

## The Trip Home (04/17/20)

---

The trip home was just amazing. We were supposed to return from Israel at the end of March, after the birth of our third grandson, but COVID-19 intervened. The national airline, El Al, shut down and we transferred to United. We arrived back at Newark Liberty Airport early evening on Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup>.

We all will be telling the story of these last few months to our children and grandchildren. Maybe those young people will repeat it to future generations as well.

When people ask me how Israel was different from the United States, I find myself stammering a bit, an unusual predicament for me. There were enormous differences, and Americans definitely have something to learn.

Israelis, also like the United States, a very diverse society, proud of their civil rights and liberties, simply cooperated in a way unseen in this country. We arrived back to discussions in the U.S. as to whether people should wear face masks, how much they should be out of their house and what businesses should be open or closed. Israel has its political problems as well. The Likud Party is still fighting with Blue and White as to who should be Prime Minister, after three elections. However, below that level the government operates, generally speaking, in a seamless and consistent way.

There was always plenty of food, toilet paper, and good wine in the local Bat Galim grocery store. People were polite, pleasant, and cooperative. Oh yes, plenty of people like us violated the local rules. Even though no one was supposed to go more than 100 meters from their house, we, like many others, walked along the concrete walk adjacent to the beach. Israelis simply are irrepressible when it comes to their love for people, family and the outdoors. Most people cooperated most of the time, and that is really all the government wanted.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Israel was the cooperation between divergent parts of society. Generally speaking, the ultra-religious do not like the military, and vice versa. Those who study in Yeshivot all the time resist or refuse to serve in the military. That causes much resentment in Israeli society. During the COVID crisis, the military was delivering food supplies to the ultra-religious, explaining to them the regulations and working together. In the beginning, there were a few ugly incidents of stone-throwing, but that quickly vanished as all the Rabbis in Israel and all of the Emums (??) got on board with the government restrictions.

While terrorist groups and leaders continued to trash Israel and tell lies around the world, the Palestinian Authority health and police officials worked closely with their Israeli counterparts. Hezbollah in the Gaza Strip threatened to unleash the disease in Israel and kill as many Israelis as possible. The Israeli authorities responded by ignoring the threats and providing health supplies in unprecedented amounts. What all of the feckless and

worthless U.N. agencies are supposed to do, Israel did for the people of the Gaza Strip and the Arabs who live on the West Bank of the Jordan River. It probably has been the most peaceful time that the Middle East has seen in millennia.

We have all seen the horror movies showing empty streets and deserted buildings. When we arrived at Ben Gurion Airport, it was completely empty. No cars to be seen anywhere. A few people dribbling into the modern terminal. We were whisked off to the airplane after a 5-minute security check. There stood a brand new United 787 Dreamliner-10, the most modern airplane in the world and one of the largest. Out of 330 seats, there were 27 passengers and lots of medical supplies being shipped to the United States from Israel. The seating section was completely empty. We had the Economy Plus section all to ourselves. Oddly, there was one other man in the Economy Plus section who was watching The Comedy Channel and laughing quite loudly throughout the trip. It was a strange and weird counterpoint to the stress that everyone else was feeling.

The flight crew told us they were bored being on a 12-hour flight with so few people to serve. We were treated like royalty, and I could not help but think this is how sheiks must live, only they do not pay the specially low prices that we were paying for the trip. I took a picture of the plane on the inside with the dim blue lights and sent it to some friends. They were as amazed as we were at the vacuous appearance.

Even the takeoff at Ben Gurion was amazing. The gigantic and powerful airplane simply leaped into the air, no doubt weighing a lot less than it normally would. The trip was easy. Some of the flight crew wore masks, and others did not. I was surprised that everyone did not wear masks. United claims that they disinfected the whole plane, and hopefully that was true.

Upon arrival at Newark, again, no people. We were told to sit in our seats because the CBC would come and take our temperatures and check us out before we could even get out of our seats. They never showed up, allegedly because there was so few of us. However, I whipped out my own electronic remote thermometer that, for some strange reason, I had brought with me on the trip, and took the temperatures of anybody who wished to be checked out. Everybody's temperatures were normal, and our pulse rates were certainly within the average. So much for playing doctor. What is a medical malpractice lawyer to do in such circumstances?

At Newark, we were told we would see the CDC when we got off the plane or at customs or at the baggage checkout. We never saw CDC or any other particular officials. We simply were checked for our passports and told to go home. Again, nobody; nothing. No life at Newark and amazingly easy.

Our car was one of the few cars left at Value Parking. From there, we headed home.

I am sure never in my life will I again see, and I hope never again to see, such an absence of activity and life. I thought about all of the people who are jobless and cannot work. The driver of the van who took us to our car said that many businesses are looking for

drivers to deliver food. He said that many of his friends were able to obtain employment that way.

Our own law office has been working remotely, and fortunately we are technologically advanced there. Everyone has been able to do a lot of work, but the courts are basically closed down, except for emergency matters and most of those are handled remotely as well.

The new world will be different than the old. For one thing, it will be filled with memories. In Judaism, we have a term which we call Zichronot. This literally means “remembrance”. Memory is not unique to homo sapiens. Elephants and many other animals remember. Human beings have elevated memory into religious ceremonies and a way of life. We hope to learn from our memories.

The question for our children, grandchildren and future generations is what will we have learned from the memories that are being made now? Each of us need to ask ourselves that question.

*Clifford A. Rieders, Esquire  
Rieders, Travis, Humphrey,  
Waters & Dohrmann  
161 West Third Street  
Williamsport, PA 17701  
(570) 323-8711 (telephone)  
(570) 323-4192 (facsimile)*

*Cliff Rieders is a Board-Certified Trial Advocate in Williamsport, is Past President of the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association and a past member of the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. None of the opinions expressed necessarily represent the views of these organizations.*