

A whole new world:

A student's experience at Disney World

Alex Trice
Online Editor-in-Chief

Elon senior Mike Milano lived an ordinary childhood. He was born in New Jersey and grew up in Maryland. He played baseball, he scraped his knees.

"I was just a normal kid," he said.

When Milano came to Elon University, he majored in political science. And, like many college students, he applied for an internship—at Disney World. Milano said applying for the internship was the result of a spur-of-the-moment decision when he was playing an online Hannah Montana game with his 8-year-old sister.

"My sister said 'you should apply and then I could come visit you.' So I applied, and I got it, and she did come visit me. She had a blast," he said.

After receiving the internship, Milano took a break from studying last fall semester and traveled to Orlando, Fla., where he lived in college program student housing provided by Disney.

"The rooms were tiny," Milano said. "No closets or anything. But the complex itself was nice, like a resort."

Milano then began training to impersonate Prince Aladdin in Disney parades. Part of his training included spending three days in waving school.

"If you are a character on a float, you have to learn how to wave," Milano said. "There's a certain way to point in Disney. You use your hand or two fingers and point but not like a gun, because that's offensive."

After learning the proper form and technique for acceptable waving, Milano was measured for his costume.

"I got down there and was a quarter of an inch too short," he said. "You have to be a certain height so that if

Jasmine wears high heels, she won't be taller than you."

Although his Aladdin days ended before they even began, other opportunities were in store for Milano.

He was reassigned to ticketing, where he had to sit in a booth all day, but was soon offered the chance to work with Disney World's partner in business, Cirque du Soleil.

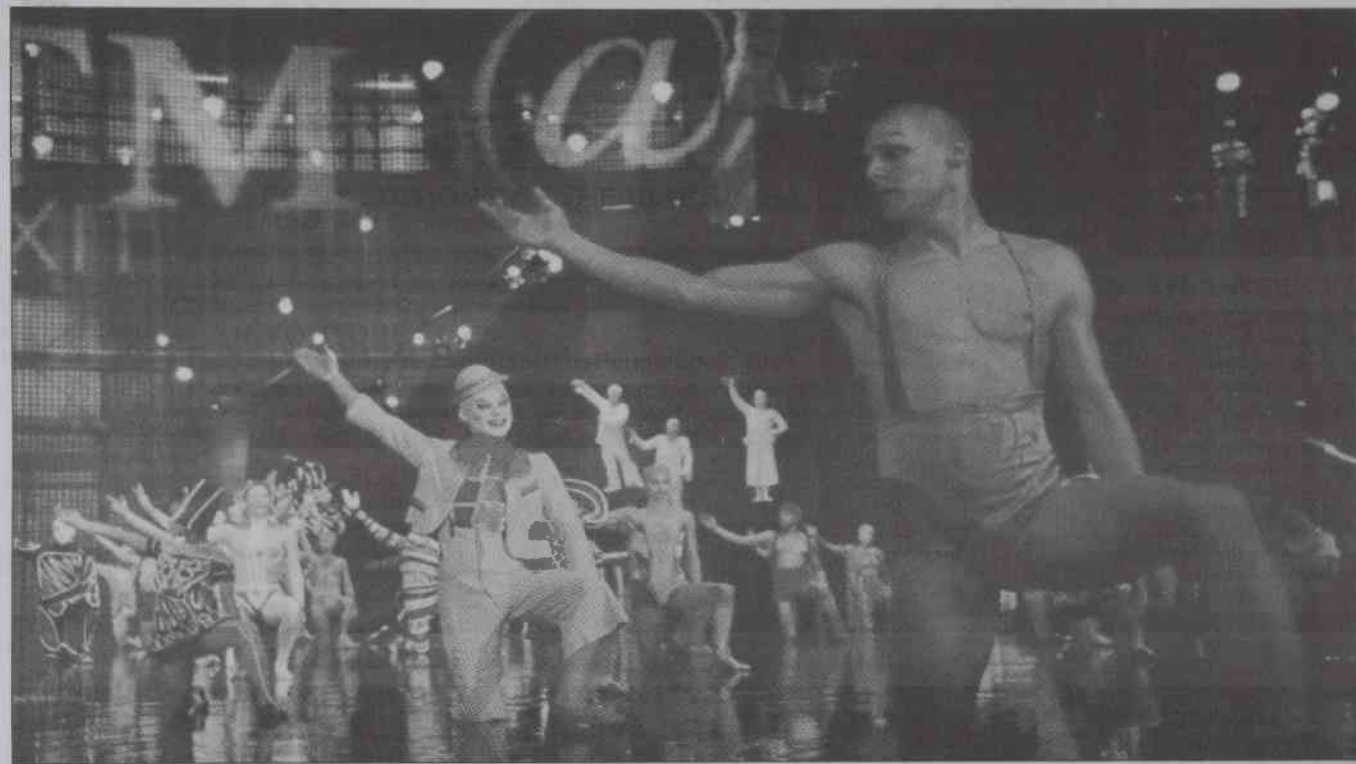
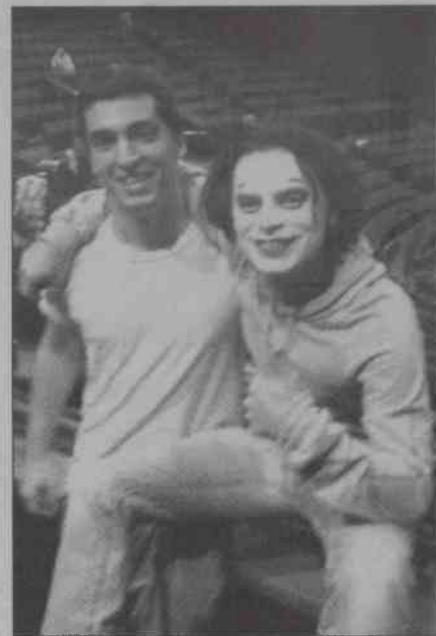
"It's a pretty breathtaking building," Milano said. "I was like, how did I get here?" This place is huge; I definitely

don't fit in here. But as soon as I got in there, it didn't feel as big as it looks. It's pretty welcoming, too."

Milano trained four months for Cirque du Soleil. He spent several hours each day jumping on industrial strength professional trampolines.

"Never once did I bounce as hard as I could," Milano said.

On stage, Milano would bounce on the trampolines and do various back flip tricks. He also filled in for other Cirque performers when they were injured on the show.



Top right: Mike Milano pictures (left) with castmate from Cirque de Soleil. Bottom: Photo taken during Cirque de Soleil performance.

PHOTOS SUBMITTED

Opening the lines of communication: Speaking about tough issues in America and the world

Mariena Chertock
Design Editor

Sometimes the toughest issues have to be discussed to make progress. In lieu of this, the Isabella Cannon Centre hosted a talk about Islam on Sept. 15.

"We're not able to communicate on a level like this, just talking," freshman Muhammad Musah said during "A Conversation About Islam, America, World Events and Individual Responsibility." "Talking is a great thing. Just protesting, shooting each other is not working."

Musah, along with several other students and professors, gathered in the Centre for the talk. Associate professor of political science Betty Morgan was one of the people who came up with the idea.

"This is such an important, critical time to start the conversation," she said. "I didn't want people lecturing. I wanted people talking to each other as freely as we could make it. I would sit on the floor and put popcorn out."

Attendees of the discussion sat on chairs and sofas arranged in a circle in the Centre where everyone could easily see the others. It was a respectful atmosphere, where people were attentive when others spoke.

The idea for the discussion was first brought up by freshman Toorialey Fazly, a student from Afghanistan, Morgan said. Morgan said she wanted to bring in professors from various disciplines and various religious leaders, though some never got back to her. She said she plans to keep trying to bring them in. Fazly was unable to attend the talk because he was hit by a car earlier that day while riding his bike.

"This is the very first (talk)," Morgan said. "I want to keep it going. We'll

be here, we'll be talking, every other Wednesday night."

The talk focused on issues of Muslims in America, Terry Jones' threat of burning the Koran and the Muslim Community Center planned to be built in New York City.

For a while, Islam wasn't on people's radar, Morgan said.

"All that we as Americans know about Islam is flying carpets, genies and belly dancers," sophomore Neima Abdulahi, a Muslim, said. "Now Americans see it under a new light: terrorists, hate, violence, killing. These have become synonymous with our religion."

Musah, who is also of the Muslim faith, agreed with Abdulahi.

"Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden have become synonymous with Muslim," he said. "How do you erase that label, that connection?"

Abdulahi said Americans and non-Muslims are not the only ones who were affected by Sept. 11.

"As American Muslims, we are left answering questions, with confusion about ourselves," she said. "We became PRs (public relation) for our own faith."

When pastor Terry Jones threatened to burn the Koran, Musah said he believed it affected everyone.

"I live 10 minutes from Ground Zero, and I've never seen anything so hateful," he said. "That an American would have so much hate in his heart,

this time it really hit home."

Senior James Pope, a Christian, offered a voice from another side.

"The only thing I can equate the Sept. 11 attack with is Pearl Harbor," he said. "I can't see something being built so soon, so close (overtop of it). (Muslims) have the right to build it (the community center) there. But I just think was that location necessary? It's too soon."

Abdulahi addressed Pope's concern by explaining that it is a lot to ask

people to wait indefinitely.

"Going forth with it (the community center) will cause solutions, help issues, because it may never be a perfect time," she said.

Musah said building the mosque might show that America is maturing or regressing as

a nation, based on the subsequent actions.

Dean of International Programs and director of the Centre Woody Pelton said the war the United States is engaged in has no set end date.

"This isn't a war between nations — who would sign a treaty if it ended?" Pelton said. "This is a war against what I would call an 'ism' — terrorism. Like war on poverty or gender equality, well, when is it over? These are wars that just don't end."

Abdulahi brought up the question of what the U.S. can do to minimize hatred and lessen gaps that are forming.

When lines are drawn, it becomes dangerous, sophomore Jasmine Whaley, who is a Christian, said.

Morgan asked attendees to explain their personal responsibility in such issues.

Whaley said people have to go the extra mile to get more information.

"It's not a hard concept to grasp, but it's hard to implement," she said.

Whaley said how, as a student, she is extremely busy and life continually gets busier. She said she considers herself a very politically conscious person. But those who are not don't always go that extra mile.

Whaley said she wishes the media would make these stories more accessible to people, so they don't have to read five different articles to get the full story, because not everyone will do that.

Associate professor of communications Brooke Barnett said it is impossible not to cover these kinds of issues in the media. But then it becomes a question of how to do so ethically, she said.

"To bring up these conversations," senior Samantha White said. "Exposing it, educating people, word of mouth. You can't just sit by because if you don't correct people, who will?"

Barnett said people have to take what power they have and use teachable moments to enact the change they can.

"Continue the conversation outside here," Pope said. "As long as we have conversations, we can only move forward."

Morgan said she will continue to offer these talks.

"This is what I can do," she said. "Get people who care to talk. I think it's important. I'd do it five years from now if I thought it would help."

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**-MUHAMMAD MUSAH
ELON UNIVERSITY FRESHMAN**