

# Andrea and Mark Hotchkin

Moving two metres up the hill and coming down a mountain.

May 2022

[www.bmsworldmission.org/amhotchkin](http://www.bmsworldmission.org/amhotchkin)

Dear Friends,

For the past 5 years we have happily lived in Bardai on a rocky hill, at 1036m, just less in altitude than the summit of Snowdon. Perched beside the wadi it is a traditional home with a mix of a stone room, ideal for winter, and wood and reeds rooms suited for summer. We thought that we were there for as long as we were working in Bardai and were surprised to be told that Amina, the sister of Mabruka our landlord, would like to live there following her recent marriage. Suddenly finding a suitable simple place to rent near to the hospital would be far from easy, and it would likely require a lot of improvements such as addition of a pit latrine and safe kitchen as we had done with our previous home. The break with our neighbours/landlords would also be hard as Mabruka and Amina have been good friends for Andrea, and living beside them, a respected local family, has been part of our embedded in the local community security.

Having heard mid-January, indirectly from Ndjamen, by telephone, that we needed to move out as soon as possible, we waited relatively patiently for a formal meeting with all the family to discuss how and when this was to be. This proved difficult for all the people to be present in town at the same time, business in Ndjamen, Niger and finally Ramadan making it impossible for some family members, so nothing happened. Two months later we were in need of some certainty and a solution before our next Home Assignment, so we decided that it would be best to move out into a property in town which was about to become vacant for a number of months due to colleagues leaving for their home assignment in Germany. We organised a meeting with Mabruka and were surprised when she said that her husband, Mahamat, proposed expanding a small one mud brick room dwelling just behind our house, and that we could live in it. He proposed building a new perimeter wall, kitchen and toilet and then leaving us to complete it as we wished. There were lots questions in our minds, on the down side, it looked like a lot of work, the ground was sloped and very



uneven, how long would it take? Would it be easy to share building with someone? Did we have the time and energy to invest in it alongside our hospital work? How much would it cost, both for Mahamat and for us? Was it all just a pipe dream? However, on the plus side, it was obviously just in the right place, and of course would potentially resolve a difficult situation that had caused some strain on the relationship: a gift from God? So fully understanding that although this was potentially the most difficult and complicated way out of the situation, it also seemed to be the best solution.



The next week was a challenge with Mark as 'patron' being responsible for supplying all the cement, sand, bricks, wood etc so that the builders can simply get on with building. They don't have vehicle so how could they go and get supplies, but then again neither do we. Each morning just after sunrise the day's activities were discussed with Daniel, the early start disrupted the hospital work very little. Mahamat was interested too and continued to supply water and gave us 500 bricks for the price of the cement used in making them. He also helped me through the complicated business of making metal doors; getting a quote from the welder, buying all the metal from the hardware store, delivering it to the welder and then transporting the completed doors to the house.

Each day the builders had run out of something, so our neighbour Barkai delivered many loads of sand, bricks, cement etc to the site. He has previously regularly delivered 1000 litres of water at a time since the towns water supply stopped working last year. In the first week the supplies were quickly done, 3 or 4 loads a day, but in the 2nd and 3rd weeks as the fasting month of Ramadan went on temperatures soared into the 40's, it got more difficult. Just a couple of deliveries early morning before his labourers found it too hot, one day we ran out of sand in a desert! Finally, Barkai's pick up found the hill increasingly difficult and one day on the phone he explained that it would be a lot easier if we weren't building on a mountain. So that is how we moved 2 metres up the hill and came down a mountain. In reality it was genuinely difficult for him, and we are grateful for his help and at the same time we have got to know each other much better.

On another occasion we needed metal reinforcement bars to make the concrete cover for the toilet, one merchant simply gave us 12 metres for free, saying it was the least he could do to thank us for the work at the hospital.

A final problem was the need for 10+ pick up loads of grey sand to cover the rocks in the yard. Mark had seen a large a JCB type digger and large lorry drive through the town previously and wanted to do this in bulk. Salah a friend and ADP colleague knew who to contact and the next morning we had a very large pile of clean grey sand in front of our new door.

For two weeks not much happened, we drew some simple floor plans, paced them out put simple stone markers on the ground, we even worked out how to make a toilet by using the lie of the land and not digging through hard volcanic rock. Meanwhile Mahamat had left for the goldfield and Ramadan was fast approaching, and it looked like everything was going to go on hold for a month. Then unexpectedly, on a Saturday evening a few hundred bricks appeared outside our front door, Amina's new husband delivered them and was keen to know when we would be ready to move out so that he could rebuild our old home. We were shocked and amused in equal amounts. The next day, on our return from church there were a thousand bricks on the proposed building site for our new home, and Mahamat was back wanting to see our plans. His builders were due to start at sunrise the next day which coincided with a few days that we were taking off, amazing timing as Mark would be able to help supervising the work, basically making sure that the walls were in the right place and the right height.

Mahamat organised cement sand and water each day the previously superficial relationship started to grow as he and Mark shared ideas and worked together. Daniel and his team of three made very rapid progress, they are amongst the skilled masons from the south who are here building villas for the newly rich of Bardai, and also building more simple houses like ours as the general standard of living improves. After a week with the perimeter walls finished and a roof on the kitchen, but the toilet and shower were with still only foundations.

Mahamat had already added an extra 500 bricks on what he had planned so he paid the masons for what they had done and it was over to Mark to carry on. Thankfully Mahamat sat in on the negotiations for the next phase of the building and helped get a fair price, and also negotiated for the masons to do their own cooking with a sum of money for food rather than us supplying meals as Andrea couldn't stay at home to cook for them. All was going very well, apart from the fact that so far there were no actual days off from the hospital as we had a number of major complicated cases present and did 2 major abdominal surgeries and a caesarean section, and on the Saturday the first general planning meeting of the year at the hospital happened which was 5 hours long.



It had been as expected hard work building a house whilst continuing with work at the hospital, but thankfully with the help all these people, it has been possible for us to move in about a month after the construction began. Just as we were approaching the end, a final delay was caused by the sudden announcement of flying visit to Bardai by the Minister of Health on the Sunday that we had planned to move house. The visit involved quite a lot of preparation with the hospital Director. Although the visit was rather brief it did go well and the minister was very encouraging about our presence here and appeared to be interested in further improving the hospital with necessary staff and equipment.

**Praise:** Thanks for God's provision of a good solution for our housing.

**Prayer:** You may wonder what all this has to do with mission? Well, usually we are the doctors and we are helping people and they are reliant on us. Now the tables were turned Mark was reliant on them with much more contact than usual with the working men of the town who he normally only sees at social gatherings or at the hospital, and it has been a really good experience getting to know people better. Pray that the friendships will continue.

Feeling rather tired by all this extra work and having had a much busier year than previously at the hospital, we are looking forward to being back in the UK in the summer time for a holiday and meeting with some of you face to face. If any of you would like a copy of a presentation of our year please let us know. Thanks for your support and every blessing to you.

Mark and Andrea

If you would like to support Andrea and Mark Hotchkin by prayer and committed regular giving, visit [bmsworldmission.org/partners](https://bmsworldmission.org/partners) or call 01235 517617 for a 24:7 Partners leaflet.



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