

Adel El Hallak, a graduate from Lebanon: If I had a choice again, I would choose Polytechnic University!

The life of Adel El HALLAK, a graduate of Polytechnic University, is like an adventure novel. During the Lebanese Civil War, he came to the USSR, graduated from the Department of Technical Cybernetics of the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute, and received a PhD in Technical Sciences. Here, in Leningrad, he met his future wife, with whom he returned to Lebanon in 1987. From there, because of the war, the family had to move to Libya. Today, Adel El Hallak is Dean of the Faculty of Engineering at the Lebanese University. He loves the Russian language and even named his eldest daughter after Russia. You may read about his life after graduation in our interview. Which, by the way, Adel El Hallak gave on his birthday.



- Mr. HALLAK, what year did you graduate from Polytechnic University Institute? What was the name of your department?

- I graduated from the Polytechnic Institute in 1984. I studied at the Department of Electric Drive in the Faculty of Technical Cybernetics. My program was called "Electric Drive and Automation of Industrial Plants." Later I went to postgraduate

school and studied at the same Department. I received the title of Candidate of Engineering and in 1987 I went back to Lebanon.

- Did you originally want to major in engineering? Why did you decide to go to a Russian, or rather Soviet, university?

- In 1975, a civil war broke out in Lebanon. I had just graduated from high school and had to take part in the war. Because of the turbulent situation, it was impossible to enter Lebanese universities. And then I had the opportunity to come to study in the USSR, which was a great joy for me. So on September 15, 1977, I came to your country. I didn't know what was waiting for me: the Soviet Union seemed so big that I couldn't even guess where I was going.

- And so you came to the USSR. Do you remember how you felt then?

- We arrived in Moscow. We were given hotel rooms and given three rubles for expenses (we were fed, so we didn't have to buy food). Together with the other foreign students we sat and waited to see where we would be sent to study. On the second day I was told that I was going to Leningrad. I looked at the map and thought, "Wow, even further north! It will probably be cold."

Of course, I have absolutely no regrets that things turned out this way. Now my whole life is connected to your country, your city, and our institute.

- How did your studies at the Polytechnic Institute begin?

- At first we studied with other foreign students at the preparatory department. We lived in a dormitory on Ploshchad Muzhestva. At that time there was no subway building, just a big square and the 53rd streetcar ran. After preparatory department I was admitted to the Polytechnic Institute, my classmates went to other universities - Leningrad Electrotechnical Institute, Leningrad Civil Engineering Institute... But since childhood I dreamed of working with electronics and automatics, so I wanted to go to the Polytechnic Institute. From my third year, I started working at the Department, helping the staff to solder microcircuits, etc.

- Do you remember your teachers?

- It was a great honor for me to be at the Department of Electric Drive. I still remember the names of my professors. Igor Mikhailovich SEMENOV was the head of the Electric Drive Department. Our subjects were taught by Sergey Alexandrovich KOVCHIN, Oleg Pavlovich KAN, Lyudmila Vadimovna IVANOVA, and many others. My scientific adviser was Nikolay Grigoryevich BUTYRIN. Unfortunately, he passed away several years ago, but I still remember his phone number. He left a huge mark on my fate. I remember the secretaries in the departments and in the dean's office - they helped us a lot with documents and academic affairs.

- There must have been some funny incidents during your life in Leningrad. Can you share them with us?

- When one arrives in a new country for the first time, something funny is bound to happen to him. At first it was difficult with the language: for example, we discussed why “kvas” is spelled together and “k vam” (“to you”) is separated. Or why the phrase “ordered to live long” meant “died.” It seemed strange to me! I loved and keep loving the Russian language very much, and already on my third day in the USSR I tried to speak it.

During my studies at the Polytechnic Institute I also remember one funny incident. One day I shaved my beard and came to the lectures. I had a long black beard and no one recognized me without it. I decided not to say anything, and just walked in and sat quietly in the auditorium. Everyone thought it was some new student. And only on the second day did they realize that it was me!

I also still remember our trips when we went to the vegetable depot near Leningrad and everybody - both students and teachers - picked potatoes together.



- Do you keep in touch with your fellow students?

- No, we don't keep in touch, although I remember all the guys very well. Twenty-five years after graduation we had a meeting, but I couldn't make it. There were a few foreigners in our group - from Mali, Brazil, Finland, and my countryman from Lebanon. The rest of the students were Russians. I remember that the groups were

large: 25-30 people.

- How was your life after graduating from Polytechnic University?

- I met my future wife in Leningrad. She was also from Lebanon, but she was studying at the First Medical Institute. We got married on June 23, 1987, and came to Lebanon. There was still a civil war going on there, so we were allowed to go to work in Libya, in Tripoli. My wife worked as a doctor and I worked as an engineer. We had three children, and in 1995 we all went back to Lebanon. I went to teach at the Lebanese Institute, where I still work.

In 1997 my wife died. Thirteen years later, when my children were already adults, I remarried to a Russian woman. It so happened that I could practice Russian and not forget it. By the way, at the military institute in Libya, I taught Russian, because when I graduated from Polytechnic Institute we also received diplomas of interpreters. Recently, my former students contacted me and told me that they still remember the song "Katyusha" by heart.

- What does your work involve now?

- Now I am the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering at Lebanese University. I teach automatic control theory, linear and nonlinear systems, robotics, and microprocessors. I will be 63 years old in a year, and I am about to retire. And today, when I give you this interview, it's my birthday! I am very pleased on this very day to talk to a person from the Polytechnic Institute, it is a good gift!

- Mr. HALLAK, congratulations on your birthday! Tell us, have you come to Russia again?

- I have only been to Russia twice since graduation. That was in the 1990s and in the early 2000s. I would like to go back, I hope to come to St. Petersburg soon and visit my native university! Russia means a lot to me. My daughter's name is Rasha, in honor of Russia. She is now 32 years old, she works for Google and is involved in the company's general policy in the Middle East. My other daughter works as an architect and my son is a filmmaker. They live in Belgium.



- What do you like to do in your spare time?

- My free time is mostly related to the sea - we swim a lot, do water sports. We have great weather, now, in winter, it's 22 degrees outside.

- What did the Polytechnic Institute teach you in a broad sense? If you had to make that choice again, would it be Polytechnic University?

- This country, this city, and this institute were my life. Mayakovsky wrote, "Every stone here knows Lenin," and I joke that every stone in Leningrad knows Adel. I hope the city remembers me. For me the institute was everything: all my friends from there, my first love, my first hikes...

They say that if a person knows one language, he lives once. I know Arabic, English, French and Russian. And, knowing Russian, I live another life in parallel - a Russian life. It is a great honor for me to speak today to a person from my institute! And of course, if I had a choice again, I would unconditionally choose Polytechnic University.

- Mr. HALLAK, thank you for the interesting interview! We wish you success and that all your dreams come true!

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