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Struggle in the Middle East

A young gay Muslim talks about his life, and the Arab-Israeli conflict

by David Moore . Q-Notes staff

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As conflict rages, a young gay man contemplates his future.

At press time a fragile cease-fire continued to hold between Israel and Lebanon. The death toll in Israel numbered 75, while well over 1,000 Lebanese have perished.

Twenty-two-year-old Ismail is a gay Shia Muslim who describes himself as "a simple Southern Lebanese guy." He also prefers to go by the nickname Izee.

At the time of the interview Izee is in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates. He's worried about family and friends that are still in the area.

"There are still a lot of relatives there from both sides of the family, including my Grandmother," he says. "We know we've lost some relatives and a lot of people we just don't know — suddenly all the connections with them were lost."

For the most part, Izee is in the dark about what is happening to his family and friends that remain in Lebanon, although access to media is providing him with some details.

"I know what I watch on Al-Manar and other channels like BBC," he explains.

"Everybody is really suffering there. All of southern Lebanon is horribly damaged and the southern part of Beirut is totally, totally destroyed. People don't have water, food and access to medicine. Many people have lost their homes and they have no money. One of

my gay friend's boyfriend was killed in an explosion."

According to Izee, life for gays and lesbians in the Middle East is much better in places like Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, UAE and Qatar.

"That's correct," he says. "Especially in Lebanon things were in a much better situation before the war."

Izee is adamant about his commitment to Islam, though he clearly practices it with a modernized interpretation. He enjoys going to nightclubs and has visited a gay bar in Dubai. He admits that he also enjoys smoking and drinking. All things taboo, for most Muslims.

"I've lived my life studying the holy book and reading in other religions to try and understand the relationship between homosexuality and religion," he says. "I'm content with what I've found. I know who I am. I understand me."

Although being openly gay is not common in Arab and Muslim culture, Izee is, for the most part, openly gay. "I am. To the people around me that I know are, too, and the people that I know like me and are accepting."

His relationship with his immediate family operates on a sort of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" kind of policy.

"I think they all know inside that I am — especially my mom and sister," he says. "I don't think they accept it, but they're trying not to believe their feelings. What I am sure about is that they love me and will love me whatever I am. At the end, we're still family."

In many ways, this young gay Arab man seems remarkably similar to a young gay American male. He enjoys partying and club-

bing. He's passionate about his beliefs. He keeps an eye on entertainment and fashion and he also yearns for a relationship with another man.

"That is my dream," he says. "But a lot of things are hindering this dream. One of them is the international gay society, which, I feel, is shifting its idea of what it means to be gay towards one-night stands. That's not what I'm looking for."

Like many young gays and lesbians around the globe, he's plugged in to the modern world — he maintains a blog site that boasts personal thoughts and details of his life — including the fact that he's gay.

It's been reported in the media that some Arab countries (Egypt, for example) have used the internet to entrap gay men, which makes me question the safety of maintaining a site that can be accessed by just about anyone.

"I get scared sometimes and it does concern me, but you tell me, shall I die under lies? I'm a guy who can't be in a jail, who can't be controlled by force, at the same time I'm not a trouble maker, so I'm just living my life. The blog, I guess, is my own personal way of revolution."

There is one resounding difference between Izee and a young gay man you might meet on the dance floor of some local club here in the Carolinas: his outlook of the future.

It's disparaging and bleak.

In a passage from his blog, he writes:

"I'm just waiting for my turn, cause [there's] no need to live anymore on such an

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A soldier's story

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Thoughts of the past and future

Editor's Note: These are the thoughts of a gay soldier — a North Carolina native — who has been deployed to Iraq. Because of the military's 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy, he must remain anonymous.

Over the past year I hope I have shed some light on this war and given you a perspective on what Iraq has been like.

I have traveled all over the country recently — back to the Palace in Baghdad and will be back there again this week. Afterwards I'm headed north — though for security reasons I can't say where. I dread this trip — it will be the most dangerous trip so far. We'll fly to an undisclosed location and then convoy to our final point.



It's a rough trek of over 30 miles by vehicle. All of us will be armored up and ready to go with a full-authorized battle load.

I'm not scared, but I do have some trepidation

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Knowing the enemy

The faces behind the S.C. 'marriage amendment'

by David R. Gillespie . Q-Notes staff

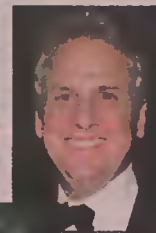
Who wants to enshrine in the South Carolina Constitution discrimination against all of those families who do not fit a particular model of marriage — one man, one woman, bound together for life?

The driving force behind the passage of what is now Amendment 1 on the General Election Ballot in South Carolina is a group called the Palmetto Family Council (PFC). It is doing so through a campaign called

The South Carolina Marriage Amendment Campaign.

The PFC is a nonprofit foundation that was formed in 1994. It operates in association with the notoriously antigay Focus on the Family and Family Research Council. It is a strange mix of conservative, evangelical Christianity with neoconservative, and oddly enough, neo-confederate, ideology.

The organization's President is Oran P. Smith. The campaign chair is none other than the state's attorney general, Henry McMaster.



South Carolinians representing both public

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The men spearheading S.C.'s anti-gay discrimination efforts: Palmetto Family Council President Oran P. Smith and S.C. Attorney General Henry McMaster.