

Behind the veils: an American woman recalls Saudi Arabia

by Barbara Minden

"If God had one son, why didn't he have more children?" asked my friend, Sam, a native Saudi Arabian and a Muslim.

That question rolled around in my mind many times since then, not because I search for an answer, but because it made me realize that I had been programmed by our Judeo-Christian based culture with "correct" answers.

Sam was programmed differently by his culture. It's probably the reason he approached me in the first place. He was not accustomed to seeing a woman in a supervisory job.

All this happened during the two years I spent in Saudi Arabia. I had accompanied my Air Force husband and was the computer systems manager for the U.S. military in Saudi Arabia. Sam

was a translator for the Saudi government and walked by my door several times each day.

I noticed that he peeked in with curiosity and I encouraged him by saying "hello" several times. I was just as curious about him. Eventually he came in to talk and through the next year and a half we became good friends. Once he even brought his beautiful little girl to meet me.

When I think back on our conversations, I remember some of the questions I asked Sam. "Why do Saudis refuse to use the brain power of half the population?" and "Why are men more valued than women?"

Saudi women have to be segregated from unrelated men, and this severely limits their occupational choices. In Saudi law, if a

Saudi male is killed (by accident) a standard "blood money" value is paid to the surviving family by the killer. If a Saudi female is killed the amount is exactly half.

He tried to use the culturally "correct" answers, but I was always the

disproving example. I told him that the woman in his country were just as capable, they just needed to be given some freedom.

The war brought back these memories, especially when I read opinions of people who have never

visited Saudi Arabia. The argument that American military women shouldn't serve in the Gulf conflict because of the Arab cultural repressions against women is one that seems particularly uninformed for several reasons.

The women in the U.S. military have worked hard to earn the respect of military men. If a military woman's principles keep her from serving in foreign cultures during wartime, then she is useless to the military and might as well resign.

Asking women to refuse service in a country that doesn't share our cultural views toward her gender is saddling her with yet another guilt trip.

Before the war, the Saudis

allowed a limited number of military personnel into the kingdom (less than 500 people) because they didn't want us to "pollute" their culture. Women soldiers were not allowed and women dependents could only work for the American government or the hospital.

The war has provided the opportunity to ship in 30,000 female representatives for the Arabs to observe. This is an inoffensive and effective way of influencing a foreign culture.

Many times I've wondered if Sam brought his little girl in to get a look at me, an uncovered woman who worked in an office. I'd like to see him again. I've got another question for him—Does God laugh at us when we make up stupid social rules and impose them on each other?"

Minden is a junior majoring in communications.



Letters to the Editor



Increasing dorm fees uncalled for

Dear Editor,
The focus of this letter is to open discussion on the financial responsibilities that affect the college community, to create a forum that will address the fairness of residential dorm fee increases.

As a college student that survives off a very small income, I find it appalling that Residential Life proposes a cost increase. An increase in living cost would be a heavy burden to students, especially during a period of recession, because of the fact that a student plans out a working budget based on their financial resources and their expected length of enrollment.

Students seriously consider their financial position so that they do not have to "mortgage" their future career by acquiring additional debt from loans. I believe a cost increase strictly originates from sheer profit motives that has little sympathy or concern on behalf of the student.

Students make up a significant part of the University system and they should not be looked upon as a subordinate

who will "pick up the slack." There needs to be a justification, a clear cut doctrine based on definite premises, for this fee increase. Students need to assured of the efficacy and warranty of the new dorm proposals in order to retain confidence toward the administration.

If the students and the administration work at cross-purposes and view each other with suspicion then unfortunate consequences will arise within the academic community. In the short-term, students will harbor an antagonistic attitude toward the administration for its insensitive and capricious policies. In the long-term, the academic community will suffer from both a perceived and actual decline in its relationship with students and prospective students. Thus, it is imperative to establish a forum that will address the legitimate concerns of the students and remedy this unjust and odious development.

Brenton Y.M. Jong
chemistry
Ron G. Westfall
graduate student

A former Editor in Chief responds to controversial stories about Student Government

Dear Editor,
Recently, the letters from students printed in *The Yellin' Rebel* discussing the problems concerning the student body president have been very entertaining and very disturbing, none more so than the one from Jorge Gonzales, a former senator.

In his letter he questioned the professionalism of the newspaper staff, compared them to the National Enquirer, and said the newspaper should not be given independence.

First, I would like to clear up the idea of the newspaper asking for independence.

It is not the kind of independence that Lithuania is asking for from the Soviet Union. It is a financial independence from Student Government. The paper needs and wants to be in charge of its own destiny, prescribed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Since the money that the paper receives—from student fees—comes through Student Government, Student Government has the idea that they control the paper and the paper should answer to them. This goes against everything the First Amendment is about.

Independence is not Student Government's to give, it is a right given to us by the First Amendment, Mr. Gonzales.

Secondly, Gonzales questioned the professionalism of the paper. That would be like me

going into a baker and telling the baker that I have eaten a lot of cherry pies, so I want to tell him how to make a cherry pie.

Just because you read a paper a day does not make you an expert on how a paper should be run or what should be in it.

The professionalism of the staff at the paper is of the highest and most responsible in the history of the UNLV newspaper. The people now working at the paper take the time and effort to make sure a story is right before it is published which is more than anyone can say for the staffs that came before them.

As for this claim that the paper misquotes everybody and his comparison of the paper to the National Enquirer, this is the same old tired excuse that anybody who doesn't like the paper, gives to make themselves believe that all we do at the paper is try to dig up trash on student government.

During my time at the paper as editor, nine out of ten times we were brought a story on student government. We didn't go looking for the stories, they were brought to us because the people involved were worried that student government was doing something wrong and they believed we could do the best investigation of anyone, which we did to the best of our ability. If the story didn't pan out or the facts were no there, we just didn't make something up, we dropped the story. But when the facts were right and there was a story, we went with it and we gave every-

body involved a chance to respond which most of student government refused to do because they had been told they would be misquoted.

Well Mr. Gonzales, that is total bull—. It seems to be the way some of you keep others from talking by whipping up a hysteria of mistrust between the senators and the paper. The paper is not there to make news, but to report it and if we were not able to get student governments side because of this mistrust perpetrated by some of you, then that is your fault, not ours.

My suggestion to you, Mr. Gonzales is to keep your view of professionalism to what ever field you are an expert in and let the paper be judged by our peers in journalism. The paper likes to hear from its readers, either good or bad, so we can find out if we have made a mistake and correct it.

I'm not saying the paper is perfect, they do make mistakes, but the tired excuse that it is just a school newspaper is wrong and should be given up and a new era of student government understanding what the paper is there for, reporting of news, should be embraced instead of distorted.

Richard Crow
Former Editor in Chief
The Yellin' Rebel

Dorm phones a bad connection

Dear Editor,
This is a letter to the writers of the article, "Dorm phones: nothing but trouble," which appeared in the March 14 *Yellin' Rebel*.

I am a dorm resident. I feel it's about time someone wrote about the lousy phone service we are receiving in the dorms. I've been here at UNLV since 1987. When I first moved into the dorms, Centel was the phone carrier. I never had any problems with the phones and if you didn't pay the bill, the phone would be cut off.

Now, when my friends call, they can never get through. When my family calls, they can't get through either, and it's fam-

ily calls that matter the most. I cannot call my family back because I refuse to go to the Residential Life Building and put money into an account just to make a long distance call, when my parents could pay for it.

I can't use my AT&T card number to make a call because I can't get access to an AT&T operator. So I have to run all the way down the hall, make a collect call on the pay phone. When my parents reject the call, it means they know to call me back. This is totally ridiculous.

They never explained why they left Centel in the first place. It's a fact that all dorm residents received notices saying that the phone problems will be corrected this spring. I doubt the problem

will be solved by the end of this semester.

With this system, it takes me about four minutes to get a free line and when I finally get a free line, it takes me about another four minutes to hang up and do this tedious process again.

It's true the students always get the run-around, the short end of the stick. We pay all this money and get lousy service in return. Residential Life should just return to Centel and stop experimenting with paying students.

Changes have to be made. More time should be concentrated on our immediate needs to make our stay here more pleasurable.

Ticked-off resident
Tonopah Hall

A senate of wimps

Dear Editor,
I am a transfer student and this is my first semester at UNLV. I was very active in the government two years ago but because of my job, I have dropped away.

When "Joe Must Go" appeared in the paper I went to the Student Government meeting. I was sure the senators would demand their president show his qualifications or step down. Instead, the senators—who should be representing students' rights—behaved like wimps. Not one even implied he/she was interested in checking. Just who is paying you guys off? Do your job!

And at what point does the university president step in?

Shouldn't he maybe attend a meeting or check this out? Or hell, send a memo—something!

You people are truly remarkable. Take an illegal president, let him "muscle" in some illegal rules (publications are suffering, I read), let it all pass with senators who don't give a damn and top it with university administration who hasn't even looked.

And there you have it folks—one lousy way to spend a semester at a school that I was told offered academic excellence. Welcome to UNLV. You may fit in if you're crooked!

Tamra Smith
junior, English