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Dear friends and family,

I'm back in the U.S. – again. It seems I was just here with my unexpected visit over the holidays; but I'm not complaining!

It's been a roses-among-thorns kind of year. Burkina Faso actually made international news a couple of times, so you are probably aware of much of it. I'll explain just in case; but if you read no further, know that it's been a wonderful year for the ministry despite all the "thorns".

POLITICS AND TERROR

From Uprising to Coup

Burkina's President of 27 years was forced to resign during a popular uprising in October of 2014. In rebellion, this past September (2015), an ally of the ousted President and the 1300-strong presidential guard staged a coup, taking hostages and seizing control of the presidential palace. Land and air borders were closed and things got ugly in the capital city of Ouagadougou. I was perfectly fine as I heeded warnings to stay put in Yako, and respect the mandated curfew. Everything, including schools and hospitals, were forced to close; so life came to a halt, yet I couldn't leave my home or the country!



The civil population united in protests, but were no match for the heavily armed guard. The violence escalated and deaths ensued. The regular Burkina army was called on to present the coup leaders with an ultimatum – lay down your arms or accept the consequences. They convoyed in

from all corners of Burkina and within 24 hours had surrounded the palace. At this point, the American Embassy did issue a warning for Americans to consider leaving the country because it wasn't certain whether the army was behind the coup leaders or the population; but getting to the airport would be risky and there was no guarantee the airport would be open at any given time, so I stayed put. Honestly, I was fairly confident the rebels had backed themselves into a corner without support, so the only question was whether they would concede peacefully. After a long week, the coup leaders were disarmed, the interim president had resumed his position, and schools and hospitals re-opened.



Bad timing – don't get sick when there's a coup!

Unfortunately, during the coup, I became ill. With hospitals closed and travel not possible, I was not able to see a doctor and quickly deteriorated. I am grateful fellow missionaries from the capital had been in touch and made the drive to rescue me. I was to be medically evacuated to Nairobi; but thankfully, I began to turn the corner while still in a small medical clinic in the capital. After 10 days, I was released and advised to come home to the States for follow-up care. Within a week, I was on a plane and blessed to be able to recuperate at my parent's home, and enjoy the holidays with my family for the first time in 13 years (a rose among thorns)!



Terrorists - in my little world

I returned to Burkina on January 4th just in time to welcome a team of students and their professor who had come from Messiah College to work with our schools. On January 15th, the team and I were in the capital city, having dinner with a group of 25 missionary friends at a favorite spot for westerners. We had just finished dinner when cell phones began buzzing and diners fled, emptying the restaurant in minutes. It was just like a TV episode when suddenly all the pagers and phones are going off and the ominous music begins playing, setting the stage for tragedy. There had been an attack a half-mile from us, but details were sparse. Feeling responsible for the safety of my young visitors, we returned to the mission guesthouse and awaited news.



Within the hour, we learned it was a terrorist attack at my favorite “coffee spot”, the Cappuccino and the Splendid Hotel across the street. The Cappuccino had already been destroyed; but the Burkina army, assisted by French and American military, had arrived at the hotel. They killed two terrorists and freed hostages. Other terrorists had escaped and it was unknown how many were involved.

Unbeknownst to me at the time of the attack, missionary friend and Yako neighbor, Mike Riddering had been dining at the Cappuccino when turbaned gunmen opened fire; and Australian friends Ken and Jocelyn Elliot were taken hostage from their home.

The day after the attack, much to my surprise, I was given permission to drive back to Yako; but it soon became clear the

Lord had cleared the way for me to be there. I remember stopping at the gas station and being shocked that everyone was going about business as usual. Arriving in Yako, I went straight to the orphanage guesthouse to be with Amy Riddering and Bekah as they paced the floors waiting for news of Mike. I prayed, asking the Lord to send confirmation as to Mike’s whereabouts; and the call came through – Mike had been found at the morgue.

You can’t imagine the chaos that followed as the employees and children of the orphanage wailed and threw themselves on the floor, writhing over the shock of the news. Mike was a true example of a loving father to them – how would they recover from this heartbreak. Amy and Bekah needed time to absorb the shock and handle their grief; so I was so thankful the Lord had me there to help the Burkinabe deal with theirs. Unable to regain control of themselves, I grabbed workers then children, one by one, to hold them and speak into their ears. It was as if the force of the news had caused them to let go of God’s hand, as if they were drowning in their grief and couldn’t see His arms opened wide. I’ve never felt so commissioned by God, as if He was right beside me and we were on triage, “Okay, now this one - remind this child I’m here and I know it hurts. Give her my hand.”, and on to the next one. Gradually, they all calmed – it was truly amazing. I’m not boasting. I had no choice. I was not ready for triage; but I was there and I couldn’t just let them drown.

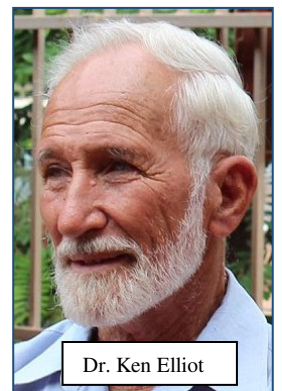
Amy is back in Yako and does amazingly well which is an incredible testimony to the people of Burkina. They are in awe of her peace – what a powerful way to witness “His peace that surpasses all understanding”.

Al-Qaeda has released Jocelyn; but Ken remains a hostage. Please continue to pray for his protection and release.

I’m just not afraid

As for me, I can’t explain it apart from God, so it’s hard to put in words; but I still do not fear. It was surreal the weeks following the attack. Was I really just blocks away from a terrorist attack? Am I truly living in a country where I could so easily be taken hostage? I was advised to begin locking my doors at night, so I do; but I found myself thinking, “I’m locking my doors in case terrorists come to get me? That can’t be real.” (As if a locked door would stop them.) And yet, I’m not afraid. Does that mean I’m brave? No. You should see me in a dentist chair! It just means God has filled me with this unexplainable peace because if I were truly afraid, I’d be the same basket case I am in the dentist chair.

I only have this unexplainable peace because I get WHO God is and I get His love for me. You have to really think about it. For those who believe the words of the Bible, God is the one we read “merely spoke and the heavens were created, He breathed a word and all the stars were born....When He spoke, the world began, it appeared at His command”!!!! Such authority! With just a *word* He created the world. He said, “Let there be light” and there was light! If I really believe those words, I get that God is so much more powerful than any terrorist. No terrorist can boast of such power; so I can choose to cower at the thought of terrorists at my door, or I can rest in the knowledge of WHO is really in charge.



I know the fact that Mike Riddering was killed in the attack can baffle us; but not if we really get WHO God is and trust Him to know what He's doing. Why did they attack that restaurant and not the one I was in a half-mile down the road? Why did God take the only loving father figure many of those children have ever known? Why did He leave Amy a widow? I don't know. It doesn't make sense; but GOD is so very POWERFUL that our simple minds can't possibly explain it all; so we just have to decide if we are going to trust Him or not. I still believe in God's protection while at the same time, I understand Paul's words when he said, "...for me to live is Christ, to die is gain". Mike Riddering got that and I'm sure Amy would tell you she does also. Ken Elliot is still a hostage; but God knows what He's doing. I fully believe God is using Ken for His wonderful purpose even though I don't get it.

"Dear Lord, I don't get it!"

"Dear Lynn, that's okay. Just remember who you're talking to and trust me on this!"

"Dear Lord – Okay, I hear you loud and clear. Now, what do you need me to do today?"

And Then There Were ROSES!



Do you remember the **20-ft shipping container** many of you helped fill with school materials, clothing, and ministry center supplies? Would you believe, I received an email that it had arrived in Togo and would be shipped to Burkina the very day the coup broke out! With borders closed and chaos in the streets, I asked them to hold it up in Togo. Once the coup ended, they shipped the container and it arrived in Yako while I was laying ill in the medical clinic in Ouaga - so much for timing! However, our BFO team is wonderful and managed to handle all the details without me. I was finally able to open the container once I returned from the States in good health, and was so pleased to find everything in order and accounted for except for my new mattress. Somewhere in Burkina, I suspect a customs agent is sleeping well on that lovely mattress that Mom, Dad and I had spent precious time selecting – irritating (!); but I couldn't be too disappointed because there was still a container full of fantastic school supplies, teaching materials, tables, chairs, games, movie screen and more



for the ministry center, cake mixes and cereals, and plenty more. Do you remember that feeling of waking up on Christmas Day to see what Santa brought? Even better! Don't you love their new t-shirts above☺?

When I unexpectedly left Burkina to recuperate in November, I had to abandon one of our young interns, Fidel, leaving him with the responsibility of leading our **1st grade training classroom**. I was jumping for joy when I returned to find those students reading, quoting scripture, smiling, laughing, speaking French and solving triple-digit math problems! I realized I need to step away at times to be able to see the progress and celebrate the victories.





The **Ministry Center** property is slowly developing. We still need a final signature from the government which has been on hold ever since the political turmoil began; but there is hope of attaining this signature by mid-Summer. In the meantime, we've built two pavilions where we can now hold our staff meetings, teacher trainings, movie nights, teen activities and more.

In fact, we've started a new "**Mamas Gathering**" now that we have the pavilions. We do so much for children that we've decided it's time we begin doing something special with the mamas as well. At our first gathering, we had 87 attend which far exceeded my expectations – we danced, shared a word, a meal and a gift, and all

went home happy. The majority of these women come from Muslim and Animist families so I shared one of the examples of Christ's love towards women in the Bible. We began with the story of the Samaritan woman who Jesus reached out to at the well. The self-righteous teachers of right and wrong, and even Christ's apostles looked down on her – an impure Samaritan, a lowly woman, and apparently a bit of a floosy at that; yet Christ so overtly sits down and asks her for a drink of water! I can just hear the apostles (and likely many of us), "What?! Doesn't he know who she is?! What if people see him?!" My favorite verse, John 4:10 "If only you knew the gift God has for you and who it is asking for a drink..." Oh, if only these women knew!

Also new this year is first steps in developing a relationship with two "**scholarship schools**". Our desire is to take what we've been doing in our classrooms and use it to help other schools incorporate biblical principals into their classrooms and in so doing, improve the quality of teaching and academic outcomes as well. We would like to provide teacher/discipleship training, some materials and resources, and encouragement along the way. As this relationship develops, we'll see where it leads for BFO.



Teen Camp was a success as always, evidenced by the fact that our graduated teens keep coming back! I'm so proud of our BFO teachers who asked if they could host a camp during Spring Break, a time when they could have been home resting. They organized it, they lead it, and they have such great relationships with those kids. All I did this time was pay the bills! Our team is definitely maturing.

What's next?

In addition to the above, we can do more! Since our employees in Burkina are growing as leaders and loving disciples, we are able to keep blessing more lives, implementing more programs and activities. When I return

in June this year, we hope to further develop our relationship with the **prison** and begin developing a program for the "**street boys**". Women who are widowed and unable to provide for their children often send a boy to the Imam to be cared for. Unfortunately, this means they are left to beg in the streets, unable to attend school, and often without food and medical care. We'd like to construct a simple food prep area near the pavilions and provide them with a meal along with other activities in order to offer a caring support system for them. We'll let you know how these programs progress as they develop.



It is thanks to the Lord and each of you that all of this is possible. Unless the Lord calls me elsewhere, we'll continue sharing the gospel, training teachers, building schools, leading teen camps, sponsoring orphans and widows, feeding prisoners, paying school fees to keep kids in school, drilling wells, and whatever else the Lord asks us to do!

We are blessed by you and I am grateful. God Bless You, Lynn

