

**The Journey to Otford  
from late September to early December, 1967**

**A thirtieth anniversary memoir**

It was 1967, and Australia was awaiting the visit of the first teaching team from the Ecumenical Institute. Jim Bishop had scheduled a series of RS-I courses across the continent, beginning in Perth. A team was assembled and an itinerary planned that would include some geo-spiritual research on the way to the land down-under. Joe Mathews was most definitely leading the team, and for him the trip had some of the characteristics of a pilgrimage. Joe Slicker and I were on the team, and, I believe, Joe Buckles. We were joined by Fred Buss in Adelaide.

This is the story of that madcap spiritual and spatial journey that began in Chicago, and, for me, in Boston, and extended across half the world, ending in Sydney with the Otford Council. It was my initiation into the Order, and to this day most details remain sharp. Earlier I had been persuaded to leave New England and join the Chicago bunch (not yet The Order Ecumenical), whose personalities, values and lifestyle were not entirely foreign to me after 3 years "in the spirit movement" and several visits to 3444 W. Congress Parkway. My immediate assignment was to the Australia team with the idea in mind that I, together with Fred and Sarah Buss, would stay behind when the rest of the team returned to Chicago, and build the movement, if we could obtain an invitation to do so. And that's how it worked out, but that's getting ahead of the story. Our journey was an odyssey that we invented as we made our way across a landscape filled with strange cultures, religious icons and heroes, hilarious happenings, and profound events.

**Stop One: Spain**

St. Theresa of Avila was the reason for stopping in Spain. Having studied her writings we were now to visit Avila and pay homage to her legacy. In Madrid we stayed in a good hotel, ate baby eels cooked in oil, and went to a bull fight. Then, in a rented car with me as the driver, we took off through the hills to Avila. My memory is vague of what we saw once there, but the deed was done, and we had touched the holy soil where Theresa had lived and ministered.

**Stop Two: Greece**

Nikos Kazantzakis drew us to Greece. Saviors of God, Report to Greco, Zorba... We were headed for Crete. Getting there was an adventure. The flight from Madrid to Athens was aboard Ethiopian Royal Airlines, a 707 with about 6 passengers, the four of us and two others. Athens received small attention; a visit to the Parthenon is what I remember.

Then it was off on an overnight ferry to Crete. Joe was in a capricious mood, playing jokes on people, and having a great time. In Iraklion we duly visited the Kazantzakis home, now a museum, and then his grave on top of the city wall, with a small memorial. In the morning, Joe was gone from the hotel when we awoke, and when he returned we learned that at dawn he had returned to the grave on the city wall, and

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danced to welcome the sun and to touch the spirit of Nikos the teacher.

### **Stop Three: Iran**

I've never been entirely clear why we headed to Teheran; perhaps it was the lure of ancient Persia, a different culture, an unheralded contributor to our spiritual heritage. In any case, Teheran was a disappointment, a modern, westernized city, all decked out in flags in preparation for the coronation of the Shah. The mystery of Persia was well hidden and we left after a brief overnight stay.

### **Stop Four: Afghanistan**

Why Afghanistan?? The best answer I ever heard was simply the fact that it was there, a strange place that no one we knew had ever visited. But I have often felt that the real reason was that in our grid of the globe, one of the corners of the country marked the spot where the three spheres, East, West and South, met making it the navel of the world.

It was a mysterious place. Bearded tribal men striding through the streets with guns and swords. A rather grand airport built by the Soviets in the midst of a medieval city. Joe wanted to get out of the city, and we hired a car and driver to take us on a short trip to some nearby villages. He walked the streets with a hunger to see and know.

### **Stop Five: India**

India loomed large in Joe's mind for the many reasons that played themselves out in the years to come. It was, as I recall, his first visit, and he was avid to absorb the culture and the spirit and the feel of the place. The 10 days we spent there was a whirlwind of visits, events, trips, and sights. From Delhi, to Lucknow, to Calcutta, to Durgapore, to Bangalore.

In Durgapore the first RS-I course in India was conducted, not terribly successfully as I remember, but it did happen. Joe Slicker learned the hard way that a meal conversation was nearly impossible. Everyone ate with their fingers, rapidly, and when finished immediately ran to the sink to wash their hands. Getting to Durgapore was an adventure. We were running very late, and no train would get us there on time. So a car and driver were engaged, a wild Chinese Indian with a queue and an old Chrysler. We roared through the countryside and dozens of villages with the horn blaring and the pale Americans even paler.

### **Stop Six: Nepal**

From Calcutta Joe decided that we should take an absolutely impromptu side trip to Nepal "to see the mountains." Tickets were available, visas could be and were

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obtained, reservations were made in a hotel, and off we went to the middle ages. Katmandu in those days was small, primitive, dirty, and totally non-westernized. We strolled the streets, and retreated to the hotel. Three years later I would return to Katmandu as a leader of the first Global Odyssey for the Order. The thirty members of the group had a free hour after arriving at our hotel before gathering for dinner, and most went walking. When we assembled in the lounge just before dinner, the faces were stunned, the conversation non-existent, consciousness wasted. Katmandu shocks the senses.

At the hotel we learned that to see the mountains one is advised to hire a car and driver, leave the hotel at 3:00 a.m. for a journey up into the mountains, to an elevation of some 11,000 feet, where, if the weather cooperates, one can see Mt. Everest and the Himalayan mastiff. We hired the car, survived the journey up narrow mountain roads with no guard rails, and were rewarded with a beautiful 5:00 a.m. sunrise on the great mountains. It was a moment of genuine awe.

### **Stop Seven: Sri Lanka (It was Ceylon; but I shall call it Sri Lanka.)**

Sri Lanka is a leading center of Theravada Buddhism, the narrow vehicle, and a place that had to be visited. Joe and I went to Sri Lanka; the others left for some other task. As usual, Joe had a destination in mind - Kandy in the mountains, the great Buddhist center. We met the monks, we visited the temples, and we learned. Robert, our driver, was also our tour guide, pointing to things and exclaiming, "We are calling that a river..."

### **Stop Eight: Australia**

Our port of entry was Perth, and it was in Perth that the first RS-I course in Australia was held. Then Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane. They were powerful events that did what was intended. People were awakened and moved. The proof came when on short notice people who had attended these courses were invited to come to Sydney for the Otford council to consider the implications, and perhaps to plan the future. Some 50 or 60 showed up, and in those days interstate travel in Australia was rare and expensive.

Joe was by then frantic with worry. It was important to our strategy that Australia take off, and it was necessary that this conference make the decision to be a movement, and to give it form. While the attendees stayed in the relative comfort of a dormitory, Joe and the team retreated to a run-down, dirty cabin, where we slept on mattresses on the floor, in order to be the presence that was needed, and to think of nothing but the dynamics of the meeting. The Council worked; the movement was formed, and an invitation was received to leave behind some team members to work with the Australians.

Sarah and Fred Buss moved into a manse vacated by a couple who were persuaded to

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go to Chicago for a year. I moved in with Maisie and Harry Roberts in the parsonage of the Paddington Methodist Church. A group of colleagues was formed around the leadership of Jim and Isobel Bishop. There were no religious houses in those days, but that is what we were, a house without a house. It was an incredible year. We met each morning in a church hall, did the daily office, and held a collegium. Every weekend, and many week days, we taught RS-I and the PLC, and in so doing must have set some kind of record for interstate travel in Australia to that date. How many courses did we teach?? I don't have a record, but I do remember that in those 12 months I taught at least 40 courses in 5 states and Canberra, and visited Hobart, Port Hedland, Darwin and Alice Springs. We held pedagogy sessions and regional meetings and trained a faculty of Australian teachers, many of whom joined the Order and became great priors and great teachers.

This event, from Chicago to Sydney, signaled the real beginning of our global reach, and it launched the first national/continental movement outside North America. It deserves hardly a footnote in the normal course of things, but it is an event of spirit and awe in the history of the Spirit Movement.

Donald J. Clark