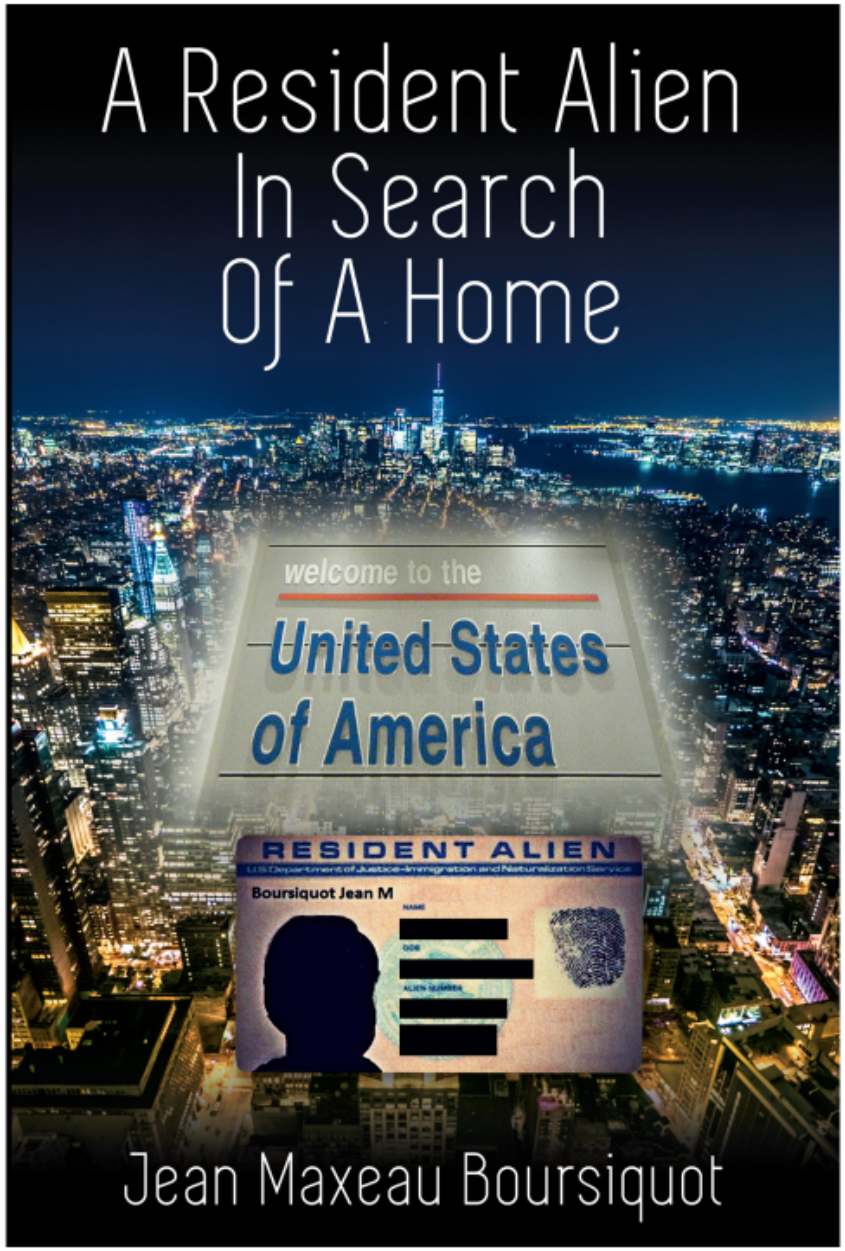
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A Resident Alien In Search Of A Home

Jean Maxeau Boursiquot

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A Resident Alien In Search Of A Home

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A Resident Alien in Search of a Home

By Jean Maxeau Boursiquot

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my wife and my children who stood beside me in all these years of writing. My family paid a tremendous sacrifice for this book. Many nights the children were deprived of Daddy's company. My wife stood by my side all the way. She had the project in her heart from the beginning. She was the one who first typed it. When the children conviction—she kept encouraging them. This book wouldn't exist without my supportive family.

I dedicate this book also to all the brethren worldwide and especially to those in Haiti. "Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua 1:9, KJV).

In addition, I dedicate this book to all emigrants who leave
their homeland in search of a better life.

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Foreword

A s I worked with Maxeau on this book, I wondered that one man lived through so many adventures. Shortly before the book was finished, I met Maxeau and his wife Martha in Port-au-Prince and we toured the places and talked to the people he mentions in this memoir.

The house where they got robbed was still standing on Ruelle Cheraquit in Port-au-Prince. The house on St. Lot, the grossest place he ever lived in, was much cleaner now, and the alley down which waste flowed to the street was dry. But an old smell of human waste lingered. I looked at the front-door lock, thinking of the frightened fifteen- or sixteen-year-old, small and scrawny, trying to electrify it as a robber attempted to open it.

His cousins and best friends, Nicolas and André, said yes, they had stoned chickens. They had stoned houses. The friend who planned Phillipe's escape from the attempted assassination remembered it vividly, expressing in body language the fright of that night.

One evening we sat in the dark yard, lit only by light shining from the house. I asked Camelle, one of the maids Maxeau grew up with, if she remembered the voodoo attack with the pig. She did. She remembered it exactly as Maxeau did. He demon-

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strated where the vegetables lay on the ground, where he stood holding the lamp, where the pig came toward the vegetables, and where his uncle was approaching the pig to grab it when—poof!—the pig vanished.

I talked to the neighbor who, when Maxeau returned to La Vallée as an adult, cursed him for all the indignities they endured as children. "I saw that all the Boursiquots went to school," the man said, "and I never even learned to read. They gave us the food they didn't want. They gave us the jobs they didn't want to do." He saw that he had no chance to better himself. He saw Maxeau harass animals and vandalize houses. Not only did he not dare to say anything, he also knew adults suspected him of the destruction.

Today the Boursiquots, who all emigrated to the U.S. thirty-some years ago, still help him. His children now go to school and life is better for them. Even so, all the help he received has not given him the advantages Maxeau has, the greatest of which is the relationship Maxeau has with the Lord.

Maxeau took off his glasses and bowed his head, his fingers in the corners of his eyes. When he looked up, his eyes were wet. What he would most like to give the man is a saving relationship with the Lord.

It is Maxeau's passion to lift up Jesus and what He will do for us and with us when we become His. That is the purpose of *A Resident Alien in Search of a Home.*

God bless this book. God bless you, the reader, with a vision of His love for you and an acceptance of His plan for your happiness and salvation.

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Melinda Schmidt, Editor

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Acknowledgements

M y acknowledgements go first to God who preserved my life and brought me to give my life to Him and then kept me in the Christian way. This book is His work.

My next acknowledgements go to my family. My parents, Martin and Odette Boursiquot, had many struggles raising me. I was a difficult, disobedient child and I cost them much money and many frustrations. Hubert, Josseline, and Eddie, thank you for your love and support. My thanks also go to my Uncle "Eric" and Aunt "Angeline" who immigrated first and helped us all to come too. Their four children gave me a lot of assistance in adjusting and in learning English.

Thank you to my friends "Nicolas," "André," and Richard from La Vallée; my friends Abel, Casamé and others at Elmaco; and my friends in Stamford: the Frantz Joseph family, Leonard Boursiquot, "Aldor" and his children, and Mr. and Mrs. Martinez Boursiquot and their children. Thank you for your friendship and for standing by me in my difficulties.

Thank you to the brethren who gave me a real home, a spiritual home: Sam and Anna Shirk, Alpha and Lenora Unruh, Elvis and Myrna Wilson. You did more than give me a bed. You made a place for me in your families with your children.

Steve and Susie Peachey, you were always there for me and your home was always open to me on the weekends.

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A special thanks to the whole New York City Mission family for your help and support the last twenty years.

The Mifflinburg youth I worked with at market asked for the story on the way home and encouraged me to press forward with the book.

Thanks to my editor Melinda Schmidt. The Lord saw the work and my needs and He sent me a co-worker to help me complete it. You stuck with me and taught me and helped me through the process. It was a pleasure to work with you.

Thank you to Michel Payen, Theodore Payen and Hubert Fortin for the photographs you gave permission to use.

Thank you to our first readers, Hugues Andries, Fred Schrock and Berniece Penner. And finally, a thank you to our beta readers. The book is better because of your careful reading.

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Preface

In Search of a Dream

M any people ask me how I, a black man, made it into this all-white, Amish-Mennonite community. It's a question that deserves an honest answer. Many in my community suspected I was a spy. One man confessed to me, "To my shame, when I heard you were marrying Martha and moving here, I thought you came to destroy us. I thought you were a government agent." But once I told people my story of how the Lord worked in my life, I gained their trust. I have told my story to many; hundreds have heard it.

I came to America to get a piece of the pie, to live the American dream—a college degree, a good job, a nice house and a family. Instead I found something else which changed my life forever.

Since then, my country, the USA, has changed. People have changed. Today our country is in trouble more than ever. People are fearing what could be next. My fellowmen are dissatisfied, confused, distraught, depressed, distrustful, to say the least. Racism, bigotry, hatred, division is reigning. Our great country is divided; small factions are fighting for their right to exist. Many people don't believe any more in God. Violence and murder have become the norm.

The justice system seems overwhelmed with case reviews of young African

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Americans who were put in jail although they were innocent. Now, through DNA testing, these people are walking away after spending decades behind bars. Through shady work or setup, false witnesses took the stand and caused hundreds to suffer. Some never made it out alive and those who did, their lives are ruined.

I also walked that road, confused, distrustful, depressed. I was a racist. I hated people. But I found something better and I want to show you what I have found.

This story is not intended to lift up or put down any one person or any certain family, culture or race. Its purpose is to point out man's wicked nature and his proneness to depart from truth. It is to shine some light in the darkness that has fallen over the country and the rest of the world and to show the way when there is no way. My focus is to lift Jesus Christ and to show the frailty of man and his need of the Savior. Man with all his best effort cannot attain true happiness and true love. He needs a Savior.

I have related the facts as they were. I have revealed myself and how I was, but I did not want to put anyone else in a bad light. There were cousins and friends who were involved with me; I changed many names to protect their privacy.

My hope is that true love will reign in your heart and that peace will

settle on you, that you may experience the story of redemption and grace.

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CHAPTER

1

La Vallée, A Miracle

O n a cool Saturday morning in November of 1965, Martin Boursiquot's wife Odette gave birth to their fourth child. The labor did not worry Odette, though in undeveloped countries like Haiti that lacked equipment, trained professionals and basic medication, childbirth could be dangerous. Things could go wrong fast for both mother and child. Midwives, often the only source of help, were limited when dealing with complications. The mother groaning on a mattress or pad of banana leaves, women rushing to and fro with potions and concoctions, the midwife screaming out orders—

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this was all too common in Haiti. Childbirth was no party; it could open the passage to the life beyond.

What worried Odette was the look of her baby. He was born too early and his head was soft and misshapen, like a bag of water that's not full. She said, "I knew something was wrong with my child." She was afraid to handle him, afraid that she would lose this baby at any time. Almost right away he started having severe seizures. She had no idea that a preemie's undeveloped brain can cause seizures, so she was terrified by them. They were preceded by a faint noise from the child who was too weak to even cry. After the convulsions, the tiny body with the soft head seemed lifeless. The days following the birth were extremely stressful for the parents and increasingly dangerous for the child.

One day when the baby was three or four days old, the mother heard a whimper and found the child between her bed and the wall. She pulled him out and he was motionless. He didn't respond to her. Fearing the worst, she hastily laid down his body. He was taboo now, poison, and she dared not touch him anymore.

"The baby is dead! Go get Martin," she told the maid.

If Odette had given the death wail, all kinds of help would have arrived from neighbors, friends, and kin. But only the grandparents and some of the parents' siblings were there. Their first response was horror: "Poor baby!" they said. "He hasn't been baptized yet."

Poor baby! Though painful, death would have freed his tiny body from pain and

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misery and released his angelic soul to God. If only the mother had understood that her baby was innocent and would go straight to heaven, her grief would not have been so intense.

The father came from the field to examine the situation. After consulting with his wife, he began to build a coffin, a simple box of the rough boards he kept on hand for such a need. For preemies or stillborn babies, the funeral was low-key, for family members only. There was still respect for the little one, but expenses were kept as low as possible. In a normal situation, the family had twenty-four hours to bury the body. However, with babies this young, there was neither a wake nor a formal funeral service. The tiny corpse would be laid to rest in a few hours.

Just before they laid the tiny body in the little box, they heard a whimper. The mother realized that her baby might be alive and she touched him. He was still warm. And then she felt just a tiny movement. She quickly called the father's attention to it. He wouldn't believe it and they started to argue. But soon they realized that, yes! the baby was still alive! The seizure had just sent him into a coma. Another hour and it would have been too late. Horror gripped them, especially the mother, that they had almost buried him alive.

But now what? They had to do something, but the mother lacked the strength to make the long, exhausting journey to the hospital.

Their first reaction was to have the child baptized to prevent his soul from going to hell. This was the parents' responsibility. Then if he died, they would be at peace,

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knowing that he went to heaven.

The next day they chose a sister-in-law, Mrs. Emma, to be the godmother and take the child to the priest. Mrs. Emma, a delicate and timid lady, was unaware of the child's problem. She was almost halfway to church when the baby suffered another seizure. She panicked, threw him on the grass and ran back to the house, trembling and crying that the baby had died in her arms.

"But where is he?" the mother asked.

"I dropped him," she answered. She felt so bad that she wasn't able to help the child.

"Where did you drop my baby?" the mother asked in desperation. Though she should stay in bed for several weeks yet, she went back with Mrs. Emma to look for the child. Thank God they found him.

Then they continued on to the church. Although only a godparent needed to be present, the mother accompanied Mrs. Emma, who was too distraught to go alone. The priest performed the *ondoiement,* the mere basics of the baptismal ritual. If the child lived, they would still go through an official baptism with a godfather and a godmother.

In the second week the seizures increased. The parents rushed the baptism, which would usually take place in the third or fourth month. When their baby was eleven days old, he was baptized into the Catholic church as a godfather and a godmother made a contract with God on his behalf.

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Taking the child to the doctor was not an option. The mother was still confined to bed while the grandmother cared for the baby. Odette was only allowed to feed her newborn and, the second week, step out of the house for some sunshine before going back to bed. But go away and go to a doctor? No.

Besides, the nearest hospital was in Jacmel, eighteen kilometers (11 mi.) away. It was a treacherous road down the mountain, through gorges, around ravines, across rivers. It was the rainy season and slipping and falling was a definite risk. However, Odette's condition was the greatest hindrance. There was no public transportation, and she was too weak to make the trip on horseback with a preemie on her lap.

A trip to Port-au-Prince was even more difficult. First Odette would have had to walk a trail that was sometimes a cow path and sometimes so steep only a mountain goat was happy on it. She would have spent night at the depot. The next day she'd have ridden all day on a ten-wheeler, swaying high on bags of corn and beans and produce piled on top of a load of wood planks. Riding that truck in and out of the river bed was like death staring you in the eyes.

A sacrifice had to be made, the child for the mother or vice versa. His seizures were so bad they did not expect him to live. Only a miracle from God would do. With so little hope for the child, it was not worth the danger to Odette though no doubt she would have given her life for her baby. They made the decision to stay. It was a heartrending choice for the mother, but it was best for the family.

Another factor that was so difficult for the mother was the reaction of the com-

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munity. In that superstitious environment, a handicapped child meant the parents were being punished for their evil deeds or they had made an offering or a vow to the devil to be rich or gain some other advantage. Although the mother's brothers and sisters stood by her, the rest of the townspeople considered the baby cursed and shunned them. Even the father, in a measure, rejected the child.

A miracle

God preserved that tiny life. The seizures peaked in the second week, then became less. When her baby didn't die, the mother took him to the doctor in Jacmel. The seizures quit within two or three months, and the family accepted and loved the baby. Had the problem continued, they would have been shamed and rejected by the community. The siblings would have been made fun of by other children: *You gota little crazy brother.* The rejection from the community disappeared.

However, it seemed the seizures had caused some brain damage. The baby boy grew but acted like a zombie, with neither cry nor smile. He never cooed. The mother took him to the doctor in Jacmel numerous times. Doctor Abel did not think he would live past eleven years of age and if he did, he'd never be normal. He would need a lot of care. They should not let rough children handle him, nor was he to play with rough children.

The doctor's prognosis stung the mother's heart. A handicapped child was a severe cross. Besides the challenge of providing his physical needs, there was the heavy stigma of a cursed child. When people saw that the child was, after all, not normal, few

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friends would support them.

The parents did not have the financial means to continue doctoring. They could not afford every test, every study. So, considering the whole package—travel, lodging, doctor's fees, and the other siblings—they stopped taking the baby to the doctor.

The child was nearing nine months when the clouds of uncertainty lifted, the dark veil over the family was ripped apart, and light shone in. One day the next older child, a three-year-old brother, wanted to play with his invalid sibling, but he got no response. Frustrated, he punched his baby brother, and for the first time, the baby cried. The rest of the family were so shocked and happy to hear the invalid cry that they forgot to rebuke the three-year-old for hitting. Crying meant the baby could feel pain. It was a sign that the brain was finally working.

At that moment a normalcy started to return to the family. Behaving like a normal child meant not only that this boy would be a productive member of the community, but it also brought a deep happiness because the family would not be looked down on.

Odette often referred to the miracles in her baby's life. She said she did not understand how and why he was alive. Considering the conditions of life for him—a premature baby with no incubator, seizures with no medication, no hospital to assist the family with the challenges, no running water, no sewage system, no heating where temperatures could dip into the fifties at night with high humidity that made the cold worse—no one thought the child had a chance, not even the doctor. She told the story to all who took the time to listen. She referred to him as a *cadaver,* or dead body, every

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time. She knew it wasn't her care alone that kept him alive; it was God's care also. Her baby was a miracle baby.

The boy never tired of hearing his mother tell the story although it made him laugh because he did not understand the seriousness of it.

Whenever he was naughty, Odette would tell him the story again. And then she'd say, "You have caused me more pain and cost me more money than any other of my children. If it wasn't for you, we would be further ahead. You'll cause me to go six feet under someday." This boy did give his mother a lot of pain and heartaches through the years, but he did not cause her to be put six feet under. He never doubted his mother's love, and in return, he loved his mother dearly.

Before this child was born, God knew him. God formed this person to serve Him someday when He'd show him the true way: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee" (Jeremiah 1:5, KJV).

I was this child.

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CHAPTER

2

La Vallée, My Home

Haiti in the '70s: Restaveks

We had these servants, these maids and butlers, because of one of the many crises in