



St. Some Times



I Lack Decoration Genes so I Recruited some Help

This has been a month worthy of apartment news. Rarely do I go in depth about apartments overseas. Why, well, they are always furnished and very temporary. I have been on the Aramco Island for almost a year and a half now and I absolutely love it. Hence the decision to "move in" to an apartment for the first time in twenty years. The last time I bought furniture, had a TV, or hung up a picture was in Oshkosh, Wisconsin from 1997-2001.

It really started in August when I recruited the ladies to help find a couch. Since then, I have spent almost every weekend going to IKEA on Saturdays. Everything is closed on Fridays

(religious day for Islam) so I got into a routine on Saturdays: breakfast early, moto to the Aramco bus pickup by 9:00am; Go to IKEA and pick out furniture to be delivered; go back through IKEA to get smaller stuff like picture frames; check out by 11:20; bus back to my apartment to wait for the delivery; assemble the IKEA puzzles during the following week; go back for more the following Saturday.

The apartment really took on a quality look once I had Sarah (above) arrange the pictures. She's got a great eye for interior design. It's really taken a whole community of friends to get my apartment the way I want it. I bought my first king sized bed at age 48. Now I don't want to get out of it in the morning. Soon, I'll have to host a party for the designers!



Growing Older but Not Up...

That's my first TV in 20 years. I have had a projector during my travels because it's difficult to ship a TV to all the different countries. They also cost twice as much as an average HD projector.

This apartment isn't conducive to a projector. Having a big white wall in my living room just didn't work out. I installed my projector upstairs so I could watch in bed.



Halo Revived.

A long time waiting, and waiting, and waiting.

I went into an electronics store to buy an Xbox. They didn't have Halo so I left without an Xbox. My TV was lonely and I figured Halo 5 would look so nice on a 55inch screen. Time for more shopping.

While I was waiting for my next batch of pictures to be printed for framing, I wandered into a lesser known electronics store. Sure enough, I walked out of the store with an Xbox and Halo 5. The clerk asked me if it was for my kids. "No, it's time for me to kill aliens!", I replied.

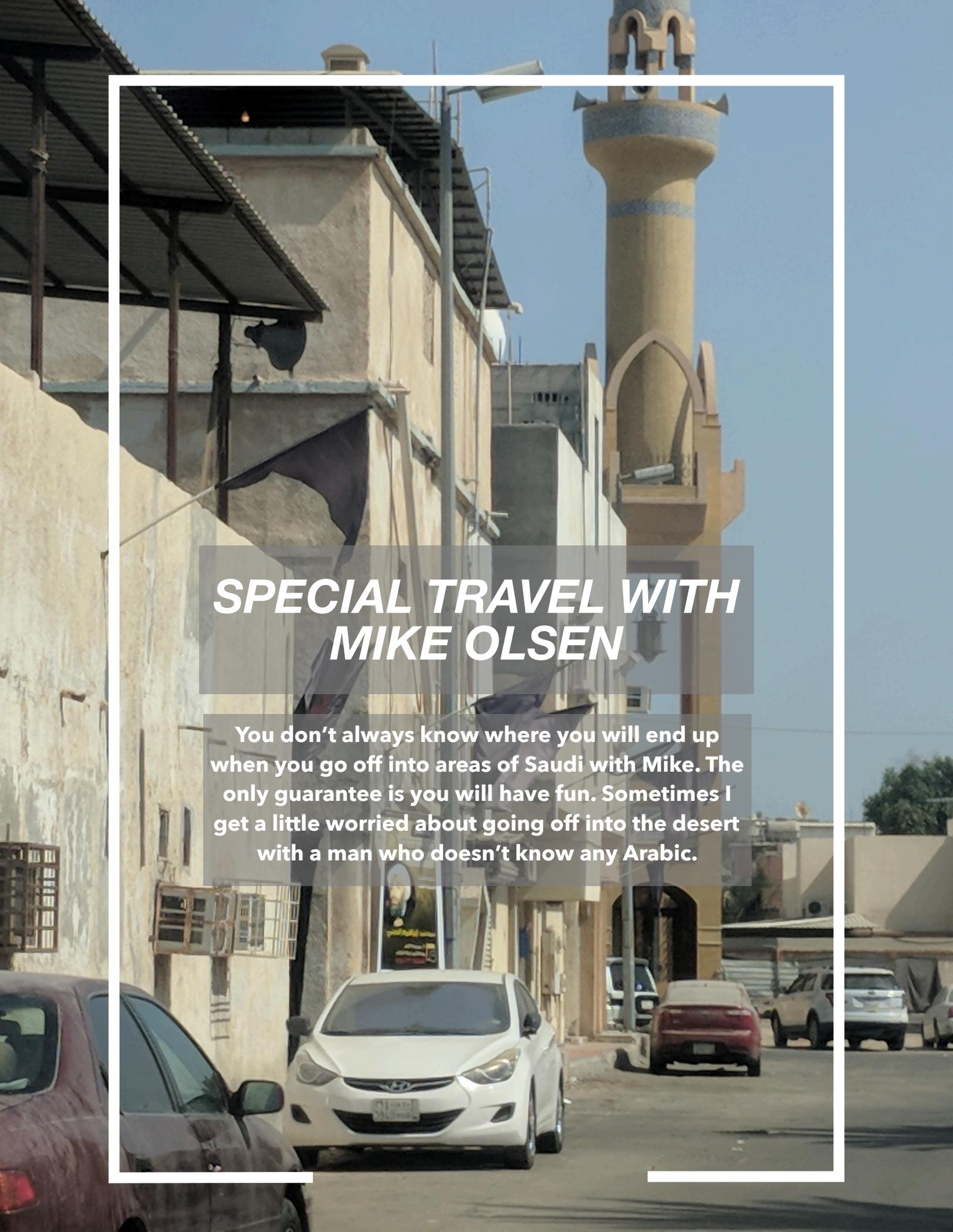
My TV had been sitting in its box for two weeks. I had been busy at school. But on this Xbox Saturday, I had set aside the entire afternoon just for playing Xbox. Out came the TV. Unboxed the Xbox. Plugged everything in and set up the wifi connections for both. Before I inserted the DVD for my new Halo 5, a message came onto the TV screen... YOUR XBOX REQUIRES AN UPDATE - DO NOT TURN OFF (...52 GB remaining). I spent the rest of the day putting up pictures and practicing my saxophone. Three days later - with continual downloading - the Xbox was fully updated. I rushed

home from school, dropped my book bag, and placed the Halo disc into the Xbox. I was even looking forward to the theme music. I saw only five words!

HALO 5 REQUIRES AN UPDATE

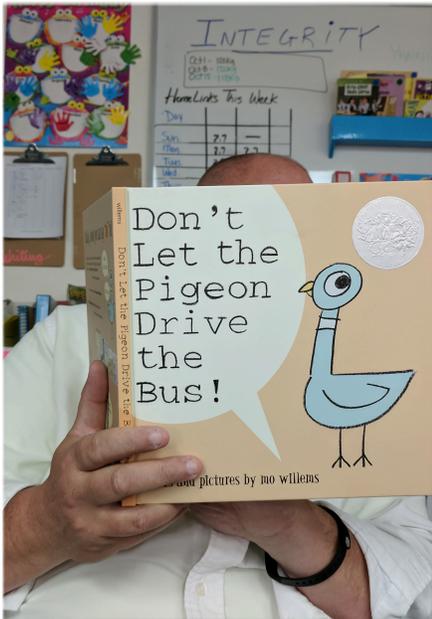
The update was 20Gb. I started the update. While it updated, the console allowed me to click around and familiarize myself with the Xbox console. I browsed a little bit through all of the new Microsoft commercialization of the Xbox. They want to sell you everything from movies to apps. I turned it off.





SPECIAL TRAVEL WITH MIKE OLSEN

You don't always know where you will end up when you go off into areas of Saudi with Mike. The only guarantee is you will have fun. Sometimes I get a little worried about going off into the desert with a man who doesn't know any Arabic.



Teaching in a quality school is the most important part of overseas teaching.

Aramco has quality schools. Mine, Dharhan Hills Elementary School, is just one of their schools. Imagine 200 students in every grade level from Kindergarten to Fourth grade! That's a lot of students!

One of the best ideas in our school is Ranch Families. Each class is in one of six Ranch Families. All of the ranches are named after local animals and sports a different color T-shirt. My family is Oryx Meadows and we wear red. Once a month, my students spread out to other classrooms and

students from all five grade levels migrate to my room. Three of my students stay in my room family. The once a month Ranch Day has a shortened schedule so we can spend the afternoon doing something special as a Ranch Family. The Ranches rotate their activity. This month, the Oryx went out with sidewalk chalk while other ranches watched a feature movie, competed in a field day, played board games, or walked to a local park to play.

Having Kindergarten, first, second, third, and fourth graders in one room is a rewarding opportunity that would have made my Grandma Lemoine smile. I love to watch the older kids helping the littlest ones. When the activity is over, my third and fourth graders escort the little ones back to their homerooms. What a quality school.

Happy Halloween, Aramco Style Trick or treating at night, parade at school

Halloween is done differently at every international school I have worked at or visited. This school and community take Halloween very seriously! Imagine having your local streets locked down from the outside by security. Imagine the security guards standing on street corners in force. Imagine kids walking around the neighborhood with big candy bags and accompanying adults. Imagine an entire school breaking for an entire afternoon and inviting an army of proud parents to witness a costume parade winding throughout the entire school building.

I don't have to imagine it. It happens every year here. The families that don't believe in Halloween due to religious beliefs or conservative ideas simply keep their students at home for the day. Several of my Muslim students and a devout Mormon student of mine were absent for the day. The parents

apologized via email or a letter to the school ahead of time.

My team of grade 3 teachers planned out our costume theme at the end of last year. We ordered T-shirts with different emojis on them. Then we added to our individual emojis with the rest of what we were

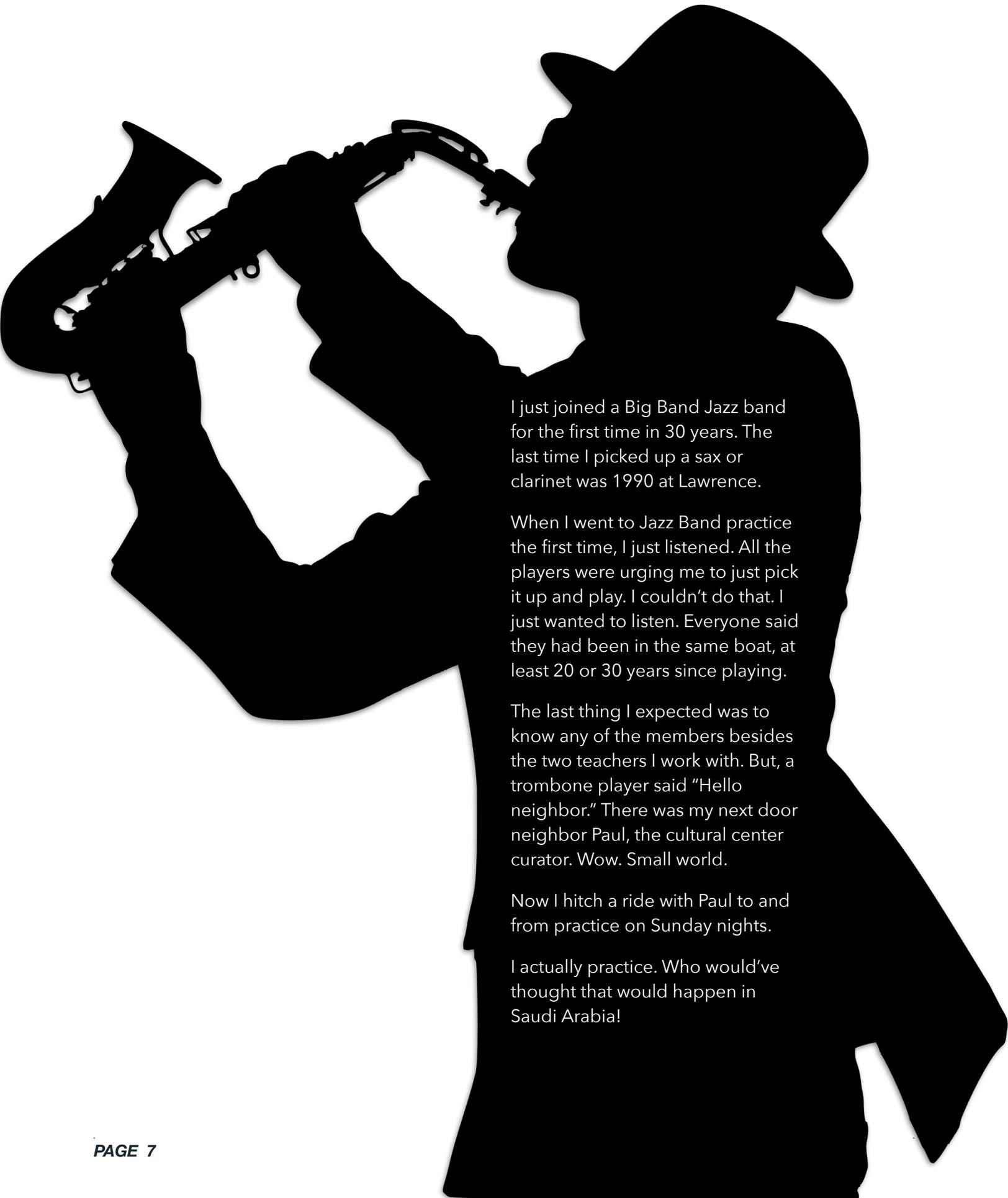
wearing. Mine was an emoji with sunglasses on. I added some Bermuda shorts, sunglasses, and a Hawaiian shirt over the T-shirt.

Last summer, I brought an elephant plush suit back to Saudi just for Halloween. No one had any costume parties so I didn't get to use it. Instead, I'm going to challenge my fellow teacher Carl to a classroom contest and make him wear it if he loses the contest. By the way, I told my class the

story about dad dressing up as Freddy at the doctor's office all those years back.



Boo



I just joined a Big Band Jazz band for the first time in 30 years. The last time I picked up a sax or clarinet was 1990 at Lawrence.

When I went to Jazz Band practice the first time, I just listened. All the players were urging me to just pick it up and play. I couldn't do that. I just wanted to listen. Everyone said they had been in the same boat, at least 20 or 30 years since playing.

The last thing I expected was to know any of the members besides the two teachers I work with. But, a trombone player said "Hello neighbor." There was my next door neighbor Paul, the cultural center curator. Wow. Small world.

Now I hitch a ride with Paul to and from practice on Sunday nights.

I actually practice. Who would've thought that would happen in Saudi Arabia!



RARELY

Having a beer in a bar or restaurant is so liberating.

This picture was taken in Bahrain. It was the first beer I've had since I was out of KSA traveling in Ireland.