

Out of Egypt: A Conversation with Bashayer Abdelkhalik

By Rachael Finney

*I*t was a beautiful day in Cairo. The sand hot, yet blissful. Blowing across the land swiftly, but not too swift to land in the eyes of royalty. Queens, kings, pharaohs, and esteemed royalty gazed through open space draped in the finest gold, jewels and diamonds. It was quite a sight to see, if it were TRUE! Contrary to the established stereotype, Egypt is no longer an untouchable land of royalty with gems and queens anymore.

Bashayer Abdelkhalik is a 25-year-old international student at Bowie State University who was born and raised in Cairo, Egypt on February 26, 1989. When asked to describe a typical day in Cairo, her eyes widened in surprise and she uttered, “HOT!”

There are so many stereotypes about a land with so much historic value, but just like America and many other countries all over the world, Cairo has progressed and modernized its society. Bashayer elegantly admires the ancient historical value within her country, but noted it has moved passed that time onto bigger and better endeavors.

Bashayer is broadcast journalism major at Bowie State University. She decided to come to the United States with her “mom and a few relatives, not my brothers and sisters” four years ago to “study, work, and obtain a degree.” Back at home she has two brothers and two sisters. Her father is the mayor in Cairo, but when asked to elaborate on her experience as a politician’s daughter she “[did] not wish to speak on that.”



Photograph by Rachael Finney

Bashayer has a beautiful essence. It is so admirable to see a student so eager to learn, with such positive energy, and such a friendly personality. In fact, her name means “blossom and beautiful new things.”

Many people from all over the world see the United States as a place of hope and opportunity. Some may come from an underprivileged background in a country that lacks a quality educational system or they may come here for more personal circumstances. However, Bashayer came here on her own terms to advance her education.

I graduated from the British school system. There are three types of educational systems in Egypt. Egyptian educational system is just regular public school. We also have American educational system, which is similar to how you learn here in the United States. But I went through the British educational system. It is private school system that follows everything from Oxford University.

"All our textbooks were Oxford, just everything Oxford!" She laughed as she thought back on how overpowering Oxford was throughout her grade school experience. Bashayer thinks the educational systems are very different in the United States compared to her country. In fact, she laughed as she revealed her highest level of mathematics is Algebra 2.

When asked about what other things she found to be the biggest differences, she immediately said "limitations."

"Here in United States people are more diverse and free. People do what they want based on how they feel. If you want to be gay, white, atheist, it just doesn't matter here. Egypt is considered to be more modernized than other Middle Eastern countries but it still has limitations," she said.

There were some students skateboarding outside while we were speaking, and she asked, "Do you know how to do that thing?" I responded "No," but it was great to see her face light up in fascination.

In addition to her reactions to campus life, Bashayer said the American culture makes her feel "extraordinary." So vibrant and full of personality she began to elaborate. "Remember when you said, 'What is so different about the United States and my country?' Everybody here at Bowie State says 'hi' to me. THAT'S NOT NORMAL!" she burst into laughter, adding "people always say 'hi' everywhere I go here. In my country, if you don't know me, you don't speak." She was very joyous and giggly when conversing about this, but still very serious. In fact, the entire time we were trying to conduct this interview, people were star-

ing and speaking to the both of us. She said, "This is just so weird! Is this normal? At first I just think everyone is being nice, but now it's starting to bother me."

As she was laughing, I noticed henna markings on her hands. In America, girls get henna as a fashion statement. Bashayer said she got hers for a religious observance/holiday, Eid. "Eid is...ummmm I don't know how to explain it" she bursts into laughter. She continues by saying: "We eat and fast the day before. It is a big celebration, all the women and girls wear henna around their hands and ankles as tradition, and it is lots, and lots of food!"

Bashayer is a very conservative young lady. Speaking about her conservativeness, she mentioned that she was Muslim. It sort of surprised me because in the United States, we are used to seeing Muslim women in head wraps and long clothing that reveals as less as possible. Most people see Muslims as a very strict and sheltered lifestyle. She does not live her life that way. She wears trendy clothes; very fashionable. She enjoys shopping at stores common to young women in our culture and takes a lot of pride in being herself. Still, Bashayer always obeys her religious principles, but also stays true to herself.

When asked about religion, Bashayer said, "being Muslim is about commitment." She looks at her clothing and twirls in her hair. "I am more free, when I am ready to do that commitment I will, so what!" Anyone in her space would be able to feel her energy. She is very comfortable and secure in every area of her life.

Bashayer is at Bowie State University because she received a full academic scholarship.



In fact, she received the same scholarship offer from the University of Maryland College Park, but refused. She went to visit Maryland and felt it was way too big, she said. "I can adjust anywhere, but I prefer to get comfortable first then go abroad and explore my surroundings. To me, Bowie State is very family-oriented. The Communications Department, everybody knows everybody. I like to be in my own zone first, then reach out when I'm ready. Coming from my country, I am used to

being isolated from a lot of people because of my father's position."

Bashayer is fluent in both English and Arabic, which will make her marketable in the communications field. As a broadcast journalism major at Bowie State, Bashayer dreams of "working as a reporter, and from there, build my TV personality and become a TV talk show host. I haven't quite planned out exactly what I want to have my own TV show

about, but my interest is more in personal growth and inspirations."

It is important for people to ask questions and address stereotypes. Everybody is not what he or she seems from the outside. With a changing culture and a heightened level of diversity in the work place, school and the community, it is crucial to gain knowledge about topics outside your comfort zone. The world is bigger than the spaces you've seen, go out and EXPLORE!

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