



Entisar Azouz

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*by Fayruz Benyousef **

"Life itself is a great challenge for all humans, men and women. To live the life you have and not watch it pass you by, to not count your years but make your years count, to make a difference, no matter how small, in someone's life, to be able to sleep at night with the thought 'it was a good day' all are challenges."

A woman who lives up to the challenges of life, Dr. Entisar Azouz is the embodiment of a highly educated, caring leader in her community. Entisar's academic background includes a bachelor's degree in architecture and planning from Ein Shams University in Cairo, Egypt; a master's degree in architecture; and a doctorate degree in environmental design in architecture from Texas A&M University. As Entisar notes, she was the first Libyan, man or woman, to earn a doctorate in this discipline.



With Congressman Blumenauer at AMC banquet

Entisar's professional profile presents an impressive list of accomplishments. She practiced architecture, taught at the university level, participated in numerous committees, and was the head of the architecture department at al-Fateh University in Tripoli, Libya. As she recalls her time at al-Fateh University, she notes, "I loved every minute I spent with those young minds, searching, planning and looking forward to a better tomorrow." Recently, Entisar has been more involved with architectural research, in particular, with Libyan and Islamic architecture and culture. In the past two years she presented her scholarly work in conferences at MIT and Qatar, as well as on professional visits to several other countries.

Entisar Azouz, Ph.D.

- From Derna, born in Benghazi, and lived in Tripoli.
- Moved to the US 20 years ago.
- Lives in Portland, Oregon.

Although living in the US now, Entisar and her family maintain a strong connection with Libyan culture. She lives in Oregon with her husband, Fathi Noah, and two children: Raabal, 21, who is studying math and computer science at Portland State University; and Sabreen, 11, who started the 2003 academic year at the International French American School and "loves it."



Raabal, Sabreen, Entisar & Fathi

"I would like to think that I brought all of my culture with me and that's how I survived away from home. My mom, Allah bless her soul, used to tell me how people in Derna welcomed their new neighbors with food, and how in their mourning or weddings the whole community participated. I try to carry on those traditions and pass them on to my kids. I have the past all around me. On the walls of my rooms hang drawings of a traditional Libyan wedding by a Libyan artist. In another room you can find a 'Jarra,' a ceramic pitcher, from Tripoli which stands on the fireplace mantle next to a 'Tabaq,' a tray made from Libyan palm leaves."

Her favorite mementos fill the little room of her basement. The inviting collection includes traditional Libyan clothes for the whole family; a set of cushion seats, *Tarareeh*, surrounding a floor mat made of braided palm leaves, *Fatta*; and a traditional Libyan tea set, complete with a hand fan! The setting is always ready for friends to come and have tea and peanuts with her - the traditional Libyan tea party.

Other traditions that Entisar and her family love to keep alive include lighting luminaries on the night before *Miloud*, to commemorate the birth of prophet Mohamed, and making *Aseeda* in the morning, a Libyan dish of dumplings in sweetened butter sauce. During *Ashoura*, a holiday on the tenth day of the Islamic year, they make traditional dishes like *Sleega* to share with close friends who have learned to expect them every year. And on the Islamic New Year, she walks around her home sprinkling flour on windowsills and doorways so the entering year will be a "white one." She recalls, the tradition in Derna is to whitewash a frame around door and window openings.

"Do I believe in these things? It does not matter; I know that these little things bring me great joy and take me back home - even for a few moments - to people I love, to sounds, smells, and memories I cherish."



In Libyan dress



A cultural event at her home



With her Arabic class students

Entisar's civic activities are equally as impressive as her professional accomplishments. She is involved with numerous social, religious, and charitable activities in her community. She is a former president of the Oregon chapter of the American Muslim Council (AMC), and she is now on the board of directors of Middle Eastern Women Empowerment and Resource Center, and on the advisory board of Islamic Society of Greater Portland. In addition to her leadership role, Entisar is an active member of Bilal Mosque and the

Muslim Community Center, where she teaches Arabic every Sunday to a group of girls and women, with the goal of enabling them to read the Quran with correct Arabic pronunciation.

Since September 11, 2001, Entisar has made over thirty presentations to American communities to give a face to the Arab and Muslim Americans. Entisar spoke at colleges, high schools, churches, police headquarters, and on radio and TV, addressing various topics such as Islam, women in Islam, family and Islamic law, Muslims and Arabs in America, the Palestinian struggle, and Iraq. She has also worked with refugees from Bosnia, Somalia, Sudan, and Iraq and participates in interfaith groups to help others understand her faith.



With Congressman Blumenauer (left) and representative David Wu, AMC Banquet

For the past five years, she has organized an annual Ramadan Kareem Drive, where she collects food and donations from the community and puts together food boxes for families in need. On the weekend before Ramadan, a caravan of volunteers delivers the boxes to less fortunate Muslim families. "We put together close to a hundred boxes each year, which is not much, but for the people who receive them they seem to be so."



Ramadan Drive, packing boxes



Ramadan Drive, waiting to load boxes

An active community force, Entisar has also organized other types of "drives" for people who are in need, providing school items for needy kids, blankets for Iraq, books for Iraqi and Palestinian children, emergency relief kits also for Iraq and others. She runs a year-round program - in her garage - for collecting all kinds of items: clothes, furniture, and household items, which are then distributed to refugees and needy families in her community. "I am blessed with a great

group of people in my community who respond to every call - sometimes they are so many - and rush to help every way they can to make a difference. May Allah bless them all."

A woman of impact and many talents, Entisar is a role model for her family, her community, and for women everywhere who strive to make a difference in the world through caring for and helping others.



With Sabreen & Raabal, London

** Fayrouz Benyousef was featured in Tibra Spotlight in April 2002*

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