



## Finding It Again, at Spicer

By Alexander Carpenter

We stepped off the train looking for a rickshaw—three American boys, each with twenty-four years of Adventist tradition. Steve, from northern Montana; George, a Michigan native; and me, a southern Californian—combined we were well traveled, with over one hundred countries between us—and now we were heading to Spicer Memorial College. Disgusted with the post-colonial rail service—six hours in a dirty, crowded, open-air coach—we were hungry and standing on the train platform in Pune, India, on a Friday afternoon.

Having recently graduated from college, George Kimmel and I had been living in Mumbai (Bombay), India, for the last five months. Together we had written and shot a short film of our own and I was filling my time with bit roles in TV commercials and writing a feature-length screenplay. George had managed to use his University of Michigan film degree and penchant for dressing well to begin working in Bollywood, the Mumbai film industry. He got one assistant directing job after chatting up an Indian model—her sister was starring in an upcoming action movie—and after a couple cups of coffee and

a discussion of *Dogme 95* filmmaking, George was on the set.

Our friend Steve Wallace had flown into India a week earlier. He was teaching business at a major university in Taiwan while getting a Ph.D. I had first met him when my academy witnessing team visited his academy. We both fancied ourselves as budding public speakers and so there was a bit of testimonial rivalry, which diffused when we marked out our religious territory: colporteur-ing for me and preaching for him. We hadn't seen each other in years. Steve and George knew each other as childhood buddies in Berrien Springs—and so, on sabbatical, Steve had decided to visit us en route to Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Now we were heading out to Spicer. What was our compulsion? We each had vague memories of Spicer from mission stories or *Spotlights* or people who had attended, and I think we missed a “Sevie” enclave—there is something about seeing the Adventist metaphors reappearing around the world.

All over exist the efficient and sharp-lined end-time architecture of compounds and church headquarters, covered on the inside with cold concrete or marble or faded linoleum. Visiting the Philippines, I remember waking up in a conference office: spanning an entire wall was a huge chalkboard that listed all

the churches, with each week's baptism numbers displayed as well as the name of the baptizing pastor. I recall the sun-soaked green grasses and wide leaves and tropical flowers of mission gardens in the Caribbean. And around the world second coming murals or pictures of pioneers appear in conference atriums and boardrooms, and always the dog-eared *Reviews* and *Signs* lie on not-yet-used-for coffee tables.

Once, traveling around Europe, a girlfriend and I arrived in Rome on an early Sabbath morning and decided to go to church. We tried reading the phonebook but failed. Then we tried a Web search—“Adventist church in Rome” can pull up some very interesting results. Arriving at the address, we found the church and ADRA compound closed. A woman walking by informed us that all the Adventist churches in Rome were meeting at a Waldensian church a few blocks away. The entire service was a mix of Italian and Romanian. We stared out the ancient stained-glass windows and enjoyed the weird confluence of prophecy, history, and convenience—the Waldensian church was the only one around that would handle all seven of the Adventist congregations in Rome.

Back at Spicer in the administrative office, the secretary offered the three of us yearbooks to peruse while we waited for the president. The



mostly male senior BBA students stared back with grainy black and white grins, ready for success to smile back at them. Tired of sitting, especially after our rickety ride, we wandered around the grounds—mostly covered in light red dust and crabgrass—and checked out the student body. Friday afternoons seem interchangeable on institutional campuses around Sevie-dom. With official business over, preparations are universally underway. At Spicer there was a lot of wet hair on the people we saw, and brightly colored saris, lungis, and shirts hung out of student hostels, like festival banners.

Back in the president's office, we played the "who you know" game. Several faculty members paraded in and out and we made connections to relatives, friends of friends, and shared alma maters.

Lead to the guesthouse, we unpacked and waited around for evening vespers. I thought about all the Adventists who might have stayed in this room—conference officials, Maranatha volunteers, donors, visiting teachers—and their stories. Once, while I was staying at the Bangladesh Union Mission compound in Dhaka, a big Adventist philanthropist arrived for a quick visit before he flew by helicopter to survey the school he was funding. He told a story about how some beneficiaries had given him a huge woven wall hanging of a Bengal tiger as a thank you present. When he looked at the financial statements he saw



that they had charged him for it. He said no more gifts.

Evening vespers at Spicer turned out to be the penultimate sermon for the week of prayer. Boys and girls were separated in the chapel, and after the song service an American conference president proceeded to preach and then give the customary Friday night hand-raising call. Later that evening we chatted with the speaker and again played the "who you know" game. Again, we made connections; he turned out to have known Steve's formerly folk-singing father pretty well.

The next morning we dressed in our church-going best. Choosing to sit closer to the girls—the mix of Adventism and Indian allure did compel—we sang the hymns, stood, kneeled, and listened to the sermon, just like we had been taught. The service concluded with the final call forward, and then the universal standing/closing-prayer call. We stood with everyone else.

That afternoon it was hot. After potluck, we packed up and walked out the compound gate. Many students were heading out as well, preparing to give Bible studies to the Muslim and Hindu poor surrounding the college compound. We could have stayed, everyone was very hospitable; but without even discussing it, we were ready to go. I guess we got whatever we came for. Like visiting relatives—knowing what words will be spoken, what food offered, what stories retold—feeling the same rituals performed; there exists a sense of rapprochement, of reconnection to a familiar molding force.

Sure, at General Conference sessions everybody parades the international nature of Adventism. But out in the "other" institutions there exists something better than the huge numbers and oh-so-colorful clothing.

Here and there in a fragmented world—on common grounds, it's something like at-one-ment.

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## Sudan in My Mailbox

By Bonnie Dwyer

To provide perspective on the African Seventh-day Adventist church, in our last (spring 2004) issue we carried a box with details about the church organization there. Two areas were omitted that are part of the Middle East Union in the Trans European Division: Egypt and the Sudan. Bertil Wiklander, president of the TED, brought this to our attention and helpfully put us in touch with Michael Porter, president of the Middle East Union. Thus began the saga of the Sudan in my mailbox.

Egypt, I learned has 25 churches, 921 members, 6 ordained ministers, 1 Adventist elementary school, and 1 secondary school. In the Sudan there are 25 Adventist churches, 97 companies, 8,097 members, 18 elementary





schools, 1 secondary school, and 1 worker-training school.

The good news from the Sudan is that there has been an ordination service for four men and a training session held for women involved in children's and women's ministries. The bad news—and there is much of that from Western Sudan—is that in addition to enormous displacement of people taking place, two churches in the Darfur region have been destroyed during the escalating humanitarian and security crisis there.

News of the ethnic cleansing taking place in Western Sudan motivated more than usual interest on my part in this area of the world and the Church's presence in it. So I was pleased that in addition to a collection of stories about the church in the Sudan, Porter also sent a report from the International Crisis Group: "Sudan: Now or Never in Darfur," dated May 23, 2004. This twenty-one-page document summarized and explained the conflict in great detail and included maps of the country showing where the refugee camps are located. (The report is available online at the International Crisis Group Web site: [www.ICG.org](http://www.ICG.org).)

"Since it erupted in February 2003, the conflict has claimed some 30,000 lives," the document said, "but experts warn that without a rapid international response, what UN officials have already called the worst humanitarian situation in the world today could claim an additional 350,000 in the next nine months, mainly from starvation and disease. Many more will die if the direct killing is not stopped."

The humanitarian crisis described in the report extended beyond the killings. It said 1.2 million people have been forced from their homes and now live in poorly run government controlled

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps within Darfur, where, the report said, "they remain vulnerable to attack by the Janjaweed (militia backed by the government) and have inadequate access to relief supplies. The perhaps 200,000 of these victims who have fled across the border into Chad as refugees are not safe either. The Janjaweed have followed them, and the resulting clashes with Chad's army threaten to destabilise that country and produce a full-scale international war."

That put into new perspective for me the immense task facing the world community—and the Adventists in Sudan. Although I was pleased to learn that the Adventist Development and Relief Agency has several projects there, I also realized how important it is for the Adventist Church to be part of the larger nongovernmental agency consortium that addresses crises of this magnitude.

The latest project announced by ADRA Sudan is a distribution program providing twelve thousand internally displaced persons in Darfur with clothing, seeds, and farm equipment.

According to LoNita Fattic, country director of ADRA Sudan, approximately fourteen hundred displaced families have returned to their farms and villages in the southern part of West Darfur. In addition to clothing, ADRA is providing seeds, such as sorghum, mullet, and okra, as well as farm tools, such as hoes, shovels, mattocks, buckets, and spades to five hundred of the returnee families. The project is funded by the Swedish government through ADRA Sweden, and implemented by ADRA Sudan.

In partnership with ADRA Germany and a German consortium of nongovernment organizations, ADRA Sudan has already responded to the crisis by airlifting

thirty-five metric tons of relief items, including blankets, tarpaulins, therapeutic food, and medicine to forty-five thousand refugees and displaced persons in the region.

To put that into perspective, Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) estimates, "To feed people in Mornay (one refugee camp) alone would require 1,200 tons of food every month. Transport alone would require 80 round-trips every month on sandy roads with trucks designed to carry 10 tons carrying 15. As the rainy season begins, the roads will be even more difficult to navigate. Meeting the food needs of all of West Darfur's 600,000 displaced persons would require 300 tons a day while only half that amount seems to arrive in West Darfur."

That information about Mornay was part of the next installment of the Sudan story in my mailbox. It came from Catherine Wiesner, a family friend, who as an employee of the International Rescue Committee has spent the last several months traveling in Darfur to support UNICEF's emergency response there. To help her convey the scale of the needs she included the press release from Medecins Sans Frontieres ([www.msf.org](http://www.msf.org)) about the refugee camp in Mornay, a place that she had just visited.

"My visit that day included stopping by to talk to MSF, the only aid agency with staff staying overnight in the camp. I stood among exhausted-looking women holding little cups of special formula to the lips of their emaciated children and thought of the many, many days of hunger and fear that must have come before their arrival to this well-run therapeutic feeding center. I talked to the doctors at the clinic about the patterns of violent injuries they see every day whereby the



younger women and girls who venture out of the camp to collect firewood and grass tend to be raped, while the older women are just beaten. And I thought with frustration about how the increasing international media attention to the issue of sexual violence didn't seem to be making much discernable difference to women and girls here. . . .

"The other image I had in my mind as we drove back from Mornay that afternoon was a photo I had seen the day before of a beautiful nine-year-old girl crouching against a tree with a very far away look in her eyes. The person who showed me the picture said the girl had been gang raped by a group of men the day before and pointed out to me the dried blood stains on her skirt. Wondering about that girl and the help that she might or might not receive, and about the impact of this experience on her future, I was also thinking about how child protection work is about so much more than delivering (also desperately needed) food and plastic sheeting."

Catherine began her e-mail to a long list of friends by saying, "Being in Darfur has been an experience that I find difficult to describe. *Utterly tragic* and *compelling* are the words I have used most often. It is such a cliché to say that seeing the immense suffering up close has made a deep impression on me, or that I will not easily forget the children of Darfur. But it is true. I continue to be inspired every day by the bravery and commitment of Sudanese colleagues. I have sat and tried to comprehend the despair of lives so brutally destroyed, and have also been totally humbled by the incredible resilience of the human spirit."

The reason for her e-mail was to answer a question that many of her friends had asked: how could they help? Her answer, "(1) speak up, (2) give



A baby named ADRA... after the workers who delivered her.

money, (3) send prayers..." She provided Web links to UNICEF ([www.unicef.usa.org](http://www.unicef.usa.org)); the International Rescue Committee ([www.theirc.org](http://www.theirc.org)); Save the Children ([www.savethechildren.org](http://www.savethechildren.org)); and Medecins Sans Frontieres ([www.msf.org](http://www.msf.org)). I would add ADRA ([www.adra.org](http://www.adra.org)).

With those words written, I thought I had my story for the issue completed. But stories don't end with printing deadlines. And there was more. The next news bulletin came from the Adventist News Network on July 9. Based on an e-mail from Paul Yithak, secretary for the Church in Sudan, the story said, "Adventists from the church in Nyala province 'have no access to help.' Around 50,000 people from Nyala have been displaced and moved to Matarik. Nearly 100 Adventists were among the thousands who spent 17 hours aboard slow-moving trains headed for this distant area, making them even less accessible."

The ANN story noted that "Recent expressions of international concern over the crisis in Darfur—including visits by United States Secretary of State Colin Powell and United Nations Secretary-General

Kofi Annan—are bearing some fruit: the Darfur region has opened up to international humanitarian agencies and human rights groups, but far more intervention is needed.

"With the sketchy information available from the Matarik Refugee Camp, the Adventist administration in Sudan have learned that there is only enough food for one month and no medication or clothing is available.

"We had initial plans to use the tents we have for evangelistic meetings, to accommodate our members on the Sabbath day for worship, however the needs are much more severe than having a place of worship. We have lost contact with our members and it is getting impossible to have direct access to the new camp that was set up. Plus we have no funds to help and assist our members in that region," says Yithak.

"The situation in the Darfur region is grim.... ADRA is hard at work distributing tents, food and medicine and will begin drilling wells in the region shortly.

"Church leaders in the region describe the conditions in Darfur as 'an extreme situation,' hoping that 'fellow Church members from around the world would extend a helping hand of support to alleviate this most difficult crisis.'"

So the story in my mailbox evolved from simply providing organizational information to giving a clearer understanding of the ties that bind the human family as well as the church family. From the news comes the call for community, for becoming engaged as part of the solution as a church and as individuals.

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