A significant moment

It is April 1978 – having ‘ pushed paper ‘ for close on two years in a City reinsurance broking firm I have chosen to take some time off for travel. Wanderlust rather than work.

200 kms south of Bogotá, Colombia and 50 kms east of Popoyán lies the charming village of San Agustín in the Andean foothills – one could be in the Cotswolds … rolling hills, friendly people, excellent coffee and dairy products. This village became my favourite archaeological site in the whole of South America – eat your heart out Macchu Picchu ! In San Agustín itself is the exquisite Lavapatas … volcanic river rocks scoured out to make animal patterns for the water to flow over and around – monkeys’ tails, lizards, snakes – all beautifully done some 2,000 years ago.

A couple of English girls : Gail Bishop & Tessa Cormack are also ‘ gap yearing ‘ before gap years have been invented and with a couple of other travellers we take up an offer of rooms at a local farm with horses from where we explore the outlying ancient stones and sites.

One glorious morning we have ridden for an hour or so to reach ‘ Alto de los Ídolos ‘ where there is a menhir and other standing stones – as we approach the site, me on a young chestnut bay of about 15 hands, there are a few houses. Out of one of them comes a middle-aged lady in a flowing skirt who walks straight up to me, takes my right hand off the reins and thrusts into it an object –

It’s an oval amulet, made of a grey stone, carved on one side with an owl and snake motif and the reverse carved with a fly agaric mushroom set against mountains and the sun. An unexpected gift that I have kept safe over the years.





My trip to Nepal

At the suggestion of a friend whose father commanded the Gurkhas in WW2 and after talking to the U.K. head of the Gurkha Welfare Trust who kindly put me in touch with several people on the ground I decided to visit this lovely little country where I hadn't been for 36 years. "What can an individual do to help ? ", many said, " you'll just get in the way", with several disparaging comments from others who enjoy trying to wound me. Nevertheless, I ignored my gainsayers and went anyway.

Armed with the latest Lonely Planet publication, Sainsbury's instant coffee and tonic, a mini kettle, a litre of Jersey milk cosseted by freezer packs, plenty of music but sadly the wrong sized bath-plug my Oman Air flight circled above Kathmandu airport on the afternoon of Tuesday 12th May while they checked the runway after the second big 7.4 quake.



There was mild chaos near the terminal with stacks of aid awaiting delivery into the hills and a long wait for our luggage but I made friends with a charming Nepali family returning from their second home up in the Swat Valley in northern Pakistan and two young guys from Hands Charity Karachi here to do good work. A short taxi ride later through streets thronged with people (too scared to stay indoors) and I am ensconced at the relatively luxurious Hotel Annapurna on Durbar Marg albeit with no hot water, lifts or working pool. There appeared to be only limited damage to these newer sections of town but all shops and restaurants were closed because of the tremors. Luckily I had brought out some home-made flapjacks and duty free Gilbey's gin so my survival was not in doubt.

The following four days saw me touring the city and outlying towns Bhaktepur, Patan, Bangamati, Dhulikel and Panauti by bus and on foot. Of these Bangamati was the worst affected ; it reduced to rubble, me reduced to tears.



Dropping names here … my initial contact was the super-efficient (and teetotal at least while on duty) Defence Attaché Kathmandu, Colonel Sean Harris, who filled me in on the U.K.'s efforts to firstly deal with our citizens in distress and then the more needful Nepali people. He and his 100 men were only able to do limited rescue work with their Land-Rovers because as it turned out, our wimp of a Prime Minister did not insist that the Nepalese Government accept the use of three Chinook helicopters which were poised to help in Delhi and wouldyabelieveit withdrew them back to the UK on my last day. They are still so needed – surely a call to the Nepal Ambassador in London could change attitudes?



Anyway, Sean put me in touch with the Army Chaplain, one Rendell Day, (running the United Mission to Nepal) and he introduced me to a tiny Christian church, the Newa Mo:Mo in Thamel which looks after street children. I had spent a few quid in Poundland and Tiger before leaving and brought out

DIY/gardening gloves, face-masks, anti-septic hand-wash and soap along with balloons, pens,booklets, crayons, candles, napkins and all sorts. About half of my stash I gave away amid great jollity at a Nepalese Army camp in central Kathmandu but I was able to leave many gifts for Anjana to distribute from her church. Surprisingly in a predominantly Buddhist country there are well over 500,000 Christians.



Of course I raided the hotel's soaps, combs, toothbrushes and paste to dish out to people. I think the gloves were my most successful import because people were removing bricks and beams with their bare hands. Balloons (starry ones from Sainsbury's) went down best with the children. Working on the Starfish Principle (Google it) to bring a smile to maybe 350 people can't be a waste of time.



Different countries were bringing different approaches to 'helping' Nepal. It was galling to see a 15 acre 'field

hospital' with 30 immaculate khaki tents set up by the Pakistan Army outside Bkaktepur that was completely empty ! Disturbing too were the ubiquitous smart blue tents with windows provided by China but sparsely populated – they could pick and choose who they wanted to admit. These arrived without being requested by Nepal. India too is playing political games – their media swamped the hills after the 25th April initial quake bringing not food and tents but just cameras and inane " how are you feeling ? " questions. I guess they have provided much canvas but it seemed to me the little Nepalese Army were doing more and with better grace.

The Yanks, bless 'em, sent 120 + firefighters from Fairfax County, Virginia and Los Angeles with sniffer dogs (all staying at the Annapurna) who were on 24 hour alert. There were 5 or 6 Huey helicopters at the airport on constant duty – do we criticize them for stopping operations for two days while they searched for one that crashed ? Yes, but with understanding.



So much brilliant work was being undertaken by the NGOs and small organisations … the Salvation Army, Christian Aid, Tearfund, CAFOD, the Gurkhas and richer local individuals. I was somewhat appalled to read an article by Sarah Sands, the editor of the Evening Standard on Friday 22nd May making a snidy remark about Israeli help, coming in without consultation, she said. Easier to pass judgement on them than the Chinese I suppose. She cadged a ride in a tiny

helicopter chartered by Justine Greening's lot in the Department for International Development up to Chautara when quite honestly 2 bags of rice would have been more worthwhile cargo .

Amazingly the earth stayed still for all the time I was in Nepal.



I came home bearing many fine souvenirs, cigarettes for my children and sweets from Muscat for my charity's stand last week at the Christian Resources Exhibition at ExCel. Reaching my Wandsworth flat late on Sunday night, the 17th May, it was so good to find a 'round robin' letter waiting, with personal accoutrements to little me from Jean Vanier of L'Arche. He has just come out of hospital but collected his $1.7 million Templeton Prize at St Martin-in-the-Fields last Tuesday apparently. I always seem to miss him by a day or two !

Please consider how you could give something back to little Nepal whose Gurkhas have so helped us – donate maybe (see charity donation links above), or head out for a holiday. Above all let's hassle Cameron et al to get their act together, stop pussy-footing around and get our Chinooks up to Kathmandu.

Danyabat.

Third Letter to to HRH King Abdullah II

Wednesday 25th March

2015

Your Highness,

You will see from the enclosed correspondence that I have been trying to reach you for some time – I am merely a humble British citizen and wanted to inform you of your father's generosity. My last letter was handed to Layali who promised me she would hand it to you personally within days but, as it turned out, sat on it (ouch !) undelivered for the past 3½ months. So I try again.

Once more I near the end of a delightful holiday in Aqaba. I learnt from the Anglican curate here, Adam Boulter, that some while back there was a scandal involving abuse in a care home and that you personally went there to 'read them the riot act' – great stuff.

All of us in England were aghast at the appalling end for your Jordanian Air Force pilot captured by those dregs of inhumanity. Should matters deteriorate on your borders with Syria and Iraq do not hesitate to request help (should you need it) from Cameron – I am sure that the S.A.S. at least would relish the opportunity to assist your own forces.

The winter/spring climate here is splendid and I hope to return next time with my girlfriend, who incidentally advises me to " … leave that King alone !". One wonders if Aqaba and

its people might benefit from more British tourists ? Direct flights from the likes of EasyJet or even the previously dreadful Ryanair could perhaps benefit the economy.

Please do glance at my charity's latest leaflet.

Thank you, Sir.

Yours faithfully,

Jamie Summers

Do you hear voices ?

I wrote this article back in 1992 and decided to run it past a journalist friend, Robin Eggar before seeking its publication. He pilloried it to such an extent that I thought oh well, a writing career is not for me and I abandoned the project. Since then he has betrayed me royally on at least two occasions. Strange isn't it how one's perceived mates can turn out to be 'smiling assassins' ?

Suffer a nervous breakdown in South West London and the chances are you will be brought to Springfield Hospital. Your initial impressions may well be favourable. It is a magnificent 1841 Tudor style building, reminiscent of Hampton Court, approached by a sweeping drive and overlooking acres of parkland. You will be led to your designated ward, generally allocated by area of residence not by your specific condition, and interviewed by the doctor on duty. You are now out of the control of your G.P. and in the hands of the NHS psychiatrists. 'Leave all love and hope behind, out of sight is out of mind'.

Since the late 1940's treatment of mental illness has moved away from the padded cell approach to a succession of drug therapies. Chemical straight-jackets have replaced linen ones. The drugs are claimed to control and dampen the symptoms of sufferers, but in reality they do little more than render the recipients semi-comatose and thus manageable. The oldest established tranquilizer, and still the most widely prescribed, is Chlorpromazine or Largactil. Known as the 'liquid cosh', this drug is in everyday use not only in mental hospitals but prisons, nursing homes and even children's homes. It is liberally used at Springfield at doses of up to 2gm per day whereas in a private clinic a patient would have to be seriously disturbed to receive as much as 250mg a day. Perhaps the second commonest tranquilizer in use is Droperidol and here again the dichotomy between NHS and private hospitals can be illustrated. The standard dose at Springfield is at least 30mg, compared to 5mg privately. This prompts the question : are these NHS patients six or more times more deranged than their middle-class counterparts ?

Other drugs in regular use here include Stelazine, Haloperidol, Modecate. Clopixol and Depixol, all prescribed at levels that would be considered obscene in the private sector. Their short-term effects are alarming enough – most patients become apathetic, sleep most of the day, their hands shake uncontrollably and muscles stiffen causing some to walk like animated scarecrows. Largactil has a particularly nasty side-effect – go outside in even weak sunshine and you will experience a burning sensation on your scalp and exposed areas of skin.

The worst side-effects, notably the Parkinsonian tremors, can be counteracted by other drugs, It is a question of exchanging one set of unwanted effects for another, hopefully more tolerable, set of side-effects, Procycladine or Kemadrin is the commonest used, but often causes dizziness, a dry mouth and blurred vision. Benhexol, Benztropine and Orphenadrine are

further ‘antmuscularinics’ sometimes used,

These pills are rarely offered to patients for several reasons. There is the fear that their use can accelerate the onset of ‘tardive dyskenesia’, the term for irreversible damage caused by long-term use of major tranquilizers. Furthermore, most of these drugs have a stimulating effect and patients have been known to hoard them for a future ‘buzz’. One suspects that the hospital’s reluctance to prescribe them is predominantly for the latter reason.

Wandering around the grounds and neighbouring Tooting Bec are scores of pathetic walking wounded. Contorted faces, open mouths, drooping or tilted shoulders, shuffling gait and an odd rolling motion of the fingers are all common sights. Many patients have been resident for thirty years or more, blighted by this pernicious damage to their central nervous systems. Probably the general public attributes their strangeness to some quirk in their mental condition but these are cases of tardive dyskenesia or ‘ the late onset of difficulty of movements’. This is the worst legacy of the last 40 years of psychiatry.

A walk up to Phoenix ward confirms the view that lessons have not been learnt from this over-prescription and that little is changing. This is a mixed ward of patients in their twenties and thirties, seemingly little different from occupants of other wards apart from the sweetener of being given individual rooms rather than dormitories. There is a price to pay for such freedom, for this is known as the guinea-pig ward. Most people here are taking the latest wonder drug of the pharmaceutical industry, Clozaril, a potentially dangerous substance requiring two blood tests a week to monitor its level and which has already caused one death.

Matthew *, a former chemistry student at King’s College, University of London, who has been at Springfield for six years, is diagnosed as schizophrenic. He recently developed

epilepsy, an occasional side-effect of long-term use of anti-psychotic medication, and admitted to feeling ‘pretty rough’ on Clozaril. He currently takes a cocktail of Largactil, Depixol and Clozaril four times a day, this practice of ‘polypharmacy’ or mixing of drugs being standard practice here. Many in the medical profession feel that the interaction between these chemicals has been insufficiently analysed and that this custom is unnecessary and unsafe. Poor Matthew has been through the whole gamut of psychotropic drugs during his time at Springfield – you name it, he’s taken it – tablets, liquids and injections. He and his fellows on Phoenix are destined to become the next generation of permanently damaged victims.

The prevailing air on all the wards is one of lack of care and sympathy from the staff. Doctors and nurses will sit for hours in their locked offices ignoring pleas from the patients … “No, I’m busy” seems to be their favourite refrain. Even the elderly and infirm are often left lying on the floor, by-passed by the nursing staff. People complain that they are lucky if they get to see their doctor once a week. Furthermore there is certainly no attempt at psychotherapy or counselling individuals about their thoughts and anxieties, The overriding concern of the nurses is to ensure that everyone receives their medication – those who have not yet recovered from the previous dose are rudely shaken from their sleep and led to the drugs trolley.

Of course there are exceptions amongst the nurses. A few are genuinely concerned for the welfare of their charges but much of the general care is actually carried out by the patients themselves, at least those who are capable of doing so. You would have thought that the choice to work in psychiatric nursing would foster compassion towards the mentally ill not the contempt shown by many.

This view of mental patients as third-class citizens was highlighted recently by a distressing incident. Before

Christmas last year Keith, a long-stay patient at Springfield, started getting severe chest pains,. An ambulance was called and he was driven down to nearby St. George's Hospital. After being assessed at casualty he was turned away because the doctors there didn't want a disturbed man disrupting their wards. Keith died the following day back at Springfield. This was no isolated case; treatment for everyday physical ailments is a low priority here, let alone for emergency cases .

It is acknowledged that mass catering in NHS hospitals leaves much to be desired, but the quality of meals at Springfield is particularly poor. Out of a daily budget of £1.72 per person, 40p is allocated for lunch. Grey mashed potato. one over-boiled vegetable and maybe a meat pasty, followed by a tasteless blancmange will be typical lunchtime fare. The evening meal is sometimes merely a baked potato and baked beans. All this is delivered luke-warm in antiquated trolleys from the central kitchen. Only six months ago patients were given a cooked breakfast every day and the quality of food was said to be better. Is this the result of 'contracting out' the service or simply poor allocation of resources ? Suffice to say that the hospital diet is almost wholly lacking in vitamins, fruit and fibre – the fortunate ones are able to supplement it with gifts from relatives or by their own shopping. Bodies already under assault from the medication are given little succour from this diet.

The cleaning service was similarly contracted out in 1990 with negative consequences. Toilets are left in a disgusting state: urine, vomit and faeces rarely adequately cleared away; windows are cleaned just once a year. Bed linen is meant to be changed weekly but in practice this is not achieved and duvets and pillows are likely to reek unpleasantly of previous occupants' incontinence.

While the hospital caters in the main for the mentally ill, there are many who are simply depressed and some, like Ruby, with no recognisable mental condition at all. Wheelchair-bound

on Bluebell ward, she patiently passes her days in quiet contemplation. Perhaps twice a year staff will make the effort to treat her to a push around the grounds. Rarely do they have any time to bring her even a glass of squash, she says. Why can't she be moved to a nursing home ?

Doctors like to pigeon-hole their mental patients with convenient labels describing their condition :- manic, hypomanic, manic depressive, manic depressive manic, schizo-affective, psychotic or various combinations of these terms. Few will be happy with their appellation. Indeed many diagnoses are hastily arrived at. Miles, a twent eight year old English graduate from Essex University, was asked the classic question, "Do you hear voices? at Birchill Hospital near Rochdale. "No, I don't, but I create voices when I write plays." After only five minutes of questions and answers along similar lines he found himself diagnosed as schizophrenic. A former voluntary patient at Springfield he can claim special prescient powers. Searching for a friend on his university campus and not knowing where she lived, he chose one of the six tower blocks at random, took the lift to the twelfth floor, went to the end of the corridor and knocked on the door. His friend answered. Peter, his twin brother, also burdened with a schizophrenic diagnosis, had a premonition of impending disaster on seeing the Marchioness manoeuvring on the Thames the afternoon before her demise.

Far from being the lower forms of life that their treatment would often suggest, many patients are among the more intelligent, creative and talented members of society. Musicians, artists and writers abound. One only has to think of past sufferers to recognise that mental illness can afflict those close to perfection in their fields … Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Van Gogh, Tolstoy, Winston Churchill and Graham Greene to name but a few. Were biblical characters immune from problems ? Isiah wandered naked round Jerusalem for seven years, John the Baptist pursued a hermit's existence living

off locusts and honey and Jesus himself was said to be ‘full of the holy spirit’ when led into the desert to be taunted by the Devil. How would his action of overturning the money-changers’ tables be construed today ? The dividing line between mental illness and true religious torment is undoubtedly narrow.

What is interesting when talking to those touched by madness is that whatever their designated label from manic through to schizophrenic, the pattern of thoughts and actions during manic phases is strikingly similar. Common to all is the feeling that what they are going through is a religious experience. A special relationship with God is claimed, a communion with the sun, the elements and nature. Birds seem to signal the way to go, leaves on trees will rustle on windless days.

There is a sensation that one has been chosen and that it is only a matter of time before one’s power becomes public knowledge. Fame and recognition seem just around the corner. Many derive inspiration from the sites and spires of churches, most will experience a surge of heightened awareness during services. Music plays a special role. The rhythm of music appears to match the rhythm of sufferers’ actions, particularly with classical pieces dedicated to God, Mozart being an especial favourite. The lyrics of rock and pop music, many of them similarly pleading to a higher authority, tend to give confirmation and credence to their manic thoughts. Likewise passages in literature from the Bible to Yeats can give messages. One patient felt he was a living book and said that he was looking forward to reading it.

Whilst these experiences seem laudable and harmless enough, there is a distaff side to the elation. The thoughts can easily become confused – sometimes there is too much information circulating round the brain and too many different ways of interpreting it. Most patients would admit to some wild and socially unacceptable behaviour during their manic

phases. Their personal striving to accomplish good at the expense of evil can alienate them from friends and family, What they see as a generosity of spirit and an openness towards strangers can easily degenerate into a spending spree and consequent debt. Some will admit to considering themselves to be lost or hidden members of the Royal Family or even the Pope or Jesus.

Home life can be disrupted by sleeplessness and a tendency to rearrange possessions into the 'correct' order dictated by their thoughts. Obsession with colour can be a factor, black and red signifying evil and danger, yellow and gold representing good. This leads some to pull out labels from clothes and to deface books and important documents. Perhaps yet stranger are those thoughts whereby world events are felt to be influenced merely by flicking through a newspaper. Kick an empty Sony cardboard box and the Japanese economy will stumble ! They feel their mental power can penetrate the minds of others and this can lead to confrontations frightening to members of their families.

Allied to their imagined mental strength during an 'up' is an actual physical strength way above normal capabilities. It can take five men to administer a sedative injection to an unwilling recipient. One patient being apprehended at Heathrow Airport by six security guards still found the force to break the arm of one of his captors.

Some psychotic people are undoubtedly a danger to themselves as well as to others and need sedation as well as careful watching. But the vast majority of the six hundred or so inmates at Springfield do not belong to this category. Many seem to be kept here for unnecessarily long periods on the whim of their consultants. Even release into the community does not bring freedom from the clutches of psychiatry. At the Deepdene hostel in Streatham are ten former patients from Springfield. The atmosphere is depressingly ward-like – medication four times a day from the one resident nurse, the

same zombie routine of sleep, television, coffee and cigarettes. Once again there is no attempt at counselling. One wonders how these people are expected to re-assimilate themselves into society, find jobs or partners when the drugs keep them asleep for up to eighteen hours a day.

Whatever the solution for these manic sufferers might be, it is clear that the psychiatric profession is as much in the dark as it was one hundred and fifty years ago when the first asylums like Springfield were built. Brutal physical treatment has given way to ‘megadosing’, ‘polypharmacy’ and indifferent staff. The NHS could save itself millions of pounds a year merely by reducing its dosage levels to more humane levels. The liberal use of the major tranquilizers has to be questioned and perhaps more use made of short-term pacifiers such as Valium and Ativan, combined with sympathetic listening and counselling. The acute stage of heightened anxiety for a manic patient rarely lasts more than three or four days, a similar time-span to the effectiveness of minor tranquilizers.

Further savings to the NHS could be made with an increased role being taken by the church. Certain monastic retreats already offer refuge. Buckland Abbey in Devon, Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight and Ampleforth in Yorkshire all provide a regime of prayer, conversation and nutritious food in peaceful surroundings that has benefited hundreds of these confused individuals. By all accounts the drug-free environment combined with an understanding community leads to a recovery far more rapid than that achieved by modern hospital psychiatry.

Given the disposition towards religious thoughts, which doctors at Springfield see as a symptom to be quashed, it would seem obvious that an expansion of the retreat system could offer a more Christian and caring approach to the problems of the mentally ill. Although many monasteries are in remote locations thus making visits from family and friends difficult, there are plenty of smaller retreats within or

close to our major cities that could be encouraged to play a larger part.

Mental illness is as old as mankind itself and misunderstanding is as rife today a sin centuries past. “There is pleasure sure, in being mad, which none but madmen know.” If only the pleasures and pains of mania were better understood by the public and the profession alike, then tragic incidents like the battering to death of a young man at the Hippodrome nightclub last year could be avoided. As Hamlet said, “Though this be madness, yet there be method in’t.” Without doubt there is madness in our method of treating it today.

* Names have been changed to protect identities

Second letter to HRH King Abdullah II

Tuesday 9th December

2014

Your Highness,

I wrote to you over a year ago and posted the letter at the main Madaba Post Office. The postcards I sent at the same time took 5 or 6 weeks to arrive in the U.K. so perhaps my letter never reached you at the Hashemite Palace – I have enclosed a copy – my sentiments regarding Jordan and Jordanians remain unchanged.

Once again I near the end of a delightful holiday – this time I have hardly moved from the excellent facilities provided at the Mövenpick, Aqaba. Indeed this letter, written on notepaper recently sourced from Zubboli's on the central square of Assisi, comes to you courtesy of Layali, the communications manager here and a friend of the Mövenpick's concierge, Omar Malkawi.

I have taken the liberty of also enclosing a leaflet of the little charity of which I am Chairman – we do good work among people in mental distress. Perhaps you know people in England who would be interested … our newsletters appear on our website www.beingalongside.org.uk. At present we have very few overseas subscribers.

One wonders whether Colonel Tim Checketts was your commanding officer at Sandhurst ? He is now the Secretary at Royal St. George's Golf Club where I play – a good man, who sadly lost his wife to cancer a couple of years ago but who has found happiness again.

Thank you again, sir, for the warmth and hospitality shown by your people. I am sure I will return soon,

Insh'Allah.

Yours sincerely,

Jamie Summers

Jamie’s Israel Diary January 1992

Saturday 18th January 1992

Spring from Springfield at 9a.m., having written letter to Graham re Patrick Estate / Wellesley Estate monies.

This is one Graham Millar who it turned out, after much detailed investigation by myself, family members and ultimately the Securities and Futures Authority, had ‘churned and burned’ some £250,000 of my Trust and Lloyd’s deposit inheritance. He had even used £13,500 of my money to pay one of his own tax bills !

Post it at Lillie Road – van started first time; surprised me! Park outside Queens Club Gardens where John Piper slapped me 12 years ago (soon forgiven) & walk to Baron’s Court Tube. Plenty of time at Heathrow … walk round Terminals 2,3 and 1. See Steve Davies + cue-case in No.3, smaller than expected, trying to look inconspicuous. Stock up stomach on coffee, coke, Burger King chicken concoction (not as pretty as picture!) & Danish pastries. Check in bag at CSA desk after long Q redirected to TAP desk. Chat with Romanian off on TAROM. Aeroflot desks to the left, Russian models and their minders; extraordinary guy in panic obviously smuggling currency / cocaine into Russia with his girlfriend who seemed to be in on the game. Kept zipping / unzipping his taped-up bags and shifting the trollies around for no good reason. Expect he’s in the Lubyanka now. Slight delay on flight but only 1⅔ hours to Prague – good plane, Tupolev 144, (a direct rip-off of a BAC 1-11 apart from the seats which were only marginally inferior) excellent snack meal of bread & meats

etc.. Free drinks & newspapers – take note BA !

Arrive Prague 5.30p.m. their time, hop onto tarmac & into bus which takes us all of 100 yards ! Not many planes around – one Mongolian, two Czech. Clear customs/controls & collect bag – leave it at left luggage. 6p.m. now, bus to town not going for ½ hour or so so take very smart clean taxi ($9 cash much appreciated) to St. Nicholas Church in main square of Old City. See about 60 cars in total on 25 minute drive in & that's Saturday night on the airport highway !

See letter/article sent to Vole for Prague interlude …

Lots of checks & piss-poor scanning equipment – TU 154 (Trident copy) → Tel Aviv. Leaves on time.

Sunday 19th January

Arrive 5a.m. at Tel Aviv – incredibly efficient airport. Through all checks & bag in hand 10 minutes after leaving aircraft – eat your heart out Gatwick. Bus to town. Check out Adiv Hotel (no Diners Club) so walk on to Hotel Moss & sleep till 1p.m.. Walk round town for 5 hours + . Highlights – Russian shop, camera guy, Spanish run café, silverware. Lowlights – dearth of books on Prague, dogs at the yacht club. Gloomy pictures bar one at modern art museum. Good cappuccino at London Café – why can't we make squirty cream non-UHT ? Synagogue on Allenby won't let me in without little hat – anorak hood not good enough ! Buy old maps, T-shirts, film.

Evening taxi trip out to beyond Hertzliya to the Daniel Hotel (very plush), Bali Hai restaurant with Thai staff. Table of 6 Germans & thoughts thereon. Back 11p.m.. Good sleep.

Monday 20th January

Slightly shoddy b/fast at H.Moss. Buy amazing Mozart and Prague book from German-Jewish run old bookshop – pay

about $18 but it's worth much more. Nice people. Get nail clipper to tackle awkward little toenails ! More coffee / croissants with the Spaniards. Suss out car hire prices & decide to take bus to Eilat for 29 shekels ($12). Arrive Central Bus Station on No.4 town bus – bolshy slob on bench – eat snack & board bus with loads of army guys & gals for 5 hour trip to Eilat. Stop at Beer'Sheeva & again just before Dimona Power (Bomb) Plant at Azad – Mordechai Vanunu and all that hooha. Negev desert. Last stop at weird animal sanctuary – nearly miss bus. Taxi from Eilat to the excellent Coral Beach hotel, masses to eat at supper including steak but with conversation-less krauts. Write half Prague saga. Good sleep again.

Tuesday 21st January

Multi-choice breakfast. Test sea and pool waters – sea warmer. Wander down towards Taba past coral reserve, funky observatory & submarine ride where 2 camels say hello, marine research centre, hotels being built & Eddi's café 1km from border. Return to hotel & continue towards Eilat. Check out 'Texas Ranch' rodeo centre, enter dolphinarium (nice), on past oil terminals & port (thousands of S.E.Asian cars), past army bases & along sea front round hotels. Looking for centre but signs not great so get rather lost climbing amongst the new settlements built for Soviet émigrés (1,600 here so far). Eventually reach bus station after some poor directing. Good snack bar there. Enter department store & purchase Cougar radio/cassette £20 ace value. Drop film for developing at Shalom Centre (Shopping Mall) – good cappuccino at café there. Browse around 11 miles today ă pied, I reckon. Managed some sunbathing at lunchtime but factor 12 Body Shop is perhaps too screening in this good but gentle sun.

Talk to drunk Finn & interesting chat with 2 young Danes re scuba diving. One is instructor – tells about guy who had to spend 115 hours in the decompression tank owing to overdoing life on holiday the week before (sans sleep) &

trying to rescue friend's diving belt whilst underwater. Doesn't sound the sport for me !

Soup/salad supper – finish Prague article.

Wednesday 22nd January

Write postcards to Sue & Andy Garber. Get photocopies of Prague piece – send one to Bernard Levin & another with letter to the twins. Whatalot of words I'm doing at the moment ! More serious sunbathing with Factor 4 after a brief excursion by bus to Taba, Egypt. Lots of form filling, tax paying, customs etc. Very little over there apart from Hilton Hotel & the Nelson Club Hotel – no army, few people. Territory returned to Egypt after Camp David accord 1980 ?

Sun loses its strength at 2'ish – so more scribbling until 4'ish when I bus in to Eilat. Buy map of bible locations, batteries – film not ready. Post Office shut. Check out 'Reliable' car hire, more expensive than Tel Aviv, haven't yet decided whether to bus up or rent car. Walk down to Galei Hotel to watch documentary (Canadian) in Finnish (!) on treatment of Jews in Russia in 1990 – apparently it's got worse since then – & their immigration here. Introduced by sweet little man from Coventry who helps their cause. Brilliant dinner at Tandoor restaurant … Tandoori Nan, Chicken Korma & mixed veg. Sweet rice dumplings in honey, Turkish coffee £12 – I assure you the best Indian food I have ever tasted accompanied by live sittar & dancing. Underneath King Solomon's hotel, v.large.

9p.m. attended lecture given by Jacky Pri-Gal, Honorary Consul, at Neptune Hotel supposedly on foreign policy, economy & tourism but the bore concentrated on domestic policy & Eilat. He was interesting on David Gurion, later Ben-Gurion who founded this country. Left early – too hot, too dull !

And so to bed.

Thursday 23rd January

Write letter to Diana. Hope it works.

My sister-in-law, a poor choice of go-between in my attempt to rescue my marriage, who binned my letters to her.

Bus to Eilat 9a.m.. Buy envelopes in Post Office, film not ready – organise car hire $310 for 8 days from Sat.a.m.. Reliable Car Hire. Buy 5 tapes at £5 each, 2 Marianne Faithfull, 1 Police, 1 Stevie Wonder, 1 Dvorak/Smetana. Coffee – film ready – none of Prague … photos they had registered as negatives ! Post letter to Diana & to Vole. Back by bus, sunbathing nearly 3 hours. Then to Coral World – underwater observatory, best aquarium in the world (?), living coral, myriads of wondrous coloured & shaped fish. Turtle pool, shark pool. Well worth 22 shekels entry – evening nap, Arab evening in dining room, belly dancer & her minder/fleecer . Leave before end to read.

Friday 24th January

Wake early & read B.Levin. Write postcards to Pip & Charlotte + Steve Morris. 7.45a.m. bus comes for tour – Timna Valley. Brief documentary showing mining/smelting of copper. Plutonium here too. Sculptured rocks, Solomon's pillars, little Egyptian holy site to 5/6 gods. Then to Timna Lake (funded by Missouri Jews) where Bedouins encamp and camel escapes to come and check me out. Coffee milk good. Discover it's made at next port of call the Yotvata Kibbutz (considered one of the best in Israel). Friesian / Holstein / Charolais cross milkers looking forlorn but get good diet of cotton seed / straw / fresh fruit & have classical music played to them. Visitors' centre. Back past Hai Bar gazelles / ostriches to Eilat new settlements at top of hill. $130,000 for 5 bed house. Jewellry centre – malachite green/ blue stone & silverware. Back 2p.m. – nap. Read, early supper, early bed.

Saturday 25th January

Shalom Shabbat. Postcard to Piers F-A. & Minnow. 9a.m.Suzuki Spirit arrives → Eilat, sign papers & off on Ovda Road up along Egypt border (wire fence) through marvellous Negev scenery to Sdi Boquer. First to Ben Gurion graves then his simple home 1 mile away. Pass Avedat fort on hill. On past Dimona to Masada. Cable car up, walk down (20 mins) – walk round edge. Essenes & Zealots. On to Qumran, Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947 in caves. Dead end street past burnt out jeeps (1967 ?) – looking for road to Bethlehem, end up in Jerusalem. Lucky to find sign to American Colony. $50 B&B in annexe, perfectly comfortable. Walk around first to St. George's Cathedral & chapel. Keith-Roach plaque …

In gratitude to Almighty GOD and in loving memory of Violet Oliva Keith-Roach who worshipped for many years in this cathedral. This memorial is erected by her husband Edward Keith-Roach, District Commissioner of Jerusalem, and by her two sons, Martin and Anthony. 1939 A.D.

"She opened her mouth with wisdom and in her tongue is the law of kindness".

On to Scolus Hill, across ring road to Jewish quarter, past the Romanian Church & 'Italian Hospital', & to St. Paul's Church where evangelical service going on, attend for ½ hour – rather odd little songs with poor accompaniment, but they mean well. Back for supper in hotel, 9p.m..

Sunday 26th January

Superb breakfast. Eucharist at 8a.m.. Congregation 4. My 3rd communion. Into Old City at Post Office gate. Tomb of Kings closed Sunday. Franciscan cloister & church & garden. Greek place of Jesus' prison in Via Dolorosa. Round & about & into Dome of the Rock. 13 shekels entry – shoes off, bolshy Muslim guard in cave shrine under rock. Allah sign & plastic bin sitting on rock. On through Arab market (saffron

50p) into smart chic Jewish quarter. Expensive coffee 4.50 shekels but good Gaggia type. Out of gate by Armenian church round walls to Jaffa Gate – enter Jaffa Gate & enter Christ Church. Vicar waffling on … service started at 9.30, it's now 10.40 & he's still rabbiting on. I got here at 10.20, 10.55 now & he's still going – lot of sore bums here. Time to go ! Left onto Patriarchate Road, left into St. James' Street – discover Rothschild Centre. Enter, look around, introduce myself as friend of Miriam's son/grandson ? Entymology → good discussion / debate on Israeli politics / Chunnel / neo-nazism / Le Pen (losing his battle in Paris – vive le peuple). Very bright Sumatran brought up in Germany. Give him card. ½ hour at least there. Back down St. James', left into Armenian church (St. James' Cathedral) – dead ends at rear. Down through gardens with deep wells (Romans) & out of Zion Gate. Right up hill to Tomb of David, cost of entry 2 cigarettes + 1½ shekels for 1 candle & Jewish little cap (cardboard version). Light candle – see tomb. Round to site of last supper, downstairs an absolute disgrace – uncared for , rubbish everywhere , nearby graves used as dump . Discuss with female caretaker – Jews have picnics there & don't take their rubbish away ! Back along Western wall past Jaffa Gate & along Jaffa Road sussing out camera shops – buy yetanothermap 20 shekels. Return via Schlomzion Hamalka (King David Street) enter Jaffa Gate – back to Rothschild centre to try to change $20 as banks now closed. John takes me to Arab money changer in market who gives me worse rate than hotel would ! Never mind, c'est la vie. Directs me to Wailing Wall – nose around, eventually turfed out due to lack of little hat. Round Arab market again (got new film for 5 shekels) & out via lower Via Dolorosa (pass monks with lightweight cross !) to Lion Gate. Down & right to Mary (Mother of God)'s tomb – rather dark & spooky & Catholic . Up into Garden of Gethsemane (padlocked !) & into beautifully fronted Basilica of Agony. Mosaic floor inside, interesting altar paintings – pray awhile. Out & up hill past lovely Russian orthodox St. Mary Magdalene church (closed), into

Dominus Flevit church with disconcerting sepulchre but masses of rosemary. On up steep hill (Mount of Olives) to near Nablus summit. Ace view of old city – couldn't find Maxwell's grave as all inscriptions in Hebrew. No loss ! On up hill, round Dome of Ascension leaving Russian tower to right. Its cross gleams, however. Along Martin Buber St. & left down hill on Shmuel Ben Adaya St.. Get smile from very pretty girl playing handball & wave in return ! Round wall, avoiding Rockefeller Museum, up Saleh El Din & round to Nablus Rd.. But unfortunately Garden Tomb closed. This is where Christians believe Christ rose from the dead – the rest think it happened at Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Return to hotel for a coffee. Was planning to go to Yad Vashem Holocaust museum but read it shuts at 5. So decide to go to Bethlehem instead. After 11 miles (once more) it's time for modern transport.

Hit Jerusalem rush hour at its peak. Road out is poor, compounded by maniac drivers particularly Arab taxis & Israeli Army jeeps. Hundreds of near misses in the twilight. Miss sign to Bethlehem so continue to Hebron – suburbs to the right then suburbs to the left before explosion rocks car ! Assume direct hit from intifada stone-throwing youth & curse Arabs but soon discover interior light has blown plastic cover out (although mysteriously light still works !?). Made one heck of a noise I can tell you ! Hit Jerusalem road and stop when near B'hem at roadside café. Very kind Arab speaking good English gives me baclava & coffee flavoured with cardomam seeds + box of matches. First gift of food in Israel & it's an Arab who obliges. Shukran. Keen Hussein of Jordan fan (makes 2 of us) – nobody buying his bakery products because people stay indoors. If Arabs venture out at night it's," Oi, where do you think you are going ? " from the soldiers. He's thinking hard about selling up & going to Jordan, where life would be easier.

Find Bethlehem turn off – down Manger Street to Manger

Square – place deserted apart from army sniper in a watchtower over the Post Office. Walk round side of Church of the Nativity (closed naturally) meet private road & return to square where pandemonium sets in – jeep & guns hurtle off westward, more scurry upstairs above shopping centre. Decide to leave them to their fun & games & return to Jerusalem. More army panic by Rachel's tomb – 10+ jeeps, eventually clears. Drive round north of city, through Hasidic quarter before returning to American Colony.

Supper $19 – Melon / Smoked Salmon, Fish Soup en Croute, Squid + veg, Strawberry Ice Cream / Pineapple Fritter. Very good value.

Monday 27th January

Letter to Steve & Wendy, postcard to Tony Yeldham after somewhat restless night. Breakfast 7.15a.m. , get car from garage, tip car-man, drive to Garden Tomb. This is the site of the cross and site of the resurrection – lovely garden



run by society based in London. Plants thriving – you name it they got it. Anti-clockwise to wooden platform overlooking bus station, past well / wine-press to tomb entrance … one bay dry one damp in the corner – out to take photos. Listen to guide with group, sitting to their right when Kerblam! SONIC BOOM ! shatters our peace. Ta very much Israeli Air Force. Buy postcards in shop after much browsing. Leave this magical place & drive round walls towards Gethsemane. Park & wretched 'guide' (this is the worst spot in Jerusalem for pestering) tells me that unless I fork out 20 shekels to him I am liable to get 'stoned' & that parking there will cost me 150 sh. . Crap. Walk down to view Absalom's Pillars (son (3rd ?) of Abraham) from above . There are 3 high canopied stone belvedere-type structures. Up through Jewish graves & back to car . Around city walls – get lost in West J .. Eventually find Knesset, Israel Museum, Biblical Lands Museum (shut).

Looking for Yad Vashem now – get directions in Israel Museum. Find it – visit museum of holocaust history. Tears & I'm not the only one. Art gallery of objects & pictures done under duress. Hall of names – they try to discover each person lost to Nazis. Round trees of remembrance covenanted to Jews from all Europe. Coffee & cigarette, bookshop browse & off towards Tel Aviv.

Get lost once more amongst new settlements – signposting abysmal, standard of driving worse ! Eventually locate right road & cruise to Tel Aviv. Park by bus station close to Dan Hotel in south. Purchase Catherine Cookson hardback (£2) – try to get money on Diners Club card. No luck twice. Collect plastic bag left at Hotel Moss . Enter Kulti shop – fine T-shirt designs etc.. But no money no buy. Ya-Harkon St . – lots of drunks around. Drive north, foiled by one way system again, & hit road to Haifa 120k.p.h. all the way. Park before port. Visit Templer War Graves 1869-1945 British, Jewish & German. Photo of C.B.Patrick grave , age 33 killed 1914? Relation ? Also one of Rea – a relation of Chris Rea ? Long walk, 5 miles, round upper Haifa eventually locating Elijah's cave & tomb. Here he met followers before outwitting Baal (Kings 2). Back to car – coffee & bad chocolate bread microwaved. Much traffic on road north – see Marks & Spencer so stop at smart shopping centre with ice-skating rink at top ! On towards Akko, then right round populous town, Qir Bialik, as usual left / right up / down before seeing signpost for Haifa . Fill up with petrol near Qir Ata & finally notice there's a dent in the car roof just 1cm from the windscreen … so it was a stone / rock that was thrown at me in Hebron. Well, 1cm is as good as a mile in this case but that could have been nasty – hope Reliable Car Hire are used to this sort of thing ! Rejoin main Haifa / Akko road & decide to go to Caesarea as originally planned this time by going over the top of Mount Carmel past enormous University tower (observation floor on 24th level). Right at sign to Atlit & peace descends. Lovely

hairpin road through Carmel National Park (3 cars, 2 army vehicles in 10km compared to 3,000 in 10km on highway). Back onto motorway & down to Caesarea which seems nice & quiet. Check into Dan Hotel by golf course – ritzy prices, food a bit dowdy. Interestingly I wasn't allowed to eat cheesecake after steak. Milk & meat don't mix in kosher practices. Americans at table next to me. Bed 10.45p.m. after reading how much there is to see around Galilee.

Tuesday 25th January

Awake 5.15a.m.. Good radio station – The Voice of Peace. Write Major & Betsy . Early morning walk round part of golf course – looks a bit moth-eaten & under repair. Expensive anyway, decide not to play. Back for 7.10a.m. breakfast – cold coffee, fair food. Dan Hotels rather jaded. Leave at 8a.m. for Roman amphitheatre – quick tour, photo. On to Herod's city, Temple to Augustus Caesar, massive breakwaters (no JCBs then), walk across beach where Jesus departed these shores? Back to car & up to Herod's Stables near the hotel but everything shut although lovely horses stabled there now. Into Hadera in heavy traffic – lengthy process cashing 400 shekels on Diners at Israel Discount Bank. Nice coffee & pastries opposite – 1st parking ticket all in Hebrew !

Head N.E. to Megiddo (Armageddon) through pleasant countryside. Naturally miss sign & end up going through Afula & out other side. Pick up student / hitchhiker who gives none too great directions. Drop him back in Afula & get lost. Eventually find Megiddo – quick look at museum & out round this powerful site. 4000B.C. buildings, Solomon's Palace, Ahab etc.. Walk round clockwise, strong wind at times, more air force jets but no booms today ! Staircase. Tunnel closed.

Decide to check out Nazareth on way to Mount Tabor. Pick up Swede & Dane girls going to Haifa. Tortuous hairpin road up

to Silesian Hospice & above to Islamic tower & reservoir (not yet on postcards). Force 9 wind as I stand on A1 ley line between University on Mount Carmel, through where I stand atop Nazareth & on to summit of Mount Tabor along pylon lines. Feel inner strength.

Descend to central Nazareth & park by Arab market / Church / Basilica of the Annunciation. Wander up market (buy 75p saffron) before church opens at 2p.m.. Very Catholic – little service going on under dome of rock where stood Mary's house ? Who knows – anyway something happened here ; maybe Jesus met disciples here after rising from the dead.

Head for Mount Tabor – of course get lost in Nazareth Illit. Large circle & back to square one ! Left on Afula road , more hairpins; skirt edge of Afula & on to Mount Tabor. Pick up high class Bedouin studying Italian & on up the hill to Mount Tabor via very steep slightly hairy road in poor nick. Park by Greek Orthodox church (pretty) there & enter using one of my very few Greek words έφχαριστω which opened the doors anyway. Not that great inside. Back down the road a bit , park & wander through rocks & bushes to drive leading to beautiful Terra Sancta Church next to Monastery. Incredibly heavy doors reveal fantastic interior of stained glass windows above & below. Sacred stone altar but roped off. This is where the transfiguration of Christ to Heaven occurred … (allegedly !). Wander round graves of apostles (?) – there's the Pope that died in 1962 buried up here as well – buy 2 postcards from sweet nun in monastery. More wandering around the old stones of this ancient fort – discover amazing cave . Photo. Return to car & descend going round hill the other way at bottom & on to Kinnaret, Tiberias & look for hostel on Mount of Beatitudes. Get lost again ! Go beyond Capernaum before turning round, going up hill to north & finding right road. Hostel closed for renovation & church (built by Mussolini, probably not personally !) Fine position, however. Alsatian sees me off.

Check out Ginnosar Kibbutz Hotel & kibbutz itself but doesn't look v.nice. Pass serious car accident, body on side of road with paramedics attending. Check out Galei Hamat Hotel near hot springs, lobby too hot, leave. Check in at Gai Beach Hotel – expensive but takes Diners. Nice receptionist recommends me restaurant, Pagoda in town. Thai veg soup (v.good), crispy duck (masses) & spring roll. £10. Fast service. Good long sleep.

Wednesday 29th January

Wake 6a.m. to see dawn breaking over Sea of Galilee (or Kinnaret). Choppy – won't take boat. Think this is a glacial lake as saw signs of glaciations last night. Breakfast 7a.m. with German working at Beit Shona. Cold coffee. North round lake to Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves & Fishes with mosaic. Pray inside chapel. Even more impressive is church next door, Deification of Peter Church where Christ made his only joke, "You are Peter & on this rock I found my church". Mensa Christi (Table of Christ) inside – for once one can touch stone & I sit on edge of table. Outside is fine bronze statue overlooking lapping lake. Walk on foreshore, take photo & return to entrance of church where lady tourist sitting. Suddenly it starts to hail – "Hail Mary", I say & walk through rocky garden & underneath 2 arches of ancient well-type structure. On to Capernaum – Roman (Herod) temple on site of Jesus' church. Shinto service going on in modern auditorium. No paper in grotty loos which causes slight grief, but manage. On up hill to Rosh Pinna & left to Zefat thinking Hazor ruins up there. Coffee & 1 felafel with good Moroccan & buy new film. Pick up Gordon, hitchhiker, who "works for God" – bit confused but spoke good English – drop him back at Rosh Pinna. Fail to find Hazor ruins – on to Qir Shemona and right towards Mount Hermon. 2 army hitchhikers. Then another who speaks English well, take him all the way to skiing area. Past Banyas where 100 Israelis lost their lives capturing

place from Syrians in 1967. Past Nimrod Castle, superb site atop hill.

12.30p.m. now. Coffee & rolls, then rent skis etc. & get lift pass, £30 total cost. Up long cold chair lift, ski down icy crusty run to drag lift then down better snow to base. Up lift again – mosey around above station before Army tick me off. Broken truck & jeep up here . Very security conscious. Photo of peak & a bit of Syria. Down to base by a different route & return skis 3p.m.. Descend to Qir Shemona , left towards Shamir, right to Gonen & up over ridge to En Ziwan. Booms (artillery practice ?) as I ask army about Quneitra border which am told is Syria not Jordan as I assumed ! So head along Route 98 all the way back to Tiberias. Extraordinary road – bomb craters, burnt out jeeps, war debris, memorials. Mostly in 2nd gear – anti-tank obstacles to negotiate . For 30kms do not see another car ! UN positions on left. Solitary deer enlivens the spirit. Excellent Arabic coffee near Tiberias & head for Jericho. Good fast road. Arrive 8.30p.m. – place utterly deserted (Intifada) but find Hishan Palace Hotel. Pretty grotty & £10. Get ripped off for OK meal ½km away … 20 sh when should have been about 12. Back to hotel – 85 year old man who was in British Police Palestine.

Thursday 30th January

Awake 6a.m. after night of dog barking and distant wailing. Café arabische in square. Leave hotel, no-one around. Drive to Allenby Bridge but told politely border closed till 8a.m.. Back through Jericho to Mount of Temptation. Climb to Greek Monastery; guidebook says open at 7a.m., difficult Greek monk says 9a.m. so descend. Coffee at Temptation restaurant – visit old Jericho. Walk round walls – already tumbled down ! Oldest city in the world they say but Megiddo must be a rival. Similar shaped archaic structures. Look for Elisha's grave to north but fail to locate (as usual) go some way before U-turn by some grazing camels. Left

to Jericho & Allenby Bridge again. This time told no way in except by taking taxi from Jerusalem. Tant pis. Decide to give St. George's Monastery a miss as it's another Greek Orthodox number & they don't welcome tourists. Ascend to Jerusalem & check in at American Colony. Assemble laundry $11 which returned immaculate in evening. Go to Old City – boy selling kids' trousers vanishes within 20 mins.. Coffee near Damascus Gate, paint on ceiling falling onto my table ! To Jewish quarter via longish route – buy presents & find bargain Yiddish cup for Tony Y. Lunch on main shopping street – drop 2 films to be developed. More bargains in pleasant souvenir shop . Enter New Gate – another closed church, get lost (this place is a tangled web of narrow twisting lanes) but find 3 English looking for Christian sector. So they guide me out of maze & I take them to Garden Tomb & St. George's. They leave; I visit British Council which only has Sunday Times & it's Thursday – could do better. Return to hotel & unload plastic bags. Soon out seeking but not finding the Kings' Tombs so enter at New Gate, quickly reverse, round to Jaffa Gate, left on St. James' Street & browse around smart Jewish area near synagogue & Roman ruins . Coffee & Danish pastry – art gallery 12 Visions of Israel exhibition. Back same way to evening prayers (6p.m.) at cathedral. Psalm 69 read alternately, vicar & congregation of roughly 12 . Then back to hotel. More Intifada explosions as I leave church. Sirens. – good browse in Arab run hotel stores – nice bag & box look tempting. Bath then supper … rigatoni, veal wrapped in ham, choc. cake + orange juice. Wander round Pasha's room upstairs – bellissima.

It wasn't until many years later that I realised I was following in my parents' footsteps here at The American Colony Hotel where they lived during the war my father organising cavalry forces at Haifa and my mother working with Colonel Bryant, Chief of Police of Jerusalem.

Friday 31st January

Wake 5.30a.m. Write postcard to Anne & Antony. Large breakfast 6.10a.m.. 7a.m.Eucharist . 4th communion. Back to hotel. Visit Kings' Tombs just south of hotel – some filled with water fed by drainage channels in side of cliff. Northern tombs more powerful. On down Nablus Rd. & right to my favourite bank, the Israel Discount. Longish wait for 300 shekels. Round corner to bus station – photo of Golgotha, Place of the Skull . Try to enter Jewish cemetery above skull rock but gates shut. Syrian Catholis centre, dead end. Wander round area between Nablus and Az Zahara roads – incredibly strong wind in my face as I stand at eastern edge of wasteland & car parking square, on east side of Salah El Din. What happened here ? Into small park further east with olive trees, very strong winds again. Jewish Synagogue at corner … round garden & back to wasteland square where stands



a tired-looking donkey. Photo. Round & about then across Sultan Suleiman – colourful Arab market going on outside Damascus Gate. Buy Charlotte some trousers – bargain. Enter Old City, discover fine shop run by good Arab who has brother in England – buy box & round silver little box. Bargains again. Next looking for shirt or dress for Pippa – find lovely embroidered number. Bidding starts at $65, I pay 75sh. Rather awkward shopkeeper. Longish search round the tangled web for Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Strong wind as I walk along S.E. side, enter. Church not that impressive. Front left pew wobbles noisily as I kneel down to muse awhile. Ascend tower, spiral staircase, many steps. Fine views at top. Photos.

Down Via Dolorosa – obstreperous guide latches on to me leads me towards quieter Jewish quarter, takes cigarette as tip but wants much more. Foul-mouths me, so I swear back ! Walk up St. James' St.. Hoping to see my friends in the Alex Rothschild Centre but shut so stop for Arab coffee in St. Michael Restaurant by Jaffa Gate. Good. Back to hotel to

unload gifts. Soon decide to visit sights south of city. So drive out on the appalling Bethlehem road – always traffic jams & nightmare drivers. Arab Mercedes taxis causing the most heartache. Rachel's Tomb closed, so on to amazing Solomon's Pools at Aflit about 4 miles past Bethlehem turn off. Large unkempt fort-type building on left, then walk round 3 one acre each reservoirs in pine valley. Very muddy. Pumping station broken but looks mendable – shame to waste this pure water. Astounded at the guile of Solomon – this was eons ago. On to Herodium, 12 km left of road but good road. Army checkpoint, drive up to near summit & park. Fierce wind shakes the car. Pay to enter & struggle against wind to walk round Roman Temple inside top of hill. Do not linger as wind in danger of pushing me over cliff – brief glance at Roman city below hill. This is where Herod, a good man turned evil, dispatched his troops to murder the children and babies of Bethlehem 5km away. His tomb is allegedly here but I care not to seek it. Back to main road & on to Hebron. To Abraham's mosque – directions given by Sheffield guy in Israeli army checkpoint. Guns everywhere in mosque & carpets. Velvet covered tombs , nice roof. Out into wind past more army & back to Jerusalem. Plethora of blue number-plates (Arab) gives way slowly to yellow (Jewish). Stop by Zion Hill Hotel & climb up through gardens. Coffee & browse in King David Hotel (most expensive here) – across road to YMCA and its tower. On up hill round some sort of closed stadium. Eventually locate top of Mount Zion (?) – an olive tree in small garden amongst flats behind electrical shop : dog barks. Return to car & hotel, lost again, take longish route over side of Mount of Olives. To evening prayers after buying bag in Colony Stores. Service given by Ian someone, the vicar of Shotton ! John Summers Steel. Bath & 7 course supper – good as usual. Tears from receptionist being harangued by nasty Arab who won't apologise. Letter to Steve & Wendy again & post it.

Saturday 1st February

Wake 6a.m.. Eucharist. Snow starts as I leave. American priest, Ian of Shotton in congregation of 4. Breakfast. Off to get film developed – play good Samaritan … old frail Arab lady across street from hotel calls me. Wants me to carry heavy flagon of water for her. Trudge to Damascus Gate – no way could she have managed it. Drop film & pick up 1 hour later. Arab shops open although it's Jewish day off. Pack & leave 11a.m. – advised against going to Nablus & Jelen. So go to Ashdod (nothing happening) then Ashkelon, south of Tel Aviv. Enormous archaeological site from way back to Herod's time. He was born here. Walk along beach in drizzle, up sand cliff & round ramparts of city before exploring middle. Much still to be excavated. Find possible site of Herod's burial although Herodium may be place. Beach lovely, strong crashing surf with Roman stones & columns everywhere. Probably did 6 miles round site, took 2 hours plus. Decide to visit Gaza strip where Israelis fear to tread though much of their labour force lives here. 1 million people – near Gaza & Khan Yunis massive used car dumps (like Panama), almost biblical scenes of donkeys & horses & carts. Countryside on east side rather pleasant. Went wrong way at Gaza & told by patrol, 100 yards further & you're dead so reverse sharpish. Just short of Khan Yunis told I can't go on, so head past Kissufim on good road towards BeerSheva. At Netivot pick up delightful Ethiopian girl hitchhiker Abiba (language problem here) & take her to Ethiopian community on outskirts of B'Sheva. Then go to shopping mall in town where she has to endure appalling racism from just about everybody. Expensive coffee & strudel. Then to bus station to meet her friend, drop them up the hill & head off to Tel Aviv. Get lost in Ramla, wretched signposts again, get lost again in Tel Aviv before eventually parking near Diezengoff Center (very plush, ă la MetroCentre). Eventually locate Tandoori Restaurant – not as good as Eilat one. Raining once again as it has for most of day – back to car & off to airport. Told car has to go to a hotel 10km away, naturally drive 20km finding it ! Explain about dent in roof

& parking ticket & get driven back to Ben Gurion Airport where I have to bide time from 1a.m. to 6a.m. when flight goes.

Sunday 2nd February

Have worked out that I have driven 2,063 kilometres in last 8 days + maybe 110 miles ă pied – phew. 3a.m. check in. Takes 50 mins of questions & bag searching. Get free biro for the hassle ! Nice German guy going back to Frankfurt, buy him ciggies at Duty Free. Tupolev 154 (2?) (the Trident copy) to Prague. Bank won't change my shekels so fellow traveller swaps them for German marks, thanks. Manage 40 minutes walking around Prague Castle area – strong feelings in St. Thomas' Church but don't stay long – up steep hill to lovely cobbled square & round Loreta anti-clockwise. Film being made – lots of extras. Down & back to tube & back to Dejvickă – then taxi, fare agreed at 80 krone – have to pay 96 on arrival. 2½ hour delay before Tupolev 134 (loaded up with coriander !) leaves – bad mistake by (trainee ?) pilot at Heathrow nearly hurts child. Back on dry land. Tube to Baron's Court – van starts 1st time – merci Dieu ! Home to Altenburg to give presents to family, answer letters & then drive to Carole's for night.

… "How much did you earn during your lifetime ?" or, "How many friends did you make ?" or, "How much progress did you make on your career ?" or, "How much influence did you have on people ?" Were any of these to be the questions Christ will ask when he comes again in glory, many of us could approach the judgement day with great confidence.

But nobody is going to hear any of these questions. The question we are all going to face is the question we are least

prepared for. It is the question: “What have you done for the least of mine ?”

Henri Nouwen

*

Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,

may we know you more clearly,

love you more dearly,

and follow you more nearly,

day by day.

St. Richard of Chichester (1197 – 1253)

*

Wandsworth. The New Jerusalem ?!

*

Men love women. Women love children and children love hamsters.

Heard from Charlie Scott 16.10.14

*

My guide for modern communications :-

Face-to-face dialogue and human contact cannot be beaten. Second best is the clarity of a landline call. Always answer your mobile phone straight away unless you are driving. Ignore calls from 0845 or 0843 numbers but ‘unknowns’ may be known unknowns as Donald Rumsfeld pointed out. Answer a text message as soon as you can. Answer an email within 24 hours – the sooner the better. Avoid Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other ‘social media’ – who needs on-line abuse from

‘trolls’ ? Not I for one.

*

“She didn’t know whether it was Shrove Tuesday or Sheffield Wednesday” — *attributed to Chris Jones, Ashmolean Trustee.*

*

Lead by example

*

After a poo, wash your hands with soap and water. After a wee, just a rinse will do.

*

Early to bed, early to rise makes you healthy, wealthy and wise.

*

How you treat others in life, particularly those you deem of lesser importance than yourself, will come back to haunt you.

*

GOD SEES ALL

*

Never assume !

June Patrick

*

It doesn’t matter what you do for a job so long as you do it to the best of your ability.

*

The simple things are often the best.

*

If you say you are going to do something … do it.

*

Manners makyth man and woman

*

‘Whenever we forgive instead of letting fly at one another, bless instead of cursing one another, tend one another’s wounds instead of rubbing salt into them, hearten instead of discouraging one another, give hope instead of driving one another to despair, hug instead of harassing one another, thank instead of criticizing one another, praise instead of maligning one another … in short, whenever we opt for and not against one another, we make God’s unconditional love visible … ‘

Henri Nouwen † Jesus *: A Gospel* †

*

Love and fear ; that’s all there is. But love is greater.

*

” I never set out to be weird. It was always other people who called me weird “.

Frank Zappa

*

In my Georgian scrapbook I wrote that only two good things have ever come out of Russia – the Lada Niva and Fabergé jewellery. To that list we must add Tchaikovsky.

*

Tremble, you who build up riches.

Tremble, you with opulent lives.

Tremble, when you meet the poor

and see Christ in their eyes.

© *Owen Alstott 2002*

*

Treat people as you would want to be treated yourself.

*

"Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me. What you do for the least of my children, you do for me." *Jesus*

*

There is no 'them and us' in society; there is only us.

*

"The mystic and the schizophrenic find themselves in the same ocean … but whereas the mystic swims the schizophrenic drowns." *R.D.Laing*

… "the schizophrenic can learn to swim !" *Aidan Shingler*

*

Watch therefore : for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. *Matthew 24. 42*

*

'Love is, like five loaves and two fish, always too little until you start giving it away.' *Quote on my Tabgha T-shirt bought 1992*

*

In your fifties try and walk five miles a day. In your sixties try and walk four miles a day. In your seventies … and so on.

*

“There are three sorts of friendship : true friendship centred on the good of the other, which is fully deserving of the name of friendship ; friendship based on what is pleasant ; and friendship based on usefulness”. *Jean Vanier, paraphrasing Aristotle 350 B.C.*

*

May I add a codicil to the above, perhaps to be inserted after the ‘true friendship’, that there is also a friendship (a little one-sided) grounded in one’s perceived recognition of future good in another person . People may disappoint you but redemption may be around the corner.

*

“The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is ‘What does a woman want ?'”. *Sigmund Freud*

*

“The capacity to love develops in the very first months of a child’s life through the relationship with their mother. One needs the experience of a first love that is unconditional. If the small child is wounded by rejection or the absence of this first love it is likely to lack self-confidence and have great difficulty in later life”. *J. Vanier*

*

“There’s nothing you can know that isn’t known.

Nothing you can see that isn’t shown.

Nowhere you can be that isn’t where you’re meant to be.

It’s easy.

All you need is love, all you need is love,

All you need is love, love, love is all you need.” *Lennon & McCartney*

*

” I am becoming increasingly convinced that both physical and all problems relating to the mind have their origin in a fundamental lack

or loss of love. ” *Suzanne*

*

<u>The Way</u>

When all about you

is dark and overcast.

When darkness seems

black and empty.

Friends have appeared

to disappear into thin air

And you find yourself

lonely and alone ~

Trust in the Lord.

The way will be shown to you

Like music of the spheres

all aglow

The right road will be

in front of you.

W.Jones

October 2002

Parish Church of St. Basil,

Toller Fratrum,

Dorset

*

Statistically, 6 out of 7 dwarfs are not Happy !

Vole Samuelson 2015

*

Sticks and stones may break my bones

but it's words that can truly hurt me

*

"Happiness is meant to be shared"

William with Misa : 'Walking the Camino', closing lines

*

"It is one of the advantages of getting older, that you can see how everything had meaning. You think everything is your choice but it's not. Gradually there is the discovery of being chosen, of being shaped in order to be an instrument." *Jean*

Vanier

Absolument, Jean , je suis en accord. Même chose pour moi. Nous sommes logés à la même enseigne. Jamie

*

‘There came then his brethren and his mother and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren ? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren ! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.’

Gospel of St. Mark Chapter 3, vs 31-35

*

‘Agnelli once told me: in any successful company there must be an uneven number of directors and three is too many’.
Clement Freud

*

Faux sincerity sucks

*

It is better to be childlike than to be childish

*

There’s a lot of noise voiced at present concerning the Human Rights Act. How about having a Human Responsibilities Act too ?

*

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and

sisters of mine, you did for me.”

*

Try not to do things ‘for yourself’. If you concentrate on doing things for other people you will find that good things come your way.

*

Apathy I find a bit pathetic

*

‘Life is the flight of the alone to the Alone’ Plotinus (205 – 270 AD)

*

‘The stars are like letters that inscribe themselves at every moment in the sky. Everything in the world is full of signs. All events are coordinated . All things depend on each other. Everything breathes together.’ Plotinus

*

Always try and leave a public place a little bit tidier than you found it

*

‘ … Jesus’ life was *defined* by rejection. His neighbors laughed at him, his family questioned his sanity, his closest friends betrayed him, and his countrymen traded his life for that of a terrorist. Throughout his ministry, Jesus gravitated toward the poor and the rejected ones, the riffraff.’

Philip Yancey from The Jesus I never Knew

*

‘being unwanted is the most terrible disease a human being

can experience. When you die, the Lord will not ask you how much you have done with your life, but how much **love** you have put into the doing.’ *Mother Teresa*

*

I’d rather be a humble trier than a tumble dryer

*

Do all the good you can,

By all the means you can,

In all the ways you can,

In all the places you can,

At all the times you can,

To all the people you can,

As long as you ever can. *John Wesley*

*

My take on lawyers ….

Why use three words when thirty will do.

*

“As you get old, you lose interest in sex, your friends drift away and your children often ignore you. There are other advantages of course, but these are the outstanding ones.”

Richard Needham, 6th Earl of Kilmorey

*

Italy diary Autumn 2014

Sunday 26th October 2014

The trip gets off to a really bad start, courtesy (or lack thereof) of 35 year old man at the Goldcar rental counter. There was no transfer shuttle at the terminal so a few of us walked round, not far, to the car rental building. I passed the Firefly counter and thought, phew, thank God I am not using them – they gave and continue to give much grief to Sara over a minor scrape (responsibility totally accepted by Dutch family who hit her when she was stationary) in the hills above Rayol in August.

No queue at Goldcar. Having already paid for the car hire in the UK via auto-europe I am surprised when this bloke demands an extra €98 for petrol and wants €137 for insurance. When I tell him this is a rip-off (not angrily) he says he will call the police & I won't be able to rent a car from him or anyone else in the building. The alternative option to his terms is to surrender a €1,200 deposit, one small scratch would cost €300 minimum and if I "break glass", "a wine glass?", I say, this would mean €4,000 cost to me. "That's more than the car is worth", I say. "No, it's worth €15,000", he says – a Fiat 500? Eventually I have to settle for his 'all taken care of, no excess' insurance addition. There is no pre-rental checking routine.

Absolute blackmail – most unpleasant, tantamount to corruption.

Leave Pisa Airport at about 5.30p.m.. Busy dual-carriageway towards Firenze – somewhat claustrophobic because of concrete central reservation. Join the autostrada at Firenze with long stretches between exits. Coffee at bland services before the exit towards Perugia & Assisi – I have lost my ticket but girl at the booth accepts my explanations and it costs just €6-90. Yet another dual-carriageway & I reach Assisi just before 9p.m.. No-one seems to speak English but more by luck than judgement I find St. Anthony's Guest House within the city walls. Park car safely in their garden. Unostentatious room with shower in bathroom attached but less than €50 per night . Short stroll to local café/restaurant.

Monday 27th October 2014

Weak coffee (enriched with my Sainsbury's Gold Choice) & white rolls served by the Sisters. Chat to nice American doctor and chaplain wife, Steve and Kerry from Minnesota, but there are few other guests.

A big walking day follows – must have covered some 30kms. My route is charted on the 'museums, galleries and sights' page a few pages back (in original journal). Many of the churches visited were rather gloomy, the exceptions being Damiano and Eremo. The former is below the town walls and where St Francis first encountered God who told him to repair this church. He later (in 1225) wrote his 'Canticle of the Creatures' here. This was the home of St.Clare, his friend and founder of the Order of the Poor Clares – wonderful worn wooden seating in the refectory.

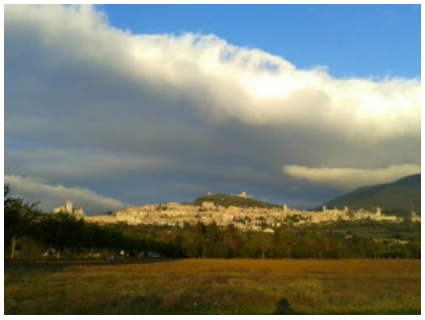


From there I walked some 5 or 6 kms uphill to the Eremo delle Carceri – no fauna alighted on me here where birds flocked to hear St.Francis preach . But I did meet 2 Austrian ladies who were back-packing towards Spello & one robin ! On their recommendation I returned downhill on the forest path.



Then via his birthplace (Piccolino) to the enormous and impressive Basilica on the edge of town. Superb ceilings, his tomb in the crypt, and an inspiring side chapel for Mary Magdalene + a newish bronze statue … Gesù Bambino appare a Sant'Antonio. Buy a few postcards before walking many more miles to the 8th largest church in the world beyond the

railway station – Santa Maria degli Angeli. The road there , well the pavement actually, is made of thousands of terracotta bricks each inscribed with a name and a town. This massive church includes the Capella della Porziuncola where our man passed away. Purchase bus ticket in nearby shop for €1-70 or so & catch the 5.15p.m. back to Piazza Matteotti.



On my way to supper I visit the central square church atop Minerva's temple – well preserved Roman pediment and pillars across the way from the bookshop, Libreria Marco Zubboli.

Tuesday 28th October 2014

After breakfast I give Steve and Kerry a lift up to the Eremo (means 'sanctuary' in Greek as at Tabgha, Galilee) & suggest they use the forest walk down. "You are an angel in disguise", says Steve. I am trying to reach Spello via the back road on Mount Subasio but navigation poor and I end up back in Assisi – so Spello abandoned for a while and it's up through beautiful Umbrian countryside to Urbino in the neighbouring province of Marche.

Underground car park & stroll up through the town. Obviously a particularly imposing hilltop town dominated by the Palazzo Ducale – the abode of that Duc Montefeltro, him of the extraordinary nose in that painting by Pierro della Francesca. The town is full of students, the black ones (and there are surprisingly few black people in these parts) trying to catch my eye to dish out some flyer or other. Not interested thank you. Visit Chiesa di San Domenico briefly, then a few large

rooms in the Palazzo – some very interesting Roman and earlier stone inscriptions but I don't pay for full admission. The Cattedrale is open but not inspiring and sadly the Chiuso di San Francisco is 'chiuso'. Wander around town awhile before descending back to the carpark – I'm glad I chose not to stay here for the night ; there ain't much going on.

Back south through the pleasant valleys on quiet roads to Gubbio, my next port of call. Get a bit lost in the modern town on the outskirts but soon find a large square with parking (€1-20 per hour) beneath Gubbio's Palazzo Ducale, also frequented by that Duc Montefeltro. My faithful Lonely Planet guide has recommended the Hotel Bosone Palace and it does not disappoint. Complicated one-way system, dropping off my baggage en route before eventually parking free underground outside the city walls. Charming small church, the Chiesa San Marziale undeneath St.Anthony's monastery is my first stop to say thanks to Him and a brief visit to the Chiesa di Santa Maria dei Laici at the other end of town.

My room in the converted palace is more than adequate, a little dark but an enormous bed after Assisi's single and the adjoining bathroom has a bath – joy. The family who run the hotel also own a couple of nearby restaurants … the first one I try is the Bosone Garden. The €20 menu dei oggi looks pretty good so I go for that with a bottle of still water and a glass of my now favourite Grecchetto.

Jesus, what a meal …

Bruschetta, 4+ varieties with local parma ham and salad

Penne pasta in cream with green broad beans & crispy bacon + pecorino shavings

Fegato, calves' liver with white grapes in rich gravy + spinach with lemon

Dusted chocolate cake laced with kirsch



All that for a total of roughly €30 including tip to the pleasant Romanian waiter. Prima.

Wednesday 29th October 2014

Good breakfast in panelled room with frescoed ceilings. Another out and about walking day, but probably only cover 12 kms although Gubbio is on equally steep slopes as Assisi. I love the fact, that as Iguvium it was where Rome exported its lunatics, 'which has left a lingering influence on the populace', says Cadogan Guides. The Eugubini have seen off hordes of Goths, Huns and Avars but the Nazis gunned down 40 citizens in reprisal for partisan attacks in 1943.

Charming streets and interlocking alleys, cobblestones and steps all beneficially graded. Sort out the correct adaptor to charge my laptop – Italy has different sockets to the rest of Europe – but fail to get a connection on my mobile phone at ITim where at least I secure a Samsung charger which of course I managed to leave at home in Wandsworth. So much less touristy than Assisi. Once round the Fontana dei Matti (mad people) … thrice and you risk insanity. Into the massive and fine Palazzo (€2-50 ridotto/concession for old people) which dominates the town, up to their Cathedral, short shrift at Montefeltro's palace from just about the only unfriendly citizen so decide not to enter. Walk around the upper city walls to the Funivia station for the rickety €6 (allez et

retour) ride up Mount Ingino.

Tour the excellent museum to Saint Ubaldo, who came before St.Francis, in the courtyard cloister in front of his Basilica. Friendly shop & see the 3 Ceri wooden icons that form a major part of the 15th May festival … second only to the Palio Festival in Siena, apparently. Why have I not heard of Gubbio before ? Everybody knows Florence, Siena, the leaning tower of Pisa but where has Gubbio been in the pantheon ?

Dante's Paradise, canto X1 talks of Ubaldo's chosen hill. It was Ubaldo who by his presence alone saw off Barbarossa in 1155. He died on 16th May 1160 and rests in the Basilica.

Back down to town, wandering around the little streets and side-alleys each with mesmerising vistas. Then quite a long stroll outside the city walls to the highlight of all the churches and sites – The church of Santa Maria della Vittorina, given to St. Francis by the Bishop of Gubbio in 1213.



Here he founded the first home for the 12 Friars Minor & nearby he tamed the Wolf of Gubbio who had been eating livestock and human beings, terrorising the town. Inside it is wonderfully peaceful … Chiesa dalla Vittorina.



Inside La Vittorina

Quick shop in the La Mura complex where ITim try to connect up my Virgin mobile phone but fail and purchase some organic milk and biscuits in the adjoining Co-op. On to the Roman semi-amphitheatre at dusk – the mausoleum commemorating the 40 martyrs is closed, so it's back to the Bosone Palace.

Supper this evening is in the sister establishment to the Bosone Garden – same price menu del giorgno but, even though it has a higher reputation Michelin * etc. it is not so good : La Taverna del Lupo – I have parma ham & melon, gnocchi with parmesan, a few slices of roast pork + rosemary potatoes. The best course is pudding … a pile of whipped cream with caramel and chocolate flakes. Wonderful vaulted rooms where the Via Anseidi crosses the Via della Republica.

Thursday 30th October 2014

Last bit of sightseeing in Gubbio, two churches, one undergoing restoration the second closed, then it's off to retrieve the Fiat 500 from its underground resting place. I am Spello-bound, once again through delightful countryside on quietish roads. Just a brief word about Italian drivers – there are quite a few annoying habits, the worst being tail-gating inches from one's back bumper … white van men being the worst culprits. Very little indication, aggression the norm.

Park free at the bottom of Spello. Wander up the steep main street and round the city walls to the right. Pretty, as are all these hill towns but once again I am relieved I did not choose to stay. There is not much action amongst the place's 8,000 inhabitants. Caffe latte by the main Roman gate.

Read up about my next stop, Perugia, and where to park … head for the Piazza dei Partigiani. Big underground car park and then a succession of escalators takes one up to the elegant Piazza Italia where the broad pedestrianised Corso heads up to their Duomo. Busy busy studenty city.

Absolute highlight here is the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria (about €8 entry) on the left hand side. A treat, even for a bit of an alleged Philistine like myself. Beautifully lit and described, there are works by Vanni, Vanucci, Nelli, Piero della Francesca (take photo), Buoninsegna, Pisano, Pinturicchio – a Bernini gold tree of leaves leaves a lasting impression. There is also a temporary Canaletto exhibition with 4 or 5 of his masterpieces. Walk around the upper part of town – a panoply of fine medieval architecture. Back through the arched brick vaulting on the down escalators and out of town on fairly busy roads towards Siena.

Skirt round the Roman walls going left round the hills and valleys past the Porta Romana, the Porta Tufi to my destination the Porta San Marco … just below the hotel I have chosen from 2 guidebook recommendations – The Palazzo Rivazza. Park car by the city gate while I investigate room availability (yes, single is €80 b&b), luggage drop & how to get to their private car park.

My hotels on this trip, Assisi, Gubbio, Siena have been 'good, better, best a my friend Vole describes my Israel diaries ('92,'95 and 2012) ! The Palazzo Rivazza is fabulous value, my room on the 4th floor has a side-view of the Cathedral and tower – a sumptuous pillowed bed, blue and white tiled bathroom, wifi on tap. Italianate gardens on terraces down

towards their car park & a bench where Aldous Huxley is pictured sitting. Helpful staff.

I drop my washing at a local Lavanderia – €15 for 4 pairs socks & knickers, 4 T-shirts, 2 shirts & 2 trousers – expertly done and hand-delivered back to my hotel the following day.

Little bit of evening exploration in the local area … street patterns are somewhat confusing at first. On the Via di Stalloreggi close to the Pian dei Mantellini junction is a calligraphist and artist at work in his shop – sadly he was always shut when I returned to make a purchase. Supper is at a great and popular, even in this quiet section of Siena, little pizzeria by the Carmine church @ Villa della Diana. Choose one with onions, salami, bufala mozzarella & tomatoes followed by an indifferent tiramisu. The place is run by the partner of the Lavanderia lady – they are agreeable and friendly hosts.

Friday 31st October 2014

Siena wakes up slowly – it's 10a.m. before anything really gets going. Good breakfast of decent coffee, fresh breads, cut your own salami & cheese; comfortable Lloyd loom chairs and glass-topped tables. My street savviness improves as I descend towards Il Campo – Siena's scalloped central circus – home of the Palio horse race contested by is it the 17 ? local Contrades (effectively gangs from each neighbourhood) with names like Porcupine, Dragon, Eagle, Goose and Panther. The Palio takes place on July 2nd and August 16th each year.

First port of call is the splendid Basilica di San Francesco set behind a large open Piazza, home to St.Bernardino and the Eucharistic Miracle of Siena. Then to possibly the world's most beautiful bank head-quarters in the Piazza Salimbeni named after the 15th century founders of the Monte dei Paschi di Siena. There is a rival for that accolade, some private bank operates from rather a gorgeous building above and to the west of the Campo.

Anyway, I am given a private viewing of the bank's archives and told of its important history helping to rescuscitate Siena with its lending and charitable acts after the Black Death. Fascinating ledgers and manuscripts housed in quite a fine modern framework & the loos were spotlessly clean.

Also devoting herself to the poor and sick in post Black Death Siena was Caterina Bencassa, born in 1347 – experiencing visions from the age of 5 and painted by her friend Vanni in 1414 during one of her ecstasies. At the Casa e Sanctuario di Santa Caterina (her family home) I am brusquely admonished for taking a picture in the downstairs chapel of one of the 'mostly unexceptional Baroque canvasses' adorning the side walls. Not a nice curator … "Fuck, fuck", were his eloquent parting words. Honestly, everyone everywhere ignores the 'no photo' signs.



Next on the itinerary is the €12 Opa SI Pass to the sites around the zebra-striped Duomo. It's first into the Museo dell'Opera har by the ticket office – full of Madonna & Child pictures by amongst others Duccio, Martini, Lorenzetti and della Francesca. Up to the scary Panorama del Facciatone – heights are not my thing.

Tour the Battistero and the Cripta before entering the main church with its famous floor and Pisano's massive detailed pulpit – any preacher ascending there must feel important. In the side chapel, the Libreria Piccolomini are Pinturicchio's frescoes … attempt a panorama photo of one wall.

Back to my lovely hotel on the Pian de Mantellini for a rest before venturing out again for some more sightseeing. Am recommended Santa Maria dei Servi for its views of Siena which

do not disappoint. Forgot to mention that after the Duomo I crossed the Piazza, paid another €8 and entered the voluminous vaults of the extraordinary Santa Maria della Scala. Originally, from about 1250, it served as a hospital for travellers and pilgrims – now it houses a mix of modern art, chapels, the archaeological museum & historical sections. It's all a bit dark and spooky as you descend in twists and turns through poorly lit corridors passing Roman funerary urns and sarcophagi. Quite a relief to reach the open air again.



Up from the Porta Romana area, brief look into the Chiesa Santo Spirito and contemplate a purchase in a jewellery shop … it's a nice design (as if a man can discern such) of silver banding with sparkly bits encased in a Greek key-style setting. The ring isn't cheap … would this help to cement a frayed relationship ? It turns out that the glistery stones are not diamonds which would raise the price ten-fold. Anticipating : "Zircons; I spit on them !", I decide against. Instead I am stocking up on Siena's panfortes in different sizes and flavours – this used to be food for weary pilgrims & makes nice gifts.
Another €8 expended for entry into The Museo Civico underneath the soaring Torre del Mangia (I won't be climbing up there) – it is money well spent here in the city's Palazzo Publico. The two lower floors are given over to an uninspiring modern exhibition of 'mechanical fishes' … all very samey. But upstairs are rooms from all centuries, yet more Madonna & Childs (slight fatigue setting in with these !) until one reaches the Sala del Mappamundo. Lorenzetti's circular map now faded but Simone Martini's Maestă is here and the terrific Equestrian Portrait of Guidoriccio da Fagliano probably by Martini but art historians are still bickering over its attribution & so it may be by Duccio, Lorenzetti or even

Filippucio (who he ?, Ed.). Then in the next room, equally astonishing, are Lorenzetti's famous allegories of Good and Bad Government – wonderful stuff. Elsewhere in the building among the 'treasures' is another lovely gold tree and leaves done by Bernini.

Central Siena is built on a Y-shaped convocation of ridges and the afternoon tour continues up the ridge to the north-west – Via Bianchi di Sopra contains smart but expensive shops but leads via the Piazza G.Matteotti (home to the main post office) to the dominating presence of San Domenico where a service is just ending. Built from 1226, it was here that St. Catherine received the stigmata and performed several of her miracles. Rather gruesomely her head is preserved behind glass in a side chapel. She died in Rome in 1380, only 33 years old – was it in ghastly circumstances ? Recently she has been made co-Patron Saint of Italy with Francis di Bernardone.

Her Basilica has rather a nice shop where I spend time browsing and buying a few postcards. More shopping opportunities arise on the Via della Sapienza. My Gucci lookalikes, cobbled together over the past few years, are getting a little tired and old (like their owner). There is a smart pair of elegant black shoes, albeit sans buckle, going for €79 but I just baulk at the price and do not purchase. But Italians make wonderful shoes, eh ?

Saunter back to my hotel, passing the still closed painting & calligraphy shop – wash and brush up and, tempting though it is to return to the nearby pizzeria, instead I head (on receptionist's suggestion) to the Cice Restaurant on the Via San Pietro. Busy, partly with fellow hotel guests; an excellent mozzarella & tomato salad + basil & do-it-yourself olive oil/balsamic vinegar/salt & pepper. Secondi platti of pork with apples and prunes is but fair – washed down with a bottle of still water. The restaurant is close to the Pinacoteca Nazionale, just about the only major site I have not visited in Siena … but perhaps it's chock-a-block with

Madonna & Childs ?!

Saturday 1st November 2014

I have arranged by email to arrive at Dave & Sascha's near Ortobello at lunchtime. Early start allows some diary writing before breakfast and departure south-westwards – I have spotted in the guidebooks a couple of suitable staging posts to visit en route. Nice windy road through Rosia to the ruined L'Abbazia di San Galgano and its special church on the hill, L'Eremo di Montesiepi where the warrior who found God plunged his sword into rock in the 1170s and where it remains embedded.

Onwards to the town of Massa Marittima passing men in day-glo parkas parked up for a spot of hunting – pity the poor birds of Italy these days not to mention the sangliers/wild boars. 'Owt that moves above the grass is fair game here. Quick tour of this hill-top town with its steep streets – up past Chiesa San Francesco to the Sant'Agostino church & cloisters then down the Via Moncini to the beautiful medieval splendour of the Duomo and Piazza Garibaldi in the lower Cittă Vecchia. Dedicated to San Cerbone, Patron Saint of Massa.

To the coast and left on the dual-carriageway to the Albinia/Argentario exit and arrive at the Hart's house at about 1.30p.m.. My large box of PG Tips is appreciated – Annabel and Odile, their eldest and youngest daughters usher me and the motor through the narrow gates. The gas has been cut off because Dave hasn't paid the bill so there is no hot water but what hey, there is an open fire on which we can boil saucepans of the over-chlorinated water.

Lovely al fresco lunch before a walk up and down the nearby beach (which disappeared for several years due to rising sea levels but is now returning) to an ice-cream café. Lots of sword-fighting with the girls with bamboo and other sticks washed up. Night falls sharpish at 5p.m. but at least we have

electricity.

We are joined by an old school-friend of ‘Annie’s’ on a sleepover & all pile into the extra long Mercedes estate that they have recently bought for £2,500 – similar year and dashboard display as my own vehicle back home.

There is a local produce festival going on in Orbetello – wine tasting (the best was a sweet white made from the usually average Vermentino grape from the Tenute Perini vineyard – but it’s €28 for a small thin bottle) and then a chaotic queuing system for a good supper in a large tent. Plates of meat or cheese or the local vegetable soup.

We notice a rabble of out-of-control children ‘playing’ at one side of the tent. They overturn benches noisily and eventually parents appear to collect them – but they have no ‘boundaries’, no rules these Italian children & can do no wrong in their parents’ eyes. I suspect this transmutes into their adult behaviour, their arrogant driving techniques and their inability/lack of desire to pay income tax. Muse upon that, my attempt at amateur social psychology.
Excellent sleep in the all white room – the copious slugs of white wine may have helped.

Sunday 2nd November 2014

Bit of boy scout work gets the fire going in the morning – matches, cardboard and fir-cones (as we are surrounded by umbrella pine forest here). Attempt to influence Dave’s musical appreciation as he’s stuck in Little Feat & similar mode. Introduce him to Arcade Fire, Elbow and Editors – he says he knows Enya (mind you, she’s been a bit quiet of late). We compose a joint postcard to Hutchy, my step-sister who, with her husband David, has a house nearby and a flat in Rome.

I drive Dave in to Porto San Stefano where we enjoy gin &



tonics at the Café Julia on the front. Then back for a barbecued beef lunch with roasted potatoes and courgettes. Eschew any further alcohol before heading northwards at about 3p.m. aiming for Lucca in daylight. The Via Aurelia road surface is poor until fairly close to Pisa where it meets the motorway. It's dark when I reach the outskirts of Lucca – park a shortish distance outside the city walls, sort out a smaller overnight bag and head through the Santa Anna/Porta Victor Emanuele gate and up his road to the centre of town. Find my chosen hotel fairly easily, the Piccolo Hotel Puccini in Via di Poggia just 100 yards from the superb front of the Chiesa San Michele. A little scruffy, the hotel not the church, but more than adequate for one night at £60 right in the middle of Lucca.

Out for a wander in the streets swarming with the remnants of their weekend's Goth Festival – there's all sorts here, Italian youth dressed ghoulishly, marquees devoted to the dark arts, odd cartoon characters, Star Wars tents, bizarre Comedia dell'Arte stuff and the streets are litter-strewn. I walk for miles, some on the city walls, down to the Porta Elisa after viewing the Duomo and back towards the centre past the Chiesa San Francesco. Lucca's street pattern is even more confusing than Siena's and it is hard to relocate the Piazza San Michele – I suppose the two main arteries are the Via Fillungo and the Via del Fossa which follows the Roman 'fossa' or ditch, probably still acting as a city sewer. Catching my eye were the Chiesa Santa Maria Forisportam, a frescoed arch nearby on the Via Santa Croce and nearer San Michele, the zebra-style facade of the Chiesa di San Cristoforo.

Eventually sit down for supper on the terrace of Ale's Bar at Piazza XX Septembre – generous portion of insalata mista, then an excellent plate of hot fusilli with pesto + a glass of

white … €20.

Monday 3rd November 2014

Need to be at Pisa Airport 9ish so do an early walk down the Via Fillungo to the Piazza Antifeatro which features on most Luccan postcards. The dustbin-men have done an excellent job throughout the night and Lucca is pretty much back to her prettiest. Precious little activity at 7a.m. but the Piazza, built in medieval times over the old Roman arena is worth seeing as is the third of Lucca's trio of outstanding churches, the Chiesa San Frediano.

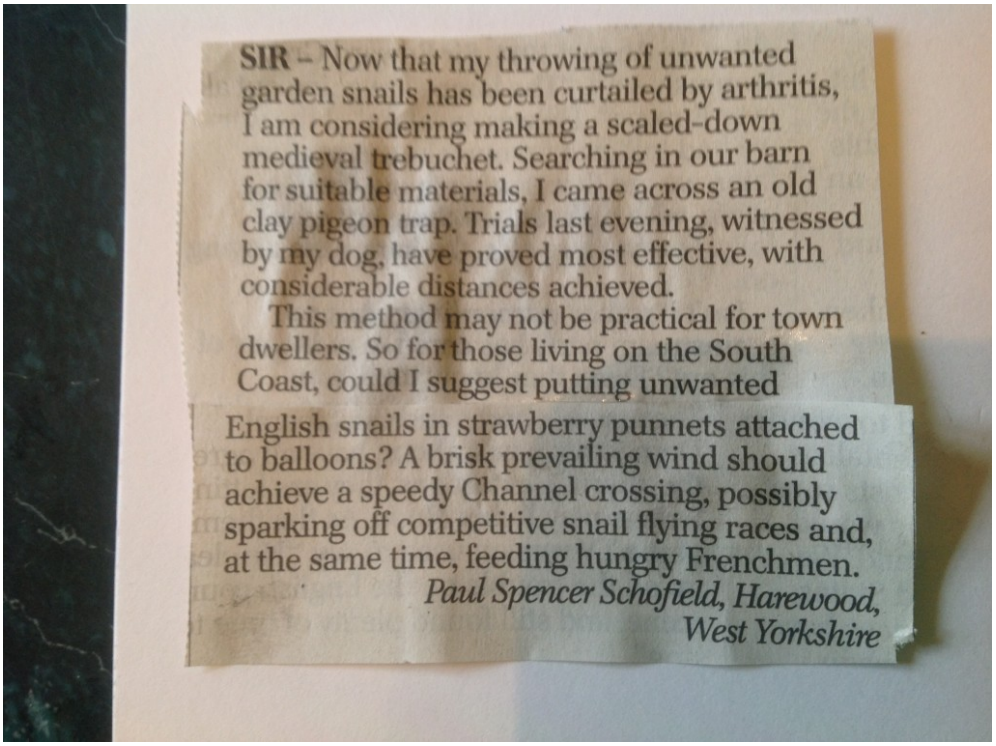
Back for a rather poor breakfast 'tray', pay the bill and walk



back to the car. Fill up with petrol very close to the airport & return the little grey Fiat 500 with 1,141 extra kilometres on its clock. This is achieved with minimum fuss but still without a vehicle check. Then walk over to the terminal. Even though it's a small airport it's all a bit haphazard and chaotic but soon enough, I guess, I am all checked in and busy duty-free shopping. A bottle of Mexican tequila for Stuart, my blogsite guru … a few packs of cigarettes for my daughters – a long wait on the tarmac for no obvious reason.

Back at Gatwick by lunchtime (in pouring rain) and home within an hour or so. Snappy Snaps is conveniently located at Clapham Junction who efficiently process my phone photos onto 'hard copy'.
Ciao, grazie, Italia.

Letter from Paul Spencer Schofield to The Daily Telegraph



SIR – Now that my throwing of unwanted garden snails has been curtailed by arthritis, I am considering making a scaled-down medieval trebuchet. Searching in our barn for suitable materials, I came across an old clay pigeon trap. Trials last evening, witnessed by my dog, have proved most effective, with considerable distances achieved.

This method may not be practical for town dwellers. So for those living on the South Coast, could I suggest putting unwanted English snails in strawberry punnets attached to balloons? A brisk prevailing wind should achieve a speedy Channel crossing, possibly sparking off competitive snail flying races and, at the same time, feeding hungry Frenchmen.

Paul Spencer Schofield, Harewood, West Yorkshire

Letter to Sam Richardson, SPCK

Dear Sam,

It was a pleasure to meet you and Alister albeit briefly at the CRE event last Wednesday. I am enclosing a small cheque in return for your tea-bag and biscuits. Your names I found in your excellent accompanying pamphlet.

God knows why but I am writing to you on the penultimate piece of writing paper that I sourced in Eilat back in 1992. It was me that joked 'tongue-in-cheekily' with Alister about Southwark being a finer cathedral than Durham although of course we do not have a bend in our river – and then I hope I handed you one of the enclosed leaflets about Being Alongside / APCMH the charity with which I am involved.

We very much hope to get our act together in time to participate in the CRE South event near Southampton on 27th November – we will struggle to produce enough promotional material by then, but will try. There didn't seem to be any stalls up at Manchester with a particular 'mental health' flavour so I feel there is a place for us.

One of my tasks at present (as new chairman) is to develop a codicil template for people's wills which seems a good way to fund-raise in the future. Look at the work that Smiths' Charities are now able to fund for example – their original benefactors are named in All Saints Church in Wandsworth. I was wondering if SPCK had any documentation regarding wills and codicils that I could peruse ? Please send any stuff you have to the address overleaf – thanks.

I shall be passing on extracts from your 'Tea Break with SPCK' brochure to Johnny Cameron who is working with prisoners and ex-offenders after his bad times at RBS and the 'History and honey cakes' article will be of interest to my friend Stuart Hall who has recently learned that one of his ancestors was the vicar on the Mayflower.

Stuart is helping me with my 'blog', www.shirtyletters.com. Please have a look – first perhaps at the two tabs top right, 'About Shirty Letters' and 'About the Author'; then have a browse around the categories. Being Alongside / APCMH gets much mention.

Once again, very good to meet yourself and Alister and I hope

we can cross our paths again soonest,

Yours in Christ,

Jamie Summers



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Dear Jamie

Thank you so much for your letter and the £20.00 gift towards SPCK's core costs which I was delighted to receive recently.

It was a great pleasure to meet you too at the CRE North event and to hear about your work to support those with mental or emotional difficulties. Tackling mental health is such an important issue and I look forward to reading your leaflets on pastoral care and the Being Alongside association in due course.

Concerning your query about wills and codicils, unfortunately, we do not at present have any relevant documentation as we are currently in the process of updating SPCK's literature on legacy fundraising. However, please do have a look at our website (http://www.spck.org.uk/support-us/legacies) or contact Primavera Quantrill, our Fundraising and Programmes Director, on 020 7592 3911 who would be very happy to assist you with this matter.

Additionally, thank you for kindly passing on our Teabreak magazine. In particular, we are always looking for new ways to develop our Prison Fiction programme (http://www.spck.org.uk/prison-fiction/) and would be extremely interested to hear more from Johnny Cameron about his work with prisoners and ex-offenders.

Thank you again for your generous donation. I wish you all the best in your new role as Chairman and with your other numerous endeavours.

Please keep us in your prayers and I hope to see you again soon.

Best wishes

Sam Richardson
Chief Executive
SRichardson@spck.org.uk