

# Postcard



## School of the Pilgrim

### 2009 Pilgrimage: Wilderness Wanderings

This pilgrimage to the Sinai desert, truly a wilderness wandering, began exotically enough with a quick trip into West Jerusalem and the familiar confines of St. Georges College and Cathedral on Sunday, Nov. 15th. It was here that I met the other pilgrims: Henry Carse, who knows this area like the back of his hand, along with Carol, a nurse from Oklahoma, Brian, an Episcopal priest from North Carolina, and Yakir from Jerusalem.

Bright and early on Monday morning we all found ourselves on a bus riding four hours south to the resort town of Eilat, Israel, with its gleaming hotels and Vegas-style storefronts. On our right was the Negev, a desert area that Abraham and Sarah knew well. We then took a cab to the passport point to Taba,

Egypt! Crossing the border is always a culture shock because of the strong contrast from the more modern Israel border office to the rudimentary border office of Taba. Our good friend and pilgrim guide Moussa Hanna, who whisked us away to Wadi Ghazalah and Sheikh Hamed, the "desert headquarters" of "rent-a-camel", met us. From there, we donned our day packs and walked the next few hours into Wadi Abu Ghadayat, nestled between two large rock formations and out of the wind. Awaiting us at this Wadi: five camels that we would all come to know well in the next few days.

After a sleep-filled night beneath a fantastic canopy of velvet black sky dotted with jewel-like stars, we walked up a craggy rock formation and soon found ourselves being followed by a line of camels! Chief camel driver Subeih and his colleague Said showed us how to get up on the camel, and off we went, into the wilderness. My camel was called "Mush-

Mush," that translated into "Apricot" in English. Not a telephone or electric wire, plane, blackboard, shop, store, or Bedouin tent were to be seen. We traveled to Nawamis, home of fascinating 6000 year-old tombs made of flat stones layered upon each other, followed by lunch at Gebel Matamir. It was here that we watched Subeih make flat bread! Rolling out dough, they took what looked like a wok, turned it upside down over the campfire flames, and threw the flattened dough that soon became baked flat bread. That night we

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# 2009

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The mission of the School of the Pilgrim is to educate people of faith in our life-long pilgrimage of following and living the pilgrim-life mapped out for us by the Holy One. On pilgrimage we rediscover the meaningfulness of being on a spiritual path wherever we may be in this world. This mission is accomplished when we come to understand that change and growth occur when we begin to see, hear, and sense that our life together in faith communities is a life-long pilgrimage. Whether we are on an actual pilgrimage, or practicing the pilgrimage rituals at home, we grow in our understanding that we are but the most recent participants in a long train of pilgrims who have preceded us in life.

camped at Wadi Keiri at 800 meters above sea level. What was memorable this night was the company of Bedouins that joined us, all of us enjoying each other's company.

Morning found us well rested and ready to ride on camel to Gebel Barga. On the way there we visited Gebel Mahroum, The Pierced Mountain, which was a large hole in the center of this mountainous rock formation that we were able to see through, with nothing but white sand as far as the eye could see. We were then given a few hours to find a quiet place to read, to write in journals, or to pray. It was then, in a cleft formed by two large rocky hills pushed together by the hands of God that I found the quiet and peace that often eludes me at home. For an hour, communion with the Holy One was natural as drinking water and breathing. With no sudden jerking motion, this time of true contemplation drew to a close and I joined with the other pilgrims as we "surf-boarded" with our feet on the Great Hududah sand dune, landing at our destination for tonight: El Gibi Plateau.

Thursday was our last day on camel back, and it is on this day that I found that many of the songs sung by the Dixie Chicks recorded on my iPod is in the same rhythmic beat as riding a camel as we rode to Sayalat E-Gibi for lunch, and then rode our camels and walked through the Red Canyon. It was here that we said farewell to our camels and camel drivers as we spent the night at Wadi Muta-harat underneath a Bedouin tent.

Today was a biblical day as we walked through the high sandstone walls of the White Canyon to Ein Hudra, an oasis that is called Hazeroth in Numbers 33, a place that Moses and the people of Israel camped at on their pilgrimage. Climbing over a large way, we walked to a rock of inscriptions, with writings on the sandstone walls left by generations of pilgrims over millennia.



After a day of rest at a resort on the Red Sea in Nuweiba, in which you could see Saudi Arabia on the other side of the body of water, we traveled by minivan to St. Catherine's of the Sinai, a monastery built by Justinian in the sixth century that is maintained by Greek Orthodox monks. St. Catherine's was the head of the trail that took us up to the top of Moses' Mt. Sinai, by way of the cleft where Elijah himself hid and was in the presence of the Holy One. And as the sun set over the west, we celebrated Eucharist, thanking God for this amazing pilgrimage that re-connected us to the faith of the desert religions of Christianity, Judaism, and the Muslim faith.

The beauty of this pilgrimage of wilderness wandering was simply this: all of us threw down a challenge to the "religion of rush"—be it rush hour, the rush of family life, the rush of our jobs—in order to re-discover the spiritual path we are on, whether one is culturally Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or questioning. In the sparse desert, free of the encumbrances of modern life, we all settled into our new routine that was wrapped in the warm silence of a desert breeze, knowing that all will be well (St. Julian of Norwich).

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## Pilgrimage in the Holy Land in 2010

We also are finalizing the School of the Pilgrim's plans for two pilgrimages in 2010. The first pilgrimage is April 10-21, 2010, "From Sinai to Tabor." We will start with an overnight stay with Bedouins in the Negev tracing Abraham and Sarah's steps, and then go to Mt. Sinai to follow in the footsteps of Moses and Elijah. This will be followed by a trek to Mt. Tabor (Mount of Transfiguration), Nazareth, and the Sea of Galilee area, following in the footsteps of Jesus. We will then turn south to Bethlehem, working with young people in a Palestinian Refugee Camp, and then Jerusalem, where we visit the holy sites, and engage in conversations with Muslims, Jews, and Christians about the current political and theological issues facing our various faiths.

The cost is roughly \$2,500, covering airfare, lodging, food, and transportation. We will be sending out an email on how to register for this pilgrimage in January 2010.

The second pilgrimage will be the "Wilderness Wanderings" pilgrimage, from Nov. 13-23rd, at a cost of \$1,800, covering airfare, travel, food, and lodging. Registration for this pilgrimage will be covered in the summer of 2010.



## Fundraising Activities

It is that time of year when, like all good non-profits, the School of the Pilgrim will be asking you, our friends, family members, and associates, to continue to support the School of the Pilgrim. In our two years of existence we have come to a place in our growth in which we can advertise and recruit people to come on a pilgrimage or two in 2010. In order for us to provide the groundwork for these pilgrimages, along with telling others about the School of the Pilgrim at conferences, retreats, and workshops around the country, we will need you to continue to keep us in your prayers, share with us your gifts and talents, and financial gifts which are, as always, appreciated and welcomed. We are humbled and honored by your support of our work, both here and abroad.

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