

## Chapter 2

### Immigrants, Imaginings, and the Impossible

by Marwan and Inge Qandah

#### Marwan's Story

A few years ago, one of my daughters was feeling sad. One of her friends asked why? To her surprise, my daughter said she was feeling homesick—not for the place of her birth but for where she lived during her early childhood and teen years. She was homesick for Jordan and Germany.

My daughter's situation is not unique to her. It is the lot of almost all those who live a significant portion of their lives in places other than their passport country.

While living overseas, my son was feeling down, so I told him we were willing to return to Canada instead of living overseas as international workers. His answer struck me. He said, "Baba, it is too late. No matter where we live, we will miss places, and we will miss people."

All of us face difficult questions. For example, some difficult questions for international workers or missionary kids are, "Where do you come from? Where is home?"

Such questions do not have simple answers. In my German class, the teacher asked everyone to share their name, country of origin, and job. The expression on her face, and the faces of other students from Libya, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, were priceless when I said I was a Christian pastor. They all assumed I was a Muslim since many people think everyone from the Middle East is an Arab and all Arabs are Muslims.

One of those difficult questions people ask me is, "Where were you born?" According to my passport, I was born in Der-Scharaf, Jordan. My father was a soldier stationed in the West Bank while it was part of Jordan. Then it became part of Israel. Later it became part of the region controlled by the Palestinian Authority. So, my actual place of birth is the Jordanian military camp next to the village of Der-Scharaf, which is now part of Palestine. But that military camp is now a Jewish settlement belonging to Israel.

My parents were Jordanians, and before immigrating to Canada, I held a Jordanian passport. (I now have a Canadian passport.) Then, to muddy the

situation, my Syriac tribe moved from Damascus to Lebanon in 1650, before it was called Lebanon, after one of my ancestors murdered a man. Then around 1750, my tribe moved and settled down in Jordan when it was not called Jordan. So, what do you call a man whose tribe was Greek Orthodox, some of whom converted to Catholicism, were originally Syriac and lives in Jordan?

If there is one thing we learned working in the Middle East, North Africa (MENA), and Europe for over twenty-six years, it is this, do not assume anything about anyone, ask questions and do not profile.

I also learned that God prepares us for His plans to build His Kingdom throughout our lives in surprising and unexpected ways.

A stranger named Mike Johnson, a student at Cambridge, England came to my language school where I was studying English as a second language and invited me to a Bible study at Tyndale House. Mike and I started meeting every Saturday to study the Bible together. We then joined another Bible study in simple English with other international students also learning English at Cambridge.

Mike invited me to the Round Church, which is literally round. One Sunday, a visiting priest put down a Bible and a glove. He told the glove to pick up the Bible, but the glove never moved. Then he put his hand in the glove and picked up the Bible. The priest explained that the Bible is the only way to God, the glove is you and me dead in sin, and the hand is the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, you cannot follow God. The illustration moved me, so I bought my first Bible, "Good News for Modern Man." I read up to forty chapters daily and finished reading it in six weeks.

Spring break saw me attending a retreat for international students organized by Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union (CICCU). The main speaker was Charles Marsh, an English missionary who spent fifty-three years in Chad and Algeria and spoke English, French, Arabic, and Kabili. He preached every night, and we hiked around Wales during the day. One afternoon, I went to his room. He asked, "What brings you to my room?" I replied, "I have a friend. I want to make her a Christian." He asked, "Are you a sinner?" I answered yes. Then we both knelt, and he led me in prayers. I was filled with joy as never before. No sooner had I left the room than I started sharing the Gospel with just about everyone I met before even knowing the term "Gospel." At that moment, I knew I must share the good news of Jesus Christ with all. I knew I must dedicate all of my life to this single purpose. Terms such as evangelist, evangelism, missionary, and calling were all foreign to me. Looking back, I now know the Lord gave me

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the gift of evangelism and called me to full-time ministry.

If I ever write an autobiography, I will name each chapter after people who have impacted my life drastically. Even before getting saved, Mike Johnson discipled me. Since then, I have always had people who spoke and are still speaking into my life. One of my repeated prayers is, “Lord, never let me reach a stage where I am unteachable.” Since the Cambridge days, there has been a “cloud of witnesses who have discipled me.” Jim and Joyce Dods, Frank Allan, and Philip Allan spent so much time and effort investing in my life. The Tunnochs, the Priddles, and many others opened their homes and showed me hospitality.

One couple was the Roses, an older couple who worked for the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). One day I told them, “I would love to become a missionary, but I have no qualifications.” Their response was, “Apply and see what will happen.” As a result, Inge and I applied and were assigned to work in Ouagadougou, West Africa. While training for the field, SIM asked us to consider moving to Nairobi, Kenya.

Eventually, we ended up in Jordan as international workers sent out by Cedarview Alliance Church, Ottawa. Bill Harrod mentored me every Saturday at six in the morning and helped me apply to become an international worker with The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA).

While in Amman, Jordan, Gerald Hogenbirk visited us, and we had our first official interview. The Hogenbirks opened doors for us to attend Canadian Theological Seminary (CTS). We moved our family to Regina, Saskatchewan, and studied at CTS. A few years later, I was approved to do my doctorate in counselling.

## **Sharing the Gospel**

Taxis in the Middle East and North Africa region are amazing. No father wants his daughter to get married to a taxi driver. Drivers smoke in violation of local laws, drive recklessly and are looked down on by everyone. One day as I opened the door to get into a taxi, I recognized it as an open door to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The driver was smoking, and I asked him not to. After he threw his cigarette out the window, I asked, “Why do you think I asked you to stop smoking?” He answered because it was the law. I said, “Yes, but there is more.” He said, “For health reasons.” I said, “Yes, but there is more.” He was puzzled, and to add to his confusion, I said, “Because my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.” Totally confused, with a raised voice, he asked, “What?” For the remainder of the trip, I shared the gospel message and gave him a good tip and a New Testament.

Another day I got into a taxi, knowing I had only a short ride ahead of me. I said to the driver, “Good morning. What makes you tick?” The man did not understand

the question at first. So, I said, "What makes you get up in the morning? After all, no one wants their daughter to marry a taxi driver." The taxi driver replied that he must put food on the table; that was his reason for getting up in the morning. So, I said, "Let me share with you what motivates me." Then I shared my testimony with him along with the gospel message.

One evening, a mechanic and I were having tea and talking at his garage. I asked him why when someone builds a new home, according to custom, they slaughter an animal, dip their hand in the blood, and put the blood on the doorpost. The mechanic replied that it was an Islamic custom but did not know why it was done. Then I told him this was done in the Old Testament during the Passover. He was amazed this Islamic practice was in the Bible. Then I went back to the story of Creation, the fall, followed by Abraham and the sacrifice of his son. Afterwards, I told the story of the cross, connecting the story of sacrifice with the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. This principle of using the practices of Islam found in the Old Testament stories when speaking to the local people did not seem to offend them.

Another Christian worker and I went to a gym together, but people did not know we knew each other. We would stand apart from each other and start talking, asking questions loud enough for others to hear. As a result of our conversation, people knew I was a Christian.

Later one man came and asked me about the Trinity while we were in the sauna. I asked him, "If someone knew all about God and could explain to me who God was, what kind of person would that be?" The man answered that person would be God. For the man to ask me to explain God and how he revealed Himself as triune would be blasphemous, as if I fully understood God. I accept it by faith since the Bible is the written Word of God. He accepted my explanation. Our conversations continued for many months, and he always seemed thankful to receive the written materials I gave him.

## **Inge's Story**

I was born in the USA and grew up in a Christian home to German immigrant parents, the oldest of ten children. I came to know the Lord as my Saviour at seven when the preacher at our Sunday evening meeting told the story of Nicodemus. "You must be born again" rang in my ears, and I knew I wasn't. So, I went home, knelt by my bed, and there arose a feeling of relief. Now I was on my way to Heaven.

I was seven years old and had my tonsils out shortly after that. Before the surgery, my father asked if I knew where I would go when I died; he was happy with my answer. The experience in the hospital made me want to be a nurse

because one of the nurses was not nice. But I wanted to be a good nurse.

I felt called to missions at camp when I was twelve years old. I could go overseas as a nurse. So I got my degree in nursing and spent time in Nova Scotia during the summer months working with children in gospel outreach. It seemed to answer the desire to do “foreign missions.”

Marwan and I met at a Bible conference on Easter Sunday, 1984. By this time, all except my youngest siblings had married. I had concluded, though it would be nice to be married, if God wanted me single, I was determined to use the freedom singleness brings to serve Him.

And then Marwan, who made it clear to me he did not like Germans or Americans, showed up to help in the children’s outreach the following summer. We were short-staffed, so it was good to have help, though our first meeting gave me no preparation for the marriage proposal that came after two weeks of working together. I saw the difficulties ahead if I said yes to Marwan, but God was working, reminding me He was the God of the impossible and asking if I was willing to trust Him. We both had a call to missions and full-time ministry, an important issue to settle before marriage. Marwan’s criteria for a marriage partner were someone who was a believer, a growing believer, and already involved in ministry.

We married in 1985 in Ottawa, Ontario, and lived there until we moved overseas. Our four children, Sarah, Rachel, Philip, and Deborah, were born in Ottawa before our seventh wedding anniversary.



Sharing hospitality in their home

During our first year of marriage, we took a biblical counselling course together, and our oldest child Sarah was born nine months and five days later. We continued the work with Chinese university students as Marwan had been doing before we were married. In addition, we started taking Bible correspondence courses and volunteering with SIM. In 1989, we made a short-term missions trip to Egypt.

From the beginning of our marriage, we opened our home to international students, mainly Chinese, many of whom became Christians. Hospitality was a valuable tool for reaching out to those who were lonely and in need.

After training with SIM, in 1996, we

were on our way to Kenya, or so we thought.

I was overwhelmed and wondered how I would get everything necessary done before we moved. Would we be able to adjust to living in another country? Then, while reading Psalm 105:4-5 one morning, the Lord reassured me and reminded me what I should be thinking about. *“Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced...”*

Marwan told me the promise he read in Exodus 23:25-26 dealing with his concerns about our move overseas. *“Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.”*

## A Change in Plans

We wanted to visit Marwan’s family in Jordan on our way to Kenya. After giving away or selling most of our belongings, we arrived with thirteen suitcases while our boxes of household things made their way to Kenya, where they arrived in good time.

But God closed the door to Kenya, so we started serving in Jordan. The Lord used the unexpected death of my youngest brother not long after we arrived in Jordan. The kindness of the family and the church made me feel included, loved, and cared for, filling me with the hope that we could live in Jordan.

After deciding to stay in Jordan, Marwan started assisting the pastor of the Alliance church we attended in Amman, Jordan. We also attended an English international church on Saturday nights, greatly encouraging the children. They also attended the Christian school, and I taught 7th and 8th grade there for two years.

One way we interacted with local people was by ‘accident.’ A car accident in December 1999 resulted in a hospitalization, where I met staff and the young man who caused the accident. He was given a Bible while his family and our extended family got to know each other using the fascinating Jordanian tribal method to deal with the shedding of my blood.<sup>1</sup>



A meal with locals in Northern Iraq

<sup>1</sup> You can learn about Jordanian customs at [Bedouins – the backbone of Jordanian culture \(theturbantimes.com\)](http://theturbantimes.com)





Inge working at a medical clinic in the Middle East

A little Kurdish girl, a few months old, needed a simple operation to save her life. Marwan collected donations, paid for the surgery, and then went to her bedside to pray for her. After the procedure, the mother came to our house to thank Marwan. She wanted to know what kind of work Marwan did, and he told her he was a problem solver. She, her husband, and two other couples, each with four children, met regularly on Fridays to solve their family problems and do Bible studies. Seeing the three couples baptized before we left for home assignment was a great joy.

In 2000, Marwan and I studied at Canadian Theological Seminary in Regina, Saskatchewan, and the Lord provided scholarships for us both. We finished in fifteen months and returned to Jordan at the end of the school year.

Marwan started working out in a local gym where they played the Koran during workouts. When Marwan gave a Bible to the owner, he offered to pay for it and then warned others at the gym about Marwan. One of the people who started conversing with Marwan was a professor of Sharia law at one of the local universities. Marwan admitted to being a Christian evangelist when asked. When no one else was around, individual men would ask Marwan about his faith and practice, such as how he fasted.

Once back in Jordan, I studied Arabic while working with our Kurdish friends

and others continued. We returned to Canada when Sarah, our oldest, finished high school.

## Our Move to Germany

Marwan had started travelling more during our second term in Jordan and was getting involved in various organizations. We took the opportunity to move to Germany in 2006, so Marwan could continue his travels, and I could then meet many of the people he had been working with. Sarah had married just before we moved to Mannheim, Germany. Rachel started Bible school in Toronto, while Philip and Deborah attended Black Forest Academy in South Germany.

Before moving to Germany, I was asked what my ministry would be since the children would no longer be living with us. I expected to continue to reach out and show hospitality to those in our church, neighbours, friends, and relatives, just like we had been doing in Canada. Our home has always been central to how we do ministry.

We liked to buy from small local stores owned by individuals. I knew if I needed something right away, I should not send Marwan to the store because it would take too long. His habit was to sit down and chat with people, discussing the issues of life. He would look for opportunities to share what the Bible says about these issues rather than his own opinion. He would respond by saying, “Jesus says...” or, “It is written in the Bible...” For example, one day, when he was in a hurry, the butcher shop owner asked Marwan to step outside because he had a question. His fourteen-year-old daughter was invited to a birthday party, and he did not know what to do. Marwan said, “Let me tell you what the Bible says about that.”

So, once we got to Germany, Marwan started doctoral studies in counselling, and I also took counselling courses online.

During our second term, we moved to a small village. Our home there has truly been the Lord’s providing; soon, we were able to show hospitality to local folks and various overnight guests. Some came for intensive



Teaching a counselling seminar  
in the Middle East



counselling, to take a work break, or to do both.

One Arabic-speaking young woman stayed with us for five months, fleeing an abusive marriage. She returned to her home country, and after a few years, she was able to return to the ministry she had been engaged in before her marriage. She now organizes the training we do in her country for people doing outreach. It is a joy to see her able to serve the Lord once again after a challenging experience.



Online teaching of leaders in Europe and the Middle East from Germany

The Lord sends people we can minister to who are often leaders doing ministry among Arabic speakers in Europe and the Middle East. Sometimes they come to us because of connections with our organization in member care. Marwan is on the board of a few Christian organizations that have asked Marwan to do counselling with people they know. Marwan could then do online counselling with these people.

God used many things in my life to prepare me for the work we are now doing in Germany and the Middle East. For example, I grew up with first-generation immigrant parents, have a German first name, learned German as a child, lived in the Middle East for over seven and a half years, studied nursing and counselling, and attended seminary. All these experiences have been helpful in continuing to follow God's call on my life.

Currently, we are heavily involved with our local international bilingual church in Germany, serving in leadership roles by leading Bible studies, doing biblical counselling, and mentoring church members. When the Covid lockdown restrictions were imposed, the ministry did not stop but was changed. We realized there is no expiry date on our spiritual gifts or the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We wanted to continue working for God's Kingdom during this time. As a result, our church grew in membership, and people came to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. People also came to our home for personal counselling.

We have opportunities to reach out to our ethnically diverse neighbours from



Marwan and Inge after doing  
member care in Switzerland

the Dominican Republic, Japan, Gambia, and France, most married to Germans.

As of 2023, back in Canada, we expect to continue to reach out to our neighbours, to continue online counselling and teaching, as well as to travel and teach biblical counselling in person as God opens the way. What has helped us throughout our ministry has been to have godly people speaking into our lives, being part of a local church, and daily reading the Bible. God promises to be with us each step of the way.