an African. Yet there were glimpses. If I knew two languages and was trying to learn a third, then Lompo put me and my fellow Americans to shame, for he knew five. In Niger and Burkina Faso you have to know as many languages to really communicate with everyone. French is good, but only goes so far.

With Lompo I shared something of a closeness to the Africans in the street, sometimes more so than with my own fellow Westerners. At that time I think a lot of my energy in associating with them was motivated by the abiding escapism that was a part of my life during that period. I could lose myself amoungst such strangers--people who had a bit in common with me but who were sufficient light years away from me to be safe. Of course that is not all. I am still very curious. The way of life I adopted with the Gourmas and the Hausas on their bush taxis, in their marketplaces, in their company and in their homes has left a deep mark on me. God's chisel. For years I have wanted to live in a society from two hundred years ago, and the land and its people around Fada or in the bush near Maradi provided that place in a shadowy way. Is it possible that in running away I found myself--in a sense? What makes God's redemptive grace so totally surprising and amazing is this--that which I did for the wrong reasons has been transformed into something good. I can only say this from the perspective of hindsight. Lompo was something of a mentor--as was Wombo--a mentor representing a friend, teacher and ambassador of the African people. In a sense we do see eye to eye more than I assume.

Sometimes he had a meal for me to eat--straight from the local marketplace. I had already eaten, but the food is so good I did not mind. As with Wombo, we would sit on either side of a small table with an oil hurricane lamp between us or on a chair nearby. So much of the Africa that entered me took place near an oil lamp, showing only faces and the common food, surrounded by the immense darkness of the night. . .

After finishing the lesson and talking a bit, I would leave Lompo and walk back to the compound at Maza Tsaye. Sometimes the streets were dim and quiet, but near the small eating place and the market it comprised life went on--shadows flitting amoungst the constellations of oil lamps. After some more dark streets I passed a small outlying bush taxi stop, where various people sat drinking tea and munching white dusty French bread, talking softly. I never really made it into their midst. Sometimes I would walk past them in the shadows, but they most probably knew who I was because of my very Western way of walking--fast and with a timeframe and goal in mind. Sometimes I was hungry and sat amoungst them, but said very little. I wonder if I felt threatened; not in terms of violence, but more. . . I suppose I was just at a very insecure time during those days. When I had left them I would walk down the same paved road that left Maradi and headed out to Zinder--I think it was the Zinder road. Darker the night, and darker still my thoughts sometimes as walked down that quiet stretch, now thinking of the lesson, now imagining the next day and what it would bring. I wish I had just mentally sat back and enjoyed the present moment for what it was. . . but that is past now.

Back across the millet field that led up to the farm school, Tony's house and the other buildings, up the hill and through a terrain I imagined as infested with all sorts of snakes but did not take much care about. During the growing season the millet stalks forested the ground and hemmed in the path, but with the harvest everything was taken in--the grain, stalks and all, to be used as food, fodder and building materials. Throughout the dry season the land lay stripped, perhaps as a microcosm of what could and probably might happen on a grander scale. Only the stalk stumps which escaped the machete bumped the landscape. The soil was dusty and dry--oh so dry! The path curved through the field like a great river seen from a high airplane on a mooncast night, unmoving and stark. No snakes, but in my imagination they were everywhere. Everywhere. Under my feet, being chopped into pieces by my machete, and chasing me over the dusty desert. . . deserted fields of the night and my dreams. After the field came the more scary walk--or run--up the hill within an avenue of shade trees which channelled and overcame me. Perhaps I dashed up that path? I do not remember. Soon it was time for bed and my thoughts subsided upon the mattress in tiredness.

The last I saw of Lompo was the night I left Maradi for the last time during that time to Africa. The bush taxi left early the next day from the marketplace, so I wanted a head start. I spent the night in his digs--rough by my standards, but I do not regret having done it--and got up with him the next morning. He did not come with me, but saw me off to the bush taxi stands. That was the last I saw of him, and I do not know if there will be another time. But the past was more than worth it.

S. Van Wyck. Hindsight entry for African Journal. 14.3.'87.

ON THE LADDER.

Sometime in between August and October I made a ladder for the compound at Maradi. At the time I was doing all kinds of oddjob work and maintenance, being supervised by John Ockers but basically running on my own each day. He was the only fulltime male on the compound amoungst the missionaries, and as the area leader he had his work cut out in liaising with the Hausa Church. True, Gordon Bishop and George Learned came in from Soura and Aguie to help with the administrative tasks that had to be done, but for the most part it was I who did the repair work. The last time someone had come out to Maradi to do maintenance work was two years ago, (1982), and the compound certainly showed signs of having been neglected. The only times John could come out to repair something was during a crisis, as when a pipe burst and the precious water escaped or when an important window was broken.

My workshop was John's garage. What amazed me was all the stuff and accumulation inside! In the middle of Africa here was a garage, full of useful things and junk that had built up over forty or so years, just like one would find in America. John pointed out that in Maradi one really needed the tools, spare parts, impedimentia and the like that horrified me, who thought that missionaries did away with all that Western truck. Yet he was right. You cannot just go to the local store and buy everything you need whenever you want. It was cluttered inside, and dim. John's Datsun sat in the middle of the room, surrounded by shelves. Woodworking tools, plumbing impliments, oils, paints, laquers, stripping chemicals, lumber, a workbench next to a filthy dusty window and alas, a container of DDT which was used mixed with old oil when building foundations were laid to keep away the termites. Two or three metal lockers were so full of tools and equipment it was a chore to figure out where to find a screwdriver. Yet it was there. John knew his system since he had made it; to me it was begging for a reorganisation. But how? In any case, if I had done so, John would have been at a loss to find his screwdriver. This is one example where a newly arrived summer missionary did well not to rock the boat as it floated in Maradi. We compromised, and I cleared out the windowside table and arranged some key tools around it: from there on the clutter became bearable and the place turned into a retreat. In hindsight, I think I became something of a troglodyte in that dim garage. Although I spent a lot of time working outside under the sun fixing things I also spent many hours inside the garage. How strange! To come out all the way to Maradi and work in a dim garage like that. Of course that was not all my life, but in a sense it was those hours within that increased my loneliness as I ruminated on many things, good and bad, and gave me the screaming urge to get out and do those wild, incredible trips on the bush taxis. It was in that garage that, after several weeks of saying little and holding my pain within that I said to John, "I think I am beginning to crack up." That wise man knew me then through and through I think, and he just put his arm over my shoulder like a father and said it was alright and why not take a break and a trip to Niamey? Of course, on a bush taxi. What a

great man.

One other thing. Those seemingly futile days as a repairman have been softened by time and I know they were very valuable. Not only did I learn the basics of several skills, especially plumbing, but I found out how usefull "missionary engineering" can be. There are no professionals out there on tap like there are here in America. Of course the Africans are geniuses in this work, but there are certainly limitations when it comes to parts and availability. You must be very adaptable and able to do many things. Not everything nor perfectly, but the basics surely help! I gained the confidence to try several things: I think that I would not have tried and done so here, because in this culture people are so preoccupied with their schedule and their priorities--myself included at present. (Reacculturation will be hard, but then it is for anyone who will admit this.) In hindsight I see that my time spent repairing things freed up John and the others for their work, and put me in a place where I could observe what was going on about me. In any case, they knew much more about the Hausas than I. It was a good recconnaissance in depth.

In any case. . . about the ladder. There were a few ladders on the compound but they were too short or so weak from termites and powdering as to be dangerous. I asked John if I could make one and he agreed. Why write about a ladder? I think the project was important because it gave me a task I could see finished and do with pride. Out in the Maradi there were no real deadlines for me, apart from crises and emergencies. You got up in the morning, worked, rested during the midday heat, worked again, and went away with the cool and darkening evening to supper, fellowship and bed. It is a laid back way of life, yet there is every chance to work hard--I wish to stress this. In time I went down to the lumberyard with a large thick plank (and George?), and had it ripped down the middle and rough-trimmed. John took his Datsun out of the garage to give me room enough to spread out and stand the ladder arms between two saw horses. Outside it was bright and hot; walking across the courtyard was painful to the eyes as sunlight bounced off the brightly painted walls and up from the red dusty earth. Inside it was still hot yet cooler, a real shelter.

Planing down long boards is a beautiful experience. I am not the best planer but that does not matter! That sound. . . the leaping shavings that come out of the plane, onto your hands and down to the floor. . . peering down the long plank to see how straight it is. . . trying to remember the little tips that John Ockenga and John Cushman taught me. . . I think I forgot myself for many hours. In hindsight I would have done the job more thoroughly by planing the plank sides too, but it is done. I cut the rungs out of 2X4 stock. Instead of nailing them straight onto the arms at the right distances I decided to do it better and chisel notches for them, so half of their depth lay within the arms and half stuck out. Measuring and chiselling was a pleasure. There was no rush, no pressure, and I am proud of what I did. In spite of being in Niger, a land under famine and drought, it seemed alright to take the loving time and effort to chisel away and shave off splinters to make the ladder. It sounds paradoxical in a

sense but I think it works. I drilled out the holes full size through the ends of the rungs and countersunk them, and part size into the arms. Some I screwed in, some I nailed. After stamping in John's initials and creosoting the ladder it was done--black, about twelve feet long and very heavy. Perhaps it was too heavy, but then it will not lack for uses when there is a need for heavier construction work.

I do not regret making that ladder, for it was of use to the compound and certainly had a healing effect on me. However, I think I wanted to leave something that would endure when I had left. In spite of anyone's best efforts, Africa remains a vast, seemingly unchangable country. I was really no different than Nebuchadnezzar, Xerxes, Darius, Cyrus and all the rest of them who, after making an empire on the earth, wanted to be remembered for it and made a monument. Now, I can accept the eventual destruction of that ladder, for this new lesson has made me think differently and reminded me of what is lasting, permanent and eternal, and what is not.

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S. Van Wyck. Hindsight Entry for African Journal. 11.12.'87.
ON JOHN AND ANNE OCKERS.

My first and most enduring memory of John Ockers remains this; after studying a Scripture passage and sharing concerns with one another, John would just drop his head and be leading us into prayer. He reminded me of a crash diving submarine, he was so quick into prayer with God. His faith was not shallow or pretentious, but he was wise, very wise, knew how to love people and certainly loved God. Both he and his wife Anne loved me and cared for me during my darkest days at Maradi, and I remember them especially with a few others, like Tony and Liz, Ulrike, and Hugues.

I forget exactly when John came to Niger but it was a long long time ago. Maybe not as far back as when Gordon, Lena and Marcia arrived in the 1940's, but then, when you have lived in Africa for more than thirty years, you pick something up. Perhaps you become cynical, but then you should not last <u>that</u> long. John was not cynical. As head of the Maradi main compound, which was the administrative headquarters of SIM in the Niger Republic, he had a lot of work and responsibility on his shoulders. Not only did he run many aspects of the mission station and whatever beyond, he had extensive contact with the Hausa Church. Perhaps he was there in its early days, when it was expanded from a few disciples. Like Gordon, John was someone who was a part of the big picture, who saw the local church grow and become something new on its own. Oh sure, there were problems, hassles, crises (or "pallavers" as John almost always loved to call them), betrayals, setbacks, infighting and the like, but with them came hope, friendships and discipleships, leaders of the present and those in formation, a shared effort and the love of Christ shown both in the mission and the Hausa Church. John did not try to carry all the weight alone, however. His friendship with Gordon Bishop and George Learned went back years, and they spent many times together working through issues, carrying on the church in that land, but above all praying. After Gordon died, John recounted the many times together when, after all else had failed, the three of them fell on their knees and prayed. John was not pretentious in his faith.

Great leaders have been known to do something in their spare time to recreate themselves. Gladstone felled trees with an axe. Churchill layed bricks. John grew watermelons. Outside his house he had a small patch which he looked after very carefully--at least, when he could get to them. During the "rainy" season he would search through the plants for pests, keep them watered and perch the melons atop tins. Perhaps he even kept them inside the tins, with a small entrance provided for the vine to enter. I am not sure here. (Perhaps this gives some indication of the challenges of bringing anything to fruition in Niger, given the parasites and other factors.) John would sometimes dust some mean chemicals on those plants during the critical stages of their development, but he said if he did not, he would lose them.

John was my boss during the time I worked at Maradi. Until I arrived in August 1984, he was the only full time man on the compound. He only left his administrative tasks at the behest of a crisis--burst pipe, failed greywater system, or some dangerous situation which he had to fix. He was very glad when the mission sent me as the maintenance man. Essentially I had two years worth of repairs to do on the compound--some desperately needed, many just needing the time and effort to have them fixed--two years since the last short term maintenance man left. There were unseen windows missing one pane, leaking taps here and there, faulty ballcocks in the toilet reservoirs and other minor projects on the compound, which nobody had had the time to finish themselves.

John's garage was something else too! It was just like any other American garage. . . in the middle of Niger. Inside, Africa seemed to vanish for a while. It was dim and dusty inside, the windows were dirty and there was junk everywhere--so it seemed. There were almost forty years of accumulated tools, widgets, old lumber car parts, electrical fixtures and parts, the Ocker's Datsun, saw horses, and whatever else you might need on a mission station if you had the patience to dig for it. (Up at the back were some cases and boxes. One was full of a white powder and carefully wrapped over. It was DDT. John said it was mixed with old oil and poured along the foundation trenches of buildings before the concrete wall bases were poured, as one of the few effective ways of keeping the wood ants and termites away from the timbers.) I remember asking him why he kept so much impedimentia. Well, he had a point. In Maradi--and that is Niger's second city--some parts are not easy to get. Sears and Roebuck is not just down the road like it is in America, and in many respects the mission station must be somewhat self-sufficient in terms of repair needs. My philosophy of missioning tends to favour being lightly equipped, but then I have never had to settle down and oversee the workings of a compound over time.

John showed me what love meant on many occaisions. The maintenance work at the Maradi compound was hard for me, not because of the tasks and the challenges they raised for me most days, but because of my loneliness and the isolation of soul I was going through at that time. As Ulrike said, she recognised my type from the start and began to pray for me accordingly. I did most of my work as required and some even better, but I was not treating myself fairly--bad thinking, overwork and not enough rest during the siesta break, keeping myself away from others when I needed them and the like. Perhaps John saw this. I am one who sometimes says nothing until I really begin to hurt. One day when it was hot, when I was weary and very vexed inside, when I wanted out of the compound and onto a bush taxi over the great road to Niamey to defend my beekeeping project to the SIM authorities, I said to John, "I think I am beginning to crack up." I hadn't really planned saying it for effect; I really was at the end of whatever rope. Like a father he put his arm around me over my shoulder and comforted me only as fathers can do. That's all right. Go and take a break, Stephen. This was apparently quite natural for him.

Then there was Anne. She was John's second wife. His first had died in Nigeria from the Lasser fever outbreak in the 1960's. Anne loved only like mothers do. What can I say about her now? I can see her smiling at me as I fixed some broken plumbing fixture or replaced a shelf in her refrigerator. Her food was plentiful and tasty. She was a godly woman, a good one too, and spoke Hausa very well. The Ockers' honey came in tins from the Rocky Mountains of Colorado--at the time I thought it strange, but the honey great. There was almost always some lemonade in the refigerator; through that I learned about hospitality and restraint. Anne made me welcome to drink lemonade when I came into her house, and I did; however, I came too often and learned it was my responsibility not to take people or their lemonade for granted--even if the work caused me to sweat a great deal.

Perhaps my defination of appreciating love sounds suspiciously like a child's "cupboard love"--what with Ulrike's milkshakes and Anne's cold lemonades. Maybe so, but in the Nigerien climate my body needed such payment; what is more, my soul was fed through this liquid refreshment. I figure if you are loved and let yourself be loved you could be on the way to loving. Ulrike, Tony and Liz, and John and Anne set me on that route. The years until now and the ways I have changed are my testimony to their love.

John and Anne introduced me to the writings of Norman Vincent Peale during the end of my time at Maradi, when my self esteem and dejection were very low. (Looking back on that time, I think of the different reactions and help I was getting from the missionaries at Maradi: Ulrike gave me milkshakes and a book on the healing of inner wounds and emotional disturbances, both she and her friends prayed over me, Tony and Liz shared their own lives and an upbeat, positive-thinking book by Zig Ziglar, and John and Anne shared their love and Peale.) As John said, in earlier years Peale was not acceptable amoungst the conservative Christian community; "Paul is appealing but Peale is appauling." I have not even glanced at The Power of Positive Thinking since I first read it in 1984, but this much sticks. Peale made the claims of Christ, the Christian life, life in general, and many other things more hopeful to me. He did not present the "gospel according to Tantalus" but amoungst other things made me feel better. Oh yes, feeling is not everything, but in a brain-bound person like myself Peale hit many right spots, when I really needed them. Positive thinking does help, and I do not think Peale had the secular humanist's stance when he preached the goodness of positive thinking to Christians or others. I wonder if he had an "I can do all things. . . through Christ" attitude.

This then is the message of hope that John and Anne shared with me. I do not know when or if I will see them again, but I look forward to that day. Through them and others God made that difficult time in Africa into my finest hour.

S. Van Wyck. Hindsight entry for African journal. 17.9.'87.
On SIMAIR.

If you thought SIMAIR a romantic part of the mission, think again. Yes, the work they do would take on an almost majestic stature if only they had some biplanes, perhaps an SE5 and a few beat up Avros from the Great War, their gun rings taken off and the canvas faded and worn in places. Their pilots would be men to match Errol Flynn in peacetime, flying out desperately needed medical supplies to some far out mission station during a duststorm.

No. The picture appeared different to me. At times, the pilots seemed to be airbourne taxi drivers ferrying MK's to and from school, taking people and mail all over the countryside, helping keep the mission viable. They could just have well served in the Outback, or in some remote part of Texas. Their pilots were missionaries too. So why the big deal with SIMAIR, then? On the surface, mission life could be very humdrum, day in and day out.

I did not get to know the pilots well or spend much time about the airplanes, but they were a part of my life in West Africa--indeed a part of everyone's life. Boy, did we love to see those mailbags come in. . . Marcia Mowatt (the accountant at Maradi main station) would jealously guard that bag and slot the mail in her own time before we took our letters. Every morning John Ockers would sit next to his radio--the one with the wire stretched out over the compound--to listen to the mission broadcast. At times radio messages would be sent via whichever plane was in the air to increase the range, and of course the pilots carried all sorts of news themselves.

My first flight with SIMAIR was between Mahadaga and Niamey in July. I had spent a week or so with Elizabeth and Sonja when the mission plane landed at Mahadaga to drop off two missionaries and take me on to Niger, for my reentry visa had finally come through. It was a hurried departure, for Elizabeth was halfway through cutting my hair when the plane landed. However, the pilot had apples for us and the other missionaries, and we craved them. They were delicious. About half an hour later the plane took off and I left my friends. The dirt strip behind the dispensary was red and dusty, with weeds growing around the edges and the occaisional animal wandering across it, but what I remember is the closeness and flatness of the African countryside bursting open as the airplane rose into the sky. The dispensary buildings became dots, Elizabeth and Sonja vanished, and I saw the greatness of the land. You could not see into the distance because of the heat haze. The pilot pointed us towards Niamey but there were no countries, no national boundaries, just this great land beneath us.

We arrived in Niamey, spent the night at the guest house, and continued on to Maradi the next day. For three or four hours the land unrolled beneath us. I remember dreaming some of Handel's Water Music to myself through the sleep-giving noise of the engine as I looked at the land, the black line of the trans-Niger highway, the occaisional patch of green amoungst the semidesert and the wink of some reflecting tin roof. I thought the trip long--and this was before I began those memorable bush taxi travels.

During the time at Maradi I did not use SIMAIR to get to Niamey or elsewhere because I thought it cost too much. In addition, I was somewhat judgemental of the other missionaries for flying when a perfectly good bush taxi route existed. That was not the right atittude. . . In any case the bush taxi to Niamey, although much cheaper (a few thousand CFA francs?), took eighteen hours and was tiring to say the least. Still, it was enormous fun, and I would do it again. Perhaps if I have children and send them to MK school the prospects of sending them SIMAIR will prove more attractive than driving out and fetching them overland.

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Whenever SIMAIR arrived somewhere in the bush they would buzz the mission compound to announce themselves. Like the mail, this became a part of life. . .

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The SIMAIR hanger at Niamey airport was a fun place to visit. Although parts were much more available in Niamey than in the bush the pilots and mechanics would sometimes have to wait for some part from outside or make do with taking it out of an older airplane. SIMAIR had one or two single-engine planes in active service, and were in the process of rebuilding/refitting an old two-engined Beechcraft. It was just the place for a zealous mechanic. One of the engines was stripped down and spread out over the concrete, waiting some part for the carburettor. The windshield was covered over, almost as if the Beechcraft had been in mothballs for several years. The pilot's dachund wandered about the machinery, very much at home. The office walls were covered with old fading calendars advertising aircraft parts and machinery. Again, the scene could have been drawn from a quiet part of Texas or the Outback. Outside the scene changed; the sun was bright, the land hot and ruddy dusty, and the sense of vastness untouched. A Tuareg family who helped as caretakers lived next to the hanger, their woven grass compound fence making an annex to the building. I am not sure how I would describe their feelings towards their situation. As caretakers they had steady work, in a land under famine. They lived a fair distance (a few miles) outside the busy part of Niamey, so had peace yet access to the market. Yet what must it feel like, to have one's family's very life and death dependent on keeping that job as hanger caretaker? At the time I passed them over and the compound seemed gringy, but now as I write they come back. . .

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One more SIMAIR story. Sometime back in the 1960's President Kennedy gave a single-engined plane to the Niger Republic. Later on it somehow changed hands and returned to America. One of the pilots or mechanics told me that all the interior furniture except the pilot's seat was taken out and fuel drums fitted in. For the first leg of the journey the plane went to one of the coastal cities, refuelled, and flew over the Atlantic to America. During the flight the pilot would trim the aircraft level, then crawl back to handpump fuel from a drum into the wing tanks. All this in a single-engined plane. . . I thought this went out after Lindburg, but no--many single-engined aircraft are delivered to site in this way.

S. Van Wyck. Hindsight entry for African journal. 19.3.'87.

ON THE MAKING OF TEA, AND TEA STORIES.

In a sense a part of African life revolves about tea, but then it has an effect on many other cultures. Whether travelling by bush taxi and stopping in some marketplace or meandering through the streets of Maradi I found it, along with the great variety of marketplace food. In Maradi, tea was sold in enamel mugs or in whiskey shot glasses. As a result, there appeared to be two types of tea seller, for the tea served in mugs was different from that slurped from shot glasses.

I drank less tea in the calm of the bright day than in other situations--on dark streets and meetingplaces or dawn marketplaces as the sun was lifting itself off the horizon--on the move from one town to another or resting from a walk. Like the bush taxis, it was a catalyst for meeting the Africans and glimpsing them and their ways. It was also the subject of many jokes, especially amoungst the missionaries, for from a distance one would think you were drinking whiskey.

Outside the main compound at Maradi rested a refugee camp made of cornstalks. The Ockers' housemaid lived there year round and near her the nightwatchman and his son, Abou. There were many nights when I would cross the still compound at some late hour, watching insects flitting about the bright flourescent lights on the corners of the important buildings. Beyond the gate lay the refugee camp and beyond it Maradi, with all its sounds and activities. There was a raised concrete porch on the courtyard side of the business office and beneath it Abou and his father would sit through the long night watches, brewing tea. All they had was a coloured straw mat, perhaps a nightstick and whatever they needed to make tea.

For many nights I just said goodnight and passed by, but later on I joined them. I was shy, but perhaps also a little proud. On that night Abou was there with a friend. We sat there in the night for quite some time drinking tea, and waiting as it was brewed up. Abou's teaset was typical of the area. It looked like a chalice or an enormous martini glass woven out of coathanger wire; the lower part rested on the ground and the upper part served as a basket to hold charcoal. It stood about eight to twelve inches tall. I never saw them lighting up, but came and saw softly glowing coals with a small enamel teapot atop. Few people would burn more coals than was necessary for the job. For many minutes Abou would sit still looking at the dusty ground or talking quietly to his friend, while the tea boiled. Perhaps the tea was not supposed to be drunk for the sake of being drunk, but was like a catalyst that marked off the passage of the night and directed and sustained the conversation or thinking through the long hours. Indeed it was like a thirty-minute cycle, like a ship's clock at sea, around which mariners told stories. The water would rustle and stir softly until it boiled; even then it was quiet. Above, the stars or the moon would shine down out of a clear sky--unless it was harmattan season and dusty--and the sounds of the neighbourhood would whisper on. The tea was loose China green tea, shipped into Niger in chests and sold about the town in plastic bags

or other containers. Abou put a lot into the pot, and a lot of sugar too. Sometimes, I thought, enough to make a spoon stand upright in the brew. However, the tea was never stirred. Abou placed the tray with the round of shot glasses on it nearby and proceeded to pour tea from two feet high into the glasses without spilling. This he could do back in his own compound too, without good light. He then put the round of tea back into the pot and poured it out again, put it in again, and poured it out again. Sometimes he did this three or four times, until the tea and sugar were mixed.

Abou and others who brewed up like this were very polite, for they offered me the first glass or else a part in their round. The tea was sipped slowly, but it was meant to be sipped noisily--almost a slurp if there was more to drink. I wish I had been older and more mature at those times, for I thought of tea drinking in terms of just gulping, drinking and eyeing up the next round, instead of in terms of fellowship. Perhaps I asked for too many glasses, reckoning on Abou's politeness. However, this and other similar experiences taught me a lot about the Africans and their politeness, their respect for people and not things and time schedules: giving, not taking. Indeed, the night watches spent around the coathanger wire brazier and the enamel teapot would be a fine way to learn more about the people and their ways. In a sense it reminds me of the times with Lompo Larraba or Wombo--a few people seated about a small fire or oil lamp, under the dark sky, surrounded by the vast presence of Africa. "Miles and miles of bloody Africa" then? I suppose so, but for me the vastness of Africa was something awesome, something to marvel at, something only just manageable in dreams and imagination--not in toil, acheivements or projects. It is too big for that.

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There are other tea stories I could tell--too many, perhaps. One though sticks with me. On the road from Niamey to Diapaga the bush taxi had to rest the night at the last police roadstop in Nigerien territory. It was a long night on that converted truck, stretched out on hard convex seats. The next morning I got up, left the trucks and the many sleepers scattered around them and crossed the road to the sounds of breakfast being prepared. It looks and tastes like the leftovers of last night's supper and indeed it is--but refried millet, bits of chicken, warmed rice and the occaisional stick of bread all taste wonderful. They were part of the reward for travelling by bush taxi! There was also tea in abundance. Like the food, it was heated up over small fires under an open-walled tin-roofed leanto. That was the roadside kitchen. The December morning was a little chill and the air was still with a very light mist, the smoke lingered, the women huddled within their cloak-like clothing stirring pots or cauldrons. I thought of Macbeth's witches making potion.

The tea was heated up in five-litre tins formerly used for soybean oil. The tops had been cut out and they were perched on the three firestones. Someone took the tea off when boiling and carried it to a serving table. Serving it was simple; a large enamelled mug was used as a ladle to pour tea into other mugs. In many cases there was

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no need for sugar since the Africans liked to use imported condensed milk. Instead of pouring it into the tea they just perched it upside down on the tea mug and left it for a while. It was very thick and came out slowly.

After that night or miles and hours of hard road a mug of tea was really welcome. . .

S. Van Wyck. Hindsight entry for African Journal. 6.4.'87.

ON DRIVING FOR GORDON'S BUSH TEAM.

Gordon Bishop's death at the wellhead in the Soura compound broke us all in Maradi. However, his death was not a vain thing, for it brought together a community that had squabbled and quarreled for months, perhaps years. Once his colleagues and friends had gone through the immediate grief and the celebration of Lena's birthday a week later, life began to return to its usual pattern. The infighting stopped, at least for the moment, as people thought about what Gordon had meant to them. His example came up a lot in the prayer meetings and Bible studies; I suppose like others I was being affected by Gordon and his life. How strange! When he was alive I sort of avoided him because I was afraid of his gruff and very blunt and forthright way of dealing with people--including myself. If nothing more had happened and I had returned to America I do not think he would have had more of an influence on me; certainly he has been an inspiration for my writing. However, his death changed me.

Soon after Gordon's death John Ockers asked me if I would like to drive for his bush evangelisation team. I agreed, and the experience deeply affected me.

Ever since coming to West Africa in 1944 Gordon had preached the Gospel; in the last several years at Soura he had gone into the bush with an African pastor and a few evangelists most weeks for overnight or two night trips. He drove the pickup and played an important role in the team, but I wonder if much of the authority was delegated to the African pastor who went with him. Until John asked me to drive I had no real idea what Gordon got up to in the bush and I had no idea what a bush preacher did. Of course I said yes; I was also curious, and wanted to get away into the bush. Since the pastor could speak French and I could drive everything seemed to be alright. In a sense, I was in Gordon's shoes, and this realisation has grown over the years. Then, I was just a driver, an explorer, driven by curiosity and a wish to get away from it all and into the bush.

I left the main Maradi compound and drove over to Soura, where the pastor and his crew were getting ready. Bags and mats leaned against the wall of the pastor's house and chickens wandered about in the courtyard and outside. Only a stonethrow away lay the well, covered up for the moment; it was later deepened. The pastor greeted me and asked if I had everything for the two nights in the bush. Since I thought the people in the village would provide, I said yes without thinking. The bags and mats were loaded up onto the roof rack of the covered pickup truck, a 4WD Nissan, but nobody was in any hurry to be off and moving yet.

There were a few buzzards circling over the compound watching the chickens, especially the hens with their chicks. One buzzard dove down from a height into the courtyard, pulled up in time and tried to snatch a chick by skimming the ground and flying through the open door that led out of the courtyard. The mother hen shrieked and threw herself over her brood with spread out wings; the buzzard flew away empty handed. In Niger the two most serious threats to chickens are

Newcastle's Disease and hawks.

Remember, there is no rush to go, go, go. Everybody was there so we got in after a while and drove through Maradi and out the other side. I do not remember which way that road went, but after a while the red strip became bumpier and bouncier. The unpaved red earth roads become corrugated easily and driving is rough on the suspension, even in a Peugeot 404. However, by going at 50 mph or faster the corrugated bumps are missed. That is why people "fly the piste" out there. The faster one goes, the less the corrugations bounce the vehicle about. There were a few crazy drivers out there. I have a flash recollection of an approaching Land Rover with a few Africans inside. They came straight at us down the center of the road (which has fewer bumps) and veered off at the last moment. I think I was too surprised to really understand what had just happened. Our pickup burst through a cloud of momentary red dust and shot on over the open road and clear sky. I did not even bother to look in the mirror at that Land Rover but I have not forgotten it.

The red road continued on and on over a barely inhabited land. Once every few miles we would pass some peddlar or a few men herding their livestock towards Maradi. There were no roadside shelters with someone sitting next to a frail table selling a few sweets or grain. The land was flat with an occaisional tree here, a group of thorn bushes there. Where there had been millet fields the open spaces were bare, barren it seemed, the ground dotted with millet stumps. With the winter and the dusty harmattan wind the land became emptier, lonelier, blown away and pulverised. I never saw any dust-devils but they would have been suited here, crossing the empty fields sucking up and spilling out dust. It is a miracle anything grows here. The land depends on the rain; there really are no permanent rivers save the Niger and what flows comes with the flash rains. Deep underground, the water table sinks and sinks, partly because Lake Chad to the east is drying up. Later on, I dropped a stone down one well and it took about four seconds to hit the water at the bottom. No wonder the women have huge biceps and dry season gardens are confined to a very small area around a wellhead! Sophisticated Western technology would not do here.

We dropped one of the evangelists off at the first stop and went on. More miles, flat land, the vibrating pounding of the Nissan over the road kept me conscious as I was learning to drive this way for the first long trip yet wore me out. We arrived at a larger village which marked our turnoff, off the hard red earth and onto loose sand. The pastor wanted to stop and greet the chief. I am glad he was in charge as I would probably have driven straight through and on my way. (It takes a long time to fully internalise the culture.) It was also a test of patience; the pastor took his time in greeting the chief and I looked about at the village. Several round mudwalled houses with their conical roofs, mudbrick or woven milletstalk walls marking off the compounds, children peering at us from a distance as through an unseen wall, the open area littered with footprints and debris. . . and, of all things, a solar photovoltaic panel on a rod over one of

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the houses. The government has dozens, maybe hundreds of televisions over the country in the villages to broadcast to the people. One village, one T.V.? Usually they were set up in a place where everyone in a village could gather around and watch.

We did not stay for a meal. All the pastor wanted to do was establish and continue good relationships with those he met on his trips in the bush. Building friendships takes time, patience and effort; again, I was glad to learn from the pastor by just shutting up and watching what he did.

The road after that village more or less ended and I switched to four-wheel drive. Many of the paths gave over to deep sandy clearings between the thorn trees. Another hamlet or two over the miles and the last two evangelists left together. The pastor and I continued alone. He knew where to go but I felt lost, in a bush where all the trees seemed the same. The deeper sand increased the sense of being a long way from anywhere. The farther I travelled away from familiarity, friends and presumed security the more I would come up against myself. Just myself and my thoughts. Myself and the very presense of the vast bush. Myself and God. In a way it was a stripping down, a naking. At that time though I was not thinking this, but experiencing it but not realising it. The pastor who I see now as such a wise man was then more of a chaperone, who looked after me while I drove and indulged my appetite for experience.

Sometime in the late afternoon we arrived at the last village. I never remembered or wrote down its name but the features and images are clear. It was miles and miles from anywhere one might dare to call cosmopolitan (and certainly a long way from Maradi), but that is not the point or an insult. It was smack in the middle of vast, sparsely populated bushland and it had two wells. (One was traditional and unlined while the other had been dug and lined with concrete rings by a rural development well-digging crew. I dropped a stone into it and heard the splash about four seconds after.) The pastor bade me drive to the chief's house, set amoungst shade trees. The other houses were surrounded and enclosed by milletstalk fences; they gave the hamlet the appearance of being divided into somewhat regular streets and avenues and throughout I felt as if I were walking down streets and not between compounds. The chief's house, larger than the others, was built in mudbrick and mud plaster. Pigeons flapped about overhead and donkeys looked at us in silence. Its domed roof was the pride of the village because it had been whitewashed. Boy, was I young then. I took one look at the dusty white roof and asked the pastor if the pigeons had been living there that long. I am glad he did not repeat my question to the chief. . .

Later on that day I sat atop the Nissan looking out at the bush while supper was being prepared. After leaving the chief we drove to the other side of the hamlet and parked in the compound where Gordon usually stayed. The place he used was simple--two round mudbrick and conical thatch structures joined together. The compound and the inside were swept and bare. Bare because the African's enemy is the snake and everything in and around his home must give a snake nowhere

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to hide. The host offered me a straw rollup mat and I realised that was all there would be. I think the pastor offered me his sleeping bag for the night but I said I would have enough clothes to pad me and keep warm. I was too proud to admit I had goofed, so I said I would be alright. In any case, I felt I had enough clothes. I hope I will not do something like that again.

The compound lay on the edge of the village and from the top of the Nissan I looked over the milletstalk fence and at the stripped millet fields. With winter and the dry season they were bare and very dusty. During the rainy season when the crop was growing one could see where the villagers had gone out into the field to go to the toilet for the stalks became shorter and less strong the farther away from the fence one went. Now, everything was equal. The day dimmed as the sun fell away and the air grew cooler. The land was so very quiet; in fact, quiet enough to hear or imagine the blood singing in my ears. There were no braying donkeys or the sound of guinea hens. This part of the bush was dead still outside the compound, where supper was cooking and people talking. Occaisionally though I heard a loud squeaking sound from near the well that I could not place, as if someone was doing something terrible to a violin. It stopped and the low voices sunk into the silence of the larger bush. I heard no wild animals calling.

Just outside the compound under a shade tree a few men sat in the sand plaiting rope made from palm strips. They were about a foot long and half an inch wide. . . so short it seemed for rope, yet the Hausas plaited them tightly and patiently. Ropes like these took hours upon hours to make and they broke with age like anything else, yet they were strong and marketable. I saw them being used to bucket up large waterskins from wells, or to securely bind a cow in its death throes in the slaughterhouse. Sometimes they talked amoungst themselves, or else they became part of the quiet compound. Sometimes the white Nissan looked very out of place.

I had a card from Shelly and I read it in this place before the reading light went completely. It had arrived at Maradi at the right time and was typical of our friendship. . . Much of the time we have known each other has been with a few thousand miles between us; yet we have come to know each other well through letters. I suppose she came at a time when I needed her. You cannot imagine how strengthening and uplifting it is to get a letter and read it in the deepest bush, way away from home when you are running out of strength. Of course she had no answers but her care helped.

The pastor called me down and I walked over to where supper was being prepared. I think it was sorghum and gravy. The famine in this part of the bush had been harsh so the pastor had come with some grain so as not to burden the host. Most of the people there ate from shared bowls but the pastor and I were given separate dishes, perhaps with a piece of guinea hen too. The generosity of the Hausas (and Gourmas too) was beyond description. This was a real sacrifice and offer of hospitality. After the long day on the bush roads and tracks it was peaceful. We edged close to the potless cooking fire to keep

warm. Some things stand out--the glowing flames, the dim shadows of those sitting about and their faces thrown into the light, the feeling of companionship with these people, the milletstalk walls and about us the vast bush. How vast it was! The stars were bright, unless the harmattan hid them.

After supper I followed the pastor over to the shade tree where the men had plaited their ropes throughout the day. An oil lamp sat on a madeup table, surrounded by several chairs. Again, everyone was very polite and gave me a seat, although there was grey hair everywhere. The pastor had his tape recorder and battery pack with him to play back a prerecorded sermon in Hausa. When it finished he gave his own commentary and answered questions.

He was a quiet man but an experienced pastor. At first I wondered what he had acheived over the years as a bush preacher. All he did was play a tape of a sermon and talk about it. It was dark, the isolated flame from the oil lamp hurt my eyes and made me sleepy. In addition, my mind followed a dozen distractions about the compound. Since the sermon was in Hausa I felt more and more removed from the pastor and the listeners, more of a driver than a co labourer. Yet in lacking what Gordon had used as part of the team I came to understand him better. To effectively reach these people takes love, but also the wherewithall to communicate with and understand them. Cross cultural work is exactly that. . . understanding, insight and a good bag of experience. Out of my inadequacy I learned from Gordon and the pastor. The Africans are the best messengers to their own culture in the long haul I think. Even Gordon could not go within certain places in their culture, since he was not from it himself. However, he worked well with the pastor. After his death people recalled him saying if he could go through life again he would not do it as a bush preacher or evangelist. Instead, he would disciple a dozen or so key people with the fire in their hearts and let them do it. Thinking back on those lampside sermons and seeing the long hard climb I would have faced if I had tried to do the pastor's work, I agree with him. In a real sense, Gordon and the pastor have greatly affected my approach to mission. The discipling of key people for longterm, low key witness to their own people. Gordon was not John the Baptist, yet there was a grandeur and scope to his work--not epic like Homer's people, yet great in his own way. However, even he was limited. He is dead now but his discovery is alive and ready to be used by whoever is humble enough to entrust his or her dreams of speading the gospel to God and through Him, those few key people by discipling them. Africa and its people are too vast to tackle on one's own steam and succeed. In addition, it later dawned on me that there was nothing wrong with playing the same gospel message, since there was little chance that people in isolated communities would hear it twice; in any case, so what if they did? The pastor had to be patient in his work and prayer--and he was a Hausa! Oh well, at least I did not have learn that lesson the hard way, after several fruitless years trying to go it alone.

It was stone quiet that night. Lying alone in the hut I listened

for a sound, any sound, but heard nothing. The bush remained still outside in the great darkness. It was also chill that night; I felt the consequences of my foolishness in not bringing any bedding, as well of my pride in pretending I could manage the night on a woven straw mat in my clothes. I was cold, uncomfortable and slept with difficulty. In fact I was impatient for the dawn and remember getting up once or twice in the night to step outside and look for the lighter tinge in the eastern sky. Those nights pass slowly; I hope I learned my lesson then.

When I finally did crawl out from the nut the dawn had passed. A few people were up and they huddled in cape-like blankets about the fire to keep warm. Even after a few months in Africa I had become used to hot days and the mornings made me shiver a bit. It was more extreme for the Hausas--they really were cold. Breakfast came from last night's leftovers. The millet was shaped into flat, hand sized patties and deep fried in peanut or soybean oil. Perhaps the pastor brought along some bread, but I do not remember. Those millet patties became a favourite; I liked their greasy and salty taste, especially since I sweated so much and became hungry from long days. However, I ate whatever they offered me--which was a lot--and now realise that someone probably ate less on account of my appetite. When people are hospitable there they are serious about the guest's wellbeing. Some newcomers to Africa have problems eating the food that is offered to them for fear of getting sick; in my case I ate whatever was put before me and sometimes gave in to my appetite. When Africans sit down to eat millet one thinks they are gorging and eating far too much. However, millet only has about a third the nutrient value of wheat, so one has to eat a lot in order to be fed. And that on land that sometimes produces small tonnages of millet per acre. And that in a climate that sometimes drops very little rain. I hope I will not go that again. . .

The pastor preached again after breakfast to a small group. I felt alienated through not understanding Hausa and realised one needed great patience, perseverance and a joyfull dedication from God to do Gordon's and the pastor's work. In a sense I glimpsed again what sort of a man Gordon was through seeing the pastor preach, imagining what Gordon would have done or said. This was the part of his life that had been a mystery to me back at Maradi when all I saw was Gordon the senior missionary--not Gordon the man of God out here. I do not mean to idolise him here or that he was a jerk in Maradi for he was not. Yet in walking in his shoes and driving for his old crew I felt something profound.

I asked the pastor if I could walk about the village and look around after the first lesson ended. In a sense I forgot my job and sated my curiosity. Between the open meeting space and the compound where we had slept was a gourd patch. It was dry season yet some of the vines were barely green as the gourds ripened. Some were grown for food yet they were really used to make containers, vessels, bowls and ladles, depending on their size and shape. When ready the gourd was cut, scooped out and dried. In the bush Maradi lay a long, long

way away and the people here had to make as much of their life as possible with what was at hand. Like the plaited rope from the fronds the gourds were not a craft--they were a part of survival. Rain was scarce and well water a long way underground. The vines also grew along the milletstalk walls of some of the compounds. One ran onto a thatched roof on its own. Throughout the village the ground was strewn with little bits of broken and dried up gourd, wooden impliments, scraps of woven mat and the like. Here, this was not a problem since everything turned to powder with time. I do not remember seeing plastic or the like blowing about.

I left the gourd patch and walked over to the well. Twice a day the villagers drew water for their flocks. The well near the compound where we slept was traditional--that is, it had been dug by hand and was unlined. Some time ago a gang of men had risked their lives to make it. The spillings they dumped around the shaft, giving the well a slight conical rise over the grade of the land. The rim at the top lay level with the ground, framed into a triangle of sorts by three round beams that were deeply scored from miles and miles of plaited rope that had run over them. There was no other restraint to prevent the whole shaft from falling in and ruining the well. Someone told me that maintenance on the bottom of the shaft was very dangerous, and I can believe it. I wondered why there was no guard rail for children. Wells are such a part of life there that the children grow up knowing they are dangerous places; like our children with cars--we hope--they keep away from the edge. (I dropped a stone down the other well and it took about four seconds to hit water. . .) A forked beam from a trunk or branch stuck out of the ground near the shaft and rose to jut out over the hole. The ends of the fork had been bored and a homemade wooden pulley put in. It was the rubbing of the pulley on its axle that had made that strange squeaking sound the night before.

Two men and a boy used the pulley to water their flock. Instead of the usual two-gallon waterbag and armpower they had a fifteen to twenty gallon bag and a bullock to haul it up. They lowered the bag and jerked it up and down until it filled, then led the bullock away from the wellhead. The pully squealed again. I almost wanted to send them a metal pulley later on, but I wonder if that would have helped in the long run. When the bullock reached the end of his walk the boy stopped him as the two men carried the bag away from the shaft and poured the water into a trough. The animals really crowed about and sometimes the herders had to kick them away while others took their turn to drink. This happened every day and like other things was part of a cycle. Pulling up the water, day and night, pounding the millet, sowing and harvesting the crops, rainy season and dry season, being born and dying. There were no watches here. Their world ran to a different clock, its ticking as slow as the days and wound up once a year. No rush, sweat and toil, flesh and blood. . .turning into dust.

Even in this lonely village there was a blacksmith. He sat in sight of the well with his apprentice under a small shelter that had no walls. His anvil looked like a woodsplitting wedge tapered out into a rod to bury it in the sand. Since most of his work involved