

2 Bd. Abbane Ramdane  
31024 Oran, Algeria  
March 1993

Dear Friends:

Thanks to one and all for the flood of cards and letters that came pouring in throughout December, January and even part of February. We much appreciate your greetings and greatly cherish any news you send about yourselves.

Some people have been concerned about us because of the terrorism that has hit the country this past year. Let us assure you that we are fine and that there has been relatively little terrorist activity here in the western part of the country. Most of the problem has been concentrated around certain cities in the central region (where the capital is located) and the east. With a few exceptions, the victims of terrorist attacks have been members of the police, army or other special security forces. Recently, however, that has been changing and various other people targeted.

A week or so ago, two heroes of the revolution, widely honored and respected not only because of their devotion to the country in the past but also because of their reputation as men of total integrity in the midst of later corruption, were shot to death. That event triggered a general reaction that soon took the form of a call for massive demonstrations in all the major cities. Those demonstrations took place on Monday, March 23rd, from noon to 2 p.m. They produced a human tidal wave through the central part of each city. There were many flags and pictures of the president assassinated early last summer as well as numerous banners and placards bearing such slogans as: "NO to the assassination of Algeria," "NO to blind terrorism," "No compromise with terrorism," "No pity for the assassins," "An end to dialogue with the extreme fundamentalists," etc. We earnestly hope and pray that this may prove a turning point that further isolates the extremists and also lights a fire under the various political forces to get their act together for the further fight against corruption and laxism and for the struggle to get the economy moving again.

Now another story can be told. There are many things in our experiences here that we do not feel free to relate because they concern others whose lives could conceivably be affected. With the passing time, however, some of these experiences can be shared.

This story concerns M.B., a student from one of the African countries that has suffered immensely in relatively recent years. He spent five years in specialized technological studies here in Oran and was a faithful member of our Protestant community the whole time. He had already lost his father and then, for two or three years, he did not know whether his mother was living or dead. He got word that the home village had been destroyed and that the survivors had formed of a group hunter-gatherers in the forested areas of the region. From time to time they would move from one forested area to another, always at night.

About the beginning of his last year of study, he received indirect word that his mother was still alive. How he wanted to see her! He had gone far away to the big city for high school and from there had had the chance to come on scholarship here without returning home. Thus he had not seen his mother for at least two years before coming to Algeria. For a young man, that was a very long separation from his mother...and brothers and sisters. Returning to his country as soon as possible seemed an obvious and urgent necessity...and yet just when and how and at what risk remained burning questions with no self-evident answers.

Things had turned for the worse back home; and another student abroad, one from M.B.'s region and bearing the same tribal markings, was killed upon arrival in the capital city. Would he dare fly in to the capital? Could he find an overland route through a neighboring country and enter nearer his home region far from the capital? That was tempting till he learned that a new system of travel



passes had been instituted and that he would surely be caught before finding his mother. Fortunately, by the end of his study program he had quite a few contacts with other students and refugees both here and in France so that he was getting more information on which to base his plans. Yet there were certainly no easy or sure decisions. Uncertainty and risk lay in every direction.

He stayed on here and in France as long as he could after his studies to plan things as carefully as possible. His determination to see his mother, coupled with looming problems of visas and money, pushed him on in his risky adventure, passing through other countries to arrive near the border not too far from his nation's capital. He was able to check with other countrymen--merchants, refugees, etc.--and determine that it was probably a fairly safe time to cross over to the capital city. He did so.

He had also received news about the exact location of his mother. Things were getting better. She and other survivors of her village had either started a new village or settled in with some other villages. Still, he could not go to her because of the rainy season and impassable roads. He applied for work but had a long wait. Before he was hired, he had to sell most of his clothes and technical books. Then he was hired.

He was dreaming of when he could finally get enough time off to go visit his mother. Then he was sent on a mission to the very region where she was. When they were as near as they were going to get, he asked for permission to take a day off to go see his mother and rejoin his colleagues later. His colleagues were the head of the mission project and a French specialist. His boss suggested they all go together in the Land Rover. So they did.

The village was soon invaded by a Land Rover with one white face and two black ones inside. It attracted considerable attention! It was a small village and M.B. quickly spotted his mother among some other women in front of a hut. He directed the driver towards her and had him stop just a few feet away. There was a bit of consternation among the women until M.B. jumped out and embraced his mother. Tears of great rejoicing flowed freely and then M.B. was paraded about on the shoulders of some young men. We do not know just how long the encounter lasted, but it was rather short. The mission had to move on.

Later, M.B. married and gathered his mother and other elements of the family with him in the capital. He now has two children and is the head of a household of 12-14 people.

In our very first year of contacts with M.B., we were taken with him. He was always pleasant, thoughtful, smiling...and teasing in a delightful way. It must have been near the end of the fourth year before we began to learn his story and to enter into it through our love for him. We had always known there were enormous problems and turmoil in his country but had not suspected he was so personally affected. We had failed to appreciate the depths of his faith, hope and love that created a veritable spring of inner peace and joy bubbling over in his relationships with others. We had no inkling of the size of the obstacles that his inner resources had to overcome to be the person he was among us. We continue to give thanks for him and for what he has meant to us. And we would ask you to join us in extending your prayers not only to Algeria but to the whole of the continent of Africa.

Faternally yours for Easter joys,

*David & Carol*

David & Carol Butler

(We apologize for the delay in this letter reaching you. We received it in our office less than a week ago.)