



RIAD'S STORY

Burgers sizzling on the barbeque, people inhaling their wings, pictures of cattle draping the wall, and the famous “Run Pig Run” sign watching over all these elements that are part of the unique experience that is Meats and Bread. The unique experience that was Meats and Bread. The pictures broke, the people could not come anymore, and the shards of glass scattered across the restaurant were so plentiful, they overtook the presence of the delicious aromas that used to waft through. All of a sudden, the place that collected smiles and meat lovers could only collect dust and pain.

Meats and Bread was a restaurant in Gemmayzeh that targeted anyone, from any age group, with a love for any type of barbeque. Whether it's a burger, wings, or steak, they had it all with a deliciously eccentric twist. Unfortunately, a menu heavily reliant on meat and ingredients from abroad mixed with the beginning of an economic shutdown and devaluation of the Lebanese lira is a recipe for quite the challenge. Riad Aboulteif –owner and chef – knew there needed to be adjustments to this recipe for the team to, as he claims, “find their way through the weeds” and take the necessary precautions to survive the impending chaos. The plan was to continue Meats and Bread with some minor alterations – a new approach to the menu and cancelling imported items and ingredients. The plan did not take into account the Beirut Blast and was consequently eradicated alongside the restaurant on August 4th, 2020. Besides the wearying mental and psychological strain caused by the blast, costs that were already rising now skyrocketed with the added expenses of restoring the devastated location, reviving the



demolished equipment, and reopening with the destroyed interior – an endeavor clearly becoming financially unaffordable.

“You can’t stay stagnant; you have to move forward.” A phrase Riad emphasized throughout our interview and strongly implemented in his life. Despite all the situations accumulating into a seemingly endless mountain of struggles, he pushed through. The demolition of the location of Meats and Bread did NOT come with the final course of its concept. Instead, it was physically closed and transformed into a cloud kitchen. Riad did not stop there. His passion for cooking did not diminish, it was just refocused towards a new business concept. “I chose to fight the only way I know – through cooking. I didn’t want to look at the bad things going around me, it doesn’t help, it demotivates you. Keep yourself busy with what you do.”

Enter Ammoula, a shift to Lebanese food with a dash of an interesting and mouthwatering twist, pinches of kindness from the help of various organizations and people and seasoned with the strongest of resilience that helped it open during the late spring of 2021, in the location that was Meats and Bread. Opening a restaurant is never risk-free; opening up a restaurant during a pandemic, political instability, and tragic economic and currency collapse is a task marinated with strife, but Riad was determined to keep moving forward and insisted that “Any idea is a good start – it’s up to you to develop it and make it distinguishable.” He knew that research was essential before starting – specifically determining his market positioning¹ and penetration². Positioning was previously determined by the average paycheck, but now, that was

¹ Market Positioning is used to determine where the brand lies in the customer’s mind relative to other brands

² Market Penetration is a strategy used by organizations to increase their customer base



not as solid of a factor to refer to. Instead, he compared Ammoula to the present restaurants and saw where he fit among them – “Am I more like Baron or Barbar?” Furthermore, to penetrate during these expensive times, the go to is a price range cheaper than your competitors. However, with even local goods becoming unreasonably expensive and the addition of various bills including a hefty electric expense accumulated from several generators to make up for the lack of state power supply, it is unattainable to provide such low prices. At this rate, Riad believes that the food and beverage industry in Lebanon is slowly turning into a luxury.

How’s the future looking? Ammoula is open, which is always something to be grateful for. There have also been many offers to go abroad, and as much as Riad likes to keep moving, he also understands the need to plan and not jump “from one headache to another” - as he puts it. Despite a beautiful journey being interrupted by destruction and dark days, light is still seeping in and will illuminate the path to a brighter future. No recipe is set in stone and there will always be adjustments, but these adjustments are what make the end product all the more scrumptious and the same can be said about Riad’s journey.