



Creativity in adversity

Expats designs t-shirts to highlight experience of life under lockdown

By Ben Garcia

Residents of Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh celebrated yesterday after their long lockdown was finally lifted. Both areas had total isolation imposed on April 6 and remained under lockdown until yesterday. The isolation created a host of challenges - from long queues for food aid, shopping and cooking gas cylinders to the psychological stress and anxiety of the restriction. One resident, however, turned his experience of the lockdown into a t-shirt that quickly went viral in Kuwait.

Moustafa Ali Hassan, an Egyptian from Alexandria and a resident of Kuwait, crafted the t-shirt with the slogan 'Mahboula Survivor'. Now in Kyrgyzstan, where he traveled at the end of June to be with his wife and daughter after the Kyrgyz Embassy arranged a chartered flight to the country, Hassan lived almost the entire lockdown in block 3 of Mahboula. "I feel sad about the problems of people who are without food and even baby milk and diapers. I witnessed this with so many of my friends in Mahboula. Thank God I was stable financially, so at least I didn't run out of money. But for months we were stuck in our homes. Every day we saw the sorry condition of the people - there were queues in several areas for food. Those are the things I cannot forget living under the lockdown," Hassan said.

His 'Mahboula Survivor' t-shirt went viral on social media in Kuwait recently when he posted it on online on Amazon. Within 24 hours, he sold around 100 t-shirts. Ali works in the human resources de-



partment of a technology solution provider in Kuwait (he did not want his company to be named). "I have a lot of hobbies online - I am an expert in social media marketing. I also sell on Amazon - it is something which lets me earn more money," he said.

"I design t-shirts to sell on Amazon US, UK and Germany, and am also working with other POD (print on demand) websites to create t-shirts. I love to work with Adobe (Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere and After Effects). I also have a background in video editing and motion graphics," said Hassan. He has also started a YouTube channel where he showcases his ideas and skills.

"When I made the Mahboula, Jleeb and Farwaniya Survivor t-shirt designs, I was sitting on our sofa bed - it was a lovely day and I was trying to create something just for fun and to pass the time," he said. "Remember, I left Kuwait only on June 29, and everything that happened to me in Kuwait and particularly Mahboula is yet fresh on my mind. The lifting of the lockdown was an-



Moustafa Ali Hassan

nounced when I was in Kyrgyzstan, but I consider myself a Mahboula survivor too because the lockdown started on April 6."

Hassan said he did not expect his t-shirt design would go viral. "I didn't expect my t-shirts would sell in Kuwait. I know there isn't a culture of buying from Amazon among expats and Kuwaitis, but the post went viral and people have been sharing it," he told Kuwait Times. He said he only contributed

the design and Amazon is in charge of printing, selling and shipping the t-shirts. "I only get a percentage of the sales. As of now, I have sold around 100 t-shirts," he added.

Hassan encountered no problems when going to the airport for his flight to Kyrgyzstan. "Because it was a prearranged flight by the embassy and I had a ticket, I didn't face any difficulties getting out of Mahboula," he said. "When the Kyrgyz Embassy announced a chartered flight, my wife coordinated with me immediately and we managed to arrange the ticket for the special flight. I am here now, but I'm very connected to Kuwait, where I lived for 11 years," he said. "I came to Kuwait in 2010. I still want to come back when everything is okay and there's no longer a threat of the coronavirus. I still want to live in the same area where I lived before. I am very happy to be with my family in Kyrgyzstan, but I consider Kuwait, especially Mahboula, to be my second home," said Hassan, who spoke to Kuwait Times through a messenger app.