



GLOBAL SEMESTER 1993-94

24 September, 1993

Peace!

This greeting takes on a radical new meaning for all of us here in Cairo. In the past three weeks, we were present in Geneva when the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia talks occurred, in Greece on the day that the current government collapsed, and in Israel on the day that the agreement on principles and mutual recognition was signed between Israel and the Palestinians. We have been in the presence of armed Israeli soldiers (most of them the same age as our students), on the borders between Israel and Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. We have undergone rigorous security checks between Israel and Egypt. All of these events have had a profound emotional, intellectual and spiritual impact on each of us. We'll try to highlight some of the specifics of our experiences but first let us tell you that the entire group is doing very well. A few cases of stomach upsets (with more to come, we're sure) as we learn to cope with non-drinkable tap water and new foods. Our greatest joy has been the students. They are a sensitive, caring, inquisitive, optimistic and extremely well behaved group with great stamina and energy. Our hosts at each location have gone out of their way to tell us how impressed they are with the group's curiosity and intelligence and the respect they show to each culture. As we write this letter, the sounds of Arabic (some with Norwegian dialects) are mingling with the busy sounds of Cairo. All 28 students are working very hard to communicate with the Egyptians in their native language. It's not "required", but the students rightly sense that it is a small gesture to return the genuine warmth and hospitality we are receiving from the Egyptian people.

Our final days in Greece were filled with travel, lectures and performances. The actress who played the role of *ELECTRA* spent a magical forty-five minutes with our group talking about the passion and transformation of classical drama. Her performance provided ample demonstration of her words, and we all came away with new perceptions of the art of theater. The next day, **JEFFREY HELLMERS** became endowed with some of that passion as he led the group in the singing of both *Beautiful Savior* and *Um Ya Ya* from the orchestra or performance stage of the historic Theater at Epidauros.

We arrived in Jerusalem on Sunday, September 12. Our residence was located inside the walls of the Old City in the Arab Quarter. The view from our windows included the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (built on the site of the crucifixion), the Mount of Olives, and the Dome of the Rock, one of Islam's most holy shrines where the Prophet Mohammed is believed to have ascended. Our first day walking tour wound us through the crowded streets and levels with all of our senses being assaulted in new ways, not the least of which was a Muslim minaret blasting out the first call to prayer at 4:00 a.m. A long bus trip took us to a spot on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where we read the story from the Gospel of the Feeding of the 5,000. We moved a few miles to the site where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount and entered a small chapel where The Beatitudes became the basis for the stained glass windows. We took a short ride in a boat on the Galilean Sea up to the point where the Jordan River runs into the Lake. All of us were thankful that **TOM FRIEDRICH** has now joined the group and is in good health and brings a completeness to our ever closer band of 30 travelers.

We were visiting Bethlehem (The Church of the Nativity) at the very time that the Israeli/Palestinian signing took place in Washington, D.C. While CNN carried the broadcast live on the television in the bus, we watched hundreds of Palestinians parading up and down the streets of Bethlehem with red, green, white and black Palestinian flags waving from all directions. Our students were the recipients of hugs and good wishes from many of them. The joy on the faces of

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all of these people gave testimony to the first "good news" they have had in a very long time. Our time in Jerusalem flew by as we were briefed by the U.S. Consul General in his private residence and by the editor of *Spectator* magazine and a leading member of the of the Israeli Labor party. We met with students and faculty at the Palestinian Bethlehem University and then toured a Palestinian Refugee camp. **STEPHANIE REDING** appears to have a potential career in working with children as they flock to her in great numbers. In the Refugee Camp she taught a large group of small kids the Alphabet song (in English) and followed that with a rousing rendition of "Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes!"

The combination of these experiences started to give us a much deeper understanding of the complexities of the situation in this part of the Middle East. Although the current steps being taken are significant, they are only that . . . a plan for a plan for a plan leading to some resolutions of some of the difficult issues still to be resolved. But it is a start. It's hard to believe and at the same time very easy to see how so many different people (Jews, Christians, Muslims) can peacefully cohabit such a small area as Jerusalem and at the same time be waging what seems to be an eternal war over territory, politics, economic, social and religious beliefs. The most poignant moments of our stay in the Holy Land were provided during our tour of the Refugee Camp. Conditions in the camp are beyond description for the 10,000 inhabitants of the fenced city within a city. Our guide through the camp was a 23 year old student who has lived in the camp his entire life. Amidst what appeared to us to be defeat, despair, frustration and insurmountable obstacles, he invited all 30 of us into his very small home in the camp and offered us water. For the next hour, as we sat in one of the two rooms of the house, he spoke of his life story . . . his pride in his family and his hopes for the future. The Arab sense of hospitality was suddenly given real life and for at least 30 people, Palestinians are no longer faceless terrorists. At no time did we have fears for our safety . . . in fact, we were overwhelmed with the genuine friendliness and warmth of the people.

Our stay in Israel concluded with a trip to Masada and the Dead Sea where the students had an opportunity to float at the lowest point on earth. We passed into Egypt after a two hour border crossing process at Taba and then proceeded to the monastery at St. Katherine's in the Sinai peninsula. We were taken into the private library at the monastery and shown perhaps one of the most valuable collections of early religious manuscripts in existence. Two or three of the students actually held a Bible dating from the Fourth Century. The next morning the group arose at 2:30 a.m. and proceeded to accomplish the rugged climb to the top of Mt. Moses in record time (one hour and 45 minutes!!) where they experienced one of the most dramatic sunrises they will ever behold. As an indication of the kind of students we have on this trip, **AMY KOOP** and **DUANE HITZ** delayed their descent from the mountain in order to go step by step with an elderly couple from Greece making a pilgrimage trip up the mountain.

We are now settled in Cairo for our first long stay. After 3 or 4 days the students are beginning to move like real Cairens (dodging through traffic, finding fantastic restaurants, rushing to classes at American University) and have shed a layer of "tourist" image. We've been to the pyramids, been besieged by perfume and papyrus sellers on the streets and still manage to get up at 6:00 a.m. for another full day. The best thing, however, is that we're under the tutelage of Dr. John Swanson at the American University of Cairo. John is an Egyptologist and provides us with between 3 and 4 hours of lectures each day. He has a wealth of knowledge of both modern and ancient Egypt and is a superb teacher. We all are gaining a remarkably new understanding of this country and the Arab world while at the same time, engaging in some exciting critical thinking because of his work.

It's difficult to condense all of the thoughts and feelings that we've had thus far into these few pages. All of us are intellectually, emotionally and spiritually being challenged, inspired and overwhelmed each and every day. Some of the most nurturing times, however, are when we pause and communicate with you at home. These letters help tie the present with our past and renew our bonds across so many miles. Your letters, support and prayers keep us strong!

masa-ssalama (Arabic for "may you be accompanied by peace!")

Kathy and Pat