

MAZHAR MALLOUHI AS I KNOW HIM

by Dale Martin

Dale Martin spent 18 years working with AWM in Morocco (and Spain), where he became friends with Mazhar Mallouhi. He now works among Muslims in the US and directs the Summer Institute on Islam programme.

On our second day in Morocco, I was walking up the steps to the language center when a short Arab man reached out his hand and greeted me with the words, 'Which mission are you working with?'

Having spent two years in France preparing to work in North Africa with all its briefings on security, I knew better than to answer that question directly. 'No, I'm not with the consulate', I replied. 'I'm here to start a business.'

One thing I learned about Mazhar in those first few minutes was that he is not easily deterred. He continued to question me about which mission organization I was with as I desperately tried to figure out who this little Arab man with that precocious smile was. He certainly took pleasure in creating an initial tension in a conversation so that he could enjoy getting a reaction and then diffusing the tension. His approach to people was anything but boring or ordinary.

Years later, after we had moved to another city, Mazhar and Christine came to visit us and the two of us went out for a drive in the car. Spotting a soldier in green fatigues hitch-hiking on the side of the road, he told me to pull over and pick him up. After the usual greetings were exchanged, Mazhar asked the soldier a question. 'There is something I'd like to know which I think you can help me with,' he began. 'You're an Army soldier; you know the character of soldiers. Tell me, how many soldiers do you think will get to heaven?'

The soldier laughed and thought for a moment before responding, 'Oh! I don't

know. Maybe fifty-five out of a hundred?'

Mazhar then said to him, 'In the Holy Book it says that people who lie, cheat, commit adultery and abuse their power cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Now think again. You know the life of soldiers. How many soldiers do you really think will get into heaven?'

The soldier thought for a moment and said, 'Maybe five, maybe only three.'

Mazhar then exclaimed, 'Now you are really getting close to the truth! Actually, all of us have sinned and done these things, so none of us can enter heaven as a result, except for the fact that Isa the Messiah died in our place to remove the shame of our sins. It's only because of what Isa the Messiah has done that any of us will get into heaven.'

The soldier leaned forward in his seat and told us, 'This is very interesting. I have never heard anything like this before.'

After talking with us for several more minutes, he told us that we had already passed by his destination a few miles back and that anywhere we wanted to leave him was fine. He asked us how he could get in touch with us again.

Over the years I have had the privilege of sitting with Mazhar at his café, as well as in other situations, and watch him interact with people. We have also been the recipient of each other's practical jokes through the years. Mazhar certainly has many qualities, like the ability to confront people with the truth in a way they can understand and appreciate because they can sense his love. However, of all the things I have appreciated and learned from Mazhar, the one thing I value most is that Mazhar is my friend.