



PERSONALITY OF THE MONTH

Fuad Shehadeh

By Raja Shehadeh



Fuad Shehadeh was born in Jerusalem in 1925 to Boulos Shehadeh, a poet and political activist, owner and editor of the weekly newspaper *Mirat Es Shark* (Mirror of the East), and to Mary Sarrouf from Jaffa, a women's rights and social activist who helped her husband edit the newspaper and directed the literary segments on the Jerusalem radio station. (Interestingly, when reading some of the editorials that Boulos wrote in the nineteen-twenties and -thirties, one is under the strong impression that he was writing about the politics and events of today!) Describing the atmosphere in the house where he grew up, Shehadeh says, "I was influenced by my father at a young age. Our house was full of scholars and literary people. They used to come on nearly a daily basis and discuss politics, literary writings and, most importantly, history."

Fuad qualified as a lawyer in 1948, the year when Palestine was struck off the map, and in 1949 began his practice amidst the poverty and misery the Nakba had caused. He worked together with his brother Aziz, my father, and their firm soon became one of the most prominent law offices in Jordan. The occupation of the West Bank in 1967 initially jeopardized legal work in general; however, the brothers persisted and rebuilt, tackling the challenges brought on by the Israeli occupation. The Shehadeh law office was involved in the establishment of Al Haq, the first human rights organization and suffered targeted acts of harassment by the occupation authorities as a consequence. Nevertheless, Fuad Shehadeh remained steadfastly resisting in the struggle for individual and collective rights of his people.



In 1978, while on his way to defend a case in Jenin, a traffic accident left my uncle hospitalized for months. During this time, he continued to follow up on his work from his hospital bed, even though he was suffering from a concussion and had lost sight in one eye. In 1984, another tragedy struck when Aziz was murdered by an Israeli collaborator and Fuad lost his most important partner. After 1987, during the First Intifada, life and work had to be adjusted to dangerous circumstances. This was a time of great anger at the practices of the occupation authorities, but my uncle provided a much-needed voice of reason, self-control, and sanity. He has always been able to meet challenges with resilience, calmness, intelligence, and humor – the secret to his successes.

The first years after the signing of the Oslo Accords were a time of renewed but short-lived confidence and hope. My uncle had by then entirely lost his eyesight and the office and its equipment had to be modernized to rise to the challenge. Fuad Shehadeh has endured the handicap of his missing eyesight without complaint or self-pity and has arranged his life and practice so that he may continue his activities and serve his clients to the best of his ability. He says, "The practice of the legal profession now flows in my blood. ... I come to our office every day to ensure that the work of our entire team remains at the highest standards." Sixty-six years in office and one of the top lawyers in Palestine, Shehadeh has earned the honor of being listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest-practicing lawyer in the world.