

# **Jehan Sadat, Ph.D.**

## **Brief Biography**

Jehan Raouf, the first girl and third child of her Egyptian father, Safwat Raouf, and her British mother, Gladys Cotterill, was born in Cairo, Egypt. Fifteen years later, she unexpectedly came face to face with her destiny when she met Egypt's national hero, Anwar Sadat, during the Holy Month of Ramadan at her cousin's home in Suez. Recently released from prison where he had been confined for many years because of his fierce resistance of the British occupation of Egypt, Sadat had come to Suez with his friend, the husband of Jehan's cousin, to contemplate his future. In addition to enduring the horrible physical conditions of prison life, he had been stripped of his cherished position in Egypt's military thus was left unemployed and alone, .

The young school girl, Jehan Raouf, had followed the media reports of Sadat's heroic deeds and greatly admired his courage, loyalty, and determination to free their country from foreign control, albeit she had never met him. Soon after their initial meeting in the dimly-lit hallway of her cousin's home, they realized they were destined to be together, thus according to their cultural and religious traditions, Sadat sought the blessings of Jehan's parents. Initially, both her mother and father voiced their objections and opposed their daughter's engagement to Anwar Sadat. But after meeting and talking with him, they happily approved. On May 29, 1949, Jehan Raouf became Mrs. Jehan Sadat.

The young Jehan did not know that when she became the wife of Egypt's hero that she was beginning a journey that would last for more than thirty-two years with a man who would become the President of Egypt, a President who would change the course of history not just for the Middle East, but also for the world. She did not know that this unpretentious man of principles who was her husband would become one of the 20th Century's greatest statesmen. Nor did she ever imagine that her marriage to Anwar Sadat would open the doors of opportunity for her to make a contribution to her society, touching the lives of millions, changing the world's image of Arab women, and fulfilling her own life-long "yearning for participation" and service.

As Egypt's First Lady, Jehan Sadat -- the woman and her work -- challenged the popularly-held world-view of the Middle Eastern woman. Through her activities at home in Egypt and her participation in numerous international events, she presented the face of the modern Arab woman to the Western World. In 1975, she was head of the Egyptian delegation to the United Nations International Women's Conference in Mexico City and later, she headed the Egyptian delegations to the UN Women's Conferences in Copenhagen and the United Nations Decade of Women in New York. The founder of the African-Arab Women's League, Mrs. Sadat has hosted and participated in, and is still participating in, countless conferences and seminars concerning women's issues, children's welfare, and peace in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America.

Having always been especially concerned with the eradication of illiteracy, family planning, and the rights of women; Mrs. Sadat became socially active long before her husband became the President of Egypt. One of her first projects was Talla Society, a cooperative for the illiterate village women of a province in the Nile Delta region. This project, the first of its kind, made it possible for village women to learn a skill that would enable them to earn their own money which in turn paved the way for them to become more self-sufficient and to contribute the financial welfare of their families. A life-changing project, Talla Society began with Mrs. Sadat's dream and a small group of women who were eager and willing to work at twenty-five sewing machines in an abandoned building. Today, completely self-sustaining, the Society that began with a meager number of sewing machines and workers boasts more than 1,000 sewing machines and offers job training to girls and women in the production of various hand-crafted items which are then marketed throughout Egypt. Talla's profits are first used to raise the standard of living for the village and then to expand the services offered by the Society, services that now include training in carpentry, electrical work, and carpet weaving for the young boys and men of the village. Talla Society also supports the personal needs of its participants by providing a clinic, family guidance, and kindergarten services.

A life-long social activist, humanitarian, and nationalist who tirelessly and selflessly dedicated herself to her country and its people, Mrs. Sadat was among the first to reach the Suez front to comfort and encourage the wounded and returning soldiers during the War of 1967. With this unprecedented act of humanity by an Egyptian woman, she entered a new phase of social service to her country: helping the disabled war veterans

and their families. The result of her efforts was Wafa' Wa Amal (Faith and Hope), the first and largest rehabilitation center of its kind in the Middle East. Designed to accommodate 2,000 patients, Wafa' Wa Amal is today a fully integrated city incorporating separate hospital and rehabilitation facilities, clinics, vocational training departments, and recreational areas. Founded by Mrs. Sadat in 1972, the Wafa' Wa Amal City depends totally on donations from contributors throughout the world.

In 1977, after visiting several S.O.S. Villages of Austria, Mrs. Sadat returned to her homeland with the gnawing feeling that Egypt's orphans, although being well cared for, lacked the comfort and stability, the love, of normal family life, which is the trademark of the S.O.S. Villages. With the same determination and dedication she had demonstrated in starting the Talla Society, she introduced the concept of the S.O.S. Children's Villages International to Egypt. These home-like facilities with their "mothers" for the Muslim children, "mothers" for the Christian children, and a "father" for each village offered Egypt's orphaned children the chance to lead normal lives within a healthy and happy family environment. The first Egyptian S.O.S. Village was inaugurated in Cairo and was soon followed by the establishment of other S.O.S. Villages in the cities of Alexandria and Tanta. Today, there are many more S.O.S. Villages in operation with more planned for other locations throughout the country.

Mrs. Sadat often states, "The most precious capital any country can have is an educated citizenry." She, therefore, promotes education, learning, in all aspects and stages of life, particularly for women, as the major way for any nation to achieve lasting economic, social, and political equality. Acting on this belief, Mrs. Sadat set out to gain the legal reforms that would give women the rights they deserved and were entitled to. Despite the harsh personal criticisms that ensued, Mrs. Sadat was instrumental in the reform of the Personal Status Laws by the Egyptian Parliament in 1979. These laws, Egypt's civil rights laws, had for decades inhibited women from reaching their political and social potential and from gaining their right to participate fully in public life.

Throughout her years of advocacy for women, Mrs. Sadat has taken a path unique to the one followed by Western feminists. She has always molded and shaped her ideology within the context of the national character and needs of Egyptian society. Never challenging the importance of the traditional family structure in Egypt, Jehan Sadat sees no contradiction in women having their rights and the traditional role of the

husband as head of the family. In fact, she regards the family as the foundation of all society and the role of a mother as the primary instrument of social change.

Education, women's rights, children's welfare, and peace are the issues that have occupied, and continue to occupy, her life's work. Though very proud of what she has accomplished, Mrs. Sadat unequivocally considers her family to be her greatest achievement and being a mother, her most important role. The mother of three daughters -- Loubna, Noha, and Jehan--and one son, Gamal; Mrs. Sadat is grandmother to eleven, eight girls and three boys. Each of her daughters holds a degree in English; her son, a degree in Chemical Engineering. After receiving her own baccalaureate degree with honors in Arabic Literature, she earned a masters degree, also with honors, and a doctorate degree in Comparative Literature from Cairo University in 1980 and 1986, respectively. Her masters thesis is titled "The Influence of Shelley on Arabic Literature" and her doctoral dissertation, "The Influence of English Criticism on critics of Romantic Literature in Egypt Between the Two Wars."

Following the assassination of President Sadat on October 6, 1981, the deeply aggrieved Jehan Sadat retreated from public life, her beloved projects, and her teaching position at Cairo University. After a period of unparalleled grief and uncertainty, she resumed her role as an educator, lecturer, and social activist for women's rights and the cause of international peace. In 1985, Mrs. Sadat was named a Visiting Professor at the American University in Washington, D.C. and the University of South Carolina. These honors were followed by her designation as the first Distinguished Visiting Professor at Radford University in Virginia. Currently, Mrs. Sadat is Associate Resident Scholar at the University of Maryland where The Anwar Sadat Chair for Development and Peace was established and fully endowed in 1997, as a result of her devotion and untiring efforts. The first Anwar Sadat Lecture for Peace and the investiture of The Anwar Sadat Chair for Development and Peace was held on October 7, 1997.

Although she divides her time between the United States and her beloved Egypt and travels the world in fulfillment of her speaking engagements, Mrs. Sadat has written *A Woman of Egypt*, her best-selling autobiography, which was published in 1987. She has also published poetry in Arabic under a pseudonym and has recently completed the writing of her second book, a book about her journey through life after the death of her husband. When her schedule permits, she enjoys reading, especially works of Arabic poetry and world history. She also enjoys painting and gardening. She, however,

regards the time she spends with her family and friends as her most rewarding and relaxing activity.

Today, Mrs. Sadat's mission is to maintain her husband's legacy, keeping alive his memory so that future generations will know that Egypt's President Anwar Sadat was a "man of peace." At the same time, she continues delivering her own views concerning the rights of women, the importance of the family, and world peace.

## **REPRESENTATIVE AWARDS and HONORS**

**Volunteer of the Year** presented by Rehabilitation International U.S.A., October, 1975.

**A Paul Harris Fellow** presented by the Rotary Foundation of Rotary International, November, 1975.

**Commissioner's Award** presented by Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, December, 1975.

**Grand Cross of Merit** presented by the Italian Red Cross, March, 1976.

**Distinguished Public Service Award** presented by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, October, 1982.

**The Margaret Sanger Award** presented by Planned Parenthood Federation of America, May, 1983.

**Living Legacy Award** presented by Women's International Center, March, 1984. WIC Honorary President since 1984.

**International Humanitarian Award**, first recipient, presented by Crittenton Center.

**Distinguished Professor Award**, first recipient, presented by Radford University, December, 1985.

**International Humanitarian Award for Global Dedication to Women's and Children's Causes**, Los Angeles, California, March, 1986.

**The International Children's Peace Prize** presented by Disneyland, California, November, 1986.

**Achievement Award** presented by Baylor University, Texas, 1987.

**Eleanor Roosevelt Award** presented by the United Nations, San Francisco, March, 1988.

**Children's Champion** presented by The Washington UNICEF Council, 1988.

**International Award** presented in Sao Paulo, Brazil, June, 1989.

**Woman of Achievement Award** presented by Zonta International, June, 1990.

**The Love, Dignity, Honor, Peace Award** presented by The Center for Human Nutrition, Omaha, Nebraska, January, 1990.

**Chairman's Award** in recognition of her life long contribution to global understanding presented by Memphis Symphony Balls, 1991.

**Women of Distinction Award**, Little Rock, Arkansas, November, 1993.

**Tribute to Three Women of the Middle East: Farah Pahlavi, Lea Rabin, and Jehan Sadat**, Friends of Tel Aviv University, May, 2000.

**The Eloise ReQua International Humanitarian Award**, Library of International Relations, Chicago, October, 2000.

## **REPRESENTATIVE HONORARY DOCTORATE DEGREES**

**The Philippine Women's University**, Manila, November, 1976.

**DePaul University**, Chicago, Illinois, March, 1981.

**University of South Carolina**, Columbia, South Carolina, March, 1981.

**New York University**, New York, New York, March, 1981.

**Vermont University**, Burlington, Vermont, May, 1983.

**Hamline University**, St. Paul, Minnesota, May, 1983.

**Wheaton College, School of Law**, Norton, Massachusetts, May, 1984.

**University of Nevada**, Las Vegas, Nevada, May, 1984.

**World Academy of Arts and Culture**.

**The American University**, Washington, D.C., 1985.

**Saint John's University**, Collegeville, Minnesota.

**Hofstra University**, Hempstead, Long Island, New York, June, 1987.

**Dowling College**, Oakdale, New York, June, 1990.

**Rochester Institute of Technology**, Rochester, New York, May, 1992.

**University of Health Sciences**, Kansas City, Missouri, May, 1994.

**University of Maryland**, College Park, Maryland, May, 1994.

**Brigham Young University**, Provo, Utah, 1999.

## **REPRESENTATIVE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES**

**United Nations International Women's Conference**, Mexico City, Mexico, June, 1975.

**The International Parliamentary Conference on Population and Development**, Sri Lanka, August, 1979.

**World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women**, Copenhagen, Denmark, July, 1980.

**The Governor's Women's Conference**, Las Vegas, Nevada, March, 1989.

**A United Nations International Year of the Family Conference**, Minneapolis, Minnesota, September, 1994.

**People to People International**, Newport Beach, California, September, 1996.

**State of the World Forum**, San Francisco, California. October, 1996.

**Insights 96**, San Diego, California. October, 1996.

**International Women's Forum, IBM and Center for International Private Enterprise**, Washington, D.C. September, 1997.

**State of the World Forum**, Guanajuato, Mexico, 1998.

**Franklin Covey International Leadership Symposium**, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1998.

**World Congress of Families II**, Geneva, Switzerland, 1999.