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74-29

August 13, 1974

Former Hostage Urges Understanding for Inmates

By Robert O'Brien

NASHVILLE (BP)--Mrs. Ann Fleming spent 11 days as a hostage in an attempted prison break "prepared to die" at the hands of inmates, but she hopes the experience will not create a backlash of public sentiment against proper prison rehabilitation methods.

Mrs. Fleming, visiting relatives in the Nashville area, described the terrifying ordeal she and 11 other hostages endured in the barricaded library of the Texas State Prison in Huntsville, Tex., and how her faith as a Christian helped her face death without panic.

Two of the hostages, Mrs. Elizabeth Beseda and Mrs. Julia Standley, were slain by Mexican gang leader, Fred Gomor Carrasco, and one of his cohorts, Rudy Dominquez, in a gun battle during a dash for freedom on the 11th day. Carrasco and Dominquez then turned their guns on themselves.

"We don't want everyone to get the idea that all inmates are like these three men" (Ignacio Cuevas, who survived, Carrasco and Dominquez), said Mrs. Fleming, who had worked in the Texas Department of Corrections library system for four weeks before the breakout attempt.

"The inmates are in prison because they made mistakes and many of them are trying very hard to correct them. Publicity surrounding something like this hurts," she said. "It hurts the prison's education and religious programs.

"I've been asked how I feel about 'mollycoddling' prisoners. I have replied that I don't consider education and proper rehabilitation procedures as 'mollycoddling.' I think they are essential," she emphasized.

Mrs. Fleming, whose husband, Herman, runs a restaurant near Huntsville, added: "Dr. George Beto, former head of the Texas Department of Corrections, was right when he said that these prisoners have lacked three things in life--education, discipline and work. To that I would add that most of them also have not had any religious training."

One of the inmate hostages, she said, a young man named Steve Robinson, carried Mrs. Bertha Davis, another hostage, to safety during the hail of bullets which accompanied the final breakout attempt.

Mrs. Fleming, a member of First Baptist Church, Huntsville, said she had several opportunities to share her Christian faith with Robinson during the 11-day period.

"I feel there is an opportunity for Steve to become a Christian. I'm hoping to give him a Bible and talk to him further," said Mrs. Fleming, who once worked for the book store division of the Southern Baptist Convention's Sunday School Board for 10 years, including two years as manager of the Baptist Book Store in Richmond, Va.

After the hostages were released she said they learned that other inmates had offered to take their places and that many had prayed for their safety.

Although Carrasco eventually killed one of the hostages, as he said he would if not allowed to escape, Mrs. Fleming said, "I have mixed feelings about Mr. Carrasco, because, during the 11 days he treated us so well.

"Everyone of the hostages feel we would not be alive today if he had not been in charge. Because we believe the other two men would have killed us. They were so nervous they would jerk their guns out at every little noise.

"Anytime we complained to Mr. Carrasco that these men were making us nervous or scaring us, he would always go talk to them and conditions changed."

She said the notorious Southwest crime figure from San Antonio "always said 'yes ma'm' and 'no ma'm' to the women" and apologized for inconveniences. "Of course, I think he was trying to build up an image so people on the outside would think he was a good person," Mrs. Fleming said.

"If he'd had the same opportunities as the rest of us he might have been a different person."

The courage and sense of humor of prison chaplain Joseph O'Brien, a Roman Catholic priest wounded in the gun battle, reportedly by Cuevas, was a major factor in helping the hostages to face their ordeal bravely, she says.

"Father O'Brien stayed with us voluntarily," she says. "He came there as a negotiator. He left at least twice to bring us linen and bedding. The last time he came, Mr. Carrasco said, 'You may go but you may not return.' Father O'Brien chose to stay."

During the ordeal, Carrasco, reportedly an agnostic, "allowed Father O'Brien to lead a service and he sat over in the far left hand corner, listening. Father O'Brien directed his remarks to Carrasco, saying: 'You are not as fortunate as we are. We know that there's another life through Christ and you do not believe there's is another life,'" Mrs. Fleming recalls.

The hostages' sense of humor, she said, helped them through the experience.

"We joked about the fact that there were no license plates on the 'Trojan Horse,' " the makeshift shield of chalkboards and books in which the three Mexicans and several hostages, including the two who died, attempted to reach an armored car.

"We said we'd have to go over where the inmates made the license plates and get some," said Mrs. Fleming, who was handcuffed outside the 'Trojan Horse' during the escape attempt.

Mrs. Fleming "from the beginning" was "prepared to die" because she believed Carrasco would not relent and that the Texas Department of Corrections would not backdown on its policy of letting no prisoner escape with hostages.

"Instantly I started praying that the Lord would help me withstand whatever I had to withstand. And what was remarkable to me through the whole thing--God did help us to be brave and courageous. I felt like Mr. Carrasco respected us because of this--especially the women. The only time we cried was when we talked to relatives on the telephone."

Carrasco required each hostage to spend time in front of windows and doors as a shield against a possible frontal assault by prison guards and Texas Rangers. Once he shot over Mrs. Fleming's head when he thought he saw someone running between the buildings.

To bolster her courage during that time, Mrs. Fleming sang, softly to herself, such Christian hymns as "He Lives," "Everyday With Jesus," "Amazing Grace," "Oh, How I Love Jesus" and "Dare to Be Brave."

During her incarceration, Mrs. Fleming's mother died in Nashville. After her release she visited her mother's church, Dalewood Baptist Church, in east Nashville, on Sunday during her visit to relatives.

"I sat there and I thought how fortunate I was to have had a Christian mother--and a Christian father--to have brought me up."

Used Car Dealer
'Sells' Cars, Gospel

By Wallace Henley

MOBILE, Ala. (BP)--"I'm just a satisfied customer," said the zesty, flamboyant used-car salesman. Fred Roan wasn't trying to sell one of the 300 or so cars sitting on his auto lot on a busy boulevard in Mobile, Ala.

Fred Roan was talking about the Gospel.

For Roan, who was once the world's largest Dodge dealer, selling cars is just a means to an end--the means by which he finances his work as a missionary.

From the gravel and grease-covered yard of "Big Three Motors," Roan strikes out on missionary journeys taking him from Panama City, Fla., to Agbor, Nigeria.

Recently, Roan was part of a team of laymen who went to Nigeria under the auspices of the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board for a series of evangelistic thrusts. Among the people Roan led to Christ was the king of several Nigerian tribes.

Roan had just completed giving his testimony before an assortment of Nigerians, when he asked: "Would you like to have this experience in Christ?" The king, resplendent in all his tribal finery, was the first to raise his hand. Later, the ruler wrote his testimony in Roan's Bible. It read: "I am a new king in Jesus."

Leading evangelistic crusades is no new experience for Roan, a deacon at Mobile's First Baptist Church. For 26 weeks of every year, he is in an evangelistic meeting of some sort, somewhere.

Several years ago, he and several other men from Mobile organized the Fred Roan International Lay Evangelistic Association. Its primary purpose is to conduct church-centered lay revivals, with the goal of involving lay people more and more in sharing the gospel.

But Fred Roan had to get "busted" financially before he could begin his ministry.

Thirty years ago, Roan launched into the automobile business, and by 1960, he had become, by declaration of the Chrysler Corp., the world's largest Dodge dealer.

His general manager at the time was a hard-driving country boy named Bob Harrington.

When the Roan-Harrington kingdom came unglued, they were selling 135 Dodges a week. But as with almost any fast-growing enterprise, financial disaster was only one hefty check-bounce away.

Roan saw disaster coming, and urged Harrington to get out. By this time, Harrington had been doing some stark wrestling with God about his own life, and had decided to enter New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

There are some interesting parallels between Bob Harrington, now the famed "chaplain of Bourbon Street" in New Orleans, and Fred Roan, the automobile salesman from Mobile.

Both boldly proclaim the gospel in a daring, almost flashy style. Both are eager to confront people of the street, people of everyday life, with the claims of the gospel. Both have known material riches, but have proclaimed loudly that things spiritual are far more lasting and rewarding.

During the period of his financial washout, Roan heard Billy Graham say that if a person would turn loose things to God, God would give back. Roan decided to turn loose.

At last, Roan has built back up a thriving used car trade but his "business" is really spreading the gospel as a lay preacher, not selling used cars.

How does he manage to stay away from his used car lot for 26 weeks out of the year? "God has blessed me with three sons," Roan answers. Two of them take care of the credit department and the third is general manager.

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Maybe the more important question is, why does Fred Roan hustle all over the creation until he's ready to drop?

"Jesus Christ is the expert on life on this side and the other side of the grave," shoots back Roan. He simply feels that it is urgent that people know Jesus' expertise covers even a used car lot.

There are times when Fred is ministered to, even while he is ministering. He strongly feels he receives more than he gives.

Take, for example, what he describes as his "healing" in Nigeria. This had nothing to do with a physical miracle, he explains, but rather a spiritual one. It was on that trip to Africa that he was "healed" of the disease of prejudice.

"Sometimes," he says, "we try to keep Jesus just for the white race. But after we realize we have been adopted, and receive this new life of God, we lose our racial barriers. This was a real revival for me."

And when Roan left Nigeria, he knew that God's grace had spurred that love. Everyone was in tears, including Roan and his African hosts.

"We didn't understand the languages, but we understood the tears in each other's eyes," he says.

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Wallace Henley is pastor of Old Spanish Fort Baptist Church near Mobile. A former special assistant to the President on the White House staff, he has been both religion and public affairs editor for the Birmingham News. Adapted from August World Mission Journal.

Ford: Public Morality Comes
From People, Not Government

8/13/74

By W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Gerald R. Ford laid a heavy responsibility on the churches, the preachers and the parents of the nation for public morality and individual integrity in his first address to a joint session of Congress.

Following an administration that campaigned on the platform of "law and order" but which fell in disgrace by the worst scandals in the nation's history, President Ford made it clear that he believes that honesty, integrity and national stability cannot be achieved by governmental action.

"On the higher plane of public morality," the new President declared, "there is no need for me to preach tonight. We have thousands of far better preachers and millions of sacred scriptures to guide us on the path of personal right-living and exemplary official conduct."

President Ford continued: "If we can make effective and earlier use of the moral and ethical wisdom of the centuries in today's complex society, we will prevent more crime and corruption than all the policemen and prosecutors government can ever deter."

"This is a job that must begin at home, not in Washington," he asserted.

This challenge to the churches and the homes of the nation is a follow-up to the remarks the new President made the day he was sworn in. The principles by which a nation attains stability and integrity were enunciated by Ford when he declared, "My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over. Our Constitution works. Our great republic is a government of laws and not of men. Here the people rule."

Continuing, he said, "but there is a higher power, by whatever name we honor Him, who ordains not only righteousness but love, not only justice but mercy."

"As we bind up the internal wounds of Watergate, more painful and more poisonous than those of foreign wars," Ford appealed, "Let us restore the Golden Rule to our political process And let brotherly love purge our hearts of suspicion and of hate."

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The President's remarks were quickly absorbed by a nation that was suffering from a severe drought of moral leadership. Like a refreshing rain on the sun-baked farm lands, the nation's spiritual climate immediately began to take on a new feeling.

In the nation's capital, it was as if a new era had suddenly burst upon the nation. Governmental officials relaxed. Smiles appeared on many faces that had been uptight for so long they did not know what it meant to be loose and free and comfortable in public service.

At least for the time being, both official and private America seems to feel that they have a President who will level with them, a President who will be honest, one they can trust and one whose religion is an expression of what he really is inside.

President Ford further enhanced this attitude when he said, "I believe in the very basic decency and fairness of America. I believe in the integrity and patriotism of the Congress. And while I am aware of the House rule that no one ever speaks to the galleries (a reference to the press galleries), I believe in the First Amendment and the absolute necessity of a free press."

Baptists will not soon let President Ford forget that the First Amendment includes more than freedom of speech and of the press. It also includes freedom of religion and provision for "no establishment of religion."

The perspective of a person changes significantly when he is elevated from that of a congressman, representing only one congressional district, to that of President of the United States representing all of the people. Ford himself recognizes this.

"The truth is I am the people's man," he said, "and I accepted and began my new and solemn trust with a promise to serve all the people and do the best that I can for America."

"When I say all the people, I mean exactly that," the new President said. "To the limits of my strength and ability, I will be the President of black, brown, red and white Americans, of old and young, of women's liberationists and male chauvinists and all the rest of us in between, of the poor and the rich, of native sons and new refugees, of those who work at lathes or at desks or in mines or in the fields, or of Christians, Jews, Moslems, Buddhists and atheists, if there really are any atheists after what we have all been through."

The atmosphere in the nation's capital now is that a choking smog has lifted and the tears in people's eyes are not caused by the stinging pollution of Watergate but are tears of hope and faith and relief that a new day is ahead for America.

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Rain and Relief Lessen
Niger Drought Suffering

8/13/74

MARADI, Niger (BP)--The countryside is now green like spring and the people are waiting to see if the drought is really over.

The scene is vastly different from the barren desert and thousands of starving refugees that once were here. The great crowds of famine-stricken people, huddled together in corn-stalk huts, disappeared almost overnight when the rainy season began.

Reports of the much improved situation came from H. Cornell Goerner, area secretary for West Africa for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, who has just returned from a six-week tour of the area, and from Mr. and Mrs. Robert D. Williams, Southern Baptist missionaries on the field.

Most significant is that so many of the people are alive. In March an estimated 100 died daily in this area alone. People from all over the world responded to the desperate need for food and medical attention.

Southern Baptists' initial response was additional missionary personnel, appropriations by the Foreign Mission Board for food and medicine and thousands of dollars sent via the board for Niger relief.

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Dr. Walter M. Moore, physician and missionary to Ghana, and Rachel Bandy, missionary journeyman and registered nurse, were temporarily transferred to Niger to help meet the medical needs. They joined missionaries Mr. and Mrs. H. Jerold Palmer Jr. and the Williamses, who arrived in the fall of 1973.

Miss Bandy remains in Niger to meet the continued needs and Dr. Moore has returned to his usual station. Measles and cholera did not reach the epidemic proportions feared because of the medical aid given.

A total of \$120,524.77 has been given by Southern Baptists or appropriated by the Foreign Mission Board for relief in West Africa. Of this amount, individual or church gifts comprised \$82,555.72. The remainder, \$37,969.05, was appropriated by the board from current funds.

The people who had cultivated land have returned home to plant the seed given them by the government. For those with livestock, it is not so easy. The drought has taken their herds, too. There are no animals and thus no need to return home. Some of these people have gone to other countries to hunt work or dispersed into the cities to beg or look for jobs.

For now, thanks to the rains and the many people who contributed, the famine is over and the epidemics have been averted. Although the people of Niger can breathe a sigh of relief and enjoy the spring, they are ever aware that without rain the same type of famine will happen again, maybe by December.



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AUG 15 1974

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