SCRIPT: Omar Samra: Overcoming Everest
Evgenia Maria (Mary) Aravani
November 2014

00:00 SOUNDBITE: (Translation) “We are now on the summit of Mt. Everest, I am very happy but at the same time we must get back down quickly because the weather has started to change...” (:08)

00:11 MUSIC: FADE IN: Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell - Ain’t No Mountain High Enough [Instrumental] (100 seconds from the start of the song)

That was Omar Samra… moments after being the first Egyptian to make it to the top of Mt. Everest – the highest mountain in the world.

But who is Omar Samra?

00:20 OMAR SAMRA: “My name is Omar Samra, I specialize in dragging myself and heavy objects to high and cold places.” (:06)

OS: “I would say I’m an adventurer, mountain-climber, and entrepreneur.” (:07)

Not too shabby for someone who was asthmatic as a child.

00:34 OS: “In my very, very young years I wasn’t even playing sports because physically I wasn’t able to because I was severely asthmatic and that prevented me from doing a lot of things.” (:13)

OS: “And then I overcame this and became actually very athletic and really into sports.” (:04)

But what in the world inspired you to climb Mt. Everest?

00:57 OS: “When I was 16, in Switzerland, it was a very short experience… I climbed a small mountain with a group of people – it was more of a hike than a climb really.” (:10)

OS: “When you’re 16, when you’re at that age, there’s simplicity in the way that you think that can be interpreted as naïve but it is also actually quite pure as well. I think I was just… I felt a connection with the mountains when I was there even though I’d never been to the mountains, never seen snow, never walked in snow, but as soon as I set foot there, I felt like I’m in a familiar place and I felt that I’m connected to this place and I want to come back here and do more of this and I wanted just… I felt like, well if I could climb this small mountain here, why not climb the highest mountain in the world.” (:37)

And here we are… the young Egyptian who became the talk of the town.
But hold on just a moment…

Sitting across Omar Samra, this man who’s accomplished so much in his life already, I couldn’t help but think about the fact that even Omar Samra didn’t have it all figured out right from the start.

OS: “I started off actually, contrary to popular belief, because a lot of people think that I always knew what I wanted to do with my life, which actually was very far from the truth.” (:10)

OS: “So when I came into AUC, I didn’t know what I wanted to major in. I remember very clearly standing in those – in those days you didn’t register your courses online, you had to actually sit with an advisor face-to-face and register manually. And there was two large queues, one was for anyone who wanted science and the other was for the non-science. And I thought well, by the time I get to the end of the queue I would have figured if I want to do business, economics, psychology, anthropology and those things.” (:33)

OS: “So as the queue was moving very slowly, I was giving this a little bit of thought – it was taking forever.” (:05)

OS: “I had been in the queue for like an hour, an hour and a half, it wasn’t moving very fast… and then I saw a friend of mine just exiting the university near Ewart Hall (that’s where we were standing) and I asked him, “How come you’re done so fast?” And he was like, “Well actually, I was in the engineering department (which was very separate from everything else because you had to declare engineering when you went in, so it was a completely different system than the others… and he said, “I was just in the engineering department, I finished everything that I had to do and I’m leaving”- because it was empty.” (:30)

OS: “So I said, “Really? There’s no one there?” And he was like, “There’s no one there.” So I said alright, maybe I’ll do that! So I actually went and started off my first years in AUC in engineering purely on the basis that the queue was shorter.” (:14)

So rest assured, even Omar Samra was just as clueless as most of the rest of us going into college.

Eventually Samra settled for Economics, and let’s just say he put his degree to good use – but more on that later.
Climbing Mt. Everest wasn’t quite enough for Samra. After completing this life-long dream, he thought, “Hey why not climb all the highest summits on every continent?”

04:00 OS: “And so the seven summits, the first project that came to mind, which involves climbing the highest mountain in every continent... each one presents its own challenges, some of them are quite easy, like Kilimanjaro for instance, some are actually more challenging than Everest in certain respects.” (:17)

And not only has he climbed all the highest summits on every continent, but he’s also been chosen to be the first Egyptian to get sent out into space.

As Samra was talking about his, rather extraordinary, achievements, I couldn’t help but wonder... where do mom and dad fit in to all this?

04:37 SHERIF SAMRA: “As a father, I was not comfortable until I heard him that oh I’m back on foot, on the ground.” (:10)

That was Sherif Samra, Omar’s father. When it comes to supportive parents, he’s as supportive as they get.

Sherif Samra’s philosophy was as simple as:

04:57 SS: “Yes, I’m happy because I see Omar happy.” (:03)

05:02 MUSIC: FADE IN: Cinematic Emotional Soft Grand Piano Note Sheet Theme Soundtrack [Instrumental] (66 seconds from the start of the song)

But what about other Egyptian parents, they’re not always as understanding as this. I couldn’t help but wonder what Omar’s father had to say about others who have a dream they want to pursue, but are in conflict with their parents about it.

05:14 SS: “I think Omar actually was a little fortunate that in the beginning he has a supportive family. But of course actually, you need to work at your family... you don’t want to quarrel with your father or your mother and you need to convince them. I mean it’s hard work, I know it will take probably a generation or two but I’m sure that if I’m talking about, say 5 million people, I mean I’m not expecting 5 million people who have the same thing, but maybe out of the 5 million or 5,000, these are pioneers – 5,000 pioneers. They will actually drive others for their dreams, but the society, the whole society, will change by this and then young people will make the change in the society. I mean they will be able – as Omar actually was able to convince us.” (:55)

06:08 NAT SOUND: Birds chirping/ dogs barking out the window. (Neighborhood sounds)

Remember how I mentioned that Omar would later put his degree to some good use. Well, here I am sitting in his office – located in a quiet Mohandeseen neighborhood.
This is the office of his adventure travel company Wild Guanabana, which he founded in 2009.

06:26 OS: “It was an odd time to start a company that relied on discretionary spending or was in the travel space at that specific time, it was even more odd to name the company after a fruit, but I thought like there are certain companies that were named after a fruit that did reasonably well.” (:20)

06:47 MUSIC: FADE IN: Gregoire Lourme – Swimming with Dolphins (44 seconds from the start of the song)

OS: “There’s a soul to the company that, at the heart of it, we care about the host communities that we visit. It’s about them more than anything else, like we want a trip to happen and we want the clients to have an amazing time and to have these life changing experiences...” (:15)

Zainab Tarek is one of many who have been on a life-changing travel experience with Wild Guanabana.

07:08 ZAINAB TAREK: “They had this initiative, it’s called the Right to Climb, and basically you climb the highest mountain in Africa, which is Kilimanjaro, but at the same time you’re supposed to raise awareness and funds for the intellectually disabled in Egypt...” (:14)

In the summer of 2011, Zainab – fresh out of high school – decided to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro.

It was a tough journey, no doubt.

07:32 ZT: “Basically, every day you walk for – or hike – uphill for about sometimes seven to six hours a day.” (:10)

But when I asked Zainab why she decided to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, I was surprised to hear quite a familiar story…

07:50 ZT: “I’ve wanted to climb this mountain for a while, it started when I was 16, and I told my dad and he wouldn’t agree...” (:09)

Let me just refresh your memory.

08:02 OS: “When I was 16, in Switzerland, it was a very short experience... I climbed a small mountain with a group of people – it was more of a hike than a climb really.”

ZT: “I’ve wanted to climb this mountain for a while, it started when I was 16, and I told my dad and he wouldn’t agree...” [Overlapping](:04)

Whether he realizes it or not, Omar Samra has quite the influence on people.
But back to Zainab… she was eventually able to convince her parents of the idea. Here’s what she had to say about the most rewarding part of the whole trip.

08:18 ZT: “It wasn’t reaching up there, the summit, surprisingly.” (:05)

ZT: “It was a nice feeling, but reflecting back on the entire trip, it was just you know living for seven days on a mountain, being just completely stripped of everything, of all the technologies, all the luxuries you have... it was very humbling.” (:21)

Omar Samra was actually also on that trip with Zainab.

08:49 ZT: “He was very, very supportive.” (:02) (Continue clip under narration)

As Zainab was reminiscing about her Kilimanjaro adventure, she eventually came to this conclusion about Omar Samra:

08:59 ZT: “I take him as a role model because of someone he’s pursuing his passion you know. He knew what he wanted to do with his life... he just, he quit everything and he decided to pursue his passion and that’s what I really want to do in my life.” (:17)

09:15 MUSIC: FADE IN: Otis Redding – Sitting on the Dock of the Bay (39 seconds from the beginning on the son)

09:17 OS: “At the end of the day, like, you know... everyone dies in the end, we all have a very brief time here, but a few people actually live like through. And you know we only do it once, I think we should do it right.” (:19)

So let’s do it right. In Omar Samra’s words, stop thinking and do something. Contribute to humanity.

This documentary was produced by Mary Aravani. Special thanks to Omar Samra, Sherif Samra, and Zainab Tarek for their interviews. Music was collected from Jamendo and YouTube. The songs are: Marvin Gaye’s Ain’t No Mountain High Enough Instrumental, Vampire Weekend’s Campus, Cinematic Emotional Soft Grand Piano Instrumental, Gregoire Lourme’s Swimming with Dolphins, and Otis Redding’s Sitting on the Dock of the Bay Instrumental. Sound effects and NAT sounds were collected from SoundJay.com and by me.

Interviews:

Omar Samra
Sherif Samra (Omar Samra’s father)
Zainab Tarek (Wild Guanabana adventure traveler)

Music:
Marvin Gaye – Ain’t No Mountain High Enough (Instrumental) [YouTube]

Vampire Weekend – Campus [personal music library]

RoyaltyFreeMusic - Cinematic Emotional Soft Grand Piano Note Sheet Theme Soundtrack (Instrumental) [Jamendo]

Gregoire Lourme – Swimming with Dolphins [Jamendo]

Otis Redding – Sitting on the Dock of the Bay (Instrumental) [YouTube]

Sound Effect: Clock Ticking – SoundJay.com

NAT sound: Birds chirping