



© Jose Gil/Dreamstime.com

## Coming and Going

By Bill O'Brien

**THE VOICE OF FORREST BRANDT** awakened me on Veteran's Day. National Public Radio played his recorded memory of going home from Vietnam. In 1969, he was winging his way from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. on a Boeing 707. Wearing his crisp khakis, shined shoes, polished brass and First Infantry Division patch on his breast pocket, Brandt was listening to Dvorak's New World Symphony through his headset. He described the melancholy English horn calling out the melody "Going Home."

The pilot broke in to announce the white chalky line below was the Oregon Trail. Brandt wondered if the pioneers ever asked, "Why did we leave? When will we be going home?" His mind flashed back to buddies left behind in Vietnam. Will they ever be going home? Some would be strapped to litters, going home. The "going home" ride for some would be in flag-draped caskets. This retired Lieutenant Colonel, now teaching at

Northern Kentucky University, captured my attention, causing some flashbacks of my own.

My family was living in Central Java, Indonesia in 1965. On September 30<sup>th</sup> the Communist Party of Indonesia attempted a coup d'etat in the capital city of Jakarta. The months leading up to the coup were very intense. We were all aware something big was coming down.

In that atmosphere we received a letter from my sister-in-law in Texas. Much of our mail was censored at that time. She wrote the letter in coded language, reminding us of the song "Softly and Tenderly." She admonished us to remember who was calling, and what the caller was asking us to do. (Jesus is calling, Come Home, Come Home) And, we wondered if we would ever be going home?

We approach this season of the year that children long for. Beyond anticipation of Santa's coming, they hear

their parents' conversations about "going home." And, they eagerly look forward to seeing grandparents once again. After days of hectic holiday activities with the larger family, everyone looks forward to going home again.

College students turn their eyes toward home for the holiday season. Ah! Two whole weeks with no early morning classes, no long lab sessions, no all-night cramming for tests. Sleep in, eat mom's cooking and see old friends. No place like home.

"I'll Be Home for Christmas" became an immediate hit when recorded in 1943. The lyricist had actually written the words when he was a 16-year-old homesick college student. It became a favorite of soldiers fighting in World War II.

Millions of people are in global migration at this very moment. Over twenty million of them are in refugee camps. Most of the others are intentional migrants,



© Joseasreyes|Dreamstime.com

moving from home country to another land. They become like the children of diplomats, corporate employees and missionaries who bear the tag of “Third-Culture Kids” – no place truly feels like home any more.

As I walked through the streets of Terezin, Czech Republic a few weeks ago, I wondered if the Jewish children thought they and their families were going home when they boarded the train destined for Auschwitz? And what of other children, children in our own time orphaned by war, AIDS and all forms of oppression? Where is home? Or what about the homeless of Dallas numbering almost 6,000. Will they ever be going home?

Two-thousand years ago there was an unusual visitation. The Son of Man left home taking an unorthodox route for a traveler bound for Earth. The Mother named Mary, birthed the babe in Bethlehem, a long walk from home. With eyes turned back to Nazareth, instructions came that negated a home-going. Joseph, Mary and the babe fled to Egypt for the safety of the boy. Born in poverty, the family refugeed in a foreign land. With mixed emotions, these three

pilgrims turned their eyes toward home after receiving news of the death of the one who had the power to kill. They made the long trek back from Egypt. Bypassing Jerusalem, they were bound for home in Galilee.

Many years later, Jesus of Nazareth left home. Most young adults do that, don't they? Parents rejoice when the kid gets a job, has a sense of purpose and moves out. Jesus did that. He was committed to serve the cause for which he was born into this earthly home.

Jesus drew crowds wherever he went. No surprise. He had celebrity status now. Ask anyone who had felt a healing touch, or the crowds who had been fed with little or nothing on hand, or a town favorite who had died and been brought back to life. As his celebrity grew, one day a person approached Jesus and said that he was signing up; he wanted to be a part of the team. Jesus reminded him that the birds have nests, foxes have holes, but he didn't even have a place to lay his head.

The One who was willing to become a resident alien on Earth for our sakes, must have looked forward to the time when he could go home. But it was not a

selfish longing on the part of Jesus. In fact, he told his followers that he was going to prepare rooms for them so that one day they could be with him at his place. His coming was not the end of the story.

In the fury of ripping the wrapping from the presents under the tree, some toys or gifts might get lost in all the debris. Have we lost the meaning of the season in the commercialization of Christmas? A third to half of a store's annual profits may come from the Christmas season. But the trappings, the decorations and the music are seen and heard many weeks earlier. Image. Marketing. Competition. Is this what makes home so enticing that we cannot wait to get there? Or, is there something more compelling that puts home in its proper perspective?

In the midst of the global crisis that engulfs us at this season, let us consider the coming and going of the One who enables us to continue Earth's pilgrimage with meaning and purpose. For now, this world is our home and we're not just passing through.

---

*William R. (Bill) O'Brien is Director of BellMitra Associates and Founder and Director of Compassion Frisco.*