Five Years in Palestine

1982-1987

I lived in East Jerusalem with my partner, Harold, and our children, Adrian and Jennifer from 1982 to 1987.

We loved living in East Jerusalem. The impressive mosaic of sights and sounds included the frequent Muslim call to prayer; the church bells; the mingling of many languages; Palestinian women in long black embroidered dresses; dignified Arab men in lengthy flowing robes; priests and nuns in religious garb; Orthodox Jews with skull caps, black coats and fur hats; Jewish women in their wigs; young brash Israelis; Palestinian young men with their black and white checkered head dress; the bins and smells of spices in the markets; unknown cooking pots and their aromas in some of the neighbourhoods; and even the tourists with their cameras, hats and glazed eyes. All of this tickled the senses and the imagination. Soldiers, guns, boots and tanks, unfortunately, also sit in this mosaic.

While living in Jerusalem, we travelled the Mediterranean as a family. Our children, ages four and six, thrived as we explored the history, archeology, religion and culture in this intense and fascinating part of the world. Our home was the first significant house built outside the walls of the Old City. Its thick stone walls could tell many tales. We added our stories to the mysteries contained there. This book contains vignettes and writings about our time in this captivating part of the world. How grateful we are for the many experiences of those years.

Five Years in Palestine

1982-1987

By Judith Dueck

Top two photos by Ann Marriott

Dedication

For the Palestinian people from whom I gained new insights into the complexities of the Middle East.

For my life partner, Harold, and our children, Jennifer and Adrian, who shared these experiences with me.

For my grandchildren, Landen and Noah, and any future progeny, so they might better understand our lives.

And in memory of my two joyful grandchildren, Sarah and Jacob, who died at ages nine and ten.

Acknowledgements

The editing work of Mary Ann Loewen, Kathleen Venema and Cat Essoyan was invaluable.

Comments from Harold Neufeld, Elaine Strite, Jonathan Kuttab, Edyth Friesen, Eleanor Martens and other readers were immeasurably appreciated.

Content and design comments from Marjorie Speiser were incredibly helpful.

Elfriede Dick, my wonderful mother-in-law, saved all my letters and returned them to me after forty years.

The much-treasured opportunity provided by Mennonite Central Committee, MCC, to work and live in Palestine, challenged my assumptions and altered my world view.

Many books and articles read over the years influenced my thinking and are too numerous to mention here.

I am grateful to people with whom I worked in Palestine, notably Ibrahim Matar, Ya'coub Amer, Sahir Dajani, Adla Issa, Samia Khoury, Kathy Bergen, Harry and Kathe Harder, Harry and Agnes Huebner, Bishara and Selwa Awad, William Klassen, Landrum Bolling, Kenneth Bailey, Hanan Khoury, Jonathan Kuttab, Paul Hunt, Raja Shehadeh, Charles Shammas, Nina Atallah, Paulein Natour, Emma Playfair, Joost Hilterman, Mona Rishmawi, Riziq Shuqair, Marty Rosenbluth, Afaf Harb, and others.

Many treasured friendships developed during our time in Jerusalem including relationships with Nina Dodge, Cat Essoyan, Ann Marriott, Roger and Laura Heacock, Penny Johnson, Rita Giacaman, Beth Kuttab, Margaret Chumbley, Minda Pearson, Dona Harvey, Marsha and Tilman Bergmann, John Lundblad, John Viste, Elaine Strite, Peter Coleridge, David McDowall, Mick Dumper, Barbara Ibrahim, Kitty Warnock, work colleagues and so many others.

Foreword by Mary Ann Loewen

Given the state of affairs in the world today, this book of memories by Judith Dueck is tremendously relevant. For while it depicts a Middle East of the 1980s, it is that very history that makes these stories precious. The account of life in Palestine amidst the turmoil of injustices, political striving, human suffering (and also merry-making) serves to make us aware of our own precarity in the world.

Judith Dueck, along with her husband, Harold, and their two young children, embarked on an ambitious five-year term, beginning in 1982, in Palestine, with Mennonite Central Committee. Clearly these five years made a huge impact on the family, and in many ways. Certainly there is much on offer in this memoir: background history on the many places Judith and her family visited while stationed in East Jerusalem; descriptions of special events, like the parade on Holy Saturday, replete with ululating women and lit candles; a sharing of the routine activities she and her family participated in; poems she composed in response to what she saw in her work with Palestinians; accounting of long, anxious waits at border crossings; excerpts from letters sent to loved ones back home; recounting of human rights' conferences; first-hand reporting of brutality encountered within refugee camps; visits with Israelis; photos of trips taken with those who came to visit; and presentations of their time away upon her return to Canada.

Despite the many injustices Judith and her husband witnessed, and the many frustrations they encountered as a result of the hugely troubling political situation they were a part of, happy stories are also a part of this book: images of old and young women belly-dancing as part of a wedding celebration, descriptions rich in detail of meals shared with generous Palestinians; laughter shared with others over their children's frequent antics. Indeed, the number of times the word "visiting" is used in this memoir reflects the amount of time Judith and her family spent sharing of themselves with those in their midst, including MCC workers and the many, many friends and acquaintances they made within Palestine.

Because of the variety of entries included in this memoir – a veritable potpourri of the five years spent in the Middle East – the reader comes away with a real sense of the place. But that's not all; we also come away with Judith's huge concern for Palestinian people, her constant longing for justice to prevail, her genuine desire that God's love and mercy would become apparent for the people they lived among.

May this book delight those who read it, and may it bring comfort to those who most need it.

Mary Ann Loewen is the editor of two published anthologies, and has contributed to various journals in the form of academic articles. She has also taught both writing and literature courses at several universities in Winnipeg, and is currently an instructor at McNally Robinson Booksellers (Winnipeg).

Foreword by Kathleen Venema

I first met Judith and Harold Dueck twenty years ago, when I joined a nurturing friendship circle that they had been part of for much of their adult lives. At the time, I marvelled at their unstinting, open-hearted welcome; now – in part thanks to Judith's memoir – I recognize it as a manifestation of the legendary Palestinian hospitality they learned decades earlier. Given my interest and involvement in peace education, I was quietly in awe of Judith's world-wide engagements: her participation in UN Human Rights Conferences and the internationally-recognized books she'd written; the development of methodologies for documenting human rights violations; the online information resource she created for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); her human rights advisory role in Rwanda in 2006; her work with the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA Europe); and later, her role as Director of Research, Content and Scholarship at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

What I didn't know was the rich backstory, the genesis of Judith's deep and lasting commitments to justice, equity, and human rights. This memoir provides that backstory. The memoir is, as Judith notes in her Introduction, a record of their family's experiences in Palestine from 1982 to 1987, and an account of the profound transformations that marked those years. As Mary Ann Loewen attests in her Foreword, this is a lively, multifaceted memoir, replete with vivid renderings of sights, sounds, smells, and tastes; innumerable laugh-out-loud moments; rich historical material (I urge you not to skip the Notes); joy-filled stories and photographs of family life; and carefully detailed maps. I could pick out a dozen highlights, but what stay with me long after reading are Judith's accounts of her work, first for Tantur Ecumenical Institute, and later as Administrative Director for Al-Haq. At Al-Haq, Judith had her first experiences in an organization that documented human rights violations, launched test cases in Israeli courts, and advocated locally and internationally for legal justice in the West Bank.

Throughout that work, as her prayers and poems make clear, she deepened her spiritual searching, trusting in a Creator who calls us to active engagement in bringing about the peaceable world that justice engenders. As Cat Essoyan notes in her Afterword, our times could not call more urgently for such work and for voices like Judith's as you'll find it in the pages of this remarkable memoir.

Kathleen Venema is an Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of Winnipeg, where she works on life writing about illness, ageing, disability, and care. Her memoir, *Bird-Bent Grass, a Memoir, in Pieces,* was published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press in 2018 and was shortlisted for the Alexander Kennedy Isbister Award for Non-Fiction.

Contents

Foreword
Introduction 1

1. Starting Out: Winds of Change
* Why Leave Home? 4
* Moving to Jerusalem: A Thirteen-day Journal 5
* Orientation to the North of Israel 12
* Mine! 14

2. Being Family
* A Family Mosaic 20
* The Violin 27
* Pets 29
* Visitors 31

3. Celebrating
* Christmas Rituals 38
* Manger Square, Bethlehem 41
* Palm Sunday Reflections: Power in the Journey 42
* Easter with Fire and Crowds 47
* Weddings and Wives 48
* New Baby in Jerusalem 53

4. Living
* One day in Our First Year 55
* Communing with a Spider 57
* Connections with Israelis 58
* Challenging Arabic Lessons 60
* Picnics, Walks and Being Home 62
* An Interrupted Education 64
* Kidnapped 66
* Driving and Licence Plates 67
* Keys: A Reflection 70

5. Writing Poetry
* Prayer in 1985 74
* Psalm 6, 7, 8 In Israel-Palestine 76
* Deceit and Innocence in a Nuclear World 79
* HELP! 79
* Prayer in 1986 80

6. Travelling
* Jordan: Strip-searches and the Rules of Game, 1982 82
* Egypt: Confusions, Curiosities and Sand Dunes, 1983 84
* Greece: Fireworks, Motorbikes and Nude Beaches 86
* Budapest: Bridges Across Christian Divides, 1984 89
* The Red Sea: A Necessary Risk, 1984 91
* India and Bangladesh: Contrasts, Fun and Friends, 1984/5 92
* Rome: An Intense HURIDOCS Conference, 1986 87
* Syria: Border Crossings, a Castle and an Old Souk, 1986 99
* Turkey: Through Adrian's Eyes, 1986 100

7. Heading into Villages, Farms and Camps
* Ya'coub Amer: A Jolly Community Leader 107
* Meals in the Villages 109
* Four Days in Al-Fawwar Refugee Camp 112
* Curfew in Jalazone 115

8. Experiencing and Observing
* The First Term: 1982-85 121
* Beyond Factions: A Demonstration 127
* Blood on Their Hands: Sabra and Shatila 128
* Challenges and Fascinating Experiences. 1985-87 130
* Murder and Mourning 134

9. Leaving, Remembering and Reflecting
* Imagining a Better World 138
* Journey into Human Rights 139
* A Middle Eastern Menu 146
* An Exercise in Futility 147
* Prayer in 1987 150
* Seven Weeks to Paris 152
* Family Reflections on Leaving Jerusalem 154
* A Cornucopia of Memories 156
* Pilgrimage 157

The Family: Decades Later 158
Afterword 15[illegible]
Appendices [illegible]60

Introduction

This book is based on writing I did while living in Jerusalem in the '80s, my memories, as well as reflections after my family and I returned home. Our years in the Middle East were remarkable and transformational in many ways. In writing this, I hope to take you with me on my journey of increasing understandings. My experiences led me deeper into human rights issues, expanded my world view and enlarged my spiritual life. I also want to leave a record of what we experienced for family and interested friends, many of whom visited us.

We worked with MCC, Mennonite Central Committee, West Bank and lived in East Jerusalem from 1982 – 1987. Harold, as MCC Representative, managed programs in economic development, kindergartens and agriculture. By the time we left, he was deeply connected to the land and the people in both urban and rural environments.

Jennifer, age 6, attended the British Anglican International School, and later the Lycée Français de Jérusalem. She studied violin at the Rubin Academy with Walter Ritter, and later with a private teacher. Adrian, age 4, attended a Finnish preschool, and later the British Anglican International School.

After setting up an MCC resource center for journalists, visitors and local people, I worked for Tantur Ecumenical Institute as a Special Programs Director, organizing and orienting international scholars who were there on a study leave or sabbatical. My last and most challenging assignment was as Administrative Director for Al-Haq. Al-Haq, meaning truth in Arabic, is the West Bank Branch of the International Commission of Jurists with a head office in Geneva. Our focus was on documenting human rights violations. We also had a free legal advice clinic, the most significant law library in the West Bank, an education program, and a translation program. We conducted test cases in the Israeli courts, brought in international legal observers and published legal opinions. We advocated locally and internationally. By the time I left, we had field workers throughout the West Bank. Working at Al-Haq was a very steep learning curve for me. It was also a privilege to work with such dedicated and knowledgeable people.

Although this book is a memoir, it does not follow a linear timeline. Instead, our experiences are grouped thematically somewhat loosely. You will find stories related to our family, our celebrations, our everyday life, our church, our experiences in cities and in rural areas, our travels, our thoughts on leaving such a complicated part of the world as well as reflections that became apparent long after we left.

How did I remember all this information from back in the 1980s? Some experiences are etched in my mind forever. My dear mother-in-law, Elfriede, saved my many letters; forty years later, she gave them back to me. Paul and Bev Hiebert, long time Winnipeg friends, were the last people we saw at our MCC orientation in Akron, PA before we went over the ocean for the first time and arrived in the Middle East. They kept and returned a fifteen-page hand-written letter about our arrival in Amman and Jerusalem. This early letter expressed our experiences and feelings as we arrived in a culture new to us.

While in Jerusalem, I sometimes wrote poetry, and even prayers for the Lutheran Church we attended, as a way to help me think through what I was experiencing. Writing in general helped me to process some of the more complex and intense situations. I also wrote short pieces for a variety of publications as requested. On our return, groups sometimes asked for presentations about our time away; these too provided hooks onto which my memory latched.

The photos are mostly from our family collection. Some were digitized from prints or now yellowed slides. The quality in some cases is quite poor. I wish I had taken many more photos. Still, they are helpful reminders – and examining these old photos triggered many memories. Some photos are not from our collection or not taken by us. Where possible, I have noted the sources.

The maps are from Google Earth Pro and adapted by me to help orient the reader. The print is small and you will have to look closely if you want to examine the maps carefully. I enjoyed revisiting these places in my mind. They were reminders of both joyous and very sad experiences rooted in the places on the maps.

How did I choose what to include in this memoir? I chose what mattered to me. What affected me. What changed me. Sometimes I chose a funny incident or one that made me cry. You may find some of the material a little bit raw. Some pieces are thoroughly digested, but others are not. The inclusion of both is intentional. I wanted you to glimpse at some of my first thoughts and reactions to intense, unusual or surprising experiences. There are two pieces written by Harold, my dear partner, in the appendices. Both of these relate to our MCC experience and the situation in Israeli-Palestine. I felt these were important pieces to round out a description of our time there.

The most difficult part of living there was with the complex political situation. Now, in 2023, it is even more complex, heartbreaking and terrible. As you read my memoirs, you may find some parts more challenging and more intense than others. We went to Jerusalem with the intention of maintaining "balance." As well as working there, we wanted to see the land of our childhood Sunday School stories. We didn't know much about life for Palestinians. Our understanding of balance changed as we realized the incredible imbalance in power that existed and still exists in Israel-Palestine. We made deep friendships with Palestinians and also with foreigners who were working in such a complicated geographic area. We had meaningful relationships with Israelis as well: rabbis, musicians, violin students, peaceniks, journalists, academics as well as others we met along the way. These relationships were important to us.

Our time in Jerusalem changed our lives, our perspectives, our belief system and our view of the world. We explored history, archaeology, religion, culture, language and, of course, the political landscape. We are grateful for the opportunity to live and work there, the deep friendships, as well as family and friends who visited us. Some of the religious and political views we held when we arrived developed over time as we grew more knowledgeable. The Bible was deeply ingrained, sometimes on a subconscious or even superficial level. By the time we returned, we knew that the Middle East had gifted us with a broader world view and an enriched spiritual life. We are so grateful for that. What an opportunity those five years in Palestine were. We would not have traded them for anything else.

1

Starting Out:

Winds of Change

Why Leave Home?

Written in 1982 for our church community in Winnipeg before leaving for the Middle East

How does one decide to leave a stimulating, rewarding, challenging life in Winnipeg to live in an unknown culture and politically volatile climate? What was the process that led us to move to Palestine for five years? Thoughts of an overseas assignment began even before we were married in 1969, when we were 20 years old. However, health problems were an issue for us. So we spent those early years at university, in career development and in local church involvements. Babies, diapers and bottles also brought their own joys and commitments.

During the first ten years of our marriage, we worked through decision-making processes with several close friends as they considered international assignments. We visited some of these friends in their new homes. Sometimes we were critical of their assignments and of their sponsoring agencies. Mostly we admired their courage. After each visit, we thought again about international possibilities. Seeing our friends make life-changing decisions was both encouraging and challenging.

We began to realize the importance of these discussions as we worked through our own choices. Harold and I had many important exchanges: Is this the right time? Does this fit into a sort of lifetime plan? What about our careers? How will it affect our children? What about finances? What is the point? We know we can make a contribution here in Canada – do we have anything to offer another culture? How will it change us? Why now? Why at all? "Why?" was the question that surfaced most frequently.

In attempting to answer this "why" question, we became convinced that Christians must make their contributions anywhere and everywhere. As one friend said, "the Christian is called to serve. The decision lies in the where and how." As we prepare to leave our home in Canada, we regard this overseas assignment in much the same way as we regard our current work, family responsibilities and other activities. Where we are needed and where we have inclination, inspiration and vision we will contribute. We want to experience, to be stretched, to broaden our perspective on life and to live in a non-North American context. While these motivations might be considered selfish, I believe they lead naturally to working in another culture and to life-long learning. To my mind, service and the fulfillment of personal goals are inextricably linked.

So where do Christ's teachings fit into this new experience? Being made in the image of a creative God invites us to be innovative and break with binding traditions, to view life from a range of perspectives, to live life according to inner convictions freeing us from at least some outer expectations, to experience the wonder of living and to embrace life with freshness and vitality.

Note: In spring of 1982, we applied to MCC (Mennonite Central Commiittee) without specifying a particular posting. MCC, a development and relief agency, asked us to consider Jerusalem. We accepted the post without really knowing what we were getting into. There was a short orientation at MCC in Akron, Pennsyvania and then we were on our way. It was our first time leaving North America.

Moving to Jerusalem: A Thirteen-day Journal

August 4, 1982. We arrived in Amman, Jordan. On the plane, I sat next to a young Palestinian woman from Bir Zeit University, West Bank. Her family had moved to Texas because of the difficulties of life under Israeli occupation. As a senior at the university, she was returning to Ramallah West Bank, hoping to finish her studies in the next two months. However, she wasn't sure if it would be possible since the Israeli military was continually closing the university. She was very soft spoken and helpful with our children. She also helped us at the Amman airport by preventing us from getting off the transport bus at the wrong time. Instructions on the bus were only in Arabic.

Finding our luggage and going through customs while holding on to our two precious but very tired children was not a highlight for us. However, we managed to collect everything – all eight super large suitcases along with our eight carry-on bags. We had to open and close every single one for the customs officer. Then – into the noisy brawling swarm of taxis, luggage carts and Jordanian Arabs crowding around us. We were a family of interest to them and we felt overwhelmed. We were new to this place and were not prepared to entrust anything to a stranger. Finally we did hire someone to put everything onto a cart. Almost immediately it tipped over sending our luggage flying. A huge fight ensued between several "luggage helpers" to determine whose fault it was and who should now handle our luggage. Tired from our flight, sweating from the heat, trying to keep track of all our luggage which was now on two carts with two helpers, and most importantly holding onto our four and six-year-old children, we finally met MCCers from the Jerusalem office. We needed two taxis to get to our air-conditioned hotel that overlooked the city.

Photo: jordonhistory.com

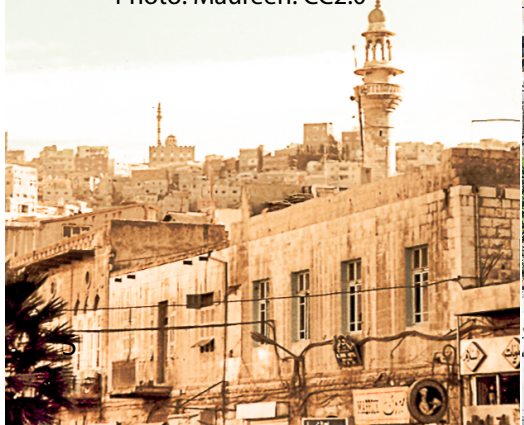
Photo: Maureen. CC2.0

Scenes from Amman.
Middle: Roman Amphitheater ruins
Right and left: Amman: 1980s

Photo: I. Producer. Wikimedia

Photo: Howard Dale

August 5. Jet lag hit us full force. We spent nights awake and days asleep. The mosque with the Muslim call to prayer, happening five times a day, was right beside our hotel and seemed to blare in our ears every time we drifted off to sleep. Jennifer and Adrian adapted the most quickly and were all into exploring.

We needed Jordanian residency permits(1) in order to live and work in Jerusalem. MCCers, already living in Jerusalem, had come to Amman to renew their permits. Doctors' checkups were required for all of us in order to get a permit. Doctors' offices in Amman are not like offices in Winnipeg. After waiting in the outer waiting room, our family and the MCCers moved into the inner room. There is only a limited amount of privacy between patient and doctor. There is a sort of privacy screen. We could hear everything. One twelve-year-old MCCer was having trouble with diarrhea. I am sure he was not pleased with the public discussion of his problem. We later discovered that bowel movements: hardness, texture, amount, frequency are common conversation topics.

The means of getting the necessary papers was unclear. However, it was very friendly and involved handshaking and coffee drinking with the officials and others who needed papers. Bribery did not seem to be part of it. Sometimes a group of problems were addressed. Several strangers with various issues, met, shook hands, drank coffee, and entered the inner office together to jointly solve problems with the officials in charge. The whole thing was a slow process with many meetings, especially since all offices closed at 1:30 regardless of what still needed to be done.

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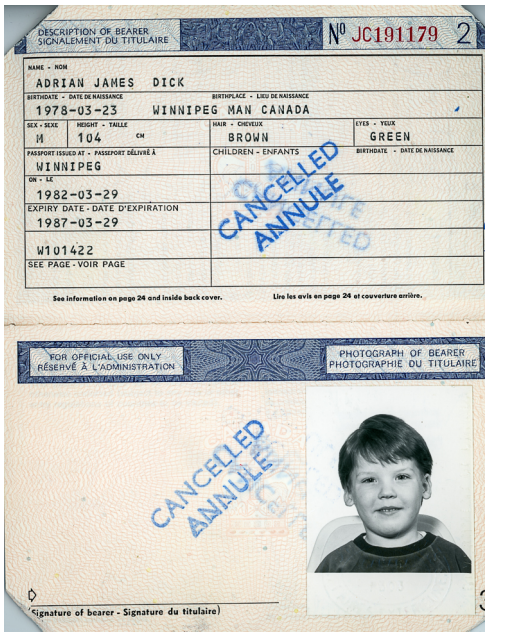
(1) In 1982, Jordan controlled our residency permits in the West Bank including East Jerusalem. By the time we left in 1987, Israel controlled our permits. An indication of the political changes that occured during our time there.

Right: Canadian Passport for Israel and Egypt only

Left: Jordanian Residency Permit



We spent the rest of the afternoon visiting the amphitheater, walking on the city walls and climbing the citadel. Apparently, this is where Old Testament Uriah the Hittite was killed. Amman seemed quite drab at first. However, the people, sounds and smells brought it to life for us. Horns blared constantly, traffic circles were very busy, pedestrians were everywhere and life seemed intense.

We had our first taste of Arab food at supper-time. After being seated at the restaurant, pita with many kinds of dips, lemon potatoes, falafels, tomato salad, eggplant, along with a deep-fried spiced ground beef concoction appeared, seemingly without anyone ordering them. There were about 30 small dishes on the table including pickles, eggs and more. Later came the kabobs of beef and lamb. It was delicious.

Jenni and me. Amman Amphitheater

August 6. Friday is the Muslim holy day so government offices were closed. We visited Jerash – the ruins of a provincial Roman city. Apparently human remains from 7500 B.C. were found at this site. The only other tourists there were Arab, some were from Saudi Arabia. Clearly they were not used to seeing western foreigners. I felt very conspicuous, perhaps because I was not wearing a long skirt or head covering. I was wearing my normal clothes for hot weather – which were perhaps a little inappropriate in this context. Live and learn.

August 7. To obtain a Jordanian permit, we needed pictures of all of us. However, Jennifer was feeling very tired, so we photocopied her passport picture, trimmed it and presented it. Amazingly the officials accepted it with no problem. Harold spent the day shuffling from office to office. They made the circuit about three times until they finally met Jemal - probably from the secret police. It usually takes about five days to complete the process but we did it in three. After obtaining the papers, Jemal invited everyone to see his farm and meet his family. Given the possibility of a secret police connection, we declined. Were we paranoid?

August 8. We were up before 6:00 a.m. and enjoyed an Arab breakfast of cucumbers, tomatoes, sesame bread, boiled eggs and yogurt. Then we were off to the Allenby Bridge by taxi through the Jordan Valley, which was blisteringly hot. We had our documents ready – residency permits, both sets of passports - one for Israel and Egypt and another for the rest of the world. We were mentally prepared for a body frisking, guns, questions and having our many suitcases emptied. Sometimes it takes well over two hours to cross the bridge over the muddy skinny Jordan River. After clearing Jordanian officials, we crossed the bridge, changed our passports in the middle of the bridge and reached Israeli security. We opened all four suitcases for an initial check. Then we were frisked. Just ahead of us an American citizen of twenty years, a Palestinian born in the West Bank, was led off to a special room for a complete body search. We were not subjected to this. The next stage was to unpack all our suitcases. For some reason, security decided this was not necessary. Maybe it was too much work or maybe our kids were too cute. Anyway, to our amazement, we were through in fifteen minutes and on our way to Jerusalem via Jericho.

August 9. We had tea with the MCC staff today. Some don't speak English so communication is challenging. But clearly they have a sense of humor and we enjoyed the interaction. Adla speaks English well and will be Harold's assistant. Sahir, a sophisticated Palestinian woman, manages the needlework program. They seem to really enjoy Adrian and Jennifer. The people we meet in these early days clearly impact our understanding of this place.

MCC house, where we were to live was a mess. The painters weren't quite finished and everything was in a state of chaos. We spent most of the day cleaning, unpacking and fighting a constant battle with ants and cockroaches.

August 10. Our cleaner, Abid, came. He is a hard worker and seems to do all kinds of things including ironing and even some cooking. He brought me tea with mint leaves from the garden and calls me Mrs. Harold. We have fun communicating because his English is limited and my Arabic is nonexistent.

August 11. I drove a car for the first time in Jerusalem. Getting lost is expected. Many streets have several names, no name, or only a spoken oral name. Street signs or labels on maps might be in Arabic or Hebrew or even nonexistent. Or they might be a translation from Arabic or Hebrew or a transliteration. Or they might be left-over from the British mandate. Or the name might be different from the street sign or different from the map. I headed out towards Jaffa Gate, confident that I knew where I was going. I suddenly became aware that the road I was on had turned into a one way street for two blocks - for no reason that I could fathom. After consulting with other people nearby, all of whom became involved in convincing me where to go, I took an unknown side street leading into the middle of a very narrow market. Suffice it to say that I did eventually find my way back to Jaffa Road, two blocks further down, where for no apparent reason it turned into a one way street in the other direction.

We met Jonathan – an energetic delightful Palestinian lawyer who is trying to get Israeli bar admission papers. This is a challenge as It is rare for a Palestinian living in Jerusalem to be admitted to the Israeli bar. Recently Jonathan's sister's husband died in Jordan. The family was not permitted to go Jordan to attend the funeral. We are constantly amazed at the number of ways in which life is difficult for Palestinians through various bureacratic measures.

Our home: top floors. Offices on the bottom.

Entrance to the yard of MCC office, shop and our home.
Photo: Elfriede

August 12. We went to Hebron to see some projects (olive groves and land reclamation) with Ibrahim Matar, a Cornell educated economist who manages the MCC agriculture program. On the way, we stopped to see two razed Palestinian homes. They were demolished because the teenagers had apparently thrown stones at Israeli soldiers. Three young people were arrested – the youngest was fourteen years old. The homes, one of which housed sixteen people, mostly children, were completely demolished. The accused were jailed indefinitely by the military without trial and without the possibility of appeal. Some Israeli lawyers were embracing the cause. Sometimes there are legal ways to get a limited type of justice but usually the houses are demolished and often the land is taken with no compensation, all in the name of security. Hatred and bitterness seems understandable in the light of these actions.

In the evening, we went to an MCC unit supper and met the rest of the team. It is a small team: Huebners, a family of five live down the hill and the Harders, a couple live across the street. They have made us feel very welcome. Harry Huebner, a professor, has a peace focus and Agnes, a teacher, looks after the kindergarten program. Harry Harder is an agronomist. who knows Arabic and jokes around with the farmers. Kathe, his wife, looks after their newborn.

August 13. We spent the day throwing out garbage, unpacking and getting settled. Our place is now beginning to feel like a home. It is large with very high ceilings and wide halls. We have huge windows that let in lots of sunshine. There are verandahs off several rooms that are continually full of pigeon poop! I thought of putting out poison but then realized that then we'd have verandahs full of dead pigeons and that might be worse.

The MCC offices are on the main floor and mezzanine of this building. We are on the top floor with a kitchen, very large master bedroom, good sized bedroom for the kids, very large living/dining room, bathroom, and one more bedroom which might become Adrian's bedroom in time. There is an unfinished floor above which we might make use of in the future. We enter either from steep stairs on the outside of the building or through the MCC offices. The grounds are well-treed and are tended to by a gardener who does a less than adequate job, or so we are told.

MCC house, located in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, is comfortable and has everything we need although I do find myself prowling the house, can in hand, stalking various insects. There is a certain element of satisfaction that comes with zapping the little creatures as they cluster around a squished grape on the floor, stepped on by our carefree son.

In the afternoon, we walked the Old City – a cultural montage of lively crowded narrow streets: Palestinian women with long black dresses embroidered in red, each pattern unique to their home village; conservative Muslim women with their drab long coats and head scarves; tourists with shorts, halter tops and cameras; priests, nuns and ministers in their religious garb; Palestinian shebab *(young men)* with their keffiyeh *(white and black head scarf);* dignified Palestinian men in their galabeyas *(floor length loose robes sometimes with a suit jacket);* loud Israeli soldiers with guns; Orthodox Jews with black coats, fur hats, skull caps and ear locks. The earlock is a spot on the side of the head where ultra-orthodox males are forbidden to cut their hair. Seeing a man with young sons walking along with their ear locks flapping the wind easily brings a smile. In the background, one hears the church bells, the Muslim calls to

prayer, along with the mingling of Hebrew, Arabic and other languages. It is incredible to be here.

August 14. The painting is finished! All the paintbrushes, tools, paint tins are gone. Not a great job. But malesh *(never mind)*, the job is finished.

We saw some Israeli settlements today. The Israeli government philosophy and practice is to settle Palestinian land. Israeli military and settlers confiscate the land, destroy Palestinian houses and uproot their orchards. Gradually they begin to build huge fortress-like apartment complexes. It is astonishing to see these enormous Israeli settlement complexes arising on the Palestinian hills and farmlands. The settlements are connected by strong wide highways which can withstand the rigor of tank and military vehicles and on which Palestinians are not allowed. One wonders if this security will eventually be Israel's undoing. It is certainly a switch from the "God is our refuge and strength" idea.

After our tour of Israeli settlements, we went to a Armenian pizza restaurant, a quaint little cave-like place. Customers set the tables themselves and often bring their own food to add to the solitary item on the menu. We enjoyed the cheap, delicious, cheeseless, spiced ground beef pizza drizzled with lemon and baked in an oven that has been used for centuries. On the way home, since the Sabbath was not over, we drove the long way around to avoid the area where the Orthodox Jews live. Anyone driving through that area on the Sabbath might receive a shower of stones.

We spent the evening drinking tea, writing letters, listening to classical music and enjoying the security of our own fortress-like home. Our very tall house, rented by MCC since the 1950s, was built in the 1800s and is made of big stones and cement – including the inside stairs. It is the first significant home built outside the walls of the old city and is owned by the Jarallah family. Jarallah means "neighbor of God." Although laundry is occasionally missing from the line outside, daily life seems to be safe. Movement is unrestricted within Jerusalem. The kids play freely in the large yard.

Right to Left: Adrian, Otto, Peter, Harold, Me, Kay, Jennifer at the Armenian Pizza Place. Photo: Elfriede.

Our kitchen window looks out over no-man's land, the boundary area between West Bank considered to be Jordan from 1948 to 1967, and Israel. A big cement fence divided the city then, and no-man's land was mined. Our yard includes a bunker used in the 1967 war when the Israeli army occupied it. In one of the bedrooms, there is a two-foot circular burn mark where Israeli soldiers built a fire using the bookshelves as kindling.

Thick stones from a previous small house make up part of the fence around our house. You can still see where the oven used to be. Goats and sheep graze on top of this wall or in the vacant lot next to us.

August 15. On Tuesday, a colleague is leaving for the U.S. MCC sends all its mail in person to North America. Censorship is rampant – usually resulting in the mail not arriving at its destination. So rather than risk making a comment with political overtones, we will use the MCC method of sending our mail with people, usually foreigners, who can hand-carry it out of the country and mail it from North America.

After attending the Sunday service at the Lutheran Church in the old city, we spent some time at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher where Jesus was supposedly buried. The Catholics, Orthodox and Armenians have decked it all out with candles and icons. One priest sprinkled holy water on Adrian and somehow managed to get it into his eye. Adrian began crying loudly, attracting all kinds of attention. The poor old priest was very embarrassed.

On the way home we stopped to pick up mail and melons. Sunday is a normal working day here. In fact, there is no standard day of rest. The Muslims take Friday, the Jews take Saturday and the Christians take Sunday. Most people work six days a week. After a brief rest, we headed out to the Jerusalem pine forest for a picnic with other MCCers.

August 16. We started Arabic lessons this morning. Our teacher, Omar, says we will be fluent within a year. HA! Adrian and I explored the neighborhood in the afternoon. It is always fun to walk with Adrian. He is so cute and loves to engage people. Palestinians love children, especially boys. They call me Imm Adrian – which means mother of Adrian. It is a term that bequeaths respect since I am the mother of a male child.

We have had so many experiences. It seems unbelievable that we have been here only two weeks. So far I:

- signed a contract for a rented piano written entirely in Hebrew.
- got caught, all alone, in a tightly packed crowd of pushing, shoving men at the Damascus gate on a Friday.
- bargained and was conned at the old market, eventually learned how to bargain, and then got conned again.
- shopped with Israeli shekels – the largest bill is 100 shekels which equals about $4.00.
- learnt to drive the MCC vehicles all of which are standard shift and no power steering, on hilly, narrow, crowded lanes; got honked at; discovered the hard way what a one-way sign looks like.
- met the four local shopkeepers. They all sit outside their shops waiting for customers. One of them gets quite angry if we go into another shop. Another gave Adrian a cat, which we politely refused.
- enjoyed the smell of jasmine in the evening air.
- became more aware of the complex relationship between Israelis and Palestinians and wondered how we would ever understand it.

We are here and somewhat settled. We know a few words in Arabic. We can shop for groceries and other things. We have so much to learn. Life commands our attention and stimulates our brains. We are aware of all our senses. We are so fortunate to be here. We wonder what the next five years will bring.

Orientation in the North of Israel

Excerpts from Letters

As part of our orientation, we travelled to the north of Israel. We spent the first night in Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee. We were very hot. The lake was rocky and not great for swimming. The bugs ate us alive at night so we were not very impressed with Tiberius even though it is regarded as a major resort.

We did enjoy climbing Mount Tabor, also known as the Mount of Transfiguration – but we were not transfigured. It was a wonderfully calm spot on a bright clear day with views of Nazareth, a monastery and a church. On the way down, we saw some folks hang gliding. Adrian was extremely intrigued. Adrian's creative play now involves a towel as the hang glider with a rope wrapped around his body and legs to hold him in.

The most significant part of the trip was our drive through the Golan. Much of it looked like a moonscape with large boulders and no life. We passed various military stations with barbed wire, tanks and half-hidden gun sites. The eerie feeling was heightened in the deserted Muslim villages where the signs of battle were very evident. We saw many bullet holes especially around doors and windows, as well as bombed out walls. With most road signs in Hebrew, our rather out-of-date map, and no villages, pedestrians or vehicles in sight, we frequently found ourselves lost. We drove as far as the Syrian border where soldiers firmly indicated that we could not cross. Driving further west into the Golan, we found flourishing Israeli kibbutzim. The terraced orchards of the Arabs who once thrived here were not obvious any more. We wondered what this area looked like before the Arab villages and farms were destroyed.

We stopped at Mount Hermon in the Druze village of Majdal Shams, which has been under Israeli control since 1967. Most residents consider themselves to be Syrian and have relatives just across the border in Syria. The Druze in this village are a religious and Arab minority in Israel who generally do not participate in the Israeli army, politics or public service. When the Golan was annexed in1981, Israel offered the Druze full citizenship. Most refused but have status as permanent residents of Israel.

As we reached the Lebanese border, we found ourselves on a narrow road with barbed wire, six feet thick on either side of us. We could see Lebanon on one side and Israel on the other. Israeli soldiers were everywhere with their Uzi guns slung carelessly over their shoulders.

Photo: Destroyed mosque with Hebrew graffiti in a Druze village in northern Israel. We saw this destroyed mosque on our trip to the north in 1982. The Hebrew graffiti was added more recently. Photo: Share Alike 3.0. Taken in 2022.

After a night at Stella Maris monastery on Mount Carmel, we spent the day at Netanya Beach: swimming in the Mediterranean, lounging in the sun and building sand castles with the kids. Living here, it would be easy to forget the problems just an hour away.

We toured Akko, an ancient city that both Paul of the New Testament and Marco Polo visited. One of the oldest continuously inhabited cities of the world, it has been under the control of Egyptians, Phoenicians, Canaanites, Israelites, Assyrians, Persias, Seleucids, Romans, Byzantines, Umayyads, Crusaders, Mamluks, Ottomans, British and ultimately Israelis. It felt incredible walking through the 13th century restored ruins of the Knights Hospitaller Complex (1).

The political situation here is not always apparent on the surface – especially to tourists and often not to Israelis themselves. Many ordinary Israeli citizens are not aware or don't want to be aware of the situation on the West Bank. With other Israelis, one hears doubt and suspicions about government policy and practice. The remains of armed conflict are not present at the ocean in Israel, but a short ride away they are very present indeed. There, one sees tanks, guns, boots and soldiers everywhere.

Above left: Adrian at Mount Carmel

Above: Building sand castles at Natanya Beach

Right: Crusader Knights Hall in Akko. Wikimedia. Public Domain

Left: Majdal Shams, 2009. Wikipedia, Public Domain

(1) Now a UNESCO World Heritage site

Mine!

Written near the beginning of our time in Jerusalem, this piece was an attempt to understand life in this land with its depth of both love and animosity. The two characters are each composites of people I met and stories I heard. The Israeli story is not from Ultra-nationalist settlers.

1930:

Ramleh: A large town in Palestine

A son is born
Secure
Well-fed
Content
Safe
Happy
Loved by family
Welcomed by community.

1940:

My family owns hundreds of dunums (1) of land
I help a little with terracing the land and farming it
When I am older I will help more
We have six houses. I have many friends
Our family has always lived here
Muslim blood runs in our veins
But sometimes Jewish and Christian too
Grandfather tells me stories of Turks and war
The ancient olive trees could tell me of my ancestors
Maybe even before the Romans
We have been here for 2000 years or more.

1944:

My brother is married now. He already has two boys and one girl. The children are:

Secure
Well-fed
Content
Safe
Happy
Loved by family
Welcomed by community.

1930:

A small village in Poland

A son is born
Secure
Well-fed
Content
Safe
Happy
Loved by family
Welcomed by community.

1941:

The German occupation. A pogrom in our town
The priest encourages the villagers to kill us.
500 Jews killed. Why?
We have so little food. I am always hungry
The Germans take some people away
They never come back. Why?
They arrest me but I escape. I am afraid.
I see the Germans shoot my father.
I am all alone. Why do they hate me?

1943:

I am twelve years old and I work in a labor camp.
I am tired and hungry. I must escape.

1944:

I have lived in the forest for one year. Twenty people escaped from the labor camp. Eight of us remain.

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(1) Ten dunums of land is 2.47 acres or a tenth of a square kilometer, or .003 square mile. The Palestinian farmer below originally owned hundreds of dunums.

1945:

I farm with my grandfather, father and brother. We have many orchards. Life is good. Allah has blessed us. We will be here for another two thousand years.

March 1948:

Terrible things are happening. The want our land. They say God gave it to them. Their soldiers seem to be merciless. Many of my friends are leaving for Beirut, Amman, Saudi Arabia and even America. They will return soon. Why all this hate? Surely we can live peacefully with the Jews?

April, 1948:

Many of my friends have died. They are no more. Women, children, men, babies – slaughtered. The unborn ripped from wombs and dashed to the ground. The village has evaporated. The people - invisible.

We flee for our lives. Beit Jala in the West Bank will offer us sanctuary. We escape with only a small flock of sheep. We will return. We cannot desert our land and our ancient olive trees.

1952:

We have lived in a cave for four years. The Israelis would not permit us to return to our many dunums of land even though we have the land deeds. Tomorrow, after many years of saving and working we will buy five dunums of land in Beit Jala. We will begin again from the beginning.

1945:

The war is over. I am the youngest member of the Zionist organization in Poland. With my forged identity papers, I am starting my journey to Palestine tomorrow. I will be a real person on real land, living without hate and without fear.

1947:

After two years, I am finally here. Passing many borders, some at night; living in a camp for displaced persons; taking a boat for illegal immigrants; and now I am here.

January 1948:

Our Kibbutz was attacked by Arabs. Our food convoys cannot get through. Many people are being killed. Will this never end? I will leave the kibbutz and join the army. I am determined to be a free citizen and I will defend that right.

May 1948:

We won! We are free! The land is ours! My children will be:

Secure
Well-fed
Content
Safe
Happy
Loved by family
Welcomed by community.

1966:

I am married. My good wife has borne me two sons and one daughter. We have cleared the land of rocks and planted orchards of grapes, olives and apricots. We tend our sheep with care and work hard. Our new orchards cannot tell old stories but once again our children are:

Secure
Well-fed
Content
Safe
Happy
Loved by family
Welcomed by community.

1967:

Conflict again. I fear for my family. The Jordanians promise to protect us but I do not believe them. They take away our guns. In only twenty-four hours, the Israelis take Jerusalem. In three days our villages are in their hands.

1970:

The Israelis left letters in the streets here today for whomever happened to read them. They say our land will be confiscated for public use. Whose public use? When? Why? I have an official deed. They cannot take my land again.

1955:

No person of conscience can ignore the sufferings of the Palestinians. Still, I think we have the right to exist as a country, as a nation, as a state. And I think we have suffered. Six million of us were exterminated.

1967:

Our borders should be more secure. The Arabs will surely push us into the sea tomorrow. Still we have not escaped hate. Why?

1968:

We have to suggest to the remaining Palestinians that they settle on other Arab lands. An Arab Muslim could be easily assimilated into Syria or Iraq. If they need to have a state, they can have Jordan.

1972:

I can understand another minority group on the basis of my own experience. In Israel, there can be a democracy. There can be a place for every minority, for every religion. Every solution can be humanitarian. I am sure we can have a peaceful land where Jews, Muslims, Christians and other people from all over the world can find a home and a place to fulfill their ideals. Israel can be a cosmopolitan place. BUT IT HAS TO BE A JEWISH NATION.

1976:

The Israelis are building huge settlements all over Palestine. They have wide, strong roads and barbed wire fences all around to keep people out… or in? The buildings are all the same. Not connected to the land. They have not taken my land. Maybe they will not need it for their unearthly structures.

1978:

The bulldozer appeared this morning without warning and began to destroy my trees. I have a deed. I have a detailed survey map showing each tree planted with my own rough hands. They told me that my land was confiscated in 1970, that it is not mine. The noise of the bulldozer continues as I argue but there is no stopping them.

1982:

The Israelis have destroyed my orchards. They have put up one of their ugly settlements. 9,000 Jews already surround me. 50,000 will surround me.

They said they would compensate me for my land in 1990 Israeli bonds valuing the land at 1948 values. I will not accept such a pittance. They want my house too. We have fought in the courts and we continue here in this hostile place. We added a small stone room to our house when my son was married. They threaten to tear it down. Their children beat my children. They yell when my children laugh. They complain about my small radio. They bulldozed my neighbour's house. Will mine be next?

1978:

My wife and I are moving into a new home. Close to Jerusalem and subsidized by the government. Several of my friends are moving there too. My wife had already chosen the paint colors and window coverings. We are excited to be part of a group who will settle the land permanently. We will do our part to create a firm Jewish state.

1980:

We have an Arab neighbor living beside the settlement. He has a very large family with many small children. There are always Arabs coming and going. I have some Arab friends. I like Arabs. Maybe they should move a little further away from the settlement. I think they would be happier living with other Arabs, somewhere else.

1982:

I am an official in the Israeli army. I have survived pogroms, ghettos, concentration camps and flight through Western Europe to Israel. I have survived all the wars with the Arabs.

For my grandchildren, I only wish for:

Security
Satisfaction
Contentment
Safety
Happiness

Although they are loved by family, they are not welcomed by those around us.

My father is one hundred and ten years old. He will not begin his life again. I am fifty-two years old. I will not begin again. They will take my life before they take my home. I have a father, wife, six sons, their wives and thirty grandchildren living in this house. We will not give up our land. We will die first.

This is my home. This is my land. To my children, I will give:

Security
Satisfaction
Contentment
Safety
Happiness
Love from family
Joy in community

We are free Jews living on Jewish land which we will never give up. We will die first.

Mine!
My home! My land!
Mine forever or death to us all!

Left photo: Taken in the 1980s of a Palestinian farmer from Beit Iksa whose land was confiscated for the Israeli settlement in the photo on the right. In 2011, the family home was surrounded by a metal barrier. The family's ten members, four of them children, can only reach the home via a 36 meter long lane, lined on both sides with a six meter high metal fence. They must cross an Israeli road frequented by Israeli army jeeps.

Right: Israeli settlement of Giv'on HaHadasha on land confiscated from three Palestinian villages Photo: Jacob בקעי. cc 3.0. Taken in 2012.

Ammunition Hill Park

St John's Eye Hospital

Bergman's and Minda's

Cat, Nina, Kathy, Harders

Ambassador Hotel

MCC. 79 Nablus Road

2 Being Family

Sheikh Jarrah

Grocery shop

Felafel place and little shops

Red Cross

Video shop

Image © 2023 Maxar Technologies Google Earth

A Family Mosaic: Snippets from Letters Home

1982: ***Adapting, Parties and Bugged Phones***

There is a large fig tree at the entrance to our yard. Adrian likes to sit on the smooth tree branches amongst the leaves and call out to anyone who enters. "Hello friend" is his standard greeting. No one can really see him because fig leaves are huge. But his welcoming call leaves a lasting impression with anyone who enters our space. In contrast, one summer day, Adrian and Jennifer decided it would be a good idea to charge money to enter the MCC shop and offices. So they tied a string across the entrance and asked for coins before people could enter. Only a few coins were gleaned before the mischievous children were discovered.

Adrian attends a wonderful, play-oriented Finnish nursery school. He is getting used to going there but still prefers to be at home or in the car travelling about with Harold. He loves to visit with the MCC staff or even with the customers in the MCC needlework shop. He is very imaginative and lenjoys playing Lego especially making up stories about the Lego people in the folds of his bed. He enjoys music and sings in tune.

I asked both kids what they like most about Jerusalem. Jennifer happily said, "I like our big garden of flowers and the Old City. The shops are different from those at home. I like my best friend, Carolyn, and our kitten. At school, I like Math and monday afternoon story club. I like writing and getting letters. It's fun living above the office because there is always someone to chat with." Clearly, she is enjoying her life! She always has a twinkle in her eye and a penchant for asking probing questions.

Adrian likes the donkeys, the camels, the horses, the sheep and the kitten. He, too, likes to chat up the staff and anyone else who comes to visit. Once he pretended that he didn't speak any English, only German. He insisted on this – even though everything he said was in English; he doesn't know German at all. He often manages to get candies, little toys and chocolates from staff and visitors.

Recently, Adrian was in trouble and Harold scolded him. After thinking for a while, Adrian told Harold that God wanted him to be nice to little boys and that Harold would go to hell if he didn't treat his own little boy very nicely.

He is a cheery, very loveable boy who makes people smile. Not long ago, he fell and bashed his head open and needed three stitches to close him up. The look was augmented by the fact that he cut his own eyebrows and trimmed his hair in front and on top. He now looks like a boxer or perhap a member of some religious sect. He is not happy about the look but the hair will grow and the gash will heal. He seems to trip quite often. The ground is uneven and maybe he doesn't lift his feet high enough.

The children were invited to a kids expatriate Halloween party. Jennifer went as a very cute black cat. Adrian was not interested in dressing up at all. So we compromised. He went as Super Jogger and he wore his jogging pants.

We had another invite to a Halloween party, this time with Quakers and Palestinians in Ramallah. It was great fun. Jennifer again went as an adorable cat with whiskers. Adrian was a cowboy. Harold and I borrowed some robes from a minister friend and went as a priest and a pregnant nun. Of course, I needed a cushion underneath to create the pregnancy illusion. We have been here less than a few months and I think some folks wondered what kind of Mennonites were these? The kids had lots of fun. Palestinians seem to adore kids.

We are getting used to life here. We don't expect the phone to work. We know it is bugged if it does work. If we get the right number after several tries or even at all, we feel grateful. I try to remember not to turn on the kitchen tap if anyone is taking a shower. I can drive through the narrow gate into our yard without taking off the side view mirror. We have discovered where to buy thread, shoe polish, safety pins, razors and a range of other everyday necessities. We love the Arab food especially felafel, shawarma, Armenian pizza and sesame bread rings called ka'ek.

1983: ***Outings and Interchanges***

Last Sunday we all attended church in the small English-speaking chapel of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. As usual, our five-year old Adrian sat in an aisle seat where he could see the front of the church from the best vantage point. At the end of the service, Rev. John Lundblad walked down the aisle to the back of the church so he could greet the people as they were leaving the church. Before I knew it, Adrian got up, took John's hand, walked to back of the chapel with him and proceeded to greet everyone, just like the minister did. As we left, we shook Adrian's hand and he greeted us like a pro. Adrian is well known in the community – in fact we are often known as Adrian's parents.

Ruth and John Richert *(Harold's sister and brother-in-law)* sent us a tape recording in the mail. Part of it was directed specifically to Adrian. He was thrilled. On the tape, many questions were asked. Adrian answered every one of them as he listened to it and firmly believed that John and Ruth could hear him.

Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. Photo: Adam Miller-Stubbendick.

Dressed for a Halloween party

Time for a movie party. We picked up some cartoons and a pirated copy of the movie, "The Party," starring Peter Sellers. We enjoyed popcorn and laughed uproariously. We have a TV and VCR in the resource center of our building that is often used.

We went on a family outing with a Swedish family to a third century monastery, Mar Saba. It's a bit isolated and we drove rough roads to get there, damaging the suspension in the process. But the mountains were green and lush, covered in poppies, orchids, daisies and other wild flowers. The monastery, built into the side of a cliff, is a hermitage for naughty monks – so the rumour goes. Women are not permitted to enter. Jennifer was outraged. Apparently, the monastery will collapse in a huge heap if ever a female contaminates the entrance. We climbed the opposite mountain and then peered over the wall. The monastery is huge and literally part of the cliff. Then we picnicked in that delightful spot, quiet except for the laughter of our kids. On the way home, we passed a major Israeli tank training camp.

Recently we joined the Quakers in Ramallah to square dance. A teacher from the school set up a record player outside on the school playground. We danced and danced. The kids loved it. Jennifer was the belle of the ball and participated with enthusiasm. By the end of the evening everyone was perspiring from all the exercise. There were some stiff muscles the next day.

Adrian frequently brings us joy. He just asked me "But mom, why can't I marry you?" He and Jennifer had been discussing their future adulthood. Jennifer with her superior wisdom told him that he couldn't always live with his mother. He was heart-broken. Adrian has learned to whistle. He owns a turtle and would love a dog. The cat died and his teddy bear is still a good night companion. On our first trip to Cairo, both kids thought that Egyptians wear their pajamas all day, even outside. Adrian deemed this to be very cool. He loves loose clothing. Family moments abound in the same way they would at home in Canada.

Jennifer discovered the maleness of donkeys when one peed right in front of us. She was both curious and amused. Jennifer is curious about everything. The other day she wondered how Jewish boys keep their skull caps on. She also asked if soldiers go to heaven. Her friend told her that they didn't.

Jennifer thinks she and I should both get our ears pierced. We will. She loves nail polish and perfume. She enjoys playing with Adrian, writing letters and hiking. She had to do a bit of catch-up work in school since the British system is about a year ahead of the Canadian one. But she is doing fine.

When the Huebners, an MCC family here, returned to Canada after two years, Jennifer was very upset. Their daughter, Carolyn was her best friend and she was quite angry at Harry for promising to return to CMU (*Canadian Mennonite University)* to teach.

1984: ***Encounter with a Wild Orange Cat and Prince Charming***

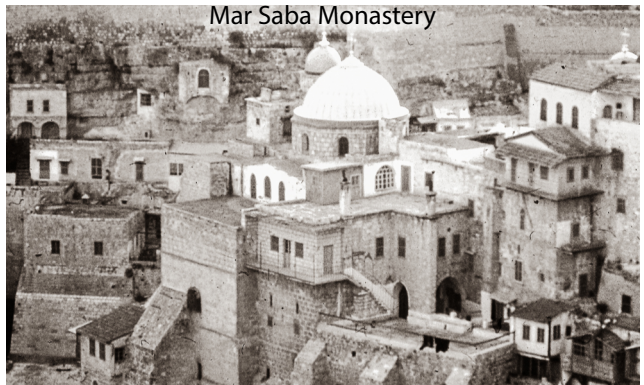
One night, after we were asleep, we woke up to hear the sound of cats. Our flat is high and we wondered how any cats could get inside. Harold got up to investigate. Two enormous orange wild cats had broken into our kitchen by pushing against the balcony door. They were helping themselves to anything they could find. After a wild chase involving a broom, Harold managed to get one cat out the door. The other one ran downstairs into the offices. Not wishing to fight a wild cat in the buff, in the middle of the night in the cold offices, Harold decided to forget about the problem until the morning. In the morning, we heard a scream from the staff downstairs. 7:30 a.m. found Adrian, Jennifer, Harold and the entire MCC staff trying to outwit the ruddy wild cat. The cat escaped and no one was hurt.

We went to Stella Carmel for a retreat with the Mennonite Messianic missionaries who work with Israeli Jewish Christians. We were not at all on the same page with regard to Israel-Palestine. We could feel the tension. Apparently the prophet, Elisha used this place as a retreat and Elijah killed four hundred prophets of Baal here. Such a violent act.

Jennifer and Adrian are growing taller every day – or maybe their clothes are shrinking. At age eight, Jennifer is becoming increasingly independent and inquisitive. She definitely has her own ideas. Her curiosity is delightful and she absorbs information very quickly. She now thinks she is ready for see-through stockings. She particularly enjoys jokes and riddles and seems to have one ready for whomever will listen. She reads voraciously – right now she is reading Sadako, the story of a girl who survived Hiroshima; she also really enjoys the Childcraft Encyclopedia.

Adrian is finishing kindergarten, is learning to read and often has an insightful comment. When we went to see the musical, *Heidi,* I asked him if he was my Prince Charming. He replied with considerable disdain, "You already have a Prince Charming." He has a booming voice like his father and spends a lot of time outside. He loves to build things and frequently has his room in a total state of chaos. Adrian is very insistent on choosing his own clothes – his favorite being jogging pants. The environment seems to collect around him. It seems he always has a dirty streak on his cheek, a tear on the knee of his pants and sand, rocks or even worms in his pockets. He rides his bike wildly, wrestles his father and often erupts into infectious laughter. He enjoys meeting the many visitors to the needlework shop downstairs. More than a few have signed the guest book with a reference to Adrian.

Riding bike in our yard


Mar Saba Monastery

1985: ***The Luggable Computer and Birthday Parties in the Judean Hills***

Jennifer is now in grade four. She reminds us that her ideas should be considered in family decision making and she quizzes us on a variety of topics including communism, politics, government and theology. We enjoy the lively dialogue. Her questions often make us think about things in a new way.

Adrian enjoys sports and improvises as necessary. Now basketball has captured his imagination. He throws a hula hoop over a high tree branch and then throws his soccer ball through it. He has managed to convince children and adults to join him in playing "his" kind of basketball.

Wadi Kelt. Photo: Arnold Slyper.

We headed to Wadi Kelt for Jennifer's birthday party in the Judean Hills with eight other little girls. We picnicked in the hilly desert next to an old Turkish pumping station at the source of the spring. It was hot, so the girls stripped down to their underwear and enjoyed the water. What a picture: blue sky, warm sun, water, laughter and good food.

This year Jennifer has had some health challenges. She is quite pale and anemic. She has been on iron and antibiotics and was hospitalized for a short while at the hospital on Mt Scopus. One of us always stayed with her, even through the night. Jennifer handled it all with amazing calm. She healed and all is well. She is back to her happy, inquisitive and fun self.

Adrian is still full of sparkle and mischief. Recently, while Jenni was practicing her violin, he peered around the corner holding a sticker from her collection. Immediately roused, Jennifer raced off after him. Eventually, he realized she was bigger than he was so before she got him, he quickly pulled on the elastic waist of her jogging pants and dropped the sticker in. In response, a few days later, she put a rotten tomato on his head. He was not amused.

On our return to Jerusalem after a two-month home leave, we brought back a "luggable" computer with a very small, eight inches by eight inches, screen. DOS, 128K of RAM, one double-sided double-density 360KB disk drive, and a 20mg hard drive. When we arrived at the airport, we were told we had to pay $2000 US to bring it into the country. We decided to leave our new toy there and return later. How disappointing! Three days later, Harold retrieved it for the sum of $6. It did take a trip to the authorities, Adrian in tow. Diplomat that he is, Harold took his Mennonite picture book with him and showed the official some pictures of Russian Mennonite refugees. He managed to retrieve not only our special toy but also shipments of beef which MCC supplies to two schools here - certainly worth the effort. Jennifer has learned to format the 5.25 floppy disk and knows more than Harold about the computer. Both kids enjoy the games. I sent my first email from Al-Haq to Amnesty International yesterday.

1986: ***French School, Carpools and Climbing***

I went to the Israel Museum with Jennifer's class. At one point, the guide pointed out a butter churn. He explained how it worked and told the students that it didn't make the kind of butter we all eat, but rather the "yellow, dirty, yucky kind the Arabs eat." A very clear way to indicate that Arab food is distasteful and undesirable.

Jennifer decided, quite on her own, that she wanted to attend a French school. She came home from school one day in spring and said that she was the only girl in her class who knew only one language. She also said, "If I want to be a world traveler or an ambassador, I need to know French. And by the way, do ambassadors get to travel first class?" With a few weeks of tutoring in summer - she thinks her tutor is a spy - she plunged into the Lycée Français. After seven weeks, it seems to be going quite well. She understands most things in class already and often visits with a girl from France who speaks no English. She continues with her violin, reads a lot and has recently started surprising us with baked cakes.

The children get to their school in a carpool with the two other families: the Chumbleys, who live at St John's Eye Hospital, and the Bergmanns, the Lutheran Pastor family who live across the "no-man's land" field. This is a very convenient arrangement. Jennifer is dropped off at the Lycée Français on the way the British Anglican School.

Adrian loves to climb. We have two small balconies on the west side of our house. There is a little narrow stone ledge along the house. One day I came home, and Abid, the man who helps around the house, told me in his broken English: "Adrian, he climb outside. Not good. Please, no tell him I tell you." Adrian had climbed on the outside of the house from one balcony to the other, nine meters above the ground. Another day, I glanced out of our bedroom window at a very tall tree – and there was Adrian - again nine meters in the air. We decided that a tree house was needed so a friend, John Viste, and Harold built a tree house. Adrian spends a lot of time in the tree house. The yard here at MCC takes on different perspectives as new forts and tree houses are built and re-built. Adrian is a merry soul with a great deal of sparkle. He looks forward to coming home to Canada and talks often about the farm, the motorcycle, and horses.

1987: ***Demonstrations, Walks and Jericho***

Harold has stopped jogging. He pulled a muscle in his "cute cheek" when he was imitating me putting on panty hose. Serves him right.

The kids and I often go on long walks together around the neighborhood. We pass St John's Eye Hospital which originated with the 12th century Templars – and where Adrian's friend, Justin Chumbley, lives. We sometimes head down the hill to one of the Palestinian "corner stores" for a small grocery item or treat. We might pick up a movie, walk past the British Archaeology center, or see our friends, Kathy or Cat. Or we head to Ammunition Hill Park with the old trenches from the '67 war. We might venture down to the shops at Salah al-din Street – the Palestinian downtown near Damascus Gate. It was at one of these Palestinian shops where Jennifer and I got our ears pierced.

Recently there was a demonstration in the Red Cross Gardens which are very close to our home. Palestinian village women, mothers, grandmothers and friends walked down one of the main streets quietly to protest the very harsh Israeli prison conditions. The Israeli police broke it up and arrested about eight of the women after roughing them up a bit. The other women dispersed but then recongregated. Jennifer and I managed to get through the Red Cross gates and talked to a few people. At Al-Haq, we monitor prison conditions which are terrible. A prisoner on a hunger strike has died. Over half of Palestinian male teenagers have been arrested at some point.

Dancing and relaxing in Jericho

Students were also demonstrating at the French Hospital near the old city wall. Adrian and I went to check that out. Earlier, somebody had thrown a stone at an Israeli settler car on Salah al-Din Street. The settler chased the suspect and shot two Palestinians. The police did nothing to the settler.

Jerusalem is cold in winter. In our first year it snowed thirteen times. On one of those occasions Harold was trapped by the snow in Hebron. When it is cold, we sometimes go down to the orange groves in Jericho where it is warm. On the last visit there, a farewell event, we sat midst the papaya plants, Askidinia trees and grape vines, wondering how we will survive in Canada without beautiful Jericho. As we relaxed, a mathematics prof. played the shepherd's flute. A young Bir Zeit University student did the dabke - Palestinian folk dance. Some of the rest of us tried, but we merely succeeded in looking clumsy. We walked through the groves, fed the fish in an irrigation pool, barbequed kebabs and drank Turkish coffee on the estate of a refugee-made-good wealthy landowner. A fine memory of our last time in Jericho.

Note: Our family activities were a vital part of our lives during our whole stay in Jerusalem. Often these involved picnics in the Judean Desert, hikes, short trips with visiting family members or outings to the markets and sites of Jerusalem. Friends often joined us. On leaving Jerusalem, we were showered with many dinners and gifts. It was very moving and we were astonished. To us, the gift was being able to live and work in such an interesting and amazing place with such marvelous people.

The Violin

Excerpts from Letters

1983

Jennifer takes violin lessons. I accompany her on the piano and sometimes play for other Israeli violin students. My sight-reading, never very good, is improving a little. Jennifer has an orchestra recital in one and half weeks in Tel Aviv. Last week she played at the Anglican School and at the Rubin Academy. We were very proud and she loved the kudos she received. She loves listening to music tapes – she is listening to Paganini now.

The Rubin Academy is located right beside Prime Minister Begin's house where security is particularly heavy. Jennifer and I often see jeeps with soldiers carrying their guns, laughing and joking around. Sometimes we stop to chat. They are young. I wonder if they have been sent to Nablus or Hebron in the West Bank to practice "riot control" on children who throw stones? Have they used their guns? What will happen to their souls after they have destroyed a Palestinian home or an orchard? They are too young to be able to visualize their future and what it will do to their psyches.

1984

Jennifer's teacher, Walter, likes to have recitals in homes when it is possible. Our home is very suitable since we have a very large living room with excellent acoustics. We had about thirty people come for a two-hour recital with about ten students playing. Walter has very high standards and the recital was a smashing success. Israelis tend to be casual and after the recital, Walter and another couple stayed around for borscht *(beef-based cabbage soup)* and visited with us. His wife developed a very bad headache. Harold gave her a head massage and suddenly she nearly passed out. She lay down for about fifteen minutes while the rest of us visited. After her nap, she seemed fine so they all stayed around for another hour and we had an excellent time.

It is difficult for some Israeli parents to come to these recitals, since many have not been in Palestinian East Jerusalem. Over the entrance to our sizeable yard where they enter and park, is a large sign saying Palestinian Needlework. Our home has Palestinian artifacts and we work with Palestinians. This is uncomfortable for some of them. Often, they claim they don't know anything about Palestinians – and maybe they don't. Or maybe they don't want to know. For us, the connection to ordinary Israeli citizens is important. We want to understand their various approaches to life.

The recitals are wonderful. The students play well and enjoy the enthusiastic response from parents and friends. Jennifer sometimes plays duets with an Israeli Jewish boy from a conservative family. They both seem to enjoy playing together. Her teacher, Walter, is a very gifted violinist who plays for the Jerusalem Symphony. When he was called up for military duty, he faced a great barrage of somewhat uncomfortable questions from Jennifer. Will you carry a gun? Why? What will you do with it? Will you kill people? Why? Will you beat up Palestinians? Why? Are they bad? Not easy questions to answer.

I drove a van full of string players, including Jennifer, age eight, up to Tel Aviv to play in an orchestra concert. The concert was recorded for airing in France. The musicians were between ten and fourteen except for two eight-year olds. Everything was in Hebrew but Jennifer seemed very comfortable. She found the other eight-year-old who knew no English; they still had a great time. Although the concert was indeed fun, I did feel uncomfortable with all the Israeli flags. On the trip home, Walter and I had a somewhat political discussion. We had not ventured into politics before. Like so many Israelis, he knew very little about the situation in the West Bank.

Wendy, her second violin teacher

1985

In June, we back to Canada for two months. After three years in Palestine, we enjoyed a visit to Manitoba and B.C. before returning for another two years. The tricky part was leaving Israel. Things went very smoothly at the airport. A family of four with two cute kids. Nothing suspicious there. Jennifer protectively carried her violin. Adrian was his charming self and we were just about to leave the security area when Jennifer made a comment. She had a frown on her face and was not happy with the invasion of our suitcases and the arrogant attitude of the Israeli security. Turning around, she put her violin on the search table and with considerable disdain, said, "You missed something." Opening her case, she showed the guards the little "secret" compartment with resin. "See," she said, "No bomb!" The guards were stunned and there was an awkward silence. They could have stopped us. We could have faced yet another level of security. We nervously looked at them. Then one of them laughed breaking the tension. They waved us on.

1986

Jennifer still studies violin although with a different teacher this year. Walter left Israel because he could no longer mesh his democratic ideals with Zionism. One of Jennifer's old classmates, an Orthodox Jewish boy, Danny Shy, who is a little older, invited her to play a duet with him. His teacher at the Rubin Academy suggested two of his own students but Danny Shy insisted, "I'll only play with Jennifer." So, they are preparing a three-movement violin duet, *Queen of Sheba* by Handel, for a special Rubin Academy of Music recital.

Wendy, her current teacher, lives in a large, old, very run-down dwelling with very high ceilings and peeling wall paper. Her partner is an artist so there are large unusual paintings on the cracked walls, often of nudes. There are frayed deep green velvet curtains that hang in swags over the tall windows of the likely once-grand home. Going there every week, I always feel that I am entering another era, a world apart where music dominates a fascinating bohemian life style.

Note: Jennifer played her violin for many years, continuing on in Canada with Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra Concert Master, Gwen Hoebig. She completed the Royal Conservatory of Toronto Grade 10 level. She then went on to other pursuits. She continues to enjoy music.

Pets

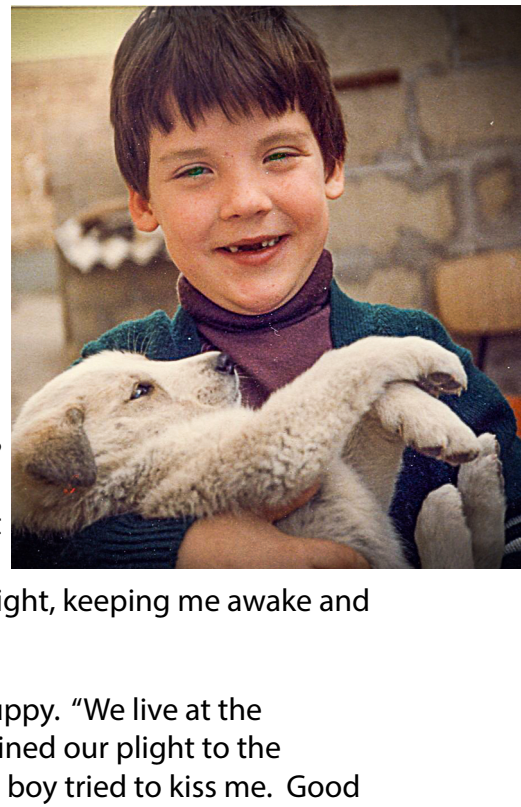
Excerpts from Letters

1982

We are now the owner of a black kitten which the children love, cuddle, pet, carry, talk to but somehow forget to feed. The rule is: outside only! However everyone seems to ignore this rule. The children are very protective of the cat. Today it was inside for a while and it pooped on the stairs. Adrian, fearing that the cat would be in trouble, quickly cleaned up the mess by putting it in his slipper. When he was found out, still wanting to protect his animal friend, he told us that he had pooped in his slipper – not the cat. A very loyal boy.

One of our friends gave the kids a turtle. It needed a name. Adrian immediately suggested Twinkie. His stuffed animals are all called Twinkie. Sometimes he calls himself Twinkie. The turtle's home is on the balcony of the kids' bedroom, but they bring him inside quite often. Twinkie created a huge uproar when he went missing for two days.

1985



A little six-week old puppy has been added to our family - a beautiful pure-bred Canaan dog, born in Bethlehem, given to us by Brother Thomas, president of Bethlehem University, on the promise that we would care for it. Adrian named her Sara. Harold wanted her named Cornelia. I thought Sabotage would be a good name.

We picked her up shortly before Harold went to Egypt for a few days. I knew disaster would strike while he was away, especially if I was in charge of this puppy. I said, "It will escape." Harold said, "It won't!" and quickly built a little fenced in area for the dog. I said, "This fence is inhuman." Harold said, "So are dogs." I said, "It will cry." Harold said, "Not for long." And then he left for Egypt. Disaster did strike. Sara sleeps outside in a pen and the pigeons did a number on her. She had poop all over her. Guess who cleaned her up?

Then, more significantly, Sara escaped. Our beautiful dog was gone. It had wriggled out of the pen and wandered off. Adrian and Jennifer prayed and played. I worried and thought, "Oh bother, why do I have to be plagued with a pure-bred puppy that cries all night, keeping me awake and then runs away. Why does Harold have to go to Egypt now?"

Adrian and I combed the neighborhood, asking everyone we met if they had seen our puppy. "We live at the Mennonite Center. If you see it, please bring it to us." Since school was just out, we explained our plight to the students. After giggling at my Arabic, they promised to look for it. One thirteen-year-old boy tried to kiss me. Good grief! I am a thirty-five-year-old mother! After setting the entire neighborhood on alert, we returned home. Jennifer and Adrian were confident it would be returned since there were so many people looking for it. I wasn't so sure.

The next morning, the students actually found and returned the puppy. I didn't see them because they gave it to the staff downstairs. Maybe the thirteen year old was one of the group hoping for a sighting of "the Mother." He hoped in vain. The next dilemma was what to do with this puppy. It couldn't go back in the pen. So it came into the house. It slept at my feet while I worked – a picture of tranquility.

When Harold returned, he built a better pen for the dog and bathed her again. Between all of us, the dog gets lots of attention. The dog is still somewhat bonded to me. After all, I let her into the house, fed her and comforted her. And she is cute. Some months later Sara again escaped and was not returned. We were very sad – even me.

1986

We found a small black fuzzy puppy. We named it Sooda, which means black in Arabic. It will be 80% Adrian's. This was a result of what we call the "drip technique." Adrian has a way of slowly insisting on certain demands that eventually wear us down to the point where we must give in. His constant request for a dog, made relentlessly, was finally granted on the condition that addition and subtraction facts to twenty would be mastered. Adrian is now enraptured and adept in his arithmetic.

Note: Sooda was gifted to Ibrahim and his family when we left Jerusalem in1987. When we returned to Canada, Adrian wanted a large Husky dog. We were not so keen on another dog. So we tried to satisfy him with a cat, goldfish, turtles, a budgie and other pets. We gave him two gerbils. Harold built an elaborate three-story cage and they multiplied like crazy. That did not do the trick for Adrian, so we got rid of all the gerbils except one. Our friend, Ron, agreed to accept one gerbil and the cage. Unbeknownst to us and unfortunately for him, that one gerbil was pregnant. Eventually, we did get a pure-bred Dutch Keyshond. Adrian would have preferred a Husky.

Visitors

Visitors? All the time. We were very happy when friends and relatives from Canada came to stay with us. Adrian and Jennifer loved showing them the sites and sharing our lives with them. We took them around the country and also encouraged visitors to explore independently but also Harold would show them MCC projects and we would explain situations faced by Palestinians. He often took visiting senators, politicians, journalists, academics and church groups around the West Bank as well. Sometimes we had a village meal, or stopped in places like the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, the Golan Heights, the Mediterranean Ocean, the salty Dead Sea, old monasteries, ancient ruins, or the oasis Ein Gedi. We always picnicked in the Judean Hills and walked on some of the old Roman viaducts between Jericho and Jerusalem. Often, Ya'coub, MCC Agriculture Project Co-ordinator, invited our guests and us for a meal with his family.

Some visitors from North America thought they were entitled to be in our home. One person just walked in and asked where the shower was. Another one, a man, knocked, and then walked right past me into our home and asked if anyone was around. I wonder who he thought I was. Whatever the situation, we frequently had delicious borscht made from MCC beef ready for our family to share with anyone who came into our home.

We usually gave our visitors some advice before coming to Israel. Some people struggled with safety and security issues. Some had never flown. Harold eased their minds by saying, "It is more dangerous to drive a car than to fly in a plane." We also gave some tips when people left Israel. However, we forgot to do this for one young fellow when he left, and he ended up being unpleasantly strip-searched.

Below is an excerpt from a letter from me to Harold's mom and dad before their visit. When I read it now, I wonder how they were brave enough to come:

When you go through security, you will be asked many questions. This may occur in the Israeli airport or it may occur in the airport before you board the plane. The questions are designed to find out if you are a security risk in Israel's opinion, or if you have drugs or bombs.

1. Where will you be staying? We live in Jerusalem near Ramot Eshkol, an Israeli settlement. It would be better not to say East Jerusalem.
2. Did you pack your suitcase yourself? Yes
3. Are you carrying anything to deliver in Israel? A few little things for my son and family.
4. Did someone in the airport ask you to carry a foreign object? No
5. Is there anything in your suitcase which you don't know exactly what it is? No
6. Are you carrying documents or business mail? No. A few letters and notes for my son

At security, be as brief as possible. Don't elaborate. Best not to mention Palestinians or Arabs. Be the ordinary tourist that you are. You could mention that you are looking forward to seeing the Christian sites. If security people ask you where we work, you can tell them that Harold works for a voluntary agency. Which one? The Mennonites. Who are they? A Christian group. What do they do? You aren't exactly sure. I am sure you won't have any trouble. I just tell you this to speed up the process. Ask them not to stamp your passport. Some countries won't let you in with an Israeli stamp. If you ask, they will stamp a scrap of paper which you keep in your passport.

My parents, Jack and Lena Block

We enjoyed the many visitors. Some came with a pro-Israel stance and viewed Palestinians as terrorists. Others came with an anti-Semitic ideology. We tried to address both extremes in this complex environment. Many came with assumptions that were deeply challenged during their visit. Some were interested in Biblical sites and others in politics, culture and history. No one left without being changed. It was a treat to explore the sites with friends and family. We learned much in the process. My Uncle Peter and Aunt Ruth, MCC folks and many others visited. George Letkeman married us back in 1969 and it was wonderful that he and Sue came. Some visitor comments follow. Direct quotes are in ***italics.***

Jack and Lena Block (my parents)

Our family had a wonderful Palestinian meal in the Old City with Ya'coub. Ya'coub always offered wine and no one could really refuse. My parents, who were non-drinkers, complied somewhat reluctantly. Ya'coub quickly snapped a photo. He then showed us his picture album of various Mennonites drinking his wine or smoking the hubbly bubbly (hookah).

My parents enjoyed their stay with us. My mom was very curious about the local people and connected well with them. She loved the ocean and walked barefoot at the edge of the water even though the days were not particularly warm. My dad was full of questions. He loved the MCC agricultural program, and enjoyed visiting various farms, orchards and villages. His interaction with the farmers was remarkable – even though he and they didn't share a common language. Adrian and Jennifer loved to show their grandparents around Masada, the Dead Sea, Crusader Forts, the Golan and more. My parents also went on a four-day trip to Cairo on their own. We all enjoyed the Easter celebrations together.

Vern and Helen Ratzlaff, MCC Egypt

Really – this is Bethlehem? How can you say Bethlehem and just keep talking?

My sister, Marjorie

It was a great adventure to travel to see my sister in Jerusalem. I remember the large kitchen and wonderful view, the treasures sold in the Palestinian workshops, warnings of what to say or do, countryside drives to historical and biblical sites, the ultra-hospitality of a Palestinian woman giving me a hand-made dress, the contrast between some flirtatious Israeli soldiers and others whom I thought would throw us in prison for taking illegal photos, the somewhat normalcy of walking on West Jerusalem main streets with modern shops, the young women in full army gear serving their two year mandatory time as soldiers, the barbed-wired walls separating Lebanon and Israel-Palestine, the delight of being with my sister and her family, the Western Wall with the repetitive prayer rocking, the separation of Jewish women and men at the Wall, the grandeur of the al-Aqsa Mosque and thousands of Muslims mulling around the large square, narrow streets of the Old City with friendly Palestinian shopkeepers inviting us to buy something in their exotic shops, the wonder of many religions, cultures, languages in one place, the pride in my sister and Harold for their wholehearted embracing of such an undertaking as this, and their undeniable courage to walk into the unknown.

Mom and Dad Block at the sea

Marjorie in a traditional Palestinian dress

Mom, me and Jen

Dad and a farmer

Walter, Wilma, Sam, Nathan, Mary, Thom Dick

(Harold's brother and family)

Wilma: *Loved Herodium* (a small palace built by Herod the Great). *A night in Gaza. Sleeping in A-frame tents at the Red Sea and snorkeling. Was interviewed by a CNN reporter. Swimming in the Dead Sea with Nathan only lasting a few minutes – the salty water stung. Walking in the Kidron Valley and hearing a shepherd playing the flute.*

Thom*: Walking with the nuns on the Palm Sunday walk and being shushed by them. Eating rice with our fingers at a village meal – no cutlery or plates were used.*

Nathan: *Eating thin-crust Armenian pizza and Palestinian bread with sesame seeds). Relieved and amazed to discover that I just might survive eating food in a foreign land. Perfect for a skinny 12 year old.*

Being treated to a few puffs of hubbly-bubbly (hooka) and sneaking back for a few more tokes when no one was looking. I remember Adrian seeing imaginary worms and being afraid that they were poisonous.

Sam*: Spending my 13th birthday dinner on the Sea of Galilee and thinking it was so much smaller than I'd imagined. I didn't like the interruption at breakfast by a bird crapping on the table.*

Being saddened and confused by the history of religious tension, especially around the Dome of the Rock. The exhilaration of the sights, smells, sounds and tastes – so different yet so exciting to experience. Beginning to understand the difference between media coverage and the reality on the ground. A lesson in perspective.

My Uncle Jim and Aunt Anne Poetker

Let's stay in the car. Roll down the window so I can take a picture from the car. Let's just eat at your place. We don't want to eat the local food. They were afraid of everything even though it was safe. They wanted to drive where Jesus walked

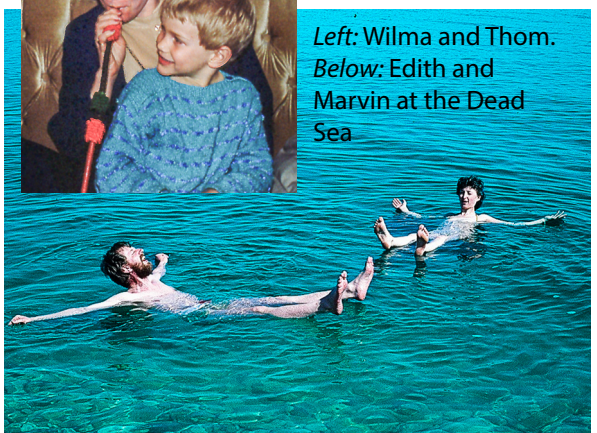
Edith and Marvin Dyck (Harold's sister and husband)

A visit to the Palestinian Orthodox Christian village of Taybeh to see a fourth century house / barn situation which might have been like the stable where Jesus was born. The people living in this village are probably descendants from the earliest Jewish Christians. The village has an underground tunnel that leads to the other end of the village. This was a security feature that allowed for escape if the house was attacked.

A meal at Ya'coub's. Judith had warned us not to compliment them on their belongings because they would immediately give the items to us. As we sat in the living room, Edith began to compliment Ya'coub on a metal clock sitting on a shelf. Ya'coub immediately got up and began moving in the direction Edith was looking. As he did so, Edith noticed in horror that the clock was part of a much larger metal sculpture that included a naked woman. Fortunately for all of us, Edith failed to fully describe the article she admired. Instead of picking up the large clock-and-naked-woman metal sculpture, Ya'coub went for a small Spanish dancing couple of a man in a dark suit and a woman in long green dress. Edith was very relieved, accepted the gift, and restrained herself from complimenting anyone else on their possessions.

Climbing up the steep, rocky Mount of Temptations with Judith and Jennifer. Waiting for permission to go through a monastery. Through the monastery was the only way to get to the top. The reward was a passionate kiss at the top overlooking the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea and the mountains of Moab.

Marvin and Edith with us



Left: Wilma and Thom.
Below: Edith and Marvin at the Dead Sea

Walter and Wilma and our families

Ted and Betty Dick (Harold's brother and wife)

A desert trek in the Judean hills with mint tea out in the open, Easter ceremonies, the Bedouin meal, the Golan, Ramallah, Old Jerusalem inside the walls, markets and the FOOD!

My Uncle Peter and Aunt Kay Giesbrecht

Let's see everything. Peter, let's go. A hike? Sure. A picnic in Wadi Kelt? Sure. Armenian pizza? Absolutely. A side trip to Cairo on our own? Yes! Peter and Kay were up for everything.

Al and Agatha Doerksen with daughters, Susan and Alison

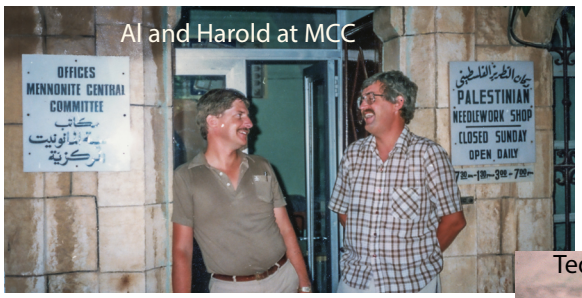
*We loved the beaches on the Mediterranean (*about an hour away*). We spent the weekend in the Golan Heights. There were ubiquitous tank tracks on the raked earth. Underbrush was all burned away. Soldiers everywhere. A huge number of reserves had been called up for military duty. Long lines of tanks and big green tank transporters were moving north. Astonishing military practices going on. At one point we somehow got into the military zone between the Golan and Lebanon. A special military convoy, before us and after us, delivered us out of the zone pronto.*

We swam in the Dead Sea – nothing lives there. Lowest spot on earth. Very salty so you float without even trying. Painful if you have sores. Then we climbed up to Masada, perhaps a little too hot for all this in one day.

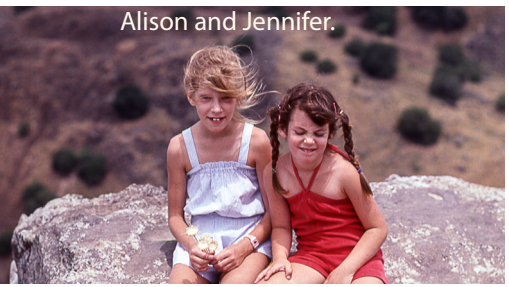
Loved the Mount of Beatitudes. Harold was wearing shorts which were not permitted in the church. The entrance keeper supplied some long pants. The funny thing was that the long pants belonged to a short chubby person and weren't much longer than the shorts Harold had been wearing.

Peter, Paul and Mary Concert - 1983

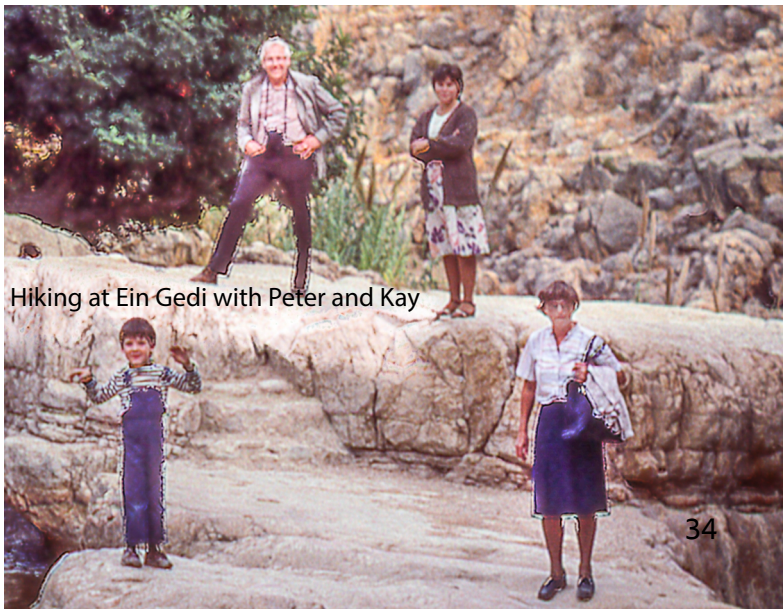
With Al and Agatha, we entered the huge former reservoir, now a grassy park called Sultan's pools. We brought blankets, wine, a picnic and excitement. It is one thing to hear "Blowin' in the Wind" in Canada at a concert where everything is stable and peaceful. It is quite another to be in this conflicted region and hear "Light one Candle" and realize that there are many interpretations of that song: peacenik, Israeli, Palestinian, military, activist, right wing, left wing, and others. We all come with baggage and beliefs. Each of us had reasons for holding our candle high into the dark night. It was a rather emotional concert, and one which I have never forgotten.



Al and Harold at MCC


Alison and Jennifer.

Ted and Betty. Betty above.


Hiking at Ein Gedi with Peter and Kay

Otto and Elfriede Dick (Harold's parents)

Excerpts from Elfriede's diary.

Enjoyed tea in the grape arbor with the MCC staff. Later, mint tea in Bethlehem.

Judie took us and the Giesbrechts to see the Holocaust Museum and other stops. The drive was a hilarious, very fast with a few stops to check the map. Saw the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Holocaust Museum was very moving.

Put my toe into the small, dirty Jordan River, swam in the Sea of Galilee with Jenni, and then had a moonlit supper at the seaside. Jenni threw some meat to a cat and suddenly cats surrounded us. Harold threatened to throw them into the sea. Adrian, with fire in his eyes, exclaimed that if Harold did that, he would find himself in hell.

Is it real? Here I am sitting by the open window overlooking the Sea of Galilee where Jesus did many miracles, called his disciples, stilled the storm and walked on water.

Big smorgasbord breakfast. Adrian ate a lot. Saw a large dairy, many sheep, goats and a shepherd. Beautiful flowers at Capernaum. Warm sunshine at the Mount of Beatitudes.

Headed into the Lebanese hills between Israel, Syria and Lebanon. Stopped at a kibbutz. Passed an army camp, a Druze village and Mt. Hermon, the beautiful spring of Banias (Caesarea Philippi) *and Crusader castles. Overnight at Stella Carmel. So green and lush. Adrian loved the three dogs. Jennifer played her violin: "I will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord Forever" by ear. Pretty good.*

Then the Bahai Temple, Haifa, a Mosque in Akko, Mount Tabor – How can I keep track of all this? The Mediterranean Ocean and on to the Nazareth market. As we walked through the market, I noticed a bag of potatoes on the ground. A dog came along, lifted his leg and peed. We won't be buying those potatoes or anything else on the ground.

We stopped at the Ramallah Market where we bought veggies that were in bins. The two grandkids were noisy so grandpa promised shekels to whomever could stay quiet all the way home. They both got 10 shekels and were delighted.

Explored the Old City on our own. You must experience it to believe it. Stopped for a bite in a tiny little place to eat falafel, eggs, tomatoes, cucumbers and potatoes. Rested our feet. Sat at the Damascus Gate to people watch. The Arabs are warm, friendly and love to visit.

Elfriede and me

Ibrahim, Otto and Palesstinian farmer

Otto and Adrian. Photo: Elfriede

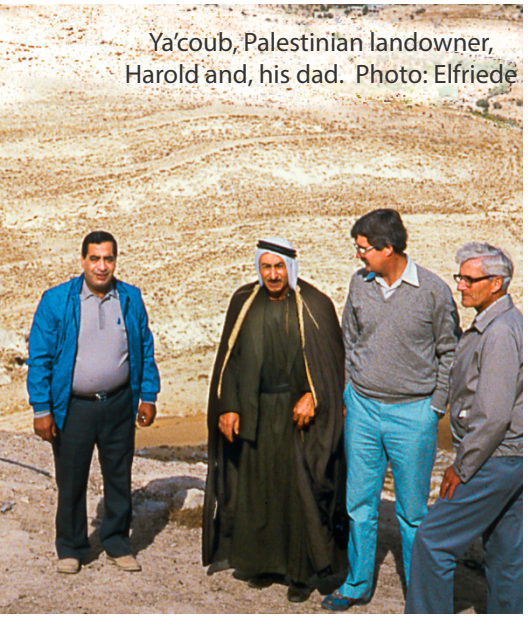
Otto, Jenni and Elfriede

Found the Western Wall. The cracks are stuffed with little bits of paper with prayer messages on them. Midafternoon, we started to head home … and suddenly there was Judie – ready to drive us home. Jenni read to me while we both lay on her bed. I fell asleep. She laughed. After supper, the children sang songs in bed before falling asleep.

Went out with Ya'coub, MCC agriculture co-ordinator. Saw olive presses. Saw a huge water cistern. How hard it must be to carve such a big cavern out of the rock. Otto used the ladder to go into it and was puffing when he climbed out. MCC restored this cistern by providing cement to line it.

Saw Palestinian homes and land confiscated by Israelis. Disenfranchised Palestinians sometimes rent the land back from the Israelis. Palestinians are starting to form farming cooperatives which occasionally helps them keep their land. The ground is so stony. The stones are used to make fences. MCC helps with olive seedlings, drip irrigation, roads and other supports. Stopped at a Bedouin farm for Turkish coffee. The Bedouin man sang for us.

Dead Sea. We didn't really feel like going in but we did anyway. It was hilarious. Really hard to stay on our feet. Jenni came in too while Adrian looked after the things on shore. Then stopped in nearby Jericho for freshly squeezed orange juice and a walk to the ruins.



Ya'coub, Palestinian landowner, Harold and, his dad. Photo: Elfriede

Otto and Elfriede at a meal in a farmer's home

Sunay we went to the big German Lutheran Church of the Redeemer - the English service in the small crusader chapel. Jennifer sat with the organist. Went to a baroque (violin, harpsichord and recorder) concert with Jenni in the evening where her teacher and others played.

Walked in Mea Shearim, the Orthodox Jewish area, shopped, and had tea at the American Colony Hotel. Harold says it's the place where the journalists and spies gather. Later, Adrian and Jennifer took us to Ammunition Hill Park – a park of army trenches and pill boxes which were used in the war. MCC house was part of no man's land during the 1967 war.

Hiked in Wadi Kelt to St Georges Monastery built right into the cliffs of the Judean Hills. The road was bumpy, full of holes and stony. Ridiculous. On the way home, the van hit a stone that bent the rim on the wheel. We used Harold's belt to tie something together and managed to get home.

Adrian, Otto and I napped in the afternoon on the bed. Adrian put his arm around me and we declared that we loved each other. Seconds later, I took a picture of him lying on the bed with Otto. For some reason, Adrian did not like that and told me that "he would not forgive me." Adrian also informed us that "the dentist told him he would soon die." Thank God for another day.

We all went to a village meal of flatbread, rice, lamb and broth–all served on a huge round pan. We ate with our hands. The hosts pushed the best bits of meat over to our part of the pan. We also had soup and a cucumber, tomato and parsley salad. To finish, we had apples and Turkish coffee. The dishes were washed outside in large bowls on the floor. We ate with the old men, were served by the young men and were not allowed to meet the women – but we saw them peek around the corner.

Went to Abid's house for a 2:00 dinner. He helps with the housework at MCC house. The dinner was magnificent. We were high on a hill overlooking the Judean Hills.

Headed to the airport on Nov 11 after an amazing trip. Harold, Judie, Jenni and Adrian have a hectic life – with love in the family and many beautiful relationships. What a joy to have been with them for three and a half weeks.

CELEBRATING

Christmas Rituals

Over the five years we spent in Jerusalem, we developed some Christmas traditions. We would put up a very tall tree several days before Christmas. Adrian would stand right in the tree as close to the stem as possible, because he loved the smell of the freshly cut tree.

Christmas trees were supplied, surprisingly, by the Israeli military to resident foreigners a few days before Christmas. In our first year in Jerusalem, it fell to me to get three trees for the three MCC families. Taking our largest vehicle, I arrived at 11:00 a.m. as instructed, expecting an orderly affair. Not so. Apparently, the Baptists had been there first. They took their time choosing three specific trees from the truck where all the trees were stacked. Everyone else, meanwhile, was impatient. By the time the Baptists were done, pandemonium had broken out. Foreigners were elbowing and pushing their way closer and closer to the very large truck with trees. Soldiers were standing on top of the trees on top of the truck. Everyone else was standing around the truck with arms outstretched wanting the desired trees. It all looked a little ridiculous. A short woman in her thirties, like me didn't have a chance. BUT I needed to prove that I was up to the task. So, I too elbowed my way close enough that I could catch the eye of a young soldier on the truck. I winked at him and held up three fingers. Amazingly, the soldier singled me out and magically handed me three good-sized trees. They were tied with rope and somehow, I managed to drag them to my vehicle and actually load them up. I certainly wouldn't be able to do that now – in my seventies – nor, I expect, would the soldier enjoy my wink.

Our family gift opening was first thing on Christmas morning – Adrian and Jennifer woke us very early. Sometimes our friend, Cat, came over still in her sleepwear to share Harold's signature crepes with us. Christmas Day dinner was in our home with good friends.

But the big day was actually Christmas Eve Day which started around noon eating a meal with friends in our home. Around 3:30 we travelled to Bethlehem going the long way through the orchards and shepherd's fields. We headed to the Protestant Shepherds' (1) field - not the Franciscan or the Greek Orthodox one - to sing carols with about sixty people, mostly foreigners. It was an ordinary field just below the town of Bethlehem, in Beit Sahour, but it was the most incredible carol sing I have ever experienced. The cracked voices there weren't very musical although they were fairly loud. The poignant, strange, intense part was that Israeli soldiers surrounded the field with guns ready. Not sure why. We were a small group of Christain foreigners.

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(1) There are several shepherds' fields in the area. The Franciscans, the Greek Orthodox and the Protestants each have a field in the Bethlehem area which they call Shepherds' Field. All we know is that there were shepherds in the area and there still are.

From there, we would head to Bethlehem Bible College, part MCC's program, to pass on good wishes, have a glass of punch and eat cookies. Thinking back about Joseph and Mary back in the day, we wondered if the oft maligned Bethlehem innkeeper might have been a kind old man who offered Mary the warmest, most private shelter available.

Our next stop was back in Sheik Jarrah at the home of the minister of the English congregation of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. Jennifer and Adrian often enjoy playing with their children. The parents, Tilman and Marsha Bergman, served delicious soup and bread to warm us up. It is cold at Christmas in Jerusalem.

After soup, we were off to Ramallah where, to our astonishment, we found cars filled with Santa Clauses, racing through the streets. Although Ramallah was originally a Christian Palestinian town, it had increased in size and had a significant Muslim population. Jerusalem and the West Bank were not really decorated for Christmas because it was not a significant holiday for Muslims. But on Christmas Eve, Ramallah came alive. We were headed to a carol sing in the home of a Lebanese friend, Charles Shammas, who could have been a concert pianist but instead founded a successful Palestinian lingerie business. The group at the carol sing were mostly Palestinians in their thirties – about the same age as us. I remember singing the words "O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel" and the refrain of "Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel." And then being gently informed that Palestinian Christians use different words. Their words were "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel and ransom all the captive nations now" and "Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, All people far and near." That was something to think about. How do Palestinian Christians come to terms with the Old Testament or even the New Testament? It was a lesson for me about inclusivity, well-loved habits, and the impact of words.

In our first year, we attended midnight Mass at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The church was completed in 330 AD by Constantine, destroyed by a Samaritan rebellion in the sixth century, then rebuilt and greatly expanded. We needed a special pass both to park our ten-person van and to get into the church compound. After several thorough security checks to get into the Bethlehem town square, we finally found ourselves amidst a huge pressing throng of people pushing toward the Roman Catholic part of the church grounds and the final gate. Every so often the gates opened a little and part of the crowd would surge through. Then the guards pushed back the gates with all their might, forcing the crowds into an even more tightly packed mass. Harold and I were somehow separated from each other and from everyone else in our little group. Above us, Israeli helicopters purred; their sliding doors wide open with soldiers aiming guns directly down at the pressing crowds of people. It all felt a little scary.

Once we were finally inside, the Christmas Eve service seen on TV around the world was in progress. The church itself was quite empty in contrast to the courtyard outside. It felt cold and drafty with its large stone arches. The VIPs, like Ethel Kennedy, had chairs, but most of the people were standing, milling about, talking or visiting during the service which droned on and on oblivious to people inside or outside the church - a service which seemed to me to be devoid of meaning. The most publicized celebration of Christmas seemed to have no real relevance even in the place where it needed to be especially relevant. That was the only time we attended that Mass.

In our last year in Jerusalem, our Christmas Eve included an incredible dinner before the midnight Mass, with the Brothers at Bethlehem University – a Catholic University founded by the Brothers and the Pope, specifically for Palestinians. The hotel management program includes culinary arts. On Christmas Eve, they outdid themselves with a rather spectacular feast. We enjoyed it very much.

Usually, we went to the Christmas Eve service at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer within the walls of the Old City. The large sanctuary with its high arches was reserved for Arabic and German services on Sundays. We regularly attended an English service in a small crusader chapel. Maria Latina Chapel was built in the twelfth century, with a beautiful courtyard, all part of the church compound. Sometimes chamber music was played in that very calming courtyard, with an occasional interruption for the Muslim call to prayer.

photo: Aviel Schneider, Israel Today

The land for the impressive church complex was donated by the Ottoman Sultan in 1869 as a reward for German participation in the opening of the Suez Canal. The new church was built on the site of the former crusader church. Kaiser Wilhelm II dedicated the large stone Church on Reformation Day in 1898. In preparation, Jaffa Gate, one of the major gates in the wall of the Old City, was altered quite dramatically to allow the Kaiser to ride in style through the gate on a white horse. Outside the Old City, two other temporary gates were specially constructed at that time: one was a gift from he Ottoman Sultan and the other from the local Jewish community.

On Christmas Eve, in the big sanctuary, Finnish, Hebrew, Arabic, English, Swedish, German and other languages were all represented. The packed congregation included Israelis, Palestinians, Germans, North Americans, Scandinavians Germans and others. Fortunately, we could enter through a special door since we were regular attendees at the English service. I was moved to tears when a lone guitar string plucked the melody of "Silent Night" and sent it echoing through the large stone sanctuary. The massive crusader-style arches reminded me of an extremely violent and oppressive Christian era as I sat in this quiet church with its twenty-foot candle-and-apple-decorated tree; its hushed atmosphere; the soldiers in uniform without their guns; and the Palestinian Christians in their home church.

Running through my head was the thought that a Christ heralding peace was born precisely in a place which has usually been in conflict or been under the political occupation of some oppressive regime or another, from the Romans, or even before, until today. This service always made me wonder. In fact, Christmas in Jerusalem, as a whole, was an experience that disturbed my mind, tickled my brain and challenged my belief system. I still harken back to those Christmases in December each year. We were so very blessed to have these experiences.

Note: This was written in 2020 and is based on my memories and letters.

Manger Square, Bethlehem

A Parade! A parade
Drum beats - steady
Children - marching
Small feet, nearly adult
Out of step - in step
Left, right, left, shuffle
Up and down
Running shoes. Cowboy boots. High heels?
Innocence - marching to Manger Square,
Bethlehem.

Helicopters - flying low
Guns - ready
Soldiers - trained
Uniforms - official
Uzi machine guns - top condition
Big boots - well used
Oppression - crowding in on Manger Square,
Bethlehem.

Security - everywhere
Body search
Security
Passports required
Security
Bombs? Weapons?
Security? securing everything at Manger
Square,
Bethlehem.

Church proceeding
Patriarch
Important Men
Crosses on gold sticks
Stiff robes - white and gold
Priests in black
Young boys darkly dressed with folded hands
Religion - impressing Manger square,
Bethlehem.

Crowds pressing
Pushing
Hoping to see
Stepping on toes
Standing, reaching, wanting,
Watching
People - filling Manger Square,
Bethlehem.

Note: Religion, archeology, history, geography, culture, and politics were an integral part of our lives. Privilege and oppression operated side by side. We learned so much. After our first Christmas in Jerusalem in 1982, I wrote this poem. It is about real people, Palestinians, caught in the midst of political complexities – people who still find the strength to walk in the procession from Jerusalem to Bethlehem at Christmas time.

Both Photos: Erik Stewert, Flickr

Courtesy Latin Patriarchate

Note: One of the afternoon rituals of Christmas Eve is the procession of the various Palestinian Church dignitaries with all their robes and vestments, walking from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. The end of the procession includes Palestinian boy and girl scout groups marching in uniform with drums and batons. The distance is about 10 kilometers. Not everyone walks the entire distance. Everyone then congregates in Manger Square to process into the church. It is a Christian celebration but also a political statement: "We are Palestinian Christians and we are here." The Israeli military and security are obvious in Bethlehem, adding a very oppressive element.

The people in the bottom photo are wearing masks. This photo was taken in Jerusalem during the world-wide COVID pandemic.

Palm Sunday Reflections: Power in the Journey

A homily at Hope Mennonite Church in 2022

A Palm Sunday journey in Palestine roots itself in a contemporary reality but finds its basis in an ancient story. This story has spun its web through time, touching every aspect of our lives. Raw blatant power is inherent in this journey.

We might travel this journey like a curious tourist or as a thoughtful visitor reflecting on historical and current dynamics. We might identify with the powerful or with the oppressed or with neither. We could be a penitent pilgrim looking for forgiveness in the mystical and divine. If we are brave and open, we will let the journey speak to our hearts, perhaps creating a changed perspective, a fresh insight, or even an unexpected inspiration.

Prior to Palm Sunday, Jesus and his disciples came from Jericho, 1200 feet below sea level literally UP to Bethany, 2700 feet above sea level. When our family lived in Jerusalem, we often hiked on paths beside the still-existing old Roman aqueducts that might have been used by these travellers.

Today, on Palm Sunday, we will travel from Bethany, through Bethphage, over the Mount of Olives, through the Kidron Valley and into Jerusalem. Bethphage and Bethany are on the backside of the Mount of Olives. At the time of Christ, Bethany was an unwalled village of several dozen families including Jesus' close friends: Lazarus, Simon the leper, Mary and Martha. Today in 2022, the nearby town of Silwan is in crisis as Israel confiscates Palestinian homes.

Bethphage is named after an early small tart fig that ripens before the leaves are out - a symbol of new life. I wonder if the tempting fruit given to Adam by Eve was a fig rather than an apple. It is a sensuous fruit - in color, texture and flavor. Taste a fresh fig and you will want more. There was one fig tree that Jesus cursed. It dried up. Jesus then promises more than the power to dry up a fig tree. He says: Even if you say to this mountain, "Be lifted up and thrown into the sea, it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive." What should we do as individuals... or as a church... or as communities... with power like that? Or do we believe it? Do we want to use this power to dry up tart fig trees or rather, to taste the lusciousness of the later figs? A curious teaching and worth more thought.

Many olive trees grow throughout the area. The olive is a symbol of Palestinian identity, wealth, hospitality, peace, and yes - power. Olives can be pickled or made into oil. They are used for fuel in lamps, healing the sick, cooking and making soap. For anointing priests and kings, the oil was solidified into something like butter and then a small cube was placed on the head which melts into the person's scalp anointing the whole head. I wonder how that felt.

Since 1948, the planting of olive trees is a political statement. Palestinians plant olive seedlings in the hope, often in vain, that this will prevent Israelis from using their power to confiscate Palestinian land. To Palestinians the olive is their livelihood - a hardy symbol of their millennia living on the land. The Israeli military, on the other hand, bulldozes olive trees to show their power over Palestinians and their land.

The first Palm Sunday happened at Passover – a Jewish celebration. The Palm, a symbol of Israelite nationalism, welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. The Palm was used on Israelite coins about 100 years before Christ - one of the very few short periods of history when the Israelites had control of part of the land. On the first Palm Sunday many Israelites were feeling the heavy Roman oppression. They expected the Messiah to lead and free them. By waving palm branches, the people were saying to the Romans – we are still here. We will carry on with our religion and our lives. It was a political demonstration and show of grassroots power. At the same time there were some Jewish leaders who collaborated with the Romans, as happens in any occupation. The political situation was tense. Roman soldiers, weapons, and symbols of power were all very present. And today, ironically, Palestinian Christians use palm branches to present a similar message with modern secular Israeli soldiers in control.

From the top of the Mount of Olives, you can see the Wall of Jerusalem. Yes, it is still there and you can walk on top of it. This, of course, is not the big cement powerful, political, separation wall more recently built by the Israelis – but the ancient Jerusalem wall was also a security wall in its time.

Ancient wall with the sealed Golden Gate

Modern Day Separation Wall near Jerusalem

In the time of Jesus, the Hosannas began on the back side of the Mount of Olives and became more intense by the minute. From the top of the Mount of Olives, Jesus would have gone down into the Kidron Valley, then up to the now- sealed Golden Gate. Inside that gate was the portico where Jesus taught. Further in was a Roman garrison with soldiers. It was also the place where Pilate was based - especially during the difficult Passover time with its high emotions and riots. Powerful Roman soldiers would have lined the walls of the temple. This is also the place where Jesus had earlier identified the corrupt market sellers and angrily overturned their tables. The furious Chief Priests and Pharisees would have wanted the procession stopped. Perhaps the Romans would be angry with them. Or maybe they felt their power was being challenged. They didn't want the status quo changed. In any case, this show of political energy was not in either their interests or in Roman interests.

The Chief Priests and Pharisees were often God fearing, learned, law abiding men, highly regarded by the general populace. They truly believed they were acting according to God's law. Life was prescribed by rules which anchored a belief in scriptural certainty and expressed itself in rigidity. Do we find comfort in certainty? What are our certainties? Do we hold some religious beliefs too dear? Do they give us power? What kind of power?

People still take this journey, coming to Jerusalem with expectations, hopes and dreams. Some are tourists observing the curiosities. Some become the curiosities – thinking that they are John the Baptist or Jesus or, as I once saw, ten older women on the Mount of Olives - all gauzily dressed as the ten virgins awaiting their bridegroom, reflecting the New Testament story. In fact, psychologists use the term "Jerusalem syndrome" to identify religious obsessions, delusions, or psychoses that are triggered by a visit to Jerusalem.

Some people are travelers who come to study or work, perhaps with specific political, archaeological, historical, or religious perspectives. Some are pilgrims who wish to experience the joy, pain or spirit of a Divine Being. Some come to understand Jesus' teachings and try to integrate them into their everyday lives. Some leave Jerusalem remarkably changed – as did we when we left after five years in Palestine.

Whatever the reason, every year, many people make the Palm Sunday journey. At the front of the procession are the Palestinian clergy. The pageantry, vestments, scepters and gold of the church are evident in full force. "We are Palestinian Christians and we are still here in this land," is part of the message. The procession includes Palestinian monks, priests and nuns, chanting as they go. The Palestinian girl and boy scouts are there too, marching and sometimes playing instruments. They are so young and I wonder about their future.

Other Christian orders and pilgrims are also present on Palm Sunday. Not weeping today, but when they come back on Good Friday, they will weep. They may do penance, inflict pain or mark the sadness in some other way. For Lent they likely will have denied themselves some pleasures. Sometimes, they are pushy. During Orthodox Lent, the small Greek women pilgrims clad in black are the most aggressive. We had to watch out for their elbows. Muslims who live along the route often offer a glass of water to thirsty pilgrims if it is a hot day.

The procession is a religious and political statement, as it was in the time of Christ. Only now it is Christian Palestinians rather than Jewish Israelites saying, "We are here. We will practice our culture and our religion. We oppose your power." It is Israeli Jewish soldiers who are very present now, rather than the Romans who were there then. An interesting irony.

At the end of the procession are the North Americans – Baptists, evangelicals, fundamentalists, possibly there for the emotional experience. Singing. Sometimes dancing. Often in support of the Israeli occupation. But perhaps not understanding that they are part of a religious political procession which challenges it. Maybe they don't see the dynamics of power and the oppression of the community around them. They may be wrapped in their own emotional and personal religious journey near where Christ once walked. This experience can be uplifting and long-lasting.

Maybe they believe that the land itself is holy and that present day secular Israel is the same as covenanted ancient Israel. Modern secular Israelis are not the early God-fearing Israelites. When we lived in Jerusalem, the Jewish ultra-orthodox Hassidim refused to accept the government of Israel, serve in the army or pay taxes, because, to them, modern Israel is secular and therefore not part of the prophecy. Holding to a deep spirituality and mysticism, this Jewish community believed that the secular state was not the way forward.

Near the end of the procession, enthusiastic North American tourists joined this Palestinian Christian event. Note the Star of David that she wears.

The Palm Sunday procession route no longer includes Bethany because of Prime Minister Sharon's security wall - a scar on the landscape. It divides farmers from their orchards, students from schools, communities from churches or mosques, and alters everyday life. Bethany is very thirteen mosques. The historic road connecting Bethany to Jerusalem is now completely sealed off by those in power.

What does it mean to be a Christian in this Holy Land - a land of political strife, violence and oppression? Taking a tour or running where Jesus walked? Waving a palm branch on Palm Sunday? Believing that a song, a prayer, a cultural dance or a special program will fix things? Or working with agencies to help disenfranchised Palestinians and refugees? Or standing with the peace-loving Muslim and Christian Palestinians like I knew in the 1980s? Or supporting those Israeli citizens who defy their government and refuse to serve in the army on the West Bank? Perhaps their defiance is more in keeping with the teaching of Jesus than some of the North American right-wing Christian supporters of Israeli policies?

Photo: Ryan Rodrick Beiler

Your journey will not be the same as mine but the questions may be the same. How will we let the deep spiritual, sometimes mystical messages of Christ infuse the depths of our souls? How will we release that energy into practical living? How will we use Passion week to remember and explore the powerful life of Christ?

Courtesy Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Our childhood teachings, religious or not, set the stage for us. However, our stage is not the same as the stage of our parents and grandparents, or even the ancient stages on which Christ or Moses played. Is a new stage needed?

Christ's teachings moved beyond the scriptures of the day. He changed the stage, exploring a new way of living. He irritated and angered the religious and political leaders to the point where they wanted to murder him. In the last week of his life, he was not quiet. He addressed corruption in the temple. His life was on the cutting edge of social change. He was a radical,

raising ideas that were unpopular with the leaders. He tackled politics, changed society and impacted the world. He lived in the muck of life, connecting with each person where they were, regardless of gender, economic level, sexual practices, or ethnic background. He was, in fact, a human rights champion. He threw out rigid dogma using metaphors and stories to explain life-giving principles. He experienced personal disaster. Yet he had more influence than anyone could imagine. Even centuries after his death.

How close do we want to be to this Jesus? An observing tourist? A searching traveler? A pilgrim wanting grace and inner peace? A full blown follower of Jesus' teachings… loving our enemies, exploring what that means in today's world, moving beyond strict conformity to sacred texts, experiencing life with all its complexities, joys, sorrows, passions, and creating a world that is better because we are in it?

Passion week - perhaps the story of Jesus in his last week is worth another read?

Photo top left: Palm Sunday in 2013. Ryan Roderick Beiler. Activestills.org

Bottom Left: Courtesy Latin Patriarchate

Easter with Fire and Crowds

Easter in Jerusalem was always a series of very unique experiences. In 1983, Orthodox Easter, Roman Catholic Easter, and Passover all fell quite close together. Jerusalem was a teeming mass of tourists, pilgrims and other visitors. On Palm Sunday, we walked in the procession from Bethany on the back of the Mount of Olives, through the Kidron Valley, into Jerusalem through the St Stephen's Gate, along the Via Dolorosa and into the Church of St. Anne.

Every year, on Holy Saturday, the Greek, Armenians, Ethiopian and Coptic Orthodox wait for many hours for the Holy Fire that originates magically from inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Crowds of pilgrims, tourists and parishioners wait too. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch, who has been inside the crypt alone, emerges from the crypt with the Holy Fire sometime on Holy Saturday night. This symbolizes that Christ has not forgotten his followers. Dignitaries from all over the world are there, waiting to light their candles to take the fire back to their congregations.

On Holy Saturday, we walked down to the Old City to participate in the celebrations around the lighting of the Holy Fire in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Parading boy scouts and pressing hordes of people thronged through the Old City. We had an incredible sense of the blend of politics and religion as the parades continued. The crowds swelled; the boys were lifted high on the shoulders of others. They sang and chanted with gusto while waving swords with bravado. At times, we could hardly move. The people were pressed so tightly that we were simply carried along.

Photo: Mar Sharb, cc 2.0

Jennifer and I managed to get to the roof of the Church where we could see everything. We watched the courtyard of the church entrance where the crowds pressed in on the door. When the fire emerged from the door, everyone screamed and held out their bundles of thirty-three thin long tapers to be lit. The candles were tied with string and had beautiful decorations. The church bells rang and the cacophony was astonishing. The women ululated and others beat on drums. Some dripped wax onto their faces. Apparently, this ritual has been done every year since 876 A.D. when a French monk first recorded it. It is also mentioned in some 4th century documents. People say there has never been an accident with the candles so far, but it seemed very dangerous to me. Later we mingled in with the parading, celebrating crowds and eventually watched the Ethiopians perform their special Easter dance on the roof of the Holy Sepulchre Church. Called "Looking for the Bones," it is very graceful and involves umbrellas and large drums.

Easter morning, we hosted a large buffet and an Easter egg hunt for the Lutheran Congregation - about seventy-five people. Then Jennifer and I went to a French mass at Abu Ghosh Convent. The mass was medieval with phenomenal Gregorian chants along with recorders and a harp – all taking place in the crusader chapel with the music echoing through the arches. An inspirational Easter service.

Weddings and Wives

We enjoyed the traditional Christian celebrations very much. We also enjoyed a number of Christian and Muslim wedding celebrations and observed a variety of marriage arrangements throughout our five years in Palestine.

Before an engagement occurs, usually the fathers will meet informally, sometimes even before the potential bride and groom meet. Both families want to ensure that this will be a good match. At some point, the mother and the sisters of the groom go to the home of the bride's family. The groom's mother and sisters check out the bride. Often the women will ask to see the bride's dresses. This involves trying on clothes, looking for defects such as ugly body scars and checking out the bride's figure. The bride's family also checks out the groom and his family. In some cases, this might involve a check list. We knew one such case, where the mother of the bride had a written list of criteria such as: income, physical appearance, health, age, potential, education, career, reputation, and financial security.

An elder in the groom's family then visits an elder in the bride's family to formally ask if the family agrees to the terms of the marriage. Then both families celebrate with a small intimate wedding ceremony that concludes with tea and sweets. The main celebration comes later, usually involving many people.

The groom's family usually pays for the wedding celebration. They are also responsible for going door-to-door and inviting everyone in their village, the bride's village and sometimes other villages. The wedding feast is often a show of wealth including the slaughter of animals in order to create a feast. The groom may choose not to marry until he has procured and furnished a house. If this is the case, the groom may be many years older than the bride.

A village, Muslim or Bedouin wedding celebration is usually a segregated affair with men and women in different spaces. In the men's area, loud music and the dabke dance are enjoyed. The women's area is a celebration of the bride. She has a special chair decorated with flowers. The grandmothers and others ululate, a loud, high pitched, protracted sound expressing joy and emotion. Very sensuous belly dancing is expected by everyone. Women remove their head scarves and conservative robes to reveal sometimes surprisingly sexy dresses beneath. Long hair flounces, hips gyrate and wrists twirl. But no men are allowed. It is a women's domain.

If the groom is well off, he will present the bride with gold coins which she wears on her ears and around her neck for the first two years of marriage and then saves for special occasions after that. Gold jewelry may also be provided by the families of the bride and groom, relatives and guests. It belongs to the bride to do with as she chooses, but usually it is saved in case something happens to her husband.

The bride is expected to produce children as soon as possible, particularly within the first two years. When nursing a baby, there is no hesitation in exposing the breast in women's company. It is a matter of pride, especially if the child is a boy. The parents take on new names once a son has been born. If the child is named Ahmed, The parents become Imm Ahmed - mother of Ahmed - and Abu Ahmed - father of Ahmed. This new name now becomes the used name.

The bride might wear a white dress or she might change into different colorful fancy dresses for her wedding celebration. However, the traditional village Palestinian garb for weddings is a black dress with beautiful colorful embroidery – each design is specific to the village of the bride's home village. A young woman preparing for her wedding, makes several of these full-length loose-fitting garments which she will wear for many years. This tradition began near the end of the Ottoman Empire.

Muslim Village Wedding

We were invited to a village wedding where MCC had made a contribution. Upon our arrival, Harold and Adrian went to the men's area, while Jennifer and I were ushered into the bride's home – a one-room building. The bride had waited until we arrived to get into her bridal attire. Dressing is a community affair with someone doing the brides's hair, someone else doing her make-up and everyone being liberally sprinkled with silver sparkles. Then the dancing begins. We were a small group of women and everyone took turns belly dancing to the drumbeat. The dance is learned by Muslim girls from early childhood. Later, many women and children joined us and the house became packed and hot with everyone pressing around the bride. Occasionally someone would physically push everyone back to make room for the dancers. Chants and high-pitched voices created the emotional joyful mood both inside and outside the house. I tried the drum but I am not sure if I got the beat quite right. They expected me to "disco disco" but I am not good at that either. This experience was very new to us and Jennifer was a little concerned. For the men, this wedding was a rather boring affair. They spoke only Arabic, leaving Harold at a loss for words since this was still our first year in Palestine. Usually they dance the dabke, a Palestinian folk dance, but at this wedding, they didn't.

Palestinian Needlework. Her dress was probably created for her wedding

Christian Palestinian Wedding of Al-Haq Administrative Assistant, Paulein Natour.

Another Village Muslim Wedding

I went to a wedding in Deir Samit with Sahir, the MCC needlework program manager. Foreigners were not often in that village and I was quite a curiosity. The children stared at me and then ran away. The teenagers, mostly already married, tried to come close, feel my hair, pat my arms and touch my shoulders. The women in Deir Samit, as in other villages and even in cities, were all wearing traditional black embroidered long dresses. Underneath they might be wearing polyester pants. It was a hot day andthey looked very warm.

Left to right: Emma, Cat, Me, Paulein, groom, Nina. Photo: Cat's collection

A Kidnapping

We were at one village wedding where the bride was kidnapped from another village. It was all in fun, and she knew it was going to happen. The groom and his friends came to the bride's village, kidnapped her and, in ceremonial style, brought her to the groom's village where the usual wedding festivities continued. This tradition grew out of a need to diversify the gene pool and originally, long ago, it was sometimes done without the bride's or even the family's consent or knowledge.

A Second Wife

Abu Mussa, our handy man, told us of his plans to marry a second wife – a twenty-eight-year-old school teacher who was too old to be anyone's first wife. He needed another wife because he wanted more children, even though he already had eight. was very sorry for me because Allah had blessed me with only one boy. Our daughter was irrelevant to him. We attended a pre-wedding party with lots of drums, belly dancing and ululations (joy calls). Of course, there was complete segregation of men and women. It was a great deal of fun – even if my Arabic was not strong. Unfortunately, not too long after the second wedding, Abu Mussa died of a heart attack.

A Bedouin Living Situation

A Bedouin man we met had two wives. We met the Palestinian wife but we were not allowed to meet the more modest Bedouin wife, who stayed inside the tent. One of the agencies had built this family a small cinder block house. The man seemed to like the tent better, so he put his animals in the house. The family continued to live in the tent. The man kept one room in the house for the television. I don't know what the wives thought of this situation.

The Engagement of Mona's Sister

Mona is one of the lawyers at Al-Haq. She invited me to come to the engagement party for her sister, an engineer, who was engaged to a dentist. I was told it would be would be an intimate, family gathering at the Intercontinental Hotel on the Mount of Olives. This engagement turned out to be a double one for two brothers. Over 300 people were in attendance. Upper crust, high fashion, shimmering lamé fabric and gold jewelry. I was underdressed for the occasion. I was seated with Mona's brother and other sister. I was honored to be there even though I didn't know anyone. Mona's family is Greek Orthodox. Ten black robed priests with their tall black hats performed their chants and recitations. After they finished, hors d'oeuvres were served and gifts of gold were presented to the bride. Not just a ring, but necklaces, bracelets and earrings were put on her. A live band alternately played Arabic music and 1950s American music. Lots of dancing. Palestinians love to dance. Lots of fun.

A Mixed Marriage

A Canadian MCC worker and an Egyptian decided to marry. We received an invitation on papyrus paper in Arabic and English. It was controversial on both sides of the family. Yet, over forty years later, this couple are still together living in Egypt. And I still have the papyrus invitation, now in 2023.

A Wedding in a Refugee Camp

In our second term, when I worked at Al-Haq, it turned out to be a rather romantic place with several engagement parties and weddings. Riziq, Al-Haq field work supervisor, was single and looking for a wife.

He, an energetic young man with a bit of a temper, was from a northern village. Very macho. About twenty-four years old, he spoke English quite well and was a sort of "country boy made good." He was communist and always wore red sneakers. Once he brought me to his communist meeting hall and pointed out the red chairs. He often used the word "bourgeois" to describe anything he found too fancy.

Ever since I started work at Al-Haq, Riziq had been telling me that he would be married in six months. If I asked who the lucky girl was, he said he hadn't chosen her yet. I would chuckle and he seemed not to understand my amusement. He would wink at me and swagger away. For a period of months, he would occasionally bring a girl round to the office. Afterward he would ask, "Well, is she pretty?" During this time Riziq was rather irritable. Everything seemed to get on his nerves. One day, he told me the choice was made and he would bring her to the office on Monday. I would see her and I should not forget to kiss her on both cheeks. His bride was a shy pretty girl from a refugee camp nearby. The marriage contracts, dowry and at least a symbolic bride price had been agreed upon. Since the groom is responsible for the wedding expenses, finding and furnishing a house, decking the bride in gold, buying her several dresses and any other parts of the agreements, could he have a loan from Al-Haq? No, but he could have one-month advance pay. His head held high, his swagger a bit more pronounced and his sense of self-satisfaction obvious, he carried himself through the next couple of weeks with great expectation.

For Riziq's wedding celebration several weeks later, we relied on one of our lawyers to make sure appropriate customs were followed. He arranged transport and bought an incredibly huge arrangement of flowers. Then we all headed to the refugee camp. I was assured that everything was looked after. HA!

The moment we arrived at the refugee camp, our supposedly efficient lawyer stopped to ask directions to the wedding. After stopping several times, we finally arrived. I was the only woman so I went into the women's room which was surprisingly quiet with no dancing. It seemed rather strange to me. We did not hear any noise from the men's area either. Riziq was a very energetic man, waiting with undisguised expectations for the marriage. Why was everything so quiet? Where were the Al-Haq women who came in the other car? And where was the bride? But the host welcomed me and there I sat. After a while, I noticed our incompetent lawyer at the door motioning to me. "This was not the place! This is a relative. The wrong wedding!" He somehow retrieved the monstrous bouquet of flowers. To the confusion of everyone concerned, we all conspicuously left the house with the flowers. Eventually, we did end up at the right place. Joyous. High energy. Riziq and his bride sat on a dais on the roof of a house surrounded by flowers. The women were chanting, playing the drum and making joy calls in a separate area. The men were below, spilling onto the dirt road, performing the dabke traditional dance. Anything but quiet. A beautiful picture and lovely memory. I never did find out why the other wedding was so subdued – maybe a second or third wife?

A Sophisticated Urban Engagement and Marriage

The MCC needlework manager has a very beautiful daughter. Her family is wealthy and well educated. She and her husband selected a young man who is a doctor doing a residency in Toronto to marry their daughter. He has great prospects. He came home to Jerusalem to meet his future wife. The next week, they were engaged and the week after that they were married. The following week the young couple left for Toronto. The daughter had never been in North America. It seems to me like a huge transition for her, but they seem happy.

Marrying for Love or for Children

There was a doctor, head of a large department at a hospital. He married a beautiful woman for love. She could not bear him any children. So, he married a second wife. She bore him many children. When the doctor went to social functions, it was the first wife on his arm. They all lived in one house. The first wife lived on the top floor; the doctor on the middle floor; and the family on the first floor. The house was built on stilts so there was room underneath for animals or storage. People there told us the arrangement worked well.

Note: Marriage in Israel-Palestine takes place within the context of religion. Domestic and family law is controlled by the church, mosque or synagogue. In the 1980s, there was no such thing as a civil ceremony. You were born, married and died within a specific religious community. Inter-religious marriage could only occur outside the country, perhaps in Cyprus. Such a marriage could occasionally have very serious consequences, including beatings, ostracization or even death. Legally, a marriage between a Palestinian and an Israeli Jewish person could result in them not being able to live in either Israel or West Bank. In 2022, Israel's parliament passed a law denying naturalisation to Palestinians from the occupied West Bank or Gaza, who were married to Israeli citizens. This forced many mixed marriage families to either emigrate or live apart.

Top: Mansaf. Traditional Palestinian dish often served at weddings. Flatbread, rice, broth, chicken or lamb, parsley. Delicious.
Middle: Henna hand decoration. Traditional for celebrations like weddings.

Left: Urban Christian Orthodox Palestinian wedding

Right: Wedding celebration with women dancing and ululating.

All photos on the right by Paliroots

New Baby in Jerusalem

Dear mom and dad:

I know you're new at this
And so am I
But life with me will be astonishing
Because you see
I've got the best of you… and more!

Let me show you big brown bulrushes
Hiding dazzling dragonflies, sapphire scarlet snakes
Prowling pirates, peculiar sounds
And magnificent fuchsia flowers just right for
Decorating our ears, nose and mouth… achoo!!!

Hug me tight! Don't let me go and I'll show you my special world
Of painted green and yellow lions with five heads and two tails
And menageries of little, tiny crawling floor specks
And soft fluffy orange cotton kerplunkets
Just waiting to be loved…like me!!!

Come with me on my candy train/boat/plane/rocket
We'll whiz through lands of hef-a-lumps, Oz and Star Wars,
Kingdoms of bubble bath princesses, sunshine skies and oozy
slimy mud
Swirling, whirling, merry-go-rounds of dizzy delicious dreams
Saying, "Come, explore!"…Shall we?

So put your hands in mine and help me
Build a world of golden gauzy castles
Write fairy sagas of slippery silk and sparkling silver
Swim in meandering elixir brooks
of winged rhinestone fantastical creatures
And make a new reality… together!

Photo: Kuttab family collection

Note: Babies are a significant celebration. While we were in Jerusalem two very dear Christian, pacifist friends were married and then had a baby. Beth, a Mennonite from Pennsylvania chose, as a thirty-five- year-old woman with a rewarding career in New York, to marry into another culture and move to Palestine. Jonathan, who attended Messiah Mennonite College and University of Virginia Law School, is a Palestinian lawyer, who left a potentially brilliant law career in New York to become the first Palestinian from the Occupied Territories to be admitted to the Israeli bar. He conducted many complex and ground-breaking legal cases and was a co-founder of Al-Haq.

I remember the time he sat down in a dress suit on the black earth in front of an Israeli bulldozer about to mow down a Palestinian ready-to-harvest field of ancient olive trees. The field was not mowed - at least not that day.

When their first child, a daughter, was born in 1986, into this incredible place of conflict and strife, this seemingly hopeless situation, this territory occupied by the Romans in the time of Christ, followed by Turks, Crusaders, Arabs, British and now Israelis, I wrote this poem for them based on something that tickled my imagination. I have long since lost the original inspiration, but the poem still stands.

I shared it with each of my children when their first children were born.

Meal with friends. Left to Rights: Cat, Omar, Penny, Me, John, Emma, Laura

One Day in our First Year

Excerpts from a Letter in early 1983

The day began quietly. As usual, we rose at 6:00. Jennifer practiced her violin. We ate breakfast, read a Bible story, had some quiet time and by 7:30 the kids were off to school. We've started using the last ten minutes before the children leave as story time. We hope they can leave for school with a sense of inner calm that will stay with them for at least part of their day.

After the kids left for school, I discovered that the office downstairs had been broken into during the night. Not much was taken: some keys, Harold's calculator, some office money and a small black-and-white TV. I guess the TV wasn't worth stealing because we found it outside on the driveway. I suspect the robbers were disappointed, since there wasn't much to take. We were robbed in Winnipeg too so we took the theft as part of life anywhere.

My next task was a quick shopping trip. Life has become somewhat normalized so it wasn't a hard task. We occasionally miss the easy shopping of a mall, but the trade-off is the flair and color of the markets. Donkeys, herds of sheep and goats, volatile tempers as well as unexpected experiences are all part of "ordinary" shopping excursions.

For me, an Arabic lesson in our home was next on the agenda. I am not catching on to Arabic very quickly. I can understand the structure and grammar of it. But I can't remember the words – the roots from which every word in this language begin. In most cases, these roots comprise three letters with added prefixes and suffixes but no vowels. I can remember the prefixes and suffixes but not the three letters that constitute the root. This is a problem.

We had planned a trip with Ibrahim *(MCC staff)* into Nablus and environs today, but it was cancelled. Nablus is under curfew by the military – that means no one is allowed in or out of the city and sometimes not even out of their homes. At lunchtime, I joined the staff for very sweet tea in our grape arbor. Today we had figs from the fig tree at the entrance to our yard. We always have lots of laughs. These are wonderful people.

After lunch, I went to pick up the proof for a needlework brochure. The print shop is a puzzling place. Part of the complex is in ruins and workmen were busy with some restorations. It is an Israeli establishment and no one spoke English. I couldn't seem to figure out where to go. Finally, I decided to try out my inadequate Arabic – perhaps the workers were Palestinian? Sure enough, they understood me and led me to the place I needed to be. But they wondered: how was it that I didn't speak Hebrew? And how was it that I knew a little Arabic with a reasonable accent? Clearly, I was not Palestinian. I left them wondering.

I also met with Danny Amit, an Israeli Princeton Einstein scholar. He is unhappy with his government's treatment of Palestinians and is interested in publishing a Hebrew translation of Gene Sharp's manuscript on non-violent resistance. MCC is already working at translating it into Arabic. If the Hebrew version can be published first, the Arabic version is less likely to be banned.

Then kids came home from school with all their exuberance, bringing some friends along. They always come in through the offices downstairs so they can visit a little with the MCC staff. Adrian, with his toothless smile, and Jennifer both love cookies and milk for their after-school snack.

Yesterday I interviewed several women who might be suitable to help with the resource center we are establishing, as well as other administrative tasks. One of them was very beautiful. The Palestinian staff all thought we should hire her. Somehow her looks were paramount to them. But she had no experience and could not type. We did not hire her. Today we hired a more experienced woman who has the skills to do the job.

In the evening, we went to a U.N. reception. I met a Lebanese woman who has a five-year-old son. He will be starting at the Anglican School and will be in Adrian's class. His mother plans to come over next week so that the two little boys can meet.

When we got home, some friends dropped in. Once they left, I finally rested my head on the pillow beside Harold, whose day had been equally full. I wonder what tomorrow will hold.

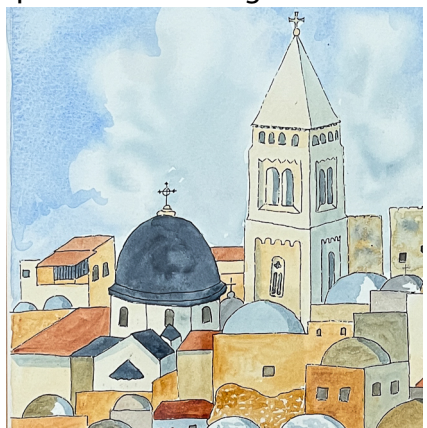
Arabic class around our dining room table. *Left end*: Ustaz (teacher) Omar Othman,
Back: friends Laura, John, Kitty. Right end: Harold. *Front*: neighbours Nina, Cat (glasses)

Communing with a Spider

Excerpt from a Letter

Today I assisted with communion in the small chapel of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the Old City, as I do from time to time. The English congregation there is not large and is less formal than the Arab congregation, who meet in the main sanctuary. The regular pastor was on holiday, so there was a substitute. The first thing the temporary minister told me was that he did not want to receive communion from a lay person and that he would serve himself at the end. The service began and then carried on, almost as usual, except that he had forgotten to ask someone to do the offering. When it was time for the offering to be taken, there was an awkward silence. As the silence continued, Harold realized what was happening and stepped in to do the job. At one point, he had to carry the chalice and the bread basket along with the offering basket – I can't remember why. In any case, he managed by stuffing the bread basket on top of the money basket. The minister was not amused.

Later, as we said the Lord's Prayer, I noticed that a very large, ugly spider was beginning to crawl up the chalice. The minister was oblivious. I was a little nervous, since I would be the first to be communed by the minister and drink from the chalice. The spider continued to climb. He reached the rim and then sat atop the thin edge of the chalice. The pastor droned on as we stood side-by-side behind the communion table. The bread was lifted, and broken. The wine chalice was lifted along with the spider. The chalice and the spider were blessed. I was very watchful. The pastor was not. He served me the bread while the congregation sang. Then with both hands, he clutched the chalice mightily, crushing the full-bodied fat spider and, without realizing what he had done, communed me with the wine. As he proceeded to serve others the bread, I gingerly took hold of the chalice, used a cloth to obliterate some of the spider remains, and served the wine, ignoring all thoughts of the precious life which had just been snuffed out. As we finished, he began to commune himself and whispered to me that he would now finish the wine. Well, I dislike serving communion from a half empty chalice and had filled it - several times. There were not too many people in attendance so there was quite a bit of wine left. Not a problem for this minister. He gustily grasped the chalice, tipped it and drained it, spider remains and all. There seemed to be a rather awkward pause, and then he began to complete the service. His voice cracked several times, perhaps a spider leg was caught in his throat or, on the other hand, perhaps his communing lasted a little too long. We were glad when the regular pastor returned.



Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the Old City. ***Left:*** Tower.
Middle: Courtyard of the English congregation where concerts are often held. Watercolors by Margaret Chumbley and gifted to us when we returned to Canada in 1987.
Right: Front of the English Chapel. Photo: Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. Used with permission.

Connections with Israelis: Snippets from Letters

Friday is Jewish Shabbat. Mea Shearim is an ultra-Orthodox Jewish Haredi area close to our home. It is one of the oldest Jewish neighborhoods outside the walls of the Old City. It seems to be a poor neighborhood, and I have heard that the education system there is very weak – except for study of the Talmud and Torah. The Haredim do not support Zionism or the State of Israel. To them the state is secular and they believe Israel should be religious. They usually do not serve in the Israeli army, pay taxes nor take part in elections. The roads are often closed on the Sabbath and vehicles entering the area might be stoned, sometimes causing significant damage. People wearing immodest clothing could be harassed at any time, and advertisements depicting lifestyles deemed unacceptable might be defaced.

Photo:W. Robrecht. cc 3.0.
Left : Lisa Mathon cc 3.0

I dress modestly and this makes it safe for me to walk in the Mea Shearim area. The men wear long black coats and grow their hair into long ringlets on the right and left sides of their heads. They wear fur hats or a kind of top hat – even on hot days. The women wear wigs and often additional head coverings. There are clothes-lines filled with garments for the many children, and with adult bedsheets with a single hole, sometimes embroidered, in the center. This hole is to facilitate procreation while maintaining modesty. Once a Haredi man propositioned me as I walked in the neighborhood. He invited me to enter his shabby dwelling through a rather small door. I did not take him up on it. It was a surprising and unusual interchange.

Even after being in Jerusalem for a few years, I still manage to get myself into small cultural embarrassments. One day we received a rather large gift of almonds from a Palestinian friend. She explained that almonds were a traditional Palestinian gift. The next evening, we were invited to the home of an Israeli psychologist. Since we had been given so many almonds, we brought some along for him, telling him that they were a traditional Palestinian gift. The psychologist smiled rather strangely and later told us that, according to Israeli culture, almonds were a "traditional" cure for impotence. An unusual gift for a bachelor. I am not sure why they were given to us in the first place. Perhaps our friend thought we needed more sons. In any case, the almonds were very good and we served them in great quantity to a young Palestinian couple who visited us the following night.

Another time, we were invited to a Shabbat meal in a conservative Jewish household by the parents of Danny Shy, a boy with whom Jennifer played violin duets. It was a meat meal – which meant no dairy, as dairy and meat are kept separate for conservative Jews, to the point where some people have two kitchens – one for meat and one for dairy. Before the meal, prayers and chants - the Kaddish - were said in Aramaic, and our hosts kindly provided English translations. The hands were then ritually washed in silence, after which two loaves of bread were broken, salted and eaten. Grape juice was shared, and then the actual meal consisting of chicken and various other dishes, began. After

the meal, another set of prayers were said, and there were more chants. The whole meal was a celebratory affair. After supper, some neighbors stopped by to check out the "Christians who work with Palestinians." They were well educated and spoke English. We enjoyed the conversation. We find that many Jews do not know any Palestinians, don't know about their lives and have not been in the West Bank or even Palestinian East Jerusalem.

The Rubin Music Academy connection prompted another evening spent with an Israeli family. The man was a reporter from New York working for the Jerusalem Post. His wife was Jewish from Morocco. They had invited a very diverse group of people. One of the guests was part of the political party, Gush Emunim. He believed that all Arabs should be forced to leave Israel and even West Bank. This was the first time I had been in the same room with someone who stated this so openly. He offered no apologies and figured that all Israel's problems would be solved if the Arabs left. He seemed to be totally uninterested in establishing "good relations" with Arab neighbors, either interpersonally or on a national level. His wife, however, disagreed vehemently. She used to shop at the MCC Arab Needlework Shop and was comfortable coming to East Jerusalem. But when the name of the shop changed to Palestinian Needlework shop in 1976, she stopped shopping there. Apparently, the name change caused quite a stir. The word "Arab" is not as specific as the word "Palestinian." "Palestinian" seemed to have more political overtones.

Another guest was a kind of guru who taught Kabbala and mysticism at the Hebrew University. He stated openly that Israel was heading in the wrong direction in terms of its attitudes and behavior to Palestinians. He claimed that Israel would not survive unless it could work with the Palestinians. He spoke from both a military and moral perspective.

We began to realize that many Israelis had very little knowledge of what was really going on in the West Bank. For me, politics is not just an ideology, but results in very real events which affect real people - Palestinians, with whom we have eaten meals and visited.

We sometimes met with Rabbi Yehezkel Landau, a Rabbi with dual Israeli and U.S. citizenship. He co-founded an organization called Open House where he worked at peace issues with Palestinians and Israelis. He was also executive director of Oz Ve Shalom, a Zionist peace organization. We had him over for meals where we served only prepackaged food with no meat, on new plastic plates with plastic cutlery. This is because we do not have a kosher kitchen; our dairy and meat are not kept completely separate. At first, our conversations were stimulating and the exchange was hopeful. Gradually as we plumbed deeper, we discovered that even he, a peacenik, believed that Jews had more right to the land than did the Palestinans, that Jews were more special than other people and that Israel had to be fundamentally Jewish. We found this viewpoint extremely disturbing.

We valued our interchanges with Israelis even though our work was with West Bank Palestinians. While our Sunday School heritage led us more naturally into Jewish communities, our hearts were with the Palestinians. This was partly because there was such a power imbalance between the two communities. It felt to us like the Israelis were very powerful while the Palestinians had to be bravely steadfast.

Challenging Arabic Lessons

Excerpts from Letters

1982

I am now taking an actual Arabic class. Enrolling was difficult since the application forms were in Arabic. It is a six-week intensive course, three hours a day, three days a week. We are expected to spend the same amount of time at home on our preparation for the next day. As a result of these classes, I can now read a vowelled sentence slowly like a young child would. Vowelled sentence? Mature writers don't use vowels because "everybody knows the words." They are based on three letter roots. The Arabic alphabet consists of 28 letters, only 3 of which are vowels:

ا is like A; و is like U or W; ي is like I or Y. Sometimes vowels are included as small diacritical marks above the consonants. I have begun to understand some simple grammar rules – and there are many rules. For example, even the spelling of proper names changes depending on the case they are in.

The class is not a homogeneous group. There is Canadian-born Palestinian, Jamael – here to find his roots; a Dutch Christian book salesman/missionary who works in Nazareth; an English woman who works for a local organization, but is perhaps a spy for a British organization; a left-over American hippie type with long pony tail down his back; an evangelical Mennonite who works in an Anglican orphanage in Ramallah; and a friend, Lynn, an ordained Presbyterian minister who works with pilgrims, having left a 1000-member congregation in the U.S. Adding to the class is a legally blind Marxist from Switzerland who will return to studies in the U.S. in fall. This fellow, in his opening conversation with me, thoroughly castigated the church and all other colonialists. He then informed me that the Mennonites weren't too bad but they should get out too: "The hypocrisy of the church must be exposed." A few days later, I offered him a ride home from class. He then found out that I did, in fact, have some connections with the church, and specifically with the Mennonites. We have since had several strong discussions. Who else was in the class? A Quaker teacher and a few young Christians missionaries. There was also a newly converted Muslim from France who one day appeared in class dressed in fancy robes like a Sheik. He had just been circumcised. The clothing was an acknowledgement of this act and proof of his serious intentions to be a faithful Muslim.

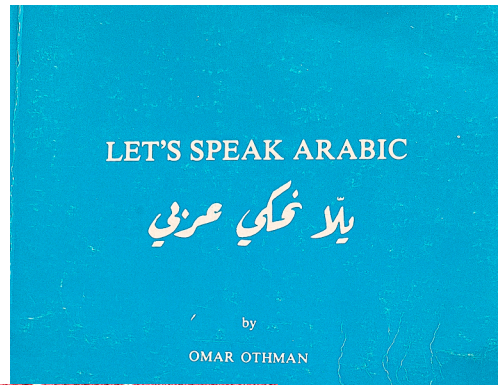
1983 - 1986

We now have Arabic classes at our dining room table once a week with a group of friends who work with other NGOs - non-governmental organizations. These classes are taught by Omar Othman. There is much laughter in the classes. Harold is becoming quite proficient, especially in speaking about agriculture. As for me, I can go to the market and even bargain about prices a little. Jennifer and Adrian are having a few lessons too and can say a few things.

Language is so important. Having limited Arabic skills sometimes led to misunderstandings. Once when someone was telling me a very sad story, I responded with "that's so sad." Or so I thought. What I really said was "khiar" which means "cucumbers." People looked a little confused at this. But they always made allowances for foreigners.

I love the Arabic greetings and idioms. Some examples in italics are below:

- *May God give you healt*h. A common greeting
- *On my head and on my eyes*. If someone asks a favor, it will be done absolutely.
- *He sold him for an onion peel*. Someone has broken a relationship or betrayed someone.
- *It put him in a whirlpool.* He was shocked and confused.
- *He lightened his blood.* Someone is clowning around, entertaining or acting like an idiot, perhaps annoying.
- *Tip the jug over on its head.* The girl will turn out like her mother.
- *The monkey in his mother's eyes is a gazelle.* Mothers tend to see their children in the best light.
- *They are only two monkeys and a guard.* They are very few people.
- *Oh mountain, don't let the wind shake you. You are strong.* Don't let a small problem bother you.
- *Whoever doesn't know an eagle, might try to grill it.* You don't know who you're dealing with. An eagle would never let you grill it.
- *Excess is the brother of shortage.* Too much of something is just as bad as too little of it.
- *A pot has found its lid.* When two people get along really well, they've found their other half.
- *If you take the monkey for his money, the money will go away and the monkey will remain.* People who marry for money will end up with the guy or girl and no money.
- *May God shine his light on you.* If you go into a room and turn on the light, you must say this.
- *May God bless your hands.* If you pass a someone doing physical work, even if you don't know them, you say this.
- *May God also give you this blessing.* If someone notices that you have haircut, you must say this.
- *The believer is not bitten from the same hole twice.* Learn from your experiences.
- *Repetition can teach even a donkey.* Practice makes perfect.
- *After his hair turned white, he went to school.* You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
- *The cub is from the lion.* Like mother, like daughter.
- *Stretch your legs only as far as your blanket extends.* Live within your means.
- *One who cooks poison, tastes it.* What goes around comes around.
- *The shroud has no pockets.* You can't take it with you when you die.
- *Tomorrow in the apricot season.* The apricot season is very short – usually less than two weeks. In other words, it will never happen.



Language is a window into culture. We are learning much from the language, but we are not proficient enough to tell jokes in Arabic. Language comes easily to some and not as easily to others. It is not easy for me. But the Palestinian community isgracious and easily forgives my many mistakes when I dare to speak.

Inscription on an Egyptian necklace. "Allah is the living outstanding God" or "God is Great"

Picnics and Walks in the Hills

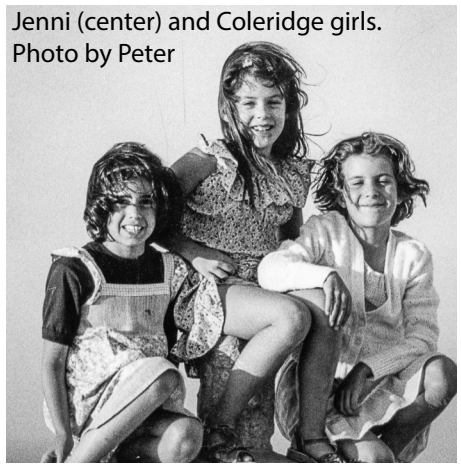
Adrian and Rita on a return visit

Kathy, Selwa, Me

Minda, Adrian, Jenni, Ann

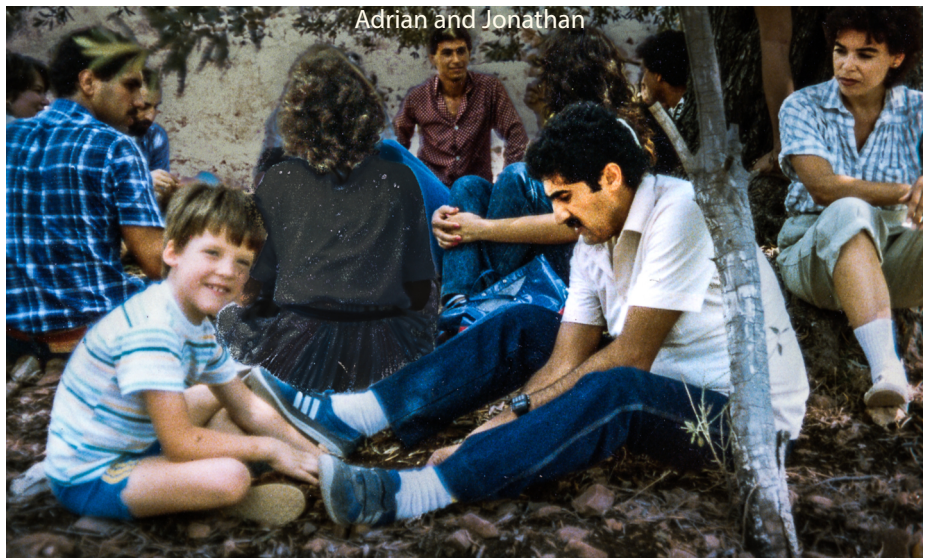
Margaret Chumbley

Peter Coleridge


Jenni (center) and Coleridge girls.
Photo by Peter

On the Mount of Temptations

Penny at Ein Gedi


Adrian and Jonathan

Beth Kuttab at a picnic

At home in MCC House

The treehouse in our yard built by Harold and John. Photo by Cat

Dona and Jenni on our balcony

Parties

MCC Staff

Games with Emma, Adrian, Cat, Jenni and Nina

Charles and Mona

An Interrupted Education

Excerpts from Letters

1982

Initially, we had thought we would enroll Jennifer and Adrian in Arab schools in Jerusalem since we wanted them to learn Arabic. The Arab schools in Jerusalem are significantly based on rote learning and have very large class sizes. They have little funding and are not autonomous. They use Jordanian curricula. However, Israeli officials have final control and have deleted large sections of their curricula. After seeing these schools, we changed our minds and opted for an international school along with an Arabic language tutor.

In September, the West Bank schools did not open for fear of riots and demonstrations. Even little children - under six years of age - were burning tires in the streets and throwing stones at soldiers to demonstrate their frustration. A whole generation is being raised under the occupation of Israelis. These young Palestinians identify Israelis as people who arrest, beat and harass their fathers, brothers and sometimes sisters. They constantly see Israeli soldiers with guns and boots. They also experience frequent disruptions to daily life, including the frequent school closures.

Despite these difficulties, however, Palestinians in the cities generally have a high level of education. However, in the small towns, villages and refugee camps, education is often limited. In the village of Deir Samit, for example, only four girls had attended high school. One of these girls just found out that she had not passed the English course. Rural teachers are often not well qualified. Indeed, English teachers often hardly know the English language well themselves, making it very difficult for students to pass the exams.

1983

Often the Israeli army closes schools and universities. I am struck by the deep steadfastness the students possess despite the many blocks to education. Well over half of the male students have been in prison at least once. They may have been arrested for stone throwing, as part of random community harassment or because of suspicions around a family member.

Students continue classes outside in the '80s despite Israeli military closures. Photo: Bir Zeit University website.

1984

The Israeli army closed the universities again but classes continue to be held anyway. They meet in parks, community centers, homes, churches or wherever possible. Palestinians value education. Both professors and students are determined to keep opportunities for education open. We heard about the "underground classes" from several friends as well as from foreign and Palestinian professors, all of whom are dedicated to educating Palestinian students. We know and admire several professors who are operating in this way.

1986

The Jordanian grade twelve exams are very difficult. Students must memorize a significant amount of information. Students cram intensely for most of the year in order to pass these exams. Their families encourage them, excuse them from responsibilities and make it as easy as possible for them to succeed. This is because everything depends on the marks they achieve. The exams are set for a specific date by Jordan. No exceptions are made for health reasons or any other circumstances. No rewrites are permitted. If students don't write the exam on the date specified, their next opportunity is one year later.

The Israeli military sometimes undermines these Grade 12 students by arresting them a day or two before these exams - called tawjihi - and holds them with no charges until several days after the exams. These arrests are usually made in the middle of the night. The next morning, the parents, who don't know where their children have been taken, sometimes arrive at Al-Haq's legal advice clinic, a legal aid center or a lawyer's office, to try to find out where their son or daughter is, and to receive counsel as to what to do. Usually, the students are released several days later, but by then it is too late to write the exams, and they must repeat the year.

1987

All West Bank universities have been closed again by the military. The West Bank is alive with both soldiers and Israeli settlers. It is not unusual for these civilian settlers to pull up beside a Palestinian student, jump out of the car and physically assault the student. Once we watched this take place from the 6th story balcony at the Al-Haq office. We started yelling but to no avail. The settlers didn't stop. So some of us ran down the many stairs to be a physical presence, document the event and take pictures if we could. Eventually, the army came and arrested the student. The settlers simply drove away. We took the license number and followed up as best we could.

NOTE: I was shocked to realize the systematic way in which education for Palestinians was undermined. At the same time, I was impressed with many Palestinians who had managed to be educated in Palestine or abroad. The two award-winning, distinguished lawyers who founded Al-Haq had law degrees from the U.K. and the U.S. The MCC Agriculture Manager had a Masters from Cornell University in the U.S. and the MCC Needlework Manager graduated from the American University of Beirut.

Classes outside at Bir Zeit University. Photo by Eyad Jadallah.

Dr. Hanna Nasser, President of Bir Zeit University from 1972- 2004. In 1974, he was exiled by Israeli authorities. He remained President in exile until 1993 when he was allowed to return to West Bank. From 2000 - 2004, he was also President of the International Association of Universities. He holds a PhD in nuclear physics from Purdue University. We were honored to have considered him a friend. Photo: Bir Zeit University website.

Kidnapped

The phone rang in the middle of the day. It was Gail, Nina's boss. Nina, the Quaker Representative in charge of the Information and Legal Aid Office in East Jerusalem. We were great neighbours and friends often spending time visiting picnicking or playing games. Nina enjoyed our children and they enjoyed her. She was a close colleague with whom we could discuss the political situation. Nina was an American who had grown up in Lebanon.

Gail was calling from the U.S. and was trying to locate Nina who, for some reason, was not at the office and could not be reached by phone. Her staff had no idea where she was. Although it was early afternoon for me in Jerusalem, it was still night in the States. Gail sounded tense and needed to reach Nina urgently. She asked if I could go across the street to see if Nina was at home.

On July 19,1982, David Dodge, Nina's father, was abducted from AUB, the American University of Beirut campus by pro-Iranian Shiite Muslim extremists. After being held in Lebanon for several months, he was flown to a prison in Tehran. Gail told me that she was trying to contact Nina to tell her about some new developments. Diplomatic negotiations for David's release were underway. Syria, the U.S. and Iran were all involved. Gail told me not to tell anyone about this, not even Nina, because the negotiations could be compromised if anyone else would find out. Could I ask Nina to call her?

Of course, I immediately went across the street and sure enough, Nina was at home, looking very emotional. We didn't immediately talk about the subject. We danced around it. I asked her why she was at home. She said that something serious had come up and she couldn't be at the office right then. Eventually it came out in our conversation that she had been informed by the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem. Two men from the Consulate had come to her office. Because of possible suveilance(1) inside the office, they asked her to come outside onto the street to speak with them. She wasn't supposed to say anything to anyone until she heard further from the Consulate. We cried, hugged and hoped.

Mr. Dodge was released on July 19, 1983, and flown to the U.S. on an American military aircraft. He was reportedly in good health and claimed he had been treated well. The motive for the kidnapping is not known. He remained active with the American University of Beirut and in philanthropic work for the remainder of his life and had deep feelings for the Middle East. Dodge died in Princeton on January 20, 2009 of cancer.

Our friend, Nina

Mr. Dodge was one of the first of more than 90 Western foreigners abducted during Lebanon's 15-year civil war in the 80s. Some hostages were killed and others released after many years, including Terry A.Anderson, the well-known journalist at Associated Press. Malcolm H. Kerr, who succeeded Dodge as president of AUB, was shot and killed outside his office in January, 1984.

Another day for us in Jerusalem. Poignant. Emotional. Tearful. Life-changing. Important. Historic. Heart-wrenching.

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(1) We assumed that a number of NGO offices and homes, including ours, were bugged

Driving and Licence Plates: Snipetts from Letters

1982: ***MCC vehicles and Driving in the West Bank***

MCC has a distinct presence throughout the West Bank. Staff often drive to villages to help with economic development or agriculture. Licence plates are color-coded, indicating where the owner of the car lives: blue for West Bank, yellow for Jerusalem, silver for Gaza. This allows the military to identify cars at the many check points. When we drive through the West Bank with our yellow-plated Jerusalem vehicles, we put an MCC sign in Arabic in the front and back windows along with a black and white checkered Palestinian keffiyeh. If we come to an Israeli checkpoint, we remove the sign and then put it back after the check point.

On West Bank drives with Ibrahim, MCC Agriculture Program Manager, he will say, "MCC planted these olive trees, installed this village water line, developed this irrigation system, helped with land reclamation here, or created this road." He will also say, "The Israelis are putting in a settlement here and taking this farmer's land. They have cut the water supply to this farm by lowering the water table and taking the water for themselves. They won't let these people farm their land, have razed this house, refused a permit for a well on this farm and have harassed this family." There is a deep bitterness rooted in their experiences. TTheir only contact with Israelis is oldiers or settlers.

Once on a drive to Ramallah from our home, we passed the Kalandia(1) refugee camp. Tear gas was clouding the entire area, and soldiers with weapons, clubs, big boots and communications devices were racing around everywhere, looking so powerful and so important. On the way home, we stopped at the same checkpoint as required. Our yellow-plated car was let through easily. Blue-plated cars could be held up for hours. On that day, all blue-plated cars were turned back and were not allowed into East Jerusalem even if they were headed to a hospital.

Another time, at the Kalandia checkpoint, I wanted to take a photo. So I stopped and chatted with the laughing soldiers. They had set up a huge green tent with about fifty soldiers who seemed to be having a great time despite the sorrow and pain just outside their tent. Taking pictures of military personnel is strictly forbidden. However, three young soldiers willingly posed. They seemed so insensitively carefree. And for me, they posed no threat, because I have a yellow licence plate and a Canadian passport. I am fortunate. For the average Palestinian shopkeeper, student, farmer, patient, mother or any other Palestinian, this is not the case.

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(1) In the 1980s, the Kalandia checkpoint was small. As a foreigner I drove through easily. Palestinians could frequently get through too, especially if they had Jerusalem ID even though it would take longer. That was not the case in 2012. It took hours to get through and very often Palestinians were turned back. Israeli military frequently use tear gas at the Kalandia refugee camp beside the checkpoint. Kalandia camp was established in 1949 to support 1948 Palestinian refugees from Haifa, Lydda, Ramleh and areas west of Hebron. As of 2022, there are over 16,000 registered persons in less than half a square kilometer in the camp. It is located on the main road to Ramallah right next to the daunting security wall. It is the main checkpoint between East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

MCC agricultural project

1983: ***Food and Cars on Yom Kippur and Passover***

On Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, the ultra-orthodox Haredi "Stone throwing on the Sabbath Program" comes into effect with more vigor than on an ordinary Sabbath. Haredi Jews throw large and small stones at any vehicles that drive in their areas since driving is considered "work" and should not be done on any Sabbath. Especially not on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, a day of fasting, mourning and repentance.

On Pesach, the Jewish Passover, observant Jews remove all grains such as wheat, oats, rye, barley and spelt from their homes and shops. All belongings are given a deep clean. Ironically, vehicles are sometimes taken to Palestinian garages to be thoroughly cleaned, sometimes even taken apart. This ensures that no grainy crumbs are inadvertently left in cars or homes. Arab garages are very busy in the weeks before Pesach. One Pesach, we ordered pizza for ourselves and another family. It was delivered to us in East Jerusalem even though Jewish delivery vehicles from Israeli West Jerusalem generally do not like to drive into Palestinian East Jerusalem. The pizza tasted awful since it was made from matzo rather than flour. Even the pizza shops do not use flour at Pesach. A surprising disappointment!

1984: ***Driving to Gaza***

Even though it was Easter Monday, a friend, Ann, had to make a quick trip to Gaza. I went with her. The trip was a bit like a bizarre movie. Tension in Gaza was very high. We drove with a keffiyeh(1) across the dashboard signaling that we were not Israeli even though we had the yellow Jerusalem plates. The shopkeepers in Gaza were on strike because of Israeli mistreatment. The Israeli soldiers were driving down the main street with their loudspeakers, announcing that if owners did not open their shops, their doors would be ripped off. Israelis do not like any show of Palestinian solidarity. The shops mostly belonged to Muslims so there were no Easter celebrations. One shop belonged to a Christian who had closed for Easter. Another shop belonged to a man who had just died. The doors were ripped off any shop that remained closed, regardless of the reason. When we arrived in Gaza, we drove to Ann's workplace and exchanged our yellow-plated Jerusalem car for a Gaza silver-plated vehicle and went about her business there.

There is a saying in Israel: instead of "Go to hell," they say "Go to Gaza." The situation in Gaza is even more difficult than it is in West Bank. On this drive to Gaza, we again saw the strong Palestinian spirit in spite of the hellish situation. Their self-respect is amazing. The women are strong too, but Gaza is much more conservative than the West Bank, so they tend to be more covered than do their West Bank counterparts. While Gaza women don't usually wear the face covering *(in the '80's)*, many of them do wear a long coat and headscarf. There is also a perceptible attitude of submission in many of them.

On Monday evening we changed cars again, and travelled back to Jerusalem in our yellow-plated car. The border crossing was surprisingly smooth. Looking back, this Gaza trip contributed to an Easter replete with many emotions: sadness, jubilation, inspiration, puzzlement, anger, joy, awe, curiosity, empathy and amazement.

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(1) A keffiyeh is the checkered scarf worn by Palestinian men. Traditionally worn by Palestinian farmers during the Ottoman period, it became a symbol of Palestinian nationalism in the 1930s. Arafat was rarely seen without it. We often had one on the dashboard of our vehicle.

1987: ***A West Bank Palestinian driver in Jerusalem***

Palestinian West Bank drivers have cars with blue plates. If they come to work in Jerusalem and drive a yellow-plated Jerusalem car, they need a permit. The driver for a mainline church in Jerusalem lives in the West Bank and is licenced to drive blue-plated cars. He has been in the employ of the Jerusalem church for fifteen years, and has always had a special permit to drive yellow-plated cars in Jerusalem. The driver has been trying, with a lawyer, to renew his permit to drive a yellow-plated Jerusalem car for almost a year. He has a valid driver's licence and is a good driver. He has a family, but now has no means of support since his employer only has yellow-plated cars. Without a permit to drive a yellow-plated car, he cannot keep his job. I wonder if his inability to obtain a permit is related to the fact that this year his brother was released from prison? Often Palestinians are punished if they have family members who have been arrested or are regarded with suspicion. Called "collective punishment", this practice is illegal under international law.

The technicalities of living here are frustrating, and the rules, often designed solely for harassment, are often baffling, surprising and irritating for us. However, for Palestinians, it is much worse and affects their lives in every way.

Note: A little piece of trivia - all Jerusalem taxis have 666 licence plates.

Often vehicles have a hard time at checkpoints so most Palestinians take a taxi to the checkpoint and walk across. These photos were taken in 2002 when I returned to do a project.

Left top: Israeli Kalandia checkpoint between Palestinian West Bank and Palestinian East Jerusalem.

Bottom right: Checkpoint from Gaza into Israel. Many cross daily to work in Israel.

Left bottom: As I passed through the checkpoint into Palestinian East Jerusalem, I noticed this ambulance. It was stopped by Israeli military and prevented from reaching the Palestinian hospital in East Jerusalem.

Keys: A Reflection

Keys can lock us in or out. They lead us into new life or they hold us back, blocking us. Let me tell you a story about a key that opens a building important to millions of Christians. It is a story about growing and . . . not growing.

In the fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine became a Christian. He then sent his mother, Helena, to find the tomb of Christ. A church was built at the place identified by Helena and the local bishops. Today, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre can be found in the center of the Christian Quarter of the walled Old City of Jerusalem.

Millions of people worldwide journey to this site including tourists, guides, clergy, locals, Palestinian Christians and pilgrims. Spiritual growth, ritual, curiosity, prayer, power, grief, ecstasy, and just the practicalities of living all animate the environment in this somewhat unattractive building. Visitors come to think, remember, find peace, grow deeper in their understandings of this place, or to kiss the stone slab where Jesus was supposedly washed before burial. They enter the crypt, examine icons, light candles, chant, or choose to "just be." All walk past the Muslim guardians, who sit on a bench just inside the sole public entrance to Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre. To get into the church an ancient, cast-iron, twenty-centimeter key is needed. It is about 500 years old, and replaces an older key which was used for centuries before that. It is the only key that can unlock the imposing wooden doors. The site itself is considered sacred for both Muslims and Christians. So sacred for Christians, in fact, that the Crusades were initiated to take it back from the Muslim "infidels" who were in control in the 11th century.

Two families are involved in opening the door to the church. The Muslim Nusseibeh family opens and closes the church's door every day, a duty they trace back to 637 C.E. when Caliph Omar first brought Islam to Jerusalem. When invited to pray in the church, Omar refused because he did not want his fellow Muslims to convert the church into a mosque. Instead, he prayed a few yards away. The Muslim Joudeh Al Husseinis, the other family, still hold the actual keys - a duty given to them by Saladin, the sultan who captured Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187. Saladin also wanted to make sure that the church was not harmed by his fellow Muslims.

Both Omar and Saladin were fierce and sometimes ruthless. So why did they act to protect a Christian church? Other Muslim leaders had destroyed or changed Christian holy sites into mosques. But not these two. They chose to respect the Christian religion. I wonder why...

Left: Lock on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. ***Middle:*** Entrance of Caliph Omar to Jerusalem. Public Domain.

Right: Painting of Saladin by Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard, cc4.0

Then and today, Muslims control the door and the keys to arguably the most famous church in the world. They were given these tasks partly because Jerusalem was under the control of the Muslims at the time. But, more importantly, because the Christian sects could not get along and kept irritating the Muslim rulers with their squabbles.

The doorway to the sprawling church is where Joudeh Al Husseini and Nusseibeh spend their days, like their Muslim forefathers before them. Nuseibeh arrives at the church around 4:00 am, and takes the key from Joudeh Al Husseini. Nusseibeh climbs a small wooden ladder to unlock the top lock. Then he steps off the ladder to unlock the lower lock. Clergymen from the three main denominations take turns on a rotating basis to pull open the door from inside, while the others observe. The entire process is repeated in reverse each evening, when the church is locked.

The complex is now used by six different ancient churches: Roman Catholic Franciscans, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and to a lesser degree Coptic, Syriac and Ethiopian Churches. Monks from each sect live in the church. Simultaneous services result in a cacophony of sound. Each group jealously guards its own part of the church, often leading to dramatic, angry interchanges. In the 19th century, an Ottoman Muslim decree was issued in order to keep the peace by limiting each church to the spaces and practices they used in1853 when the decree was issued. So actions like changing the unlocking ceremony, moving a piece of furniture or altering a ritual in a shared space would be a violation. Renovations have been a bureaucratic nightmare. Recently, however, the three main groups have been able to work together on renovations – perhaps this a sign of progress, a change from the past.

However, strife continues. The Ethiopian Orthodox live in a mud hut village on the roof of the church. The Egyptian Copts object. For three centuries the two groups have been fighting over the small Chapel of St. Michael on the roof. When the Copts obtained the keys for the Chapel, they locked the door and refused to allow anyone else in. The struggle is ongoing. In the summer of 2002, a Coptic monk moved his chair to a shadier area of the roof – an Ethiopian area – leading to a fight so fierce that eleven monks had to be hospitalized.

In 2008, priests, worshippers and Israeli police were all involved after Armenian priests tried to expel a Greek priest whom they believed was disturbing their procession. Participants beat each other with the palm fronds they were carrying to commemorate Palm Sunday. An Armenian monk and a Greek monk with a bloody gash on his forehead were both taken away in handcuffs after scuffling with Israeli police.

Today, for both historical and practical reasons, it is still two Muslim families who consider it an honor to control access to one of Christendom's holiest shrines. A strange irony that Christ's message of peace doesn't seem to be understood by the six Christian groups in this shared Christian space.

When we lived in East Jerusalem, this constant internal wrangling, sometimes with tragic outcomes, made me wonder more broadly about religion, life and relationships. The historical and current reality of Christian sects unable to work peaceably together became an opportunity for deeper personal growth: an opportunity to think broadly about

Christianity, rigid rituals, inflexible traditions, and faith in general. Indeed, our five years with MCC hugely influenced my own belief system: it changed the way I expressed my faith and it encouraged me to understand the spiritual experiences of others. I find the story of this 500-year-old key unsettling, and yet strangely, in some ways, sublime.

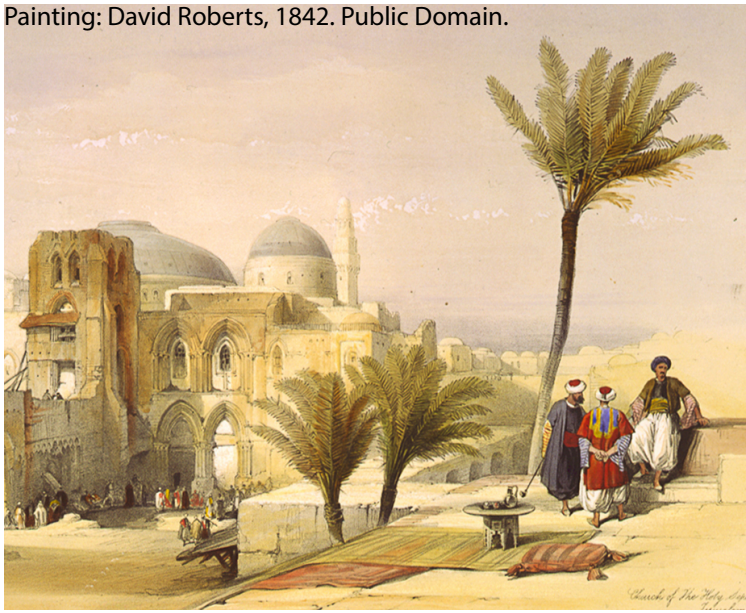
Note: This reflection was prepared for a Sunday during Lent at Hope Mennonite Church in March 21, 2021. We sometimes went to the Holy Sepulchre Church to experience a special occasion, light a candle, show visitors the site, explore it ourselves or absorb the fascinating history.

Photo: Gerd Eichmann,. cc 4.0. Domes and Rooftops

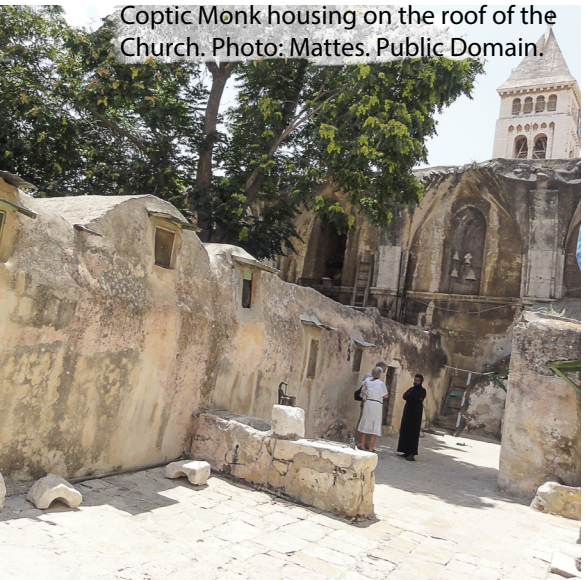
Top Left: Entrance to the Church Complex is in the lower left below the two arched windows.

Bottom Middle: Orthodox Crucifixion Altar at the supposed Golgotha Site. Pilgrims enter and go down to see the large stone.

Bottom Right: The Annointing Stone. By tradition, this is the slab where Jesus' body was placed to prepare it for burial. Pilgrims often weep and kiss this slab.



Painting: David Roberts, 1842. Public Domain.



Coptic Monk housing on the roof of the Church. Photo: Mattes. Public Domain.

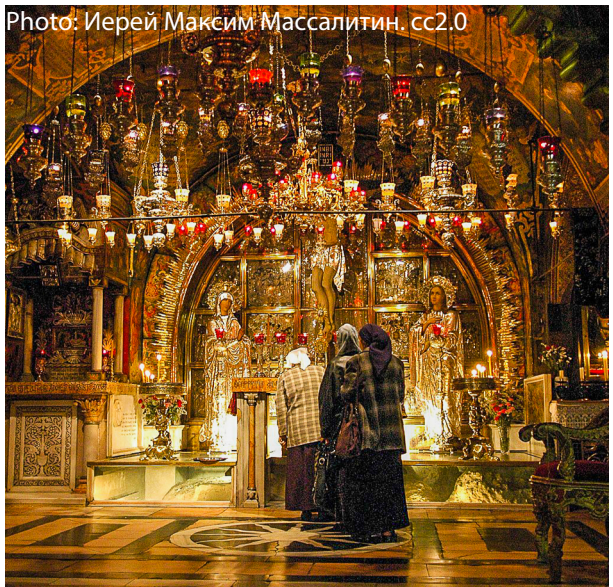


Photo: Иерей Максим Массалитин. cc2.0

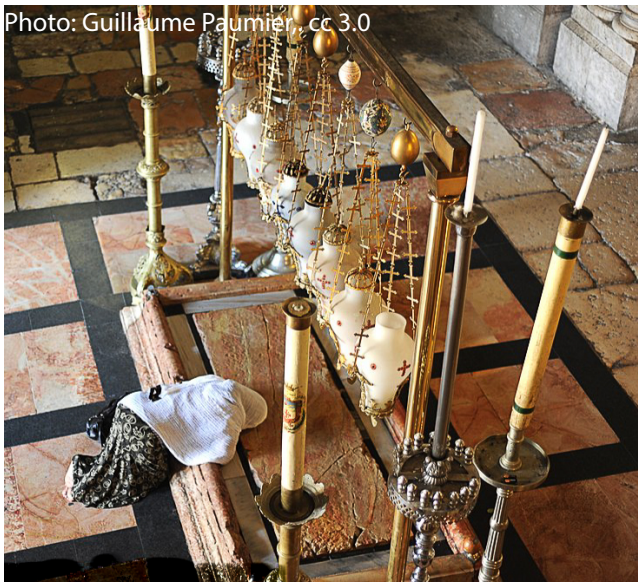


Photo: Guillaume Paumier, cc 3.0

5

Writing Poems

Prayer in 1985

We Give Thanks and Praise

Our God and our Creator, we acknowledge and praise You as the Giver of Life. We thank you

For LIFE and all its potential. We know of its beauty through knowing of beautiful people, creatures and nature
For WORK which we have deliberately chosen. It is our offering to you and the world
For FREEDOM which has been given to us, usually through circumstances beyond us
For FRIENDS AND FAMILY whom we love and who love us

We Pray for Ourselves

So often we become the impediments to Your acts of grace and mercy. We prevent Your love and peace from entering the world. Forgive us. We want to open ourselves anew to You and to Your future. We commit ourselves to becoming vulnerable, so that we can become channels of Your healing love. May we learn afresh how to live and how to avoid violating the humanity of others. Teach us to forgive and to break destructive evil powers through love.

We confess our culpability in the unjust structures of this world. Enlighten and empower us so that we may see and destroy both the conscious and the unconscious evil in our own lives. Transform our thoughts of self-justification, self-preservation, and selfish desires into the recognition of the rights and lives of others.

We Pray for Our Loved Ones

We have left relatives and friends to come here. There are those whom we miss especially because in their presence, we felt loved and understood. We ask your blessing upon them. These people have taught us the meaning of community and friendship. They have made notions of love, freedom and personhood real, rather than mere abstractions. May we learn from them that joy and peace come not only from receiving love and understanding but also in giving these to others. But we also may have left those behind who truly needed us. By your grace, we had become tiny mirrors of your mercy, love, and acceptance to them. Heal the pain that is brought about by this separation. We ask for your special blessing upon these loved ones. Grant them the peace of God.

We Pray for the Suffering in the World

There is much evil in the world today. People are suffering in many places: in Poland, South East Asia, South Africa, Latin America and here in the Middle East. There is also suffering in the overdeveloped countries. People suffer because of oppressive regimes, unjust structures, political rulers and others who have a narrow and restricted vision of peace and liberation. Lord, we pray for the coming of peace and freedom.

We also recognize the growing despair and fear in the world today. We think especially of Israelis and Palestinians. Jesus has empowered suffering groups with a new way of social change using non-violence. We pray that those who are oppressed by a dominating force and those who are the powerful, may find ways to at least co-exist.

There is also a growing despair which affects all of us. We observe the birth of ever more sophisticated weapons of destruction which emerge so naturally out of a universally pervasive imagination of violence. Lord have mercy on our evil ways. Save us from despair.

Forgive those who have a stranglehold on us and forgive our collaboration with them. Help us to see how radically you transformed the idea of power through the way you lived your life. May we be seized by the transforming power of moral and spiritual truth which alone can metamorphize dark despair into the hope and reality of your kingdom.

We Pray for the Church and All God's People

We rejoice in diverse expressions of worship and religious faithfulness. We know the message of Christ to be non-defensive and inclusive. The community to which we are invited includes all people. So, we pray for the community of the Church and the larger Ecumenical world. As we celebrate communion this day, we celebrate the breaking down of the walls of division and hostility. We celebrate a new reality – one in which the barriers that kept Jew and Gentile, and male and female apart, are being destroyed. May your Spirit of unity and truth bless us.

Note: Prepared for a service for the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the Old City of Jerusalem

Photo taken in the courtyard of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in 2012 on a return visit to Jerusalem.

Psalms 6, 7, and 8 in Jerusalem

PSALM 6: PRAYER IN ORDEAL

O GOD!
Woman leaps to death from Negev Tower
Top police officer perjured himself
Six more months of tension in Tyre
No justice in expulsion

Yahweh, do not punish me in your rage
Or reprove me in the heat of anger
Pity me, Yahweh, I have no strength left,
Heal me, my bones are in torment
My soul is in utter torment
Yahweh, how long will you be?

12 IDF soldiers die, 14 hurt in suicide attack
34 terrorists killed in assault
IDF "iron fist" raid on Zrariya
Beirut car bomb blast kills 80

Come back, Yahweh, rescue my soul,
Save me, if you love me;
For in death there is no remembrance of you:
Who can sing your praises in Sheol?

Kawkab villager believed kidnapped by Israelis
Skin sought for wounded soldiers
UNRWA school director assaulted
4 homes destroyed

I am worn out with groaning
Every night I drench my pillow
And soak my bed with tears:
My eye is wasted with grief,
I have grown old with enemies all around me

Lebanese resistance kill 12 and injure 14
Israeli raid against Palestinian base
Iranian jets bomb Baghdad
Katyushas at IDF post

Away from me, all you evil men!
For Yahweh has heard the sound of my weeping:
Yahweh has heard my petition,
Yahweh will accept my prayer
Let all my enemies, discredited, in utter torment
fall back in sudden confusion

OH GOD! WHO ARE THE ENEMIES? WHERE IS YOUR STRENGTH?

Note: This Psalm and the next two Psalms are taken from the Jerusalem Bible. The verses are interspersed with actual headlines in 1985 taken from two newspapers: the Israeli *Jerusalem Post* and the Palestinian *Al Fajr.*

During the eighties Israel invaded southern Lebanon. I compiled these psalms and headlines in March of 1985. This incursion was devasting for the Palestinian community, many of whom had relatives in Lebanon. I felt their pain deeply.

PSALM 7: PRAYER OF THE RIGHTEOUS UNDER PERSECUTION

OH GOD!

Yahweh my God, I take shelter in you:
From all who hound me, save me, rescue me
Or, like a lion, he will carry me off
And tear me to pieces where no one can save me

15-year-old gets 4 months
Asqalan prisoners go on hunger strike
Maternity: high risk in West Bank
Thousands mourn as two soldiers are laid to rest

Rise, Yahweh, in anger, awake, my God!
Confront the raging of my enemies
You who demand that justice shall be done
Let the nations muster round you in a body, and
then return, high over them.
Yahweh is arbiter of nations.

Engineer jailed
Issawiyeh Home Demolished
Farmers ordered to destroy trees
Nazareth priest barred from territories

God is the shield that protects me
He preserves upright hearts
God the righteous judge, slow to show his anger,
But he is a God who is always enraged by those who
refuse to repent

Molotovs hit Israeli targets
Israeli army defeated in Lebanon
After grenade attack; army raids Sa'ir

The enemy may sharpen his sword, He may
bend his bow and take aim
But the weapons he prepares will kill himself,
his arrows turn into firebrands.
Look at him, pregnant with wickedness
Conceiving Spite, he gives birth to Mishap.
He dug a pit, hollowed it out,
His spite recoils on his own head, his brutality
falls back on his own skill.

Air force hits Bekaa terror base
Jewish underground man pleads guilty
Syrian hit squad gunning for Arafat
"Secret team" set up to help Jewish terrorists

I give thanks to Yahweh for his righteousness
I sing praise to the name of the Most High

GOD! WHO ARE THE RIGHTEOUS?

PSALM 8: THE MUNIFICENCE OF THE CREATOR

OH GOD!

Yahweh, our Lord, how great your name throughout
the earth!

Rabin says, "No peace for the Shi'ites if none for us"
Arab students protest "Iron fist" policy at universities
14 soldiers wounded by car bombs still hospitalized
Call to stop demolition of Palestinian houses

Above the heavens is your majesty changed by
the mouths of children, babes in arms
You set your stronghold firm against your foes
to subdue enemies and rebels

2 buses firebombed near Dura
Bomb explodes on Egged bus
Car bomber fails to kill
Bethlehem bomb detonated
I look up at your heavens, made by your fingers at the
moon, and stars you set in place
Ah, what are we, that you should spare a thought for us
Or the children of God that you should care for them?

Bitterness, determination at funerals of 12 soldiers
13 years later: Dura family buries son's remains
Rabin delays plan to axe military industry staff
Sharon's terror tactics failed

Yet you have made him little less than a god
You have crowned him with glory and splendour
Made him lord over the work of your hands
Set all things under his feet

Pentagon to advise Israel on how to sell bombs
Islamic U. closed following violent scuffle
Villager's car torched
100 demolition threats

sheep and oxen, all these
yes, wild animals too
birds in the air,
fish in the sea travelling the paths of the ocean

Yahweh, our Lord, how great your name
throughout the earth!

OH GOD! WHAT HAVE WE BECOME? WE BEG YOU TO RESTORE YOUR CREATION!

OH GOD! WHERE ARE YOU?
DO NOT DESERT US TO OUR OWN WAYS!
RENEW US WITH YOUR STRENGTH!
RENEW US WITH YOUR WISDOM!
RENEW US WITH YOUR CREATIVITY!

Deceit and Innocence in a Nuclear World

The brothers quarreled
Demanding
Commanding
Not for milk and honey but for land they fought
For they knew not the ending plot
"It's mine," each brother thought

The brothers armed
Fighting
Hating
First, one then another ascendancy gained
Blood and Death between them reigned
"I've won," each brother claimed

The brothers lost
Attacking
Resisting
"Compassion, Justice, Mercy," the true God sighed
"Missiles, War, Bombs," the serpent lied
"More arms," each brother cried.

The serpent smiled
Luring
Promising
Land, power, honor, riches for you is dealt
The pain and price was not felt
"We want," each brother yelled.

The serpent won
Destroying
Rejoicing
The price paid, he ruled the black charred earth
now DEAD
To their graves the young he led
"Why us?" the children said.

HELP!

BLACK
VOID
NOISE
NUMB

DEAF
HARD
COLD
EMPTY

POUNDING
BLIND
HOLLOW
DEAD

HELP!

Note: In 1985, the Israeli National Unity Cabinet declared an "Iron Fist" policy of crackdowns against Palestinians. Palestinians were deported or detained under administrative detention without charges. House arrests increased. Curfews for villages and refugee camps were frequent. Beatings continued. It was a very difficult time. I found the inhumane treatment of Palestinians to be horrific and wrote these two poems during that time.

In 2002, I returned to Palestine for a project. At that time, I took photos of drawings done by elementary school children in Gaza. Some of those sad pictures are included here.

Prayer in 1986

Lord, we pray this morning for inner serenity;
for a calmness which invades and pervades our beings
for rest leaning on your strength
for relaxation in your engulfing love
Let our souls find relief from the crowded pressing turmoil of thoughts and activities
Give us stillness in you.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, we praise your greatness and through you, we are great
We praise your power, and, in you, we have power
We praise your strength and in you, we have strength.

Lord in your mercy

Fill us with the height, depth, length and breadth of your being.
Free us to act on our beliefs.
Help us identify and recognize our deepest and most intense secrets and desires
Transform our aims, our goals, our objectives through contact with your essence
Prioritize our wants
Elevate our wishes
Purify our hopes
Direct even our subconscious inclinations.

Lord in your mercy

We pray not only for ourselves
We pray for Christ's church, a global, universal wonder
We pray for our local church and for each of us here both
We pray for Christians who feel isolated and alone

Lord in your mercy

We pray for those who have no faith
Give them a vision of your greatness, your wonder, your strength and your power
Let them also find refuge and inner serenity in you
Give them the courage to face their spirituality and allow a connection with you

Lord in your mercy

Lord, we cannot pray to you in this place of toil and strife
without seeing what is here
We pray for justice, your justice, a terrifying justice stemming from your righteousness
Be with those who suffer here in this physical place
Release them from pain and give them courage

We pray
For those whose homes are destroyed
For those in prison for political reasons
For those separated from family through deportations
For those denied basic rights
For those who suffer humiliation and physical pain

We also pray for compassion and mercy.
Your justice alone will destroy us all

We pray, Lord, from the depth of our being,
for inner peace,
for faith in your faithfulness,
for transformation of our will and desires through your amazing power.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Note: Prepared for a service at he Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the Old City of Jerusalem

6

TRAVELLING

France
Hungary
Italy
Former Yugoslavia
Black Sea
Greece
Turkey
Cyprus
Mediterranean Sea
Krak des chevaliers
Syria
Damascus
Lebanon
Israel/Palestine
Jordan
Iraq
Cairo
Egypt
Sinai
Sharm El-Sheikh
Nile River
Luxor
Red sea
Saudi Arabia
Russia
Kazakhstan
Uzbekistan
Turkmenistan
Afghanistan
Iran
Pakistan
New Delhi
Nepal
Taj Mahal
Jaipur
India
Puri
United Arab Emirates
Oman
Yemen

Jordan: Passports, Strip-searches and the Rules of the Game

You cannot phone, mail or fax between Jerusalem and Amman, Jordan. Officially there is no communication except through underground or unofficial channels. One cannot take a vehicle from one side of the bridge over the Jordan River to the other side. Not even tourist buses can cross. The only way to get to the other side is to take a bus or taxi as far as the border, cross the small dirty River Jordan over the bridge and then take another bus or taxi on the other side. The Jordan River is the border between Jordan on the East Bank and Israel-Palestine on the West Bank.

The distance between Amman and Jerusalem is 252 kilometers. It should take about three hours by car. But it takes much longer – especially for Palestinians. For them, it can take a full day, because it often involves standing in lines, emptying suitcases, having belongings confiscated and being strip-searched. This experience can be traumatic, especially for conservative Muslim women. For this reason, they often send their belongings with foreigners.

For political and logistical reasons, we have two Canadian passports: one for Israel and Egypt and one for the rest of the world. MCC made this arrangement with the Canadian government. This is necessary because many countries will not accept a passport with an Israeli stamp. The Israeli border guards know that some people who work in Israel have two passports. When travelling to and from Jordan, we use one passport on the Jordanian side and the other passport on the Israeli side. Once, when I mistakenly showed the wrong passport, the Israeli guard simply handed it back and said, "I think you want to show me the other one." Still, they could make things difficult for me.

On one of our trips, I remember looking out of my hotel window and seeing a Muslim minaret, several cranes used to construct new high-rises, carefully cleared terraced farm land, and a Bedouin camp. Even in this wet weather, the Bedouins live in tents despite the fact that they are the ruling class in Jordan. In the city they have become urbanized, but until the 1950s, even the king lived in a tent. Even in the'80s, there were still tents in parts of the city.

I took several trips to Jordan with Sahir, the MCC Needlework Shop Manager. On our return, we would catch the taxi back to the border crossing at the Jordan River. I would take all luggage – mail, parcels and most of Sahir's things. This was because she had to cross the border into Israel in a separate area for Palestinians, where she expected that her belongings would be searched, possibly wrecked, and maybe confiscated. I crossed forty-foot-long bridge over the Jordan changing my passport in the middle. It was always a bit tense trying to guess what Israeli security would ask and what I would say. While my route involved a moderate amount of insecurity, the separate Palestinian process was much worse. Border interactions were based on national or ethnic heritage. Life can be so unfair.

Crossing the border is anxiety-producing for everyone. Ford Foundation, based in Cairo, was a funder for both Al-Haq and MCC. Its representatives came to Amman and Jersalem from time to time. We became friends. Once, three of them were coming from Amman to Jerusalem. All three were American, and none had Arab roots. However, one was married to a high-profile Egyptian professor and writer. When they were crossing into Israel, she was singled out for an invasive strip-search. When the other two realized this, they raised a fuss. The Israeli guards

would not relent. So, the other two Ford people demanded a strip-search for all of them in solidarity with their colleague. It was very distressing for them. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they came straight to our home to debrief. Fortunately, I had Mennonite borscht ready and we enjoyed a comforting meal together.

Going to Amman could also be very interesting. Once, on my way to Amman on the Israeli side, I met a Palestinian postal worker in the group taxi. He kept asking if I loved Arabs. And then, "why aren't you married?" When I told him I was married, he was shocked. "Why are you travelling alone?" And then the hospitality and invitations, "Would I like to bring my family to his home in Jericho?" This offer was typical of the Palestinian hospitality we often experienced.

In the group taxi on the Amman side, Palestinian men surrounded me, all talking in a very animated fashion. One man, who looked very wealthy, had just returned from doing the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. As is the custom, he was dressed in very ornate robes and was revered by others in the cab. Another man seemed to be angry about a Palestinian issue, although I couldn't understand enough Arabic to know what he was saying. The man sitting next to me was Italian, married to an Arab woman, had two children, did not live in the Middle East, was in Amman for one night only and invited me to dinner. I declined.

We sometimes carry letters, parcels and sometimes even large sums of money from Amman to Jerusalem. The Israeli security officers at the border check to see what we are carrying into Israel. Sometimes Israeli officials examine, confiscate or damage items, while at other times they don't seem to care. Harold once carried the equivalent of 50,000 U.S. dollars in Jordanian dinars from Amman to West Bank: the payroll for a Palestinian hospital. He picked it up from a certain hotel in Amman, put half in each inside breast pocket and crossed the border without incident. If discovered, that money most certainly would have been confiscated.

Once I was carrying books from Amman to Jerusalem for a school in Hebron. The Israeli border personnel asked me if they were mine. I started to explain that they were for a Palestinian school. They interrupted me and asked again if they were mine. I was puzzled and started to explain again. They interrupted me a third time and this time I caught on. I said, "At this point in time, they are mine." Those were the magic words and all was well. Living here involves understanding the unwritten rules of the game.

Note: Many changes in the region have taken place since the '80's. For some, these changes might be better, but for Palestinians, life is worse.

In our second term, we took a delightful trip as a family, to Petra in Jordan, an ancient major trading center of the Nabataeans. It was possibly inhabited as early as 7000 BCE. Over time its importance waned, and it was virtually abandoned by the eighth century CE. Its ruins were undiscovered by the western world until 1812. We rode donkeys on the 1.2 kilometer-long gorge entrance to this remarkably preserved site and were amazed at the skill of the builders.

Amman remains special in our hearts because it was our entry point into the Middle East and our first non-North American experience. We returned to Jordan in 2012, enjoying Amman, Wadi Rum and Jonathan's vacation home in Aqaba on the Red Sea before crossing the border into Palestine near Jericho. This piece is based on letters I wrote in the '80s.

Egypt: Confusion, Curiosities and Sand Dunes

We drove through the Sinai Dessert on our way to Cairo with no one in front of us or behind us. There was just sand and more sand and our two MCC taxis. An occasional camel and a few goats mysteriously appeared out of nowhere, seemingly eating sand, but really eating dead plant roots. Did someone own these animals? The two cars were speeding at about seventy kilometers per hour, not more than four feet apart. We had no idea why they had to drive so close together since there really was no need to tailgate. We found ourselves in an isolated, never ending, wide expanse of fine sand on a lone straight road that led into the horizon. Without water, one could easily die in this place.

At the border crossing from Israel into Egypt, we handed over our passports and wondered if we would ever see them again. Everyone in the crowded hall did as we did, handing passports to a clerk who took them in stacks and made no attempt to identify whose they were. They were handed further back, with no seeming order, into the maze of desks behind the counter. Harold planted himself beside the wicket and refused to move. When the passports finally came back, they were handed into the crowd at large. Harold took the stack first, because he was right there at the wicket. He pulled out all the MCC passports, and then handed the rest into the crowd. This seemed a very strange system with strong possibilities of lost passports. However, everything worked out, at least for us.

Eventually we cleared security and then headed toward the Suez Canal. We were fifth in line waiting to get onto the ferry, for the ten-minute ride. A quick trip – I thought. Not so. The army trucks and busses were all loaded first. Then one red car tried sneaking onto the ferry and ended up blocking the entrance to the boat. Eventually, its driver was guided out of the way, but only after several cars experienced new dents and scratches. Then everything closed for the Muslim call to prayer. Patiently we waited as the sun set on the Suez. There were no facilities available to use if nature called. We drifted, one by one, behind the oft-used sand dunes. Darkness came, and the taxi drivers began sending signals across the canal with their headlights. We were not sure why. Finally, four hours later, we managed to cross.

The drivers in Egypt often do not use headlights. Who knows why not. Superstition? Thinking it saves gas? Thrills? Who knows – but it results in many accidents. Fortunately, we arrived safely at Helen and Vern Ratzlaff's *(MCC, Egypt Representative)* home at 10:30 pm after a journey of fifteen hours, which should have taken seven. After a delicious meal, we headed to the very cheap hotel chosen for us. The lobby was not very clean, but it did have a huge cement stairway at least fifteen feet wide with about 20 stairs that led to nowhere. The hotel staff was amazed when we asked for toilet paper, towels and soap.

The next morning, we went down for the breakfast that was supposedly included. Our taxi driver had already arrived, so there was no time to waste. But where was the breakfast? Eventually, the hotel clerk asked me to take his place at the reception desk. Perhaps I looked trustworthy. He scampered off to make tea. Our MCC taxi driver was dispatched to buy breakfast buns for all the hotel guests. After fresh buns with butter and tea, we were on our way back to Jerusalem. We won't stay at that hotel again.

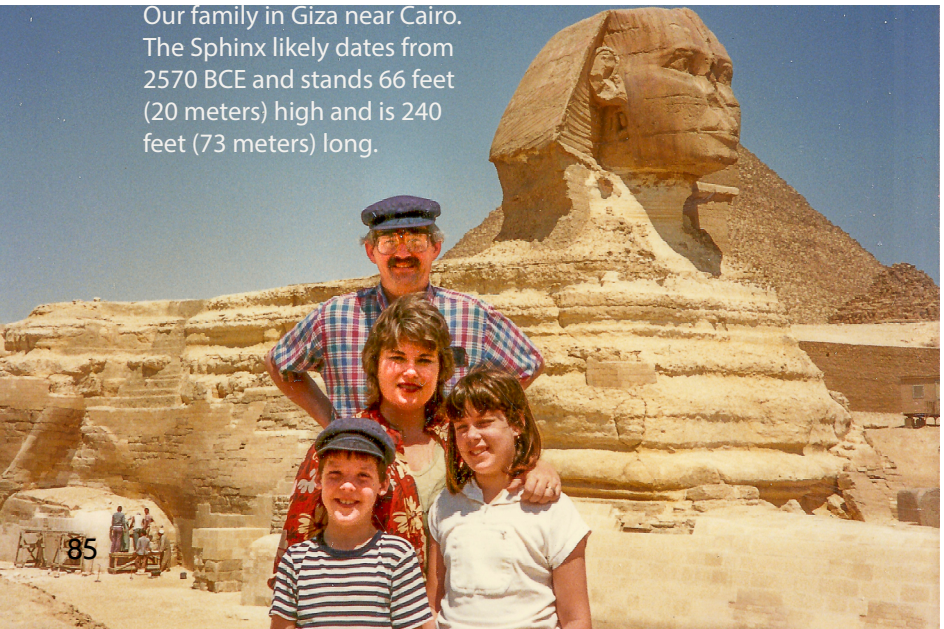
On the way back home to Jerusalem, we made a quick stop in Gaza for the taxi driver to get a new battery. This appeared to be some kind of personal business, a little route change to suit the needs of the driver.

We made a number of trips to Egypt in our five years. In 1986, we took a quick trip down the Nile. We boarded the night train to Luxor, one of the oldest cities in the world, to view the antiquities in Karnak, as well as the tombs and temples of the Valleys of the Kings and Queens. On the way down, the train stopped at an additional station, where the steward told us it was time to get off the train. Fortunately, we managed to figure out that this was not the right place and refused to move. He was not happy. I think he wanted a bribe.

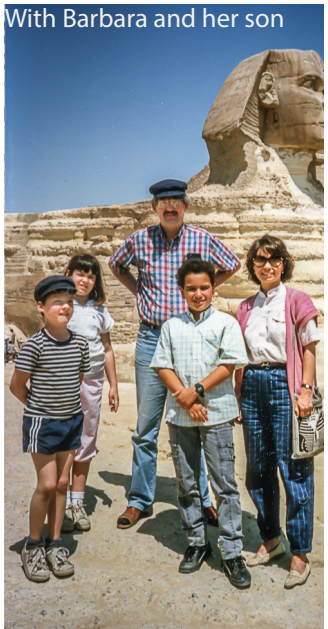
Once we arrived at our intended destination, we rode donkeys from tomb to tomb in the huge site. The usual hawkers were at many of the sites. At one tomb, a teenager was selling souvenirs. He caught our eyes and said, "authentic artifacts recently discovered inside this tomb." He paused, winked at us and said, "straight from China." The tombs were absolutely exquisite, especially the tomb of Queen Nefertari, the favorite wife of King Ramses II. The Karnak walking nightime sound and light show included actors impersonating Pharaohs and telling their stories with a backdrop of haunting music and magnificent ruins. Unforgettable.

When it was time to fly back to Cairo, our guide informed us that the plane was oversold. We had a boarding pass but no seat assignment. He told us that when the door opened, we should run as fast as we could across the tarmack to the plane, board it, sit in any seat and not move. We did that and it worked. I am not sure if the plane was really oversold or if this was just some sort of strategy to ensure we actually made it onto the plane. It was a full plane.

Life is casual and complicated at the same time. We just never know what will happen on any given day.



Our family in Giza near Cairo. The Sphinx likely dates from 2570 BCE and stands 66 feet (20 meters) high and is 240 feet (73 meters) long.



With Barbara and her son

My foot in comparison with one of the few remains of the colossal seventeen-meter statue of Pharaoh Ramses II., 1303 BCE

Greece: Fireworks, Motorbikes and Nude Beaches

Excerpts from Letters

In the thirteenth century, a mysterious old glowing icon of the Virgin Mary was discovered by a hunter in the cave at Aiya Napa, Cyprus, suggesting that a Byzantine Christian community of the eighth century might have been there. A small chapel was erected at the place where the icon was found. Later, a Catholic monastery was built, possibly by a wealthy Venetian woman who became a nun. Her father had not allowed her to wed the commoner whom she loved. When the Muslim Ottomans took over the area in the sixteenth century, the Catholics had to leave. The Greek Orthodox were permitted to take over the site. For unknown reasons, the monks left the monastery unattended in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It no longer boasts nuns, priests, Gregorian chants or hermits in its cloisters. In 1950, it was renovated and became a museum and cultural center. A Greek Orthodox parish church was built nearby for the locals in the now touristy village.

Our annual 1983 MCC retreat was held in this town. A dramatic spectacle awaited our MCC team who were gathered there from Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt. On Easter Saturday, a huge bonfire replete with firecrackers, burning effigies and dynamite celebrated the death of Judas. The observance continued all night, with explosive booms going off just outside our bedroom window. It felt quite unsafe, with sparks and fire finding their way into the narrow streets. The MCC retreat with speaker, Ken Bailey, was very stimulating, even though the noisy, slightly distracting celebrations outside continued non-stop. However, the morning three-hour sessions didn't even feel long and it was easy to concentrate in spite of the noise. Bailey interpreted the parables from a cultural point of view. Who was Jesus speaking to? What were the people like? How would they have interpreted what Jesus had to say? Who was Jesus as he told these stories? I found Bailey's talks very fascinating, opening up a new window into my faith.

For recreation while at the retreat, we rode motorbikes to various beaches. Adrian was crazy about the motorbike, a Yamaha 125, and since he usually rode with me, he pronounced me the best driver ever. He was particularly impressed with the little jumps and wheelies we inadvertently experienced.

After the Cyprus MCC retreat, we flew to the Greek mainland for a family holiday. We wondered if the gods were picking on Harold when, within five minutes of landing, he lost his glasses and then got his head caught in the door of a bus. However, the glasses were found, and his head seemed to continue working reasonably well.

We rented a car and toured around for a week, staying in cheap, quaint little bed-and-breakfast places. The languages we heard included Greek, German and French, but not much English. We spent time travelling back roads, stopping in villages for picnics and ice cream, as well as walking through the narrow, cobbled streets. We climbed lots of hills to view ancient castles, Byzantine churches and Greek ruins. The blue sky, hiking, chatting, having fun with the kids, and gleaning tidbits of information here and there were all we needed. Adrian spotted a row of industrious ants that we watched for an hour. The Byzantine churches and small edifices with their frescoes, tapestries and icons were everywhere. They were fascinating and also very foreign to our North American concepts of church.

In one little village we watched an impromptu folk dance within three meters of where we sat. It celebrated St. George slaying a dragon. The kids were very amused at the men's outfits: a sort of ruffled crinoline mini-skirt with white leotards underneath and pom poms on their curled slippers.

We spent our last week on the Greek Island of Paros. We found a lovely room in a white house with windows on four sides for $12.50 U.S. a night, including candy for the kids and breakfast. The landlady watched them in the evenings after they were in bed so Harold and I could enjoy moonlit walks on the harbour.

We day-tripped to the isle of Antiparos, known for its rugged terrain and lovely remote beaches. We also discovered many nude beaches. While we weren't about to disrobe ourselves, we did overhear a comment between a nude couple on a blanket lying next to each other. "So where are you from?" one of them said. As we walked past a group of nudists sitting cross-legged, Jennifer pointedly stared at one young man, turning her head as we walked past. He became self-conscious and covered himself with his hat. A nine-year old girl could make a young man cover up with a glance. Maybe he was new to this particular type of beach?

We rented motorbikes again, but Adrian was not quite as impressed this time, since we took a minor tumble in a gravel pit. We ended up on an empty beautiful sandy beach. Harold took off on his motor bike to explore some more while the kids and I enjoyed the beach. Soon, a boat with about twenty people pulled up to the shore. They got off the boat and proceeded to take off all their clothing to enjoy the beach in the nude. I asked the kids if they wanted to be naked, too. They said, "definitely not." However, they did go and play volleyball with them – all the nude parts jiggling. No big deal for the kids or the nudists.

Later, we rented a beach buggy to tour the island some more. Jennifer loves the water and tried to convince anyone to play in the water with her. Adrian preferred to build things in the sand and so he just dabbled in the water at the edge. By the end, he too was enjoying being in the water. We all acquired wonderful tans, and I got my usual cold sores on my lips from too much sun and wind.

Celebrating St George slaying a dragon

The holiday had done exactly what holidays are supposed to do. We came back home to Jerusalem, refreshed. Our home had been thoroughly cleaned from top to bottom; even the windows sparkled. It was really good to be home, back in Jerusalem.

Note: During our time in the Middle East, we spent a number of holidays in Greece. In addition to Paros, Antiparos and Cyprus, we explored Crete, Cos and Zakynthos on other trips. Adrian and Jennifer loved treating the museums as treasure hunts, using brochures to see if they could find the paintings or sculptures. Once, in Athens, they decided to find and count all the bare bums on the sculptures in the museum.

We spent time all over the mainland. We used a paper guidebook - no internet then - and found ancient amphitheater ruins in the middle of farmers' fields. Jennifer and Adrian would perform for us on the recorder and violin. Sometimes the children from the surrounding fields and farms would appear and watch as well. We must have seemed so odd to them. We ran races at Olympia where the first Olympic Games were held in 776 B.C.E. We saw the 3000-year-old Parthenon in Athens and climbed Parnassus at Delphi – once considered the center of the earth.

Right: Sitting in the throne seat at an ancient amphitheatre in a farmer's field.

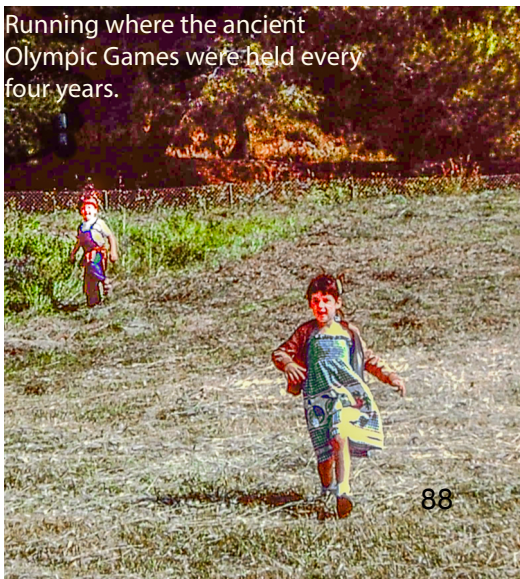
Middle: on the boat on the way to Cos.

Left: Playing recorder in an ancient amphitheatre.

Bottom left: At the Parthenon in Athens. Built and dedicated to the goddess, Athena in 438 BCE.

Bottom Middle: Just looking at stuff in the water.

Drinking from the 3rd century BCE fountain at the site of Hippocrates ' ancient hospital on the isle of Cos.



Running where the ancient Olympic Games were held every four years.

Budapest: Bridges Across Christian Divides

The plane hit the pavement smoothly. The cool damp air welcomed me. Thankfully, the handsome Hungarian host who met me spoke English. I had just arrived at a seminar in Budapest entitled "Toward a Theology of Peace." The format of the five-day conference was not unlike many others: eight formal carefully prepared lectures, twenty position papers, working discussion groups and lots of informal dialogue. However, this conference was also unique.

The significance of this particular seminar lay partly in the fact that it actually happened. The planning occurred during four meetings in three cities over twenty-one months. It was officially planned by eight organizations: both eastern and western European, and one Nicaraguan. That such an ideologically diverse group was able to agree on the conference program, the final choice of speakers and participants, the location and all the necessary details seems a significant achievement. The 124 participants from thirty-two countries represented many denominations, including Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic. This group of people was seriously committed to their political and religious ideologies, but were, nonetheless, able to dialogue and worship together, to laugh together easily and to share deep, painful concerns with each other.

The location of the seminar in Hungary as part of the Eastern Bloc could have posed problems. Would Hungary allow the conference to take place? Could visas be obtained? Would both eastern and western participants be willing to come to Hungary? Within the country itself, the conference stimulated a coming together of Reformed and Catholic clergy. For the first time, Hungarian Catholic Bishops came to Rady College, the Hungarian Reformed Church Seminary where the conference was held. Cold War tensions between east and west were significant.

The conference also clearly bridged gaps between various peace organizations and strengthened a feeling of oneness on common causes of peace and justice – even if these causes were not uniformly defined. In providing information about Christian peace groups within various countries, it raised awareness that there are common threads but also significant differences.

For me, the personal dialogue and interaction with the participants was an invaluable part of the conference. I think of the Czechoslovakian theologian with whom I strolled along the sidewalks of Budapest one cloudy afternoon. He told me of his work as a young man in the European resistance movement during the war, and how it resulted in a career switch from medicine to theology. I think, too, of the English Anglican pacifist, of his stance on conscientious objection, of the attitudes his peers extended towards him with their verdict of "his suffering from religious mania."

* Or a meeting with Franciscan Sister Beatriz in the old-world Hungarian library. Living in Nicaragua, she had experienced threats of imprisonment by phone, letter and in-person. Her words carried the message of her life and her work. Her most poignant statement to the conference was: "You are frightened by the threat of nuclear death; we are already dying."

* Or the insights of a young, vibrant theology student from the East German Democratic Republic, who outlined some of the current difficulties in the European Peace movement.
* Or the lovely Czech woman who spoke so enthusiastically about her teaching in a Hussite Theological Faculty, her work with the World Council of Churches and her ecumenical work with various colleagues and women's groups.
* Or the warmth and hearty vitality of a South American theologian who had been exiled from his country for twelve years, and his Christian commitment to work for social change.
* Or singing "Nun Danket alle Gott" (Now Thank we all our God), and "Dona Nobis Pacem (Grant us peace)," while joining hands with a Russian Orthodox professor on one side and an American Protestant on the other.
* Or a personal meeting with Dr. Nikolaj Goundjaev, a forty-three-year-old theology professor and priest in the Leningrad Russian Orthodox Seminary, over breakfast. As he drank dark coffee with two lumps of sugar, he told me of the urgency of dialogue between the East and West: "they each speak in monologues rather than in a dialogue – they can't hear each other." Looking at me with his clear, greenish-blue eyes, Dr. Goundjaev emphasized the seriousness of nuclear weapons: "no one has anti-freeze in their concepts of nuclear weapons. Their concepts are frozen with no options for dialogue." Our breakfast was serious, but the tone lightened when he spoke of his wife and his teenaged children.

These wonderful people charmingly accommodated my inability to speak their languages and spoke to me in English rather than in their native languages. Because I was from a religious institution in Jerusalem, many of them thought I was a nun and asked which order I was from and when did I stop wearing a habit. I told them I was not a nun, but they would not believe me; it seems they really wanted a nun from Jerusalem. There were also some members of the Hungarian press who interviewed me, and who later called me in Jerusalem to speak with me again.

The seminar clarified certain dominant themes which seemed to cut across religious traditions. Although a consensus was not reached on issues such as pacifism, non-violent resistance and nuclear deterrence, these issues did receive an open airing. The entire group – with its political and religious diversity – did reach the consensus that peace with justice is central to the gospel message. To that end, the seminar sent a powerful message to theological faculties world-wide: that it is necessary for academic theologians to place peace and justice in the center of the theological curriculum.

The various people in this seminar left me challenged with a responsibility to understand the present pain of those in less fortunate political and socio-economic conditions; to be aware of the immediacy of our potential for nuclear suicide; to think and act within the reality of a world that perpetrates the evils of injustice while spinning itself directly towards nuclear destruction.

Note: This was written in 1983 when I was Director of Program Development at Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. Other versions of my report on this conference were published in the conference proceedings, the *MCC News Service* and in a *Tantur Newsletter*.

The Red Sea: A Necessary Risk

The first time I snorkeled, I hated it! The fins squeezed my wide feet. Walking seemed impossible. I tripped constantly. My suit kept catching on sharp rocks, making small tears in the fabric. My mask fogged up. Salt water irritated my eyes and nose. My ears plugged up. Using a snorkel made even ordinary breathing unmanageable because of a leaky mask. Worst of all, the brown rocks and slimy seaweed didn't seem worth the effort or the imagined risk.

Given how my first venture into snorkeling had gone, I was not really interested in doing it again in the Red Sea. I had come for the water and sand. One afternoon, my dearest friend and life partner invited, cajoled and insisted that I try snorkeling again. He looked after all the details: renting the gear, carrying it to the rocky beach and pulling me along behind him. So, on with the fins and into the water I went. Sure enough, I again experienced the brown rocks, scratched knees and torn suit. At least the mask didn't leak. But since I'd taken the risk, I thought I may as well go a little further. I was a good swimmer, a lifeguard when I was younger, but the shallow water of the narrow channels between the rough slimy rocks was not pleasant. I continued to brush against unknown things I didn't like. But I pushed ahead and discovered the water getting deeper and the narrow brown channels widening. And suddenly the sea floor fell away. I was left looking down an underwater cliff into a turquoise blue cavern of brightly coloured coral, fish and sea plants. It was truly amazing! I saw huge purplish blue clams opening and closing – they must have been at least a meter wide. A huge underwater cliff of brilliant coral with sea creatures swimming everywhere. Dramatic, Surprising, Inspiring. There was no visible bottom. I saw textures and shapes I had never encountered. I felt both calm and a little bit frightened. A new and different world had opened up to me. It was definitely worth the scratches.

Is there a parallel to be made between snorkeling and striving for peace? Certainly, working for peace is a much more important risk to take. No one knows if the brown rocks of conflict, violence and warfare will fall away to the colourful beauty of a peaceful reality. Is it worth it? There's no certain sunny beach waiting for us. We are stuck amid the brown rocks in a world spinning towards destruction. Our choice lies in staying with the slimy rocks or pushing on to that somewhat elusive cavern of peace. That means effort, searching and believing. It means many risks taken by many people: peace activist groups, scientists against nuclear warfare, war resisters, educators, politicians, mothers, fathers, ordinary people. People who live their lives in a world where the blue sky and the blue sea are constantly threatened. People who struggle with the meaning of life in a world of violence and confusion. Where are the answers to be found? In medicine? Psychology? Sociology? Physics? Religion? Perhaps by making peace with the Supreme Being, the creator of a once perfect world; by developing a theology of peace and making it practical; by relating that theology to the reality of our existence - perhaps then we can move closer to that turquoise cavern of peace. The cost of searching for peace may involve discomfort, scratches and even lives. Peace will not come upon us without people willing to dedicate their energies to both inner spiritual peace with God as well as working out the implications of that peace in a very real world. Certainly, examined carefully and rationally, the search for peace must be a risk worth taking for everyone living in this complex, clashing, conflicted world. The alternative is incomprehensible.

Note: This was written in 1984 when I worked at Tantur Ecumenical Institute.

India and Bangladesh: Contrasts, Fun and Friends

Excerpts from my Journal in 1984-5

December 14: ***Tension and Release***

Living and working in Jerusalem is always filled with pressure. The exit from Tel Aviv was, as usual, fraught with tension. Our suitcases had been thoroughly searched and many questions had been asked. Frankly, it was a case of harassment. We almost missed the plane. In addition, since planes were not allowed to fly east from Tel Aviv into Arab airspace, we had to fly west, and then spent a night in Rome before heading east to Delhi the next morning. In Jerusalem, there is not a lot of hubbub around Christmas, so when we left there was little sign of the upcoming holiday, especially so far in advance. In Rome, it was different. We arrived to beautiful Christmas decorations and lovely Christmas music everywhere. The streets were lit and store windows had amazing artistic displays. I burst into tears at the contrast and felt a sudden release from the tension of Jerusalem. Then I was ready to holiday.

December 16: ***Colonial Holdovers***

We arrived in New Delhi late at night. The entry was fairly easy since English is widely spoken, thanks to the British colonialists. Jennifer's first comment was: "Why does everyone talk like Peter Sellers?" We had watched the very funny *(and now perhaps inappropriate)* movie, "The Party" shortly before leaving, in which Sellers plays a man from India. In Delhi, we watched, listened and smelled. It was new for all of us. The kids especially loved the snake charmers.

December 19: ***Exotic Delights***

After a few days in New Delhi on our own, we began a three-day excursion with our friends, Jim and Goldie Pankratz, and their two girls. They had lived in India and were now with MCC in Bangladesh. Our first stop was the crowded, noisy, busy Jaipur, known as the Pink City, the capital of Rajasthan. Hundreds of rickshaws, bicycles, three-wheeled taxis and cars filled the streets, honking and driving every which way. Sometimes they came to a standoff – with eight lanes of vehicles facing another eight lanes of vehicles – and we wondered how this would be solved. This normal traffic confusion, coupled with the usual unenforced regulations, resulted frequently in a kind of chaos that somehow eventually sorted itself out.

Watching a musician play a one-stringed instrument

We saw an enormous sundial, listened to a street musician playing a haunting melody on a one-stringed instrument, examined exquisite tapestries and jewelry, tasted flavors that tickled the tongue and watched sacred cows wandering anywhere they wanted.

We were awed by the intricate latticework on the balconies of the 953-room Hawa Mahal Palace, built from red and pink sandstone in 1799. The openings in the women's quarters of this palace allowed royal ladies to observe

everyday life and festivals celebrated in the street below without themselves being seen. This was because women were forbidden to appear in public without full coverings. The openings in the lattice work also allowed breezes from outside to pass through during the high temperatures in summer.

The kids loved riding the elephants up to the Amber Palace, the royal residence built in 1592, located about eleven kilometers outside of Jaipur. The most fascinating part of this edifice was the hall of mirrors, built for the women. Because they were not allowed to sleep in the open air, the tiny mirrors on the walls and ceilings reflected the lit candles, making it seem as if they were in a roomful of stars.

Then – the Taj Mahal. We were so fortunate to see it both in the daylight and again under a full moon. It was built between 1631 and 1648 by the Muslim emperor, in memory of his favourite wife. The beautiful mosque faces Mecca and has 569 prayer spaces. In the evening, we enjoyed an outdoor performance in this incredible memorial. The girls joined in the Indian dance show, but Adrian was too shy to get involved.

December 21: ***Overwhelmed***

We headed back to New Delhi. The trains here are not the cleanest, not even the first class coaches. Everything was very crowded and noisy. The smells, the pushing and shoving, the seeming confusion, the heat and the need to hold onto our little ones made us feel a bit overwhelmed. But we made it to our destination without any problems.

December 23 – 26 : ***A Kaleidoscopic Christmas***

On to Puri, a sacred Hindu town. Jim and Goldie Pankratz and their girls, Agatha and Al Doerksen with their girls, and us. We stayed at the Eastern Railway Hotel by the sea in the Bay of Bengal. It is a holdover from the British colonial days. Nothing much had changed, it seemed. The uniforms were the same – tattered at the sleeves but still being worn. Mosquito nets, slowly moving fans, big verandas, cold drinks, wicker chairs with footstools and big arm rests, 6:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. formal tea - all of this contributed to a feeling of well-being and langorous relaxation.

It was hot in Puri. We spent the time body-surfing and playing in the huge waves. Lots of fun until Harold lost his glasses in the waves on the first day there. This was a disaster. Now what? While he did have prescription sunglasses, that was hardly an adequate substitute for a trip of three weeks. The kids were very concerned. They looked and looked for the glasses. Then they prayed and prayed. In the evening we went for a walk. And suddenly – there were the glasses just lying in the sand. Well. What should we learn from this?

Staff at the Eastern Railway Hotel

On Christmas Eve, our three families - Duecks, Pankratzes and Doerksens - sang carols and did a mini-Christmas Eve service with readings. We stuffed stockings and the kids unstuffed them. Christmas Day included playing games, taking pictures, laughing a lot and eating good food.

Puri is different from anywhere else we have been. There are many temples, beggars, lepers and very scary wild monkeys. Sacred cows are everywhere, even in the middle of the streets. MCC is active here so we toured some projects. The villagers were very curious about us, and were especially interested in Jennifer. She, however, did not appreciate the attention.

December 29: ***Living on the Streets***

On to Calcutta to stay with the Doerksens. An enormous dramatic city. People were bathing and peeing in the streets. We witnessed extreme poverty. There were many beggars, and often they were maimed. Some beggars or their owners think they will get more money if they are maimed, so sometimes the maiming is done on purpose. There is very little western influence in Calcutta's food, clothing or general culture.

Agatha hired a substantial Indian woman to give all of us a massage. This lady really got the circulation going. I loved the head massage the most.

December 31: ***Where Poverty Abounds***

New Year's Eve. There was good food and lots of laughter. Agatha dressed me in a sari. It was not very practical, but maybe one just has to get used to it. We went to an Indian circus which which was a little chaotic and amusing. Watching the participants and the audience's reactions was fascinating.

January 2: ***Then Came the Circus***

We visited the MCC offices for high tea and met all the workers. There were garlands for us – lilies and roses – how lovely! Then we all went for manicures and pedicures. Jennifer chose the brightest colours of nail polish. Later, the kids went horseback riding. Adrian was on a large horse all by himself. How proud he was and perhaps a little scared.

Jennifer, Carmen, Adrian, Rachel in a tuk tuk (a sort-of motorized rickshaw)

January 4: ***Garlands, Nails and Horses***

Off to Dhaka, Bangladesh to stay with Jim and Goldie. We saw poverty everywhere. MCC has a significant presence here with programs in health, employment, education, agriculture and economic development.

The streets were colourful with painted rickshaws with Bruce Lee images. There were almost no women in the streets. Those who did leave their homes wore long black burqas that covered them from head to toe.

At one point we boarded a flat-bottomed boat about fifteen feet long. The upturn on the side was only about one foot. This type of boat is the major transportation vehicle here in Dhaka. We were poled up the Ganges River to an area with bamboo huts on high stilts. People were bathing, washing dishes, eliminating body wastes, washing clothes, brushing teeth and getting water for food preparation. All the life functions were taking place in the holy but dirty water of the Buriganga, Old Ganges River. How does one respond to this poverty? I went with Goldie to a clinic where she worked with mothers and babies who have scabies. Scabies is an infestation of tiny mites that burrow under the skin. If left untreated it can be fatal. It is very contagious and spreads in crowded unhygienic living conditions. Access to safe water is crucial. Consequently, hygiene education in the program there included a focus on boiling water before use. It was awful to see these poor suffering babies and mothers.

Washing in the river. Photo: Peter Steyn

Jennifer, Carmen, Adrian and Rachel in a rickshaw

On the Buriganga, old Ganges River. Photo: Jim Pankratz

Top: Goldie at the clinic with a baby who has scabies

Bottom: Preparing food in the river. Photo: Nushrat Yeasmin/REACH cc 2.0

January 7-10: ***Mix-ups and Challenges***

We then headed back to Calcutta and spent a few more days with Al and Agatha. Our flights to Jerusalem via Delhi were scheduled and confirmed several times. But there was a mixup with the flights which we discovered in Delhi. So, I took the kids touring while Harold tried to sort it out. We toured museums, saw the Gandhi memorial, and looked at the sun dials. The kids loved the diorama of Gandhi's life. Meanwhile, Harold refused to leave the ticket counter. Finally, after spending the night in a resting room at the airport, we made it onto a flight on January 12. We got the last four seats on the plane. Whew! There were no economy seats left, so the airline put us in first class. A great nine-hour flight with good food, treats for the kids, slippers and leg room for Harold. A sharp contrast to what we had seen on this holiday.

Palestine is politically difficult. Parts of India and Bangladesh are unbelievably poor. Both have severe challenges. MCC works in all three of these environments. The conditions in each country are different but each is so very challenging. One wonders what is the best approach to take?

We enjoyed the trip, but the poverty is depressing. Men having their bowel movements by the side of the road was unappealing, to say the least. However, to gain perspective, we realize that often these people don't have other options. India and Bangladesh are fascinating on so many levels, with amazing and ancient art, religious complexities, sophisticated histories, and varied religious practices. This trip showed us both the awe-inspiring and the dirty side of life. Contrasts. Some of the awe and some of the dirt are on the surface – lying there for anyone to see. Other aspects of life here are hidden deep underneath and only discoverable with digging, wisdom and time.

Note: Much later I was in New Delhi for a conference where I presented some initial ideas on documenting human rights violations. These ideas ultimately became books on human rights documentation, which were translated in a number of languages. I was glad to have had this first experience in India before going there professionally.

Top row: Alvin, Agatha, Goldie, Jim, Harold, Judith

Bottom row: Susan, Alison, Carmen, Rachel, Jennifer, Adrian

Rome: An Intense HURIDOCS Conference

Getting to Rome was not a great experience. Security at Tel Aviv was tight as usual. I was travelling with Jonathan Kuttab, lawyer and co-founder of Al-Haq. He warned me that we should not be together at the airport because he was Palestinian and they would give me a hard time if I was with him. He carried a book of Jewish short stories in plain view as was his custom when travelling. He breezed through and I had the hard time. Four security guards put four benches around me in the main part of the airport. Red fluorescent security stickers were put on my suitcases, attaché case and even on my purse. They emptied everything, completely, right there in public and took the suitcase off to be checked for bombs. The lining was ripped when it was given back to me. My hand luggage went through the security machine four times. Questions, questions and more questions – but no tough ones. Where did I buy my suitcase? I gave them a long story about its origins in Mexico, how I didn't like it all, that my husband and I had had a disagreement over buying it. And now that it was empty, they could see why I didn't like it, since it was very heavy even without anything in it. Four times they asked how many children I had. Eventually, I managed to get through security with amazing cool. I even asked them some questions, such as "Did they enjoy their jobs? How did they choose which passengers to harass? How old were they when they started doing this sort of thing? Did their mother know what they did for a living? Did they always harass Christian travelers?" They searched my suitcase once more as I went through the last check, but this time not in my presence. I know this because the security seal was broken. Then a plain clothes security officer accompanied me into the departures lounge and even onto the plane. In the end I experienced an incredible sense of relief – more than I usually feel on leaving Israel (1).

We arrived at our hotel about 9:00 p.m. and proceeded to walk to the Colosseum. After walking around it, and observing that it was clearly locked and closed in with high iron bars, Jonathan and I decided to scale the bars and explore the place in the dark. What fun. Also spooky and probably a little bit foolish.

The next day we headed out to the conference center which was held in a little picturesque village outside Rome. The conference was on human rights documentation, data bases and satellite communication. About 150 people from all over the world attended. The participants from Latin America and Sri Lanka seemed to be the most technologically advanced. There was no political rhetoric – just professional interchange – at least during working hours.

Now the parties – that was another matter. Because most participants worked within tense situations, party-time was an opportunity for tension release, an interlude, a suspension. It was refreshing and good fun. And I learned some new skills as a bartender for a few hours. The dinner was at a very quaint restaurant in the small village– but big enough to handle all of us. The owner led us down into the very large wine cellar, replete with little tunnels in all directions. He didn't seem to mind if we tried a few bottles.

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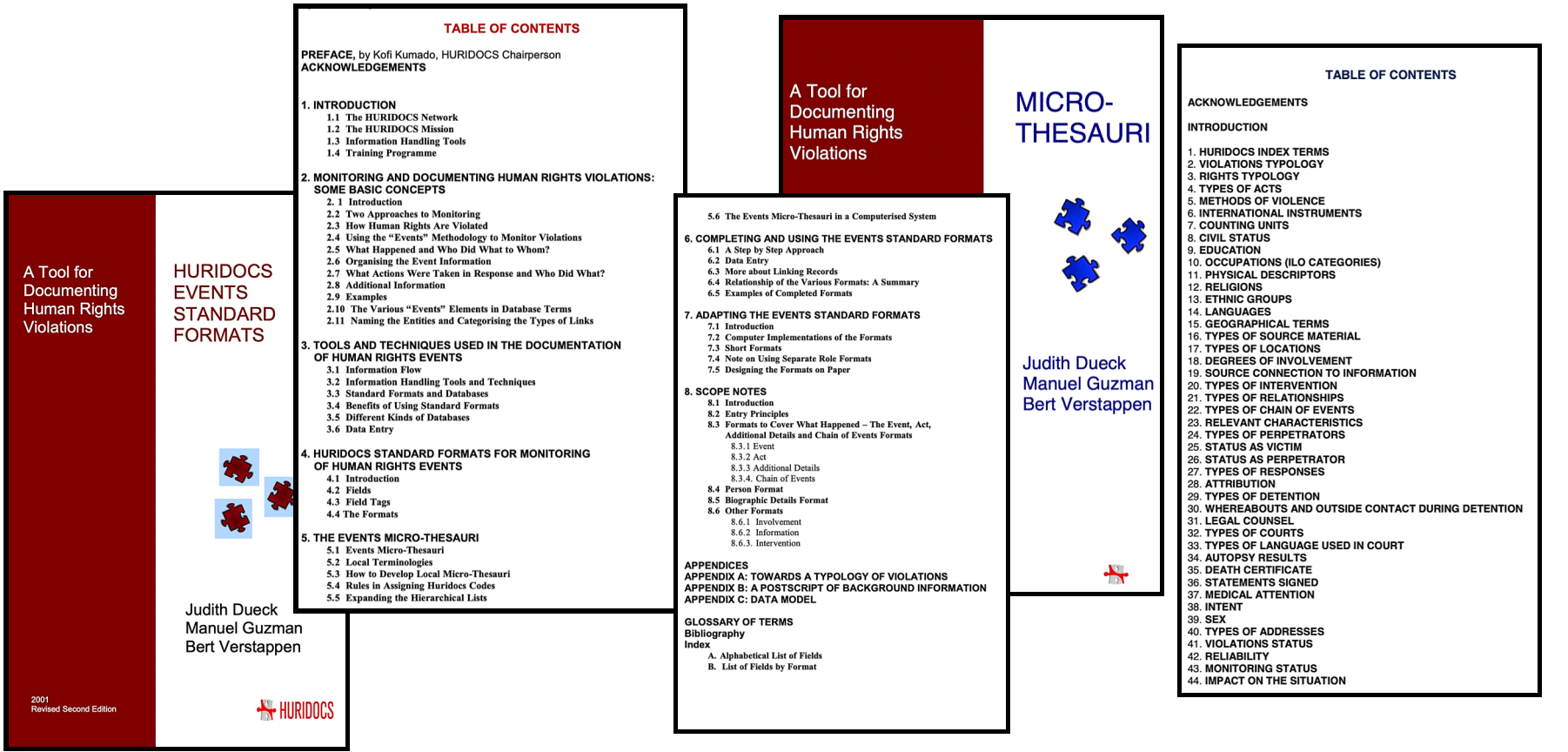
(1) Going through Israeli security was usually quite difficult for me. Often I was carrying mail from from Al-Haq or MCC and there would be tricky questions. Fortunately, my mail was never confiscated although a small travel iron once was taken. I don't know why.

bottles while we were there. There was dancing, music and laughter. When we emerged, it was dark with sparkling stars galore. We merrily headed to our hotel, singing and making a racket in the quiet night. It was all rather magical.

The conference focused on human rights documentation methodology. How could we document an evolving situation with multiple victims, perpetrators and witnesses as well as different versions of truth. Ultimately, at the end of the conference, an international task force was created to consider this matter further. I was elected the chair, but since there was no money, I wondered if anything would develop from this meeting. Still, the issue strongly held my interest and was very relevant to the work at Al-Haq.

The conference, in 1986, opened my eyes even further to the complexities of documentation. I also met many people who are friends to this day. How fortunate I was to meet this dedicated group of principled and fun people.

Note: This was the beginning of the *Events Standard Formats: A Tool for Documenting Human Rights Violations* and the *Micro-thesaurii*. The task force developed a methodology and various books outlining how violations could be documented. Our first edition in two volumes was published in 1993; the second in 2001. This was a major feat. It was translated into a number of languages. Computer programs in DOS, Windows and Open Source were created. Some organizations used the books as a basis for developing their own systems. Training on the system was done in many countries. HURIDOCS was a long and satisfying involvement for me between the years of 1986 – 2010.



Syria: Border Crossings, a Castle and an Old Souk

In October, 1986, our family went to Damascus, Syria by bus from Amman. In part, this was a belated fifteenth wedding anniversary celebration. In part, it was a break from a very hectic fall. Damascus is a very cosmopolitan, intriguing thriving center and the food was great. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. From the top of Mount Qasioun, overlooking the city, it seems drab. But once inside the Old City, it is colourful, noisy and dramatic. I loved finding the "Street called Straight." It was the main road in Roman times and runs straight through the old city from east to west. In the New Testament it is the place where Saul stayed and was healed from his blindness by Ananias.

The Damascus souq is one of the great markets of the world and we loved it. Built in 1780 under Ottoman rule, it is covered with a tall curved metal arch and ends at the Umayyad Mosque. The imposing, ancient Roman Temple of Jupiter guards the entrance. Another souq adjoins it, making the entire area a huge shopping district. Jennifer bought a peacock feather and chain with a charm, and Adrian bought a snazzy brass knife.

We enjoyed the countryside and especially the incredibly well-preserved Crusader castle - complete with moat, inner and outer walls, turrets and underground caverns. The Krak des Chevaliers (1) site was first inhabited in the 11th century by Kurdish troops. In 1142, it was given to the order of the Knights Hospitaller. At its peak, Krak des Chevaliers housed a garrison of around 2,000. In 1271, the Mamluk Sultan captured it after a siege of 36 days.

At the time of our trip, Syria and Palestine were not on good terms. So, before we left Jerusalem, we combed our belongings for West Bank or Israeli tags – clothing, school supplies, books - and removed all marking suggesting any tie with Palestine or Israel. Since Arabic and French are the languages spoken in Syria, we relied on what little French we knew. Although our Arabic was considerably better than our French, we did not use it since our accent was distinctly Palestinian.

We were nervous crossing security at the borders both going into Syria and leaving it. Had we missed anything? Would they find any reference to Israel or West Bank in our belongings? Could we answer the questions they were likely to ask? In the end, although the line-ups were long, we made it through without any problems. Travel in the Middle East can be complicated and we had expected a few problems. However our worries were not realized, we had a good break and we were introduced briefly to yet another Middle Eastern country.

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(1) In 2006, Krak de Chevalier was recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. It is about 2.5 hours drive from Damascus.

Note: Years later, when Jennifer was working on her Doctor of Philosophy dissertation in Middle East History, she spent considerable time in the archives and libraries of Syria and Lebanon. During the civil war in Lebanon in 2006, she stayed in the mountains above Beirut where she could hear the gunfire. Canadians were chaotically being evacuated by boat. However, Harold had a wonderful Canadian Lebanese business colleague who was in Beirut at the time. This wonderful man arranged for Jennifer to be driven by car with his extended family who lived there, through small roads in the mountains from Beirut to Damascus even though she did not have a Syrian visa. The main roads were too dangerous. Instead of leaving Syria immediately, she remained with relatives of the same Lebanese family to do a little more research in the archives of the French Institute in Damascus. Our friend, Beth Kuttab, who was working with the U.N. based in Jordan, checked to be sure she was ok. We were relieved when she finally left Damascus.

Turkey: Through Adrian's Eyes

A Diary

June 20: ***Scary Stuff***

We have arrived! We all got here. But we almost lost Mom along the way. Dad had to get her from the washroom or the plane would have left without her. How embarrassing! Then we thought we lost our neighbor, Cat, who is travelling with us. Jennifer and I started to cry and make a big fuss because we thought she was stuck at Israeli security. We found out later that she was already waiting for us on the plane. What a relief!

We arrived in the huge city of Istanbul. It used to be called Constantinople. Saying that word over and over feels funny on my tongue. In the Topkapi Palace, we saw the Topkapi Dagger with emeralds and other jewels on it as well as a small clock in the handle. We also saw cute but uncomfortable-looking outfits for little sultans. The big thrones didn't look comfortable either. Sultan Mehmed IV, a child sultan, played in a huge room and did all kinds of naughty stuff. I wonder if those rich sultans felt like they were in a prison.

Topkapi Dagger. Photo: Duvallon's Cabinet

Later we bought sandals in the market for me but we couldn't find anything for Jenni.

We drove out of Istanbul in a rented white Fiat. Mom talked us into going on a very narrow, bumpy, scary road right on the edge of a cliff. Finally, we arrived in Gallipoli where we had supper on the Strait of the Dardanelles. Dad said this is the division between Europe and Asia – but both sides are Turkey.

Mom said I have to shower. I hate showers.
I like baths but there is no tub.

June 21: ***Sneaking out***

First thing this morning, Mom and I snuck out of the hotel and went for a long walk to the Bosphorus Straight. We watched the boats and then looked in the windows of an old mosque. There were two kittens. A third kitten, a small one, was left out. I didn't like that. Mom wanted to go explore the other side of the mosque but I wouldn't let her. I don't think we were supposed to be there.

At Hagia Sophia

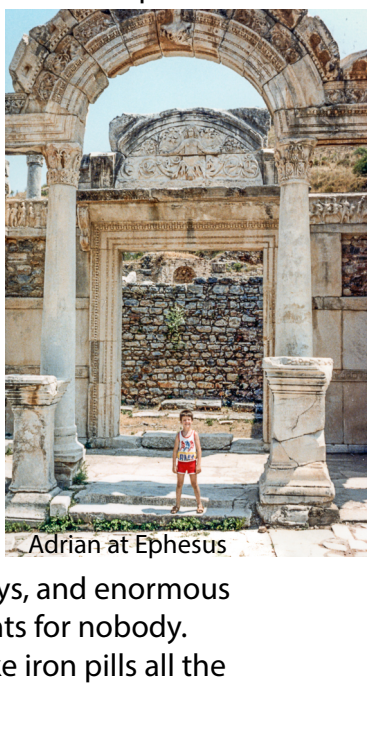
Left: Topkapi Dagger. Photo: Duvallon's Cabinet.
Right: Adrian, me, Cat, Jennifer at the Hagia Sophia, a World Heritage Site. Built by Constantine in 325. Restored and rededicated in 425 and again in 537 - both following Muslim insurrections. In 1453, Sultan Mehmed II turned it into a mosque. In 1934, it was turned into a museum and worship there was prohibited. Since 1991, a controversial movement to turn it into a mosque gained momentum. It is now a mosque with approval from the Turkish government and international disapproval.

June 22: ***A Day of Forgetting***

We took a ferry to Lapseki. I got oil on my jacket. Nobody was very pleased about this. I guess I have to remember to be more careful. Actually, it was a day of forgetting. Dad forgot his pants in the hotel. Jenni forgot her camera in the café in Çanakkale where we ate breakfast. Dad said it was a lousy camera anyway. Dad forgot his book and postcards in a shop. I forgot my jacket somewhere. I think Mom is forgetting to look after us. What other explanation is there for all this forgetting?

I climbed up the steps at Troy and tried to get into the huge horse but it was locked. I bet they shot arrows out of its nose and eyes. Jenni really liked this place because she read The Iliad. I liked climbing on the rocks and pillars. We ate lunch by the sea. I dropped a glass and it broke. The waiter swept it into the sea. Poor fish!

At Pergamon, Mom and Cat wanted to check out every little thing. The rest of us were ready to go after ten minutes. Instead, we climbed on the trees in the Altar to Zeus. Dad read us stuff from the Book of Revelations about this place. It was boring, so he told us about how the Apostle Paul travelled all around here.


Adrian at Ephesus

June 23: ***Old Stones and Washing Machines***

Nobody lives at Ephesus anymore. The amphitheater could hold 24,000 people. When we were at he top, we could hear Mom and Cat talking on the stage. I was hot but Mom and Cat still wanted to look at those dumb old stones. Mom showed me some special ones which were a monument to Hadrian. Good old Hadrian must have been pretty important to get such a nice archway. I got prickles in my feet and fussed. Nobody cared.

Then to Kuşadası where we swam in the sea. We played washing machine in the water, moving our feet and arms as fast as possible while dad turned us around and round. I think we tired him out.

June 24: ***Lost Shoes, Leather Bracelets and Rust Pills***

Dad and I lost our shoes first thing, so we had to wash the car in our bare feet. Later, we found them.

At Priene in the amphitheater, there were huge, special chairs for important people watching the plays, and enormous columns in the temple to Diana. We were all alone there. It was very quiet. We played our instruments for nobody. Mom was very hot and Jenni was very tired. She has something wrong with her blood and has to take iron pills all the time. Dad calls them her rust pills.

Later we swam at Altinkum. Jenni and Dad had a war against Mom and me. Jenni and I pushed each other off Mom and Dad's shoulders. I can swim really well – even underwater. In Bodrum, I bought a jazzy leather bracelet with my name on it. Dad broke the strap so we had to go back and get it fixed.

June 27: ***Playing in the Ruins***

Mom broke her baby toe and dad broke his camera lens cover. Jenni broke her sun glasses. I didn't break anything.

We do fun stuff in the car while driving: play hangman, sing songs - especially rounds, examine maps and brochures, find out about the places, listen to Mom read books, sleep in the back window and tell jokes. When we arrived at Letoon, Jenni played her violin in a big amphitheater ruin. I held the pages of music for her. A little boy my age was our guide. He showed us mask carvings, church mosaics, fountains and a turtle in a pool. We find these ruins all over the place, sometimes in a farmer's field. Mom uses the guidebook to help us find them. Sometimes I play my recorder. We imagine the crowds cheering. Sometimes people, and especially kids, appear from nowhere to listen. Maybe they are shepherds or goatherders. We ate supper in Kaş, checked out the boats in the harbor and ate ice cream - like we do every day.

June 28: ***Secret Tunnels, Shirts and Snakes***

Demre was the home of St. Nicholas. We saw his church and I found a secret tunnel. We shopped and bought new blue and white striped shirts for me and Dad and a dress for Jenni. The store lady said I was handsome and gave me a bowl of cherries. In Antalya, our next stop, we did laundry. Jenni's panties fell off the line into the garden. I laughed. I saw a huge snake as big as my arm. At supper, I did not like my meat, so Mom shared her octopus stew with me.

June 29: ***Octopus Stew and Farming***

In Perge, Jenni and I pretended we were shopkeepers. I sold Mom some new earrings and Cat bought a walking stick. Dad ate my cherries without paying.

In Side, we met a bear on a chain. He looked sad. We got lost and ended up on a little dirt road. We saw farmers, horses, carts and other workers. I am sure they wondered what we were doing on that tiny road. Dad said they farmed the way his Grandpa used to farm. For supper, I ordered octopus stew and stuffed clams. So good. The man put Canadian and Turkish flags on our table. Because it was Cat's last night with us, we had extra-huge bowls of ice cream.

June 30: ***Swimming in Milk and Getting Lost***

We swam in the white Pamukkale calcium natural pools - sort of like swimming in milk. There were some old women in long black dresses swimming there too. They looked hot. Then we swam in the huge hot spring-filled swimming pool. I dove off the high diving board eighteen times. Maybe I'll be a diver when I grow up. I can also dive off my dad's shoulders and do somersaults. Jenni was scared but finally she asked Mom to push her off the diving board. Jennifer jumped off the diving board only twice. Later she fell and burned her toe against a live wire. It looked really sore.

On our way to Bodrum, we took a wrong turn and ended up on another tiny dirt road in the middle of the mountains. We actually didn't know where it would end. Mom loved the mystery of it, but Dad was worried because it was getting dark. Nobody spoke English so we couldn't ask for directions. Finally, two hours later, we found Bodrum, had a quick supper and went to bed. No ice cream.

July 1: ***The Old Boatman***

Turks and Greeks don't like each other, so it was hard to find the schedule for the boats that went to the Greek island of Cos. But we found a boatman who took us there. He showed us how the boat works. He is seventy-four years old. That is very, very old. He drives back and forth every day. Maybe I'll be a boat driver when I grow up. When we got there, we rented motorcycles. I rode with Mom to show her how.

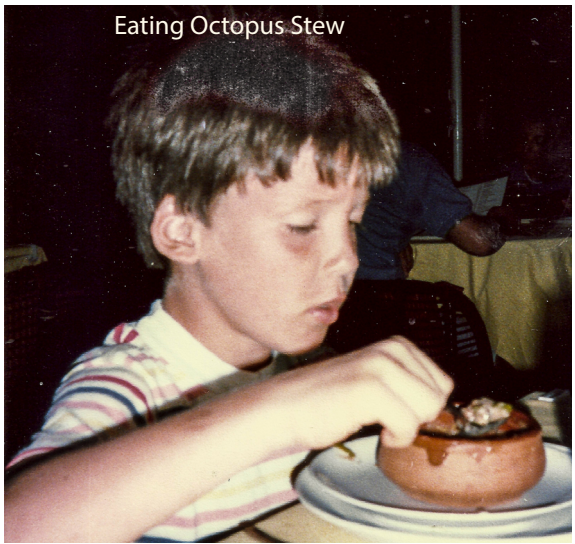
July 2: ***Aches and Pains***

We rode 30 kilometers to Paradise Beach on our motorcycles. Dad sunburned his legs and forehead. Mom has a sore bum from being on the motorcycle. Jenni is a little tired. I am just great. We rented kayaks and played war. Jenni and I pushed Mom into the water.

July 3: ***Motorcycle Mama***

Mom goes for a bicycle ride every morning. This morning she came back with fresh donuts, warm ham and cheese turnovers, and chocolate milk for breakfast. We rode motorcycles again. Today I hurt my leg on the engine when I was riding with her. Later, Mom and I tipped over when we hit a sandy patch. I hurt my leg again. But it will be okay.

At the beach, some of the people took off all their clothes. Dad says it is so they can swim faster. He and Uncle Wally used to swim like that in the river on Grandpa's farm. At supper on the water, we watched a colourful folk dance. I liked the way the girls' skirts twirled. The little girls were very cute.



Eating Octopus Stew

July 8: ***On the Sea***

We took the boat back to Bodrum in Turkey today. I drove the boat all by myself. There was a woman at the front of the boat who took her top off and sat by herself, suntanning with her face to the sun. We had supper by the sea. I saw an octopus being caught by a boy. The octopus grabbed a shoe and the boy couldn't get it back. Maybe I'll be an octopus catcher when I grow up.

July 9, 10: ***Beds and Tombs***

We rented another car and drove to Bursa. We saw the tomb of Murat I. It took him twenty years to build it. When he was killed at war, his son carried him all the way home. Later we saw a tomb park that Mehemet II built. He had the fanciest tomb - his brother and others had plainer tombs. Another brother didn't get along with the rest and so he was sent to live in another country. Imagine that. At the Ethnographic Museum, I saw a special room with a fancy bed for boys my age who had just been circumcised. That sounds awful to me. I had to use the bathroom and they charged me twenty lira.

Then on to Iznik *(Nicea)*. Dad says they made important decisions about the Bible here a very long time ago. Some old men were playing backgammon at the church ruins and cemetery with stones and orange peels. Everybody stared at us because we were foreigners. Dad wore shorts and everybody looked at his legs. We ordered fish for supper but it seemed bad so we sent it back and went to another restaurant. What a full day. Mom and Dad fell asleep before we did. Jenni and I crawled over our balcony onto theirs and into their room. They sent us back the same way.

July 11: ***Point and Eat***

On the way to Şile on the Black Sea, we stopped so Jenni could throw up. Maybe it was the fish from last night? But the rest of us were okay. We saw some people who live in tents and move around a lot. Dad and I went for a long walk and I counted eighteen starfish. I saved one and put it in my room. We had supper on a very high, rickety, old porch over the sea. As usual, we went right into the kitchen and pointed at what we wanted to eat. After supper we wandered around, bought runners for me, tasted apricot ice cream and bought special yogurt with honey for Jenni.

July 12: ***Soccer, Rocks and a Lighthouse***

Dad went to Istanbul to drop off the car. Mom, Jenni and I went to the beach. Lots of people came to make friends with Mom. I met a nice Turkish boy. We played soccer together and some men came to join us. When Dad came back from Istanbul, we hiked up some big rocks that used to be part of a castle. The waves were crashing all around. Then we hiked to a lighthouse. I wonder what it is like to be a lighthouse keeper? After supper, my tooth came out! I guess the tooth fairy will come tonight.

At the Black Sea

July 13: ***The Tooth Fairy***

The tooth fairy forgot to come! Mom sent me to use the bathroom. Maybe the tooth fairy will come while I am busy. Sure enough, the money was there when i finished. Good old Mom, she doesn't fool me. I rubbed her feet for her.

July 15: ***Sultans and Special Bathrooms***

Off to Istanbul on a very full bus. A man fell off his seat. He wasn't hurt but it looked funny. Later, we stood in line for hours to see the huge Dolmabahçe Palace. Actually, Dad stood in line while we played and talked to people. We saw special bedrooms for the Sultan, his mother and his best wife. There was a schoolroom for important children, with a fancy chair for the child who would be the next Sultan. I don't think I'll be a sultan when I grow up. We saw clowns and guards outside the palace. One of the guards showed me where the ordinary guard bathroom was. He let me use it but not Dad. We all got the giggles.

July 16: ***Dad Chased by Shopkeepers***

We boated on the Bosporus and saw palaces, boat garages, a fish factory and many villages. In the last village we found a well. We shopped in the Grand Bazaar. Dad created a big fuss. They wanted him to buy stuff. Eventually, everyone in the bazaar knew he looking for a leather jacket and kept pestering him. Dad was trying to get the best price and was talking to several different shopkeepers. They didn't like that. In the end, he did not buy anything and the shopkeepers chased him out of the market.

*July 17: T****he Grand Bazaar***

We spent the day at the Grand Bazaar. We needed to take a little boat stuffed with people because the bridge was broken. On the steps of the mosque, we saw pigeons all in a row. They looked like they were in church. The bazaar shop keepers remembered Dad. They were friendlier this time. We bought piles of stuff: sunglasses, four shirts for me, a shirt and earrings for Jenni, a leather purse and a skirt for Mom, two leather suitcases, a brass tray and coffee cups, a leather jacket for dad and presents. One man got mad at dad and told him that the suitcase we bought from someone else was not leather. Jenni always feels sorry for the shop keepers and tells them that they have beautiful stuff. Sometimes she tries to talk Dad into buying stuff. We finished the day with our last ice cream in Turkey.

July 18: ***What a Fun Holiday!***

The airport. Gule Gule – which means good bye. What a fun holiday! When I grow up, I might be a diver, or a lighthouse keeper, or an octopus catcher, or an ice-cream truck owner, or a boat captain or a shop keeper or a motor cycle driver or a rock finder or. . . .

Note: Our neighbour, Cat Essoyan, joined us for nine days of this four-week vacation in 1986. This story was written in Adrian's voice and is based on both the diary we kept during the trip, and the photo book I created for him after the trip. I had made an earlier album in Jennifer's voice when we took a five-week trip to the east coast of Canada.

7

Heading into Villages, Farms and Camps

Qalqilya
Nablus
Palestine
Jordan
West Bank
Tel Aviv
Jaffa
Jalazone Refugee Camp
Bir Zeit University
Aybut
Al Haq
Quaker Meeting Ha
Ramallah
Israel
Kalandia Refugee Camp
Latrun Monastery
Jericho
King Hussein/Allenby Border Crossing
St George's Monastery
Wadi Quelt Judean Desert
MCC. 79 Nablus Road
Bethphage
Bethany
Gilo Settlement
Tantur
Bethlehem
Shepherd's fields
Mar Saba Monastery
Herodium
Dead Sea
Fawwar Refugee Camp
Hebron
Ein Gedi

Ya'coub Amer: A Jolly Community Leader

"Ahlan wa sahlan. Ahlan. Walla believe me, you are welcome. Ahlan. Welcome. Kief halek? How are you? Ahlan." A warm smile. A firm handshake. An infectious chuckle that comes from deep inside. Deep brown eyes that radiate both personal contentment and interest in those around Ya'coub Amer.

Many people in Ya'coub's home community are discouraged because of the recent fighting and tensions. Yet Ya'coub with his genuine concern for others, manages to bring them some hope as Mukhtar for the community. He serves as the liaison between Roman Catholics in the Old City of Jerusalem and the formal Roman Catholic Church. His responsibilities include finding housing for needy families, certifying births and marriages, counseling various clients, funneling requests to church administration and offering various kinds of assistance where needed. This is an official volunteer task. Although he receives some benefits from the church, he is not paid a salary.

Ya'coub Amer is also the village level project coordinator for MCC. Ibrahim Matar, Amer's colleague, says of him: "Ya'coub is a genuine Mukhtar and is naturally suited for his job with MCC. He is completely concerned with the needs of others, and devotes time and effort to the welfare of Palestinians." When he travels in the West Bank, one sees farmer after farmer greet him with affection, offering sweet tea, Turkish coffee, grapes, cucumbers, figs, or whatever produce is in season. Ya'coub responds by accepting only a token bunch of grapes or a cup of tea.

Farmers here are discouraged because of the restrictions they face from the Israeli occupation. Amer drives in the West Bank in a lime green V.W. double-cabin truck, counselling and advising, arranging projects and funneling requests to MCC. He helps farmers trellis their grapevines and reclaim land. He distributes olive and grape seedlings. He helps with the construction of cisterns and reservoirs, as well as the installation of drip irrigation systems and canals. Access to water is often very limited, and so these forms of assistance are important for agricultural projects. Sometimes simple roads are needed to access the rocky orchards. Amer invites farmers to come to the MCC offices to discuss new and innovative ideas. MCC generally covers thirty to fifty percent of the costs of approved projects.

The attention and friendship Amer offers farmers is often as important as is his technical support. He tramps through their fields with them, crawls into cisterns to check them out and looks at other possible ways to assist. Some women whose husbands have died, been deported or arrested, lean on Yacoub for the sympathetic ear and support they need to manage a farm single-handedly. He listens, advises and encourages.

In the face of the many restrictions imposed on Palestinian farmers by the Israeli military occupation, it is essential that farmers find a means of practical and moral support. The threat of land confiscation, conflicts with Israeli settlers, disruption of their water supply and many other hassles tend to discourage these farmers. Many have lost all their land to Israeli settlements. Some have experienced death of someone close either in the war in Lebanon or in clashes with Israeli troops. Many have been imprisoned and tortured. They often feel utterly powerless.

Amer was born in the Old City of Jerusalem. Until recently he and his family lived in the same apartment that his family has occupied for the past 225 years. Recently he, his wife Lucy, their three sons and two daughters moved to a new house in the Old City, a house which the Roman Catholic Church built for them.

Previously, Amer worked with Lutheran World Federation. When they closed their agriculture program in 1976, Amer came to work with MCC. At the same time, he was chosen by his community to serve as their Mukhtar. On a trip to North America, Amer says, "I liked the new ideas: irrigation systems, methods of trellising, electronic feeding of animals, no-till planting of cotton and corn."

Amer also visited Palestinians in North America and expressed genuine concern for them: "They have no time to rest. They work like animals. Even our donkey at home has more time to relax. They have cars, expensive houses and huge loans. They seem to be happy, but it is not a good life because the family is not together. Everyone is alone. Even though the Palestinians in America are better off financially, they are still strangers in another land. It is important for me to provide moral and practical encouragement for the people who stay in Palestine."

Note: My early experiences in villages and camps were often with Ya'coub. He drove fast on the narrow winding roads in the mountains. If he saw me clutching the armrest or looking worried, he just laughed and said, "no worries, I have full insurance." This article was published by MCC News Service, December, 1982. Republished by Women's Missionary and Service Commission of the Mennonite Church, April, 1983. The version here is slightly edited. Below: MCC Agriculture projects.

Center top: Ya'coub and woman farmer.

Center bottom: Irrigation project.

Right: Lunch in the orchard.

Repairing an ancient cistern for collecting rain water. Ya'coub is wearing blue pants.

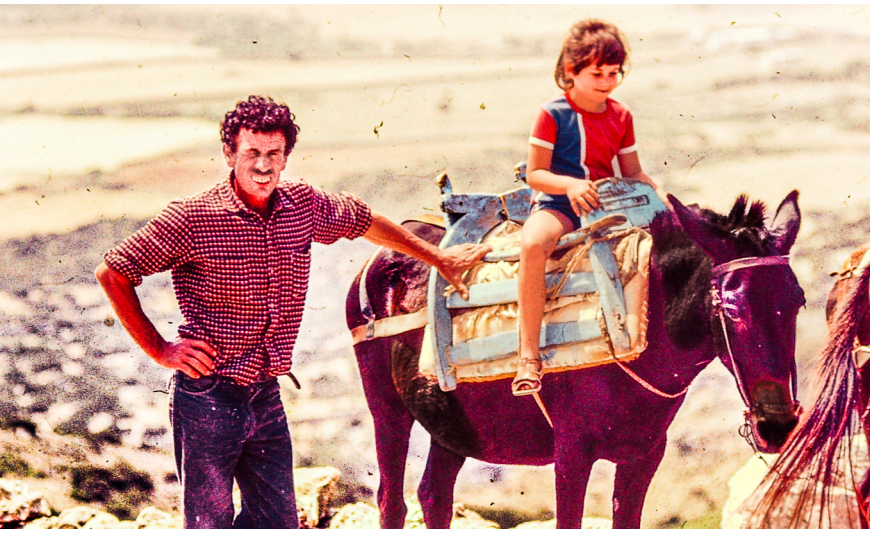
Meals in the Villages

From time to time, we were invited to a home in a West Bank village where MCC had contributed to some projects. The first time we ate in a Palestinian village, we wondered what to expect.

When we arrived, everyone in the village except the older men and women came out to greet us with hugs and kisses on both cheeks. There seemed to be a huge number of children. I think sixteen children lived in the small house where the feast was to be held. After walking through the village on rocky, connecting paths replete with goats and donkeys, we were invited to drive out to the orchards. Three very good-looking young men came with us. A very pretty and affectionate fifteen-year-old girl managed to sneak into the car as well. She loved to hold my hand and lead me along as we walked in the orchard. We saw the village's well-designed irrigation system stemming from a nearby natural spring. While we were gone, Adrian and Jennifer were entertained by riding donkeys and petting the goats. As we toured their farmland, we tasted their figs, dates, pomegranates and grapes.

By the time we returned to our host's home, the grandfather, uncles and father were present, wearing their galabayas - long grey or white robes. A young man had a pitcher of water, which he poured on our hands with a towel to dry them. Inside, there was a plastic table cloth on the floor and lounging cushions around it. We were invited to relax on these cushions with some of the older men. Fortunately, someone had suggested that I wear a long skirt which allowed for modesty while sitting on the cushions. The young men hung around but did not eat at that point.

People from the community stood outside and peered in the windows and doors, watching to see if the host would live up to their expectations of how and what we would be served. Although we were hosted by one particular family, the villagers expected that the family would put on a respectable feast for the visitors. And of course, they were curious.



Right: Ya'coub enjoying a village meal of mansaf.

There was no cutlery and there were no individual plates. We used our hands, picking up a handful of rice, rolling it into a ball and popping it into our mouths. Our hosts pushed the choicest bits of meat into our sections of the pan. If we didn't clean off the bone well enough, it found its way into the mouth of one of the men sitting on the cushions.

When we were finished with the main course, the young men ate. The pan was then carried to the back where the children and women continued eating from it. Although there was a lot of food, we knew it would all be consumed by someone in the house or the community. After the main feast, fresh figs, prickly pear (peeled and ready to be eaten), pomegranate seeds and grapes were served. We finished the meal with cokes.

As it grew dark, I was amazed to see a small battery operated T.V. There was no electricity. The house only had a few rooms and was sparsely furnished with a few chairs and several mattresses, but it was clean. During the day the main space was used for living, and during the night it was used for sleeping. In the morning, the bedding was packed away and stacked in the corner. The outhouse was equipped with only a hole in the floor, which Jennifer found quite curious.

When we left, our hosts put two large boxes of grapes, pomegranates, lemons, prickly pears and figs into our trunk. The whole visit was surreal. This was such a different culture from ours. It had been an amazing experience which I later found to be typical Arab hospitality.

As time went by, we visited the villages for meals quite often. There were variations – the meat could be chicken, beef, goat or lamb, but it was never pork. Once the Canadian ambassador and his wife were with us. The meat, in this case, had been cooked on coals under the ground in foil pouches. The hosts offered the ambassador's wife the pouch with goat testicles, which was considered a delicacy. I noticed a bit of a smirk as they offered it to her and I think they had made such offers before. She very graciously offered it to Harold who very graciously offered it to Ibrahim, the MCC agriculture manager. He accepted with pleasure and appeared to enjoy it very much.

Left: Enjoying a meal in the orchard.

Right: Battir: A beautiful Palestinian village. MCC assisted with irrigation pools and canals.

Occasionally I would be allowed to meet the women at the homes we visited, or even go back into their kitchens. I was a western woman, in a very different cultural category than they were, so I was able to eat with the men but not necessarily see the women. Sometimes there were one, two or more wives. Sometimes I would be allowed to meet with one wife and not the other, perhaps with a Palestinian but not usually with a Bedouin. The situation depended on how conservative the household was, or how concerned they were that I might influence their women with my western ideas.

Another meal I remember was in Jericho, a three-quarter of an hour ride from Jerusalem. It was winter, so it was cold and snowy in Jerusalem. When we arrived in Jericho to visit an orange grove, we were at 240 meters below sea level and it was much warmer. We didn't even need jackets. We were there to visit a Palestinian veterinarian and his family. Toward the end of the meal, a backgammon game appeared. Ibrahim (MCC staff) suggested that the old uncle play against me. The old man's eyes grew very big and he muttered in Arabic, "I've never played with a woman before." We played and he won. But I think I won too - in changing a stereotype.

Life in the Middle East was often surprising, sometimes amusing and usually engaging. We were so fortunate to have the opportunities we did. I often found myself in unlikely situations for a Mennonite girl from Vancouver and Winnipeg. I was very privileged. And we certainly never went hungry.

Abid worked for MCC and helped us with various things around the house. Shortly before we left, he invited the MCC team to his farm for a meal. It was delcious. His wife was incredibly elegant. He was very proud of his home and family. It was so generous of him to invite us.

Right: Abid is far right beside his wife.

Left top: Abid's wife
Left bottom: Abid with Adrian

Four Days in Al-Fawwar Refugee Camp

Day 1

Driving into Al-Fawwar Refugee Camp (1), we saw the cinder block buildings which would be home for the next few days. I wondered what Kathy, an MCC colleague, Jennifer, aged 7, and I were getting into. In 1983, Kathy and I requested a refugee camp experience to improve our Arabic. Sahir, MCC Women's Program Manager, identified the family, made the arrangements and brought us to our hosts in the morning. Inside, we discovered a lovely grape arbor and a freshly poured cement patio. Our hosts were curious and welcoming but knew no English. Any Arabic I did know seemed to have disappeared. I wondered if I would survive four days of difficult communication.

We stayed with a family with five children between the ages of twenty-two and thirty-five. The thirty-five-year-old had been killed in a car accident in Iraq, ten months before. The mother, wearing the traditional black with red embroidery dress, probably in her fifties, was very sweet and constantly urged us to eat. Aminha was the youngest.

Food is prepared on the floor. Lunch was a special meal called mansaf – consisting of saffron rice on flat bread with lamb, rice, leban (*yogurt)* along with olives, pickles and tomatoes. Delicious. It was special and served only to the younger women: Jennifer, Kathy, Aminha, her friend and me. After lunch, it was time to do dishes – not such a simple thing. First the dishes were carried to the cement patio floor. Then we sat on two very low stools about six inches high with a basin of water. Before sitting down on the stool, Aminha brought me a pair of lime green polyester pants with polka dots, to wear under my calf length skirt – for modesty reasons. After the dishes were washed, they remained on the patio floor drying until the next meal. There was no table or counter.

After lunch, we visited, napped and walked. Many people stopped by to see us. I changed into a longer skirt after our hosts gave Kathy a towel to cover her legs. We were both amused when Aminha asked if Kathy was wearing a bra. They asked so many personal questions, especially of Kathy. Why aren't you married? Will you marry an Arab? Will you have any babies? How many? In the evening, we ate again and then visited some more. Visiting in English would have been ok, but visiting in Arabic? Yikes!

The family was large and the house had three tiny rooms. The toilet was Turkish style – an outhouse with a hole in the floor and a jug of water. Thank goodness we brought our own toilet paper. Since 1948, the family has added a grape arbor, a chicken coop, a goat pen and a new building for broiler chickens. I hope I understood all of this correctly. They have a little more room now because some refugee families have left the camp. The mother is blind but had no trouble carrying a live chicken in my direction and then killing it. Jennifer was a little shocked at the beheading.

By night-time, we were totally exhausted. The bedding, stored in the corner during the day, was brought into the main living area. This became a shared sleeping space for the women. I am not sure where the men slept.

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(1) Al-Fawwar Refugee camp was founded by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) in 1949 to accommodate Palestinians who had been forcibly displaced by Israel from Beersheba, Jibrin and villages in the south.

Day 2

The next morning, for breakfast, we ate eggs, olives and fresh stone-baked bread. Aminha and Kathy went for a walk. while I visited with the old women. I loved these old women with their expressive faces full of wisdom lines. Relatives and friends stopped by, children played, chickens were killed, wheat was shelled and another little cement patio was poured.

Partway into the morning, a large fancy car arrived with someone who wanted to take us for a ride. Our hosts encouraged us to go as did some of the neighbors. As we drove to Dura, we could see that the driver was showing us off. Later we learned that this was a Village League official. The Village League was a corrupt group who collaborated with the Israelis. We felt compromised. Tricked. Embarrassed. We were puzzled why the MCC staff had suggested this camp and this family – a camp clearly in cahoots with the Village League.

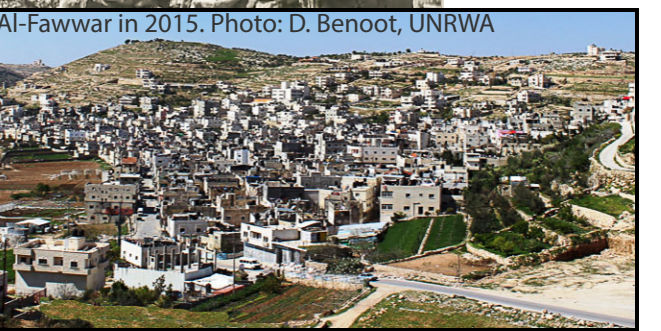
Lunch was mansaf with chicken this time, again from a common pan. Even water is shared from a common jug. We were constantly plied with food. The only way to refuse is to eat slowly and rave about how tasty it is.

In the afternoon, they offered us a bathing opportunity. In a separate room they hauled in two tubs of water in which we were to bathe. Several of the women stayed in the room. They were very curious about our bodies. I made short shrift of the whole thing. It was generous of them but I am very modest.

In the evening, we went to a pre-wedding party; drumming, dancing, laughing all with a spirit of celebration. Lots of gyrating hips. It seemed very sexy but at the same time, also joyful and free. Women and men were separate, as is the custom. Jennifer loved the dancing.

Life is difficult here, especially for those people who don't have running water. Electricity comes on between 7 and 11 p.m. only. In general, life is quiet and I am sure it can become dull. And so every car that enters causes great excitement.

Al-Fawwar in 1951. UNWRA Archive



Al-Fawwar in 2015. Photo: D. Benoot, UNRWA

Day 3

We woke up tired. Jennifer and I slept on a single-sized mattress and she kicks. Everyone gets up very early. For the conservative Muslims, it is prayer at 3 am. So they often sleep in their clothes.

Today we went to the Hebron market by bus with Aminha. We were the only non-Arabs on the bus and I am sure they wondered if we were Israelis. Shopping with a local immediately brought us friendly glances and there was a great deal of amusement when we spoke. After shopping we went to Dura, for Aminha to have some papers signed. Later I found out that it was a Village League (1) office and we should not have gone there. Kathy and I continued to wonder what was behind the connection of this family to the Village League.

For supper we ate chopped spinach leaves boiled into a thick dark green paste called imoulchia. I did not like it but it is considered a specialty. Later a group of girls stopped by, and then an older woman from another village. She was very interested in Kathy and eventually offered her six camels if she would marry her twenty-year old son. A way out of the refugee camp for the family? We were amused.

Day 4

Time to go home. While I did enjoy our time in the camp, the thought of a shower and a sleep on a solid bed was appealing. We had stayed in one of the nicest homes in the camp. To stay in one of the less well-to-do homes for a lifetime without running water, spending the day gathering wood for the fire or cooking the main meal could be depressing, I think. Yet I did sense an undercurrent of acceptance and contentment. Palestinians are very generous and hospitable. Aminha tried to give us her entire wardrobe and everything else she owned. Yet when we wanted to give her a simple gift, we had to give it as if it were a personal favor if she would accept. A good experience for us.

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(1) The Village League will be discussed again later.

Note: Refugees in Al-Fawwar lived in tents initially. By 1956, cinder block one room units were being built. Running water was not available in homes until 1980 and electricity became available in 1990. By 2002, only seventy percent of the camp's homes had access to the sewer system.

The Israeli settlement, Beit Hagai, was established in 1984. An Israeli military watch-tower has more recently been erected and controls the entrance of the camp. Consequently, protection from the Israeli military is a major concern for camp residents. Incursions, camp closures and clashes between camp residents and the Israeli military are common resulting in injuries and deaths.

Photo: IDF soldiers using tear gas at Palestinians at Al-Fawwar refugee camp, south of the West Bank city of Hebron, on December 31, 2017. Photo: Wisam Hashlamoun/Flash90

Curfew in Jalazone: Interview Excerpts

Curfew is a common method of collective punishment used by the Israeli military. If someone from a village or camp commits an act that irritates the Israeli army, the entire village or camp or family might be punished, even if the person doesn't live there anymore, has not been convicted or has not been accused of any crime. Such collective punishments are illegal under international law as outlined in the Geneva Conventions (GCIV Art. 33). Israel's use of collective punishment such as curfews, and house demolitions is condemned by the United Nations *(UN General Assembly Resolution 37/88).* Yet the practice continues.

Jalazone refugee camp is located north of Ramallah and borders on the Israeli settlement of Beit El to the east. Beit El was created illegally in 1977-78 by ultranationalist Gush Emunim. The land was confiscated from three nearby Palestinian villages. Relations between Gush Emunim and Jalazone are tense. The refugee camp was established by the UNRWA, United Nations Relief and Works Agency, in1949 following the Arab Israeli War. The refugees came from the villages of Lydd, Ramleh, Haifa and others, in what became Israel.

Initially the 3500 refugees were housed in tents. As early as 1951, UNRWA began to replace the tents with stone shelters and then with plain cinder block rooms. The area of the camp was about sixty-five acres. Just before the 1967 war, Jalazone camp sheltered approximately 5000 refugees in 938 shelters with food rations for 2740 people. During the 1967 war, approximately 1700 people left the camp and most did not return. The population in 1983 when we were there, was approximately 4370 people.

As of 1983, Jalazone had a medical clinic; centers for sewing, food and youth; a slaughter house, separate schools for boys and girls; a YWCA kindergarten; and a water distribution / sanitation set up. Water was provided through sixty taps at the average norm of twenty liters per person per day. There were seven septic tank latrines totaling only fourteen seats for the camp. Refugees built 473 private latrines themselves. Forty-eight shops in the camp were operated by the refugees. The mosque was constructed by refugees through contributions.

The camp sits in a valley and can be monitored easily by soldiers who are in the hills surrounding the camp. Like many Palestinian villages and refugee camps, Jalazone is put under curfew regularly. In 1983 at one point, Jalazone was placed under heavy curfew by the Israeli military for twenty-three days. Curfew means "no movement" so people were very traumatized by the length of the curfew. Eventually, they could leave their cinder block homes for one or two hours every three days. No one was permitted to leave the camp, even to go to work.

I was at this sorrowful village the morning after the curfew was lifted, with a translator. I wonder about the impact on people experiencing curfews, harrassment, beatings, arrests and lack of many of life's opportunities. Some have lived all their lives under Israeli occupation. They often know only Israeli soldiers and settlers - not civilians inside Israel. I also wonder about the souls of the Israeli soldiers and settlers who are part of enforcing the occupation. What does it do to them? The following statements are excerpts from interviews I did with the residents in Jalazone.

1. ***We could not leave our homes***

On the first day of curfew, Israeli soldiers drove through the camp at 5:00 a.m. in their armored cars announcing that a curfew would be imposed indefinitely. No reasons were given. Patrols were everywhere in cars and on foot. For five days we could not leave our homes for any reason. We were not permitted to use our outdoor latrines. We could not open windows. The supplementary food rations which normally come daily for the children, the sick and the old were not distributed. On the fifth day of curfew, the supplementary food came for those who qualified. We could leave our houses for two hours. We rushed to the shops to buy food.

On the thirteenth day, three members of the Red Cross visited us. We told them we had been allowed out of our homes twice for two hours. The shops were empty. There was no food. The Israeli officer had told the Red Cross we were allowed out of our homes for three hours every day and that the shops were full. This is nonsense. The Red Cross people went to the market to check. There was not even one potato. The Red Cross tried to get permits for five shopkeepers to replenish their shops. By day sixteen, the Red Cross finally managed to obtain the permits. At that time, four sanitation workers were permitted to collect garbage for three hours a day.

2: ***Our Families are hungry***

I was fired from my job because I couldn't leave the camp to go to work during the curfew. Most of us are laborers. We lost twenty-four days of work. We have no money. Our families are hungry. When the curfew was lifted, I went to work immediately.

3: ***They don't want us here***

Twenty-three days of curfew. Why? Because we don't like the Israeli administration. Maybe a little kid throws a stone at a passing car or jeep. Can I control what children do? Maybe kids write slogans about the occupation. Maybe they draw a Palestinian flag. *(Anything with the colors of a Palestinian flag is illegal. I have a red, white and green earring which is illegal)*. Maybe they burn tires to make a peaceful demonstration. For these things the whole camp is punished? What kind of world is this? They do this to make us leave, to depopulate our West Bank. They want our land but not us. My son is in Algeria, my other son is in Amman. It is too dangerous for them to be here.

4: ***Our children became hysterical***

One morning at 6:00 a.m., I was ordered to come to the main courtyard with all the men of the camp aged fourteen and up. We were kept sitting on the ground until 12:30. Those between the ages of sixteen and forty, were interrogated one by one. My wife and children along with other women and children became hysterical and began throwing rocks. To disperse them, the soldiers used tear gas, shots in the air, beatings and finally the fire truck sprayed the women with hot water. My daughter was injured from the tear gas cannister and is now in the hospital.

5: ***I was not permitted to leave***

My sister in Jericho needed blood but I was not permitted to leave the camp to donate.

6: ***Soon we will all die***

My two-month-old baby died. She was vomiting and had diarrhea. The soldiers would not let me take her to the hospital. Soon we will all die or leave.

7: ***They took my son and me***

First, they broke my windows and furniture. Then they took my son and me to their headquarters for interrogation. They separated us and kept us there from eight p.m. until midnight. When I reported this to the Red Cross, the Israeli liaison officer simply denied it.

8: ***My baby died during delivery***

My baby died during delivery. The mid-wife came to help. When the child was half out, the military came to see what was going on. About ten soldiers beat upon my door. I fainted and the baby died.

9: ***No milk, no food***

My husband was imprisoned during the curfew. I don't know where he is. I have eleven children. We live in this small room with no milk, no food, no money. If I open my window, they break it. One of my children was burned in an accident with the kerosene heater. I tried to take him to the hospital. The soldiers refused and ran into me with their jeep. I am three-months pregnant but now I am bleeding. The blood is on their hands.

10: ***I was imprisoned***

I am nineteen years old. I went to get bread from a neighbor so I was imprisoned. They put my head in the ashes of a burned fire. They poured hot and cold water over me and set a fan blowing on me. They covered my head for seven days. After I was released, I went to Ramallah Hospital for treatment.

11: ***How do I feed my family?***

My daughter went out to hang up the wash and they shot at her. I am a worker outside the camp. I could not go to work. How do I feed my family?

12: ***Bruises on my ribs***

I am an old woman. See the bruises on my ribs where they beat me.

13: ***They beat me***

I went out to open the drainage system. They beat me on my head and on my hip.

14: ***We could not use the toilet***

They ordered me and the other men aged fourteen and up to come to the courtyard. We had to stand for hours. We could not use the toilet. They threw cigarettes on us.

15: ***They came into my house***

They came into my house breaking furniture and windows. They made so much noise. Half an hour later, my six-month old child died.

16: ***They shot my water tank***

They shot bullet holes into my rooftop water tank. This is our third curfew in three months. Four times my water tank has been shot. *(I went to the roof to see the water tank and the bullet holes).*

17: ***Prayers calls stopped***

Our Muslim prayer calls were not permitted during the curfew.

18: ***I was afraid of the rats***

There was no garbage collection until sixteen days. I was afraid of the rats.

19: ***We were all punished***

My father died at age 95 during the curfew. He was not getting enough food. The primus, a small kerosene heater, exploded. Usually, I start it for him but the soldiers would not let me go to him. We did manage to get him to a hospital but he still died. We wanted to bury him properly but the military refused. We did have a funeral but too many people came. We were all punished by sitting in the courtyard, again.

20: I ***snuck out at midnight***

I had to get out of the camp to get food. I snuck out at midnight. I managed to get some food and get back to my family. Nobody saw me. Others who have tried this were shot or arrested.

Above: Jalazone Refugee Camp. 2018. photo: B'tselem

Right: Jalazone Refugee camp in 1950. photo: Willem van de Poll. CC 4.0

Note: I did these interviews within the first year of being in Jerusalem with MCC.

Words in italics are mine. Each quote is a different person.

21: ***They shot at me***

I wanted to sweep my porch to get the bugs away. They shot at me.

22: ***I cannot bear it***

They messed up our house and took our son away at midnight. He is now in prison. I know what they are doing to him and I cannot bear it.

23: ***His spinal cord was broken***

My twenty-two-year-old son died in hospital during the curfew. He has been imprisoned three times: in 1979 for seven months, in 1981 for four months and in 1982. His spinal cord was broken from the beatings. I couldn't visit him during the curfew.

24: ***School is closed***

We have no school. How can I pass the Tawjihi *(Jordanian grade 12 final exam)*? Education is the only way out.

25: ***The soldiers are still everywhere***

They lifted the curfew. The men rushed to work. The women went to the market. But really the curfew is not completely lifted. At 7:00 p.m. we cannot be outside. We cannot get travel permits. The soldiers are still everywhere. When will heavy curfew start again? Tomorrow?

Note: The harassment of Jalazone continues from 1983 when I collected these interviews until now in 2023.

Arrest by Israeli forces in Jalazone. Photo: Ryan Rodrick Beiler, 2013.

The ultranationalist Gush Emunum settlement of Beit El is very close to the school in Jalazone. Students are regularly harassed by settlers and soldiers. Photo: Noam Moskowitz/Flash90, 2013.

Students celebrate the start of a new school year at the UNRWA Jalazone Basic Girls' School. Photo: Ameen Saeb,/UNRWA, 2018.

Middle: UNRWA created an special exit from the school so students could access the school safely. photo: Marwan Baghdadi / UNRWA 2021.

Right: Reaction to stun grenades thrown by Israeli forces into Jalazone camp. Photo: Ryan Roderick Beiler, Activestills, 2013.

8

Experiencing and Observing

Beirut
Sabra Palestinian Refugee Camp
Shatilla Palestinian Refugee Camp
Lebanon
Majdal Shams
Golan
Syria
Akko
Tiberias
Sea of Galilee
Nazareth
Megiddo
Jordan River
Um El Fahem
Palestine
West Bank
Nablus
Jaffa
Jalazone Refugee Camp
Bir Zeit University
Ramallah
Al Haq
Jericho
Jordan
Jerash
Amman

The First Term, 1982 – 1985: Snippets from Letters

Ibrahim Matar

1982: ***Dinner, a No-win Situation and Politics***

Driving to Jericho with Ibrahim, MCC Agriculture Program Manager, we came upon the old ruins. He pointed to them as we passed and said, "That's ancient Jericho where they fought the battle." I replied, "Oh, you mean Joshua, when the walls came tumbling down?" Ibrahim was quiet for a while with a rather puzzled look on his face, and then esponded with, "Yes, but for some strange reason, the walls are still standing." Modern Jericho is very much alive. It is not far from Jerusalem but being much lower in elevation, it is very much warmer and is regarded as a winter resort.

Recently we were invited for dinner to Ibrahim's home. Ibrahim is highly regarded in the Palestinian community. He has many international contacts and is sought out by the media for interviews. Ibrahim is Roman Catholic and has church membership in three different churches. He says that this is "to increase the Christian population here." We were told in advance that we needed to dress for the occasion, since this would be a fancy event. I wore the best dress I had and whatever jewelry I had along. But I was very under-dressed, as I usually am at urban Palestinian events. We brought a box of After Eight Mints, some Canada flag pins for the children and a few other things as simple hostess gifts. One couple brought two dozen roses and another brought a large very ornate porcelain statue. Six couples made up what was considered a small dinner party. The party included the best potter in Jerusalem – his ancestors had done the tiles for the Dome of the Rock. The evening was all very elegant. Ibrahim's home has ornate French provincial furniture with beautiful needlework covers on the chairs, loveseat and footstools. The exquisite meal, comprised a large buffet with both Arab and Western specialties, must have taken weeks to prepare. A lovely evening.

Politics affects everything here. MCC has one volunteer couple teaching English in An-Najah National University in Nablus. Along with other professors, they were interrogated by the Israeli military and forced, through fear tactics, to sign a statement denouncing the Palestinian cause. Now they must leave the country because the Palestinian community wants no part of them. The Israeli military is deporting the foreign teachers who didn't sign. This was a no-win situation and two young teachers were forced to become political even though they didn't want to. This Israeli action was intended to harass and cause division among teachers and professors. Military personnel, barricades, and checkpoints are all in place to prevent Palestinian universities from operating. The result is that they operate underground. Classes meet in churches, homes, basements, abandoned buildings or even in parks. However, they are not closing completely despite the deportations of professors and even of the president of one university.

Not only universities are affected by these political actions. Public primary schools in the West Bank are often forced to close. MCC's kindergarten program was ordered to stop. However, MCC continues to assist kindergartens but very quietly and off the record.

I find it amazing to see the effects that the occupation has had on women. Traditionally, in Muslim culture, women are very much in the background. When we go out into the countryside to see the farms and villages, we expect to meet the men. But if the men have been arrested, deported or killed, the women have to take charge. Sometimes they come to the office, usually accompanied by a young male member of the family. I received many affectionate kisses from these experienced women with their very weathered hands and wrinkled faces.

I am interested in taking some Library Science courses at the Hebrew University. So I met with the head of the library graduate school. The courses are taught in Hebrew, so I likely won't pursue this track, but the interview was interesting. In the course of the conversation, I mentioned my book on censorship. He looked at the abstract of it and his first comment was: "Israel doesn't have any censorship." He expanded his point rather defensively referring to the media coverage of Israel's involvement in the Lebanon war. With no questions from me or even comments, he carried on for about fifteen minutes and then, amazingly, asked if I would be interested in giving some guest lectures.

The Israeli government sometimes uses symbolic measures to express irritation or anger. One day on a drive to Ramallah, I passed the remains of Jordanian King Hussein's summer palace. Building began on it after the 1948 war, when the area was under Jordanian control. However, the Jordanian palace was never finished. A few days ago, King Hussein publicly said something that irritated Israel's current leaders. When I drove by the unfinished palace today, I noticed that several Israeli flags were flying high atop the unfinished structure. This was clearly a blatant symbol intended as a strong message to Hussein. "We are here and you aren't."

I met the deposed mayors of Nablus and Ramallah. Both these men had severe leg injuries caused by Israeli-set car explosions which occurred at exactly the same moment in two different West Bank towns. Now they live under house arrest with very curtailed movement and visiting rights. Yet their message of peace is strong, their gentle spirits are alive and their desire to show love is ironic.

We spent an evening in the home of a man under house arrest. This means he cannot leave his home after 6:00 p.m. and he must report to the police station once or twice a day. He lost his job because it involved going into the areas surrounding Jerusalem. Being under house arrest, he can not leave Jerusalem at any time.

Twice I visited a farmer in Jericho whose story is unbelievable. To get to his place, we drove into a huge, mostly abandoned refugee camp – a sort of ghost town. My interpreter and I arrived at about 4:00 pm. This farmer was a 1948 refugee. In 1967 six-day war, almost everyone was forced out of this camp. Of 70,000 people once there, he and a few others found a way to stay. Now he has a farm and still lives in the camp with his son and grandson. As the sun set, we could see the twinkling lights from Jordan on the other side of the river. The old man, aged 92, told us his story in flickering lantern light beside his irrigation pool. We could hear his cow and see an abandoned house across the path as we drank the

beverages they offered us. There was no electricity or running water. It was the simple home of a family having endured great hardships. He harboured very little bitterness but his generosity was overwhelming. His remaining yellowed teeth, his greyish stubble, his white cap and his earth-stained clothing were embodiments of his story.

1983: ***Politics, a Retreat and Tantur***

MCC office needed to hire someone part-time to type catalogue cards for the resource center. The chosen young woman did well. Shortly after being hired, her father phoned to find out about MCC. Then the father and brother appeared at the office. They impressed upon me how very special their daughter/sister is. I was not sure what they were getting at, but finally I figured it out. They told me that there were too many men in our office. We agreed that she could work from home where she would be separated from possible contamination from the men. Oh dear.

An MCC staff picnic in the Galilee region revealed another side to the local staff. At work, they were quite serious although their humor was always present. Palestinians love to belly-dance. So they danced - in the bus, in the park and wherever we stopped. Jennifer and Adrian loved it. We all sang, chanted, walked, laughed uproariously, and ate good picnic food.

The bus company sent us a non-air-conditioned bus. A bus for local people. Second class for Palestinians. Not acceptable. The bus company told us to open the windows. Many windows didn't work. Harold insisted on a change. After all, it is against the law for foreigners to rent non-air- conditioned buses. Eventually, the bus company relented and off we went with the staff and their families in a comfortable air-conditioned bus for a great day in the Galilee. We were over fifty people.

Elizabeth Nasser is from one of the leading Palestinian families here. Stocky and square, she stands about four feet seven inches tall. With bushy eyebrows, grey wiry hair and few wrinkles, she is an appealing character. At age 80, she is still highly energetic. She took us to lunch at the Notre Dame monastery, where she knew all the male waiters by name and took great delight in making them smile. She is very fond of MCC. Nasser graduated from the American University of Beirut. She was a teacher and later she became a social worker. In the 1948 war, called the Nakba - catastrophe, by Palestinians, she had to flee Jaffa. She became the Director of the Social Welfare Department under Jordan in the West Bank. Later, she founded the Rawdat Az-Zuhur, Garden of Flowers, School in 1952 on the Mount of Olives after meeting two little girls begging in the street. The school soon became an elementary co-educational school and kindergarten, integrating music and art into the curriculum. She told us that anyone she hires must be good-looking. She means that they must have energy, a sense of humor and a twinkle in the eye. She won a U.S. award in 1955 for "Enriching the Human Spirit through Recreation." Delightful!

A retreat with the Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM) people and MCC was held at Baptist Village near Tel Aviv. The Tel Aviv area is much lower and more humid than Jerusalem, so we saw green grass again. Historically, there has been some tension between the MBM and MCC people. MCC's work started after the 1948 war with a focus on relief in the refugee camps, mostly in the Jericho area. Later, MCC worked in education. Now it has a focus on agriculture,

economic development and peace in the West Bank. This contrasts with MBM, who organize traditional church-building mission work inside Israel, mostly with the Jewish population. In the evening of the retreat, we attended a service at the MBM church in Tel Aviv - a 150-person Messianic Jewish congregation. Harold sat in the back row observing, while I, being short, chose to sit closer to the front so I could see what was going on. The two-hour, charismatic service was in both English and Hebrew, using interpreters for the sermon. Songs were sung in both languages, sometimes simultaneously, and most had a slightly mournful, minor melody line. Piano, guitar, flutes, tambourines, bongo drums and a variety of rhythm instruments were used to accompany the singing. Movement, swaying, dancing and lots of emotion were integral to the service. At one point there was an opportunity for speaking in tongues – or perhaps I should call it a sort of "Praise God in your own way" activity. It was sung, not spoken, and instruments were used. The piano kept everyone in the same key by playing an E major chord continuously. Everyone participated at the same time, so the volume rose and subsided with the crowd. This participatory experience started and ended spontaneously with the chanting of Hallelujah over and over.

The young man sitting next to me was leaving to serve in the Israeli army in Lebanon. The congregation offered a blessing for him, with everyone around him laying their hands on some part of his body and praying aloud. I was in the middle of this and felt very uncomfortable. I did not want to be part of this. So I conspicuously remained sitting. Harold said that it served me right for sitting so close to the action.

Occupation is a dirty, messy business. Its long-term impact is devastating for the Palestinians. Examples include land confiscations, restrictions on economic life, curbs on freedom of speech and movement, constraints on education, limits on the right to assemble, and an undermining of credibility. One also wonders how this affects the soul of the occupier – Israel - a country claiming democratic principles and equality. But tempers are hot, here and retaliation comes in very real forms as well as in symbols. For example, Reagan says, "No more settlements." So Prime Minister Begin immediately announces plans for ten new settlements.

Here in Jerusalem, practical everyday tasks and work co-mingle with political symbols and intrigue. For example: A young person from a village south of Bethlehem requested permission to travel to Amman, Jordan. He was told to go to the Israeli military government offices at a particular time and day. He did so, and after waiting for some time was told to return on another day. He returned and the same thing happened. This occurred about half a dozen times. It suddenly dawned on him what was happening. He had been forced into a situation where his external behavior - going to the Israeli military office regularly - exactly matched that of an informer collaborating with Israel: frequent relatively brief visits to the military. His visits had all been duly noted in his community. He now lives under a cloud of suspicion – even from his own family. This fracturing of trust, essential to a healthy society, is devastating.

Another incident even more grievous illustrates the same point. A seventeen-year-old boy stole a bicycle. The authorities apprehended him and put him in prison. It was clearly a crime, but his first offence. The authorities spent over a week telling him how terrible he was and that he would stay in prison for a long time. After ten days of this treatment, the authorities abruptly changed their behavior. They told him that it wasn't so bad and that if he helped

them a little, he could go free. In his traumatized state, he agreed. He was placed in a cell with other offenders and asked to inform on their conversations. He did this. After several weeks, he was released… and then disappeared. His community had passed judgment on him. He was never found.

1984: ***An Israeli Interchange***

Some Jewish acquaintances from Winnipeg visited us and stayed in a very fancy hotel with wonderful pools. Jennifer was friends with their daughter. We spent the afternoon with them. They are strong Israel supporters, and received the 'full treatment' from their Zionist Israeli tour guides. Their cousins live in Jerusalem and were also with us poolside. One of them is a professor at the Hebrew University. He came to Israel after the 1967 war in a sort of idealistic euphoria. Now he is very critical of Israel, and may even leave the country. So here we were with North American supporters of Israeli policies who actually knew nothing about the real situation, and local Israelis who wondered how to mesh their original idealism with the current corrupt morality.

With some Israelis, one senses an awareness of loss of innocence. But many Israelis do not know what is going on politically. Or perhaps they don't want to know. Some are leaving Israel because their Zionism and principles of democracy conflict with each other.

Entrance to Tantur

1985: ***Peaceful Tantur and the Judean Hills***

I have been working at Tantur Ecumenical Institute where I am seconded from MCC. Professors, theologians, clergy and others come to Tantur to retreat, study or explore. Built in the sixties, it is a beautiful complex located on a hilltop between Jerusalem and Bethlehem on forty acres of olive trees and gardens. It feels restful to drive up the hill and through the crusader-style gate. It is run by the Notre Dame University, with strong input from the Vatican and a group of Anglicans from Britain.

When I started at Tantur, the rector was a very tall, skinny, vegetarian with his head in the clouds – as close to heaven as possible. He was a sincere, cerebral man who often spoke with his eyes closed. He seemed almost not of this world. He liked things to be very quiet and thought that I was too loud. His wife was a short, very sensible woman who disliked bugs. He told her not to kill them because they are God's creatures, but whenever he would leave their apartment, she would spray an insecticide and kill the bugs.

Me, Bill, Jerias Khoury, Barbara, Landrum

The administrator of the institute is an Anglican British ex-army guy, loud, boisterous and bossy. Sometimes I find him somewhat disrespectful to the Palestinian staff. He does enjoy Jennifer and Adrian though.

Landrum Bolling, who later became rector, was a Quaker who was a special advisor on the Middle East to Jimmy Carter. He has thirty-five honorary

My boss, Dr. Bill Klassen, a Mennonite, heads up the Peace Academy, and I am the Special Programs Director. I have a variety of tasks in this role, including orienting newcomers and setting up specialized programming, selecting and ordering resources, preparing press releases, and connecting with other peace institutions. I recently completed a needs assessment for the rather large Tantur library. We eat communally at Tantur. Our family often joins the community for Sunday lunch. One controversial issue at Tantur is the communion service. The Catholics don't want to serve or accept communion with people from other denominations. This attitude seems not very ecumenical, and it is certainly something that causes tension.

Bill, Donna and our family on the old Roman viaducts in Wadi Kelt

Once, the President of the University of Alaska visited us at Tantur. I took him and Landrum on a tour of the Judean Hills in Wadi Kelt, along the old road to Jericho. On that narrow dirt road there are military installations but not much traffic. There are also old Roman viaducts, still in use for irrigation. We often find them refreshing on hot days when walking there. Our family frequently walks down to St Georges Monastery in Wadi Kelt – an amazing structure built right into the cliff, complete with beautiful blue domes. Only a few monks still live there. On this visit with these two delightful men, we stopped on a hill from which we could see into the deep ravine and across to the monastery. There was a large permanent, sturdy cross at the top of the hill. Suddenly, the two old men, at least they seemed old to me, broke into song. "I walked where Jesus walked today." Their voices echoed in the hills.

Some visitors call Israel-Palestine the Holy Land, and come for a "holy" experience. The holy experience roots might grow from inside their heads, from their childhood Sunday School stories, or from a mythology that is very far from the current reality here. Nonetheless, these two highly educated and powerful men lifted their voices and sang with all their hearts to the revered God of the Jews, Christians and Muslims, in a land where the conflict between Jews, Christians and Muslims is seemingly unsolvable.

Note: The snippets in this piece take us to the end of our first term in Jerusalem. In mid 1985, after three years in Jerusalem, we decided to renew our term for another two years. We took a three month break to relax and see family. This included several weeks in Spain. We flew into Madrid and drove down to Almuñécar, Spain. On the way, when we stopped for a stretch, Harold forgot his shoes by the side of the road. It was hot so he drove barefoot and didn't realize that he didn't have shoes until we had driven a long way. He had no other shoes, and finding large size 13 shoes in a small Spanish town was not easy. On another roadside break, we found a miniature set of soccer shoes. We saved them and they became part of our Christmas ornaments, along with this story.

Ibrahim's mother-in-law loaned us her villa on the Mediterranean. Finding it was a challenge since we had only approximate directions. It was worth the effort, however. A stunning view looking out over the water, from our high cliff awaited us. We explored the area with our kids along with Al and Agatha Doerksen who joined us. On the way back to Canada, we stopped at Disneyworld and Epcot Center. After being in the Middle East, Jennifer's response to Epcot Center was, "Is this it?" She had somehow expected more, especially since her life experience was already significant. We then spent time with our families in Manitoba and B.C. before returning to Jerusalem in the fall.

Beyond Factions: A Demonstration in 1984

Excerpts from a Letter

Kahane, an American right-wing Orthodox Rabbi, moved to Israel in 1971 and founded the militant anti-Arab Kach political party. This party advocated the forcible removal of all Palestinians out of Israel-Palestine, including those in West Bank and Gaza. Kahane lobbied for his beliefs in violent ways and was jailed several times. He was the first Jew in Israel to be accused of sedition. Kahane ran for Knesset - the government. He lost in 1976 and 1980, but was elected this year *(1984)*. He is extremely vocal, and is often compared to Hitler by both Israeli Jews and Arab Israelis.

The Palestinian Arab village of Um al-Fahem, located inside Israel, sponsored a peaceful rally against Kahane with the cooperation of the municipality, the mixed Arab/Jewish political parties and all of the many factions within the village. The village itself is made up of about 25,000 people, and has a history of factionalism. It has no sewer set up, almost non-existent community services and terrible health care. It is congested and lacks many basic services. This is because of intentional hold ups from Israeli officials in getting adequate infrastructure from the Israeli government. The people pay taxes in Israel but don't have access to the services they pay for.

This particular village was chosen for a demonstration because it is one that Kahane wants to liquidate first. Situated on a hill inside Israel, the main square is about half-way up. Those joining the demonstration had to walk up the hill, through the square and on up to the top. The turf was clearly Arab. The language was Arabic. The village is Arab Palestinian and mostly Muslim. The demonstration seemed to be a success in that it remained peaceful.

The moving part for me was to see the mass of heads with black hair all unified and chanting. And then the Israelis came – they joined in the demonstration! They walked up that steep hill in the hot sun: the old people with canes and arthritis; the mother and her eight-year-old son; the twenty and thirty-year-olds; the forty and fifty-year-olds. The army was noticeably absent. There were no police. But there was cheering! As each group walked up the hill through the narrow passage between the pressing crowds, they were welcomed with clapping and smiles. How courageous of Israelis to come to that very Palestinian, Muslim village. Perhaps even more courageous, for a Palestinian Arab village to protest against the Israeli authorities. The unity of the village with its many Palestinian factions and the participation of Israelis was awe-inspiring, even though it was only a relatively small number of Israelis. It brought tears to my eyes. I admire those who let their views be known and those who stood in solidarity together.

Um al-Fahem. Photo: Makbula Nassar

Blood on Their Hands: Sabra and Shatila

Journal Entries: 1982

Following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June, the right-wing Lebanese Christian Phalange militia stormed the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in West Beirut. Israeli troops surrounded the camps to prevent the refugees from leaving and allowed the Phalange to enter. The Israeli army fired flares throughout the night to light up the camp and allow the militiamen to see the narrow alleys of the camps. Murder and torture of women, children, old people and anyone there over the period of three days (*Sept 15-18*) ensued, resulting in destruction of the community. The massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon is shocking.

September 20: ***Blood for the Martyrs***

As I sat on our front balcony, I watched a group of Palestinian school children who had been dismissed from school. As the thirty or so children, aged ten to fourteen, walked down the road, they chanted, "Our blood for the martyrs." What a contrast to the shepherd with the flock of sheep I saw from this balcony last night. Here, in Jerusalem, the response to the massacre is one of stunned shock. Most shops in East Jerusalem were closed in mourning. In the West Bank, however, the military refused to allow businesses to close. They used violence and harassment to get shopkeepers to open their shops. Either that or they welded shops completely closed.

September 21: ***Right Place, Wrong Story***

I went to the post office to get the mail. I found a huge crowd of Palestinian women in a somewhat of an uproar. A post office official was standing on a desk trying to get everyone to settle down. I assumed this uproar had something to do with the Lebanon situation. I asked the man next to me what he knew. Turns out he knew a little English, and was only interested in taking me for coffee. I declined but only after extracting some information. He told me that the women were collecting their social welfare money. Looking outside, I saw that the shop vendors were set up to lure them into immediately spending their money. As I left, I noticed many reporters with their fancy cameras. On the evening BBC news, we heard that there had been a demonstration staged by Muslim women in Jerusalem. The reporters had it all wrong. If it had been a demonstration, tear gas and armed soldiers would have been everywhere. It was simply people who were anxious to get their social welfare money. At the same time, many Israelis did participate in a peaceful demonstration about the massacre outside Prime Minister Begin's house.

September 24: ***Old City Tensions***

I went to the Old City to pick up some items for our MCC unit meeting in the evening. As I entered Damascus Gate, I noticed hundreds of soldiers with wooden clubs, guns, helmets and shields. Their presence was overwhelming, stifling and somewhat shocking. In a place where I usually feel a sense of earthy vitality, I felt oppression and fear. I stopped to chat with some soldiers to ask them why they were in this place. What did they expect? They said that when the Muslims finish with their prayers, they would likely demonstrate and vandalize the shops. The shops in that area are Palestinian – so that didn't really make any sense to me. One shopkeeper told me that the soldiers do this to

keep the tourists afraid and so they stay away, which is not good for business. Palestinian anxiety, fear, vulnerability, and feelings of powerlessness are reactions to the massacre, and also to their own experiences with Israeli soldiers.

I bought a tablecloth from a Palestinian merchant. In his shop, there were three men sitting and drinking Turkish coffee. The owner sat behind an old Singer-style treadle sewing machine which was surrounded by bolts of cloth. The entire shop was about six feet by twelve feet with hardly a place to stand. The mood was not jovial. The men spoke of old times. They were depressed by the massacre and did not see much hope for the future.

September 25: ***Israelis for Peace***

We attended an Israeli Peace Now demonstration against the massacre. The mix of people included hippies from the 60s, ordinary mothers, fathers, children and grandparents. The posters and banners, mostly in Hebrew, included slogans such as: "Sharon, where is the dove?"; "We are not the policemen of the East"; "The government of Begin is an immoral bankruptcy"; "Begin murders." I spoke with one woman who has four sons in the Israeli army. She had received a telegram from one son in Lebanon indicating that seventy percent of the soldiers are fed up. She hospitably invited us to come and stay with her family in Haifa, although we were never able to make that happen.

September 27: ***Repentance?***

It is Jewish Yom Kippur: a time of repentance. However, there doesn't seem to be repentance for Sabra and Shatila. The massacre has had a profound effect on the Palestinians here. Ralph and Phyllis Miller, MCC workers in Lebanon, were here this week and told us their story. It is hard to imagine the panicked fear of twenty-five people in a bomb shelter with the world falling all around them. They told us of the fine line they walked, of the suspicions of people from all sides, of the shrapnel, of seeing a minister's wife locking her gate to keep out the crying, suffering refugees running from the camps, of tensions between Christians and Muslims, of watching accurately aimed bombs blow up houses less than a kilometer away, of being frustrated with UNRWA for their lack of ability to respond, of seeing the victims of torture and dead bodies in heaps, of showing their American passports and being exempted from standing in long all-day lines in the hot sun waiting for interrogations. Their story heightened the sense of helplessness I frequently feel here.

Note: The United Nations condemned the Sabra and Shatila massacre as an act of genocide, while an Israeli fact-finding commission determined that Ariel Sharon, then the country's defence minister, bore personal responsibility for the killings. He subsequently resigned his post. He is known by Palestinians as the "Butcherof Beirut." In spite of this, he became the leader of the right-wing Likud party and ultimately held the post of Prime Minister from 2001 – 2006.

MCC faced an interesting dilemma when they wanted to send food aid into Sabra and Shatila. The tins of MCC beef and other canned food always carry the MCC logo underscored with the words "In the Name of Christ." Sabra and Shatila are mostly Muslim. The massacre was caused by the Christian Phalange and Israeli Militias. Those in the camps would suspect any food aid that was labelled Christian, possibly poisoned. What should MCC do? They decided to buy food without the labels and deliver that to Sabra and Shatila.

Challenging and Fascinating Experiences

Snippets from Letters in the Second Term: 1985-87

1985: ***Eschewing the Army***

An Israeli friend, Dr. Daniel Amit, has been imprisoned for refusing to serve in the Israeli army in Lebanon. About 50 years old and Head of the Physics Department at Hebrew University, he is a quiet, unassuming, gentle man. I admire his courage. He is a man of conscience and protested the Vietnam War in the '60s. He is known for his work on peace between Israel and Palestine. *(Toward the end of his life, Daniel was bitterly disappointed at the failure of the left and took his life in his Jerusalem home on November 4, 2007).*

I drove Amit's daughter, aged 21, to and from Ramallah a few times. Israeli women are required to spend two years in the army after completing high school unless they are married. She married young and then almost immediately divorced. Now she models nightgowns for a Palestinian lingerie factory in Ramallah. Her Jewish boyfriend did not serve in the army for moral reasons. For him, as an Israeli Jew, the repercussions are many. Every Israeli employer looks at army records. Available mortgage rates, various government subsidies and university admittance are all related to army service. Israeli Arabs do not qualify for these benefits because they are not permitted in the army *(in 1985)* so there is systemic discrimination against Arabs or anyone who does not do army service. This young Israeli woman, married and divorced, avoided army service on the basis of conscience. How tired she looked for a twenty-year old. I wonder how her future will unfold.

1986: ***Tanks, Checkpoints and Hitchhiking***

One day, I went to the rooftop of the building next to the Al-Haq office to take photos of what was going on. I had been there about five minutes when two soldiers with guns appeared. They pointed them at me and rather gruffly escorted me downstairs. Somehow it didn't even faze me. I think my view of normal is changing.

Al-Haq offices, where I work, are in Ramallah. Driving home from Ramallah, I often find myself in a long line of tanks and big green tank transporters, both making an incredible racket. Where are they going? Who is going to be hurt? What is a young thirty-four-year old Mennonite pacifist woman doing in a white MCC Peugeot driving on a main road in the middle of a line of fierce-looking military vehicles? There are usually checkpoints on the main road where I am required to stop, briefly, if I am alone in the car. If I have a Palestinian with me, the stop and the questioning take much longer. If I am riding in a car with a Palestinian driver, the wait could be hours or more.

On Wednesday evenings, we have strategy meetings at the Al-Haq offices. These often go on until very late. Once when I was driving home alone, my car broke down just outside of Kalandia Refugee Camp. It was dark. I was about to go across the road to the camp to see if someone could help me when a car stopped. An Israeli got out of the car and asked if I had a problem. I took a chance and asked if he was going to Jerusalem. He was. I wondered if he could give me a ride since my car had broken down. He generously obliged. Was it wise, to get into a car with a stranger? I had hitch-hiked regularly as a student at Simon Fraser University in the '60s, but this was something different. Would I

have been safer with a Palestinian from the refugee camp? Would my car still be there in the morning? The Israeli man was somewhat taken aback when he realized that I lived in East Jerusalem and worked with Palestinians, that I knew some Arabic and that I had been considering entering the refugee camp. In the end, it all worked out. I got home safely and the car was still there in the morning and the MCC staff looked after the situation. I was grateful.

1987: ***A trip to Tel Aviv, a Party, a Challenging Weekend and High Tensions***

Raja, a Palestinian lawyer and co-founder of Al-Haq, and I wanted to see the movie, Shoah, a ten-hour film about the Holocaust. We decided to see it in Tel-Aviv. We left Jerusalem from the bus depot at 11:00 a.m. on an Israeli bus. Then we took an Israeli taxi to the theater. The taxi driver in Tel Aviv was curious about us. A Palestinian? But not a terrorist? Raja has a small frame and looks a bit like Ghandi. He doesn't look like a terrorist. What does a terrorist look like anyway? The taxi driver wanted to know about me. Wouldn't I rather go to the Museum of Art? Once in the vicinity of the theater, we had lunch in a small Israeli restaurant with a menu in Hebrew. No English or even Arabic was spoken in this restaurant. We were having an immersion experience.

Once at the ticket counter, we were told that there were no seats left. This proved to be a lie. I don't really know how but we did manage to secure seats. Finally, amidst a sea of Jewish school boys with kippahs, we sat down to view an incredibly moving, detailed series of interviews with Holocaust victims, SS men, Polish citizens and Germans. Later, during a break, we strolled down the darkening streets of Tel Aviv. By the time the whole thing was over, it was 11:30 at night. We headed back to Jerusalem in a group taxi which included a very boisterous, probably drunk, Israeli. The taxi dropped us off in West Jerusalem. Israeli taxis don't like to go into East Jerusalem. We decided to walk back to my home in East Jerusalem. It was a long walk. The crisp midnight air felt refreshing and cleansing. The "Palestinian Problem," as some Israelis call it, has not resulted in exactly the same incredible atrocities of the Holocaust. However, there is severe injustice and systemic, overt and underhanded discrimination. Examples include the harassment and arrest of Palestinians, the practice of taking their land, the torture in prisons, the deportations, the refusal to provide or even allow for adequate basic services – all of this and much more renders Palestinians powerless and without control of their lives. In addition, many Israelis appear to be unwilling to "know" what is happening.

Both photos taken at an Al Haq picnic. *Left:* Judith and Raja. *Right:* Al-Haq researcher, Joost Hilterman

Experiences here continue to fascinate me. On one occasion, we were invited to a dinner party with an unusual mix of people. This mix included:

- A very suave French travel agent.
- The travel agent's assistant, with a blouse open to her navel.
- The travel agent's wife, who had just arrived and was leaving the next day. The dynamic amongst this triangle was undefinable but very intense.
- The French commercial attaché and his wife. They were in their 50s. He had just returned from abroad. I guess he had really missed her because he kept feeling her knee and thigh. She eventually moved to another couch.
- A loud, boisterous Palestinian millionaire who told off-colour jokes. He invited Harold to visit him in France, but told me I didn't have to come since I didn't enjoy his jokes.
- A beautiful sixteen your-old girl whose uncles couldn't seem to stop touching her shoulders and arms.
- A Palestinian print shop owner who cornered me into a monologue about Ashkenazi Jews whom he claimed were not Jews at all.
- The print shop owner's wife who became very emotional about their large family house which had been taken by Israelis during the wars without compensation.
- The host's sister who lives in Haifa. She said that her son doesn't like anyone to know he is Arab.

Imagine a dinner party with this assortment of guests, in a rather small but very ornate living room replete with an amazing feast of Palestinian food. It felt like a surreal movie with many different stories going on at the same time.

Last weekend was rather stressful. To begin with, there were some heavy deadlines and work pressures related to impending house demolitions and arrests. On Friday, I started work at 4:00 a.m. and at 9:00 p.m., I was still at the office. The day had been frantic. On top of work issues, the electricity wasn't working. The boiler was being installed and we had no heat. It was pouring rain and very cold. After finally finishing, I drove home. I had trouble with the car on the way but thankfully managed to reach my destination. Something had happened to our water tank, which is in the attic, and water was coming through the kitchen ceiling. Harold figured out what to do about that and I fell into bed.

At 1:30 p.m. the next day, our new MCCers arrived, ready to go with the kids and me to Zababdeh to see our other MCCers. It was pouring rain and there was mud up to our ankles in Zababdeh. We left for home at 7:00 p.m.

The next day was Sunday and Harold was leaving for the U.S. I was so tired that I refused to leave the house even though I was supposed to go to two weddings. I located enough heaters to warm us up. I gathered the children into the warmth, along with some good books and their homework. I found some soothing music and made popcorn. Adrian baked cookies. We all napped. The next weekend was bright and sunny. The heaters were working at home and at the office. As I write this, Harold is back home and life is good.

The political realities often contrast strongly with our everyday family life. A man we know, Jabra, has a brother in the US who is wanted by the Israelis. I do not know why. Jabra himself is a hard-working computer repair man. Because of his brother, there was a demolition order on Jabra's house and it has sincebeen demolished. The punishment of family members because of the actions of one family member – "collective punishment" – is common here and illegal under international law.

Last week, an Israeli was killed by a Molotov cocktail thrown by a Palestinian near Qalqilya, a Palestinian town. In response, Israeli civilians looted the town, beat up the people and ripped out fruit and olive trees. The army and the police, as usual, claimed they could do nothing to stop it. Qualqilya is now under curfew and no one knows what is going on.

There was also trouble at Bir Zeit University - a student was shot in the back and died. The army has closed the university for four months. At the same time, women from the teacher training college demonstrated against the closure by walking down the main street in Ramallah in silence. The police used tear gas to break up the demonstration.

On Palm Sunday in Ramallah, a town with a significant Christian population, we found an odd combination of "Sunday best clothes," striking merchants, students ready to demonstrate, people waving Palm branches, as well as soldiers with riot shields and clubs - perhaps not so different from an Easter 2000 years ago.

The atmosphere is close to the boiling point. When there is a death of a Palestinian who protests, he/she becomes a martyr. The actions of Israelis in seriously harassing Palestinians are instilling hatred. It is so difficult to watch people being so continually oppressed. When one reads of all the horrors and atrocities, when one talks to burdened Palestinians and when one sees the strain on the staff at MCC, Tantur, or Al-Haq, I can understand the bitterness of the people. I can understand the seething frustration that quietly rages just under their skin. Yet, somehow, they remain warm and generous people.

Below: The Israeli Security wall now surrounds Qalqilya almost 360 degrees. There is only one small opening which is controlled by Israeli military. It feels like a prison. Photo: Yval Ben-Ami in 2014.

Murder and Mourning

It all began on Monday morning, December 2, 1985, in Ramallah, Palestine. It was cold and rainy. And as usual, the contractor for the new Al-Haq offices - the addition of another floor to an existing building - had forgotten about our scheduled meeting. However, his lawyer had not. Our lawyer, Mona, was detained in the military court, attending to the case of an arrested 63-year-old, crippled man, father of one of Al Haq's field workers. About 90 minutes after the appointed time, the meeting finally commenced. No one was in great spirits. The morning at court had not been successful for Mona. The contractor was not being co-operative. His lawyer was not helpful. Eventually we came to an uneasy agreement, after which Mona left for another session at the military court. All of this messiness was nothing compared to what happened later that day.

That evening, the father of our friend, Jonathan, phoned me to check out a terrible rumor. Harold was not home and I was alone with the kids. Thirty minutes after the phone call, the doorbell rang. Three friends were at the door: Mona, Charles and Selwa. They walked right in, hardly saying a word. Their faces told me that the rumor was true. Mr. Aziz Shehadeh had been murdered. He was a 73-year-old, well-respected, forward-thinking Palestinian statesman known for his integrity. He was the founder of the largest, most prestigious law firm in the West Bank. He was the father of Raja Shehadeh, a lawyer, author and co-founder of Al Haq, as well as our friend and colleague. We were told that when Aziz Shehadeh arrived home from his office at 7 p.m., his throat was slit and he was stabbed in his neck and back. The murderers left him in the rain, which drifted over his body and mingled with his blood which was flowing down the driveway. He was found by a neighbor some time later.

We spent the next three hours in somewhat of a daze. Mona was in shock, her frail body shaking intensely until, at last, deep sobs convulsed her. Charles (1) absorbed himself with the task of locating Raja, who was in Nairobi attending the International Commission of Jurists Conference. What could I do? Stay calm, make coffee and hope we could find Raja.

The next day was deathly somber. Jonathan, in the absence of Raja, performed many of the tasks that an eldest son usually does, including buying the coffin and making arrangements for the body. At last, Raja was found. He had to come home using a slightly longer route via Amman, Jordan. Using the shorter route through Tel Aviv would have meant that his Jordanian passport would have been confiscated and he would have no proof of citizenship. Aziz's two daughters arrived from Amman where they lived. Their crossing had not been pleasant, as it never is for Palestinians entering the West Bank from Jordan. Sometimes a strip search by the Israelis would be involved, a particularly humiliating experience for women in a modest, conservative society. The military authorities were

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(1) Raja, Jonathan and Charles were co-founders of Al-Haq, a well-respected and award-winning human rights organization, the West Bank branch of the International Commission of Jurists. Its mandate included documentation of human rights violations, test cases, trial observations, free legal advice, education and research. I was the Administrative Director in our second term, 1985-1987. Mona was a Palestinian lawyer with Al-Haq.

contacted, and a request to allow Raja to pass through the crossing quickly was made. Surprisingly, perhaps because of Raja's and his father's stature in society, this request was granted.

At Al-Haq, we arranged to have condolences printed in the newspapers as is the custom. A floral wreath was ordered. Then we went to the Shehadeh house to sit in mourning. The house was warm with sunlight streaming in through the window. About twenty-five women sat with Mrs. Shehadeh in silence, drinking small cups of bitter coffee. Very bitter!

Questions of why, who, and what now ran through everyone's mind. Was this a politically motivated murder? Was it something involving a known criminal? Was it simply the result of a lawyer who was willing to take risks for peace? Or perhaps because he took on sensitive land cases? The result of winning controversial cases? Was it intended as a warning to Al-Haq? Clearly, it was pre-meditated and well-planned.

On Wednesday, December 4, we again went to sit in mourning at the Shehadeh house. It was not quiet. Village women were chanting outside the house. Mrs. Shehadeh sat like stone. My heart broke for her. How could she bear this day? Her life had changed forever. The body lay in its coffin in the middle of the living room, strewn with flowers. As I left, at about 11:30 a.m., I met Raja on the stairs. He looked so small and thin. We embraced and wept.

We returned at 1:00 p.m. to gather for the funeral procession. The chanting of the village women outside had increased in volume and intensity. The house, the yard and street overflowed with people. As we sat again in the house, I marveled at the public nature of this event and the intesity of the process. The Anglican priests entered the living room and the chanting stopped. Prayers were said, and the coffin was lifted high onto the pall bearers' shoulders and carried from the room to form the beginning of the lengthy procession. The family followed and then the men. Women trailed behind ; they grieved separately from their husbands, as is the custom. As the procession began, the chanting resumed, along with loud wailing and ululating. We processed through the main street of Ramallah, coffin held high, walking the long mile to the St. Andrews Anglican Church. Weeping people watched the long procession from their windows, doors, alleys and sides of the street. I walked with Mona who very nearly fainted at several points, her sobs mingling with the chanting. The procession stopped when we reached the Shehadeh law

Left: Aziz Shehadeh in his office in 1982. Photo: from the Shehadeh collection.

Right: Inside of St Andrew's Anglican Church where the funeral was held.

offices. A lone mournful siren rang out. The tears flowed and everyone was completely silent. After several minutes, we continued to the church. The Anglican Church was full and overflowed into the courtyard. I stayed in the courtyard to be with Paulein, Al-Haq's administrative assistant, who was completely overcome with grief. How strange it felt to hear the familiar Anglican hymns sung in Arabic, mingling with the wailing outside the church. I can still picture three Palestinian Christian women standing outside in the rain, beside the barred window of the church, singing hymns in Arabic. Near them, Palestinian Muslim women chanted and ululated in their black village garments, beautifully embroidered in red.

After the ceremony, the procession moved to the cemetery, and then to the house for more bitter coffee. After coffee, I returned alone to the old stone church, now locked and quiet, appearing as if nothing had happened.

The next day, I went to see about having an alarm system installed in the new building. I talked to the architect, bemoaned the uncooperativeness of the contractor and wished we owned the building so I could fire him. These administrative tasks don't stop because of a death – even if one does not feel like dealing with them.

In the evening we celebrated the release of one of Al-Haq's field workers from prison. Another is still in prison. Another field worker's father is also in prison. Living can be so brutal.

We don't know who killed Raja's father. We don't know how Mrs. Shehadeh will face her future. We don't know how Raja will mourn. We don't know how we can help. We don't know about the heart-breaking turns of life. We just don't know.

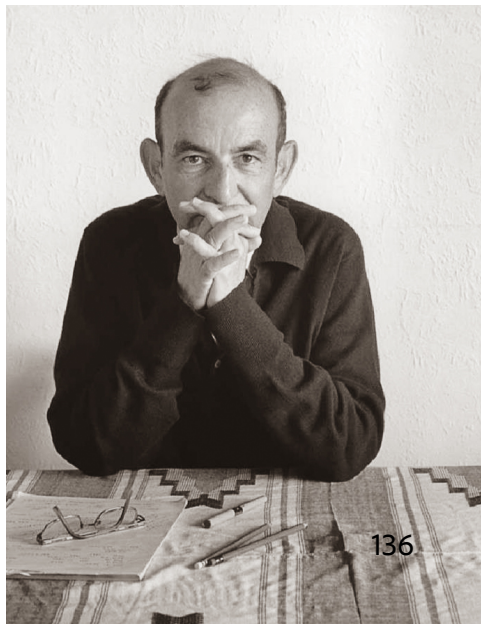
Note: Written December 10, 1985 on Human Rights Day. Some edits were added later. The images of this event will remain with me forever.

The Israeli police knew who killed Aziz. They concealed this information and conducted a sham investigation. In fact, they deliberately accused the wrong person and then informed the family that there was not enough evidence to formally charge this so-called suspect.

In 1994, a suspect known to be a criminal, murderer and Israeli collaborator died. Twelve years later, it was confirmed that Aziz was killed by that very collaborator working with the Israelis. The specific motivation is not known. This information comes from the"Afterword" in *Strangers in the House*, 2009 edition, a book by Raja.

Top: Raja with his parents in London after he was called to the bar in 1982. Photo: from the Shehadeh collection.

Bottom: Raja at home, 2012. Photo: Mariana Cook, 2010



9
Leaving, Remembering and Reflecting
Jerusalem
Paris
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Imagining a Better World

There is a place in Palestine called Megiddo, situated on a hill overlooking the Jezreel Valley. In ancient times, it was a busy place between Egypt and the East, where travellers, traders or invading armies stopped. During the Bronze Age, it was a strongly fortified Canaanite city. Sometimes called Armageddon, it was the site of many epic battles.

At one point, the Old Testament King David captured the city. Solomon beautified it and designed a camouflaged, practical, water system to supply the city with clean water especially during a siege - an example of elaborate Israelite fortifications during the Iron Age. In 732 BCE, the Assyrians captured it, developed a street system and used the city as their capital. In 609 BCE Egyptians took it. Then it declined, and was eventually abandoned in 566 BCE.

When I stood at the Megiddo ruins for the first time, viewing the more than twenty layers of ancient civilizations, I cried. Over the centuries, people had imagined a better world. This gave them the strength and inspiration to build, create, design, invent and beautify. People working together, trusting each other, can accomplish extraordinary things. Unfortunately, each "better" world needed guarding, and so people began to fortify, arm, fight, win, destroy, kill, wipe out.

At Megiddo, I wept because it all seemed so futile. All that energy to build, destroy, build, destroy and build again - a cycle that continues in the Middle East and in other parts of the world. Is it possible to have a positive, more permanent influence in politics, finance, medicine, education, development, social services? Where can we find the necessary energy, power and courage to make a difference in our homes, communities and countries?

Christ alienated the religious and social leaders of his day. In a society which promoted salvation through laws and rules, he introduced forgiveness and love. In a place of established lifestyles and values, he offered a divine, radical approach which was powerful enough to change the status quo. In a society that devalued women, he empowered them. As an alternative to rigidity and ritual, he introduced ideas of freedom: freedom from religious judgments and from set expectations. In a society dominated by rigid religious leaders and the Roman occupation, he offered a new way to live.

Our task is to focus on this powerful vision. Our lives should not be a passive waiting. They are to be an active working force. Initially received by only a small Jewish minority who believed in an improbable Messiah, Christ's message affirms the power of persistence. Indeed, that small minority, that first gathering of believers, has had a profound impact on our world. Do we, as a much larger body than that first church, still have the power and persistence they had?

Imagine a better world. Can we turn imagination into reality? How?

Note: This piece was written several years after we came home and was originally published in the Fall, 1993 issue of *Sophia*. It has been edited slightly and is included here because it is based on our experiences in the Middle East.

A Personal Journey into Human Rights

In some ways, serendipity played a huge role in my journey into the realm of human rights. I have been fortunate in the sometimes chance opportunities that have come my way. How did I find myself on a human rights journey? Where did that process begin? At birth I suppose. Perhaps I always had a sense of outrage at unfairness.

A good starting point might be my first book, entitled *Not in Our Schools* and published in 1982, about censorship in Canadian schools. The political reality when I wrote the book included a right-wing group paradoxically called, Renaissance Canada. It accused the public school system of secular humanism and attempted, among other actions, to remove a significant number of books from school curricula and libraries, often without even reading them. As an educator, I found this distressing. I wondered, "What is wrong with humanism in a public school where the students come from various ethnic and religious backgrounds? Isn't humanism actually a helpful approach in a secular school setting? Weren't humanistic morals and values ingrained in most religions?

The book also deals with the censorship found in left-wing approaches. For example, in the U.S., *Huckleberry Finn* has frequently been banned in schools – even, ironically, by Mark Twain School. In the novel, the "N" word appears 219 times. It was written in 1884 when the "N" word was a commonly used word. The book was reissued much later without the offensive word. This reissue caused quite a debate. Is the meaning of the book changed or the power of Twain's anti-racist message reduced if that word is changed? Other forms of censorship discussed in my book relate to politics, sexism, racism, profanity, perceived immorality and the presentation of history.

Aside from studying examples of censorship and possible solutions in a pluralistic society, I was also looking at the role of Christianity within society. How was it that some Christian groups could get so carried away as to ban even the Bible or the Narnia books? How was it that the focus of these Christian groups was negative rather than positive? To me, it seemed that they were afraid of the exploration of ideas. Why would that be?

And then we went to Jerusalem with MCC from 1982-1987 and experienced another world. We were in our thirties. "Prime time for establishing careers" and "it's dangerous" were comments we heard from concerned friends and family. Harold was told that he should not be taking a family there. We went anyway. We would not trade that life-changing experience for anything. However, the questions kept coming. How could the Crusades have taken place? It was a religious war that forever damaged Christian credibility in the area. How could some Christian tour groups, which we often saw there, use their trip to bolster their already established views and refuse to see the current political reality or even notice the local Palestinian church?

Halfway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem is a small mountain called Tantur. The terraced hill is graced with

ancient olive trees and a small graveyard. The ecumenical institute at the top of the hill is surrounded by an old crusader- style wall with an archway leading to rose gardens and pools inside the wall. From the flat roof of Tantur the view includes oppression and opportunity. On a clear day, you can see the hills of Moab in Jordan, the place where the Israelites assembled before crossing the narrow, muddy Jordan River into the long-awaited land of milk and honey, the promised land of opportunity, a land full of challenges which they would encounter.

Immediately to the west of Tantur is the enclosed, sleek, modern, cement, high-rise Israeli settlement of Gilo, built on land seized from Palestinian farmers. At the bottom of the Tantur hill lives 95-year-old Palestinian Mohannes, once a farmer with significant land. He now lives in an old school bus; his lands were taken from him for the Israeli settlement of Gilo.

To the south of Tantur is the West Bank city of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus and home to many Palestinian Christians. In Bethlehem one finds the ancient, small, dark grotto in the Church of the Nativity, where oral tradition says that Christ was born, and Milk Grotto Lane where rumor has it that Mary spilled a drop of her milk. Manger Square, in the center of the town beside the old Church, leads into a warren of old alleyways and narrow streets. Here the Muslim and Christian Palestinians of Bethlehem live and work amid the intense challenges and roadblocks of modern everyday life, within a politically volatile environment.

For a year and a half, I worked on this hill at Tantur, at an ecumenical Institute operated by Notre Dame University, supported by the Vatican, British Anglicans and others. It was run by a staff of Palestinians, Israelis, and international folks and enjoyed by visiting scholars, theologians, ministers, and other religious people. People came to Tantur with fear, hesitation, anticipation, curiosity, enthusiasm and wonder. Some of them could hardly wait to take the local bus into Bethlehem or Jerusalem to try their hand at bargaining, communicating or exploring. Others preferred to stay within the safety of beautiful Tantur. The latter group rarely ventured into the real world that surrounded that lovely old mountain. The Middle East, with its roots in three related, major world religions and its modern-day complexities, often defies attempts at sense-making and was perhaps too challenging or maybe unappealing for some people. Some folks travel all the way to the Middle East to see the land which contains ancient biblical truths, but then can't see the current realities staring them in the face every time they go shopping.

As I worked within this complex context, questions kept coming. Why is there so much suffering? Why do some people experience what seems to be a gilt-edged life while others feel like Job with one blow after another coming at them. Why was I born into a loving home, and someone else to a refugee or a homeless mother?

In the second half of our MCC assignment, I was asked to become the Administrative Director of a grassroots

human rights organization founded by two Christian Palestinian lawyers. The organization, Al-Haq, was the West Bank affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists based in Geneva – an organization with UN observer status. The office was in Ramallah, a Palestinian city about twenty-five minutes by car from East Jerusalem where we lived.

The hours were long, and sometimes I drove that lonely road home from Ramallah at midnight, passing by Palestinian villages and refugee camps, and at times being stopped at various checkpoints by Israeli army. But the work was challenging and interesting. Our programs included a free legal advice clinic which served a Palestinian cliente including: people whose family members had disappeared or been arrested; people who were separated from family; individuals who were about to be deported; and farmers whose homes, olive trees or crops were about to be bulldozed by the Israeli army.

Al-Haq had the only major law library in the West Bank and had a significant translation program. These were invaluable resources, since the 1400 military orders which affected most aspects of Palestinians' lives, were generally produced only in Hebrew. Al-Haq also took test cases into the courts (1), and we used international lawyers to produce legal opinions. The bulk of our work, however, was the documentation of human rights violations, such as torture, land confiscation, administrative detention, disappearances, house demolitions and other violations. To do this we trained field workers who lived in various parts of the West Bank. Among the last people we hired were a Jewish labor union activist and a conservative Muslim Palestinian librarian. Other characters on staff included a Palestinian communist field coordinator who always wore red runners; a very smart, creative Dutch researcher; a very precise British lawyer who carefully dotted every "i"; and about twenty Muslim, Christian, agnostic or atheist people with passionate opinions and viewpoints.

You can imagine the intensity of work and the interpersonal tensions that could arise. However, these tensions were usually overcome by a focus on the "rule of law" regardless of personal opinions, politics or beliefs. I learned about human rights, about international law and about people who lived what they believed. I saw farmers, children and everyday people make crucial decisions on the basis of their beliefs – decisions which would affect their whole lives in very practical ways. I saw professional people - who could have left a dangerous situation to live in the US or elsewhere - choose to stay, because they believed they needed to be there. Our offices were raided and tear-gassed by the Israeli army, and our workers were imprisoned because they worked for us, even though Al-Haq was a legal and registered non-governmental organization.

The personal questions continued. What was the difference between these steadfast people and the tour groups that came with their video cameras and red tourist hats? What was the difference between people who lived

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(1) Legally, the West Bank was very complex. It relied on old Turkish and Ottoman law, British law, Jordanian law, Israeli military orders for Palestinians in the West Bank, Israeli law for settlers, religious laws for domestic issues and international law which included U.N. resolutions.

their beliefs at great personal cost and Renaissance Canada, who promoted their beliefs by imposing restrictions where they could? How could I deepen my committment to non-violence and non-discrimination, here, in Israel-Palestine?

As a librarian and information specialist cast in the role of director, I had a particular interest in the methodology of documenting human rights violations. The information had to be accurate and without bias, regardless of the situation. If human rights violations such as torture, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial execution are properly documented when they occur, it becomes easier to apply the rule of law. Proper documentation also provides an accurate historical record of the facts about cases of individuals, communities or ethnic groups who experience uprooting, execution or other hardships because of their race, nationality, gender, associations or other factors. At the same time, versions of "truth" can be very different, depending on whether the person is a victim, witness, perpetrator or analyst. So the complexities of documenting human rights violations began formulate in my brain.

Some months after we were back in Canada, I received a call from Hans Thoolen from the UN asking me to present a paper at a development conference in New Delhi about human rights documentation methodology. Hans was one of the founding members of HURIDOCS - Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems, International. So I prepared the paper and went to India. That paper was the start of what proved to be a long-term project, culminating in two books which I presented at the UN Human Rights Conference in Vienna in 1993. The books were published by HURIDOCS with sponsorship from funders in Denmark, Finland, Germany, France, Canada, Norway, Sweden and other countries. We revised the books in 2001. They were translated into a number of different languages, became the basis for various computer programs and were used in many parts of the world.

A task force comprising twelve people from all over the world was appointed to work with me in preparing the books. What are these books? They are a tool for practically documenting violations and organizing information on gross human rights violations like torture, execution outside the legal process, displacement, and arrest on the basis of race, beliefs, ethnic group, language and religion. This work took me much deeper into the field of human rights as we worked on developing classification systems for torture, descriptor codes for autopsies, controlled vocabulary describing arbitrary arrests, types of violations and more. We faced many questions in coming up with a system:

- How can we retrieve information on a particular victim, on a particular violation, about a particular army unit, judge, or government official? About a particular prison, refugee camp or village?
- How do we record the source of our information while respecting issues such as confidentiality, security, privacy, protection? How do we avoid further endangering victims or witnesses?
- How do we show trends? Statistics?

- How do we identify the variables? For example, in Northern Ireland, religion may be the pertinent variable; in the Sudan it may be tribal loyalties; ethnic group in Guatemala or Peru; race in South Africa. The specifics of documentation methods can vary by region.
- How do we devise a system that can be used manually with a pen or typewriter, and at the same time used by a sophisticated computer program? This was an issue in the late 80s and early 90s when computer systems were very expensive and not always available.
- How do we develop uniformity of language? Doing this amongst English speaking countries is difficult. Broadening it further to include Russian, Spanish, Arabic, and Asian languages becomes even more complex.
- How do we bridge different legal concepts between countries? Even developing a working definition of "human rights" is not easy when different countries have ratified different international agreements, have different or no Charters of Rights or have different cultural understandings and have different legal systems.

This work took me much deeper into the field of human rights as we developed classification systems for torture, descriptor codes for autopsies, controlled vocabulary describing arbitrary arrests, types of violations and more.

My work with HURIDOCS was not my bread and butter. It occurred alongside teaching in the inner city for nearly twenty-five years, before and after our time in Jerusalem. At Gordon Bell High School, my longest position, I worked with mentally, emotionally and physically challenged students, new Canadians, refugees, indigenous students from Winnipeg and northern communities, street kids, members of gangs and a full range of students from many backgrounds. My work as head of technology and teacher librarian allowed me the flexibility to create a safe place where all students had access to technology, books and media. I found it rewarding to see a row of Muslim girls, new to Canada, working at the computers at lunch time, communicating with far-away friends. and family. I also worked on developing human rights curricula for the school district. I learned much from those experienced students.

In 2004, I retired from teaching and took on a major project in Warsaw with the OSCE, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, where I worked to create an online information resource for the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. This was the only time I worked for an inter-governmental organization. We created a website with information and best practices resources related to the fifty-seven OSCE countries. It included not only government reports but also a search engline leading users to NGO findings.

In 2004, President Paul Kagame invited me to visit Rwanda and meet with his ministers. It was an interesting assignment. I was impressed by their hard work and confounded by the dreadful massacre. Kagame was interested in how to improve Rwanda's human rights reputation. Laying a wreath with the mayor of Kigali at a mass grave, attending a local Gacaca trial in a village field where a nun was being accused of murder, and meeting daily with the minister of Justice were all incredibly moving experiences and deeply affected me. Some years

later, the Minister of Justice contacted me. Rwanda was being pressured by neighbouring countries to enact legislation making homosexual activities illegal. I indicated that if Rwanda moved in that direction, it would make their human rights reputation worse, not better. Rwanda did not make homosexual activity illegal but there still are societal taboos and there is not much legislative protection for LGBTI+ people.

Other opportunities and privileges arose. I enjoyed being on the Advisory Board with ILGA Europe (1) - and setting up a fund for documentation projects in Eastern Europe. These projects focussed on hate crimes, discrimination in employment or housing and other relevant topics. Training LGBTI+ organizations in documentation methods and evaluating their project proposals was very rewarding. Setting up the criteria for the granting fund, establishing the procedures, choosing the annual themes and selecting the organizations to receive the grants was satisfying. Sometimes these experiences, along with general documentation training for peacekeepers in Ghana, or for people documentaing various human rights violations in Gambia, Portugal, Thailand, Romania, Belgium and other places left me astounded. The stories I heard were sometimes heart-breaking.

I was honored to speak at a number of conferences. In 1996, 2,500 librarians, including me, descended upon Beijing to attend the International Federation of Library Associations /UNESCO Conference. The conference had received a great deal of publicity in China, indeed there was more hype than a political convention would have gleaned. The conference was very efficiently organized, and security was high with guards posted at all entrances. I had been asked by Canada's Parliamentary Librarian to present a paper.

Social events of the conference included a many-course banquet in the Great Hall of the People at Tiananmen Square. Everyone was efficiently bussed in convoy to the Hall – all other traffic had to wait. People lined the streets waving, maybe thinking these librarians were royalty? It was embarrassing. If anyone moved into the convoy, they were removed very quickly. This kind of security was absent on another day when we walked in Tiananmen Square watching skateboarders, kite-fliers, roller bladers, remote car controllers, families and lovers. A very different Square than it had been in the horror of 1989.

When I first arrived at the conference, security was waiting for me. My phone was tapped. My materials were taken. I was followed. Why all of this? Because my topic was on how to access human rights information. One night at midnight, two guards escorted me into a room with eight very formal-looking Chinese officials. They charged me with something, but I don't know what. There was no translation offered. Intimidation was clearly the strategy they preferred.

The president of IFLA asked if I would prefer not to give my speech. Of course I was going to give my presentation!

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(1) ILGA Europe is part of the greater ILGA network: The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association.

The American and Canadian embassies requested a meeting with me. They sent people to my session just in case there would be trouble. I did the presentation and was completely safe. This was a high-level conference and there really was no danger. It wouldn't have been a good image for China had they forced an altercation. The part that really angered me, though, was the Chinese officials who took pictures of the Chinese attendees at the session. I hope they were safe.

Another conference was in Tunisia, a HURIDOCS conference. Since I was on the Board, I was heavily invested in making it a success. A Tunisian human rights organization with permission of the government was hosting us. The glitch came when an Israeli activist wanted to attend. When he arrived, we were told by our hosts that he could not attend or the government would shut down the conference. We held our ground and were prepared to shut down the conference if required. The hosts came up with the idea that he should stand outside and listen to the proceedings from there. The government might be amenable to that. We said no. HURIDOCS was a well known international human rights organization and if the government shut us down, there was a large international network that would find out. We called the bluff. In the end, the conference went on and the Israeli man was in full attendance. He was very gracious about the whole incident, we were embarrassed and tensions with the Tunisians were high. The fun part was that I had the opportunity to spend a day with him touring Tunisia. A wonderful courageous man.

In June, 2008, I had the privilege of being elected onto the Canadian Board for Amnesty International. Every Christmas, Amnesty has a wonderful campaign to send letters of encouragement to prisoners or to their families. One of the things I enjoy doing when I speak to groups or attend other informal gatherings, is to bring an Amnesty human rights case to their attention, and then encourage people to sign a corresponding card or petition.

In my last post, I worked with the Canadian Museum for Human Rights as Director for Research, Content and Scholarship - an opportunity which brought together my experience in libraries, technology, human rights and education. My work included managing the archives, the library and the research/curatorial team. A challenging and rewarding opportunity.

The questions have not stopped. There are and always will be more questions about life and living. About fairness unfairness. About rights and responsibilities. About strategies and tactics. I have been blessed to have had so many rich experiences and opportunities to learn. My life has led me into many diverse situations. I am grateful to, and awed by, the resilience of people who rise above incredible hardships. Given my particular experiences and opportunities, how could I not be involved in human rights?

Note: Since the Middle East figures so intrinsically in my journey, it is included in this collection.

A Middle Eastern Menu

The MEZZE (To whet the Appetite)

Turkish stuffed vine leaves with rice, onions, mint, dill, lemon
Baba ghanoush – a smoked eggplant dip
Hummus with basil and hummus with pomegranate molasses
Arabic pink pickled turnips – often found in falafel wraps
Palestinian baladi green split olives
Egyptian eggplant Msaqa'a with pine nuts and raisins
Lebanese kibbeh - spiced beef and bulgar.
Parsley tabbouleh, fresh pita, Nuts
Shanklish cheese with cloves, red pepper, mint, sesame and nuts
Za'atar toasted pita – a Middle Eastern spice sprinkled on pIta. Thyme, marjoram, toasted sesame seeds and a touch of lemony sumac
Syrian mhammara dip. Walnuts, grilled red pepper with a beet twist
Armenian lahmajoun – A sort of cheeseless pizza with spiced beef, lamb, lemon and mint

Soup (To warm the Body)

Havuç çorbası Turkish carrot soup with cream and lebneh. Actually, you can put labneh (*heavy yogurt)* on anything including soup, stew, rice, vegetables etc.

Main Course (To fill the Belly)

Ruz bel-sha'riya. Rice with vermicelli noodles prepared in the Palestinian way with saffron, almonds, apricots and oegano
Middle Eastern chicken with lemon and Lebanese 7 spices (paprika, cumin, turmeric, cinnamon, nutmeg, pepper, allspice)
Minted Moroccan peppers with figs, seeds, tunisian cranberries and soft goat cheese.
Morrocan cauliflower and couscous salad with dates and cilantro
Egyptian tomato and cucumber salad with feta cheese, pistachios, basil, and sumac

Dessert (To sweeten the Life)

Walnut baklava. The richest of Arabic sweets. Ground mixture of flavored nuts centered in a crunchy layers of filo dough separated by melted butter, drenched in rose water syrup and topped with pistachio. Palestinian baklava, is not as sweet as Mediterranean varieties
Chaeban Syrian Ice cream– abir al sham. A traditional syrian recipe using rose and orange blossom water with toasted pistachios and cashews, ricotta cheese and orchid root powder.
Grapes and oranges. An Arab meal without fruit is incomplete

Drinks (To quench the Thirst)

Palestinian mint tea. Coffee. Mango juice. Sparkling water
Ouzo. We couldn't find Arak but Ouzo is pretty close. Straight, iced, or with water
Wine. Scotch. Limoncello. Sometimes forbidden in Arab Muslim households. But it is enjoyed in our home

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Note: Although I did not cook in the Arab way while we lived in Palestine, I loved the flavors and foods. When we returned home, I missed the aromas and tastes and so learned to cook with Middle Eastern spices. From time to time, Harold and I prepare a full Middle Eastern meal for friends. This is the menu from one such meal.

An Exercise in Futility

To us, just words they seem to be
Mesolithic, Paleolithic, Epipalaeolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic
Bronze and Irons Ages
And so began the history
Of war on war

Egyptian and Assyrian
Fighting, struggling, winning, killing, losing, weakening
Until at last
The Canaanites began to reign
And cities grew.

Yet soon the Israelites appear
And with religious fervor they attack the land and people
For their God had said
"To you in covenant I promise,"
And cities fell.

A temple built, a nation birthed
Rulers, strife and civil war; destruction, hate and ruin
By Babylonians with Nebuchadnezzar II
Jerusalem now contains no mirth
The temple gone

Persians came and Alexander
Ptolemies, Seleucids, Maccabees, Syrians, Romans and
Herod the Builder
The Jewish Temple now revived
Then came Constantine, a worshipper
Of Holy Ruins

A new religion now began
Muslims followed Byzantines: Arabs ruled and then the Turks
More war!
"For my God," Christian Crusaders cried, their hand
On cross and sword.

Next Mamelukes and Ottomans
Suleiman rebuilt destruction: structures, gates and walls
Fountains now emerged
But not for long creations stand
Then fall again

The Brits, then Jordanians taking turns
Israelis too, command a place, creating roads and
settlements
Palestinians, always there, demand their place
The gods now ask if we can learn?
A fading hope.

We, stupid people, try once more
Pain and sadness, war on war, creating ruins and more
strife
Building hatred, lacking love
A vicious circle, rotten core
Ruins evermore?

Note: This poem was written and published iin *MCC Intercom* in 1987 towards the end of our term in Jerusalem. The inspiration for it came from Megiddo, an archaeological site called by an Assyrian name, meaning Armageddon, where there is a cut-away cross section of over 20 different civilizations who were once resident there. Settled by many peoples through time, the ancient Israelites held it for only a short period of time. Ruin built on ruin.

Photo: Megiddo Expedition

Prayer in 1987

O God
Under your eyes, within your ever creating hands our mortal lives begin, continue, end…
We consider your omnipotence and feel as small as a grain of sand or like a dissolvable bit of salt
We consider your eternalness, unending greatness, and unfathomable depth and ongoing mystery
We are awestruck at your enormity
Yet we pray that in your mercy you will hear our cry, our call for salvation
For you created us in your creator image
To recreate and newly create your world
Give us vision.
O God in your mercy, hear this prayer

We examine our lives and we see that
We are no longer aware of our needs
We dislike change and new creation
We have lost the will to struggle for your kingdom
We desire your coming but have no determination to be in this world
We pray empty prayers which sound false even to our ears
We refuse to act first or alone, even if we understand the need
We cannot even hear your voice and we wouldn't know what to do if we did
Give us new life and renewed commitment
O God in your mercy, hear our prayer

We examine the nations and our governments
We despair at the tensions in our small world, ill-used power and force, oppression, torture, death
The cycle of corruption continues within the nations, between the nations
Give the influential your direction and give us strength to be the catalyst for change.
O God in your mercy, hear our prayer

We examine the situations in these lands of physical beauty and the internal, external and eternal conflict
For those suffering from debilitating corrupt power, grant understanding to see at least what is in their own self-interest
For those experiencing dehumanizing oppression and outright injustice, grant inner fortitude and healing
For those who feel immobilized and confused by critical dilemmas, grant wisdom and freedom to act
For those to whom you have given special vision, skills and commitment, but who are baulked by bureaucracy, brute force and injustice, grant patience, encouragement, courage, and refreshment in your joy-filled Being
O God, in your mercy, hear our prayer

We examine the state of people – individuals
We celebrate their uniqueness, but we mourn their sadness, their grief, their pain
Often, we are too stupid to notice even their basic hunger, their cries for help, their need for suffering compassion
Sometimes we stand dumbfounded at difficulties and tangled complexities
We feel we can offer nothing
Give the afflicted your comfort and give us wisdom to know what to do
O God, in your mercy, hear our prayer

We examine your gift of Divine Spirit and we thank you for your joy, for your inspiration, for your forgiveness
Give us power to overcome weak resignation to evil and to move out of a fearful paralysis at the enormity of our task.

We see you in those who suffer
We find you there
Give us the dynamic, urgent need to be with you
Grant us the power to share your serene presence with those who need you
Give us vision and skill to design and build a new world with peace and joy at the center
O God, in your mercy, hear this prayer

Note: Prayer written for the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the Old City of Jerusalem. Published in the *MCC Intercom*, April 1987.

Top: Photo of the cover of a book by Frank H. Epp.
Left: bottom: Photo taken in 2012 amidst the rubble of a Palestinian house bulldozed by Israeli military
Right: Poster. I don't remember the source.

Seven Weeks to Paris – the Long Way Home

After five years in Jerusalem, we were heading home to Canada. But, first we were going to take seven weeks to travel in Europe. We left by boat from Haifa via Cyprus to our first stop on Crete. Eventually we would catch our flight over the ocean to Canada in Paris. Fifty dollars Canadian a day for both food and accommodation for four people was our budget. We made it on fifty-five until we got to Venice. Then our costs were about seventy-two dollars a day.

We each had one carry-on suitcase. That's it. After five years in Jerusalem, that's all we were taking back with us. What about the rest? We shipped five banker-size file boxes – four of which made it back to Canada. The other one was lost somewhere. Thankfully, some of our visitors agreed to take large suitcases home to Canada for us. Everything else just stayed in Jerusalem.

After a fun boat ride from Haifa to Heraklion, Crete, we rented a car and headed south, to the less populated side of the island. We toured the whole island complete with ruins, beaches, mountains, medieval towns and the beautiful valley of cloth windmills on Lasithi Plateau, which were historically used for irrigation. Jennifer's interest in mythology took us to the Minoan Palace at Knossos, where Daedalus built a labyrinth to hold the king's son, the Minotaur.

After a week in Crete, we headed to Piraeus, the Greek port, and then to Athens. We had been in Athens on an earlier trip, so we immediately headed by bus and then via a ferry to the Ionian Island of Zakynthos. Beaching, hiking and exploring with mopeds were our main activities while we were there.

Then on to Yugoslavia by train via Athens to Skopje (*the capital of Macedonia)*, and then onto Lake Ohrid at the edge of the Albanian border by bus. It was very hot. There was a small child who was sick so the passengers decided that we should not open any windows. I thought the heat would be bad for the child because it might increase the fever, but perhaps they thought the breeze would be harmful. Since we had no Greek language skills and they would not have we just endured the heat. We tried opening the window a slight amount and all the little grandmas in black made a huge fuss. We quickly closed the window again. We learned later that the people believe that sickness comes in through open windows. luckily we stayed healthy. Once in Ohrid, we explored the beautiful ruins and hiked in the countryside.

Picking up a somewhat unreliable car rental, a Yugo, we headed into the highest pass in the former Yugoslavia *(now Kosovo)* on a gravel road. The scenery was gorgeous, but the people were nervous about Westerners and so we did not feel very welcome. However, when we went for a walk along the river, a family invited us to barbeque with them. We stayed at the only but rather sketchy motel and were glad to leave in the morning. Eventually we ended up at beautiful Kotor and Perast, *(now in Montenegro)* on the coast. Stunning Dubrovnik, *(now in Croatia)* was next on the list. Here we stayed in a lovely home above the sea with a great view. The owners adored the kids and let us hang our wash on their laundry lines.

Our next stop was the island of Rab where we stayed for nine days. Getting there was a challenge since our Yugo car was sputtering. There was a long line of cars on a hill waiting for the ferry, and our useless car decided to die in that line-up. Now what? Well, the German man in the car behind us was a Panasonic technician and as we rolled down the hill, keeping our spot, he lifted the hood and fixed the problem. We were more than grateful. We made it to Rab and the next day Harold took the car back to Rijeka *(now in Croatia)*.

Meanwhile the kids and I beached and explored. To get to the main beach, we had to walk single file on a path past a nudist beach. At one point, we encountered a German couple in front of us, both of whom were fairly large. Adrian was right behind them, and he had some choice words to say about hefty bare bums. I hope they didn't understand English.

Next on to more expensive Venice by train, where we stayed in a home full of many, many cats. At least there were no mice! The kids loved the pigeons on St Mark's Square. We rented a boat and toured the coast.

In Paris, we had to find accommodations for three nights. We checked out various places and finally settled on a six-story walk-up. There was no elevator. Jennifer managed all the negotiations for us, since she spoke with an impeccable Parisian accent - thanks to her year at the Lycée Français in Jerusalem. The proprietors were amused that the cute young girl knew French and the parents didn't. The place was small but adequate. The bathroom had been added later and was tiny. Unfortunately, Harold's legs were too long to fit in the bathroom and so the door remained open when he was in there. The kids thought this was hilarious. So did I!

The time for our flight arrived; we were on our way home after seven weeks of travel and five years living overseas. What an adventure it had been!

Note: Remembering this now, I wonder how we could have planned this trip without the internet. We managed to arrange most of our transportation and accommodation on the fly, and it seemed to work out. We had no significant mishaps and, thankfully, we all stayed healthy.

Coming home was not easy on many fronts. Harold and I needed to find jobs in Canada. Jennifer and Adrian had to fit into schools. Their friends had grown up in Winnipeg, and many of them had never travelled outside Canada or even been to either coast. They did not understand Adrian's and Jennifer's lives. We lived in a Jewish neighborhood and the politics of where we had worked were sensitive. However, family and friends were very helpful and we found our way.

We came home at the time we did because we believed our children deserved to experience Canadian life. We thought they should have at least a year in elementary school before hitting their teen years. We also wanted to be close to family.

We could have stayed longer with MCC, or gone on to other jobs with other agencies in other parts of the world. But coming home when we did was a good decision. The experience in Jerusalem had been an exceptional one, and leaving was hard, as was adapting to life back in Canada. However, we would not have wanted to miss the Middle East experience. All four of us made deep connections to the Middle East. In fact, Jennifer went on to become a Professor of Middle East Studies. Adrian continued to keep in touch with quite a few Jerusalem friends. Harold continued to be involved in Middle East issues. I became very involved in international human rights training and boards.

Lake Ohrid near Albania

Sound of Music Gazebo, Salzburg

In St Mark's Square, Venice

Family Reflections on Leaving Jerusalem

Created as a family at the end of our time in Jerusalem and used in a variety of presentations when we came home.

Never will we forget:

Jennifer: A hike to the top of the Mount of Temptations to see the fantastic view of the Dead Sea, Jericho and Jordan

Adrian: The Palestinian shepherd with the sheep and goats grazing in the empty lot beside our home

Judith: The eeriness in a deserted Crusader castle, thinking about their warring religious fervor in the eleventh century

Adrian: The joyous dancing at a Jewish bar Mitzva at the Western Wall in the Old City

Jennifer: The special squish of a fresh fig in my mouth from the tree in our garden – was it a fig that tempted Eve?

Adrian: A birthday party in Wadi Kelt beside a Roman Aqueduct, with the Bedouin children and their sheep nearby

Jennifer: The celebration chants at a Palestinian wedding and the ululating women

Adrian: Palestinian food, especially Selwa's cooking *(Selwa was an MCC Palestinian colleague)*

Jennifer: The pause for the Muslim prayer call during a baroque chamber concert in the Redeemer Church cloisters

Adrian: The Israeli guns in Bethlehem at Christmas time

Judith: The Palestinian lawyer with whom I viewed nine hours of Holocaust film – the movie Shoah

Harold: The fifty-year-old Israeli physics professor who chose prison over military service

Jennifer: The Jewish boy with whom I played violin duets

Adrian: The springtime calls of young lambs joining their mothers at the end of the day on the Mount of Olives

Jennifer: Playing violin in a Hebrew-speaking violin chamber group and counting in Hebrew;
Echad, Shteim, Shalosh, Arba

Harold: The Bir Zeit professor who questioned us extensively as to why we would want to identify in any way with Christianity, since the church has been such a divisive, warring influence here

Judith: The young Israeli woman who married and divorced six months later, solely to avoid military service

Adrian: Playing with the lambs and goats at my friend's house and eating ice cream

Jennifer: The smells of jasmine and orange blossoms

Harold: Cardamom in Arabic coffee

Adrian: School boys passing our house in the mornings: laughing, chanting and sometimes snitching a fig or two

Judith: Shopping in the produce market in Ramallah with all the stall keepers shouting out their prices

Adrian: Gaza strawberries

Jennifer: The special light at sunset in the Judean hills

Judith: The Palestinian Sunday School class lustily singing "Father Abraham had many sons" and "We are One"

Adrian: Traffic jams involving donkeys, cars, tractors, trucks, cars, sheep, goats and people

Harold: Jewish parents dreading sending their son or daughter into the army

Judith: The rousing Christmas carols sung in the home of a Lebanese pianist with his Palestinian wife and thinking about the words

Harold: The frustrated Israeli economist not knowing how to cope with inflation

Jennifer: Mom and me getting our ears pierced on Sultan Suleiman Street

Harold: The Palestinian eighty-year-old widow whose house was demolished while she was in the hospital

Judith: A Bedouin who moved back into his tent because the new house, funded by an NGO, wasn't comfortable

Harold: The Jewish rabbi struggling with ideas of non-violence and civil disobedience

Judith: The intensity of a Palestinian funeral procession and the public mourning

Harold: The energy and persistence of several Palestinian lawyers in defending dignity and rights

Jennifer: Going to the French school where they didn't speak any English

Adrian: Playing at the Finnish nursery school

Jennifer: Sitting with the organist at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer

Adrian: Playing in the tree house that my dad and John built for me

All of us: Picnics and hikes in the Judean hills

Note: We could go on and on, listing impressions, people, the history, the archaeology, the peace movements, the politics. Five years in Jerusalem was a life changing experience – the images and experiences live on in our imaginations.

A Cornucopia of Memories

Ah Jerusalem! Remembering the dominating and beautiful seventh century Dome of the Rock, I feel a catch in my throat. The ancient City of Jerusalem, which was within walking distance of our home, is walled all the way around. Anyone can go for a stroll on top of the wall or explore the mysterious narrow alleys inside. Outside the wall, one finds several religious sites, including the Garden of Gethsemane, the Church commemorating the place where Jesus wept for Jerusalem, St Stephen's Church in remembrance of his martyrdom by stoning, the white Russian Orthodox Church of the Ascension and its sixty-four-meter tower and other remnants of history.

I also remember the three cemeteries of the Jews, Muslims and Christians, which cover the hills and valley below the Mount of Olives and on Mount Zion. Jews bring rocks instead of flowers to put on the tombs. They are more permanent and they believe the stones hold the soul for a while before it departs the body. Many ancient Jewish, Christian and Muslim sites or geographic markers still stand in Palestine-Israel. They ground many people's faiths and lives: the tomb of Abraham, patriarch of the three faiths; the site of the crucifixion of Christ; the place where Mohammed ascended into heaven; or the remains of the city of David near the Old City Wall and others. They may not be the actual places but they are sites where people can remember.

Our experiences while living in Jerusalem were unbelievably varied. Sometimes, on a hot summer day, we would treat ourselves to ice cream at the beautiful and fascinating American Colony Hotel where there was a pool. It was originally built in 1860 as a palace by Ottoman Pasha Effendi al-Husseini, where he lived with his four wives. After his death in 1895, the building was sold to a group of American Christians led by Horatio Spafford, a Chicago lawyer. Spafford wrote the lyrics for the hymn, "It is Well with my Soul" after the death of his wife and family. The colony was later joined by two groups of Swedish settlers wanting to form a utopian society to wait for the second coming of Christ. Eventually it was turned into a luxury hotel where media, journalists, tourists, politicians and perhaps spies would meet, or so the rumor went. The ownership remains with descendents of the Spafford family.

We hiked the Judean hills over and over again. We enjoyed picnics with friends and visitors, held children's birthday parties there and soaked in the desert sun. Deserts are not always flat – these were hilly and rocky. Never will I forget the shirtless Israeli young man walking the barren lonely hill with an Uzi gun on his shoulder. What was he doing? We also climbed to the natural oasis spring at Ein Gedi near the Dead Sea. This is allegedly the place where David hid from King Saul. We also swam in the Dead Sea – if we didn't have any cuts or sores on our bodies.

The Wailing Wall has been called the Western Wall ever since the 1967 war, when Israelis illegally bulldozed the existing Palestinian homes of 108 families to make the large square in front of the wall. There was wailing then, but it came in the form of Palestinian cries at their destroyed homes. The wall itself carries the history of the region with stones from Israelite, Roman and Ottoman eras. The area continues to be excavated from time to time amidst protest from Muslims who fear that this work will destroy the foundation of the Dome, from Orthodox Jews who fear that the Holy of Holies may be inadvertently desecrated, and from Hasidic Jews who do not want any buried bones to be disturbed.

It was actually Suleiman the Magnificent, a Muslim, who rebuilt the city walls in 1535 and declared the then smallish area in front of the Western Wall to be a place of worship for the Jews. Today Israeli soldiers praying at the wall are a common sight, as are military award ceremonies, tourists, bar mitzvahs and various Jewish services.

The Palestinian animal market, which takes place very early morning on Fridays, has been held continuously, just northeast of the Damascus Gate, for the past 2000 years – as if nothing in the area has changed. The atmosphere is loud and smelly. Sheep, goats, donkeys are all part of the action. Camels were once part of the scene too. Traders wear the traditional Arab robes, smoke rolled cigarettes with Turkish tobacco, and view the selection with practised eyes. Farmers, Bedouin, a few Palestinian women, beggars and some determined tourists are all there. The sellers shout loudly in Arabic, hoping to be heard above the crowd. The currency is Jordanian since this is East Jerusalem, officially under Jordanian control in the early eighties when we were there.

We often went to the Damascus Gate, the largest and most impressive gate into the Old City. This gate connects the Palestinian market area inside the walls to the Palestinian commercial and shopping center on the road to Damascus by way of Nablus, also known as Shechem. Beneath the current gate, there is another gate which was built in the second century to celebrate the Roman victory of the area. In the third or fourth century it was connected to the walls around Jerusalem. However, it was the Muslim Ottoman ruler, Suleiman the Magnificent, who built the Gate in 1537 as it is now.

A mass of people go in and out of the large gate, with its grand entrance to the old city. In one place I could see soldiers, an ever present reality; conservative Muslim women in grey coats and head scarves - their faces not covered; Palestinian women in the traditional, beautifully embroidered, black, long dresses; individual tourists taking pictures of everything; groups of tourists blindly following their leader whose hat was held high and who sometimes carried a megaphone; old Palestinian men playing backgammon with orange peels and stones; Christian pilgrims – often in black – elbowing their way to holy places; Palestinian vendors - men and women - selling their wares either on carts or on the ground; Hassidic Jews with their long, black coats and fur hats on their way to the Western wall; young Palestinian men with black and white keffiyehs; Muslim pilgrims on their way to the al-Aqsa mosque, and older Palestinian men with their 100% virgin wool gallabiyahs *(long robes),* often ordered from London. Add to that the sounds of horns, taxi drivers, busses, loud voices, verbal disagreements, the Muslim call to prayer, Israeli soldiers shouting and making arrests, demonstrations, as well as a mingling of Arabic, English, Hebrew and other languages. Blending with the sounds and sights were the smells of cinnamon, cloves, garlic, parsley, sumac, lemons, other herbs, along with grilled meats and baked goods. This was a marvelous cacophony all under a blue sky, with the sun bright overhead. And yet there remained sometimes obvious but often hidden political, emotional and cultural undercurrents. It was a complicated but fascinating and surprising place to live.

Note: After we returned home to Winnipeg in 1987, we were often asked to report on our time in the Middle East. This particular presentation was given in Fort Garry MB Church, who requested that we offer some 'word images' of our time with MCC. We also used slides. This is an excerpt from that presentation.

Pilgrimage

A pilgrim in this land
I look to what has been
And find that there is grace
In the history of our dreams

The symbols of things past
Give us clues for life today
Inspiration fills our souls
New truths will light the way

The path I now will choose
Rests on paths crossed yesterday
But my footsteps are unique
As I walk along life's way

The future is unknown
Yet my soul within is free
Joy and peace for evermore
The Creator gives to me

The majesty and crown,
May be seen or left concealed
The Divine will show me truth
Which in time will be revealed

A pilgrim in this land
I dream of what will be
And glimpse the signs of hope
In the path ahead for me

Note: Written in the 1990s for a Palm Sunday service at Fort Garry MB Church. It was sung to the tune of "He My Shepherd Is" (#46) by Carol Dyck from *Sing Alleluia*. Kindred Press: Hillsboro, Kansas.1985. It is included here because it seems to fit.

Photo of Jennifer by Peter Coleridge

The Family - Decades Later

Jennifer, Noah and Bill

Adrian and Landen

The Grandkids in 2019: Jacob, Landen, Sarah and Noah in front

Afterword by Cat Essoyan

Over the past few days, I have been reading Judith's book. The experience has triggered a range of emotions in me. From 1984 through 1987, Judith and Harold, Jennifer and Adrian were my neighbors in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem. Reading about our having Christmas morning crepes together or our procession to the Old City on Palm Sunday has been wonderfully nostalgic. Reading about our trip together to Turkey from Adrian's perspective made me laugh aloud at times. We share so many special memories of our years together in Jerusalem. At the time, I ran the Quaker Legal Aid office in East Jerusalem so I had professional connections both with MCC where Harold worked and with Al-Haq where Judith worked. To this day, we have many close friends in common from our time in Jerusalem.

Reading Harold's piece, "Palestine and a People Denied," brought me to tears. In my 40-year career with the American Friends Service Committee and Oxfam Novib, I have focused significant attention and energy on aspects of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the ever more urgent need for an end to the occupation, for peace with justice, for a durable solution for both peoples.

I have been reading Judith's book at an especially poignant and traumatic time. Israeli forces have been shelling Gaza in the wake of the devastating October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, and are now carrying out a ground offensive. The human costs are overwhelming. At the same time, radical Israeli settlers continue unchecked to attack Palestinian communities on the West Bank, uprooting olive trees and terrorizing villagers. The global community appears powerless or unwilling tointervene, to stop the violence, to enforce a ceasefire and to finally commit to forging a lasting solution.

It is a polarizing time. With so much pain and loss, people reach out to others to take one side or the other. Some have given up on any solution and feel only despair, questioning whether their past engagement with the area and its issues had any meaning or was legitimate. I believe for the sake of both peoples we simply cannot give up; in the overwhelming darkness we must hold on to the light. We must do all we can to raise our voices, to call on our governments to act, to fight hatred and polarization and to support a durable solution.

I am grateful to Judith and Harold for their friendship, for this book sharing their memories, for their commitment to the Palestinian people and for their conviction of the need for a lasting solution grounded in justice.

Photo from Cat's collection, taken in the 1980s.

Appendix 1. Power, Tomatoes and Anabaptists: a Lecture by Harold Dueck

It took a very short month to realize that the two solitudes claiming the right to the ancient land of Palestine would attempt to use me in the struggle for the land between the river and the sea. MCC, its staff and programs were useful pawns that the Palestinians and Israelis could mobilize while contending for legitimacy in the Occupied Territories. I needed to establish who I was rather quickly or risk spending a long five years being a rather irrelevant, benign "presence" in this captivating and stimulating place.

As a newly minted MCC Country Representative in West Bank, I was invited to the signing ceremony for the opening of a new agricultural road in the Palestinian village of Dura. As I entered the room, waiting to welcome me was Mohammed Nasser, the local head of the Village League. With his handshake of greeting, I was drawn unwittingly as a bit player into the struggle for Palestine.

The Village League was a collaborative leadership structure that the Israelis supported with arms and money in a clumsy attempt to create an alternative to the PLO. Village League people were often regarded negatively as collaborators. By channeling MCC and other NGO funds through the League the Israeli military government hoped to give the League some political ascendency. As in most such attempts, this one failed dismally and the League soon disappeared.

There are few things more hated than Palestinians who collaborated with the Israelis, thereby undermining the Palestinian leadership. Associating with collaborators marginalized foreigners hoping to work in the larger Palestinian community. I still recall the tension within me as the story of my meeting with Nasser was reported in the press. Palestinians were not apt to give me many chances. This was not a simple matter of political choice in a pluralistic society. The issue lay right at the visceral heart of Palestinian identity, religion and ideology.

There was little in my training and preparation that provided direction. All I knew was that I had unintentionally failed the first test. I was already aware of NGO personnel who had been compromised because they couldn't deal with the intense political climate.

In the 1980's the NGOs in the Occupied Territories were the primary conduits for Western funding to the Palestinians. NGOs were drawn into the larger relational game between governments, various authority structures and sponsoring communities. It was therefore inevitable that the familiar playgrounds of the development world – matters regarding health, education, credit, community organization, advocacy, and religion – would be challenged in attempting to meet a variety of frequently conflicting objectives.

The purpose of this developmental activity seemed to be fairly clear. When we work in solidarity with the marginalized, we labor to extend their options and their choices. For me that became my working definition of development purpose.

But the questions pushed in from all sides. How should we respond to these powerful forces that wished to use us? What was appropriate non-violent programming? What actions would reflect withintegrity the views of the broader sponsoring Anabaptist constituency?

Like many grandchildren of Russian Mennonites, the lore of the Russian experience was a part of my upbringing. I had always been captivated by the story of how my great-grandfather David Dick had counselled his son not to retaliate against the anarchists who had killed his wife, raped his pregnant daughter, and shot another son in the leg as he fled. My great grandfather found it within himself to leave this legacy as he lay mortally wounded in the wreckage of his large estate of Apanlee.

This pacifist Mennonite heritage is part of my history. The Middle East made me a radical pacifist. Above all else, the message of relational hope that we carry with us, was and is relevant in Palestine today. For me, MCC programming initiatives need to be tested against this fundamental strength of the Anabaptist ethos. If I had a dream upon leaving for the West Bank it revolved around the desire to be a witness to a God who cares mightily about how we relate to each other.

Respected agencies have a good deal of power in the debate around appropriate development activity. Power lies in our dollars, expertise and ready access to diplomats and journalists. Strategic use of this ability to shape, direct and influence situations and events requires great skill. In time, this power can even take on shades of moral authority.

MCC's reticence to openly discuss power has frequently left us exercising power in ineffective, unarticulated and perhaps harmful ways. We are well-served by the business literature of the past ten years. It is good to be an Anabaptist in business. The themes of power sharing, team building, informedand empowered employee groups as well as limited hierarchical layers, crowd the pages of this literature. We can learn much from business leadership writings. For me, the themes around power require theological work to connect them to the broader world of Anabaptist thinking. Bearing this in mind, where could we make connections into the West Bank community?

Thankfully we encountered people who had a succinct way of crystallizing and focusing our energies. Anwar Nusseibeh, an avuncular, elder Palestinian statesman, Oxford educated lawyer and former Jordanian cabinet minister, shared some ideas with me. He headed up the last remaining Palestinian institution in East Jerusalem. All other institutions had been taken over by the Israelis. He used a rather brilliant series of legal maneuvers to maintain Palestinian control of the Jerusalem Electric Company. He encouragingly shared his wisdom and insights freely. At the end of our time together, he looked at me and simply said, "Harold, think big." Well, MCC wasn't into thinking big. We were the smallest Jerusalem agency with resident personnel. We had thousands of dollars, others had millions. But an opportunity presented itself.

Great-grandfather David Dick. Photo: Dick Family archives. Thanks to Ruth Richert.

Anwar Nusseibeh, 1967. Photo: Boris Carmi. cc 4.0

By 1982, improved agricultural techniques had produced an abundant Palestinian produce harvest which lay rotting because of its limited market. Israeli markets were largely closed. Arab boycotts, transport and security restrictions made it difficult to sell into the Arab world. Israel prohibited Palestinians from selling into Europe, jailing some who had tried.

Reclaiming land was supported by the NGOs. It was a powerful statement of commitment to a future Palestinian entity. It was a rather bleak time because newly reclaimed land was going out of production since people couldn't sell their existing products. The constraints were not due to technical competence or quality of product. The constraints were almost entirely political, due to contending power blocks. Various commercial interests – both Israeli and Jordanian – used the political constraints to block another competitor entering the marketplace.

Clearly a way through the obstacles was needed. Selling produce was not typical NGO territory. For a year we debated about what to do. The debate with the leftists was very intense. They only bought in because of the benefits for the Palestinian national cause. Finally, it was decided that a Palestinian economist, a co-operative manager and I would travel to England, Norway and Sweden to sell Jordan Valley sun-ripened tomatoes into the dreary winter climes of Northern Europe. Source of product origin had commercial value: the sunny Jordan Valley in Palestine had a certain ring to it. We could use that as marketing leverage.

Industry contacts were made. Diplomatic support was established. This was important because of the protection it offered to safeguard against Israeli counter measures. We prepared a professional presentation that profiled the sophistication of the Palestinian people, the quality of their product and their infrastructure.

Most people thought this was all unmitigated folly. Palestinians had not been in the European marketplace for many years due to Israeli restrictions. In the '80's most people in Europe still thought of them as the world's favorite terrorists. The Palestinians could frankly not believe that someone would take them seriously.

Gaining MCC Head Office approval stretched things just a bit, but since we had secured external funding, it was forthcoming. They said it was an interesting idea but shouldn't we do a study first? I think studies really are the opiate of the faint-hearted. I asked if Akron would approve fifteen thousand dollars for the study. "Well, yes," they said, "that seemed reasonable." I then said, "Look we only need $6000 for the selling trip itself. We would simply go sell. The response would tell us if we were onto something."

The trip met our objectives. The produce-importing executives were interested. One elderly executive in Sweden met us at the airport with the words, "I'm glad you've come back, we used to buy from both Arabs and Jews." We met with senior people in the British Foreign Office in London who posed the simple question, "Where are you going to trade from since there is no actual country called Palestine?" We smiled and responded by saying that was precisely the point.

Gaza greenhouse. Photo: ANERA and Zakat

The impact on the Palestinians from European importers' visits was dramatic. They realized they had some positive power. Somebody out there liked what they produced and wanted to buy their produce. T here was hope. They felt that they actually could compete like they used to.

This trip started a business and diplomatic process that culminated in a fifty-ton order for tomatoes. The diplomatic battle to get the tomatoes to Norway took four years. Some very hopeful things canhappen when you try to move fifty tons of tomatoes across a hostileborder. This kind of challenge is not for the faint-hearted.

The EEC - European Economic Community - became very interested in this venture and began to put pressure on the Israelis to let the Palestinian product go. The EEC delegate in Amman explained why the Europeans took such an interest. It had become a litmus test. If Israel would not allow a commercial identity for Palestinian products, then how would they ever move on the more substantive issues of land and water?

Israel only relented when the EEC began to impose countervailing tariffs on certain Israeli goods shipped to Europe. It was costing Israel six million dollars a week before they finally gave in. At a Paris food show in 1989 a Palestinian flag flew over the Palestinian display in the same show that displayed an Israeli flag over the Israeli display.

The whole process involved a lot of pressure. This fifty-ton order of tomatoes made it to the agenda of foreign ministers and heads of state. It involved carefully orchestrated news stories, support from solidarity groups and pressure from church groups on their home governments. It was broadly orchestrated and demonstrated effective power in action. There were elements in the Israeli system that did not like what we were doing. I was warned. "Be careful! They will make it look like an accident." Fortunately, the warning came to naught.

I would also suggest it was a development activity consistent with an Anabaptist understanding of the use of power. It non-violently demonstrated the justice of the Palestinian cause without undermining the Israeli position. The importer who ordered the tomatoes also bought Israeli produce. He planned to continue buying from both Israel and Palestine.

In conclusion, allow me to suggest that the ability to exercise power is a gift from God. We need to unabashedly begin to talk about the techniques and strategies of power to maximize the positive impact that we as Anabaptist Christians can have, particularly since we speak from such a unique perspective. We will become much better at the development game if NGOs nurture their leadership talent by learning from the most creative leadership models in the business world and elsewhere.

Note: This paper was presented by Harold Dueck at a conference in Kitchener-Waterloo on Power and Anabaptism in the 1990s. It is included in this collection because it illustrates some of the complexities of MCC work and our life in Palestine, as well as the issues we found ourselves discussing with each other, our friends and our colleagues.

Ultimately, the Gaza farmers decided to market their tomatoes in Europe. It was a courageous move. The first ton of tomatoes actually shipped from Gaza in 1989. Israel still controls exports of Gaza produce. Almost all Gaza exports must go through Israel or Israeli controlled checkpoints. There is a small fishing port near Gaza city but it is under Israeli naval blockade. Borders can be closed at any time. Requirements and operations are regularly adjusted, often on short notice. For example, in 2021, Israel imposed a new requirement - all green crowns must be removed from tomatoes before any exports would be allowed. No reason was given. The strange thing is that removing crowns causes tomatoes to ripen more quickly which increases the possibility of rot. The BDS - Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions - movement took up this cause.

The Village Leagues mentioned near the beginning of this vignette, were introduced in 1978. They were a very controversial as they tried to reserve major power and sovereignty for Israel or even initially for Jordan, by restricting the powers and funds of elected West Bank Palestinian officials. In other words, Palestinian villages and camps who cooperated with Village Leagues would be rewarded and others would not. These Leagues had a bad reputation among Palestinians. Their appointees were considered to be thugs and collaborators by the local Palestinian population. By 1983, they were not highly thought of by Jordan or by many Israeli authorities and they were abandoned.

When MCC helped a particular village, there was usually a signing ceremony. Most often Ya'coub handled things. At the ceremony noted earlier, there were some hints in advance that there might be trouble, so Harold, as the official MCC representative, was asked to attend. We had only been in Jerusalem for two months and were very new in understanding the complexities.

When Harold and Ya'coub arrived at the village of Dura, Nasser stated categorically that he was going to sign the agreement. He started to yell and berate Harold because the project had not been cleared through the Village League offices. Most villages refuse to have anything to do with the League. As a result, these villages often lacked basic services such as a good water supply. This MCC project was in a village that did co-operate with the Leagues. MCC, however, was exempt from dealings with the Leagues. Harold considered the options: To argue? To leave without signing? To watch and wait? Signing if the League also signed was not an option since it would signal that MCC was in cahoots with the Leagues. At that point, the Israeli Department of Social Welfare for West Bank - Beit El - representative said, "If the League signs, I won't." Then the entire group of government people, the League and Social Welfare, left the room to confer. When they returned, Nasser apologized, agreed not to sign and the ceremony proceeded without a hitch – although Harold insisted on signing last. The next day, the newspaper reported that MCC had signed "in the presence" of the League. Harold decided that MCC simply will not sign anything again if a League man is anywhere in sight.

Left: BDS Poster. BDS is a Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice and equality. Launched in 2005, it advocates equal rights for Palestinians

Right: Gaza tomato paste factory. Photo: Xinhua and Stringer

Appendix 2: Palestine and a People Denied: a Lecture by Harold Dueck in 2010

The heartbreaking histories of two peoples are unfolding in that mythic land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. In my current professional role, I teach selling skills – the process of helping people make good decisions. A key lesson is that one needs to think very carefully about the words one speaks – because when you have said one thing you have not said another. I learned how important it is to choose words carefully in the crucible of five years navigating life in the Israeli-controlled Occupied Territories of the West Bank. An inappropriate choice of words gives people the wrong impression of what you really want to say. Carefully nuanced words are critical in any message about the last one hundred years in Israel - Palestine. In the Levant, it is difficult to find so-called truth. Truth lies buried under the weight of historical imperative, religion, culture, sacrifice, family, death, love, hatred, grief and more. These are blurred together, creating powerful mythologies that shape the myriad understandings of truth.

Let me briefly set the stage by reflecting on my own personal journey of insight and confusion about the Levant. The iconic Jewish stories of my early Sunday School years formed a key piece of my journey. These stories shaped me then and still inform my life today: David and Goliath, Samson and Delilah, The Ten Commandments, the parting of the Red Sea. These narratives also weave themselves into literature, art, music and popular culture. They are a part of my identity, especially my spiritual identity.

In my teens, the world of mythic antiquity and the modern State of Israel were connected. My most compelling reading at that time could be found in the gripping, powerful stories of the Holocaust, the miraculous birth of the State of Israel, Exodus, and the biographies of Ben Gurion, Moshe Dayan and Golda Meir. Playing a part in the "Diary of Anne Frank" in a high school play fueled a connection to the modern state. There was little in my twenties that made me think critically about the link between those powerful Israelite images of my youth and the modern State of Israel. I had, at best, a superficial view of the Palestinians who laid claim to this same small piece of land. Yasir Arafat was not a particularly good PR figure for the Palestinians, and he could not muscle his way into the Western world past the agile mind and verbal dexterity of Israeli leaders such as Abba Eban.

Then came the early '80's. Judith and I were in our early thirties and had always wanted to live overseas. When MCC offered me the position of West Bank Country Representative, stationed in Jerusalem, it seemed like a fascinating place to spend some years. We stayed from 1982 to 1987. These were perception-changing years. Years that changed us in ways we could not have imagined. We met the other side of the story both ancient and modern. We met those who seemed to be on the losing side of these iconic tales – and increasingly could find no compelling reason why this should be so. The lesser-known story told to us by non-Jewish but still Semitic people did not invalidate the Jewish story. But it did add a new perspective and more information. Truth has many dimensions and these all inform each other. We went to Palestine determined to have a balanced view. However, our question quickly became, "what should we be balanced about?" Most of what we encountered there in the minutiae of daily l life had no balance. One side controlled almost everything. The other side had very little power.

1982 to 1987 were some of the best years of my life. We were immersed at the front line in a struggle for identity, land, culture, safety, food, housing, mobility, power, education and the basics of life. As the head of an NGO - non-governmental organization - the confrontations with the Israeli Military, a physical and ideologically driven settler movement and collaborators in the Palestinian community were all part of daily life. Palestinians who were struggling with the occupation could find some support in the NGO world. The eighties were a time before official recognition of the Palestinian Authority. NGOs were one of the main sources of connection and insight into the Palestinian community for international and local people, various organizations and sometimes even governments. We drove the roads, visited the villages and operated programs throughout the West Bank. We saw what was happening.

Any consideration of life in Palestine must include the Arab lengthy view of time. We knew an American Presbyterian theologian, Kenneth Bailey, who had spent almost his whole life in the Arab world. He spoke fluent Arabic along with other Middle Eastern ancient languages. He taught at the near Near East School of Theology in Beirut and later at Tantur where Judith worked. He was so respected by the Eastern churches that he was invited to a Synod of Eastern clerics in the Sudan. When the hosting bishop welcomed Pope Shenuda, the senior Coptic cleric from Egypt, a part of his greeting included the phrase "I am sorry you lost the war." Arabic greetings can go on and on, but Bailey had never heard this phrase before and turned to another Egyptian cleric next to him and asked which war: 1973?. No, no – well then, 67? 56? 48? "No, no," responded the cleric. "He was referring to the seventh century when Christian Egypt was overrun by Islam." A seventh century war was a current reality in the greetings at a modern conference.

I once walked up to a Palestinian notable at a reception and in conversation, asked him, "Mr Dakaak, how long has your family lived here?" He paused for a moment, reflected and then said, "Not that long. Our family is one of the more recent ones. We only arrived 500 years ago." These stories with long memories abound in the Palestinian psyche. They are in this struggle for the long haul. It is important to remember this concept of time as we consider their situation today.

At first, I immersed myself in understanding the historical demographics of Israel and Palestine. As I met Palestinians with deeply rooted stories in the land west of the Jordan River, I found myself needing to know more. I also spent time with Jewish Israelis who gave keen insight into the unfolding of the story. Respected academics, mostly Jewish like Benny Morris, Tom Segev and Avi Schleim have echoed the narratives of Arab scholars, Edward Said and Rashid Khalidi.

There is little disagreement among them on the following very brief synopsis of salient points:

- Palestinian see their lineage as an amalgam of the tribes and families who were always there. They intermarried with whomever happened to come along. Their bloodlines are intermingled between Canaanite tribes, Samaritans, Persians, Romans, Mamaluks, Turks, Bedouin, Jews and others. Israelites were only one of many tribes in the land.
- Arabs, largely Muslim, significantly dominated the area from the 7th century until 1948.
- At the beginning of the 20th century, Palestinians numbered approximately ten to one as compared to the Jewish communities and were centered in Jerusalem, Safad, Tiberias and Hebron. Thirty years later, in the 1931 census, Jews numbered 174,000 out of a total population of just over one million in the area west of the Jordan River.
- During the four centuries of Ottoman rule, the communal life of Palestinians was dominated by large landed families like the Dajanis, Husseinis, Nashashibis, Nusseibehs and others who made their deals with the Ottoman rulers.

- Until the middle of the 18th century the concept of titled private land in Palestine was not significant. Land was considered patrimony of the community. Rights to land were governed by usage. The legitimacy of a claim to a specific piece was determined by history and the kind of usage in this order: grazing, cultivating, planting, terracing, building a house. By the end of the British Mandate about twenty-four percent of the land was titled – the rest was community land where the rights were rooted in this tradition of usage.
- The Jewish National Fund began acquiring land mostly from large landowners - some absentee - in the late 1800s, and then throughout the period up until 1948. This land was purchased in the name of the National Fund and became the possession of the Jewish people. There is a limited amount of private land in Israel. At the time of the creation the State of Israel the Jewish National Fund owned just over six percent of the land of Mandate Palestine.
- Much of the violence of the period between 1900 and 1948 occurred due to the dispossession of tenant farmers who were suddenly alienated from the land that they might have farmed for centuries. They felt poorly served by the land-owning class of Palestinians who sold some of that land out from under them to the Jewish National Fund. The Zionists were not secretive about their intent: it was to create a state for themselves without Arabs. The vitality and growth in numbers of the Zionists disturbed much of the Arab community, particularly due to the appropriation of their land.
- The UN Partition plan of 1947, largely based on the work of Britain's Lord Peel, failed. It proposed the division of Mandate Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews. Tom Segev's book, *One Palestine Complete,* about the Mandate period details this well. The division, the way it is drawn, was intended to create two states: one where the Jews would be about fifty-five percent of the population, the other where the Arab population was approaching ninety-seven percent. One of the main reasons that the Arabs declined to accept the offer was that the Jewish community owned less than seven percent of the land overall, and were just over twenty-five percent of the total population. They felt that this division was grossly unjust. More importantly, in the portion of land where Jews made up just over half the population, they would be given special rights not available to others. This was hardly something that any Arab could accept. The Arabs were by far the dominant community in Mandate Palestine, and still saw themselves as the legitimate heirs to all the land. Much has been made of the Balfour Declaration, promising a homeland to the Jews. What is often ignored is the similar promise made to the Arabs. Hence the oft used phrase "A Land Twice Promised" is appropriate.

The Levant is burdened with compelling myths that shape its current reality. An understanding of the flight of the Palestinians prior to the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, is rooted in the story of the massacre at Deir Yassin. On April 9, 1948, fighters of the Irgun and Lehi led by Yitzhak Shamir and Menachem Begin, both Israeli Prime Ministers at later dates, attacked the village of Deir Yassin. Approximately 120 of the 650 villagers were slaughtered in the attack, many of them innocent women and children. It was a particularly brutal attack designed to create terror. The baker was thrown alive into his oven, and wombs were ripped open. Survivors were driven to the east side of Jerusalem and left to their own devices, including fifty orphaned children who became the first residents of what is today the Dar El Tifl Orphanage. About twenty-five surviving members of the community were loaded into trucks with loud speakers and driven through the Arab neighborhoods of Bakaa and Katamon, informing the inhabitants of what had just happened; and that this is what would happen to them if they did not leave.

Here in North America, I did not hear of this event. However, I did hear a lot about the reprisal on the Mount Scopus Haddasah Hospital relief convoy which came on April 14. Seventy-nine people, including women, children and medical personnel, were killed in this attack. The monument commemorating this violence was just several hundred meters up the street from where we lived.

Deir Yassin became personal when employees of MCC told stories of the raw fear that gripped them as the story spread, and then how they fled. Deir Yassin is the reason that they give for their flight. Some Israelis claim that Arab

leadership urged them to flee. Israeli historians have done extensive research and can find no evidence of this claim. Menachem Begin, in his memoirs, defends the Deir Yassin massacre since it helped create the conditions through which Israel was able to achieve a Jewish majority when Independence was declared.

However, the story is personal for me because the siblings, Miriam and Ali Barakat, worked for MCC. They were the only members of their family who survived the massacre. The village of Deir Yassin is now absorbed into a Jerusalem suburb, but at the time we lived there, Miriam could take us to her family home and show us the window through which their father led them to hide them in the well. I believe Miriam and Ali were six and seven years old at the time. As with so many traumatic events, this massacre took on mythic proportions for the Palestinians.

Removing a significant element of the Arab population was a key requirement of the Zionist leadership starting with Ben Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel. The Zionists could conceive of no other way to create a Jewish state. Israeli historians and writers with access to the writings of Zionist leaders now detail this clearly. They believed that the 700,000 Palestinian refugees who had to leave their homes during the wars must not be allowed back. Ben Gurion never gave written instructions to expel Palestinians; it was simply understood that this needed to happen. Rabin, in his memoirs, details clearly his role in the forcible removal of 50,000 Palestinian inhabitants of the Lydda/Ramle region. I personally knew several of those who were in the forced three-day walk to Ramallah from their homes in Lydda and Ramle. They were not allowed to return.

Sandy Tolan in his book, *The Lemon Tree,* accurately describes what took place:

> The imperative to keep Palestinians from returning was in direct contravention of UN Resolution 194 which allows for the repatriation of civilians uprooted in war. The new Israeli government closed the borders to Palestinians attempting to return to their villages. Israel also destroyed or rendered uninhabitable over 400 Arab towns and villages (1).

The village ruins can still be seen throughout Israel if you know what you are looking for. In some places they are obvious; for example, in Canada Park on the main Jerusalem/Tel Aviv road. A Palestinian student who was researching the many destroyed villages, drove me past some. He said, "If there are no outright ruins, prickly pear cacti are a giveaway. The plant is hard to uproot and was used by Palestinians instead of fences. The Arab memory is deeply anchored in the land and it goes on for generations and generations." This was the voice of someone taking issue with the oft-used statement that described "A land without a people for a people without a land." It was the voice of someone saying, "I have an identity, a history, a culture and I am here in this land."

In the 1967 war, Israel took control of the West Bank and Gaza and inherited a demographic problem - some would say a nightmare. There was no intention of incorporating any more than an absolute minimum of the Palestinian population into the State of Israel. Israel's policies and practices about how to handle this demographic situation evolved quickly. They are still evolving. But the main principle is that they need more Jews than Palestinians inside Israel.

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(1). Sandy Tolen. *The Lemon Tree*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2006.

The struggle for land is literally dunum by dunum (1) - taken from Palestinians piece by piece. It is also what lies right at the heart of what threatens Palestinian identity and, of course, their major grievances. It is important to understand some of the salient issues about land and the settlement question. Barak Obama got it right in his Cairo speech when he stated that all settlement construction needed to stop. It is my contention that aggressive Israeli settlement practices have rendered any possibility of a two-state solution impossible. UN Resolution 242, created at the end of the 1967 war, called for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. Israel has entirely ignored this resolution.

All the Arab inhabitants of East Jerusalem were given the opportunity to become citizens of Israel. The majority did not do so, on principle. Israel immediately embarked on the creation of twelve settlements encircling Jerusalem, to ensure that a sufficient Jewish population would render it impossible to physically separate East Jerusalem from Israel. These include Ramot Eshkol, French Hill, Talpiot and Gilo. Virtually no international governments (2) have recognized the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem, including the U.S. and Canada *(as of 2010)*.

The Israeli authorities, under pressure from the military and the settler movement, began to establish settlements in the West Bank for Israeli citizens. Under the plan designed by Yigal Allon, Israel remained in the Jordan Valley and established a string of about sixteen settlements there. They then proceeded with a second string of settlements along the mountainous ridge on the western edge of the Jordan Valley.

Up until the mid '70s the settler movement had been military and ideologically driven. The total civilian Israeli settler population was less than 5000. With the election of the Likud government of Menachem Begin in 1977, the policy changed to encourage secular, non-ideological, nonmilitary families to move to land in the West Bank because it was a good deal. Subsidies, low interest rates and other benefits were encouraging to settlers. Prime Minister Begin also considered the West Bank to be an indivisible part of Eretz Israel. For Begin and the right side of the Israeli body politic, it was a huge concession to give up claims to Jordan. Settlements burgeoned between Jericho and Jerusalem. Today the 35,000 residents of Maaleh Adumin drive to work in Jerusalem on lovely roads that bypass Palestinian communities. In the bedroom communities of Jerusalem, ideology or theology is not the issue. For them it is simply a matter of congenial Jewish communities with services including good schools, water and infrastructure. The same approach led to a huge expansion of settlements south of Bethlehem, and to the creation of Har Homa on a hilltop between the three cities of Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala.

Twenty years ago, when Ariel Sharon, later Prime Minister, was asked by Winston Churchill, the grandson of the first Winston, what the Israelis would do with the Palestinians, he retorted that they would make a pastrami sandwich of them. When queried what he meant, he said that they would put so many Jewish settlers in between the Palestinians that no one including the UN or the US would ever be able to separate the West Bank from Israel. His words proved prophetic.

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(1) A dunum is about a quarter of an acre

(2) As of 2021, only the U.S. has formally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Some countries have moved Embassies to Jerusalem but have not formally accepted it as the capital. Australia did recognize Jerusalem as capital but reversed its decision in 2022.

Israel uses a variety of mechanisms to, as Meron Benvenisti, the former deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, puts it, "alienate Palestinians from the land." Palestinians see these mechanisms as a monolith that denies them the right to land which they have occupied for centuries, or for that matter, millennia. By the time we arrived in 1982, about fifty percent of the West Bank had been expropriated for exclusive Jewish use. We got to know one of the members of the Najjar family who owned some of the land on which the Hyatt stands today. This land was simply taken, supposedly for public purpose. No compensation was given to the Najjar family for this very valuable property.

The story of the settlement of Ofra is another interesting case in point. It is located northeast of Ramallah, just next to Beit El in the heart of a Palestinian population. This settlement represents a significant break from Labor's Allon policy to avoid Israeli settlements in the heart of densely populated Palestinian land. Ofra was the first settlement established by the Gush Emunim, an Israeli right-wing ultranationalist movement. The settler movement had not been able to establish itself through a frontal attack on the Labor government, so they decided to do it without fanfare, using stealth. In December 1974 the Gush Emunim leadership convinced an Israeli contractor to hire their members to work on the construction of an army base at Baal Hatzor Mountain in the West Bank. For five months the workers traveled back and forth at night to Israel proper. They used this time of travel to scout opportunities to establish a settlement. One night they decided to stay in some abandoned buildings of the nearby Ein Yabrud army base. That same evening the Gush Emunim leaders met with Prime Minister Shimon Peres and asked him not to evict the settlers. Peres agreed, provided it was considered a work camp, not a community, with the understanding that the state would not allocate any funds to them. In other words, Peres would not help them, but would also not hinder them. Within six months additional settlers had arrived and Peres again visited the site. At this time, he gave permission to connect the site to the electricity grid and he ended the charade of it being a work camp. This was a huge tactical victory for the settlers. Virtually all of Ofra was built on private Palestinian land. The land was taken and owners were not compensated. When Likud came to power in 1977, the tactical barrier of putting Jewish settlers in the heart of heavily populated Palestinian territory on Palestinian land had been broken.

This also established the precedent that Israeli facts on the ground, created without formal permission from the government, was a successful way for Israelis to begin new settlements in the Palestinian West Bank. We arrived in 1982 and repeatedly watched the following process: Israeli tents would come and then the caravans. Although this was deemed illegal by the government, the settlement continued to grow and morph into permanent housing; in time it was recognized by the government. A human drama emerged. Indeed, we were frequently appalled spectators watching this drama play itself out. Palestinians rarely won. Prime Minister Shamir, when asked about these settlements, replied, "There is a little Gush in all of us."

Sabri Ghureib had a family of 13 people. He actually had title to his land, which was on a hilltop about one kilometer from an old Jordanian army base near village of Beit Iksa. The problems for him began when the Gush Emunim moved in tents, then moved in the caravans and then started to build simple but more permanent housing. Harassment, beatings and the odd gun shot ensued. When the settlers threatened to kill his children, Sabri simply said "I will make

more." Not the voiceof harshness, but the steadfast voice of a person who says, "I have no place to go." I don't know how he has survived to this day, but the last time I saw his family, we walked to his house on a narrow path lined with razor wire. Settlers put the wire so close to his house that he could not get to his water pump or his outhouse.

When I encountered stories like this and got to know the people involved, I began, seriously, to question why the world was demanding that Palestinians recognize Israel's right to exist. For a Palestinian that meant accepting the fact that the Israeli Jew had the right to take their home and their land. I am not aware of that demand being made of any other people. I can hardly imagine anyone asking an Indigenous person here to recognize the colonialists' right to take their land. It was taken, agreements were violated and there are consequences. Now we work at finding ways to atone for those deeds.

I visited Meron Benvenisti on several occasions. He was a Sabra - someone born in Israel - a former Knesset member and former Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem responsible for the affairs of the Arabs. He headed up the West Bank Data base project, which he founded after leaving city government. He was a proud Israeli, but also a firm believer in the need for Israel to withdraw to the Green Line - the 1967 borders. He saw the demographic dilemma facing Israel clearly. I asked him how he reconciled his role in the expulsion of the Palestinians from the large area in front of the Western Wall – approximately 65 houses – with the realization that sovereignty over Jerusalem would lie at the heart of any peace settlement with the Palestinians. Without a pause he reached behind and pulled out his book, *Conflict and Contradiction,* which had just been published. It is largely his personal memoir. He read me a passage in which he indicated that he could no longer reconcile his Zionism with his humanism.

He then told me how he had come to leave politics. In 1977, the South African government was establishing its homeland policy for Blacks. The South African government sent senior administrators of the policy implementation to visit him, because he had been so successful in creating separate Arab ghettos in East Jerusalem. As Benvenisti tells it, "I was horrified at what I had become a part of and resigned as Deputy Mayor literally immediately."

Much of the work of the NGOs focused on land and water issues. Due to the tremendous dislocation, much of the land in the West Bank had gone out of use for anything other than grazing. Terraces were in disrepair and few trees of any kind had been planted after the '67 war. One of the first things that had been dismantled by the military authorities were the tree nurseries, since they were seen as something that rooted Palestinians to the land. Some agencies worked on the distribution of olive seedlings. By the time we arrived, one and a half million olive seedlings had been planted in the West Bank. The olive tree is the Palestinian national symbol. It is not hard to understand why. It lives for hundreds and hundreds of years. The tree prunings provide fuel for fire. Both olives and olive oil are highly prized, and are valued for generations.

Planting seedlings around settlement sites was a major tactic on the part of Palestinian farmers in an effort to protect their land. Land reclamation work, designed to encourage Palestinians to stay on the land, was a major piece in our effort to aid the Palestinians. MCC would fund some bulldozer costs to clear rocks off the land. These stones were

then built into retaining walls and terraces. At the same time, one had an overwhelming sense of powerlessness watching farmers work the land, while rocks dislodged by the Israeli bulldozers building settlements rolled into their vineyards and fruit orchards. No amount of working the land could save it. As I reflect on their hard work, I view it as a largely useless exercise – but it had great symbolic significance.

MCCs second major involvement lay in water projects. These included support for canal repair, lining for agricultural cisterns and support for the installation of drip irrigation equipment. Today fully ninety-five percent of all recoverable water west of the Jordan is used. Twenty-five percent of all water that Israel uses comes from West Bank aquifers. Israel needs ongoing access to the water resources of the West Bank. The average Israeli settler uses ten times as much water as the average Palestinian. Palestinian water usage is tightly controlled, and I am aware of only four wells that Palestinians have been allowed to drill since 1967. Drilling wells requires permits from the Israeli military. Land remains a huge issue. Water, I would contend, is almost as big an issue. It is not by accident that the settlement of Ariel positioned on the spine of Palestine sits right atop the largest West Bank aquifer. It is hard to conceive of Israel ever recognizing Palestinian sovereignty over this water.

Since we left in 1987, I have returned a dozen times to Palestine. There was euphoria during the early nineties after the Oslo accords. Maybe there might be some hope for an agreement that Palestinians could accept and that met the conditions laid out in UN resolutions of 242. The period between the efforts to implement the Oslo accords and the beginning of the second Intifada in the late nineties saw a huge amount of development in the Palestinian community. They worked hard at creating the infrastructure for a state that involved security, health, education and commerce. They had the education and skill, as well as a high degree of enthusiasm and political vitality.

However, life on the ground remained difficult. The settlements doubled in size despite the Oslo agreements, continuing the process of making the pastrami sandwich. Major road projects connecting the settlements continued. These roads cut huge swathes through Palestinian fields and orchards. They also cut Palestinians off from each other because these roads, often fenced, frequently bisected local Palestinian roads. Generally, Palestinians were not permitted on Israeli roads.

More importantly, Israel established numerous checkpoints throughout the West Bank. Some were permanent and others were arbitrarily operated by settlers or the military. The lineups were often very long, and it could take hours to get across. There was often harrassment and violence and one never knew what might happen.

In 1992, I took a ride with a friend from Beit Jala, south of Jerusalem, to Ramallah north of Jerusalem. In the worst traffic of the eighties this might have taken one hour. It now took two and half hours, since the main Palestinian linkages were checkpointed and, as noted above, Palestinians were not allowed on the settler roads.

The roots of the second Intifada lie in the dramatic doubling of the Israeli settlements. One of the understandings of the Oslo Accords in 1993, was that settlement activity would cease. It did not cease. It sped up. In fact, the number of settlers doubled in six years to over 200,000, excluding the growth in annexed East Jerusalem. In response to this

settlement growth the Palestinians, who had largely kept their end of the Oslo bargain, launched the second Intifada with the disastrous suicide bombers who had lost all hope. When people are oppressed, there can be terrible results. Israel then again moved in and assumed even tighter control of the West Bank. With this control came the cement eight-meter-high security wall.

Qalqilya, a Palestinian city, is located at a strategic point that juts into Israel at is narrowest. 40,000 people have been fenced in by this wall. Access in and out of this community, now a ghetto, is controlled by a small group of soldiers. There is only one narrow passage in and out. Farmers are cut off from their fields and commerce is highly restricted. I cannot imagine living in this prison-like world where all movement is restricted.

Today, in 2010, the population demographic between the Jordanian border and the sea is over forty percent Palestinian. They have demonstrated astonishing resilience in the face of heart-breaking deprivation and restrictions. They are not going away. So what will Israel do – what are the options for both communities? Avraham Burg, the former speaker of the Knesset and former head of the Jewish Agency, makes this point with chilling clarity. Already in 2003 writing in the Guardian (1) he states:

> Between the Jordan and the Mediterranean there is no longer a clear Jewish majority. And so fellow citizens, it is not possible to keep the whole thing without paying a price. We cannot keep a Palestinian majority under an Israeli boot and at the same time think ourselves the only democracy in the Middle East. There cannot be democracy without equal rights for all who live here, Arab as well as Jew. We cannot keep the territories and preserve a Jewish majority in the world's only Jewish state – not by means that are humane, moral and Jewish.

I have never really believed that the solution lay in political separation. I spent too much time driving the roads of the West Bank, witnessing the rapidly growing settlements to think that there was really a way to dislodge the hard core of the settler movement out of the West Bank. By comparison, Gaza was easy. It is far from the heart of biblical Israel. The essence of ancient biblical Israel lies in the West Bank, in what Israelis call Judea and Samaria.

I once attended a debate between Rabbi Waldman, from the Kiryat Arba settlement next to Hebron, and Mordechai Baron. Both were Knesset members at the time. Baron was from the left and Waldman was from the right. The debate was about what to do with the West Bank – or Judea and Samaria, as Waldman called it. The debate went back and forth. I will never forget Waldman's closing line, "If any government considers giving up Judea and Samaria then the Jews of Judea and Samaria will rule Judea and Samaria." It was a declaration of possible civil war. Its stunning clarity still makes shivers run up my spine. I visited with Waldman and other settler leaders at Kiryat Arba later. They have a clear-eyed view of their mission. Their marching orders come from the words of Joshua and Judges. They believe that God gave them the land, and that their only real mistake is not cleansing the land of Arabs completely. They are quite prepared to have some Arabs live alongside them, but only as people with restricted rights.

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(1) Avraham Burg. "The End of Zionism." *The Guardian*. September 15, 2003.

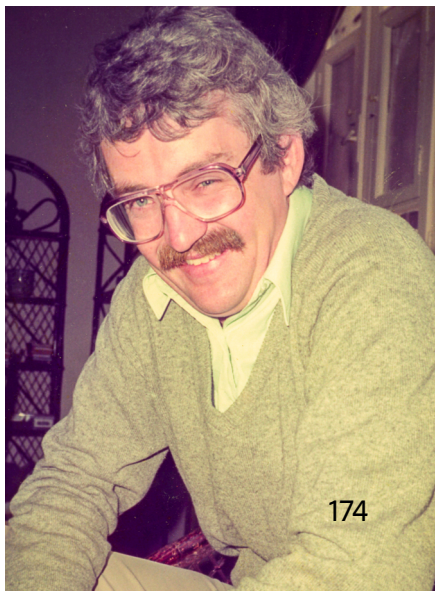
One sobering recent development has caught me by surprise: the growing embrace of militarism and the modern State by the ultra-religious Haredim and Hasidism. In the 1980s Mea Shearim, the Haredim enclave, was avowedly anti-state. They believe that God did not bless ancient Israel when it was in a state of apostasy. Since modern Israel defines itself as a secular state, God will not bless modern Israel either. Currently there is a growing link between the Gush Emunim, the religious heart of the settler movement, and ultra-religious Jews. They now form close to twenty percent of Israel's population. They are quite open about wanting to run Israel as a theocracy.

This presentation is entitled "Palestine and a People Denied." However, as I reflected on this topic it seems that it is as much about Israel being denied. There is something vibrant and dynamic within the fabric of Israeli society. Its creativity, energy, artistic flair are very compelling. Israelis root themselves in transcendent values that have informed so much of human history. So what happens to that Israel, the one we want to admire, when it ceases to be a democracy because it continues to deny equal rights to half the population between the Jordan and the Sea?

I believe that we have for far too long locked ourselves into the concept of the two-state solution. The language used by Palestinians was "it is five minutes to midnight." To me, it seems to be more like five o'clock the next afternoon. This fixation with two states has kept everyone from looking creatively at other possibilities, at a co-existence where two peoples can thrive spiritually, culturally, linguistically, economically and politically as they enrich each other's identities.

Note: This lecture was presented with graphs and photos by Harold Dueck in 2010 to a Winnipeg group of people who were interested in understanding the situation in Israel-Palestine. This edited version is included here because it provides insight into our lives and work while we lived there. Much has changed since then, making the situation for Palestinians even more intolerable.

An MCC irrigation project



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The experiences and viewpoints are mine and not those of any institution or other person, unless otherwise stated. I have written what we experienced and how we experienced it in the 1980s when we lived there. Readers may have different opinions, experiences or beliefs.

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