

COMING FULL CIRCLE

When Anna Ray, first arrived on the AUS campus her plans didn't involve sticking around for very long. Her plan was to live at AUS with her parents while finishing her last year of high school and then returning back to the United States to start her university studies. "When I first came here I thought that 'I'll have fun for these ten months and then I'll go home.' So things were fine; they were easy."

Anna's original plan, and one reason why the Ray family moved to AUS from the United States, revolved around her desire to spend her senior year abroad. "I was a significant reason for the family's move to AUS. I had always wanted to be an exchange student, but my mom always told me 'no, that's what you do in university,'" As luck would have it, AUS advertised a job opening for the position of head librarian, and Kathy Ray decided to apply. Anna explained that "My dad had wanted to make a career change, but my mother's job is very specialized, so she had to be the one to look for a job. Mom got tired of my dad's wanting to make a move, so she applied for the Head Librarian's position at AUS, not really expecting anything to happen." However, Kathy found herself under consideration for the position. Things became

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more and more serious as the application process progressed and Anna pushed things along as much as she could. Anna laughed while she recalled that "it was I who really pushed for the move, since I could spend my senior year abroad; so we moved. My senior year in the Middle East; I may not have known anything about it, but I knew that one day it would make a great story. 'My senior year in the Middle East.' That's really why I did it—for the bestseller."

Once the family had relocated and settled in, things seemed to go according to Anna's original plan. Anna attended Dubai American Academy (DAA) for her senior year while Ron and Kathy became ensconced in their respective positions at AUS. However, as her senior year went on, Anna found herself making a mid-course correction and applying to AUS. Said Anna, "For a number of reasons, but mostly because I didn't know what to major in, my parents suggested that I stay here, so that I could figure things out."

While the AUS campus had been her home, it had not been her school. The move from DAA to AUS, and the change in her plans, caused Anna to experience a transitional diversion. "It was fine to spend my senior year being amazed by Dubai and Sharjah," said Anna. "I had seven weeks to hang out with my friends in California, and when I came back, that's when the transitional bump hit me." Anna pointed out that the university's diversity, which is such a highly valued part of the AUS experience, can also be a little intimidating. "When I came back to AUS for my freshman year I wasn't around my California friends, and I wasn't around my American high school expat friends. There was a completely different mix of people, and a completely different environment. Although I was fine with the decision to attend AUS, I was also adjusting to a huge number of changes."



The transition from DAA to AUS wasn't the only source of Anna's diversion. Anna also found herself caught between two worlds. She explained that "part of me hadn't yet accepted the transition. Part of me wanted to be online finding out what my friends back home in California were up to—so the transition wasn't only about getting used to college and the reality of AUS. The challenge was also about adjusting to new people, and adjusting to the fact that I wasn't going home to go to school."

As with many people, Anna's transition eased when she began to make friends at AUS. "That first year at AUS I made a friend who was here from Georgetown," she said. "That friend was the one who got me into the food, the music and the people from AUS and the region."

Where Are You Now?

Atif Khawaja '05, and **Omran Al Owais '06**, graduates of the School of Architecture and Design, were recently featured in the internationally recognized and circulated *Metropolis Magazine* for their creative design of the *Warqaa Courtyards* in Dubai. Both architects are now associated with Dubai-based Centimeter Cube Thinkspace.

As she began to make friends and grow comfortable with her surroundings Anna's outlook slowly started to change, and AUS began to seem more like a home to her. "I remember thinking, 'Ok, it is cool here.' It took me a while to get to this point because I still had one foot in California, and I still hadn't really committed to life here at AUS." As she grew more comfortable with her surroundings, Anna grew more comfortable with AUS' diversity, which had once been challenging. "I realized that there was a whole different side to what I had seen. I slowly changed my perception of things. I realized that there were new experiences that I could have, and that I could learn things from a different angle," she said.

Although she lacked a strong focus at the start, Anna *did know* that she wanted a career that involved travel. This led her to choose International Studies as her major. "I knew that I wanted something that would allow me to travel and do interesting things," explained Anna. "International Studies gave me the opportunity to explore a number of areas of interest, which would allow me to find a future focus. It was at the end of my first year at AUS that I thought to myself, 'The Middle East is so interesting,' and I decided that I wanted to make the Middle East the focus of my studies."

Towards the end of first year at AUS Anna also decided to study Arabic intensively. One of the leading programs in the United States was at Brigham Young University (BYU), in Anna's native state, Utah. BYU offered a six-week intensive Arabic immersion program. "The summer between my two years I went back to the U.S. and studied intensive Arabic so that I could really soak up AUS. My first year had been such an adjustment. I finished high school and moved to AUS, and I was taking my time meeting people and getting used to things."

During this summer trip Anna noticed that something in her had changed. "I found it very hard to go back. It took me three weeks to get used to it. Things like adjusting to weekends. And I felt as if I didn't fit in, which is unusual, because at AUS I also felt as if I didn't fit in." Much to her surprise, Anna discovered that what had originally been so daunting to her about AUS, its diversity, had now become something familiar and welcoming. She

explained that "the conclusion I came to was that the culture at BYU was very homogenous, and I had been abroad, whereas at AUS there is a great deal of diversity, and I discovered that I fit in at AUS precisely because I was different. I felt that at BYU there was a mold to fit in to, whereas at AUS things are just so diverse."

Anna's return to AUS was a much more comfortable experience. Her classes were more interesting to her, and her life at AUS had become much more familiar. "My second semester in my second year was great," said Anna. "I had done my generals and now I was taking courses in Arabic Heritage and Arabic literature, and other subjects to do with the Middle East."

Anna's interest in Middle East studies has led her back to Utah, this time to the University of Utah, where she specializes in the subject. Anna notes that, "Going back to Utah after my second year at AUS I felt that things made much more sense more easily—that I had much more insight. We study things in class—the history of the region, the conflicts, its culture—and I have a context to put things into. For me, it's not just about names and dates. I've been there, I've met people from these places, and I've heard a variety of perspectives on these topics, and not just from people who are scholars."

Anna has also learned that, unexpectedly, AUS has come to be her home. Coming back for her Christmas break has been, in many ways, like the closing of a circle in Anna's life. "Now I consider AUS to be home, more than California," said Anna. "Partly because my parents are here and my room is here.... And I don't know what I'll do if they ever leave, because I have come to realize that this is where my friends are too. This is where I feel comfortable and where my place is. It's fun to see people here, and to see AUS again. It's where I feel most comfortable. I feel a huge sense of gratitude towards AUS; the people, the professors who have helped me to get ahead, and a sense of gratitude that I was enabled to go back to the U.S. and pursue a new course of study. I also feel a great sense of gratitude towards my peers; they made me feel so comfortable at AUS, and they're the reason for my major and my enthusiasm for it."

Close to 300 Attend Alumni *Iftar* in Abu Dhabi

Some 300 AUS alumni attended an *Iftar* at the Rotana Beach Hotel and Towers in Abu Dhabi on Thursday October 4. The Abu Dhabi Chapter of the AUS Alumni Association hosted the *Iftar*. This highly successful event was the first event organized by the Alumni Association for its members this year. Also in attendance at the event were Dr. Winfred Thompson, AUS Chancellor, Dr. Nada Mourtada-Sabbah, Assistant to the Chancellor for Development and Alumni Affairs, and senior members of the academic administration.

"As the first graduates of our young and dynamic institution, these alumni carry both the privilege and responsibility of serving as our ambassadors to the business world and to their circles of families and friends," said Dr. Mourtada-Sabbah. "I am very impressed by the high level of attendance at this *Iftar*, especially since this was the Chapter's first organized event. It is a wonderful success and a testament to the hard work of the Abu Dhabi Chapter of the Alumni Association." Dr. Mourtada-Sabbah went on to say that one of the key functions of the *Iftar* was to "ensure a connection with our vibrant body of young alumni, to keep them informed of important developments and to provide an effective channel of communication between the alumni and the university."

The *Iftar* featured a raffle for a number of Air France/KLM return tickets to Paris, as well as a number of seats in AMIDEAST/AUS management training courses, which are always in high demand.