

Through Tragedy, God Is Showing His Love for the Libyan People

On September 11, 2012, four Americans died in an Islamist attack on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya. Just months later, Anita and Ronnie Smith, along with their infant son, left their home in Austin, Texas, to move to Benghazi.

“We wanted to take God’s love and the gospel to Libya, to Benghazi, because we knew that they just didn’t know who Jesus is,” Anita said.

Anita admitted she felt some fear about moving to a dangerous place, but she and Ronnie felt the peace of God as they settled into their new lives in Libya. They built relationships with their neighbors and the students at the international school where Ronnie taught, which gave them opportunities to share their faith.

“It was easy to speak to the Libyans and tell them, ‘We believe that God wanted us to move here; we wanted to show you what love that we know is from Jesus, His peace,’” Anita said.

Less than a year into their time in Libya, tragedy struck the Smith family. While Anita and their son were back in the States for the Christmas holiday in December 2013, Ronnie was shot on the streets of Benghazi during a morning jog. An eyewitness reported that four men in a black jeep pulled up alongside Ronnie, engaged him in conversation, then pulled around the block again and opened fire.

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Within days of Ronnie's martyrdom, Anita shocked the world during a national television interview where she expressed forgiveness for the people who killed her husband. She spoke of her love for the Libyan people and God's love for them, too. Looking back on that interview, Anita said God gave her the ability to forgive her husband's killers.

"We wanted our lives to really glorify Jesus. We only have one life here," she said. "I wanted the people that did the shooting to know that Jesus is different ... I do believe that was something that God gave me because I did want to show them this is what Jesus lives for ... that He loves us and there is no other message or faith that shows that you love your enemies and you forgive your enemies except Jesus."

Though the Smiths were only in Libya for a short while, Anita has heard testimonies in the 10 years since Ronnie's death that his story has served to advance God's kingdom among the Libyan people, including a Libyan who accepted Christ after reading Anita's testimony on Facebook.

"It is really powerful for me to hear those stories because I do feel at times, you know we lived in Libya that short period of time, what dent have we made to show who Jesus is," Anita shared. "I remember Ronnie saying before that if he could only have one person turn to Jesus with his life, that it would have been worth it."

Anita shared that while she never expected to be a martyr's widow, suffering for Christ has been a gift that has allowed her to encourage others to faithful obedience to Christ, no matter the cost. "I hope that God can use my life and Ronnie's life and now our son's life to continue to point people to Jesus," she said.

Anita shared her story during the recent Hearts of Fire Virtual Event hosted by The Voice of the Martyrs. The event can still be viewed online at [.](#)

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