

# desert days



by Katie Kyle

WHEN MY HUSBAND ACCEPTED a posting in the Middle East last year, one of our biggest concerns was that our new life would force us to make a secret of our faith. I couldn't picture how that would work. God started answering the question before we even left the UK.

Several months ahead of our departure, I met up with a Christian whose daughter lives in the Middle East. I needed a few pointers - until then, I'd barely left Europe! As we chatted, we realised his daughter, Rebecca, lives in the compound where we now live, a few blocks away from our new home. He'd visited her several times so he was able to give me all sorts of information, from matters of faith, culture and dress to the size of the villas!

He gave me Rebecca's number and I spoke to her before we moved here. She invited me to help her run a Christian youth group once we arrived, which I now do every week. Rebecca has become one of my closest friends. But when we arrived last July, with the temperatures pushing 50C, Rebecca had returned to the UK for the summer. In fact, the compound had virtually emptied as people fled to cooler climes.

We'd known this would be the case but we needed to brave the heat to get the children into the compound school where they wanted to go. Their applications wouldn't be considered until we arrived in the desert. As we landed in the Middle East one night, the temperatures still sky high, everything so strange and alien, we were driven through the darkness to the sandy villa that we would eventually

call home. Eight lonely weeks stretched ahead of us, with no church and no friends. Our daughter was sorted out on the friendship front almost from the outset. My RAF mentor lived next door and our daughters spent most of the summer together. And I immediately forged a friendship with the amazing lady who had volunteered to guide me through those early weeks. But our sons had no-one.

The compound has its own website so I advertised for friends! Within a couple of days, the boys also had some new playmates and so did I. One of the mums who responded to my plea invited us to her villa. I was a tearful mess that day - I was having what I now call a 'desert day'. This lady comforted me, enveloping us all with her kindness. It turned out she was a Christian too.

She now sends me encouraging Bible verses most days. Having arrived with only a few suitcases (the rest of our things wouldn't arrive for another six weeks), I became an avid trawler of our compound's 'eBay'. One morning, I found myself buying garden furniture from a lady whose artwork and music choices left me in no doubt about her faith. I returned to my villa with a garden seat and information about a Christian ladies' group, which I now go to every week, meeting with people who I count amongst my best friends here.

Within 10 days of arriving, my husband returned to the UK for a fortnight. My sense of vulnerability deepened. During that time, a ginger cat became fixated with us. It scratched at our door most

mornings and evenings. It sometimes sneaked inside the villa. I was worried about it so I took a photo and asked on Facebook if someone was missing him. The other leader of the Christian youth group got in touch. The cat was hers. She was in the UK at the time so our friendship blossomed at a distance of 3000 miles, before we ever met.

During that hot, lonely summer, we were without a church. But not for long. Even that need was met, although I won't go into how.

Today I'm having another desert day. I was crying before I started writing this. Occasionally, the days are like that here. I don't want to give the impression that I just skipped into my new life like a Disney princess with cats coming to my aid. It has been, and still can be, tough.

But, in writing this, I am reminded that God has written His name numerous times across our new life. Recently, I found myself remembering Isaiah 49:16, a verse which tells us that God has written our names on the palms of his hands. This is a promise that God will never forget us. If you find yourself experiencing something new, scary or hostile, look for where God is writing His name in your life because He will be. And if you can't see it, look back. Search and remember until you find Him.

• **Katie Kyle is married to Jack, a Chinook helicopter pilot. They are currently posted abroad with their three children.**