

The Jerusalem Road

March 1

“Put a sock in it!” That was the advice from Lura, with a grin, when I told her about my bedroom door rattling all night from the wind. Indeed, closing the door on a sock did close the door tight. Because Arad is built on a hill, the wind coming across the desert is constant and strong. The houses here are made of cement, drafty and chilly. From my bedroom window I can see out across the desert hills which are quickly turning green and bright yellow. The Bedouins plant mustard, wheat and grass seed all over the Negev for crops and to feed their flocks. Beginning immediately outside of Arad, you see flocks of sheep and goats everywhere, alongside the road, far out in the desert, down in the wadis and right by the villages. Camels are hobbled and let loose to forage. Occasionally, you will hear of someone driving at night barely missing a group of camels standing in the middle of the road.

Obviously, when in another country, things are going to be different, citing my trip to the grocery store. When we arrive (after locking the van, putting on two theft deterrent “clubs”, and setting the lock code) we proceed to the shopping carts outside. Each cart is attached to the next one by the cart. By inserting the 5 shekel coin, the chain is released. When you return the cart and attach the chain again, your money is released.

Proceeding to the store, we present our handbags for inspection and are “wanded” by the guard with a handheld metal detector before entering. Pushing the cart ahead of me, I struggle to make it go straight. The cart slides to the left and I go in the opposite direction. Strains of the Blue Danube “skating waltz” go through my head as the cart and I struggle to stay in sync on the smooth floor. Tile floors in Israel have no non-skid surface and are completely smooth. Looking around I see other carts going at an angle much like a car that has the frame bent from an accident. “Good,” I think, “it’s not just me!” I have, several times, been close to performing a gymnastic split despite being athletically unprepared.

Inside it looks very similar to an American grocery store. Naturally, I expect all products to have Hebrew titles, but I am surprised to find American products with Hebrew lettering on them. Such things as Frosted Flakes, has Tony the Tiger on it, but the packaging is different and it is all in Hebrew. Deodorant, candies, baking goods – I recognize the packaging, but can read none of it. Since I am one that reads the ingredients of something before I buy it, I suddenly realize I have a small dilemma. Lura invites me to get whatever I need and add it to the cart. A very generous offer, but I find myself not sure what I want – I am not sure what I am looking at!

Many of the things that are bought here are already packaged. For instance, ground beef. At home I buy ground chicken. No such thing here. So, we look for ground beef – excuse me, ground MEAT – for that is what the label says. Now, the trick is to find ground MEAT without additives such as spices, parsley, vegetables – just plain old MEAT. Well, that can also be true – some of the meat is old so you need to check the expiration dates. All of it is frozen with no explanation of what meat is in the MEAT.

Much of the bread is not wrapped, just loaves piled into bins. The dairy shelves hold Yoplait as well as a vast assortment of other yogurts, goat milk as well as cows’ milk. In the snack section I find Pringles in English – at least the name is with ingredients in Hebrew.

The last area is the produce section. I look over the fruits and vegetables, assortment of nuts. Let's see, 6.5 shekels, 10 shekels, 8.9 shekels – is this per pound or per item? No, it is per kilo. Kilo? I forgot! The metric system! More to learn!

Heading for the checkout I notice all the attendants sit down at their registers and you bag groceries yourself. The gentleman in front of us is a Bedouin in his robe and headscarf, paying in Jordanian dollars. Lura explains the Bedouins' use all kinds of money.

It has started raining while we were shopping, so I wait with the cart and the guard while she gets the van. The guard attempts to hold a conversation with me. Attempt is the operative word as he is Russian and speaks neither English or Hebrew and I only speak English and a few words in Hebrew. We manage to identify our respective countries and how long we have been here. A small comment on the weather and we have now exhausted all each of us knows to communicate. Heading home Lura grins at me, knowing this night Israel "is real" to me. ☺

Of course, not all things are brand new experiences. Every Wednesday several people from the congregation get together for prayer. Now I feel at home! We all talk to the same Lord, some praying in Hebrew, some in Arabic and some in English. But we all have in common that we are believers. Most have their prayer language and we all have a wonderful time as we come in unity to the Holy Spirit. All of us are touched by His presence each week.

Two weeks ago a shop at the shuk (market) was secured and a chess club opened its doors with the Lord's provision. A large concentration of Russian Jews settled here in Arad and they all play chess, checkers or dominoes. Up until now they gathered in the parks, under trees, anywhere they could. They sat on broken chairs and picnic tables and cement benches. When the club opened up they were amazed. Free chess? A bathroom for them to use? Water, coffee and tea available and all of this seven days a week? They began to trickle in little by little over the first week. Today during our congregation there were about 40 men playing chess. The tables and chairs were donated (all new), chess sets and chess clocks are still needed but the men wait and take turns. On Friday nights the building is used by the youth group, Saturdays is congregation and on Wednesdays we have prayer meeting. It has been opened up for use by the other congregations in the area as well – a truly multipurpose building; an example of how the Body of Christ works together and upholds one another.

Inside the shop are bookshelves filled with Bibles and books in Russian, Romanian, Spanish, German, English, Arabic, Hebrew and Amharic (Ethiopian). Everyone who stops in receives a free Bible and questions are answered. Please pray these seeds being sown are watered by the Holy Spirit and more souls are added to the Lamb's Book of Life.

It is very expensive to live here in Israel. The average cost of living for one year is \$42,000 – and that is just to pay your basic bills, rent, groceries and taxes. Renting an apartment or a house means you pay the taxes on it. Taxes can be assessed for any amount and at any time the government decides to do so. One dollar is equal to 4.75 shekels. The cost of a refrigerator is 8700 NS (New Shekel). A washer – 4200NS, dryer – 3800NS, boom-box – 1000NS, small microwave – 600NS. Going to the grocery is a major drain on your finances. Bringing home 8 plastic grocery bags (not full) cost 490 NS. If you have American dollars and want to change them to shekels, the moneychanger will charge \$25 to do so. He sits on the ground outside the shuk, making change right there. Some things have not changed since the days of Jesus.

Two weeks ago we traveled to Jerusalem. While in Jerusalem we spoke to the Christians Friends of Israel about the visits to the Holocaust survivors. I am to work with Kathy, the woman in

charge of visiting them here in Arad. Meanwhile we have begun collecting foodstuffs for filling boxes once again for these elderly, lonely people.

My main work here these last weeks has been identifying the different aspects of this ministry, the branches and how they operate, seeking to streamline the operation and set it up for future growth. This ministry is growing and I am helping prepare and delegate functions and actions to involve more of the congregation.

I am also practicing my lessons in Hebrew and have at least learned polite greetings to and essential words. I am attempting to learn the alphabet in preparation for learning to write Hebrew as well. I would covet your prayers for this area!

In the congregation we have a diverse group of nations represented, with some needing translation. We are currently using the video tapes of Prophecy of the Seven Feasts by Pastor John Hagee for the weekly teachings, but need it translated for an Arab believer and some Jewish young people. Using a laptop computer I spend about 5-6 hours each week typing the transcript directly from the tape. When the video is played for everyone, the person translating has the remote control. With the transcript in front of them, they play a portion, pause the tape, translate into Hebrew, and resume the tape. Everyone waits patiently through this process so all can hear the message. A Romanian gentleman also uses the transcript as he can read English better than understand the spoken word. He also takes it home to translate for his wife who speaks no other languages than Romanian. There is a hunger here in this land and a shortage of good teachings of the Word of God. What is available in the different languages is not affordable to the majority of people. But God is good in providing a few people who can translate when needed.

Spending time with the people here, not knowing any of their languages, we can still communicate to them the love of Christ. That requires no words, presents no language barrier and always brings priceless dividends. People know and recognize love and compassion in any language.

Thank you for your prayers and your support. Daily we come closer to the time when Christ calls His Church out of this world. I look forward to that day with a mixture of great anticipation of the ultimate redemption and deep sadness at all those who are choosing to reject the salvation offered them. The angels are standing in place, Christ is preparing to descend and the wedding music is already playing. Be a part of God's plan to give everyone the Good News. Tell your neighbors, your co-workers and your family. Jesus is coming. It's not a theory, it is a fact. He is on His way. Don't leave those you know and love behind.

Support can be sent to Cindy Dillingham c/o Sue Heagy, P.O. Box 65228, San Antonio, TX 78265 or through Pay Pal at [www](http://www.paypal.com).