

Homage to Rose Ghurayyib

Julinda Abu Nasr

In our effort to pay homage to Rose Ghurayyib, we asked the first director of IWSAW, Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, a life long friend and colleague of the writer, to reflect on her relationship with the late Ghurayyib.

Rose was a very dear friend. We worked closely together for more than a decade and remained friends until she died. Prior to meeting her, I had already learned a lot about her from my mother who had taught her as a student at the American Evangelical School in Sidon.

According to my mother, Rose was diligent, hardworking, a perfectionist and one of the most intelligent students she had ever taught. When Rose transferred to an American school from a French school, she did not know any English. However, by the end of the year she earned the highest score in the whole school on the English test. Unlike other students, Rose spent recess time reading or studying or consulting her dictionary to accelerate the learning process.

As a young person she wanted to become a nun but her mother would not allow it. Her desire to study medicine was also blocked by her parents, hence she opted for Arabic literature. This decision may be considered a blessing since she excelled in literature thus enriching the Arab library with her literary contributions.

Rose had difficulty communicating with her parents and people in general. Even though she was loved and appreciated by many, she was a loner and hardly accepted social invitations or paid visits to anyone. She felt that these activities were a waste of time, and was very suspicious of many. She was reserved in showing her feelings or opening up to people, a drawback in her social relations which she regretted in the last year of her life when she was bedridden with a broken hip. I recall her saying to me, "I do not know how to show my affection or appreciation to people who love me. I was lucky to have so many friends who genuinely cared and supported me but I regret that I did not know how to reciprocate."

Our friendship developed when she came to live at the Beirut University College after she was displaced from her home during the 1975 war that devastated Lebanon. Rose occupied a small apartment in Shannon Hall above the offices of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World directly across from the apartment where I lived. As the director of the Institute at the time, I was in the process of recruiting an editor for *Al-Raida*. It was our luck that Rose accepted to assume full responsibility for the task. She produced *Al-Raida*, single handed, in English and Arabic, as writer, researcher, and editor. It was smaller in size than it is now, but she managed to turn it into a scholarly publication on Arab women that attracted a lot of subscribers from East and West. Over and above she helped in translating documents, articles, and conference proceedings in addition to the research she conducted on Arab women that culminated in three books, *Mai Ziyadeh: al-Tawahuj wa al-'uful*, *Nasamat wa A'asir fi al-Shi'r al-Nisa'i al-'Arabi al-Mu'asir*, and

Adwa' 'Ala al-Haraka al-Nisaiyyah al-Mu'asirah. She did all this for half a salary in appreciation for the college which gave her lodging when she was displaced. As if all this work was not enough to pay her debt, she donated to the University a sum of money as well as all her books and manuscripts.

Working at the Institute was a continuation of a mission Rose had started many years before. She was a pioneer in the struggle for women's freedom and a feminist who had written extensively on women's liberation and women's rights. She struggled to empower women and alert them to the need for rebelling against inherited stereotypes that enslaved them. In her essays that appeared regularly in daily newspapers and women's magazines, she tackled issues of women's oppression, exploitation in society, at work, and within the family. She urged women and men to take immediate action to change prevalent conditions that kept women in the abyss of ignorance. Rose left a rich literary inheritance in books and articles on women's issues.

In her dealings with people, Rose was very modest and so was her lifestyle. Despite being considered an outstanding writer who was honored and decorated on several occasions, she never felt special. She considered herself first and foremost a teacher, and she was an excellent teacher. Rose was very knowledgeable and creative. She could converse on a variety of topics in three languages and never hesitated to write a poem, a play, a jingle or a rhyme at a very short notice in any of the three languages she had mastered, namely English, French, and Arabic. Rose was an avid reader and a prolific writer who was very critical of her achievements and felt uncomfortable when praised. She was always striving for higher levels of excellence.

Although she looked austere, Rose was very sensitive, caring, loving and tender. She was able to relate to children and young people with ease. She enjoyed their company, identified with them and took pleasure in telling them stories and writing for them. Her contribution to children's books exceeds 110 stories in addition to songs, plays, poems, and rhymes. *Alnakd al-Jamali*, a book on literary criticism for adults is considered a classic in the field, and her translation of Nadia Tuweini's difficult poetry from French to Arabic is a masterpiece.

Forgiveness was another characteristic of hers. She never held a grudge against anyone, not even those who were responsible for her displacement and the destruction of her house. Her rich library with choice books was looted and so were all her belongings, including two manuscripts that were ready for print. Her reaction was, "Thank God the library was stolen and not burnt down. At least I know that the books are being read and are of use to someone." Although she knew who took it, she was willing to forgive and forget.

According to those who were at her bedside when she passed away, Rose left this world in peace with herself and the world. She was surrounded by people who loved her and took good care of her. Her last words were, "Love is happiness." With the departure of Rose, I lost a dear friend from whom I learned a lot and whom I will surely miss.