

IT HAPPENED AT THE DUKHAN!

Mike Potter

Day 5 in Sudan, and it finally happened! I am now a bonifide and officially labeled "Howaga." I've been boldly venturing down to the local dukhan (corner store) alone with some Sudanese pounds in my pocket and a few Arabic words in tow. I've gone three times alone to grab some snacks - twice at night when the dukhan is surrounded by Sudanese men eating and talking. A perfect scenario to be called a foreigner, a "Howaga." And for sure, I'm the most foreign looking Howaga in the country, but until tonight, no one has called me one.



Tonight, my order was larger than normal and required more Arabic than I could remember, so I grabbed Solomon (the men at the dukhan call him "Sooleemahn") - our friends' 10-year-old son. As he was placing his order, the man behind the counter called him by name and then referred to me as a Howaga. Solomon, knowing that I had been waiting for someone to call me this turned to me and said, "Did you hear it?! He called you a Howaga!" I threw up a fist pump (probably startling all the men who had gathered around), and there was a grand celebration when we got back to the house.



Not only did I finally earn my Howaga badge this evening, but I also was introduced to a Sudanese dish named after a former US president. Back in 2001 when the United States invaded Iraq, the economic impact was felt worldwide. In the Sudan, prices for daily goods went up, and the people there - most of whom are very poor - were forced to make changes. People who were already skimping by had to skimp even more. During this time, a cheap but filling dish emerged that consists of beans, bread and yogurt. Because of the actions of the US, and because of the financial repercussions in Sudan, the people called this dish "Bush" - as in George W. Bush. The name stuck, and today, Bush is a common food staple throughout the country.