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Sunday, 17th May, 1984.

Here begins the account of my nine months in Niger as a short-term missionary with the Sudan Interior Mission.

Leaving home was strange in that I felt that I was just leaving for a short visit to the country instead of embarking on a long and arduous venture that could very well run me down or out. My father, however did not feel this way, for he sniffled as would any parent who releases a child into the great unknown. No wonder parents hate to see their offspring go off to war, in spite of what folklore says, for they may very well miss them for ever. Indeed, the setting was almost pastoral, with my father sitting on the grass by the pond, and my brother standing beside. Perhaps it is his insight as to what I will find in Africa that worries him so; for he knows much more of what I will encounter in terms of growing up than I do.

In fact, this theme has been, and continues to be repeated. . . that of the outside world commenting that I do not know what I have let myself in for. In a sense, they are true! I have not the slightest concept of life and raw conditions in Niger; all I know is that it is going to be rough, unpleasant in parts if not all, very strange, unfriendly, yet an education that cannot be bettered. For half the price of Gordon, I will be exposed to an education that is ten times as beneficial. Therefore, at this time, it would not do to be arrogant in these writings, or overly self-confident, or pretentious, for I do not know what is ahead in precise terms. Over the past few months since the decision to go, many people have said this and that, so my head is a stuffed repository to their varying opinions. What to do? Some seems very obvious--watch your health, and the like--and others seem ambiguous--don't destroy the native culture but help them. On all sides, I am beset by the anti-Christians who see all mission work as destructive, or the armchair cynics who ask if the Third World is worth the effort, considering that all my work will be ruined once I leave. Others instruct me in "the way" to assist/evangelise/coverse/live with the locals. What a mess! Yet there have been a few freinds, (and even critics) who have given some words that will, I hope, be kept by me if they seem proper. It is--to listen, learn, ask questions, and don't try to "save the world" in these few short months; for this is a recconnaissance and an education as well as a mission. That old and wise friend of mine will recognise her advise when she reads this covey of lines, bringing back all those hours we spent talking in her underground rooms at the college, with students coming and going, in search of college found work. Do you recognise yourself by now?

I think that I have not done as much thinking as I ought to have done in good preparation for this venture. On the one hand, this may be good, for there is a little less room for armchair solutions and a know-it-all attitude which will be infuriating to the mission. On the other hand, I will be jumping into the deep-end on all fronts, thereby opening myself to fearsome culture-shock and stress...and this is not pleasant! At the moment, all I can do is spin off ideas and many hypotheses: in a matter of weeks, the tone of writing will change in mamners as tormenting and tempestuous as my experienced-ravaged eyes witness the African world around me. What is their to do on those nights when there is nothing fit but to write and account for the things that happened? For me, there will be no spots of time when the urge to record hits me--it will be one long metamorphosis as I try to wash the damned spots off my hands onto this paper. The writer, and of all writers the journalist who records what has been seen and done has a great and terrible responsibility to those unable to see XXXX. Are these pages the place for mere observation, or criticism, or the battleground of the tormented mind that witnesses the cruel world at play?

Some readers may wonder why I place such stock on the writing side of these upcoming months. Why don't you get off your ---- and do some evangelism/farm-work/etc.? Well, since this ministry is a wholistic one, as SIM seems to say, I have decided to take that injunction seriously, and do more than the vital work

of witnessing, digging mesquite-trees, building mud-brick ovens and the like, for it seems appropriate to record. After all do not the profs make us take notes for their lectures, which are important in themselves? In any case, I suspect that all the physical work done will ultimately perish in one way or another; and since this trip is in effect a nine-month lecture course given by Prof. God, I had better keep good notes!

What are my aims? I am sure that SIM will ask me that one during orientation, and I am only sure in a very vague way: I have yet to see and listen a little, if there is time for that ar Maradi. Ideals, however, are different. Would you, as the reader groan if I said "to follow God's will"? Oh no, here is another one from Gordon spouting off... Yet, it would seem to me to be a realistic path to take. I cannot explain it well here -- I am sure that Aquinas spent many books on this one -- some of you know what I mean, and others cannot. This is a topic which I will cover later.

Saturday, 2nd June, 1984

So much for the typewriter! In the past few days, I visited my grandmother's half-derelict apartment in New York, and then my grandfather in New Jersey. Up until then, I had the impression of coasting through an archipelago, through to one haven after another. However, I am hearing the open sea calling, for the last island of refuge is underfoot... Now at SIM orientation with 20 or 25 other missionaries, I am getting a very rushed into. to missions and culture-clash. In fact, with each new minute, I realize just how much learning we will have to do -- in Africa, and not here.

Having been to many orientations, the main concern on this one is not mere fear and apprehension of the other people in the group, but a fear of acting too cocky and self-confident. I say this as I have travelled much and probably seen more of things French than most, but don't wish to brag or offend. Some of us have worked in Africa before, so one is advised to shut up and listen. Indeed, there are many times when I could have made a monumental cockup by speaking out and saying something grating; so I have been silent of lare. But, there comes a point when silence is no good, and I need to find a way to balance silence with comment. How much should be recorded here? Indeed. I know that I can never record everything, for there is too much to contemplate, record and deal with: I cannot write all day. Perhaps, then, I will be a living diary that people may read when I return.

How strange! It is now evening and the birds are coming to roost, calling to each other. Through the curtain of the clock strokes the occasional cry or voice, and the crunch of a car on the gravel. My eyes tell that I am in America, but upon closing them, I am removed a few years and many miles to a green and willowed path I know so well in England: only the clock serves as a tenuous link that bridges the past with the present, over the oblivion of fled time. Here, but here on this bank and school of time I'd jump the life to come, but the clock bridges only to the past--I can do nought but surmise the future in Niger and record it as it passes. Here too, there is difficulty. . . although events happen at a slow rate in Africa, one must be quick to learn and record them, for there are few reruns.

In addition to the sounds there are the sights. . . the irises are in bloom, and their three-tongued sepals demand an examination. Looking at one, I saw two ants struggling in and amoungst the hairy stamens, jaundiced in the desert-dust of iris pollen. Striving for an aim beyond their thoughts (if any), these ants made an apparently

futile endevour--what a waste! "If i were a a flying bee, I would be more sucessful in my whimsical ventures." But these ants accomplished an aim beyond their apparent means, as pollen kissed stigma. To me, this is thought-provoking. . . are not we, as missionaries, the ants that strive in a hairy world, apparently futile in our attempts, yet ultimately used as pollinators? We pollinate, yet it is God who affects the gametophyte generation, that ultimately leads to seeds and a beautiful new plant--but only after it dies! By just looking at an iris flower I am inspired and would record what I see: this journal is meant to be that way, for there is more to observation than one facet. The pastoral mingles with the dreadful or the mundane; if life be unto itself a college, then why not its chronicle?

Tuesday, 4th June, 1984--It is at times like this that I realise just how much travelling I have done. After many years of jet flight, especially across the Atlantic, I can cross over and switch to a new place with ease. Yesterday I was in New York, and today I am in Paris, and the change seems effortless. Not that I am bicultural--far from it--just used to travelling. . . The funny part is in observing those who are going out to Africa, many for the first time: they are like children in an evacuated chocolate factory, for they are new to this.

Wednesday, 6th (???) June, 1984--I am now at the SIM base in Niamey, but would recount all that has happened to me over the last few days. It is incredible, and I am still getting over the effects...

As I might have said before, travel across the Atlantic is very commonplace; not because it is to be despised--it just becomes a habit. It was fun to see my fellow missionaries and their attitudes as many of them had never left their native shores before. Innocents abroad, they made me look as a veteran or a cynic: however, I am neither. In their excitement, one could draw pleasure, for here was the personification of the discoverer. The flight was long, as usual, yet a time for thinking about this trip and work. The hum of the jets made me more pensive than usual. This brought up the question of goals and of expectations while in Niger. Unfortunatally, for the first few days I had the wrong attitude about the whole venture, in that I was becoming arrogant and full of self-confidence. I felt that I could walk as I would, where I would, and that all would be well with me. (By the way, please excuse the typo's--this machine jumps a space at will!) In hindsight, I know that this was sheer folly and wickedness, for this attitude would have landed me in great trouble with the host nationals and with SIM, and would have led me down the paths of dryness and self-serving waste. Two things helped to put me in a better state of mind. First was the admonition given to us at orientation, from Phillipians. . . Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Here, the word "mind" was changed to "attitude", and that made all the difference. In fact, it convicted in many ways, and I am sure that I will see the implications in more things, as this venture goes on. If one tries to follow this admonition well--and this is difficult in itself--then the whole pattern of living changes, since this goal rules one's very decisions. It calls for a total revocation of one's own game plan, in favour of one other's, and that certainly is not the Mission's, but God's. The second of the two events that moved me was the advice given to act in terms of being, and not mere doing. This sounds like something from ethics

or some other abstract science, a s opposed to practical living. . . yet it seems to be eminently practical. If one were to spend these six to nine months in the pursuit of doing, then the results would be very finite and even wasted. Indeed, I have the hope to do the following things in Maradi this year--to follow my work assignment of digging wells and planting mesquite trees, of trying to lea rn the Hausa language or a part of it, of keeping this diary, of visiting the local lepers in Ma radi and working with them in my spare time, of lea rning to live and even eat in the African culture, of working with the bees, and of course, growing through the daily quiet-times. Many of the things listed above are things that could go horribly awry if the underlying priorities were not put in order. Indeed, as some have said,"Why are you <u>really</u> g·oing out there?", and there might be anX insight in the "being" side of my objectivesX. These are few but important. Being a servant is first. . . the real problem is translating this common knowledge into daily living and action. In other words, theoria must become praxis, and real praxis at that. The next is to become a learner, observer, and recorder; the three go together, and require e ffort, for they enter into all parts of the "doing" section. Then, one must become flexible and teachable, and not a cynic. The good part about this is that it can be applied to all that I do, but the bad or rather sobe ring pa rt is that if there is no right being in what I do, then doing is worthless to many. During the orientation, and later, there was a great stress layed on growing in God through service in being, not solely doing the will of God. I feel like one of those waterskating insects that skim over the surface of a pond, aware of the great and unfathamable depths below, yet unsure of how to comprehend them by XXself.

E nough of contemplation for the moment; there will be more room for that later as I observe more of the daily life that takes place. Our group arrived in Paris, and spent the night in the airport hotel. During this time, some of us visited parts of the city. Again, it was fun to see my friends at large in a strange city. . . full of a wonder that gobbles in all the sights and loves them. Unfortunatly, Notre Dame looked in a dismal state--the interior was dim, dusty, and shrouded in a murkiness that was more than merely optical, could it be a symbol of the present-day darkness that is sweeping across the northern countries today? On the other hand, the Saint Chapelle was as beautiful and bright as ever. Unlike the former church, the windows shone with a radiance that burned the e yes with wonder.

With the approquinquity of the landfall in Africa, there was the rise in suspicion of the unknown; for some reason, I was expecting to have a rough time with the customs, and visions of ripped-apart bags haunted me. Why the pessimism? When the event took place, it was relativly passive, for I learnt that SIM has carte blanche. Tha t was the ea sy part, the heat was something else!

Living in the tropics is a totally new experience for me, and for this temperate body. Life is one long sweat, B.O. rules, one's clothes are perpetually damp, the hair is dirty and wet, as is the very air one breathes, and the mind soon becomes exhausted. One well remembers the complaints back home that those in the tropics are lazy and do no work. . . well, the very heat and oppressivness of the sun are enough to kill the four hours after midday. At that time, <u>everyone</u> takes for the shade and just sits and lies, as they say. The whole world just stops, and I have yet to see any mad dogs or other Englishmen out in <u>this</u> noonday sun! The first night will be one to remember for a long time. After s upper and talk, the three of us who shared one of the guest rooms collapsed onto a bed each, w ith nothing on save our underwear, and that was not enough! In a few moments, I found myself sweating all over, and the bedsheets became drenched. With my back to the sheets, arms tucked onto my chest, and legs drawn up, the image was irrevockably of a roasting-

chicken on a cooking tray. My sweat was the drippings that went onto the sheets--indeed, I was a self-basting chicken. The same was very true of the other two, Robert and Keith. The only real difference is that these three chickens were not still! Every so often, we would roll over and over, unable to find a position that was comfortable. We were smitten by the very night.

All of the windows were opened, yet the heat continued, until ten o'clock, when the wind picked up, and a dust/rain storm came over Niamey. The door slammed to, and the rain played its familiar pitter-patter on the tin roof. The only strange thing was the lightning. . . it seemed that the very angels were playing Star Wars with strobe-lights in the firmament, for the flashes came and came, and came, with never a break. The dust, insidious as never before, slipped in and clothed whatever it touched, so that our room changed overnight.

Thursday, 7th June, 1984,

This date is necessary, to bring things into perspective, as I am in a total state of limbo--I do not know what the time is, or what is going on; it is just that which is within reach or sight, or thought. Although I have not yet got the dreaded culture-shock, I have seen so much that I am worrying if these words will be too much of a preoccupation. . . indeed, the typewriter could draw me away from other, more important pursuits. Yet, so much of real note has transpired that the many hours of enforced idleness that invade the midday are put to good use, for the heat makes any outdoor activity a real killer. Before going on to the thoughts of the day, a description of Niamey is in order. . .

This town is the capital of Niger, yet it is very reminiscent of a town in Southern France--in parts, that is. The road from the airport is laterite, which is a hard, red, and barren ground that looks like the surface of a kiln-baked pot when seen through a magnifying glass. This laterite makes good roads and runways, but renders the ground unfit for very few plants save the desert trees and thorn-scrub. Yet, surprisingly, there are many trees in Niamey, many of them being just for shade. The town itself is the smallest capital I have seen, so it is easy to get around. The mission guest house is on the west bank of the River Niger, accross the only bridge for several hundred miles ; however, the river is low, and many of the sand-bars are bared, so that the locals are using the land as pasture or rice-field. When driving on these roads, the vision of France persists, for the cars are French in the main, the signs are too, and so are the drivers! Although not as bad as the dreaded Cairo, everyone dodges around, and hoots at will. We are always sharing the streets with donkeys, camels, and humped cattle. The camels are particularly attractive, with their stilted legs, yet full of their culture--slow and stately. More could be said of Niamey, yet this will come out of the wash as life continues .

I am becoming very conscious of my ignorance of the ways and means of this land for I have made some very rude cock-ups to the nationals. So much of the offence that Americans give to others must come from sheer ignorance, as from common arrogance. When at the airport, a porter offered me and a friend a foil-wrapped handiwipe to clean up our wet faces. My one was partly opened, so my instinct told me not to use it, for fear of germs. Now , if I had been thinking, I would have taken it and groaned in my heart: guess what I did! Not very polite, dear heart. . . This was not the only one too. A few days later, when visiting the market, a Tuareg tried to offer a box for sale, which I did not want to buy. Fine. But how to disengage politely? It was fun to speak to him, for he spoke French; but after a while, he showered me with French obscenities that even I do not know! To make it even

worse, the young missionary that was with us pointed out my error after it had happened and been seen by her. No offence, but very embarrassing. . .

The four of us walked through the marketplace, drawing stares and hagglers like iron filings; yet I would hardly call ourselves magnetic! I am glad that I have had a past that included the gutting of the game that I shot, as well as the liking for very basic and crude food, for without it, the market would have been a nightmare. As it was, I found it allright--so-so--for when in Maradi, Rob and I will be in the self-catering dorms, which means that we will live off the fare from the open markets. There was nothing that seemed uneatable, as long as it was cooked; however, the meat section was riveting. The flies clung to the machete-butchered goats and camels like my bees do to the supers at the annual extracting-party; they were <u>everywhere</u>! An African housewife selected her meat and cared nowt about the flies. The chopping-blocks were chopped and scarred, and looked like a Yuletide log that was only half-burned--thick at each end, and much narrower in the middle. Of course there was no sanitation here, yet for some reason, it seemed all so proper and natural. . . What should I make of this? Ii an optimist, then be glad for the acceptamce: but if not so, then one could well call this entry-shock! I am not sure which it is yet. Moving on, I found the vegetable and grain section to be fine, for this is very close to my likings for whole food; yes, there were germs, but it seemed all right. Just wait, you say, until it hits you inthe face. Indeed, it probably will, but there seems to be no way of dealing with this.

So far, there are three things that I have noticed that do trouble me. I do not wish to raise them openly yet, for there is probably a reason for them all, and in any case, it is too early to make a fool of oneself. The first is on water: missionaries and Nigeriens alike use it very liberally, and even in a time of drought! Well I remember the drought of 1976 in England, when water-use was tightened severely: here, this is not so. Cars and airplanes alike are washed, and the city government waters its lawns very well, so that the city is very green. The drought shows no sigh of abating, and I don't know what to make of it. The second is the pattern of living and working in the mission itself. It is within a walled compound, but this is natural, since all properties in Niamey are required by law to be walled. If I were to return to home right now the impression would be that the mission was just " living" here, and not doing anything--just existing. . . However, I know this is not the case, for I still am a babe in the desert, and do not wish to anger the older missionaries . The very fact that the Nigeriens like the "Sim"tells me that there is more to this than meets the eye. From a fleeting perspective, it seems that the pace of life in Africa comes to the mission itself. To be a servant to these people, one must adopt their ways, and the way of slowness and lack of concern for the fast life must be taken up. I feel as if I was set in wax, that would never quite harden, due to the heat, but that was so viscous as to reduce me to limbo. I am under a strobe-light, where all movement is dragged down, and down, and under. Is this what the orientation called "introduction to culture"? Back home, I can just see my father, of all people calling me all sorts of names. . . lazy, shaking hands limply, and living in filth and my own sweat. Come along now, can't you get a grip on yourself? And so on. Yet the Africans would call me super-clean, arrogant to the extreme, haughty, weak and dependant on fans and the like. This is yet another example of being caught in the crossfire, save that the fire "from home" is in my conscience, and the fire "from here" is real enough. Culture-shock will not be long in coming. This

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real issues at hand. Even now, there is a dillemma; should I be in town with the missionaries at the office, where one talks of very little, and waits, or should the vivid sights of the past be laid down? The other, much more experienced missionaries see my own behaviour as quite normal, and they bid me constantly to rest, yet my conscience, Kschooled in the ways of America and family tells me to do otherwise. There is no concrete solution, and in any case, the temperature is forcing everyone into the Kshade.

Today, I will be moving on from the base in Niamey to. . . of all places, Upper Volta, and the bees! SIM asked me to go to Fada n' Gourma, to make a reconnaissance of the bee project there, for two weeks, before returning to Maradi to begin work at the Farm-School for six months. This is a great surprise and joy, for there w ill be a perfect chance to see what is going on there, and see if I can return to Kwork there in November for a few months. More on this in due course. . .

End of Part One — left in Niamey, to send back with part three . . .

Sunday, 10th June, 1984.

I am typing this account separatly, as I was sent to Upper Volta by SIM to check out the beekeeping station at Fada n' Gourma. After many weeks of wondering if there would be any work with bees at all, this opportunity came through, so it seemed right to grab it. At present, the situation seems to be as follows. For two weeks, I will be at the Bible-school near Fada, and will be introduced to the mysteries of African beekeeping, as well as its dangers! Then, the six-month term of work at Maradi will be started; however, in addition to the assigned work of digging wells and building mud-brick ovens, SIM will have me set up a bee project using one empty hive from Fada, and any wild bees that can be captured locally in Maradi. At this juncture, one can only be thankful for this open door to opportunity, and assume that it falls within what is planned over the long run for me. Tomorrow, therefore, the two weeks of testing will begin, and although Iam obviously looking forward to working with African bees, I am not exactly looking forward to their terrible attacks, especially since the Bible-school has little in the way of ultra-safe protective clothing. . . Still, that is all part of the job.

The ride from Ouagadougou to Fada was facinating, the more so because it was by "bush-taxi". After being taken by pillion to an outlying road towards Fada on the outskirts of Ouagadougou, a SIM friend found the right taxi, and in five or so minutes, it left. Now, most bush-taxis are beat-up old Peugeot pick-ups, with the engine and body near the end; this taxi was a Peugeot minibus, and was inquite good shape, by European standards that is. I thought that this means of travel was normal within the mission, but was later told that although not forbidden, it was left in favour of quicker and easier means. This shows what a tourist I must be! Still, it was worth it for it gave an unequalled view of the terrain of Upper Volta. However, there are the opportunity costs, as the economists would have us know. . . The bush-taxi makes so many stops, be they at police roadblocks, or to rest at the halfway point at a market town. More on that later.

Upper Volta is much greener than Niger, if only for a very few weeks or months. The land is flat, and covered with the now familiar red soil, some of it laterite, and some of it more fertile soil. There is perhaps a one-fifth to one-quarter coverage by the trees and scrub bushes, and the rest is either bare ground or dry grasses. Many of the trees look like the wonderful and stately oaks of England, and every so often, a baobab tree stands aloof. Well are they called the "upside-down tree", for their branches look just like the roots, which should have been in the soil. The road from Ouagadougou to Fada is paved, so the taxi went along at a good 50K's an hour. Along the roadside, one could see the Gourma villages, with their distinctive round houses and conical thatched roofs. Although the land was the same for most of the trip, It was riveting to watch, and like a long and exciting film, kept me raptured and sore-eyed at the end of it.

The villages gave way to the occaisional town, and the influence of France could be seen very clearly: from the town-signs and roads to the very aura of the place, one cou have been in southern France. Obviously, the people looked like Africans, and the thatched houses said that this was not Provence, yet with the several Motobecanes whizzing about, one wondered. This is helpful, for the inevitable culture-shock will be diminished somewhat by the realisation that there is a little bit of France here.

In any case. . . back to the journey. Much happened that one could describe, but a few vignettes will suffice. First was an introduction to the local thinking in terms of animals. The bush-taxi stopped by another that had just run over the colt of a donkey. The radiator and cooling-fan of the taxi were smashed, and the colt was too, but it was still alive--just. Now, this thing happens everywhere, yet the different thing was that the crowd was surveying the front-end of the taxi, while the colt bled and gasped itself to a slow death. Why no effort to shoot it? In any case, it would have been very rude of me to meddle in this affair, yet the scene was poignant. I would dearly have loved to shoot that donkey in the head.

The next took place in the stopover village. Not knowing the ground-rules, I sat in stoic sweat for three hours, while everyone else walked about. Not knowing when the bus would leave, or whether the bags could be left unwatched, there seemed to be no choice: still, I would have loved to look around, but felt unsure of what was polite, and what was not. I'm afraid that all the warnings and "horror-stories" that were given back at orientation were getting to my head. Since I am still in the "first" stage of moving into a culture, one looks for the commonalities: the second,

and how to behave, with respect to the mendicants and beggars. In spite of all the talking one does at college, especially an ivory tower like Gordon, one is never ready for what one sees in the streets here. Not that I was offended by what was seen. . . on the contrary! Conditions are not the issue, for I will not attack the institutions here as I see them, and in any case, one can find similar things back in America, if one looks hard enough. The question that really got after me was this: How should we, as Christians deal with what we see? Having thought and spoken to other missionaries about this problem, two views have come forth. One says that one should give one's coppers to those in the streets as they ask for them. This is what my conscience seems to tell me: however, one coin will bring them running like hens to the feeding tray. In any case, what was really achieved? They will still be hungry and destitute, begging is a real and viable profession here, and it is one of the so-called "five pillars" of right action that uphold the Muslim faith--to give alms is to give straight to Allah, and earn "salvation". The missionaries call the giving of coppers as dead-works, and in a sense, they are right. If one is to do something that will endure and be God-pleasing, then a constant handout of coppers will not do. The other way has already explained itself--to give over the long-term through service. To some, this can easily make the missionary seem as selective and a hypocrite to boot. I, for one am very unhappy when I see these beggars, as my instinct tells me to give him something; after all, what kind of Christian are you, if you pass by on the other side? A SIM friend reminded me that to give without saying why, and for whom I was giving was as a dead-work, even without the plan that has been charted for my work here by God. It is like Morton's Fork, or Catch 22, as they say today. Oh well. . The haunting cries of the little children are like nightmares, for they do not so much affright me for their poverty as for the seemingly gaping holes they tear in my outlooks, preconceptions, and above all--faith. That will stand, I feel, but it is being sorely challenged. It brings one into the whole question of theodicy--why is this allowed? I can just imagine my friends back home saying "well then, where is thy God, in this place?" Another SIM short-termer had just this experience many years ago, when she was on a very rough camping/safari trip, and she said that it rocked her faith to the core: yet, she was all the stronger for the weathering of it. . . It is in the time of unexpected trial that the native metal of a man is tested, said Lincoln, and this seems to be true here. Things are beginning to turn upside-down, as if one was in the "salt-and-pepper" machine in a fairground.

This experience, and the multitude that will invariably follow it are all pointing to one discovery. . . there can be no good and lasting work here if it is done on one's own force and initiative, fueled by mere human initiative and raw compassion. I tell you back home, indeed I warn you, you will burn out in a week or a month, if you are lucky. The raw experiences that one sees here are too much without someone to turn to, and an awareness of the Truth of reality, which the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer was so astute in observing. With every passing day, one is aware that any work done here, and certainly with the SIM is "no human affair"--this is my open secret to you back home. A few days ago, I wondered what was the reason for the seemingly lazy atmosphere in this country; it proved to be the heat, not enough to fry an egg, but certainly enough to fry the mind! Now, the daily experiences that come past, richer than wealth, are convincing me that one lives by grace alone. I tell you, it is easy to be "good" and super-spiritual back home, especially in Gordon; yet here, but here, the very stones prate out against us, and the situation bears witness to our pitiful attempts to do anything by human-agency. It is a strange paradox--the more one moves towards right action and calling-by-faith, the more one is conscious of the cock-ups in life. To put it another way. . . the more one steps into the light, the clearer and darker becomes one's own shadow.

Now then, where was I? In case you wonder why there is so much being recorded here, it is because there is nothing done during the midday here, for the sun and heat are terrible. In any case, I have yet to acclimatise, and have been feeling the heat and the rigours of diahorria lately. Between noon and three or four, this land is set in plastic, except for the crickets, who rub their legs at will.

Here is a new turn in events. . . Since I left Niger to visit Upper Volta, the Niger Wisa is now useless, and it could be a month until I can return to the work in Maradi. This means that I will have a month or so in Fada n' Gourma with the bees, at the Bible school. Good, for it will be a sound apprenticeship in learning about African Beekeeping, and the way of life with the Gourmas; yet bad as it lessens the

available time in Maradi, where SIM has asked me to start up a bee project. . . in addition, (I will need a) bee-suit, as well as the other paraphenalia of the unequipped beekeeper in Africa. . .

It has now become too hot to even type, so I will stop.

Monday, 13th June, 1984--As you can see the typewriter is down, this time over a dried out ribbon. Such things happen here, and I am glad for this Biro. . .

It is now Tuesday, and I have moved yet again. On Sunday--or was it Monday?--I was moved to the Bible School near Fada, to begin work with the bees for the five weeks that circumstance has given me. This school is run by a Gourma, Paul, and his work is helped by a Swiss couple, both missionaries. The three of them are very polite and helpful, and are absolutly delighted that the visa will take five weeks to get, for they want a beekeeper badly! This is no egocentric boast, yet it is pleasant to feel wanted, even over bees.

Upon arrival at the Bible School Paul gave me a house to live in. Since my camera is in Niamey, a plan will have to suffice--a pity! This is my <u>first</u> real bachelor digs. . . a Gourma house of twelve feet diameter to sleep and write in, another house to cook in, all surrounded by a woven straw fence. There is even a place to shower. . . well, sort of. Ten cracked tiles, and a tin bucket to pour water over me. For lunch and supper Paul, or Hans and Marie-Anne Pantli invite me over, and they are very sociable. Life in the brick and straw house is spartan but fun, for one is truly closer to the elements. If you could see the "toilet" you would agree!

For the bee project, I am not alone. A Gourma, Wombo, has been here for many years and as a Bible School student he has managed the bees, for the honey is sold to subsidise the teachers. Wombo and I seem to have mixed very well from the start, and as beekeepers we relate very well. Once we get into the field and fight the African bees, we ought to know each other better. . . To prepare for the bees I had to get a bee-suit and a veil; I was amazed to have them tailor made, no less, for a little under twenty dollars. Wombo just walked into the marketplace at Fada and as I watched, he did the haggling. There are three prices in Africa--for Africans, whites, and Americans--so I was quite happy to shut up here. Here, one was struck by the swiftness of business, for the tailor began his work at once--no manana here! Perhaps it is the French influence. The market too was interesting. (A few lines missing, here.)

. . . wondered just what I was <u>doing</u> here. The days were becoming patterned. . . eating, shopping and learning in Fada, and shaking hands with so many people (it is the custom). Where were the bees?, I wondered. At times, I wondered if I was just a tourist, watching African life go by, sitting on Hans' veranda after supper, talking about "whatever", or listening to the incessant dirge of the many crickets. Am I just a taker? When will the giving begin? Happy as I am with the learning and the way of life here, I feel somewhat guilty, for I <u>did</u> come here to serve. Indeed, one can imagine Elizabeth in her hospital, a hundred miles across the bush from here, in a situation that makes Florence Nightingale at Scutari seem a party. . .sewing up hernias and gunshot wounds, etc. It is a real effort to convince myself that I am doing some good here, to the

glory of God. Perhaps I shouldn't be so "works" oriented, for one's acheivements in Africa are measured over weeks and months, and not days, as in America. How strange! The people love my mere presence here as a beekeeper, and my conscience gets after me. Life again is one series of Morton's Forks.

However, these worries were (temporarily) put to rest when Paul and Wombo sat me down, and ran off a long list of work they want done: this will keep me going for five weeks. To note--the bees have to be worked, the honey house needs an extensive revamp job, and hives must be built. These will be excellent training, for I will have to establish a bee project from nothing in Maradi, if ever I get that visa and get there. Now, <u>there</u> is a worthy challenge!

Tuesday, 13th June, 1984--Here I am, again! Last night, about four (plus) inches of rain fell, which is very important for the people here. Wombo came by to tell me to help him plough his field when the rain stops. However, last night's storm was powerful, to say the least. At four in the morning the first cock crowed, and was promptly shut up by the thunder. In this small house, under the toiling skies, I felt like a flea in a kettle-drum, for the shocks of the thunder (some words missing here). Since the flash was long so was the clap, and the thunder came passing overhead like the slipstream of a sixteen inch shell on low trajectory, raking the atmosphere. Some of those shells burst overhead, and threatened to shake the very lizards off their mount onto my bed. No thank you! After this tantrum, the heavens sobbed in peace over this sun-smitten land, and even now, in the late morning, continues to do so. Yet it is a tragedy--like a soft-hearted giver,the rain pours down to the land. In a few weeks, it will be gone, the vaulted heavens will be bankrupt, and the land will burn anew, and the only sound will be of the troubled wind and dusty flake, when the harmattan comes.

Wednesday, 14th June, 1984--Well, this certainly looks like a new ribbon! Even in Fada, one finds a few of the essentials.

I feel obliged to write today, for culture shock is beginning to make itself felt, and of course, I do not feel happy over it. Culture shock comes in many guises to those who travel abroad, but must be universally unpleasant. That first "stage" of interest and goodwill towards all, and the search to see similarities in the two cultures has come to an end: it lasted one week! Now, there is a depression, caused from without, which affects my outlook and therefore my attitude and general sense of wellbeing. So far, there is nothing too wrong with the physical stresses of living. . . Yes, life here is rough, what with the heat, the gut problems, and the fact that two anthills are springing up through my concrete floor; but it is bearable. That is a given--so the sweat-licking flies can take me for granted. What is harder is the mental stress, which comes from several angles: a few of them were mentioned in the earlier entries. It is still necessary for me to accept the fact that Africa is a huge country, with enough problems (like the rest of the world) to keep an army of missionaries and Peace Corps volunteers going for milennia. I have only seen a small part of Upper Volta, and the enormity of the work to be done here is

crushing, and in the process, depressing. One feels like an ant amoungst the pebbles--without the perspective of the flying bird, the job seems terrible. Yet that airbourne perspective is still lacking. . .

Something is warping my observation. Walking through the millet fields, which are sown around the tall stumps of cleared but unuprooted trees, I felt that I was on the battlefield of the Somme or Ypres, for the land looked like it. Wandering through a city of devastated termite hills increased the image. What appeared to be a cow's dried up skull was a bleached log. Why the ease of morbid imagery? Some Gourmas were killing a guinea hen and then roasting it for lunch in the bush, yet it hallucinated as a pagan bloodletting. Obviously this was not the case, but. . . It must be culture shock. Like a cold, something to be worn out and then withered with time and patience.

Saturday, 16th June, 1984--Siesta time--again. The lizards, and the noise have finally reached a state where one must write about them.

There are many lizards to be found amoungst the buildings of the Bible School at Fada. The largest are the predators, and spend much time trying to catch the smaller lizards; they are black, with an orange head and tail. The other two sorts are the smaller, but of them, one lives almost exclusively in the buildings. These have five toes on each foot, all with suckers and not claws so they can go anywhere they wish. They are also so noisy!

Which brings one to the subject of noise. Since coming to Africa, I do not think there has been a single quiet moment to bathe in. Oh, how I sometimes long to be in the lake district of Maine, where the only sound is of the occaisional loon! In this place, the crickets sing at all hours, and it is certainly better than cars, but gets tiresome after two solid weeks. Then, there are the farm animals, especially the guinea hens, who call at the door. The rippling sound of the sucker-footed and nimble lizard running over a hot corrugated tin roof. The slow and telegraphic pounding of the women preparing millet in the wooden pestles: they start at five and end late at night. The cancerous wheezing of the donkeys, with a voice that sounds as if it is in trouble. The syncopated clapping of the Gourmas at Sunday fellowship and prayer. And many others, too. These liven up work here by their unfamiliarity, especially the many lizards, but it is all so incessant!

Hans and Marie-Anne Pantli have left for an orientation of SIM full-time missionaries in Niamey (did I say that already or not?), and have left the house to me. The shower and the toilet drew me in at once! However it was not long before the familiar guilt trips arrived, and I seriously pondered moving back into the thatched house that I had started out with. Either choice, it seemed, would leave me in a bind--was one to put up with the guilt or the added hassles of primitive living? Being here is a great privalege, and the less time spent on such internal worries the better, as there is work to be done with the people here. Living in the Gourma house

won't make a difference to those who have no house anyway, and in any case the shower has a very magnetic effect!

Nor was that the beginning: the Pantli's have pictures of their beloved Switzerland all over the house, and they began to make me homesick. Not because I have ever been to that country, but because those pictures reminded me of mountains, green valleys, the tranquillity evoked by a herd of Swiss cows, and the <u>snow</u>! Looking at those pictures was enough to start me thinking on a travel through Switzerland on the way home. In any case, one can see how a few pictures can make one forget the task at hand. It must be the culture shock. Of late, my dreams, which are escapist to start with, have become far more so; so every morning, when I wake up, I wonder what on earth I am doing under a mosquito net. Shouldn't I be in England? Other symptoms are a lethargy that comes on top of that inspired by the tropical heat, a dislike of any company, and the pondering of why I am here. I am the only non-African here, and although that is no problem in itself, I still feel alienated. No, that is not racism, just good old culture shock. . . Living alone in the house has its ups and downs. I can cook what I wish, with no fear of complaints for my "cooking." In fact, the monastic diet is fun, in a way. Last night, Wombo came to eat, so the food was upgraded for the occaision. In any case, the food I cook, which Americans call slop, he would call luxurious, and not be lying, either. . . More on this way of living later.

OVER TO NEXT ENTRY------>

Sunday, 17th June, 1984.

Last night, Wombo and I went to work with the bees. After three days of delays due to clothing and equipment problems, we set out for the hives, which were half a mile from the mission compound.

African beekeeping is very different from the American; very different! In the first place, the bees are very vicious; all the horror-stories that reach America from Africa are true! For this reason, one must work the bees under the cover of darkness, and put a red filter on the flashlight, for the bees cannot see it: in any case, they attack what they see at will. The hives are different too; instead of the familiar box-shaped Langstroth hives from home, there are two sorts in use here. The traditional hive is a long tube of woven grass or thatch, plugged up at one end; when honey is desired, the Africans just cut them apart, leaving much dead brood and bees. The other hive is a marriage of African and the newer--the Kenya Top-Bar hive looks like a three-foot long pig trough, with sloping sides; on top are arranged the bars. On these hives, one can lay out 25 or so bars, and the honeycombs just hang from their bottoms. Therefore, what you have is much loose comb, but all arranged in a parallel order, which can be raised for examination. During the honey-harvest, one just cuts the comb from the bar, and the bees just make a new comb. The combs are then piled onto a screen, and the honey drips out from them into the 50-gallon oil drums, and from there to empty whisky-bottles. If the system sounds crude at Fada, it is; but there is not much money to do extensive improvement, and it would take a very long and extensive programme at Fada to get a Langstrothian system going well.

Oh well, enough of this. . . . Wombo and I were kitted out as if for a nuclear-warfare exercise. Having done just that when in the Army, the feeling of heat, the constriction, and itching is familiar! I was very glad to have spent the previous day at work repairing an old Dadant bee-smoker, for it worked well--certainly more than the homemade one. Much thanks to Dadant. Opening the hives was as usual--lots of smoke and more care, but this was where the similarities ended: the bees came boiling out to the last man, and started to look for us. I tell you, the stories about these bees are all true! Since they could not see us, due to the red light, they flew everywhere, and if they landed on us, they stung. At times, the sound of their striking pattered as rain, and later, I saw that my gloves were riddled--just full of those stingers. . . Twenty feet away, where Wombo had left the Hurricane-lamp on low flame, the bees were furiously attacking. Having seen this, I never wish to work an African hive in the day-time, when they can see me!

This year, due to the drought, the honeyflow in Upper Volta has been useless: Wombo tells me that nothing has been brought in since last September. This was clear last night, for there was nothing to be pulled from the hives, save many angry bees. It is a shame to see this; hives full of brood, for the queens were good in egg-production, yet no honey. The same is true all over this area. There was something very mystical and etherial about working these hives the way we did: with bees crawling all over us and buzzing softly, the sound of Wombo scraping the burr-comb off the bars, and the ruddy smoke rubbing its back against the inside of the hive. Puffing the smoker, like an incense-bearer to Methestopheles himself, and watching it through the rose-tinted perspective was unreal, but the bees were real enough; Wombo had a faulty elastic in his helmet, and got stung up to 15 times in the face. The staggering thing was that he just said, "oh, ces abeiles sont mechants!" Truly, he must have the thickest skin, and real patience. There are few people back in Essex County who could handle that, save some of the old Polish beekeepers. Wombo then proceeded to disrobe within stonethrow of the hives, but thought nothing of it. On the other hand, I kept my clothes on until we were well back into the mission compound, and then took off the clothes very carefully. Two beekeepers, but different bees, beekeeping, and attitudes towards bees. In Africa, they would call me afraid: in America, they would call Wombo insane and lock him up. Yet, we both have our pasts, and ways, and much health to them both!

However, after the day's fun and stings were over, the realisation that we were <u>really</u> so very different came home with a shock, when we sat down and happened to talk about the comparative life-styles we live. Wombo has a family of five, I think, raises his own millet, and is considered quite well off in the area. By American views, he would be living in the direst poverty, and one can just imagine the welfare agencies tut-tuting over his ilk. He could not understand the background from which I, and the other missionaries X

went on for some time, and during the process, some intuitions came to light: first, that there was more than a tangible barrier between us, and second, that this might not necessarily be wrong.

It was during this talk that the full extent of the background, culture, value-system and belief barrier came to light; indeed, it was surprising that we were making the communication acheived thus far. He could not understand my background, but his was very well figured out. Whereas I would only see the likes of his house in some parts of Appalachian West Virginia, he was content with it, ✕ the life he led, and the surroundings about him: and I think he declared this with a good idea that life was a lot richer in old USA. If this be true, then this shoots down all claim on these in the Two-Thirds World by those humanitarians who want to "improve" the life of the locals. I sense that I am on the edge of a huge argument that would delight those back in college, but I will save it for then. However, this experience with Wombo suggests to me that any Biblical aid to anybody has to be tailor-made to the local needs, and not from a universal template, forged from the textbooks back home. Massey-Ferguson tractors are just not on in Upper Volta farming, as they would plough the land in such a way as to create a dustbowl in five or less years; whereas the donkey-drawn ploughs are slow and tiresome, but all the land will allow. In any case, they work, as Wombo testifies.

Having said that, there is much left to glean from that insight, but it is hidden within the subconscious now, Indeed, all the best insights of this venture are like water spilt on the dry sand: if they are not recorded in some way right away, they are lost. That is why this account will always be somewhat incomplete, as I cannot carry this typewriter about, nor wish to. Mission-work is too vital for just that. . .

Wednesday, 20th June, 1984.

I think that is the date, but I am not too sure: time means nothing here, and I have picked that one up. However during the immediate 24 hours, time is still regimented by me, and shows no sign of changing yet.

Sometimes, I wonder just what I am doing here. It is all so very tranquil here, except when with the bees at ✕✕ night; one thinks of mission work in more desperate areas. This Goumma village has its needs, it is true, yet I could be in Kew Gardens, in the tropical section for all I knew. Oh yes, the work is fun and instructive, yet what is the real and the ultimate benifit that comes from it? Here, one gets the feeling that one is not doing the work one was called out to do in the first place. It is very clear by now that God would have me in the mission-field, but in what capacity? Although the bees are a valuable service, with enough work cut out to keep one occupied for many years, I wonder if that is the thing to do. Not in these short ten months, for that is so obvious, but in the long run. . . For some reason, medical work has cropped up as a possibility, but this stems more from a wish to do work that yields tangible and quick results than from a real love of medicine. In any case, the ten odd years of med. school, etc, would kill! No, this problem comes from a wish to do something useful and tangible rather than God-pleasing; so back to the drawing-board, for that will not do. It is relativly easy to give ones life to service, but harder to fing that appropriate service. Let us hope that the remaining nine months will yield something...

If there is a problem in finding out what to do in the long run, then there is no such problem in the short. There is a huge amount of simple "fix-it and repair it" work to be done. In Africa

were lazy and without the initiative to fix things, I think that there are some other factors to take intp consideration. In the first place, there is very little access to tools and the raw-materials that go towards the making or repair of an object. In addition, most people have not got the money to buy what they need or want. This leads to the attitude that if something breaks, it is <u>finished</u>. For all you handymen back home, there is a wonderful set of tentmaking ministries here for the taking.

However, having said that, I wonder just how lazy people can be; after all, in USA, there are many who just let things go. So they do here, in parts. At this moment, I cannot work in the honey-house, as it is having a concrete floor put down; otherwise, there would be shelves to mount. During this spare time, there has been a good chance to make and fix. The Dadant bee-smoker was one; then I decided that I would need one in Maradi, so made it out of a Quaker Oats tin, and scrap parts; it was very stimulating and fun, and the finished smoker blows as much air as a real one. However, the cases of the honey-extractor and of the grain-grinder made me wonder as to what gets done here.

Both of these machines were found in the honey-house, and both were in a severe state of neglect, brokennes, and filth. Since they were obviously necessary tools, why was it so that nobody had made an effort to fix them? Upon inspection and a little cleaning, the honey-extractor was restored to very good order; after a good stripping and brushing, and the help of two of the School director's sons, the grain-grinder was also restored. All it needed was a little TLC and a bar of metal that could have been found very easily. Since I am not so pessimistic and cynical as to call the locals lazy of without initiative, I do not know what to make of this affair. Both of these tools had just sat there broken, and everyone just accepted it. Now then, there was no air of superiority in the fixing, for I just <u>did</u> it, more by habit than as a "do-gooder". It is all so strange, untill I think of the many projects back home that have yet to be begun!

Thursday, 21st June, 1984.

I am absolutly mad to be writing now, in the heat of the day, yet my daemon is pushing hard; I would sorely record what tapestry the day's events have woven for me, before oblivion and forgetfulness, time's suitors, come to unravel it. Only in this way can life advance, a notch at at time. You see that every day, I have to look anew at the calendar to see where I am: like the sea-captain who takes his noonday shot when in the Doldrums, lest he lose his perspective and position. Maybe Coleridge was right. . . hours hours everywhere, but not a mo' to think/ minutes minutes everywhere, and all the hours did shrink. The very days did rot, O Christ! My mind is dry in the noonday sun, and looking up at the foof of the Pantli's house, all sorts of imagery comes from the grain of the wood-work and stain. I am alone in this sun-painted house on the face of this dusty sea, working a penance for the things I have seen here by writing about them. In the night, when all natural light has fled, I hunch before this machine, with the portable flourescent lamp hung around my neck before the very keyboard, like that damned albatross--yet it does give light.

Outside, it is really hot; even the Africans have given up for the moment. Toilers under Vulcan though they be, they have fled. Why do the crickets insist on being the only ones here who work on in this heat, playing their dissonant fiddl

likes a little peace and quiet? No, that is not the way things run around here. You see, I have culture-shock. . . It is not physically painful, unless one has gut-rot, but it is, in a way. I found myself cursing the lizards as they ran after one another like demented squirrels up and down the trees and walls. Whenever the jocular Africans would laugh, I would of course think that I was the butt of the joke: why can't they speak French (at least) and not Gourma when talking to me? I am not resentful, but the culture-shock certainly makes me feel so. Driving through the middle of Fada, I saw a European, and waved to him as one would to ones mother after an absence. There are SIM missionaries in Fada who can be seen, but that is seven miles away, over some horrible roads: there are many people to see and talk to here, and indeed I do, but after a while, one yearns for familiar faces. Oh, I like it here, but it can get hairy every so often. Culture-shock is like that.

There is however, a beautiful side to this desert, this time of hassle and apparent stagnation. It is a time to learn more of God; perhaps that is why he turfed the Israelites into that great and terrible wilderness for forty years. No, this house is not flaming or smoking, yet in this place is occuring a growth and instruction that could never happen back home, or which I could here describe, for I know not how, I doubt if the merely physical work done here will endure--that honey-extractor and that grain grinder, and others like them will all be re-broken in a while--but something else would have transpired, and I am not sure ~~XXX~~ how to account for it in any exact sense. When the short-termers left orientation in New Jersey with SIM, we were given a bookmark to stuff in the fronts of our Bibles: one of the captions said--"My growth in Him is more important than anything I do for Him." When I first read that, I wanted to complain to SIM. What do you mean? Surely we are supposed to be <u>working</u> out there; and if we cannot save the world as some try to do, then at least try to do <u>something</u>. Now, I wonder. . . Whereas I thought SIM was trying to push off a spiritual head/ego trip by saying that to us, I wonder. Here but here, on this bank and school of time, all alone with nobody to influence my thinking, I am beginning to wonder if they are right. No, dear hearts (back home), I am not on drugs, or being brainwashed: just looking about, and noting much more than you are reading here.

The world outside is coming back to life, so I go. . .

Wednesday, 27th June, 1984--

Another siesta, with the ground outside hot to even look at. It is meant to be the rainy season, yet the very millet fields are dying; the rains that fell two weeks ago have not been followed by more, so the seedlings perish before one's very eyes. If this sounds trite, then imagine your total livelihood vanishing from before you, for the Gourma's counterpart to the Dow Jones index is in their millet fields. Yet, whereas we would be jumping from the skyscrapers, the people here are almost resigned to this: it happens so often. What is one to do in this situation? Due to the nature of the land, agriculture would never bear tractors and their ilk, for the land would blow away in a year or two, as was seen in the Dustbowl.

That is the large picture; the smaller one of the honey house repair project is like the proverbial flea in the ballroom during a polka. Sometimes I wonder just what good is being done in the work, for the millet crisis is (rightly) taking up everyone's worries. There are three, sometimes four of us there; pastor Paul's two sons do the cement work with another Gourma, leaving me with the carpentry. One of the sons has shown an interest in wood, so a new priority has emerged--in addition to just doing the work at hand, there is a good chance to leave something good behind, in this case, teaching him how to put a door together with dovetails. It is also a good refresher course, although I am glad the door is not going to be seen by too many American carpenters! Such defects are to be expected when the wood is always warped, there are no planes, and the house getting the door is very much out of kilter. Here, the idealism of the dovetails gets hawked by certain realities, and if one forgot that missionary work should not be scruitinised for results <u>per diem</u> but over a longer time, then one would go crazy. Having "discovered" this truth, why is it that each day's events refute it, and force us to relearn it? It is in times like this, when the great and noble sketches of the "honey-house to be" have long been left in my room, when on-the-spot decision rules the work, and when the new idealism is flaking away, that one finds that faith really is a foundation upon which to build, whatever building emerges from the work here. I am not just referring to honey-houses either.

There is one cold spot of comfort here that is fun. Mix together powdered milk and the local honey to a thick drink, put it into an old coffee tin, and put it into a struggling old kerosene-powered freezer overnight. The ice cream that comes out puts Dick and June's or the Junction to shame. Tut, tut! (***Also, try mixing in local peanut butter, too.***)

Saturday, 30th June, 1984--

Exercise has always been a problem here. The days are so hot that any really hard work leads invariably to heat-stroke or the like, and the Africans who work with me are all up tight when I do so. Only the mornings are cool, yet if one goes for a run down the road, those working in the fields think I am absolutely mad! What to do, for exercise is very important. For a while, I would try the standard Navy calisthenics in the privacy of my room, yet that was boring.

Now, for a short time each morning, the bedroom floor looses its reality, and becomes a dance floor from the the 1920's. There is something very Olympian about doing the Charleston in one's undies at six in the morning, but it is wonderful exercise! So those old dance lessons come in use after all. I would prefer the polka, yet the room is too small, and one needs a partner for that, (of course, the Mission would object). Naturally, the best is a run, but the locals get you by day and the snakes by night.

Sunday, ??? July, 1984--

Yesterday, the work on the honey house sped along and now the end is in sight. However, it led to much thought and wonder as to what it is all towards. In this, I do not doubt the validity of the honey project--it will obviously benefit the (Gourma) Bible School--and I do not doubt at all the motives of the Mission. Yet I wonder and am sorely beset upon to answer why I am here, working in an occupation that the world calls a waste of life and a futile endevour that will not change the world much. You know, in a sense they are right, and as I said earlier, the very countryside refutes the work of a missionary. However, if one was told to go "out there" then all temporal doubts and refutations are worthless. As some local SIMers said (***Hans-Jorg and Marie-Anne Pantli***), it is only the calling that keeps one sane, and gives one the power to stick it out. Yes, even compassion "for those people" can wear thin, and one's very existance here is forced to hang upon that solitary clothespeg--the calling. Here then is the rub. . . I am sure that I should be out here, yet unsure if work with the bees is a task fit for a lifetime. There is no problem with these nine months, but what of later? Trying to figure out what God would have me do over the long run is much harder in the fog of the daily work here that it was from the vantage point of Gordon College. We Americans (figuratively) chart our lives by searchlights, yet people here--as well as the Hebrews--just have little oil-lamps tied to their toes, so they can see where they are going only by stepping forward into the darkness. This appears to be reality, yet it can be frustrating. Did you know that although we work for a different boss, the same problems of direction beset us? There is a metamorphosis going on here in the daily passage of life, work and growth, it is true; yet when one walks by "toelight" there is litle (if no) vision, perspective, or hindsight. This can be--no, is--a pain. I feel like the soldiers in the Western Front in 1916, with no vision of the "grand strategy" as Haig would have said, and wondering "what in the life is going on here?"

Still, life is full of zest and fun in spite of this, so don't think I am becoming like "Mr. Kurtz."

Thursday, 5th July, 1984--

Please forgive me, you back home--the 4th came and went without my knowing its passing. In any case, salmon and peas are hard to find here for that celabratory meal. However, there were "fireworks" of sorts, but the thunder was empty, and it brought no rain.

Siesta time, again. A time when the land reels about under the drenching of solar inebriation, and its people like drunken doormice. Even the crickets are at half-volume now, although they would do more. Oh, how the sun smites us! However, it does serve one use in the courtyard; the bucket of water which is in a homemade solar hot-box is heating up very well. Although I am not totally pleased with the beauty of the box, lined with black painted, corrugated tin, there is great pleasure in seeing the locals walk by it as if it were. . . I don't know! They peer through the scrap glass at the familiar bucket within. I wonder if I can (or even should) explain how it works. Now one can symaphise with all those physics profs who try to explain the behaviour of heat to young schoolchildren and adults alike. Oh well, let it run on, for the hot water is only to be used for washing out the honey tins; this is not an attempt at solar revolution or the like.

There is still no news of the visa that will spring me to Maradi. Not that I am unhappy here, for there has been much learned, accomplished, observed and given. There has also been growth--imperceptable yet suspected--that comes from the many hours one has here outside the work hours. During the heat of noon until three, there is a little time for rest and quiet time. Perhaps the best place for Christian growth is in a prison, even in solitary confinement: maybe this is why Saint Paul and Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote such things as they did, for their environment was a noteworthy contribution, (as well as the obvious inspiration). In Africa this time is taken for granted; back home, we rush about so much that many things are forgotten in the pursuit of those to be gotten. Perhaps prison is the place where one is, in a sense, truly free and boundless. At night here, one is left much to one's friends or one's own. The lights are pathetically dim, and I do value my eyes, so the darkness is no longer the straightjacket it can be back home. Standing out in the courtyard one is amazed at the starry heavens above, and the authority within. Yes, I think Immanuel (Kant) was right--in a certain sense--for his words have an interesting sound when seen through these new eyes. How to give a good description of the things learned here? That could be as hard as describing the beauty of the Grand Canyon to a Mongolian. One is only left with wonder, as Heschel said.

(***I have to add here--the stars in Burkina Faso and Niger can be incredible and clear beyond imagination. I have never seen anything like it; even the Milky Way looks like little stars. It is awesome, totally awesome.***)

Tuesday, 10th July, 1984--

At least, that is what I think the date is. The honey house project is finished, and set up for more efficient and simple work. Looking back on it, most of the ideas that were used to change the house around were very simple and basic. What then was the ultimate use of SIM sending me out here? On the other hand, one secretly suspects that nothing would have been done if left to chance. This project could have been done by most people, given a good idea of order and arrangement, as well as the ability to improvise and construct. Perhaps in many cases, such "help" does not need the