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## Ahmad Abou El Maati: A brief biography



Ahmad El Maati, at home in Canada with his mother, Samira Al-Shallash

Ahmad Abou El Maati was born in Kuwait on October 1, 1964. His mother, Samira Al-Shallash, is a retired teacher and a Canadian citizen originally from Syria. His father, Badr El Maati, is a retired accountant, auditor and business consultant, and a Canadian citizen originally from Egypt. Both his parents, now separated, live in Toronto. Ahmad's younger sister lives abroad with her husband and children.

Ahmad and his father and brother immigrated to Canada in 1981 when Ahmad was seventeen years old. His mother and sister arrived in Canada in 1983. Ahmad became a Canadian citizen in 1986, and is also an Egyptian citizen through his father.

The family settled in Toronto, where Ahmad completed his Ontario Academic Credits. They moved to Montreal, where Ahmad took college courses in electronics, and then studied statistics for two years at Concordia University. He worked odd jobs in the late eighties, driving a taxi in London, Ontario, and working in factory jobs in Montreal. In 1990 and 1991 Ahmad studied part time to be a computer technician at what was then Control Data Institute (now called the Career Development Institute).

In 1991, when Ahmad was twenty-seven years old, he travelled to Afghanistan to join the U.S. backed mujahideen in its fight against what he saw as a communist/Soviet puppet government. He received basic infantry training, but because of a knee injury sustained in high school wrestling, did not engage in any combat. Instead he cooked, drove trucks and an ambulance, and occasionally provided first aid. The Taliban emerged as the ruling power in 1996, and Ahmad's group, led by Hekmatyar, was forced out of Kabul into northern Afghanistan in 1996, and then out of northern Afghanistan into Iran in September 1997.

Ahmad travelled to Pakistan to renew his Canadian passport, and then to Syria to meet with his mother in February 1998. They had decided that it was time for him to marry, and searched for a wife for him, but were not successful. They spent several months together in Syria before he returned to Canada in August 1998.

Ahmad worked for two months as a mechanic's assistant in a Montreal garage, before deciding to take a course in truck driving at the Adanac Truck Driver Training in Scarborough, Ontario. Ahmad passed his test and earned his Class AZ truck-drivers license.

Ahmad went to Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj for the first time in March 1999. After returning, he got his first truck-driving job with Leger Trucking, based in Montreal, in the spring of 1999. That summer, Ahmad decided that he would try flying lessons, because he had heard about successful air taxi services. He started the lessons, flying in a single engine Cessna at Buttonville Airport in Markham, Ontario. Ahmad found it frightening and expensive and gave it up after only five interrupted hours of lessons.

In the spring of 2000 he started driving for Motion Supply Company, which supplies professional drivers for other companies. Ahmad was assigned to Traffix, a company based in Toronto.

Ahmad went to perform the Hajj for the second time with his mother in February 2001. He returned and was then assigned to Highland Transport, another client of the Motion Supply, where he worked until August 2001. Most of his deliveries were to the United States, and Ahmad travelled there hundreds of times without incident until August 16, 2001.

In April 2001 Ahmad and his mother travelled to Syria to meet a prospective wife. He met Rola, a young woman born and raised in Syria, and they were immediately attracted to each other. After spending time together, Ahmad proposed engagement, and their families celebrated with a traditional ceremony. Ahmad left Syria about a month later to return to his work in Toronto, promising to work immediately to bring Rola to Canada.

Ahmad learned that he needed a legal marriage certificate in order initiate sponsorship procedures to bring Rola to Canada, and travelled again to Syria to legalize the marriage. He spent as much time as possible visiting Rola and her family. They talked about their future life together, and chose names for the children they hoped to have. Ahmad left for Canada after about three weeks, promising to return in December in time to observe Ramadan, and to prepare for and celebrate their marriage with a formal ceremony.

On November 12, 2001, Rola and her family were waiting for Ahmad at the airport in Damascus when he was detained. With no sign of Ahmad they contacted his family. Sometime after Ahmad was detained, Rola's father travelled to Cairo to tell Ahmad's mother that he could not have imagined a better husband for his daughter, but that his family felt they had no choice but to annul the marriage because they feared for their safety.

Since being released from detention and returning to Canada, Ahmad has sought medical help for injuries sustained during his detention and torture in Syria and Egypt. He has had two operations, one for his knee, and one for an anal fissure. His shoulder was dislocated and still needs treatment, and he has sciatic nerve damage in his right hip and back. Ahmad is also seeking professional help to deal with the psychological impact of his ordeal, and has been unable to work since his return. The ordeal has also taken a tremendous toll on the health of his parents.