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SBC Executive Committee

901 Commerce #750

Nashville, Tennessee 37203

(615) 244-2355

Herb Hollinger, Vice President

Fax (615) 742-8919

CompuServe ID# 70420,17

BUREAUS

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January 30, 1995

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Bees kill missionary kid
in Panamanian mountains

By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press
1/30/95

PANAMA CITY, Panama (BP)--Andrew Nicholson, 14-year-old son of Southern Baptist missionaries to Panama, died Jan. 28 from stings of a swarm of African killer bees that drove him over a cliff in Panama's Chame Mountains.

Nicholson and classmate Andrew Scoble, 16, were climbing in the mountains during an annual camping trip sponsored by their school. Nicholson's parents are missionaries Glenn and Pauline Nicholson of Forrest City, Ark., and Cherry Valley, Ark., respectively.

The boys were near the edge of a ridge when hundreds of killer bees suddenly attacked them, Richard Schweinsberg said in a telephone interview Jan. 30.

The boys began running parallel with the ridge as they tried to get away from the bees, said Schweinsberg, a dorm parent at Escuela Hogar Misionera, the school for missionary children operated by New Tribes Mission.

Nicholson, who was allergic to bee stings, stopped and swatted at the bees, eye witnesses said. He began swaying on the edge of the ridge and fell more than 100 feet.

"Since he was highly allergic to bees, I'm sure that the shock (of the stings) had gotten to him by this time," Schweinsberg said. "Several hundred bees were probably stinging him by then."

An autopsy revealed he died of the bee stings, rather than the fall.

"Almost every square inch of his body was covered with bee stings," said Bob Hensley, chairman of the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in Panama. Hensley and several other Foreign Mission Board missionaries traveled to the mountain as soon as they learned of the accident.

Scoble, son of News Tribes missionaries Dave and Wanda Scoble, kept running to escape the bees. But by the time he reached some adult sponsors, "every exposed area of his flesh was penetrated by these bee stings. He was starting to swell and stagger."

Although Scoble sustained several hundred stings, he is in stable condition and expected to recover fully, Schweinsberg said.

The Nicholsons were appointed missionaries by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in 1987. Glenn Nicholson, a church planter, works with churches in the Rio Chame Baptist Association in Panama.

The accident occurred around noon Jan. 28 but rescuers didn't find his body until the next morning. Nicholson apparently hit some trees as he fell.

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The branches hid his body from several hundred volunteers -- including U.S. military personnel, Panamanians and missionaries -- who helped search the steep slope, Schweinsberg said.

From another slope across the valley, Nicholson's 16-year-old brother, Nathan, and several other children saw the accident.

"Please pray that he (Nathan) can get over the anger he's feeling," said Schweinsberg. "He's in shock," added Hensley. "He's not doing too well."

"I think every one of the (students) who saw the fall cried themselves to sleep that night," said Schweinsberg. "They said every time they closed their eyes they saw him fall. They're stabilizing. They're receiving counseling."

Initial search efforts were hampered by the bees and the steep, rocky terrain, according to Schweinsberg. Bees swarmed a U.S. military helicopter trying to locate the body, initially forcing the aircraft to retreat.

Later U.S. special forces -- wearing bee suits and using rappelling gear -- retrieved the body. It was flown by U.S. military helicopter to Gorgas Army Hospital in Balboa, Panama.

Glenn and Pauline Nicholson, who were called to the mountain after the accident, and son Nathan flew in another U.S. military helicopter to the hospital. They live in Coronado, about an hour's drive from Panama City.

Born April 8, 1980, in Batesville, Ark., Andrew Nicholson also lived in Brookland and Smithville, Ark, while growing up. His father was pastor of Baptist churches in those towns and in Cotter, Ark.

"Andrew was a good student," said Hensley. "He was looking forward to going to college. He was an extrovert. He kept his family laughing."

"He liked to have fun. He was very lively," added Nicholson's aunt, Reta Ragland, of Cherry Valley, Ark.

Besides his parents and brother, he is survived by a married sister, Jennifer Holloway of Fayetteville, Ga., and grandmothers Elizabeth Jane King, Forrest City, Ark., and Leathel Vaughn, Cherry Valley, Ark.

Funeral arrangements are incomplete but the family hoped to travel to Arkansas with Nicholson's body on Feb. 1. The funeral was expected to be held at Cherry Valley Baptist Church.

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Nobles hospitalized in California
following arrest by FBI agents

Baptist Press
1/30/95

By William H. Perkins Jr.

SAN FRANCISCO (BP)--Former Mississippi College President Lewis Nobles is in a San Francisco hospital after he collapsed Jan. 26 while being arrested by federal law enforcement agents acting on a fugitive warrant issued after he failed to appear earlier in the day at a pretrial court hearing in Jackson.

David W. Johnson, special agent in charge of the FBI in Mississippi, said Nobles, 69, was located around midnight Jan. 26 at a San Francisco hotel where he had registered under an alias.

"A significant amount of cash was seized from Nobles at the time of arrest. Shortly after Nobles' arrest, it became apparent that he was experiencing medical problems, and he was immediately attended to by paramedics and taken to a hospital," Johnson said.

Nobles remains under guard in the intensive care unit of St. Francis Hospital in San Francisco, and will not appear before a federal magistrate in California until his doctors approve, Johnson said.

Meanwhile, U.S. District Judge William Barbour of Jackson has ordered a psychiatric evaluation of Nobles be performed at a federal facility after he is released from the hospital.

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Nobles is scheduled for trial Feb. 7 on a 20-count federal indictment charging him with diverting at least \$1.7 million in contributions intended for the Baptist-affiliated college in Clinton.

Nobles' medical emergency and the psychiatric evaluation have put the Feb. 7 trial date in jeopardy, but no decision has yet been made to postpone the trial.

The indictment against Nobles includes allegations of fraud, money laundering, income tax evasion and illegally enticing women to cross state lines for immoral purposes.

Barbour issued the arrest warrant in Jackson after Nobles did not show up for a Jan. 26 pretrial hearing involving routine motions to suppress evidence prosecutors intended to use at his trial.

Nobles was last seen by a family member on the evening of Jan. 24. His 1992 Oldsmobile was discovered on the afternoon of Jan. 26 at Memphis International Airport.

The FBI did not release further details of Nobles' apprehension.

Nobles resigned as Mississippi College president Aug. 3, 1993, under pressure from the school's trustees over his handling of large donations intended for the school. The college filed suit Aug. 7 against Nobles to recover at least \$3 million in donations alleged to be missing. Federal and state authorities began a criminal investigation of Nobles on Aug. 12 of that year. On June 22, 1994, a federal grand jury examined evidence gathered against Nobles; on Aug. 17, U.S. District Judge William H. Barbour Jr. froze all of Nobles' known assets; on Sept. 21, 1994, a federal grand jury returned a 20-count indictment against Nobles.

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Non-readers find help
in SBC literacy programs

By Clay Renick

Baptist Press
1/30/95

CHARLESTON, S.C. (BP)--Ted Wiesand was like many adults who can't read. School was a bad memory. Notes were confusing at work. Even his own Bible seemed like a foreign language.

Wiesand was a self-employed contractor, but he longed to stand in front of his own congregation and read a passage of Scripture.

"I had a speech problem," said the 10th-grade dropout. "I had many different jobs."

He approached leaders at Midland Park Baptist Church in Charleston, S.C. And they agreed to start a tutoring program for adults.

"It just shocked me to find that there was someone in my own congregation who couldn't read," said Mary Watkins. "They're probably all around you and you don't know it."

Watkins works as a nurse but also directs literacy for the Charleston Baptist Association. She started the process for Wiesand. And he later read from the Bible aloud at a Midland Park service.

"There wasn't a dry eye in the congregation that Sunday," Watkins said.

Literacy work isn't new in Southern Baptist churches, but the approach is showing more results with evangelism.

There are at least 1,000 SBC churches with literacy programs. That includes more than 5,000 volunteers a year.

"We try to stay current," said Gayle Leininger, a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board literacy work leader based in Georgia. "In '93, we directly started 12 churches from this."

They also saw 815 people become Christians.

The Home Mission Board developed three areas in the outreach: English as a second language; adult reading and writing; and tutoring for children and youth.

"We are witnessing the way Christ did," Leininger added, "meeting the total needs of the person."

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Betty Lassiter sees this in Florida. She directs international ministries at Downtown Baptist Church in Orlando. Last year they had 315 people in literacy classes.

Many of those studied English as a second language. The average attendance is 75 in eight different classes.

"The people are unforgettable," Lassiter said.

She was a foreign mission volunteer as a young person. But the opportunity never came in full-time service. Last year nine people became Christians from international classes at the Orlando church.

"Our society is more complex than before," explained Leta Cornman at Fleming Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga.

She has volunteered in literacy work the last 26 years and currently has nine students. Some need the reading skills for applications at work.

"Most entry-level jobs require a ninth-grade reading level," Cornman said.

"It's fast becoming necessary to read on a 12th-grade level just to get a job."

June Tate said she sees an expansion of needs in California. She's the state literacy coordinator and member of First Baptist Church, Fountain Valley.

"So many more people need conversational English now," she said. "For a lot of these people, English is not a second language, but a third or fourth.

"I know of no church in California who couldn't have this."

Truett Memorial Baptist Church, Long Beach, Calif., recently started a tutoring ministry. They offered free help with homework for after-school children. More than 40 adults participate.

"A lot of senior adults are helping," Tate noted. "Literacy is an excellent ministry for senior adults who want to stay active."

Volunteers take a 16-hour workshop to qualify for each area of literacy work. The Home Mission Board offered 250 of these last year. They're taught at local churches and can be stretched across two weekends.

"It's a wonderful way to introduce people to Jesus," said Louise Yarbrough, a retired home missionary who helped start literacy work in Alaska. She still teaches an advanced English class in Fairbanks.

They have 11 students from six different countries. Many needed language help for their U.S. citizenship test.

Alaska churches started an English course to help in that. The Immigration Service provides the books and sample questions. Students go through six weeks of instruction to pass the 100-question test.

"It gives us a wonderful point of contact," said Yarbrough. "They come from the world."

Information about starting literacy missions projects can be obtained from the Home Mission Board at (404) 898-7438.

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Renick is a free-lance writer in Martinez, Ga.

He taught 17 years
but couldn't read

Baptist Press
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COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (BP)--John Corcoran understands the need. He had trouble with language processing and went through school as a non-reader. He later graduated from college and taught school for 17 years even though he still lacked reading skills.

His book, "The Teacher Who Couldn't Read," published by Focus on the Family, explains how, at age 48, he finally got help from a community literacy program.

According to Corcoran:

-- One out of every four graduates from high school each year can't read at an eighth-grade level. That's the cutoff for functional literacy.

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-- One in five adults in our country can't fill out a job application or read a simple story to his children.

-- In the 1960s a fifth-grade reading ability was considered literate. Today many employers require a 12th-grade ability. By the year 2000, most jobs will require at least two years of college.

"The skills for literacy have increased," said Corcoran. "Teaching any person to read is an act of love."

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**New believer takes initiative
in church 'Here's Hope' effort**

By Ken Walker

**Baptist Press
1/30/95**

UNION CITY, Ky. (BP)--David Thurman never knew life could feel so good.

Although a member of Union City (Ky.) Baptist Church for less than six months, he was one of the first to help lead a friend to Christ the day after the start of "Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now" Jan. 9.

Although raised in church and baptized at age 9, Thurman realized last September he never had made a personal commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Salvation messages at two funerals let him know he wasn't saved and needed to do something about it.

After church one night, he approached pastor Rick Brown and invited Jesus into his heart after they talked. Not only did his church gain a new member, noted the pastor, but a very eager participant for the 60 days of witnessing in the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board-initiated "Here's Hope" campaign.

Thurman attended a witness training session at the church in preparation for the "Here's Hope" kickoff. Three days later, Gina Cottongim, a family friend, brought her two young children to see Thurman's new puppy.

As they played with the pup, Thurman noticed the Bibles and tracts he had received at church lying on the mantle. Something told him to get the materials and go through them with her, he said, a prompting he later realized came from the Holy Spirit.

"It wasn't long before she looked up and said I had made her cry," Thurman said. "I said I didn't do that, the Lord did. I asked if she wanted to receive Christ, but she said no."

Not discouraged, he called longtime deacon Johnny Covington. That night they visited the Cottongims and reviewed the tract with the family. This time, Mrs. Cottongim said she wanted to become a Christian.

"It was a great feeling when we went and witnessed to them again that night," Thurman said. "I never experienced anything of that nature that could make you feel so good. I guess it shows the power the Lord has, to make you feel that good."

In addition to that profession of faith at Union City Baptist Church, another rededication was recorded and an active church visitation effort inspired many thought-provoking encounters, Covington said. He expects the excitement to increase as the church prepares for revival services beginning April 23.

"I had a double blessing," Covington said of his visit with Thurman. "First, that I was even there. And to watch Dave do the things he did as a young Christian. It's a thrill to watch him work."

"Dave's really been bubbling over. He's been floating up there on cloud nine and we've been up there with him. It's been wonderful to be a part of it."

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**HMB v.p. notes varying levels
of response in Here's Hope**

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--As Southern Baptists witness during "Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now," Darrell Robinson says they will encounter five levels of spiritual development among non-Christians.

Robinson, Home Mission Board vice president for evangelism, said people can move from any level to the point of accepting Christ in one visit. But for some people, reaching the point of making a profession of faith may take several contacts.

The five levels and the response Robinson recommends are:

1) Ignorant. They know nothing about the gospel and they must be taught.
2) Indifferent. They've heard the gospel story, but they are apathetic toward it. They must be stirred to make a response.

3) Hostile. They've heard and rejected the gospel and are antagonistic. Christians witnessing to hostile people should respond in love, Robinson said. Rather than reacting to their anger, be a good listener.

4) Interested. They've heard about the gospel and want to know more. They must be cultivated to reach a point of accepting Christ.

5) Ready. They've heard the gospel, and they want to accept Christ immediately. Christians need to lead them in a prayer to repent of their sins, ask forgiveness and invite Christ to be their Savior and Lord.

"Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now" is Southern Baptists' first simultaneous witnessing effort. Christians are asked to share Christ with one person a day through March 9. The individual witnessing effort will be followed by simultaneous revivals.

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**Church rallies to support
quake victim's family**

By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
1/30/95

PORTER RANCH, Calif. (BP)--Donations from church members, an international airline and others are helping to ease a serious financial burden thrust upon a California Southern Baptist couple by their daughter's death in Japan's Kobe earthquake.

More than 1,000 people attended a memorial service Jan. 27 for Voni Wong at Shepherd of the Hills Church, Porter Ranch, Calif. Wong, 24, was the only American killed in Japan's devastating January earthquake.

Earlier the same day, graveside services for Wong were conducted at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Hollywood Hills. Jess Moody, pastor of Shepherd of The Hills, officiated.

Wong, a 1993 honors graduate of UCLA, had been teaching English in Japan. She was crushed to death Jan. 16 in the collapse of a house of Ashiya, near Kobe.

The Kobe quake, with a Richter scale magnitude of 7.2, killed more than 5,000 people and caused damage estimated in the billions of dollars.

Wong's body was returned from Japan aboard a Northwest Airlines flight which arrived at Los Angeles International Airport one week after the earthquake.

Moody remembered Voni Wong as "a great, spiritual Christian" whom he had baptized more than a decade earlier. He said her parents, Henry and Myrtle Wong, are active members of Shepherd of the Hills.

Henry Wong, a retired aerospace engineer, is a deacon at Shepherd of the Hills.

After learning their daughter had died in the earthquake, the Wongs feared her body would be cremated, which is traditional in Japan. The family was forced to use savings as well as money from relatives and friends to arrange for the return of the body and ensure her burial according to the family's Christian beliefs. They reportedly bought a \$12,000 cashier's check to pay for the expenses involved.

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Henry Wong told the Los Angeles Times that's how much the U.S. State Department estimated it would cost to prepare his daughter's body for intercontinental shipping and return it to the United States.

"It's going to be a real burden, but we have to do it for the sake of our daughter," Wong told the newspaper.

But Moody told The California Southern Baptist Jan. 30 much of the expense of returning their daughter's body for burial "is being restored" to the Wong family.

"Our church rallied and raised about seven or eight thousand dollars," Moody said. "Outside sources have brought in a little more," he noted.

In addition, thousands of dollars in shipping costs were waived by Northwest Airlines. When a church staff member explained the situation to an airline official, the company agreed to "fly her home free of charge," Moody said.

Calls placed to the church following the memorial service were met with a recorded message. In it, Moody gave instructions for donors to send contributions to the Shepherd of the Hills benevolence fund to assist with the Wong family's expenses.

Besides her parents, Voni Wong is survived by two older brothers, Andy and John.

A condolence message from Walter Mondale, U.S. ambassador to Japan, was among hundreds received by the Wong family, Moody said. Network television news crews and other media representatives joined church members, friends and relatives attending both the graveside and memorial services.

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