



## Friendship Force of Manitoba Newsletter December 2023

### My excellent 27-day Journey in Turkey.

The friendship force trip mid September to Turkey consisted of 10 travelers, 8 from various parts of Canada originating from the Niagara FF club and 2 from the USA. We all boarded a ferry in Istanbul to travel about 1 ½ hours to Mudanya. We were met at the ferry terminal by a crowd of smiling people, a guide, and a bus from Bursa. Right away we were taken to a restaurant by the sea for lunch. Our ever-present guide was a great asset for the whole 5 days of touring.

Each morning our hosts took us to a pickup destination where a bus took us to several other pick-up points to gather our group and several of the Bursa FF group. Once we were all in the bus our guide took us to as many



interesting locations as could possibly be crammed in. With out the bus and guide it would be impossible to see all that we saw-many beautiful mosques, churches, tours of museums, bazars, old towns, and the natural beauty of the area. Our hosts were most

generous with their time and making us feel right at home. We were introduced to family members, friends, and fed so many delicious foods. We were also encouraged to get up and dance at any opportunity that there was music provided.



The 6th day of the FF journey we boarded a minibus for a road trip of about 4 ½ hours to Saferihisar, close to Ismar, on the Aegean Sea. Our greeting with the Saferihisar FF club was most exuberant. A bit of a walk-around tour beside the sea then off to my hosts friends' home for soup. The dinners we had with the club were boisterous, always with music and dancing. My host lived in Ismir so every morning they would take us to a tram station then to a ferry to take us over to the other side of a bay of water where we met up with a tour bus and the pickup of others in other locations. We had a professional tour guide for 3 days with the other 2 days being led by a local FF member. Again, so much to see and do. On the 6th day we were taken to the airport in Ismir to go our

own way either home or further our trips. The end of each journey with both these clubs felt sad, we had made such good friends and hoped we would see each other again.

There were 6 of us on the journey that extended the trip before and after the home host stays. I went early to Istanbul to meet up with my ever-present companion for the whole trip; she was from Calgary. We shared hotel rooms and home host locations. The 6 of us hired a guide for 3 days, again the use of a guide really made the difference of how much we got to see and do. After our send off in Ismir airport our 6 flew to Antalya on the Mediterranean coast. We were greeted by a guide and driver of the minibus, and taken to our hotel to settle in. We had the guide and driver for the next 3 days of touring the area and driving us to the Cappadocia region. This is where all the fairy chimneys, caves and hot air balloon rides can be found. We hired a guide and minibus for 3 days, again a great asset to having a guide rather than trying to arrange for transport or even finding so many of the locations we explored.

This was my first journey; I don't think it could have been anymore spectacular. The journey coordinator did an incredible job lining everything up. We must really recognize the amount of work and in some cases angst that goes into planning a journey.

*Submitted by Rose Gerbasi*



At the Beach in Turkey

### Our Executive for 2024



President- Denise Lawson (centre right)  
Secretary – Rose Gerbasi (right)  
Treasurer- Diane Schipper (center left)  
Vice President- Lynne Foley (left)

## **President**

Greetings from your President for 2024. I want to first thank you for re-electing me for a second term. I take this position with a great sense of responsibility and pride – to do my best to include you in the process and increase our profile and membership.

It is a time of change for Friendship Force International and they are working very hard. I have tried to attend as many of the strategic planning virtual workshops and conference webinars as possible. Global or special journeys, individual home hosting opportunities, individual memberships with no club attachment, virtual offerings from book club to language lessons to workshops – FFI is working very hard to retain members and recruit new ones, as is our club. We have lost over 50 clubs since I joined about 8 years ago, most during and after the pandemic.

This is also a time of changes in the travel industry – rising costs, a focus on carry-on luggage, airport delays and cancellations, and increased cautions re vaccinations and COVID outbreaks - to mention a few. Clubs that are still hosting are taking fewer ambassadors, and our aging membership is thinking twice about 14-hour flights.

This is also a time of improved connections. We have a strong network in western Canada thanks to Gail, our western rep, and more contact with head office than I recall in past years. Do you want to travel on your own or with a friend? Look up the individual home hosting opportunities and string a few together to create your own opportunities. Are you not interested in your club's outbound or, even if you are, do you want more travel opportunities? Look for undersubscribed journeys with other clubs or join a special, global journey. Are you unhappy with how your club is being run? That is great – we are always looking for people willing to take on leadership positions. Are you looking for people to connect with? Join the virtual book club or recipes around the world. Take a language class.

I am excited about the next year. We have a strong vice-president who is doing incredible outreach to recruit new members. Join the membership committee and give her a hand. Let's go beyond the norm in our monthly meetings and use them to take advantage of the cultural life of our vibrant city and celebrate all the travel our members are doing, regardless of who they travel with. We can expand our worldview without leaving home.

We have new people in the treasurer and secretary positions, and I welcome them aboard. We will be appointing the other board positions in the next month or so and will be at full capacity for our February Board meeting. Check off on your renewal form where you would like to get involved, and we will call you.

I cannot close without paying tribute to Roslyn Carter. Although Wayne Smith took his idea to Jimmy Carter, we all know who the driving force behind the impetus was really to get this organization off the ground. She presided over the first 25 years. Let's get the next 25 off to a great start.

Denise Lawson

## **Vice President**

My full name is Margaret Lynne Foley - reflecting my Irish roots. I am 71 years of age, mom to 3 and grandmother to 4. I was born in Ottawa but have lived in Winnipeg for a long time. I love my pets, 2 big Golden Retrievers and 2 silly cats.

My days are filled with volunteering at the zoo and NICU, going to gym classes, gardening, cooking and reading. I am a foodie now and was a Public Health Registered Dietitian while employed.

I joined FFMB in 2019 and I am also an associate member of FFW. I was Program Committee Chair in 2021-2022 and have been Vice President for 1 year in 2023, continuing until 2024.

I travelled to New Zealand, Switzerland, Finland, England, and Ireland through international pet sitting. I have travelled with FF to Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Brazil, Australia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Japan, Ecuador, and Galapagos Islands.

I hope to keep healthy and active so that I can continue to see the world. My dream is to visit Africa for several weeks.

Lynne Foley

### **Secretary**

I have been a member of Manitoba FF club since 2018, with the encouragement of Don Greig. I had signed up for a 3-week trip to Thailand in 2019 but due to a gall bladder issue I had to cancel the trip. I really wanted to go on that exotic trip. Since then, there have been various events that have made travel not possible. This summer the chance to go to Turkey on a grand adventure came up so I grabbed it. While there I got an email from Peggy Smith asking if I would consider being the secretary, I had to think long and hard about taking on that position as what did I know about recording what was being said accurately. The most I ever write about were emails to friends and they don't care about my spelling or sentence structure that doesn't get corrected automatically. The thing I had to consider was that this was a club that relied on those in it to step up and volunteer for positions to keep the club thriving. It was my turn to help even though I have no idea how to do the job. I was assured that I would have help with the computer part and how to keep the information to be presented short and sweet. So, I'm thinking Loretta, our present secretary will be getting a few phone calls soon from me asking what the heck am I supposed to do. This certainly will be a big learning curve but I'm up for it, I just must remember I'm not a court recorder and nobody is going to fire me.

Rose Gerbasi

### **Treasurer**

Dallas Bagby introduced me to Friendship Force Manitoba shortly after I became a widow in 2007. I felt this would be a great way to see the world and to really get immersed in other countries culture. When I first joined FFM, I became a member of the Program Committee for a few terms and since then have sat on numerous journey planning committees and helped over the years in one capacity or another. I have now agreed to be Treasurer for the next term.

My first-time being home host was for Lynn Pappas from Richmond, Virginia in 2008. What a great experience and quite interesting to see my own city/province through the eyes of an ambassador. Lynn reciprocated with her hosting me and Kathy Hansell in Richmond, Virginia in 2015. My first trip with FFM was to Japan where we spent 25 days visiting Tokyo, Nara, and Oita. We also took in the 35th World Conference in Hiroshima where members from across the globe had a chance to come together and make friends. Since joining FFM, I have been to Japan, France, USA, Thailand, Cambodia and with each journey I have learnt more about the countries and cultures than if I had been a tourist. In August of 2022, I also participated in the Friendship Force International Festival at Sea Cruise where we sailed from Rotterdam to Norway, Iceland, and Scotland.

I look forward to traveling even more with the club in coming years and hope to continue enjoying the friendships I have made over the years and to make new ones along the way.

Diane Shipper

## Good Neighbours Choristers Christmas Concert

On Saturday, December 2, I attended a Christmas Concert at River East United Church. Clare and Esther McKenty who sing with the Good Neighbours Choristers performed many wonderful Christmas songs to get us all in the Christmas spirit—Carol of the Bells, Song for a Winter's Night (Gordon Lightfoot), Mary's Boy Child to name a few. They also sang a traditional Hannuka song Ma'oz Tzur. We had an audience sing-along. I actually won a lovely door prize and refreshments ended a great afternoon.

Submitted by Peggy Smith



Clare and Ester McKenty with Peggy Smith at the concert

## International Conference Sessions in Dubrovnic

FFI presented to webinars of several sessions from the conference over the last few weeks. I

attended about 6 of them. Susan was at the conference and Lynne attended some of the webinars so you can ask them about these as well. Here is a quick recap. If you are interested, there may be links on myFFI.org to the presentation.

**A. SOCIAL MEDIA:** The focus was on how FFI and individual clubs use Instagram, Facebook and What's App. This included using social media for individual posts, group posts, news feed, pages of events and photos, direct messaging to individuals or the group, group chat, member engagement, Q and A, pre and post journey uses, club development, safety, addressing concerns of members. Lastly, she marketed the new tech group at FFI, identified our rep on this group, and talked about how they can help us. One possibility is to have a round table discussion at one of our meetings about these three social media sites.

**B. APPS:** In addition to the three sites above, she discussed how we can use Apps like Duolingo, myFFI.org, Google Translate, Four Square, Packpoint, Skyscanner, Uber, Airbnb, Uber, Rome2Rio. She also mentioned that because the 3 social media sites above are all Zuckerberg products, they can be interconnected. (Don't ask me now) Again, as above, the ways in which we can use these Apps is almost unlimited. Several would require a club member to be the administrator, however.

**C. JOURNEY ASSIGNMENT PROCESS:** They talked about the process used by FFI to determine how they assign journeys. It has become more difficult since COVID, as many clubs have closed or, in some cases, are not hosting e.g., Russia. She gave us some tips on how to get a great journey.

Turn in your forms on time. (We do)

Be flexible regarding your destination and month of travel (we have been)

Select several realistic destinations. If we put the same country for all our preferences, we may get nothing. (We usually list several countries)

Include as much info as possible in the information box. Say No if you don't want to be joined with another club, although we are more likely to get a two-week journey if we join with another club. (We got our two-club journey to the US as a result information I gave FFI) Host at least as much as you want to travel. (One of the reasons I do not want to see us host less than 2 Inbounds.)

**D. DIVERSITY INFUSION:** This focused on what diversity looks like on the global level and why we need to address this topic. Our mission is to promote global understanding across the barriers that separate people. People lose sight of this and identify us as a travel club. The important thing is WHY we are traveling. The use of the word ambassador is not accidental. She identified FFI's 6 core values:

*Welcoming:* FFI promotes friendship amongst peoples of different backgrounds and cultures globally, regionally, and locally. FFI welcomes everyone regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, political opinion, religion, or any other difference.

*Open-minded:* FFI seeks to foster mutual respect and appreciation of differences. Members challenge their own prejudices and approach new situations with a learning attitude.

*Adventurous:* FFI members have a spirit of adventure! They are flexible and adapt to uncertain circumstances with energy and enthusiasm.

*Positive:* FFI members always consider the needs of others and seek to give more to host communities than they take. FFI members seek to be a force for good and aim to have a positive impact wherever they go.

*Innovative:* FFI seeks to be constantly evolving; adapting to new and better ways of carrying out our goals, and responsive to cultural and social changes. Members are open to change.

*Peace:* FFI firmly believes that a world of friends is a world of peace. FFI brings diverse people together to discover common ground. FFI members seek to further peace in all they do.

The focus was on activities we can organize which promote these values. Travel is only one.

**E. SPECIAL JOURNEYS: SPECIAL LEADERS:** This was an overview of special (formerly global) journeys: how they are organized, how ambassadors are recruited and chosen, what makes a special journey successful, how to deal with obstacles while ON the journey.

**F. LEADERSHIP:** They talked about what you really NEED to run a club. As clubs decrease in size and members age, it becomes difficult to find members willing to fill executive positions. Basic needs are a treasurer, an FFI contact, a program committee, members to lead and host journeys, and someone to do a newsletter and administer social media. She discussed a few different models - committees instead of a President/Vice President, some who have dispensed with formal meetings and minutes, and a regional group of individual members as opposed to a club. FFI has 40 individual members whose clubs have folded. Use myFFI.org in place of a newsletter. Various members on the webinar talked about how they are reorganizing, what they are doing with archives, etc. *CAUTION:* Changing our model would require a complete overhaul of bylaws and standing rules.

*Submitted by Denise Lawson*

## **Navigating an Unexpected Journey: A Lesson in Travel Preparedness**

### **Allison Lindsey, Director of Member Engagement**

It has long been Friendship Force International's policy that every Ambassador has travel/medical insurance to cover them in case of an accident or sickness while on a journey. That requirement can sometimes be met through the person's health insurance policy if their policy provides coverage while traveling.

Friendship Force offers the Friendship Force Travel Protection Plan for US residents and policies through a company called Trawick International for non-US residents. The premiums are based on age and trip cost and can be used for both Friendship Force travel and personal travel, as well as by your friends and family members who aren't FF members.

I'd like to share with you a recent experience that I had in which I was able to test out the Friendship Force Travel Protection Plan firsthand and why I'm so grateful I purchased it.

Before the recent Friendship Force world conference in Croatia, my fellow staff members and I were enjoying a quick break from our conference duties to take a lovely walk around the walled city of Dubrovnik. As we headed back to the hotel I slipped at a water taxi dock, falling four feet and landing on my right hip. I could tell something wasn't right immediately, and at the advice of those who had witnessed this dramatic fall, an ambulance was summoned. The reality of what had happened and what was before me began to sink in.



The ledge I didn't see. October 2, 2023

Hospital staff performed an x-ray and a CT scan, determining a fracture of my greater trochanter which would require surgery. The emergency department asked if I had travel insurance. I've spent countless hours explaining travel insurance benefits to our members and encouraging them to purchase a travel insurance policy - and I am so thankful I took my own advice! Even before the call to my family to let them know what was going on, I called the

number listed on the policy for On Call International (OCI), the provider of the 24/7 Emergency Travel Services plan that is included with the policy. They had a little trouble finding my policy because ours is a custom group policy written specifically for Friendship Force members. From my smartphone, I was easily able to send them the email confirmation that I received when I purchased the policy. That was exactly what they needed and from that point onwards they took care of everything for me.

As my week-long hospital stay progressed, it was determined that I would not need surgery after all. Physical therapists had me using a walker 3 times a day, but it was very painful and still very hard to even sit up. Further x-rays showed I could be discharged from the hospital as soon as I had plans in place to get home. Thankfully, the hospital had been in communication with the folks at OCI and were arranging for a nurse to fly to Croatia from the US to accompany me home. My liaison with OCI kept me informed every step of the way. My assigned US nurse, Dianna, would leave the US on Saturday and arrive in Dubrovnik on Sunday evening. We were booked on a 7:45 a.m. flight on Monday morning so that was a quick turn-around. I was nervous about the fact that Dianna wasn't arriving until almost 9:00 p.m. on Sunday and we needed to leave the hospital by 4:30 a.m. to get to the airport in time. Where would we find a taxi at that hour?! I had nothing to worry about. On Call International had arranged for a taxi and Dianna had already been in touch with them.

OCI had also booked flights for me and the nurse through Frankfurt and Paris in business class, necessary because of my limited mobility. Dianna advocated for me along the way, standing firm when TSA wanted me to walk through the scanner and convincing the mobility assistant in Frankfurt that taking me on an escalator because of construction was NOT going to work. I still shudder imagining me, in a wheelchair, being tilted backwards on an escalator!

Due to the layout and logistics in Charles de Galle airport and needing help from their Mobility Assistance Team, we missed our flight. No problem! Air France put us in a hotel and again, I was so grateful to have my nurse with me. I couldn't have done it alone and I wouldn't have wanted to do it with a family member helping me.

OCI had arranged for a driver to pick us up at the Atlanta airport - on Monday when our flight was supposed to arrive, but once again, I had nothing to worry about because Dianna was in touch with him and let him know we had missed our flight. And just like clockwork, the car was waiting for us when we exited the airport on Tuesday evening. Dianna accompanied me all the way to my house, got me settled comfortably, and then headed to her hotel where she would spend the night before flying home the next day.

Most travel insurance policies are considered secondary policies in that they cover anything that your primary insurance doesn't cover. In my case, I was able to email a copy of my health insurance card to my case worker at On Call International and they were able to verify that I did not have coverage while traveling out of the country. Therefore, OCI was able to guarantee payment to the hospital from my insurance policy and **the only thing I paid for was a walker to bring home with me.** I didn't pay for the ambulance transport, any of the X-rays or CT scans, or for any of the 7 nights I spent in the hospital. I also didn't pay anything out of pocket to fly home business class accompanied by a nurse.

In addition to being secondary policies, travel insurance policies are often referred to as "pay and submit" policies. You pay for your medical care or travel emergency and then submit receipts for reimbursement. That's another important point - always ask for receipts and reports from the doctor who treats you. I forgot to get a receipt for the walker I purchased so I

couldn't submit a claim for reimbursement. Forty-three Euros was a small price to pay, considering everything else.

So, what are my takeaways from this experience?

1. **Accidents can (and do) happen.**
2. **It's important to have a smartphone that has an international data and calling plan activated when traveling.**
3. **The "24/7 Travel Assistance Services" is a benefit that is often overlooked and could be the most important benefit there is.**
4. **Always ask for receipts, proof of payment, and medical or accident reports.**
5. **Never travel without travel insurance!**

For more information on the policies that Friendship Force offers, please see this article in the Help Center on MyFF: [Is insurance a requirement for travel on a Friendship Force Journey?](#) For questions about any of the policies, contact Allison at [allison@friendshipforce.org](mailto:allison@friendshipforce.org)

## Upcoming Events

### Guess Who is Coming to Dinner?

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner is a fun way to enjoy gathering with other Friendship Force of MB members in January. This will replace the usual January dinner and meeting, and usually occurs within the first 2 weeks of January. Members are requested to sign up for either hosting a dinner or lunch or choosing to attend a dinner or lunch. The hosts choose the date that is convenient for them and ask the members assigned to them to contribute to the meal.



The mystery part: guests do not know with whom they will be dining. As coordinator, I will assign guests.

There were sign up sheets at our December 6th meeting. If you have not yet signed up and would like to, please contact me and join in the fun!

Esther McKenty

### A Use for Unwanted Luggage

If you are getting rid of any kind of luggage - do not take it to Goodwill. Clean it up and drop it off at your local foster care agency. Foster kids are often asked to transport their belongings from place to place in a trash bag. I don't ask you to share often but if enough share we can help just a little bit with the self esteem of these young people. Just a thought as we get closer to our Spring cleaning.



From Facebook submitted by Lynne Foley

### FF Basics

**Membership renewals** Memberships run from January to December. **Renewing member: \$70 / New member: \$70 / Associate member: \$40**

All members are being asked to complete a membership renewal form at the time they pay their membership.

**Address changes** Have you changed your address, email, or phone number? Please tell our VP Lynne Foley right away so she can update our membership list.

**Club website** [friendshipforcemanitoba.org](http://friendshipforcemanitoba.org)

**FF Canada website** [friendshipforce.ca](http://friendshipforce.ca)

**FF International** Go to [friendshipforce.org](http://friendshipforce.org) for up-to-date information.

**My.friendshipforce.org** gives you access to the latest new messages and allows you to pay journey fees.

**Newsletter** To contribute to the Keystone Klippings, contact Gail at [gailke@hotmail.ca](mailto:gailke@hotmail.ca)