



STUDIO OCHENTA ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

MIJA (ENGLISH) – 306: Sherif

[0:05]

Hi, I'm Mija, or Binty, in Arabic, and this podcast is about my family, those who are alive, those long gone, and those still dreaming.

Here's what you need to know about Sherif:

He's very kind,

He is passionate

[0:20]

And what we call gada3, or what we call 'ride or die.'

and Egypt is his life.

Sherif is my uncle, though he's not really my uncle.

[0:30]

So here goes, 10 minutes to tell his story.

We're in a house in Alexandria,

[0:49]

At the dining room table.

There is a boy fixing a clock.

A small evil eye stone is hanging beside him
reflecting specks of blue light on his fingers - a nazar stone.

[1:02]

This is Sherif.

The stone is for protection, though he won't need it just yet.

The young Sherif is always fixing things.

Something about the feeling of solving a problem,

[1:16]

Helping others,

Always made him feel good.

In Egypt, we say he is a *gada3*, which means

"He's always got your back."

[1:35]

Sherif is the son of fruit vendors, he goes to school and
helps them at their stall in the city centre in the afternoons.

But one day on a trip to visit family in the city of El Behera,

[2:00]

His parents are killed in a terrible car crash.

And Sherif is left all alone.

The day he gets the news, he loses faith in himself.

[2:22]

He can think of no future without them.

But his neighbour, Abdou, gives him a job in his restaurant.

He wants to make sure the young Sherif doesn't end up on the streets.

[2:46]

Abdou and Sherif become good friends despite a few years of age difference.

They play tawla, or Egyptian backgammon, on weekends

In their local coffee shop, the ahwa,

and when Abdou, my father, meets Mona, my mother,

[3:03]

It is Sherif who ends up urging him to follow her to the UK.

Abdou notices Sherif's talent for fixing things and advises him to go to school,

To have a better future.

[3:22]

With Abdou's help, Sherif would sneak off in the corner of the restaurant,

during his shifts to study.

and eventually he gets the right grades and makes into an engineering school in Cairo.

No one could believe it.

[3:42]

Flashforward a few years, and we're in Cairo

Where Sherif is finishing up school

[3:47]

Still always helping his neighbours,

Still always hustling and making some extra money

fixing led lights for the fruit sellers working night shifts.

[3:56]

He dreams of being able to do his technical handiwork all across Egypt.

After his classes, one of his side hustles is to work at a movie theater serving popcorn and turning reels for Egyptian comedy films.

He becomes best friends with his co-worker, who is also a student:

Sayyid.

[4:28]

Every night they would watch the same movies over and over again, especially the classics.

After everyone left, they'd stick around and mute the films

and recreate their own dialogue up in the projector room.

[4:50]

They stick together and help each other study for exams and

At school, Sayyid draws up a plan for an internet café business
That they could start in Cairo and bring to other cities.

[5:07]

They saved their money from their job and paid the lease on a shop when,
the protesting began in Tahrir Square,
It's a Revolution

[5:37]

Like many young people,
Sherif and Sayyid participate,
joining thousands of voices in Tahrir Square
Every night.

[5:48]

Though at first the protests are peaceful,
Abdou tells him to wear the famous nazar stone that saved Auntie Heba,
A blue stone with an eye on it.
On the back, it carries the Quranic verse: *Ayat al Kursi*

[6:00]

Which signifies protection.
One night a dark smoke travels through the streets of Cairo.

[6:18]

Blowing through the crowd

The smoke travels to the cafe.

And takes Sayyid.

[6:43]

Sherif finds him, dead.

And mourns his friend in the middle of the protest.

A month after Mubarak steps down,

Sherif still hasn't left the square because he wants to ensure a peaceful transition.

[7:11]

He can't believe that Mubarak was ousted by them, the youth, after 30 years of rule.

He felt so much bliss. So much hope.

And he's built a community there now.

[7:28]

One afternoon as he's getting his haircut at one of the tents camped in the square

He sees the figure of Sayyid in the crowd.

He waves.

[7:50]

We hear parts of this story on the phone

In London,

Egypt,

and

New York.

Mama Mona, baba Abdou, Omar and I experience the Egyptian Revolution at a distance,
watching the news from afar.

[8:04]

Mobilizing in streets where we are, in solidarity.

We see headlines calling it the “Arab Spring.”

Omar and I admire Sherif’s determination to stay in Egypt.

With family in London and New York,

[8:23]

He could very well leave.

But he decides to stay.

Because Egypt is home.

He tells us stories from the square

[8:32]

Many months later, when things have settled,

Sherif sends us links to music that started circling around after the Revolution:

Shaabi music, which means music of the people,

with electronic beats.

[8:51]

Today, Sherif still has his internet cafe in Cairo.

It took him a while to repair it after the protests.

After working day and night for weeks on end,

[9:01]

There came a moment where he wanted to give up.

Where he thought building something that wouldn't last

in today's Egypt,

wasn't necessarily worth it anymore.

[9:10]

For weeks he left the shop abandoned...

But five years after the 2011 Revolution,

Sherif visits Sayyid's family.

[9:22]

He spends some time with them.

Eating oras, cookies filled with date paste, and drink black coffee, no sugar.

They all do El Sanawiyah, the yearly community prayer

at the local mosque in his honor.

[9:46]

That night, Sherif attends a mahraganat mosh up party where the Shabbi music has evolved into a whole new genre called Mahraganat.

Which sounds like this:

[10:08]

His eyes are drawn to the stage

Which includes LED lights.

That forms letters to say

“We Egyptians are alive”

[10:26]

When he goes back home that weekend,

He opens up the shop for the first time.

[10:34]

Everything is covered in dust.

He clears everything away.

Cleans up and

Places the nazar stone in the shop’s window.

[10:57]

And renames the shop in Sayyid’s memory.

Sherif now lives his days hoping for a better future for

his family

his country

And his people.

FINAL DEL EPISODIO