

# MY TRIP TO GREECE

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by Mrs. Leonard C. Gwinn

In the spring of 1973 my son who has been in Athens, Greece for three years wrote that he would pay my way from New York to Athens and it all sounded fantastic to me.

I have never been a good traveller and had hardly been on an airplane before. I really hoped they would come home instead. When they definitely said they could not come, I began to make plans. Since I had planted a garden and dreaded the hot weather that prevails in Athens in the summer, I decided to go in October. By that time the garden would be harvested and the weather cooler in Athens.

In September, my Sunday school class gave me a Bon Voyage Party and money enough to pay my fare home from New York to Beckley. My daughter gave me fare to New York. Earlier, I had secured a passport and had a physical checkup. In August, my son Joel in Louisville gave me a test flight from there to Beckley. It was very agreeable and I enjoyed it.

On September 30th I left Beckley on the 11 AM Piedmont. When we got to Roanoke, Va., I was the last one leaving the plane and so was separated from the crowd. Entering the first door I came to, I found myself in the maintenance department. But the Lord takes care of infants and fools and I knew I wasn't an infant. Anyway, the workers were most courteous and a nice young man piloted me to the waiting room.

I do not hear well and the messages coming over the intercom are unintelligible to me. In a few minutes, a distinguished looking gentleman came in whom I recognized as Senator Jennings Randolph of West Virginia. Knowing in reason that he would be going to

Washington, D.C., I approached him and introduced myself. Our plane would be leaving Roanoke one half hour late and I was afraid that I would miss my connection in Washington. I told the Senator that I was due in New York by 5 o'clock. He was most kind to ask the man at the gate to wire ahead and have them hold the Braniff flight until we got there. At the time, I did not know that Senator Randolph had, at one time, owned a lot of airline stock.

When the stewardess on the Braniff announced that the flight would be held until Mrs. L. C. Gwinn of Beckley, W.Va. arrived, my self-esteem was completely restored.

The Piedmont to Washington was crowded. I sat between a teenage boy and a nice looking young man at the window. As I helped the stewardess serve the young man his lunch, I asked him if he knew which airport in Washington was our destination. He said that he made regular trips through there and would be happy to carry my tote bag and show me the Braniff section. Senator Randolph had squeezed in between two passengers behind me. I guess he thought that I needed someone to keep an eye on me. It was at the National Airport that the Red Carpet was rolled out for everybody. It was a fitting welcome to our National Capitol.

I immediately boarded the Braniff and, because it was such a close connection, when I got to Kennedy Airport in New York, my luggage was not there. I gave the baggage man instructions to forward it on to Athens. Then, I took a cab to the Olympic section where my reservation was confirmed. Our flight did not leave until early 9pm so there was a wait of almost three hours. I was surrounded by Greeks. I could figure out only about three native Americans. But the wait was interesting.

In the Coffee Shop, I introduced myself to another lone lady. She was Greek but could speak English. As it happened, she lived in Athens in the same suburb where my son lives. She has two children living in the States and had been here to spend the summer.

Finally we were all processed and we embarked on the Super Boeing Jumbo Jet 747-200B, a two decker. It had a capacity of 389 passengers, 12 First Class and 377 others. Its cruising altitude was 31,000 to 39,000 ft. Its speed 587mph, length 231 feet, wing span 195 feet, height 63' 5". To me, it was most luxurious. It had space to move around in. I had three seats to myself because it was not crowded. First we were treated to baskets of candy. It was the first time I had been served a five-course dinner at 9:30 in the evening. After dinner there was a movie. Then, we could have earphones and listen to music of our choice. I didn't sleep but I did stretch out on the three seats and, before I realized it, day began to break.

The sunrise over the ocean was spectacular. I simply do not have words to describe it. It was an experience that I will count as one of the rare moments of my life. Before I thought about it, the girls began to serve breakfast. My watch said 4am but there is a difference in time of 6 hours so I set my watch to 10am. The Captain announced that we would be in Athens by 11 o'clock. When we arrived, there I was without luggage, so I didn't have to go through Customs. Shelia, Jon and Andrea were there to meet me. Jon said that with a hundred or more people there to meet their friends and relatives, who should come through the gate first but his mom! Their apartment is not far from the airport. It was very warm for my fall suit and, since I had no clothes with me, I had to borrow some cooler clothes. Lucky that I could wear my daughter-in-law's.

At first, Athens overwhelmed me. I had not known it was so big. The population is around 8,000,000. The barren mountains depressed me at first. But at sunset they turn a miraculous transparent purple which seems to reflect over the waters of the bay, or the Saronic Gulf. In time, I learned to appreciate their beauty. Glyfada, where my son lives, is not far from the beach on the gulf. The next day, we had lunch at an open air restaurant beside the shore. Of course we had Greek food. My children relish it but it is much too greasy for me. With every lunch and dinner, you are served tomato and cucumber salad, floating in olive oil. If you

have a mind to, you can sop it up with the hard, crusty bread which is also served.

My son's landlord and lady were gracious and friendly. Flora baby-sits with my youngest granddaughter. She and Papou care for her as if she were their own. We had many coffee hours with them and enjoyed Flora's Greek dishes. Their garden was in front and enclosed with a high iron fence. There were nine olive trees, a grape arbor and flowers of all kinds. The geraniums were as high as my head. It was delightful to sit on the balcony in the evening, bathed in the perfume of jasmine and watch the sunsets over the bay. They were always so colorful and brilliant, every one worthy of being painted.

One afternoon we drove all the way down the peninsula to the tip. The waters of the bay were a deep blue. The beaches were so clean they looked like they had been washed, which really they had been. All along there were big hotels being built and every sort of recreational facility provided. All this of course to attract tourists. On our way back, we stopped at a village and bought some yogurt. We browsed around in the shops, admiring the pictures, ceramics and handmade articles.

We spent a whole day at the Parthenon on the Acropolis. One thing that impressed me was the stones worn to a shining smooth surface by the thousands or millions of feet over more than two thousand years. What a shame that so beautiful a work of men's hands had been ransacked and destroyed in times of conflict during the years. I will not go into detail on this most magnificent ruin of the world. From the Acropolis, we looked down on the ancient Theater of Dionysius where the Miss Universe pageant was staged in September of this year. On the other side we looked over the old city called the Plaka, the Greenwich Village of Athens. From the northeast side, we saw the temple of Zeus, the beautiful modern stadium called the Panathenaic. It is fitted into a natural ravine of the pine-clad Ardettus hill. The 70,000 seat stadium was laid out by Lycurgus in the 4th Century B.C. It was covered with dazzling white Pentelic marble by Herodes Atticus some 500 years later and completely restored by the modern benefactor Averoff in time for

the revived Olympic Games in 1896. From the northeast, we could see the King's Palace and Constitution Square.

Leaving the Acropolis, we drove down by the Hadrian Arch and the King's gardens. At each gate were the colorful costumed Royal Guards. We admired the fountains in the Omonia Square and the Concord Square. Near the foot of the Acropolis is the business section of Athens. The narrow streets are crowded with cars, carts, bicycles, trucks and pedestrians, each squeezing past the other. The University of Athens is in this area. Here you can see people from all over the world. It was here that the riots of November of this year were staged. The police headquarters are also here.

Another day we went to Ancient Corinth. It is about 80 miles from Athens, in the Peloponnesians. There is a modern highway which leads over the canal where the Isthmus used to be. This canal was quite an engineering task when it was built. A railroad bridge also spans it. We did not go to the modern city of Corinth which is built on the bay because we had to be back in Athens by afternoon. We drove through Ancient Corinth and onto the Acrocorinth, a high plateau. The walls and gates of fortifications from the time of Byzantium are considered to



Mom, Jon & Andrea at Ancient Corinth

be the finest thing of this kind in all of Greece. From this prominence, one can look out over the valley. It is a panoramic view of the lush farms of grapes and olives. The farms are outlined by pines, plane trees and silver firs. On beyond, one can see the mountains surrounding the valley. Here were the ancient ruins of the Temple of Apollo. Near here, Helen of Troy was born. On our way down, we stopped at the ruins of temples where most of the excavations are taking place. We visited the shops and bought some books. This does not begin to tell all about the Corinth where the Apostle Paul lived in the house of Gaius and wrote his letter to the Romans.

One of the things I observed about the Greeks was how the people walked in the streets. Of course they did not walk on the freeways. That would have been impossible. But in the suburbs, they did. There, the cars looked out for the people instead of the people looking out for the cars. Tuesdays and Thursdays were market days. The farmers and others brought their wares and set up stalls along the sides of the streets. It was a colorful sight and the traffic just had to take a chance of getting through. There were no shopping bags. Each person had his own metal cart with wheels. It was almost like a day at the fair. Another thing: I never saw a female waitress. They were all young men. Two meals will be remembered. One evening, Jon took us to a restaurant where the wine was special. There was a huge fireplace in the center of the room. Two guitar players entertained us with their music. There were big barrels of wine in a row, on their sides, across a balcony in the back. It was called "turpentine wine" which acquired its flavor from the wood of which the barrels were made. I didn't taste it. Turpentine just doesn't appeal to me. Another time, we had dinner at the Navy Club. The place was attractive with real green grass surrounding it and tropical flowers. Their special was fried chicken steak. Ummmm.... It was delicious! We crossed the street to a Greek shop where we bought several things to bring home. As I left, the owner gave me a hand-wrought ring.

The Greeks are a peace-loving people. You never read in their papers accounts of murders, rapes, assaults and robberies. You see women walking in the streets late at night, at least in the suburb where I was.

The Greeks are very protective of their children. The mothers walk them to school. There seemed to be a feeling of respect and love between parent and child. The school children wear blue and white uniforms to school. The middle class get up early. School is out by 1pm. The shops close and they have their big meal about 1:30pm. Then comes their siesta. It is actually against the law to make loud noises during siesta time. Many of the children go back to school in the evening. The Greeks seem to reverence the old and the dead. Mourning is worn at least a year after a death in the family. When visiting the cemetery, they dress as if they were attending church service. The Orthodox priests are a familiar sight in their long, black robes and hat. One thing that marks the Greek man are his worry beads. He is seldom without them. As he walks along, sometimes with his hands behind his back, he will be telling his beads like a nun tells the beads of her Rosary. The Worry Beads are supposed to release tension and even help to overcome bad habits such as smoking.

The war curtailed many of our plans. Jon had arranged for a 12-day leave. The very day the leave was to begin, the war started. He was required to check in at the base every day and, when he checked in, they usually kept him. The day after the fighting began on Saturday, I went to the base to church because that is where my grandchildren go to Sunday school. The service was rather somber. The Chaplain remarked that the Navy men who were usually a part of the congregation were absent because they had been ordered back to their ships. The second Sunday, my name was in the bulletin, listed as Mr. L.C. Gwinn. The last Sunday, Shelia took me to the Trinity Southern Baptist Church. It was really only a Mission. The Sunday school Superintendent was Ed Connally from Tennessee and the Choir Director a Mr. Dillon from Huntington, W.VA. I felt right at home.

The time came for my departure October 26th. A strong wind was blowing and it was cold. Jon thought we might have a rough takeoff. We were due to leave at 10am but did not leave until 11am. Maybe the winds had calmed, but the takeoff was smooth. The plane was not a Super Jumbo, but was luxurious enough for me. We skirted the eastern

coast of Italy and were soon over the Alps. Looking out our left, we could see the highest peak. The plane lowered as we came over Paris. I remarked to a German lad who was sharing my window, "Well, this is the first and last time I will ever see Paris." Crossing the English Channel, we were over the southwest coast of England and the southern tip of Ireland. We were four hours over the Atlantic. Once, I looked out the window and saw two perfect rainbows -- a circle within a circle, seemingly resting on the clouds like a plate would rest on a table. This was to me a good omen. A rainbow is always a promise of God's favor. The first land sighted was Saint John's in Newfoundland. It was foggy for a while but by the time we reached the New England coast the sun was shining. What a welcome sight it was to see the trees still wearing their autumn dress of browns, reds and gold. When we reached New York, it was a balmy 69 degrees. As I came through Customs, an old lady who had boarded the plane in Athens was rejected. I felt sorry for her but I could not communicate with her. The man in charge gave me my passport and said, "Welcome home." That was music to my ears. I thought about how awful it would be to go up to Saint Peter's Gate and not have the right credentials.

Another pleasant surprise. A gentleman just outside immigration asked me which plane I was taking out of Kennedy. When I told him the National, he handed me a ticket for the bus. Going through Customs was another surprise. A lady had placed three big suitcases on the counter and she began to unload about six bottles of liquor. I thought if I have to wait through all this I might miss my plane because I only had half an hour to get down to the National. The lady in charge came back to me, looked in my tote bag and asked, "Do you have any liquor?" I answered "No Ma'am." She didn't even open my suitcase. As the cold wind had been uncomfortable in Athens, the heat in New York was uncomfortable in the opposite way.

Before I go on, I must add that we had three meals on the plane -- all Greek food and snacks. It was all delicious except, for me, the shrimp salad, because I do not like shrimp. Within an hour, we were at Newport News, VA. I had one half hour before boarding the Piedmont for



Beckley. What a difference between the Piedmont and the Olympic! The seats were cramped and the music raucous. The plane stopped at Richmond, Roanoke and Lewisburg. 20 minutes from the Greenbriar and were at Beckley. The plane seemed to hop a few mountains and then stop. I had been on the way 20 long hours. It was good to see Betty and Marshall there to meet me and oh, how good to be home again! // Mom

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