



Being Interviewed

by Lesley Dawson

I had been offered this job in Bethlehem, so I thought, by the people at Save the Children Fund in London. We had spent a whole morning discussing the political situation there, which extended a very nice lunch in a restaurant in Holborn. I was under the impression that they had interviewed me. I began to see that, no, I was wrong.

“The Vice Chancellor of Bethlehem University wants you to go out there and see the situation for yourself.”

This was during the First Intifada, the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, when violence erupted daily between the Palestinian Shebab, the young men and the soldiers of the Israeli Defense Force. I had seen the infamous footage of a soldier striking an unarmed (unless you count stones) young Palestinian and breaking his leg.

“They don’t want you to say you will accept the job here in the UK and then find you can’t cope with the political situation there.”

It sounded like a sensible idea.

So off I went and was escorted around East Jerusalem and Bethlehem by a Scandinavian social worker, coming to the end of her assignment with evident relief and an Irish American teacher on a short consultation visit who was very matter of fact about life in Bethlehem. The ten days I spent in their company gave me a clearer picture of what it would be like living there.

I did have meetings with some of the De La Salle Brothers who ran the university but didn’t really meet any of the Palestinian staff as all Palestinian universities were closed by Israeli military order. It was explained to me that this new programme would go ahead at a place not yet named. It was considered vital that the young men being shot by Israeli soldiers needed up to date rehabilitation, not available locally.

However, I don't remember being interviewed, not according to how I thought an interview should be done. I did not understand this low- key approach until much later when the Vice Chancellor and I interviewed a potential member of staff. When he finished his questions, he was surprised that I continued to ask what I wanted to know.

The night before I was to fly home, I was invited to supper at the Brothers community house, preceded by mass in their chapel. Being an Anglican I could more or less follow the service, what we would have called communion. About halfway through the service different individuals present voiced their petitions after which we all joined in with, "Lord in your mercy. Hear our prayer."

I suppose I was not listening very closely when I heard the Vice Chancellor say, "Lord we thank you that we have found the leader for the new physiotherapy programme," and I realised he was speaking about me. Instead of joining in the appropriate response I thought, 'Hang on a minute, don't bring God into it yet. I haven't made up my mind'.

I was in the middle of the situation before I knew I had begun. It seemed that my mind had been made up for me.