



February 2024

Connection

Dear Friends,

I've never been one to choose a single word to focus on for the New Year, or as a star word for Epiphany. It's just not a practice that I've adopted. In the past I've sometimes chosen a hymn or a Bible verse, but never a single word.

This year, however, in the time between January 1 and January 6, I had one word that stood out to me on three separate occasions: connection. I decided not to ignore it, and have spent some time reflecting on the word connection and its significance in my life and my work as a missionary.

And I've decided to write a series of Dear Friends letters in 2024 focused on the word connection.

Today, I'd like to share a story of my connection with the Sale Family from West Michigan.

In May 2022, Dee Dee Piers from Hope Church in Holland, MI, reached out to me with an urgent request to connect with a woman named Alison Sale. Alison's husband, Scott, served on active duty with the U.S. Army in Afghanistan, and Scott and Alison have been working hard since the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in August 2021 to protect the lives of Scott's Afghan interpreter and his family (I'll call him M* in this letter to protect his identity). My name came up as someone who was working to evacuate vulnerable Afghans, and I connected with Alison immediately to assess the situation and see if I could offer any assistance.



Above left: M and his family; above right: Sale family*

Would you like to receive these updates digitally? Please email Kelli at kgilmore@rca.org to be added to the email list. You will receive more timely updates from the missionary you support and help us be good stewards of our resources.

Here we are almost two years later (and almost three years since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan), and we are still working together to find safety and refuge for M* and his family. I can't begin to estimate the amount of time I've spent the past two years consulting on this case, exploring options for resettlement in six different countries, and praying for the safety of M* and his family and for God's guidance amid so much pain and suffering. These past 10 years of working in refugee care have taught me that we don't also get the happy ending we would like to see, or in a timeframe that fits our desires. **But the faithful response has been—and continues to be—to honor this connection to Alison, Scott, and M*, and to continue walking beside them, praying for them, listening to their hopes and worries and frustrations, and letting them know that they are not alone. This is an important part of what it means to faithfully engage this calling of refugee care.**

Alison and Scott have written some words about this connection in a letter that I'd like to share with you today (with full permission from the Sales' to share):

For over two years, we have been tirelessly working to find a new home country for our Afghan friends whose world was ripped out from under them when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan. They were forced to quickly leave their home and live in hiding for fear they would be killed due to their family's multi-generational history of fighting the Taliban and their beliefs. Throughout this painful and devastatingly long process, we have been so blessed by others who have used their time, skills, and resources to guide us. We are incredibly grateful that one of those special people was JJ TenClay. When it felt like doors were closing at every turn, JJ made us feel like we weren't alone. She has never given up advocating for this Afghan family we care for so deeply. It has given us so much hope and confidence knowing that we have her in our corner, praying for this family, and advocating for their journey to safety with her colleagues around the world. The connections we've made with people like JJ over the past two years that simply cannot be explained other than by God bringing people into our lives to help us on our mission to get this Afghan family to safety. It is because of the generosity of our global community that we've made it this far. From financial support to prayers to people taking the time to educate us about secure communications and filing legal documents, or connecting us to someone they know who might be able to help—one thing we have learned is that humanitarian work can't be done in a bubble—or by a single person. It takes all of us working together, sharing what we know, and making the time to connect with others that will make a positive impact in this world. While this family still has not reached their destination, we remain determined and continue to pray for God's guidance. We are hopeful 2024 will be a great year for this family.

Faithfully,

Scott and Alison Sale

(Here is a link to a news segment sharing more information about this story: <https://www.woodtv.com/news/ottawa-county/zeeland-couple-works-to-bring-afghan-interpreters-family-to-us/>).

Will you join Scott, Alison, and me in praying for safety, security, and a viable pathway to refuge and resettlement for M* and his family?

If you believe this ministry is important, will you share this Dear Friends letter with two additional people who might be interested and willing to support my ongoing work as a missionary?

Sincerely,
JJ TenClay

www.rca.org/tenclay

RCA Global Mission does not receive denominational assessments or covenant shares. We depend on the faithful generosity of churches and individuals.