

Yvette Deane



**Most  
Memorable  
Experience**



When coming back from the west bank and trying to enter Israel, we found out the Kalandia checkpoint was closed. Experiencing what thousands of Palestinians experienced every day, our driver went to look for an alternative route. With the wall to our right, we saw a cloud of black smoke. Approaching the incident, we witnessed Palestinian teens burn tires in an attempt to burn the wall while other young men pelted rocks at the IDF soldiers. In return the soldiers lobbed tear gas over the wall to quell the small riot. We continued driving, and as we passed a roundabout we witnessed a soldier aiming a sniper at a far off target, which momentarily felt like us, as we passed by. This quick succession of events was the first violence I had ever seen in-person. I saw the palpable

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tensions from both sides unfolding, realizing that even in a time of 'peace', there is no peace, until there is a solution.

### Most Surprising Experience



I had never thought Islam was a hostile religion, but because of Israel's relationship with many Muslim countries, I never thought I would feel so welcomed in one as a Jew. This does not mean that Oman has a great

relationship with Israel or is a perfect country, but rather Omani culture highly values hospitality and acceptance. I witnessed their hospitality one night when they served us a lavish meal that could have been enough food for a wedding. Additionally, they supplied us with gifts such as, expensive perfumes and an incense burner. But what was the most surprising was the amount of thought that was put into our dinner at a diplomatic restaurant. After the cook, had heard that the three of us, who were observant Jews, were eating raw vegetables throughout the trip, he decided to cook us something kosher. The laws of kashrut (keeping kosher) are extremely complicated. There are not only restrictions on what type of food, but how it is killed and how it is prepared. This did not stop the cook from buying a new pot, a new knife, and kosher fish. Never would I have thought that I would eat a cooked kosher meal in Muscat, Oman.

### Assumptions

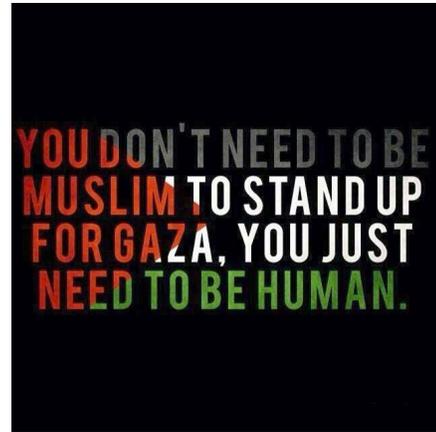


There were two main assumptions that I had that were altered because of the trip. The first was in regards to women in the Middle East. I largely thought they were repressed. I understand that is a generalization, but that was my association when I thought of women in the Middle East. While most news stories on women in the Middle East concern their dress code, or child brides, there is significantly less press about women entrepreneurs such as, Ja'afar's mother, Mayyada, and the other powerful women we met during our trip.



The second assumption I had was in regards to inter-faith dialogue. Whenever I speak to people, I try to come from a place of understanding. When they say something I disagree with, I listen, because other people are entitled to their own views and raising my voice would be uncivilized and rude. During our first night in Dubai we spoke to Nasif Kayed to learn about the culture of Dubai. Kayed, assuming we knew nothing about Islam, came off abrasive and rude. He presumed we were islamophobic and treated us disrespectfully while he threw around misogynistic slurs. I thought many people in the group over reacted, raising their voice while pointing out where he was wrong. I thought that if he were wrong, yelling would not change his mind and would leave us more angry than fulfilled. As we discussed the situation, I realized there are proper times to raise your voice even during an interfaith discussion. When you believe in something strongly it is important to show your position and stand against grievous wrongs. While I do believe there is still a time and place for everything, I have a new understanding on how some view interfaith dialogue and its purpose. It does not always have to be calm and collected rather people can raise their voice and challenge ideas.

## Future Plan



My friends complete my sentences, saying "That time in Oman....," a phrase they think I have overused over the past month. As described, one way I have shared my knowledge is via casual conversation. However, I have other ideas of how I can share my knowledge as well. During the most recent Israel-Gaza Conflict, I could not escape the plethora of images that bombarded my Facebook newsfeed. We are a visual society. Seeing images such as the ones above, I tried to express my own feelings through digital manipulation, which I will continue to work on and share (seen below).



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But, everyone is not visual learner, thus there are other ways I believe I can spread what I learned. While Queens College has a large Jewish and Muslim population, there is very little interaction between the two groups. Over the past couple of years there has been more, but there is still room for growth. I would like to organize an event where Muslims and Jews can learn more about each other's culture and faith.

**Group Camaraderie**



Coming on the trip, I was excited and nervous about meeting students who also had a passion for the Middle East. On one hand, it was a great platform to communicate diverse ideas with a group of people from such different backgrounds. On the other hand, we were thrust together with strangers to discuss highly controversial topics. Luckily, we did not remain strangers for long. The group's dynamic progressed as we walked through Petra. There were times where we had the opportunity to talk beforehand, but walking amidst such splendor, allowed the group to start a new relationship with a unique shared experience. We now began to associate each other with fun and a once in a lifetime opportunity.