

Werner Elias passed

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Werner Elias in the 1982

I received the sad news today that an old friend of mine passed away a few days ago. Werner Elias was an original missionary sent out to Niamey, Niger in 1975. I had gone out the same time and lived in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso which was the closest large town to Niamey. Werner was joined by an American, Jim McCann and a Japanese brother Tatsuo Sasaki. I don't recall all the details but it wasn't long before the Niger team were booted out of the country. The first time I met him was when they all landed on our front porch in Ouaga after being summarily evicted.

They stayed with us for several weeks before moving on to Abidjan. During the brief time we spent together Werner and I became close friends. Werner was a very creative person and always happy to help out. I think it took his mind off of things to build tables and beds and such. He was very skilled, trained as a carpenter in Germany. Over the years we had the opportunity to work together more than once and we had many enjoyable conversations. I introduced Werner to geodesic domes as an alternative style for housing. We were both very enthusiastic about the possibilities and we kept trying to find an opportunity to build one. We did some fundraising together, using silk screened prints we made and built beautiful hand lacquered frames to sell them in. We both eventually went into the photography business. I built a film processing lab and Werner became a professional photographer. I can't say either business was a great success but we learned a lot and found an outlet for our creativity as well as earning a few dollars to support our missions.

Werner was a kind hearted and uncomplicated man. He was devoted to do something good for mankind and never returned from Africa. Although we had a falling out in the end, I still often think about him and remember his warm, good natured personality. I am genuinely saddened at his passing.

I snapped these photos of Werner in a local coffee shop in Manhattan in 1982 where we'd go for breakfast every morning while staying in the city.