

ECSU Junior Basem Calis finds life in the United States much more free than his native Kuwait, where unmarried couples can be jailed for holding hands in public.

ECSU's Global Connection From Kuwait



'American women love making love,' says ECSU junior from Middle East

ECSU junior Basem Calis finds life in the United States much freer than life in Kuwait, where he grew

up. "The basic difference between the two countries is the freedom you have here," said Calis. "In Kuwait if you criticized the government, you would be dead. You would go to jail, and there is a big chance you would be hanged."

Calis first came to the United States in 1986, and he enrolled in Chowan College in Murfreesboro, N.C. He had been studying English and accounting at Scheller International University in England.

"I attended Chowan for one half a semester," said Calis. "And then I met an ECSU student, Monique Thomas, who invited me to see the campus here. I came to ECSU and liked the campus, so I enrolled here."

Although Calis grew up in Kuwait, he is a Palestinian who holds a Jordanian passport.

"I have only been in Jordan one day," said Calis. "I got the passport because my parents lived in Jordan. After the war for Palestine in 1947 my father had to move out and he went to Jordan. He met my mom in Palestine, though, and after they got married they moved to Kuwait."

"And there is no sex outside of marriage . . . there could even be a penalty of death."

-- Basem Calis

Calis said that in Kuwait social customs are heavily influenced by the Islamic religion. "There is no dating in Kuwait. Kuwait women must cover all of their bodies except their hands and feet when they go out in public."

Foreign women, including Christians, can date men "only as long as the government doesn't know about it," Calis said. "And there is no sex outside of marriage. Two people holding hands who are not married can go to jail for a period of time. For people who are caught having sex outside of marriage, they could go to jail for a long time. And there could even be a penalty of death."

Calis said people in Kuwait do not marry for love, but for "position, power and money. Marriages are arranged to consolidate the power of families."

According to the Islamic religious customs, a woman can refuse to marry a man if she does not like him, however.

Although Kuwait law allows men

to have four wives, many members of the royal family break this rule, said Calis. "They can get divorced and married again. In Kuwait, a man can be married to as many as 20 or 25 women."

In Kuwait "women have no influence, and no political power at all," Calis said.

American women, on the other hand, are a different story.

"American women can love making love," he said. "And in America, many women are willing to have sex relationships so easy—in just one date."

The major disadvantage to the freer lifestyle in the U.S. is the risk of catching a venereal disease, in Calis' view. "You don't hear about AIDS and herpes in Kuwait," he said. "But in the U.S. you hear about it every day."

In Kuwait, said Calis, "you cannot marry the woman you love, but you can't catch a disease that easily. Over here people will always get married to the one they love."

Calis sees one big thing in common Americans have with Kuwait people. "In both countries every person loves money. If you love money in Kuwait you marry a woman who has money. And you will be a happy man the rest of your life."

Calis said the Kuwait high schools are more difficult than the U.S. schools.

"In high school, I finished physics, calculus and chemistry in my first and second year. But here, they don't really have to study. That's why you see so many people in the streets with no jobs, because the school system doesn't make people think. Back home school is hard."

Calis, who plans to transfer to ECU or UNC-Chapel Hill for an engineering degree, said he liked Elizabeth City State University.

"I love the way faculty members care about the students here," he said. "and pay attention to them. And they are willing to help the students as long as the students are willing to help themselves. They are always there for you."

Calis likes to listen to American music in his spare time, and he also likes watching American films, especially "funny movies and action movies. I liked Sylvester Stallone's Rambo, and I really loved Back to School."

Brockway compares U.S.A. to Philippines

By Karen Blanchard

Not many freshmen are eligible to take upper level courses like calculus and physics their first semester in college. But then, not many freshmen know the exact distance from Pluto to the Sun, either.

ECSU has such a freshman: Nelson Brockway, 16.

Although he was born in Elizabeth City, Brockway has spent most of his life in the Philippines. His father is American, and his mother is Filipino. His parents met when his father did a tour of the Philippines with the United States Coast Guard. Following his assignment in the Philippines, Nelson's father was assigned to the USCG base in Elizabeth City where Nelson was born. Later Nelson's family was transferred back to the Philippines where they spent the next ten years.

"Life in the United States is much different from the kind of life I lived abroad," said Nelson. "I had to make many adjustments in terms of school, work and family life when I came here."

Brockway said the transition was easier, however, because "I was raised by an American father."

In the Philippines, the outlook toward God, money, other people and government, is far different.

Filipino social customs are much more conservative than in the U.S., and Filipinos have a much more restricted flow of information.

"There is one television station which is government controlled and censored," said Nelson. "The radio stations are also censored, and they won't permit heavy metal music to be played, and especially singers like George Michael."

"The Philippines are highly influenced by the Catholic Church. They believe the music would pollute the young people's minds."

The church also wields great political power in the Philippines, according to Nelson.

"There seems to be a unity of church and state in the political, social and economic affairs of the Philippines. Some legislators introduced a bill to legalize abortion, but the Catholic Church condemned abortion, and the church had so much influence that the bill did not pass."

The Philippines have a much lower standard of living than the U.S., said Brockway. "In the Philippines, they have to be conservative just to have food, shelter, clothing and water. An amount of only 25 cents would be very valuable."

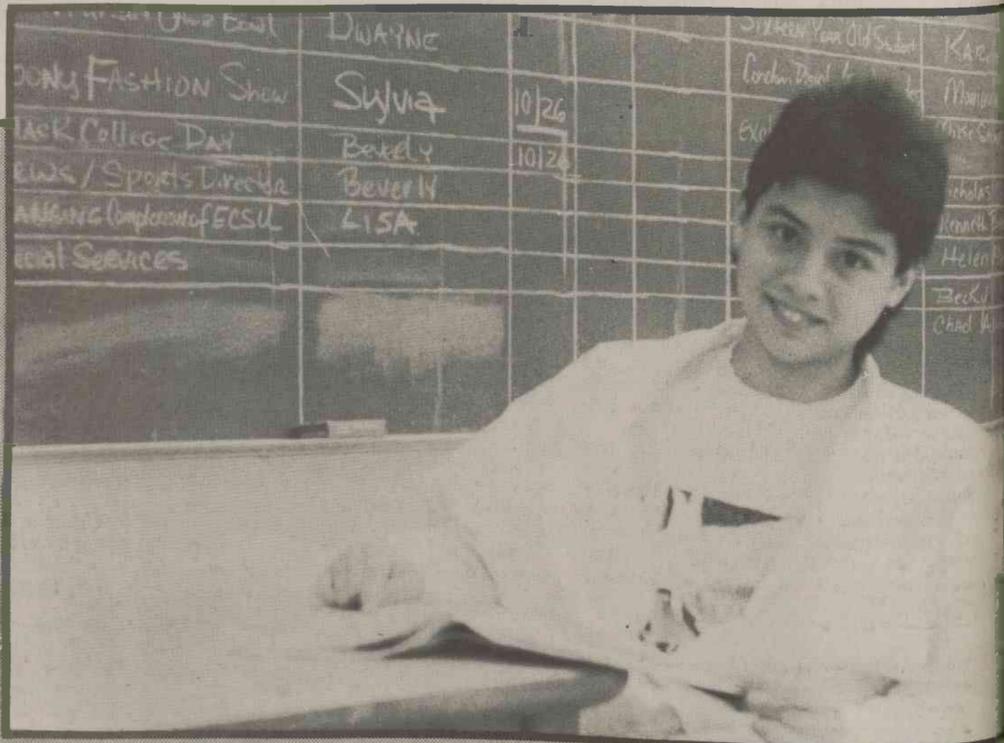
"The economic system is so unfair in the sense that only the rich profit. They exploit the poor people through unfair wages, unfair labor practices and hours."

Brockway said that although the U.S. enjoys a higher standard of living than the Philippines, Americans tend to be "more self-centered" than Filipinos. "One thing I don't like about American society is most people tend to think only about themselves, and they want to improve their own standard of living. In the Philippines, the less fortunate would even be willing to give to help people worse off than them."

Americans are also less family-oriented, Brockway believes. "As I have observed Americans have a different way of life. Most of the people are on the move, and they are raised up to go on their own by the time they reach college. But in the places I grew up in, the family would usually stick together until there would be a marriage in the family."

Brockway said he chose Elizabeth City State University because his parents wanted him to go to a nearby college, and "College of the Albemarle is quite limited." He believes in putting "100% effort in everything I do, whether it's job, school or home. I knew it would never be easy to attain the college degree that I want except through hard work and persistence. I believe I can make it."

Brockway said he would accept whatever comes in life "provided that I know that is the best effort I could give. The kind of life I'm living now is far different from what I expected it to be. But I hope that someday I can succeed in this ever improving world."



"Life in the United States is much different from the life I lived abroad," says ECSU freshman Nelson Brockway, 16. Brockway, who grew up in the Philippines, says the two countries are different economically and politically.