

Tulsa

Caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt

When I applied to the Call for Grants, launched by Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of US State Department, for participation in program Faith and Community : A Dialogue, in the autumn, exactly one year ago, I thought I did it rather for the wish to explore my personal outreach, and because I was looking for confirmation of the activities that I am already involved in, than for the sake of the expectations to become part of `lucky twenty four`, coming from three states : Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. I was, in fact conscious that I stood weak chances to be accepted.

And then, the winter came. After the interview in Sarajevo, in early spring- or perhaps the spring did not come yet ?- I knew that, with all the appreciations that I received over years of my engagement in educational work, but also in formal and informal personal education, the happiness smiled at me.

They say that there is no such thing as tiny happiness.
However, I felt my happiness to be really great.

Divided in groups of 12, we received the terms for our visit to United States. I was part of the mottled group that consisted of religious and educational workers, youth activists and advocates, students and honorable people in our community. The aim of our travel was improvement of communication among religious communities, increase in level of understanding nongovernmental sector and similar organizations in USA, but also maintaining the correct contact between us, the participants, during and after the visit to the States.

Coming from three different countries, we headed “across the big sea”, cheerful, excited, curious, almost unknown to each other. And a bit dubious, if we are to be absolutely honest.
So that is the way I felt.

By thinking about the trip that was in front of me I asked myself how these 12 individuals, having diverse national belongings, professions, attitudes and opinions, and coming from three states, will function together for 21 days, when citizens of these countries, can in a way be regarded, as people who rather looked at each other, just a day before, through gun-shooting target-holes.

We will change the climate, but what will happen with our way of thinking? Shall I, or the way I am, bother anyone? Have the national policies taken tribute when it is about my co-travelers? The faith is anyway the topic that can ignite the fire sparkles among family members as well...



We met at the Washington airport. We all smiled at each other and were in a good mood, even though we had 11 hours of strenuous trip and rigorous custom controls.

While seated in the minibus on our way to hotel we started to feel the breeze of the States, in a way that we got to know them from the movies: huge automobiles, with their unordinary car plates, wide roads, and traffic jam.

They drove us to hotel in the centre of the city. It was small, but pleasant place, obviously conceived in a way to conquer the guests by its warm and `at home` atmosphere. This was, as well, our first chance to start sharing our time – and room, with someone who was relatively stranger, and whose way of thinking we could not know.

Accommodated by two, from different cities, and even different countries, we commenced our three-week, official visit to United States.

And it started well.

I noticed, that very particular morning, while having my first breakfast in a row of many other breakfasts I was about to have.

And with a smile ☺

On that particular morning, our team got three new members – translators, «our» girls with status of permanent residence in Washington. I say «our», though their names and the way in which they talked clearly pointed that these dear ladies were of different religious and national origin.

Four laborious days stretched before us, filled, from the early morning to late afternoon hours with meetings and appointments introducing us to welcoming people in different organizations that had something to do with interreligious dialogue and tolerance. Nevertheless, we spent our evenings together as well, in stroll, and taking photos- or to summarize in one phrase, in having pleasure.

After four days we departed for Philadelphia.

We came in evening hours, not really in time when Philadelphia could wait for us in its full glitters, washed in lights of powerful commercials in numerous colors on the buildings that prompted to the sky.

In this huge, luxurious hotel, just next to the City Hall, we were awaited by Ann, our caring hostess, and rotation happened: we are again in two-bed, shared rooms, but this time with another male or female roommate.

And once again we could experience the close-look on how democracy and human rights function in reality. With every new visit to different institutions our small community started to breathe as one joint organism. For working time it is quite understandable, but we spent the «parade» time also moving in a big group, of rarely less than 5, 6 persons.

We took care of each other, helped each other, and were caught together in new, marvelous experience of metro ride, acquiescence in unknown streets, discovering familiar and unfamiliar talents that each one of us possessed.

We, the 12 individuals, of different national backgrounds, professions, attitudes and opinions, coming from three states whose citizens can in a way be regarded, as people who rather looked at each other, just a day before, through gun-shooting target-holes...

And three translators.

Two more weeks passed very fast, and gave us the opportunity to attend religious services of Catholics, Orthodox, Muslims, to celebrate Jom Kippur with Jews, to see the schools that are religious and where love is nourished also in diversity, to find out more about Quakers, and to experience the Amish and Mennonite communities, on the spot, to meet with the



three-member and three-national UN delegation in New York... The sole enumerating of all different people who opened for us the doors of the institutions where they work, but also their hearts, would last too long.

We felt that we were welcome everywhere.

The time flew, and it also meant the return to Washington, and return home.

Washington waited us as though we were its old and known fellows, and this time, we came to terrain that was familiar to us. We spent the last days of this exceptional travel in making visits to institutions that have the mission to build peace and understanding among people and in preparing action plans that will serve us when we get back to communities we originated from.

We said good bye at Washington airport.

With haze in the eyes and solid promise: that we will not let the friendships that we carried on our bosom to be broken, that we will remain connected and at service of one another! Marvelously, but in this unity of diversities, I felt we somehow became stronger than our individualities. We did not change hereby, and with this germ, we started our trip. We honored and began to love human in ourselves, and not exclusively Bosniak, Serb, Jew, Croat or agnostic. We gathered our small community on the internet, with the goal of promoting dialogue and launching tolerance and democracy.

And, landed again on the soil of Bosnia and Herzegovina, my dearest homeland, I suddenly realized: *Caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt!*

Jasmina Mehmedovic, Tuzla, B&H