Abdallah Zarzour often quotes from a famous poem called *Al-Atlal* [the ruins] to describe his situation:

*“Oh, my beloved, it’s all pre-destined;*

*It was not up to us that we were to suffer.*

*Every one of us has got a plan*

*That was designed for them, not by them.”*

Abdallah’s life philosophy, developed over 60 years, is one of realism balanced by optimism. He believes in destiny not out of despair, but out of a belief that life has a course that he needs to keep pace with. “What fate dealt for us might change our conditions, but it is our choice whether or not to be active in our lives,” as he puts it.

Abdallah describes himself as an “enlightened farmer”, as his passion for growing things goes hand in hand with a love of reading. Sitting beneath his pomegranate and orange trees, he immerses himself in books. He inherited his love of reading from his father, who encouraged him to delve into literature, philosophy, economics and psychology, to know something about everything, and to become a man with opinions within his society. Likewise, Abdallah hopes that his children will be leaders in their society and will help others to the best of their ability and means.

Abdallah worked in tourism and hotel management until 2003, and then did a variety of short-term jobs, before finding work as a photographer for a local news agency. As a photographer, he documented the 2016 battle to wrest control of Mosul from the Islamic State (IS) group. He received threats from IS and, after they killed his son and his brother, he had to change the direction of his life once again.

Abdallah found work as a cook for a non-governmental organisation. For more than a year he has been working for MSF as head cook at Nablus hospital in West Mosul. When he was appointed, he was asked to present a proposal for preparing meals for patients and their caretakers inside the hospital, instead of outsourcing the task to a restaurant. Thanks to his experience in management, ever since then the hospital kitchen has been providing healthy meals seven days a week.

“I like to be creative in what I do,” says Abdallah. “I know that it is impossible to please everyone, but I feel satisfied every time I please a patient, a colleague or a neighbour. I seek to always give my best in my work and to be worthy of what I am entrusted with, especially as, through my work, I am also serving the people of my town.”

If he ever feels stressed, Abdallah goes to the banks of the River Tigris, where he finds peace of mind. “Water is life,” he says. “Beside the river I recall the memories of the past, which we put behind us but never forget, since they are the cornerstone for building our chosen future.”