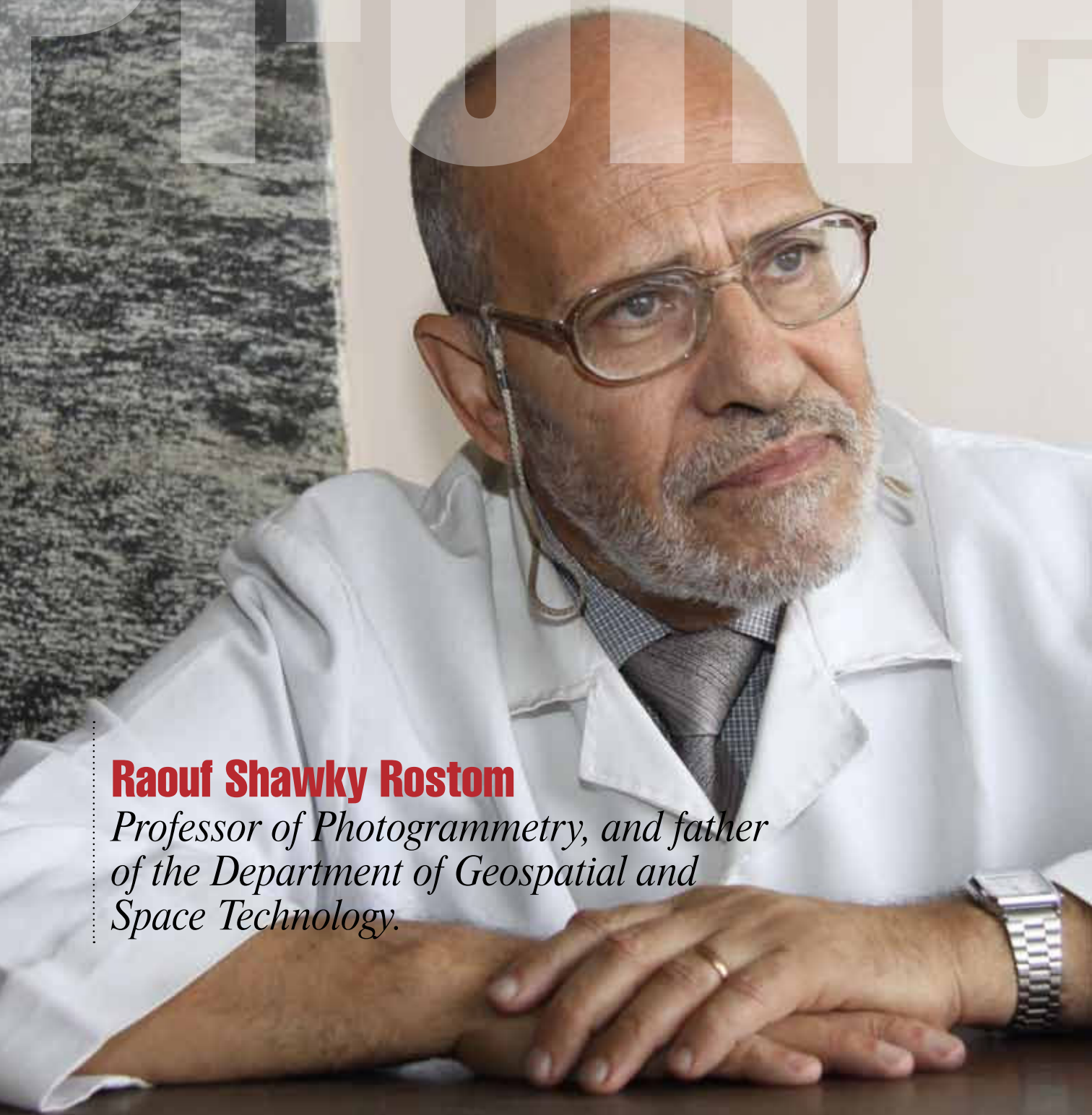


Profile

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Raouf Shawky Rostom

Professor of Photogrammetry, and father of the Department of Geospatial and Space Technology.

Meet Raouf Shawky

the father of photogrammetry at UoN

“The gentleman is always effacing; walking about the Campus, he is not so visible, but you feel he must be up to something. His eyes, a grey/green color, intriguing colors, he looks like a professor, he is so quiet, you can pass him on the way, without paying attention to him until someone tells you of the number of books and articles he has published”

This is a description of Raouf Shawky Rostom, Professor of Photogrammetry, and father of the Department of Geospatial and Space Technology at the University of Nairobi.

Born in 1938, in Cairo, Egypt and brought up as an Egyptian Coptic Orthodox, Raouf, now 74 years old was educated in Cairo and joined the Faculty of Engineering at Cairo University, graduating in 1959 with a B.sc degree in Civil Engineering.

Because he was at the head of his group, the faculty decided that he should get a government scholarship to study for a Ph.D in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was the first choice of the then president Nassir, who during a visit to Moscow University's department of photography, saw an opportune time for a student from Egypt to pursue that field as the country did not have enough specialists. Another circumstance for the choice of Moscow was that 1956 was the year that Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, therefore, Israel, France and England attacked Egypt, Moscow was the only major country to assist Egypt hence the cementing of a friendship.

This is where Rostom, the civil engineer changed, as it were, careers midstream. However, he quickly reassures me that in

photogrammetry one makes maps from aerial photography providing views that can be used by engineers to get appropriate alignment of engineering works in order to calculate the costs of a project.

Rostom arrived Moscow in 1961, and spent the next six years learning the language, enhancing his previous superficial background in photogrammetry; under supervision, Rostom ultimately combined B.sc, M.sc and Ph.D in photogrammetry. At the end of 1965, after completing his studies, Rostom went back to Egypt to a job at the faculty of engineering, Cairo University. In the next five years, of struggle as he states, he was not able to improve his knowledge due to bureaucracy, nor was he able to introduce a new programme in photogrammetry. In 1970, therefore, he took up a position at the University of Khartoum, on secondment. “It seems he says, with a twinkle in his eye, that they were glad to be rid of the ‘noisy Raouf’. The salary at the University was very low, so after only two years, Rostom moved to the University of Abu Zaria, Nigeria where he was informed, the survey department required his services. He served for two years and in 1975, completed his secondment and had to return to Egypt. But the University at Cairo had not changed; there was still no development, and it was thus both

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luck and relief when he saw an advert placed by the University of Nairobi for a position in the Department of Photogrammetry and Survey. He posted his application in December 1975, and the University responded positively, they sent him a telegram appointing him Associate Professor and requesting that he confirm his acceptance. So I ask, "You were not interviewed, and Rostom cheekily says, no, I was not interviewed, it is my papers that spoke for me to a department that was in need of a member of staff".

So what did you find when you reported for duty, I ask. "Well, I found 4 British staff, two of whom then subsequently resigned. There was no Kenyan staffer and I suspect this is why they needed me. I tried to ask a few questions of the two year contract, I wanted to know the staff competence, the units taught etc. The salary was not much better than that in Egypt or Nigeria but rather, what appealed to me was that there was time for a real change, a challenge really because I needed to develop a program, staff also needed to be developed ready for mounting of the program. The only staff member at the time, of Kenyan extraction was a Mr. Nick, he was away studying for higher university education, then David Macoco, at the time was a tutorial fellow, I managed to send him to Oxford to pursue M.sc studies and he successfully completed his studies a year later and to date is still in the department".



Prof. Rostom with a student in his office.

As a father, Rostom has learnt a few lessons; the first is that one should let their children follow their dreams.

How difficult was it to develop the department? "This says Rostom, was not difficult, I simply lobbied the Faculty board and Senate, indeed, as soon as I reported on duty, I was made chairman of department, a position that I occupied for ten years. In that time, I exposed David Macoco to administrative work and it was easy for him to take over, when I got tired. As part of the program, I introduced what is called digital and analytical photogrammetry, remote

sensing (images from satellite), I used to teach four units per week". Prof. Rostom used external examiners to criticize the program staff, which was useful for the development of the program. Rostom also appointed some MSc graduates, and introduced MSc courses. getting scholarships for some of the students to study in Germany. Indeed, Rostom takes pride in some of these first graduate Msc students, who have moved from tutorial fellow to senior lecturers,

one of them, Professor Francis Aduol, is now Principal of the Kenya Polytechnic University College. "The poaching of staff, which has been perfected, is not new, I used to do the same, I can't tell you who they are, but I poached several staff from the Kenya Polytechnic and developed them" says Rostom.

Rostom embraces Kenya as his country. "I rarely go on home leave, I got my bride in Egypt but I brought her to Kenya and we have resided here for the last 36 years". He has two sons, John and Fagy, who have studied civil engineering at the University of Nairobi. "When my sons joined the University, I was not a citizen and it had proved difficult to get the papers, but one day when I learnt that Moody Awori had been appointed Vice President, I sent him a congratulatory message, and I was elated when he called me to express his appreciation, and organized for me to fill out the forms and get my citizenship".

As a father, Rostom has learnt a few lessons; the first one is that one should let their children follow their dreams. "You see, when my son Fagy was in second year, he was inclined to computers, but I prevailed on him to finish his course, perhaps hoping that he would forget. But no, after he completed his studies, achieved upper second class honors, he presented me with the certificate, and told me that he was now in the IT business. True, he runs his firm and even has a number of employees".

Rostom's, philosophy in life

surprisingly is "love" if you love your students, they will perform better, love and support your colleagues, they need appreciation, love your superiors, they will support you, love the cleaner, he will love, appreciate and keep the office clean. Love your job, attend meetings on time. Raouf Rostom, never misses meetings at faculty level, department level, or even at committee level. This last one is really important; keeping time is respect to the chairman and to the other members of the group.

Rostom draws inspiration from the word success. "When I find success, either I succeed in publishing, or when I succeed

in teaching a female student, or supervising a female Msc student, I am really inspired". If Rostom was to live life over again, he would not waste time, wastage is painful. Rostom wants his department to develop, there is still a shortage of up to date equipment and programs for students to use. "If the list of equipment that I have submitted for purchase materializes, then this will increase my happiness and love "

Raouf Shawky Rostom, remains a father, friend, colleague, superior and despite a wealth of experience, knowledge and years of service, a human being.

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Prof. Rostom during one of the practical sessions.