

*Story Corps/ Interview Project*

**Interview Transcript**

**Interviewer:** Hanna El-amrawi

**Narrator:** Sachi Virahsawmy

**Dates:** 19/02/2012

**Place:** Narrator's home;  
New Campus: AUC Avenue,  
P.O. 74 New Cairo 11835,  
Egypt

**College:** The American University in Cairo

**Prof.:** Dr. Kim Fox

**Date completed:** 21.Feb.2012

## Sachi Virahsawmy

Twenty-eight year old, Sachi Virahsawmy was born in Mauritius on Aug 11, 1983 to the third or fourth generation of Indian workers who came to the island. Having started his college degree at Saint Johns University in Minnesota, he decided to head to Egypt after becoming disillusioned with life in America.

Graduating from The American University in Cairo (AUC) in the fall of 2010 with a degree in Political Science, Sachi Virahsawmy wasn't ready to leave Egypt behind. His love for the Egyptian culture as well as for his job as the on campus Residence Director (RD), made him not want to return to his hometown. He explains how his favorite part of being an RD is that he gets to meet people of different backgrounds and cultures.

A tall man with volleyball skills; Sachi during his studies at AUC became the captain of the AUC volleyball team. In addition Sachi also plays other sports such as soccer and basketball but he explains how he is most talented in Volleyball.

During the Egyptian Revolution, Sachi truly experienced the challenges of being an RD as he was put in charge of for over 500 students living on campus during those unstable weeks. He had to figure out a way to get the students food and water as all campus food outlets shut down. He also had to come up with an emergency plans incase of danger.

Sachi's love for Egypt and his decision to stay here even after he graduated truly captured my attention and made me want to interview him. His admiration for my hometown was one that truly made me feel proud and curious enough to conduct an interview with him.

Interviewing Sachi Virahsawmy, we touched on many topics such as; religion, Egyptian culture, Mauritius, Egyptian revolution, languages, volleyball, and the role of an RD.

## Glossary

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Saint Johns University:           | University where Sachi studied in, from 2002 to 2004   |
| The American University in Cairo: | University where Sachi studied in, from 2006 to 2010, earning a Political Science degree.              |
| Residence Director (RD):          | Sachi's job; where he is in charge of students living in the AUC dormitory.                            |
| Residence Advisors (RA):          | Selected AUC students living in the dormitory, who work under the RD (Sachi).                          |
| Le Poisson Sale:                  | Sachi's favorite Mauritius dish, which is made up of salted fish mixed with tomatoes and tomato sauce. |
| Welcome Gathering:                | Sachi's favorite on campus event, which takes place every semester in the AUC dormitories.             |

19 February 2012

Persons present: Hanna El-amrawi - I  
Sachi Virahsawmy – S

El-amrawi: Good morning, what is your name?

Virahsawmy: I am Sachi Virahsawmy.

El-amrawi: Hi Sachi, uhm where are you from and how old are you?

Virahsawmy: I am from Mauritius and I am 28.

El-amrawi: Okay Sachi, um so can you tell us about where you live?

Virahsawmy: I live on campus in the AUC new campus residence.

El-amrawi: And you are a Residence Director right?

Virahsawmy: Residence Director, yes that's correct.

El-amrawi: Can you please tell us more about your job?

Virahsawmy: Uhhh as a Residence Director I am pretty much in charge of uhh residence here which uhhh we have around 500 students. I have a team of RA (Residence Advisors) around 12 of them and I am pretty much in charge of them.

El-amrawi: Okay can you tell us uhh what's your favorite on campus activity?

Virahsawmy: Uhhhhh one of my favorite uhh on campus activities is the welcoming gathering, umm main reason for this is I love a part of my job where I get to meet people from different backgrounds and different cultures, and um during the welcome gathering we we get to meet those those kids. I call them kids because umm for me they are, most of the students are kids. But umm tsk just being able to meet with them and uhh share their experiences and share my experiences with them is one of my favorite activity on campus.

El-amrawi: So you were also once an AUC "kid", can you tell us why you picked AUC?

Virahsawmy: Uhh I picked AUC, it was very random, I started my uhh university years at Saint Johns University in Minnesota and then I got a little bit uhh disillusioned by the uhh university life in the states, by life in general in the states, so I left and went back to Mauritius and then I applied for jobs around around the islands and I end up getting a job in Madagascar. When I was in Madagascar I met an egyptian women uhh she was actually egyptian ambassador to Madagascar and uhh she told me about AUC and since I have always been very interested in Egypt I..I jumped at the chance to come down here. I came here and loved it so I stayed.

El-amrawi: And did Egypt live up to your expectations?

Virahsawmy: Absolutely, Egypt I mean the uhh country the history the culture, ahh (sigh) it's amazing. I mean you know you go to every different part of Egypt it's something different. You go to; in Cairo you have the pyramids the Nile, every time you walk past the Nile you think about what happened here and its such a privilege and honor to me to be able to do that. And then you have the rest of the country, the desert the uhh Sinai the uhh oasis, I mean it's such a rich country that it definitely lived up to my expectations and some uh I mean its just amazing.

El-amrawi: Can you compare Egypt to uh Mauritius?

Virahsawmy: Uhhhhh yes abs uhh I mean no you can't compare them really because its uhh we are so so different. I mean the the country itself the size. Mauritius is a tiny drop in the ocean whereas Egypt is one of the biggest countries in Africa. Uhhh Mauritius uvv uhh the the com composition of uhh the population is very different. We have uhh the uhh majority of the people in Mauritius are Hindus whereas we also have some Muslims, Christians, Chinese and uhh all kind of different religion whereas in Egypt it is a little bit more just mostly Coptic Christians and Muslims but uhh that's one of the differences and uhh also just uhh the country itself. I mean Mauritius is mostly known for its beaches and Egypt I mean has everything. So yea very different.

El-amrawi: Uhh can you tell us more about your background, so you are, are you fully Mauritius?

- Virahsawmy: Yup, I was born and raised in Mauritius and I think my families the third or fourth generation that came from uhh India. Uhh I have never been to India, I didn't speak the language but, uhh I do respect the religion and I do follow the religion. And uhh growing up I mean its it's a little bit typical to of Mauritians where I um um Hindu but I went to Catholic school and uhh you really get to experience the different cultures that was one of the best parts about growing up in Mauritius.
- El-amrawi: Can you tell us a favorite, your favorite Mauritian, Mauritius dish?
- Virahsawmy: Uhhhh okay umm Mauritians dish I mean my moms food for sure (small laugh). But uhh we don't really, we are very influenced by Indian, Indian cuisine and Chinese cuisine uhh my favorite Mauritius dish I'd have to say is the ty typical Mauritius dish, its rice with rice and red lentil and dry fish.
- El-amrawi: What's that dish called?
- Virahsawmy: Its uhh um its I it doesn't really have an english name for it but its uhh called poisson salé, which means salted fish and that's pretty much what it is. Its salted fish and you prepare it with some tomatoes and tomato sauce and its pretty decent. Too bad there isn't salted fish here or else I would have made it.
- El-amrawi: That sounds French. Do you speak French?
- Virahsawmy: Yes French is my first language, uhhh like I was saying earlier the history of Mauritius we went for uhh Dutch and then British, the French and then eventually the British but Mauritius kinda kept uh a lot of its French uhh history which means that probably 90 percent of the population of Mauritius speaks French. So it is my first language.
- El-amrawi: And ahh with your stay here in Egypt, have you learned to speak arabic?
- Virahsawmy: I have been trying. I mean the thing is when your at AUC you don't have to speak Arabic, but uhh I have been trying especially for the workers here and uhh I do need to know a few words of Arabic. I can get around I can speak a few words, my grammar is bad but, I no its um I'm getting there.
- El-amrawi: Living on campus have you um gotten a chance to go to the sports, gym and take part in the sports activities?

- Virahsawmy: Absolutely, um when I was at AUC I used to be the captain of the volleyball team and uhh, (burp) sorry, and uhh definitely being moving here to this campus. I mean when comparing to the old campus this campus has so much more like so many more facilities. I mean the gym, in the in the old campus all we had was a small ihh court a one tennis court, a one basketball court and we used to play everything. Here you have like 5 courts for each sport its its amazing, defiantly been using it and keep on using it.
- El-amrawi: So is volleyball your favorite sport?
- Virahsawmy: Uhh its one of my favorite sports, I I really I actually am am very big on sports I play football, basketball, volleyball, I love watching sports as well and uhh but volleyball is probably the one that I am most talented in, actually I was the most talented in. Umm so yea it could be ranked as my favorite sport.
- El-amrawi: Have you been playing volleyball since you were little?
- Virahsawmy: Yea, when I was uh in High school because I was tall, my coach kinda recruited me and I started playing volleyball so uhh I have been playing it since I was around 17, 16 around 15, 16.
- El-amrawi: Do you have any siblings?
- Virahsawmy: Yup I have a little brother, he came to he actually came to visit me right before the revolutions, actually so umm he got to see the Egypt that I actually really like. Ehh I've gotten a little bit less fond of Egypt since the revolution started I mean uhh, it has been such a big impact on life here that uhhh it makes it a little bit less enjoyable. But still uhh still it's uhh a nice country.
- El-amrawi: Were you one of those foreigners who went down to Tahrir square?
- Virahsawmy: Absolutely not, I could not if I ehh, if I went to to Tahrir I would have had everyone in the dorms following me. I mean I had to literally stay here because people were telling me, as long as you are staying here, we are staying here. If you go we go. So I kinda had the responsibility of staying here. What we did during the revolution here was trying keep people informed as possible, and uhh I mean during the January 25 revolution we had to move people back to the states because their universities were asking them to return. So we had to return them first and the their suitcases, so that was a big and challenging part of our uhh of my uhh of my work last year.

El-amrawi: Now what actions did you take to try to calm down the foreigners that were living in Egypt during the time?

Virahsawmy: Well actually they weren't very panicky, a lot of them wanted to stay here, they didn't want to go back to the states, they really wanted to stay here and experience history. But uhh for whoever were a little bit uhh panicky we talked to them and explained to them that we are safe. Were probably one of the safest uhh area in not area but safest place, safest location AUC we have an emergency plan we have everything ready in case there is any problem. It was probably one of the safest location in Egypt during the revolution.

El-amrawi: Did you, what what measure did you have to, like did you have any guards outside? what did you do?

Virahsawmy: Ahh the the police and military were informed and they had checkpoints outside since because of our location of uhh the AUC we really had to, there is only one entrance so the fact that we could block that entrance uhh really prevented people from entering any other ways. So road 90 was our way to to help people in and out, uhh what we did was a little bit of uhh bringing food on campus because once the revolution started there were no food outlets on campus or barely any so we had to really work on that. That was one of the biggest challenges.

El-amrawi: Oh and in five years where do you see yourself?

Virahsawmy: Not at AUC (small laugh), probably not in Egypt uhh like I said earlier this is just like a stepping stone , transition like kinda thing so um im im probably gonna be working in diplomacy in five years times.

El-amrawi: Okay thank very much Sachi.

Virahsawmy: You're welcome.