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Shereen Mahoney: Breaking Barriers and Building a Legacy

Born to Egyptian immigrant parents who left their village for a better life in the United States, Sheeren Mahoney grew up in Virginia, where her father's brother had secured a job at a local university. Though her upbringing was comfortable, she constantly navigated the clash between her family's expectations and her own aspirations.

From a young age, Sheeren was aware of the challenges her mother faced. In Egypt, her mother had servants and a comfortable lifestyle, but the shift to the U.S. forced her to navigate a new reality. "My mom had a hard time adjusting," Sheeren recalls. "In Egypt, women typically don't leave the house until they get married, and my mom was used to having help with everything." Sheeren's first visit to Egypt at just three years old was a cultural awakening. However, it was her second trip, at age eleven, that left a lasting impact on her. "I saw how different life was for women there," she explains. "It made me appreciate the opportunities I had in the U.S." That experience left a lasting impact on her, highlighting the limitations women face in Egypt and reinforcing her desire to challenge those norms. While her friends at public school focused on typical childhood interests, Sheeren gravitated toward computers and math. She started taking business classes in seventh grade and by sixteen, she was already working in data entry and filing, proving her dedication to her future.

Growing up in Virginia, Sheeren felt the weight of cultural expectations, especially compared to her brother, who enjoyed more freedom. Watching her brother enjoy the freedom to choose any college and date any girl he wanted, Sheeren faced a much stricter reality. “My parents didn’t really want me to pursue a career,” she admits, recalling their traditional views. They even encouraged her to return to Egypt to find a husband instead of pursuing her education in the U.S. But Sheeren had other plans. “Going to college in the U.S. was a battle,” she recalls. “I had to convince my parents that I could succeed here, not just find a husband.” After finally persuading her parents, she enrolled at James Madison University (JMU), where she majored in computer information systems. “That’s where I felt like life began,” she says.

At JMU, Sheeren set her sights high, aiming to become a CPA and work with one of the Big Six accounting firms. She interned with Marriott, traveling to audit various locations, and even worked at the school’s help desk, where her hard work earned her a graduate assistantship. However, by her senior year, when job offers didn’t match her ambitions, she shifted her focus to obtaining her CPA certification before graduating. While navigating college life, Sheeren faced the usual challenges but felt added pressure from cultural expectations. “In Egypt, women had little hope or dreams,” she reflects. “But I was in the land of opportunity. I wanted to take advantage of that.” Ultimately, she applied only to D.C. firms and was thrilled to receive offers from five out of six.

Her first role at Coopers & Lybrand marked the beginning of an impressive career, where she not only defied cultural expectations but also thrived in a male-dominated field. “I got my dream job,” she reflects. “I was put in a position where I either had to sink or swim.” As a senior consultant, she thrived, working on groundbreaking products and leading teams in project implementation. It was through this work that she met her future husband, who sought her

expertise as he launched his own company. Recognizing her skills, he asked for her help, and their professional collaboration quickly blossomed into a personal relationship. They were engaged just five months later. After marrying, Sheeren decided to leave her job and join her husband's company, where she stepped into the role of CEO.

Under her leadership, Sheeren transformed the business. She was determined to develop new products and expand the company's offerings. Over 5 years, her relentless work ethic led to significant success, driving the company's growth by 60% during a period of stagnation. With her company gaining recognition in the industry, a mentor encouraged Sheeren to consider selling. She ultimately merged with a national top 20 CPA firm, Whitley, where she has continued to excel. Over the past eight years, she has led the nonprofit sector, fueled by her desire to help others while continually challenging herself. Now pursuing certification as an executive coach, Sheeren is eager to teach others how to achieve success like hers while expanding client relationships and enhancing service offerings.

Looking back on her journey, Sheeren's influence goes far beyond her professional accomplishments. Her daughter Jada, studying business at Auburn University, recognizes her mother as a trailblazer. "Now, all my Egyptian female cousins are going to college and becoming doctors," Jada notes. "When I grew up, it was already encouraged to get a higher education, and I saw that change through my mom's journey." Sheeren Mahoney's life story is a testament to breaking barriers, ambition, and redefining possibilities. From a young girl determined to make her mark in a world that often sidelined women to a successful business leader who grew her husband's startup exponentially, she continues to inspire those around her. Through her hard work and dedication, she has not only transformed her own life but has also paved the way for future generations of women in her family and beyond.