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Sent: November 14, 2025 4:21 PM

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Subject: From Lydia

I was born in Nyankwala, a Nigerian village, in September 1960, at a time when the peace we lived in felt almost extraordinary. My father was a first-generation convert, and he often told us how he and others would trek all the way to Wukari just to receive Holy Communion. Back then there was a deep sense of safety; no one worried about danger or imagined what the future would bring.

In 1966, I was adopted by Baba and Mama Boer, missionaries with the CRC, and I have always counted it a privilege to have been raised by them. I attended Ebenezer Primary School in Wukari and later Wukari Division Combined Secondary School in Takum—both church-run mission schools. Even then, Muslim students were fully part of our community. In the boarding house they kept their fasts, and their meals were set aside until “bude baki,” the breaking of the fast. There was no hostility; they were encouraged to take part in all school activities, though church attendance was never required of them.

Our family life was interwoven with Muslim relatives—cousins, nephews, aunts, uncles. We attended their weddings, and they attended ours. At Christmas we shared food with our Muslim neighbours, and during the Salah celebrations we children eagerly awaited the special meals prepared by our Muslim relatives and neighbours, especially since there was no regular lunch served then.

But over the years, for many reasons, tensions between Muslims and Christians began to surface. One Easter weekend in 2014, my elder cousin Reuben Baga, who oversaw our compound, called us at midnight. He was breathless, skipping all pleasantries: “They have come...boko haram...they are here.” He had just escaped and was running toward the church. That night was long and terrifying. Women, children, and the elderly fled to the church for safety. By the time the Boko Haram fighters realized people were gathered there, the young men of the village and the Wukari vigilante had already arrived. Their escape that night was nothing short of miraculous. The village fell silent for days afterward as people fled, and life in Nyankwala has never returned to what it was. Many who survived later died in their places of refuge.

Almost everyone in the Middle Belt has been touched by this conflict. My mother died in “exile,” worn down by trauma and her longing to return home. Later, my brother Obadiah was kidnapped. To spare my mother further fear, we told her he had travelled, but she eventually learned the truth and even offered money for his release. Keeping that secret was painful, especially since he had visited her in Donga every week. His absence broke her heart.

Today, young men in Wukari and across the Middle Belt struggle to survive by forming vigilante groups, but they are no match for the heavily armed terrorists. Insecurity now blankets our country, especially the Middle Belt. It is normal to wake up with fear and uncertainty, and every call from home begins with the same question: "Is everything okay?" Even the cities are no longer safe. Kidnapping has become a tool not only to kill but also to drain church treasuries. When schoolgirls are abducted, Christian girls are far less likely to be released; the lists of those freed almost always contain only Muslim names.

We have grown somewhat numb; violence reaches us daily, yet life continues. Recent pressure from international leaders has raised awareness and encouraged a few of our leaders to speak out, though only a handful dare to. Those who benefit from the government rarely voice dissent, and sadly, some church leaders now defend the government for personal gain. Whether one calls it a Christian genocide or a genocide affecting both Muslims and Christians, the truth remains: people are being killed.

Please pray for Nigeria.