

Journey to Jesus' Footsteps

Edited Journal of Holy Land Pilgrimage by Janice Donahue

Lent, 2008

Day 10 (Departure/Return) March 1st 2008 Saturday

Wake--up call: 2 AM! Harsh. We had maybe 4 hours of sleep. At 3 AM we load into the shuttle, which will take us back to Tel Aviv and David Ben Gurion Airport. We have a new driver. He's very nice but I miss Nedal. We are: Mom and Fr. Soney, Fr. Henryk, Viola, Sandy, and myself. We hit our first security checkpoint at 4:15 AM. After 30 minutes of separate security suits questioning both Priests, then proceeding to ask each of us questions (What Gifts were we given?), and looking very, very closely at our tickets and passports, we are sent through, one at a time, to put our bags in an x-ray machine of some type, then two barcode stickers were put on each piece of luggage and sent to the next checkpoint. All three of my bags are singled out for inspection.

The inspection agent amazes me. He knows exactly what I have in each bag and where the particular item he is questioning me about is located within each bag. He wants to see the gifts of honey and oil lamp. Finally, last bag, he wants to know what I am carrying from the Dead Sea. What did I get from that location? Oops, I think. Busted! I start to shake with remembrances of stories of American travelers in foreign jails. I had stuffed a fistful of sand from the shore of The Dead Sea into a baggie, never expecting that would be a problem. How can he know, I wonder. I pull it out.

"Did you get this as a gift?"

"No, Sir", I admit in a quavering voice. "I took it myself."

"Oh, that's fine then. You can go on."

I breathe, thank the agent and move on. Amazing technology our TSA has no clue of. We stop at one more checkpoint where our luggage is taken, Mom gets a wheelchair and a push to the final x-ray walk-through. A funny moment comes when I rhapsodize to the young woman pushing the wheelchair about how much I love this country and its people. She looks shocked.

"You like the people!?" she asks, incredulous

"Yes, don't you?"

This young immigrant from Ukraine shakes her head. Does not like anything much here, but had to come as a child when her parents immigrated without consulting her. It is a very funny moment. We navigate through a number of lines, ours always the shortest because of the wheelchair. Sandy and I tag along moving quickly. At one point, we cause a commotion because some security officer thinks we should not be accompanying my Mom, but ultimately relents with a scowl. All the chatting takes place

in fast and furious Hebrew and we have no idea what is said. Finally, we get to the walk through screening. What a surprise! We run into the owner of the travel company who spoke to us at dinner last night. He is as delighted to see us, as we are to see him! He's off on holiday.

The walk--through screening is a hundred times easier than in the U. S. No problem with the wheelchair or Mom's artificial knees. Leave on the watches, belts, shoes, wallets and just walk through. No removing of toiletries from bag; so quick and efficient and pleasant. We have a lot to learn at home!

A trolley is arranged to take Mom and her wheelchair to the gate, so we rode along to the end of the terminal, waving at Fr. Soney along the way as he walked, laughing at us.

7:52 AM--We are all aboard British Airways and we have liftoff! Everyone is very tired, but our seats are all close. Viola and Fr. Henryk fall quickly to sleep. I just want to watch more movies. It is rainy in Tel Aviv This morning. First rain we have seen in Israel. On the day of departure! How good God is to provide such good weather on our whole trip and now to grace this land with the rain it needs, the rain that nourishes it, immediately as we leave! I stop to say a little prayer for those journeying on to Petra, that they have continued good weather.

8:23 AM--Just south of Cypress in the eastern Mediterranean. Quite a headwind. Outside temp: -56 degrees to -68 degrees. The progress map has us traveling north of Athens, Greece, south of Sophia. Looks like we'll fly over Rhodes again, south of Mykonos and just north of Milan. We are served a wonderful English breakfast: Lox, English cream cheese (more like sour cream), cucumbers, lemon, fresh fruit salad, water, orange juice, an egg bread roll, butter, jam, a sausage, egg, roasted tomato, savory roasted mushrooms and potatoes, peach Yoplait (made in Israel) and a lovely cup of English tea!

8:45 AM--Now in London time. Over the eastern edge of the Adriatic Sea. This is so exciting!! Places I've only read about in *National Geographic*!

I think about our little travel group: Sandy, a special ed helper and tutor from Riverside, California; Violetta Turek, a Polish immigrant who teaches religion and other subjects at the Polish school in Yorba Linda; Fr. Henryk, a Polish immigrant now serving at a Polish church in Southern California; Fr. Soney, who traces his family's Catholicism all the way back to St. Thomas the Apostle and is from the very most southern tip of India, where his parents still live, works for Fr. Mike Manning at Wordnet Productions as camera director, among other things; Mom and I, two partly Polish American cradle Catholics, and not terribly interesting.

Those going on to Petra: Dr. Jim Mullen and wife, Linda. Dr. Jim is a retired surgeon with one daughter and two Granddaughters, from Riverside; Gene and Melinda Rapp, formerly from So. Cal., but now living on acreage near Austin, Texas with one

adult son; Ed and Marilyn Legayada, originally from the Philippines, and friends of Fr. Mike's; Jerzy and Elizabeth Grabiec from Poland and parents of a seven years old son, friends of Viola and Fr. Henryk; Fr. Mike Manning, founder of Wordnet and host of his own Catholic TV show on Trinity Broadcasting network; Fr. John Tran, he of sweet and funny personality who is the only member of his family to get out of Vietnam; and Brother Stephen Pardy who is celebrating his 50th anniversary in Religious Vows, a former overseas missionary who now handles development and more for Wordnet Productions.

9 AM--London time--northeast edge of the Adriatic Sea, southwest of Pula, Greece. 34,000 feet altitude, 2 hours flight time to go, 87 mph headwind.

Thank you, Heavenly Father, for everything, everything, everything! As Fr. Soney said at our final pilgrimage Mass, "For all that has happened in our lives, 'Thank you!' For all that is to come, 'Yes!'"

10:36 AM--Just crossing the English Channel. Good weather in London with strong westerly winds. I pray again on my new resolution from this pilgrimage: letting my soul sing to the Lord every day through my love for all I meet.

We have a little layover at Heathrow, navigating this very complicated and confusing airport. They insist Mom uses their wheelchair, then take us to a confining, dark, hot little room with closed blinds, full of sick and elderly in more wheelchairs. It looks like a room everyone is taken to die! I am horrified. We refuse their service and make our way back to the land of the living in the terminal where we all hang out, some sleeping, and some reading. Mom and I split a very expensive and strange tasting Scottish beef hamburger and onion rings meal. Mom likes it. I gag. They must have put haggis in that bun! The meal server is from Australia. This has been so much fun meeting all these terrific people from somewhere else!

We make the thirty--mile walk (!) to the end of the terminal to catch our flight home. (No wheelchair amenities for Mom since we refused the death room.)

6:45 PM--London Time--Over Iceland, north of Reykjavik, 31,000 ft. altitude, only 4,222 miles to go. Headed towards southern Greenland. Outside temp: -68 degrees. I'm over Iceland! Wow!

Dinner is served: not so great. A kind of chicken stew. Not awfully wonderful. There is a good roll and butter, a good salad nicoise, rice pudding.

Approaching Greenland's southeast shore, Mom and I go to the back of the plane to use the facilities. We can look out the windows at back of plane and view the breaking ice in the ocean waters near shore. Incredible!

Back to seats. I watch "Enchanted" (again) and "hit the wall". Fall asleep for 2 or 3 hours, finally, like everyone else. Then, lunch (??) is served. We are time-disoriented

now. Time means nothing. Another interesting meal: some kind of very sweet tuna-egg salad and tomato sandwich, grapes, lemonade, a fine lemon cake and another utterly splendid cup of real English tea. Gotta say, really great tea on these flights!

We have also enjoyed and appreciated the very excellent service and charming manners of the British Air Stewards. Well done! I sit between Fr. Soney and Mom on the last leg of our trip, London to LAX, ten hours. This is a joy to me as I appreciate Fr. Soney as a humble and holy Priest.

Inevitably, we land. It is hard to say goodbye, again, after getting our luggage. Hard to bid farewell to Sandy and Fr. Soney. I enjoyed Sandy, like a long lost sister. We also find Viola and Fr. Henryk. Both are such warm, friendly people with big personalities. I admire Viola's spunk and how gracefully she handled the loss of her luggage and all her personally packed belongings at the very beginning of the trip. Fr. Henryk is a very warm, very holy Priest, I think. Such a blessing to meet all these brothers and sisters in Christ. Such a joy to share in our mutual love and dedication to Our Lord! How blessed we all have been. Alleluia!

And I give thanksgiving for my Mother, who gifted me with this incredible dream, this trip of a lifetime. It has enriched my Scriptural studies, deepened my understanding, widened my horizons, matured my expectations, and fed my spiritual life in ways yet unrealized. Another reason to give praise to God!

Thank you, Mom, Fr. Mike, Brother Stephen, Fr. John, Fr. Soney, Fr. Henryk, Sandy, Viola, Jim, Linda, Gene, Melinda, Marilyn, Ed, Elizabeth, Jerzy, Yossi, Nedal, Mariza, and others we met along the way, for everything!

God bless and much love, Janice