

E-LETTERS FROM ABROAD

I SENT THE FOLLOWING PERIODIC DISPATCHES FROM INTERNET CAFES TO VOLUNTEER POSTMISTRESS MCKENNA HARTMAN, WHO THEN FORWARDED THEM TO A LIST OF ±100 FAMILY AND FRIENDS. THOSE READERS' RESPONSES ARE COPIED AT THE END.

THE "EARLY INTERNET" LACK OF CAPITALIZATION IS REGRETTABLE, BUT INDICATIVE OF THE PERIOD.

1 - HI FROM PAUL IN JERUSALEM

Date: Sunday, 8/6/00 7:08:56 AM Pacific Daylight Time

From: Coeurhomme

To: My Virtual Travelling Partners (via emails)

walking the via dolorosa today and saw this internet cafe, so here's a quick hi. i don't expect to be able to do this often.

flights were uneventful but loooooooooooooooooong. i was PRAYING to find a place to go horizontal by the time we landed ben gurion intl last night at 1 am. got to jerusalem by sherut (shared taxi) about 2, and he searched all over for my hostel. even called and they didn't answer (despite having promised to "leave a light on for [me]." when some kids offered to walk me to it, i went ahead and paid the driver. turned out they didn't know. so i wandered in the old city for 40 minutes (quitcherbellyachin', paul, moses was wandering near here for 40 YEARS.) finally some young jewish men showed me the way, God bless them. i got to bed about 3 am local time--almost exactly 24 hours after jason dropped me off at SeaTac. (thank you Jason!)

bells and loudspeaker calls to prayer woke me about 10:30. so far today i've been to the king david tower museum (wow! you'll love the videos i took) and the rockefeller museum (ok, but disappointing--all d.s.s. stuff has been transferred to the israel museum).

london yesterday was fun, despite not having slept a wink on the overnight flight. i took an express train into town, had a 20 minute cab ride to see buckingham, parliament, hyde park, etc etc etc. then spent 3 hours in the british museum. incredible stuff, but tacky place now because they're deep in a huge remodeling project.

big day tomorrow. lots to share.

love ya! i got the best family and friends anywhere.

--dad/paul

2-SHALOM

Date: Tuesday, 8/8/00 5:23:39 AM Pacific Daylight Time

From: Coeurhomme

To: My Virtual Travelling Partners (via emails)

tour guide: "if you know 'shalom,' you know three hebrew words. 'hello,' 'goodbye,' and 'peace.'" she also told us there are only three words that are the same in every language in the world. (1) amen. (2) hallelujah. (3) [ya have to read the rest of this before i'll tell you #3] :)

it's 2:50 pm here (4:50 am on the west coast). we had a short day touring jaffa (an ancient port just south of where they built tel aviv from scratch in the early 1900s), and the museum of the diaspora. before starting in earnest tomorrow (6:30 breakfast, 7:30 on the road up to caesarea, acre, nazareth, then to our kibbutz under the golan heights), we had a light "ramp up" day today. so i had a chance to find this cyber cafe, change some dollars into shekels ["shazayam, you're a shekel!"], buy a hat, and then (nobody who knows me will believe this so i'll have to get pictures to prove it), i'll go swimming in the mediterranean. then the group re-assembles for a dinner to introduce us to israeli cuisine.

yesterday, you ask? how the heck was the highlight day i've been waiting for forever? very good. i had an extremely knowledgeable guide (he had been in the israeli army for many years, most of it in intelligence; then he worked fulltime as a guide for tour groups; for the past two years he has worked at the shrine of the book). we spent more time than i wanted in jerusalem, but he thought it helpful to show

"second temple jerusalem" (jesus' time) archeology as a means of explaining the rifts between increasingly liberal jews at that time, and the probable writers of the scrolls (the essenes) who retreated to a desert commune to be pure and holy. lunch with one of his colleagues was a trip. he was about 30-35, in jeans and a shirt open about three buttons' worth, high energy, mile-a-minute talking (and thinking), mildly curious about me but more than willing to just talk (which i wanted). "a real piece of work."

finally, about 2 pm we walked very briefly through the shrine. (i found myself saying repeatedly, "i can't believe i'm here.") but i have time with the tour group next week, so we dashed down to qumran. unreal, to actually pull up onto the flatland where the ruins are. but physical necessities took over and we sat in the a/c tour center over cold drinks a bit to prepare ourselves for the 100-degrees outside. then we hiked up to a "low" cave -- still WAY up the side of the wadi. if the videos turn out, my three beloved kids will yell at me for having hiked up those narrow and loose-rocked paths, let alone having taken video. a slip could have meant a 200' vertical drop.

anyway, it wasn't a document cave, but gave me a sense of the area that just looking up at it never would have. (to get into document caves, say the national parks service's signs, you have to be able to rappell, and you have to use a certain kind of crampons.)

after that we walked throughout the ruins. i took long stretches of video, but all we'll see are rocks piled on rocks. regardless, there is no substitute for being "in situ" (which, perhaps, is why God's Only Begotten came to earth), and the sense of communion with 1930-to-2200-year-old spirits there was very strong. i share very little of their understanding of God--they're all "we're sons of light and everybody who doesn't do it our way, no, GOD'S way, is a son of darkness," and i'm all, "God loves each of us more than we can even guess, and probably the only thing that really pisses Him off is the little control freaks who take authority over His institutional church, and who pay more attention to little rules than to the Big Love." pretty deep theology, there, i know, but if you struggle over it for the next 15 years you might grasp some of it... :)

so it was a very good day. both the curator and guide were quite interested in what they dragged out of me about my novel, and want to stay in touch.

well, time's nearly up. apparently my article came out ok, since i checked WelcomingChurch@aol.com and found that about a dozen readers wrote in for additional info. anxious to see it.

all hail kenna shay who heads back to college this week. to any who don't know, my beloved daughter got a 4.0 in her second semester freshman year. what a woman!

and hail jordan patrick ("toadly awesome") for doing his second wedding last friday night -- a popular photographer!

and hail jason, who spent hours and hours to get us online.
www.coeurhomme.com/GrandTour [Post trip note: that website from 2000 has now been transferred to this one, www.CarpeKairos.com]

that's probably it for this week ... the schedule doesn't look like we'll be near the internet. know that i think of you all.

"whoever reads this, i love ya!" (and yes, lou, i'm in heaven--a whole new crowd who haven't heard my jokes. and most of them gray-hairs who love pbs. how many ways can this pig slop?)

always--dad/paul

3-HI TO ALL FROM AMMAN JORDAN

Date: Friday, 8/11/00 10:41:34 AM Pacific Daylight Time
From: Coeurhomme
To: My Virtual Travelling Partners (via emails)

well, just a quick note since others are trying to get on this one internet link. a five-star hotel -- and its only i-net access is in the manager's office!

today was probably the tour highlight so far. check jerash (sp?) on the GrandTour--especially if we have hyperlinked pictures. (if we don't have links for jerash, jason, could you check the links for petra? i think the guy with the thumbnails we linked to for petra has jerash too. we

should put that in, because this is one incredible place! i think all 36 of us were freaking blown away.

no big news otherwise. can't wait for petra, and to go back to jerusalem, then on to egypt. they say abu simbal is as incredible as petra -- and if either beats today's old roman ruins at jerash, i'll be astounded.

God bless y'all. love from around the world!

--paul/dad

ps--i forgot to tell you the third word that is the same in every language! "amen," "hallejulia," and "coca cola"! :)

as ever -- p.

4-BACK IN ISRAEL AGAIN

Date: Tuesday, 8/15/00 7:52:49 AM Pacific Daylight Time

From: Coeurhomme

To: My Virtual Travelling Partners (via emails)

what an incredible few days since my last note. two days on a kibbutz. beautiful tour of the galilee area. stunning, absolutely stunning place called jerash in jordan. roman ruins so extensive you'd think they were frozen in time. it was the trip highlight for all 36 of us to that point, supplanted two days later by petra in jordan. (check www.coeurhomme.com/GrandTour for the 11th or 12th or 13th--it's so hard to keep track of what day it is). **[Post trip note: see this website, www.CarpeKairos.com, on the pages for August 11, 12, and 13.]**

then yesterday we were in three countries in less than 90 minutes-- leaving jordan at the gulf of aqaba's head (exit tax=\$6 or 4 Jordanian dinars), entering Israel at the adjacent port of Eilat and driving 10 minutes to the Egyptian Sinai border (exit tax = 64 shekels, or \$16--it was 122 shekels/\$30.50 when we went into jordan earlier in the week)-- -PLUS an entrance fee of 20 Egyptian Pounds (\$5.75). If we had started just 20 minutes south of our jordanian border that day--at the Saudi

Arabian border) it would have been 4 hot-spot countries in 2 hours. take "hot-spot" any way you want to. lots of border security.

this morning at 2:15 am we had wake up calls. we were on the bus in 20 minutes, drove a couple miles to the entrance to the mt. sinai climb, most took camels for the first 2/3rds of the climb -- under an incredible, clear, full-moon shine. unreal experience. approximately 500 people made the trek today -- they say up to 3000 do. we disembarked camels and walked another 45 exhausting minutes up 1000 steps to the summit (very uneven, hi-rise/lo-rise steps), and rested a few minutes before the sun made its orange-red burst above the (slightly hazy) horizon. there were cheers all over the mountain (the highest on the sinai peninsula). the picture on our GrandTour website doesn't start to do it justice.

i must say that you all (yes, this is a mass mailing), that i did indeed remember to take my list. i not only whispered your name into that grandeur, i paused and thought about you. individually and collectively, you (and the setting) moved me so deeply that i was barely a few names in before my wet contacts made it hard to read. God's second-greatest gift to me is the family and friends He has showered into my life.

anyway, know that your name arose from Moses' mountain today at 6:15 am (8:15 pm Monday evening, to you).

then we saw the 4th-6th century monestary established at the base of mt sinai--st. catherine's. it honors the burning bush and mooses' well, and catherine whose body didn't decompose. (! :) it was at this site the sinai codex was discovered. they still have the most extensive library of scrolls and codexes (?) anywhere in the world.

from the spiritual to the romantic (as our tour group passed another, i caught the eye of a very sweet young thing who's just my type. i looked back once and saw those same eyes. and i should be ashamed to say i looked twice more in the next 5 minutes as our groups wandered in a courtyard, and each time found that i was being watched, too. one can carry away from a grand tour profound and moving experiences AND some lusty daydreams of what might have been, right? s'wonderful, s'marvelous.

two things keep occuring to me on this trip.

first, to a west coast boy for whose area-history reaches back MAYBE 200 years (since he's as other-culture blind as most of us, and he is almost totally ignorant of the indigenous cultures on the left coast), to hear tour guides tick off the dozen or so civilizations which have ruled the areas we're in each day here in the middle east is mind-boggling. of course they are reminded of it daily by roman ruins, crusader castles, archeological digs back to herodian artifacts and homes, etc. so it's "in yo' face" here unlike the history in washington-oregon. still, i feel so shallow, not knowing more about theirs and ours.

(that's brief to the point of inanity, but perhaps you sense the idea.)

second, we kid unmercifully about the landscapes in israel, jordan and the sinai. "there's great variety," we say. "there's granite mountains, igneous mountains, sheer cliffs, bolders (sizes: XXL, XL, L, M and S), rocks, pebbles, and sand. that's variety! oh sure, approximately 3% of the land seems arable (it's green). and the mediterranean is an aluring warm blue. but as an international goodwill gesture, i'm taking some rocks back home so they don't have quite so many to worry about. (i brought some down from the summit today.) but it is a ROCKY place. i can't wait to see the green green grass (and trees, etc) of home.

i didn't even touch on petra, really. but my hour is almost gone (35 shekels!) so we'll leave that for next time. memo to yourself: YOU HAVE TO SEE PETRA. the siq is the most astounding 2-mile (?) walk i ever made, and even more followed that.

whoever reads this, i love you.

always--dad/paul

5-ONCE MORE FROM JERUSALEM

Date: Saturday, 8/19/00 5:12:45 AM Pacific Daylight Time

From: Coeurhomme

To: My Virtual Travelling Partners (via emails)

this could be the last email unless i can find internet service in egypt next week. i have never had so many new and fascinating experiences in so little time. i've never enjoyed a trip as much, nor been so eager to

go home. as pogo (?) said, "people are more fun than anybody else, and family\friends are the best of people."

floating the dead sea was not only fun but pretty hilarious. the group got to know each other a lot better (we're all old and fat, some just hide it better); one retired woman even slipped in to the water in bra and panties since she forgot to bring a swimsuit. the sensation of floating is incredible. and that water on tongue and in eye is terrible! (i'm bringing some home.)

masada is fascinating. the ancients' engineering feats continue to amaze me, and masada's entry in that arena is the 2000 year old sub-floor heating and other marvels in their sauna. beautifully preserved interior walls (plaster and frescos intact) help put the lie to the impression we get from other ruins that people in that era had raw-rock walls only.

our website promised an explanation of the last supper room which was constructed by the Crusaders. well, of course, it was built OVER the venerated original site. and we saw "the tomb of king david" directly below that room -- which is even more unlikely since he died hundreds of years before that section of jerusalem was opened up.

on the other hand, the garden tomb is quite moving. very peaceful and much less commercial/frenetic than many similar sites. the church of the holy sepulchre is a mess of tourists. (self-indicting comment, eh?)

i'm into the 12th hour of videotape. i'll have to find a computer-assisted editing program so that the only decent six minutes i've shot can be compiled... :)

tomorrow we drive in a caravan of busses to the egyptian border (2 hours) then across the sinai to cairo for a total of 10+ hours. the caravan has to have armed escorts ... which worries me. visions of a new lawrence of arabia blowing up bridges ahead of us dance in my head. er, maybe that's this gold star (israeli) beer beside me....

and sunday begins the final lap. all those who have gone before say i'm lucky to have gotten the abu simbal excursion, and we just have to hope weather allows that flight. apparently that is about equal to petra in the "take-your-breath-away" quotient.

i haven't heard any discussion here of al gore's choice for vp. but then my discussions with locals pretty much consists of "shalom!" to which they answer, "where are you from in america?"

true story: i said hi to somebody who walked up while i was waiting for the elevator here at the laromme hotel yesterday. he looked suspiciously at me and said, "how did you know i'm from america?" i said i didn't, that i usually said hi to everybody. "oh. hi." (hilarious. he had just gotten off the plane from boston, and i remember how you feel about half-a-bubble-off-plumb then.)

love ya!

always--dad/paul

6-HELLO, CAIRO CALLING

Date: Monday, 8/21/00 7:16:14 AM Pacific Daylight Time
From: Coeurhomme
To: My Virtual Travelling Partners (via emails)
BCC: Coeurhomme

g'day mate--

that's what i hear night and day from my aussie friends. both the israel/jordan and now the egypt tours are 80% aussies, a few kiwis (new zealanders) and brits, and one or two yanks.

the drive from jerusalem to cairo was excruciating. it took two hours to get down to the gaza strip and the egyptian border, an hour to get out of israel and into egypt (and they're at peace!), and eight more hours on the road along the north end of the sinai peninsula. we saw "the med" a couple of times (it's so blue and beautiful), but mostly we saw sand. for every rock we saw in israel and jordan (refer to earlier lesson, class), we saw a bucket o' sand yesterday. the whole crew of us was tired, achy (achey? where's spell-check when i need it?), famished (nothing but carry-on snacks since breakfast at 8 am) and ready to go horizontal when we got into the hotel at 8:30 pm.

worse, the 80ish gentleman behind me on the bus picked yesterday to get sick. he's a great old italian guy from australia, and has been fine for 13 days until now. but as soon as we took off on this odessey (sp), he asked for a plastic bag and he filled every one in the bus in the next two hours. we picked up a new supply at the border and he began anew. he was actually a very quiet ralpher, but you know, a little telltale sound escapes now and again. my gag reflex has always been hyperactive, but amazingly i was ok through the whole day with one exception. at an afternoon reststop i happened to catch sight of his daughter carrying out the used bags, and they were all the clear plastic ones we had gathered at the border. i had a couple of dress rehearsals, but no full performance imitating his.

shooting the bull, i asked some of the other aussies if they had slang for the activity poor old phil had been engaging in. i told them my american favorite was "worshipping at the porcelain altar." they and we share "ralphing," "chucking," and "hurling." but they finally added one that i didn't know and has now replaced my longtime favorite saying. (my former favorite was "trash cmpctr" -- an onomatopoeically-correct pronunciation of "trash compacter.") they refer to the well-known traveller's (and other sickies') activity as "the technicolor yawn." i can't stop laughing.

today we saw the egyptian museum. they have more sarcophagi than could possibly have been exhumed, along with fascinating ephemera of life back as far as 5000 years. the highlight, of course, is the tutenkamen (sp) exhibit, including about 9 nested gold-covered boxes which probably outdid the ark of the covenant in (worldly) glory. and the mask is stunning. pictures don't begin to convey the gooseflesh the actual creation does. i paid the extra 100 pounds egyptian to videotape inside, but there is so much exterior light (a surprise, given their precious exhibits) it was hard to avoid glare and get the auto-focus to find the object instead of the glass casing. but i think those who sit through this portion of my tapes will be rewarded.

we went on to the giza plateau, to see the three major and many minor pyramids there. i went down inside the little one (10LE [ten pounds egyptian, or about \$2.90] gives you a chance to walk bent over double for a hundred yards down into the middle of the huge structure). unfortunately, your sole reward there is an undecorated, empty room with a raised "bedrock" resting place for the deceased. (this wasn't one of the well-decorated tombs; we'll see those this week.) we also saw

the sphynx, rode camels ("paul of arabia" succumbed to the hawking boys and bought a bedouin headgear for the ride. a fitting addition to my "hatman" collection if i ever go back and work the channel 17 auction.)

tonight we return for a sound-and-laser show at the pyramids.

so you're up to date. but as always, it's the little things that tell so much. the cairo traffic (tijuana to the third power) which includes donkey carts, motorcycles, hundreds of tour coaches like ours, taxis, cars, bicycles, and a million horns. the satellite dishes, so many of which are tilted back almost to the horizontal level, reminding us we are just 20+ degrees north of the equator. the Nile river. crossing the Suez Canal on a ferry boat. dealing with yet another currency; if it's not one's own, it all feels like play money, doesn't it? no real value, of course, only greenbacks have that :) and still, yet, once again, the reminder that regardless of the treasures i see here, everything of value to me resides in your home and the homes of the other readers of these epistles.

He lives. whoever reads this, i (still) love you.

always--dad/paul

7-HOME AGAIN HOME AGAIN JIGGITY JIG

Date: Sunday, 9/3/00 2:47:51 PM Pacific Daylight Time

From: Coeurhomme

My Virtual Travelling Partners (via emails)

hello from tacoma!

a concluding dispatch has been in order for almost a week, but has been delayed by "arrival flu," surely exasperated by the lag in my jets.

breakfast in Cairo *last* Sunday morning was followed by five and a half hours' flight to London, nine and a half to Sea-Tac, and finally dinner with Jordan and Renee' here in Tacoma. except for breakfast and the flights, it was a great day. i'm the luckiest dad in the world.

after my last dispatch we flew to Luxor and began our cruise up the Nile to Aswan. getting used to calling south "up" was difficult for most of us.

south seems "down." but the great river (the longest in the world) flows from mid-Africa to the mediterranean, so cairo is down-river regardless of what seems natural to me. surprised i wasn't consulted on the matter but since it's so well established now i doubt we can change it...

the temples of luxor are almost unbelievable. the silent stand of 134 massive columns at karnak (6-ft diameters, 50-60 ft heights) in one hall boggles the neck and cranes the mind, or vice versa. i couldn't stop shooting tape. to see both bas-relief (forms cut into the surface) and high-relief (where the entire surface except the form itself was cut away) in fascinating up-close detail is one thing. to see relief after story-telling relief extending around and up one such huge column is another. to see dozens of those granite columns in a row, and almost a dozen rows--all created by hand and erected without benefit of cranes ... well, you get the point. i waswhelmed.

then across the Nile is queen Hapshetsut's temple and behind that, the great valley of the kings. we descended into three tombs, learning from our excellent guide some of the lore that the pictographs tell along the way. the tomb of one pharaoh who died unexpectedly young showed the process they went through: carving the approach tunnel and the tomb out of the mountain first, then chipping the entry walls flat and painting them (with such vivid colors, unretouched for 3300 years!), and on down that way by stages. two-thirds of the tunnel wall down into the burial room of this short-lived pharaoh was rough-cut rock, unfinished. they always began working on the tomb as soon as a new king was enthroned, and never quit until he died. somehow the unfinished one--clearly demonstrating the process interrupted--made all the tombs more real.

a recurring pictograph theme in the first few steps of each tunnel was the weighing of the pharaoh's heart; that organ was shown on one side of a balance scale and a feather was on the other. if his heart was light--if his conscience was clear and he had been a just ruler--he passed the first test of entry to the afterlife. it's a scary prospect, and likely close to truth. i thank God: His Son will lift my side of the scale someday or i wouldn't have a chance.

Kom Ombo (which our website promised more information on) was interesting: a dual-temple, dedicated to both the falcon god Horus and the crocodile god Sobek. (both were white-hats, by the way, being

enemies of evil.) it had a small passage where priests hid and spoke into a stone chamber which magnified their voices. oooo-oo.

the simple hour we spent floating the Nile in a falucca (sail-boat) was wonderful. after all the hustling to sites, rubber-necking and photographing, straining to hear (and remember) the guide's fascinating stories above the din of the crowds at each place (damn tourists :), it was cool and refreshing to be down next to the water. ragged but beautiful youngsters paddled little canoes up, grabbed onto our boats, and sang to us. in english. "row row row your boat." honest.

what differentiated those kids from similar encounters was that they did not ask for "baksheesh." repeatedly throughout the three week trip, young and old would ask for money, or at least the pen they saw in my pocket, "for my school." i doubt my hotels would be pleased to know how their guest pens disappeared from my room and helped local schools (or, more likely, were sold for a few coins).

throughout all three countries we were "assertively marketed to" near all the tourist sites. "my friend, i will make you very good price." "where you from? usa? my favorite country." "i have perfect gift for your wife."

sometimes i'd say, how much for that item? "40 shekels." no thanks. "ok, 35" i'd take it for 10 but i don't want to insult you with such a low offer. "ok, 30, for you my friend." maybe i could go to 15, i'd say. "25, but i'm telling you, my family will suffer. no matter, i like you and i want you to have it." well, 20 is as high as i can go. "i'll wrap it up."

it happened in every transaction. if you pay more than 50% of their asking price, you lose. if we really didn't want something, abdu (our guide in egypt) told us to say, "la, shok-run" (no, thank you). and if they kept trying to bargain as we kept walking and saying that, abdu said, "say: 'em-shee.'" it is a polite phrase we egyptians use, and it is roughly translated as, "kindly let me enjoy the pleasure of your absence." it worked magic. i intend to print that and put it over my desk for easy reference.

it was on the falucca ride that i scooped up a liter of Nile water to complement the samples i took from the sea of galilee and the dead sea. somehow all three specimen bottles made it to sea-tac without leaking into the rest of my luggage. jordan/renee' can already tell you

how amazing the taste of a single drop of dead sea water is. your taste is waiting. one drop won't kill you, but a gulp or glassful would.

one other bit of unfinished business from our website: on the august 25 page you saw a picture of the colossus of memnon. the pair of these were situated near the valley of the kings, and i had two reactions to them. (1) they were quite large, but not colossal (some of ramses' statues, and the sphynx--they're colossal). (2) they were as out-of-focus in person as in the website pictures. all the fine features had somehow been chiseled or weather-worn off, and these two identical seated statues simply looked "soft" -- through the lens of both eye and camera. and the sun wasn't over the yardarm, so not even a hint of egyptian beer had passed our lips. they reminded me of a station i worked at where the staff disparaged the vacillating manager by naming a teddy-bear mascot "fuzzy-the-objective."

on saturday the 26th, a dozen of us (out of 30) flew to abu simbal, near the southern border of egypt. there next to lake nasser (a huge, rambling body of water created by the aswan high dam) was a quite incredible temple to the triad of gods amon-ra, harmakes, and ptah, but mostly to ramses II. it is virtually impossible to imagine as you face the four 50-ft-tall seated statues at the entrance, but that entire facade *and* the entire interior had been cut into 1500 huge multi-ton blocks and relocated, piece-by-piece, to the top of the mountain it had originally been cut into. that rescue was accomplished about forty years ago to save abu simbal (and 13 other temples) from permanent submersion under the new lake nasser.

all the ancient constructions and art we saw reminded me of the chicago museum guide who was asked by little old lady visitor, "how old is this dinosoar?" the guard said, "well, one million and twenty-four years." the woman did a double-take. "that's pretty precise!" "well," the guard answered, "if you want precise, it's one million twenty-four years and 87 days old." "how do you KNOW that?" she said in amazement. he raised his chin proudly. "well, when i came here they said it was one million years old, and i've had this job 24 years and 87 days."

so we come to the end of the trip of my lifetime.

the brightest flashes across my mental screen include ...

~sunrise at the summit of mount sinai (picturing your face, and whispering your name to God).

~rocks (and boulders), plus some stones (and pebbles), along with mountains, cliffs and outcroppings--but not much green grass or trees--in israel and jordan.

~sailing the sea of galilee, "the one place we are 100% positive is exactly where Jesus actually was."

~walking the ruins of qumran, and hiking a dangerous trail to one of the caves above.

~seeing a 2000-year-old parchment with the words of isaiah in its original language.

~traversing the incredible half-mile siq ("seek") rock chasm, ending in the dazzling 'treasury' carved onto the face of, and deep into, a rose-colored rock wall.

~the extensive roman ruins at jerash, jordan, where chariot tracks on the stone cardo (main street) are still visible.

~the lovable crusty old Jew who described the decades-old kibbutz movement to us visitors in about three minutes, and then gave good answers shorter than the inquirers' questions.

~new friendships forged with fellow travellers from around the world.

~swimming in the mediterranean and floating on the dead sea.

~a long day's bus trip full of technicolor yawns audible behind me.

~shawarma; hummus and pita at every meal; a shabbat dinner with gefilte fish, consomme with kreplach, and stuffed cornish hens which the innocent-faced waiter called "baby chickens"; watermelons galore; and gorgonzola spaghetti.

~a busload of laughter as i tried to actually drink a "banana-date" drink i had bought at a rest stop. in principle it was adventurous. once actually opened, it didn't seem like such a great idea. it looked and smelled like banana-date bread put through the cuisinart. with all of us in stitches at

the situation, my busmates started chanting, "drink, drink, drink..." and finally i got my objection out between convulsions: "but i've never had a date with a banana in my life!"

~kidding the kids of all three countries by countering their pleadings with my own: "but i have six wives, twelve children and two donkeys to feed!" (every one broke into big grins at this echo of their own spiel; a couple of them then got wallets out to offer ME baksheesh!)

~three phone calls to beloveds halfway around the world.

and mostly: coming home.

thanks for reading, even this long finale. and now as you say, "paul: em-shee!" i retreat with a bow of thanks for your company this past month. Shalom, lecha'im, salam.

--p.

**RESPONSES FROM FRIENDS:
IN-COMING EMAILS ON MY RETURN**

Re: home again home again jiggity jig
Date: Tuesday, 9/5/00 8:23:16 AM Pacific Daylight Time
From: [A Buffalo attorney and Bible Study Brother]

Paul - Thanks. With your descriptive powers and curiosity (I'll not soon forget "technicolor yawns") you can tell some great stories. I thoroughly enjoyed your emails and think others will enjoy your writing. Good luck. [Name]

~~~~~

**Re: home again home again jiggity jig**  
**Date: 9/5/00 8:16:31 AM Pacific Daylight Time**  
**From: [A brother]**

I want to compliment you on your writing style and content. It's always a pleasure to read your emails. You display so much talent, I can't wait to read your novel!

~~~~~  
Re: home again home again jiggity jig
Date: 9/5/00 8:12:53 AM Pacific Daylight Time
From: [A Tacoma Bible Study brother]

Thanks, Paul. I almost feel as if I have had the journey of a lifetime also.
Peace, [Name]

~~~~~  
**Re: home again home again jiggity jig**  
**Date: 9/5/00 7:34:44 AM Pacific Daylight Time**  
**From: [A friend from church in Gig Harbor]**

hey dude,  
what great letters, feel like i have been there almost.  
do you want your fish back yet, or want to get settled more?  
love and stuff. [Name]

~~~~~  
Re: home again home again jiggity jig
Date: 9/4/00 8:47:38 PM Pacific Daylight Time
From: [A gay friend]

Paul : I thoroughly enjoyed your travel log during the last few weeks.
One could tell from the enthusiasm in your writing and the detail
provided that it was truly a remarkable time for you. I am glad that you
found the trip so rewarding. It brought back many memories of my trip
to Israel ten years ago. Your descriptions refreshed the pictures that I
had cataloged in my brain. Thanks for allowing me to be a part of your
journey. [Name]

~~~~~  
**Re: home again home again jiggity jig**  
**Date: 9/3/00 10:46:14 PM Pacific Daylight Time**  
**From: [a fund-raising professional, colleague and friend]**

Thank you for keeping us posted on your trip, and your reflections. I  
assume you've saved all your emails. Don't you think they'd make great  
fodder for an article for the Travel Section of the News Tribune? Or, a  
national travel magazine? There were so many fascinating details. I  
think you should give it a try. [Name]

~~~~~  
Re: home again home again jiggity jig
Date: 9/3/00 4:22:20 PM Pacific Daylight Time
From: [a high school friend from Ellensburg]

Great letter, about an even greater trip.. glad you have quieted down some, and can let your stomach return to normal.. like french fries and Tacoma water.. either could give you the "Green Apple Quick Step"..

~~~~~  
**Re: home again home again jiggity jig**  
**Date: 9/3/00 3:42:00 PM Pacific Daylight Time**  
**From: [a gay Bible Study friend]**

Hope the flu is history for you by now. Please know that I very much appreciated, and enjoyed, receiving the on going experiences of your trip. Thank you for including my Email address.

[Name] tells me you will be sharing some of your experiences with the Wednesday group this week. I will try to wrangle an invitation. I'd like to be there.. Thanks again. [Name]

~~~~~  
Re: home again home again jiggity jig
Date: 9/5/00 10:46:52 PM Pacific Daylight Time
From: [a 1960's PLU classmate and his life partner]

Dear Paul: Thank you, thank you, thank you, for sharing your trip with us! I took several days to read and re-read your final letter, and also to absorb about your final summary sentences. What a wonderful trip, and certainly YOU are one who deserved it, because YOU are one who truly appreciates all the sights, sounds, tastes and smells (and tactile sensations i am sure....the course rock on the climb, the briny water of the dead sea, etc) of all that this trip presented to you. You must still be overwhelmed with all of it! Again, thanks! We look forward to the time when we can visit with you in person about your trip. Needless to say, additional thoughts will come to you as your mind continues to synthesize the knowledge you gained....so your trip, even though you are home, will continue. Love and hugs, [Names]

PS: If you find yourself itching to travel again, remember that we too have a desert with rocks, boulders, pebbles, plus free room and board! And although not as "historical," there are many wonderful sites to behold in Palmius Springaus. :)

~~~~~  
**Re: home again home again jiggity jig**

**Date: 9/6/00 1:35:21 PM Pacific Daylight Time**  
**From: [a 1960s PLU classmate]**

Paul! What delightful travelogues you have been sending! (You should be writing for a travel magazine or doing a show like what's-his-name Steves! It would be great! (While my mom was in the hospital, she got me onto a Jewish guy that has a show on Saturday afternoons at 3:00. You would LOVE him. I'll try and get the information to send to you). I'm so glad you had this opportunity to enrich your life. Indeed the trip of a lifetime. I printed out all of your e-mails to send to my sister Hope who will be going to Israel and Egypt this Christmas. She'll find them excellent reading. .... [Name]

~~~~~

Re: home again home again jiggity jig
Date: 9/13/00 4:28:35 PM Pacific Daylight Time
From: [a former pastor]

I have so enjoyed traveling with you these last several days of your trip. You spun some good tales, Paul. It's funny how I can see you so clearly by the way you write. You are so transparent. Thank you for the gift of you. And thank you for whispering our names on Sinai. I felt I was there and could here the still small voice.

So welcome home. My only question is, where are we going next?
~Your Buddy

~~~~~

**Re: home again home again jiggity jig**  
**Date: 10/5/00 8:47:32 AM Pacific Daylight Time**  
**From: [a gay friend]**

Paul, thanks so much for sharing your fantastic trip [videos] with us. I found it totally fascinating. The Mesada tales really interest me. The second temple discussion was also impressive. Take care, [Name]

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