SEEDS OF HOPE, SEEDS OF HATE

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SEEDS OF HOPE, SEEDS OF HATE

A Love Story (Begins)

Donald A. Luidens

Visiting Research Fellow, 2015

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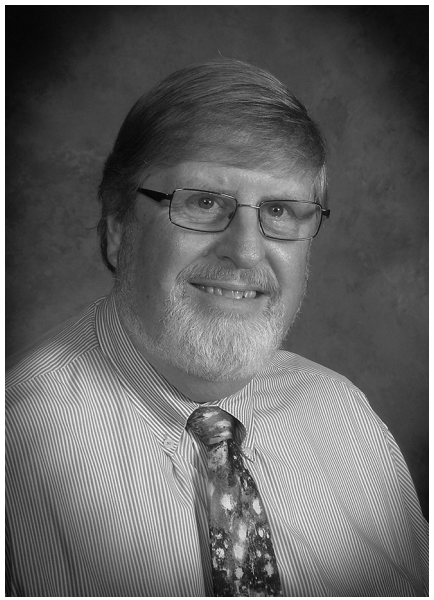


Don Luidens is the son of Ed and Ruth Stegenga Luidens. He was born in the third year of their missionary service while they were stationed in the Bahrain Islands. With them, he shared life in Iraq, India, and Lebanon until he enrolled at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. Following graduate degrees at Princeton Theological Seminary and Rutgers University, Don joined the faculty of his alma mater, where he taught sociology for thirty-seven years. Among other publications, Don coauthored *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby-Boomers* and *Divided by a Common Heritage: The Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America at the Beginning of the New Millennium*. Don has held visiting research fellowships at the Tantur Institute for Advanced Theological Studies, Jerusalem; Selly Oak Colleges of the University of Birmingham, England; and the Center for Inquiry into the Liberal Arts, Wabash College, Indiana. During the 2014-15 academic year, Don was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Van Raalte Institute and is now a Senior Research Fellow.

It is my sincere hope that this slim volume will serve as a small measure of the outsized love and respect I have for Edwin and Ruth Stegenga Luidens, stalwart Christians in an age of change.

It is to them that I dedicate this book with filial gratitude and affection.

Contents

Illustrations

Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by thanking Provost Jack Nyenhuis and the Van Raalte Institute. They have given me the opportunity to focus my research on a topic of abiding interest to me—

the early professional life of my parents, missionaries in Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon from the 1940s into the 1960s. I have found the Van Raalte Institute cadre of fellow researchers to be a most welcoming and congenial community of warm-hearted, hard-working, and productive colleagues. They have inspired, challenged, and humored me on a daily basis. I cannot overstate my appreciation for their friendship and their encouragement. Thank you.

Funding for this study has come from several sources. I was the happy beneficiary of three Nyenhuis Faculty-Student Summer Grants which brought three outstanding student researchers into my project. Anne Jamieson, Emma Zagar, and Emily Dittmar were superb collaborators at various stages of the effort, from the initial sorting, collating, and cataloging of my parents' letters (Anne), to researching people, places, and events reported in them (Emma), to making sense of the time and cultures which the letters recount (Emily). I received

additional student funding from the Frost Research Center. Finally, the Van Raalte Institute provided the time and context to bring this initial study to fruition.

Preface

Life for a "mish kid" (the offspring of missionary parents) was always an adventure. Like most adventures, it had its highs and lows, but in balance, it was an extraordinary childhood that I enjoyed. Growing up in the Middle East of the late 1940s and early 1950s provided a unique vantage from which to watch traditional societies collide with the imperatives of modernity. Of course, I wasn't aware of those larger forces as a child, but I did know that a world that depended on donkeys and camels wasn't going to survive easily in a world of jets and telephones. Things were changing.

My parents, Ed and Ruth Luidens, however, were keen observers of the transformations taking place all around them, and they shared their observations with their doting parents half a globe away. Once or twice a week (and at times, even more often than that!) they wrote back to their "folks," telling of their comings and goings, of the people they met and the places they visited, of the historic events swirling around on the streets and in the lives of individuals who they worked with and counseled and taught. Miraculously, Ed's father, Anthony Luidens, saved those letters, a treasure trove of over a thousand, typed, single

space, time capsules. In the course of time, these epistles fell to my hands, and after lying fallow for several decades, I decided to "see what was there."

To my great joy, the letters (re)opened a world to me, a world that was at once familiar and yet forgotten. In their human detail and self-effacing response to all that they encountered, my parents invited their readers to marvel with them at God's eternally fascinating creation. From the moment I began to read the letters, I was transfixed. They serve as the meat of the matter that follows in this book. In extracting extended passages from their letters, I have tried to be faithful to my parents' wide-eyed wonder and to their growing adoption of a community and a culture that was not natively their own, but that, perforce, became their adult home and family.

It is perhaps needless to say, but appropriate nonetheless, that while the words that follow are largely my parents' own, the selection, ordering, and contextualizing of those words are my responsibility. Where I have been true to their original intention, I am truly glad. Where I have (inadvertently) strayed from their inclinations, I regret that fact. In the end, it is my hope that I have faithfully shared this slice of their lives with all its excitement and challenges, with its abiding sense of vocation and faith, and with its evolving understanding of and affection for the people of Iraq with whom Ed and Ruth lived and grew between 1944 and 1946.

CHAPTER 1

Setting the Stage

Given the cauldron of hostility and division which characterizes geopolitics in the Middle East today, it is hard to imagine the buoyant optimism, even joyful naiveté, with which Christian missionaries from the Western world approached that region at midpassage of the twentieth century. They brought a vibrant brand of hope nestled in a package of Christian goodwill. In large measure, this message was received with warm grace and heartfelt appreciation. Grateful for unavailable social services—from education to medical facilities to orphan care—the receptive Arab populations generally welcomed the foreigners, displaying their traditional generosity to strangers in their midst.

Simultaneously, other forces brought less generous gifts, ones that spawned division and hatred. The inevitable dislocation of people that accompanied war was acute in these former Ottoman colonies. Refugees from Eastern Europe and the steppes of the Soviet Union—Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and secular—were swept into the restive Mandateships of Britain and France, displacing indigenous people and stirring ethnic, religious, and racial pots. Economic uncertainties,

Box of unsorted Luidens family letters

skewed by wartime demands and sky-high costs for basic goods, complicated life for everyone. The mixed blessings that would come with abundant oil were dancing on the horizon but were not yet realized.

Thus were hope and hate juxtaposed, each planted in the freshly turned soil plowed by the churning blades of world war and imperial decay, of nascent nationalism and sectarian revivalism, of the appeals and threats in the seductive guise of modernity. What follows is the story of one missionary couple's venture into this tumultuous world. Bit players in the grand drama of the day, Edwin and Ruth Luidens were frontline observers of the seeds of hope and the seeds of hate being planted all around them. In October 1944, with the world still gripped in the unyielding vice of military entanglement, they set sail from Philadelphia to share their faith, hope, and love with the people of Arabia. In many ways, theirs is a double love story, between the newlyweds and between the couple and their adopted kinfolk, the populations of the Arab world. At times it was an uplifting story of love returned and at other times one of unrequited love.

My scholarly journey into their lives began about four years ago. My sister, brother, and I had inherited from our father a truckload of boxes, poorly packaged and with mysterious content labeled "family papers." They had fallen to my father's care from the attic of his father, an inveterate packrat. The boxes had been rammed full of "stuff" in the wake of our grandparents' deaths and had lain untouched for twenty years in Dad's basement.

Mix of letters, articles, and clippings

The press of our professional lives and our tender memories of beloved parents kept us from looking at that treasure trove for another twenty years. Then, in an unwitting moment between research projects, I hauled out some of those dusty crates and tentatively rifled through them. Much to my amazement, among the debris of newspaper clippings, old wrapping paper, birthday and anniversary greeting cards, discarded paper clips, and typewriter ribbons was more consequential material—letters, sermons, passports, and other gems from my grandparents' lives and from my parents' early missionary days.

Like King Tut's tomb, the papers were humble-jumble, in disarray, reflecting the haste with which the containers had been filled—and the scattered files from which they had been drawn. With the aid of three wonderful student assistants, Anne Jamieson, Emma Zagar, and Emma Ditmars, I was able to comb through the twenty-plus boxes, separate the wheat from the chaff, file the former according to author and date, and begin to read and absorb the contents. It took three long summers of work to realize the magnitude of the records, which include over one thousand letters written by my parents to their parents between October 1944 and June 1957. Most astonishing, there appears to be virtually *no* missing letters from that period. In addition, there were several hundred letters written back to my parents, together with countless photographs, slides, and sermons and newspaper clippings and published articles by and about them. The boxes even included hundreds of baggage tags from their years of air and sea travel!

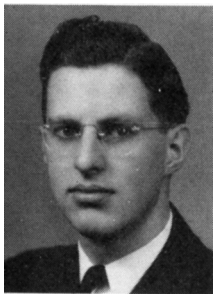
Forty loose-leaf binders of letters

The significant find, however, was the cache of letters, most of which were typed on a small portable Royal typewriter, making them particularly legible but unfortunately not scanable. In total these letters have filled over forty loose-leaf binders. They have been the inspiration for, and they are the substance of, this heartfelt project.

The principal players in this narrative are Edwin Marion Luidens and Ruth Stegenga Luidens. Ed's father, Anthony Luidens, was a Reformed Church pastor in churches in New Jersey and New York. Ed's teen years were spent in Rochester, New York, where his father pastored Brighton Reformed Church during the period of this narrative. Anthony's wife, Mae DePree Luidens, was the daughter of William DePree, founder of the DePree General Store in downtown Zeeland.

Ed came to Hope College in the fall of 1936 and became a campus leader, editing the *Milestone* yearbook during his junior year and serving as student council president in his senior year. He graduated in 1940 and began seminary training that fall at New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS). Early in his junior year of college, he was smitten by the freshman beauty who was destined to be his life partner.

Ruth Stegenga, known as "Steg," was the daughter of another RCA *domine*, Miner Stegenga of Grove Reformed Church in North Bergen, New Jersey. During World War II, Miner was frequently absent from his pulpit while serving as an army chaplain at Camp Gordon in Augusta, Georgia. Ruth's mother, Dureth Bouma Stegenga, was the daughter of still another RCA pastor who had served throughout the Midwest. Ruth arrived at Hope in the fall of 1938 and quickly immersed herself in the life of the college on the arms of the upperclassman



Edwin M. Luidens, from 1940 Hope *Milestone*, senior picture

Ruth Stegenga, from 1942 Hope *Milestone*, senior picture

from Rochester. She became a student leader in her own right, serving as officer in several campus organizations. Athletic and graceful, she regularly outshone her boyfriend on the tennis court and in the bowling alley. It took him years to master ping pong sufficiently to outplay her in at least one sport.

As a seminary student, Ed struggled with the exact direction in which his "call" would take him. In an undated letter to his parents, probably in the spring of 1942,[1] he informed them that he was increasingly inclined toward mission work:

> There's a very important matter for decision coming up in my life pretty quickly now. It's been on my mind for a long time, but never has it crystallized so that I felt justified in talking about it and asking you for your opinions. You've noticed hints at it in my cards, no doubt. It's becoming my conviction that, for times like these, we need a strong presentation of the Gospel throughout the whole world at once: we can't build a Christian America and, having finished that job, turn our hands to Mexico and thence to Burma and work our way around step by step. It's going to be a Christian world—or there can be no truly Christian nations in it.

[1] A note on the editing of these letters. Since they were often typed in haste, they are rife with "typos" and inadvertent misspellings, some of which were caught by their authors and typed over, but many of which were not. I have taken the liberty to "adjust" many of these errors, and they appear in the text corrected. When the errors were egregious, I have so indicated using a "[*sic*]" designation. Moreover, in order to conserve space, Ed and Ruth provided very little in the way of paragraphing in their letters. Again, I have taken the license to interpolate paragraph breaks when topics changed. Finally, the references to the letters (e.g., "EML 45.01.23") indicate the letter's author and date of its composition. Letters by Ed are designated with "EML" and by Ruth with "RSL."

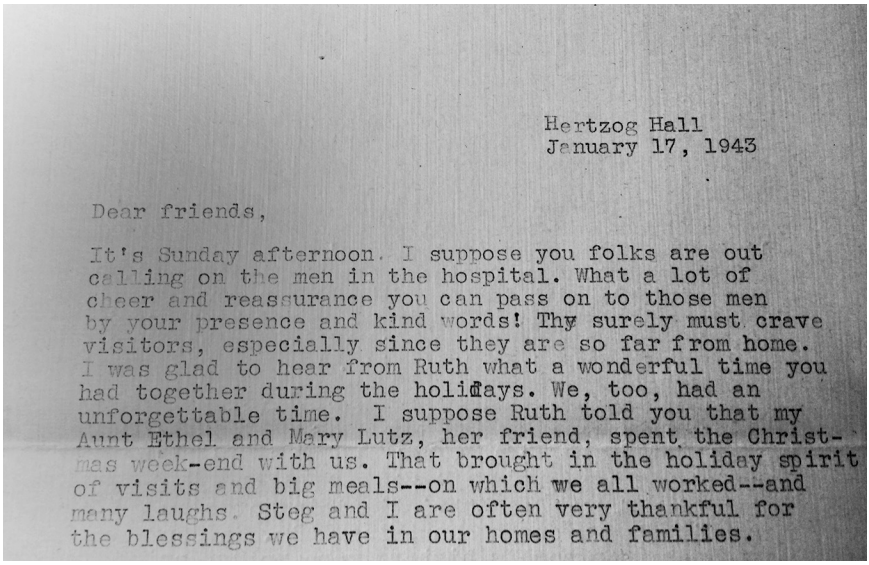
Happily, most of the letters in this study were carefully dated and give their place of origin. That, however, was not the case for this particular two-page note to Ed's "folks." Internal evidence (e.g., Ruth seems still to have been in college) suggests that this missive was written in early 1942.

> Furthermore, it seems to me from the reports that we get from missionaries, that the amount of energy expended on the mission field produces greater—at least more obvious—results than the work in our own regular churches here in America (not, of course, that the work here isn't absolute[ly] vital!). Men are needed on all the Reformed Church fields; they lack not money, but men, according to all reports. Of course, you've known for several years that I have hoped to spend my life in bringing the Gospel to our fellowmen. More and more it has come upon me that God can use me to a greater advantage in missionary work than anywhere else.
>
> Now, I hope this news isn't too startling to you. I realize there are all kinds of ramifications and considerations. That's what I'd like to talk with you about (via the mail).
>
> The Storm's[2] [*sic*] appeal for Arabia is very strong; also the China work appeals to me. The place or station isn't fixed or determined by any means. Such a job would mean taking at least one year's work at Hartford Missionary School,[3] or some such place, after Sem. Of course, what eventualities the war will bring forth no one can foretell. I've already mentioned this inclination to Ruth. We'll have to have some good talks on the matter soon. (EML, Spring 1942)

And "good talks" they must have had. Although constrained by the miles between Hope College and New Brunswick Seminary, Ed and Ruth's relationship continued to deepen during Ed's first two years in NBTS, from which he hitchhiked on a regular basis to Hope College. In the aforementioned spring 1942 letter, Ed opened by averring that "It's a beautiful day. The kind that puts the hitchhiking motion into one's thumb—especially since the sun sinks in the West. But none of us fellows here has the time or the money to go anywhere. So we all stay here and console each other." (EML, Spring 1942) Those hitchhiking treks were uncertain affairs, beginning after class on Friday and running

[2] Dr. Harold and Mrs. Ida Storm, long-time RCA missionaries, were then stationed in Bahrain and were strong advocates for the Arabian mission program. The term "Arabia" generally referred in these letters to the four countries which were the focus of RCA mission work: Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman. At times it was used more specifically to indicate Saudi Arabia, a young country at the time of these writings.

[3] Hartford Missionary School became Hartford Theological Seminary and then the Hartford Theological Foundation. It was widely known as a leader in Muslim-Christian studies and would have been a natural site for Ed to do Islamics studies in anticipation of a career in the Middle East.



Hertzog Hall
January 17, 1943

Dear friends,

It's Sunday afternoon. I suppose you folks are out calling on the men in the hospital. What a lot of cheer and reassurance you can pass on to those men by your presence and kind words! Thy surely must crave visitors, especially since they are so far from home. I was glad to hear from Ruth what a wonderful time you had together during the holidays. We, too, had an unforgettable time. I suppose Ruth told you that my Aunt Ethel and Mary Lutz, her friend, spent the Christmas week-end with us. That brought in the holiday spirit of visits and big meals--on which we all worked--and many laughs. Steg and I are often very thankful for the blessings we have in our homes and families.

Ed's fateful letter to Ruth's parents, January 17, 1943

until early Saturday morning and then recommencing on Sunday after church worship and lasting until the wee hours of Monday morning. Ed missed several Monday seminary classes because rides had not materialized along the way.

When twenty-two-year-old Ruth completed her college education in June 1942, it was natural that she would return to New Jersey in order to be closer to Ed and to save some money by living at home. In the fall she began teaching in Union City, New Jersey, a professional career which would take unexpected twists and turns in the coming years. But there was much to settle in the meantime.

On Sunday afternoon, January 17, 1943, Ed sat down in Hertzog Hall, his seminary dormitory, to write a fateful letter to his future in-laws. "Dear Friends," he addressed Miner and Dureth Stegenga at their posting in Camp Gordon. "I suppose you folks are out calling on the men in the hospital. What a lot of cheer and reassurance you can pass on to those men by your presence and kind words! They surely must crave visitors, especially since they are so far from home." (EML 43:01.17) The war was a constant companion in their family's life, as it was in homes across the globe, and it would become more so in the days ahead.

After assuring the Stegengas that "Steg and I are often very thankful for the blessings we have in our homes and families," Ed launched into the meat of the matter: what the future might hold for the two of them. First on the platter was the prospect of his doing "mission"

work somewhere in the world. Moreover, with the war underway, other possible career options presented themselves.

> We did a lot of serious talking at home [with his parents at Christmastime] about this mission proposition, as you can well imagine. I sometimes wonder why that always is with me. It popped out of every page in my thesis as I was writing it.[4] It "haunts" me in every sermon I write and preach. It enters into every prayer.
>
> There are several possibilities for the immediate future of us senior men:[5] army or navy chaplaincy, regular church work, lifetime mission work, short-term teaching mission, reconstruction work in devastated countries after the war. I believe Steg explained to you how I've come to feel about the chaplaincy; I'm afraid that my personal attitude toward war[6] would put quite definite limitations on the work I could and should do as a chaplain, if, indeed, I would be acceptable at all to the armed forces. (EML 43.01.17)

As the weighty letter to his future in-laws proceeded, Ed listed all the "regular church work" opportunities that were open to him in the New York and New Jersey branches of the Reformed Church. Although a viable option, parish work was not a compelling priority for Ed as he reviewed his choices:

> The Foreign Board[7] will be glad to consider an application for lifetime work in any one of the three major fields (China, India, Arabia). Stauffer and Shaeffer present China; VanEss and Potter stress Arabia; JW Beardslee[8] suggests India as a place for real live

[4] On 8 January 1943, Ed submitted his seventy-page senior thesis to the NBTS faculty on "The Koran and the New Testament on the Grace of God." In it he reviewed the life and times of Mohammed, the religious environment in which the Koran was composed, and his understanding of the Koranic interpretation of grace in contrast to the biblical one. Not surprisingly, the former came out more problematic than the latter. The Koran, he wrote, posed an Allah of justice who would weigh humans in the latter days and find them wanting: "A believer [in Islam] cannot but be grievously goaded by fear; he certainly is not drawn by love. The Grace of Allah is not a causal agency—it is not redemptive, it is not attractive" (p. 60).

[5] The Bachelor of Divinity degree (currently called a Master of Divinity) required three years of postgraduate work. The third, or "senior," year was one during which ministerial students sought future postings by "candidating" for open positions.

[6] Ed was a self-described "conscientious objector" to war, although this status was never formally recognized because his ministerial deferment superseded it.

[7] The Foreign Board was responsible for hiring missionaries on behalf of the RCA.

[8] At the time of Ed's letter, Milton Stauffer was the pastor of nearby Second Reformed Church in New Brunswick and had been active in the Student Volunteer Movement.

work—all of which is quite natural when you consider the past experiences of each of them. That would mean training here, either singly or as a couple, for a year or two—or for the duration depending on the international circumstances, so as to be ready to go over as soon as there is an opportunity.

Dr. VanEss presented the need of the Basrah Boys School for a three-year-term English teacher and advisor-comrade, living as a bachelor in the boys dorm. That man has to be a Sem student, for no others are draft deferred. He will leave in July with VanEss, with the approval of the State Department assured, he affirms. He was very convincing in his attempt to show the need; but he has been using no pressure at all since that time. . . .

So you can easily see my decision is not yet made. You can also see that, for some strange reason, I seem impelled toward foreign service. If that is possible. I can give all kinds of reasons for one's doing that sort of work; but why it is that they all seem so much more real and weighty to me than to . . . the other men in Sem, I cannot say. I only know it as a fact of my experience. Psychologically, it may be anything from desire for adventure (greener pastures on the other side of the world) to an escape mechanism or a martyr complex. But being conscious of these possibilities, I am trying to be careful that they are not, at least, the deciding factors.

At this point in Ed's letter, the options became really complicated. Although Ed was inclined to engage in some form of ministry outside the United States and was fully aware of the multiple reasons which might lie behind that inclination, he was also reluctant to impose any such expectations on a future spouse. The letter continued with a whole new tone:

"Shaeffer" likely referred to Rev. Luman Jay Shafer, then secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the RCA. Rev. Dr. John Van Ess would figure extensively in later discussions. He was a pioneer missionary to Iraq, notable for establishing the Basrah Boys and Girls Schools (the latter with the indispensable assistance of his wife Dorothy) and for becoming one of the premier Arabic linguists of the era. His encouragement of Ed to join the Arabian mission ranks, along with earlier contacts Ed had had in college with the legendary Rev. Dr. Samuel Zwemer, cofounder of the Arabian mission, was the determinative factor in Ed's decision to go to Arabia. Marmaduke "Duke" Potter was the executive in charge of the Reformed Church's Foreign Mission Board. "JW Beardslee" was John Walter Beardslee Jr., then president of NBTS. Interestingly, he was advocating for India, although his son, John Beardsley III, had recently (1935-38) served as a short-term missionary in Basrah, Iraq. This confusion may account for the misquotation in the subsequent reply of Miner Stegenga, who conjoined Beardsley with Potter in pushing for Arabia.

> Now you can see what I'm getting at. What disturbs me is Ruth's sincere attitude. And I would very sincerely like your counsel and advice. You certainly know by this time how much we think of each other. We're both most happy when we are together. We're both happy for whatever opportunities we can find to exert a positive Christian influence in our own ways. Ruth is quite evidently doing a fine job of teaching in a rather difficult situation, for which I am very thankful. If I were certainly going to accept a call from one of the churches I mentioned above, I'm sure I could ask for no finer, truer, more loving companion and could have no better "minister's wife" than Steg. And I feel confident from what she has said and done in these past four years that she would gladly accept a proposal to enter in on a lifetime of work like that with me.
>
> But it is just as evident to me that Ruth does not want to go to a foreign mission field. She would not think of going herself, I'm sure. If she did go, it would be because she loved a fellow who wanted to go and therefore wished to enter the life that he had felt himself called to. Ordinarily, that would be fine. But in a proposition that involves so many sacrifices as the foreign work obviously does, particularly the separation from friends and the family . . . , it seems to me to be essential that she definitely wants to enter of her own free will. Perhaps this is asking too much.

It is revealing that this late in their relationship, Ruth continued to have strong reservations about foreign mission work. Yet Ed was increasingly insistent that this was the direction toward which he felt divinely drawn. Needless to say, this tension had led to considerable discussion between them, and its resolution was evidently still in the future. He then elaborated, with remarkable equanimity, on the possible courses of their relationship:

> You can see, if you've been able to follow through this rambling letter—I only wish we could talk personally about all this—that the situation is doubly difficult. For each of us, two of the three major decisions of life are hanging in the balance: first, the choice of life's work; second, the choice of life's companion. But I feel that in this case, the first so definitely affects the latter that we should not proceed with deciding the second until the first has been settled. I hate to think of what would happen if each of us conscientiously came to different conclusions on that first question. At other times, I feel that the one thing of which God has made us certain is that, whatever happens, Ruth and I would

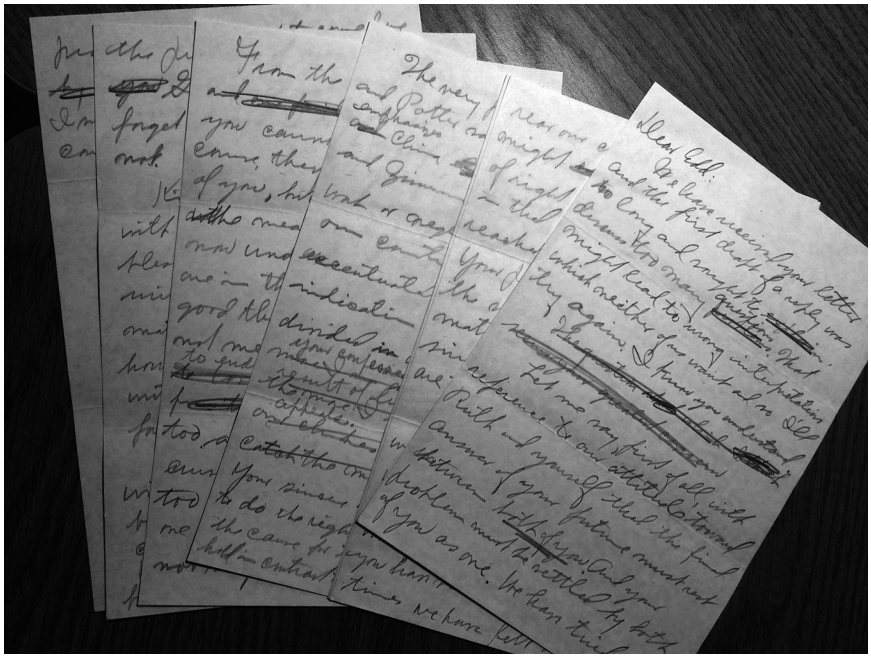
> sincerely like to experience it together. When I feel this way, I want to write you and ask if that proposition has your blessing and whole-hearted approval. But then I ask myself, "If I were a father or mother, would I be happy to let my daughter accept a proposal with such an uncertain future for her?" And furthermore, would Ruth, with the common sense she possesses, want to accept such at this stage of the game?

Was he asking Ruth's parents for permission to marry her? Was he giving them an excuse to refuse him? In either case, it must have been one of the most extraordinary prenuptial letters a prospective father-in-law had ever received. In the end, Ed saw fit to leave the final response in Ruth's hands.

Then, as if to cover all bases in the eventuality that Ruth might ultimately concur with his vocational preferences, the letter shifted focus one more time. Ed became practical:

> A fact and a question: Within the next two or three weeks, I hope to have accumulated enough money to purchase a decent—but not too expensive—diamond ring. I won't have to get it right then, of course. What I would like to know is this: considering your own feelings and desires on this whole matter and knowing, I trust, how Ruth would react to a proposal that involved an uncertain future, do you think it would be wise, in a Christian sense, for Ruth and me to become engaged soon and make the decision about life's work jointly? Or do you believe that we could be more certain to come to the happiest conclusion by waiting until the first question about my life's work was answered (for the immediate future, at least) before tackling the second? Perhaps you feel that you cannot speak definitely for either side, which will leave us just where we are now, not by any means the worst thing that can happen.

One can imagine the mixed feelings with which Miner and Dureth Stegenga must have received this circuitous letter requesting (qualified) permission for their daughter's hand in marriage! On the one hand, they certainly appreciated the continuity in family connections and Reformed Church traditions which would be fulfilled in this union. On

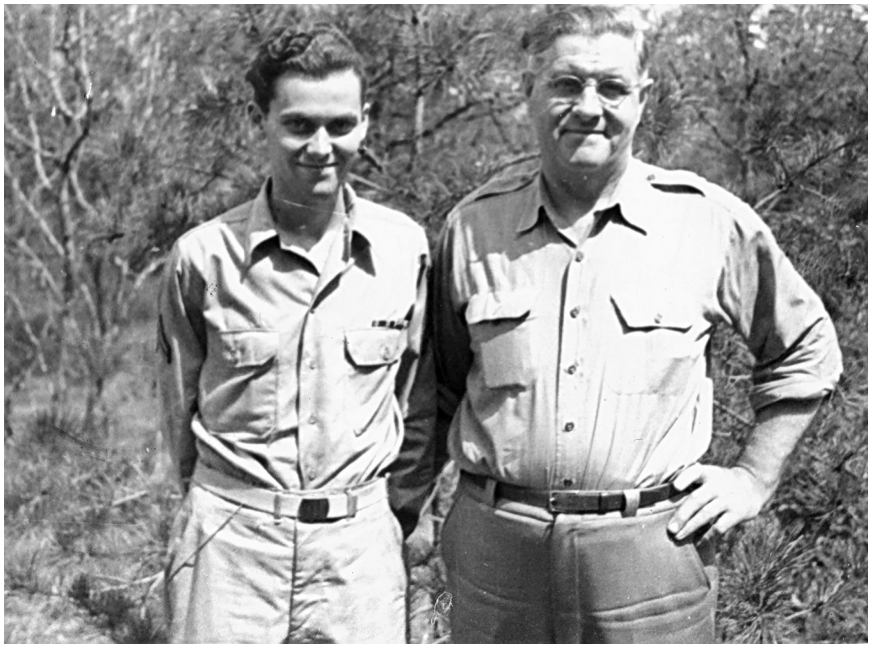


Miner Stegenga's draft response to "Eddi"

the other, they must have been as confused as Ed about what the future would hold.

Although the letter which was sent back to Ed from his "Friends" does not remain, there is a draft of that letter in Miner's hand. "Dear Eddi," he began, and then revealed his own ambivalence about the issues under consideration: "We have received your letter, and the first draft of a reply was too long and sought to discuss too many questions. That might lead to wrong interpretations which neither of us want[s], and so I'll try again. I know you understand." The revised reply continued:

> Let me say, first of all, with reference to our attitude toward Ruth and yourself that the final answer of your future must rest between *both of you*. And your problem must be settled by both of you as one. We have tried to rear our children so that they might have standards of right and wrong and guide them in that way, so that decisions reached by them might be right. Your parents have likely done the same. That complicates matters now, for both of you are sincere and conscientious and are trying to live up to that standard.
>
> From our own angle, we have always hoped that whoever might be led into our family circle might fully enjoy our home



Preston "Pres" Stegenga (*left*) and Rev. Miner Stegenga in army uniform, summer 1943

> with us. As you have been with us at different times we have felt that way toward you and hope that you have felt that way too. Speaking of your engagement, the time of it, etc., Mother and I feel again that that must be done between yourselves, and in it you have our blessing. (MS undated draft letter, Spring 1943)

With the caveat that the decision about the future was in the young couple's hands, and with the assurance of Miner and Dureth's blessing, Miner turned to the presenting dilemma with some words of advice and caution.

> The problem suggested by your work is indeed a complicated one, and I cannot presume to settle it. I am wondering, however, whether the [Foreign] Board takes into consideration the uncertainty of the outcome of this war in the appointment of men for training, etc. It may well be that all Christian manpower [will] be needed in this country. The future alone can tell what the world may have in store for us; the present work makes a demand upon all our time. I wish we could talk together about all of that, for the chances of partial explanations of our meaning

> are too great. I am convinced that the war is not going to settle our problems, but Christianity in the war will help much. If that doesn't help, we're sunk. Probably America and the American churches need to learn that fully as much as foreign lands.

The Stegengas' ambivalence about their daughter's impending nuptials was trumped by their greater concern about the possibility of her being taken to another country. This concern was not unfounded; within the previous year, Miner and Dureth's only son, Preston ("Pres"), had enlisted in the army and would soon be shipped to the European Theater. The prospect of also losing their daughter to foreign uncertainties only added to their anguish and reluctance. Permission for marriage was circuitously asked for, and it was just as circuitously granted. These formal, yet heartfelt, exchanges initiated a relationship which ultimately matured into one of deep mutual affection between father and son-in-law.

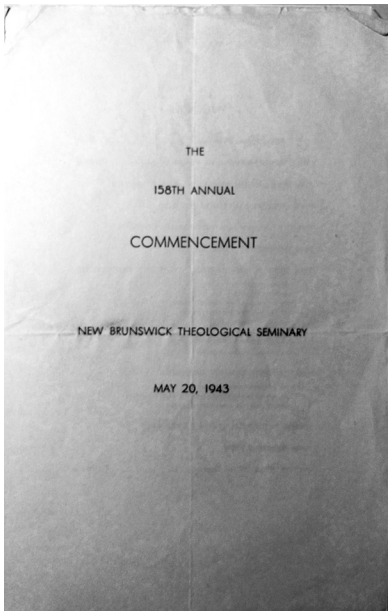
CHAPTER 2

An Interval of Transitions

Few records remain of what must have been a whirlwind of deliberations and negotiations in the lives of Ruth Stegenga and Ed Luidens during that spring of 1943. In the coming months, a drove of life-transforming decisions were enacted and milestones achieved. Ed and Ruth were engaged on Palm Sunday, April 18, 1943. Hard on the heels of their engagement was the completion of Ed's seminary training and his formal graduation, which was celebrated on May 20, 1943.

As was her wont, once Ruth had made her commitments to Ed and to the life as a missionary, she threw all her cards into the game. The July 2, 1943, cover of the denomination's weekly journal, the *Intelligencer-Leader*, portrayed seven young people who had been "commissioned" at the annual General Synod in June to serve as missionaries of the RCA. Prominent among them were Ruth Stegenga (soon to be Luidens) and Edwin Luidens.

Ed and Ruth were married on September 4, 1943, Ed's twenty-fifth birthday, at Grove Church. Following a honeymoon in New York City, followed by the obligatory stay at Niagara Falls, they found themselves on September 14 in Rochester. There, under the aegis of the Classis of


THE

158TH ANNUAL

COMMENCEMENT

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

MAY 20, 1943

Ed's graduation program,
NBTS, May 1943

Rochester[1], Ed was ordained as Minister of the Word in the Reformed Church. Participants in the ceremony included Rev. Dr. John Van Ess, who delivered a magisterial sermon on "Christ, the King," and Anthony Luidens, who presented the "charge to the candidate" in which the young minister was given his religious marching orders.

The primary center for Arabic language training for military and diplomatic personnel during World War II was Princeton University. There, young trainees were sent in anticipation of either diplomatic careers or more clandestine, war-related work in the Arabic speaking world.[2] So it was to Princeton, New Jersey, that the young couple decamped in mid-September 1943. Ed enrolled in a Master of Theology program at Princeton Theological Seminary so that both could take Arabic courses at the nearby university.

The cloistered rhythms of graduate school life set the tone for Ruth and Ed's first year of marriage. Married student housing was a

1 A "classis" is the local judicatory in the RCA which oversees a minister's professional life.

2 In a 5 May 1943, announcement in the *Princeton Bulletin* (the abbreviated, wartime version of the *Daily Princetonian*), President Dodd described the role of Princeton University in educating military personnel: "These reserve corps students, numbering presumably not less than 400 or 500, will be in uniform and will live under military discipline; but their work will be for the most part in nontechnical subjects—language and literature, history and the social sciences, mathematics and pure science" (p. 39).

The Intelligencer-Leader

A Christian Weekly Serving the Reformed Church in America

July 2, 1943

Photo by Bud De Wo

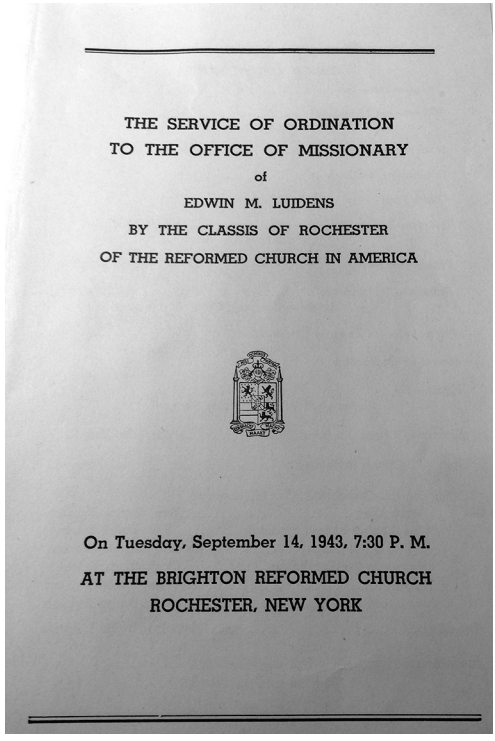
New missionaries commissioned on Sunday evening, June 6, at the meeting of the General Synod, Buck Hill Falls, Pa. Rev. and Mrs. Andrew Branche, Rev. and Mrs. Garold Van Engen, Miss Ruth Stegenga, Mr. Edwin Luidens, and Miss Glady Kooy.

Cover of the *Intelligencer-Leader*, July 1943; Ruth Stegenga (*third from right*) and Ed Luidens (*second from right*)

communal affair, and privacy was in short supply. Nonetheless, they found their neighbors to be congenial ones, some of whom they retained as lifelong friends and several of whom they met again in the Middle East.

Down the street from their lodgings at Tennant Hall was the white clapboard house whose tousled-hair occupant was a daily sight

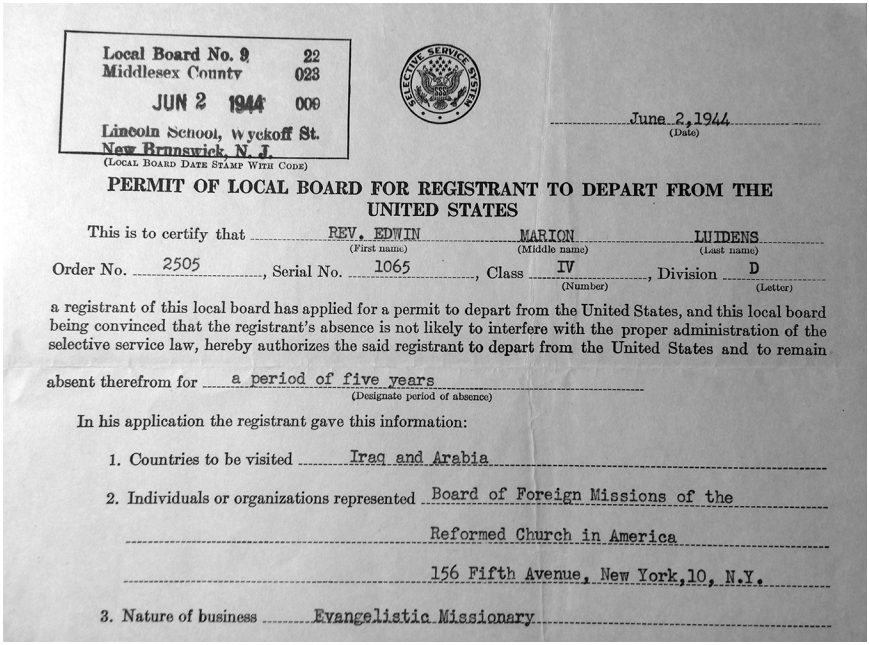
Ed and Ruth Luidens
on their wedding day,
4 September , 1943



THE SERVICE OF ORDINATION
TO THE OFFICE OF MISSIONARY
of
EDWIN M. LUIDENS
BY THE CLASSIS OF ROCHESTER
OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

On Tuesday, September 14, 1943, 7:30 P. M.
AT THE BRIGHTON REFORMED CHURCH
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

Ed's ordination program,
14 September, 1943



Local Board No. 9 22
Middlesex County 023
JUN 2 1944 009
Lincoln School, Wyckoff St.
New Brunswick, N. J.
(Local Board Date Stamp With Code)

June 2, 1944
(Date)

PERMIT OF LOCAL BOARD FOR REGISTRANT TO DEPART FROM THE UNITED STATES

This is to certify that REV. EDWIN (First name) MARION (Middle name) LUIDENS (Last name)

Order No. 2505, Serial No. 1065, Class IV (Number), Division D (Letter)

a registrant of this local board has applied for a permit to depart from the United States, and this local board being convinced that the registrant's absence is not likely to interfere with the proper administration of the selective service law, hereby authorizes the said registrant to depart from the United States and to remain absent therefrom for a period of five years (Designate period of absence)

In his application the registrant gave this information:

1. Countries to be visited Iraq and Arabia
2. Individuals or organizations represented Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, 10, N.Y.
3. Nature of business Evangelistic Missionary

Permission from the draft board for Ed Luidens to travel to "Iraq and Arabia" as an "Evangelistic Missionary"

as Ruth and Ed walked to class. Albert Einstein, always followed by a bodyguard, was also enjoying the peacefully idyllic retreat that was Princeton, contemplating the cataclysmic power of the atom.

Ed completed his graduate work in June 1944, and the young couple bent their energies to prepare for their fall departure.

The summer of 1944 was still very much a time of war, and that required that draft-age Ed obtain permission from the Selective Service System to leave the United States. His draft card, registered on October 16, 1940, had been signed by his Aunt Ethel Luidens as the registrar for New Brunswick, New Jersey, so his standing with the draft board was undoubtedly a good one. On June 2, 1944, permission was granted to Ed to sojourn for "a period of five years" in the "countries" of "Iraq and Arabia" for the purpose of "Evangelistic Missionary" work.

In the spring and summer of 1944, travel plans were made for Ed and Ruth to trek to Basrah, Iraq, for two years of intensified language training. It was determined that they would be accompanied by two nurses, Jeannette Boersma and Harriet Wanrooy, who were also heading to the Middle East as novice missionaries. Jeannette became a lifelong Reformed Church missionary serving initially in Amarah, Iraq,

and then spending the bulk of her career in Muscat, Oman. Harriet was a short-term missionary who worked in Bahrain for three years before marrying a Britisher and settling in England.[3] Although they did not know each other well, all four were glad for the company, and they became fast friends.

The initial plans were for the four to sail from Philadelphia to Lisbon on a Portugese liner. Portugal was officially neutral in the all-enveloping war, so passage aboard Portugese ships or stopovers in Portugese ports were considered relatively safe. The SS *Colonial* was scheduled to leave in mid-October for a two-week crossing. Upon arrival in Lisbon, the Quartet (as they came to call themselves) was to transfer to another Portugese liner which would take them around the Cape of Good Hope to the Portugese colony of Mozambique. From Lourenco Marquis,[4] its capital, they would sail to Portugese Goa on the west coast of India and then make their way overland to Bombay where they would board a British-India steamship for Basrah, Iraq. It was anticipated that the entire trip would take about six months. Accompanying them in their staterooms would be their travel bags, and in the holds of the ships would be several large trunks and crates full of the housewares, clothing, and utensils they would need for establishing a new life.

In early October, the young couple made a last pilgrimage to Rochester to embrace the Luidens parents. It was a bittersweet time, for all knew the parting would be for more than five years, and the uncertainty of the war made even that estimate a doubtful one. In a farewell postcard to his parents mailed from the train station in Syracuse on his way to Philadelphia, Ed wrote:

> When I saw you [from the train window], I was afraid you wouldn't see me. Did you hear me "bang" on the window?? It was good we could wave there, wasn't it!! I suddenly felt as though I hadn't thanked you enough for all the hours we had spent together, for all the talks and visits, for all the rides and walks, for the cheery goodnights at bedtime, for the love you both showed day after day, for the interest in our work, and for the countless little things that went to make up such a pleasant stay at home with you all. Thanks for arranging your work so that we could have so many evenings together. . . . Lots of love from *your son*, Ed. (EML 44.10.07)

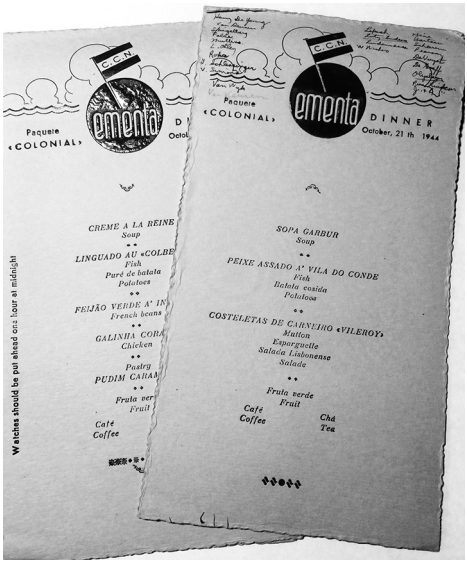
[3] Boersma recounted her missionary career in *Grace in the Gulf,* in which she also mentions Wanrooy's "happy marriage" (pp. 27-28).

[4] Lourenco Marquis is now known as Maputo.

Ed and Ruth in front of the Sylvania Hotel, Philadelphia,
on the eve of their departure, October 17, 1944

The Stegenga family, enlarged by several members of the Grove Church congregation, made the short journey from northern New Jersey to Philadelphia for the embarkation. They enjoyed "roaming around in Wanamakers" and having "dinner in Schraffts," landmark establishments in Philadelphia. A delightful picture of Ed and Ruth standing arm in arm in front of the Sylvania Hotel, where they stayed for their final night before departure, reveals a happy young couple on the doorstep of the adventure of a lifetime. Then it was Tuesday, October 17, and the intrepid voyagers made their way to the pier. "At about 4 pm, 16 army-navy time, . . . we boarded the Portugese steamer '*Colonial*' at Dock D, Port Richmond, just outside Philadelphia," Ed wrote at the beginning of an extended account of the trip.[5] Once checked in, Ed and Ruth were lodged in cabin 34, their trunks and crates carefully stowed in the ship's hold. Last minute cables were received, including one from the Alto Reformed Church in Wisconsin:

[5] During their crossing, Ed and Ruth wrote almost daily about their experiences aboard ship. This travelogue/letter, posted from Lisbon, runs to twelve, single-spaced pages and serves as a rich resource about their Atlantic crossing, the new friends they made, and the impending encounters they anticipated. Unless otherwise indicated, the following quotations come from that source.



Menus from the SS *Colonial*

ALO [*sic*] CONGREGATION PRAYS GODS BLESSING PROSPEROUS VOYAGE FRUITEFUL [*sic*] MINISTRY = J C VAN WYK. (JCVW 44.10.17)

The trans-Atlantic passage, which began at about seven o'clock on the morning of the eighteenth, was a remarkably relaxing and refreshing one, filled with spectacular weather and an abundance of fine food. All this, in spite of the ever-present threat of German U-boat attacks. The first day provided a reminder of that grim possibility as they sailed at a leisurely pace "down the rivers and through the bays that connect Philadelphia's ports with the Atlantic":

> We were mightily impressed with the border patrols of our nation during our afternoon's ride. Several times army and navy planes droned by overhead, some at great height in echelons of three, some single ones whizzed past right overhead. At one time two navy boats resembling the famed PT type of vessel, small, heavy, and speedy roared in from the sea. Where they had been, no one knew. We all watched their gray hulls plow through the waves, the second coming down the wake of the first. Their bass-voiced motors emitted a noise resembling an amplification of both notes of the "B-O" foghorn heard on our American radio programs. . . .
>
> As we promenaded on the first class balcony (where we have spent much time already, since its chairs are more comfortable [than those of the second class lounge] and scarcely ever fully

> occupied), we ran into a most startling sign. It was on the back of a navy blue jacket leaning over the rail: "US Navy." When the jacket turned around at our ejaculation, it turned out to be a young man of our age. He was a navy guard aboard this neutral vessel until it reached the limit of the United States' territorial waters. Three such navy men with an officer-pilot were aboard, we learned. They were to be picked up in a short time.

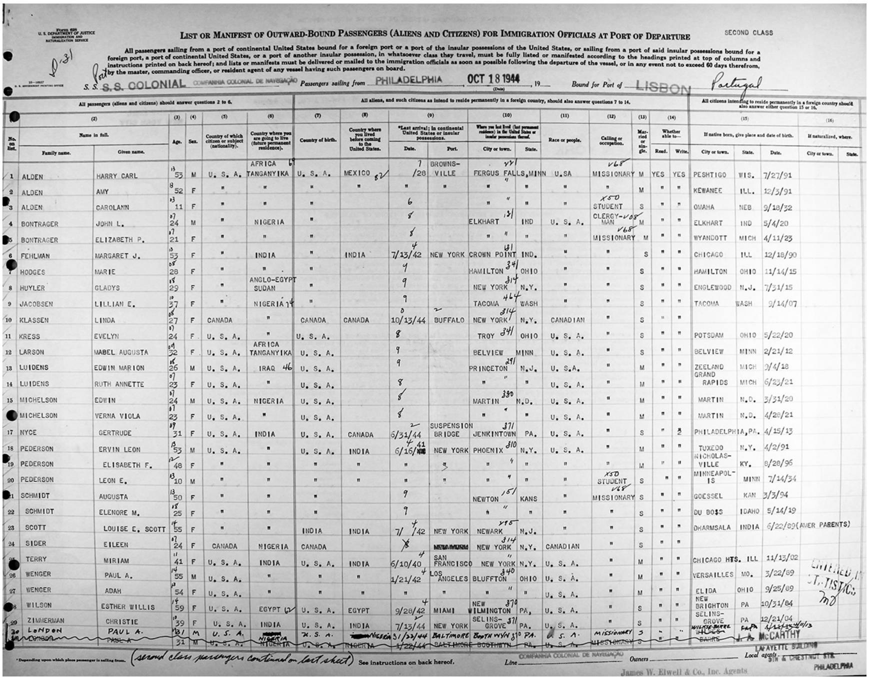
When the SS *Colonial* headed out into the Atlantic on the evening of the eighteenth, the searchlights were lit and trained "on the wooden-slat painted flag which was erected in sturdy, wind-resisting fashion on the back of the boat." It was this flag of Portugal that was presumed to guarantee the neutrality of the ship and its passengers and to protect them from German attack when the vessel was no longer in American waters.

Once they had left the protection of the US coastline, more mundane matters took over. Ed described their quarters in extravagant detail, even using seminautical terminology:

> Our cabin is on the port side, toward the rear. It is quite spacious, having room for four sleepers (though scarcely enough for four people dressing, nor indeed for their clothes). . . . Our cabin is provided with numerous hooks at various heights and angles—very handy—with two lights, an electric fan in the ceiling, four mattresses, eight pillows, two blankets, running water, . . . a throw rug, two heavy towels (N.B. to Dad S.: we are using our own face towels rather than our hands or the corners of the bath towels; this is much handier; Ruth has good foresight!), one porthole which will be on the north side of the ship for the major part of the trip.

Much to their pleasure, Ruth and Ed found that the ship was filled with missionaries, new and well worn, traveling to postings in Asia and Africa, as well as with a polyglot mix of passengers bound for Europe.[6] Many of the missionaries, like Ed and Ruth, were in their early twenties. Even the "veterans" were only in their thirties and forties. Taking advantage of the Allies' June invasion of France and the

[6] Among the passengers listed on the official ship manifest is a Portugese, Joao Martins De Oliveira, described as having come to the United States from Brazil and being on board as a "Deportee." Presumably Joao was not sufficiently neutral in his activities while visiting the United States.



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE

LIST OR MANIFEST OF OUTWARD-BOUND PASSENGERS (ALIENS AND CITIZENS) FOR IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS AT PORT OF DEPARTURE — SECOND CLASS

All passengers sailing from a port of continental United States bound for a foreign port or a port of the insular possessions of the United States, or sailing from a port of said insular possessions bound for a foreign port, a port of continental United States, or a port of another insular possession, in whatsoever class they travel, must be fully listed or manifested according to the headings printed at top of columns and instructions printed on back hereof; and lists or manifests must be delivered or mailed to the immigration officials as soon as possible following the departure of the vessel, or in any event not to exceed 60 days therefrom, by the master, commanding officer, or resident agent of any vessel having such passengers on board.

S. S. S.S. COLONIAL COMPANHIA COLONIAL DE NAVEGAÇÃO Passengers sailing from PHILADELPHIA, OCT 18 1944 (Date), 19__ Bound for Port of LISBON Portugal

No. on list	Family name	Given name	Age	Sex	Country of which citizen or subject (nationality)	Country where you are going to live (future permanent residence)	Country of birth	Country where you lived before coming to the United States	Last arrival: Date	Last arrival: Port	Where you last lived: City or town	State	Race or people	Calling or occupation	Married or single	Read	Write	If native born: City or town	State	Date
1	ALDEN	HARRY CARL	53	M	U. S. A.	AFRICA TANGANYIKA	U. S. A.	MEXICO	7/28	BROWNSVILLE	FERGUS FALLS	MINN	U.SA	MISSIONARY	M	YES	YES	PESHTIGO	WIS.	7/27/91
2	ALDEN	AMY	52	F	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	M	"	"	KEWANEE	ILL.	12/3/91
3	ALDEN	CAROLANN	11	F	"	"	"		6		"	"	"	STUDENT	S	"	"	OMAHA	NEB	9/18/32
4	BONTRAGER	JOHN L.	24	M	"	NIGERIA	"		8		ELKHART	IND	U. S. A.	CLERGYMAN	M	"	"	ELKHART	IND	5/4/20
5	BONTRAGER	ELIZABETH P.	21	F	"	"	"		8		"	"	"	MISSIONARY	M	"	"	WYANDOTT	MICH	4/11/23
6	FEHLMAN	MARGARET J.	53	F	"	INDIA	"	INDIA	7/13/42	NEW YORK	CROWN POINT	IND.	"	"	S	"	"	CHICAGO	ILL	12/18/90
7	HODGES	MARIE	28	F	"	"	"		9		HAMILTON	OHIO	"	"	S	"	"	HAMILTON	OHIO	11/14/15
8	HUYLER	GLADYS	29	F	"	ANGLO-EGYPT SUDAN	"		9		NEW YORK	N.Y.	"	"	S	"	"	ENGLEWOOD	N.J.	7/31/15
9	JACOBSEN	LILLIAN E.	37	F	"	NIGERIA	"		9		TACOMA	WASH	"	"	S	"	"	TACOMA	WASH	9/14/07
10	KLASSEN	LINDA	27	F	CANADA	"	CANADA	CANADA	10/13/44	BUFFALO	NEW YORK	N.Y.	CANADIAN	"	S	"	"			
11	KRESS	EVELYN	24	F	U. S. A.	"	U. S. A.		8		TROY	OHIO	U. S. A.	"	S	"	"	POTSDAM	OHIO	5/22/20
12	LARSON	MABEL AUGUSTA	32	F	U. S. A.	AFRICA TANGANYIKA	U. S. A.		9		BELVIEW	MINN	U. S. A.	"	S	"	"	BELVIEW	MINN	2/21/12
13	LUIDENS	EDWIN MARION	26	M	U. S. A.	IRAQ	U. S. A.		9		PRINCETON	N.J.	U. S.A.	"	M	"	"	ZEELAND	MICH	9/4/18
14	LUIDENS	RUTH ANNETTE	23	F	U. S. A.	"	U. S. A.		8		"	"	U. S. A.	"	M	"	"	GRAND RAPIDS	MICH	6/23/21
15	MICHELSON	EDWIN	24	M	U. S. A.	NIGERIA	U. S. A.		8		MARTIN	N.D.	U. S. A.	"	M	"	"	MARTIN	N.D.	3/31/20
16	MICHELSON	VERNA VIOLA	23	F	U. S. A.	"	U. S. A.		8		"	"	U. S. A.	"	M	"	"	MARTIN	N.D.	4/28/21
17	NYCE	GERTRUDE	31	F	U. S. A.	INDIA	U. S. A.	CANADA	6/31/44	SUSPENSION BRIDGE	JENKINTOWN	PA.	U. S. A.	"	S	"	"	PHILADELPHIA	PA.	4/15/13
18	PEDERSON	ERVIN LEON	53	M	U. S. A.	"	U. S. A.	INDIA	6/16/41	NEW YORK	PHOENIX	N.Y.	U. S. A.	"	M	"	"	TUXEDO	N.Y.	4/2/91
19	PEDERSON	ELISABETH F.	48	F	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	M	"	"	NICHOLASVILLE	KY.	8/28/96
20	PEDERSON	LEON E.	10	M	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	STUDENT	S	"	"	MINNEAPOLIS	MINN	7/14/34
21	SCHMIDT	AUGUSTA	50	F	"	"	"		9		NEWTON	KANS	"	MISSIONARY	S	"	"	GOESSEL	KAN	3/3/94
22	SCHMIDT	ELENORE M.	25	F	"	"	"		9		"	"	"	"	S	"	"	DU BOSS	IDAHO	5/14/19
23	SCOTT	LOUISE E. SCOTT	55	F	"	"	INDIA	INDIA	7/ /42	NEW YORK	NEWARK	N.J.	"	"	S	"	"	DHARMSALA	INDIA	6/22/89 (AMER PARENTS)
24	SIDER	EILEEN	24	F	CANADA	NIGERIA	CANADA				NEW YORK	N.Y.	CANADIAN	"	S	"	"			
25	TERRY	MIRIAM	41	F	U. S. A.	INDIA	U. S. A.	INDIA	6/10/40	SAN FRANCISCO	NEW YORK	N.Y.	U. S. A.	"	M	"	"	CHICAGO HTS.	ILL	11/13/02
26	WENGER	PAUL A.	55	M	U. S. A.	"	"	"	1/21/42	LOS ANGELES	BLUFFTON	OHIO	U. S. A.	"	M	"	"	VERSAILLES	MO.	3/22/89
27	WENGER	ADAH	54	F	U. S. A.	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	U. S. A.	"	M	"	"	ELIDA	OHIO	9/25/89
28	WILSON	ESTHER WILLIS	59	F	U. S. A.	EGYPT	U. S. A.	EGYPT	9/28/42	MIAMI	NEW WILMINGTON	PA.	U. S. A.	"	S	"	"	NEW BRIGHTON	PA	10/31/84
29	ZIMMERMAN	CHRISTIE	39	F	U. S. A.	INDIA	U. S. A.	INDIA	7/13/44	NEW YORK	SELINS-GROVE	PA.	U. S. A.	"	S	"	"	SELINS-GROVE	PA	12/21/04
30	LONDON	PAUL A.	31	M	U. S. A.	NIGERIA	U. S. A.	NIGERIA	3/22/44	BALTIMORE	BOOTHWYN	PA.	U. S. A.	MISSIONARY	S	"	"	WILKES-BARRE	PA.	4/11/13

*Depending upon which place passenger is sailing from. (second class passengers continued on last sheet) See instructions on back hereof. Line COMPANHIA COLONIAL DE NAVEGAÇÃO Owners ____ J. A. McCARTHY LAFAYETTE BUILDING 5th & CHESTNUT STS. PHILADELPHIA Local agents. James W. Elwell & Co., Inc. Agents

ENTERED IN STATISTICS

Passenger manifest from the SS *Colonial* listing Ruth and Ed and their destination as Iraq

growing evidence that the Nazis were retreating to the Rhine borders, these fellow passengers were eager to return to prewar stations. With mathematical precision, Ed enumerated the seventy-plus missionaries and their related denominations:

> I don't know if we have indicated to you some of the groups which have missionaries aboard the "*Colonial*." Bapt[ist] Cameroon Miss[ion] – 5; Disciples of Christ – 11; United Lutheran – 3; Augustana Luth[eran] – 4; Meth[odist] Ch[urch] – 4; Mennonite Brethren – 4; Mennonite – 4; Pres[byterian] USA – 9; Amer[ican] Pres[byterian] – 9; United Pres[byterian] – 6; Sudan Interior Miss[ions] – 8; Ref[ormed Church] – 4.

While ecumenical interaction among this disparate collation of American Protestantism was constant and generally pleasant, it was not always so. Missionaries were sent under different funding circumstances, with different educational backgrounds, and with widely divergent worship styles and theological orientations. These contrasts became increasingly apparent as the voyage progressed. On

both of the Sundays aboard ship, along with the daily Bible classes, responsibility for worship was shared among the multiple groups, a cooperation which was not always easy. In a December letter to his parents, Ed described some of the points of rub:

> On the ship coming across the Atlantic we had over seventy missionaries, as we said before. Many of them were so-called "faith missions," which is a very unhappy misnomer, I believe.[7] There were points at which we realized we differed from each other, but all in all, we had a good fellowship and friendship together. One problem was that of the services. The Pres[byterians], U[nited] P[resbyterians], Reformed and Methodist groups were favorable to the type of service to which we are accustomed. The others favored more of a testimonial and chorus singing service. We had both; perhaps it was good for all of us to get out of the rut of the routine services. We really had some remarkable testimonies given. But we couldn't help noticing the effect of some of these people on the nonmissionary group aboard.
>
> For the most part, they had not had college training; several were from Moody's,[8] some had junior college. We were pondering on the Providence that directs them to a needy field where education could cause, very easily, a feeling of pride and a sense of distance between pastor and people while we, who have been unusually fortunate in our training, are directed to an area where that is recognized as a desirable prerequisite.
>
> We honestly doubted our own ability to cope with the problems of living conditions and isolation which face them even though they can use a very simple modification of English, according to their reports. We became very friendly with two of the young couples. One young fellow just my age was traveling with his wife and two nurses, just as I was. . . . They're *en route* to Nigeria, Africa. (EML 44.12.15)

Each day began with two hours or more of self-taught Arabic. Since Ed and Ruth had had a year's introduction in Princeton, they

[7] The term "faith missions" or "faith missionaries" refers to those who have to solicit their own funding rather than have it secured under denominational auspices. This practice has been widely used among the more fundamentalist and evangelical groups who often have a more fluid denominational structure.

[8] Moody Bible Institute was founded in the mid-nineteenth century to educate evangelists for mission work as well as for pastorates in the United States. It was widely known for the passion of its graduates rather than for their intellectual strengths.

Sooren and Dorothy Topalian with Ruth and Ed at the Sintra Palace, Lisbon

become the *de facto* mentors of the nurses, Jeanette and Harriet. Neither had studied any Arabic to this point, so the lessons were rudimentary. Ruth wrote: "Thursday morning the girls had their first Arabic lesson which they prepared themselves. We had given them the alphabet on Wednesday and then Thursday they tried to repeat it after us, etc. It was really quite a sight to see us off in our corner, trying to do Arabic."

In their eagerness to improve their Arabic, Ed and Ruth sought out passengers who were native speakers. One Baghdad-bound couple, Sooren and Dorothy Topalian,[9] became fast friends with Ed and Ruth. Although Dorothy was an American, Sooren was Iraqi and enjoyed speaking Arabic: "We are hoping to become acquainted with them before long," Ed wrote on October 19. As the crossing continued, the Topalians became fixtures in the Luidens' retinue. By the twenty-seventh, Ruth could write:

> The rest of the afternoon we spent with the couple from Baghdad who will probably be on the same route as we [from Lisbon to Basrah]. He has connections around Damascus, so he offered to help in our transportations from that point on. They too will go around the Cape because they have a little baby, three months

[9] The "Topalian" name (they are initially referred to in the letters as "Topellian") is Armenian in origin, suggesting that the family were Christian immigrants from Ottoman Turkey into Iraq. The correct spelling will appear in the text while the original spelling(s) will be retained in the letters.

> old. They gave us some interesting ideas concerning the Near East, and we enjoyed talking to them. She is a Texan and he is a Native from Baghdad—quite a combination to say the least.

Reacting to the same conversation with their new friends, Ed came out with a very different set of insights, hinting at his own aviation interests:

> After that we went to walk the deck again and got talking with the Topellians. He is . . . a dealer in airplanes and their parts. He is an independent dealer on a commission basis. His father is an MD in Baghdad. When we started talking, I suddenly realized that this is the man who is going to help us with an airplane in the Arabian mission. It was he who started the Dept. of Aeronautics in the Iraqi Government. It was he who taught the former King, Al Ghali, to fly. He had the first chartered flying route in Iraq (Baghdad to Basrah and elsewhere). He was issued Flying License No. 1 in Iraq. And now he is going to sell planes and parts and hopes to be instrumental in the establishment of American, and perhaps British, flying bases in Iraq. This is what he says: we'll have to await developments.
>
> But it is he who said last night as we talked: I'll sell you a good plane without charging you the discount which I usually make, and I'll teach you to fly! He really meant it. Our conversations continue. We'll keep you posted.

At the same time that Mr. Topalian was expounding on the wonders of airfare,[10] Ruth and Ed were finding Mrs. Topalian to be an exotic and rare acquaintance. She was described by Ed in a later missive from Lisbon as

> his wife of over a year, a former Broadway chorus girl, tall, thin, black haired, overly lipsticked, well read, inquisitive, self concerned, yet greatly appreciative of sincere friendship, mother of three-month-old Jamilah (whom the nurses cared for on her day off with us [as they toured Lisbon together]). (EML 44.11.14)

[10] One can't help but wonder whether there were dinner conversations about *Wind, Sand, and Stars*; Topalian, as a renowned flyer himself (in an obituary, the gossip columnist Dorothy Kilgallen eulogized him as "the aviation ace of the Near East"; *Toledo Blade*, 20 October 1955), was undoubtedly acquainted with Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

As Ed and Ruth came to know the Topalians better, the missionary couple found the colorful dancer and her pilot husband to be challenging and entertaining conversationalists. In a letter composed in Cairo later in his journey, Ed wrote the following extended account of their new friends:

> Our experience with the Topalians, whose picture we sent you from Sintra, near Lisbon, was certainly unique. This Broadway chorus girl, called "Butch" Bigbee by her Broadway friends, and her world-travelling husband of one year were almost horror stricken when they found the whole second-class dining salon of the *Colonial* filled with missionaries!!! According to their stories (which came out after we had been close to them in Lisbon), they would talk with someone, then quickly return to their rooms and discuss what he had said, then set out again for more information. Some they thought to be naïve, childish, uneducated. Others impressed them as being real men and women. They became very friendly with several of the older (by that I mean those returning for 2nd, 3rd, or 4th terms) men and women. But since we were going to Iraq also and therefore faced the same problems in transportation and hoped for the same opportunities, we had much in common.
>
> Our year in Princeton stood us in good stead because we were able to talk with this Iraqui [*sic*] fellow (about 35 years old, I'd guess) about the political, economic, and social situations in which he was interested. Several times their curiosity reached the bubbling-over point, and we were privileged to have deep discussions with them about religion and Jesus Christ. The girl, sent by her parents to a Presbyterial S[unday] S[chool] until she was eleven or twelve years old, thought that she knew pretty much about religion. She thought Jews were Christians, too, because Christ was a Jew. A sad product of our S. S. system. . . .
>
> The man was a typical educated agnostic in most respects. But it was an unusual question, or rather demand, he put constantly: I would be glad to be the most sincere Christian in the world if you can tell me how God—who must have power—can bring such suffering and destruction to innocent people or even allow it to exist (referring to the present world chaos). No other "intellectual type" question concerned him as much as that one—a rather intriguing thought. He must have done much thinking to boil it down to one question, and he must have a "heart" to

> feel the urgency of the question. We pray for the opportunity of talking more with them. (EML 44.12.15)

Between the evangelically zealous on the one hand and these new "agnostic" acquaintances on the other, it is instructive that the greater narrative energy in Ed and Ruth's letters was placed in describing the chorus girl and her world-traveling consort.

Lisbon in the late fall of 1944 was rife with rumors, rascals, and refugees. It was one of the last "open" ports in Europe, which was embroiled in the fifth year of its convulsive conflict. In many ways, Lisbon was a safety valve for all those displaced folks desperately seeking refuge from the maelstrom. In that capacity, it also served as an open market for those willing to parlay other people's desperation into nefariously gained fortunes. Along with a steady stream of Jews fleeing from the Nazis and bound for the Americas and Nazis making their own escapes in anticipation of a post-Hitler bloodbath, there were shadowy conspirators from both Allied and Axis powers seeking an upper hand in the stealthy game of espionage. It was into this Casablanca-esque Lisbon that the SS *Colonial* sailed on the morning of November 3, 1944.

Much of the urban landscape of Lisbon reminded Ruth of the 1939 summer trip to Europe she had taken with her family. Her father, Miner Stegenga, had served as the interim pastor of the American Church of the Hague, and the family had joined him there. From that base, they traveled to London, Paris, Amsterdam, and along the Rhine into Nazi Germany. On the other hand, for Ed this great adventure was the first time he had been outside of the United States, and he breathlessly soaked in the kaleidoscopic sights which assaulted him:

> We came up through the dock areas, seeing donkey carts and women carrying heavy loads in baskets on their heads and small, junky shops and beautiful, swank, Fifth Avenue style shops, Singer Sewing machine shop, PennZoil signs, trolley cars galore, tiled houses in blue and green and tan patterns, four- and five-story buildings, fish women with bare feet, large statues and monuments, alleys that wind and bend, streets that are stairways, palm trees (some with dates), the electric car lines that run to the suburbs (reminding me of the Holland to Grand Rapids style car), and innumerable other things.

Their driver took them to the Tivoli Hotel on the grandiose Avenida de Liberdade. The Tivoli turned out to be a well-appointed hotel, and the Luidens party felt itself fortunate to experience such

Photographs and ticket stubs from touring in Lisbon

extravagance; the Tivoli "has a[s] modern [a] lobby and dining room as any I have seen anywhere else," Ed wrote home.

The contrast between the general poverty which permeated Portugese society and the opulence of the hotel district was almost overwhelming to Ed. He tried to put it within a context that would make some sense to his readers, and he came to a rather disturbing conclusion:

> We were struck nearly dumb with amazement when we first saw the modern-looking hotels and apartment buildings. There were

> many more streamlined balconies and postwar style buildings than we had seen in any city in the USA. But someone pointed out later that this was the way with countries trying to catch up with modern times and ways, especially under dictatorship. Several streets or a city's best section are put into apparently A-1 condition as a show place for the regime. (EML 44.12.15)

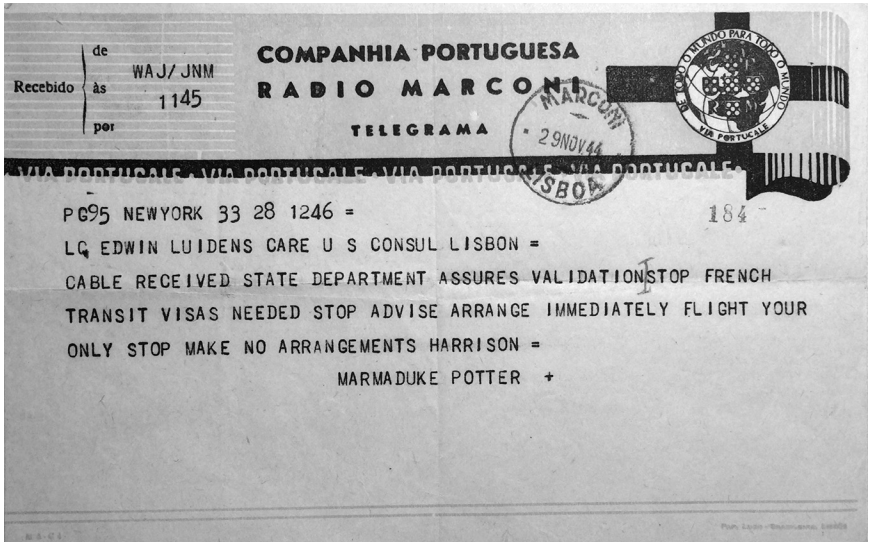
An unexpected result of the class structure in Portugese society was that Ed and Ruth, as outsiders visiting and staying in relative opulence, had declared their unwitting alliance with those who were the most fortunate. When this painful connection became apparent to him while walking through a poverty-stricken part of Lisbon, Ed sadly observed:

> Walking through those sections, one feels helpless to speak to them, for they see you as the *other* class—the wealthy, the plutocratic, the pitying passers by!! And they're right. In Lisbon we became very conscious of the two classes—the rich, propertied, owner class, and the servile, poor, enslaved class. The middle class which is so familiar to us Americans is virtually nonexistent. We had to fit into one groove or the other. We chose, partially on the basis of cleanliness, partially on the basis of appearances, partially because we looked for the best in services (to us)—but we fell into the class which inspired a sneer on the lip of the news boy, a curse on the mouth of the beggar-passed-by, and obsequious smiles on the faces of servants. (EML 44.12.15)

Despite these disquieting observations, Ed and Ruth were taking in the larger scene with considerable relish. In a Tuesday, November 7, letter to his parents, the first written in Lisbon, Ed gave evidence of his interest in the robust market scene in this lively capital:

> The shopping district simply fascinates me. The shops are small, busy, attractive, well kept, with modern stuff displayed in modern fashion. It seems that half of the display signs are like those at home, only with Portugese words substituted. Colgate's Dental Cream (large) is $1.40 a tube. But watches, Swiss made, sell as low as six dollars, beauties for fifteen to twenty!![11]

[11] According to the 2 January 1944, *New York Times*, four fluid ounces of "liquid toothpaste" sold for twenty-one cents in New York. A 19 September 1944, *New York Times* advertisement for Gubelin watches from Switzerland listed them for "$33. [and] up."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LQ EDWIN LUIDENS CARE U S CONSUL LISBON =
CABLE RECEIVED STATE DEPARTMENT ASSURES VALIDATIONSTOP FRENCH
TRANSIT VISAS NEEDED STOP ADVISE ARRANGE IMMEDIATELY FLIGHT YOUR
ONLY STOP MAKE NO ARRANGEMENTS HARRISON =
MARMADUKE POTTER +

Cable to Ed in Lisbon from Duke Potter in New York City regarding travel arrangements, dated November 29, 1944

> The people here go SSSSSt (hiss it) to call a cab or "whistle" at a friend. The hats are definitely Paree! Ahead of USA in styles—which are in—large, voluminous, high-fronted felt hats. The Portugese edition of *Readers Digest* must have come over on the *Colonial*, for Saturday we were mobbed on every corner and on every tram and in every store by little boys and old men yelling "*S'leshoish*" (Selecois de R.D.)[12]; Friday we had not heard it; Sunday it was all over. They must have sold quickly.[13] (EML 44.11.07)

Travel plans were the cause of major concern and ongoing ingenuity. The Quartet had intended to take the SS *Nyassa*, another Portugese liner, around South Africa to Madagascar and then to Goa. Ed regularly communicated via cables with the New York office of the mission board about their status. In a later letter from Cairo to mission executive Marmaduke "Duke" Potter, Ed explained that they had made the necessary arrangements to follow this intended route.

12 Presumably Ed was trying to phoneticize the Portugese term *seleções*, which means "selections [of *Readers Digest*]."

13 The October 1944 issue of *Reader's Digest* (published in Canada at that point) included a number of war-related articles (such as an interview with Stalin and an account of Mussolini's "last days"), along with short stories by Anthony Abbot (the penname of Charles Fulton Oursler, later to write the best seller *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, a fictionalized life of Jesus of Nazareth) and Saki (the penname of Hector Hugo Munro).

> We arrived in Lisbon November 3rd. The next day we paid to Cook's [Travel Agency] office in Lisbon $200 hundred dollars [*sic*][14] for each person as down payment on reservations for sailing to Mormugoa, India,[15] on the *Nyassa*, which was scheduled to sail about November 25th.

These plans were, so far, in keeping with the itinerary which was outlined to the Luidens group when they were still in New York City.

However, as they began to contemplate the length of the journey, and as they heard of other travelers' alternative itineraries, they began to plot about how to cross the Mediterranean directly to Cairo or Haifa. In a letter to their parents on Friday, November 10, they attested to the major obstacles which stood in the way of these alternate routes:

> We went to the Amer[ican] Consulate Wednesday, and after much talking learned that there is no possibility of our having air transport without two things: a) military permit to travel through North Africa, which has to come from Washington, and b) army permit to use military planes (the only ones flying the route). The former is the big problem. Oncoming missionaries should have it before leaving the States to expedite the trip. Perhaps you should tell Potter. (EML 44.11.10)

As November slipped by, missionary and other friends were finding ways to continue their journeys, a bittersweet challenge to the Quartet's own immobility. On November 24 they took a taxi

> out to the airport to see the Topolians off for parts of the world to which we are headed. It was a thrill to see them slip off into the distance. We got the bug for flying, but of course, will have to wait to see if we can carry out our desires. On the way back, we met a man who is in charge of the Jewish refugees of Europe, and he gave us some more ideas concerning our departure. One surely learns a lot in a world such as this, and we are growing up fast. One of the Portuguese boats leaving for Africa sails this afternoon. We're going down to see it off. Some of the missionaries we know are on it. (RSL 44.11.24)

[14] Wartime costs were unusually high; in current values, this represents about $2,000 per person. Presumably, these were funds which Ed maintained in the form of traveler's checks (since, as was noted earlier, Americans were not allowed to take more than $50 in cash out of the country) and were used for all four RCA passengers. This suggests Ed carried more than $800 in traveler's checks.

[15] Mormugoa was the capital of Goa, a small outpost of the Portugese on the Indian subcontinent, several hundred miles south of Bombay.

Then things began to move quickly. In a December 11 letter to Potter from Cairo, Ed recounted an opportunity that presented itself through a chance conversation that a friend had had with British authorities. This conversation held great promise for an early departure, but documents were desperately needed, so Ed swung into action:

> Before Thanksgiving . . . another young missionary going to Nigeria[16] had occasion to call on the British Air Attaché in Lisbon to request air passage to his destination. She dropped the remark to him that, if he were going to Cairo, she could help him, but she could not help him to his station.
>
> He told me that day; the next day I called on that Air Attaché, a Miss Wyatt. She advised me that, if we had validations to travel over North Africa, she could very likely help us. (EML 44.12.11)

Miss Wyatt's unexpected willingness to assist in the eastward progress of the Luidens foursome set in motion a frenetic series of cables. Permission from the Office of the United States Secretary of State for these civilians to travel to Cairo was essential. Although Rommel and his Afrikakorps had been cleared out of North Africa the previous year, the Mediterranean was still very much a war zone, and permission was required for noncombatants to pass through or across it.

In consequence of Miss Wyatt's offer, cables were sent to several agencies, including one to Potter on November 21:

> POSSIBILITY FOUR FLY BY BRITISH TO CAIRO PLEASE GET NORTH AFRICA MILITARY PERMIT FROM WASHINGTON.

Pressing on all fronts, also on November 21, Ed wired to Rev. Dr. John Van Ess, the missionary in Basrah who had urged Ed to join the Arabian Mission ranks and who had preached at his ordination:

> POSSIBILITY BOERSMA WANROOY LUIDENS FLY TO CAIRO STOP NEED MILITARY PERMIT STOP ASK AMERICAN CONSUL BASRAH CABLE AMERICAN CONSUL LISBON STATING URGENCY OF OUR ARRIVAL AS REPLACEMENTS.

These cablegrams were followed up on November 25 with a communique directly to the State Department from US Ambassador Norweb in Lisbon[17]:

[16] This is the "Rev. Edwin Michelson, graduate of Rochester's German Seminary" mentioned earlier, one of Ed and Ruth's tablemates aboard the SS *Colonial*.

[17] R. Henry Norweb was appointed US Ambassador to Portugal in 1943 and served through the balance of the war. According to his obituary in the *New York Times*,

SECSTATE
WASHINGTON
4065 TWENTYFIFTH 1 PM EDWIN MARION LUIDENS BEARER PASSPORT 16281 NEW YORK SERIES INCLUDING WIFE RUTH ANNETTE STOP HARRIET MARIE WANROOY BEARER PASSPORT 16308 NEW YORK SERIES AND JEANETTE HARRIET BOERSMA BEARER PASSPORT 16371 NEW YORK SERIES ALL REPRESENTATIVES OF FOREIGN MISSIONS OF REFORMED CHURCH OF AMERICA 156 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK REQUEST VALIDATIONS FOR AIR TRAVEL VIA NORTH AFRICA TO CAIRO EGYPT EN ROUTE BASRAH IRAQ HAVE NO MILITARY PERMITS

On November 25, Ed sent Duke Potter a follow-up Radio Marconi Telegrama:

LISBON CONSUL CABLED WASHINGTON FOR FOUR NORTH AFRICAN VALIDATIONS PLEASE ASSIST.

The flurry of missives paid off in record time. Ed credited Potter for the speedy response: "With your help, the validation was authorized in Lisbon five days after the application was cabled, which we were told was quite a record." (EML 44.12.11) Passport 16281[18] was given the visa stamp of the American Embassy which "amends" the passport "to be valid for air travel via North Africa to Cairo *en route* to Basrah, Iraq—for missionary work," dated December 2, 1944, and signed by "W.E. Hagerman, Vice Consul of the United States."[19]

Travel details were maddening, and the last-minute permissions were not easy to get. In his December 3 letter to his parents (a letter begun by Ruth on December 2), Ed's frustration with the serpentine Portugese bureaucracy was palpable:

"Mr. Norweb was sent as Ambassador to Portugal to head the negotiations for establishing the United States air base in the Azores" (4 October 1983).

18 Passport 16281 was issued to Ed and Ruth, activated as of 1 September 1944, and (initially) good only through 1 March 1945; it had to be renewed regularly at US embassies or consulates. On 27 August 1947, it was amended at the Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, consulate to "exclude wife—Ruth Annette S." Following the birth of Donald in the spring of 1947, and in anticipation of future travel on her own, Ruth was issued her own passport. Her picture in the old passport, number 16281, has a large "X" drawn through it.

19 According to State Department records, Worthington E. Hagerman served as vice consul in Paris on the eve of World War II and was then reposted to Lisbon: http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/united-states-dept-of-state/foreign-service-list-volume-1944-tin/page-6-foreign-service-list-volume-1944-tin.shtml.

Now it's Sunday evening. We have just returned to our room after another busy day. It's really quite amazing to me to sit down at the end of the day and think of how busy I've been arranging for our travel. In the States you look at a timetable, go down to the station a few minutes before the train time, buy a ticket, and climb aboard. But this is quite different. There are so many details, so many permits to get, so many uncertain factors involved, so many offices to clear with, so many governments to receive OKs from, so many trolley cars to take to get there that one goes besirk [*sic*] in a few hours. . . .

Just exactly all that's happened in the last few days would be hard to describe in chronological order. The situation at present is this. We still have our *Nyassa* reservations. We have our North African validations (permission to fly over N.A.) in our passports. Miss Wyatt, British Air Attache, is wiring Gibralter [*sic*] for permission for us to fly from there to Cairo at the next possible opportunity. We await Gib.'s reply. These arrangements are only to Cairo. There we arrange about ongoing passage, either by air or overland, according to what seems advisable at the time.

If we fly [to Cairo], our baggage will go around from here to Lorenco-Marques by ship, be transferred to another ship[20] to go from there to Basrah. (You will recognize this as being the plan of travel which we had in mind upon leaving the States.) Cook's Travel Agency will handle the whole thing for us, they say. I have assurance that their representative in L-M is a very reliable, English man. This is from Cooks and other sources. This seems much more certain than having it wait to go thru the Med. on a boat which may (it is still uncertain) go thru in January to Haifa; for it would have to be transfer[red] there to train for Beirut, then to another train for Damascus, then to truck to Baghdad, then to train for Basrah. It's the transfer points where trouble comes, I believe. Therefore the simpler, tho longer route seems safer.

Tomorrow we get exit visas from Port. Govnmt. And pass thru the British Passport Control Office about our air travel; also arrange about crates with Cooks. We're having our suitcases crated in one crate for the sea journey. Hope all these details

[20] There was still uncertainty in Ed's mind about which ship and which route; would the luggage go to Goa and then to Basrah via Bombay? or would it go up the east coast of Africa to Cairo and then overland to Basrah? In the end, the latter route was used.

Christmas cards drawn by Ruth and Ed while waiting in Lisbon for passage to Basrah

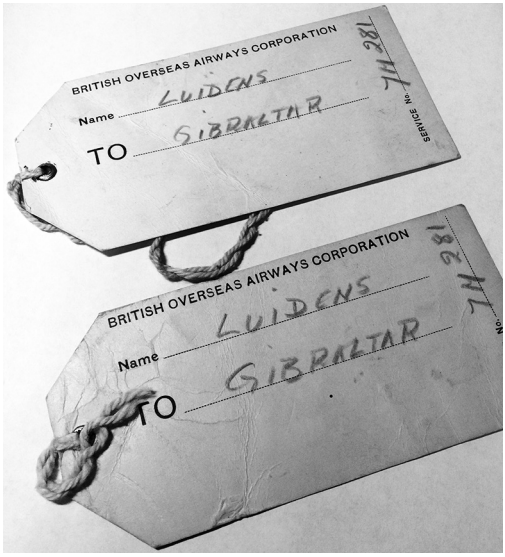
make sense as you look at them in retrospect. We'll probably be in Basrah by the time you get them. (EML 44.12.03)

During their stay in Lisbon, Ed and Ruth crafted a bundle of personalized Christmas cards, complete with sketches of holly and intricately woven ribbons. Each said "Alegre Natal e Ana Nova prospero," "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year" in Portugese. These were all mailed on December 2 with hopes that they would arrive for family and friends by Christmas. In point of fact, family and friends were not far from their minds during this whirlwind time. "We think of you both every day," Ed wrote his parents.

On Wednesday, December 6, Ed and Ruth bid adieu to Harriet and Jeannette and boarded a BOAC[21] plane for Gibraltar. This was to be the first flying experience for both of them, although Ed had fantasized about the prospect for many years. The next morning they wrote from the Rock Hotel, a magnificent, colonnaded, colonial-era behemoth nestled at the base of the famous Rock of Gibraltar. Ed positively gushed about the turn of events, although he had to restrain himself due to military censorship:

> Wow!!! Imagine this?? But here we are on the "Rock." Our hotel is on the opposite side of the Rock from that flat face you see on

[21] British Overseas Airways Corporation.



Baggage tags for Ed and Ruth's flight from Lisbon to Gibraltar, December 6, 1944

the Life Insurance picture (is it Prudential?). We are in a military zone, obviously. So we must be very careful not to say anything that should be censored. We had a very pleasant flight here. Six or eight of the people going on the *Nyassa* next week came down to wave us off. I won't say anything about the size or kind of plane we were in, but it was comfortable and in excellent condition as far as we could tell.

Ruth and I had to tend to many last-minute affairs before leaving: checking our baggage and its insurance took a lot of time; we had to pay the hotel, pack our bags (altho that's not so bad, since they only allow 20 kilograms, which is about 44 pounds, per person), tip the servants, tell goodbye to everyone we met. (We were the first ones to fly during our period in Lisbon,[22] altho several have gone on by air before we arrived there. Passage for the nurses [Jeanette and Harriet] is assured for "very soon.") (EML 44.12.07)

It was to Cairo that they flew aboard a Royal Air Force aircraft after leaving Gibraltar. Flying to Cairo was a mysterious enterprise, made all the more so because they were civilians traveling aboard a military transport.[23] Moreover, "Of course, we can't tell [you] how many

[22] Ed seems to have forgotten about the Topalians, who had flown on 24 November. Perhaps he was referring only to the missionary contingent.

[23] In a letter to their "folks" on 10 November 1945, Ed had the following parenthetical comment about the travels of their friend Rudy Wiens: "Rudy Wiens told us about

Exmorandi Hotel in Cairo where the "Luidens Quartet" stayed during December 1944

hours it took or what route we followed, but you can be sure, it was very interesting, and we are definitely in favor of air travel whenever and wherever it is possible," Ruth told her parents in their first letter from the Exmorandi Hotel in Cairo.

"Even the take offs and landings weren't as bad as we had been warned. How many times we talked of you and your reactions to this adventure can't be counted, for we did it again and again." (RSL 44.12.08) The nurses arrived in Cairo a day later aboard a BOAC seaplane which landed in the Nile.

Cairo was a momentous stage along the journey to Basrah. The four weary travelers breathed a prayer of thanksgiving for their safe passage so far—and then immediately confronted a new labyrinthine maze. Ed told his folks in a letter dated Sunday, December 10:

> Minute chronicles are rather dull, of course. So I will just mention what we did yesterday (Saturday, the first day we were all together

his trip. He went by RAF airplane (*exactly the same kind as that in which we flew from Gib. to Cairo*) [italics added] over Crete (where he saw the 'Dunkerque' beaches of Crete), thence to Athens." The "Dunkerque beaches" presumably refers to the battle-scared harbor and seascapes of that hotly fought over island. In a subsequent letter, Ed indicated that the transport used by both Wiens and the Luidens couple was a "Dakota" or DC-3, the workhorse of the skies. (EML 45.11.15)

in Cairo). We went to British Overseas Airways to arrange about passage to Basrah; they sent us to British Embassy; they sent us to American Consul; he is going to make application for priority rating for the nurses but is dubious about getting or asking for any priority for Ruth and me. Planes to Basrah are flying fairly frequently, we understand.

There is an overland route available, however, which offers the opportunity to see more of the country (you can't see much from two miles altitude!). So again, we have two possible routes, either one of which would be quite pleasant. There is an overnight train Cairo to Jerusalem, leaving here at 5 p.m., arriving there the next morning. It has first-class Pullman accommodations, I am told by Russ Stevenson (our friend from Princeton).[24] (EML 44.12.10)

Stuck in Cairo for another indefinite period, the increasingly frustrated travelers decided to distract themselves and enjoy the local tourist sites which loomed on the horizon:

Well, with just a little time for sightseeing, we decided to take a trolley and go out to see the pyramids. Well, we not only saw the pyramids but we got to see the way of living for many of the natives. We in America don't know how fortunate we are to have a country that stresses cleanliness. The places some of these poor folk live are surely in need of cleaning up, etc.

Well, after a long ride, we came to Giza where a guide immediately stopped us and talked and argued and persuaded us that we needed a guide around the pyramids. Well, we said O.K., and we proceeded to climb the hill on which the largest pyramid stands. It covers thirteen acres and is 450 [ft.] high. It was a thrill to see it, and we were impressed by the years represented by such a structure built in 3733 B.C. The time and effort that it must have taken to put stone upon stone is beyond imagination.

We also saw some tombs underground where a skeleton was laid. The others did that; it didn't interest me. The writing of pictures on the walls was very evident and interesting. Then, too, the sphinx down in the valley was a sight to behold. Yes, the place

[24] Russ Stevenson is mentioned in an obituary for Mary Courtney McClelland Stevenson in the Sharon, Pennsylvania, *Herald* for Monday, 9 October 2000. The memorial reported: "A Presbyterian, Mrs. Stevenson served with her family as a missionary for the church. From 1944-49, with her husband, A. Russell Stevenson, whom she married Aug. 28, 1942, she traveled to and lived in Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt."

Ruth's picture of the Great Pyramid of Giza, December 1944

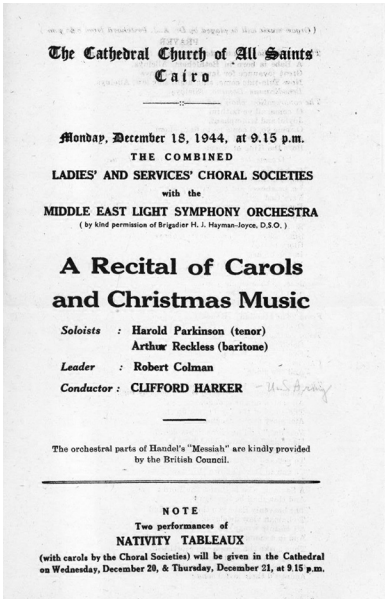
does look like the pictures we have seen in the past. All in all it was another fascinating experience. (RSL 44.12.13)

Despite this archaeological interlude, the pressing matter was ongoing travel, and Ed bent to that task with renewed energy:

> I am going to see the British Air ministry this aft. Their office hours are from 5 to 8. If they hold little hope of flying, we will have Cooks here wire Nairn Transit in Haifa for reservations for us two to go through to Baghdad as soon as possible. The train from here to Haifa goes daily leaving at 5 p.m. arriving there 12 p.m. the next day. Sleeping cars are available. Nairn bus service over the desert is operated every Tuesday and Friday from Haifa, leaving in the morning, arriving the next morning. Baghdad to Basrah train service is daily. We'll keep you posted. (EML 44.12.13)

The Nairn Transport Company[25] was a legendary pioneer in desert travel. Started by two brothers from New Zealand, it had established a regular bus route through the Syrian Desert from Haifa through

[25] See http://fuchs-online.com/overlandmail/articles/The_Nairn_Way.htm for a fuller account of the Nairn Transport Company.



The Cathedral Church of All Saints
Cairo

Monday, December 18, 1944, at 9.15 p.m.
THE COMBINED
LADIES' AND SERVICES' CHORAL SOCIETIES
with the
MIDDLE EAST LIGHT SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
(by kind permission of Brigadier H. J. Hayman-Joyce, D.S.O.)

A Recital of Carols and Christmas Music

Soloists : Harold Parkinson (tenor)
Arthur Reckless (baritone)
Leader : Robert Colman
Conductor : CLIFFORD HARKER

The orchestral parts of Handel's "Messiah" are kindly provided by the British Council.

NOTE
Two performances of
NATIVITY TABLEAUX
(with carols by the Choral Societies) will be given in the Cathedral on Wednesday, December 20, & Thursday, December 21, at 9.15 p.m.

Program for "A Recital of Carols and Christmas Music" at the All Saints Cathedral Church in Cairo, December 18, 1944

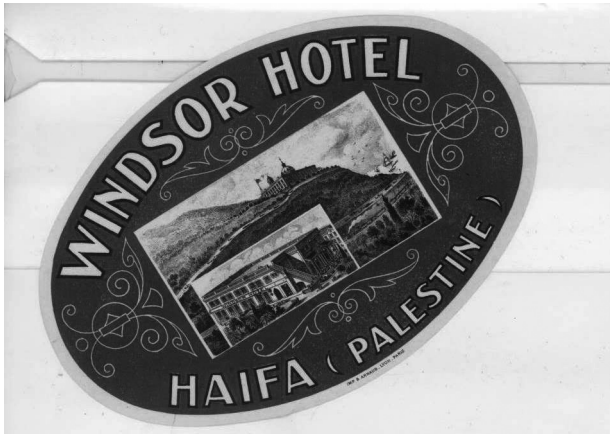
Damascus to Baghdad. Using articulated buses, with semitruck-like cabs and Pullman train-like cabins, a relatively comfortable thirty-hour trip was possible from the Mediterranean port to the Iraqi capital on the Euphrates. Often following "dead reckoning," since there were few roads and many stretches of open desert along the way, it was always an adventure to undertake this crossing. Not surprisingly, therefore, Ed and Ruth much preferred the luxury of air travel. But that was not to be their lot.

Among their final pleasures in Cairo was attending "A Recital of Carols and Christmas Music," held on Monday evening, December 18, at the Cathedral Church of All Saints. Along with selections from Handel's *Messiah*, sung by the "Ladies' and Services' Choral Societies," accompanied by the "Middle East Light Symphony Orchestra," there was a scattering of Christmas carols and prayers. (*Program of Service*, 44.12.18)

On Thursday, December 21, Anthony Luidens received a cryptic cable postmarked Haifa, Palestine:

> CHRISTMAS PRAYERS FOR BRIGHTON OUR LOVE TO YOU ALL=EDWIN RUTH LUIDENS (EML 44.12.21)

Having taken the overnight train from Cairo, Ed and Ruth were lodged in the Windsor Hotel in downtown Haifa, at the base of Mount Carmel. Happily, they were one step closer to Basrah.



Baggage tag for the Windsor Hotel in Haifa, Palestine, with Mt. Carmel in the background

For all intents and purposes, Ruth and Ed's arrival in Cairo was their introduction to the "Holy Land" of the Bible. Although they realized that Egypt had played an equivocal role in the history of Christianity—as a haven for Joseph, Jesus, and St. Mark and as a penal colony for Moses and his followers—they were very conscious when they hit Palestine that they were in the Bible's heartland. Ruth wrote a "reverie" from Haifa reveling in the wonder of treading where biblical heroes and villains had trod:

> There is so much to say that I hardly know where to begin. We're in Palestine! The Bible lands of which we have heard since we were babies! Right outside the window (I'm sitting in front of it) stands Mt. Carmel, reaching to the sky. To think that Elijah went to the top of this mountain.[26] It all seems so wonderful to be here. As I said last night [presumably to Ed], we surely hope that you and the folks of Rochester will get out here some day. I'm sure such a trip would be valuable. (RSL 44.12.21)

"Mount" Carmel is a plateau which rises above Haifa to a height of seventeen hundred feet with ragged bluffs swooping sharply down to the city and farmland below. As a West-East promontory of high

[26] I Kings 18:16-45 tells the story of Elijah's challenge to the prophets of Baal to call down fire on a sacrificial altar atop Mt. Carmel. When the prophets of Baal failed to light their altar, Elijah called on Yahweh to ignite his; the ensuing fire was so powerful that it consumed the wood, the sacrificial bull, the stones, and the water which had been poured on the pyre.

ground stretching from the edge of the Mediterranean deep into the interior, control of this spit of land has been the objective of invaders for millennia. Its Old Testament allure to Ed and Ruth was palpable, and Ruth soon abandoned her letter writing so that they could take a hike. The next day she resumed her narrative:

> Because the sun was shining so bright and clear yesterday, we decided to take advantage of it and climb Mt. Carmel. It was indeed a lovely and gratifying hike. We followed the road which is paved, as it went winding around the side to the top. The mountain is inhabited all the way up, and on the top there are many lovely villas, etc.
>
> The view from the top was magnificent. On two-and-a-half sides all that could be seen was water. The blue of the Mediterranean made a beautiful picture with the sky a lighter color, with fluffy clouds slowly moving around. Words fail to describe the restfulness and joy of such a scene. We stood and gazed down into the harbor and the town of Haifa, built on the hills and beach of the Mediterranean. Off in the distance a valley with mountains beyond it made the panorama captivating. The soft lovely colors were blended by the hand of the great Painter—God—who can do so much more than man. What a beautiful world, if we could only see beauty painted by God.
>
> As we began coming down, it began to rain, and the clouds changed from fleecy white to dark menacing blankets foretelling a storm. We didn't come down the roadway but found paths directly down the stony hillside, and we both ran and slipped and slid and *laughed* as we came back into town. Incidentally this is the rainy season, and although we do have sun, it rains now and then during the day too. Most of the people wear boots, because the rain makes mud, and of course boots protect them. Incidentally there aren't many natives in the town dressed in Arab garb of flowing gown, etc. The population in the city is predominantly Jewish, but of course the native Arabs live in the country and outskirts. (RSL 44.12.21)

The Palestine of 1944 was still under the political and military thumb of Great Britain, which had been granted its "Mandateship" by the League of Nations in the wake of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. The bloody struggle for the future of Palestine was well under way, and Haifa was one of the principal entry ports for the legal and illegal in-migration of European Jews fleeing

the Holocaust. In the ensuing years, this struggle would become an unsettling reality for Ed and Ruth as they juggled their intense sympathy for the Jewish victims of Hitler's evil and their growing frustration that Palestinians were forced to pay such a heavy price for the fallout of that evil.

Ed and Ruth had hoped to leave quickly for Baghdad, but their plans were delayed a few days. In order to fill their time, they took an unforgettable day trip to Nazareth. In a pre-Christmas letter, Ruth gave her exuberant description of their pilgrimage, imagining what Jesus must have seen and felt:

> To be in Palestine is a thrill. To walk in the village of Nazareth is a feeling far beyond a thrill. It is a sacred experience! Yes, we took a bus this morning and visited the village in which Jesus spent so much of His life. It's an hour's ride through country that is fertile and beautiful. The hills are rolling, with rocky sides to make them uncultivated. However the valleys are sights to behold. They are green and obviously very productive. There aren't many trees and shrubs, but the land is cultivated with vegetables growing in abundance.
>
> We could picture Jesus going to the outskirts of His village and looking out over the valleys. What a wealth of joy He must have experienced as He saw the gifts of God. The village of Nazareth itself is built on the sides of four or five hills. The little native houses are nestled on the sides of the hills and the winding paths through the village are probably very similar to those of Jesus' day.
>
> We had a little boy guide us, and we were taken to the shrine built by Greek Catholics[27] in the 16th century. The shrine is built over the well from which Mary is supposed to have drawn water. Of course, that is all more-or-less legendary, but it could very possibly be true. We also went into the town's synagogue, also made into a shrine by Catholics. Here Jesus is supposed to have preached. Of course it has been rebuilt, but they had one stone which was supposed to have been [from] the original building.
>
> At any rate there is no doubt that Jesus lived in Nazareth and walked down the narrow alleys, etc. We couldn't help but notice

[27] This is probably a reference to the Greek Orthodox chapel built over the presumed location of Mary's Well, traditionally associated with the Annunciation during which the angel Gabriel forewarned Mary that she would give birth to Jesus. (Cf. Luke 1:26-38) An alternative, Roman Catholic site is about half a mile away.

Nairn bus which Ruth and Ed took from
Damascus to Baghdad, December 23-24, 1944

> the simplicity of it all. They probably live in that village today very much like Jesus did. The houses are made of clay and are very crude. The donkeys still carry loads on their backs. The women carry water on their heads in jugs. Yes, it was a sacred experience to walk thru the town of Nazareth and picture Christ and His home. There's no splendor and majesty about such a village and yet it holds a beauty because of its history! (RSL 44.12.21)

Finally, on Saturday, December 23, Ed and Ruth set out by taxi for Damascus. Their route took them north of the glistening Sea of Galilee, and "For almost an hour, we saw some part or all of it as we crossed a valley or as we met the crest of a hill," Ed recalled. (EML 44.12.27) In Damascus they met the infamous cross-desert, articulated Nairn bus for the next leg of their expedition. The trip across Palestine and through the heart of Syria and the desert of Iraq was a long one, "leaving Haifa Dec 23 at 6 a.m., arriving the next noon" in Baghdad.

About the traverse Ed wrote: "The desert bus was draftless, even tho it was a bit bumpy, since there is no road for it to travel on, just a track or 100-ft.-wide lane marked by occasional barrels and posts." (EML 44.12.29) Ed was inclined to underplay the jarring impact of the trip when he wrote to his anxious parents and in-laws.

The result of this bone-rattling escapade was to deliver Ed and Ruth to the River Front Hotel in central Baghdad on December 24. Their ten-week ordeal was almost over, but Christmas activities intervened. In the anonymity of their hotel room, Ed and Ruth exchanged Christmas cards, ones which they had secreted in their bags and purses all the way from the United States. Ed's sentiments were summarized in the

note he wrote in his card: "To the best wife in my world." In later years, Ruth recounted orally the experience of sitting in the hotel room on Christmas Eve, taking out their gifts for each other, no longer surprises, for they had been unwrapped at a half-dozen border crossings and then lovingly rewrapped in disintegrating paper in anticipation of this day.

The last leg of Ed and Ruth's journey to Basrah was uneventful, almost anticlimactic, as Ruth retold it:

> Our train left at 6:30 p.m., and we had been told to go to the station early, so we were there at 5:45 and visited awhile before it left. What a surprise to see that train. Again we had our own compartment, very spacious, clean, and comfortable. The seats were long and made of leather. We had a quiet and comfortable trip as we slipped across the desert. You know we have been amazed at the travelling accommodations. We haven't suffered a bit—quite different from the time Dr. Zwemer and our first missionaries came out here. (RSL 44.12.29)

CHAPTER 3

Ruth's Private World

Ed and Ruth arrived in Basrah, Iraq, on the morning of Friday, December 28, 1944. The excited pair was met at the railroad station by Jeanette Boersma, who had flown earlier from Cairo, and Harry Almond, a short-term missionary on a two-year hiatus from his ministry training while he taught at the Basrah High Hopes Boys School.[1]

Together with another newly minted minister, Rev. Jay Kapenga, who had arrived in September, these neophytes were about to launch together into a rigorous program of Arabic language training and cross-culture exposure. "We are to start on Monday," Ruth wrote the next day. "They have hired a special teacher for Jay Kapenga, Ed, and me." (RSL 44.12.29) Ed described him as "a very pleasant young fellow whom we have already met." (EML 44.12.29) His name was Mohammed

[1] This was one of the "short-term" options which Ed had considered and rejected. Almond returned to New Brunswick in 1945 to complete his seminary degree and then rejoined the Basrah mission where he worked until the early 1950s, at which time he joined a world-wide evangelistic movement entitled "Moral Re-Armament." He rose through the ranks of that organization, retiring as its executive director in 1980.

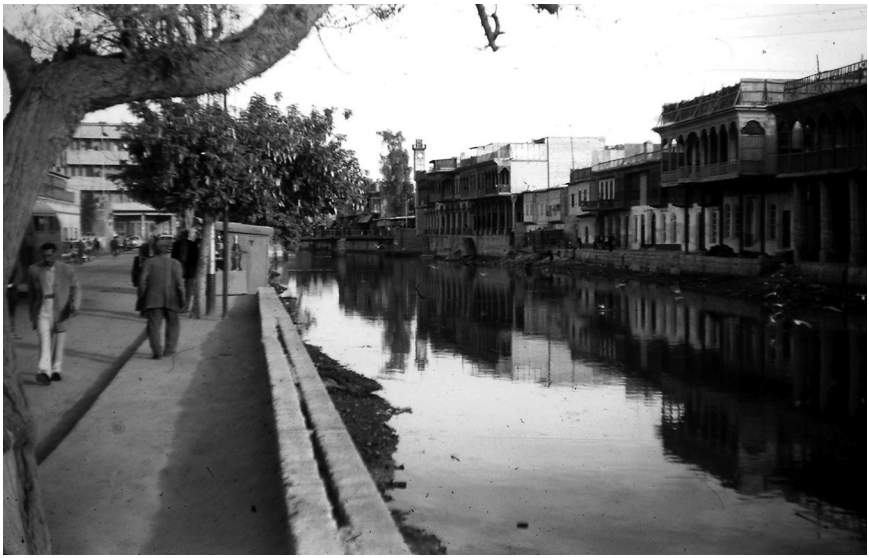
Ed and Ruth shortly after their arrival in Basrah, ready for church

Baqr,[2] and he would prove to be their primary porthole into the life of contemporary Iraq.

In 1944 Basrah, Iraq, sat on the eastern bank of the Shatt Al Arab, the principal maritime artery of the country; today the city sprawls across both banks of the river. The "Shatt" is a massive waterway created fifty miles north of Basrah by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Laced by canals and tributaries, Basrah has been likened by Western travelers to Venice.

Much of the travel around the city was carried out in *bellams*, elongated canoes which plied the canals and acted as lorries and taxies. While there were roads, and more were being built all the time, travel by water was a time-honored tradition in this Mesopotamian Delta community and was still the dominant mode of transportation.

[2] As was the case with the Topalians' name, the spelling of names will be retained as they are found in the letters, while the corrected name will be used in the body of the text. For instance, Ruth and Ed refer frequently to "Yusuf" and "Bakr," both of whom were intensely involved in their lives. In both cases, as the young couple became more fluent in Arabic, they came to refer to their friends as "Yusef" and "Baqr," more accurate phonetic renderings of their names.



Basrah, the "Venice of the East"

Annually, Basrah was inundated by the melting snows of the mountains of Eastern Turkey, melt off which fed the two great rivers and caused them to overflow their banks. The vast desert north of the city would become a temporary lake, making life difficult but bringing silt to the region and providing for a glorious profusion of vegetation. Its vibrant date orchards, punctuated by olive, wheat, and barley plantations, were a witness to the vitality of this easternmost prong of the Fertile Crescent.[3] It was at the joining of the Tigris and Euphrates, a particularly lush region, that the Garden of Eden was reputed to have flourished in a town known as Gerna.

During their first few months in Basrah, Ed and Ruth were to share a home with veteran missionary Charlotte Kellien (soon to be known as "Miss K."). Their presence was an undoubted imposition on this independent woman's firmly established routines. Nevertheless, the young couple quickly found that they had much in common with her and readily turned to her as a mentor and interpreter of their new experiences. In particular, she introduced them to the life of British

[3] In subsequent years, the regime of Saddam Hussein dramatically altered the waterways of Iraq, creating great lake/reservoirs and redirecting the Tigris and Euphrates so that the annual flooding could be controlled. He thereby undermined much of the nautical culture in the region, especially among the "Marsh Arabs" who had roamed the vast floodplain between Basrah and Baghdad for millennia, including the region around Amarah, where Ed and Ruth spent several years.

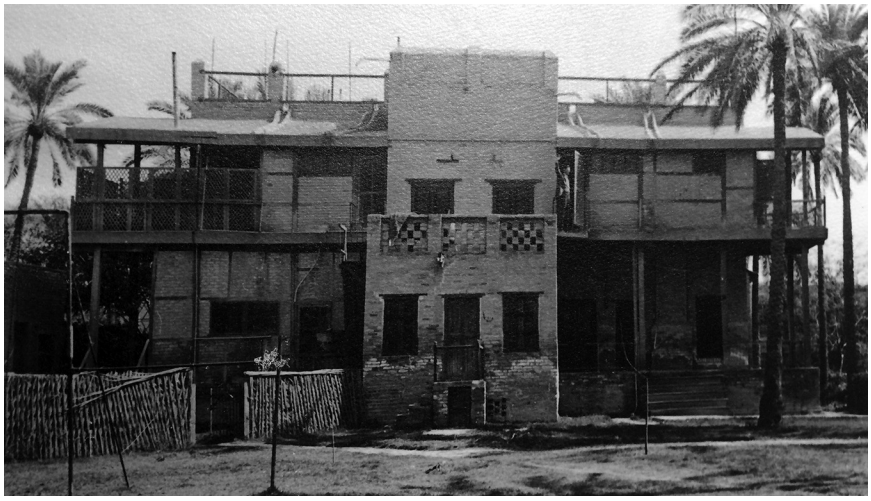
A *bellum* on the great Shatt Al Arab

colonial households, including how to manage a retinue of servants and to juggle home and work. With barely a day's worth of observation, Ruth wrote about some of her initial insights into this venerable missionary's life:

> Miss Kellien is a very lovely lady and is a real hostess. She is a wonderful house manager and her cook does some remarkable things under her guidance. She is very cordial, and all in all, the situation is very grand. The general food problem in Basra is not as bad as it might be. Thus far we haven't suffered and lacked a thing. All these women [Charlotte Kellien, Dorothy Van Ess, and Christine Gosselink] are real managers and do wonders with what they have. There is a little shortage of sugar and tea, but they seem to manage with the careful planning. . . . They are all most kind to us, however, and we are managing well. (RSL 44.12.31)

The war's backdrop had an impact on more than the availability of tea and sugar. "To buy anything here would be a laugh and an impossibility," Ruth wrote. "Prices of anything and everything are impossible. We trust that by the time we have to furnish a house, things will be more normal, for there is scarcely anything in the line of furniture, dishes, etc. However, we are all set for at least a year and a half for we shall be living in the Gosselinks' house after Miss K. goes home this summer." (RSL 44.12.31)

Life for Ruth and Ed soon settled into a frequently interrupted pattern. Language training dominated their waking hours, and it began early each morning (including Saturdays) with the arrival of their tutor:



"Beit Kellien" where Ed and Ruth first lived in Basrah along with "Miss K.," Charlotte Kellien

> Tuesday a.m. [January 2] Bakr, our language teacher arrived for our first lesson (we are working through VanEss's book [*An Aid to Practical Arabic*][4] to begin with and reading *John* in *NT*). He is a clean young man, thin, dressed in western clothes, neatly polished shoes (brown), grey tie like one Dad L. has (French tag on the inside I noticed once); he speaks good Arabic and passable English, which is a fine combination under the circumstances. He comes at 9 a.m. leaves a few minutes after 12 p.m., when we have lunch. (EML 45.01.03)

The afternoons were filled with a variety of recreational and outreach activities wedged around Arabic homework assignments. Some of these activities required creative imaginations, while others were more physical:

> After lunch we read a while, then rest and/or study. About 3 we get some exercise. The last few days, Ruth and I have gone out on that back porch (cement) where we play volleyball with a couple of socks rolled together on this perfectly marked court. It really takes a little skill to hit this figment of our imagination properly. I blush to record for posterity that *zowjati* (my wife) has won two out of three matches. I hesitate to predict anything about the oncoming tennis and badminton season. (EML 45.01.11)

[4] *An Aid to Practical Arabic* (Oxford University Press), 1920.

Ruth and Ed in their garden with Mohammed Baqr,
their Arabic language instructor

Baqr would become an enigmatic figure in the lives of the young missionaries. He was a formal yet patient and creative mentor, a devout Muslim much appreciative to the Christian missionaries for his own education, and a budding nationalist in an era when the British Empire was waning. He confounded and informed their sense of modern Iraq by bringing them face-to-face with Muslim Iraqis and with the ideas germinating in the streets as colonial-era accommodation gave way to self-conscious Arab national awakening.

Baqr proved to be an inventive teacher, repeatedly surprising his students with unexpected assignments. In her January 11 letter, Ruth recounted the following interaction:

> This morning Bakr, our teacher, said "Mr. Ed, tell me a story about Jesus, in Arabic." We looked at each other and thought he was foolish. But Ed started and talked about fifteen minutes about Jesus. Of course, Bakr helps out now and then, but at least we can say a few sentences without stumbling all over. It is a fine way of practicing, and we do enjoy it. (RSL 45.01.11)

Baqr arranged for field trips to schools and the bazaar, which were particularly instructive, both for their language demands and for their introduction to the local milieu. Ed provided a colorfully graphic description of one such excursion, complete with "local" (US local) comparisons:

Suq scene, Basrah, Iraq

We walked over to the *suqq* (market). All we knew about it was that it is the place all our food and supplies come from, the place of fabulous prices and wretched poverty. We were amazed. Bakr took us to one door in the middle of a street of shops. It was a large door, big enough for a one-and-a-half-ton truck to enter. We walked through it into a sort of indoor market. It was clean, divided off into thirty or forty stalls or booths where individual dealers displayed their carrots, tomatoes, turnips, oranges, etc. It reminded me very much of the market of the Brethren in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The building itself was high, looking like the inside of the Pere Marquette train station in Grand Rapids (that shed-like, semi-outside part), although it was not nearly as large, of course.

A special section is set apart for meat dealers. As we walked through, we broke into real smiles and wished you folks could be here with us; for we had expected it to be unorganized and therefore less clean. We passed through this building on into long, covered streets where merchants sat, each in his store, an open-fronted room in which he kept all his supplies. Some sold cloth—good looking, but dear, dear!! ("*dinar wanusf*"—$6.00)[5]

[5] A dinar and a half was roughly equivalent to six dollars.

> Some sold trinkets, everything from toothpaste to perfume, including wristwatch straps. Some did tailoring, others ironed; some sold shoes, others repaired them.
>
> Everything went on before your eyes, for all the shops are three-sided rooms into which you can walk at random. Almost like sideshows or home-arts exhibits at the old Ottawa County Fair! (EML 45.01.28)

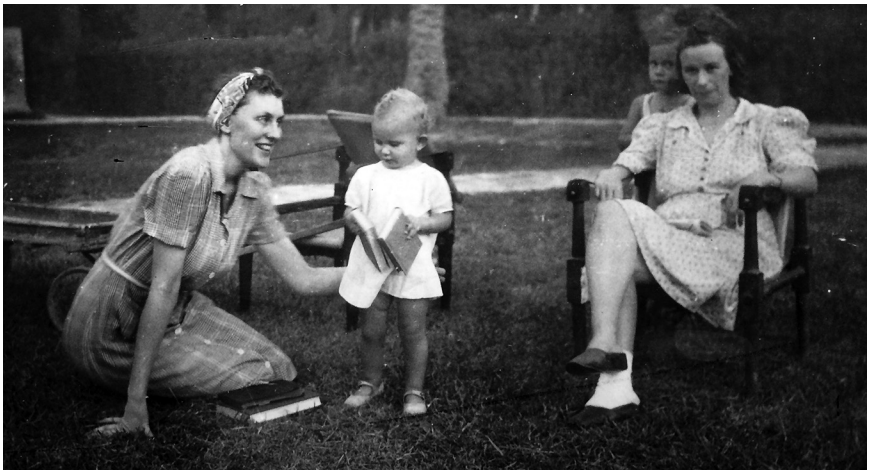
The rigors of language training were severe. Ruth in particular struggled with learning to speak and read Arabic. While always sounding upbeat, Ruth related her frustration in many letters home:

> Yes, Arabic isn't easy but we are gradually beginning to feel as if we can see a ray of light. (RSL 45.01.11)
>
> Hello—I've been struggling with some Arabic sentences so if my note today sounds rather queer, just blame it on that other language. The stuff really takes a lot of plugging, and sometimes my brain just gives up, and I am continually admiring Ed for his ability in it. Well, so much of the chatter about language. (RSL 45.01.18)

As if to mock them for their linguistic fumbling, they had occasion in July to entertain the Nykerk family from the mission station in Kuwait. The Nykerk children's fluency with Arabic brought out comments from Ruth in her letter of July 4:

> The Nykerk children are adorable, and they add real happiness to the gang. David is three years old and plenty active. In fact, he has to be watched, or he will pull the house down. Great sport, to say the least. Then, Nancy, the little girl, is about a year old and a real doll. She is very dainty and sweet. You can imagine there is never a dull moment with such additions. They are sleeping quietly now after some time of singing to them by yours truly. When I put the light out, little Davy grabbed my hand and said in Arabic, "Don't go away." It is comical to hear them talk Arabic which they know better than English. It makes us feel foolish to hear little tots like that talking beautiful Arabic and we stutter along incorrectly. How we do laugh when David goes out to the kitchen to talk to Yasir or Jowad. (RSL 45.07.04)

In the long run, Ruth became extremely adept in colloquial, spoken Arabic, and Ed became a master of the more classical strands of the language, reflecting the very different cultural worlds into which



Ruth with Rose Nykerk and children Nancy and David Nykerk, Basrah, Iraq

they were thrust.[6] Ruth was quickly introduced to the domestic and private worlds in which middle and upper middle class Iraqi women lived their lives. The *harem* (plural: *harim*) was the focus of their days, and gossip was the currency of their exchange. Ruth was fascinated by the intrigues within families and general chatter about husbands, multiple wives and trousseaux, and food and the cost of household goods. In order to engage in these interactions, command of the local Iraqi dialect of Arabic was essential to her.

On the other hand, Ed was more slowly integrated into the Iraqi community. His early weeks were spent dealing with bureaucracies, Iraqi and British civilian and Allied military ones, as he tended to the byzantine requirements imposed on the recently arrived expatriate. Moreover, his roles in the Hope Boys School and the Arab and Anglican churches meant that he was interacting with a more educated populace—almost exclusively male. Most of his contacts had at least a rudimentary command of English, and many had studied in Britain or the United States and were inclined to speak English rather than Arabic. His was the world of written rather than spoken Arabic. As a result, his early encounters with Iraqis were generally through formal channels and in the public sphere.

[6] One knowledgeable missionary has pointed out: "The fact that colloquial Arabic is quite different from classical Arabic is something most Westerners do not appreciate; i.e., missionaries, in effect, had to learn two languages! Miss[ionary] kids [like the Nykerk children] learned colloquial; textbooks taught classical." (Peter Kapenga in personal correspondence with author, August 2015.)

Within days of her arrival in Basrah, Ruth accompanied veteran missionaries Christine Gosselink and Dorothy Van Ess to the homes of local Iraqi families, both Christians and Muslims. As was the practice at the time, the women and children of middle and upper class families were largely confined to the harem. With the exception of the husband of the household, men were prohibited from entering this part of the home, so it provided a sheltered environment for women to "let down their hair," quite literally. The head-to-foot covering—called an *abba*—which women wore when in public, was quickly shed when they came home.

It was in these havens that Ruth was warmly welcomed into a very different world than she had known. On being introduced to one such family a week after her arrival in Basrah, Ruth was given an Arabic name, one which stuck with her until she bore her first son. Almost off-handedly, she wrote about the name to her parents:

> Incidentally, your daughter has been given an Arabic name. It seems that Ruth is not Arabic and doesn't mean anything special, so the Arab women friends of Mrs. V. E. who have heard about me have chosen the name of Nuria. I think it is pretty, and the meaning very lovely. It means Light. So from now on, I am Nuria as well as Ruth, etc. (RSL 45.01.11)

Ruth's maiden encounters with Iraqi society left her in breathless amazement. "Well," she began many paragraphs of her reminiscences, as if to say, "Can you believe it?" Recounting the time she spent with new friends, Zahara (spelt "Zahra" in Ruth's early letters) and her sister Fadheela, (initially spelt "Fadeela"), Ruth reflected on the contrasts with her own past experiences. Ruth visited with the two young women—in their late teens or early twenties—on an almost weekly basis, sometimes at their home and sometimes at hers. As a result, they served as Ruth's windows on the decidedly *indoor* life of well-to-do Iraqi women.

Ruth's fulsome letter of January 8, 1945, barely a week into her life in Basrah, set the tone for subsequent descriptions. It is replete with colorful observations of menu, people, and place:

> Because this past week has been so full of activity, I just have to describe some of it to you. In the first place, I can see that being a woman missionary has its advantages in these Moslem lands. We go places the men can never come near, and they surely are interesting. But let me describe it in my feeble fashion.
>
> Last Friday was our big day. At noon the women folks of the other compound [Dorothy Van Ess, Christine Gosselink, and

Ruth with new friends, Fadheela (*left*) and Zahara, in Western clothes

Jeannette Boersma] and Miss Kellien and I went to have luncheon and spend the afternoon at the home of some real Moslems. They are a wealthy family with many of the old ways still prevalent in their lives. Their home is built around the courtyard. The room to which we were taken had pillows all around the floor with pillows against the walls to provide the back rest. All these pillows were covered with beautiful oriental rugs as soft as velvet. The floor is also completely covered with these exquisite rugs. Everyone sits on these pillows and leans against the wall pillows.

Well, the family relationship of the ladies of the family would fill a book, and I'm still not too well acquainted with it all, although Mrs. V. E. gave me the high points before we went in. At any rate the three older women wore the long veils, but the three younger women were in Western clothes which they made themselves. They were all in mourning-black clothes because of a religious mourning month.[7]

Well, the two younger girls are trying to learn English (Mrs. V. E. is giving them lessons). Jeanette and I tried in our feeble way

[7] This was the month of Muharram, the first month of the Muslim calendar during which the martyrdom of Hussein Ibn Ali, grandson of Mohammed, is memorialized. Among Shi'a Muslims, this is a particularly auspicious month. The faithful regularly selfflagellate with extended bouts of outward displays of grief. (cf. EML 45.01.03)

> to say the words we knew in Arabic, and the Arab girls did what they could in English. You can imagine we had to have help from the older folks many times. One of the girls is especially beautiful and attractive and very eager to learn and talk. We had great fun writing new words down as we learned them from each other. I shall probably call there every week, and I believe Zahra and I shall become great friends. They live only a block from here so that is convenient.
>
> Well, we had lunch which looked more like a banquet. The food was cooked in Arab style and very delicious. The older women ate with us (with their hands), and the younger girls stood up and gave us anything we desired. What a meal! We were all literally stuffed. There was rice with duck on a platter, vegetables rolled around rice and meat, potatoes, bread, pickles, fruit and a large oatmeal bowl filled with a sweet pudding made from date syrup. They expect great appetites and feed them with everything imaginable.
>
> After all the food, we went back to the sitting room (pillow room, called *meglis*) and were served tea in tiny glasses that made me think of playing house. These people are very close friends of Mrs. V. E., and their hospitality was shown to us as well. It is a place where many old customs are kept, and yet they are gradually becoming modern. It seems that the V. E.s think I can help the girls, who are about my age. Well, it is the custom to sit and talk so we did our best, Zahra and I. (RSL 45.01.08)

Ruth's initial encounter with Zahara engraved a lasting impression in her mind. In her first letter to one of their supporting churches, the Alto Reformed Church in Alto, Wisconsin, Ruth introduced Zahara to her readers. In this periodic broadside, Ruth unveiled a double motivation for this budding relationship. On the one hand, she enjoyed and was intrigued by the exotic and welcoming environment of this new home and family, so different from her past experiences. On the other hand, she saw Zahara as a potential focus of future evangelistic work:

> Among the many interesting people we have met here in Basrah, there is one particular girl about whom I write now and about whom I shall write more often in the future. She is of a very strict Moslem family, friends of the VanEsses. She is about eighteen years old and extremely beautiful. Her home is a typical Arab home with the courtyard, ladies' sitting room with all the trimmings.
>
> I shall never forget the thrill I had when we went into their sitting room. The floor was covered with beautiful Persian rugs.

"At home" in the harem of Zahara and Fadheela, *on left*: "Mrs. VE" (Dorothy Van Ess), Zahara, Jeannette Boersma, and Christine Gosselink, *on right*, Fadheela serving from a samovar

> Around the wall were pillows covered with the same kind of rugs. We all sat on these pillows and the older women and Mrs. Van Ess and Mrs. Gosselink visited. Zahra, the girl I just described, has been learning a little English. We two tried to talk, and it was great fun as she would say something in Arabic, and I would try to say it in English, if I understood, and vice versa. She has invited me to spend some time every week with her to help each other in our native tongues. How I hope I can help her to know Jesus Christ also! Yes, you will hear about Zahra in the future. (RSL to Alto 45.01.17)

It was not for three weeks that Ruth was to again visit with her new friends. On January 30 she returned, this time on her own, to share an afternoon with Zahara and her sister. Ruth's description of this visit was laced with astute observations about her surroundings; as with many of her later descriptions, it had the ring of an anthropologist's sensibilities. Of particular note is that she was referred to as *sediqa*, or "friend," an honor which she relished:

> [S]ince the women invite women only, I have been fortunate thus far. The afternoon today brought one of those visits. Mrs. Van Ess had arranged with the Moslem family in which there were those

two young girls, about nineteen or twenty years of age, and the family we had lunch with a couple of weeks ago where we sat on the pillows and had such a thrilling time.

Well, to get back to the tale. Mrs. V.E. has been teaching these girls a little English. It was thought that it would be an excellent way for me to learn Arabic and for them to learn English, if I went to their home once a week, we could help each other.

This afternoon was the first visit. Yes, I went by myself—that in itself was something new, for up to this time, I have been with someone who could speak Arabic. I really had a few unspoken qualms as I trotted off down the street and along the canal to their home.

I knocked with the big door knocker and was immediately led into the courtyard by the colored servant[8] who had been told of my coming. The girls were waiting in the courtyard together with the other women of the house, older women, one of the girl's mother and some sisters, plus all the women servants who wanted to take a peak. I went through the salutations with all of them, and each one responded, "You are very much welcome to our home," in Arabic.

Then the girls led me to their bedroom where they had a table and three chairs set in the middle of the room. It was here we sat and did our talking—Arabic and English combined. For some time the other women stood and watched and listened. The older sister, who has been to Mecca on a pilgrimage and therefore given a special name of respect, showed much interest in the activity and asked me what my husband's name is. When I told her, she smiled all over and said, "How beautiful." How much they appreciate simple things. Really, I felt as if I was bringing the world to them.

Our talking and studying went on about three quarters of an hour with much smiling, laughing, and gesturing. They wanted to know about my parents and if I had any brothers or sisters. Oh, we talked about a lot of things. When I said I had better leave, they had the servant bring me tea and some sweet bread. We ate together, although it is the custom for the guest to drink tea alone, which I did.

[8] The euphemism "colored [or black] servant" probably referred to someone of African descent who was a long-term indentured servant or outright slave in the house. Slaves and former slaves from Africa were long part of the social fabric of Iraq. Yasir, the "houseboy" who worked for the Gosselinks, and later for Ed and Ruth, was probably the son of former slaves.

> Just before I left Zahra, the especially brilliant and attractive one, went to her jewel box and took out a pin and said, "I want you to have this." It is a silver pin made in the shape of a dagger. On it there are tiny flowers engraved in black. She pinned it on my suitcoat and it is there now. You can imagine I was speechless and tried to thank her the best I could. This hospitality of these people is truly surprising. Well, I finally made my departure as they said, "We are anxious for your return next week."
>
> What an experience. I felt as if a whole new opportunity was opening before me. They are Moslems, and yet I am certain that someday we shall be able to talk about Jesus, etc. Oh yes, the one thing they wanted to know was if my husband liked to have me visit my *seduqi* or my friends. They thought it was quite wonderful that I was "allowed to go out." Yes, another reflection of their background. So much for that, you will probably hear about it again and again. Just think, my first visit alone. Whee! (RSL 45.01.30)

A month later, Ruth was moved to report on another afternoon spent with her new friends. A meandering conversation about domestic matters turned serious when starkly different courtship patterns between the United States and Iraq were introduced. One can imagine the cultural critiques which ensued on both sides. In a reflective diary note to herself, Ruth wrote:

> Whether this will ever be used in the future is a question, but I do feel I must write down some of the things I feel inside. In the first place, I must say I am thankful to God for the blessings of love and precious background which He has given me. The more I see of this land, the more certain I become that the Christian way is best.
>
> I have just come from my regular weekly visit to the home of Zahara and Fadeela, my first two native Arab girlfriends. We are trying to teach each other a little of our native tongues, and I am continually amazed that we are able to get along as well as we do. But that is beside the point.
>
> Right now I must write about our conversation today. We talked about my visit to Hamadan[9] last Friday, their sewing, about

[9] Ruth probably means Abadan, Iran (Hamadan would have been a two-day journey), where there was an Allied military base and where Ed and Ruth's APO (Army Post Office) mail, including V-Mail, was delivered. Missionaries regularly drove from Basrah to Abadan (about two hours' distance) in order to pick up arriving mail from the United States. Ed became very familiar with that route.

their open house, which is to come next Sunday, and then, by some queer twist—I can't trace it directly now—we started to talk about my wedding ring. Oh yes, they asked about the word "jewel," and I told about the difference between pearl and diamond, etc., and the custom in America for a man to give a woman a diamond at the time of engagement; "before marriage" was the only way I could describe that time for my vocabulary is so limited. However, I believe they understood, and then they asked if I knew Ed before we were married.

Imagine marrying someone whom you don't know before you marry him! I said I knew him in college, and that we had many happy times together then and now. This delighted them no end, and their next remark made me jump inside, for dear Zahara said, "You loved your husband before you married him, didn't you?" Obviously, she was comparing our way with theirs, and since marriage is a thing arranged by the parents, love is unknown before the marriage. How sad, and how many unhappy couples could be avoided if only love were present. I then said we study together, read together, laugh together, and have many good times together now, and this brought a happy response from both of the girls. They clapped their hands and laughed and giggled, and then the next remark by Zahara made me stop and think. She said, with a smile on her face, "You love your husband very much don't you?" At first it was difficult for her to say love and the Arabic word, "like" was used, but finally she said "love" with a great flourish and smile on her face.

Yes, I do want them to know I love my husband very much and that we have fun and good companionship together. These poor girls probably have many pictures in their own minds of husbands and wives [who] are not companionable. Even Fadeela's father has had a very shady and unsavory background with dancing girls etc., to make his history rather unhappy.

I thank God for the love of my husband and the joy and companionship we can share because we are both desirous of giving ourselves for the other. There is no doubt in my mind that the Christian love is the worthwhile love. How I pray that these girls together with all the girls out here may find real love, and in some way I am able to help them to find the love of Christ, a love which prompts happiness and joy unbounded. Thank God for the love in the world, I pray that my life may be a stronger and more certain example of love through Christ who gives the power

to love. I again want to rededicate myself to this great purpose. (Diary entry; RSL 45.02.27)

The customs related to marriage were a source of continual wonderment for Ruth. A wedding in May 1946 provided her with an intimate account of the intricacies of a Muslim ceremony, one which she contrasted so sharply with her familiar past:

> This week has been one of another new experience which took place last night. Rachel [Jackson][10] and I were invited to the home of a bride for a special evening's activity. The girl is about nineteen, I believe, an old school girl and sister of a couple of present school children. They are of lower middle class, and still cling to some old customs, which are mixed with the outside world also.
>
> But let me tell you about the custom. The night before the bride is brought to her husband (whom she has seldom, if ever, seen), all the women gather in her house and have a celebration, which is called the "night of *henna*." Henna, a red stain made from crushed plants, is considered a special decorative item, and all the brides are supposed to have some applied to their hands and feet the night before the marriage.
>
> Well, last night we went to the home, seven o'clock, the appointed time. Well, we were the first guests and were ushered into the courtyard where chairs had been placed in a circle. There were some cushions on the reed mats on the ground also. The courtyard had one electric light which had a bright bulb, so we were able to watch the family and, later on, the guests. After about half an hour, the bride came out of her dressing room, and she greeted us and sat on the bench between Rachel and me, so we were the honored guests and could see all. Then, the guests arrived—all women, of course, with the usual number of babies, from a month old to little toddler. On the street all these women wear the body and face covering, but they all had dresses of Western style. They were far from the most stylish in the world, but there were attempts to be Western.
>
> Forgot to describe the bride. . . Wheeeeee. She was really dressed up. Her dress was a bright red, our style. She had lots of jewelry, gold of her trousseau. She had just had a "frizzy" permanent, and her hair was shiny with oil to keep it in place. The

[10] Rachel Jackson was a career missionary and teacher in the Basrah Girls School along with Miss K.

thing that was so very, very inconsistent was the lip stick, rouge, and powder. She had so much on that Rachel and I were sure she felt stiff from it. Oh yes, the bright red nail polish all made her quite a sight to behold. I suppose the description in words doesn't sound as [in]consistent as it seemed to me.

Here, in a home where there were few chairs, a native courtyard, with two rooms for a family of seven, just one water tap with no further plumbing, this young girl sat dressed up as if she were on a movie set.

After the guests had assembled and chairs had been borrowed from all the neighbors to take care of the many guests, some little girls began to sing and beat on the native drum. After about an hour of that, with the usual talking and visiting, we were served tea and some cookies. Then came the big event.

From the "would be" kitchen, a girl carried an enormous tray on which was a bowl filled with stuff that looked like mud, which was henna. Around the bowl of henna there were three lighted candles as well as some flowers standing in the mud to keep them erect. The tray was placed right in front of the bride, and thus in front of our bench so we could see all. An old friend of the family came up and Badrea, the bride, put out her hand and then the old woman patted the henna in the palms of her hands. It had to remain there for half an hour in order to ensure a "good" color.

Oh yes, as the old woman applied the stuff, she had a little blessing, in the name of "Mohamed, the prophet." The women all make a certain screaming or shrill sound to signify happiness, and while this performance was going on, they were screaming for joy. Money was thrown in a dish on the tray also; this was for the old woman. Later on, she was to have her feet taken care of, but we left before that, for it was ten already. This evening at sunset we saw the cars pass, taking the bride to her husband. And so it goes. Another new and different custom. Hope this description makes sense. (RSL 46.04.21)

In March 1945, Zahara and Fadheela were invited by Mrs. Dorothy Van Ess to visit with the American women on the mission compound. Ruth was fascinated by the precautions which had to take place in order to preserve a male-free zone around the visiting young women:

Yesterday afternoon—another experience that has made me stop to think and ponder. Mrs. V. E. had invited my two Arab girl

friends, Zahara and Fadeela, as well as the aunt to have tea in V.E. house. It was in honor of Chris [Gosselink's] departure.

Well they came, all in black *abbas*. Zahara wore her real Arab clothes. Mrs. V. E. had warned all the men folks of the mission to keep away from the house. We sat on the porch; the girls did not keep their veils on then, but the aunt sat with a watchful eye, and if a man went through the compound, she would literally order the girls inside.

The girls, it was obvious, hated it. They would get just inside the door and peek around the doorway to see the man. It sounds queer on paper, and yet, it was absolutely pathetic. It just seems to me that suspicion and such doubt heighten curiosity. Of course, it is their way of doing things, and yet, I'm afraid these girls and girls like them are going to take it just so long, and then revolt; that's not right either, and I pray that in some way, I can help them to be satisfied under such strict control by bringing enough of the outside world so that they won't be curious and yet adhere to their custom. It's a problem, and I have had many a talk with Mrs. Van Ess about it. It is this type of girl that needs help. Many of them have shown signs of interest in my teaching them English and visiting them. I hope I shall be able to do what I can for them.

What a land, and what a challenge! Incidentally, Zahara sewed clothes and dressed a doll which Chris is taking home to America, and I have asked her to have it with her when she sees you. (RSL 45.03.24)

After just three months, Ruth's frustration with the unequal treatment of women was beginning to bubble over, seeing their lives as being lived in gilded cages. In August, following a robust evening dinner in the midst of Ramadan, Ruth was moved to bemoan the impact that the cycle of fasting and feasting had had on Zahara's health and the role that gender segregation, even during dinner, had on the lives of men and women:

Well, another day has come and is going. Each day is full of new experiences which are fun. This past week Jeanette and I have been especially busy going from house to house. Muslim folk, for this month is their special feasting and fasting month, and we have been visiting them during their eve occasions. They fast from sunrise to sunset, and then they feast.

Yesterday, Jeanette, Rita, the English minister's wife [and formerly a nurse in Burma], and I went to the feast at the home of

Zahara and Fadheela. They were most cordial and gave us a grand time. We got there about six fifteen and sat around until about six forty-five when the cannon went off (run by some Iraqi soldiers under the direction of the church and state heads). The cannon shot means that the sun has set, and it is time to eat.

Jeanette and I both felt that this fasting has affected Zahara's health, for she looks very pale and even during the feast, she scarcely ate anything—only drank a glass of milk. The women of the house entertained us for the meal. The man of the house and the little son had food from the same pots but on their side of the house. I inquired if that was a regular custom and found it to be. The women always eat together in their quarters and the men in theirs. I couldn't help but think of the many, many happy meals we have all had together as a family, and then I felt sad for these friends, for think of the fun they are missing. But of course, the whole social system is so different that even if they ate together, it would be difficult for the man to forget that he is the boss. All these customs indicate the train of thought of the land. How thankful I am that we have and always had meals together AS A FAMILY!

After the meal, we sat out in the courtyard (where those pictures were taken, near the tree, sitting on benches and reed mats), and there we drank tea from tiny little glasses. It always reminds me of playing house, for the glasses are tiny, and the little gold trays (maybe they are brass) and the little table [are] no bigger than the area of the size of a regular book [and] always make me feel like make-believe land.

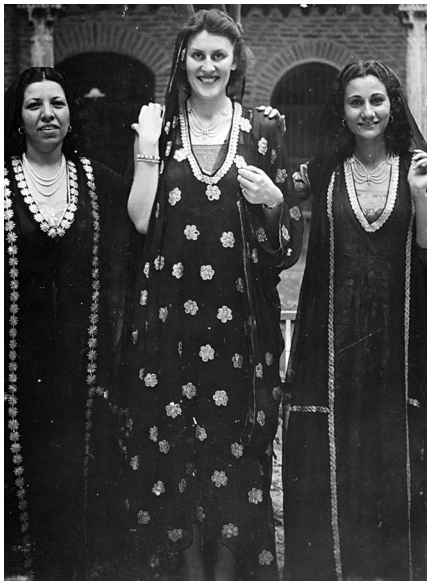
We had never seen the kitchen, and they offered to show us. What an amazing sight! They cook over little holes in the ground with a grate over the top. There were about six of these outfits, plus the large oven in which they bake the bread. The bread is not like ours at home. They are flat loaves which are about one eighth of an inch high. They are patted until this thin and then literally plastered on the inside of this oven affair, which is made of dried clay.

After the loaves have been plastered on the walls of the oven, a fire is put in the middle and they bake. Someday I'll try to get a picture of this, for it certainly is unique. Oh yes, we eat this Arab bread every day ourselves and enjoy it tremendously. The food they produce out of these kitchens is amazing for it is all very clean, and the entire table and table linens, etc., are spotless

> and very tasty. One has to acquire a taste for these new foods, for they are highly spiced, but are good, too.
>
> After the review of the kitchen, the girls dressed up in their finery, Arab style, so Rita could see the real thing. Yes, a pleasant eve was had by all. (RSL 45.08.26)

Ruth continued to visit her new friends and enjoy the interaction. In February 1946, she recalled a recent visit with the young women and their female relatives. By now, she had developed considerable facility with Arabic, which afforded her the opportunity to join in with the general discourse. Once again, she was struck with the downside of the gilded cage, and the opening which that downside provided her and her fellow missionaries:

> On Monday I went to the "at home" held at Zahara's and Fadheela's. Jeanette has had a siege of malaria, so she hasn't been out for a week or more. Missed her company on Monday, for we enjoy doing things together. Well, anyway, went alone to this at home and spent about two hours listening to the chatter of the girls and young women of my age. Believe me that is some test of language, and every time I come home, I become more resolved to study harder.
>
> These girls are all of the "upper crust." Jewels and lovely clothes are most obvious. I always come home with a sad feeling after one of these affairs, for these girls are all discontented. They have nothing to keep their minds occupied. All household activities are done by servants. They don't do much in the line of schooling, usually just a few years. They HATE the veil and all it implies. Invariably, the conversation turns to "purdah" and how much they hate the restrictions put on their lives. They gossip!!!! That is all they have to do to keep busy. There are no constructive club groups, ladies meetings, etc., that would keep their lives more interesting and worthwhile.
>
> It is with a group like this that [there] is an endless amount of possibilities for work. They are hunting for something, and I am confident that the answer is our reason for being here. Again and again I am surprised and pleased to see their cordiality toward us. Really, I never expected such friendliness. They love to talk and find out how things are done in the Western world. Yes, the opportunities are endless. How anxious I am to get the language well enough to do something for such groups. (RSL 46.02.10)



Nuria (Ruth) between Fadheela (*left*) and Zahara (*right*) in traditional Iraqi robes

A highlight for Ruth in her relationship with Zahara and Fadheela came in May 1946. Once again, Ruth was a visitor in their home, but this time the female members of the family more fully embraced her in a uniquely symbolic way:

> Yesterday I had another thrill!!! The women folks of the home of Zahara and Fadheela had their monthly "at home," and we were invited. When we arrived they asked me to help serve the tea. Now this was a real joy, for there is much ritual and ceremony about serving guests, and usually only the girls of the house serve. Well, they told me I was a sister and I should help. When I first entered the room where all the older women were sitting on the floor, a great wave of "ohs" and "ahs" went up, and they seemed both pleased and surprised. It was unusual, and Mrs. V. E. says it is a compliment and an open declaration of friendship which [is] very worthwhile. The system of serving was quite intricate, and Zahara directed me and I trust I didn't make too many mistakes. I must say that this experience was one of my most thrilling and precious times. I was really considered a sister through that experience.
>
> Perhaps you would like to hear about the order of service. Well, first the tiny individual silver trays with tiny little cup-like sugar bowls are placed at the feet of each guest. Then a plate about the size of [a] salad plate was placed next to the tray. Following this the glasses of tea were distributed from lovely large silver trays.

Girls from Ruth's sewing class

> Next came the sweet cupcakes and then the Arab bread. After [the] guest had drunk and eaten her fill, usually three glasses of tea, she was served bitter Arab coffee in [a] tiny little cup, reminding me of toy cups. There were about fifty present, and we had to do a lot of running, but what a lot of fun! (RSL 46.05.05)

Although Ruth found herself especially comfortable in the company of the wealthy women who often had some capacity in English, she spent most of her time with a very different stratum of society. Her daily responsibilities, between her morning Arabic lessons and her evening Arabic homework, took her to the girls school (populated by the children of the working poor) and to the homes—often mere hovels made of mud and tree branches—of servants and other new acquaintances.

In February 1945, a month into her sojourn in Basrah, Ruth wrote to her parents with a vivid description of the divergent worlds in which she lived:

> I have been thinking that we may not have described the people as fully as might have been done, so I'll see if I can do that now. The wealthy are very wealthy as shown by that girl who was just married. Then a complete contrast can be seen in the poor. They are as poor as anyone could imagine. All around the city of Basrah and some of the sections are small native villages made of homes built of mud or sticks from the date palms. Animals, birds, and people all live in the confines of these villages, and although we

have not visited one yet, we have seen them, and one wonders how they exist. These people are usually the ones lugging the date sticks to market for firewood or who work in the date gardens or go up and down canals in their boats called *bellums*.

Yes, all the irrigation is done by means of these canals, and they run throughout the entire city. The largest one runs in front of the other [mission] compound, and from it are many little tributaries. This past week the moon has been so bright that we have been thrilled by the scenes with the canals in the background. All along these canals are built the houses; roads, of course, are on each side of each canal.

But let's get back to the people. These people living in these huts earn scarcely anything, and because prices are so high, they are suffering to no end. As far as clothing is concerned, they are thankful if they have one cloak—no shoes or perhaps a piece of wood with a string to tie the wood on each foot. Then the serving class, who live in houses which are some better, are also finding it difficult to keep above water financially. I would say that the average salary for them is about thirty-five dollars a month. Yes, they practically live on rice and bread.

The merchants seem to be making out alright, and their homes, clothing, and food bespeak the fact. When we take the bus to Ashar, the other compound, we have a fine chance to observe the people, and there are all types. If a man knows a little English, he tries to use it by telling the driver when we want to get off. They usually try to give me a seat. Some are rough and ready and are real Bedouins. (RSL 45.02.01)

For Ruth, the wonder of poverty was overpowering. Again and again, she asked how one could live so dismally and still have the resilience to face a new day. A few days after her vivid description of the contrasting worlds of the rich and poor, she was immersed in the latter:

After I finished that letter on Thursday down at the Van Esses, I went with Mrs. V. E. to the back of the compound where they have a section set off for the servants and their families. Here we went into the typical reed hut. It is the first one I have been in and [it] left a deep impression on me. It is about as big as the living room in each of our homes (there). The ground is covered with a woven mat made from the palm branches. Along one side there were a couple of pillows. These were placed for Chris G. and Mrs. V. E.

> Well, we entered, and soon the little room began to fill up. There were a few mothers with their babies. Then there were about a dozen teenage girls with their knitting. Then, too, there were some older women. These people are all of the poor class, and their clothing or lack of it bespeaks that fact. One little baby, about a year old, attracted my attention immediately, and Mrs. V. E. said that Dr. Melrea[11] had been able to save the child's eyes this past summer, otherwise, she would have been blind by this time. She is a beautiful little thing, but I don't see how she lives with the few pieces of clothing she had on. Not even any little panties, and here we were sitting in woolen things. What a world! (RSL 45.02.11)

The poignancy of children with nothing either to wear or to claim as their own was a bitter pill for Ruth. It became a driving force in her mission work. She regularly appealed to supporting church women's groups to collect and send out clothes, and she taught sewing or knitting classes to women from these impoverished groups (a practice already well underway, as indicated by the "dozen teenage girls with their knitting"), thereby providing them with skills to support themselves.

In a June letter, she wondered again at the deadly impact of poverty on the life expectancy of babies:

> I still find it difficult to understand how the babies of the poor classes live. They are so dirty, it is unbelievable. All the rules of baby care which are followed so carefully at home are violated out here; they say if a baby lives through its first two years, it has a good chance to survive. They have to combat so much. These mothers take their babies to meetings, and I'm gradually getting to know them all. (RSL 45.06.07)

More than a year into her time in Basrah, Ruth was still marveling at the cross section of poverty, dirt, and babies. In February 1946, she recounted another visit she took with Dorothy VanEss in the wake of an earlier encounter with her upper-crust friends, Zahara and Fadheela:

> Tuesday afternoon was a complete contrast to Monday's incident. I went calling with Mrs. V. E. We visited the home of one of the little school girls, or rather club girls, I wrote about

[11] Dr. Stanley Mylrea was stationed in Bahrain at the time, but he would visit Basrah periodically and hold clinics for local patients. Dr. William Moerdyk, from Amarah, would also conduct clinics in Basrah.

> in my article for *Church Herald*.[12] Well we had to go down some back alleys and tiny little streets before we arrived. After passing the doorway, we entered the courtyard, which at the moment was being scrubbed. We were ushered into a room where there was a bed, a chair, and a settee affair. Mrs. V. E. warned me to sit down carefully, for you "never can tell about the springs of such settees."
>
> Well, the habit of such a call is to sit, sit, sit. I still don't know how many women there were in the house. They came and went, and neighbors, friends, and relatives all came – WITH THEIR BABIES. Really, it seems every woman of that class of people has a baby or babies tagging behind. . . . Some are clean, and some—well, how they live is beyond me. All the hygiene rules I've ever known are violated, and yet, they exist. The death rate of babies is high beyond imagination. Well, after the visiting, "How is your baby? What is her name?," etc., we were served hard biscuits and four glasses of hot tea. Felt as if I would float if they had brought any more out. The tea was topped with oranges, a good thing, to say the least. These visits do something to one. I always feel more grateful than ever for all the blessings we have been given. Then, too, the opportunity to help them is endless and makes one think. Here again, cordiality is the most outstanding trait. (RSL 46.02.10)

The local climate only complicated the lives of the destitute. Each year, usually in late spring, once the snow melt had begun in the mountains of eastern Turkey, the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, Basrah was inundated by overflowing canals and tributaries. The deserts became vast lakes, replete with fish and stranded wildlife. While Iraq had a moderately comfortable spring and summer in 1945, Mother Nature was saving her clout to be rained on the lives of the poor. The late spring of 1946 was especially harsh, and the result was dislodged, impoverished folks making do any way they could. Both Ed and Ruth reported on the devastating impact of the flood on the poor that spring:

> In many places whole communities have been forced to abandon their homes and live on the roads or other high spots. This will continue another four weeks, at least, it seems, so it is taking on the proportions of a major catastrophe. It is only to be hoped that this stagnant water does not give rise to an epidemic. Mrs. VanEss

[12] In the 13 April 1945 issue of the *Church Herald*, an article composed of several earlier letters was published under the title, "In the Land of Arabia" (pp. 13-14, 19).

Annual flooding turned the desert into a vast lake

says this is the highest they have ever seen the flood waters. (EML 46.05.04)

Ruth's lament about the flooding followed a grim description of the sorry state of her garden and the flaccid flowers she was able to pick for her bouquets. Then she put all of this agricultural trivia in perspective:

> Really, this flood is terribly sad. Of course, the garden is a sad situation, but even worse by far is the sad condition of the folks living in the mud huts. Many folks between here and Amarah have been completely washed out and are living on the road. Right here, in Basrah, there are many who have water-soaked huts all the time. The other day the cook reported that their place was all wet. Ed and I went out to investigate, and it was really a mess—soggy, filthy mud and water. We had some dirt dumped in his place, and that helped a little, but when the moon rises again, there is bound to be trouble. We are literally living on an island, except for one walk that we can take to the street. (RSL 46.04.28)

In a *Church Herald* article of April 13, 1945, Ruth hinted at the missionaries' hopeful news to those of lower estate, a message which assured them of their essential worthiness in the eyes of God, despite their current economic and social conditions. She wrote of one session with a group of poor women who listened attentively to the Gospel promises shared by veteran missionary Christine Gosselink:

Ruth in back yard measuring the depth of the flooding

After they had assembled, they started to sing hymns which are taken from our hymnbooks and fitted with Arabic words. I followed by following the hymnbook carefully. Then Mrs. Gosselink read a Bible story and told about what she had read. She talked on the theme "Ye are the salt of the earth," and although I did not get much of it, I did get a few words. The women listen carefully and drink in everything that is said.

They think the missionaries are the most wonderful people in the world, for they bring new thoughts of love and compassion to these people who are so unhappy. As I sat there and watched their faces, I knew that such work was worthwhile and rewarding. They are learning about Jesus and His love and the fact that God loves them. Even in their sad lives, it certainly must make an impression. Needless to say, I think Mrs. Gosselink and Mrs. Van Ess have done a wonderful piece of work, and I stand before them humbly desirous to learn from them. It is interesting; it is challenging [pp. 13, 19].

CHAPTER 4

Ed's Public World

While Ruth was being welcomed into the private world of Iraqi women, Ed found himself confronting the labyrinthine world of Iraqi and British colonial officialdom. From the mundane business of sending and receiving mail to the more consequential matters of securing legal resident status, Ed found his time, outside of language training, swallowed up by governmental, business, and military agencies, each with its own set of opaque rules and regulations. In short order, Ed learned to massage these systems, a skill which enabled him to prevail amidst all manner of administrative intransigence.

Such routine matters as establishing a checking account and paying household staff took up an inordinate amount of Ed's time when he first landed in Basrah. In general, local payments for goods and services (including salaries for Yusef, Baqr, and others) were done by cash. Ed recounted a typical week's transactions: "This morning I went down town to the Imperial Bank of Iran (incorporated in England) and cashed our check for January and February, opening therewith an account in that bank. Tonight we settle for the month of February with Miss K. Next Saturday we pay the *dobee* (washman) his monthly fee, then we're square with the world." (EML 45.02.28)

The mechanics of banking became even more problematic in 1946 when Ed was elected to be the treasurer of the entire Arabian Mission community. A letter home in the spring revealed the complexity of conducting the business of the mission across four countries, with dozens of missionaries, scores of employees, and multiple banking systems, each with its own currency:

> Wednesday the notice from our bank arrived. You'll hear about this notice every month from now on. It advises me that the board has telegraphed such-and-such an amount of money out to the credit of the Arabian Mission. That is the signal for me to go ahead with writing the checks for salary, children's allowances, rents, repair, evangelistic work, teachers, schools, etc. I've decided that I'll keep my mornings for study even during the "treasurer's week" and just work on that money stuff in the afternoon and evening. I finally got to the point in my bookkeeping that I could make out the checks Friday evening and send them out Saturday noon. It's amazing, even to me, how much bookkeeping is involved in the work. Of course, working the various exchange rates back and forth between dollars, rupees and dinars[1] creates a certain amount of paperwork. I'm not quite finished yet with the preparation of my journal and the sorting of my receipts. But things are well in hand for this month. (EML 46.03.24)

Creative management was an essential skill for Ed to navigate the local economy and its unrelenting red tape. As suggested by these parallel incidents involving transshipping missionaries' luggage, Ed became adept at contending with the inimitable corridors of Iraqi officialdom:

> [Monday morning] Harry and I went down to the railroad station together in the YM (Indian) three-quarter-ton truck. The train was an hour late, so we got intimately acquainted with the station, which is an all-outdoor affair—no waiting room. The Scudder family, Cornelia Dalenberg, Rachel Jackson arrived with their baggage—no small item.
>
> We sent the women home in a taxi. After two trips by the YM truck, there was still enough heavy baggage for two more trips;

[1] While money from the United States came in dollars, those living in Iraq used *dinars* and those in the Gulf generally used Indian *rupees* (as issued by the Imperial British authorities). In the interior of Oman, exchange was usually conducted in eighteenth-century "Maria Theresa *thalers*," issued by the Austro-Hungarian Empire!

> but it was noontime. So we hired a truck on the open market and used that. I was baggage-watcher-over at the station while all this was going on, sitting there from a little after nine until almost two in the afternoon with my thoughts. Mostly I was thinking about the little things that make a difference—a check room or checking safes such as all American RR Stations have, would have made quite a difference. An inside waiting room would have been a comfort (but since this is the end of the line, and since only two trains go and come daily, there is not much purpose in it). A Union News Stand, a modern signal system so that they could have told us over the phone that the train would be an hour late, a modern baggage-unloading depot so that we wouldn't have had to pay six dollars for coolies to carry trunks on their backs from the railway car to the truck—such little things one notices when there is time to reflect. (EML 45.09.25)

A month later, Ed was again aiding a missionary in transit to make her way through the Iraqi bureaucracy.

> It's Saturday evening. In the latter part of the afternoon, Cornelia Dalenberg and I went down to the *Tsinan*, her boat to Bahrain, and put on her heavy luggage. The boat is one that usually (prewar) is on the China Coast run between Shanghai and Hong Kong. It is leaving Basrah for the last time before returning to its former haunts. On the docks near her were thousands of bags of rice and barley packed as high and wide as a warehouse—Iraq's chief export (with dates excluded). As we stood there, a big English plane circled low overhead and landed just a short distance away at the airport. There are many ways to come to Basrah. (EML 45.10.06)

These practical forays into the mercantile world were essays on the incipient global economy waiting in the wings. The mere task of managing these routine functions was time consuming and at times overwhelming. Ed's pointed comment about the plane circling overhead while he had to contend with an antiquated passenger liner reflects the distance between the modern world that beckoned and the traditional one that still prevailed.

Plumbing in this canal-riven community was a constant source of stupefaction and frustration. In general, the missionaries learned to adapt, making the most of a trying set of drips and rust, and seeing the humor in it:

> Phunny phenomenon: We are at the end of one of the branches of the city water supply system. The pipe to our house here runs along the surface of the ground next to the sidewalk for about four hundred feet. From 12 to 4 (approximately), it gets the sun directly on it. So during that time, we can take baths, wash our clothes, dishes, etc., by turning on the "cold water" faucet. Some service!! (EML 45.04.27)

The whimsies of the plumbing infrastructure frequently demanded resourceful skills, which Ed had not learned in seminary or college. He was often called on to respond to pipes gone awry:

> The water had been turned off in Miss K.'s apartment up at Basrah City. So when it was turned on again [after her successor arrived], all the connections sprung leaks—the washers had dried up and cracked in the heat. So yours truly went up with a great big two-foot Stillson wrench and opened up the plumbing so that we can put in new packing. You should see your son slowly become a plumber by necessity! Did I ever tell you about the extension I put in our bathroom so that we wouldn't have to bend over with a pail to get our water but could have it run directly into the basin? Not a bad job and a great deal of satisfaction, I must admit. Psychologists say it's the joy of producing. (EML 45.09.25)

However psychologists might characterize the completed task, there seemed to Ed to be an unending regimen of repairing outworn faucets and pipes.

When Ed and Ruth arrived on the scene in Basrah, the political landscape was generally calm on the surface, but turbulent streams flowed just beneath it. The British Empire, with its longtime stranglehold on India, the Gulf, and Egypt, was unraveling. The twin strands of nationalism and communism were being fueled by centuries of hatred for outside oppressors, whether Christian (like the British and French) or Moslem (like the Ottomans). Not yet engulfed in the mixed blessing of oil gushing from the desert, Arab communities of all stripes—clans, tribes, and regions—were struggling to define themselves. Postcolonial prospects, independence and self-determination, were optimistic watchwords on the street, although colonial hegemony, autocratic rule, and outside control were the grim operating realities in government, military, and business circles.

It was through this morass that Ed had to wend his way, complying with regulations and structures which could easily confound. On

While on the surface, the political life was calm (*top*), under the façade was brewing resentment, which was often violently suppressed (*bottom*)

arriving in Basrah, he had to obtain a residence permit from the local Iraqi authorities, something which had to be renewed every three months. When he went to the appropriate office, he was amazed to discover a political functionary who was a *practicing* Muslim:

> Yesterday I went to the Mutesarrifiya, local magistrate, office and received our residence permit for three months. Apparently this will have to be renewed every so often. When I walked into the office designated, I was surprised to see a man sitting behind his desk but with his face level with the top of the desk. I was quite surprised. Someone told me to sit down while he prayed, which is what I did and what he was doing. Since they don't close their

> eyes as we are in the habit of doing, I was perplexed. He was very decent about the matter; I was sorry to have intruded. Several other men in the office were not praying, however. Not everyone here is an orthodox Moslem, it seems. (EML 45.01.03)

A central component of Ed's mastery of the social networks involved becoming familiar with the political and community elites of Basrah. This was a path that had been carefully cultivated by veterans like John Van Ess and George Gosselink, and it conformed easily to cultural expectations. Ed's education took many courses, some planned and formal, others more impromptu. Getting to know the political elites—foreign and domestic—was frequently facilitated by grand dinner parties. In October 1945, Ed reported on two such galas, one small scale and the other more munificent:

> Monday's two Arab-style meals were strikingly similar—fried chicken, rice with raisins, special stew, sweetened macaroni for desert, watermelon, honeydew melon. One meal was in the city home of the sheik who controls all the Arab tribes in Iraq and bordering Saudi Arabia (the Muntuffiq tribes) (or League); the other [meal was] in the open next to a reed hut on rugs and mats, served by men who walked across the table cloth to set the dishes down in their proper places! (EML 45.10.05)

Unanticipated events often led to direct contact with the political and social elites. For example, President Roosevelt's untimely death on April 12, 1945, the eve of Allied victory in Europe, occasioned the opportunity for Ed and the other missionaries to circulate with Iraqi leaders:

> We were deeply impressed to read the accounts from you folks of the days immediately following the death of ex-Pres. Roosevelt. You might be interested in what happened here. Chris G[osselink] heard the first news on the radio at 7:30 a.m., phoned us; we listened in profound and almost unbelieving silence to the 8:00 announcement over our Ahwaz (Iran) A[merican] E[xpeditionary] F[orce] radio. Baqr, our young teacher, already knew about it when he arrived at 8:45.
>
> When I went downtown at 9:15, the Turkish flag over their location was at half mast. The Iraqi flag over the Liwa courts (like county courthouse) and that over the Mutassarifiya (like city hall) were at half mast. The British and American Consulates were

> closed; their flags were half mast. The local cinemas closed for the day (Friday), and I believe, for Saturday as well. (Two big days for a businessman; I wonder if this happened in the States?) The Sargent Mother of the local French (Catholic) Convent School sent a note of sympathy to Miss K[illean], the principal of the American Girls School. Dr. V. E. received several telegrams. The padre of the local Anglican Church asked Jay K. to preach Sunday a.m. in a memorial service, and I led in prayers in Vespers; Sunday a week later, a special service was held; V. E. preached; even the Muslim mayor attended. (EML 45.04.27)

Politics intruded on all fronts, most decidedly in the conversations with Iraqi gentry which increasingly absorbed Ed. Early on, these took place with teachers in the mission's Hope Boys School as well as with men relaxing in the *suq's* coffeehouses. Typical was this exchange on the status and role of Russia and the promise of Communism, a conversation which took place in July 1945:

> We have had some long talks [with local Iraqi men] about Communism and the Russian influence here. I wish I could express my feelings and ideas on this subject in a separate page where it could be read by you folks alone[2] and then stored away for future reference. These young men read much about Communism. Books coming from Russia and England (!!) about Lenin and by him and about the various issues that we commonly hear associated with the Communist propaganda are all over Iraq. The young men talk for these ideas very enthusiastically.
>
> I was having a rather droopy conversation with one of our younger teachers a few days ago when I said something about Russia in passing. He immediately perked up and started talking with fervor and enthusiasm; he stayed through tea until his friend, who had been waiting for him at a local coffee shop more than an hour, came over and found him here. The ideas they have are not bloody now, but they envision the possibility of revolution. The young men are thoroughly convinced that Iraq politics is too corrupt to be mended by any legal means. Those who can speak English want to get away from the mess and live in America.
>
> Those who can't get up nerve to leave or can't speak English want a change here by any means that will give every man a

[2] Ed was very conscious that all of their mail was being censored, either by the Allies (the war was in its final stages) or by Iraqi authorities.

chance at proper clothing and food. The strange thing is that the young white-collar workers are carrying the spear in the Cause [of revolution]. They are the ones who get all the privileges under the present system. Everybody is allotted a given amount of cloth, but government employees get a lot extra; they get special rates on the train, special soap rations, etc., etc. But they want more.

They have over them, they feel, an administration of old men who want to keep everything in their own power and who run the whole government for their own good and that of their friends and relatives. (This spicy bit of gossip they splice with the other morsel: that the English are running the whole show and giving the native Iraqis nothing to decide about. Any attempt to make them say one thing or the other meets with repeated affirmations of both sides.)

Elections here are apparently a farce. The list comes down from Baghdad, according to some reports, to the local "electoral college," which says "yes" to the list of nominees and adjourns. Those who try to put another name on get a heavy scowl and no result. The information I have has all come from Christian men who have their own prejudices, no doubt, and who insist that a distinction is made against them and their candidates. The local Christians and Jews have much the same song here as the Jews in the USA. It is striking to note the similarity. Both are minorities; both make much ado about every problem they face and assert that it is a minority problem. Here it is extremely difficult for anyone to get a visa for leaving the country—I'm speaking now of the nationals, the Iraqis. But the Jews and Christians insist that it is a point of discrimination even after they have had brought to their attention the cases of several Muslims treated the same way.

On the other hand, there is obviously some discrimination in certain departments which no neutral observer can help noticing. So the Christians and Jews are likely to be for a change in government, which means in this country a swing to Communism.

But not they only! Many of the young educated Muslims are now chafing under restrictions imposed by men and bureaus of men who are not educated. They would have a rule of the enlightened if they could. But any change would be better, they feel.

I have not yet felt the pulse of the peons here (for this land is feudal in the real sense of the word, everywhere but in

the main cities). The lot of the sharecroppers who receive only three hundred pounds of rice a year for their wages (figure out how much of that you'd eat yourself just to keep alive) and of the coolies who infest the place (our cook, being a cook, will not carry the tomatoes or cucumbers home; a boy gets five or ten cents for walking along behind him with the stuff) is indeed a cause for action. They would have to make the body of the revolt most likely. But they are not nearly in the mood for producing a change themselves. They've got neither the physical nor the mental and spiritual vigor that is necessary for the uprooting of the status quo, either by passive or bloody means. It might even happen that the educated class or white-collar men might set up a new government some day that would put the power and privileges into their own hands and leave this peon class in about the same situation it has been for centuries.

I wish I knew more about the Russian system and the way it has worked out in the experience of the common laborer in the field and factory. Perhaps some day I will get a chance to see. But to date nobody can get into Russia from our end, whether Persian, Iraqi, English, or American, and few come out.

A Russian legation has been established in Baghdad and is functioning very well, apparently. It was quite a surprise to some people that it was "permitted" in this land. Everyone here is of the opinion, or at least the hope, that the new English government under Atlee [*sic*] may have a change of policy in store for this corner of the world.[3] In a few months we'll know.

I didn't expect to go on quite like this. You can see that I'm still in the stage of gathering facts and trying to correlate them. I've been able to form no definite judgments about what should happen. There are many things I don't know or understand. But I thought I'd let these few come out on paper while we still have APO privileges, and I can say what I want, for I'm afraid that such a statement as this might not pass unnoticed through civilian channels. Of course, you will keep this bit of paper to yourselves. Do not under any circumstances read it in public or publish it.[4]

[3] In the wake of victory in Europe, Prime Minister Winston Churchill was promptly voted out of office in favor of Clement Attlee, Labor Party leader.

[4] This note is a direct instruction to Anthony Luidens, Ed's father. While it is Anthony that we must thank for the preservation of these letters, he was widely known—even notorious—for his inability to hold his tongue. On numerous occasions letters which had similar instructions from Ed were retyped on Anthony's typewriter for

Ed taking a break during cross-desert trek with US military personnel

> Of course I want you to have some insight into our situation and daily subjects of conversation and thought. But this expression of thought is only for family consumption. (EML 45.07.05)

The military and political alliance between the United States and Britain on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other had a direct impact on Ed's life in unexpected ways. A central role in the Lend-Lease program to supply the Soviets with military aid was played by the massive Allied seaport installations in Khoramshahr and Abadan, Iran, a two-hour ride from Basrah.

When the war wound down, the Allied militaries left behind warehouses of surplus equipment—from tanks to bullets—and tons of more mundane items, such as the household goods. In addition to these staples, there were storerooms of leftover medical paraphernalia and hospital furniture. These flotsam and jetsam caught Ed's notice. He quickly surmised that the surplus military equipment could be used to furnish the new mission hospital in Kuwait. The narrative of his response unfolded during March and April 1946:

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greater legibility . . . and wider distribution. It is hard to imagine that this tasty piece of political reflection was not similarly reworked for sharing with "a select few" of Anthony's family and friends, despite Ed's plea to the contrary.

Contrary to the usual stay-at-home practices of yours truly, I managed to get out of town four days this past week! The business started Monday with a trip to Abadan. Saturday night at the Consular party which we reported last time, I met the head man at the Abadan air base. He invited me down to inspect their impending surplus stock (it has not been declared such, yet).

So I went on Monday, spending from 8:30 til 1:30 at the air base (which is extremely quiet now, since Dhahran [air base] has opened near Bahrain), talking with the officers and getting the information from the clerks. They are all Americans who were discharged from the army to work for TWA. I met two of the three fellows I've married here. The other has already left for America with his bride.[5] They were all very friendly and, with the exception of the usual quota of small guys in big jobs who like to make things difficult, gave me all the help they could. I now have a list of food stuffs, mostly canned, and some other items which we may buy when the stuff is declared surplus. . . .

I hitched a ride from the air base into Abadan itself after lunch. I was completely astounded to find the kind of a city they have there. Some two thousand Englishmen who operate the refinery there (the biggest in the world, according to some reports) have a completely western city. Modern office buildings two and three stories high, a large fire department, a beautiful new theatre-movie house, a whole residential section of brick houses and paved streets lined with trees between the sidewalk and the curb, a *free* bus service that runs *on schedule* along prescribed routes, and a hospital. . . .

Thursday and Saturday went back to Khorramshahr to do business about heavy steel and that sort of stuff with the Persian Syndicate that has bought all the American Army surpluses. Nothing much to report from that trip except, again, that I was almost always treated very cordially and generously, partly because I was an American and partly because my business concerned a hospital (proposed for Kuwait).

Saturday I met a bad bump. Upon arrival I found that the customs authorities had locked all the warehouses in preparation for taking an inventory. That prevented my seeing the stuff we were interested in purchasing. The chief of the Customs Department listened very carefully to my interpreter and immediately ordered a pass to be made out that would take me into any warehouse

[5] More about this below.

> locked by customs. It did. I'll draw up my report and send it down to Kuwait tomorrow. I hope that business is almost finished now. (EML 46.03.31)

While the Americans—and Ed—were dealing with a "Persian Syndicate" in Khoramshahr and Abadan, the British were also liquidating their surplus equipment in Iraq. A week after making his forays into Iran, Ed was again on the road, this time north to Habbaniyah, just outside Baghdad. Working through the Surplus Property Board, a short-lived agency of the United States government which had to dispose of $90 billion worth of surplus equipment,[6] the British RAF was stripping its long-term facilities in Habbaniyah.

> I think it was Tuesday that a letter came to Dr. V. E. from a Surplus Property Board Field Representative here in Baghdad saying that certain stuff was available from the US Army equipment at Habbaniyah, the RAF permanent airport for Iraq.
>
> We wired some of the most important items down to Kuwait and got an order back to buy certain beds, mattresses, sheets, blankets, chinaware, kitchenware, office equipment, etc. So I immediately made plans to leave on Wednesday night's train for Baghdad. Since I am treasurer, and since I have been engaged at Khoramshahr in this sort of business, V. E. thought I should go rather than Jay K. . . .
>
> Friday morning, after tea in bed, breakfast, and more talk, we arrived here [at the YMCA of Baghdad] at 9:50. I buzzed over here, cleaned up, and got up to the American Embassy as fast as I could. I had sent them a telegram saying what we wanted to buy and that I was coming. I saw the SPB field representative, Mr. Robinson, who looked and acted like a state senator. He was very cordial and straight forward. He's the first supplies official that has said to me that I could get at least *some* of the stuff we wanted. He advised my going out to Habbaniyah, about seventy miles SW to see the stuff myself.
>
> Next I saw the military attache to see about transportation to the place, but he had none, altho he did try, very kindly, to make arrangements for me through Br. circles. I also went in to see Mr. Moose, Minister [Plenipotentiary] to Iraq.[7] He, too, was

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surplus_Property_Board.

[7] In 1946 the United States was transitioning between a minister plenipotentiary and a full ambassador to Iraq. It may be that "Mr. Moose" was an acting minister, for he is not listed on the official roster of US ministers or ambassadors to Iraq.

very decent; talked ten or fifteen minutes, explained that we as an American philanthropic organization got #2 priority, second only to US gov't agencies, e.g., the embassy. So apparently, we'll get a show this time! . . .

Made some phone calls after lunch and finally arranged to ride out to this nearly inaccessible camp on an RAF duty truck leaving at four o'clock. We arrived at the camp about six o'clock. It took the driver several tries before we found the barracks where the few remaining Americans were quartered. Two groups [each consisting] of a 2nd lieutenant and six men were stationed there. One [group] had just come to guard the stuff until it's sold. The other was the end of a signals unit just leaving; the plane took this latter group away Sat. a.m. (It had come in from Cairo.) The lieutenants took me with them to the British Officer's Club where they eat. We had a superb supper. I ordered pork chops because we hardly ever get them at home. A British officer-friend of theirs invited us all to go to the "cinema" with him. They have a beautiful movie house there with accommodations for about twelve hundred men, I guess. This is a first-class permanent RAF base. It's got all the riggings of a big-time airport, altho they aren't handling so many planes now as they were, say a year ago. Twenty or twenty-five planes were on the ground at the time, and nearly as many landed and took off while I was there.

I slept in my "sleeping bag" again on an army cot in the big room with the six enlisted men. This was a typical American barracks: cots, desks, wall lockers, ping-pong table, Victrola with stacks of v-discs (light-weight records), GI-issue magazines around on chairs and benches, a good radio on a chair in one end of the room, an empty mail sack on the floor (the first one to arrive in two weeks!). The fellows were very ordinary, very amiable, clean and amazingly clean of speech—even though they didn't know I was a "missionary" until quite late in the visit.

Saturday a.m. I spent most of the time inspecting the stores in the warehouses and hangers, seeing what stuff we needed and what condition it was in. This took me again to the place where I could get a private "gander" at some of the war-type planes which were resting there. About noon time some of the fellows decided that they might as well go into Baghdad "this afternoon as any other time," for they had to deliver some heavy crates to the military attache. (EML 04.07.46)

Staving off boredom, Ed spent the next few days trapesing from office to office around Baghdad waiting for word that he could proceed with his purchases. He resumed his narrative:

> I puttered around going from the embassy to the river shipping company and to various other offices during the next few days, clearing the deck for action. Finally, on Thursday, I got a call from the embassy saying that they had the contract ready to sign. I made arrangements to go out to Habbaniyah, the permanent British RAF base in the Middle East, that afternoon on a duty truck. But because of some slip up in communications, I missed the truck and had to wait over in Baghdad until Friday morning.
>
> I finally was told to report to the Levies Camp (the RAF employs Kurds, Indians, Iraqis, and others as guards).[8] The officer there, a British regular army man, put out a cup of tea and took me into the best end of his barracks as though I were an honored guest rather than a hitchhiker. He talked big about the problems of discipline in the Levies and about the bad condition in which England is now. He compared the present "giving in" to Russia all along the line to the policy of appeasement followed by Chamberlin in prewar days, concluding that the results would necessarily be the same!
>
> As we finished our tea, he said he was expecting a high officer at ten o'clock. At exactly that hour, a plane zoomed overhead and landed at the nearby Baghdad airport. He jumped in his command car to fetch him. In the meantime, the Kurd Levies with whom I was to ride had prepared themselves and were ready to leave. We arrived in Habbaniyah at about 12:30.
>
> I've never yet driven in a British vehicle on any long distance hauls when that vehicle has not broken down. We had to stop twice to repair the fuel line and pump. Both times we had to wait until another truck came along to lend us some tools, for—believe it or not—we had been sent out across this unpopulated section of desert without so much as a pliers!! I thought to myself: It's a good thing there isn't a war on. I wonder what they ever did?
>
> The six US Army boys and their lieutenant (Looey Willie behind his back) were very decent about helping me corral my

[8] These are the troops who had been "levied"—or voluntarily enlisted—into the British military service from the British colonies. For most, military service was a matter of economic necessity rather than ideological commitment. For many, the irony of fighting for the British while their own countries were being controlled became a strong motivator to end the Empire.

odd assortment of surplus property. These boys, as I believe I explained before, have all come out since the end of the war. They form, in this particular situation, a residual team that guards the surplus property left behind at the station until it is sold. It's a fairly easy job. The boys like it quite well at Hab. Because that place is as close to being a city as any base I've seen, being laid out with macadam streets, well-grown trees, a shopping district (tailors, etc.), a modern theatre, etc. They pitched right in and during the course of the afternoon we counted out our quota of blankets, mattresses, sheets, mattress covers, chinaware, kitchenware, and office equipment.

They had "readied up" a big six-drive truck to haul our stuff [back to Baghdad], because they had been told of my coming out by the embassy. We packed all the small stuff into three coffins, which they had not had to use, fortunately. Needless to say, they made ideal packing boxes for large quantities of goods. With the truck piled high with these boxes and the mattresses, and with eight of us fellows trailing in a weapons carrier (commonly referred to as a weppo), covered with mattresses (in place of the comfortable seats that are never found on military vehicles), we advanced on Baghdad at about sunset, six o'clock.

It so happened that two army lads from H-3 (pumping station halfway between Kirkuk and Haifa way out in the desert) were going into Baghdad to get a glimpse of the big city. One of them was from just outside Montclair [New Jersey]—I forgot the name of the place—and was a typical Joisey City Boid. He was all set to stake me to a couple beers and whatever other liquid refreshment I wanted, when we hit the boig lights. After he'd blown his own horn about half an hour, he patronizingly asked me what I did. You could almost see him wilt when I told him! The rest of the fellows got a big kick out of it, of course. The fellow "bounced" very nicely, however. We had a lively conversation. He joined the rest of the fellows in accepting my invitation to have dinner at one of the good European-style hotels in Baghdad.

When we finally returned to Habbaniyah at about 2:00 a.m., I don't think he had had a drink. We all had a good American gabfest, which I must say, looked very peculiar (even to me!) in this staid hotel dining room and lobby which had been, until two weeks before, "For Officers Only." Privates and sergeants sprawled over the big cushions and gathered around the piano singing "You are my sunshine" (with variations) and "Carry me

back," while one of the play-by-ear boys kept us on pitch. Not a few British eyes pivoted in their sockets at this "ghawstly sawght"—practically an invasion of the vulgar into the domain of the sophisticated. The fellows had fun, and I got a big kick out of watching the sufferings of the besieged ones! . . .

Riding through the desert in that weppo, I thought frequently of Pres[9] and wondered at the number of times and places he had ridden like that. The stars were bright; we talked about them a lot.

Oh yes, on the way in, we picked up three Iraqi soldiers who were going into the city. They used another fellow who spoke some Arabic and me as interpreters and discussed through us everything from their homes to their desire to be rid of the English. One of the US boys asked why the Iraqi hitchhiker liked Americans more than Englishmen. The answer was quickly given: because with you everyone is equal. I worked (the Iraqi went on to say) at a British camp near Basrah for six months. When I returned to Baghdad, my teacher asked me what I learned. I told him "Nothing." All they said was "Bring the pliers. . . . Take away the hammer. . . . Wipe this off." They never taught me anything, nor let me see what they were doing.

But when the Americans work, you work together. Everybody knows what is being done, and there is no distinction between the director and the coolie.

Saturday I finished packing my stuff, and we left for Baghdad again, this time with the weppo only, for the bulk of our stuff had gone the night before. We arrived at 1:15, got our stuff received into the warehouse (even though it was after hours), went to the embassy to arrange for the Demand Draft on America, wrote a letter of instruction to the shipping company, made a reservation for travel to Basrah, packed, and got on the train at 6:10.

That day I hadn't eaten one thing—not even a sandwich—in all the rush and excitement. From Friday night in Baghdad until Saturday night on the train, I had been fasting! But the funniest part about that item is that I wasn't even hungry!! You can be sure I did justice to that supper though.

I shared my compartment with a young Englishman who had just been discharged from the army (Burma campaign on

[9] Preston "Pres" Stegenga was serving, sometimes as a truck driver, with Patton's Third Army on the border of Germany at this time.

> the return) and was resuming his business status. He waxed quite eloquent in describing the product which he sold, the way it was used in almost every civilized country, the way he did quite some traveling to sell—Rose's Lime Juice. I thought of VanEss's experience in America when he [the young Englishman] asked me what my business was. So I told him I was a traveling man, too (which was true just then, at least) and that we had branches in every civilized country and a lot he would not call civilized. "Oil company?" he guessed. When I told him what I meant, I got the common rejoinder, "Oh, isn't that nice. Fine work. . . . Don't you think we ought to have the fan on?" (EML 46.04.15)

The vagaries of war crossed Ed and Ruth's paths in many guises. The swell of young, single men into this war zone was met by the ebb and flow of young, single women from the region. The consequence was a rash of engagements, many of which led to the door of the "local" pastor—Ed. The resulting marriages read like an international roster as they joined American soldiers with Armenian, Persian, and even Polish women. Ed (in regular consultation with Ruth) found himself frequently asking, "Is this really a union which will stick, or is this a matter of opportunism on behalf of one or the other partner?"

One representative episode began on Christmas Day 1945:

> Later in the afternoon, a young Polish girl and her mother as well as an American man came in. Yes, way out here the parson has marriages to perform. Ed had a long talk with them, and the time was set [for] Wed. at ten in the morning. She was just a young girl, and he is in his thirties—she about twenty-two. He is on the War Shipping Board in Khorhamshar. You see, there are many, many Polish refugees in the area, and lots of the girls are marrying American fellows, in fact there were seven in a couple days last week. What strange experiences one does have! . . .
>
> On Wed. morning Yasir and I did some fast work to get the living room in readiness for the wedding. We had the candles on the fireplace and a fire burning in it, as well as our Christmas decorations and the room looked quite cheery. (RSL 45.12.28)

The plight of Polish refugees was a particularly poignant one, and their story was slowly unraveled over the next few months as Ed and Ruth met many of them. Stories related by participants in Polish-American and Polish-British weddings added critical pieces to the heart-rending record of ethnic cleansing in Eastern Poland, a record

which still boggles the mind (and has been largely lost to history, given the strict Soviet control of subject matter taught in postwar Poland).[10] Ruth narrated one encounter with local Polish friends:

> On Monday afternoon, we had the head man of the local "Y" as well as the woman and two army helpers over here for tea. The head man, and woman as well, are Polish refugees who will not be able to get back to Poland—on a different side of the political government right now. The stories of these people, political refugees, are all amazing. Most of them have spent some horrible years in Siberia. The madame, who is now at the Y in charge of the food, is doubtless of a very good family. Her sons are in the army in Italy and Cairo, respectively, and her husband, she will not say. Mr. Tripke [who also worked at the local YMCA] has his family still in Poland, and he just received word that they were all right, at least living. He hasn't seen them since 1939. What tales. (RSL 46.02.03)

Ed filled in more details in his own letter that same day:

> Monday afternoon two Englishmen and two Poles were here. Wednesday several more Poles were here for the wedding. Their stories are almost all the same. They have lived near the Polish-Russian border. In 1939 and 1940 Russian soldiers came to their homes, gave them and their families two or four hours to pack while they watched everything that was put in their bags, put them in cattlecars, and sent them out to various villages in Siberia or Asiatic Russia, where they were a hundred miles or so from the nearest railroad, effectively isolated. Several of them have traced their sojourns on our maps. They all, needless to say, would have helped the Germans against the Russians in the early stages of the war. But Britain negotiated for Russian's turning them over to British protection (under London Polish government) when Russia, Britain, and US became allies. So they were brought down into camps in Iran, Iraq, India, Palestine, Egypt, etc. It's from this background that these girls come, many of them—not all, of

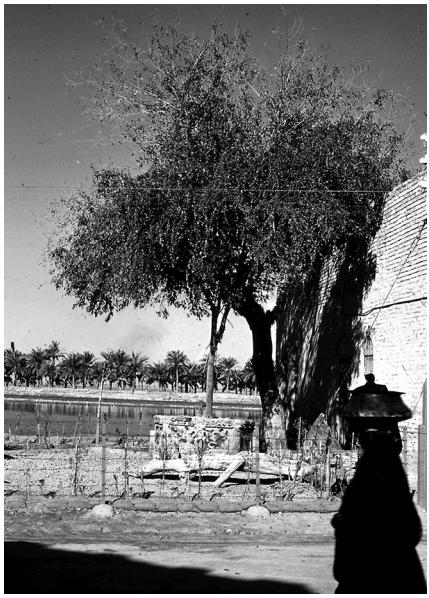
[10] In a personal interview with Ms. Marlene Kartsch Pavlos, a 1990s Polish emigre to the United States, the author found that the history of this expulsion of Poles and the radical dismemberment of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union was widely remembered through word of mouth since official Communist censorship kept it from being taught in schools. The numbers of Polish citizens forcefully relocated is estimated at more than five hundred thousand.

> course—from families of means and high social rank before the war. (EML 46.02.03)

For many of these desperate refugees, a new world opened up as they saw the prospect of marriage to American GIs or British Tommies and the option of immigrating to the United States or Britain.

In May 1946, weddings were again at the heart of Ruth's weekly letter home and a central part of Ed's previous week. Ruth, ever the starry-eyed romantic (as underscored by her ubiquitous "Well"), reported on two recent marriages:

> Well, this past week has been just as heavy if not heavier [than the past] in weddings. Last Monday was the day. Mom, I know you would have laughed at my excitement about weddings, probably reminding you of days when I would go to church with Dad if I knew the couple or not. 'Twasn't as bad as that this time, not quite.
>
> An American fellow and a Polish girl from Abadan had come up a few weeks before, and Ed had had some long talks with them, and finally arrangements were made for the wedding for Monday at 10:30.
>
> Well, I tried to fix up the living room so it would look more cozy. Not anything in the garden except some white oleander bushes which seem to like water. I used that lovely glass bowl from Walt and Fan Riker [members of Grove Church], and with the pure, lovely white oleanders, it made it seem quite festive. We were already on time, but a telephone call came through saying that they would be late—two hours.
>
> Well, we waited, did a little Arabic, ate some sandwiches, etc. We had also been invited to a wedding of another couple who were [to be] married in the Catholic church at one o'clock. We felt quite confident they would wait for us there, for we planned to go over with the American consul who had to witness both weddings.
>
> Well, the wedding in our house went very nicely. Ed was very helpful, and it was obvious that the couple were grateful to him. When the fellow had first come, he was antagonistic against the church, etc. His attitude was completely changed, and it was obvious Ed had helped him during their previous conversations.
>
> Well, after the signing of papers, we piled into the consular jeep (ha, ha) and arrived in time to see the bride and groom leave the [Catholic] church. There was a bit of a mix up, for the priest



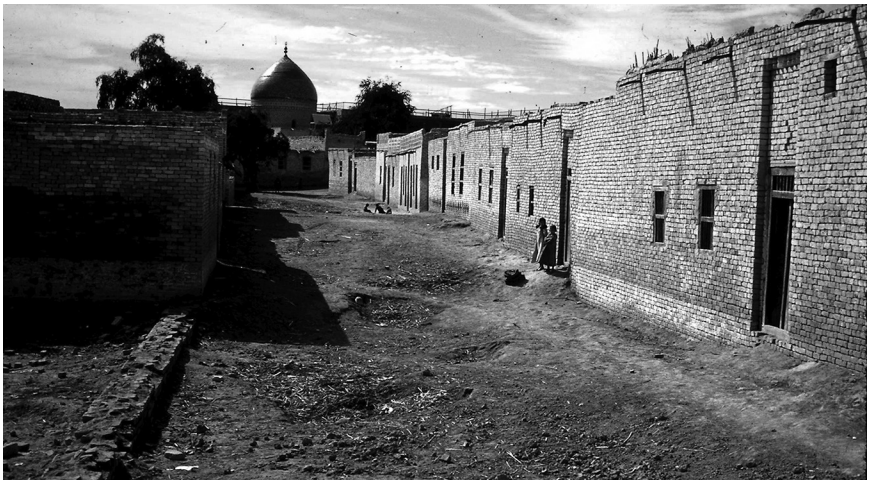
Tree in Gerna, Iraq, traditional site of the Garden of Eden on the bank of the Tigris River

had thought the consul was there, but he was not; he was with us. Well, after another few moments, things were arranged, and we all went over to the "YM" where there were about thirty guests for a lovely luncheon.

But let me tell you about the couple. Hold your chair. The girl was a New Zealand lass who had fallen in love with an American fellow who stopped in her country on an American boat—he was of the merchant navy. Now here's the point: she stowed away all the way from New Zealand to Basrah, the next port of call. And, to make it even more surprising, she was never discovered, ahem. The captain of the boat had heard rumors that she was on the ship and had held two searches, but never found her. Wheeeeee.

There was a lot of cabling back there by the consul, and finally the marriage was OKed. They are quite a nice couple and obviously very much in love. We all went to the reception and luncheon which was very nice. (RSL 46.05.05)

Biblical references abound throughout the Iraqi countryside, and they were not lost on Ed who commented frequently on their theological implications. The sunbaked, mud-brick, riverside town named Gerna, halfway between Basrah and Amarah on the Tigris River, has traditionally been associated with the Garden of Eden. Indeed, a



Ezra's Tomb Mosque, Gerna, Iraq

gnarled old olive tree on the side of the road, covered in the dust of passing traffic, was flippantly referred to by local cab drivers as a direct descendent of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Ed drove through Gerna on several occasions, taking note on one trip that, "We stopped at Gerna (supposedly the Garden of Eden was here; we stopped here on the way back again) while the driver got a cup of tea and we drank pure Basrah water from our thermos (Holthausen[11] special)." (EML 45.08.14) Ed's acerbic, theological assessment of this purported holy site can be summed up with the word "supposedly" and then his quick move on to more consequential matters, the source of the thermos from which they drank Basrah water! The nearby tomb mosque of Ezra received no comment.

Ed and Ruth's first home, with Miss K., was on a compound protected by a towering wall and entered through a large wooden gate, big enough for a small lorry to drive through, but with a smaller door (known as a needle's eye) embedded in it. Ed was prompted to observe:

> Many little things in life here illuminate the scripture stories. E.g., you cannot go through the needle's eye every day and continue to be confused about whether the passage about a camel's going through the eye of a needle referred to a sewing needle.[12] Our

[11] A department store in Union City, New Jersey.

[12] The reference is to a parable in Matthew 19:24 discussing the likelihood that "a rich man" could enter the kingdom of heaven, a difficult undertaking likened to that of a camel stooping to get through the needle's eye.

> gate on the street is usually closed. It is large enough to admit an automobile. In one side of it is a small door, about two feet wide, about four feet high, with a sill about a foot high. You can understand that milkfed youngsters like us have to stoop down and "climb" through.
>
> I always used to wonder, when we read the account of Lazarus and the rich man,[13] whether it was not possible that the rich man used a side entrance to his house, so that he never really realized wretched Lazarus' need. But that is obviously impossible, for these houses are side by side and back to back, with only one main entrance, through which servants and masters alike must pass. (EML 45.01.23)

Ed and Ruth's side trip to Nazareth, on their initial trek to Basrah, had made a lasting impact on Ed's thinking and his theology. He continued to ruminate on the impoverished circumstances in which Jesus was raised and the sharp contrast between the poorest classes and the opulence of the social and economic elites he encountered in Basrah. After ten months in that city, during which time he had come to know many of the leading, local gentry as well as a few of its poorest citizens, Ed returned to his focus on the "ordinariness" of Jesus:

> Of course, Jesus' birth in a little village inn was not celebrated then as it is now—it was too ordinary! His childhood in that small village of Nazareth on the side of a rocky hill certainly was as obscure as that of His playmates. We would expect that if God Himself was going to come as a man among us, He would at least choose for Himself some regal setting, or perhaps some priestly family. But He chose to be among us ordinary people. He came to an ordinary baked-mud city, to the home of an ordinary rustic couple on what was an ordinary weekday as an ordinary Jewish lad. He saw fit to dwell with us in the commonness of life on earth and, therefore, He spurned the special privileges which were His due. (EML 45.10.25)

The notion of a low-class origin for Jesus fit nicely into Ed's theology, which was strongly infused with a hopeful message of personal and spiritual uplift, of individual potential and initiative, and—paradoxically—of ultimate reliance on Providence.

[13] The reference is to a second parable, in Luke 16:19-31, in which a rich man ignores the pitiful pleas of Lazarus, a beggar at his gate.

During their first year in Basrah and environs, Ed and Ruth developed keen insights into Iraqi cultural and social practices. Ed was particularly enchanted by the desert milieu and what that meant to the lives of its inhabitants. Indeed, he took all kinds of opportunity to travel out of Basrah (to Baghdad, Amarah, Khoramshahr/Abadan, Kuwait, the Neutral Territory between Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere).

In February 1945, barely two months into his Iraqi sojourn, Ed drove through southern Iraq to Kuwait, a half-day trip which cut right through rugged, brilliantly hued desert scrubland:

> The desert, here at least, is mostly a gravelly plain, with sage brush scattered all over it. It has rained much this winter; the sage brush is luxuriantly green. When you look out over it for miles, it gives the impression of a sea, with rolling swells, only it is green, not blue. No matter which way you look, it is always the same, except that in the west, the mountain (Jebel) I mentioned above breaks the horizon with its rocky-looking, unwooded, silhouette.
>
> We saw all sorts of strange things en route. We passed great herds of several hundred sheep wandering through the sagebrush desert with two or three men watching over them. I could not imagine how these men kept themselves supplied with food and water. Fifteen and twenty miles out, we would find Bedouin tents, pitched in picture-book fashion, or men riding side saddle (a ridiculous-looking position but quite effective for transportation!) on donkeys, or (strangest of all) two men running across a little hillock up ahead, trying to get to the roadtrack before we did in order to hitchhike a ride down the road to a desolate camp to which not more than one truck goes daily! Whatever made them want to walk forty miles across the desert if they don't have military duties there, I cannot possibly understand. Since we were following along quite close to the southern border of Iraq, I thought at first they might be smugglers or some such, but they had nothing with them, so that was out. . . .
>
> Further on I was dumbfounded to see men sitting on their haunches with little whiskbrooms in their hands sweeping the desert!!! Of all the impossible and disappointing tasks, that must be the worst. We were told later that these men sweep the desert floor actually, but not for making it cleaner. They are collecting the larger pebbles this way for use by the railroad as filler and grading rock.

> We came through Zubair on our return trip, where we saw the first real all Arab town I have seen with mud-brick walls, few doors, fewer windows, outdoor market, all Arab clothes, few cars, no visible electricity. Just outside of the town, we came across one of the donkey-driven wells that are frequently used here. Donkeys trudge back and forth in a sloped runway pulling hogskin "buckets" of water up from the well and letting them down for more water. These buckets dump their contents into a surface pool, from which it runs into the truck-garden sort of a farm several acres large. (EML 45.02.18)

In August 1945, Ed and Ruth made their initial trip 120 miles north along the shores of the Tigris River to the mission station in Amarah. They were to spend four years in Amarah in the early 1950s, but the August visit was their first exposure to this more rustic outpost. The sights and sounds along the way, so fresh to their eyes and ears, became familiar in later years, but on this occasion, they elicited reverent wonderment for Ed's musings:

> Ruth has mentioned to you our nighttime trip to Amarah. It was really quite exciting in a way. Very few people travel at night here. We had this big truck; we all could have slept in it if need be. After fifteen or twenty minutes driving, we had left the street lights of the city [of Basrah] and army camp, crossed the double track of the Baghdad-Basrah railroad and headed out into the darkness. Palm groves line the road for a short way, after which you get out into the open desert. In many little places along the way, we saw a cluster of mud huts revealed by a kerosene lantern hanging in their midst. The families had gathered around for their evening festivities; it is Ramadhan now.
>
> Ramadhan is the month of special piety for Muslims. They are supposed to eat nothing, drink nothing, and let nothing pass through their lips between sunrise and sunset. So, when the hour of setting finally does arrive, they fall on the biggest spread they can afford. It is a strange mixture of fasting and feasting. Basrah is very much westernized, however. Only the slaves and servants, the uneducated ones, and the rather rare pious rich keep the fasting properly.
>
> But out on the edge of the desert were many little villages and camps where the evening feasting and dancing kept the people awake long hours in the night. We could see their lights and hear their drumming. (I'm trying to learn their rhythm so that I can

pass it on to you when we have our first ganging together.)

We were stopped by an armed guard at one point along the road. He demanded to see inside the truck. Our driver (an Iraqi employee of the Y) argued with him, but finally had to give in. The inspection was made. Afterward the driver asked the fellow what he was looking for and reported to us that the guard didn't know himself! (Don't publish this; it would be a slur on the government efficiency.)

As we drove on across the desert we realized in many places that the road was very hard to distinguish from the desert floor itself. The only basic difference, it seems, is that the road is pounded down by trucks and cars. . . . In the whole trip, we remembered passing only two other cars, both headed the other way but parked for the night. (EML 45.08.14)

Ed and Ruth's interactions with Muslims, the core of their mission calling, were rich and varied, often resulting in totally unexpected conversations. On their arrival in Basrah, Ed and Ruth went to stay at Beit Kellien where they were introduced to Yusef, Miss K.'s cook and general factotum. Yusef elicited a great deal of attention in Ed's early letters to his parents, beginning with a winsome description of the young man written on December 31, 1944:

Miss Kellien's cook is Yusuf, a very pleasant, clean young man of about twenty-eight who has a wife (23) and five children, one about a week old. He cooks expertly, under the supervision of Miss K., does the shopping, etc. Since he uses only a little kerosene stove for cooking and heating water, since it takes an hour or two for him to haggle over prices at the *suqq* (market) and would take longer for us, it seems quite essential to have him do that while Miss K. and Ruth each do their work, using their energies for the more important business.

Yusuf is a Moslem Shi'ite. The day we arrived, he was engaged in their annual Muharram celebration when they mourn the death of a descendent of Muhammad, Husayn, by beating themselves with chains and crying copiously. Miss K. reports his having returned with very bloodshot eyes.

There seems to be little or no hostility to Christians on religious basis; they consider us misled by Jesus and say they do Him more honor than we do, for they believe He did not die but that another man substituted for Him, then went to Heaven (all this according to Miss K.). (EML 44.12.31)

A few days later, having come to better know and appreciate the comfortable, colonial routines of Miss K.'s household, Ed relayed more information about Yusef:

> When we walked in the door, Miss K. rang the bell as a signal to Yusuf, the cook. We peaked [*sic*] into the living room to see if he had lit a fire in the fireplace (it was cold enough so that Ruth was cold in her blue tailored coat over a sweater). He had; then he sat down beside it to wait for us, and fell asleep! Quite a sight: fire, small tables set for supper, Yusuf stretched out on the floor with his head on the edge of the sofa.
>
> Yusuf is a Moslem; he says his prayers five times daily; he is honest, clean, very pleasant to us; he considers it his responsibility to teach us the names of everything from *nakhla* (date palms) to *ma'* (water). He looks ten years older than I do, is actually about thirty, has five children. He wears a long white *abba*, a nightgown-like cloth descending to his ankles, which has a top like a shirt (buttons and collar); over this he wears a grey suitcoat, something like my new grey suit in color and design. Regular shoes and stockings but the usual turban-like headgear. Sallow complexion, very pleasant smile. He is a swell cook, by the way! We had another *omellette* this evening that would be the pride of any hostess. He understands enough English to get along in his job if the mistress of the house didn't know Arabic, so he is doubly helpful to us. I tell you all this, because he is the one person beside Miss K. whom we meet every day many times. (EML 45.01.07)

Yusef's very presence thrust him forward as one of the main faces of Islam which Ed and Ruth encountered. His every move and religious pronouncement was carefully observed, and as they developed language skills, Ruth and Ed found occasion to press him further about his world and his religious understandings. Yusef seemed to welcome and enjoy their interactions. Unlike Miss K., who was a single woman and Yusef's elder, Ed and Ruth were near his age and eager to learn about him and his life's circumstances. In his next letter home, Ed described this growing friendship:

> It would have done your hearts much good to have looked in on us this last hour. Yusuf brought supper to us promptly at 7:30, then backed off into a corner, half waiting for our acknowledgement of his presence as someone more than a servant. We said something to start the conversation. Then we talked during the whole meal

> (which ended with a delicious bowlful of figs, stewed!!) about Mrs. Gosselink's cook not being able to speak English or write Arabic and about Miss Rachel Jackson (who lives here) who taught him how to write Arabic, about the length of time to get from here to America, about the Arabic names of what we were eating, and assorted subjects. He volunteered to write out a list of the Arabic names of foods for Ruth (Khatoun) (I'm Sahib), which he produced shortly on a neat piece of school-line paper. Ruth wrote down the English equivalents beside his Arabic. Of course we can look the words up in the dictionary; but it is much more fun for everyone concerned to learn this way.
>
> As it got late, he said something about having to go now because of his wife; he was smiling all over. Ruth kidded him in Arabic something like this English translation: "Your wife—your wife—she say 'Yusuf, Yusuf, go to your home quickly!'" He laughed, picking up our dessert dishes, and said something which we understood as "My wife said to me last night, 'Come home right away—'"; he translated the last part at which we frowned: "Or I kick you." It was a joke; we all laughed. He has finished his evening chores now and is leaving already. He will say his evening prayers when he gets home (two hours after sunset is the last one). (EML 45.01.11)

Concurrently with their daily interactions with Yusef, Ed and Ruth were regularly meeting and conversing with another "clean" young Muslim, Mohammed Baqr, their language instructor. While Baqr's language skills were of paramount concern, he soon became another focus of theological discussion and debate. Both the Americans and he were probably using those conversations as a means of enhancing their Arabic language skills, but they also took on more somber hues as symbolic of the challenges awaiting the young evangelists.

> Tomorrow our teacher, Bakr, is going to take us to one of the government boys schools (both of us!) by permission of the principal. . . . He is making every effort to please us and help us. He is a Moslem but says that he has read more in the NT than in the Koran. He feels that they do more honor to Jesus than we, because they say that a substitute was put on the cross while Jesus Himself ascended directly to heaven without his humiliation. I believe that this young man gives more credit and honor to Jesus in his own life than to Muhammad, but he is still definitely and outspokenly Muslim. Herein lies an opportunity and a danger, as

you can readily see. (EML 45.01.23)

Conversations with Baqr frequently echoed those with Yusef and others, and they always elicited some concern about faltering language skills.

In a letter to his college and seminary friend HermBernie Luben, Ed put the life of Baqr on center stage as a potential recruit to the Christian ranks:

> When I think of you, I think of our young Muslim teacher [Baqr]. He comes here every day to teach and to learn. He's alert in mind, earnest in spirit, but tied down in thought and action by his very family and community. This morning we had as eager and straightforward a discussion as you could want, the point of which was his affirmation that certain religions belong to and were inseparable from certain nations (e.g., Iraq for the Muslims, America for the Christians) and my denial of that thesis.
>
> In the midst of the controversy, I thought of you, Herm. Baqr's moral code is determined almost entirely by the teachings of Jesus. He knows the text and the elementary ideas of the gospels as well as I do. (Needless to say, he is a graduate of our mission school.) He asks questions that pierce, giving evidence of long hours of mulling; he asks questions that cut, attempting to justify his own "enlightened Muslim" attitude, yet wistfully hoping that the argument will be wrested from his hands. Several times when I have watched him go out through the gate, I thought of you Herm and how your very being would ache (I never knew the meaning of that word "ache" before) for him and how your mind would leap at just the sort of challenge he offers for it. (EML to Lubens 45.07.16)

CHAPTER 5

Looking Backward, Looking Forward

In October 1945, Ed looked back on the year since they had left from the misty port of Philadelphia. His reflections took him over disparate events to solid conclusions which reconfirmed his sense of missionary purpose and his resolve to forge ahead. His letter of the seventeenth was especially instructive because of its tone of open-eyed, chastened optimism; gone was some of the boyish naiveté which characterized his earliest letters home. He saw with clarity the limitations of the Church, but also its great potential. He had seen much, and it had refined his convictions and enhanced his message of mercy and hope:

> During this past year, thousands of Unknown Quantities have become Known Facts. During this past year, we have learned that fear mounts as faith decreases, that faith is far stronger than the fear which assails it, that the prayer of you folks and our friends has been very effective in us, that God's gift to us in Jesus Christ was not only the most merciful deed possible for Him but also the most practical for us.
>
> I have seen with my own eyes and understood in my own mind that men and women in every walk of life—from the

diplomats of the continent to the stone gatherers of the desert—need the same forgiveness and guidance and strength that we have in Jesus Christ.

It has been a great year for me in that our experiences have confirmed for me what were still unproven truths the year before. It is easy in America to be confused by the almost completely Christian heritage which we have; for it is difficult to be sure how much of it is due to the influence of the Gospel and how much is due to purely secular forces (if any social forces can be segregated and called purely secular). But in this entirely different environment and in that of the continent, those purely Christian truths and effects seem to stand out more clearly.

Just as clearly, too, if not more so, the faults of the Church become prominent—

its fear of change and flux in politics and economics which leads it into awkward affiliations with governments and pressure groups that are not Christian in approach or vision; its concern with matters of formula and doctrine, creed and ritual, that absorbs the energies which are ever given it in abundance; its failure, or partial success, at presenting to those who are not within its pale the living Christ from Whom it derives all its spiritual strength. These are tendencies, not forthright policies, of course.

In almost direct contrast are the strong points of the Church: its bold leadership (in some cases) in effecting deep and meaningful social changes; the unity of action and spirit of fellowship that cross boundaries of creed and denomination; the average man's comprehension of the essentials of the faith and the meaning of Jesus Christ to him personally. Here is the great point of unity. Perhaps the old story is not so wrong that says many people climb the mountain going up many paths and roads on all sides; but as they approach the summit, where Jesus stands, they find their nearness to Him brings them into ever closer fellowship. (EML 45.10.17)

By the summer of 1946, Ed and Ruth were two years into their missionary experience. They had made significant strides enhancing their language proficiency and had developed a clear-eyed—if, at times, a somewhat wide-eyed—view of the cultural and political landscape. While they had become aware of the seeds of hate which were incipient in the social and political landscape, they were more than ever committed

to planting the seeds of hope which they found in the Gospel of Christ. On parallel tracks, Ed and Ruth had grown firmly convinced of the vital service which they could provide among their new friends in the Arab community, a community for which they had begun to cultivate deep and lasting bonds of affection.

Over the next two decades they shared their affection in mission stations in Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon. During those years they were witnesses to the end of the British Empire, the formation of independent countries throughout the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, the carving of Israel out of Palestine, and the mushrooming of oil derricks throughout the Arabian desert expanses. The tales of these adventures wait in the treasure trove of Ruth and Ed's letters which remain unread.