Muntaha, 5; Hasan; Mona and Mahmoud, 9. The family owns and runs Mona’s Hair and Beauty Wholesale, Inc. and Mona’s Beauty Accessories. Mona grew up in Cleveland and Florida; Hasan is from El-Bireh, Palestine; both children were born in Cooper City, a suburb of Miami.

Aisha Neal, 9; Fatimah Bhutan, third grade teacher at Iman Academy; Safiyah Neal, 7; Jim Coates, stepfather, deliveryman for the Houston Chronicle. Fatimah was born of Indian and Bhutanese parents, and she grew up in Trinidad and Tobago; Jim was born of Italian and English heritage, and grew up in Chicago. They live in west Houston, and Fatimah jokes that the car is “our home away from home.”

Aditya, 18, University of Washington freshman; Paramitha, 12; Irma Ladya Bebasari, Wartini’s niece; Wartini, chemical engineer, homemaker, part-time worker at Marshall’s department store and Renton Technical College student; Tonny, engineer at Boeing Co.; Ratih Puspita Ningrum and her husband, Eric Trisandja, Wartini’s nephew, who is looking for work in the travel industry. Wartini, Tonny and the children immigrated to the US in 1995 from Indonesia. Wartini is from Madura; Tonny is from Bali.

“There is no God but Allah [God], and Muhammad is his prophet. Pray five times a day. Give alms. Fast during the month of Ramadan. If you are capable, make a pilgrimage to Mecca. If these ‘five pillars’ seem foreign to you, you may not be talking to your neighbors. Islam is an American religion.”

—TIME, October 1, 2001

Hammad: MIAMI
Bhutan-Coates: HOUSTON
Soeharto: SEATTLE

RAMADAN IS SO PURE,
like the whiteness of the moon that brings it.
The purity is contagious,
cleansing everything it touches.
Ramadan unites the community.

—Safiyah Hosein, 6th grade
Islamic Academy of New England
Sharon, Massachusetts

ONCE THE MOON IS SIGHTED there is this sense of urgency that sets into the soul, this sense that I need to do as much as I can, since I don’t know if will I be around for the next Ramadan. With each passing day I wonder, did I do enough, give enough, hurt anyone? Did I waste time not doing the things I need to, the things that get me closer to heaven and to my Lord? Did I gossip, did I make enemies, was my forgiveness accepted?

—S. A.
Hayward, California
Fasting during the month of Ramadan—abstaining from food and drink between sunrise and sunset—is the fourth pillar of Islam, prescribed for Muslims in the Qur’an. (See p. 36.) Though the fast is difficult—especially when Ramadan falls in summer—the season is a happy one, thanks to the feelings of community and closeness to God, the overflowing mosques, the gift-giving and the special foods prepared for night-time meals. This year, Saudi Aramco World photographers visited six American Muslim families as they fasted during Ramadan and then celebrated the ‘Id al-Fitr holiday (the “Feast of Fast-Breaking”) that begins with the new month. At the same time, we invited American Muslims to share with readers what Ramadan means to them, and to recall favorite Ramadan memories; we regret that space does not allow us to publish all of them.

—The Editors

Khan: COLUMBIA, MO.

Faiza, 14; Fahmida Akhter, physician and homemaker; Helena, award-winning author of more than 45 Bangladeshi children’s books; Mahir, 11; Fazle, son of Helena, chief of the Office of Surveillance for the State of Missouri’s Division of Environmental Health. Originally from Bangladesh, the Khans moved to Columbia from Boise, Idaho in 1998. “We wanted a good community for our children,” says Fahmida.

Randolph: JEFFERSON CITY, MO.

Deborah Ann Randolph is an administrative support techni-
cian for the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. Born in Boston of Dutch-Irish heritage, she grew up in Texas and has lived in Jefferson City since 1992. She became a Muslim last year.

McCloud–Al-Deen: CHICAGO

Aminah McCloud, Ph.D, assistant professor, DePaul University; her daughter Sadikia Thomas, crime scene investigator, Schaumburg Police Department; Sadikia’s daughter Jenna, 3; Frederick Thaufeer Al-Deen, caseworker, Illinois Department of Human Services. Aminah was born in St. Louis, and has been a Muslim since age 16; Frederick was born in South Carolina and became a Muslim in 1976.

I am a month of mercy, forgiveness, and protection from the fire.
A month that disgraces the liar.

I am a month that encourages you to feel like the poor.
A month which has opportunity knocking on your front door.

Encouraging you to fast in this month every day,
I call Muslims for tarawih, which is recommended to pray.

I am a month that helps you to feel,
The way the poor and needy deal.

—Anum Shami, 8th grade
Laurel, Maryland
11:30 a.m.
Each year, Mona and Hasan give a “family present” at the ‘Id. This year, Mona books a trip to Disney World.

12:00 p.m.
Muntaha breaks her morning-long fast. Mahmoud fasted until early afternoon every day.

3:35 p.m.
Mona and Muntaha stop to buy food for the evening’s iftar at Al-Salam, a restaurant and Arab food shop run by Hasan’s aunt and uncle.

4:45 a.m.
Hasan reads a passage from the Qur’an.

4:45 p.m.
Mona prepares dinner: Lentil soup.

9:45 a.m.
Hasan reads a passage from the Qur’an.

12:00 p.m.
Muntaha breaks her morning-long fast. Mahmoud fasted until early afternoon every day.

11:30 a.m.
Each year, Mona and Hasan give a “family present” at the ‘Id. This year, Mona books a trip to Disney World.

4:45 p.m.
Mona prepares dinner: Lentil soup.

IN THE FRAGILE GLIMMERING OF THE NEW MOON, a powerful practice begins. Its yearly rhythm returns as a welcome friend, a mighty force for change and renewal, a reminder that my appetites are not in charge—I get to walk the talk of submission. For the love of God I determine to fast each day; for the love of God I embrace hunger and thirst and loss of sleep; for the love of God I surrender to this obligation—praying to increase my hunger and thirst for God. And in this process I get to do my own inner jihad against pride, anger, envy, appetite and blame.

—Hilal Diane Sala
San Francisco, California

TO ME, Ramadan is not something I do to please my parents or to show my cousins that I can. I commemorate Ramadan out of respect for my God and my Prophet, Muhammad (pbuh). I feel honored to let my peers know that I am a Muslim.

—Taslima Choudhury, 8th grade
Lorton, Virginia

“Ramadan is all about how we should be thankful for what we have. We donate money anonymously. We want to show our kids how to do things without bragging to people.”

—Mona

Hammad
MIAMI
9:55 a.m.
Mahmoud gives best friend and neighbor Nathan a birthday present while Nathan’s mom looks on.

10:05 a.m.
Mona arrives at work.

10:40 a.m.
Mahmoud helps Hasan pack the van that serves their wholesale clients. Deliveries to beauty shops fill their day.

1:32 p.m.
Mona drops by a girls’ birthday party run by her store.

1:45 p.m.
Mona picks up Hasan’s dry cleaning.

5:49 p.m.
With Hasan and Mahmoud not home yet, Mona breaks her fast by eating a date.

5:55 p.m.
Mona and Muntaha pray salat al-maghrib, the sunset prayer.

6:10 p.m.
Iftar together. “We teach them how important family is,” says Mona.

“When I pray I say thank you to God for my family, my house, my religion and that I am Arab.”
—Mahmoud, 9

RAMADAN
Ramadan, Ramadan
We read Qur’an
We don’t do anything haram
In Ramadan!!!
We stay up late
And eat some dates
In our plates
But we don’t always gain weight!!!

We pray all day
And never say
A bad name
And ask God to keep Satan away!!!
Ramadan Ramadan
We read Qur’an
We don’t do anything haram
In Ramadan!!!

—Dahlia Fateen, 5th grade
Santa Clara, California

January/February 2002 45
SOME PEOPLE THINK that in Ramadan we just do not eat. For me, Ramadan is a very spiritual month. When I first began to fast, I needed a lot of courage and strength inside. Yet it didn’t take me long to get used to it. It’s simple. In Ramadan, I learn more about myself and what I can do. When it’s time to break the fast, I feel good. It’s not that I feel great about eating food. I think of it as running a marathon, and that yes, I did it. I made it.

—Rasheeda Abdul-Musawwir, 5th grade
Islamic Academy of New England
Sharon, Massachusetts

RAMADAN IS A UNIQUE MONTH. What makes it special to me is having friends over for iftar. Once when some of my friends came over to break their fast, I had just had a dentist appointment. Therefore, I couldn’t chew the food, and my mom had to grind it, which made me look like a baby. Everyone started making jokes and we all started laughing. We really had a good time.

—Aula Alami, 6th grade
Islamic Academy of New England
Sharon, Massachusetts
THREE YEARS AGO WHEN I MOVED to Stoughton, Ramadan arrived quickly. When we arrived at the mosque for ‘Id, it was the largest mosque I’d ever seen. The parking lot was so crowded that we had to park way back in the field. When we entered, we had to put our shoes in a bag so we wouldn’t lose them.

As my Dad and I found a spot to sit, I saw the imam. He said something that I still remember: “Treat your brothers and sisters the way you want to be treated. And whenever you hurt your brother’s or sister’s feelings, you should ask them for forgiveness, and insha’ Allah he or she will forgive you.” There I was, sitting near the last row, and I couldn’t even see the imam clearly, but what he said was like an ‘Id gift for me.

—Iziz Akbar Dar, 5th grade
Islamic Academy of New England
Sharon, Massachusetts

I try to teach my friends who aren’t Muslims about Ramadan. They tell me, “You don’t look like the type to do that! How do you do it?” And I tell them what it’s about and why we fast.”

—Mona

FAJR: A JOURNAL OF NUR
I wake up every morning and thank God for the happy dreams I have been having since I started fasting this month. It is dark outside but I manage to walk downstairs and fix myself some suhur.
I return to my room, wash, and pray. Every morning I pray for peace. I envision peace graphically. It looks like light—*nur*. It starts growing from my heart and takes over my consciousness. The *nur* spreads to my surroundings, lighting everything.

My non-Muslim roommate stirs in her sleep as the light falls on her, over my books and my shelf, and escapes under the door. It is peace, light. It shoots across the hallway, lighting the entire dormitory. It travels roads and interstate highways. There is the illumination of peace across my home state of Massachusetts, quickly taking over every state in the nation. I imagine a map of the world, countries and bodies of water, being taken over by the *nur* of peace traveling at the speed of light.

Peace. I pray and feel the warmth of my tears in my hands as I praise God for this light, peace, and happiness. I look up and the sun shines outside. Dawn has passed and everywhere I can see, light shines down from not just the sun, but from heaven. I thank God and prepare for school because I know that it was from my own heart that the *nur* was born. And it is from this *nur* that I know that my daily *jihad* will pay off.

Such is the peace I find in Ramadan. Such is the peace I find in fasting. It gives me more than just a glimmer of hope: It lights up my universe.

—Zahra Shoaib Ayubi
Wellesley, Massachusetts
5:06 p.m.
Jim drives home and helps with seatbelts, since Fatimah and the girls have to let their hands air-dry for several hours.

12:04 p.m.
The children color placemats while Jim looks over the menu at Le Peep restaurant.

12:07 p.m.
Jim attends prayers at the El-Farouk mosque in west Houston.

12:20 p.m.
“I’ve studied Christianity, Judaism and Islam a lot. It’s striking how much they have in common,” says Jim.

12:40 p.m.
Sunday, ‘Id al-Fitr
The family visits the Noors, who recently moved from Afghanistan. Fatimah comforts Zakia Noor, whose husband unexpectedly had to work this day.

1:07 p.m.
Safiyyah and Aisha, who fast only in the mornings, have lunch at home.

1:07 p.m.
Jim and Fatimah take the Noors’ two kids and their own to prayers at the Astrohall.

1:53 p.m.
A ride on the toy train in Hermann Park, in a drizzling rain.

3:30 p.m.
Shopping for ‘Id gifts at K-Mart. Safiyyah wanted a toy talking parrot; Aisha had already received a pet goldfish.

3:55 p.m.
In the car afterwards, Fatimah gives Jim the watch she bought for him.

4:22 p.m.
Back at the Noors’ apartment, Formoli Noor has returned from work, and Jim and Fatimah give him a watch as a gift; he and Jim compare.

8:00 p.m.
Jim and Fatimah join friends for dinner at the home of Mustafa Tameez. The girls visit with their father at his home.

Since 1976 Janice Rubin’s photographs have appeared in numerous publications including Smithsonian, Newsweek, Town and Country, Fortune, Rolling Stone and The New York Times. Her photographs are included in the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, as well as private collections. She is currently documenting religious diversity in the Houston area.
7:02 p.m.  
Wartini and Mita cook iftar. “It’s fun,” says Mita. “I get to learn,” “I am proud of her,” says Wartini. “She is very helpful.”

11:25 a.m.  
...to the library, where she joins others for the period.

7:02 p.m.  
Wartini and Mita cook iftar. “It’s fun,” says Mita. “I get to learn.” “I am proud of her,” says Wartini. “She is very helpful.”

8:45 p.m.  
Mita ponders her homework assignment next to a hat from Bali.

“...to the library, where she joins others for the period.”

7:10 p.m.  
Adi shows Tonny verses from his Qur’an computer program.

8:18 p.m.  
“I educate my family by the Qur’an and hadith regularly, not just in Ramadan,” says Tonny.

8:15 p.m.  
Tonny reads from the hadith, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad.

11:16 a.m.  
Mita, who is fasting for her third full Ramadan, follows a classmate past the cafeteria...

7:15 p.m.  
Iftar. Eric dishes out noodles.

8:25 p.m.  
Eric, Ratih and Mita gather around the piano. Mita studies both piano and viola, but the viola is her favorite.

7:50 p.m.  
Tonny encourages her reading, even though she’s tired.

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Soeharto  
SEATTLE

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THE FIRST TIME I FASTED FOR RAMADAN, I was 14 and at boarding school in Massachusetts. I was a little scared but also excited. Until then, physically challenging myself hadn’t been important. Going to school every day, doing my homework, learning the state flower of Colorado and getting the Barbies and books that I wanted—those were the priorities. Fasting would be the first thing I would do that I couldn’t study for.

Marching up to the chef in charge of the dining hall, I asked for food to take back to my dorm for my predawn breakfast. I expected to be laughed at, but the burly man looked me in the eyes and simply asked what I would like to eat. “Well, cereal and a sandwich would be nice,” I said meekly. The expected argument and humiliation disappeared like a fly waved off my arm. One of my eighth-grade dorm-mates asked me why I was eating a sandwich at check-in that night, around 10:00 p.m. Emboldened by the dining-hall encounter, I said with as much relish as if I had won an Olympic gold medal, “I’m fasting for Ramadan!”

Later, in college, we Muslim students sometimes organized pre-dawn trips to the International House of Pancakes. We would all pile into the school van at around 3:00 a.m., arguing about where IHOP actually was and the best route to take. I always ordered regular pancakes, but the chocolate-chip variety was very popular too, as I recall.

One time, I brought my non-Muslim friends along. I sat between them and the other Muslim students. I thought that maybe I had made a mistake with this clear separation, that perhaps our groups would not be so easily merged. Then one of my friends began to talk about her English professor, and one of the Muslim girls piped up in agreement. Before our chocolate-chip pancakes had come, it was obvious that we were all college girls on a late-night outing. But we were not just “the Muslim girls” and “the friends of Asma”; we were more than the sum of our parts. We were all observing Ramadan.

In law school, I mostly broke my fast with my sister, or alone. I didn’t feel the same strong urge I had once had to share Ramadan with everyone I knew. I would go home and quietly prepare a meal. I watched pasta boil and wondered whether it was done. The only way I knew how to tell was to taste it, which I could not do till after sunset. What about people who could see food, through restaurant windows or remnants in the trash, who knew they would not be eating at sunset—or perhaps ever? Being alone on those evenings helped me grasp this purpose of Ramadan—to empathize with those who suffer.

Fasting during Ramadan was the first accomplishment in my life that I was really proud of. Being a good student wouldn’t make me good at fasting. I had to do it on my own.

—Asma Gull Hasan

DURING THIS BLESSED MONTH OF RAMADAN, MAY PEACE BE WITH THE FAMILIES OF THE VICTIMS WHO WERE SENSELESSLY LOST ON SEPTEMBER 11.

May peace be with the innocent children of Afghanistan, who are as blameless as those who perished in New York and Washington on that infamous day. May peace be with the mothers of this planet, without whom life would cease. May peace be with those whose homes are the cardboard boxes of large digital televisions. In a time when people succumb to the apartheid of hate, may peace be with those who stand defiantly in the name of faith and love. On behalf of every living Muslim in the world, may peace be with us all.

—Arsalan T. Iftikhar

St. Louis, Missouri
Soeharto
SEATTLE

Sunday, 7:12 a.m., ‘Id al-Fitr
On the morning of the ‘Id, Tonny gasses up the van for the 90-minute drive to Olympia.

9:45 a.m.
Prayers in the gymnasium of St. Martin’s College, sponsored by the local Cambodian Muslim community. The Soeharto family has attended ‘Id prayers here for four years.

9:47 a.m.
Wartini, Ratih and Mita pray with the women.

11:20 a.m.
Tonny leads a separate prayer in anticipation of missing prayer time during the drive home.

11:37 a.m.
After prayers, Adi and other men greet each other with embraces.

11:41 a.m.
Wartini embraces Adi.

12:27 p.m.
Lunch has been prepared by the young people of the Cambodian host community.

2:35 p.m.
Mita jokes with friends after lunch.

4:45 p.m.
The family’s friends from throughout the Puget Sound area gather for a group photo.

5:37 p.m.
Mita and Eric nap in the van on the way home.

“This is the point of ‘starting over,’ like the feeling of being born again, to be sinless.”
—Tonny

Veteran news photographer and amateur violinist Steve Shelton is currently with the Eastside Journal in Bellevue, Washington. His coverage of conflict and peacemaking efforts worldwide is represented by Black Star.
January/February 2002

**THE LESSON I LEARNED THIS YEAR** was to be kinder to people no matter how they feel toward me. By fasting, especially for a period of 30 days, one reaches a certain point of complete and utter peacefulness where one can truly see all the rights and wrongs that life contains. This year I have learned, through fasting, that by displaying kindness toward your fellow man, true friendship is achieved no matter what social, ethnic, or economic background the other person is from.

Ramadan, to me, means a month of peacefulness, a month of prayer, a month of discipline, and now and forever a month of kindness.

—Ahad Ali
Upland, California

A LONG TIME AGO when I was five years old, I wanted to fast, but my mother would not let me because I was very small. But I kept asking her until she agreed to let me fast until 1:00 p.m. When Ramadan came, I ate suhur before dawn so I wouldn't get hungry, and I began my first fast! It was very hard because it was my first time, but it got easier and easier as the month went on. When Ramadan finished, I asked my mother if next year I could fast until 2:30 p.m. She said yes. I could hardly wait, and I counted the days until Ramadan finally came. When I started fasting, it was harder than the last year because I was fasting longer, but it got easier and easier as the month went on. The next year, I fasted the whole day. It was easy because I was used to fasting from the years before. Now I have fasted in Ramadan four complete years. I feel very happy, and I will keep fasting for the rest of my life.

—Osamah Kmail, 5th grade
Islamic Academy of New England
Sharon, Massachusetts

**FIVE YEARS AGO**, when Ramadan fell in January, I visited my parents in Cleveland for a week during the holy month. I was not fasting because I had six broken ribs from a car accident. One morning, my father and I went to the West Side Market. I walked slowly and flexed my fingers to keep warm. Dad strode ahead, choosing cilantro and hot pepper for salatah, parsley for sambusak, a rock-hard avocado. A man yelled, “Try the fresh honeydew!” Dad told me, “Go ahead.” The man sliced and held the melon all with one hand. It was sweet and green. I offered Dad a taste. He half frowned and said my name in chiding way. “Have some,” I said. Then I remembered—he couldn’t eat it, he was fasting. He laughed when I apologized and bought two melons to eat after sunset.

—Eman Quotah
Washington, D.C.

**‘ID**
Ramadan departs with the swiftness of light
But then comes ‘Id, a celebration full of joy.
Excitement occupies our minds
Splendid, superb, awesome, incredible
‘Id is unmatched against all other holidays.
Spotting the moon,
Putting henna on,
Greeting friends and family,
Exchanging gifts,
Attending ‘Id prayer,
Enjoying ‘Id parties,
Exhausted!

—Sima A. Dar, 6th grade
Islamic Academy of New England
Sharon, Massachusetts

**9:46 a.m.**
Wearing a white cap, Adi prays with the other men.

**11:38 a.m.**
Tonny and Wartini embrace.

**3:18 p.m.**
Tonny sings an Indonesian song about ‘Id. “I used to sing this kind of music with groups,” he says.

**7:15 p.m.**
Back at home, the family gathers for an annual, solemn ceremony in which each member asks Tonny, and then Wartini, for forgiveness for any offense they have given during the previous year.
Fazle prays twice each day at work, first retreating to a restroom. There, he performs the ablution, or washing. First the hands, then the mouth, nose, face, forearms and hairline, and last the feet, as the Prophet Muhammad taught. Fazle returns to his office to pray. The ritual takes less than than 15 minutes, and he says his employers have always been accommodating.

In Bangladesh, the Khans lived under a government headed by a woman prime minister. They laugh when people tell them Muslim women are oppressed. “I tell them I’m not oppressed, you’re oppressed,” says Faeza. “Let’s face it, why do girls wear spaghetti straps and little shorts? It’s to get that cute guy. I’m my own person, because I wear this hijab.”

ON FRIDAY NIGHTS SHILOH BAR AND GRILL HOPS AS college students shake off the stress of a week of studies. Music sometimes booms a block down the street to the Islamic Center of Central Missouri, where local Muslims gather for congregational prayer at the mosque. Among those at the mosque are the Khan family: Fazle Khan, his wife, Fahmida Akhter, and their children, Faeza, 14, and Mahir, 10.

Eight thousand miles away in Bangladesh, where most of the Khan family was born, 88 percent of the population is Muslim. Here in Columbia, there are only 1000 Muslims in a city of more than 100,000.

Fazle is a physician with the state Department of Health. Fahmida, also a physician, is now a stay-at-home mom. They order pizza, drive their son to soccer practice and watch “Jeopardy” on television. And five times each day, they stop what they’re doing, turn toward Makkah, and pray. To announce the prayer times, the Khans keep an alarm clock atop the television in the living room of their duplex. Fazle Khan must reset it every few days, as the time to pray changes with the ever-changing length of the day.

Fazle and Fahmida rouse their children a little after 5:00 a.m. Most of the year they, and Fazle’s mother Helena, offer the first prayer, between dawn and sunrise, separately in their respective bedrooms. During Ramadan, the family prays together in the still-dark living room. In this as in each of the four other salats, they praise God, seek His forgiveness and ask for guidance.
Sunday, 7:55 a.m., ’Iid al-Fitr
On the ’Iid morning, neighbor children visit for breakfast.

12:20 p.m.
Faeza prays in a storeroom at Jefferson Middle School between classes. She and a classmate asked for a quiet place for prayer.

Saturday, 12:30 p.m.
Mahir combs racks of electronic games at Sam’s Club. “We only allow certain computer games in the house,” says Fahmida.

12:48 p.m.
The Khans buy only non-meat products at conventional stores; for meat that is processed according to Islamic principles, they visit a specialty shop.

11:31 a.m.
The family arrives at the second visit, a potluck lunch.

11:48 a.m.
Faeza talks to Deborah Randolph, who has become a friend of the family over the past year. (See next page.)

2:30 p.m.
While the adults visit downstairs, the younger children watch television.

12:20 p.m.
The Khans buy only non-meat products at conventional stores; for meat that is processed according to Islamic principles, they visit a specialty shop.

Fazle retreats for some quiet time reading the Qur’an, then spends a half hour on the treadmill. By 6:45 a.m., he drops Faeza at Jefferson Junior High School and drives 35 minutes to work in Jefferson City, where he coordinates Missouri’s surveillance for bioterrorism. Later, Fahmida drops Mahir at the Islamic School of Columbia-Missouri.

In the short winter days, Fazle must pray two of the daily prayers at work. The ritual takes no more than 15 minutes, and Fazle says his employers have always been accommodating. “For some reason or another—I have no way of explaining how—wherever I’ve worked I’ve always found a place where I could spread my prayer rug and pray,” he says.

In their community, the Khans say that they haven’t felt any negativity toward them as Muslims, but rather an increased, well-intentioned concern. Recently, when the family ordered from Pizza Hut, they asked that the knife that cuts meat pizzas be washed before being used to cut their vegetarian one. (The Khans do not eat meat in restaurants, since it is unlikely to meet Islamic dietary requirements.) When they picked up their pie, the server rushed out to assure them that a different knife had in fact been used.

“The ordinary people in America are extremely nice, extremely understanding,” Fahmida says. “Most of the time you don’t hear about this.”

—Erin Fitzgerald

Excerpted from “Muslims in Missouri,” © 2001 The Missourian, December 16, 2001. Fitzgerald is a senior at the University of Missouri-Columbia’s School of Journalism.
Ramadan was simpler then: It was about date omelets.

My memories of Ramadan are from growing up in Iran in the late 1970’s. When I was a kid, it happened in the summer. Summer fasts are hard: You have to get up around 4:00 a.m. to have a suhur, called sahari in Persian, meaning a dawn-time meal. My mom would come and wake my brother and me. Mind you, we were children, which meant that part of our job in life was to torture our parents by taking forever to get out of bed in the mornings and into bed at night. But not on Ramadan mornings. We got to have a special treat on those days: date omelets.

My mom, God bless her precious heart, would get up and cook sahari for us. Ramadan mornings were the only times we got to see her before she had showered and, as we say, “looked as beautiful as a rose.” Still, there was something so fragile and sleepy, so warm and comforting about her in those early Ramadan mornings.

She would take four or five fresh dates, cook them in butter (no margarine, please), and then mix in some scrambled eggs. Sugar, fat, protein. Oh, and a tall glass of chocolate milk, and another glass of water. Happiness on a table, served up at 4:30 a.m. We lived for that meal. We were not allowed to have date omelets at any other time of the year, no matter how much we begged for them.

As children, we didn’t have to fast, and yet it was an important rite of passage to wake up with our family. My brother and I would do what was called rooze-ye gonjishki, “fasting for those who are as big as sparrows.” We would have our lovely date omelets, and then skip our mid-morning snack, and then have lunch. We loved our snacks, but it was Ramadan, a time for testing your spiritual willpower. Around 10:00 in the morning we would inevitably ask my mom for our favorite snack, a type of sweet cracker which we dunked in sweet tea. My mom would gently ask us which we loved more, the crackers or God. We hated it when she did that—but we went without the crackers.

My father used to tell us that fasting was a privilege. He said that we chose to not eat from sunup to sundown, whereas there are people in the world for whom not eating lunch or snacks was a daily fact of life, and not a choice. In being hungry, we are to feel their pain and suffering. He would often repeat this poem by the Persian poet Sa’di, from The Rose Garden:

**The Children of Adam are members of one body,**

**made from the same source.**

If one feels pain,

the others cannot be indifferent to it.

If you are unmoved by the suffering of others,

you are not worthy of the name human being.
These days, I miss my mom’s date omelets. Ramadan is hard now, but not eating is the easy part. The hard part is feeling the suffering of others. I am a parent now, which means my life is no longer my own. Before I am a Muslim, I am a parent. Before I am an American, I am a parent. And this Ramadan I am thinking a lot about children. I am thinking about the children whose parents never came home from the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. I am thinking about the children of Afghanistan, who never asked for the Taliban and who have never heard of the Northern Alliance. And I am thinking especially about the children who make up far too many of the 600,000 people who the UN Human Rights Commissioner has stated may perish from starvation in the unforgiving winter of Afghanistan—unless something is done immediately. All of our children are precious, the ones here, the ones there, the ones everywhere.

I have an eight-year old son, and at dawn this Ramadan I will make him a date omelet. And I will hug him tight—nappy hair, sleepy eyes, nasty breath and all.

May he grow up to be one who feels the pain of others as his own.

May he have the courage to bring some healing into this fractured world.

And may he always remember my date omelets.

—Omid Safi
Hamilton, New York

THERE IS A MEMORY THAT RETURNS TO ME as clearly and exquisitely as the sliver of a crescent moon on the eve of Ramadan. It is the memory of my first Ramadan, 18 years ago, spent with my husband’s family in Morocco. It was the middle of summer, and the first day of fasting was the hottest day I’ve ever experienced. I never knew what thirst was, until that day. I suddenly understood the truth of God’s words: “Verily, with every difficulty, there is relief.”

—Barbara Sahli
Teacher at Islamic Academy of New England
Sharon, Massachusetts
3:05 p.m.  
Aminah at work in her basement office.

Friday, 10:45 a.m.  
Frederick at work. A former prison chaplain, he has long worked for community betterment. “If you see a stone in the road, you pick it up.”

11:35 a.m.  
Sadikia at work.

5:28 p.m.  
Sadikia picks up Jenna from day care.

5:58 p.m.  
Jenna watches “Clifford” on video while her mom prepares iftar.

6:32 p.m.  
Sadikia and Jenna have dinner. “Aminah was probably on the phone, and I was probably trying to read something to keep up with Aminah,” says Frederick.

Sunday, 10:07 a.m., ‘Id al-Fitr  
Frederick at the Villa Park mosque.

“We in America are so driven by the clock, but in Ramadan you run on God’s time. It’s a time of the willful loss of self.”

—Frederick Al-Deen

5:04 p.m.

Chicago-based Loren Santow has covered Central America, Europe, and India in addition to his home city of Chicago. A recent grant from the University of Chicago/MacArthur Justice Center supported his photography of men exonerated from Illinois’ death row.
THANKSGIVING, IFTAR AND 'ID IN WASHINGTON
As an American economist currently on assignment in the Arab world, I made sure to be back in Arlington, Virginia with my parents, brothers and cousins for Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is not only my favorite holiday, but also the most American. *Eid al-habash*, my Lebanese cousins call it: Turkey Day.

The trip made me realize that America really has changed since September 11. And I hope it will never be the same.

When my brother and I landed at Dulles Airport, despite his “Arab looks” and my having been born in Beirut, we were treated with the utmost courtesy. And from the moment my dad picked us up from the airport, till Thanksgiving dinner at sunset a few days later, I never stopped counting my blessings.

Indeed, this Thanksgiving was different. It was the first Thanksgiving to fall during Ramadan in my lifetime. And as Muslims, my family and I were fasting. It was perhaps the first time in my life that I was able to feel 100 percent American and 100 percent Muslim without any conflict.

Islam is being mainstreamed in America, and there’s no going back. Today, there are dozens of mosques in the District of Columbia and Virginia, not just one or two. On this trip, I received several invitations to iftar dinners from members of President Bush’s cabinet. That’s something new. Cabinet-level iftars, unheard of when Bush’s father was president, now are commonplace. And things will stay this way. I can feel it.

This ‘Id, at the end of the Ramadan fast, the enhanced American-Muslim dialogue is one small but important thing for which I will be giving thanks.

—Hadi Amr
National Director of Ethnic American Outreach for Al Gore’s presidential campaign
(adapted from *The Daily Star*, Beirut)
(hadyamr@hotmail.com)

previou year, and as a time to learn. I learn how it feels to be poor, something that millions of people around the world have to live with. I learn how important it is to control my desires and give charity to those who need it most. I also learn how precious family is and how nice it feels to break a fast together with many people and pray *tarawih* together. All these things make me look forward to Ramadan more and more each year.

—Hamza El-Guenaoui
Islamic Academy of New England
Sharon, Massachusetts

OH THE DAYS OF RAMADAN!!!
How I wish they were not gone.
I can’t wait for next year
To say that Ramadan is here!

—Dina Mortada, 6th grade
Islamic Academy of New England
Sharon, Massachusetts

THIS IS A TEEPEE THAT I PASS EVERY EVENING, as I walk home from evening prayers at the mosque in the mountains of Abiquiu, New Mexico. The photo was taken in Ramadan in 1999 when our Muslim neighbors were living in it, Maryam (Mary), her son Issa (Jesus), and her daughter Bezika.

—Karima Alavi
Abiquiu, New Mexico

REMEMBER God with each pang of discomfort.
Remember: there are many people much more intimate with real starvation who have no hope of an evening meal.
Remember: the incredible abundance we all take for granted.
Remember: this emptiness is a blessing, a hollow accommodation for clarity.
Remember: we are all united in God’s mercy.

—Hilal Diane Sala
San Francisco, California

I AM NINE YEARS OLD, AND MY MISSION IS TO FAST THE WHOLE RAMADAN. By the time you’re almost done you feel so hungry. We invite people to break their fast at our house. After we break our fast, we go to the mosque to pray.

My dad leads the prayer. The prayer is so long that your legs ache. Afterward, we play soccer with the men or we can go to the computer room. I made a lot of friends in Ramadan. And I have completed my mission for the first time, so I felt very happy and strong. Now my little sister wants to fast the whole next Ramadan.

—Hamza El-Guenaoui
Islamic Academy of New England
Sharon, Massachusetts

REMEMBER

God with each pang of discomfort.
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—Hilal Diane Sala
San Francisco, California

Unfamiliar Terms

*tarawih*: supplementary prayers during Ramadan
*jihad*: struggle
*haram*: forbidden
*iftar*: the fast-breaking meal after sunset
**(pbuh)**: Many Muslims say “peace be upon him” after every mention of the Prophet Muhammad; in writing, the phrase is often abbreviated.
*salam*: peace, used as a greeting
*imam*: prayer leader, preacher
*insha’ Allah*: God willing
*fajr*: dawn
*nur*: light, or the light of God
*suhur*: the pre-dawn meal before the day’s fast
*salata*: salad
*sambusak*: fried savory pastries filled with ground meat and/or vegetables

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