



## Dartmouth-AUKuwait Internship Program Intern Newsletter – Spring 2013 Maggie Rowland '14



### Beginnings

It was mid-December 2012, and I was sitting on a beach in Hawaii with not a care in the world. I had just finished one of the more brutal terms of my Dartmouth experience - junior fall - and I was enjoying the rest and relaxation that comes with lounging on a deserted Hawaiian beach, while looking forward to my upcoming Anthropology Foreign Study in Auckland, New Zealand. Waiting on my final information for the FS in New Zealand, I decided to check my blitz, and noticed a blitz from Professor Eickelman. It was an invitation to work as an intern at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) during the spring. *I'll be gone from Dartmouth for 9 months in a row*, I thought first. *What will that be like? I'll probably miss it terribly. Will my friends forget about me? I hope not.* (The worries that come with the D-plan.) I had already made up my mind. "Mom, how would you feel if I went to Kuwait in the spring?" I asked the woman on the lounge chair next to me.

I had heard about the Dartmouth-AUK exchange before. My host during Dimensions, my academic inspiration, and my longtime friend and sorority sister, Jackye Waugh, had gone the previous spring. She had also studied Arabic before, so I figured that one needed to know Arabic to even qualify to go – and thus I didn't even think of applying. But when Professor Eickelman asked me if I wanted to go to Kuwait, and when I learned that I did not need to know Arabic before going, I saw the opportunity to pursue my academic interest in the Gulf region on a new level. I wanted to immerse myself in the culture and the region that I had studied in a few of my classes, and become so interested in. So I booked my flight to Kuwait, and went off to New Zealand to begin my six months abroad.

Getting from New Zealand to Kuwait was a sort of five-day adventure in jetlag. I ended up flying from Melbourne to Auckland to San Francisco to New York to London to Kuwait City in the space of quite literally 5 days. It was sheer entertainment when asked by a neighboring passenger "where I was coming from."

Flying into Kuwait was one of the most magnificent sights I have ever seen. We flew south along the gulf past Kuwait, and then made a 180 degree turn to fly back towards it and approach the runway. Looking out the window, I could see the coastline of Kuwait dotted with buildings that got progressively shorter the further they were inland, and past those, I saw . . . nothing. There are very few places, in my opinion, where one can truly see undeveloped (in terms of urban construction), uncultivated land that stretches as far as the eye can see. It is beautiful and hauntingly bare, and reminds one just how large the world truly is. The pilot explained that we were making the sharp 180-degree pivot so that we could appropriately approach the runway . . . while also staying out of Iranian airspace. Right. I had the academic knowledge that told me that Kuwait was smaller than New Jersey, and that the whole Gulf region was fairly small, geographically, but it internalizes differently when you can almost see Iran from your British Airways seat 34F, or when you feel an earthquake in Kuwait that happened in Iran.



When I landed and got through customs, I had the privilege of meeting my fellow intern and flat mate, Emily Estelle (Class of 2015) for the first time. For the amount that our academic interests align, I am amazed that we never actually met on campus, but such is the D-Plan. My experience in Kuwait was greatly enhanced by her presence, so I have to thank her for it here. We made a great team!

Emily and me during an afternoon walk to Kuwait Towers.

## Working Life

When I arrived in Kuwait, I found out that I would be working in three different places at AUK; my primary placement was in the Office of Public Relations and Marketing, and my secondary placements were with the IEP program and the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences. In the Office of PR and Marketing, I had the privilege of working under Amal Al-Binali, Assistant to the President for Admissions and Public Affairs. Our office was responsible for all of the official university communications, events, and press coverage, so each week, my dear friend and coworker (Rehab) and I would go over the list of university events, and determine which ones we wanted to write press releases about, which would then be sent out to the 10 Arabic and 3 English newspapers in Kuwait. Often times, I would attend the event with the photographer/student worker for PR (Sarah), and we became fast friends covering events together. After the event concluded, we would both return to the PR office - Sarah to edit pictures, and I to write up a press release of 300-1000 words about the event. Most of the press releases that PR put out as a team were sent off to the newspapers and put up on the website, and we often had the privilege of seeing the articles we wrote appear in the newspapers, lending great publicity to AUK as the gold standard of a liberal arts education in Kuwait. The PR department even gave me an office on the floor! As that was where I spent much of my time, both working for PR and for my other assignments, the department and the people really began to feel like my home and my family.



The PR office poses for a picture together during the celebration of a staff member's birthday.

My second assignment was working with the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and assisting an anthropology professor, Dr. Marjorie Kelly, with her research. Dr. Kelly takes an anthropological approach to studying museums and exhibits; her work fascinated me, and I was extremely grateful to be able to work with her while I was there. Together, we proposed a budget and itinerary for a two week museum tour through several museums, exhibitions, and places of historical significance in one of the largest cities in the US, researched

and summarized the history of tourism in Kuwait (which is quite unique), and put together portfolios of images and videos of public art installations in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Gulf. Dr. Kelly was a wonderful mentor to me while I worked with her, and I look forward to seeing her research and publications in the future. She opened my eyes to a discipline in cultural anthropology that I had never been aware of, and I have to thank her for that.

My third placement was with the Intensive English Program, or IEP. The IEP is a program designed for admitted AUK students who need to improve their English prior to beginning a formal university liberal arts curriculum in English. It is a yearlong program that helps students at all proficiencies of English, and guides them in improving their writing, reading and listening comprehension, and speaking. I worked with Level 2 and Level 3 students (two female classes) and had a wonderful experience getting to know them, and helping them practice the English language. Most of the girls were about the same age as me, or slightly younger, and thus there were many topics that we could all relate to. I found that as they began to open up and talk with me, they became more and more excited about being able to practice English with a native speaker - and they taught me a little Arabic and Farsi too! Because I was more of a mentor and less like a teacher, and because I wanted to learn Arabic from them just as much as they wanted to learn English from me, we became fast friends and spent many a lunch hour together at The Diner, AUK's cafeteria.

One of my most rewarding experiences with the AUK IEP program was helping to coach the English team for the first annual University Challenge, held at the Gulf Institute for Science and Technology (GUST). GUST is one of AUK's main rivals, and it was clear that the 5-girl team I worked with really wanted to beat them and take home the University Challenge cup. The English competition had two portions: the first, a spelling bee, and the second, a sentence construction game. The sentences had to be a very specific length (8, 12, 16, and 20 words for rounds 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively), and had to contain three random words provided by the judges. The sentences had to make sense, but bonus points were given for the sentence that the judges deemed the funniest. In practices leading up to the challenge, the 5 girls on the team (Mariam, Sarah, Fatemah, Haya, and Marjan) would practice spelling different words, writing out sentences as quickly as they could, and working together as a team. We practiced during every car ride, break in class, and lunchtime that we could. The vision behind this team and their "inspirer-in-chief" was their IEP class teacher, "Miss Alison," whose infectious enthusiasm, constant smile, and cheers of encouragement were critical in team bonding and team spirit. And all of our practicing worked! Miss Alison and I cheered on the team as they won the spelling and sentence challenges (with two awards for funniest sentence!) and took home the University Challenge cup! Seeing the girls so happy and so excited meant so much to me - they had empowered themselves with what they had learned, they knew it, and they were proud of their achievement . . . and I was proud of them.



The AUK English team wins the University Challenge!

## Living in Kuwait

Living in Kuwait was a mix of luxurious, chaotic, entertaining, and educational. It is impossible to encapsulate my entire experience in a newsletter such as this, or an entire book, I think. The memories are simply too numerous and too ineffable to be able to truly capture all of them in any form of writing, which is a clichéd thing to say, but nonetheless true.

One of the most enjoyable ways to spend time in Kuwait was to drive or walk up and down the Gulf coastline while chatting with friends, listening to music, or simply taking in the natural beauty of the coast juxtaposed with the incredible urban landscape next to it. I spent many an evening with Emily, walking up and down the path next to Gulf Rd, and chatting about life and the set of circumstances and choices that had allowed the both of us to end up in Kuwait during our time at Dartmouth. While the days were always above 90 degrees, and usually above 95 (which we were told was unusually cool for March –June) the evenings would cool to a balmy 75 or so, and thus they were the time when the city came to life. People from varying walks of life and many different backgrounds would all come out once the sun sank below the horizon, and walk the gulf path together. One evening towards the beginning of my stay, I saw a woman in running shorts and a tank top (unusual dress, even for exercise) run right past a woman in an abaya and niqab (the long black flowing garment for women, and the veil that covers the nose and mouth). The two seemed to take no notice of each other, and simply continued moving in their desired direction, at their desired pace. In a way, I think I had expected there to be some sort of notice taken...but there just wasn't. Kuwait is a country with a population that is nearly 2/3 non-Kuwaiti. It's one of the most religiously diverse in the Gulf. Diversity is quite normal there as it is across the Middle East – it is not and cannot be described as simply a uniform chunk of land or the imagined “homogenous block” that is the Middle East in the minds of many Americans. Every country and culture has its own distinct personality, and those personalities are apparent and distinguishable. Facts like these I understood before my arrival, but they didn't mean anything to me, personally, until I lived in Kuwait and watched them play out in everyday life.



Emily and me under the dome of the Prestige at the Grand Avenues, inside the Avenues shopping mall in Kuwait

## Endings

I'll use this word “endings” to signal that the conclusion is near, but I don't want to use it in regards to Kuwait because I'm not sure my time there has ended. I loved the place, and I don't want to rule out the idea that I could go back. I hate goodbyes, so I won't say those either, but I have to thank the whole of the PR department, Maher (Admissions), Trevor (Sports), Kim (Sports), my IEP classes and their wonderful teachers Miss Rasha and Miss Alison, Dr. Marjorie Kelly, Tadd Kruse, Fahad, and so very many others for making my time in Kuwait so special. At Dartmouth, I am so grateful to Professor Eickelman for allowing me this opportunity, and to Emily Estelle for being a wonderful flat mate and friend.



In true college student (read: Dartmouth) fashion, I am writing this newsletter right up against the deadline. But this is not the typical procrastination of college. In delaying the writing of this, and my reflection on my time in Kuwait, a part of me could feel like my wonderful experience there had not truly come to a close. Indeed, this set of experiences has now finished and left me with a nostalgic taste in my mouth, but this is assuaged by the conviction that I will return to Kuwait someday. It is only a matter of time.

### Trip to Jordan Near the End of My Stay in Kuwait



A tired Emily and me celebrate our arrival at the top of Jabal Haroun (The Temple of Aaron in southern Jordan. It was a tough hike, but extremely rewarding!



Emily and me in Petra, Jordan, with the ancient monastery in the background.