

Subj: Oh-so-cheery holiday greetings from a city Not Far Away from Judea's plains

Date: Fri, Dec 27, 1996 5:52 PM EDT

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To those of you whom we've recently added to our (admittedly massive) cc list,

greetings. In case you're not up-to-date, Dean and I are happily living in a small apartment near the University here in Amman, Jordan. Dean is studying

Arabic and working and (for various and sundry reasons) I just quit a job teaching English and am doing a little bit of private tutoring.

This is our not-so-weekly-but-still-semi-regular epistle sharing whatever

snippets of our experiences here that we hope are at least somewhat entertaining.

We hope you all had a good Christmas. We got to spend Christmas Day evening at

a member family's home with some other members and had a deelishty potluck

dinner complete with baked ham (a rare luxury here -- it was commissary

ham from
the embassy.) On Christmas Eve . . . well, I'll let Dean tell y'all about what
we did on Christmas Eve because he's going to write the rest of this
email,
after I tell you my favorite quotes-o'-the-month which I have been
hoarding for
your reading enjoyment.

The first quote-o'-the-month is from a local grocery store that carries
quite a
few imported products. On this particular day they were giving out
samples of
Trix cereal. As the sample-lady handed us our dixie cup of Trix, she said,
"they're corn flakes, from America!"

The second quote-o'-the-week is actually a conversation overheard
Christmas at
the Wohlgemuths between Juliette Qureshi and Diane Toronto (I suppose it
is fair
to add in Juliette's defense that they were sitting across a crowded room
from
each other and it must have been hard to hear.)

Juliette (upon overhearing that Diane was from Idaho): "From Poky?" (I
assume
this is short for Pocatello.)

Diane: "About an hour away."

Juliette: "From where?"

Diane: "Poky."

Juliette: "You're from Poky?"

Diane: "From about an hour away."

Juliette: "From where?"

That's all for our quotes-o'-the month, thank you very much.

Before I have Dean take over, let me see if there's anything I want to add about our life lately that he won't think to say. Hmm . . . we had a fun branch Christmas party, with a White Elephant gift exchange, including such treasures as an actual white elephant and an Eric Estrada action figure (I don't think this was fully appreciated by its recipient, a nurse from India . . . I think she pawned it off on a little kid (who also won't FULLY appreciate it) and got another gift.) we went to Mount Nebo for Christmas Eve, which Dean will tell you about. We've been staying up late a lot and baking a lot of gingersnaps and lemon bars to give folks (sorry, they don't transport well over Internet wires) and enjoying our loot from our Christmas stockings and various Christmas goodies, as well as our Corn Flakes from America . . . well, I think that's all from me for this week (Mary, Sherlene, and others to whom I owe email: I WILL send it, someday.)

And now from Dean:

Hi, umm, I feel like a person thrust on stage and asked to do some sort of impromptu comedy routine...

Yes, we had a swell time Christmas Eve. The Torontos invited us to go with them to a Christmas mass held at a restored Byzantine monastery (complete with huge mosaics on the floor and walls) on Mt. Nebo, the traditional site where Moses looked into the Land of Canaan. From this vantage point on a clear night you can

see the lights of Jerusalem, Jericho, and the Jordan River Valley. One this night we could see the latter two. There is a wonderful 20-foot-tall outdoor metal sculpture here of the "brazen serpent" that is suggestive of Christ on the cross with John 3:14-15 quoted on the plaque below. Incidentally, this monastery is one of the spots visited by the huge Jerusalem Center group of students that cruises through Jordan every semester. As for the mass, we sang in the ad hoc choir with the Torontos. It was fun, but a bit disorganized. At the point where all the children come forward and receive lit candles to present at the nativity figures, the choir director (who is the embassy high school choir director) had us start singing "Away in a Manger" as background music. Suddenly one of the priests looks over and gives her a no-not-right-now look and she had to cut off the choir mid-sentence: AWAY IN A MANGER NO CRIB FOR A... We felt mighty foolish! Anyway, when the time came for the next musical number, the same priest looked over at the choir director and with a snap of his fingers gave us the official go-ahead to start singing. The rest of the night went well. Actually, it made for a really nice Christmas Eve to be singing hymns and carols.

Christmas in Jordan requires some adjustments (if you want a tree you have to buy an artificial one, so instead we got a christmas plant and decorated it like you would a tree). Even though Christians make up only 5-10% of the population, the commercial aspects of Christmas are slowly infiltrating the consciousness of local merchants (Even staunch muslim store owners have started putting

Christmas lights up around the windows). For the first time ever there was an official government holiday on Christmas. This does not go unnoticed by the fundamentalist muslims who are sensitive to Western, particularly American, influences on their society. All this said, it is fun to spread the Christmas cheer around. In Arabic, the word "Christmas" translates as "feast/holiday of the birth," which is essentially the same as "birthday." So, our landlords told us "happy birthday" to express their desire for us to have a merry Christmas.

Zina back again. We're pie-eyed and sleepy-headed now since it's been a long day and we ate a big dinner and it's about time to go home and sleep.

Happy New Year and much love,

Dean (and Zina)

----- Headers -----
From qureshi@go.com.jo Fri Dec 27 16:51:36 1996
Return-Path: qureshi@go.com.jo
Received: from go.com.jo (amman-server2.go.com.jo [196.27.0.3]) by emin31.mail.aol.com (8.6.12/8.6.12) with ESMTTP id QAA24991; Fri, 27 Dec 1996 16:51:25 -0500
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