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DARTMOUTH-AUK INTERN NEWSLETTER

**Surprises and Goodbyes:
*The Final Weeks in Kuwait,
October-December 2007***



In the second half of our stay in Kuwait, we settled into routines as we became accustomed to the Kuwaiti society and made a number of friends from the University. Still, we visited the better-known tourist sites, like the Kuwait Towers and the massive Avenues Mall.

Our last few weeks in Kuwait further confirmed to us that there is a real mixture of the East and West in Kuwaiti culture. *Hijab*-wearing women staff the Western stores and restaurants, and American goods are available in even the most traditional of marketplaces. Kuwait, better than any other place that either of us have visited, thoroughly mixes Eastern and Western culture in a way that works well for the people and businesses there.

The American University of Kuwait is a perfect example of this blending of cultures. Classes resembled those we would attend at Dartmouth, except that they were held in classrooms segregated by a partition. The Diner at AUK, mimicking the feel of an American diner, served dishes like the Eastern rice and vegetables, as well as the Western meat and potatoes fare. As for the dress, many students wore clothes from American and European designers, but they mixed into the crowd of men wearing the traditional long, white *dishdasha* and women dressed in the black, coverall *abaya*. At times, Kuwait seemed oddly familiar, though some ever-present differences reminded us that we were 6,000 miles away from home.

Halloween

Another excellent example of the connection between East and West was Halloween. We did not expect to celebrate this traditionally American holiday in Kuwait. To our surprise and pleasure, the Model United Nations at the American University of Kuwait (MUN at AUK) sponsors an annual "Pumpkin Festival" on October 31.

Dressed in makeshift costumes, we arrived at the American University of Kuwait ready to celebrate Halloween. The Diner at AUK served hotdogs and hamburgers, and the students sold treats and played games. Some students entered into the costume contest, and others bobbed for apples. Dan volunteered to be a target for the pie throwing booth. Seizing the opportunity to give Dan a pie in the face, Weston, along with a few of the student workers from the Student Life Office, paid one dinar to hit him with a plate filled with whipped cream.

Yet the centerpiece of the Pumpkin Festival was the haunted house. The students transformed one of the classrooms into a small maze filled with spooky decorations, props, and actors. We were led through the haunted house by a masked guide, who narrated the frightening tour in both English and Arabic. MUN at AUK did an impressive job recreating an American Halloween in the Arabian Gulf, and in many ways the festivities felt like Halloween in New England.

Surprise!

We often overlooked the fact that Kuwait was, indeed, our home for only eleven weeks. After decorating the apartment with new furniture, we made the place feel like our own. Yet, it was only during the last week that we really had the opportunity to have company over. The best opportunity to show off the new apartment came when Dan and Mona put together a surprise party for Weston's twenty-first birthday.

Even before we had left, Weston's parents had approached Dan about carrying on a Sager family tradition: hitting Weston in the face with a pie on his birthday. Dan took advantage of the resources of our good friend Mona Kareem, the Iraqi poet and our friend from AUK, and together they put together an American-style surprise party in the middle of the Arabian Gulf.

Under the pretense of "getting coffee," Dan and Mona went shopping for decorations and party supplies the day before at the Sultan Center, a Western-style supermarket and department store located in the heart of Salmiya. They found that everything that could be found at an American supermarket (with the exceptions of pork and alcohol) was available at the Sultan Center. After picking up decorations, cards, and rotating party lights, Dan and Mona had all the supplies that they needed to throw a surprise party fit for a young American.

On the evening of November 13, Dan had to "work late" in order to finish a project, so Weston and Fatoom, the Student Activities Coordinator at the American University of Kuwait, went out for coffee and sweets. With Weston distracted, Dan and Mona quickly decorated the apartment. Mona picked up the food while Dan worked on the final preparations for the party in the apartment. Our guests arrived, including Mona's younger sister, who was in charge of photographing the event.

However, it was not until the last minute that Dan and Mona realized that they did not pick up any whipped cream for the perennial pie-in-the-face. Dan ran to the neighboring *baqaala*, the Kuwaiti corner market, to pick up some whipped cream. Struggling in broken Arabic with the shopkeeper, Dan tried to explain that he wanted whipped cream. Despite the immense difficulty in finding the obscure word for whipped cream in Arabic, Dan still managed to procure the next best thing: a small carton of whipping cream. With only minutes until Weston returned to the apartment, Bedour, a friend and student worker in the Office of Student Life at AUK, helped Dan to whip the cream by hand. It was exhausting, but they finally managed to create a cream pie fit for Weston's face.

With everything finally in place, shades pulled and lights dimmed, everyone waited for Weston to come back. Restraining nervous laughs and giggles, the party listened as Weston fiddled with his keys. Unsuspectingly, Weston walked into the apartment completely and utterly surprised at the decorations and friends standing in the living room.

The birthday party was everything Weston could have possibly wanted. He received generous gifts and a delicious dinner. Finally, Weston was presented with a cake, complete with a picture of him on it. After singing "Happy Birthday" and blowing out the candles, Weston began to cut his cake. Unbeknownst to him, Dan was standing right behind, pie in hand. By the time Weston stood up straight, Dan had nailed Weston in the face with the cream-covered plate, successfully keeping the old Sager tradition alive.

Finishing Up

Unfortunately, Tadd, the Student Life Director and AUK internship coordinator, had to travel to the United States to attend a funeral. In his absence, Weston devoted all of his time to overseeing and working in the Office of Student Life. Although this meant giving up work in the Writing Center, Weston was able to devote more time to working on his major project for the term: a brand new leadership program at AUK.

In September, Weston was put in charge of developing this new leadership program, later named “L.E.A.D. (Lead, Experience, Achieve, Discover) at AUK.” This new program was to consist of a series of leadership-oriented lectures and workshops, each covering one facet of leadership, such as business etiquette or public speaking.

Starting from little more than a concept, Weston created all the materials and planned each event. His work will unfold over the course of the coming year, but he did get to see the first L.E.A.D. at AUK presentation in the final week of the internship. Although attendance was low, feedback about the program was very positive. Hopefully, L.E.A.D. at AUK will blossom into a full-fledged, honors-style program in the years to come.

As for Dan, finishing up his work meant completing the *Job Opportunities Database* and *Directory* for the Student Success Center. The Database allows students to browse and search a database of employers seeking students or recent graduates for work. The *Directory* is a three-volume collection of recruiter notices describing the types of positions available and the areas of concentration in which those companies are most interested.

Dan also worked on developing a temporary student-worker program at the University. Before leaving for home, he submitted a thorough, written proposal for implementing this program. The proposal will be considered by the Office of Student Life, and a similar proposal will be considered concerning a new Student Ombudsman position.

Going Home

The last few days of the internship were bittersweet for us: we were happy to be heading home, but it was also difficult because we were leaving so many good friends behind. The last day of work was filled with reminiscing and goodbyes. The Division of Student Affairs generously threw us a small party, and everyone made sure to see us.

The night before we left, we grabbed dinner at McDonald’s and played cards. The next morning, Tadd stopped by to check out the apartment and to wish us well. By 6:00 A.M. Mona and her sister had come to pick us up for our flight.

At the airport, we had one last coffee with Mona and her sister. Leaving for our terminal, Mona gave us a teary goodbye, and we exchanged contact information. An hour later, we boarded the plane for London, and arrived at Logan Airport by 6:30 P.M. It was literally the longest day of our lives—thirty-two hours long because of the eight hour time difference our origin and our destination.

Looking back on our internship, we were both happy to have experienced life in the Middle East. We

were particularly fortunate to have met so many wonderful people in Kuwait, both young and old. We look forward to meeting the AUK interns that will be coming to Dartmouth in the summer. The internship was rewarding, and in addition to the memories that we made there, we made a number of cherished friendships and hope to one day return to Kuwait, *inshallah*.