legged on her bed and the servants singing and beating the rhythm on a table or a pan as I danced "*balladi*" I can even remember clearly the songs they sang.

I also remember my mother making for me a *Fallahi gallabiyah*. [Garment the female peasants ware]. It was yellow and had a black velvet ribbon sewn across the yoke.

I also had a *Mandeel* [head kerchief] and *Tarhah* [head veil] that I wore when I danced in social gatherings, parties and at summer vacations.

I have two precious pictures.



It was about the same time, one evening I was walking with my mother. She was upset for some reason, so I told her not to be unhappy because when I grew up I would become a big star and buy her a Cadillac. The reason that I remember clearly what happened, was because she would often repeat what I said to her friends in front of me. 1964 or there about, and after my success as the first dancer of the Reda Troup, She teased me jokingly, "Well now that you have become a big star where is the Cadillac?" I Said, "there are no Cadillacs in Egypt, and even if there were, I could not afford it."

What was it that made me know and believe deep in my heart and mind what I would become? Was it intuition, an innate instinct, a subconscious perception?

I do not know.

Very many might say that there were and still are, numerous people around the world that have had their childhood wishes to dance fulfilled. That is because dance was and remains admired and respected in most parts of the world. There were, and still are, many opportunities and venues, through which dancers can pursue their chosen careers. Not in my case as a child, I was completely oblivious to the fact that Egyptians, on the whole, looked at dance as inevitable activity, and regarded professional dancers with disdain.



The Egyptian aristocrats and uppers class intellectuals, only allowed their daughters to attend “western style” dance schools for amateurs. At the end of year recital, only families and friends of these events attended. I am borrowing a quote from my thesis that will shed light on how even the Egyptian educated elite viewed dance in general. Mr. Musharrafa in his Cultural Survey of Modern Egypt wrote in 1947.

*“As a school activity, it is mainly Western: as “swing” Exhibitionism, it is an industrial product; as Franco-Arab cabaret, it belongs to the tourist trade, and as a native vulgarity, it is a neurotic activity....Ballet has recently been introduced in the girls’ schools of the rich”.*

During my teenage years, I went to various dance schools. There, I was taught the rudiments of classical ballet, tap dancing etc. I did, in fact, enjoy myself and moved very well, but I was uncomfortable and I always felt that this was not how I wanted to dance. Something was missing but I did not know what it was at the time. Just now whilst I am writing these lines I remembered an incident. I must have been about fourteen or fifteen years old. During performing a pseudo Spanish dance with a male partner at one of the many amateur performances that took place at the sporting club, where we were members. I actually felt so stupid that I began giggling and soon I had a fit of laughter and could not stop. Needless to say I ruined the dance.



It was during these years and at the same club, that we met the Reda brothers. There, Mahmoud and my sister, Nadeeda, fell in love and got married, and three years later I became betrothed to Ali Reda. During that period, we found out that we all shared the same love for dance and had the same artistic ambitions and aspirations. I knew instinctively that Mahmoud Reda, with out any doubt, was the only one who could make me dance in the way I always wished.

I remember a good deal of the long hours that were spent prior to the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1959 - the date of The Reda Troupe’s opening night. We, (both the Reda brothers and the Fahmy family) spent endless hours talking about Egyptian arts and culture, as well as the social norms and traditions of our people. Mahmoud Reda, as a graduate of the Faculty of Commerce and Ali Reda, who was deeply merged in show business, plus my father’s wisdom and experience enabled us to understand what was needed to create a theater dance troupe from both the artistic and logistic point of view. Obviously, all I did, at the age of eighteen at the time, was to listen and take everything in. All the while feeling eager and elated. Most of all, I felt safe and secure, with these magnificent people around me.





These days, I get slightly apprehensive whenever I ask myself what if we had not met the Reda Brothers? What if my father was not a strong, courageous and exceptionally broad-minded man? So many more 'what ifs'? There would not have been The Reda Troupe as we knew it, and I would not have danced. I am so grateful that my dream has come true. To this day, whenever people run into me, I am met with such love and respect that fills my heart. I know that I with the Reda Troupe have remained in the memory of the Egyptians.

Finally, I would like very much to know from anyone who would like to share with me, what was it that triggered the interest and desire to learn and perform Egyptian dance. Keeping in mind, that wherever you are in the world there are endless varieties of dance genres available to all.

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