

BAT DOR TOUR

By: Gus Dick Andros

As if by cue I'm up at 6:30 am, but it is Saturday and I can sleep in. I can hear the wind blowing and the window rattling but the noise is only acting like a drug and I'm soon sound asleep. Around 10:30 I have to get up and walk my dog, Alex. I am half asleep and when I raise the shade to see why the wind is making so much noise, I can't believe what I saw. I live on the 12th floor and on a nice day nothing blocks my view to Central Park, but as I looked out my window the snow and wind is so intense that I couldn't see across the street.

Unfortionally Alex didn't care and began barking to go out. I dressed quickly and warmly so Alex can make it outside in time. Alex, who is all white, loves the snow and by then it was a foot deep. He could have easily gotten lost had I not had a leash on him. The wind was blowing the snow so hard that it hurts my face, it was difficult to see. I had to pull Alex back in the building, because he resisted.

Back in the warm apartment I decided that there was nothing I could do for the rest of the day. Not wanting to waste the day I thought it would be a good idea to put my files in order. While picking through the files, I came across a letter I had written my family while on tour with the Bat Dor Dance Company of Israel. I was surprised how detailed I had covered the tour. Sitting own the bed I read and reread the letter. I could relive that period from the first discussion with the directors to undertake this tour until I was back in Israel

You might ask how did a goy like me come to be in Israel in the first place. After the assassination of Martin Luther King, I watched my dancing school go down hill. My enrollment went from 99% Jewish to 75% non English speaking clientele. I was not equipped to handle the language barrier of my new students. So I ran an ad in Dance Magazine and got a request from Israel for my ~~resume~~. After a long interview and two weeks in Israel, I got the job as assistant to the director of the Bat Dor Dance Company of Israel. Jeannette Ordman was the director and the Baroness Batsheva de Rothchild was the producer.

At the time an Israel Dance Company was considered a novelty. It was also shortly after the Yom Kippur War and many countries were afraid for us to visit for fear that terrorist would cause trouble. Great Britain was willing to take the chance. Security was tight, and the company was briefed on how to avoid terrorist. I laughed at the time because the briefing was in Hebrew and I couldn't understand what was being said.

My dear family,

The morning we were to leave on tour I took a cab to Ben Gurion Airport. I had two suit cases full of clothes: suits, dance clothes, and toilet articles. As the assistant director I

needed to be dressed in a suit at all performances. My suit cases were heavy and I wished that I didn't have to dress for every occasion.

Lugging my luggage into the airport I notice that everybody else had at least five suit cases. I thought they knew something I didn't. I later found out that four out of the five bags were empty. You see there were very few material goods to be had in Israel, so the company members planned to do a lot of shopping.

There were a few in the company that had dual passports, but I was the only one with an American passport. I had flown in and out of Israel at least five times and I was never stopped before. Now I am flying on a company ticket and I was the only one taken into a small room by two men and stripped searched. I think they wanted to see what a non Jew looked like, but I fooled them, daddy had taken care of that along ^{time} ago.

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The Greeks and Turks were fighting in Cyprus and the El Al Airline was the only national airline that would fly over the island. El Al was seven hours late before taking off. We had most of the plane for ourselves and a lot of partying went on, but when we got to Heathrow Airport in London we missed our connection to Edinburgh, our first performing date. We had to spend the night at the Heathrow Hotel. The hotel was very elegant and I was to learn that I was not allowed to share a room with any member of the group. It had to do with my position in the company. I was told that the dancers were not my equal. So I was to be separated from the company members from that time on. While I was with the Bat Dor Company I was given a list of who I could socialize with, and the ones I couldn't. I must tell you I never accepted this cast system and when I could, I broke every rule.

The next day we flew to Edinburgh. I got my first glimpse of what it is like to be under observation. As we got off the plane we could spot the security men every place, hiding behind newspapers, and faking telephone calls. I really thought I was in a spy movie. A bus drove us to a dormitory out of the city. We were assigned our rooms and locked in the building. Of course I had my own room next to the business manager. I looked out the window and saw that the building was surrounded by security with machine guns.

A Bus would pick us up and take us to the theater always a different time and a different route, because of this we saw more of Edinburgh than the average tourist. As I got out of the bus at the theater and looked across the street I saw men standing in the windows with machine guns drawn across their chest. I can't remember feeling more safe.

We were finally allowed out on our own, but they preferred that we did not travel in large groups. We had to tell security where we were going and when we would be back. On performance days we had the mornings off, at which time I did my sightseeing. Rachel, the lady that handled the payroll, and I had a great time together and traveled every place together. Edinburgh is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. The main street in Edinburgh is divided, on one side are shops and the other is the castle of Mary Queen of Scotland. The parks are beautifully kept, and when we were there flowers were

everywhere. Park benches were in abundance, where we could sit and take in the atmosphere.

Back at the theater we were aware of the security. At the performances the ushers were men who looked like they had never been in a theater. I got to know some of them and asked why they would be ushers and to my surprise I was told they were not ushers, but were policeman. I told them that they looked like it. I was informed that is what they wanted. They stood out like a sore thumb. They informed me if their presence were obvious then terrorist would not try anything. Even with the police in abundance on opening night I was told to expect a bomb. It would have been my job to look after the dancers. I was very nervous and wondered if the theater was being evacuated would I get the hell out of there or would I go back stage and take care of the dancers. I was thankful that I didn't have to make that decision. I wondered if the audience was aware that their lives had been in danger

On our day off I did some sight seeing and attended the opera "Don Giovanni" and what was called a "Tattoo." The "Tattoo" was a spectacular event. I had no idea what to expect, but I was impressed by what I saw. The "Tattoo" was held on the Palace grounds with hundreds of men in kilts with bagpipes and drums parading in formations. A Broadway show could not have been more theatrical. I believe it was worth the trip to Scotland.

We did a television show in Glasgow, which was my responsibility. Television had come a long way since I use to danced on the TV. I was a pioneer when there was one camera and the dance had to fit in the space that the camera could encompass--about six feet. In Glasgow there were three cameras that were movable so the space was as large as a stage. After the television show we had to get back to Edinburgh for a performance, we made it just in time. I must say that we got great reviews and full houses every night. When it was time to leave Edinburgh there was a dense fog, and our flight had been canceled. Bathsheva hired a bus to take us to Glasgow. The flight to London was uneventful, and once we were there we stayed at the Royal Scot Hotel about a fifteen minute walk to the Saddler's Wells.

My room as usual was separated from the other members of the company. Thank God Rachel stayed next door so I did have someone to talk to. When I got my first mail, it had been opened by security. It was funny how quickly one becomes accustom to this invasion of privacy. When we got to the theater there were more police back stage than dancers. In Israel we were used to having our bags searched just to go to the movie. The audience didn't seem to mind, although I did hear some complain. Across the street from the theater there were pickets. One sign read "The Panov's live on stolen land!"

It was hard for us to concern ourselves with this for we were protected. The tensions about opening night over shadowed all other problems. The London press didn't like us and we were panned in every paper. This caused our director to work us harder. We rehearsed more and more, and the dancers took out their frustrations on me.

Jeannette, was also our lead dancer and blamed everyone else for the failure. I was trying to tell her what the critics were saying, but she didn't want to hear that we were dancing without feeling and the program was too heavy. Every time I mentioned that we should dance with more expression, I was knocked down. Jeannette's idea of dance was doing steps without any emotion and my idea is that dance without feeling is not dance. When we got back to Israel Jeannette and I had this out.

To help you understand the tension let me tell you of one incident. One morning I came to the theater to find television cameras set up and the dancers waiting to start rehearsal. I didn't know what to think, but when Jeannette arrived and we were sitting there waiting-- she exploded. In front of the company she torn into me like a mad person because nothing was prepared for the television crew. I kept asking what was to be set up. She had forgotten to tell me about this, but Jeannette could not take the blame in front of the company and the television crew. I stood there and took the abuse. I then turned angrily to get things going and walked directly into a light tree, cutting my head. I went on with blood coming down my face and got the stage set up. I wouldn't let anyone touch my head until all was finished. That night after the performance Jeannette came over to me, like a mother, and ask me how I hurt my head. She was no more that two feet from me when I hit the light tree.

One day, while I waited for the underground, I heard someone shouting my name. I looked across the tracks and saw David Vaughn, a dance critic from America. I shouted back "Saddler's Wells! Saddler's Wells!" He called and we got together for dinner and drinks. In conversation he told me of having drinks with another David that I knew. The other David was a close friend of mine from San Francisco. I hadn't seen him in at least twenty years. I called my old friend David Johnson, hoping that he might remember me. I think he almost fainted when I told him who I was. I invited him to a performance, and told him that in the twenty years I had changed. I told him I had a beard and he said that he would know my eyes any place.

When we finished at the Saddler' Wells I had three weeks vacation coming to me and a week for Yom Kippur. So I had four weeks on my own. I had to move out of the hotel and through my friend David found a charming place to stay. I went to every museum and theater event I could. I saw Diana Riggs in "Pygmalion" and Ethel Merman at the Palladium. I visited the Tower of London and saw the crown jewels. London is a very entertaining place, but nothing can compare with New York City.

My last night in London I had dinner at David's flat. We had fun as we always did when we got together. David can make me laugh all of the time. We spent the evening telling stories and drinking scotch. I do not know how much we consumed, but we said our good-byes and I left. At his corner I stepped off the curb and fell flat on my face. It was very late and I have no idea how long I laid there, but I kept thinking I had to get up or I would be arrested. Somehow I got back to my lodgings and slept until noon.

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One of the great events of this trip was the Boat Train to Paris. I was alone and didn't know my way around, but asking questions I found the best way to get to Paris. The train leaves Victoria Station at 10:00 PM and goes to Dover where you take a ferry to Paris. During W.W.II The song "The White Cliffs of Dover" was very popular, and to see them and know that they were real was a thrill. I fell asleep and woke up when we docked in Dunkirk, having read the "Snow Goose" a story of the evacuation of Dunkirk, also made this an event. I boarded a train to Paris and arrived at 8:15am.

I didn't have reservations, but was told the best place to stay would be on the West Bank. I found a hotel in the hub of the artist community. I couldn't speak a word of French, but got a room in a hotel and I didn't know how much it would cost. After I got use to the idea that the French do not like Americans I had a great time. The City is so full of history that you can't absorb it all.

I was an art student in High School and College so I wanted to see all of the art museums. I spent two days at the Louver which is not enough. One should have all the time they need to encompass it all. To think I saw the Winged Victory, Venus de Milo, Rapfeal's Madonna and Leonardo de Vince's Mona Lisa was more than I could imagine. I went up the Eiffel Tower a most freighting experience. It is funny that airplanes do not bother me, and yet on the lift to the tower I was panicked.

Every morning I had breakfast at the "Drug Store" a restaurant, across the street from the Hotel. On the last day I returned to the hotel from sightseeing to find that the "Drug Store" had been bombed, because it was own by a Jew. I thought how funny it was that I had traveled with all that security and the first week away I almost got blown to bits.

The next morning I checked out of the hotel and handed my money to the clerk and she gave me change. I still don't know how much it cost. I took a train to Brussels arriving early enough to find a place to stay. Brussels is not my favorite place. I made reservations on the phone, and gave to cab driver the address. He drove me for at least fifteen minutes and let me out at a sleazy hotel, but I had no choice and went in. This hotel usually rented by the hour. The bidet was at the head of the bed. I can't tell you how uncomfortable that made me feel, but I figured that I could in endure anything for a short period. I changed clothes and went for a walk, looking for a map. At the corner I saw the train station. I was really pissed off. That damn cab driver cheated me. You see it is not only in New York.

I found a map and started my tour of the City. The nicest place in all of Brussels is the Grand Place, and square where the facades of the buildings have remained the same for centuries. I found a bar and met a Japanese man and he was surprise that I knew some Japanese. We talked for some time, and were over heard by a Canadian who was glad to

I told him of the place I was staying. He insisted that I stay with him. We went back to the hotel, and at night you had to enter via a bar. When I told the bar-tender that I wanted to check out, he gave me a hard time. You see they had my passport. The Canadian spoke up in Flemish and I got my passport. I got my luggage and as I past through the bar everyone followed me out and they were saying something that I did not understand. When I got in the car, I asked him, "What was that all about?" My new friend stated that they were saying something about an American meeting some rich man. First of all he wasn't rich and secondly it was not what they thought. I thanked the Canadian for showing me a Brussels, that I would not have seen on my own.

I left Brussels early so I could get to Amsterdam by mid morning and find a nice hotel. Amsterdam is a very civilized place. I think the Dutch are the nicest people I have ever met. As you get off the train you can make reservations at the station for a room that you can afford..

Rudi Van Danzig, director of the National Ballet Company of Holland, had given me addresses of hotels close to the Opera house so I had no trouble getting a room. The hotel clerk was waiting for me, and when she told me my room was on the top floor and pointed to the stairs, I said, "No way!" The clerk hit the bell on the desk and out of nowhere a young handsome guy was there and he put both suit cases on either shoulder and away he went up the stairs. It was all I could do to make it to the top. I wanted to tip him but he wouldn't let me.

After a shower and a change of clothes I went to the dining room and the same boy was my waiter. I had lunch and tipped him again and again he would not take it.

After the usual sight seeing I called a friend I had met in Israel, and she invited me to spend the weekend at her home in Rotterdam. I was expecting a little thatch roof house, but it looked like a ranch house on Long Island. I managed to embarrass myself at breakfast. The table was set with many different kinds of breads, cheeses, and lunch meats, so I made myself a sandwich. They explained that one didn't eat it that way, but each food was eaten separately. I left knowing what a continental breakfast meant.

Back in Amsterdam I did the tours and one day bought myself a beer and some cheese and went to the large park by the hotel to have lunch. I guess it was the Central Park of Amsterdam. I lost my bearings and couldn't remember which way I came in. I knew if I walked in any direction I would get out, but think, if you are in Central Park and you wanted to go to Central Park South and you walked the wrong way, you could end up at 110th Street. After three tries and a question to the right source, I found my way out.

At my last breakfast in the hotel, my waiter called me a cab, and while he was taking care of my luggage, I slipped a large tip under my plate, and I was gone.

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I really enjoyed my stay in Holland and wished I could live there, but everyone told me the winters were very unpleasant. I had to take a plane back the London to fly to Israel. I had planned it so I could ~~had~~ have two more days with David. At the airport I had trouble with passport control. You see unbeknownst to me there was a work permit stamped in my Passport and they were not going to allow me entrance until I produced my ticket to Israel.

I arrived in Israel Friday night (Sabot). I had no food in my apartment and I was hungry and there was nothing opened. I was listening to my stomach growl, when there was a knock on the door. I opened it to find Karen, one of our dancers, with food for me. She knew when I was to arrive and had planned the food knowing I couldn't get anything to eat on Sabot.

~~I hope I haven't bored you with my trip, but just wanted to relive it with you.~~

Love always,

Dick

that
After reading about my long trip, and thinking I could do it all again, I looked out the window and saw that the storm had not let up. Reading about my trip had made me tired, so I went back to bed. Alex joined me and snuggled against my neck.