

Interview with Mishka Moujabber Mourani

By Myriam Sfeir

She is the only woman to have attained the rank of Senior Vice-President at the International College (IC), and the first woman at IC to have been appointed director of the secondary school. Moreover, she has served as educational consultant for various national and international organizations.

Given that Mourani comes from a mixed background, her mother being Greek and her father Lebanese, and having lived in several countries, she has managed to pick up five languages. Even though she lived in Australia for many years, her childhood was spent in Egypt and Lebanon. She recalls that her parents were very important role models. Her father never complained of not having a male heir and took pride in his daughters. Mourani asserts: "My father was a very liberal and open-minded man. He took pride in the fact that he had two daughters and was never bothered by the fact that he had no sons. All my uncles used to encourage him to have a son and his answer always was: 'I am very happy with my girls; they are as good as boys if not better.' Growing up and knowing that your father is proud of you no matter what your sex is made all the difference. It helped to shape our self image and was very crucial in determining our needs and expectations." Mourani was also influenced by her mother who worked both inside and outside the home: "My mother was a working woman. Even though she left work for a while when we were first born she went back as soon as we went to school. So this culture of a woman running a home, having a family, working and leading a social life was part of the life I grew up in."

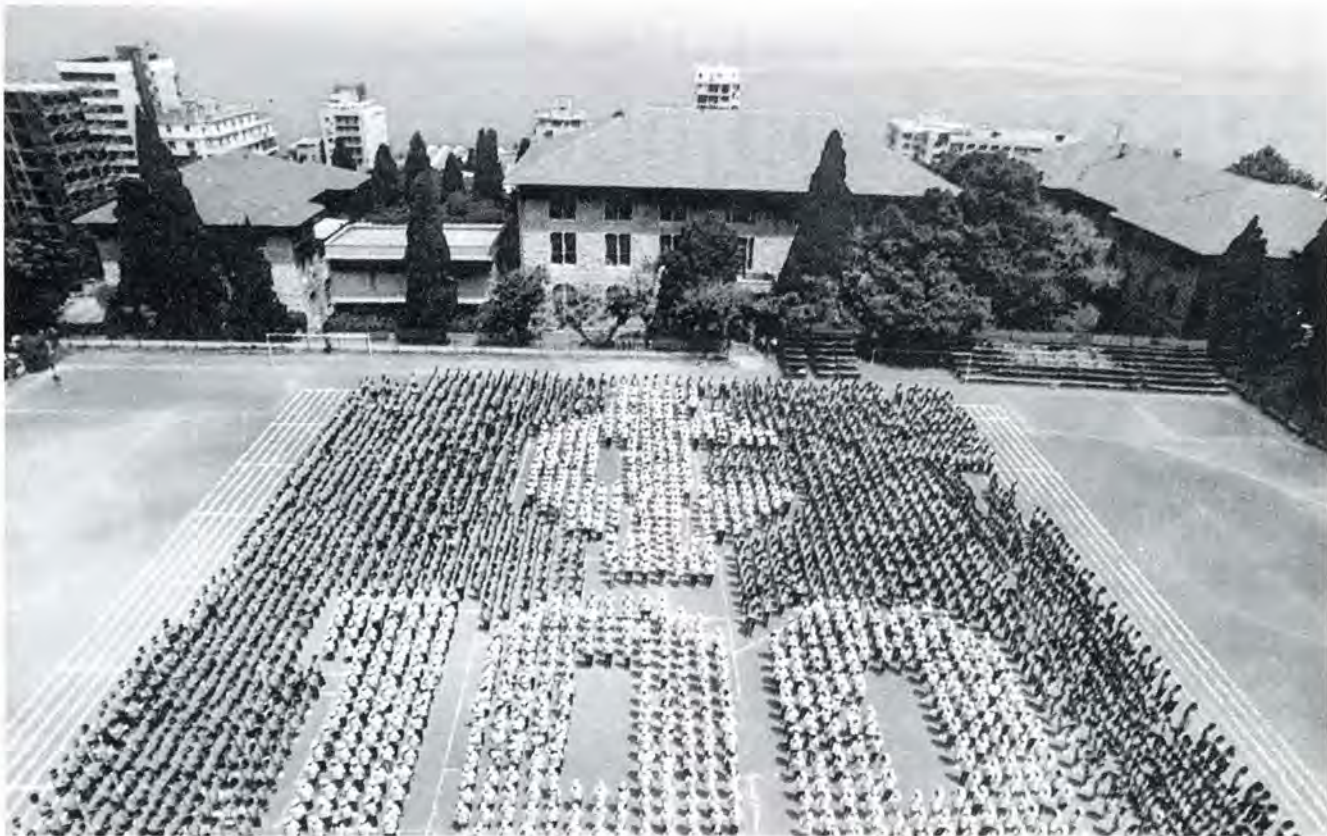
Mourani studied at the American University of Beirut where she received her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts as well as a diploma in Educational Administration. While still a student at AUB she taught English at IC (7-12 graders). Upon receiving her BA she traveled to Oman and worked as a program Coordinator at the Sultan's School. She then returned to Lebanon and while completing her graduate work she taught English communication skills to AUB undergraduate students. Mourani also served as an instructor at the Civilization Sequence department at AUB from 1986-1988.

In 1985 Mourani was appointed chairperson of the English department at IC. Her job entailed training teachers and supervising the English program at all levels. In 1988 she served as Assistant Director of the Elementary School. She



was also chairperson of the academic committee where she coordinated and supervised professional development and curriculum projects. In 1990 she was appointed Director of the Elementary School, then she served as Director of the Middle School and after that as Director of the Secondary School. Mourani is currently Senior Vice President at IC. Mourani explains that she stopped teaching at IC as soon as she became Director because her administrative tasks were numerous. She was the first woman to run the secondary school since IC's inception. She asserts: "It was an achievement for me to be appointed to be in charge of the secondary school. What was very unusual about my directoral appointment is that for the past 100 years it had always served as a male's domain." The prevalent misconception was that women teachers wouldn't be able to handle older students or male teachers, Mourani explained. However, "history has proven them wrong". She went on to say that when she first started working at IC women teachers were very few and the institution was run mostly by men. Nowadays things have changed because IC is changing with the times."

Four years ago Mourani was invited, by the National Center for Educational Research and Development, along with other colleagues in the private sector to work on the National Educational Reform Project. Among her duties was to supervise the articulation of the government curricula in both private and public schools at all levels elementary, middle and secondary. Her task also entailed supervising



the review of the official books and materials to be approved for use by the Lebanese Ministry of Education. Mourani maintains: "The committee strove to incorporate issues of gender, race, social relations and political realtions into the national curriculum following the principles of global education."

Mourani lived the war years in Lebanon; her work as well as her students gave her the incentive to go on. She recounts: "When the war broke out I took a conscious decision never to leave the country. One of the things that kept me sane throughout that period was a journal of poems that I kept in which I documented my war-time experiences and fears. The journal was a personal testimony that helped me come to terms with the civil war that tore me up." Mourani managed to publish her poems in a slim volume, and it is one of the achievements that she is particularly proud of.

Concerning her personal life, Mourani admitted that marriage was never a priority for her; however, it happened that she met the right person at the right time and they were both ready for a commitment. Coping with the double burden of a family and a career was not that hard according to Mourani. She explains: "I am a very energetic person by nature. Moreover, I am very organized and function well under pressure. Hence, I had no difficulty in maintaining a balance between my work and family. Besides, what helped me most is that I have a very supportive and understanding

husband. We both share the responsibility of bringing up our daughter, for he too was raised in a family that strongly advocated equality between men and women. "

When asked if she views herself as a feminist she answered: "If someone has been historically discriminated against and disadvantaged and if feminism is a conscious action on the part of individuals to restore the balance between the sexes, then yes I am a feminist. I believe in the importance of human rights and everything that falls under it. Besides, people with equal competences should enjoy equal opportunities.

Mourani believes that Lebanese women can play an important role in the future of the country. According to her, even though Lebanese women are excluded from decision making positions in the political arena, because it is still a men's club, the important role they are playing socially and economically can no longer be ignored. Mourani admits: "The important role women played during the war and are still playing now is becoming an unavoidable reality. This is perhaps the only positive thing that came out of the war. While men were away fighting, women were left behind to fend for themselves. Women all of a sudden had to work not for leisure but because they couldn't afford to remain idle. Even though this responsibility was imposed on them, they rose to the challenge and managed to pick up the shattered pieces of war torn Lebanon."