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**Expressions for Father Ed**  
By Mary Hwass-Hay

## Eye-opening, Heart-expanding Travel

Travel is an eye-opening experience. Travel to the Holy Land and Jordan is not only eye-opening, but heart expanding, as well. For many of us, our vision of the Middle East is crafted by the sights and sounds of news media. Our real life experience was much different. We all agreed that the most often asked question before we left was, "Aren't you afraid to travel there?"

The people we met were welcoming. In Jordan, children and adults came out of their homes to wave at us. In person, they asked us where we were from, and then replied, "We love America. Americans are our friends!" (They seemed to particularly excited to find out that most of us were Californians.)

We discovered our commonalities with Jordan and Israel, particularly the lack of water. They pray for rain, as do we. The Dead Sea is dropping at a rate of 1 meter per year, and could feasibly dry up in our lifetime. Part of the Jordan River is dammed up for agricultural uses. Like Americans, everyone has a cellphone to their ear. Israel's number one business is high tech, followed by agriculture and tourism. (Thank God, unlike America, they don't expect us to read or speak their language.)

Touring the religious sites brought us face-to-face with the four sectors of Jerusalem. The Jews, the Armenians, the Muslims, and the Christians share the city. While there is inequality between cultures and between men and women, there is peaceful co-existence on a daily basis. Our driver David is an Israeli Jew of Persian (Iranian) descent, and our guide Ibrahim is a Palestinian Catholic. They have been friends for ten years. Ibrahim asked two things of us, that we would pray for peace, and that we would use the word "shared" when describing Jerusalem because he said "divided" is not how they live. Yes, they have differences, and they strive for equality, but they also strive to live in peace. Light overcomes darkness.

We were honored to see and touch the place where Jesus was born. We celebrated Mass there. We visited the Church of the Beatitudes; Mt. Nebo, Jordan, where Moses died; the Church of the Pater Noster where the "Our Father" is displayed in one hundred-eighty languages; and we walked the Via Dolorosa, the Way of the Cross. We touched walls worn away by pilgrim's hands who want only to touch the places where Jesus touched. We blessed rosaries and crosses. We prayed for our parish, and delivered prayers from friends to the Church at the Garden of Gethsemane. We asked for healing at the site where Jesus answered the faithful prayers of a man paralyzed for thirty-eight years when Jesus said, "Get up and walk!"

In contrast with these sites of love and hope, we visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Research Center and Museum, where we saw the horrors of humanity when fear is allowed to rule. Many of us cried our way through as we walked the museum prison which tells the story of sadness, and which houses everyday items of those murdered in the extermination camps. We saw eyeglasses, combs, menorahs, love letters, suicide notes, photos of the emaciated men, women, and children who lived and died in these camps. Shoes, we saw piles of shoes left by those who were marched to their deaths. We listened to the recitation of names of the children who were murdered before they had a chance to live. (Had we listened to the entire recitation of children's names, we would have had to extend our visas for three months.)

We bring back with us the spirit of Shalom - an eye-opening view of the world, and a heart-expanding appreciation for tolerance and peace. We are blessed.