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31024 Oran, Algeria
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Dear Friends:

Halloween is here again. Time to start sending you Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year greetings. May your Thanksgiving extend to every day of the year, your Christmas bring you a new birth of love as the wellspring of peace and joy and hope in your lives and the lives of those around you. And, if those wishes are fulfilled, that will take good care of the New Year.

In our last letter we spoke of the two Rwandan students here. One of them has received word from an uncle who made it to a refugee camp and who said almost all the student's old friends had been killed. He did not know how many of the family had been killed or had survived. Both students have finished their three-year training in the Institute of Telecommunications and would normally be heading back home. Under the circumstances, and given the fact that they had done very well in their studies, they applied to continue in related technological fields at the Oran Technical and Scientific University to earn engineering degrees. They have just received refusals.

As for events here, the general estimate now is 10,000 rather than 5,000 killed over the last two years. Almost everyone is convinced the higher figure is still a conservative estimate. A few have tossed out figures of thirty to forty thousand but that is surely quite far-fetched. In any case, the killing goes on with the toll recently including two Spanish nuns who had lived and served the poor for many years in a neighborhood of the capital that is known as a hotbed of fundamentalist extremists. Even some extremists denounced those particular murders, but that does not help the situation. Just as we have seen a miracle in South Africa and think we are seeing one in Mozambique and hope we are witnessing one in Palestine, so we must pray for a miracle here—some miraculous breakthrough toward peace and justice that can serve as grounds for new confidence and new hope.

On the library front, we are overjoyed to report that we have received eight out of nine mail bags of books that have been sent to us. The results have been so positive that we feel the need now to limit somewhat the requests and remind folk to check with us before sending anything. The categories of books that can really be useful are narrowing as shelf space diminishes. We could still use solid, fairly recent works on grammar as well as good anthologies of English, American and/or African (Eng.) literature (especially student editions with introductions and notes). Any good, recognized literature produced in English by African or Arab American writers would still be welcome. Other categories still of interest are: British and/or African history and civilization; translation; psycho- and socio-linguistics (but NOT The Articulate Mammal of which we have two copies already); applied linguistics; educational psychology, pedagogy; specialized dictionaries; relatively recent magazines or journals in medicine, architecture, computer science, electronics, mechanics, general science. Please note that we already receive both National Geographic and Discover. We must also ask that nothing be mailed later than April 1 (and that is NOT intended as a joke!).

We could add that anyone sending packages totaling 15 lbs. or more should send them by M-Bag, which is much more economical. The books should still be well wrapped in packages with each one bearing our address and the notation "Books for M-Bag" or "Books and magazines for M-Bag."

Estimates of killed reached
50,000 by the end of 1995
+ 60,000 in Jan. 1997.

Now irrelevant

We are continuing our every-other-week service in English in one of the camps for foreign workers near the petro-chemical complex some 25 miles east of us. We have lost the two couples who had received us in their living rooms but have also outgrown the house service format as a dozen Filipino workers have started coming from another camp by shuttle bus. We meet in a lounge at the club house. Another camp, where we also had services for a short while, has been an impenetrable fortress to all non-residents for some time now. A few could theoretically arrange special transportation to come to the other camp for our services, but they have been working seven days a week for the last six weeks or so. They expect to continue that for another month. We cannot have evening services because it would be most imprudent for us to return home after dark. Hence we can meet only on Friday, the local equivalent of Sunday and only day any of the workers there have free.

The return trip here from the States had to include a week out for a meeting called for us and some others in Switzerland. Our Swiss colleagues received us in a Swiss Methodist hotel in the magnificent Alps. We enjoyed the setting all the more since we would not (and will not in the near future) travel there on our own. The cost of things in U.S. dollars was absolutely shocking!!

In spite of that week out, we had time in Great Britain to see two units of our "extended family" and to make a round trip between train strikes to visit friends in Edinburgh. We had not seen them since 1977. What a joy to visit with them and see how three children are getting on these 17 years later...and Edinburgh remains a fascinating city to visit. Incidentally, we stumbled upon a chance to see and hear the drum and ^{and} fife corps of the Middlesex County, Massachusetts Volunteers. In their colonial uniforms and wigs, in their disciplined bearing, they were an easy match for the guards of Buckingham Palace, while in their precision movements and drumming^g and fifing, they rivaled computer-programmed robots. It was truly amazing!

Coming back through Paris, we were able to see one of the two units of our "extended family" there and to spend one night with a former parishioner just recently married and settled there near the airport. How convenient. They also invited another old friend from Oran to join us for lunch the next day before we had to catch our plane. There are some³⁰ other families, couples or individuals we would like to visit again in Europe but that will have to wait.

In the printing of our last letter, a few crucial words were omitted from the last sentence making it sound rather odd. We shall now end with a repeat of the last two sentences since they are still appropriate. We shall put the missing words in ALL CAPS.

The intensity and depth of personal relationships within our small Christian community (including Catholics as well as Protestants) and the assurance of your Christian love and prayers remain a primary source of inner strength, and for that we thank one and all. Such loving solidarity is truly a God-given antidote FOR THE SOLITUDE (physical or psychological) which one might otherwise experience, and is a well spring of meaning and purpose in life...and of hope.

Fraternally yours,

Dave and Carol Butler