

# I Think I'll Go to Jerusalem

by Nicole LaCour

I decided it was time to take a trip.

Getting fired had been brutal. Unexpected. It knocked me off my course. There was no new job on the horizon and I didn't know what to do. There was a reminder on my calendar. I was supposed to have a *plan* to travel by next summer. *Might as well do it now*, I thought. I wasn't doing anything else.

But where? There were so many places I wanted to see. Paris, Italy, Greece, Japan.....India! But of all the places I imagined going, when I asked myself, "If you could only travel to one place outside of the US for the rest of your life, where would it be?" the answer was always, Jerusalem.

"Why Jerusalem?" people asked. It was difficult to express that answer. That Holy City holds a place in the western imagination like none other. Though I'm an atheist, I was raised Catholic and I am not immune to this connection. *Israel, Galilee, Judea, Bethlehem, Jerusalem.....*these are names that were read to me each Sunday in sacred stories that I believed in, for a while.

Even as my faith faded, my obsession with religious history grew and that place, Jerusalem where the three Abrahamic religions collide became increasingly fascinating to me. The everlasting conflict there, studied and watched by the world, disproportionately to its size and strategic position, with tentacles stretching long into ancient history and reaching far into the future, nurtures the intrigue. It's a sacred place, if such a thing exists, with veneration and strife simultaneously alive. I wanted to experience it.

Is there ever a safe time to visit Israel or the Palestinian territories, or anywhere in the world for that matter. When I first had the idea, the 2014 Gaza conflict had not begun. As I contemplated the logistics, people were dying. Gaza was being bombed back to the Stone Age. And the voices of both sides were screaming through news outlets and social media. I followed the news feeds. I wondered about the morality of being a tourist while people were suffering.

I couldn't stop the voice in my head telling me, "If you don't go now, you might not ever go."

So, I made my plans. I booked the flights. I found Airbnb's to stay in. A cease-fire was announced.

A friend convinced me to work in a night in Istanbul on the way back. I would see the Hagia Sophia. On Facebook, I jokingly invited my soul mate to meet me there, specifying the date and time.

"Why Jerusalem?" people kept asking. I wanted to see ancient sites and eat strange foods. I wanted to see the tiles on the Dome of the Rock and the art of the Holy Sepulcher. I wanted to stand at the top of the Mount of Olives and walk the path of Jesus. (Or at least what some claim is the path of Jesus). I wanted to be in awe of a physical place on this Earth. I wanted to buy weird, overpriced trinkets and stuff them in my carry-on. I wanted to sit at a café and listen to people speak languages I didn't understand.

The truth is, I was afraid of what was going to come next or that anything would be coming next. Maybe I was running away for a couple of weeks hoping the answers would be there when I came back. I think I was hoping that if I go and see extraordinary things, I would be able to create an extraordinary life for myself.

If nothing else, I knew I would come back with some great photos, a new magnet for the fridge and maybe a glow-in-the dark crucifix.

## **I'm a Terrible Traveler**

9/16/2014

I've only been overseas once before. I was meeting a group of political professionals that I was somehow invited into. I was nervous. One was a Washington state senator, another worked for Emily's List and another worked in the White House. I carefully planned out my luggage, buying all new stuff. I found this cool purple bag that went over my shoulder. I stenciled a cool design on my black suitcase so it would stand out. I was determined to be stylish and graceful.

By the time I got to Atlanta, I ditched that stupid purple bag. It was cutting a groove into my shoulder. I bought a simple backpack and sat on the floor of the airport, rearranging my clothes, shoes, computer and other nonsense. I was always that person, fumbling with my camera bag or taking longer to put my shoes back on.

I'd like to think I learned from that trip to keep it simple. *No, you don't need to bring a sketchbook and five novels. No, you really don't need to bring five pairs of shoes or extensive jewelry options. One shade of eye shadow is fine.*

For this trip, I would stick to a tight budget. I wasn't going to buy a new pair of jeans. But the size 8's were a little tight and the 10's were way too loose and that pair I tried on at New York and Company was as comfortable as Goldilock's chair. And what was I supposed to do, not buy the

cool skirt that was the perfect length? It was buy one, get one half off! Come on. Sure, I said I wouldn't get ANOTHER pair of Converse, but none of the ones I had matched the breezy, brown travel pants I found. Plus they were all wearing out. It was an investment. I would wear them forever.

And yes, I had tons of t-shirts but they were all low-cut v-necks. What if I need to appear more modest? *I should probably get some round neck ones as well.*, I told myself. The one thing I didn't buy was a scarf. I had 10 million scarves. So, I successfully avoided the temptation of the accessory department at Target, sticking to my grey, Native American print head cover, one of which was an overpriced tourist grab from a museum in D.C.

I've had to change a lot in the past few years. But some things didn't change and my thrifty trip with its cheap flights and Airbnb rates inevitably escalated beyond my intentions. I hoped I would take some great photos because I might have to eat them or trade them for rent when I got back.

I was ready to fly the next day. I would try to play it cool. *Just a seasoned, casual traveler here, nothing to gawk at.* I had my bag of liquids and electronics ready for inspection. Everything was carry on. The Converse were broken in. I had books to read.

But I knew what would happen. Something would fall out of a bag. I would take too long unlacing my shoes. My iPhone earbuds would get tangled on my purse strap. I would hog all the grey plastic bins and get looks of annoyance from business men with their one, organized bag and slip on shoes. I would fumble my way from Lafayette to Houston to Munich to Tel-Aviv and arrive disheveled and ready for wine.

## **Munich to Tel Aviv**

9/23/2014

I knew I was at the right gate in Munich when I saw Hasidic Jews rocking back and forth with Bibles in their hands, the fringe of shawls swaying and little boxes attached to their heads.

*I'm going to Israel, I thought.*

That first ten-and-a-half-hour flight had been rough. I had traded seats with a father so he could sit next to his wife and son. This put me next to an ornery woman whose husband was sitting just behind her. She complained and fidgeting the entire flight, leaning towards me and poking herself between the seats to have conversations with her husband. I think she had hoped I would offer to trade with him. I'm sorry. It's one thing to trade one aisle seat for another for a nice young family. It's another to trade an aisle seat for a middle seat on a ten-and-a-half-hour flight. *She was a grown woman. She could deal with it. She didn't deal with it very well.*

True to form I had already rearranged my things several times, stuffing my purse in my backpack and putting my passport and little black book in the side pouch. I didn't realize how many times I'd have to pull that sucker out. In Munich, I scanned it at the gate and rushed down the stairs with the crowd of people.

You know those moments when you go to put your keys down in a different place than you usually do and you think, *Don't put them there*, but you do it anyway? Well, I think I must have stuffed the book and passport in my back pocket, temporarily, thinking, *Don't leave them there*. And this pocket wasn't as deep as typical blue jean pockets. I was wearing the New York & Company jeans. The back pocket was sort of a half pocket.

Leaving the gate, everyone crowded onto a bus and I scanned the crowd, not understanding anyone and smiling. *We're taking a bus to Tel Aviv*, I thought. I wished I had someone to joke with. We got off the bus and a family of Orthodox Jews with two little girls dressed exactly alike, a stroller and some hatboxes were lumbering up the stairs to the plane ahead of me. The man stopped and opened his overnight bag to get his camera out. He posed his family on the stairs, forcing those of us behind him to stop and back up while he took a photo. They looked so happy. *We're going to Israel!* they were probably thinking.

Once in the air, I started to reach for my little black book and its treasure trove of important information and phone numbers. *Where is it? It's not there. It's not in my back pocket. Shit. Where's my passport?* I combed through every square inch of my purse and backpack. It was nowhere. *Ok. Don't panic. I can't be the first person to lose my passport. I have copies. I'm sure there's a solution.*

I told the flight attendant that I lost my passport at the airport. She was very nonchalant about it. She told me to write down all my information and she would call the airport and see if someone found it.

"You got through our security already," she said. "You shouldn't have any problems."

This sounded incredibly naïve to me. I had read about Israel's border control. I knew that if you had a name that sounded remotely Arabic, if they didn't like the answers to the questions they asked, if they didn't like the way you looked, they could deny your entrance. I've seen the movies. But I have a French name, LaCour. I just wanted to be a tourist and see Jerusalem. I didn't think I would have any problems.

Until I lost my passport.

I drifted off to sleep and woke up the feel of the flight attendant's hand on my shoulder. "They found your passport," she said. "Someone on the ground found it and turned it in."

"Oh, great!" I said. I was so relieved.

"They've informed the Israeli's that they have it and it will be put on the next flight to Tel Aviv," she said with a smile. She was so nice.

As we descended, I looked over and watched Tel Aviv float up beneath us. The plane leveled and I saw sand and green hills in the distance. A few people clapped, customary upon arrival in Israel.

*I'm in Israel. I thought. I'm going to see Jerusalem. By tonight I will be walking distance from the Old City. I can't believe I'm doing this.*

Getting off the plane, things were still rather vague. Who do I see about getting my passport when it arrives? Who knows that Lufthansa has my passport? How do I confirm that? The flight attendants were very reassuring.

"It's going to be fine," they kept saying.

They gave me a small piece of paper with German copy on it. They told me it said that Lufthansa had found my passport. They told me to go to the Lufthansa Lost and Found to let them know that I would be expecting it.

I made my way to the long row of border control booths. I waited my turn.

"I lost my passport. I have a copy and Lufthansa said they informed you that they have it and will be sending it on the next flight," I said nervously to the woman behind the glass.

"Let me check on that," she said. She picked up a phone and spoke quickly to someone and

hung up.

"Stand aside m'am."

I stood next to the booth with a couple and waited to be helped.

## **Border Control**

9/24/2014

A short, serious looking man walked over, spoke to her then looked at me.

"Come with me," he said. He had the paper copy of my passport in his hand. He directed me to a sectioned off part of the large room with a sign that said Border Control. The man directed me to stand in a short line just outside the room. Inside were two, adjacent offices with doors opened to a group of people waiting, sitting in chairs. Everyone looked sad and frustrated. The short man started to walk off. I looked at him and gestured as if to say, "What now?"

"Someone will call you," he said and left.

I thought it was kind of cool at first. *I'm going to be questioned by Border Control. This will make a great story, the beginning of my Jerusalem stories.* I took a photo with my phone of the sign outside the room.

A seat opened up and I waited my turn. Thirty minutes turned into an hour. An hour turned into two. I sat and watched the Border Control officer, a very gruff, loud woman, as she shuffled through passports and called people into the office. Everyone was tense and nervous. There was no rhyme or reason to the order in which she called people in. No first come, first serve. She picked up passports randomly, looking at them and putting them back down, occasionally calling someone's name. One man was getting increasingly frustrated. He paced back and forth gesturing with his hands and speaking Russian. Many of the people waiting spoke Russian. There were girls, crying.

My amusement quickly dissolved into rising frustration and impending fear. I saw the woman pick up my papers, look at them with a huff and put them back down in a bin on her desk.

I thought about my friend who had been detained and questioned in Houston upon his return from

India. They had put him in handcuffs for eight hours. *Ok, if he could deal with that, I can get through this*, I thought. I texted him. "I lost my passport. I'm stuck in Border Control. They're not very nice."

I texted my airbnb host. Her responses betrayed her alarm and made me more nervous.

I tried to ask other people for help. If I could just get to a Lufthansa ticket office or lost and found. My passport could be there now, I naively conjectured. No one could help. "Sit and wait." I was directed again and again.

I watched as others were questioned. I didn't understand what anyone was saying but the officer's tone of voice was accusational. She often laughed at people and asked to see their phones. Sometimes people would leave with their passports and a smile of relief on their faces. But most remained, their problem unresolved.

The woman finally got up and left, closing her door with all of our documents behind her. I got up and asked the woman in the other office, "Excuse me m'am, I'm very hungry and tired and I don't understand how this process works. Can I go find something to eat?"

"Sit and wait," she said.

I sat back down and finally let myself cry, not caring who saw or heard me. I didn't know what was going to happen.

A man came in and took the woman's place. He started from scratch, picking up passports from the stack. People crowded around the entrance of his office. I realized that he didn't even know my paper copy was there. I walked through the group, poked my head in his office and said, "Excuse me sir, but this is me," pointing to the papers in the bin. "I just wanted to tell you that. I'm going to go try to find something to eat."

"You don't even have your passport?" he asked. "No," I said, "I dropped it in Germany."

He directed me to sit down. *Thank God*, I thought. I told him what happened. I told him that Lufthansa said they had the passport. He looked up the number for a Lufthansa office and let me speak with them. They promised to call right back. He told me to "sit and wait," and that he would get me some food.

I sat for another hour or so. The man called me into the office. Lufthansa called back but they

didn't know anything about my passport.

"Why are you in Israel?" he asked me.

The question was more like an accusation. It sounded more like, "What the hell are you doing here and why should I believe you?"

"I'm a tourist. I always wanted to see Jerusalem," I said.

"Where are you staying?"

"An Airbnb host. Here's her name," I pulled out a piece of paper I had written her name on. "I have her number in my phone." I started to go through my contacts.

"Is she Israeli?"

"Yes. She lives in the German Colony in Jerusalem."

"Is she Jewish?"

"I don't know what religion she is."

"Why do you want to see Jerusalem?"

"I love history and I've read so much about it and I wanted to see all these amazing places."

"What do you want to see in Jerusalem?"

"The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Old City, the Mount of Olives." I skipped the Temple Mount.

"Do you know anyone in Israel?"

"Just my Airbnb host and a professor I met online. We are supposed to have coffee and talk about history and politics."

"Where else have you traveled?"

"I went to Jakarta and Bali once."

"Why did you go there?"

"It was a State Department funded cultural exchange program."

"Where did you get that Hamsa?"

I was wearing a small Hamsa symbol on a chain. I knew it as the Eye of Fatima, a symbol of protection.

"I got it at Target."

"Let me see your phone." I handed him my phone.

"Who's Mohammad Zubair?"

Aww *shit*, I thought. He was one of the last people I had texted. His name popped up on the screen. That's the only time I think I allowed a smirk on my face.

"He's a friend of mine in the U.S. He's Indian." I said, defending my friend's nationality. "He is Muslim," I said, stating the obvious.

"He's not Palestinian or Arab?" he asked accusationally.

"No, he's Indian."

The rebel inside of me was screaming in my head. Is it a crime to have a Muslim friend? What if he was Arab? Am I a threat because one of my friends has one of the most common names on the planet? I have friends named John and Mark, too. Is that a problem? But I kept that inside. I knew to expect this. I'm the one who wanted to go to Israel. I'm the one who dropped my passport.

"Do you plan on visiting the West Bank?"

"No. I didn't think that would be a good idea."

"Where did you say you traveled before?"

"Just Indonesia."

"Indonesia? I thought you said Bali and Jakarta."

Trying very hard not to come off like a smart ass, which is difficult for me in the best of circumstances, I said, "Yeah. It's a group of islands. Jakarta and Bali are part of.....it's an archipelago.... Indonesia."

"What do you think of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," he asked.

*Oh, Jesus*, I thought. *I can't lie*. I'm a terrible liar even when I'm not exhausted and scared.

"Well, I think it's a complicated issue that has a long history and a complex future and it's not black and white and it's difficult to understand...." I rambled. Not exactly the pro-Israel stance he was looking for.

Of course I had been following the war with Gaza. Of course I had been following news feeds from various sources. Of course I had opinions about the conflict. I was well versed in its history. I had been reading books and watching documentaries not just in recent weeks but for years. I could quote Thomas Friedman. I read *From Beirut to Jerusalem* twice. I was hoping to see the house in Ramle from *The Lemon Tree*. In that moment, that vague answer was all I could muster. I didn't know what he wanted me to say but I knew I wouldn't be able to pull off a lie. I also knew he could tell I wasn't a die-hard Zionist.

"I can't let you in the country. You don't have a passport. You could be Russian, for all I know."

"What happens now?" I asked.

"You'll be deported back to Germany. Sit and wait."

I sat down and cried again.

There's a moment during the Apollo 13 flight when Jim Lovell turns to the other pilots and says, "We just lost walking on the moon." Sitting on that plastic chair in the Tel Aviv airport, I realized, *I just lost seeing Jerusalem*. The sadness of the fact was overwhelming, followed closely by the shame of having ruined this opportunity.

After a while, someone came to me and told me to follow them. They directed to me to sit in a sort

of secondary holding area. No offices, just chairs and a vending machine.

A woman was sitting there wearing matching aqua shirt and capri pants, with disheveled curly hair, velcro sandals, white socks with pink polka dots and a face that looked like she had been to hell and back. *(Let's call her Crazy Eyes)*

Still very hungry, I used my debit card to buy a coke from the vending machine. I noticed there were a lot more people guarding the entrance to this lobby. When I had to go to the restroom, I was escorted and watched.

They were all so young. All of the guards and security people. Except for the ones in the offices, making judgment calls about who gets to enter the country. The rest of them all looked like they were in their 20s. I remembered that all Israeli citizens serve in the military. They seemed rough. Seasoned. They were not messing around.

There was a young, Russian man sitting nearby. He had been in the Border Control office as long as I had. The gruff woman had yelled at him and laughed at him. He didn't say a word the entire time I was around him. He looked very sad.

By then it was around 10pm. I put my head down on my jacket and backpack and closed my eyes. I was startled by the sound of Crazy Eyes yelling at the short security guy. I looked up to see that he had coffee down the front of his shirt. He was pissed. He approached her, yelling in another language. Not Hebrew. Maybe German. She kicked him. He took no time at all to pin her to the ground. She resisted. A group stepped in, confronting her and helping the little man control the situation. They yelled at each other.

*Holy Shit*, I thought. I looked at the guards hoping they were going to take her away. Clearly she was disturbed. *Why are you not bringing her somewhere else*, I wondered. *Surely there's a padded cell around here somewhere.*

The short man yelled at her in English, "Shut up and sit down!" He went off to change his shirt. While she sat there, she would periodically kick out her legs into the air, like she was doing Molly Shannon's Sally O'Malley skit. I half expected her to exclaim, "I'll mmm fifty! Fifty year's old!"

They took me to get my checked bag at baggage claim. The airport was empty and I could see big glass sliding doors in the distance and beyond Tel Aviv. There were probably taxis and vans just outside, waiting to take people to their destinations.

They took me to yet another room. My bags were searched again. Very. Thoroughly. They removed everything, using wands with some kind of substance on cotton ends and rubbing it over everything. They asked me to take a picture with my camera.

When I was preparing for this trip several of my friends teased me, telling me I should pack condoms. I refused. "You never know," they had said.

"There is no way I'm going to sleep with a stranger on this trip," I assured them. As the very serious security people searched my bags I was very grateful that I had not heeded their advice. I smiled to myself as I imagined them pulling out condoms and saying, "I thought you didn't know anybody in Israel." Then again, maybe that would have got me into the country.

A woman took me into a small room and searched my person. She was very thorough (not prison-thorough but close). As she passed the metal detecting wand over my body repeatedly and ran her fingers over my arms, legs, waist and feet, I thought about all the dangers, all the fear that led to this level of security. These guys don't mess around because they're afraid. I thought about the U.S. after 9/11. We reacted with fear, too. We treat people just like this every day. Worse than I can ever know, I'm sure. I wasn't angry about what they were doing. I understood. They were protecting themselves. It was just sad. I knew who to be angry with. I'm the one who dropped my damned passport. I started to cry again. I apologized to the young woman. "I'm just tired," I said.

"It's ok," she said.

I sat back down in a chair while my things continued to be searched.

"I don't understand where I'm going now." I said to the security person next to me.

"You're going back to Germany," she said. "If you find your passport in Germany, you can come back and get into the country."

"Can you guarantee that?" I asked her.

"Yes," she said. I didn't believe her.

A young woman with a very heavy Russian accent and very little command of the English language led Crazy Eyes and I through a heavy door. Suddenly, we were outside. There was a van waiting.

"Get in here please. We're taking you to an Immigration Facility," someone said.

*I'm sorry—what now?* I said to myself. I had no idea what that meant. I thought, "You're going back to Germany," meant getting on a flight right away or at worst, sleeping in an airport terminal.

The Russian girl asked us questions.

"If..... you..... allergy?"

"You..... feel good now?"

"If..... you.....medication?"

The van drove into a fenced-in area. There was barbed wire on top.

*Holy shit-cakes*, I thought.

## **Being Held**

9/26/2014

The Russian girl led us into a multi-leveled, small building with short flights of steps in between the levels. It was like a bad camp. A lot of beige. They brought us to a room with big wooden cubbyholes and lockers. The Russian girl told us to put our stuff away.

"You can.....take money. You can take.....few things."

I grabbed my make-up bag for reasons that are not clear to me. Vanity, I guess. She looked inside, seeing a razor, nail clippers and tweezers.

"No, you not take this," she said. I laughed. *Of course not.*

I grabbed a change of underwear and shirt, my notebook and several pencils (I don't go anywhere without several, sharpened pencils.) and my newly acquired *Hyperbole and a Half* book.

We went upstairs to the office area.

"Why are you in Israel?" someone asked. Again, an accusation.

"I wanted to see Jerusalem," I said again.

"You need to call the embassy right now and tell them where you are," I was advised.

"Yeah, ok," I said. *Why hadn't I thought of that before? Why hadn't anyone called the embassy yet?*

"I don't have the number," I stumbled.

"We have the number." A guy gave it to me. I wrote it down in my notebook. He said something in Hebrew to another guy, pointing to my scarf. I had worn a v-neck shirt on the flight and added the scarf in Munich so as not to offend whatever variety of conservative person I might encounter. When in Rome and all that. I thought I heard him use the word, "keffiyah," to describe my scarf. I was a little defensive at that point and I said, "No, this is a Native American print."

I got the embassy on the phone and a marine answered.

"Hi, my name is Nicole LaCour and I'm in an Israeli immigration facility. I lost my passport in Germany."

"Hold on, M'am."

I told the story to someone named Marsha and she promised to call the place back and work on my problem. I told the staff what she said. The same guy who had pointed to my scarf said, "Come with me. I want to show you something." He was a handsome man with blue black hair.

"Ok," I said.

The floor had a sort of open plan with three or four rooms, each with a metal door and small, square window. The doors were painted the color of really bad, green baby poo. Maybe a little darker. Kind of army green but more baby-poo-like.

"This is where the women go," he said pointing to the first room. "This is where people go when they're giving us trouble." He pointed to a second room.

"Uh, ok..." I stammered.

He took me to a large room with two sets of bunk beds, a bathroom, a shower and a large open window. A cool breeze from an open window hit me as I walked in.

"This is the family room. This is where you will stay tonight. Do you know why I'm putting you in here?"

"Uh, because that other woman is crazy and attacked a guard?" I guessed.

"I want you to understand that this is not a jail."

"Ok. I understand that," I said.

"I didn't think your scarf was a keffiyah," he explained, "It looks like a Iraqi design."

"Oh," I said, "I'm sorry for the misunderstanding."

"And I noticed the Hamsa around your neck," he said.

"Yes," I said, "you know this has meaning across all cultures, Christians, Arabs....it's not just a Jewish symbol."

"Yes," he said, "I'm Arab. I know all about it. Try to sleep."

He left a po-boy-like sandwich and closed the door. I never saw him again.

I looked out of the big, open window. There were bars blocking the opening, made into a design with lots of diagonals. The weather was gorgeous. No hint of humidity, of course. I was glad I brought a jacket and kept it with me. The night air was cool.

*I'm not going to see Jerusalem,* I thought.

There was a Winnie the Pooh decoration on the wall. It must have been a growth chart but only the bottom part was on the wall. Pooh Bear was holding up Tigger's bottom half, his head missing.

*Shower. There's a shower.* I took my clothes off and got in the shower, not remembering that I had neither soap, shampoo, nor a towel. I got out and sort of wiped off most of the water with a roll of toilet paper and just put my clothes back on. My hair was dripping. Minutes after dressing, another guy opened the door without knocking.

"The embassy is on the phone," he said.

The woman at the embassy wasn't much help but asked if I was ok. "Yes, all things considered," I said.

"Is your husband there also?" she asked.

"I'm not married. I'm here alone."

She asked if I wanted to inform anyone. I didn't want to alarm anybody so I said "no."

The guy took me back to the room and left the door open.

I sat on the top bunk and wrote. I felt a wave of shame. I was so embarrassed. How could I be so stupid?

"Why Jerusalem?" everyone had asked. "Why not Rome or Paris?" I didn't want to do something so *normal*. I wanted something more gritty. I liked the idea of the tension, the history. I wanted to feel the thousands of years of history in the walls and the streets and the daily life and activity of the city. I wanted to experience what I had read about. I wanted to see all those holy places, place prayers in the cracks of the Western Wall, see the tomb of the Virgin Mary and the Church of Mary Magdalene. Eat hummus from street vendors and buy silly trinkets. And all of it with my camera. All of it through my 50mm and 200mm lenses. All of it taken and changed through my viewpoint and maybe made into something new.

I wanted to be daring and bold and adventurous. I wanted to be a different person. I had told everyone that I was going to Jerusalem. My guidebook was highlighted. I read books and watched movies. I had north, south, east and west written in Hebrew in my now-lost little black notebook.

I felt like a fool, a failure. I wasn't sure I wanted to go back. I wanted to hide under a rock. A bunk bed in a detention center would do for now.

*You wanted gritty?* I asked myself, *Well, you dropped your fucking passport. You got gritty now.*

I looked around the room. There was writing on the plywood under the top bunks. A lot of writing. "You can detain me, but I'll be back." Some hateful stuff. "My two-year old was in here." Most of it indecipherable to me, in other languages. There was a note from a U.S. Congresswoman who was there with a peace activist. I wrote their names down.

I tried to sleep.

My pants were very comfortable. I laughed at myself. I could write a J. Petermen catalog description about my New York and Company jeans.

*The stretchy cotton of the NY&C jeans have the hip look of real blue jeans, easily paired with Chuck Taylor's of any color, yet so comfortable that if one finds oneself on a 3-inch plastic mattress on the top bunk at an Israeli detention center, they will feel like silk*

*pajamas. Warning: The back pockets are not as deep as say a pair of Levi's. You might not want to put your passport there, even just for a few minutes. It might fall out without you ever noticing it.*

I looked down at my feet and my new, beautiful, purple converses.

*Thank God I bought these, I said to myself. Because the ratty old black converses I had would not do in this fine establishment.*

I was seriously happy that I had bought a watch. That cheap little Target watch kept me sane. I read a little, wrote a lot and tried to sleep, using my jacket as a pillow.

### **My Only Day in Israel**

9/19/2014

After a fitful night's sleep, I woke up with the sun. Quotes from my favorite movie, *A Room With a View*, came to mind. "This is not what we were led to expect. I thought we were going to see the Arno. This pensione is a failure. Tomorrow we'll make a change." I thought about the episode of *Girls* when Hannah does cocaine so she could write about it. I thought about the episode of *The IT Crowd* when Roy gets thrown out of his building with no shirt. "I work here!" he screams, "My badge is my jacket! My badge is my jacket!"

Around 7am, I timidly walked out of my open door to the front office and asked the first person I saw, "May I call the embassy again and.....coffee?" I asked, gesturing with my hands.

"We're changing shifts. Give us a half an hour or so and breakfast will be coming soon," a guy told me as he led me back into the room. I think he was surprised to see me out of the room.

An hour or so later, I went back out and asked to call the embassy again. A young woman with orange-blonde, straightened hair looked at me as if she knew who I was.

"Are you ok?" she asked with more concern than I expected.

"Uh....yeah," I said.

"I didn't think you'd still be here. I thought the embassy would have gotten you out of here by now. I hoped you would be released."

"Uh, me too," I replied.

A different guy looked at me as he was walking by and said, "You need to call the embassy right

now and tell them it's an emergency because you're in jail." Not exactly the characterization the first guy had given.

I talked to the embassy, explaining my story again.

"You have to come to Tel Aviv, if you need a passport," a woman said.

"I am in Tel Aviv. I'm being held," I said.

"Oh, you're being held! Oh, you're Nicole LaCour. We're working on trying to get you released or finding your passport."

I asked her what would happen if I landed in Germany without my passport. Wouldn't I be in the same situation? She told me she would inform the American Embassy in Germany and that I should ask to speak them as soon as I landed. It was not a solid plan.

While I was sitting just outside the office, Orange-Blonde brought in an older woman who moved very timidly. She had curly, wispy hair. She didn't have control of her curls. Her hair was a mousey brown with blonde tips, like she had dyed it once but let it go. She clutched her wallet and a book dearly to her chest.

"Get in here, m'am," Orange-Blonde said, directing her to the women's room a few feet away from me.

"But I didn't do anything," Wispy Woman replied in a slow, wispy voice.

"M'am, please get in here," Orange-Blonde insisted. The staff was generally very kind and accommodating, unless you resisted. That much I had seen already.

"You don't understand," Wispy whispered, "I've never been in a place like that before."

"I am not asking you to get in. I'm telling you," Orange said.

I watched this exchange and wanted to say to Orange, "You know if you would just take a minute to explain to her why she's here and what's going to happen to her and when she's going to leave and where she's going to go, she might cooperate."

I also wanted to say to Wispy, "What the fuck is wrong with you? Get in the room. What part of Israeli detention facility do you not understand?!"

She went in the room. I felt really sad for her.

I went back to the family room. Outside the doors were little eraser-board signs for names, like in a hospital. I looked at mine and was kind of insulted my name wasn't on it.

I sat up on the top bunk. *Well, what do I do now?* I thought. I had a free day. No obligations. Nothing to be productive with. Nowhere to go. No one even knew I was there. Might as well sleep. I was exhausted. I dozed off now and again. I wrote and drew. I copied the weird cartoon drawings from my *Hyperbole and a Half* book. The psycho-looking grin of the oversimplified caricature of a little girl stared up at me. I should remember to send Allie Brosh a thank you card.

The embassy must have lit a fire under the staff because every hour or so someone would come into my room and ask more questions or look at my driver's license. Once someone said, "I think you're going to be released today." I imagined being allowed into the country, calling my Airbnb host, salvaging the trip. Maybe I would still get to see the Hagia Sofia.

I was standing at the window watching a dove-looking bird making weird noises. I think he spoke Hebrew. He was on top of a large palm tree looking down like he was afraid of heights. I thought of Tracy Jordan in *30 Rock*, "Have some dignity bird. Don't you know you can fly?"

Sitting back on the bed, I thought about my ex. He would be loving this. Of all the stupid mistakes I've made in my life and there have been plenty....the keys locked in cars, things broken, phones dropped. I once flushed a beeper down a toilet. Lost jewelry, careless fender-benders.....my ex hated that about me. It drove him nuts. Blame was part of the air I breathed. *It's a shame we don't talk anymore*, I thought. Finally, I was facing real consequences for my careless behavior. A lost trip, wasted money and actual detainment with the Israeli government. I laughed at myself.

I hadn't posted anything on facebook since Wednesday. I thought people might be worried so I decided to try to use my phone to make a post. A different guy took me to my phone.

"Why are you in Israel?" the question was lobbed at me again. He looked at me with confusion, like he didn't understand what I was doing there.

"I wanted to see Jerusalem," I said, "But I dropped my passport. I was stupid."

There was no internet connection to make a post so I decided I better call someone. Mark or Lisa? Hmmm. What if I really needed someone to act as an advocate, just in case they didn't let me out of here? Better make it Lisa. I turned on all the switches to make an international call. The guy led me outside to get better reception.

*"Hello. Oh hey....I didn't realize what time it was there. Midnight. Oh sorry. Um, well, not exactly. I kind of ran into a problem. I lost my passport and they didn't let me in and I'm being sort of detained. No, I'm ok. No, not the Americans. The Israelis. Could you post on facebook that I landed*

*and that I'm safe."*

Someone fussed at the guy for taking me outside to use the phone so he directed me back in.

*"I have to hang up now. Bye."*

I used to joke with Lisa that I wanted to have t-shirts made that said, "I danced with Wild Man at Whiskey River. You can't touch me." I have a idea: "I spent two nights in an Israeli Detention Center. Don't Even."

The embassy finally said that Israel was refusing to let me in. They "denied my request for entry." Lufthansa couldn't find my passport, which may have been headed to Tel Aviv on Saturday. They said I would be flying to Germany at midnight.

Someone poked their head in my room and asked if I wanted to go outside. Of course I did. I wasn't exactly busy or anything. They took us into a little yard that doubled as a break area for the staff. They all smoked. They were all so young. They laughed and joked and yelled at each other from across the yard and up and down the floors like siblings in big house. They ignored us for the most part, just a revolving cast of characters, I imagined. The women fascinated me. They had a sort of Jersey-girl look. The hair, the make-up, the nails, the jewelry but with a soldier-like toughness. An attitude. Anyone studying gender stereotypes? Feminist issues? I have a subject for you. It's real easy to get inside this subculture. Just try to get into Israel without a passport and make sure you have several people in your phone with Muslim or Arab names. Also, put up some resistance if you want to see ideas of gender, power and authority turned on their heads.

Back inside, I watched the setting sun hit the tops of the palm trees outside my window. I imagined the Dome of the Rock being hit by the same rays, shining brilliantly. The gold donated by King Hussein and installed by Armenians. Or maybe that was the blue tile. I forget. They say this is the best time to be in the Old City. It's Friday. People are likely ushering in the Sabbath at the Western Wall while others are making their way to or returning from Al-Aqsa. It was right there. Just an hour's drive away.

*A Room With a View* popped into my head again. "Sunset. The Sunset of Italy.....and she wandered as though in a dream through the wavering sea of barley.....all unobserved he came to her....."

"Sunset. The Sunset of a Tel Aviv Detention Center.....Isn't it immortal?" I reworked the script.

Later that evening a man came into my room and said, "I need you to get your things and come with me. We have a family coming in."

He took me to the women's room, the one the first guy had shown me. Crazy Eyes and Wispy Woman were in there. It was a bit more scary in there but I knew I was flying out soon. It was smaller with more bunk beds, less light and no open window. They didn't leave the door open. You had to knock if you needed something. I settled on a top bunk with the ceiling right above my head. I actually talked to Crazy Eyes. She didn't seem as disturbed as she had in the airport. She spoke English, Spanish and German. I drew and wrote and watched the hands move on my little watch.

They brought in a Russian woman with red hair. Let's call her Red. She tried to ask which bunks were taken. We had a minute or two of lost in translation moments with a *het* and yes attempted before I finally held up three fingers, telling her there were three of us here.

She found a spot and sat there, a bit dazed. She never lay down or got comfortable in any way. Wispy Woman on the other hand seemed to be nesting obsessively. She started looking around and touching all the wool blankets, like she was looking for a specific one. She moved slowly and timidly but her actions were possessive and aggressive. When she needed something she knocked on the door softly and timidly for 10-15 minutes. She started asking Red if she had taken her blanket. Red looked at her like she was crazy and looked up at me as if to say, "What's with this bitch?" Knowing smiles were exchanged. I tried to ask Wispy why she was looking for a specific blanket.

"I don't understand. Is one of them softer than the others?"

She ignored me. She tried to take Crazy Eye's blanket who was laying down on her cot with a sheet over her. "Put that back please," she said without turning around. I laughed. My sympathy for Wispy Woman was fading.

They gave us dinner and some chocolate covered waver things that were actually pretty good. The staff changed again. There was a young man that looked to me like a typical, young, studious Jewish student. The glasses, the hairstyle, his way of talking. I could picture him pouring over texts in a library. He asked us if we wanted to go outside again. There was a mother and a little girl there. One of the staff was a stunningly beautiful woman with deep, black hair and a striking face. She seemed to be making a lot of effort to get Glasses Guy's attention. He was having none of it. They competed over the attention of a cat who seemed to like Crazy Eyes. Red was crying.

I walked to the fence and looked up at the sky and saw Orion. I started to cry again. I was in Israel and I would be Germany by the morning without having seen anything. What a loss. I felt like such a fool. I sat down at the picnic table, put my head down and cried.

When we were coming back in, Glasses Guy asked me, "Is everything ok?"

I looked at him incredulously, "No. Everything is not ok," I said, allowing the sarcasm to escape.

"Is there anything I can do?" he asked.

"I don't think so."

"If you need anything don't hesitate to ask," he offered.

"I need my passport."

"Don't worry," he said. "You're just going to go home."

*Right. I'm just going to go home. That's all.*

Before we returned to the room, I asked someone at the front office, "The embassy said I'm flying out at midnight. Is that correct?"

"What's your name? No. You fly out at 5:30am."

"Ok, so what time will you come and get me?"

"4:30. We take you straight to the plane."

*Ok, I thought. I just have to make it until 4:30.*

We returned to the room and Wispy Woman was handed a towel.

*I want a towel! I thought.*

The next time the door was opened I asked for a towel and some soap. I tried to wash my hair with soap, but it didn't lather very much and I ended up just adding soap to my hair. Oh well, a shower's a shower.

Again, I tried to sleep but there was no way that was going to happen. Crazy Eyes was snoring and kicking her feet in her sleep like she had in the airport. *How can she sleep like that?* I wondered.

Around 2am, the door was opened and the light turned on and another Russian woman was brought in. She wore a dress with black stockings, boot-like, high-heeled shoes and big pearls on her ears. She was very curvy and confident. She immediately started speaking Russian to Red who I imagined was very grateful to have someone to converse with. No doubt they were exchanging stories. I was happy to have the distraction. I sat up and watched and listened to them. I love being around people speaking a foreign language. Not understanding allows you to just listen to music of their words and guess the meaning. It was so beautiful. It reminds me of being around my parents and grandparents when they spoke French.

They continued to converse, making gestures to Wispy Woman and laughing. I could tell Red was telling her about the blanket search. The new woman laughed readily. She wasn't afraid.

Wispy Woman got up and went to the bathroom. She looked up at me and gestured for the time. "Was it morning?" she seemed to ask.

"Oh, no, it's only 2:30am." I said.

She laid back down on her bunk and turned away. But the Russians continued to talk and the light was still on. Finally she tried to admonish them. "They don't speak English," I said. I was loving this.

She gestured that perhaps they should tone it down and sleep.

The new woman looked at Wispy, then at Red and laughed. After a while, she finally acquiesced and said in broken English,

"Yes, yes. Ok. We sleep."

She knocked on the door loudly and was allowed to get some sleep clothes from her luggage. She changed and laid down in the bunk. They turned the lights off again.

It was around 2:30am. I was hours away from being put on a plane for Germany. What if they didn't come get me at 4:30? I had been holding it together fairly well up until then. If they didn't open that door at 4:30 I thought I might lose it. And then, what was I going to do in Germany? I still didn't have my passport. How would I pay for a ticket back home? Would they exchange the flights I wasn't going to use? Will the American Embassy be any more help there than they had been here?

I remembered the lenses in my bag. I had packed them carefully so they wouldn't be damaged. The security people had not repacked them the same way. *At 3:45, I'll ask to see my luggage and rearrange the contents*, I thought. I was also expecting Aunt Irma at any moment and needed my provisions on the flight. I was at least smart enough to think of that.

I sat up and waited, looking at the window and checking the time every 20 minutes or so. Finally, at 3:45, I knocked on the door, loudly. Wispy Woman got up.

"Sorry," I said. I wasn't sorry.

Someone led me to my luggage and I packed my lenses properly. I took out my Lonely Planet guide book, *Israel and the Palestinian Territories*, looked at with a sigh and put it in my suitcase. My camera was in a locker.

"Please don't let me forget my camera," I said to the guy. "That would be the worst part of all of this." He suggested I put it in one of my bags. I did.

He started to take me back to the room.

"So, you're going to come and get me at 4:30, right?" I asked, looking at my watch. He must have seen the apprehension on my face.

"Would you like to wait here and have some coffee?"

"Oh, God yes!" I said, "Thank you!"

He served me some awful instant coffee and I waited, grateful not to have to be back in that room.

At 4:30am, the Glasses Guy got the two Russian women and a man I hadn't seen before and took all of us to get our luggage. We went outside to a waiting van and they all had a smoke before we left. Our luggage had red tags and special security stickers all over them. They drove us to the tarmac. Passing through the gate, I saw men with guns. We drove past El Al and other airplanes. I saw a Lufthansa plane. We stopped. Glasses Guy got out and talked to someone on the ground. He gave them my luggage. He opened the door and escorted me out. I turned and waved goodbye to the Russians, who had been talking and pointing at me most of the ride. He led me up the metal stairs to the plane. I walked in the loading arm just as other passengers were coming aboard.

I looked like shit. No make-up. I had a head cold so I had been blowing my nose. My hair was matted and gross. And I'm sure I had a very anxious look on my face. I can't imagine what the other passengers thought as this security guy escorted me, holding my boarding passes as I clung to my bags with red tags all over them.

We walked into the cabin and Glasses Guy handed the flight attendant my boarding passes. It was loud and people were moving past us.

"Here's her pass to Munich," he showed the attendant.

Then he flipped up to show a second one saying, "And here's her pass to.....IAH, what's IAH?" They didn't know what the airport code IAH was.....but I did.

"I looked over at the boarding pass. "IAH?!! Houston?! I'm going to Houston?!" I exclaimed. I burst into tears. "Oh God, I'm going to Houston!"

The flight attendant was alarmed. "Did you not want to go to Houston?"

"Yes. I want to go to Houston!" I said.

I turned to Glasses Guy and said, "Thank You." I really don't know why. He bowed to me with his hands together in a Namaste-kind of gesture, which was weird. I went into the cabin. The flight attendant put her arm around me and took me aside. I pulled myself together. She gave me some water.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I just spent two nights in a detention center because I lost my passport. I didn't know I was going back to the U.S."

"Did they mistreat you?" she asked.

"No, no, they were very nice," I said. "I'm just relieved to be going back to the states."

I found my seat all the way in the back row between a young man and an older man. I put my things away and put my head in my hands and just cried. No one asks me why.

I let myself cry for a few minutes, mourning my lost trip, punishing myself for being stupid and feeling relief that I wouldn't be stuck in Germany.

I wiped my face, sat back and sighed as the plane climbed steeply into the air, headed to Munich.

## Coming Home

9/26/2014

The plane leveled off and we were free to move about the cabin. I found my make-up bag and hairbrush and went to the bathroom.

God help me, I love make-up. I've never been accused of wearing too much make-up but I don't leave the house without at least some base under my eyes, eyeliner and something on my lips. I looked at myself in the mirror. I brushed my hair and smoothed it out as best I could, wishing I could wash it. I put some base on my face, maybe a bit too much. *Easy girl*, I thought. *You don't want to walk out looking like a geisha*. I put some eyeliner on, blush and found my lipstick case. Ahhhh, lipstick. Sweet, lovely lipstick. I love you so. I felt a bit more like myself and went back to my seat.

On this flight, I didn't mind sitting in the middle seat. When we landed I asked the man next to me what the time was. We were landing at exactly the boarding time of my next flight. *Shit*. He alerted the flight attendant and they got me on the bus. What's with the buses in Munich? No one walks to their terminals? No trains? It's all buses.

On the bus I turned on my phone. A plethora of texts lit up the screen.

"Did you find a solution?"

"Download this app and call me ASAP."

"Are you alive?"

With what little battery life I had left, I texted Lisa, "On my way to Houston. I'm ok. More later."

There were e-mails from her. I scanned through the messages. Calls to the embassy, state department, the airline. Aw *Shit*, I said to myself and laughed. I guess I alerted the right person.

I got off the bus and ran through the airport, asking for help along the way. Found the gate. Security again. I told them I was very late. Camera. Liquids. Wand. Shoes. Hurry!

Then another, "May I see your passport." *Shit*.

"I don't have my passport."

"Step aside, m'am."

Not again. A tinge of panic started welling in my stomach. A phone call was made and I was given the all clear. I ran through the loading passage and onto the plane, panting and out of breath. I sat on the floor of the cabin.

"Are you ok?" the flight attendant asked.

"Yeah, I was just running."

Then I pulled the first of what I was sure would be many, "I just spent two nights in an Israeli detention center," excuses.

"Would you like some chocolate?" she asked.

"No." I said, "but maybe a drink."

I found my aisle seat, next to a lovely older woman. The flight back was as easy as any 10-hour

flight can be. Though I didn't sleep. I cannot sleep on planes. I find myself watching everyone else's movies. It's like channel surfing with no sound.

We landed in Houston. In the airport, we were corralled into yet another border control area. Everyone was using kiosks to scan their passports. *Here we go again.*

"I don't have my passport."

"Get in this line."

*Sigh.*

When the couple in front of me got to the booth, they started complaining. The tall, African American man listened and replied, "You think you're better than all these people? You're no different than anyone here." I liked him.

It was my turn. "I don't have my passport," etc. etc...

"Step aside m'am."

*Son of a Bitch. But I'm in the U.S. now, I thought. It's going to be ok.*

Then I wondered if maybe being in the U.S. didn't necessarily guarantee an easy process. Would my own government treat me any better? Being a citizen is not a guarantee for justice. Maybe I was just being paranoid. I was pretty loopy.

A man came to get me and took me and about 5 others to a separate room.

*Here we go again.*

I walked into a room full of very tired and sad-looking people.

*I might be here a while,* I thought and went to the restroom. In the single stall, I heard my name being called. I tried not to lose my dignity by yelling from the bathroom, "I'm here. I'm here. I'm Nicole!" By the third time I heard my name, I did just that. I stumbled out of the bathroom, still trailing my backpack, purse and camera.

He asked to see my driver's license. He barely looked at it and said, "Ok. You can go."

"I can go? Go where? Where to now?"

"No. You can go. You're released."

"What do you mean released? Where do I go now?"

It took me a few minutes to realize I was actually free to go. Even when I left that room and found my luggage, I saw another line of people showing documents and thought, *Wait. He didn't give me anything. I don't have a piece of paper like these other people do.* I asked someone for help. They looked at my customs form.

"Yeah. See. He stamped it right there. You're good."

"Oh. Ok."

Then, there I was in the Houston airport. Free to do as I like.

My phone was dead. I muddled back and forth not knowing whether to get a flight to Lafayette, try to exchange my unused Lufthansa tickets, take the bus.... Finally, exhausted, I walked out of the airport, went up to a cab driver and said, "Take me to a hotel or motel near the airport. Red Roof Inn? Perfect."

"I need a room for the night. Yeah. That's fine. Whatever."

I got to my room, which seemed like the most luxurious accommodation I'd ever been in. I plugged in my phone and took the longest, hottest Silkwood-ey-est shower of my life. I think I washed my hair three times. I got dressed, finally ditching the amazing New York & Company pants for my cool, new travel skirt and walked to a Chinese restaurant down the street. Over hot tea and the worst Pad Thai I've ever had, I called Enterprise and reserved a car.

My phone back to life, I had my first debrief with Zubair. Mohammad Zubair, that is. I told him about his name coming up in my phone at Border Control. We laughed about it. For the rest of my life, I will never forget his reaction to the story of my carelessness and resulting detainment.

"I wish I had been there with you and I had lost my passport too."

He always knew just what to say.

"Though it may have been a little harder for me," he added.

My son's reaction was not as sentimental. Upon reading my text, that I was detained for losing my passport, he called me saying, "No, no, no. You have to come up with a better excuse than that. You cannot tell people you lost your passport. You have to say you protested or spray painted a wall or something. You can't say you were actually detained by the Israeli government because you dropped something."

"Yeah. Too soon, son. We'll joke about this later," I said and hung up on him before he had a chance to hang up on me, as per our custom.

I slept like a baby and in the morning took the airport shuttle to get my rental. Approaching the Bush International Airport, I felt a little trepidation. *No, not the airport*, I thought.

The Enterprise people were polite and accommodating. "How was your flight?" Parker asked as he stood there with a bottle of water and a smile.

"I'm not coming from a flight." I answered. And yes, I pulled the second of what would be many, *I-just-spent-two-nights-in-an-Israeli-detention-center's*.

I told Siri to take me home and happily drove back to Lafayette, in control once again. The windows down. My music in my ears. And the stupidity of my mistake and the loss of my dream trip still smoldering under the surface.

I was going to see the Hagia Sofia. My soul mate was going to meet me there.

A few long phone calls, telling the story a second and third time and a pop over the Basin Bridge and I made it back to Lafayette. I returned the rental at the airport and grabbed a taxi back to little Apt. No. 5. I put my luggage down in the living room and looked out my front door. I looked at the back of the warehouse across the adjoining parking lot. I remembered saying to myself, *I want to change my view. Well, I tried*, I sighed to myself.

### **"This is Lufthansa."**

It wasn't a big deal. I was never in danger. I wasn't treated badly. But the failure of that attempt to travel haunted me. I wrote on a small sticky note, "It was just 5 days," and stuck it on my computer as a reminder to get over it.

I made lots of phone calls in the days following my return. To Lufthansa, to my insurance company,

to the State Department. I called the former Congresswoman whose name I had seen under a bunk. I took pictures of the red tags on my luggage. It was the only evidence I had that I had spent time in a detention center in Israel. I gave up hope of getting my passport back, but I couldn't bring myself to report it lost. I would have go through the process of getting a new one. I wasn't going anywhere anytime soon, anyway.

Then, one day I got a phone call. "This is Luftshansa." I couldn't believe it. I had made so many repeated inquiries with no reply.

"We found your passport. It's in a Lost & Found warehouse in Frankfurt."

"You're kidding. Wow. That's great. Can I have it back?"

"Yes, I'm working with my contact there to have it mailed back to you. Did you have a little black book with it? With Hebrew letters and handwritten notes?"

"Yes. Absolutely. That's mine."

Someone had really picked it up from the tarmac in Munich. The flight attendants had told the truth.

A few weeks later, a package was left at my apartment door and there it was, my passport. Still crisp and clean without a single stamp. I looked through my little black notebook. I unfolded the papers I had stapled to a page. I scanned over the long list of sites to see and resources listed. Bike tours and ways to see the West Bank. Palestinian pizza and the best time to go the Jaffa Gate.

I took the notebook and passport and opened the little cubby of my grandmother's chifferobe. I put them in the plastic folder where I kept important documents and closed the small, mirrored door, held tight by a hinged nail.

*One day I want to try again,* I thought.