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September 12, 1990

90-120

Messages from couple in Kuwait
give relatives bittersweet hope

By Art Toalston

N-SMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Relatives of a Southern Baptist couple stranded in the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait are preparing for bittersweet news.

Maurice and Laurie Graham have given relatives in Tennessee and Kansas hope that she and their two sons, Peter, 13, and Aaron, 10, will be on one of the chartered flights evacuating American women and children out of Kuwait.

But their exodus from Kuwait likely will be tearful because Maurice Graham apparently faces the same uncertainty as an estimated 1,500 other American men stranded in Kuwait, not knowing if or when they will be freed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, whose forces have controlled Kuwait since their invasion Aug. 2.

In a message received by her relatives in Kansas Sept. 10, Laurie Graham reported, "We are fine. No one can leave the embassy. State Department has to negotiate for boys and me to leave soon. It's a slow process, but we are patient." The message was transmitted from the embassy via its communications link with the State Department in Washington.

Relatives of Maurice Graham in Tennessee received a message from him during the Sept. 8-9 weekend noting that the family was fine and, "It will probably be a week or two before Laurie and the boys get there."

More evacuation flights for American women and children remaining in Kuwait tentatively are scheduled for Sept. 12, 14 and 16, a State Department spokesman said. During the morning of Sept. 12, or afternoon by Kuwait time, the spokesman was unable to confirm whether the Iraqi Airways jet had left Kuwait, nor did he have a list of possible passengers.

By the State Department's count, 474 American women and children and a few men left Kuwait on evacuation flights Sept. 7 and 8.

The names of Laurie Graham and her sons were on some of the early passenger lists Sept. 8. U.S. officials said "glitches" in the lists involved the names of a number of Americans who were not aboard either the Sept. 7 or 8 evacuation flights.

"Things are looking better, I guess," said Margaret Nuzum, Laurie Graham's mother.

"It's going to be hard on those little boys and Laurie ... if they have to come home without their daddy," she confided. Mrs. Nuzum, of Hutchinson, Kan., was reached in Albuquerque, N.M., where she was visiting her son, Jack, and his family. Laurie Graham grew up in Hutchinson.

Mrs. Nuzum said she has "high hopes" that her daughter and grandsons will be able to leave Kuwait, but at the same time, "I'll believe it when I hear her voice in the United States."

In Tennessee, Graham's brother, Dwight, said his parents, J.V. and Ruby Graham of Shelbyville, both in their 70s, are "holding up as well as to be expected. They look forward to seeing Maurice and Laurie and the boys just like all the rest of us do." Maurice and Dwight and two other brothers, Jay and Danny, grew up in Shelbyville.

"All of our faiths are strong," said Dwight, who now lives in Winchester, Tenn. "We understand why Maurice is over there. We feel like the Lord led him there. We feel like he'll look after Maurice."

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Still, he said, "Life has no guarantees whatsoever. If Maurice gives his life, well, (the Apostle) Paul did, too."

The U.S. Embassy in Kuwait remains open, a State Department spokesman said, even while at least five other countries' embassies were succumbing to the Aug. 24 cutoff of water and electricity after defying an Iraqi order to close. Eighteen embassies remain open in Kuwait.

"We're hopeful that they can survive under the conditions," the U.S. spokesman said. "If it gets too bad, they have permission to pack it in."

According to the State Department, nine diplomatic officials remain in the embassy. A spokesman said Sept. 10 there were a handful of civilians in the compound, but at least one former hostage who was in the embassy compound said the number is higher.

Sept. 14 will be the 51st birthday of the U.S. ambassador to Kuwait, W. Nathaniel "Nat" Howell. A Portsmouth, Va., native, Howell attended Court Street Baptist Church as a youth and was active in the Baptist Student Union during undergraduate studies at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

Maurice Graham observed his 41st birthday in the embattled embassy Aug. 14.

At Maurice Graham's home church, Southside Baptist in Shelbyville, the sign out front has read, "Pray for the Graham family in Kuwait," ever since the couple was trapped in Kuwait less than three months after beginning their youth and music ministry at the National Evangelical Church there.

The latest information about the Grahams also has appeared atop the prayer list in church newsletters and bulletins, said the pastor, Mike Gass. And the church sponsored a community-wide prayer service for them Aug. 27.

When news came in late August that the Grahams were leading nightly prayer services in the embassy, Gass said, "It was just a thrill to the family, to the church members ... of how they were being used ... that they were doing what they felt God wanted them to do."

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Saudis' Muslim faith jolted by
Iraqi threat, American troops

By Art Toalston

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Many Saudis probably are wondering, "Where is Allah?"

Samuel Shahid, executive director of Good News for the Crescent World in Fair Haven, N.J., believes the crisis in the Middle East has placed troubling questions about the Islamic faith in the minds of many Saudis, and other Muslims around the world.

Saudi Arabia, which counts more than 99 percent of its 15 million people as followers of Islam, is the religion's birthplace.

Especially for Saudi Muslims, monumental questions arise from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the threat of Iraqi troops lining Saudi Arabia's borders with Kuwait and America's military buildup on Saudi soil, says Shahid, a Middle East native who has lived in the United States the past 13 years.

Shahid earned a doctorate in Middle Eastern studies from the University of Chicago and, earlier, a master's degree in the same field from the American University in Beirut, Lebanon. He founded Good News for the Crescent World in 1987 as a ministry for educating Christians about Islam. And he is a member of Monmouth Baptist Church in Tinton Falls, N.J.

Explaining the impact of the crisis in the Middle East on Saudi Muslims, Shahid first notes that Saudi Arabia sees itself as "the protector of Islam." And many Muslims around the world accord this status to the Saudis, he says.

Islam came into being in the 7th century A.D. in lands located within today's Saudi Arabia. The Saudi city of Mecca was the hometown of Islam's revered apostle, Muhammad. Mecca and the Saudi city of Medina, site of Muhammad's tomb, are Islam's two holiest cities. The faith's holiest shrine is the Kaaba in Mecca. It is a cube-like structure, 40 feet wide, 35 feet long and 50 feet high, within Mecca's massive Holy Mosque.

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Some 1.5 million Muslims venture to Saudi Arabia each year from across the world, fulfilling the duty expected of financially able Muslims to join in a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetimes.

Islam is the state religion of Saudi Arabia, and its legal system is based solely on Islamic holy writings and subsequent tradition. Saudi Arabia's green and white flag prominently displays the key Islamic profession of faith: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the apostle of Allah."

Shahid notes the troubling questions confronting Saudis in the Iraqi threat and the American military buildup within their country: Why did Allah fail to protect them as his trusted followers? Why has a fellow Islamic country, Iraq, become such a threat? Why did they have to resort to asking for help from non-Muslims, namely the United States and its military, made up of Christians, atheists or "infidels" (a term Muslims use for those who reject Islam), and women?

In short, where is Allah?

"From a religious point of view, these are questions that will create a turmoil in the minds of many Muslims," Shahid says. The Saudis had taken their key role in Islam for granted -- until the current crisis, he says. "Now it's going to make them think and ask questions."

Saudi Arabia's senior religious leader, Sheik Al-Baaz, already has made an extraordinary public declaration that those who have come to "defend Islam" will be "rewarded by Allah for their good deed," Shahid notes.

Before this crisis, the only non-Muslims permitted into Saudi Arabia were persons involved in business or diplomatic affairs, not tourists.

America's use of women soldiers is particularly at odds with Saudi culture and religious practice, Shahid says. Saudi women traditionally have not gone out in public unless they wore a veil over their face and were accompanied by a male relative.

In early September, however, the continuing crisis prompted King Fahd of Saudi Arabia to call for wider participation by women in the labor force. In time, women may move into jobs involving regular interaction with men.

Efforts by Christians in the Middle East to share their faith and meet human needs probably will not suffer over the long haul from the buildup of American forces in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East, Shahid says.

"If Americans are just coming to help, to defend, and they leave as soon as everything is over, then I don't see that there will be any negative reaction," he qualifies, noting that most Arab countries have taken a stance against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

"But if it were proven that the Americans were out to colonize Saudi Arabia, then there would be a different reaction" among Arabs, he says.

As Muslims begin pondering the religious implications of the Middle East crisis, Christians should intensify their witness to Muslims, Shahid says. Christians in the United States, for example, can minister to thousands of college students who come to the United States from Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries -- and to numerous other Muslims who now account for 15 percent of all immigrants here, Shahid says.

"Muslims do not have a personal relationship with God," he says. "Islam is a matter of 'do' and 'do' and 'do' so that you may be able to go to heaven. But if you ask them, 'Are you sure that all your sins are forgiven?' they will never tell you, 'Yes.' They say that forgiveness of sin and assurance of salvation depends on God's will and his mercy. There is always doubt."

Various verses in Islam's holy book, the Koran, even say that God can send a righteous man to hell and a wicked man to heaven if he wishes, Shahid says.

Christians, meanwhile, can offer Muslims a faith of "full assurance of salvation ... the love of Christ toward us, the peace of mind that God gives even in times of turmoil ... his promise that he will always be with us," Shahid says.

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"Our faith has nothing to do with holy sites; it has to do with a personal relationship with Christ himself."

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Ernest Mosley urgently requests you run the following story in state papers as soon as possible.

Atlanta housing requests
to be postmarked Oct. 1

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Hotel reservations for the 1991 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting should be mailed Oct. 1, Convention Manager Ernest E. Mosley announced.

The meeting will be held June 4-6 in Atlanta.

Housing request forms are available from the offices of Baptist state convention executive directors and the September issue of The Baptist Program magazine, Mosley said.

The forms provide complete instructions for filing. They also list hotels in the 8,000 room Southern Baptist block, their rates, distances from the convention center and the amount of deposit each requires.

Requests postmarked Oct. 1 will receive priority. The Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau will assist in finding rooms for others after requests postmarked Oct. 1 have been filled.

The Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau will fill the request Oct. 15, after all forms postmarked Oct. 1 have had time to arrive in Atlanta.

Registrants may not submit more than one request per person. The housing bureau's computer will cancel all copies of multiple requests by the same individual.

Multiple registrants may submit as many as but not more than ten individual requests in the same envelope.

The convention's block of 8,000 rooms, the largest block of rooms ever held, is spread among twenty-eight Atlanta hotels. However, many rooms that are not in the SBC block will be available through travel agents or direct from the hotels.

Transportation for messengers attending the Convention will be available through Atlanta's excellent mass transportation system on a per use basis.

Handicapped people and others with special needs should contact Housing Information, SBC Executive Committee, 901 Commerce Street, Room 750, Nashville, TN 37203; telephone (615) 244-2355.

Information concerning Campground and RV Parks and Tourist information is available through The Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau Tourism Information Department, 233 Peachtree Street, NE, Suite 2000, Atlanta, GA 30303; telephone (404) 521-6688.

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All-American family
attacked by addictions

By Maria Sykes

Baptist Press
9/12/90

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Until 1986, Frank and Carolyn Andrews of Brentwood, Tenn. had the typical all-American family life. The Andrews and their four children enjoyed family vacations, were faithful members of a local church and worked through routine family crisis common in large families.

But then things began to change when Brent, the youngest, who was twelve at the time, began to do things differently. He would often wear a black leather jacket, combat boots, torn jeans and would shave his head. Spending many hours out with older friends soon found Brent deeply involved in alcohol and substance abuse.

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"It was cool to do drugs and drink," said Brent, while sharing his experience in chapel at the Southern Baptist Convention building in Nashville recently. "I wanted to be tough. I was using drugs and didn't care who knew it," he continued. "When I was high I was carefree. I felt I could do anything. I could talk to anybody and say anything -- nothing really mattered," he said.

Brent recalled one specific day drinking liquor and taking seven Valium pills. After an emergency trip to the hospital, the doctor told his parents there was nothing to do but let it wear off. "I don't remember much about those two days that it took to recover from that," reflected Brent.

It wasn't until two years later on Feb. 29, 1988, after finding a half-full bottle of vodka he had forgotten about, that Brent's parents recognized he had a problem that had to be dealt with.

Overcoming denial is most difficult for some family members. "Parents need to understand we're growing up differently. Face the facts. We are not growing up on the family farm these days," said Brent.

Brent's father fought those facts for a long time. "Drug and alcohol abusers are manipulative. They work one parent against the other," Andrews stated. "Carolyn knew, almost from the beginning, that Brent had a problem. After weekly yelling and arguing, I was convinced my wife had the problem, not Brent," he continued.

Many parents deny this could happen to their family. "Often, in the stage of denial, parents refuse to accept their child has a problem, because they, themselves, have a problem," Andrews explains, "Social drinker's habits have to change. You don't have to be in the gutter to be an alcoholic."

Speaking to Baptist adults in the weekly chapel service, Andrews emphasized, "Our communities need to put away our apathy toward alcohol and drug abuse and become aware of what is happening in our neighborhood and schools. First grade is not too early to start children in awareness programs."

After two and a half years of sobriety, Brent admits, "I am an alcoholic. Abusers have to hit bottom before making a successful recovery. That bottom varies for each person.

"Alcoholism is a chronic disease. It lies, then tries to cover itself," Brent explained. "Alcoholism and drug abuse doesn't care who or how it strikes. This can happen to anyone," he said.

After graduating from high school in 1991, Brent plans to go to college and study to be a writer. When faced with drugs or alcohol today, Brent says, "I find my strength from within. To become involved again would be a blow to my ego. I've worked hard to be where I am today. I like myself again."

Brent talks with various groups and assemblies about his experience and recovery. To a group of 7th and 8th graders Brent stated, "Drinking and taking drugs is not cool. If you are using them, stop."

Brent encourages parents to notice early possible signs of drug or alcohol abuse: violent outbursts, abusive behavior, mood swings, seclusion, a change of friends, lying, and slipping grades. Upon discovering a child with a chemical dependency, Brent encourages parents to provide positive reinforcement and lots of love.