

# Greetings from the Sahara sands of Niger!

We are excited to catch up with you now that we are “in place” here in Niamey. It’s hard to believe that just one year ago this month we finished our Intermediate French class in Quebec, Canada. Since then we’ve been truly on the move! We finished language school, left Québec for a short visit in Washington State, packed 22 pieces of luggage, said goodbye to our loved ones, and arrived in Niger mid-January. Our kids started school right away, while Nikki and I began another French language course with a Nigerien tutor. We finally moved to our permanent house three weeks ago, and now that we are settled, we want to connect with you!

## Reflections on our first 5 months

God has given us a good work here – one that is significant and challenging. There is no doubt that there is need for development of marriages and families within the church. There is a need for training resources to be developed that local pastors, teachers, and counselors can use. There is need for intentional discipleship and encouragement for Christians. These are the reasons why we are here!

As you already know, this is indeed a pioneering work. There isn’t a team carrying out this work with us. *We* are the team – Nikki and myself. We are thankful for the advice and support of our mission, but we weren’t given a step-by-step manual for how to begin this work upon our arrival! We easily feel overwhelmed and exhausted. This is normal and even expected, but difficult nonetheless.

## What are we learning?

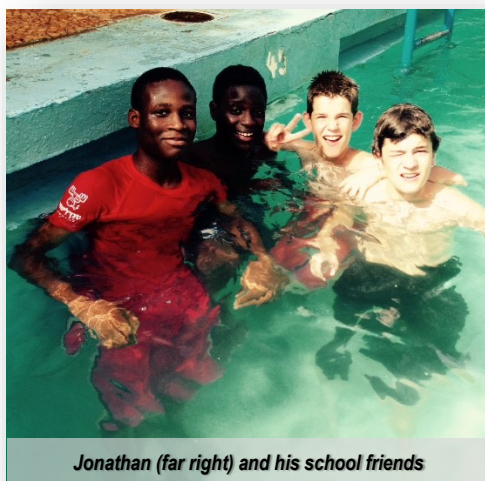
- This is a long-term project. It will require patience, perseverance, and great humility.
- We strive to be significant and accomplish something on a daily basis. But this merely leads to discouragement. **We must adopt a mentality of “being present” here – knowing the language and culture in-depth rather than “doing” a bunch of things.** We must be at peace that we are “learners”.
- The French language is incredibly difficult – still!
- Nigeriens are skilled, resourceful, and intelligent. We have a lot to learn from them!
- Technology is influencing even under-developed countries like Niger. Young and old alike are glued to their smart phones – just like the western world. With this, the desire for material things and the pleasures of this world are on the rise.
- The traffic in Niamey is exponentially worse than our first term in 2012-13.
- God is at work in our hearts. We feel His comforting presence amidst the challenge and suffering of being transformed by Him.



*We hosted a meal for our Tamajaq guard and his family.*



*Nathaniel and George-the-tortoise*



*Jonathan (far right) and his school friends*



## UNEXPECTED TREASURE

Interestingly, we learned of a family ministry that was founded in the English speaking African country of Ghana. Some of the needed marriage and family materials for this cultural context have been written and even translated to French! We feel fortunate to have something ready-to-go, rather than starting with a completely blank slate.



*Nikki & Hannah, an Oxford student who helped with our translation work*



*Ruth & her friends, Elayna and Brynn — Happy 4th!*

## What we see in front of us: some perspective

**What?** Our task right now, for the next several months, is simple: *build relationships with Nigeriens and get to know this culture*. Unless we do this effectively, our efforts will be fruitless. Sometimes this doesn't feel much like "work", but it takes up all of our time and is the foundation for all that we hope to do here.

**Where?** We find ourselves for the fourth time in our married lives living on some kind of school campus. On our compound, (which is like a small neighborhood with walls all around it), there are homes for some missionaries, our church building, a small theological school, dormitory-style housing for African students and families connected to the theological school, and several ministry offices. *This is a busy place!*

We are still becoming acquainted with our new home. There are at least 10 men attending the theological school preparing to be pastors. Some are married and are accompanied by their wives and children. It is easy to connect with these neighbors and put ourselves in a position to encourage them in the Lord - or maybe it is the other way around at times!

**Who?** I say "Nigeriens", but in actuality we are getting to know the Africans who live in Niger. When you ask someone where they are from here, it is not uncommon for the person to say that they are from Chad or Burkina Faso or Benin. We are getting to know the people of Francophone Africa – the countries that speak French as their trade or "official" language.



Nikki and our househelper, Hadiza; pictured here at Hadiza's home

We now live on this campus, CBN—Centre Biblique Nationale



Our family selfie with Hannah on her last day in Niger

### BEING TEAM PLAYERS

SIM Niger has various needs right now, so we are happily serving in a couple of ways outside of our ministry to families. I have agreed to be on the school board for Sahel Academy for two years, and Nikki is helping the SIM office with an online newsletter.

### Prayer Request:

Our greatest need right now is for FAITH. Pray for us to overcome our doubt and unbelief, and to believe in all that God has brought us here to do. Thank you for your faithful prayers for us!

## A Word about our Family

Perhaps you have heard this before from us - (we will be the first to admit) - **this is not the ideal way to raise a family**. We have endured many transitions since our first arrival here in 2012. We have lived in 3 countries and left behind many dear people (and pets!) along the way. Our kids are the true heroes in our family, for they did not sign up voluntarily for these challenges. *They have been led down this road by their imperfect parents.*

It is an incredible sight to watch Nathaniel, Jonathan and Ruth transition with maturity, strength, and flexibility. We are deeply proud of them! In truth, we hope our most significant fruit is found in them.

I will close this newsletter by sharing a well-known Bible verse with you - one which has truly been an anchor for us. Proverbs 3:5 *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."*

May the Lord bless you and keep you! We are honored to be in relationship with you – thank you for your love and encouragement.

With love, *Andrew Nikki Nathaniel Jonathan and Ruth*



Summer job for the boys—mowing lawns at Sahel Academy



Our beloved Mariners were over 500 for about a week, so we had a party!



Ibro & me, our French language tutor

You can visit our family blog at [www.grays2niger.wordpress.com](http://www.grays2niger.wordpress.com) to read Nikki's short "snapshots" of our life here. We also have email [Andrew.gray@sim.org](mailto:Andrew.gray@sim.org) [Nikki.gray@sim.org](mailto:Nikki.gray@sim.org) - we'd love to hear from you sometime!