

CRT Blogs



Anna's Blog from Israel - 2012

Hello All. Andy Blanch and I (Anna Raphaella Lewis!) are about to embark upon a trip to Israel. The CRT board thought it might be nice to hear about our travels as they occur. So the task has fallen to me to document our journey. Our travels start in Tampa where we'll fly to New York and take a direct flight to Tel Aviv Israel. Here goes...we're on our way!

December 20, 2012

We have arrived! The flight was long and uneventful and according to Andy, we went through customs and retrieved our luggage in record time. The drive from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was lovely - many trees that looked like they came from Dr. Seuss books! As we drove past mile after mile of generic white stoned apartments and buildings I was struck by the lack of ornament or detail in any of these structures (sorry no pictures of this - will post later). Everything appeared to be built with a strictly utilitarian purpose. When we reached Old Jerusalem in the Arabic and Christian quarters the buildings were built of the same white stone, but appeared graceful and beautiful. I pointed this out to Andy.

We pondered these observations over a "hubbily bubbily" and lamb kebabs that evening. Andy thought this utilitarian appearance of the Jewish buildings stemmed from the fact that Israel was still a quite young nation and had not yet developed a national esthetic. I argued that Judaism has been established for a very long time, surely they had time to develop and create an esthetic that could be reflected in their architecture if beauty were an important value for them. I thought that perhaps since Judaism valued and upheld "the law" as the highest principle that this was reflected in the stark architecture. Andy disagreed. Her thought was that even though Judaism has been 'around' for a long time, the Jewish people had been living in diaspora and never created a national artistic expression. She suggested that if we were to wait 50 or so years we might see a change as the nation developed and expressed their identity in concrete (so to speak!)

December 21, 2012



Today was the winter solstice. I had wanted to get up at dawn to watch the sunrise to commemorate the event, but it was pouring rain and cold! So instead we went to St. George cathedral for 7:00 mass. The rain had stopped just long enough for us to walk to there, where we had a lovely celebration. On the way back to the hotel we were soaked but luckily they had lots of hot water to warm us up.

After breakfast we decided to explore the old city. It's so amazing to walk the cobblestones realizing how many people over such a great expanse of time has walked here too. Each station of the cross is commemorated by a chapel, church, or carving. The picture here is the entrance to the Church of the Flagellation; the first station of the cross. We wandered through the streets soaking in the atmosphere and the rain! Unexpectedly we met Ibrahim at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was lovely to see him and he looked good.

The plan for the afternoon was to meet up with Patty Westwater who was staying at Ibrahim's Peace House and then go to Iris and Tani's home that evening. After another change of clothes, we were heading up to Ibrahim's.

We had a tour of the house and saw where Patty stayed while photographing for the last 3 months. We took a group photo on the roof (Iris, Tani, Andy, Ibrahim jr., Patty, Nasir) what an amazing view. In the distance we could actually see the Wailing Wall and the Dead Sea. We then drove to Iris and Tannis' home in Tel Aviv – we had shabat dinner with their entire family. It was so lovely and joyful (and delicious!).



December 22, 2012 (Part 1)

Andy and I are a bit like Heckle and Smeckle. We both woke up in the middle of the night – we just couldn't sleep! I had two comforters and a sweater wrapped around my head, I was so cold. Andy on the other hand was so hot she had opened the window! What a pair. Aside from our temperature regulating differences we are really traveling well together. It's truly a blessing to be here with her. Plus we both agree her camera is amazing! We'll have a lot of pictures to show when we get home. The day was so full I'll write about it tomorrow. At least the first few days have been documented. I hope the first day of the new millennium was wondrous and beautiful in every way for everyone. Andy and I send our love and unspeakable joy to all of you from the Holy Land, Shalom – Salam!

December 22, 2012 (Part 2)

The weather had taken a turn for the better. We woke up to sunshine and lovely cool breezes. Tani and Iris were our gracious chauffeurs for the day. First they took us to see Rahel, the Reike Master who is offering healing classes to Israelis and Palestinians. Through the mini-grant program CRT had funded her work with 6 men over the course of 7 days of training spread over several months. Rahel shared that these men had first come to the class with overt signs of fear, anger, and depression. The high levels of stress encountered every day by just living in Israel and Palestine has a caustic effect on the inhabitants. After several weeks of Reike training these men could apply energy healing to themselves and their families. The sister of one of the men in this first class



was there on the day we met with Rahel, she said that her brother was transformed by the Reike training. Where before he would be angry and out of control, now he seems to have some hope and direction. At the time of our visit Rahel was offering a demonstration to a group of Arab speaking Israelis. Rahel gave all of us a short treatment and described the background and details of what Reike training was all about. Afterwards we had lunch and learned more about her vision and goals. She sees Reike as a way to bring peace to individuals, but more importantly she sees it as a means of bringing peace to the region, by providing a safe space for people from both sides of the conflict to meet and heal each other.

Our next stop was to visit Naima and Zaher. Naima is a Palestinian woman who received a CRT mini-grant to develop 3 organic gardens in her village. These gardens will be used to teach a course in organic gardening and demonstrate the viability of organic farming in raising healthy foods for their families. The project has been delayed since Naima recently was diagnosed with cancer and is now undergoing radiation treatment. When we went to visit her she was in bed, but looked so vibrant and alive it was hard to believe she was actually sick (that's her and her husband Zaher in the picture). It was heartbreaking to hear her tell of how difficult it is to receive treatment and the barriers she had to overcome just to get to the hospital. Please hold her and her family in your prayers for a swift and easy recovery.

We made it back to Jerusalem late that night. I was so happy to have met these amazing people and glad that I'm

part of an organization like CRT that has been able to contribute to the work they do.

December 23 2012

Today Andy and I met with Elena and went for a wonderful walk in the peace forest. The views of the city were amazing and more so as Elena gave us a



guided tour of the entire scene. This place is so old, it's seen so much history, so many lives have been lived here, so many many stories to be told. Just contemplating the multiplicity of universes existing in this space and knowing it really is only a small fraction of the whole world is overwhelming. I think most places live their history sequentially, but in Jerusalem history seems to be existing all at once. It's as if the ticker tape got stuck in the machine here and it's just all bunched up in one place – writing a different story on the same inch of paper.



Next we had lunch with Eppli. Wow, what a delightful woman. Eppli has a way of listening and being present that seemed to come from a deep silence. Eppli is interested in providing opportunities for women to heal personal and social trauma through voice and movement practices. From her own personal experiences and

others she has seen the power of these practices in helping people heal and transform. She is proposing to collaborate with Teacher's College here in Jerusalem to provide training to about 10 female instructors and 10 adult students in the program. This would entail a commitment of 2.5 hours once a week for approximately a year. Her hope is to find funding for a trainer to conduct this program and eventually use this healing modality to groups composed of Jewish and Muslim women to address issues resulting from the ongoing conflict in the region. It was a stimulating conversation and the possibilities seem endless. I look forward to hearing and learning more from Eppli and I hope we can keep this initial connection alive. She said she would be coming to Sholmit's networking meeting next week, so we're getting everyone connected.

As many of you know, our dear friend Ibrahim is turning 70 tomorrow. Since we were in town, Andy colluded with friends from the Peace House to throw him a pre-birthday party. Andy lured him away from the house while the party was being set up by asking Ibrahim out for coffee. This was the first time I actually had an opportunity to talk one-on-one with Ibrahim. He is a story-teller! Andy then told Ibrahim that Patty had left something at the house that she was supposed to pick up – so gracious man that his is,



he took us back to the Peace House. Of course the party wasn't ready yet, but eventually things got underway. It was a great success, there must have been 40-50 people there, the food was amazing (Andy was still talking about how great it was a day later!), and Ibrahim was ecstatic.

December 25, 2012

Merry Christmas Everyone! I thought I'd get the niceties out of the way first, since today has not started out so merry. We had a miserable night, and now I have a cold along with Andy - poop!

Yesterday was fun; I spent more time walking through the old city. Stopped at the Wailing Wall and offered up some prayers for peace. It was interesting to see that most of the women were more interested in what the men

were doing on their side of the gate than actually being near the wall. There were chairs lined up against the divide and most of the women were standing on them singing and cheering on the men. But of course this meant there was plenty of room for me at the wall to stand right up against it for as long as I liked! I then wandered through the Christian quarters; sadly most of the churches were closed so I could only peek in. We went to Christ's Church for Christmas Eve and sang carols in an acoustically delicious enclosure. How did those builders figure this out without knowing that sound is a wave? Trial and error? Something I'll most defiantly have to research when I get home!



Today we drive up to Fureidis to stay with Iptisan at her Peace House. It should be an interesting adventure to drive through Israel and see the landscape. Send us some healing vibes so we both get over these colds pronto. Love to everyone!

December 27, 2012



Yesterday was a long but wonderful day. We went to interview the women in the "Women Reborn" program from two villages and the mayors from each village as well. The women are Arab speakers – speaking Hebrew – which was then translated to English by our interpreter Sarin. Then Andy and I will interpret our notes to hopefully render their thoughts with some reliability! Every woman interviewed said their lives had been transformed by the program. Where before the program they were fearful, quite, depressed, and lonely now they were happy, could approach an talk to their husbands and children, express their needs, find the means to achieve their dreams.

After hearing the unanimous chorus in favor of the program, three questions came to mind. 1) Are the women in this program different from other women in the community (i.e. were they ripe for change and needed only a catalyst such as this program to create the changes they had been ready for?) 2) What about the program triggered this transformation. When asked this the women couldn't really articulate the process, the most common answer was that they were with other women, talking together, sharing, not alone in the home anymore. Is this all that is involved in transformation? We need to unpack the Women Reborn program to a greater degree to understand what and where the dynamics of this change really are coming from 3) This was a year-long program, what were the stages that women went through to arrive at this transformative place? Where in the process does transformation occur? To me, these seem like fundamental questions that we can try to answer in our evaluation. Of course "how" this might be done is the tricky part! A new village is being added to the program next year, perhaps our data collector (still being worked out) will be able to interview women before they begin the program to help us discern any particular or special qualities that women in the program might have. We have a few ideas on how to develop this framework for evaluation and we'll be talking to the team tomorrow evening (after another LONG day) to discuss the possibilities.



The pictures are of the women interviewed and the town of Jiser al Aarqe. It's a beautiful place next to the sea, however they are not allowed to build next to the ocean, there is 60% unemployment, and an astonishing rate of illiteracy. So much work to be done in this one little village.



December 29, 2012



Yesterday and today we learned more about SHIN's young women's parliament and interviewed the Jewish and Muslim girls who

have participated in the program over the past year. These girls were very inspiring, they talked about how the program helped them to learn to speak out for themselves and develop more self-confidence. The Jewish girls we spoke to have participated in several gatherings regarding several topics such as "girls and the media", "understanding the Knesset", and "strengthening education". The girls' last meeting was in Tel Aviv during the time of the last Gaza bombing, and though the girls reported that there was much tension due to the fighting, it was not between the Jewish and Muslim girls but rather a shared tension that brought them all much closer. The Muslim girls stated that they loved how open and free the Jewish girls were and how they would like to be like that someday. The Muslim girls loved being exposed to new ideas and wished that their parents could join them in these discussions so that perhaps they could become freer. The Jewish girls were excited that the Muslim girls had the same concerns and problems as they had; they were surprised that they too had many of the same issues regarding parents and access to activities. All the girls reported they would like to have more meetings on different topics like girls rights and how they can change laws to be more equitable.



While interviewing the Jewish girls, we learned that the local school district had passed a law that required both students and teachers to engage in gender awareness classes in all K-12 grades. In addition, in our travels we learned that Israel passed a law that all municipalities must have a coordinator of women activities. It appears that in Jewish towns and villages this is a paid position, but in the Arab villages this appointment was unpaid yet still considered very important. Interesting huh?.... Can you imagine either of these things happening in the US???

December 30, 2012



Oh boy, I'm ready to come home. Tomorrow we head for Tel Aviv and meet one more group. Then return the car and head for the hotel. I'm feeling a little grumpy and tired - and a bit sad. We're heading out to take Iptisam and family out for a goodbye meal. One more round of lamb and salads! Pictures are from Acco where we spent the day meeting with folks and taking some time to walk along the ocean.

