

## MEET GEORGE NASSER

### In pursuit of knowledge

K. Michelle Burgess

When people first meet George Nasser, they notice his accent. He sounds British. That's nothing out of the ordinary. What they wouldn't guess is that he was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1933 to British parents during the reign of Haile Selassie.

As a child, Nasser was surrounded by cheetah cubs, monkeys, and other exotic animals. It was this early experience that formed his love for animals and respect for wildlife.

Nasser's wild surroundings were changed abruptly when Benito Mussolini's troops invaded Ethiopia in 1936. Nasser's family moved to England and Cyprus, where they lived during World War II. After the war, in the mid-1940s, his family returned to Ethiopia.

One of his enduring memories while attending school in Nairobi, Kenya, was being able to see, on a clear day, the snow-covered peaks of Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro, both situated close to the equator. Today, most of the snow has disappeared from these mountains.

Now at home in suburban Chicago, Ill., with not a peak in sight, Nasser has a yellow Labrador retriever instead of African wildlife and ponders his canine's evolution from wolves. This lifelong drive to ask questions likely comes from his parents, "who instilled in me the will to work hard and to never stop learning."

Nasser says that his quest for learning brought him to the United States in 1955 "because there was no higher education in Africa that I could really go to."

He arrived with his brother and without much of an idea of what he wanted to study. When an adviser asked them what they would major in, his brother said architecture and Nasser, who would later hold the title of editor-in-chief of *PCI Journal* for more than 30 years, said civil engineering. "It wasn't a profound decision, you know. Writing wasn't particularly my best subject at the time. I learned that on the job."

He eventually earned that BS degree in civil engineering from the University of Detroit. Then in 1960, Nasser obtained his MS degree in engineering from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

After college, he says, he remained in this country "because basically I felt that I could get a better job here in the United States than going back to Ethiopia. It was going through a Marxist revolution. Politically speaking, it was really unstable."

He worked as a structural engineer for several consulting engineering firms in the Detroit, Mich., area and taught for a couple of semesters at Oakland University in Rochester, Mich. Then, for the next five years, Nasser attended night school to work on his doctorate while acting as associate editor of the *ACI Journal*.

His studies came to an abrupt halt when, at an American Concrete Institute (ACI) cocktail reception in 1972, Art Anderson and Dan Jenny asked Nasser if he was interested in moving to Chicago, Ill., to join PCI. He did go and through the years was named a PCI Fellow and Titan for his contributions there.

Working in publishing has satisfied his thirst for knowledge. "I enjoyed the writing part and having an overview of the whole industry rather than working in a firm where you would see only the individual projects."

He has authored more than 100 technical papers for ACI, the American Society of Civil Engineers, PCI, and other technical publications.

Nasser advocates that all engineers submit articles for publication. "In the course of one's work, if you come up with a unique solution to a common problem, however trivial it might appear, write it up with a diagram or two and submit it for publication. That offering will be a useful contribution to the industry, and in return you will become an expert in that subject area."

Nasser has remained a regular contributor to the *PCI Journal* since his retirement in 2005 and for the past four years has answered technical inquiries for PCI on a part-time basis. His sons, David and Mark Nasser, followed in his footsteps and work for the Consulting Engineers Group Inc. (CEG) in San Antonio, Tex. ■



George Nasser sits with cheetah cubs in Ethiopia in 1935. Courtesy of The Daily Mirror.