

Experiencing Compassion of the “Enemy”

Introduction *In the midst of war people often experience the compassion and kindness of the “enemy” which speaks once again of our oneness and our need for each other in the human family. The following relates this experience in Iraq. Members of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) and Voices in the Wilderness (VITW) were leaving Baghdad, Iraq, on March 29, 2003, headed for Jordan, when the tire of their vehicle blew and they landed at the bottom of a 10-foot ditch. Below is what happened after the accident. This is from a March 30, 2003, CPTNet release and is used with permission.*

They were able to open the doors on the topside of the vehicle and eventually were able to pull everyone out. Everyone was bruised, badly shaken, but all were conscious though it was clear that Weldon was badly injured, and Cliff was bleeding badly from a large gash in his head. The car was



totaled, and the other two cars in the convoy were well out of sight down the road toward the Jordanian border and no one in the delegation had a satellite phone. Because of the intensive U.S./British bombing, with very good reason, there were very few vehicles on the road between Baghdad and the Jordanian border.

The group was just beginning to panic, when an Iraqi civilian car approached, pulled over and asked if he could help. Without a second thought, the driver packed the 5 additional passengers into his car and drove to the closest Iraqi town, Rutba, about 6 km from the site of the accident.

Rutba is a city of about 20,000 people located 140 km east of the Jordanian Border. The group was astounded to see that this civilian town, with no apparent military structures, had been devastated by U.S./British bombing three days earlier. Much of the town was destroyed including the children’s hospital in which two children were killed in the bombing.

The group was taken to the only remaining functioning medical facility in town, a 20-foot X 20-foot four-bed clinic. The people of the town quickly gathered to inspect their uninvited foreign guests. The group hastily offered everyone a copy of the CPT hand-out, a description of the Christian Peacemakers Team’s mission and work in Iraq, with English on one



side of the page and Arabic on the other.

Introduction in hand, the people of Rutba warmly welcomed the wounded stranded American refugees, just three days after their town had been destroyed by American/British Aircraft. The next morning, Shane asked, “How do you think Americans would respond to Iraqi civilians accidentally stranded in their community three days after Iraqi aircraft had destroyed their town?”

When the doctor arrived, the group was in for an even bigger surprise. In this town of 20,000, in the middle of the Iraqi desert, the doctor who would treat them spoke perfect English, and without delay, he started his examinations. By the time everyone in the group had been treated, about two hours after they had arrived, the two other cars in the convoy had returned and found them.

The group warmly thanked the people of Rutba for their hospitality, and tried unsuccessfully to pay the clinic and doctor for their services.

“We treat everyone in our clinic: Muslim, Christian, Iraqi, or American. We all are part of the same family you know,” the doctor said.