

The Day the Big Mac Came to Jordan

Kelly Gleason Sage

A couple months before graduation, the rumors that Amman might be getting a McDonalds became reality. It was like Jordan was suddenly coming into the 20th century, even though in reality, it had been there for a long while. Other than super stores and strip malls, Jordan wasn't missing much. There were plenty of clubs and bars, ethnic restaurants ranging from Chinese to Italian. Jordan had bowling alleys, movie theaters, and stylish boutiques filled with both traditional Middle Eastern wear and modern European fashions. Internet Cafes were popping up everywhere, and other than the herds of goats and sheep being lead by Bedouins through the streets, it was a typical city. Sure, the movie theater was about 50 years old and the movies were so poorly bootlegged that suddenly the shadow of a head or entire body might appear in the middle of a scene, and sure, the bowling alley's lanes were so bumpy the challenge was more to just get the ball down the lane, but we were not living in tents or riding camels like so many an Americans presumed. Needless to say, we had what we needed in Jordan, but having a McDonalds made it seem to us high school kids like we were somehow connected to something bigger.

The first day McDonald's opened, the line wrapped through the city for more than a mile. Yasi, my best friend that year, a beautiful half Irish, half Jordanian twig, who looked like she walked off of a runway in Paris, and I got out of her car, despite Yasi's driver's protests for having to wait for us, and joined the line. It moved quickly, and before we knew it, we were approaching the door to get inside the building. It was the cleanest, McDonald's I had ever seen. Tables glistened, the floors-perfectly white- it resembled the McDonalds back home, but it was so much better.

When the customers in front of us approached the counter and gave their orders, the cashiers suddenly sang back the customer's order in thick Arabic English. Each time a customer ordered, they repeated their overly zealous sing song of the order, and each time it was just as funny as the first. We tried not to laugh- to be cool, but the oddity of the situation made it impossible not to find joy.

When I approached the counter, I told the skinny man dressed sharply in his perfectly pressed stripped uniform that I wanted a hot fudge sundae and a medium fry. He smiled and sang, Hot Fudge Sundae, Medium Fry. I guess it sounded so good that he felt the need to repeat it. In fact he repeated it several times, Hot Fudge Sundae, Medium Fry, Hot Fudge Sundae, Medium Fry, and soon other cashiers were repeating it. They were clapping along to the beat, and bouncing around while collecting the different wrapped packages of people's orders. Part of me wanted to die and the other wanted to join in.

For weeks my friends and I went to McDonald's: after school, after bar hopping- we needed to make up for lost time. Sadly, the singing orders only lasted a couple weeks, but the cashiers still had a proud sense about them. They smiled when you ordered, kept the restaurants spotless- in many ways, this restaurant chain was a treasure. After a couple of months, the thrill for us wore down, but it was still comforting, in a strange way, to know they were there. It was like a little piece of home, only better.

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