

# Tantur Ecumenical Institute

## Newsletter “Out of the Frying Pan and into the Fire”

by  
*Roma Criddle*

### Latest News and Events:

- **Out of the Frying Pan and into the Fire** by *Roma Criddle of Perth, Australia.*
- **The Dead Sea, You See, is as Down Under as Can Be** by *Sr. Leona Garchow, Auckland, New Zealand.*
- **Walking Abraham’s Path** by *Liza Hester, Washington, D.C, USA.*
- **A Reflection for September** by *Fr. Steve Lowe, Auckland, New Zealand.*



One of the very many memorable trips to take place during my stay at Tantur. Clockwise Jim Elliot, Mary Linton, Roma Criddle & Jan Elliott

With feelings of anticipation and excitement, Jan and Jim Elliott and I arrived at Tel Aviv Airport on Thursday, 31<sup>st</sup> May, after a long flight from Perth, Western Australia (indeed, the far end of the earth!). We were looking forward to arriving in Jerusalem and to attending the June Course at Tantur Ecumenical College. However, the first challenge for me was that my luggage had been left behind at Bangkok Airport, and as we struggled with the language and the officials, we were reassured that it would arrive the next day. Thankfully it did.

When we finally arrived at Tantur we were all in need of a strong whisky after the terrifying bus trip! Many prayers and exclamations were expressed! We really had no idea what to expect from the course although the reports from friends and colleagues had been very positive indeed. My initial feeling at Tantur was of a warm, peaceful, friendly, environment and immediately felt at home. All of the staff members were very helpful in assisting us to settle into our new accommodation and surroundings.

By the following day, all 15 members of the ‘June group’ had arrived from around the globe, and in no time we had gelled together despite our different beliefs, ages and nationalities. It was just amazing! During the weeks that followed we visited numerous churches and archaeological sites. I am not sure that any of us, if asked now, could pass the test of remembering them all! However, some of the more significant sites and churches are engraved in my memory for various reasons, and not all of them of a religious nature! Jerusalem was extremely hot during the month of June and for those of us in our senior years this was a daily challenge and we have many memories of standing in the heat with an over enthusiastic tour guide giving us too many details of some ancient site when all we really longed for, was some shade and a much needed cold drink! Our visits to Masada and the Dead Sea are two such experiences. The heat was around 44c. It is now three months since we completed the course at Tantur, and there has been much time to reflect on that truly wonderful *life experience*, and the aspects that made it such a memorable time. Although we were from different religious backgrounds, there was great respect and tolerance shown for the different beliefs and religious practices. Personally, I was so appreciative of the moral and physical support that I received from so many people and the kind way that people looked out for each other. Those nights spent chatting and drinking on the balcony, and the late night parties, will be long remembered, as will some of the jokes told with glee and responded to with hilarity!

The hospitality shown by all the staff members at Tantur was so positive and nothing seemed to be too much trouble: the organising of taxis, dinners, morning teas for the ladies, a great fish and chip night at the Jerusalem markets, assistance with photo copying, cleaning our rooms and attending to our constant requests for the iron. All was done with grace and humour. There is no doubt that we all learned so much about the political, cultural and religious differences that make up Israel and we all came away feeling deep compassion for the suffering of the Palestinian people and the need to tell their story. Tantur has three main aims for those attending one of their courses: a sense of community, hospitality, and the opportunity for learning. It is these ideals that were such a life enriching experience for me at Tantur.....I will be forever grateful!

Sr. Leona Garchow happily bopping away in the Dead Sea



## The Dead Sea, You See, is as Down Under as Can Be.

by  
*Sr. Leona Garchow*

I was asked by a certain Irishman from Tantur to write an article about the Dead Sea for the newsletter and who could refuse the charm of the Irish and so of course at the time I said yes! Now some time later I am thinking what on earth one can write about the Dead Sea that is interesting and creative and why did he ask me? We are told that the Dead Sea is the “lowest” place on earth. I live in the Southern Hemisphere in a place that is often referred to as Down Under because it is “below” many other countries on the globe so maybe that is the reason. The Dead Sea by its name indicates what it is – dead to living things. It is a harsh environment in which no fish or aquatic plants can live because of the high saline content of the water. The 33.7 percent salinity makes it one of the world’s saltiest bodies of water and 8.6 times saltier than the ocean.

This body of salt filled water is referred to in the Bible as the Sea of Salt, the Sea of the Arabah and also the Eastern Sea. This Sea today has Jordan as its border to the east and to the west Israel and the West Bank. It is 67 kilometres long and 18 kilometres wide. In depth 37 metres, and it’s the earth’s lowest elevation of land at 423 metres below sea level. This arid land has a very low rainfall which is due to the rainshadow effect of the Judean Hills which rise steeply to the west and yet the mountains to the east are higher. The Dead Sea can be very hot as it sits in this basin. Before we drove down to the Dead Sea we had stood in the heat on the exposed mountain top of Masada where we could see the vastness of this arid land. We arrived at the Dead Sea in time for lunch “picnic style” under the shade of the trees. With the scarcity of leaves on the trees it was difficult to find shade but we did find a seat in the 44 degree heat to have lunch.

Some of us then went to have the experience of floating in the Dead Sea. We very carefully clamoured like crabs over the slippery rocks so that we could reach the water. Our photographers were on shore so we tried to lie on our backs without rolling over while moving towards a mound of salt so that the paparazzi could get a good photo. This swim was not such a refreshing experience as the water is really quite warm but it wasn’t the 44 degrees of the surrounding air temperature. If during this experience a drop of water arrived in your mouth you soon discovered what high salt content meant. What was even worse for one of our group was a splash of water in the eyes which meant exiting as quickly as possible over the slippery rocks to find relief with ordinary water. The sensation of buoyancy in the water was coupled with a feeling of ‘thickish’ water. When out of the water the feeling on the skin was of a thin coating over the body of a substance that felt somewhat smooth. At the end, the shower of coolish water was most welcome.

I decided to get dressed under one of the umbrellas that I passed on the way back to the ‘picnic ground’. I did not have any more money on me for the dressing shed as I had used it for the undressing on the way down. As I walked up the path I passed ‘mud people’ who were going in for the health experience I guess. Our numbers were counted and we found that no one had passed out from heat stroke so we continued on our way to the place of the Dead Sea scrolls at Qumran. Like many days of our time at Tantur this experience at the Dead Sea was unforgettable and not just because of the temperature. The area holds history. It was a place of refuge for King David and was one of the world’s first health resorts for Herod the Great. The Jordan River where Jesus was baptized is the main tributary for the Sea. Because of diversion of water from the Jordan River the Dead Sea is shrinking so we were fortunate to have had the opportunity to bathe in the water.

The Stunning Views from Masada to the Dead Sea



Oh the Joys of floating in a giant cauldron!



**Walking Abraham's Path**  
by  
**Liza Hester**

There is an old saying that "some conflicts are so difficult that only a *story* can heal them." The story of Abraham, a 4,000-year-old story shared by more than 3 billion people – Jews, Christians, and Muslims around the world today – has that power. In a place often seen as one of the most divided regions in the world, there is a path pointing to our greater unity – Abraham's Path, a cultural walking route following the footsteps and memory of Abraham across the Middle East. Abraham's Path transforms the ancient story of a man and his journey into a contemporary catalyst for community-based and sustainable eco-tourism; a platform for cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding; and a beacon for global citizenship.

With decades of international mediation experience, negotiator and author William Ury ventured to create a unique project which would engage people in the unifying potential of the values of Abraham: kindness to strangers, hospitality, and friendship. These are the values fundamental to a future in which conflict gives ground to compassion and equality, and to a world in which a basic sense of human unity takes precedence over differences of race or religion. So in 2004, Ury and his colleagues formed the Abraham's Path Initiative at Harvard University's Program on Negotiation. In Ury's TED talk on the origins of the idea of Abraham's Path (See web link below), he describes the first steps towards transforming the conflict in the Middle East: "What is terrorism? Terrorism is basically taking an innocent stranger and treating them as an enemy that you kill in order to create fear. What is the opposite of terrorism? Taking an innocent stranger and treating them as a friend who you welcome in your home in order to sow and create understanding, respect, and love." Abraham's Path intends to foster this shift from terrorism to tourism, hostility to hospitality by creating opportunities for people to walk side-by-side and share in the age-old traditions of storytelling and hospitality with the local communities along the Path's route. The first sections of this 400km route are now open, travelers are making their way along the route, and host families are opening their doors to guests. Over the past three years, more than two thousand people have walked some part of the trail, guided by local people and hosted in family homes.

And now there is an opportunity for you to walk on Abraham's Path in the Nablus and Hebron regions. Every weekend, our partners are organizing a walk along a section of the Path through the sacred sites, warm villages, and beautiful landscapes of the West Bank. The Path begins in Nablus, winds through the small villages perched above the Jordan River Valley, continues through Jericho, into the desert landscape around Mar Saba, and ends in Hebron at the Tomb of the Patriarchs where Abraham and his family are buried. Local guides lead these walks, and each walk concludes with a traditional meal prepared by a local family. Many have already joined these weekly walks -- young and old, expat and locals -- and anyone is welcome to walk. Please contact me at [liza@abrahamspath.org](mailto:liza@abrahamspath.org) for more information! I'm looking forward to walking with you soon.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/william\\_ury.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/william_ury.html)

Our trusted local guide Habib on the Wadi Auja hike



Meet Liza Hester Program Associate of the Abraham's Path Initiative, hiking at the Dead Sea.



Hiking to Mar Saba near the beautiful Wadi Qelt



*A Reflection for September by Fr. Steve Lowe.*

A wall is a barrier, a gate the way through. When the Word became flesh a wall was broken between heaven and earth and Jesus, entered our World and God, in his son once again walked and talked with us. When Caesar Augustus decreed that a census should be made of the whole world Joseph and Mary, obedient to the occupiers' wishes, set out for the Royal City of Bethlehem. Tradition has it that they entered the city walls through the gate on Star Street, and He who is the gate, the Prince of Peace, He who shatters walls, the walls of sin, division and death, was born one of us, one with us. Today around the city there is another wall, another gate. The Separation Wall, Security Wall; call it whatever you will, but the wall nonetheless speaks of division while the gate, the checkpoint is closed to so many. We too have our walls. We lock out the people or concepts that threaten us. We try to feel safe behind the security walls we build around ourselves. But walls, like closed rooms, do not stop Him. In the midst of oppression, behind our closed walls, Jesus enters our lives with his word which is Peace and opens the gate for us which is Love, which is Love, which is life

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