

# THE North Texan

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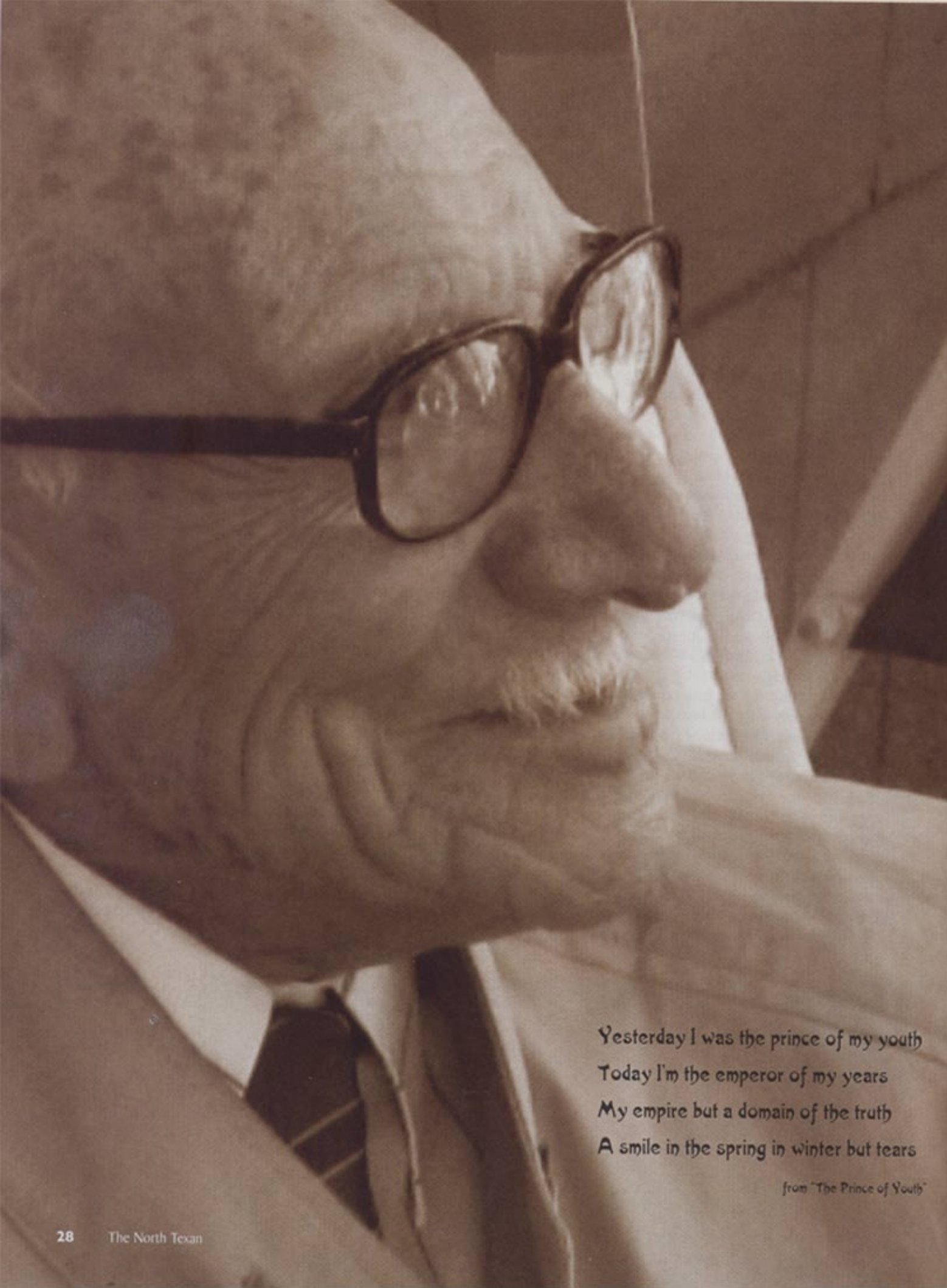
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I BLEED  
MEAN  
GREEN!  
GREEN!

**UNT**  
UNIVERSITY OF  
NORTH TEXAS



Yesterday I was the prince of my youth  
Today I'm the emperor of my years  
My empire but a domain of the truth  
A smile in the spring in winter but tears

*from "The Prince of Youth"*



# 'Life is a gift'

Jawdat Haydar published his first poem as a North Texas student — 80 years ago

By Rafael McDonnell

Jawdat Haydar ('28) has worked as an educator, an executive with the Iraq Petroleum Co. and a farmer. Now 101, the native of Lebanon has published a new collection of his poetry, *101 Selected Poems*.

Haydar, who is one of the best-known poets of the Middle East, published his first poem eight decades ago as a student at North Texas. Printed in a newspaper then known as the *Dallas News*, it was about life in Texas:

"The skies of Switzerland are clear and blue/The old German castles are pretty, too/France is charming and England not less/But there's no place like dear old Texas."

Many of Haydar's poems now focus on large issues such as injustice, war, peace, life, death and man's interaction with the natural world.

"What first inspired me to write poetry was the beauty of nature and the diversity and mysteries of the world," he says. "Once I started writing, I realized that through my work I can express my deep inner feelings of beauty, love, ambition, passion, pain, despair, loss and worry.

"In my 100 years I have seen a lot of changes around me in the world, but the elements that inspired me to write remain constant all through my life on this earth," he says.

Haydar says his poems often carry a message.

"Nature is a gift from God. I hope that through my work I can convey a simple message, saying: 'People of Earth, better listen and be awake, be wise, read the past to make the future. Do not pollute nature, do not destroy it, avoid wars; otherwise, you shall lose the paradise you are living on,'" he says.

Haydar grew up in the Bekaa Valley, east of Beirut. He remembers when he was a young boy he bought candy from British soldiers stationed in the area before World War I, during the last days of the Ottoman Empire. He describes his homeland as "a dot on the world map" but says it is mentioned in the Bible, a place "where beauty and dreams meet in poetry."

In a 2003 interview with the *Daily Star* of Beirut, Haydar said he got the opportunity to come to the United States and study thanks to a chance encounter in a movie theater in Lyon, France.

He assisted a woman who had dropped her handkerchief. It was the wife of the American consul to France. Two weeks later, Haydar was on a boat to the United States and then took a three-day train ride from New York City to Denton. He says to save money, he only ate breakfast cereal on the train.

Haydar says the North Texas campus still holds a warm place in his heart.

"My years at North Texas are among my cherished days and moments. After all these years I consider it home. I'll never forget the man in the registrar's office who was generous enough to lend me some money to start my life in the new world and, more importantly, to help me achieve my dream. The last time I was on my campus was when I graduated in 1927-28."

After graduation, Haydar became the principal of a school in the Lebanese city of Aley, and later in Nablus, on the West Bank. For 25 years, Haydar then worked for the Iraq Petroleum Co. as a recruitment executive based in Lebanon. He retired from the company in 1960, worked in the plastics industry and then

I dreamt my lifeline beaded with the years

Each was blinking happiness in my brain

All were spent without regrets, without fears

And I had determined to start again

from "Guess?"

went into farming. He also unsuccessfully ran as a candidate for the Lebanese parliament.

Haydar, who lives in Beirut, has six daughters, 17 grandchildren and 25 great-grandchildren, some of whom live in Europe and the United States. He still gets up early in the morning to write his poems out by hand, and his daughters transcribe them onto a computer. Haydar and his poetry have been honored with the Lebanese Order of the Cedars, the Gold Medal of Lebanese Merit and the Medal La Croix de Grand Officier of France. Haydar has also been honored with other medals, including one from Pope John XXIII for humanitarian efforts.

He says his philosophy of life is simple and easy to follow.

"My secret for long life is always being thankful to God and enjoying every second of it," he says. "Life is a gift. Be happy when you can." ■

*Editor's note: As we went to press, we learned that Jawdat Haydar passed away in Beirut in early December.*