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Wael Ghonim and Egypt's New Age Revolution

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Wael Ghonim, speaking with Harry Smith in an interview for "60 Minutes." (CBS)

This Sunday night, for the first time in more than two weeks, traffic is flowing through Cairo's Tahrir Square. In Egypt, businesses are open, university classes are back in session and a new military government rules with popular support and a promise of coming democracy.

Egypt is an ancient civilization with a youthful population - nearly two-thirds of them are 30 years old or under. Many of them are educated but unemployed and angry.

Their 18-day revolution began not with terrorism and tanks, but with Twitter and texts and satellite TV broadcasts.

This week an aging autocrat who ruled as a modern pharaoh fell victim to those weapons of the young - out-organized and outmaneuvered by social media, by kids with keyboards.

In Cairo, CBS News correspondent Harry Smith had a chance to talk with the man who emerged as the symbol of the leaderless rebellion, Google executive Wael Ghonim.

Ghonim was jailed for his Internet organizing; when he gave a live interview on satellite TV following his release, he galvanized the movement. Though he was at the center of the "new age revolution," he has no ambition for leadership, nor any way of knowing what comes next.

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Wael Ghonim: The regime was extremely stupid. They are the ones who basically ended themselves. They kept oppressing and oppressing and oppressing and oppressing. Right after I came out of jail, I wrote a status message that we are gonna (win), because we don't understand politics, because we don't understand their nasty games. We're gonna win because our tears comes from our hearts. We're gonna win because we have a dream. We're gonna win because we're convinced that if anyone stands up in front of our dream, we're ready to die defending it.

Harry Smith: Two and a half weeks ago, when this started, did you anticipate this outcome?

Ghonim: When I went on the streets on Tuesday, on the 25th, I was like, 'Whoa, it's gonna happen.' Because the only barrier to people uprising and revolution is the psychological barrier of fear. All these regimes rely on fear. They want everyone to be scared. If you manage to break the psychological barrier, you're gonna definitely be able to do the revolution.

That wall of fear fell in the last few weeks, as hundreds of thousands of Egyptians defied their government and demanded change. Helping to lead the charge was 30-year-old Ghonim, Google's regional marketing manager for the Middle East. In his spare time, he created a Facebook page, posting information about the brutality of Egyptian police.

He was especially angered by the killing of a 28-year-old Internet activist, who was beaten to death after trying to expose police corruption.

Smith: How important is his story in what happened here in the last three weeks?

Ghonim: By the way, his name is Khalid Sayid, name translated in English into 'eternal happiness.' His photo, after being killed by those police officers made all of us cry. Made all of us, you know, because he's coming from middle class. I personally connected to him. I thought, 'This could be my brother.' You know? And I know the police in Egypt. You know, they used to act like they controlled the world. You know, they'd beat you up. You are someone basically who have no rights. So when he died I personally got deeply hurt. I decided to start fighting this regime.

Produced by Tom Anderson, Andy Court, Harry A. Radliffe II, Jeff Newton, Amjad Tadros

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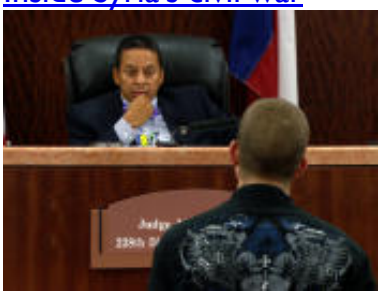
- 

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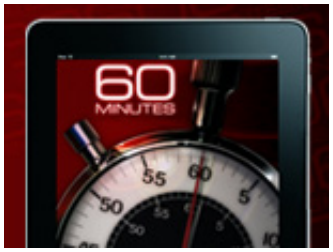

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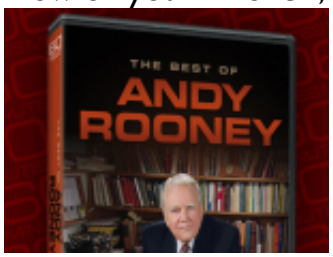

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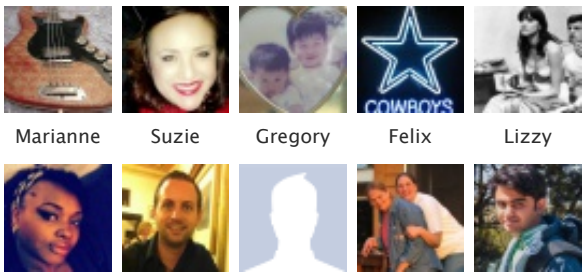

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