

◆ CORY ELDRIDGE

# Journey Inward: REFLECTING ON THE AMERICAN PSYCHE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

*Editor's Note: The following account was written by UO journalism major Cory Eldridge, who studied in the Amman, Jordan program in the 2004-2005 academic year. In his account, Eldridge tells about his experiences while traveling with friends in Lebanon.*

At Saïda, we turned left and entered Shia (Shiite) territory. The number of yellow and green Hezbollah flags increased, and images of martyrs and the Ayatollah replaced the risqué Jaguar ads that fill the country. We came to a checkpoint, stopped and were waved through.

I turned around because I thought it was interesting that one Lebanese Army soldier had an M-16 and the other had an AK-47.

That's when they stopped us.

I don't know if they stopped us because they realized that three

white kids were in the car or because one of us looked at them, but they made us get out and see their commanding officer. Sofia and I got our passports out, and Tyler realized he didn't have his.

We presented our IDs to the officer, Tyler using his Jordan Residency Card. The officer, who spoke no English, asked why Tyler didn't have his passport, then made a call, hung up, and told us we couldn't go in.

Tyler has the best Arabic of the three of us, but he's only in level three, so he protested as best he could, but to no avail. He then had to argue with our cabbie about taking us back to Saïda, where the officer said we needed to go to get permission to enter the south.

That didn't work either and, in ten minutes, we found ourselves standing in a village with no taxi and no idea what to do. We started walking back to Beirut, a 50k walk.

We passed two men who were working in a garden, where two little girls were playing among the eggplants. They said hello, we said the same, and they invited us to have coffee with them.

We went down to their porch and quickly realized that we were going to practice our Arabic a little more. I think the home belonged

to Ibrahim, along with the two girls, but Mohtis was probably a relative or good friend because he helped with the beverages.

They asked us where we were from, tried their English with Tyler and me and their German with Sofia, which was a little useless, since she's Swedish!

It was amazing. I hadn't seen this kind of hospitality yet – the hospitality that Arabs are known for – and receiving it at that stressful moment gave us such ease.

We stayed about an hour, long enough for Ibrahim to wave down a taxi for us and give the driver directions to where he thought we needed to go. Saying goodbye to them was a disappointment.

The area we went to that day belongs to the scary places in the American psyche: the place of terrorists and lawlessness. But the people I met there were among the best I have met in the last ten weeks.

That's why Tyler and I want to base ourselves out of Tyre, not Beirut, when we go back. Nightclubs are fun, but they don't make a difference in my life. I changed a lot in the past few days. I don't know how yet, but I have, and it's exciting and challenging.

Kind of like Lebanon. ■



**Above:** Bagpipes originated in the Middle East, though they are not commonly used. These performers play in the ancient theatre in the ruined Roman city Jerash, in northern Jordan.

**Left:** Fans of Jordan's soccer team, in traditional honor guard regalia, cheer on their team before they played for a spot in the World Cup.

photos: Cory Eldridge



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Snow falls on drying laundry during the winter term in Siena, Italy.  
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