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91-89

Thomason attacked by
pit bulls in Georgia

By Polly House

N-10
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COLUMBUS, Ga. (BP)--John Thomason, executive director of the Wyoming Southern Baptist Convention in recuperating in a Columbus, Ga., hospital after being attacked by two pit bull dogs.

Thomason was jogging on the morning of June 12 on a road near his parents' home near Columbus when he said he heard some barking behind him. He turned and saw the two dogs chasing him. "One dog went straight for my Achilles' tendon on my right foot, and the other one went for my left hand and forearm," Thomason said.

After knocking him to the ground, the dogs tried to pull him off the road to a wooded area, Thomason said. Thomason had remembered seeing a store about 100 yards away from where the attack took place, but was unable to get there. "A Georgia power employee in a truck saw me waving my bloody hand and stopped to help me. Fortunately, he had a radio so he radioed the county sheriff and an ambulance. If he hadn't stopped, I don't know what would have happened. I guess I got help about as fast as I could have."

The power company employee arranged for someone to call Thomason's wife, Eleanor, and his parents to tell them what had happened. They met him at the hospital.

"The pain was excruciating. There were so many puncture wounds. But now I'm a little better. My legs are real swollen and the muscles are sore," said Thomason. "They took the IV out today."

The chaplain at the hospital made arrangements with the hospital's vice president for Mrs. Thomason to have special VIP room with a "real bed so she can stay here with me," at no extra charge, said Thomason, adding, the whole staff at the medical center has been "wonderful and so supportive."

"It was a nightmare, an absolute nightmare. If you'd ever said something like this might happen to me, I'd have said 'no way,'" said Thomason.

Thomason said the doctors have told him he may be able to be dismissed from the hospital Thursday, June 20, after they re-examine his wounds. "It will also depend on when I can wear some trousers. Right now, we are looking for some sweats that might fit on my legs."

After Thomason is dismissed, he will stay at his parents' home for a period of time. He said he did not know when he might be able to return home to Wyoming.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Specialized versions of this story will be sent to the Baptist papers in states that sent volunteers to "Crossover Japan": Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and the Northwest and New England areas.

'Crossover Japan' nets
345 professions of faith

By Michael Chute

N-FMB

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TOKYO (BP)--A "Crossover Japan" evangelistic thrust led 345 people to faith in Jesus Christ, reported leaders of 42 Southern Baptist volunteer teams from the United States that worked in the partnership crusade.

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One of the largest evangelistic crusades ever planned by Japanese Baptists, the May 20-June 3 effort involved 139 Southern Baptists from 20 states who worked in 41 Japanese churches and mission congregations. It grew out of Japanese Baptists' goal to increase their churches from 238 to 500 and membership from 28,000 to 50,000 in the next 10 years. The Japan Baptist Convention matched up the volunteer teams with churches.

"'Crossover Japan' exceeded any expectations we had," said missionary Bill Walker, who helped mission volunteer Dub Jackson coordinate the crusade. "It proved that an individual's testimony is still one of most powerful tools Christians have. Regardless of cross-cultural difficulties, the power of the living gospel translates."

The first in a series of annual "Cross Overseas" crusades sponsored by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, the project involved pastors and lay people from throughout the Southern Baptist Convention. The annual partnerships will parallel the "Cross Over America" campaigns, coordinated by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Both emphases came from suggestions made by SBC President Morris Chapman.

In "Crossover Japan," each partnership team included a preacher and two or three lay people, such as secretaries, seminary students, businessmen and retirees. Several former missionaries to Japan returned as team members.

Three former missionaries reported at least 30 people accepted Christ in their assigned church during the week, Walker said. Returning missionaries said they "sensed a real change in Japan, a new openness to the gospel, a new warmth in the churches," he said.

More teams went to new church planting situations than is usually the case because 33 missionaries in Japan directly are involved in church starts. About one-fourth of the teams were involved in new church situations.

Jackson, a former Japan missionary who spent the past year in the country planning "Crossover Japan," invited the Ohman Brass, a six-trumpet ensemble. It traveled to 10 churches in the Tokyo area, appeared on Japanese television and gave concerts at a school for the blind and several high schools.

A team of volunteers reaching out to the deaf -- a first for Japan partnerships -- worked in five churches. The team, from the 150-member deaf congregation of Applewood Baptist Church in the Denver area, included two deaf members, Audrey Warden and Robert Payne. Missionary Nan Jordan and Payne's hearing son, Mike, helped interpret for the pair.

"When we had to interpret it was in four different languages: from American sign language to English to Japanese to Japanese sign language," said Robert Payne, who has been deaf since birth. "The Holy Spirit blessed us and worked through us as we did that."

Payne said he thought Japan had only about 25,000 deaf people, but he discovered during his stay 3.4 million Japanese are deaf. Japanese Baptists have no deaf churches and only one church, located in Kyoto, has deaf members who attend regularly. Churches with deaf members often don't have people to interpret for them, Jordan explained.

Besides working in the five churches, team members attended meetings of several deaf groups and joined in a deaf sports day -- similar to the U.S. Special Olympics -- where they distributed evangelistic tracts to about 500 deaf students and gave their testimonies. They also visited an independent organization for deaf Christians.

"(The deaf) need Jesus Christ," Payne told participants at a celebration banquet closing the crusade. "Yet, Nan Jordan is the only (missionary) who can speak Japanese sign language, the only one who can interpret and work with the deaf here in Japan. Pray for her that she won't give up."

Jordan plans another evangelistic crusade next year for the deaf. Most deaf people the team encountered were first-time contacts, Jordan said, and she wants to go back to those same churches with another deaf team.

"The power of God working through 'Crossover Japan' was a testimony to the prayers people have been praying in the States and in Japan for a long time," said Walker. "Some very miraculous types of things happened."

Joe Williamson, a lay volunteer from Iowa Park, Texas, had an unusual experience. Assigned to a large Japanese church, he became sick with meningitis just after the crusade began. He was forced to enter the hospital, where he met a Japanese woman named Mrs. Matsumoro.

"She was in the hospital herself and came to my aid," said Williamson. "(With her translating) I was able to witness to all the nurses -- about 12 of them -- and seven accepted the Lord. I feel confident the others will too."

Mrs. Matsumoro was the wife of a pastor who had died seven months earlier, Walker explained. Pressures involved in her husband's illness caused her to become despondent and she was bedridden for three years.

"The way I heard it, Joe Williamson apparently just drug her around the hospital, making her translate as he witnessed," Walker added. "It got her so fired up that she's ready to leave the hospital."

In an early-morning prayer meeting at Utunomiya Baptist Church, volunteer Everett Ingram from Fort Worth, Texas, had just finished sharing the Scripture: "Cast all your cares upon the Lord because he cares for you." Suddenly one of the men in the meeting suffered a heart attack.

"That stopped the meeting," Ingram recalled. "Everyone rallied around the man and we began to pray. The pastor and I laid hands on him until the ambulance took him to the hospital. But just two hours later they released him from the hospital. God answered that prayer in a miraculous way."

Volunteer Rothell Wasson of Sledge, Miss., related a visit to a 70-year-old man who had been vice president of one of the largest soft drink companies in Japan but now lay paralyzed by a stroke. The man's wife, a Christian, didn't want him to become a Christian; if he did, their son would leave home. She is in her mid-60s and cannot care for her husband by herself.

"We just prayed while the wife was still talking and God got her to quiet down a little bit," Wasson remembered. "The man prayed to receive Christ and when he opened his eyes, he was weeping. That really struck our interpreter and he started weeping. The wife started weeping. And I started weeping."

"The Holy Spirit came down on us to the point that our interpreter confirmed to his heart that he was called to be a preacher. He surrendered right there to full-time ministry to proclaim the gospel."

Speaking at the closing banquet, a former president of the Japan Baptist Convention thanked the American group for their work. Okamura Shouji, pastor of Simura Baptist Church, said six people made spiritual decisions in his church during the week-long crusade -- the same number usually baptized in his church in a whole year.

"Japanese pastors say churches hit a barrier and partnerships like this help to kick-start them and fire them through that wall," said Walker. "It has something to do with the weight of being in Japan (where many people resist the gospel). It stagnates people, pulling everybody down to the norm. To have an outside charge like this gets us going again."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Sullivan: Absentee fathers
create vacuum others must fill

By Tom Strode

F-CLC

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WASHINGTON (BP)--In a special Father's Day commentary by the head of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, American adults were challenged to reach out to children suffering because of "absentee fathers."

"Given a father's importance, we must work to strengthen our families, wrote Louis Sullivan, secretary of HHS.

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"At the same time, it is vitally important for caring adults to provide mentoring relationships" for children whose fathers are absent, he said.

Adults can help prepare such children for adulthood by providing "equal measures of love, discipline, challenge and responsibility," Sullivan said.

The best thing adults can do for children, he said, is "to protect them while they are vulnerable and help them develop an armor of inner strength and strong values as they move beyond the safety nets of our families and communities.

"Every child needs to 'find out' that there are adults who care enough to provide consistently genuine love, teach real values, develop good character, and that there are adults who are models of strong integrity," Sullivan said.

Some people can open their homes, while others may participate in and provide funding for programs that help young people, he said.

The article was entitled "Father's Day in an Era of Absentee Fathers." Copies were sent to the department's 10 regional offices for distribution to media and other outlets, a spokesman for HHS said. Father's Day was June 16.

Sullivan decried the widespread abandonment and neglect of children by American fathers.

"On this Father's Day, as our nation recognizes the positive influence and significance of fathers, it is sobering to acknowledge that too many American fathers are abdicating their responsibilities by not forming a family in the first place, or impairing their family through divorce, separation, neglect, 'busy-ness' or abandonment," he said.

"Literally millions of our nation's children -- rich and poor alike -- live with the anger, loneliness and insecurity produced by absentee fathers. And, we are 'reaping the whirlwind' in our cities from youth growing up with the hopelessness and violence engendered by those feelings."

The problem is not exclusive to the poor, Sullivan said, but includes children in middle and upper economic classes who suffer from what he called a "poverty of parenting."

"It is not acceptable when fathers abandon their children, either in fact or attitude," he said. "The father who acts more attached to his golf game or his TV program than to his children needs to rethink his priorities."

The resultant problem of single mothers also crosses racial and social boundaries, Sullivan said. In 1988, 63 percent of black babies were born to unwed mothers; 20 percent of other minority births were to unmarried mothers, and 18 percent of white babies were born to unwed mothers. Sullivan noted, however, whites accounted for 81 percent of the increase in births to unmarried teenagers in the last decade.

Other problems stemming from "absentee fathers," Sullivan said, include:

- One-third of such fathers do not make support payments;
- More than 50 percent of public spending through Aid to Families with Dependent Children, food stamps and Medicaid is to families that began with a teen pregnancy;
- Studies show 75 percent of the children of divorced parents are in contact with their fathers less than two days a month.

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Cooperative effort
moves dream to reality

By Charles Willis

N-SSB

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MARIN CITY, Calif. (BP)--Cooperative efforts among local, state and national Southern Baptist organizations have brought a 38-year-old dream to the brink of reality for a small Southern Baptist church in Marin City, Calif.

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Since constituting as a church in 1953, the members of Gospel Fellowship Baptist Church have prayed, dreamed and saved money for the time when a church building suited to their needs could be built.

The 20 active members have made gains toward their goal, but the work has been slow and difficult. Now, through joint efforts by Men's Ministry members in other California Southern Baptist churches, the California Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church architecture department, a building will be built this year.

Leon Samuels, pastor of the church since its founding, recalled the congregation's early days when members met in borrowed facilities, including a room in nearby public multi-housing units.

In the early 1960s, Samuels led members to purchase property high on a hillside overlooking the predominately black community. The site included a Victorian house which has been used for Bible study and worship since then. Meanwhile, the steady, but slow, accumulation of funds was insufficient to pay for a church building, and the need for a new facility became more urgent as time took its toll on the aging house.

Arthur McKay Jr., a consultant in the California Southern Baptist Convention's black church extension department, said the congregation had "received a half-dozen attempts at help" from various sources, "but there was always the assumption the church would follow through. The congregation needed a road map and someone to lead the project, spending a lot of time working on it."

That help came when Samuels wrote to Tom Kelly, director of the black church extension department. Kelly sent McKay to investigate the situation, leading to the resulting joint effort.

McKay recalled he and Samuels "sat down and talked and dreamed some. We decided to get Tom (Kelly), Jerry Harris of the state convention foundation and Edd Brown of Men's Ministry to walk step-by-step with us to see what we could do."

What they did, in fact, was assemble a team to accomplish the task.

Soon, Jerry Grubbs, a consultant with the Sunday School Board's church architecture department, was on-site to assist.

"When I arrived," Grubbs said, "I saw immediately the location was ideal for the ministry they wanted to perform. We felt an imperative need to help them with the facility so they could continue to use the property."

Plans and working drawings from the department's files were provided to a local engineer.

For a nominal fee, he adapted the plans to conform to local building codes, and the year-long process of negotiating governmental "red tape" began.

Meanwhile, Harris helped with financial arrangements to supplement the congregation's savings. "We submitted three different sets of plans, and now we've just had a hearing with the planning department," McKay said recently. "Hopefully, we are filling out the final set of forms."

Volunteer Southern Baptist laymen from Men's Ministry will construct the church building in two phases, beginning within 180 days from the issuing of a building permit.

Samuels, who has just turned 78 years old, said he hopes a new building will enable the congregation to grow and "expand into a great Sunday school."

"We have a lot of unchurched people around us," he reflected. "Between 2,500 and 3,000 people live in Marin City within a mile of the church."

McKay agreed, "One of the barriers to reaching younger adults and youth is the old building itself. Younger people aren't attracted to it."

While Samuels admits some older members are grieved at the thought of demolishing the old house where they have worshiped, his attachment to the building is diminished by the anticipation of reaching more people. In fact, he said, when the house is torn down, "I'll smile!"

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Wallace Davis named
11th Wayland president

*N-CO
2/2/91*

Baptist Press
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PLAINVIEW, Texas (BP)--Wallace E. Davis Jr., vice president for academic affairs and former interim president at Corpus Christi (Texas) State University, has been named president of Wayland Baptist University.

Announcement was made by James Henry of Midland, Texas, chairman of the Wayland board of trustees.

The appointment was approved by vote of the 39-member board at a specially-called meeting. During that meeting, the board heard and accepted a unanimous recommendation of Davis by the board's executive committee, which also served as the presidential search committee.

Davis, 59, replaces Lanny Hall as the university's chief executive officer. Hall, who had been president since 1989, has assumed duties as president of Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas. Davis officially will begin his new position at Wayland July 1.

He earned his bachelor and master's degrees from Baylor University and his Ph.D. at the University of Texas.

Davis has spent the past 36 years in Corpus Christi in elementary, secondary and higher education.

Previously, Davis has chaired and served on numerous state and local committees, been president of the Texas Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, and chaired Texas Education Agency accreditation teams evaluating colleges and universities.

In addition, he has been a consultant and team chairperson for Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation teams for various school districts, and a consultant to Escola Americana in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Davis is currently an ordained deacon at First Baptist Church of Plainview, where he teaches an adult Sunday school class.

Davis and his wife, Janis, a public school teacher for the past 30 years, have two children -- Scott Kevin Davis, a professor at Texas A & M University in College Station, and Melanie Ann Davis Williams, a homemaker from Corpus Christi -- and one granddaughter.

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