

I sat there on the steps of the tourist police station in Cairo, with no money, no travelers' checks, no passport, no credit cards and no concept of what to do next. Where would I sleep; how would I eat and how would I get back home.

When my friend dropped me off at the airport, she asked me why I was going to the Mid-East. "Adventure" was my response. If this were a movie instead of a short story, the irony of my response would be shown as a jump cut from me standing there in the dramatic TWA terminal with its undulating arches of concrete, like wings of a giant bird overhead, to my single checked bag riding aimlessly on a conveyor,



The Sphinx and the Great Pyramid of Cepheran, Giza

falling and ending up being a lounge chair for a baggage handler as he smoked a Cuban cigar he took out of someone else's luggage. Whatever happened, my bag did not make it on the jet and that set in motion a series of improbable events that ultimately doomed my trip.

It was the summer of 1986, just under a year after terrorists hijacked the Achille Lauro cruise ship and killed the wheelchair bound Leon Klinghoffer. As a result, no sane Americans were traveling to the Mid-East. The rates were low and I had just broken off with a girlfriend. This was a period in my life when I would date, breakup and spend whatever money I was saving on our future on a trip someplace. I did a lot of traveling. I did wonder if I should use the money for the trip on something useful like a sofa or bedroom furniture. But I figured in the future, I would have the money to buy the furniture but not the time to take the trip. Besides, if I bought a sofa, people would visit me because there would finally be a place to sit down. Who needed visitors?

I had through out my years studying architecture developed a list of things I wanted to see before I died. The opportunity to study based in Rome for a year of school help me check off most of the European buildings on my list. It also developed my travel skills. I knew how to travel light, fast and for little money. I eventually traveled with a sketchbook, depicting the things (mostly buildings) that I saw. I would also read a book appropriate to the land of I was exploring: **I Claudius** for Rome, **The Longest Day** for Normandy, **Anna Karenina** for Russia. For this trip, I brought Leon Uris's **Exodus** and **The Holy Bible**.



My plan was to land in Tel Aviv just long enough to take a bus across the desert to Egypt. I would figure it all out when I got there – part of the adventure. I would spend a week in Egypt; see Pyramids; see Abu-Simbel and get back to Israel for the second week.

So while I traveled light (two shoulder bags) my mistake was checking one of them. I was trying to respect the airline rule about just one carry-on. I did not want to be like the many foreign travelers with overstuff leather luggage, the size of body-bags, held closed by a couple of mismatched stretching belts they would cram into the overhead storage. When my flight touched down in Tel Aviv it was without the bag. I was forced to stay two days in Israel and wait for it.

I put the time to productive use and saw the Old City of Jerusalem during a Friday afternoon. As a light skinned American of full Italian descent, I had been treated well and treated poorly in New York because people thought was Jewish. I found that most people in Jerusalem assumed the same about me. (In fact as customs agent at the airport checked my pass “Israeli.”) So I attracted very little attention just walking around the old city. And moved easily from the Christian



The Wailing Wall and Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem.

Quarter, to the Arab quarter, to praying at the Great Wall of the Solomon/Herod’s Temple. Jerusalem is amazing and worthy of all the hyperbole assigned to it over the millennia. The proximity of the holy places of three major religions cannot be overstated. It spurred much of its rich convoluted history. Perhaps the only way it could be more tortuous would be if Buddha went to Jerusalem on spring break.

My journal entries sum it up well. (I include these entries with as little editing as necessary to make my scrawl fit Standard English. Please forgive the rambling style and occasional non-sequitor. I occasional fill in necessary details.)

Friday, August 8, 1986, 11:12 AM local time - Jerusalem

When contrasted with Tel Aviv, Jerusalem is a step backward in time. Tel-Aviv is a modern Mediterranean city with little difference from Sicilian cities. Jerusalem is a stone paved city, although I don’t know how old the stones are, of windy narrow roads. One cannot see the city through the buildings.

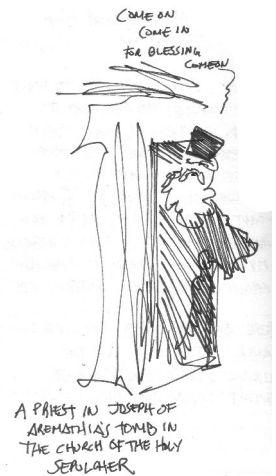
I just came out of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. These ancient Christians were a real pain. First, Helena finds everything she ever looked

for: the cross; the stone Jesus was anointed on; the tomb; the stone which was in front of it. Then they build ugly churches on top of it and guilt it with figures, so the place loses all context and significance. It is a shame some real archeology can't be done on this place.

I am back in the realm of old world Christendom. Of superstition and commercialism which is such a far cry from Saint Theresa's Parish back in Briarcliff, (*my home town.*) Maybe wealth saves us American Catholics from such backwardness – yet it is we western Christians these carnival churches depend on.

3:31 PM local time, the road back to Tel Aviv

In the five short hours I was Jerusalem, I saw no less than 3 places where Jesus was (*supposedly*) entombed. The Church of the Sepulcher, the Garden Tomb and (*another place*) from a Moslem boy called Abraham, 19, who had been to New Jersey. I got into a conversation with him just inside of Saint Stephen's gate. I knew it would cost me money. He took me on top of the gate (*where you could look down into the Dome of the Rock during the Friday assembly*) and told me the biggest lies he could think of. "Jesus was buried there" (he pointed into the hills beyond the garden of Gethsemane 180 degrees away from the Garden Tomb and Holy Sepulcher.) "and some say he is no longer dead. But he is at least 300 years old." I chuckled. He said, "Maybe 1,000 years, but he looks younger." I laughed and he said, "Okay, 3,000."



El-Jabsheh Road in Old Jerusalem

I was sketching in a residential district in the Arab quarter, when a couple of locals came up to me and began to speak Italian. I instinctively responded in Italian but it took only a couple of sentences before my poor grammar gave me away. "You are American!" And we went on to have a friendly conversation. I watched a swarm of Moslems try to get through the north gate after their weekly holy day prayer. I noticed bumper stickers spread all across the Damascus gate: "We love everybody. We trust nobody." I was not

one to judge since I held onto my travel bag and its contents like it was gold. I had no idea when I jumped on the last bus before sundown that I would never see Jerusalem again.

My luggage arrived that night and the next day I got the bus to Cairo. I met a German woman with a baby who was trying to buy a ticket for the same bus. Her husband was

and Egyptian. She flew in on Friday night and found everything closed and since I was the only person in plain clothes in the terminal at 6:30 AM she was asking me what to do. All the other people were young men and women in military uniform off to their service. I tried to help but you could only buy the tickets at travel agents, not the bus depot. She complained in accented English that no one around there knew anything that could help her. "I thought this country would run like American only smaller." She eventually got a ticket on another bus line.

When I travel, I like to eat local foods that have not been Americanized. My journal describes my first encounters with local spicy ground meats, humus salads, and a ubiquitous local drink called "Coca-cola." Just before leaving Israel, the bust stopped at a plaza near a strip mall and mobile home park. I was drinking a Coke looking at flat farmlands surrounding the gas station and hearing John Fogarty songs playing on the PA system. I noted in my journal, "Egads! I'm in Ohio. I must have caught the wrong bus."

The border between Israel and Egypt was distinct. The irrigated farmlands stop. And desert drab military uniforms were replaced with white military uniforms with black boots that varied in style and age from soldier to soldier. I was required to exchanged a certain number of dollars into Egyptian Pounds or buy a voucher for three days in a hotel. I opted for the voucher. I had no idea it would save my life in less than a week.

Saturday, August 9, 1986, 3:38 local time, the Sinai desert

Wow. The desert is incredible. Most of it, of course, is sand with sparse grass covering it like polka dots. But parts of it, as in Bir Masa'id, are right on the Mediterranean Sea with its light blue waves splashing onto beige sand. Other parts are just dunes, hills and hills of unblemished sand swirling about – but not on the road. The major pastime for people on the desert is "stay out of the sun." We passed through at the height of the day and most were gathered in the shadows of twig corrals attached to their block masonry homes. On the beach at Bir Masa'id, they were building condos, of course, but there were quite a lot of tents of old and new style pitched right on the beach.

Occasionally you'll see a person walking with no building or town in sight on any of the horizons. Sometimes, there are just fresh footprints with no one, or town or building in sight. Along the whole length of the road, Route 55, a pipeline is under construction to bring fresh water to all the towns who either use scarce wells or truck it in with the rest of their food. Said our guide, Lebon, "I don't know how these people live like this. It is certainly, not for me."



The standard drink of Egypt seems to be Pepsi. Coke has Israel – Egypt has Pepsi. It's a wonder the two nations were allowed to make peace.