

Muhammad Abdul Wahid Thraya [1920-2006]

Muhammad Abdul Wahid Thraya (1920-2006) (known in Lac La Biche as Mike Ferris), was born in Lebanon to Abdul Wahid and Aisha. A man of modest means and barely an elementary education, he came to Canada banking on the promise of peace and prosperity in 1953. His sister had arrived a year before to Edmonton and had encouraged her brother to seek out a new future. A friend in Alberta (also from Lebanon) also suggested that a good life could be had out west.

The journey to Lac La Biche began.

Like so many immigrants, he made the arduous journey from Beirut harbor by ship arriving at the now celebrated Pier 21 in Halifax, where he was reunited briefly with his maternal uncle Ali Mansour, before taking the train across the country to Alberta.



Photo: **IN HALIFAX – 1953-1954**

A few years and a few odd jobs later, he embarked on starting a mink ranch with only a few couples. In a few years, his stock would become of the calibre deserving of awards and trips to fur competitions across the country. He had also become somewhat of an entrepreneur. He purchased land

adjacent to his mink farm and bought a grocery store and rooming house which was operated diligently by his wife Fatima until 1975. Mike became a well respected and beloved community member of Lac La Biche. He was always ready to help raise money to maintain both the Mosque and school for his children and for the many generations that followed.

His love of classical Arabic poetry and song expressed by his unmistakable voice moved all those who came near to listen at parties and similar events. His rare talent and charisma symbolized all that was good brought to Canada from the “old country”. Here are samples of his own in traditional prose (translated in English – please bear with the translation given the richness and complexity of Arabic) where the poet plays on the underlined word, which though contains the same letters in Arabic, is both pronounced differently and different in meaning:

انا بمحبة الاحباب شاعر
الذي حبهم لعظم الصدر شعر
عنطر ابوالفوارس كان شاعر
معلقته على الكعبة انكتب

*I sense and feel the love of my beloved ones
whose love is strong enough to fracture hard bone
Antar bin Shaddad was a Warrior Poet
whose poems and writings
were displayed in honor on the Kaaba.*

يلي فراقك لعظمي شعر
قضيت طول اليل انظرك شعار
لوعرفت كار الفن و المغنى شئ عار
لتعلمت كار المشيخة والرهينة

*To you whose very departure left me fractured in pain
I spend my nights watching out for your Sign
If I had thought that my calling to song and art was a dishonorable one
I would have answered the calling of a monk or other man of the cloth.*

Many will never forget the pride they felt as they watched him Marshall the Pow Wow Parade one sunny morning in the early 70's, in full Arab garb mounted on what appeared to be a fine Arab steed.

In 1976, Mr. Ferris decided to move to Calgary to be with his older children Fatme and Nawaf. Calgary would remain home to Mike and his family until his move to Lebanon with his 5 younger children in 1978. Over the next 9 years, the 3 older children would make their way back to Calgary, leading ultimately to the return of Mike, his wife Fatima and two younger children in 1987.

For the next 2 decades, Mike would watch his children and grand children marry until his peaceful passing on Christmas night 2006. Mike leaves behind wife Fatima, children Fatme, Nawaf, Abdul Wahid, Fadwa, Sammy, Hadla Marzouk and 29 grandchildren, with 25 great grandchildren.

Today, his children live in Calgary with their families and are successful in the fields of business, retail and food industries, commercial services, real estate and law.



Photo: **IN LEBANON - 1991**

...not bad for a man of modest means and barely an elementary education.