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I am an idealist who tends to look for the good in people rather than suspect them immediately of ill-intent.

For that, I don't apologize — except at times when my initial instincts betray me, or when people I meet reveal another side of themselves.

My idealism will be on full display for the next four weeks. I cannot wait to roll it out to my hosts.

I am leading a group of young professionals to Israel. As this column goes to press, we should be somewhere over the Atlantic en route to David Ben-Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv.

This trip is called a Group Study Exchange, sponsored by Rotary International, a service organization that has 1.2 million members worldwide.

Our organization's mission is defined clearly by its motto, "Service Above Self."

Rotary's members have been involved since 1986, for example, in a groundbreaking project to eradicate polio from the planet. We're within shouting distance of achieving our goal. Rotary is held up as the pre-eminent non-government organization, which can collect money and put it to scientific research — apart from governmental involvement.

Group Study Exchange is another important mission for Rotary.

I'm proud to be part of it.

Rotary is divided into districts around the world. District 5730 encompasses almost all of West Texas. Each year, this district teams up with another district abroad. We exchange young professionals, who must be non-Rotarians. They need a team leader, someone from the Rotary district, to lead them on their journey abroad.

This year, on this GSE journey to Israel, that leader is me.

Our GSE team comprises young professionals from Amarillo, Lubbock and Levelland. This is an outstanding group of individuals. They are Aida Almaraz, a caseworker at Boys Ranch; Katt Krause, office manager for her family's Amarillo landscape construction business; Shirley Davis, a math professor at South Plains College in Levelland; and Fernando Valle, a professor of education at Texas Tech University in Lubbock.

These outstanding young people are going to study abroad for four weeks, learning from their counterparts in Israel.

And I don't mind bragging about these young ambassadors. They will make their state and nation proud.

A GSE team from the Israeli district, 2490, will be touring West Texas at precisely the time we're traveling through Israel — thus, the "exchange."

Our visitors to West Texas will have the experience of a lifetime. So will we on our adventure in Israel.

And a big part of that adventure will be in furthering one of Rotary's stated objectives: "The advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world fellowship of business and professional persons united in the ideal of service."

The young people who are taking part in this endeavor are certain to fulfill that mission. They are certain to advance understanding with their Israeli colleagues. They are a cinch to promote goodwill and peace, which will last far beyond the four weeks of the exchange.

This is how the world can achieve the kind of rapprochement that one often doesn't find in the halls of power. Too many brokers bring their own agendas — and their own bias — to endeavors designed to bridge those differences.

But at this level, we bring none of those agendas to any bargaining table.

We just want to learn about our professions as they are practiced in a vastly different culture.

And, we'll bring a little of our own culture to our hosts.

We expect to learn, and we expect to teach.

Our exchange likely will build friendships that will last through several lifetimes.

It's difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a world without this kind of contact among people.

We instead live in a world that allows service organizations — such as Rotary — to send people far from their homes to learn from others and build bridges among those of vastly different cultures.

One of the most generous, big-hearted men I've ever met in the Panhandle, the late Guyon Saunders, took great delight in watching others stretch themselves far beyond their comfort zone.

Well, I've been saying this for months, and the more I say it, the more I believe it: This adventure likely will take us all so far out of our comfort zones, we may never find our way back.

And that would suit this idealist just fine.

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