

EVENTS (2)**MY FIRST VISIT TO JALSA SALANA ~ 11th to 14th AUGUST 2016****Brenda Benton**

It is almost six years since we first met Pam Moon through an amazing set of circumstances. Pam is the lady who owns the British Turin Shroud exhibition and we have been part of her team of helpers since that time. This has taken us to many different venues, where we have met some wonderful people and enjoyed unique experiences.

One such experience was when we were invited to an inspiring Muslim event in Hampshire this year. When Pam was invited to join Barrie Schwartz at last year's Jalsa Salana we were unable to accompany her as we needed to attend a family celebration that weekend. We were thrilled when she was invited back this year and willingly agreed to join her on this occasion.

When Barrie contacted Pam last year to ask if she would take her replica of the Turin Shroud and the life size black and white images of the Shroud to this event it was a most unusual request. They were not sure what to expect but it turned out to be a wonderful experience.

A few weeks after the event Stuart and I watched a clip of Barrie speaking at the Jalsa on the internet. It was a powerful speech and one that our world needs to hear. He quoted the motto these people live by, "Love for All, Hatred for none!" He commented on how amazing it was that he, a Jew, was taking a Christian artefact to Muslim people!

On the day before the event began Stuart and I met up with Luigi Antoniazzi (another BSTS member) who joined our team at the end of last year. We had arranged to meet up with Pam and Amer Safir, who greeted us all warmly. He then escorted us to the Review of Religions marquee. Review is a magazine which aims to bring understanding and respect

between people of different faiths. We began to set up a small version of the usual exhibition and fortunately we had plenty of willing helpers to assist us. This was a lovely opportunity to get to know some of the people of the Ahmadiyya Community.

This was a totally new experience for Stuart and me as we learnt about their beliefs, which have more in common with our own faith than I expected. In our four days at the exhibition we saw for ourselves the bridges that are being built between Muslim, Jew and Christian. I found this very encouraging as most of what we see in the media portrays a very different picture.



One of the first things we saw as we drove into the venue were flags from every country represented at this year's Jalsa Salana. It was an uplifting and moving experience as they fluttered in the warm summer breeze. To me they were a powerful symbol of unity between nations and religions, a unity that our world is so desperately in need of.

I had been in touch with Barrie Schwartz over a number of years by e-mail but we had never met so it was such a joy to spend time with him and learn from his vast knowledge about the Shroud. Arif Khan was Barrie's helper during his time at the conference, making sure he was in the right place at the right time for the numerous radio and TV interviews he had been invited to do. We had some wonderful conversations with

Arif over the weekend about the Shroud. This was an ideal opportunity to share some of our Shroud experiences which gave us all new insight.

The Jalsa Salana was also the first time we had been involved with an event that caters for so many people. We found the sheer volume of the logistics needed to organise such a large event both amazing and inspiring. The willingness of all the volunteers and the unity with which they worked together is a credit to their faith. The interest of the media was incredible and the amount of publicity given to the Shroud exhibition was exceptional. We have never experienced anything like it.

Throughout the weekend we were treated with great respect and all our needs were met with such generosity. Amer and Arif made sure that things ran very smoothly for us all, including Hugh Farey. We knew Hugh through the BSTS but this was the first time we had met.



Stuart Benton, Brenda Benton & Hugh Farey

On Friday two ladies asked Pam and I if we would like to have a tour of the ladies' quarters. This was a very special experience and again we learned so much from all those we met. We had a unique insight into their culture, which many are unaware of. I was most impressed that at this event all the cooking is done by men. This is a huge undertaking and the food was delicious.

The volume of people (38,000 over the weekend) and the depth of their interest in the Shroud was a new and encouraging experience. When Barrie spoke to the ladies on Saturday evening the whole area was packed. A little while after Barrie had finished his talk we sensed an air of

excitement buzzing in the marquee. We then became aware of a sudden silence and discovered that Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V, the world leader of the Ahmadiyya, had come to visit the exhibition. As Pam and Barrie escorted him around the exhibits one of his aides came and asked Stuart and I if we were part of Pam's team and we were



Barrie Schwartz in mid flow; Pam Moon behind

invited to meet him too. This was a most unexpected honour and another part of the wonderful memories we brought home with us.

We knew that the ladies were coming to view the exhibition during Sunday afternoon and were amazed at the numbers that came. The marquee was full and there were many ladies outside, waiting to come in. Their interest astounded us and we had yet more interesting conversations with many of them.

Stuart and I were very privileged to be invited to this special 50th anniversary celebration. It was an experience we will never forget. We now intend to share those experiences with our Christian brothers and sisters. Hopefully we can build bridges of understanding and help to dispel the fears that the media can cause by the way things are reported.

We have experienced at first-hand how they live out their motto - Love For All And Hatred For None - and we need to share this GOOD NEWS! We have already been invited to next year's event and look forward to a happy reunion.

