

Chibli Mallat: Renaissance Man by Way of BUC

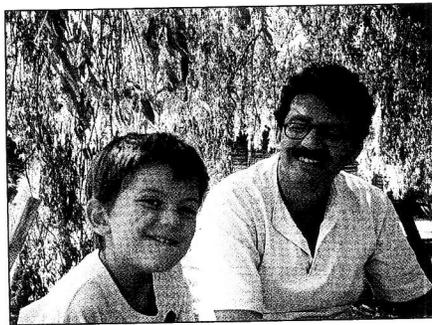


He teaches law, practices it, is a consultant for international firms, organizations and governments around the world, authors scholarly books, writes articles, pens stories for children, has his own web site, attends conferences across the globe and even has time for his wife and two sons.

He is Chibli Mallat, lawyer extraordinary, who while studying for the bar at St. Joseph University was also majoring in English Literature at Beirut University College.

So how did the son of a famous attorney, minister and one-time head of the Beirut bar and grandson of a famous Lebanese poet reconcile legal studies with the world of Shakespeare?

"It was hard to combine both subjects, especially during the war years, as I had to shuttle back and forth, sometimes twice the same day, from Saint Joseph's in Ashrafieh to Ras Beirut," he said. "I was already in my second year of law when I decided to read literature."



With son Wajdi: Never a dull moment

He recalled opting for an English literature major because it seemed intriguing for someone whose background was French and Arabic. Curiosity about Shakespeare was paramount and he never regretted it, adding that the bard and BUC changed his life.

"It was the grand opening to an altogether different world, which was unknown to me. It was also a way to many friendships that endure to date, including many excellent teachers who marked me profoundly," he said. "I will mention only Jean Makdissi and Irene Faffler, who aren't at LAU any longer, but were both outstanding, dedicated, and intellectually powerful."

So why did he choose to become a lawyer like his father?

"Mostly because I like the precision of the law, and believe it's an alternative to violence, however imperfect the real legal world may be," he replied.

Being the product of a famous family must also have created pressures to live up to the Mallat name and to carry the torch.

Mallat went on to study for a Master's in international and comparative law at Georgetown in Washington, DC, and later earned a doctorate in Islamic law from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies' Law Department.

He's lectured at his SOAS and Georgetown alma maters, at Beirut's Islamic University, at MIT, Harvard Law School, Princeton University, University of California at Berkeley, Cambridge University, Tokyo University, Berlin's Freie University and New York's Council on Foreign Relations, to name a few spots.

While living in London, he set up and ran the Center of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law at SOAS and has served as editor in chief of a book series as well as joint general editor of the Yearbook of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law.

As if that weren't enough, he's spoken before the British Parliament, the U.S. Senate, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Japanese Foreign Ministry, and, manages to write regular op-ed columns for *The Daily Star*, the English-language newspaper of Lebanon.

He serves as the principal at the Mallat Law Offices—established 40 years ago by his father—which involves litigation, consultancy and managing an eight-member team of attorneys, and, has been a member of the Lebanese bar since 1983.

So do all these professional obligations leave time to be with wife Nayla (LAU's director of Alumni Affairs) and sons Wajdi and Tamer?

"The kids are compelling, and get more so as they grow. My wife being part of LAU, it might be safer not to wax lyrical on the subject," he said. "We have restricted our social life in order not to be engulfed in the Beirut

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whirlwind of parties and other grand occasions but I'd like to spend more time with the family."

Mallat co-authored a book with Tamer because it was hard to find children's books that related to their universe and fancies. So he tried to fill some of the gaps by way of a collection of stories, "Aventures à Beyrouth."

"Tamer was four at the time, he loved drawing and did a good job of it as you can see from the shark on the website," Mallat said. "The book is about his 'adventures' in Beirut with his friends the shark, the volcano, and the cat. The drawings are his, exclusively, and I used to sit down with him, read aloud what I was writing, while he drew."

As for son Wajdi, Mallat wrote a song with him in Arabic. "I should post it on the website."

The www.mallat.com site has served him well. It's not the first he helped establish—there have been several. The Center

of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law at SOAS, which he used to direct, was his first experience.

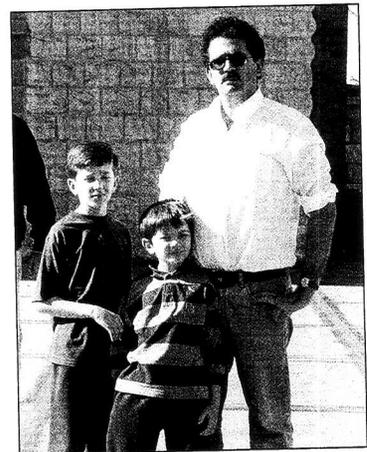
"I did not think they were lucrative though, until I received a number of consultancies from corporations in the US and Europe that had visited my Lebanese site," he said.

But the web is much more than that, he argued, noting that it is a wonderful communication tool. "Mallat.com is still not as interactive as I wish, but I have some ideas about that for kids. Keep connected."

How does he divide his time between the legal profession and teaching? Where does all the traveling fit in the schedule?

"It is hard to combine both, especially that my work at the bar is increasingly demanding, including business travel," he said. "But research is compelling, and writing is a vice. There is no good writing without good research, nor are there good lawyers who cannot write (and speak) well."

Good assistants and skillful delegation are also instrumental in ensuring success.



Young author Tamer, Wajdi and Chibli on a family outing

"But I have cut out academic travelling. In my field (Arab and Islamic law), there are few specialists, and I receive an invitation to a seminar or lecture abroad twice a month on average," he said. "It's impossible to keep up, and something has to give. Less day-dreaming perhaps."