

**December 12, 2013**

**An Open Letter from the widow of Ronnie Smith to the Libyan People**

My husband and best friend Ronnie Smith loved the Libyan people. For more than a year, Ronnie served as a chemistry teacher in a school in Benghazi, and he would gladly have given more years to Libya if unknown gunmen had not cut his life short on December 5, 2013.

Ronnie and I came to Libya because we saw the suffering of the Libyan people, but we also saw your hope, and we wanted to partner with you to build a better future. Libya was very different from what we had experienced before, but we were excited to learn about Libyan culture. Ronnie grew to love you and your way of life, as did I. Ronnie really was “Libya’s best friend.”

Friends and family from home were concerned about our safety, as were some of you. We talked about this more times than I can count. But we stayed because we believed the Libyan people were worth the risk. Even knowing what I know now, I have no doubt that we would both make the same decision all over again.

Ronnie loved you all so much, especially his students. He loved to joke with you, tell stories about you, help you with your lives and challenge you to be all that you could be. He did his best to live out his faith humbly and respectfully within a community of people with a different faith.

**To his attackers:** I love you and I forgive you.

How could I not? For Jesus taught us to “Love our enemies” – not to kill them or seek revenge. Jesus sacrificed His life out of love for the very people who killed him, as well as for us today. His death and resurrection opened the door for us to walk on the straight path to God in peace and forgiveness. Because of what Jesus did, Ronnie is with Jesus in paradise now. Jesus did not come only to take us to paradise when we die, but also to bring peace and healing on this earth. Ronnie loved you because God loves *you*. Ronnie loved you because God loved *him* – not because Ronnie was so great, but because God is so great.

**To the Libyan people:** I always expected that God would give us a heart to love you, but I never expected you to love us so much. We came to bless you, but you have blessed us much more. Thank you. Thank you for your support and love for Ronnie and our son Hosea and me. Since Ronnie’s death my love for you has increased in ways that I never imagined. I feel closer to you now than ever before.

I hear people speaking with hate, anger and blame over Ronnie’s death, but that’s not what Ronnie would want. Ronnie would want his death to be an opportunity for us to show one another love and forgiveness, because that’s what God has shown us.

I want all of you – all of the people of Libya – to know I am praying for the peace and prosperity of Libya. May Ronnie's blood, shed on Libyan soil, encourage peace and reconciliation between the Libyan people and God.