

One Night at Denver International Airport

Israelis and Palestinians at Denver International Airport

One night, around midnight, I was painting on my Denver International Airport mural, "The Children of the World Dream of Peace." I noticed two young men in their early or mid-thirties excitedly talking about imagery on my large murals upper right side. I had been painting on a ladder on the mural's left side. Soon, they came over to me with very curious expressions on their faces. They asked if I was the painter of the mural. I replied "yes, I am." To my response, they asked, "But why?"

They then explained that they were Israelis living in Denver and were waiting for their wives and children returning from Israel.

They had been looking at my depiction of youths in native costumes from their respective countries; that is from Israel, Palestine and the Arab world.

These three youths are shown happily coming together with the swords wrapped in their three respective national flags. They are bringing them to a site where other swords are being beaten into plowshares (as described in the old testament books of ISAIAH and MICAH).

At this point, they asked what country was I from and how so informed about Israel and Palestine. Earlier, they had asked why was I painting the mural, they asked this, however, with smiles of approval on their faces, even though I had earlier felt somewhat nervous at their excited attitude. They could not believe that someone was painting Israel and Palestine coming together in peace! They soon left to meet their wives and children. After two or three hours, the men returned with their wives and children. I saw that the young Israelites were showing their wives and children the mural area, showing the Israelis and Palestinians. They understood the symbolism of people beating their swords into plowshares.

They seemed pleased also to see the Israeli boy in the mural wearing a prayer shawl. The Palestinian girl was depicted wearing her nation's folkloric costume. It was clear to me that those Israelis yearned for peace.

When leaving, they said, "Thank you for what you are painting." I felt gratified and stimulated because of that wonderful moment. Despite feeling sleepy at that hour, I felt energized and happy. I went back to my painting.

Later, I was happily painting an hour or so later when I noticed a young man looking up at the same area the young Israelis had been seeing. This in itself was not unusual because airport travelers would sometimes examine our work and casually walk off. We, my daughter Leticia, and our friend Sheryl Detwilder, were always happy to speak with interested spectators. At that hour, however, I was not inclined to speak with anybody, thinking of calling it a night.

I thought the young man examining our mural would soon walk off. I continued painting still thinking of my earlier visitors.

To my surprise, the young man came up to me, somewhat shy thinking perhaps he was disturbing me. He greeted me and asked whether I was the one doing that mural. Perhaps he assumed I was a helper or assistant. I answered "yes, I am."

At my response, he asked why I was painting such a mural. Having understood the mural's meaning, he was intrigued and happy as I explained the overall theme. I mentioned my earlier visitors who were also gratified at seeing Palestinian and Israelis shown together in peace.

He abruptly interrupted me, asking how long I would be painting. He explained he was expecting a friend and wanted him to see the mural.

If I remember correctly, after more than 20 years, he said he and the person he was waiting for were Palestinians.

He left and within an hour, returned with his friend, a mid-thirties young man. After viewing the mural and examining my depiction of the Israelis and Palestinians bringing their swords to be beaten into plowshares, I saw their happy smiles. When they left, after a very long conversation, they shook my hand and said, "Thank you for painting this mural."

When they left, I said a prayer thanking God for those who want peace in Israel and Palestine.