

People From all over the world always ask me why I love Bahrain so much. When one asks this question, their tone is always shocked like I have gone mad. I always reply positively and make myself sound very enthusiastic. As I have found most Americans haven't the faintest idea what people in the Middle East are really like. One will read newspapers and get the idea that the Americans are the strong side of the two. However if you talk to someone American about the Middle East they look petrified. Most Americans have been conditioned to accept the negative stereotypes of Arabs being terrorists, or oil sheiks. However if people took time to visit these countries and realize that these stereotypes are far from the truth, then the world would change.

There were many times when my mother and I would visit the souk and wander around. All over the souk there are disabled beggars, sitting helplessly by the side of the road. Since I was young I was scared of them and steered well clear. However one day we were both rather peckish and saw an old man with one arm sitting on one corner of a street, selling dates from a large square tin. "How much?" I asked. He didn't speak English, but a Bahraini gentleman from a nearby shop over heard us, and came over to offer his service. He asked how much I wanted, and when I offered him a dinar for two handfuls he laughed. (1dinar is about 2.50). "That is way to much," he said, "Why don't you just come and sit with us, and eat in our Bahrain tea shop."

Before I knew it everyone was talking to my mother and myself. They were just as interested in my culture as I was theirs. From this group of strangers I learned how to count in Arabic, say hello and goodbye, and introduce myself. I also learned how much they value their families and love to laugh. The stereotypes, about them and the Middle East slowly began to fade away

"Where are the terrorists? Where are all the thieves? The mad people and kidnappers?" I asked myself. After our long encounter with these people we left. It was now dark and we were both safer that we would be in any back streets in London of New York.

What puzzles me about these people is their religion. They appear to have on hundred percent commitment to the Islamic religion. Their religion affects the way women dress, the way they would eat, and their daily routines. The streets are thronged with 'walking black ghosts', or at least that's what I thought when I first visited saw them. Women are only aloud out if they are draped from head to foot; so no other man can set eyes on them. What shocked me even more was the fact that they would go out like that in scorching sunshine.

Food is very important to the people of Bahrain and to be able to fast for weeks on end shows a strong adherence to the Muslim Law. (This is done in a period called Ramadan; which usually lasts for four weeks.) During daylight hours, absolutely no food was to be eaten. A blast from the cannon signaled the start and end of a fasting period. If it were the end of a fasting period big celebrations would take place and a feast would be waiting at home for the men prepared by their wives. In my opinion it is their religion that make them such special people.