

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*While I was in Toronto, Canada, I was asked to donate money in order to preserve some of the ruins of the ancient world. Syrian Government representatives, visiting Toronto, asked both Bo-Bo, my froglike husband, and me for donations in multiples of \$US10,000 to help in the restoration of ancient ruins outside Damascus. The Frog looked at me in disbelief at the chutzpah of these government officials. But The Frog was polite and said that he would consider the matter of the cash donation. (He used to be a diplomat, you know.) With that, we left the Royal Ontario Museum and headed back to our hotel, which was just obliquely across the street. The Frog, on entering our hotel room, started immediately to do some homework on Syria. These are some of the things that he discovered:*

- 1. Syria imposed Emergency Law from 1962 until recently when the current President Bashar al-Assad was forced to suspend the draconian legislation. Under the Emergency Law, there was no protection of the citizens of the country;*
- 2. The civilisation of Syria is, probably, the oldest in the world. The city of Elba, in the north, is thought to have been founded in about 3,000 BC;*
- 3. On October 3, 1973, the combined forces of Syria and Egypt attacked Israel in what has come to be known as the Yom Kippur War. The unprovoked, surprise attack on Israel was completely unexpected by the Israeli Government of 1973. After early successes, the Israeli Defense Force pushed the Syrian Army out of the Golan Heights and invaded Syrian territory beyond the 1967 border;*
- 4. In the Lebanese Civil War that broke out in early 1976, Syria sent some 40,000 troops into Lebanon in order to assist the Maronite Christians, but changed sides and became embroiled in the civil war, instead. Thus began Syria's 30-year military presence in Lebanon. Assassinations in Lebanon by Syrian intelligence agents, stationed in Lebanon, have been suggested. Syria remained in Lebanon until 2005. When Prime Minister Rafik Hariri of Lebanon was assassinated in broad daylight, the assassination was blamed on Syrian agents so much so that, on April 26, 2005, most of the Syrian military forces were forced to withdraw;*
- 5. When President Hafiz al-Assad died on June 10, 2000, following 30 years in power, he was succeeded by his son, Bashar al-Assad, who was elected unopposed. Prior to that mock election, Syria's Parliament had reduced the minimum age of a candidate, running for President, from 40 years to 34 years, allowing Bashar al-Assad to be legally eligible for nomination to the post of President;*
- 6. Censorship in Syria was tightened, considerably, during the reign of President Bashar al-Assad and many Internet websites have been blocked by the Government. All Internet cafes are required by law to record all comments, posted on chat forums and to report the names of those people who posted comments on such forums;*
- 7. On October 5, 2003, Israeli aeroplanes bombed a site near Damascus. The Israeli Government said that the site was being used as a terrorist training facility by members of Islamic Jihad. The Israeli raid was in retaliation for the bombing of the Israeli town of Haifa that killed 19 civilians;*
- 8. On September 6, 2007, Israel, once again, attacked Syria when the Mossad, Israel's Intelligence Agency, discovered that a nuclear reactor was under construction, with North Korean technicians, assisting in its construction. Syria has never denied that it was intent to become a nuclear power and*

*that North Korea has been assisting it; and,*

- 9. Syria's human rights record is the worst in the world and the Government exercises the right to arrest and detain, indefinitely, any activist who appears a threat to the Government. Travel bans on citizens are common and arbitrary detention, along with torture, is widespread.*

*On reviewing his discoveries, The Frog decided that he would not donate any money to this authoritarian government which, clearly, cannot be trusted. Today, it is known that Syrian army personnel have killed upwards of 1,500 unarmed civilians in the country and have detained more than 10,000 civilians, believed to be, in the eyes of the Government of President Bashar al-Assad, dangers to the State. But, ironically, some very religious Jews in Toronto are known to have made cash donations to Syria even though Syria is, technically, still at war with Israel. Which just goes to prove that stupidity is rife in all religions and nationalities.*

*In closing, I must tell you, My Dear Grandchild, that, since The Frog did not donate any money to Syria, I took the \$US10,000 from his pocket when he was asleep in order to do a little shopping in Toronto. I bought myself a very nice beaver coat with the money and a mink scarf to match. So, you see, good things can materialise out of bad beginnings, after all.*

*Talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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