

Testimonial to Yehia M. El-Sayed

Yehia El-Sayed was born in Alexandria Egypt on September 13, 1928. He received his Bachelors Degree from Alexandria University, and his Doctorate in Mechanical Engineering from Manchester University in England.

His academic career took him across the world. He taught and conducted research at Assiut University (Egypt), Kansas State University, Dartmouth College, Glasgow University (Scotland), Tripoli University (Libya) and The Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His legacy persists in the thousands of students and colleagues whose careers and intellectual development he has influenced. He was a recognized international authority in desalination, thermodynamics and thermoeconomics. Over the course of a highly productive career, he authored two books and numerous scientific papers. A Life Fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineering (ASME), he was a two-time recipient of ASME's prestigious Edward F. Obert Award, in addition to a Best Paper Award from the International Desalination Association.

Dr. El-Sayed's contributions brought the fundamentals of science to usefulness in engineering practice across the spectrum of energy conversions systems – providing principles for optimizing their technical and economic efficiency. The principal objective of his work was the best possible use of resources. For example, among the various systems benefitting from his efforts – as a writer, teacher and consultant – was desalination, a process very energy intensive and a key to providing water when and where it is scarce. Among other things, this work led to a U.S. patent for his design of an innovative steam compressor.

To his many associates around the world the following excerpt adapted from his Obituary is not surprising: “In addition to being a successful scientist, who wrote and published until the end, he was first and foremost a devoted husband of Amina El-Kholi, father of Dr. Yasser El-Sayed (Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Stanford University) and Dr. Maha El-Sayed (Director of Advanced Technology at Clorox Corporation), father-in-law of Dr. William Fisher (CEO of Optwise Corporation) and grandfather of Tamara and Ramsey Fisher. Despite the professional demands on his time, he loved swimming, bowling and spending peaceful times with his loved ones. He infused his family with his contagious humor, passion for learning, and hunger for adventure and travel.”

We, his professional associates, have had the privilege of having Dr. El-Sayed not only as a mentor but, it can be said, ‘above all’ as a friend. If only one word could be used to describe him it might be ‘affable’; if two, then the second, seemingly opposed to the first, could be ‘quiet’ – calm, helpful, modest, always friendly and considerate, in good humor and a droll gentle man.

On September 17, 2010, after a long battle with cancer, he passed peacefully at his home in Fremont, California surrounded by his family. Another testimony to his modesty: he never divulged his illness to associate-friends, who had been communicating with him. He is and will continue to be missed not only by his family but also by all of us who have had the privilege of his friendship.

Richard Gaggioli
Guest Editor
November 13, 2012