

Rites of Passage!

Nine years ago, Professor Loubna Abdel-Tawab Youssef gave me the opportunity to be a member of the Rainbow Team that will embark with her on a journey of love and gratitude. Inspired by the late well-known Egyptian intellectual Abdel-Tawab Youssef's legacy, Prof. Loubna decided to honour his memory by establishing a centre/library dedicated to young readers—a sanctuary where children and scholars can discover the magical, transformative power of stories. On my first day in this place, a day I remember vividly, I realised that the centre/library is much more than a place. The moment I crossed its threshold, I felt I was enveloped in a warm embrace. It was and still is a place of learning, self-discovery, and development. I will not be exaggerating if I described it as a safe haven where I am undergoing rites of passage.



In the centre/library, the Rainbow Team learnt to value knowledge, progress, togetherness, self-discovery, strength and more. Abdel-Tawab Youssef's book collection—which is not only limited to children's literature— is such an eye-opener that knowledge is not bound to a specific field but is interdisciplinary. On this journey, Prof. Loubna taught us to celebrate small steps. We started opening the boxes of books that arrived from Youssef's home to this new sanctuary to classify them even before the shelves were installed. We were thrilled when the shelves were ready! Our gatherings at the centre/library made us appreciate togetherness and sharing. We realised that division of labour and having a meal together creates a bond like no other. The joys of the comfort, happy moments and interesting conversations Mona, Hend, Engy, Youmna, I and a few others who came sporadically like Dahlia, Iman, Alaa, Yasmine share with our mentor are invaluable.



Working at the centre/library does not only allow us to be ourselves, but it granted us the chance to start an ongoing process of self-discovery. Thinking I am a restless, impatient person did not prove to be true. Being responsible for classifying the books, I discovered how patient I can be when performing an enjoyable task. The positive effect of sorting and organising the books on the shelves are processes that endow me with a clarity of thought that have a great impact on the way I face challenges in life.

The centre/library witnessed and is still witnessing our highs and lows. There...we celebrate our birthdays, vivas, and marriages. It is there also where we learnt the importance of channelling grief into



productivity and success. Observing Professor Loubna pouring her heart into honouring the legacy of her father made me discover that grief can turn into something beautiful like our centre/library. When I lost my father, my journey was one of the main reasons that granted me the power to grapple with the loss of my own father and to navigate the dreary labyrinth of my emotions. Eight months after my heart-wrenching loss, I found myself in Naguib Mahfūz's Hall defending my MA thesis with Professor Loubna in the audience. I will never forget how her eyes were shining with warmth, happiness, and pride!

For a profounder glimpse of the life-changing impact the centre/library has on my life, I must have recourse to folklorist Arnold van Gennep's path-breaking 1909 study, *Les Rites de Passage (The Rites of Passage)*. Van Gennep's discovery indicates that very different rites of passage such as birth, marriage, or death follow the same sequence of three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. It is not an exaggeration when I compare my journey as a member in the Rainbow Team to a rite of passage. Though I can feel the huge difference it brought to my life, I am still in the transitional stage, "betwixt and between," as it is sometimes called. I am sure that this journey has more to offer and teach me.