

Journals of a mother about Daniel #1

June 13-14 2017 Daniel's 3rd and 4th day

Written Tuesday evening on the plane, enroute to London, perhaps 7pm Texas time:

Tuesday, June 13, 2017, Daniel's 3rd day.

(See <http://www.orthodox.net/daniel> for more journals from Daniel's mother.)

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I will attempt to record some of my feelings and the events of the last couple and next few days. There are no words that can express the profound sorrow and sadness and helplessness and surreal-ness. I arrived at work Monday, not having yet looked at my phone. When I did, I discovered I had a voicemail from an unknown number. I listened, and to my sudden anxiety I heard the voice of someone who introduced herself as a representative from the American Embassy. This could only be bad. My beloved son Daniel was in Germany. He'd been in France for two and a half weeks, then travelled with his friend Jesse by bus to Berlin. He had loved France. He *extremely* loved Berlin. Everything about the city. But something went wrong if the Embassy there was calling me. I was hoping it was something like he had lost his passport. But it was much, much worse.

And so now somehow we are on our way Berlin, to collect our dear son's-----. How can this be real? How can this really be happening? How can my son, so full of life and happiness and love and compassion and zeal to change the world, no longer *be*? How can he no longer be hosteling and bussing around Europe, sending me texts and pictures, telling me he loves me, planning on a mini-mester in Denmark, and finishing his degree at OU, and going out and making the world a better place? He had such moral courage. He had such strong convictions. He wanted to hear what anyone thought, what each person he came into contact with thought or had to say. He would listen with genuine interest and respect. He had such an ability to express himself. He had such deep ideas, such well-reasoned opinions, and such an open mind and willingness, no, eagerness, to learn more and to consider how to adjust his opinions based on what he just learned. His mistake was to desire to experience something he had never experienced before – the nightlife of Berlin, on his last night in that city.

When I found out from the embassy what had happened, or the rude outline of what had happened, I called my husband. How could he comprehend the words I was saying? How could those words make sense? I repeated myself several times before it gradually began to register. We still didn't know details. I had to call the police in Germany to find out. I spoke in my limited German with an officer, who told me a little more, and then asked me to call back in an hour, when an English-speaking colleague would be available. I did, but they did not answer. In the meantime, I called my good daughter Natalie, steady, reliable, take control Natalie. I told her what happened. I told her I needed her to go be with my husband. After a moment of shock and processing she immediately got back in her car and went straight to our house to be with her dad. My friends at work rallied around me. Ashley drove me home in her car. My husband was at church, praying. "All I know to do in this life, Marina, is to pray and do the services. That's all I know how to do." So he went to the church and prayed the first Pannakhida we have ever had to pray for a family member. For our son. How can this be?

For Daniel had drowned. He and Jesse were scheduled to be leaving later that morning by bus for Prague. But before leaving this city that he loved so much, Daniel wanted to see everything he had already seen one last time. He wanted to experience the night life. And then he wanted to swim the Spree river. Only, he drowned in it.

I called my daughter Jenny. Her husband Nicholas answered, and I told him the horrible news. He, too, was shocked. What? *What?* I asked him to tell Jenny and to call my mom and dad, and have them call my sisters and brother. Natalie

called Tim and Christina, our other two kids. They all came over, and spent the rest of the day at our sides. Susan, good Susan at work, spoke with Dr LaNoue. He traveled to Germany all the time, and he would know the best way to get there. Another take charge kind of person who went way above and beyond. He and his wife Dierdre immediately took matters into their own hands. They researched and gathered information, made reservations for us using their miles, made changes, added another ticket, and ultimately three of us are now flying on the flight that they arranged, together with miles from Dr Dagen's husband Mike and with help from Dr Clarke. These last two are anesthesiologists I work with, so generous, so kind.

We planned initially to leave on the first available flight, that day, at 3:50. FS wanted to leave the next day, because then he would be able to serve the Liturgy, as he always did on Tuesdays, before we'd leave. I prevailed upon him to serve a liturgy NOW, and then we could still make it to the airport in time. He did do that, but cooler heads prevailed, and we ended up with reservations for the next day, Tuesday.

So FS served Liturgy and another Pannakhida. We came home immediately afterward, packed in a fog, tried to figure out what else we needed to do. Get our passports. Get Daniel's birth certificate; the embassy had said it would be needed. Get cash. Tim, good steady son Tim, calm, unflappable Tim H, was there with his dear fiancé Elizabeth. They went to the store. They looked into the trip insurance we had bought. They did and fetched and helped and answered and hugged and consoled, while mourning the loss themselves. Christina, having worked the nightshift and then found out the news as her shift ended: her husband Tim M drove up there to get her. He did not want her driving herself. He brought her home, and we were all together, all except our dearly beloved Daniel. Christina stayed up the entire rest of the day, helping with plans, attending services, praying for Daniel, and then her good husband Tim brought her all the way back up to work so they could pick up her car, bring her home finally, so she could collapse in an emotional, exhausted heap, and sleep for the first time in a day and a half. Elizabeth helped me pick up my car, left at work just a few hours ago, but it felt like years. And dear, good Jenny. I could grieve fulltime, having the support of others around me, helping me. Jenny has seven kids. Half of them are too little to comprehend. She had her own shock and grief to deal with, plus helping her seven kids on their various levels to cope, and she struggled to keep things steady for them. She took them to their swimming lesson and then to Liturgy and the Pannakhida, where Anna and Emmie and Lucy were the choir. God bless them. Sophie helped take care of "the littles", as they call the three youngers. And then to our house, where Jenny cooked dinner for everyone. Nicholas had to go to work – he had a seminar to teach, and there was no substitute. Somehow he had to get thru that, knowing what had happened, and what lay ahead for the next few days. And the whole time Natalie's husband Kevin was there, not even asking what he could do but seeing it, and taking care of it. He looked into all kinds of issues on the internet – funeral home, etc, and just praying and being steady.

We served another Pannakhida Monday evening. Many people who had heard the news on facebook, not even part of our church, came. Many good, kind people, offering their condolences and their prayers and support, pressing money into our hands, offering kind words which I received in a fog.

In the meantime, my phone lit up constantly with messages of love and support from my dear friends and colleagues at work, as each one heard the news. How can I help? I am so sorry. We love you and are here for you in whatever way you need. They prayed and cried. They donated miles and are donating money, because they know it will be expensive to bring my dear son back. To home. To his *final resting place??* How can those words even be said? May God grant him eternal rest, where there is no sickness, no sorrow, no sighing, but life everlasting, at the feet of our good and sweet Savior Christ.

My husband and I lay there in bed that night, neither one able to sleep. Wanting desperately to sleep, fearing also to sleep, for then might come dreams we didn't want to have. Our phones were turned on silent, so we didn't hear when they rang again around 11pm. Our son Tim was sobbing, being strong all day, and now, at the end of the day, after taking care of so many things for so many people, he had time to sob himself. He called us. He wanted to check on us. We didn't hear the phone. Elizabeth called. We didn't hear the phone. I wasn't there, again, for now this son. FS saw the unanswered phone calls at 3am when he gave up trying to sleep and got up. He called them, and Elizabeth explained and said that Tim had finally fallen asleep. She said when we didn't answer she called Christina, and Christina was up with him on the phone at midnight, crying together over their brother.

One of the hardest things to deal with was that we didn't learn of Daniel's passing until about 32 hours after it happened. He passed Sunday morning Berlin time around 5:20; Texas time Saturday night 10:20. I heard the voicemail Monday morning Texas time around 6:20. Apparently they had tried to reach us at a no-longer-valid home phone number. I don't know where they got the number from. But my son was in a hospital, then in a morgue, all that time, and we didn't even know. Oh, God, have mercy. I am so sorry, my beloved son.

Written Wednesday, June 14 on the plane from London to Berlin

We had a little frightening drama. The plane landed fine, and we agreed between the three of us that we'd meet at the end of the little tunnel you go thru when you get off the plane. Christina was in one aisle, FS and I were ahead of her in the other aisle. Her row moved faster than ours, though, so when she deplaned and didn't see us she thought we must have gone ahead to the next flight. So she did, too, figuring she'd catch up with us. We deplaned and expected her to be just a couple of people behind us. We waited, and waited, and waited, and didn't see her. Did she have a problem with her heart – she has LQTS and has an implanted defibrillator and pacemaker. Grief could have caused an arrhythmia. Did she collapse? Where was she? Did she go to the bathroom on the plane? The flight attendants assured us no one was still on the plane. Did she go ahead to another bathroom? I checked; no. FS stayed behind in case for some reason she was still coming. I went ahead to find someone to have her paged. I spoke with three people who spoke limited English (in England) and thought I asked for coffee when I asked how to have her paged. Then someone told me to go to "passports". Passports sent me to...blah blah blah. Finally a woman did help, God bless her. Through about 20 minutes of running around and calling she found out Christina had gone on ahead on the bus to terminal 5. So we got on the next bus to terminal 5, hoping we'd make our flight in time. Hoping that if we didn't get there in time, she wouldn't board, but just wait for us. Glory to God, the flight was delayed 20 minutes, and we made it. Dr LaNoue had told us our seats were in business class, which would entitle us to use the lounge. Unfortunately, there was not time for that. But we did get deliciously hot, lemon-scented wet washcloths to freshen our faces in that business class section! Oh, that felt luxurious!

And now, we are enroute to Berlin to...can't bring myself to put it into words on paper yet.

I keep thinking about the spiritual warfare that exists for our souls when we die. May God, thru His mercy and goodness, and the prayers of the saints and us, help him through that. There is great consolation in the prayers that we pray, believing, knowing, God hears us and helps those who desire Him.

Written Wednesday, 5pm Berlin time:

Glory to God for His goodness. We arrived in Berlin safely, if so very tired but still unable to sleep. A priest from an Orthodox church in Berlin, Fr Andre, whom we had never met but who contacted us when he heard, picked us up at the airport. He wrapped us in a huge hug with his big burly arms and just held us. Then he switched to practical, loaded us up in the car, and planned the rest of the day. At FS' request, we stopped by the church first, and we prayed another Pannakhida. Then Fr Andre served us tea and cookies, and he and his secretary Phillip showed us where things were on the map, arranged the meeting tomorrow with the police, made various recommendations, including for a funeral director. Then to the hotel to check in, to the Wechselstube to exchange our dollars into Euros, and now back to the hotel. The plan was to take a shower and a nap and then dinner, but I wanted to get things down to share with people back home. So no nap yet. But I think I will sleep well tonight.

This next part will likely not mean much to those who are not Orthodox, but for those who are, I think it will be very comforting. It sure was for me.

First is Fr Andre himself, so kind, so gentle, so compassionate and loving and capable, but not sappy emotional. He told us that there is a church in Russia called the Protection of the Theotokos, and they consider themselves somehow the protector of the river. I am not sure what that is all about. But this church, also named for the Protection of the Theotokos, considers itself the protection of the Spree river, the one in which I felt like the Theotokos knew what was happening and was there to help him. Yes, he died, because for whatever reason it was his time. But I believe she helped him nonetheless, as his soul separated from his body.

To be in a church we have never been in before, and to have the service done mostly in Slavonic (because FS was too broken up to do much in English so Fr Andre did it in Slavonic) and still know exactly what prayers were being said and be able to participate fully, and to see icons of St Matrona, and St Panteleimon, and St Seraphim just like in our church, was so comforting. And then to hear Fr Andre remark several times on different blessings that had already come out of Daniel's passing, blessings that God is giving through Daniel's passing, just helped me to have tremendous peace. So many people in their facebook postings have said similar kinds of things. Daniel was a blessing to many in his life, and somehow now in his death. People want to carry on his kindness with the "lessers" in their lives. Daniel didn't consider them "lesser", but many of us do. And we are learning to carry on his kindness toward them in his stead, in his memory. God is good.

There is a story of a woman in Greece who asked St Nectarios, while he was still alive, to pray to God for every good thing for her son. Some time later, the boy died and the woman was terribly upset with Fr Nectarios. She blamed him. She said she has asked for every good thing for him, and then he died as a child. The child appeared to her one evening, telling her that his early death protected him from something much worse that would have followed – I don't remember the details. But perhaps this is true of our Daniel. Anyway, to think so gives me great comfort.

So, perhaps a little nap now. Tomorrow will be a difficult day as we will go to the police station. But I think today's experiences will help us.

Journals of Daniel's mother. All words are from Marina Holland except lines in Italics (such as this).

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(See <http://www.orthodox.net/daniel> for more journals from Daniel's mother.)