

POPE JOHN PAUL MAY VISIT NINEVEH

(ZNRU: Baghdad) Local Christian churches in Iraq are preparing for Pope John Paul's trip to Iraq to visit the biblical birthplace of Abraham, according to the Vatican embassy in Baghdad. The "major pilgrimage" will take place before the end of this year and will include Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Greece and Holy Land. His Beatitude, Mar Raphael I Bidawid, Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church will head the committee comprised of the local Christian churches in Iraq. The Pope, accompanied by 10 to 15 of officials from the Vatican including the foreign minister and internal affairs minister, will also meet with President Saddam Hussein. The visit to Iraq will last only two days.

ASSYRIAN COMMUNITY LEADER, JOHN LAZAR, DIES AT 77

(ZNBE: Turlock) John M. Lazar who was active in the Assyrian community and helped persuade the Department of Motor Vehicles to open a Turlock office, died Friday morning of a heart attack at the age of 77. Mr. Lazar, the father of City Councilman John S. Lazar also was the first soccer player to get a full-ride scholarship at the University of San Francisco. He was well-connected in Turlock and started several people on successful political careers. "My father was responsible for me getting into politics," John S. Lazar said Friday. "He was a good friend of Tony Coelho and that led me to being a page in the House of Representatives in 1976." Mr. Lazar also was a charter member of the Assyrian American Civic Club in Turlock, the largest Assyrian organization in the United States. He later served as the club's treasurer and on its board of directors. Mr. Lazar was a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and was a charter member of the Assyrian Evangelical Church in Turlock.

IRAQI TURKMEN SUGGEST 'MOSUL FEDERATION'

(ZNRU: Prague) Orhan Ketene, the North American Coordinator for an Iraqi Turkmen organization based in the U.S., issued a statement in which he attributes much of the hostility that exists between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) to tribalism. The KDP consists primarily of speakers of a Kurdish dialect called Behdinan. The PUK is primarily made up of speakers of another Kurdish dialect, Soran. One thing they have in common is that the two Kurdish groups are hostile to the Iraqi Turkmen's concept of 'Turkmeneli,' that is, setting aside a region in Iraqi Kurdistan for

a autonomous Turkmen structure. One possible solution is the establishment of a "Mosul Federation." Ketene points out that in a Mosul Federation, Turkmen, Sorans, Behdinans, Mosul Arabs, and Assyrians could live together without interfering in each others' affairs. Another advantage of a Mosul Federation is that it would be less of a potential threat to Ankara, and even to Baghdad, than an Iraqi Kurdistan.

Although Dr. Muzaffer Arslan, the leader of the Unified Iraqi Turkmen Front, was received by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright when he visited Washington and it appears that the Iraqi Turkmen are receiving somewhat more international recognition than in the past, they do not seem to be any closer to being included as a party to the Washington Agreement. It is doubtful that a Mosul Federation would receive any more recognition than "Turkmeneli" has in the past.

IRAQ FOUNDATION TO INVESTIGATE ANTI-ASSYRIAN ACTIONS

(ZNRU: Prague) On 8 July the Iraq Foundation announced that it is

investigating a number of incidents, listed below, affecting Assyrians in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. The incidents do not all follow the same pattern. In October 1996, six Assyrians working in the Presidential Palace in Baghdad were arrested. In March 1997, Amnesty International wrote to the Iraqi government requesting information on their fate and whereabouts. It received no answer. In December 1997, six Assyrians died as the result of a PKK ambush near Dohuk. There is no information on why this Assyrian group was targeted. In December 1998, an Assyrian woman and her young daughter died in a bomb

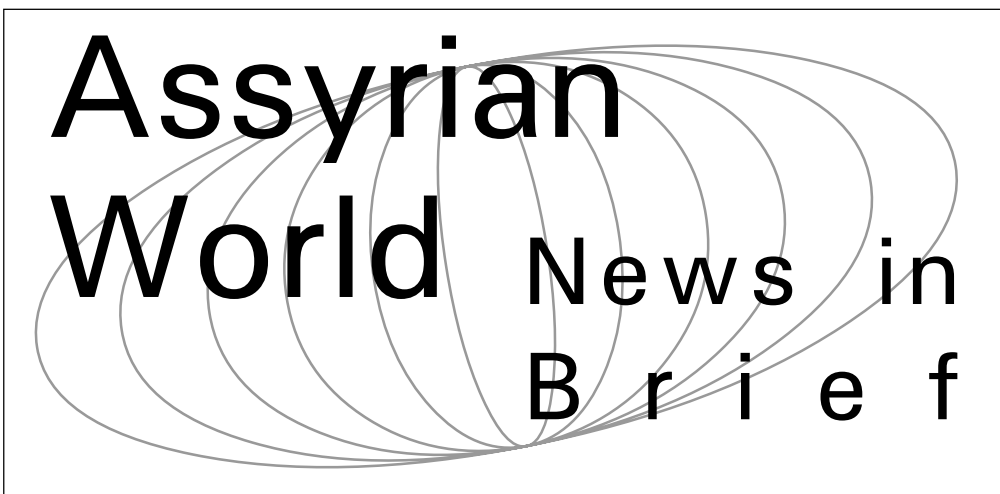
explosion in Arbil. The Iraq Foundation has contacted the representative of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Washington to ask about the status of any ongoing investigation into the case.

In May 1999 (or

thereabouts), Miss Helena Sawa was murdered—a tragedy that has received much coverage. The Iraq Foundation will report on this case and the others as well as it receives information.

NINEVEH, BEST SITE TO VIEW THE LAST ECLIPSE

(ZNAF: Baghdad) According to Qabis Saeed, Dean of Mosul University (in northern Iraq) the best view of the world's last solar eclipse of the second millennium will be around the ancient city of Nineveh, the historic capital of Assyria. The university will make available an equipment which will allow up to 85-percent view of the eclipse on August 11. The site will be located northeast of Mosul near the site of the ancient Nineveh. Saeed charged that the US space agency NASA had come under political pressure from Washington and London before deciding to set up a similar site in neighboring southern Turkey rather than Iraq. "Northern Iraq is the best place on the planet to take part in this historic event," he insisted. Special religious services are to be held in Mosul on the day.



Assyrian Remembrance Day



Assyrian refugees fleeing Iraq, during the 1991 civil uprising.

The 7th of August has been designated as a Memorial Day for Assyrian Martyrs. Although this observance is of a comparatively recent date, it has gained widespread acceptance among the Assyrian people. Each nation needs to set aside a day for the remembrance of those who gave their lives for the preservation of their culture and ethnic identity.

Throughout our long history, each time an Assyrian man, woman, or child stood up against their oppressors, and refused to give up their religion, language, or national existence, our nation as a whole was pulled one step back from the abyss of extinction.

Remembrance Day was originally meant to commemorate the massacres of Assyrians in Iraq in 1933. Gradually, we Assyrians have realised that there have been many instances in our history of massacres, and persecutions, which equaled, or surpassed Simele in importance. Consequently, there is a greater emphasis in current observations on commemorating all the martyrs of our history. The development of the 7th of August into a Memorial Day for all Assyrian martyrs is both

important, and beneficial.

When we think of martyrs, and retell their stories, it is often customary to mourn them, and the events of their lives. We are saddened, and overcome with grief, bitterness, and despair at their suffering. This type of commemoration is one of passive mourning. While it fulfills an important human need, it also brings with it the danger of adopting a passive, and indifferent attitude. But our martyrs were rarely passive, or indifferent! It is necessary for us to turn away from a passive commemoration of our dead to an active celebration of their triumphs. In the light of their sacrifices, we must make a firm commitment to understanding, developing, and preserving the cultural, and national values for which our martyrs gave their lives. This is the only fitting way to commemorate our martyrs. Instead of weeping over the loss of their lives, we must become determined to preserve the very things for which they gave up their lives.

Finally, it may be thought by some that the greatest threat to the preservation of our nation, and culture is the loss of our lives and our property.

The lesson of our martyrs is that this is simply not true. The swords, and guns of our oppressors cannot kill our culture, or our love of our nation. Rather, persecutions tend to strengthen our attachment to these. There is only one thing that can destroy our cultural, and national existence, and that is the indifference of our own people. Nothing an outsider can do will ever permanently harm us, but the attitude of indifference and neglect on the part of many of our own people to our culture and national life will surely be the cause of its extinction.

On this Assyrian Remembrance Day, and on every other day for that matter, let us dedicate ourselves to the struggle of preserving our culture, our language, and our nationhood in unity and harmony with our fellow Assyrians. Let us be worthy of the example of our martyrs. Let us honour their memory in this most suitable way preserving the very ideas and values for which they died. ■

Courtesy: Ashurbanipal Library/Shawa B'Tabakh: Genocides Against the Assyrian Nation.

SELECTED MASSACRES IN THE MODERN ERA AGAINST THE ASSYRIAN PEOPLE

1842

Assyrians were attacked, with the intention on part of their oppressors, to burn kill, destroy and if possible, exterminate the Assyrian race from the mountains. An indiscriminate massacre took place. The women were before the Amir, Badr Khan Bey, and were murdered in cold blood. The following incident illustrates the revolting barbarity: the aged mother of Mar Shimun, the Patriarch of the Church of the east, was seized by them, and after having practiced on her the most abominable atrocities, they cut her body into two parts, and threw it into the river Zab, exclaiming, "go and carry to your accursed son the intelligence that the same fate awaits him." Nearly ten thousand Assyrians were massacred, and a larger number of women were taken captive, most of whom were sent to Jezirah to be sold as slaves, to be bestowed upon the influential as presents. In



this particular massacre the bodies of the Assyrian women were burned, in order to recover the Gold, and precious stones that they were supposed to have swallowed.

January 2-10,
1915

Plundering, and destruction of seventy of Urmia's villages, massacres in the plains. Unknown number of casualties. "There was absolutely no human power to protect these unhappy people from the savage onslaught of the invading hostile forces. It was an awful situation. At midnight the terrible exodus began; a concourse of 25,000 men, women, and children, Assyrians, and Armenians, leaving cattle in the stables, all their household goods, and all the supply of food for the winter, hurried, panic-stricken, on a long, and painful journey to the Russian border, enduring the intense privations of a foot journey in the snow and mud, without, and kind of preparation... It was a dreadful sight,...Many of the old people died along the way."

Statement of German missionaries

"The latest news is that four thousand Assyrians, and one hundred Armenians have died of disease alone, at the mission, within the last five months. All the villages in the surrounding district with two, or three exceptions have been plundered, and burnt; twenty thousand Christians have been slaughtered in Armenia, and its environs. In Haftewan, a village of Salmas, 750 corpses without heads have been recovered from the wells, and cisterns alone. Why? Because the commanding officer had put a price on each Christian head... In Dilman crowds of Christians were thrown into prison and driven to accept Islam."

February 25,
1915



Troops attacked the village of Gulpashan, one of the most prosperous villages of Urmia. Almost all of the men were shot, and most of the women were violated. March 5, 1915- about 800 Assyrians remained in Salmas, most of whom were old people, with some of the poorer, and younger women, were gathered together, and killed. April, 1915- Massacre in Gawar, and other districts in Turkey. The number of Martyrs is unknown.

THE SIMELE MASSACRE

The Assyrian population of the village of Simele was indiscriminately massacred; men, women, and children alike. In one room alone, 81 Assyrians from Baz were barbarously massacred. Priests were tortured, and their bodies mutilated. Girls were raped, and women violated,

and made to march naked before Army commanders. Holy books were used as fuel for burning girls. Children were run over by military cars. Pregnant women were bayoneted. Children were flung in the air and pierced on the points of bayonets. In Dohuk 600 Assyrians were killed.

Description of the Massacre

"Suddenly, and without the least warning the troops opened fire upon the defenseless Assyrians. Many fell, including women and children, and the rest ran into the houses to take cover.... A cold blooded, and methodical massacre of all the men in the village followed... This took some time. Not that there was any hurry, for the troops had the whole day ahead of them. Their opponents were helpless, and there was no chance of any interference from any quarter

whatsoever. Machine gunners set up their guns outside the windows of the houses in which the Assyrians had taken refuge, and having trained them on the horror-stricken wretches in the crowded rooms, fired among them until not a man was left standing in the shambles. In some other instances the blood lust of the troops took a slightly more active form, and men were dragged out, and shot, or bludgeoned to death, and their bodies thrown on a pile of dead."

August 11 - 16,
1933

THE LEBANON CIVIL WAR

During the Lebanese civil war, Assyrians fought side by side with their Syriac Maronite brethren against enemy forces. Many gave their life in combat, or as victims to civilian bombing.

1975-1990

Three Assyrians were executed in Iraq for distributing literature against the Arabisation policies of the government. The martyrs were Yousip Zaibari, Youbert Shlemon, and youkhanna Jajjo. In the same period an Assyrian family of the city of Ein-Kawa was killed by the authorities.



The names of the unfortunate family are; Polous Aziz Sheba (father), Meska Wardina Sheba (mother), Hamama Polous (daughter), and Sabiha Polous (daughter). An Assyrian man, Mr.

Hirmiz Nicola of Kirkuk (born in 1964), upon his return to Iraq from Greece, was promptly arrested, and brutally executed.

March 2,
1985

The Fate of the Assyrians in the Anfal campaign barely two weeks after the arrival of the first deportees at Baharka, the official loudspeaker announced that some of the camp's



members should present themselves at the police station without delay. Those signaled out were either

Assyrian, or members of the Ezidi sect. What happened to these two groups remains one of the great unexplained mysteries of Anfal. A few days later, a single khaki coloured military bus arrived, accompanied by an army officer, and nine, or ten soldiers, to pick up twenty-six people from the Assyrian village of Gun Kosa.. None of those who was bussed from the camps ever reached their homes, and none were seen in the camps, such as Manuriya (Masirik) and Khaneq, that were set aside for relocated Christians, and Yeszidis. The inescapable conclusion is that they were all murdered. An Assyrian priest interviewed by HRW/ Middle East said that he had assembled a list of 250 Christians who disappeared during the Anfal and its immediate aftermath.

September 24,
1988

Francis Shabo, a Member of Parliament was assassinated in Dohuk.

June 1,
1993

On January 13, 1996 Wassan Mishael, a sixteen-year-old girl from Simel was kidnapped. She was threatened and forced to renounce her Christian faith. Then she was forced to marry one of her kidnapers. The attackers have been

found, and identified. The information has been brought to the attention of government officials. There has been no investigation. None of the attackers have been brought to justice; there has been no trial.

January 13,
1996

On January 20, 1996 an armed man named Khorsheed Uthman Galash kidnapped Janet Oshana, a 13-year-old girl from Mal-Urab near Zakho. The kidnapper has subsequently been

identified, and all information has been forwarded to the authorities. No investigation has been carried out. The attacker has not been brought to justice. The young girl has not yet been returned to her family.

January 20,
1996



On April 27, 1997, an unnamed Assyrian from Shaqlawa, Mr. Sabri Odo Sowrish (58 years old) was assassinated while he worked in his store in Sedara, Arbil. Three bullets fired from a silencer struck him. Shortly thereafter, another assassination attempt by means of a silencer was directed against another Assyrian from Ankawa while he was working in his store in the center of Arbil. The Assyrian defended himself, and was lucky to survive the attack. The assailant escaped.

April 27,
1997

The body of an Assyrian woman Helena Aloun Sawa (21) was found in North Iraq. A shepherd found the partially decomposed body in a shallow grave. No official investigation of the suspicious disappearance, and the alleged murder of Ms. Helena Sawa had begun at press time.

July,
1999

a warm
**Thank
you**

editor's
note

I am very pleased that we were able to bring this special issue to you. A family that made its escape from Iraq took almost all the photos we have used in this issue. Almost all the articles are of modern day war accounts, written by people who lived through all the hardships, and horrors.

This project came together easily. We didn't have to do much searching to find people who were willing to share their stories. The number of

families that have experienced the pangs of destitution is endless. So we didn't need to go far to find people with such experiences.

When I say that this project came together easily, I mean it in the sense of finding material, and participants. It did take time; a lot of time. And I am very thankful to those who participated in it.

I am hoping that this project will initiate other projects of this kind, but on a bigger scale. I would like to see a book comprising such stories; I would very much like to see our current history compiled, and presented to the world.

Every single person in the world has learned of the horrors that were experienced

by the Jews during the Second World War. Books were written, movies were made, and everyone knows about the Jews. My people have lived, and are still living through wars. They are lost in every country of the world. But who knows anything about them? Nobody.

I truly admire how the Jews put their voices together, and told the world that they were hurt. To improve the situation of the Assyrians, who are still on the road; the world needs to know what they continue to live through. The only way to do that is by bringing our accounts of the war to light. But my proposition is easier said than done. I could never understand how we live through all these hardships, and upon arriving here, we quickly forget about them. We lock them away, and they only come out in our nightmares.

The stories we have recounted can be very helpful to bring our situation into light, and they might capture the attention of the world. All that would add up to some relief to other Assyrians looking for a place to call home. ■

Sennacherib Warda



Assyrian refugees fleeing into the mountains of Northern Iraq.

I on behalf of Nakosha, and all its staff wish to extend my deepest gratitude, and sincerest thanks to the Ashurbanipal library for extending to us, the permission to use their resources at the SHAWA B'TABAKH - Genocides Against the Assyrian Nation web-page <http://aina.org/martyr.htm>.

This resource has proved to be invaluable for the completion of Nakosha's Shawaa B'tabakh Special edition project. I also wish to extend my heart-felt thanks to all those brave Assyrians who were generous enough to recount some of the first hand horrors of wars, destitution, and deprivation, whom include:

Kamiran Abdouke, Hanan and Helen Jajou.

If there is a common thread in the historical accounts, and the modern first hand accounts of war experiences is that Assyrians of all backgrounds, and across all generations have suffered greatly.

Their stories will undoubtedly evoke in all people spine chilling emotions, especially in those fortunate enough not to have had a first hand experience of wars, and the destitution experienced by refugees.

Assyrians as a nation need a forum where they can

grieve as a collective. Grief is something that cannot be handled in solitude. It needs the presence of family, friends, and people of a common background, who have been overcome by a common hardship. Assyrians across the board, if they have not personally had a first hand account of the misery of war, know a friend or an acquaintance whom war has touched.

The first step to reconciling grief is to first admit that we are hurt, and have been hurt. As human beings we have an in-built defense mechanism, where we often try to brave the worst conditions meted our way alone. Instead, this form of grief tends to be a soul-destroying process, which often weakens the soul with the build up of sadness, bitterness and despair. This is rarely very healthy. It simply perpetuates the cycle of hatred. Our grief needs to be an active celebration of our dead and their triumphs. This is how we should honour their memory preserving the very ideas, and values for which they died.

This Nakosha special edition is dedicated to the memory of all those Assyrians who have lost their lives throughout the ages, and to those still enduring the hardships of destitution. ■

w a r s t o r i e s

The intensity of the Iran-Iraq War increased during the mid eighties, while the innocent people of both countries spent their daily routine living as normal as they could; until they were prompted to seek shelter by the blaring air raid sirens. Helen Jajou, an Assyrian-Chaldean was a primary school student, aged 8 at the time, living in Saadon, a suburb in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. She distinctly recalls the following events that have left her with a deep impression of the war.

“ As far back as I remember Iraq was always at war. Life in a country constantly at war became the norm for the country's citizens. The first-hand evidence that we would see of the war was the constant air raid sirens that would announce an Iranian attack. It could come in the form of an air strike, or a Scud missile attack. The Scud missile attacks were even scarier because of their unpredictability. Unlike the air strikes, a Scud missile attack could land anywhere.

I remember hearing the air raid sirens, and instantly feeling scared. In the back of my mind I would wonder if my family, or myself would be amongst the unlucky few who would be killed in this next attack. I remember thinking, what if this attack strikes our house.

Our routine, at any time of the day or night, involved turning off all lights, gas, and electricity in the house, and running to my aunt's cellar next door, and seeking shelter during the air strike.

We all felt helpless, as we had no control over the situation. My aunt's cellar was dark, and cold, and usually around 10 to 12 people would cram into it seeking protection. My sister Hanan, and I would group with our cousins, Susan, and Salwa and we would attempt to pass the time. Our parents

There was nothing we could do to change our situation. We felt hopeless. So we did what any Christian would do, during a time of stress, and began praying to God for protection during the strike.

I remember an air strike that happened when we were at primary school. How silly it was to be in school when an air raid was happening. The standard procedure was to remain seated at our desks, and the school's policy was to continue school as usual. The school was not even prepared for such an attack, and no bomb shelters had ever been built. When an air strike happened while we were at school I remember thinking only of my mother, at home, and my father at work. Where they safe? What would happen to them?

Upon arriving home they would tell me of their fears for our safety while we were at school.

I recall that Iranian air strike very clearly. It was on the Iraqi news that evening.

A stray missile had hit a primary school in the suburb of Dora. The pictures depicted on the news that evening were very graphic. Classrooms were shown in which young

students had been killed, and wounded. The classroom was littered with schoolbooks, school bags, and desks, all stained with the students' blood.

Upon seeing those horrible scenes on the news our parents, and my aunt broke down, and began crying, thinking how close the attack had come to our own school. ”



Hanan (left), and Helen (center) at their home in Iraq.

would also group together at the other end of the cellar, and listen to the radio for the latest news updates. If we talked too loud our parents would tell us to be quiet, and tell us that the Iranian jets would be able to hear us, and might target the cellar. The feelings of helplessness that would overwhelm us in the cellar were very unsettling.

Kamiran Abdouke was a 29 year old with a Masters in civil engineering working as a consultant in Baghdad. This is the story of the journey he took to escape from U.S. bombs, and the Iraqi army's retaliatory strike against the civil unrest in Northern Iraq.

“ It was the 16th of January 1991, and the Gulf war had just begun. My family, and I had wisely left Baghdad, and traveled to Arbil in northern Iraq two days before the war had begun. It was obvious that Baghdad would be a prime target for an air attack, and I knew that the farther away I could get from Baghdad the safer I would be.

From the 16th of January to the 26th of February the U.S., and their allies destroyed the majority of Iraq's army, and it's infrastructure. Opposition groups who had been dormant for years suddenly seized their opportunity. The Kurds began an uprising in the north while the Shiites began an uprising in the south. They were capturing province after province. On the 11th of March Kurdish groups captured Arbil where we were staying, and Arbil immediately became a front line city in the bloody civil war. The Kurds attempted to capture the oil rich city of Kirkuk but were repelled by the newly arrived elite republican guard. Their heavy losses, and the arrival to the scene of Saddam's most trust-worthy, and well equipped troops put the Kurds on the defensive.

The government troops then attacked Arbil.

The civilian population of Arbil knew that the republican guard who had endured months of U.S. bombing in Kuwait would now take out their

frustrations on the civilian population. This along with horror stories of the brutal treatment meted out to the Shiites in the south created a general panic among the people. Almost the entire population of the northern cities of Iraq, including Arbil, began the exodus towards the mountains.

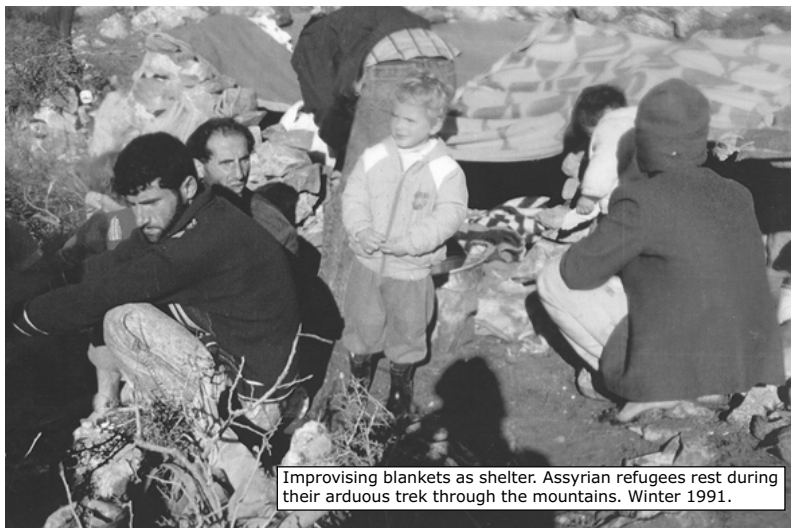
Hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians fled

with a piece of plastic. Thousand of refugees were crowded into a village of around 20 houses sheltering where ever they could. The nearby pristine village streams became polluted, and dirty under the constant human pressure. We were finally allowed to enter Turkey. We entered Turkey, and were admitted into a very basic refugee camp. While in this camp U.S., and British medical teams setup much needed facilities in the camp. They installed a sanitation system as well as water purifiers. They called in parachute drops to feed the refugees. The food also improved.

We were then moved to another camp after a stay of around 20 days in the first camp. The next refugee camp was called Shandilee, and was better organised than the previous camp. It was run by the Turkish Red Crescent. During our stay here an Assyrian-Chaldean man with a dislocated disk needed special transport in order to be moved to a medical camp. A girl called Jennifer, working for

the UNHCR, helped us arrange a medical evacuation by helicopter for the injured man. The 18 hour car trip though mountainous terrain took half an hour by helicopter. We were then relocated to Silopi refugee camp, in Turkey, close to the Iraqi border.

In Silopi I was able to apply for immigration to Australia. I then traveled to Istanbul, in Turkey, where I awaited the results of my application. After a five month wait I found out that I had been successful. I was ecstatic the many months, and the long journey I had first begun back in Baghdad, had finally taken me to Australia. ”



Improvising blankets as shelter. Assyrian refugees rest during their arduous trek through the mountains. Winter 1991.

by car, bike, or even on foot. We arrived at the mountains near the Turkish border, and began the 12 hour journey to reach the border. We had a small amount of food, and water, and the 12 hour hike, through steep mountains, really took its toll. With no tents, and sleeping on rocky ground we used blankets to provide us with cover against the light showers, and cold winds, as we rested along the journey.

We then arrived at a Turkish village where we remained for around 5 days. I slept four days in the open without a tent. I was wet from the constant mountain rains, and would attempt to cover myself

The outbreak of the Lebanese Civil war in 1975, plunged the country into a state of chaos where neighbours who had at one time been the best of friends suddenly became the worst of enemies. The senseless loss of life was to continue for another 15 years with the war's end in 1990. I have given an account of the horrors of the war as seen through my eyes; a 5 year-old child at the time.

“ Although being Australian born, and bred, I returned with my family in the late 70's to war-torn Lebanon. No sooner had we settled back in the country, the civil war escalated, and at one point in the spring of 1980, Syrian forces with the intent of seizing it surrounded our valley city of Zahle. At the time I was 5 years old, but the battle that ensued has left an indelible stain upon my psyche, and my mind pregnant with the horrors, and evils of war; permanently etched upon my memory.

During that time I remember being limited to the cramped confines of a damp bomb shelter, where we had no running water, proper sewage, and where rats, and mice shared our meals, and our scarcely prepared beds. And the constant nerve racking sound of shelling, and bombing meant that no one got any sleep. In the heat of the battle I did not see the light of day for 3 months, and could not distinguish when day would turn into night.

In the city of Zahle, there was at the time close to a 1000 Assyrian households, all as I am descendants of ancestors from Southern-East Turkey, from the village of Benezil, in the province of Mardin. A whole generation of these Assyrians had been born, and bred in Lebanon, and their hearts were totally aligned to the country which they called home. Although most did not possess a document recognising them as Lebanese citizens. And when their lives, honour, and sanctity of life was threatened, many young men did not hesitate to take up arms; as their forefathers before them had done, when their honour, and way of life were threatened in Turkey.

Our gallant young men proved to be an

unbridgeable, and obstinate opposition to the oppressive enemy forces. Inevitably, young men were cut down in the prime of their lives, with wholly unexplored futures ahead of them; losing their lives in the battle that ensued.

Our young parish priest, who had just recently been assigned to our city, found himself performing mass funerals for 3 to 5 young men at a time. The church courtyard was made into a cemetery, where young bodies mutilated by the ravages of war, were hastily placed in body bags; and bulldozers worked day, and night to fill the unmarked graves. Many lost sons, and fathers alike.

My forefathers migrated to Lebanon to escape the ongoing persecution of the Assyrian Christians in Turkey by the Ottoman, and Kurdish forces. They left their homes, and everything that they had worked for, in the hope of securing for their children a future free from the horrors, and unspeakable atrocities that they had been witness to. Never did they envisage that their children, and grandchildren would lose their lives in the defense of their way of life once again. In a twist of irony, they had attempted to escape the fate that would have been dealt their way in one part of the world, and were to face an arguably bloodier, and horrible end in another.

In that same church courtyard no one dares step upon its grounds for fear of tainting the sanctity of its grounds; that have been soiled with the red blood of the young men who had so gallantly given their lives, in the defense of their honour, of their fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers. In that church courtyard, cherry trees blossom in its grounds with the coming of each spring, and the ground is paved white with the blossoms that fall upon the graveyards, signifying the whiteness, and purity of cause of the young men that fill its graves.

Every one in that city lost a loved one. No one was left untouched by the horrible, and evil machinations of war. I too lost members of my extended family.

With the coming of this 7th of August, Assyrian remembrance day, my prayers go out to those young men, and all young men that had taken a stance

against their oppressors, and paid the ultimate price. May the Doves of peace, and the Angels upon high sing your praises.

I stand up tall, and proud in this country, as an Assyrian, by the virtue of the gift of life extended to me by those gallant young men. I could have easily have met a similar fate had it not been for their valiant defense of the city. Let this Assyrian Remembrance Day be a signifying force to us all of the sacrifices that our fathers, and forefathers have had to make, and let it be a cause for us to stand as one proud people, proud of our heritage, culture, and way of life. ”



The Untouchable??

I never realised how close the war had come to my heart!!!

I had never really felt the impact that wars posed on us. It was so, for a long time, till the day I realised that it had touched my inner most being.

I remember waking up one day, and my brother telling me that *Operation Desert Storm* had started. I had breakfast while watching footage of the allied planes taking off, and heading for the targets in Iraq. I saw pictures of Baghdad at night. The deadly sounds, and sights were lighting up the dark sky. All this was happening as I sat there having my breakfast, and watching the TV. Unbeknown to myself, the person that I care about most today was in one of those dark houses. It truly is a funny world, one day you are watching a city being bombarded; the next, you are holding the hand of some one who lived through the terror of those same attacks.

When I learned of this, an indescribable feeling

rushed through me. I guess it was a realisation of the limitations that stopped me from helping a good person. I can not understand how I was able to sit in the comfort of my home, and go on with my life with out sparing a thought for her. I feel like I have done a wrong by her.

My way out of my country of birth was as easy as it could ever have been. I boarded a plane, and on the way I spent a night in a five-star hotel. Twenty-four hours latter I was in a warm home, with everything ready for me to pursue my future.

Her escape was not as easy. Like many others who have, and still are experiencing the hardships that are faced by Assyrians in Jordan, she tasted her fair share. The next country was Turkey, and then she made it to Australia. Every step was filled with the terror of being caught, and sent back.

I wonder sometimes what she did to deserve

such hardship. Many of the Assyrians who fled Iraq are good people. They just wanted their lives to go on. They wanted a future to look forward to. But like many Assyrian generations, they were caught up in someone else's war.

My experience of war was not as direct as other people, but as slight as it is, it has changed my outlook on life. I am part of a close circle of friends; there are ten of us; only two of us have not lived through a war. I do believe that every single one of us has been touched by war, if not directly, through their partner, a member of their family, or a friend that has lived through it.

All I want to say with this article is that you may think the war is far from you, but unbeknown to you, a person that you may very well care about one day is living every day, and night in fear. ■

Sennacherib Warda

w a r s t o r i e s

Hanan Jajou, an Assyrian-Chaldean, was an 11 year old student, when the U.S. led Operation Desert Storm, began to bombard the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. She recalls the terror filled night that the U.S. air force launched the air war against Iraq, and the trek she undertook to reach safety in Northern Iraq.

“ The entire world was against Iraq, and we all felt as though this war would be even deadlier than any previous wars in which Iraq had been involved in. The Iraqi people had experienced air raids before, and were well aware of the storm that would break over their capital.

My aunt was sleeping over our house that night. She had abandoned her house as it was close to Saddam's Imperial palace, a prime target for a U.S. strike. The time was around 2.am, and we were all asleep in our house.

Then it began without warning and, without any air-raid sirens. Bombs exploding in the distance shook the window panes in our bedroom. My sister, and I both leapt out of our bed and ran into our parents' bedroom, where they attempted to comfort us.

We all moved to the living room, and turned off all our lights, and heaters. It was very cold, and dark in the living room. We couldn't sleep, now that we had been awakened. We all waited in the living room for the four long hours till sunrise.

The sounds of U.S. bombs exploding at regular intervals were broken by the burst of anti-aircraft fire which sent streaks of tracer bullets into the sky. The anti-aircraft guns got into a routine of 10 minutes of continuous fire, followed by a 5 minute break, probably to reload, and then another 10

minutes of continuous fire. This routine was maintained throughout the night.

We knew that Baghdad, and its many military installations would be a prime targets for the U.S. air force. We then prepared food, clothes and money, and packed them inside our car.

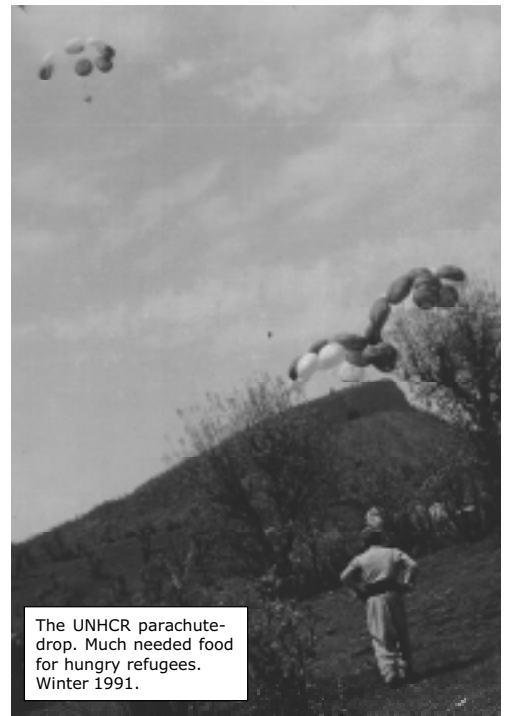
We took off in a car crammed with seven people, and their possessions.

The road to Northern Iraq was crowded with other motorists fleeing the city. The trip required us to fill the car with petrol half way along the journey. That night the U.S. air force had destroyed Iraq's main oil refinery, and storage facilities. This had caused oil prices to skyrocket, and prompted motorists to fill up while they still had the chance. This meant that we had to wait for over one hour to fill our car with petrol.

The road trip took us around twelve hours. We eventually arrived in the city of Tel Keppfe, in Northern Iraq, and took shelter in a friend's house. We had been invited to stay with my father's friend, as we would be safer. His four-bedroom house was filled with around thirty people. To make matters worse we had no electricity, no water and no heating.

We were forced to buy water from a water truck, and we had to use a naphthene burner to warm the house.

Sleeping at night was broken by bombs going off in the distance. The room in which I would sleep had a cupboard filled with crockery. The crockery would rattle, and shake telling us that the U.S. had destroyed a target nearby. The nights I spent in Iraq were filled with worries, and tension. We eventually left Iraq, and fled along with other refugees and arrived in Australia.



The UNHCR parachute-drop. Much needed food for hungry refugees. Winter 1991.

When we arrived in Australia we felt both sad and relieved, as we had left our friends and relatives behind, but had finally fled Iraq. The worries I had, while living in Iraq, have decreased but they still remain. Today's worries are for our relatives who remain behind in Iraq. Our family sends them money to help them get by, and we also maintain communication with them. I look forward to the day when there will be peace in Iraq, and a new generation of children will not go through a similar experience. ”

“ There was nothing unusual about that night. Silence filled the air, darkness embraced the streets and the feeling of emptiness and eeriness is all you sense, gazing outside the window.

We all knew it was coming, and we were ready for it, just another night to be spent in our usual place; which is the underground shelter. And there it goes, the first bombing for that night, I guess it happened sooner than we expected. The first one was pretty close from the sound of it. We could actually feel the earth shattering, and the ground moving beneath our feet, resembling a body that trembles after it gets struck by a major blow. More, and more were falling, closer, and closer they were getting.

You could hear the screams of people from far away just yelling for each other to get inside and run for a place to hide in, and the cries of the children frightened from the noise. And there I was, one of those frightened people who was running, and trying desperately to find some shelter

for that night. No matter where I looked, I could only see shallow buildings, and destroyed places. As I started to scream out for help, I was awakened by the beep of my alarm clock going off besides my bed. Then I realised it was just a dream, then I curled up in my bed just thinking how glad I am

real for me, and for many people who are still living in the Middle East. It just makes me think how grateful I am to be living in this peaceful country, where you can go to sleep not worrying if your village, or your suburb is going to be attacked by enemies at any time; or always getting prepared

for another day that is to be spent in an underground shelter, or go days without seeing the day light, or even the warmth of the sun touching your face. As well as, having to feed your kids rotten food, and let them stay in the same clothes for days without a wash. My thoughts are always there with those people who are still suffering, and it hurts me so much that I can not do anything to stop it.

Unfortunately, this is only a small part of what our people go through every day. That's besides asking their God if they are going to survive the bombing this time. Are they going to be able to see the sunrise again, or even have enough food left to feed their kids. That's how their

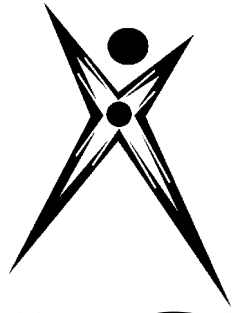
life story goes. And as for us, who are very fortunate to live in this peaceful country, we are always taking things for granted, instead of appreciating what we have. How selfish can we be, just wanting more and more, and not cherishing the finer things in life. ”



Doctors without frontiers. One of many international organisations that gave much needed aid to our refugees.

that it was just a nightmare. It was only one of those many re-occurring dreams that I get every now, and then. They all have different scenarios but they have the same effect on me, the feeling of fear, and loneliness.

However, a few years back, that would have been



AYGV

The Assyrian Youth Group of Victoria is a non-political, non-religious and non-profit organisation.

It seeks to promote the Assyrian culture, history and language, as well as the Assyrian name and community, bringing it to the world stage.

It does this by supporting all artistic and social activities run by the youth of the Assyrian community.

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view.....	<i>khezwa</i>	ܚܝܘܬܐ	settlement.....	<i>khomsana</i>	ܟܚܘܡܫܢܐ
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suprise.....	<i>peghaa</i>	ܦܝܓܗܐ	migrant.....	<i>taw-tawa</i>	ܬܘܘܬܘܘܐ
existence.....	<i>e-tota</i>	ܐܬܘܬܐ	interview.....	<i>tpaqa</i>	ܬܦܩܐ
ministry.....	<i>wazerota</i>	ܘܙܪܘܬܐ	martyr.....	<i>sahda</i>	ܫܗܕܐ
environment...	<i>makhdora</i>	ܡܚܕܘܪܐ	massacre.....	<i>parman</i>	ܦܪܡܢ
love.....	<i>khoba</i>	ܚܘܒܐ	anger.....	<i>krapta</i>	ܟܪܦܬܐ
peace.....	<i>shlama</i>	ܫܠܡܐ	frustration.....	<i>sqadta</i>	ܫܩܕܬܐ
country.....	<i>atra</i>	ܐܬܪܐ	hate.....	<i>snayta</i>	ܫܢܝܬܐ
letter.....	<i>atota</i>	ܐܬܘܬܐ	sadness.....	<i>khasha</i>	ܚܝܬܐ
number.....	<i>man-yana</i>	ܡܢܝܢܐ	happiness.....	<i>khadota</i>	ܚܕܘܬܐ
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