

PARTING SHOT FROM DANNY MILLER

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



The Astoria drum line warms up before the start of the first Clatsop Clash football game of the year during the Fishermen's homecoming in September at CMH Field.

ODDITY

LOST IN TRANSLATION

First fame then arrest for Saudi teen who chatted up US girl

By AYA BATRAWY
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — When a teenager in Saudi Arabia began chatting up an American woman online, he first found fame and then notoriety before he was arrested over concerns that his clumsy cyber flirtation violated the kingdom's conservative norms.

The teenager, known only by his online name of 'Abu Sin,' a reference to his crooked teeth, speaks almost no English. Christina Crockett, a 21-year-old vlogger from California, speaks no Arabic.

Even so, they managed to create goofy, light-hearted videos in which they appear fascinated by one another. The spectacle of the two trying to communicate attracted millions of viewers both inside the kingdom and abroad. As a result, Abu Sin shot to fame on the livestreaming site YouNow, receiving nearly 6.5 million views of his videos.

In one of their most-watched videos from YouNow, Abu Sin tells Crockett: "I am Saudi Arabia." Wearing a low-cut tank top, she smiles and responds with a flick of her blonde hair: "That's cool, I'm America."



Saudi men talk and browse the internet in 2000 at a hotel in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. When a teenager in Saudi Arabia began chatting up an American woman online, he first found fame and then notoriety before he was arrested over concern his clumsy cyber flirtation violated the kingdom's conservative norms.

Throughout the conversation, he periodically blurts out in Arabic, "what's she saying!?" Appearing nervous and excited, he later offers her some of the few English words he knows, proclaiming: "I love you too. I love you too. I love you too."

She tells him: "Aw, I don't even know what you're saying, but I love you so much."

Extra significance

Their exchanges took on extra significance in Saudi Arabia, where unrelated men

and women seldom see one another. Almost all public spaces are gender segregated and most women cover their face, hair and bodies in billowing black cloth.

While the conversations appear harmless, Saudi media outlets say the teen was detained late last month for "unethical behavior" due to the videos. Footage posted online on Sept. 25 purports to show his arrest, and Abu Sin's YouNow site, on which he used to post almost daily, had not been updated for 13 days.

In Saudi Arabia, where the internet has become the preferred forum for young Saudis to meet and express themselves, his arrest sparked mixed reactions.

Abu Sin's videos could constitute a violation of the country's cybercrime law, which prohibits producing material that harms public order, morals or religious values, according to lawyer Abdulrahman al-Lahem. He may also be found in contempt of the kingdom's sometimes unyielding interpretation of Islamic law.

Al-Lahem was quoted in the Saudi newspaper, Okaz, as saying the teenager could consequently face between one and three years in prison.

In comments to the Saudi Gazette daily, Riyadh Police spokesman Col. Fawaz Al-Mayman said Crockett and Abu Sin made "enticing videos" that "became famous and received negative attention." He said police had received requests from the Saudi public demanding Abu Sin be punished. After his arrest, the case was forwarded to the Bureau

of Investigation and Public Prosecution, al-Mayman said.

The Interior Ministry did not immediately respond to an Associated Press request for further details on the case. Abu Sin's real name has not been made public. Al-Mayman said he is 19 years old.

Deserves trial

The Saudi daily Arab News wrote that people in the kingdom argue the teenager deserves to be tried because his videos "made people laugh (at us)." In an op-ed for the pan-Arab Asharq al-Awsat newspaper, prominent Saudi commentator Mishari al-Thaidy said the incident raised serious questions about how young people in the kingdom are being raised.

Yet in an editorial published Sunday, Arab News wrote that if Abu Sin was indeed arrested based on the demands of public opinion, then "let it be known that this published opinion believes Abu Sin should be released ... and given his own television show!"

"When did being 'silly' ever become a crime?" the editorial continued.

Crockett released a video saying she doesn't really understand the situation in Saudi Arabia, but that many people are blaming her as the reason for his arrest.

"Obviously, I think this whole situation is totally crazy and unfair, but I don't feel I should be getting any hate for this because I have no control over it," she said. "It's not my fault that it went viral. It's not my fault that he got this fame from it or that I got it. Neither of us asked for it."

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