

### *Journals of a mother about Daniel #3*

*Thu-Fri, June 15-16 2017 Daniel's 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> day*

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

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Written Thursday morning, 4 am, Berlin time.

I slept well. Thank God. 5 hours solid. I needed that!

I awoke and got onto the computer because I wanted to reread some things that my son Tim H sent, some essays Daniel had written. I opened my email and found a letter from Catherine, who shared with me a memory she had of little Daniel asking me, "Do you know who the biggest person in the world is?" I asked, "Who?" And he said, "The Theotokos, for she is more spacious than the heavens!" I thank her for sharing that.

For those who are not familiar with that phrase, it is from a hymn we sing at church, honoring Mary, the birthgiver of our sweet Savior.

And I know to the very core of my being that she was with him in his last moments of struggle. The water was very cold, he was not in his best condition, he struggled and he most assuredly called out to God, and He and His mother were with him.

Written Friday morning, 8 am Berlin time.

So much happened yesterday. We are in a time warp. By the time we got back to our hotel last night, we had been in Berlin 36 hours. How can so much happen in 36 hours. We'd had 5 hours of sleep Wednesday night, after only fitful dozing on the plane Tuesday night and during the previous Monday night at home, after having learned of Daniel's passing. How can we keep going? Yet, when we finally got back to the hotel last night, around 10 pm, we stayed up still another four hours, talking together, and talking on the phone with a couple of you. Then slept four hours, and here we are up again, having awakened on our own, rested. Well, rested enough.

We started out yesterday with the plan to meet with the police at 11 and then with Annika, the funeral director here in Germany. We prayed, then went down the street to a small café for breakfast. FS had some very excellent espresso. Those who know him will be surprised and glad for him that he had excellent coffee which had not been made by himself (!). We got an uber to the police station. The driver asked us why we were visiting Germany. We told him. He was familiar with the story of course, as it was big news here in Berlin. His genuine compassion and kindness and gentleness were overwhelming. He was really moved. Somehow, genuine compassion from another person, even a stranger, helps one to bear one's grief.

We got to the police station, where we met with Herr Gollnau and Frau Witte. They are the detectives who handle a lot of the deaths here in the city, including Daniel's. They, too, were so compassionate, so gentle, giving the impression they had all the time in the world to spend with us. They answered every question. They gave us his belongings, and sat quietly while we went through Daniel's backpack, and cried. I strapped Daniel's watch to my wrist. His phone somehow was still charged. We do not have the password to the phone, but we could see messages on the screen, from before he passed. It is our hope that AT&T can help us unlock it. Germany does not allow that. There is a particular item from the backpack that was by far the most meaningful. But first, some background.

We all wished for some sign, some indication that Daniel was going to be ok. He hadn't been to church much in the past year. He was working on figuring out God. He was dealing with some difficulties in a particular relationship, which perhaps affected his relationship with God. He had taken his icons down from his wall a year or more ago. But when he and I spoke last about God, back in May, he assured me that he does pray, and would continue to pray.

Unbeknownst to me, FS had asked God for a sign. He said, all he had ever asked God for was mercy and wisdom, for himself, for his parishioners and loved ones. Not a job, not money, not a particular *thing*. But now he asked for a particular thing. He asked that somehow an icon would be found with Daniel. Not a very likely thing.

You have perhaps read in earlier journal entries about the icons commemorated by our church on the day of his death. That was very consoling, but it wasn't an icon *with* him. One of the items in Daniel's backpack was an icon. His icon of St Daniel, from home, which he had taken off his wall a year and a half ago. He had packed it, brought it to Europe, carried it around in his backpack. It was with him, at the side of the river, when he died. God is good.

We took another taxi to the church, where we prayed another Pannakhida, and then met with Annika, the funeral director Fr Andre had recommended, and with Peter, the church secretary. Annika was also so very kind. Her eyes, her voice, her tone conveyed sincere compassion. One in her industry might have cultivated such a look and tone. But her words, her stories as our time with her unfolded, her eagerness to hear about Daniel alive, not just dead, her actions throughout that day, revealed her genuine compassion.

We have made another new friend. Peter, God bless him, quietly moved in the background, gently helping, facilitating. He asked if we would like some tea. No thank you, just water would be good, please. Water? Just water? I cannot bring you just water. Can I make you some tea? We really would be so happy with just water. Just water? It seemed to really distress his sense of hospitality to bring us just water. So he brought us water, in teacups, with a candy on the side. Thank you, Peter. We should have willingly accepted tea.

Annika told us the amazing news that the autopsy of Daniel was completed. This was quite unexpected, for the police had told me on the phone several times earlier in the week that they would try for Friday, more likely Monday, quite possibly later in the week. We had been told by others, no way would it be done this next week. It will take two or three weeks. But now it had been done, by 1pm Thursday. This allowed Daniel's body to be transferred to the funeral home. This allowed us to see him, for we could not see him except from the funeral home. Annika made everything work out for us to see him that very day. She is an independent agent, using various people and personnel according to the need. I said to her, "Annika, I know what back rooms of funeral homes look like. I know what embalming rooms look like. I have been in them. Please, pick one that is clean." She nodded, and said she likes to use a particular man she has used many times in the past ten years, and his facility is very clean and neat. We would see Daniel in that room. We could see exactly where the embalming would take place. And indeed, later that day, we did.

We went back to the hotel with Annika so we could give her Daniel's birth certificate and a photo. She left to work on transferring Daniel to the funeral home, and we walked across the street to a deli for lunch. We ate out in front at a table under the awning. I went in to get refills on our waters. The lady at the counter and two customers/friends of hers were talking. They acknowledged me with a smile and continued their conversation. Such nice people, these Berliners. Suddenly I wanted to thank all of the city of Berlin for their kindness to us and for what they had shown Daniel that made him fall in love with their city. I wanted to thank the city through these three ladies standing in front of me. When there was an opportunity, I said, "excuse me" auf Deutsch, and introduced myself as the mother of the twenty year old who had recently died in their Spree river. It is still all over the news here. They were of course shocked, and then exceedingly sorrowful and kind. We spoke at length. Gemma invited us to her home, just down the street. She said we "might want a chance to sit somewhere in a living room, in a home, not a hotel, not an office, not a restaurant."

This next part is about the time three of us spent with our son and brother. Tears are already streaming down my face, as my fingers somehow type. Oh, what dread we felt as we got off the U-bahn (subway) and walked toward the address given us by Annika. What cold panic I fought in my belly. We each suddenly needed to visit the restroom. Then Annika led us toward a very large door. She told us he was just inside. In the middle of the room we were about to enter. We nodded, and she opened the door for us and we entered. Oh dear God. There lay my son. How could this be? Was all this a cruel joke after all? There he lay, looking for all the world like he was asleep. He was not yet embalmed. He lay in an open coffin, his head and face available to us, the rest wrapped sweetly in a white cloth. There was a red cloth draped over the whole coffin, from his waist area down. He had *natural color*. He was cold, but he had *normal* texture, normal turgor. I did not expect this. I expected cold and hard and pale and fake looking. Annika said because he died young and healthy and quickly, his tissues did not suffer much before his death. Death? Was he really dead? Was he not just napping? The nurse in me (I am a nurse) reached out and checked for a carotid pulse. There was none. He was so very cold. I spoke to him. I caressed his face. I cradled his face in my hands. He did not respond. It was true. Oh, how I loved him. How I love him.

I will not speak for FS and Christina. They have their own thoughts and experiences to share or not share, but it was very obviously such an emotional and difficult time. One should never have to bury one's child. Or a young person. God have mercy on those poor families who do not have a body to hold one last time.

Annika left us with Daniel, after ascertaining what we wanted. We wanted to be alone with him. We were with him at least an hour. We prayed a Pannakhida yet again. This time with greater and louder sobs than any of the other times. I should say, FS and Christina prayed the service. I stood there and caressed his face, and whispered to him. After a time, I pulled up a chair beside him, and reached in to him. I whispered into his ear some of the phrases from the service. I told him I loved him, I forgave him for leaving us, I begged his forgiveness of us, I told him how proud I was of him, I told him what a legacy he has left. A far greater legacy than one would expect of a twenty year old who was only on the verge of what promised to be such an amazing life. He wanted to make a difference in the world, and set about learning everything he could, and to meet everyone he could, and to hear every thought and idea and reasoning he could.

In my grief when we first learned of his passing, I lamented that he would never get to make that difference. But I am realizing how false that was. He already has made such a difference. Look at the things people are saying on Facebook. People are changing their own behaviors in tribute to him. People who haven't prayed in a long time are praying. People who have not been in church in a long time are coming to church, and praying with such fervor, their hearts warming with pain and hope. And individual people I know, who had such struggles in their hearts, are renewed and have made peace and have grown in ways that were unfathomable a few days ago. Now *that* is a legacy.

We placed Daniel's icon, which he had carried with him in his backpack, into the coffin with him during the Pannakhida. It had been my intention that it would continue to travel with him. FS said no, he could not bear the possibility of that meaningful icon being lost. So I took my cross off and left it with him instead. It is a delicate cross, for a woman, but that is ok for now. We will get him a manly cross this weekend. I could not stay with him now, but my cross could. And what a blessing it will be to me to wear that cross again later, after it has been with him for the next few days until I see him again. Christina wrote him a note and placed it right beside his head, and whispered something to him.

About embalming. For the benefit of those who are not Orthodox, allow me to explain that we do not normally embalm our loved ones. We prepare their bodies for burial ourselves and bury them as quickly as possible, without artificial chemicals and processes, etc. To embalm is not forbidden, just not generally done. It turns out that the state would have allowed us to return Daniel's body unembalmed in a sealed casket. But we wouldn't have wanted to open that casket, and therefore wouldn't have been able to see him again and given him another

kiss. Family members and friends at home who have not seen him at all yet would not have been able to do so. So we had him embalmed.

Anyway. We left the funeral home. Annika walked down the sidewalk with us, and promised to see us again, to give us documents we would be needing. We walked across the square to a biergarten on the other side. We needed rest. We needed refreshment. We talked and remembered. We gradually regained the peace that had moved aside for a while while we were with Daniel. One cannot feel peace in the face of their loss. At least, I couldn't. But that was only because seeing him, touching him, made his passing so much more real and new and present again. As God brought memories back to us, and awareness of things that were always there but we had missed or not understood, the peace, yes, even joy, slipped back in.

Christina remembered that before Daniel was born, Tim would sing to him a hymn from our church. A hymn to the Theotokos. "More honorable than the Cherubim, beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, true Theotokos, we magnify Thee." And after he was born, and there were times when Daniel would cry, Tim would sing that familiar hymn to him, and Daniel stopped crying.

We moved on again toward the U-bahn. We figured we'd just retrace our steps, but it turned out the very first station we started out from earlier that day was mislabeled on the directions written down for us by Stephanie, the sweet lady at the little café across the street from our hotel. We didn't realize that, and followed the directions, and got utterly lost! We got off at what we thought was the right stop, but it clearly was not, being no longer underground but above ground and out in the countryside! We got on the next train heading in the opposite direction and back underground and regrouped, and got tentative suggestions from someone. We got off at the zoo stop, for we knew the zoo was within walking distance of the hotel. Hopefully something would look familiar. A few sets of wrong directions later, someone said, "What does that street sign over there say?" We squinted, walked across the street to better see it. It was our street! 150 meters later we were walking into our hotel! 10 pm. And because Berlin is so much farther north, it was still light enough outside that we hadn't had the additional factor of darkness to deal with as we wandered. We made it, without having to call an Uber to just take us!

The plan of course was to say our evening prayers (actually, I had said mine already on the U-bahn) and go immediately to bed. But I wanted to catch up quickly on text messages and emails. I hadn't had wifi access for several hours, and a bunch of messages came crashing in. Four hours and a couple of long phone calls later, we actually went to bed...

This morning, it was raining and cold when we awoke, at 6 AM somehow. We dashed out between rain showers and ate breakfast in the same lovely place we breakfasted at yesterday. Christina actually was still asleep, so we brought breakfast back for her. It is now 11:00. I woke her up. She is eating her sandwich, the sun is shining. Perhaps we will go see Gemma, our new friend from the deli yesterday.

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

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