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90-145

Plane crash survivor  
will return to Oklahoma

By Kathie Chute

N-FMB

HONG KONG (BP)--Erin Thomas, the Southern Baptist teacher who survived the Oct. 2 crash-landing of a hijacked plane in Guangzhou, China, has been moved to Hong Kong and will return soon to Oklahoma.

Thomas, 30, of Harrah, Okla., traveled by train with her parents from Guangzhou to Hong Kong Oct. 18, where she was met by an ambulance and taken to Hong Kong Baptist Hospital. As soon as arrangements can be made, she will be moved to Baptist Burn Center in Oklahoma City for further medical treatment.

Her Southern Baptist colleague, Mary Anna Gilbert, 23, of Alexander City, Ala., who taught English with Thomas for only one month at Jia Ying University in Meixian, China, was killed in the crash that claimed 132 lives. Gilbert had planned to teach English in China for two years through Cooperative Services International, a Southern Baptist service organization.

Thomas suffered second- and third-degree burns over 6 percent of her body in the crash and will need skin grafts. She also sustained a dislocated shoulder and several broken bones, and she developed pneumonia from smoke she inhaled while struggling to escape the burning plane wreck. Southern Baptist missionary physician Lewis Smith is treating her during her stay in Hong Kong.

"I'm better than I was two weeks ago," she commented from her hospital bed. "My lungs are clear, the pneumonia is gone and I feel better. People have been so wonderful. So many calls and letters ... I couldn't have made it without them."

Thomas said she plans to return to China once she is fully recovered but will "wait and see" how she feels when the time comes.

"Right now I feel like I'd like to go back," she said with a smile. "The university has lost two English teachers. Maybe they'll want to go ahead and get somebody right away. Then I could just go someplace else in China. But if I'm OK when the next term starts in February, I think I'd like to go back to Meixian."

Thomas, a graduate of Central State University in Edmond, Okla., taught English as a Southern Baptist journeyman in Japan from 1987-89. She also taught at private schools in Oklahoma prior to joining the China teachers program of Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist service organization.

The two teachers were returning to the Chinese university after a long-weekend holiday trip. They had planned to take a flight a few days later but decided to return early to Meixian for China's autumn celebration, the Moon Festival. Their Chinese Boeing 737 was hijacked by at least one man demanding to go to Taiwan or Hong Kong.

As the pilot attempted to land the plane in Guangzhou, a struggle began in the cockpit that resulted in the fiery crash-landing at Baiyun International Airport.

Later reports indicated the pilot, who died in the crash, had been faced with another hijacking a few years before and had been reprimanded for meeting the hijacker's demands.

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Thomas' mother, Diane Ames of Oklahoma City, said the only items among her daughter's possessions that were recovered intact from the crash were a porcelain cup and four saucers.

Jia Ying University was scheduled to hold a memorial service Oct. 26 for Gilbert.

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Baptist worker saying hello  
to husband still in Kuwait

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--It only lasts 30 seconds, but Laurie Graham is saying a daily hello to her husband, Maurice, in Iraqi-devastated Kuwait.

The Grahams, of Shelbyville, Tenn., and Hutchinson, Kan., were Southern Baptists' first workers in Kuwait. They had been in the country less than three months when Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait early Aug. 2.

Graham and an undisclosed number of Americans remain in Kuwait at the U.S. Embassy compound. Mrs. Graham and her two sons, Peter, 13, and Aaron, 10, left Kuwait Sept. 12 as part of an exodus Iraq permitted for American women and children. Only a handful of American men were allowed to leave.

Mrs. Graham and her sons, now in a church's missionary residence in Nashville, have been sending daily greetings to Graham via a Voice of America shortwave broadcast set up for families of U.S. hostages in Kuwait and Iraq.

The Voice of America broadcast, called "Messages from Home," began Oct. 4, said a VOA spokesman in Washington, D.C. It is aired around 7:45 p.m. each day Mideast time, or 12:45 p.m. Washington time.

Relatives of hostages in Kuwait and Iraq may call a special number at the State Department from 1 to 6 p.m. each day to record a 30-second message. The volume of calls determines the length of each day's program, but it usually runs 10 to 15 minutes, the spokesman said.

The U.S. State Department also calls Mrs. Graham daily to report that her husband remains safe in the Kuwait embassy compound.

"Periodically, they pass short messages to Maurice and back to me," she said. "Maurice says they have little to do and are very anxious to leave."

The Grahams have been "encouraged by the constant prayer support" of family, friends and Southern Baptists who have written to them, she added.

"Please continue to pray for Maurice to stay in good spirits and to be able to maintain his weight," Mrs. Graham said. "He has food, but tuna, rice and lukewarm water get monotonous."

She also asked for prayer for thousands detained in Kuwait, including people from various countries who were part the National Evangelical Church in Kuwait and remain there. The Grahams worked on the staff of the church, which housed 28 different ethnic congregations that met for worship and activities.

Church members have begun feeding the hungry and helping in a hospital for the handicapped. In a brief cable, Graham said the hospital has 200 children who lack adequate care.

"Above all, pray for a peaceful solution" to the Gulf crisis, Mrs. Graham said.

She said her sons have done well in adjusting from life in Iraqi-controlled Kuwait to the relative calm of Nashville. A key factor is that "we know what life is like at the embassy," she explained. Her husband is not "holed up" in a room but can exercise by walking around the large embassy grounds and chat with other Americans who have taken refuge there.

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"Being inside the embassy isn't like being on the outside where (the Iraqis) are doing house-to-house searches," she said. "It's not like being holed up in an apartment and waiting for someone to knock on the door and say, 'We're going to Baghdad.'"

Also, Mrs. Graham added, "We sat down every night when we were in Kuwait and asked the boys what questions they had, what their fears were. We talked about it and then we would pray about it. We weren't hiding anything from them, and I think that helped a lot."

Another factor helped her sons quickly adjust to the United States: three of their school pals were at the airport when the family arrived Sept. 14. The Grahams spent a year in Nashville between the end of their previous work in Liberia and their Kuwait assignment. One of the Grahams' close friends in Nashville arranged for the classmates to be at the airport.

Ever since the first hours after the invasion, Mrs. Graham said she has learned much about being sensitive to other people in crisis.

"That's one of the reasons I married Maurice. I've always had an admiration for people who can be sensitive to people in crisis," she said.

Between 600 and 700 Americans, mostly men, remain in Kuwait, including the undisclosed number in the U.S. Embassy; another 350 Americans are in Iraq, according to a State Department spokesman.

The U.S. Embassy is one of the few that remain open in Kuwait. "It's still functioning as an embassy," the spokesman said. "We're planning to stay open as long as our supplies hold out -- and they'll hold out for some time."

At the helm of the embassy is W. Nathaniel "Nat" Howell, U.S. ambassador to Kuwait. Howell was a member of the Baptist Student Union at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville during his studies there and was a member of Court Street Baptist Church in Portsmouth, Va., as a youth. His mother, Josephine, has been a member there for 65 years.

Howell's wife, Margie, also a former BSU member at the university, was not in Kuwait when it was stormed by Iraqi troops in August. Howell's tour of duty there was scheduled to end later in August.

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Pastors find common cause  
in house for fired ministers

By Sarah Zimmerman

F-HMB

Baptist Press  
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CARTERSVILLE, GA. (BP)--Two pastors with opposing views of the Southern Baptist Convention controversy have found a common cause in assisting fired ministers.

"We're on totally opposite ends of the SBC conflict, but we both have a heart for fellow ministers," says John Yarbrough, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Cartersville, Ga.

Yarbrough, a self-defined conservative, and Jim Strickland have established a home for terminated church staff members. Strickland is pastor of Cartersville's Heritage Baptist Church which ordains women deacons and uses a liturgical approach in worship.

"I can't think of two more diverse preachers and congregations," Yarbrough says. "But on some things we can celebrate and work together."

"When people are hurting or in trouble, our differences are less important," Strickland adds.

A 1988 survey, conducted by the church administration department of the Baptist Sunday School Board, of directors of missions showed that 116 pastors are terminated every month in the SBC. Norris Smith, consultant, notes that the statistic does not include people in other church staff positions.

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The Cartersville home is a three-bedroom house occupied by one family at a time. Smith does not know of any other homes dedicated to helping fired ministers, but he and Yarbrough would like to establish a network of homes so they could refer ministers to other locations while their house is occupied.

The Cartersville home is named for Thomas J. Holmes, the late Georgia pastor who was fired from Tattnall Square Baptist Church in Macon in the early 1960s. Holmes had fought for the right of a Nigerian student to attend the church.

Ironically, the first residents of the Holmes House were fired for similar reasons. Bob and Wynette Hoggard, who currently live in the house, were dismissed in June after serving a church in coastal Georgia for 16 years. He was pastor and she was music minister.

"We were told we were fired because I baptized foreigners," Hoggard says. The church had a Vietnamese mission, and people representing as many as 10 ethnic groups regularly attended the church's worship service.

Hoggard points out that their termination does not reflect the thinking of the entire church or the most actively involved members. But the action does characterize the group which attended the Wednesday night business meeting when the couple was fired.

The Holmes House is open to ministers regardless of the cause of their termination. Strickland says the board of directors considered whether it should allow people who were fired for immoral actions to stay at the house.

"We decided we're not going to judge, but to help redeem them for ministry," Strickland says.

"No matter who's at fault, there's hurt involved," Yarbrough says. "Even if the person warranted termination, he still needs a ministry to love and restoration and usefulness and away from bitterness."

As part of the restoration process, residents are required to go to counseling sessions provided by the Georgia Baptist Convention.

"When staff members are forced out, the hurt is so deep and the feelings are so raw, they cannot help but take those feelings with them," Strickland says. "This gives them time to process what's happened so they can go to another place without all that baggage."

People who live in the Holmes House are not required to attend church, but the Hoggards attend Heritage on Sunday morning and Tabernacle on Sunday night. Hoggard calls himself a "pre-1979 Southern Baptist." Strickland and Yarbrough both say a person's affiliation with SBC groups will not make a difference in determining who lives in the house.

To make the home financially feasible for unemployed ministers, residents are only required to pay the utility bills. The 12-member board of directors raises money for the \$1,200 monthly house payments. Strickland says the house, which was purchased in February, is financed for five years to save money on interest payments.

Heritage and Tabernacle churches have each included \$600 a year in their budgets for insurance, taxes and maintenance.

Having lived in a church-owned house, the Hoggards were homeless as well as jobless when their severance package expired.

Hoggard was given three months salary plus one month's vacation pay. Mrs. Hoggard was given 30 days salary plus three weeks vacation pay. In addition to the cost of moving, the couple now has to pay their retirement, health and life insurance.

Looking for a job has been frustrating at best. Hoggard, 56, finds age his biggest obstacle, though he says he has at least 10 more years to give to full-time Christian service.

The Hoggards have both considered secular employment, but Hoggard still feels called to the ministry. They find employers are not eager to hire people temporarily. Mrs. Hoggard also notes that her only secular work experience in 30 years is three months as Christmas help in a department store.

Strickland says people are allowed to stay at the home for a year, but that is negotiable if they actively seek employment during their stay.

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Photo mailed to state Baptist papers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

Training sessions, commissioning  
begin Breakthrough pilot phase

By Frank Wm. White

F-SSB

Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE (BP)--The Great Commission Breakthrough project could revolutionize Sunday school work and church efforts to grow, project planners and participants in a pilot project training session contended.

More than 160 people participated in a three-day training session Oct. 15-17 in Nashville and were commissioned as Great Commission Breakthrough consultants for the one-year pilot project that is to involve as many as 540 churches.

After the pilot, project planners at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board expect to train as many as 7,000 consultants who will work with every interested church and mission in the Southern Baptist Convention to develop Great Commission Breakthrough action plans.

The Nashville session was the second of five regional training conferences. The first session was at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center. Others will be at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center; Dallas; and Tampa, Fla.

Project architects and newly trained and commissioned consultants agreed the project was "sent of God" and marks a "new beginning for Southern Baptists in Sunday school work."

Harry Piland, director of the Sunday school division, described how the idea developed "as if God was telling me what we needed to do.

"No one needed to tell me the difficulty of going into every church. But God is a God of the impossible. There are many who have seen the plan and believe in the dream," he said.

In the commissioning service at the end of the training, Sunday School Board President Lloyd Elder said the Great Commission Breakthrough project represents a change in the way the board assists churches. "We can't continue business as usual if we are going to move forward and realize a dream of breakthrough growth in the churches."

Elder encouraged the consultants to become "dream painters" for the churches to help them envision possibilities. God is going to bless this work because the focus is on his church and reaching lost people."

Gary Johnson, pastor of Vale Baptist Church in Bloomington, Ill., said as he participated in the training he realized the plan was his dream too. "I believe this is of the Lord. This is how we can revive the churches."

In Mississippi, state convention-trained consultants have been working with individual churches in ways similar to the Great Commission plan for the past two years, according to Keith Williams, consultant for adult work in the state convention Sunday school department.

Twenty-seven trained consultants each spent six months assisting churches with Sunday school growth plans, Williams said. He attributed a 1989 statewide Sunday school enrollment increase in part to the individualized consultations.

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"This helps churches see that the state convention or the Sunday School Board can come in and help them. The customized training does help churches decide what specific things they need to do to grow," he said.

Alan Tungett, one of six consultants from the board's Sunday school division who are assigned to the Great Commission Breakthrough Project, said the plan will "lead the board into new areas of helping churches."

About 15 consultants have led as many as 50 churches in a pre-test of the project during the past six months. Although those projects are not completed, consultants report many have experienced growth in enrollment, baptisms, attendance, giving and other areas.

Because the project is customized for each church, schedules, actions and objectives will vary depending on the church needs. A consultant will work with church leaders to plan a three-day Great Commission Breakthrough event.

During the event, church leaders will prioritize their needs and develop action plans to accomplish those objectives. The consultant then will work with the church during the year to assist in carrying out the plans, helping the church arrange training or locate other resources.

The pilot phase will be completed in the test churches by Sept. 15, 1991. After adjustments are made, additional Breakthrough consultants will be trained to work in churches between 1992 and 1995.

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Theology, architecture study  
can result in 'sacred space'

By Charles Willis

F-SSB

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SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP) -- Architects who develop a sound theology of church buildings and who do their homework have an opportunity to create "sacred space," a pastor and an educator told participants in a Workshop for Architects Oct. 12-13 in San Antonio, Texas.

Jack Riddlehoover, pastor of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church in Abilene, Texas, told architects from across the United States and Canada that knowing about Southern Baptist programs and about the congregation planning to build is crucial to a successful relationship.

William Hendricks, professor of theology and director for the center of religion and arts at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., said he believes church buildings "are not just function, location, or money, but sacred space."

Riddlehoover, whose 41 years as a pastor include 12 building projects, said: "The personality of a church has much to do with the kind of building the congregation wants and needs. Visit some of the services; feel who that church really is; learn what they feel they are there to accomplish."

Riddlehoover urged architects to ask each building committee member the purpose of the proposed building.

Hendricks agreed that committee members should deal with specific questions about the nature of God and the mission of God's people. The answers to those questions can be expressed architecturally, Hendricks maintained.

"Look for the spiritual implications of God in what you do," he said. "The biblical God takes the initiative, calls his people by name, confronts them and sends them forth."

Architecturally, Southern Baptists need to show the presence, the holiness, the love, wrath and power of God, he continued. Church buildings not only say who a church is, he asserted, but they also say who the congregation thinks God is.

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Riddlehoover challenged architects to "catch the ambition of the church," and to "find the unique needs of the specific part of the church for which you are to plan. There are uncommon needs related to a church. Architects should become familiar with everything the (Sunday School Board's) church architecture department can give them before they work with a church."

Among other areas of concern, architects were advised to understand the decision-making process in the church, research the church's financial status, give the best possible counsel and lead the church to build beautiful buildings that invite people in.

"Church buildings do not have to be ornate," Riddlehoover said, "but they do need design that says they are houses of God. View what you do as a labor to be used of God in a building that will be a blessing to others long after you are gone."

The Workshop for Architects was sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church architecture department.