

# A Day in the Life of the Butlers

2 Bd. Abbane Ramdane  
Oran, Algeria  
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Dear Friends,

Again it has been too long since our last general letter, and now it risks being further delayed by the pre-Christmas crunch in the Board offices that get our letters printed and in the local church in Iowa that has been so kindly handling the mailings for us. So we had better seize the occasion right now to wish you all a truly sincere Thanksgiving (past by the time this reaches you), a wonderfully blessed Christmas and a New Year filled throughout with faith, hope, and love.

A significant change has occurred in our family. At the end of the summer vacation, as Mark left to return to a second year at Baker University, Jim went off with him to start his first year there. John (now a senior) is still there, too, while Paul is in his second year of graduate work in Knoxville. The three Kansans plan to join their older brother in Tennessee for Christmas. That leaves us two old folk alone at home for the first time since 1960.

While we greatly miss the boys, we hardly suffer from loneliness. Their room has not been empty for long at a time. Mark and Jim spent the last four nights sleeping in the chapel, having turned their quarters over to guests from eastern Algeria. The guests stayed on several days after the boys had gone. Less than a week after our guests' departure, we took in a young family. A young Protestant couple from Madagascar was having their second child. They were living in a tiny room at one of the university housing centers, without neighbors (other students not yet back then since their opening date was mid-September), without water (had to fetch it from an outside faucet about 150 feet away) and without any convenient shopping arrangements (nearly a half hour walk to the nearest store). The university restaurants were all closed for the summer of course. So we took in the father and fifteen month old daughter when the mother went to the hospital, which is not too far from us. When she returned with their new son, we kept them all for a couple more weeks till it was time for classes to begin.

Then it wasn't long till we took in a young Catholic girl from Northern Ireland. She is here on a one-year cultural exchange deal, teaching English at a teacher training institute. Because of the general housing crisis here and a lack of coordination between the British cultural exchange center and the school where she teaches, she had wound up in a two-room apartment with another young girl and three young men. She was here about a week before finding other arrangements. Incidentally, she has become a good friend and attends our services as well as the mass. Coming from Northern Ireland, she is literally amazed at the real Christian fellowship here between Catholics and Protestants. Her comment at the end of her first conversation with David, whom she accidentally met on her second day here, was: "How nice to meet a FRIENDLY Protestant pastor!"

We are still frequently asked what our life is like here. One way of giving at least a partial answer to that question would be to tell you about "A Day in the Life of the Butlers." Thank goodness it was not really a typical day; but it did contain many of the typical elements of our life such as suspense, the unpredictable, the inexplicable, bureaucratic red tape, opportunities of service and enough people coming and going to keep us immunized against loneliness. The day was July 9, a Saturday, which is the first day of the work week in Algeria and hence more like a Monday to you.

4:40 a.m. -- David got up to awaken Roland. He is a Protestant student from Madagascar and had spent the night here with Mark and Jim so that he could more easily catch the early bus to Algiers on the first leg of his long journey home. The bus station is far from his university residence but near us.

5:50 a.m. -- We all got up to get the Johnsons off. The wife and daughter of the pastor in Algiers had arrived the day before and were driving to France via Morocco and Spain. They had slept in our living room.

6:30 a.m. -- Breakfast for all but Roland, who had left at around 5:00.

7:30 a.m. -- Johnsons left.

8:30 a.m. -- A.B. arrived. She is an Iraqi friend, whose daughter taught English along with Carol at the university for several years. A.B. has been retired for several years now and that daughter is settled in England. The mother had remained here with another daughter and granddaughter, but they were all three moving to France and would leave during our absence on vacation. David spent quite some time discussing problems of packing and mailing with her and then spent a half hour helping her dial through to her daughter in England and trying, unsuccessfully, to phone her brother in Paris.

9:30 a.m. -- David took off for some errands while Carol went down to the chapel to continue sorting through some ten cartons of left-over mimeographed materials from her university courses (university year runs through the end of June) and A.B. went shopping. David had to make an appointment for the car at the garage for the next day. He was soon back and received a call from a Protestant student frustrated in his attempts to get back home to Burundi. It was a long conversation and David was able to give him some helpful advice; but because of complications in both getting an exit and re-entry visa and in getting later plane reservations, he never did make it. This was a very cruel disappointment to him because he did not get home the previous summer either. His government

*will pay for tickets home only every other year*



- 10:00 a.m. -- David went to the regional government office building to pick up our passports with exit and re-entry visas in them so we could leave on vacation the following week. It is at least a two-week process getting these visas and includes getting supporting documents such as a certificate of residence, a tax clearance certificate (requiring visits to three different office buildings around the city), a tax stamp from the post office and a special form to submit to the police. From there he went to the police station in another neighborhood to answer a summons sent to a parishioner absent on vacation at his parental home in Mauritius (an island in the Indian Ocean). It was only to inform him that his residence permit was ready. He could pick it up whenever he got back.
- 10:45 a.m. -- David returned to leave passports at home and pick up other papers. Then he was off to Swissair on business related to Jim's ticket. There he had a long wait and a good conversation with an American parishioner getting tickets for her and her husband's return to Texas.
- 11:15 a.m. -- After checking back in at home, David left for the Catholic bishopric to return the English missal he had borrowed to use for recording texts to help a French priest with his pronunciation in reading the mass in English. Then it was on to the bank to pick up traveler's checks ordered two weeks earlier. There was a long wait at the bank.
- 11:30 a.m. -- While David was out, Johnsons returned, having been turned back by the Algerian border police. Mrs. Johnson did not have her resident permit with her. It was due to expire during her vacation, so she had started the renewal process six weeks before leaving. She was called in just a few days before her departure and instructed to turn in her old permit and return in ten days to get a provisional renewal slip. She protested that procedure, explaining she was leaving and needed an official paper in hand to cross the border. They explained to her that she did not need it since the exit and re-entry visa in her passport was proof that she had a valid residence status. That sounded good enough, so she protested no further. Unfortunately, the border police did not have the same opinion in the matter! She phoned her husband in Algiers to see what he could do about getting the provisional renewal slip speeded up.
- 11:40 a.m. -- An Egyptian Coptic Orthodox friend called for help and advice related to a trip to Spain.
- 11:45 a.m. -- David returned and got clued in on the latest events.
- 1:15-1:30 p.m. -- David helped A.B. call her brother in Paris.
- 1:30 p.m. -- We, including Johnsons and A.B., sat down to lunch while wondering whether Solomons would arrive soon and whether they would have had any lunch yet. The Solomons are both medical doctors from India serving a couple of villages some 50-60 miles southwest of here. They are Protestants and have two children. He had been having chest pains and David had arranged an appointment for him with a cardiologist in Oran. They hoped to arrive about 2 p.m. Carol had told him they could have something to eat here if they did not have time to eat before leaving. So we saved some food for them, but they did not show up.
- 3:00 p.m. -- David left for another visit to the insurance company office. He had been struggling since January to get payment for a small claim against a fellow who had run into the church car from behind at a red light. Both cars were insured by the same national company, but the church car is insured through the Algiers office. The two offices keep passing the buck as to payment procedures. We have had several firm promises of payment but still today, after more letters and phone calls and visits, have received no money!
- 3:45 p.m. -- David tried to call the university to get some information for a parishioner who had already gone for the summer. After fifteen minutes he gave up. About half the time the university switchboard number was busy, and the other half of the time, although it rang and rang, nobody ever answered! Then he called the cardiologist's office to see if Dr. Solomon had ever appeared for his appointment. The secretary said he had arrived and was with the cardiologist at that very moment.
- 4:15 p.m. -- Dr. Johnson called his wife from Algiers. He had gotten her old resident permit back long enough to get it photocopied and then had that copy certified as conforming to the original. Since the date on the permit showed it had not yet fully expired, one could hope the border police would accept it. They fixed a rendez-vous point half-way between Algiers and Oran. Carol prepared a lunch that could be eaten in the car, making it for five people to include Mark and Jim and also Dr. Johnson. Mark and Jim were going along so the two ladies would not be alone in case of trouble--especially since night driving would be involved.
- 4:30 p.m. -- In the midst of the above, A.B. left and Abrahams arrived. They are another Protestant couple from India and are now fifty-five miles south of us. We had known there was a fairly good chance they might show up that day.
- 5:00 p.m. -- The Johnsons left, accompanied by our boys.
- 5:15 p.m. -- The Solomon family showed up. He had NOT been to the cardiologist at all. They had brake trouble and had been able to get only partial repairs on the way. They had come the rest of the way very slowly and had just arrived. This still has us wondering what the cardiologist's secretary was thinking of when



announcing that Dr. Solomon was there at 4:00. Anyway, David called the office again but got no answer; the cardiologist had gone home. So David and Dr. Solomon went looking for a place for further brake repairs only to find it was too late. The repair shops were getting ready to close.

6:00 p.m. -- Solomons left after exchanging a pile of books from our personal lending library but without having attended to either Dr. Solomon's heart condition or the brakes. They had a long, slow drive home, but made it safely.

7:45 p.m. -- Abrahams left after having supper and a good visit and exchanging a number of books.

8:00 p.m. -- While putting out the garbage, David caught three boys ringing our bell just to pester us. This is a frequent problem since the bell is down at the gate and we live on the second floor (above the chapel). It is rare we can catch anyone in the act. They were boys from the neighboring apartment building and to whom we always try to be nice and for whom we often do answer the door to let them get back a ball that they have kicked over the fifteen foot high fence into our courtyard. David was able to see one of the parents and have a good chat with him. That has improved the situation so far as those few children are concerned.

12:45 a.m. -- The evening of reading and office work came to an end with the safe return of the Johnsons, Mark, and Jim. You might also like to know that Dr. Solomon's chest pains have disappeared and that the Johnsons crossed the border without any serious problem the next day.

We hope life provides opportunities of service and fellowship where you are, too. If not, come visit us.

Fraternally yours,

David and Carol Butler