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Family Ties Spark a Return to Roots

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Nadia Abraibesh '10, who interned at the Carter Center last summer, is now spending a year in Libya, her father's homeland, to become better acquainted with the language and culture.

Family ties spark a return to roots

Growing up, Nadia Abraibesh '10 heard the sounds of another land through the phone line.

A handful of visits and memories of lively family meals and boisterous cousins connected Abraibesh to an animated family on the other side of the world.

This fall, she returned to her father's homeland, Libya, to spend the year learning Arabic and immersing herself in Libyan culture. She also hopes to be a teacher's assistant at a local British school to prepare for a stint with Teach for America, which she will fulfill the following year.

"I've grown up listening to my father speak the language," says Abraibesh, a psychology graduate. "It feels important to me to learn the language that half my family speaks."

Her father left Libya when he was 18, eventually settling in the United States where he earned a college degree, began a successful business, married an American and raised a family. One of seven siblings, his Libyan ties remain strong.

Abraibesh looks forward to spending time with her Libyan family, and eventually, talking with them. "My dad has always served as the translator," says Abraibesh, who has taken Arabic classes over the years, including one while studying abroad in Ecuador during her junior year. "It will be nice to not have that barrier."

Abraibesh hit the ground running at Linfield, conducting research with advisor and mentor Tanya Tompkins, associate professor of psychology. They worked together on two research publications and presented findings at various conferences.

"Nadia is one of the most exceptional students I have ever known," said Tompkins. "She was a busy and very successful lady while she was here, and I'm sure that will continue."

Abraibesh spent last summer in Atlanta, Ga., as an intern at the Carter Center in the Mental Health Program. Her responsibilities included research and event organization, among others.

The most rewarding aspect of the summer? The people she met. "The other interns had amazing backgrounds, and the staff members are experts in their fields. It was great getting to talk with people who are so knowledgeable about the things I'm interested in."

Another highlight was interacting with former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn. At the Fourth of July picnic, after filling their plates, Abraibesh and a colleague noticed two empty seats next to Mrs. Carter.

"I just asked her if we could sit next to her and she said yes," recalls Abraibesh. "The mental health program is kind of her baby. She was sweet and introduced us to the rest of the table as *her* interns."

According to Abraibesh, her Linfield training equipped her for the experience. "I felt very well prepared for the tasks put before me," she says. "I was well aware of research methods and mental health issues. At Linfield, I had many opportunities to speak in public so I felt comfortable speaking up and talking with the Carters."

Abraibesh is passionate about homelessness. Until recently, she viewed her interests in work for the homeless and psychology as two separate areas, but she now recognizes the interrelatedness of the two.

"It's such a vulnerable population," she says. "This is a population that needs help, and many times there is a lack of resources to fulfill that need. I want to be part of the process to ease people out of that state of homelessness." 

— Laura Davis

Abraibesh file:

2007

American Psychological Association Summer Science Institute, a 10-day intensive program at the University of California, San Diego.

2009

Intern, Powerhouse, a mentoring program for foster youth

Member, governing council of the Yamhill County 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness

2010

Kemper intern, Yamhill Community Action Partnership

Intern, Carter Center, Atlanta, Ga.

2011

Teach for America