

# Audrey and Colin Gibson

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*The call in action*

Dear friends,

Traditionally, this is a time to reflect on the past year and set goals for the new one. We recognise that the problems we faced in 2021 were minor compared to the hardships faced by many in Lebanon. The situation seems unlikely to change going into 2022, although we are also very aware that not everyone here suffers equally and the contrast can be stark. A recent newspaper report highlighted how those who have fled to neighbouring countries continue to send their children to good schools, and often to universities in the West, and have access to good medical care – all sectors that are now struggling in Lebanon. For others though, like Joanne and Ishmael, the future is not so assured.

I (Audrey) first met this couple four years ago when passing a scrapyard about 15 minutes' walk from our flat. To my surprise I heard children laughing and looked over the wall to glimpse two little girls playing in the dirt. I greeted them and have been visiting the family regularly ever since. Joanne and Ishmael come from Al Raqqa in Syria (once the capital of the ISIS self-declared Islamic Caliphate) and Ishmael manages the scrapyard. Along with their four children Wadie (12), Raffief (9), Chafeh (7) and Mohammad (4) they also live at the scrapyard, in a home fashioned from old shipping containers and prefabricated huts. Ishmael speaks a little English, as he worked here before the war in Syria, and his family joined him eight years ago. With the current dire situation in Lebanon his work is slow and he's taken a second job as a concierge at a nearby apartment block, though they still say they are better off staying here than returning to Syria. Wadie started work part time recently at a bakery a few miles away, adding a little extra to the family income. Ishmael is very keen for his daughters to attend school, but all the nearby schools are full and he can't afford the bus fare to send them to one with space. Joanne doesn't speak English but we manage to converse a little. She's always happy to see me and offers me cups of chai (tea). She's a good mother taking care of her family and keeps a few chickens and grows vegetables to supplement their diets. I always take them some food items when I visit, and just before Christmas the children's faces lit up as I brought a few toys, coloured pencils and paper to make decorations together and have fun blowing bubbles. I am very aware that



**Name:** Audrey and Colin Gibson

**Location:** Lebanon

**Our call:** To serve and be a witness for Christ to the many people we meet each day.

**Our role:** Working with A Rocha Lebanon on creation care projects, Colin as national director and Audrey as education and church liaison officer.



*Continued over the page*

*Tree planting, Mekse nature park*



such gifts can be misunderstood, but I believe that over the years we have built up a mutual trust and respect for each other. Even Mohammad, who used to be shy when I first visited, now rushes up to the gate to greet me just like his sisters. I wonder what will happen to them this coming year. I am not sure how I would cope if the situation was reversed, the mental anguish alone is unimaginable with so much uncertainty (mental health problems are a growing issue here), yet each time I leave, they pray that Allah will provide. My hope and prayer is that God will continue to take care of them and that one day they will find salvation in Jesus.

Our celebrations over Christmas were mainly with friends and family. On Christmas Day morning we watched the Church of England live Christmas Day service and then two friends joined us for lunch – Rosy (Lebanese Armenian) and her husband Alistair (Yorkshire!). Later in the day we caught up with our family via Skype – Harriet in Lisbon, Josh in Belfast (with his partner, visiting her parents) and my sister Margaret in Somerset. Josh almost didn't make it to Belfast as he contracted COVID-19 (again) in mid-December but tested negative just in time to fly.

We enjoyed the short break, as the last few weeks have been especially busy at our nature park in the town of Mekse – first with work on extending the pond and then, between Christmas and New Year, planting 70 more native trees and winter vegetables in the community garden area. We have to take advantage of spells of good weather and we hope that by the time you read this we will have planted a similar number of trees again.

Sadly, this will be our last Christmas and New Year in Lebanon as, after prayerful consideration, we plan to return to the UK late spring. This is a little earlier than originally planned, but we are overdue for a long "home assignment" with CMS as we have not been back to the UK for over three years and so it seems a good time to handover the leadership of A Rocha Lebanon to someone new. Please pray that we quickly find the right candidate. If needed, we may continue working remotely to ensure a smooth transition, while during the summer we will be talking with CMS about our future. We have some ideas but would value your prayers as we seek God's direction. It will be bittersweet leaving Lebanon, but exciting seeing what our next steps will be.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; **In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.**" Proverbs 3:5–6 (NKJV)

Audrey and Colin



*Photos from top to bottom: Seed planting, Mekse nature park; New Year's Eve at Beirut Corniche (seafront) with Aein El Mrayseh mosque behind; Joanne, Ishmael and family; Wadie and Raffief blowing bubbles.*

## GOING FURTHER WITH CHURCH MISSION SOCIETY

**Are you pondering a call to cross-cultural mission?** We'd love to connect and help you discern what God might be saying. Find out more about how we can help you to step into God's mission at [churchmissionsociety.org/explore](https://churchmissionsociety.org/explore)

If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email [supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org](mailto:supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org) or call 01865 787400

You can give to Audrey and Colin at: [churchmissionsociety.org/gibson](https://churchmissionsociety.org/gibson)

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