



Newsletter of Jeff, Diane, Alyssa (and Daniel) ~ living and working in the Persian Gulf & Central Asia.

Kidnapped Friends Are Free ~

In July of last year, an "Angus" friend of ours, who is the father of a dear friend of ours, was kidnapped because of the "religious activities" of his sons. In September, another friend of ours, who is the brother of this same dear friend, was also kidnapped in order to "save Islam and their country". And our dear friend fled a kidnapping attempt and made it to the UAE. Thank God the father was released in October. In December, the father, mother, and two brothers came to the UAE to visit our dear friend and another western long-time friend of the family who was visiting at the time. It was the first time our dear friend and his father had seen each other since the father was released.

They all came to our house one day, and little did we know, the family members (except our dear friend) were harboring a lot of anger and bitterness against their western friends – in addition to the grief of the father's recent ordeal and the one brother's continuing captivity – for not responding to the two kidnappings and getting them released. All of them cried over the oldest brother's situation at various times during their visit with us. His mother, especially, needed others to hear her pain.

Alyssa was upstairs studying and Diane was out when the family came over. When the family greeted Jeff and the other western friend, the mother buried her head in his chest and wept for long minutes. This was the first clue that this was not a normal visit. Then the father and mother proceeded to vent their disappointments with us western friends for not caring about their family. Their evidence was that if we had cared about them, we would have gotten their son released by now, because, after all, we are westerners and we can do everything. They don't realize that we are nobodies in our country. Then three other men came over whom our dear friend had invited. The mother left the living room before they entered, because in their culture, men and women who don't know each other don't hang out together. She went to the dimly lit kitchen and sat on a chair by herself. She intended to sit there alone for the duration of these other men's visit. Waiting alone, even a long time, for some men's thing to finish is not unusual for women in their culture.

Jeff went upstairs to Alyssa and told her to please come down because our dear friend's mother just needs a hug. She is the only woman down there, she is sitting alone in the kitchen, her son is still kidnapped, and she needs a hug. (Alyssa had met the mother before, in her country.) Jeff said he would notice when Alyssa came down and go into the kitchen with her to help her communicate with the mother. But Jeff didn't notice when Alyssa came down – only our dear friend noticed. Jeff said to him, "Your mother is talking in there." He said, "Alyssa is in there." They went into the kitchen and found Alyssa and the mother sitting together cross-legged on the kitchen floor, with tears streaming down their faces, clutching each other's hands. They don't speak a word of each other's languages, but they kept talking anyway. The mother has a daughter in her 20s named S*****, and the mother kept calling Alyssa her little S*****. It was a cathartic moment for the mother, for Alyssa to share her grief with her. It was a holy time. Alyssa said later that she didn't expect to be so emotional, but the weight of what the mother has been going through overwhelmed her.

It was the first time the parents had been out of their country. We shared two meals over their two-day visit. We showed them the two normal ways we eat together in our culture. The first day, when there were too many of us to fit around the table, we each got a plate from the plate pile, dished out food onto our plates from the serving bowls, and sat down on the couches and chairs in the living room, with the plates on our laps. (They don't use couches and chairs in their culture – they sit on thin cushions on the floor.) The second day, when the two other brothers didn't join us, we could fit around the table, so we ate that way, passing serving bowls around to start and whenever somebody wanted seconds. (They don't use tables in their culture – they eat on woven or plastic mats laid out on the floor in the middle of where people are sitting.)

It was a privilege to be able to serve them, emotionally and practically, and to be able to take care of their son for them, our dear friend, while he is away from them during these months that might stretch on to years. In their culture, sons don't move away when they grow up – they get married, bring their wives into the family, and have children, all under their parents' roof (which hopefully expands to accommodate them).

Last month, the kidnapped brother was released. Both the father and the brother of our dear friend were tortured during the months they were held. They lost weight, bear scars, and took a while for their minds to start functioning normally again. Fortunately, God did miracles for them, more dramatically for the brother, to get them through it. They were both hung upside down for a good deal of the time. The brother felt an invisible hand pushing his head up from the back to bring his body horizontal so he could sleep. He was very worried that the pain of torture would cause him to divulge too much about others who had left Islam. But he soon found that he couldn't feel the pain, and needed to fake it, so that they wouldn't catch on and do worse things. He even said he became bored, mostly just wondering how long until he would get out, if ever – even though he was being beaten every day – because he couldn't feel it. The brutality of man, and the kindness of God. They continue to love and serve that God, in spite of continuing threats against them.

Our family overlooking a fishing harbor ~ in Oman ~ Both families' kids in an acacia tree



Daniel Visits Home ~

Daniel was back to Dubai for the first time since he graduated high school in 2010. He was here three weeks over

Christmas. It was the first time Jeff had seen him since he left. We had a good time, hanging out, playing games, as well as taking a trip to Oman with another family whose kids were back for Christmas also, and with whom we've all done lots of things together the last few years. We stayed in the town of Khasab on the Strait of Hormuz, which you are probably hearing about in the news these days in relation to Iran; the tip of Oman is on the other side of it from Iran. There we saw bunches of dolphins "running" and leaping alongside the boat we were in, toured an old Omani fort that is now a museum, went to a fishing harbor, saw some purported petroglyphs, and wandered around a mountain acacia forest ... and played games. At the fishing harbor, fishermen were loading their catch into a pickup, including a hammerhead shark. Jeff touched its eyeball!

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News from Jeff & Diane

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