

describe the euphoric state I feel after I've been fasting a week."

Farid Hassan, the philosophical, middle-aged owner of Ali Baba Café, waxes poetic. After you break the day's fast, "Life all of a sudden explodes," he says. "Movement begins, almost like when at the end of winter spring comes. Life begins to have some form of glitter."

"That's what it's like for me — a rebirth," says Rankin. "It refurbishes my feeling about what kind of human being I want to be."

For Hasnah Toran, a UO grad student, Ramadan gives clarity of purpose. "Ramadan is the time you take to think about your final destination: What is the thing I should be doing with my life?" she says.

Many feel fasting creates compassion toward hunger and poverty. "When you're reduced to hunger, it really gives you a different perspective," says Toran. When your growling stomach makes you irritable, fasting tests your tolerance too, says Hamida Bruton, a retired hospital aide.

For others, fasting provides a return to familiar childhood traditions. A South Asian couple, married 31 years, say they fast because they want to expose their children to the practice.

Still others, like Hassan or Bruton, cite studies saying that it's healthy to give your body a break from food.



Kaukab Jhumra Smith

Talal Al Rahbi leads evening prayers at EMU.

Muslims gathered at the mosque after Friday prayers nod understandingly at Succar's words.

Ramadan, to a great extent, becomes a time of family and community. Work schedules during Ramadan in Muslim countries are often regulated, sometimes shortened, by fasting and prayer times. In a place like Eugene, many Muslims miss this natural slowing down of the day and its opportunity to mingle with others.

Hasnah Toran yearns for it. Toran pursues her doctorate and works two part-time jobs while her husband stays home with their daughter and autistic son. Defying all stereotypes, Toran adopted the headscarf at age 14, wearing it while backpacking cross-country and across Europe alone as a teenager.

Toran's hectic schedule in Eugene means she longs for the social atmosphere of her Malaysian village, especially during Ramadan. Sometimes, she breaks her fast in class with a cereal bar or fruit juice. She recalls a day she was so busy she forgot to bring a snack for *iftar*, staying hungry during sunset and feeling miserable on the bus home.

Toran would like time for *taraweeh* (the evening Ramadan prayer) and family meals. "God wants you to take time to make connections with people around you," she says. "But how can you do that with a deadline the next day?"

Come the end of November, Muslims in Eugene will commemorate more than Thanksgiving. The next new crescent signals the end of Ramadan and the beginning of Eid-ul-Fitr, three days celebrating a month of self-restraint. Though Ramadan may be over, as Abdullah Al-Heymare says, your conscience will fast the rest of the year. **CW**

## Inside Looking out A Eugenean living in Abu Dhabi marvels at Ramadan.

By Jane DeGidio

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane DeGidio, a Eugenean currently living in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), gives us her perspective of Ramadan from inside that Muslim country. A former dean of students and student affairs administrator at UO, she is the chief student affairs officer at the Abu Dhabi campus of Zayed University. ZU was established to bring Western-style education to the women of the UAE.*

In Abu Dhabi nobody is ever more than a five-minute walk from a masjid and the Call to Prayer echoes across the city five times a day, beginning with the earliest call just before sunrise.

Come evening, Abu Dhabi livens up and the streets are full of traffic. The city's many taxis are even busier than usual. Trying to find a taxi late at night can be difficult — and I am not talking about Eugene, Oregon, difficult. This is like New York City at its busiest.



At 2 am I go to my terrace, which overlooks the Corniche, the eight-lane road that runs along the harbor wall. Looking out over the Arabian Gulf gives me a great perspective on this month's activities. It is almost impossible to describe the effect of fasting during the day and the nightly religious and family celebrations.

Working at a major university where all the students are Muslims presents many challenges and new opportunities to learn things I didn't know in the States. I have a Ramadan nurse to help with students, and sometimes faculty, who are tired and weak, pass out because they have been fasting.

Our working hours are shortened to 9 am to 3 pm. While Muslims are not allowed to eat, drink, or smoke, non-Muslims are allowed to do these things, but only behind closed doors and certainly not where they can be seen. Doing any of these things in public would give great offence and the consequences are grave.

As a sign of respect for their Muslim colleagues' beliefs, some non-Muslim staff choose to fast (or at least give up smoking!) during working hours. Some Western companies have taken advantage of the Holy Month with "Ramadan special" fried chicken and other delights. During Ramadan the many freedoms that Westerners enjoy in the UAE are restricted, with bars closed, liquor stores shut (these are officially for non-Muslims only), and we are warned to be especially careful about our dress and behavior.

Whether it is in the hustle and bustle of Dubai, the quieter streets of Abu Dhabi or the desert garden of Al Ain, the UAE has offered me a chance to learn and gain some insight into a culture very different from my own. During Ramadan, I and other Westerners have the opportunity to learn respect for the religious faith that has sustained the people of the Emirates for a thousand years. ■



Josh Burt

Pat Adi (left) celebrates Eid-ul-Fitr 2002 with a friend.

Muslims in Eugene come from a staggering array of countries, from South Africa to Palestine to China. Converts, immigrants, second-generation Americans and international students, many bring along with their religion the cultural practices of their homelands.

A key difference between observing Ramadan in your home country and

Eugene, several Muslims agree, is the lack of wider community participation. "In Palestine, the whole society is moving according to the hours of Ramadan. Here, the movements and feelings are different," says Farid Hassan. "It's yourself and your family, like a cell, rather than the whole community."

Hassan and his wife will fast this Ramadan while cooking all meals at their restaurant. Hassan says he won't be affected. "If the mind is set, the body follows the orders," he shrugs, adding the day would become "very frustrating" if one kept wishing one could eat.

Abed Succar, who runs Eugene Limousines, says he misses hearing the call to prayer, the *azaan*, especially during Ramadan in Eugene. Succar, from Lebanon, is accustomed to hearing the *azaan* sound out over city rooftops five times a day. The other

The diverse Eugene Muslim community often acts as an extended family, filling any voids during this social month. It also finds itself "doing a whole lot of talking this time of year," says Kalizya Hutchinson, a UO grad student and member of the UO Muslim Student Association.

The MSA holds a potluck *iftar* every Thursday at 4.45 pm at the EMU Skylight, and invites everyone to

"Break the Fast with Muslims," an educational event featuring *iftar* and a speaker on Ramadan's significance. This event is from 4:30 to 6:30 pm Nov. 12 at the EMU Fir Room.

The Islamic Cultural Center, led by Tammam and Pat Adi, organizes frequent potluck *iftars*, open to all interested parties. The As-Siddiq mosque also holds daily *iftars* at its premises. —KJS

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