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IN DEPTH WITH DR. RANIA ELWANI

By Menna Loutfy

SHE'S A FORMER ATHLETIC CHAMPION, A DOCTOR, A MEMBER OF THE EGYPTIAN PARLIAMENT AND ABOVE ALL, A MOTHER. EGYPT'S 'GOLDEN FISH' GIVES US HER VIEWS ON PARENTING TWO YOUNG RIDERS COMBINED WITH HER LOVE OF HORSES.

"HORSES GIVE ME A SENSE OF CALMNESS AND CONNECTION WITH MY INNER SELF. A KIND OF SERENITY YOU RARELY FIND IN YOUR BUSY LIFE SCHEDULE AND COMMITMENTS."

Having been one of the top swimmers in the world, why did you choose the sport of riding over swimming for your kids?

I believe that to succeed in something **you have to love it**, in order to put in the required effort. I introduced many sports to my kids, some for general fitness and some that they can keep practicing life-long.

I've always been fascinated by riding and the whole equestrian life. I've always wanted to be a part of it, but at my level of swimming I couldn't keep too many other interests. So I'm trying to give my kids the experience and opportunity to make riding one of their life choices. Even if they don't continue to top level competition, they can enjoy the pleasure of riding, the beauty of horses, and the special bond it gives them with their horse.

What has the sport added to their personality?

Definitely riding gave them both a **boost of confidence**. To learn to trust a horse and be trusted by a horse and knowing how to communicate is a very important achievement. I am blessed to have kind kids in general, but *I think riding emphasizes that nature of being kind, compassionate yet strict, disciplined and bold when needed.*

Being a former champion, have you ever thought about riding professionally?

Yes! Actually a lot! I enjoy watching the kids. I enjoy going to **watch equestrian competitions at every Olympic Games**, and I definitely would love to take it up more often. Probably not as a professional anymore, but more for enjoyment and feeling that I'm doing something for myself!

How do horses inspire you?

More than inspiration, horses, to me, are beautiful creatures that can be calm, courageous, strong, wild and competitive all at once, much like me. They make you feel that *it all comes down to your soul*, not only what people see of you, but of what you think and feel as well.

What does it take to be a successful athlete?

A successful athlete, in any sport, takes discipline and motivation, day in and day out. It also takes a lot of trust in your coaches, teammates and entourage; since they are all part of the formula that allows you to reach your goal. But for me, *passion is what really matters*. That's why you have to love your sport to excel in it.

What do you think challenges the sport of riding in Egypt?

I'm not aware of the daily challenges that riders in Egypt experience since my kids are not yet at a competitive level. But **I have seen friends struggle a bit to find the means** to properly train, compete in international competitions, have good horses, as the horses are a big investment.

I think not many people in Egypt understand how hard it is to get to international level and how much work and investment must be put into it. More awareness and support is needed for Egyptian riders, and especially more exposure to international competitions as representatives of our country.

Do you think the athletic environment in Egypt nowadays is as good as when you were swimming, better or worse?

Actually, I think this generation is **much luckier** than we were. I think they have more means now to succeed; still a lot is missing, but slowly sport is becoming a profession to many Egyptian athletes. Back in our days, this was a hobby that you had to do on the side, while keeping up with your other careers.

You're not only a doctor but a member in the Egyptian Parliament along with several other swimming management positions, how do you manage to take your kids to training and follow up? In other words, how do you manage your time between home and work?

Well, I try, but I wouldn't dare to claim I do it well. I have a lot of help from people around me, as I used to have while I was an athlete myself. I attend kids' practices when I can, but at all times, even if I can't be there, I try to make sure that their schedules are followed. *I'm lucky to have a supportive husband, parents and a good set of people to help us all with our busy schedules.*

Again, **time management** is something that you definitely learn in professional sport. And it means you have to sacrifice sometimes in some areas to be able to achieve what you need in others. If only this lesson is passed down to my kids, then I think it's all they will need for their future.

For sure, some days are harder than others. And some items on my To-Do Lists get moved to the next day or week. But in general having high goals for yourself and your family and passion for it, is what really helps you go through the days.

Do you think an athletic parent differs than a parent who has never played a sport? Why?

Yes, for sure. I think it gives the parents more insight into their kids' emotional and psychological development as an athlete. But *I have a problem with parents who were athletes that end up interfering too much* in their kids' training, even if it was their same sport. Part of the growing process is to **experience things on their own**, and to have a good relationship and trust with their coaches and teammates.

I try to be close to them on the general outlines of discipline, proper nutrition, proper scheduling and sleep schedules, financial support, but never on the technical aspects of their sport. 🏆



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