

Mamoun Hassan 1937–2022

Mamoun and his brother were born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to Dr Hamid Hassan and his wife, Fatma. In 1949 the family moved to London, settling in St John's Wood, north London, where Mamoun and his brother went to King Alfred School. Despite a passionate interest in the arts, he studied electrical engineering at University College London, but was soon spending more time with friends at the Slade School of Art.

Within two years he was working as an assistant editor for a documentary film company and later at the BBC, having found his true vocation. He began his directing career making documentaries and short films, winning best short film award at the 1965 Oberhausen International Short Film Festival.

In 1971 Mamoun became the first head of the British Film Institute Production Board. One of the first scripts he selected for production, Bill Douglas's 'My Childhood', won the Silver Lion at the 1972 Venice Film Festival, which encouraged the BFI to move into producing feature films.

He met Moya Gillespie in November 1963; they married in 1966 and their sons Sherief and Anies were born in London in 1969 and 1972. In 1973 they bought High Ridge, High Street, Deddington, where they lived before setting out for Lebanon in 1974 where Mamoun headed the Film Branch of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees. His film, 'Some of the Palestinians', made there during the civil war, won an outstanding film award at the 1976 London Film Festival.

Returning to the UK in 1976, Mamoun set up and headed the directing department at the National Film and Television School at Beaconsfield. Three years later he was appointed Managing Director of the National Film Finance Corporation, being instrumental in the making of such films as 'Babylon', 'Gregory's Girl' and 'When the Wind Blows'. His subsequent career included producing 'No Surrender' (1985) from a script by Alan Bleasdale, directed by Peter K. Smith, developing his Movie Masterclass series for Channel 4 and becoming Dean of Editing at the Escuela Internacional de Cine y TV in Cuba, while continuing to produce, write and edit.

He went on to co-produce, co-write and co-edit with the Chilean director Andres Wood the award-winning film 'Machuca' (2004). In collaboration with Wood, Mamoun wrote the script of 'La Buena Vida' ('The Good Life', 2008) which in its turn won many awards, including a prestigious Spanish Goya. Mamoun and Wood were still talking about work before Mamoun died. Film and film-making was Mamoun's passion to the very end.

Mamoun's work life in the UK after returning from Lebanon and Jordan was based first in Beaconsfield, and later in London, but he and Moya had already decided to bring up their sons in the country and moved the family back to Deddington in 1976, while Mamoun commuted to work. The weekends in Deddington were devoted to family and friends. Long walks, swimming at Spiceball, playing tennis, digging the garden and an allotment were additional seasonal pleasures – but especially the wonderfully varied walks around Deddington, whatever the weather.

Mamoun and Moya reluctantly down-sized from their much-loved house and garden in Deddington to their flat in London in 2013, where Mamoun died suddenly on 29 July 2022 – getting ready to go for his daily walk on Hampstead Heath.

Moya, Sherief and Ani