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# Point Blank

## Walking on Holy Ground Unaware

### Jack Bollan

The tour group, including myself and two colleagues, walked along the wall of the Old City of Jerusalem, approaching the room that ancient tradition claims was the location of the Last Supper. Complex personal religious feelings had me in a state of wonder and awe.

My inner state was suddenly shattered by a disturbance behind me on the wall--two men shouting angrily. One of my colleagues had faced off with another member of the tour group. Nose to nose, my colleague was threatening to beat the hell out of the man if he didn't back off. The man was accusing my colleague of hitting on his wife.

It was a momentary deal. The man backed off, and my colleague walked away. The group continued on to the room where charismatic Christians were dancing, singing, and praying. But I never fully recovered from that moment of sharp contrast between what was going on inside me and what was going on inside those men.

How can meaning and perception be so different? I probably should have beaten the hell out of both of the men and reminded them that the ground upon which they stood is holy. But what good would it have done in the midst of a city that is itself full of paradoxes of deep religious meaning and petty conflict?

Episodes like the one that happened in Jerusalem force me to look at and revise my values. I don't know how to keep the faith in a world that does not share my meanings. I hate to think of my ideals as something others cannot, with a little right thought, understand and accept.

I went to a Christmas party a few weeks back. Here was me, old man, surrounded by a bunch of twenty-something's. The only thing in common was smart phones and addiction to same. I wondered why the host and hostess had invited us and insisted on us coming in text after text. I mean, God! I'm not Ed Abbey or Justin Bieber or somebody; just an old dude.

But then I watched as the hostess consumed bowl after bowl of my wife's artichoke and hot Italian sausage soup. Now, for me, the soup is pleasantly hallucinogenic, creating illusions of a childhood that probably never existed--very Ratatouille-like. It obviously has similar effects on the hostess of the Christmas party and explains my anachronistic presence there. But it doesn't have that effect on everyone.

Is my love of the Moab area and Canyon Country just a taste unique to my particular tongue and psychology? Hell, my wife won't even begin to let me go there like I used to, like I want to. She just doesn't care that much for the long drive from Grand Junction, even down highway 128.

I remember what the area looked like when I was a kid all those years ago. We had relatives there. But my dad didn't drive from Dolores to Moab to see relatives. He drove there because he loved the remote, natural beauty of the area. There was no I-70 through Green River then, no Lake Powell, and no such thing as a "mountain bike". The license plates in Moab said either "Utah" or "Colorado." A trip to the Arches was solitary communion of beautiful Earth with her creature.

My adult exposure to the area came just before the Eastern Slope invasion. I worked at Powell the summer after I got out of the Army. The lake had filled that year for the first time.

Years before, I had seen Glen Canyon with my family and 120 other jeeps just before Lake Powell flooded the Mormon crossing at Hole-in-the-Rock. It was comely before and after the flooding. For some reason, during that first summer, it didn't bother me that they had dammed the River and flooded the canyons. By the time I had worked there a couple of summers, it did bother me. But Powell wasn't crowded then, and its shores didn't look like the area just outside the Grand Junction city dump.

I loved to take highway 128 back then. You had to ford the creeks. So I would goose it on up to about a hundred on the stretches and lay hard on the brakes at the several crossings. You didn't have to watch out for cops or bikers.

Within a few years, however, I became concerned; my trendy Boulder-based brother-in-law started talking about biking in Moab. To be fair, he is not the

type to hit on another guy's wife on the Old Wall of Jerusalem, and he is the only person I know who, at seventeen years old, did Westwater Canyon on a homemade (kid-made) wood-and-inner tube raft. And his skill as a rafts man is legendary in a small circle. So he has some squatter's rights. And how could he have known that the Department of the Interior's website would one day say about Westwater:

"Westwater Canyon is the first whitewater stretch of the Colorado River in Utah. It is an exceedingly popular trip due to the Canyon's relative proximity to metropolitan areas, its classic desert scenery, and several challenging rapids. Westwater Canyon includes class IV rapids and is therefore only recommended

for experienced boaters. As with any remote river segment, Westwater can be a very humbling and dangerous place if not treated with proper respect and ability."

My brother-in-law survived long enough to be part of the problem. And when he and his trendy buddies started talking about Canyon Country like it was Disneyland, I saw the handwriting on the wall. Their play would be the end of Canyon Country as I knew it.

Sure enough, within a few years a trip down highway 128 no longer required fording streams. The license plates at Arches now included not just every state in the union, but even some from North American

neighbors. Someone was building a housing division at Dewey Bridge. Careless children burned Dewey Bridge. The washing out of a remote desert road with access to the Green River entailed the loss of millions of dollars in tourist income. Finding a camping spot required reservations. The solitude was gone, or at least greatly diminished.

**...the associated belief in a benign self-correcting force is as hollow a solution to the environmental issues facing the modern West as is the idea of heaven a hollow solution to the problems that face humans and humankind.**

Now Moab is a play haven for all types of people. Canyon Country is not what it was. Certainly, more people enjoy it today than they did when I was a kid and young adult, and how can I expect them to understand my values? I would love to kick their asses politically, but I am in the minority and will probably stay that way throughout the remainder of my life. And, to be honest, I would concede Jerusalem to the infidels rather than carry on an interminable and unwinnable crusade.

I could hope that economic conditions would keep the infidels away from Canyon Country, but that is an awful wish that comes back on my children and grandchildren. I can certainly rest comfortable that the desert will eventually reclaim its land, but the associated belief in a benign self-correcting force is as hollow a solution to the environmental issues facing the modern West as is the idea of heaven a hollow solution to the problems that face humans and humankind.

So here I am again, walking the wall of the Old City, the Last Supper just a short distance away. In my head are meanings that my fellow travelers don't share and can't share because they are so personal, so tied up with what I am and where I've been.

We can't share the same desert. But I'm not arrogant enough to scream at them and tell them that they're wrong and drive them out of the temple. And I'm not irreverent enough to break Delicate Arch in a grand protest, as Ed Abbey might have done by now.

These hordes tread on holy ground unaware. And if there is victory in this for me—and it is an infinitesimally small victory at best—it is that I recognize that truth.

*JACK BOLLAN lives in Grand Junction, Colorado*