

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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A year of change

Muslims reflect on how their lives have been altered since Sept. 11

By Nishat Fatima
THE BATTALION

One year after the terrorist attacks took place, the Muslim community in College Station has faced a range of reactions.

"It is the responsibility of Muslims here in the West to educate those who do not know what Islam is really about," said Faisal Chaudhry, the president of the Islamic Center for Bryan-College Station. Chaudhry said he feels there is a need to spread Islamic awareness.

In the aftermath of the Twin Tower and Pentagon events, Muslims all over the world were the recipients of backlash in many forms; some cases more severe than others. The Muslim community in College Station had its share of hostility, but many said the positive reactions outweigh the negative.

Arsalan Haque, computer science graduate student and president of the Muslim Student Association, said he was surprised by the compassion the Aggie community showed the Muslims.

"The first incident that happened was when somebody left a threatening letter on the doorsteps of the mosque," Haque said. "The person behind it was caught, and later we found out that it was a friend of the offender that had turned him in."

Haque said that because of the outcome of that incident, the mosque got an overwhelming response from the people of College Station.

"We got about 50 cards from different people, we received phone calls, flowers and many people approached different members of our community just to find out if they needed anything," Haque said. "One day, we even had a guy who came and

sat outside in the lobby of the mosque who said that he just wanted to make sure that we were all right."

Despite all of the support, many members of the Muslim community were still apprehensive. Ali Hakeem, a junior economics major, said that immediately after the attacks he was very fearful and confused.

"I felt lost and afraid because of the uncertainty of what might happen. I was trying to figure out what had just taken place," Hakeem said.

Dini Sunardi, an industrial engineering graduate student and public relations officer of the Muslim Student Association, said she felt the need to be extra careful after the events took place.

"As a Muslim woman who wore a head scarf or 'hijab' I had never thought I needed to be cautious because of being a Muslim," Sunardi said. "But after the attacks took place I realized that I had to be extremely mindful of

my surroundings. Thankfully, I did not receive any hostility."

Unfortunately, not all Muslims received such a tolerant reaction. There have been numerous reports of hate crimes against Muslims in many parts of the world. The Web site for the Council for American-Islamic Relations said there had been 542 anti-Muslim hate crimes reported between the eight days of September 11 and 19. While the majority of the crimes reported took place in the United States, there have also been many painful and serious events that have taken place overseas.

In an event that occurred in South Shields in England, CNN reported that the message "Avenge America-Kill A Muslim Now!" was sprawled across a wall near a mosque. Other reports of anti-Muslim activities on the Web site www.jannah.org include the dragging and beating of an Afghan taxi driver in Twickenham, England, the battering of a 19-year-old Muslim girl by two men with bats in London, the burning of an Islamic school in the Netherlands and numerous threats and attacks on mosques all over the world.

Masoud Shadjareh, president of Britain's Islamic Human Rights Commission, told CNN that after the attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon took place, resentment towards Muslims was growing worldwide. Reports of attacks and abuse had been coming in to him from all over Europe and even Australia.

"People reacted the way they did because they saw Muslims as a threat," said Dr. Terrence Barnhart, professor of psychology. "When a perceived danger is coming from a group that is different from the relatively homogeneous group of people, then categories tend to be created."

"After the attacks people started to stereotype all Muslims as one," Barnhart said. "In a way, the reaction was almost normal, but that does not mean that such behavior is justified."

Mike Martin, a graduate student in environmental engineering and public relations manager for the Islamic Center of Bryan-College Station, agreed with Barnhart.

"People of all faiths tend to hijack a portion of the religion and use it for their benefit," Martin said. "When a Christian from the Aryan Brotherhood

holds up the Bible and calls it his guide book, the average American knows better. Why should Islam be exempt from that? Religion is made up of individuals, and there are good and bad people in every faith."

Many Muslims have been questioned by the government and many others have even been taken into federal custody for indefinite periods. According to an article published by the *Rocky Mountain News* on Aug. 15, 2002, American-born Saudi immigrant Yaser Esam Hamdi has been withheld with fewer rights than a felon. Despite repeated appeals by Federal Judge Robert Dumar to have Hamdi speak with a public defender, the circuit courts have yet to comply. Judge Dumar even went as far as asking the courts if the Constitution didn't apply to Hamdi, but the courts refused to answer.

In reaction to this event, Haque said "I learned my history and my government in this country and from what I have learned, this kind of treatment is unconstitutional. Our framing fathers fought for the Constitution and put the due process clause in it for a reason. How can that right be denied?"

Many students feel their lives have changed on a personal level since the attacks.

"Now I am more focused. I see the necessity to inform others about Islam. It's a part of a lifelong project," Hakeem said. "The fact that the number of conversions to Islam has grown tremendously after 9/11 shows that people want to learn about the religion. In the past we have done a poor job of reaching out."

Chaudhry said that although he did not receive any backlash on a personal level, the constant watch on Islam has left him feeling vulnerable.

"There are people out there who are promoting hatred on the basis of their ignorance. If everybody gets to know each other better, then it is harder to be prejudiced," Chaudhry said.

Sunardi voiced the same opinion. "Though there are almost eight million Muslims in America and 1.2 billion worldwide, Islam is still one of the most misunderstood religions," Sunardi said. "Muslims from all over should get together, inform others, and dispel any kind of wrong ideas that are out there. The media is biased a lot of times, but as long as we are out there, educating people what Islam is really about, then



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NEWS IN BRIEF

Reeves regains sensation in hands, feet seven years after accident

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Christopher Reeve has regained some movement and sensation in his hands and feet, seven years after a horse-riding accident that left him paralyzed from the neck down, one of his doctors said Tuesday.

The *Superman* star also can breathe on his own for about an hour at a time, said Dr. John McDonald, a Washington University neurologist who has been treating Reeve.

McDonald said the actor's progress should illustrate that "improvements are possible, and that's what we should be aiming at."

He cautioned against false hope.

"Where (the recovery) will end we also don't know," he said. "Nobody can tell if Christopher or anyone (with such an injury) will walk."

Reeve had hoped to walk by his 50th birthday, Sept. 25.

But just to gain sensation is also an accomplishment, he told *People* magazine for its Sept. 23 issue.

"To be able to feel just the lightest touch is really a gift," he said. "The fact is that even if your body doesn't work the way it used to, the heart and the mind and the spirit are not diminished. It's as simple as that."

McDonald, medical director of the Spinal Cord Injury Program at

the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, has directed Reeve in a home therapy program that uses electrical muscle stimulation and repetitive motion exercises.

Since beginning McDonald's program, Reeve can move his right wrist, the fingers on his left hand and his toes. He can feel a pinprick on most parts of his body and can tell the difference between sharp and dull.

McDonald said Reeve's advances defied previous scientific expectations, when experts predicted that he would never be able to feel or move from the neck down.

Reeve exercises an average of three hours a week on a special computerized bicycle that sends electrical messages to his legs.

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