

Student gets close look at strife in Middle East

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — He worked in a hospital for the dying, where more than 35 people perished during his three-month stay. He spent time in a run-down camp, which serves as a miserable home to Palestinian refugees.

And still, Elwyn Clark bubbles with enthusiasm as he recalls his stay in Jerusalem this past summer.

"It was the greatest experience of my life. I'll never forget it," said Clark, a 19-year-old junior at St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Ave.

Clark easily met his goal for taking the trip, which was to broaden his horizons as an international studies major.

"I didn't feel that I could graduate without having the knowledge of having lived there," said Clark.

His visit to Israel's capital ran from mid-May to mid-August. Father Thomas Rosica, CSB, a 1980 St. John Fisher graduate who now resides in Jerusalem, coordinated the trip.

In exchange for room and board, Clark worked as a nurse's aide at St. Louis French Hospital. The 50-bed Catholic hospital, which serves Catholic, Jewish and Islamic patients, serves terminally ill patients and is operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph.

The challenge of working at St. Louis was immense, since Clark had no prior medical training. His duties comprised feeding and washing patients, changing dressings and urine bags, and offering emotional support.

"I was just trying to make them as comfortable as possible until they died," said Clark. "At first I wasn't sure if I'd be able to do it. I had no idea how to function for the first couple of weeks."

Clark recalled his reaction to the death of the first patient he had gotten to know. "It was a very hard thing for me to deal with," he said. "The day before, she had asked me to let her die. I was up all night; that was something I had never had to deal with."

"The thing you had to learn was to care for the patients, but not to the point where it destroyed you emotionally," Clark added.

The Eden, N.Y. native also had his share of eye-opening experiences away from the hospital.

"When I first got there the atmosphere was very tense, because it was right before the Israeli national election," said Clark. "You walk the streets and soldiers are everywhere."

Although he never witnessed any



Elwyn Clark, a junior at St. John Fisher College, spent three months working in a Jerusalem hospital for the terminally ill in order to broaden his horizons as an international studies major.

Kellie Mc Cann/Photo Intern

Courtesy of Elwyn Clark
In addition to his work with dying patients, Clark spent three days in a bleak refugee camp for Palestinians. During his stay at the camp, he encountered dirty water, no sewage system and crumbling buildings. In exchange for room and board, the St. John Fisher junior worked as a nurse's aid at St. Louis French Hospital, which treats terminally ill patients.



violent uprisings, "I would hear later about a shooting or stabbing at somewhere I'd been that day," he said.

Jerusalem has been the scene of frequent violence ever since 1948, when Israel staged a war of independence in the land that was formerly known as Palestine. The Jewish takeover of that territory caused nearly 800,000 Palestinians to scatter from their homeland.

During the Six Day War of 1967, Israeli troops seized the city's Arab section. Since that time, displaced Palestinians have been living as refugees under military occupation. More recently, an Oct. 8, 1990 uprising between Palestinians and Israeli troops in East Jerusalem left 21 Palestinians dead. The Israeli capital was also the target of numerous scud-missile attacks during Operation Desert Storm.

Through Father Rosica's efforts and those of Catholic Relief Services, Clark was permitted to stay in a Palestinian refugee camp for three days. During that time he encountered dirty water, no sewage system, and crumbling buildings.

"There was frustration. The first thing (the refugees) want is to be out from under military occupation, and then they want to be able to declare the state of Palestine," said Clark.

"Almost every Jewish man I saw was carrying a gun, but for Palestinians to carry them it was illegal," he added. "The Palestinians live under the constant threat of action being taken against them."

Clark was blunt when he assessed living conditions for the Palestinians.

"They call it the Holy Land, but let me tell you — I saw nothing holy about it. The refugee camp was the most traumatic part of my trip."

Still, Clark emphasized that his enjoyable moments in Jerusalem outnumbered the negative experiences. He described Jerusalem's New City, built around the strife-torn Old City and separated by a wall, as being "like a typical Western city."

"Jerusalem is really a fun place to be — dance clubs, streets of shops. When it came right down to it, I didn't want to leave. I really love the Mideast," said Clark, who is hoping to study in Cairo, Egypt, this January. "These were the most hospitable people I had ever met."

His return to the United States was a "big time culture shock" for Clark.

"Going into a supermarket that was bigger than my dorm room made me laugh," he quipped. "And it was strange not to see soldiers anywhere."

Fall seminars will focus on Israeli, Palestinian issues

ROCHESTER — "The Significance of Palestine in the Islamic World" will be the theme of a series to be presented over the next two years at St. John Fisher College and the Islamic Center of Rochester.

Dr. Nabil Kaylani, professor of international relations at Rochester Institute of Technology, will speak on Sunday, Sept. 27, at 3 p.m. at St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Ave. The session will be held in Room B-135, Basil Hall.

Dr. Salim Mansur, professor of political science at the University of Western Ontario, will appear on Sunday, Oct. 25, at 3 p.m. at the Islamic Center, 727 Westfall Road.

Dr. Merouane Lakehal-Ayat, a professor in St. John Fisher's management department, will lead a discussion on Sunday, Nov. 29, at 3 p.m. in Room B-135 of Basil Hall.

The programs are sponsored by the

Rochester Committee on Middle East Peace and the St. John Fisher International Studies Program.

Awareness program at AQ

ROCHESTER — The Aquinas Student Awareness Program is presenting a series of Friday morning discussions to assist faculty members in better understanding the problems of adolescent substance abuse.

ASAP meetings will take place on Sept. 25, Oct. 2 and Oct. 9 at Aquinas Institute, 1127 Dewey Ave. Sessions will begin at 7 a.m. and run approximately 45 minutes.

The Sept. 25 session will feature a talk on "Use, Abuse and Experimentation" by Action for a Better Community's Millicent Reynolds.

For details on ASAP or guest speakers, call 716/647-2990.

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