**FREE FORUM with TERRENCE McNALLY - A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK**

**WAEL GHONIM (2012) – REVOLUTION 2.0 – HOW THE INTERNET HELPED SPARK EGYPT'S UPRISING**

**Transcript – Conversation recorded 02-05-2012**

Hi I'm Terry McNally and welcome to Free Forum…

Q: I like people to get a feel for the ideas behind the work that we talk about. Obviously your memoir does that. Briefly, give listeners the back story. Who were you before you created a Facebook page for Khalid Said?

WG: So I was just an ordinary Egyptian who happens to work in a multinational company that loves the country cares about it but always intimidated by a fear that there are consequences for opposing the regime. Also there are no alternatives, there is no light at the end of the tunnel, we don't see where we're going. And I was more focusing on my personal life and my career hoping to see something happen in Egypt that would be great. At the same time there were many great Egyptians on the front lines opposing publicly Mubarrak, calling for strikes and protests, which haven't really at the time captured a large audience or mainstream, mainly because of the fear, everyone was scared.

Q: And that fear was the fear of a security state and a state police. You have written that "the internet has been instrumental in shaping my experiences as well as my character". What do you mean by that?

WG: Well, the first time I got on a computer was when I was 16 years old, I was at school and I got hooked up, just like many people I got addicted to using computers, and since then the computer was at that time my best friend. I logged in the internet when I was 17 years old and I loved the virtual world, I've explained that in the book, I talked about it a lot, I love communicating with people from different countries and backgrounds. I love communicating with people whom I don't know and I have no, there are no politics to worry about in communicating or collaborating with them. And that played a big role in my life and my career. In fact the first time I met my wife was online, on a discussion forum, and the first thing I've done was an Islamic website that was sort of like youtube but audios for the Arab world which is one of the largest now until today, when it comes to this category. And I came to learn a lot of stuff online. And the most important one was collaboration and engagement, and I just love the internet, it's basically a platform that allows everyone – not just talented or gifted people – to reach out to others. And what matters in this reach, without any filtration, without someone to come in as a gate to tell you what you should say and what you should not. And the best thing here is that the more the internet is growing the more decentralized mainstream media gets and the more empowered are the users rather than the experts. So in a sense that was very good for me, I enjoyed for example doing business. I was working for a company, gmail competitor before joining google, in the region and I've done hundreds of transactions with customers and clients I've never met, I've never known, I've never talked to, it was all through the online communication. So that did definitely play a role. I call myself an internet extrovert and a real life introvert. I do love to communicate with people online more than I do offline.

Q: Very understood. It also makes you a new kind of citizen than was possible to exist before the internet, whether in Egypt or anywhere in the world.

Q: You spent six months in the US in 2001 as a student. You arrived before 9/11 and left after. What was it like before and after?

WG: I think that the US to many people from my region have completely changed before and after. When I traveled to the US it was mainly to continue my education, I told in the book saying why I was not happy with the way education is in the country and I took a decision I'm going to travel and try and see if I can continue studying in the US. But after 9/11 everything completely changed, the media had basically launched a huge campaign, instead of against terrorism it was against Islam and the religion, the Muslims who believe in the religion of Islam as well as the middle east, whether it was intentional or unintentional, that wasn't the issue. The issue was, personally I felt I was singled out. Nothing bad happened to me I have to say, but the feeling of being singled out was not comfortable and I just had, I sat down with my wife and we talked for a while and we agreed to go back to Egypt, we said let's see if we can make it in Egypt because the US was getting harder to live in for someone who is from the middle east, and specially also, right after the events it's expected that people will be more, much more emotionally. Over time things get better but at that time that was the peak of emotions and anger and frustration and the focus of the media on the stories. But I think it was after all a good decision that I went back home, I'm happy that I did.

Q: Before 9/11 you were a young student with your wife in the US. What was that like? What did America feel like, look to you, because you are both a citizen of Egypt and a citizen of the internet so in some sense a global citizen. What did you feel like prior to 9/11?

WG: I was actually impressed. I remember the first time I visited the US I went back home saying to my friends, we are fools down here. Something is going on wrong if that's our country and they're convincing us that this is the best it can get then there is definitely something wrong in those people. I really have had a lot of respect for the human rights as well as the democracy, the freedom of speech. At the same time, I was always wondering, especially coming from the Arab world, how come this is not applied. The US that we see inside the US is not the same as reflected on its foreign policy. And yet I was really impressed and I was also impressed with the education and the level of education among the people I communicated with. As a young guy it's easy to get impressed by just flying to the US, in fact many people from the country, their dream was always to go in the summer and visit the US for a couple of months and go back and talk to everyone about it.

Q: You come, it's an eye opening event and then of course 9/11 happens and the feeling of being here changes. In your initial google interviews you were asked why you wanted to work for google, which it's clear from your writing that you really did. And I believe you said that you wanted to help change the middle east and that you even at that point thought the internet was going to help make that happen.

WG: Yeah, it wasn't really about the meals at google. [LAUGHS] It was mainly the belief, I had this long-lasting belief that internet was one of the hopes for change. It's at the end of the day, change happens by the people, but people need tools and internet was great because first of all like a large number of Arabs in general were getting on line. It just shows you the whole world, the access to information is very democratic and it's easy to verify

something and know about it. You can get to see the different points of views on any issue. People can collaborate and communicate effectively. So I just felt it was a matter of time that the region changes. I remember in April 2010 I believe I wrote that, which is almost one year before the revolution, that internet will change the face of politics in this country and the elections in 2011 are not going to be like the elections in 2005, referring to when Mubarrak won the elections easily against his competitors. And so with a company like google, the scale of change you can offer is huge. And this is not by actually getting involved in politics, it's just by providing people with the tools and they are empowered to do whatever they want with it.

Q: Exactly. The sub-title of your book, that's more than a sub-title to you isn't it? The Power of the People is Stronger than the People in Power. What do you mean by that?

WG: It's what I felt right after February 11th. And I just wrote it on there, after writing it out I asked myself, who said that? So I thought I'd copied it from someone and I went to google and googled it to make sure that I get the reference right, who was the one who said it, and there wasn't anyone. This is a true feeling of what I felt when it's been always the case in the past that people in Egypt were saying, this is their country, they are the strongest, they govern us, no one can go against them, if you speak up you're going to be arrested, you have to walk on the sidewalk. It's an Egyptian common saying, that don't walk in the street or you will get yourself in trouble. So what happened in Tunisia on the 13th January and then on the 14th of January was such an inspiration to a lot of us. Wow! You are all of a sudden, you see an Arab dictator, it was the first time in my whole life I see an Arab dictator addressing his nation saying I am sorry I was wrong, I am sorry, I understood you. And then the next day he escapes to Saudi Arabia, and that was the sign. When people are united, determined, they know what they want and they are ready to pay whatever price to make it happen, it will happen. Regardless whomever in power, what kind of power they have. I truly believe that one big reason why 11th February happened and Mubarrak was forced to step down is that most of us did not really understand politics, most of us were naïve to say. And we did not want, we were not ready for any concessions, we did not want any deals cut, we just wanted him out, and this is exactly what happened and this is what forced the meaning that, once the people are united, their power is definitely greater than anyone who is in power with whatever weapons, tools they have.

Q: Prior to this, even though the power that Mubarrak had been in power so long and everything had been handed over from one dictator to the next. Even the hopes of people were usually in, what if we put someone else in power? You were involved in, you put up a Facebook page for Muhammad El Baraday, prior to the 2011 elections. So that was still a feeling that, not necessarily from you but from the culture in Egypt, that the best we can do is change who is in power.

WG: Yeah I mean, to a large extent we needed someone we trust that can bring change. And El Baradai, before he comes to Egypt I was not really interested in politics. Just as I told you, one because you are always scared of the consequences of doing that, especially if you work in a good company, if you have family, you will ask yourself ten times before getting into this. And the second, which is as important, is that, we had no hope, like, so what? You know, what can happen? No one was envisioning how change would happen. When Muhammad El Baradai started showing interest that he joins the change campaign in the country and then some young activists online started calling him for to nominate himself for presidency, that seemed like a nice exit, that was good. And he played a critical role at that time by saying

listen, I'm not running for presidency unless those seven things happen, and that was the seven demands, which I clearly explain in the book, like how the logic. But it was great how he came up with those demands and then started campaigning online and offline for people to sign and agree to. And the demands basically said, we are not going into a show called democracy, we need real democracy and for that to happen you need to make sure that judges are the ones monitoring the elections; that Egyptians are voting; Egyptians abroad are voting; Egyptians vote with their ID cards, they don't have to get other cards that complicate the matter, and so on. So at that time, I was giving a lot of attention to El Baradai as a person and eventually hoping that change will happen. I clearly remember, he said that if you are looking for a savior I am not the savior, Egyptians have to save themselves. And that's why the second chapter of the book as I named it, "Searching for a Savior". We were looking for a savior, we wanted a magical solution, we wanted something crazy to happen, someone comes in and we all go behind him and make it happen, but that wasn't the case.

Q: Yeah that is not what happened. Can you provide a little context for listeners who aren't aware. Egypt is an ancient civilization but has a very youthful population, nearly two thirds 30 years old or younger. And the numbers of educated and uneducated, the number of unemployed, the number of angry, the number of people who see no future. What is that like?

WG: Before 2011 I think if the revolution gave us anything it would be hope. A lot of people start to have hope that this can be better. In Egypt you have almost one out of every two lives under $2 a day, so people are really suffering from poverty and having huge economic problems. And one out of every three, more than one out of every three can't read and write, so there is another clear education problem. And then the country ranks very high when it comes to corruption, in all levels, from the top to the bottom, there is corruption everywhere, in politics, in education, in health system, everything was corrupted. And it was sort of a rotten regime leading us. And the level of frustration was very high. A lot of Egyptians including my dad left the country because basically the salary he makes in Egypt is one 20$^{th}$ of the salary he could make in Saudi Arabia so he left for Saudi Arabia. And so there's millions of Egyptians who live outside the country trying to find a better opportunity. And things were getting worse, a lot of Egyptians started getting on boats, hundreds and sometimes thousands on boats trying to reach the other side of the Mediterranean sea in Europe, risking their life and many people have died in this trip. But then those who survive come back and say okay, I'm living dead, so what's the point, I will take the risk, maybe I will have a better life when I cross the Mediterranean. After this, because of the regime was using fear, a lot of people were, the sense of pride, Egyptians are very proud of their nationality. I remember the guy, I was interviewed by state security in 2007 and I told the guy I love my country. He's like, the interrogator, was asking me why.

Q: Why you loved Egypt?

WG: I don't have an answer, I don't know. This is how it is. I have a very strong sense of love towards my country, which is something normal, a lot of people love their countries and love where they're from. So despite that, a lot of people became sort of broken. They feel, they cannot brag about being Egyptians, basically. So this revolution has brought back the pride and the hope that things would get better.

Q: A turning point for you prior to the revolution is when you set up the Facebook page. What drove you to that?

WG: It's purely personal. I hate injustice and when I saw the photo of Kalid Said, the young Egyptian who died after being brutally beaten up by two police officers in the street, I felt that this has to stop. I know he wasn't the first one but he's the first one I see his photo after being beaten. And the fact that he was young; he comes from a middle class, did not only connect with me but to many Egyptians and that was a very strong turning point. I remember sitting down for some time broke into tears in my room thinking what can I do. And I decided I have to take his case to the public, I have to try and help, among many others who have done that, to make sure that this is a public case; justice will prevail as well as work on the men, exposing what the dictator is doing. The worst thing for a dictator and for oppressors, for people like the ministry and state security, is to expose them. They know they are doing something wrong, they want the knowledge to be very limited of what they are doing, and the more you expose them the more you are putting pressure on them and this is where I came from. So the page was mainly all about spreading the awareness and working with people trying to understand what can we do to fix the situation.

Q: The state security apparatus wants people to know they are active enough that they have the fear but not beyond that.

WG: Yeah, they only want the people who get to speak up to be scared and to know exactly what they do. And actually sometimes they basically intentionally tell you what happened so that you are always scared, you are always intimidated, you calculate your steps. They call you eventually, every other week, to know what you are doing and what you are up to. They tell you, we are after you, be careful. But as you just said, that shouldn't be the public case. The public should not know about that, because they were scared of a moment like what happened on January 25th. The more you do this the more the anger mounts and there will be a moment where everyone is going to say no, enough and this is not going to happen any more.

Q: And then again, just to provide background, from the Facebook page, you were organizing from that page, correct? Anonymously, but silent protests, silent demonstrations. Until everything shifted, what were you doing and what were you hoping?

WG: Well I could tell the whole experience in the book because I have personally learned a lot through this process. It made me think, change a lot of my perceptions about how things should run for activists, for playing an active role. I was not an activist and I think that was very good, because most of the activists, they get into situations where others don't see. For example, like human rights activists see the cases of torture, speak darkly with the victims, get involved and see what is happening. Eventually there is sort of a gap in communication that of course unintentionally between them and the mainstream or the masses, and it's not always the case that they will know how to tell the people the reality and people can connect with them. And I was not an activist so when I created the page the first day 36,000 people joined it, and in three days it was 100,000. It was obvious that amount of frustration and anger was big. So what I've learned and I've detailed this in the book talking about the campaigns, is that one engagement was key. This wasn't a page where it tells people what to do, this was a page that asked people, what should we do? And based on their recommendations create surveys and based on the most life choices, actions take place. Second is being the language, the language being very, talking the talk of the people. So I again unintentionally, it wasn't planned, because that was just me, I was always talking as "I", I wasn't saying "we" so that people understand that the guy running this page is writing

with, he's one person, it's not a group going back sitting in the back and putting master plans and applying them on the page, it was one person. And eventually I got a second administrator, his name is Abdul Mansur, he was basically helping me out throughout the whole time. But we were always using "I", we were always staying away from words like the "regime", we say the "government" because the regime is not a word that most of the people connect with, it's such an activist tainted word.

Q: This distinction that you're making between what you were doing on Facebook, in the look of it, the feel of it, the language and so on, separating not just from the government and state security, but from in some way, ongoing activism. This was because it is how you saw things and how you thought things could broaden?

WG: Actually it wasn't separating things from activism. Activist role is crucial and important and what they were doing were basically they were in the front lines. They were doing the right things for their capacity. What we were missing were the crowd in the middle where I come from, which basically understands and relates to what the activists are doing, their demands, and at the same time able to deliver the message to those who might not be interested or misunderstand the messages if it comes directly. So, and also, there is another thing which is, I was going to say, after the language it was also very important to make sure that this is not confrontational. Most of the people were scared. I personally am intimidated, and I clearly expressed my real feelings throughout the whole journey, in the book and I wasn't shying away from saying that I'm someone who's always worried about the security of myself as well as my family and everyone whom I ask to do something. So it was the non confrontational approach made a lot of people connect with the page. People do not want to always be confrontational, there is always a smaller number of people who want to do that. And finally the anonymity was critical because not only for security reasons. I believe the cause was the hero. People joined this page not because Wael Ghonim from google created it, it's because they care about Zaid, they care about the cause, they are not happy with the Ministry of Interior Affairs. So the anonymity added a lot of, on the contrary to what many people would think, it added a lot of legitimacy to the page. And why because people did connect directly to the cause, they did not feel someone was taking credit or too much credit for their contribution. And the cause is not personal life, the moment you personalize the cause it could be attacked through the person. You can question the intentions of the person, you can basically defame the person, find anything wrong with them and make it a clear case so people would not connect with the cause. And finally, personalizing the cause could get people who believe in the cause not to join you because of the fact they don't like you, they have a personal preference against you and they don't like you as a person. It just, all of this just played very well. Probably I'm articulating it now in a good way. It just happened at that time, there was, it wasn't like I'm sitting down making all these conscious decisions except the anonymity one, which I consciously made.

Q: Seems like it's ultimately very true again to that line in the sub title of your book. You're saying that even about the person who might be in power behind the Facebook page or behind a cause.

WG: If that call did not make sense no one would have – because there have been many calls before. It's just the fact that people believing and subscribing to a cause, being determined to do it, ready to sacrifice for it, that cause will happen. Specially in our time like, hardly anyone would argue that what we are in is very bad and the regime needs to go. And that was the biggest thing. And I also have to say that in the book I was trying to explain how ideas

were just coming mostly from the members of the page. So the silent stance or the first underground activity, I tried calling on the page, was not even my idea, it was an idea from a guy who emailed me. He said, listen, I know you said we are not protesting because we are afraid of what happens to the protestors, so how about we go in all wearing black, looking at the beach, giving our backs to the street, standing up for one hours, doing nothing and then going back home. And when I read the idea, I tried to visualize it and I was like, wow, that's a very good idea. So what do we do next? I asked the people on the page, saying what do you think, should we do this? And surveyed the people, the people liked the idea, we started collecting ideas from people on how to make it nice. People said bring Koran or the Bible, listen to something, don't hold each other's hands, try to spread, and people were developing the ideas as we go until we went to the streets on that day. And the moment you see the footage coming in, there was another listen learn, because people were very happy sharing their photos. Why, because of the instantaneous feedback they get, there as instant feedback, the moment you upload the photo on the page, hundreds of likes, tons of comments and it just makes everyone happy that they took part in this. So all of this did play a critical role in building the DNA, the credibility between the page members and the page, despite the fact they don't know who's running it.

Q: That's by its very nature in some sense they are running it.

WG: That's what I was always saying.

Q: And it was pretty much in actuality true.

There were demonstrations starting, the page existed but you were nowhere near a revolution. At that point, you're polling people and you called in late 2010 for a celebration of Egypt's national police day on the 25th, correct? What was your sense of that?

WG: Four days before the 30th, Abdul Mansur, the other administrator, came and told me, the police day is on the 25th, we should do something. And I told him I don't think so, I don't know, it's a Tuesday. Because we used to do our activities on Fridays which is the weekend in Egypt. So he said no, it's a day off. We started thinking okay what can we do? And it was all about, let's do a silent stand, maybe let's, he suggested we do a list of honor to honor all those good police officers and a Wall of Fame and a Wall of Shame for the bad ones. And at that time, we didn't know what exactly will happen. So I posted on the 30th of December that these guys are basically doing a lot of bad things in the past one year and until now nothing has happened in the case of Zaid, how about we see what can happen? So I posted this and I was trying to get some suggestions from the people. I started talking to some activists like Ahmad Madur from 6th April, asking him what should we do? And at that time, it was just, we were going to do something that 1000 or a couple of thousand people do it. But the moment when Ben Ali made his speech that was the turning point and personally for me. I started feeling more revolutionary, which is not me, than the normal ordinary person. I was completely against the idea of launching massive protests before and I even wrote about that on January 7th but then what Ben Ali did and then his escape made me forget all that, and I said, we have to do it, looking at the comments of the people. We have got to do exactly what Tunisia did, even if it comes at the expense of my personal life and I was very serious about it. I put the first post and renamed the event, recreated it, called it a revolution instead of a celebration of the Police Day, I said the revolution on unemployment, injustice, torture and corruption.

Q: So suddenly what had been celebrating Egyptian police day January 25 becomes January 25 revolution against torture, corruption, unemployment and injustice, and at that point to some extent for you at least the dye is cast and you've shifted.

WG: Now completely and it wasn't just me, it was basically everyone in Egypt. Everyone in the critical mass went on 25th. Everyone just felt this is the moment, it's our moment, we will make it, we will do it. And the feedback was enormous, in a couple of days the invitation on Facebook reached about a half a million people and there was about 27,000 confirmations. I have experience with other Facebook events and the largest I have seen was 12,000 people confirmation.

Q: So two things happened: one, the ante is up as to what we're doing and two, it turns out that brings out a much greater response.

WG: Huge response, it made sense and I think the fact that the page is not a political movement, not a biased individual were calling for it made it easy for others to adopt and own. And there was no owner of the invitation and this is exactly why I don't like the fact that I've been much more exposed and taking a lot of credit while many others have worked and many others have had a lot of influence on what happened on January 25th. But I call that period one of the best marketing campaigns and I tried to detail what happened exactly, not as in just saying the story but doing something respect, reflections and what was going on that made a lot of people adopt the call and not only that work on the marketing campaign for it so we can see what we have seen on January 25th.

Q: Was there an offline grassroots uprising of the poor or the workers that your online inspired uprising joined with?

WG: There was definitely in 2010 there was about 1000 strikes and sit ins by workers and there were a few protests against the regime in general, small protests. Would this revolution have happened? I believe it would have happened eventually because at the end of the day there is a level where people will be super frustrated and say that's it, this is no longer happening. Tunisia did speed this up though, accelerated it, and the internet helped organize the day on January 25th so gave it a style and a taste, and made it look like what is it on January 25th. But definitely we were heading towards a deadlock where this regime will have to be taken out of power. So it was very critical to understand that this was going to happen anyway, probably not on January 25th but because of the internet and because of Tunisia it happened this way, it happened on 25th and it happened by invitation online that was spread from online to offline. And by the way, all the grassroots movements joined the call, that was very essential. If all of them had said no we're not going and this is wrong, probably wouldn't have happened.

Q: Right, if the grassroots folks had said that's a different movement than ours the reality would never have happened.

WG: At the end of the day, those who are online are not, does not belong to a specific movement, it comes from these grassroots movements. I was always arguing with my friends who think internet is not going to do anything, and I was like, those online are not zombies, they are real Egyptians. The fact they are more brave online than offline can change. Something can happen that can change that. But at the end of the day, it wasn't the tool, it

wasn't the internet that made the revolution, it was the people, and it wasn't the power of social media it was the power of the people.

Q: So you were captured on January 27th just as the revolution took off, you were held for 11 days in interrogation. What happened? What do you want to say about that period for you?

WG: Why would people read my book then?

Q: [LAUGHS] Okay so if you want to hear about the interrogation.

WG: Well I detailed the whole interrogation in the prison. But the hardest thing that I went through was that I did not know what was going on outside, I was all the time blindfolded and I was waiting for the unknown. The hours seemed like days, the days seemed like months, the months seemed like years. I just lost track of the time, with the exception of the night pray I know what time it is, but I lost track of the days. It was very hard, I was just praying that something happens and get me out of here. I wanted to know exactly what was going on outside. And I have to say that I was very lucky because I wasn't physically tortured. Probably beaten up here and there but that is not torture as generally happens to people. There were people who died inside prisons in Egypt while being tortured, and there are people who spent months and months in that. So I was very lucky that it was only 11 days and it was basically blindfolding and being handcuffed and that's all.

Q: You have thanked the regime of Mubarrak for making their overthrow inevitable. What do you mean when you say that?

WG: I think what happened, their reaction to what was happening was the main reason why he got out of power. Basically they completely undermined what was going to happen on January 25th beforehand, they ignored all the – I remember one of my friends who is now a parliament member, he was part of the whole movement from the beginning, he wrote a letter to Mubarrak on the 23rd January saying that it's about time you have to listen. And of course they completely did not think anything would happen. And when people took to the streets on the 25th and instead of negotiating with the young guys, who came by the way, at that time we had demands. Those demands were firing the minister of interior affairs; making sure there is a minimum wage. Like normal demands. If they came on January 25th midday and said okay, we're doing one, two, three, four, that's it, that would have been at least created a friction between the activists and the people who are in the street whether they should stay or leave. They decided to use teargas and rubber bullets, water hoses, beat up everyone, force people to leave the square. Which made people more persistent. I, one of my friends was interrogated, that same guy I was just referring to, he was interrogated by them and on the night of 25th they arrested him. The guy told him, do you think you guys can go in the street and get us out of power? You are dreaming, you don't understand Egyptian security. So they were completely arrogant, they did not see it happening. And then the lousy step of cutting down the internet and phone was very important because it just showed the whole Egypt that they are scared. The worst thing you show to the person who is fighting you is to show him that you are scared.

Q: And so people who weren't closely involved suddenly lost their phone or their internet, and so now it was like they came and told you, you may not have been paying attention, we're scared.

WG: Yes, and that did definitely create anger as well as made a lot of people join just because of the fact that this looks like it's happening, the regime is afraid.

Q: If they're reacting this way it must be happening.

WG: Of course. And then eventually through the process they did not understand the demand. I think they have done a lot of mistakes, the kind of battles after Mubarrak's speech they were just, it was overwhelming and they did not see it happening, they did not understand the young people Specially they haven't been communicating with them anyway. All of a sudden those people revolt and you see an Egypt that you never saw before. Everyone was impressed and surprised.

Q: Let's move to the present. A year ago today the protests were taking place. The recent parliamentary elections in Egypt have given first and second place to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Party. Where do things stand? And last week perhaps as many as 70 die after a soccer game. And now there are riots in various cities. What's your sense of where Egypt is and where the revolution is today?

WG: I'm very sorry about all those who died and I think this is one of the biggest problems we are facing and we have been facing is that the value of the life of the Egyptian people is not as valuable as we wanted it to be in the eyes of the regime or whomever is in power. And this must change and we are all working on this. I believe that the situation in Egypt can be seen from different angles and it's definitely complicated. It's not zero or one. There is a huge gray area and if we look at the achievements, I believe we have achieved things that if you told me 13 months ago they would have happened I would think you were crazy. Mubarrak stepping down; his son is in prison; his government is no longer there; his party is dissolved; and then for the first time in 60 years 27 million Egyptians go to the street waiting in lines and voting for whomever they want in the parliament. And so those are amazing achievements. No one had envisioned this, no one had seen it coming and we have to celebrate our success. But at the same time, there are many people who died and there haven't been real trials for those who killed them or real investigations which is one thing that really makes us angry and not happy and satisfied. And the pace of the transitional process is not acceptable for many of the Egyptians and they want to see a president as soon as possible. They want the country to end the military rule which lasted for over 60 years now, to end as soon as possible so that we start looking for the next steps. We took to the streets not just for the democracy one of the main reasons is economy. We wanted social justice, we wanted people to live a better life, especially if almost 50% of the people are living under the poverty line. But I just think that the revolution is a process. A critical mass of Egyptians have broken their fear and a larger group have been more politically active. So people are now voting, people are following the news. On the first parliamentary session, in cafes people were sitting down watching it as if it's a very critical and important soccer game. So this is where we are heading. We are heading towards the right direction I believe. The pace is very slow, it's disappointing a lot of us including myself yet I have to remain personally optimistic and I have to look at the bright picture and not just, that doesn't mean escape from the problems because definitely we have to face the problems. But the civilization, the progress, the new Egypt that we want is not going to be, it's not going to happen if we all think that we're doomed.

Q: There was a line in a review of your book in the Philadelphia Enquirer that I'd like to read: "There is an energy in the book and in Ghonim's words that makes one feel it is much too

soon to assume the revolution is over or to underestimate what the rebels achieved." Your thoughts?

WG: In the prologue I mentioned clearly that it's not over and it will not be over until we achieve the goals and it will not be successful until the democratic transition of power happens and those are the things we all should be working on. Yet the revolution on an individual basis for Egyptians has achieved its objectives. I don't think the brave guys and girls who took to the street and who stood against tanks, who opened their shifts and were ready to take shots, are going to be afraid again. And this is it. We needed a critical mass of Egyptians who are always brave and ready to sacrifice for the right cause.

Q: You say history will ultimately be the judge of whether the revolution happened too soon, whether it needed more planning or leadership. And as you look at it today, that's still the case. When you say that, are you thinking a year, two years, three years? What are you thinking? When you'll be able to give an assessment?

WG: It takes more time to judge. Yes it's important that we look at it from time to time to see if we're on the right direction or not, given that we have lists of what we want to achieve: democracy and then social justice for example and freedom. So now I can still see that we are in the right track despite the challenges. There is a very strong challenge coming in which will be significant in determining the path, which is the presidential election as well as writing the constitution. And you know ensuring that the military is not going to get any special privileges over the president or in the constitution. This is very critical, yet I see it happening, I think it will be very, everything is happening now in a fast pace. Books are written about the revolution in the same year. And the past it used to be after 40 years people tell you what happened. So everything is happening in a very fast pace. While we should be happy with that pace and we should keep going and running we shouldn't just underestimate the fact that we are recovering from 60 years of military rule, 30 years of dictatorship, things are not going to happen like this.

Q: There is a mentality that must be overthrown as well as a leader.

WG: I believe so.

Q: And it will take time.