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## GRANDMA'S KITCHEN

By [yomag \(https://theyomag.com/index.php/author/yomag/\)](https://theyomag.com/index.php/author/yomag/) / December 19, 2020

**By C. Aileen Blaine**

The first thing you may notice when you arrive at Grandma's is the door with the worn paint. It squeaks hello when you enter and will whine goodbye when you try to leave. Up three steps, and you'll enter the beating heart of the home: the kitchen.

It is not a large room by any means, less than 100 square feet, but there's something about the Americana wallpaper, dish towels and knick-knacks that keep it from seeming anything but cozy.

There are many wall hangings encouraging you from their various places.

"Live, Laugh, Love Often," say some.

"Peace, Love, and Joy," say others.

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There are a lot of things that are wonderful about Grandma's kitchen, but arguably the most wonderful is the view from the window above the sink. From there, the backyard can be seen, full of lush grass in the summer and snowbanks in the winter. When it rains heavily, the water pools in the low spots, sometimes so deeply a family of ducks can glide in, their orange landing-gear feet stretched in eager anticipation.

The animals can't see you from where you stand at the kitchen window, and they'll eat and play for hours, undisturbed. Always full of seed, the bird feeders are very popular among both the birds and squirrels. Sometimes, a squirrel will prance about the yard with mischievous flicks of its tail, scattering the birds with its sudden movements. You might be tempted to scold it, or you may be content to simply watch. A family of rabbits sometimes visits on cool summer mornings, and they eat the clover that grows in the lawn, eyes still keen to the smallest of movements visible from the kitchen window.

There's no dishwashing machine, so after each meal the red dishpan comes out from under the sink, and then it's filled with steamy, sudsy water. The sink gurgles when it drains, always thirsty for the bubbly, warm dishwater. Each dish's face is washed gently by one person, then dried carefully by another. Meanwhile, discussions of all natures are had, revelations are made and stories are told. Some of the dishes are more than a hundred years old, and though they may be scratched and faded and chipped, they still make their appearances at holiday dinners, like old reliable friends.

Sundays are for baking in Grandma's kitchen. Flour, sugar and cinnamon or sprinkles always end up spread all around the kitchen counter, but Grandma will never scold you for this. The cakes, cookies, brownies and breads produced by this delicious chaos all spend time rising in the toasty heat of the oven, whose warmth feels like a safe hug on a chilly winter day. You may be tempted to crack open its solid door to take a peek at the magic inside. The smells of cinnamon, chocolate and sweetness tantalize the noses of anyone nearby.

"It's better than a candle," you might say, "because it's the real thing!"

The heat of the oven melts the candle that sits atop the stove, and its scents that change with the seasons always mix with the smell of the goodies cooling atop the stove. If you're feeling antsy, you might be tempted to cut into the pan of brownies before they're ready, but no one will scold you for it.

If the house is particularly quiet, while those inside are taking their Sunday siestas, the gentle humming of the refrigerator can be heard, giving a gentle warm breeze against the red tiled floor in front of it. If you stand on it long enough, your toes will be toasty warm. Family photos smile from the door of the refrigerator. Some of the faces are more familiar than others, for some have not been seen in many years, though they're missed every day. These photos are held in place by the hundred-or-so magnets collected from the many travels and road trips made over the years. There are magnets from Niagara Falls, Washington D.C., Gettysburg, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and so many more.

The kitchen is the quintessential small and cozy place to be on a winter's day, with the crockpot bubbling away with chili or a roast with vegetables. The smells of meat and spices will tickle your nose in a way that makes your stomach rumble even if you'd thought you weren't hungry. In the summer, it is where watermelon is sliced, with its sweet pink flesh dripping from your chin to the counter. In the fall, it is where fresh apple pies are baked, with crumbs of flaky crust leaving you to wonder if perhaps you could eat the whole thing.

The holidays are always special in Grandma's kitchen. Though it might be a small space, it's never a constricting one. While the holiday turkey or ham roasts in the oven, busy bodies flit from stove to counter to sink to stove again, preparing those delicious side dishes with gusto.

"Ope," you might hear, in true Midwestern fashion.

"Coming through," you might hear, and you'll be sure to watch that you're not in the way of a hot dish or pan that smells oh-so-good.

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The kitchen is where the candles on the birthday cake are lit, one flame for each year of the life celebrated. It's where amateur bars of "Happy Birthday" ring out, where wishes are made when the candles are blown out.

No matter the time of year, it's a place where memories are made. The kinds of memories that are like small pieces. Not much of anything by themselves, but they come together to form a beautiful tapestry, a fuller picture. A picture as full as your heart.

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By [yomag \(https://theyomag.com/index.php/author/yomag/\)](https://theyomag.com/index.php/author/yomag/) / December 19, 2020

**By Jake Brandenstien**

September 25. The last time I conversed with my friend, Nate Offerdahl, owner of Westside Bowl, was when I got a call from him on March 14 informing me the venue’s two-year anniversary show, which my band, We, The Creature was supposed to play, was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Half a year has passed since and my sense of time has been scrambled like an egg over high heat – this event feels like yesterday to me, yet simultaneously far away. So much has happened.

I contacted Offerdahl and asked if he would like to meet and discuss the current state of Westside Bowl. I pulled into the parking lot of Westside on September 25 at about 3 p.m.

When I stepped into the building, the staff told me Offerdahl was running a few errands and would return shortly.

I sat outside to wait on the wood-floored front patio and admired the nice weather, where I was eventually joined by Offerdahl.

–Offerdahl and I returned inside, where he showed me to a table near the main stage and bowling alleys. The venue was jarringly silent, with no sounds of bowling balls striking the pins and knocking them down and no bands on stage announcing to the crowd “ok, we’re going to play one more” and the audience yelling with enthusiasm and raising toasts in response.

Although this visit was not the same as others, the memories of the venue’s energy were everywhere.

A bittersweet sense of nostalgia washed over me as I looked around and experienced the now familiar feeling of stepping into my second home. Offerdahl and I pulled our chairs out and sat down to discuss six months ago, now and the time in between.

“When we first announced on the 15 of March that we had to close, I was very concerned about what we were going to do,” Offerdahl said.

“Shortly thereafter, we started that ‘pay it forward’ program with the pizza, which really took off and kept us open.”

The “pay it forward program” was first introduced by local Youngstown bands, Rebreather and DAGGRS on the week of the first stay-at-home order. The two bands would pay for a certain amount of pizzas, allowing lucky incoming callers to acquire a pizza on the house. Other regulars took interest immediately, paying for anybody looking to grab a bite. The concept caught on like a wildfire and has been going strong ever since.

Offerdahl says pizza is still the most popular item on the venue’s menu.

Westside Bowl, in collaboration with downtown Youngstown restaurant, Space Kat, created the ‘jerk chicken’ pizza, which Offerdahl says has been selling very well.

#### **From live venue to live streaming.**

Jimmy Niemczura runs sound for the bands at Westside Bowl and is currently operating the livestream performances.

I asked him about the differences between the livestream shows and the regular concerts.

“Really the only big difference is the crowd not being there. Otherwise, everything else gets set up pretty much the same,” Niemczura said.

He also added that Westside Bowl typically hosts one band at a time for its livestream events, so there’s no real rush to get people moving gear as there might be during a live venue performance.

Local Youngstown band, Hawktopus performed one of these livestream shows for Westside Bowl over the summer; they played a fantastic set and the quality of the stream was excellent.

I met up with Tiger Hewitt, the guitarist, to ask him what he thought of performing via this medium.

“I really had no idea what to think about it. It felt really good after the fact ... During the performance, it was a weird thing,” Hewitt said.

Offerdahl said that the reception to the livestream performances has been positive, even though it’s not quite the same as a regular show.

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An exterior view of Westside Bowl on Mahoning Avenue. **Photo courtesy of Jake Brandenstein**

#### **Next steps for Westside.**

I asked Offerdahl what the next steps for Westside Bowl were.

“We’re transitioning weather-wise as we slide into October,” Offerdahl said.

“Up to this point, it’s been carry-out only, and in the last two months we’ve had some seating outside. With the weather changing we’re going to have to start bringing folks in, or they’re not going to come – no one wants to sit outside when it’s 30 degrees.”

Offerdahl added the venue will probably start offering bowling a few weeks after transitioning to indoor activities.

As for shows, Westside is starting to look at the spring for scheduling shows. However, they may do some in-person solo acoustic-type shows outside or inside for the rest of the year, depending on what the venue is comfortable with.

Offerdahl said that they would like to take a slow approach to offering live, indoor events again so they can be in a good position next spring as opposed to rushing anything.

Despite the troubles endured in 2020, the sense of community in Youngstown has not left.

“It was soul crushing to have that anniversary show get canceled,” Offerdahl said. “But by the generosity of others, we have made it through a very difficult time”.

After exchanging goodbyes, I went back home and got a text from a friend. He invited me to go to ... Westside Bowl.

We met that night and spent some time outside in the new seating area. It was a cool evening and other people were there enjoying drinks and feasting on some pizza.

The wash of nostalgia and the feeling of the venue’s untouched spirit returned as I sat back and listened to some weirdo pop tunes from the 1980s [the B-52s, to be specific], feeling strangely optimistic.

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## KUWAIT: RICHES TO FIRES TO RICHES

By [yomag \(https://theyomag.com/index.php/author/yomag/\)](https://theyomag.com/index.php/author/yomag/) / December 18, 2020

**By: Yousof Hamza**

February 24 is a crucial date in Kuwait. It is when 600,000 coalition troops started the liberation of the country from Iraq 29 years ago. They started their liberation in a cloud of black smoke. The black smoke was an attempt from the Iraqis to thwart attacks and the liberation of Kuwait. The Iraqis set over 600 oil wells on fire. The same oil wells that caused the invasion.

I lived in Kuwait while my mother taught there and I attended my last three years of high school. I have always heard of Kuwait for various reasons, such as the 1991 Gulf War, or the place where my father was born. I am not Kuwaiti though. My dad was Syrian and was unable to get Kuwaiti citizenship because of their strict laws. However, I did not know much about Kuwait or its people. I expected it to be similar to Dubai, but it was a mix, similar to Arab countries like Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, but with the oil money of the Gulf states. It was a strange brew of the humble and old conventions of the non-Gulf countries with unprecedented wealth.

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Kuwait has gone from the smoke and fire of burning oil wells to the smoke and fire of oil refineries. They have three, and one more being built. The three constructed sit next to each other, taking up over seven square miles of land, the fourth one under construction is another 4 square miles. A portion of the economy lies there, the other part lies in the massive oil fields. The largest, the Burgan Oil Fields, is around 386 square miles, or just about the size of Mahoning County. This is where 7% of the world's oil comes from. This is why Kuwait is what it is.

The people of Kuwait are bred out of the oil culture. Wealthy, nationalistic and peculiar. A Kuwaiti friend, Ahmad al-Subaie, who I have since lost contact with has said this about Kuwaitis: "The difference between Kuwait and Dubai is – in Dubai they are Arab rednecks, but they know they are rednecks so they build all these fancy buildings. In Kuwait we are rednecks as well, but we don't know this."



Oil fields burning in Kuwait. **Photo Courtesy of Jonas Jordan, United States Army Corps of Engineers**

In a way, he was right. Kuwait is largely filled with three floor cement houses tightly packed into districts. Some districts, mainly ones filled with foreigners, have almost exclusively multistory apartment buildings. In the area where I lived buildings were an average of ten floors, filled to the brim with southeast Asian laborers. There are few fancy buildings in comparison. Al-Hamra Tower, Liberation Tower and the Kuwait Towers being the most significant buildings. However, Kuwait has a proposed \$100 billion plan to build a new city to ease reliance on oil and gain tourism like Dubai.

The citizens of Kuwait, while wealthy, can be unsatisfied with their country. Kuwait suffers from significant brain drain. Young Kuwaitis leave to European and American universities for their education while being paid for by the government of Kuwait. If a Kuwaiti has met the academic requirements, they are eligible for the Kuwait scholarship, which pays for their university, housing, travel and a monthly stipend. However, according to some of Kuwait's youth, this is not enough for equality.

While Kuwait has a more liberal press and better gender equality than most of the region, there are still issues. In an article by Reuters, a protesting Kuwaiti youth, Abdullah Ashkanani, said, "One day we will get married and have children and we want them to have a fair, equal life, it is not about money. It is also about freedom and freedom of speech. Do not think you can give us money and we will sit at home and shut our mouths."

While this article was written in 2012, shortly after the Arab Spring, it still stands despite greater representation of women in the workforce and government (Embury-Dennis).

As an American living in Kuwait, I saw things with bias. I knew that the Southeast Asian laborers were treated poorly, but I realized that they were treated better than in other gulf countries. However, domestic servants are a different story. "Ethiopian maid filmed falling from seventh floor 'trying to escape Kuwaiti

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employer wanting to kill her” is not a headline you want to see (Westall). It was at the point where the Philippines banned the citizens from taking domestic servant positions in Kuwait, and a support organization was formed to help domestic servants escape their abusive families. Despite it being difficult for certain foreigners, many have settled comfortably – mainly Arabs in primarily non-Kuwaiti Arab districts.

Kuwaitis also cause issues for their government through their love of wild animals. It is not uncommon to hear of people having pet lions, tigers, cheetahs and most common, monkeys. I have had classmates with pet monkeys and heard of families with more exotic “pets”, such as a giraffe. You are also able to go to the animal market and buy exotic pets. There have been instances of maids being mauled by lions, big cats attacking herds of sheep and police capturing a lion in a police cruiser. These are occasionally seen out in the city and highways, and in the words of my mom: “Thankfully we didn’t see any lions or tigers.” (Hamza)

Since the Gulf War, it is clear that Kuwait is still finding its new self. It is the most American non-American country out there. Partly of their gratitude towards the American troops that liberated the country, but also of the bit of American culture that was brought over. The Americans brought over their food. This has been attributed to being one of the primary reasons of Kuwait’s obesity problem. American food is not the only imported food though. Most of Kuwait’s food is imported. Indian food, Thai food, Syrian food and any food that your heart desires. Kuwait’s traditional food is heavily borrowed from the Levante, Iran and Southeast Asia. Kuwait, like the other gulf countries, is a melting pot.

While Kuwait has a higher percentage of nationals than other gulf countries, it is still only 30%. 30% of the population that can own businesses, serve in public offices and most importantly, vote. While this gives Kuwaitis more power than any foreigner, some families are more powerful. This can be demonstrated by the amount of “wasta” you have. Wasta is essentially nepotism, but celebrated. Wasta can be used to get a prestigious job, get out of tickets, get better housing, getting a business or accelerating government paperwork. Wasta depends heavily on the family and where the person is within the family hierarchy.

The al-Sabah family is the most powerful family in Kuwait. They are the ruling family and have ruled since the formation of Kuwait in 1752. Other powerful families include the al-Ghanim family, the Mubarak family and the al-Kharafi family. All these families carry great wasta. An example of wasta occurred at school. A group of al-Sabah children got expelled for bad behavior and poor academic performance. However, the family paid the school for new classrooms as long as the children were allowed to attend the school again. A personal favorite of mine is a person getting \$5,000 of speeding and parking tickets wiped off. This was the biggest shock to me about Kuwait.

As an American in Kuwait, I saw a country that was unaware of itself. I saw a country that was completely normal after being devastated by war 30 years ago. It is a country that recovered to its former glory and celebrates its liberation. Despite this, it is still trying to grow, and the youth are trying to change the country. Its nationalism is celebrated even though it hurts foreigners. It is a country that is more modest than its neighbors despite being wealthier. It is a country that is aware of its limited future and is trying to work through to make it better.

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