

Local Spotlight

## THE MAID DILEMMA



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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**W**e have now reached critical mass. Kuwait has more than 650,000 domestic servants and will likely see that figure grow to a million by end of next year. Mothers of all nationalities can be seen striding through local malls and shopping complexes, with one or two children in tow and a uniformed maid bringing up the rear.

Does every single child need their own nanny? Is this culture of maids a way of showing off or a means for parents of shirking their responsibilities?

Having a domestic helper is no simple matter. It involves important legal, financial and humanitarian issues. Thankfully the Kuwait government issued a new set of labor laws providing clear guidelines for domestic helpers. But too many people continue to break the law which absolutely guarantees at the minimum:

- **Weekly day off of at least 24 hours (taking her to the mall to watch your kids on Friday is NOT a day off!)**
- **30 days paid leave per year**
- **No more than 12 hours work per day**
- **End of service indemnity of one monthly salary for EACH year worked**
- **Flight tickets home**

These laws, enacted in 2015, continue to be ignored by many in society. Yet at the same time, more and more domestic helpers are being brought in to work. Enforcement of the domestic labor law remains limited and many sponsors withhold maids' passports, don't provide a day off or fail to pay indemnity at the end of the contract.

There is also the gross act of 'selling' a maid - essentially asking for a transfer fee even after the helper has worked the contract period for the sponsor. This is illegal and considered human trafficking and it must stop. The government must outlaw the practice and put measures in place to prevent it.

The practice of selling maids is tied directly to the high costs of recruitment, with some agencies charging upwards of KD 1,600 for a helper.

That may change in coming days with the advent of a new government-owned maid agency and an expected influx of more domestic labor. The Indian embassy has also dropped a required security deposit, opening the door for more helpers from India.

The result may be a reduction in recruiting fees. This can be a good thing for families in need of help. But it can also be abused and I ask that the government consider limiting the number of maids per family to one or two at the most.

The government should also make people aware of their obligations toward their help and also provide assistance to domestic servants who have been abused, mistreated or otherwise exploited. Embassies can also help by making sure their citizens are aware of their rights and obligations when coming to work in Kuwait.

Everyone deserves the dignity of honest work and honest pay and of being treated fairly.

IN MY VIEW

## KUWAIT'S LANDMARKS OF CHILDHOOD DISAPPEAR



By Nawara Fattahova

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**I**t's a sad feeling not being able to go to places we used to enjoy visiting when we were kids. Change is a part of life, but when the change removes most or all of your favorite entertainment places and stores, it hurts. The trend started by demolishing Showbiz, the most popular entertainment park in Kuwait during the 1970s and 1980s, before Entertainment City was built in Doha. The place also housed a mini-zoo, pony rides and other attractions. Green Hill opposite Showbiz disappeared much earlier.

Then came the demolition of one of the two complexes of the old Salmiya Souq on Salem Al-Mubarak Street. This complex had many of my favorite shops including Waleed Toys, Family Bookshop, Baskin Robbins ice cream parlor, Hardees fast food and many others. Ten years after it was razed, a new building is being built and the entire street will change in the future to become a promenade where cars will be banned. At least the complex on the opposite side is still standing, so some childhood memories are alive, although the popular toy store disappeared after the liberation in 1991.

The drive-in cinemas, which were not available anywhere else in the region, were also demolished. The main one on the Sixth Ring Road was replaced with 360

Mall. The other smaller one was in Ahmadi. Many other cinemas disappeared too, including Salmiya Cinema next to the post office and Abdulhussein Abdulredha Theatre, Al-Hamra Cinema that used to be in the place of the Al-Hamra Tower, and Garnata Cinema in Khaitan, which has been replaced by a mall. Last year, Entertainment City, which was the first and largest of its kind in the GCC when it was built in 1984, was closed for maintenance. Rumors swirled that it would reopen after a few months, but this didn't happen. Some unofficial reports said that it will be demolished completely and rebuilt, and may reopen in 2021.

The other popular entertainment park was Shaab Park on Gulf Road. This park suddenly shut down last month due to a dispute over its license and some other legal issues. It seems it will surely be gone, and visitors of this park have lost the many rides, ice skating rink, rollerblading, pony riding and the only bungee jumping place in Kuwait.

Children now can only play in small entertainment areas in some malls that are not attractive to teenagers and young people. Or they can go to public parks, which many find boring and unsuitable to visit in this hot weather. Where will their childhood memories of Kuwait be created?

IN MY VIEW

## GETTING TO KNOW FOREIGNERS IN YOUR CLASS



By Salman Al-Mutawa

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**"W**hen I go to the US, I am going to make non-Kuwaiti friends, I'm too used to Kuwaitis," is a statement 60 percent of all students who study abroad, including myself, make before landing in their new home. (I made up the 60 percent figure by the way). It is a fact, however, that many Kuwaitis decide to befriend non-Kuwaitis when they leave Kuwait. Most however end up befriending a majority of Kuwaitis and Saudis, with the occasional Khaleeji here and there. This isn't because of prejudice, nor is it outright racism.

As you begin your semester, you will notice that most people generally gravitate towards the people they have the most in common with. As a result, chances are you will find a higher number of Latin Americans and Arabs as friends than you will, for example, see African Americans and Arabs. This isn't racism, but every society has a comfort zone that most people don't generally step out of. Why would you go out of your way to speak to someone you barely have anything in common with?

I realize this information comes off as a little negative, but this is the reality of the matter. Speaking from experience however, there is a large diversification movement happening in most universities in the West. Which is great, so how can you take advantage of this and make friends from all over the world?

It's simple. Just say hi. For Kuwaitis, this is a little weird, as we are accustomed to assuming that if a stranger walks up to us and says hello, he or she is going to ask for something from us. This is not the case in

many other countries. Therefore, the best approach is to always assume that the stranger talking to you is being nice. But what if you are the stranger?

Go up to the person and talk to them. Practice small talk - talk about homework, or the weather, where the person is from, what languages they speak. Always smile first, and people will smile back 90 percent of the time. (This statistic is also made up - I am not a statistical data authority nor do I claim to be one!) So go ahead! Try it! Walk up to Kuwaitis and foreigners and just say hi. They'll either think that you're really nice, or a little weird, but this is how you build a relationship with a stranger.

This being said, there are a few topics that are of bad taste when getting to know a person. Here are the main ones: - never speak about religion or politics, never ask another person to do you a favor, and do not judge any opinions the other person expresses. Stick with these rules for at least one month, and you will notice that your silence on these topics breeds an unconscious illusion of trust and depth between you and the person you'd like to befriend. Once this bond solidifies, then you can speak about those topics without giving the other person the wrong idea about yourself.

Finally, as clichéd as it may sound, just be yourself. And if by the end of the semester you realize that you have not made any new friends, don't waste time wondering why - it's probably your fault. So take a step back, reassess your actions and try again!