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SITUATION WORSE THAN EXPECTED

Activist saddened by visit to Iraq

DETAILS

Michelle Kimball will screen a video of her trip to Iraq from 7 to 9 p.m. on May 28 in the Faulkner Gallery of the Santa Barbara Public Library, 40 E. Anapamu St.

By STARSHINE ROSHELL
NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

Several days ago, Michelle Kimball was riding a bus through Iraq, eating only crackers and water in 100-degree heat and staring at ramshackle roadside homes.

On Friday, she was picking up her bubbly 5-year-old daughter, Sage, from Roosevelt School and helping the kindergartener get ready for her evening flute and xylophone recital.

Kimball, 44, returned Thursday from an illegal, week-long journey to Iraq, where she and 91 other Americans challenged U.S. and U.N. sanctions against the war-torn country by bringing \$4 million worth of medical supplies there.

The local peace activist has quickly made the transition back to her cozy home life after the risky and exhausting journey, but the images she saw there won't be forgotten.

"It was the saddest thing I've ever seen in my life," she said. "The poverty was extreme, the sewage is backed up, food is really scarce. Even we had a hard time finding food."

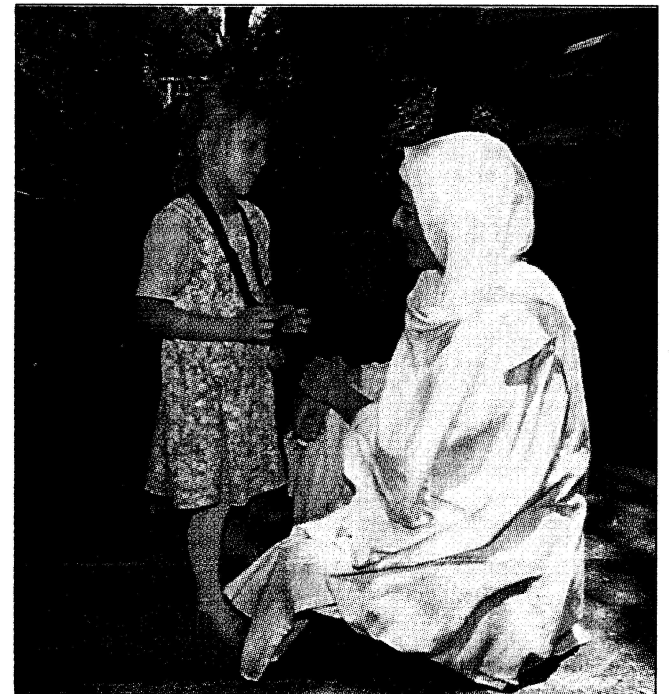
A contaminated water supply and lack of food and basic medicine have killed more than 1 million Iraqis since 1990, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization.

Kimball and her group hoped to alleviate some of the suffering, but the country's situation was worse than she had expected. The hardest part, she said, was visiting two pediatric hospitals near the Kuwait border.

"I sat in the hospitals holding the hands of the mothers and watching their children die," she said. The illnesses ranged from dysentery and typhoid to jaundice and rickets.

"We were all crying. If I'd had even a handful of antibiotics, I could have helped them."

SEE IRAQ ON B2



STEVE MALONE/NEWS-PRESS

Michelle Kimball checks out the school medal her daughter Sage won while she was away.

Local peace activist to plot her next move

IRAQ

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But Iraq's Ministry of Health required that the more than 13,000 pounds of medical supplies brought by Kimball's group be tested before being distributed to hospitals.

Kimball also visited a civilian bomb shelter the Iraqis said was destroyed during the 1991 U.S.

bombing. Kimball saw holes in the ceiling and bits of hair and blast marks on the wall.

She spent time with a woman who had created a shrine there for her nine children who died in the bombing. Like many other Iraqis she encountered, the woman was heartbroken but grateful for the kindness of Kimball and her companions.

While Kimball traveled from place to place — including one 28-hour bus

ride — her husband and daughter placed pins on a map to chart her progress from home.

"We would always talk about where you were or what you were doing," her husband, Dan, told her on Friday.

Since phone calls cost \$45 for five minutes, Kimball spoke to her family only four times, but they've been catching up since she returned.

"It feels great to be home with my

family," she said.

The traveling drained her energy and emotions, dried her skin and left a buzzing in her ears. She plans to spend a few days resting, and then plot her next course of action.

She hopes to write letters to government representatives asking that the sanctions be lifted and to start a friendly correspondence between local and Iraqi school children.

Curled up in an overstuffed chair in her peaceful Mission Canyon home, Kimball listened to the creek rush by. Although happy to be home, safe and well-fed, she said her Iraq experience has made her appreciate just being alive.

"It's so cushy and comfortable here in Santa Barbara," she said. "All this doesn't matter as much to me anymore."



■ HOMECOMING

AREA WOMAN
RETURNS FROM HER
'MERCY MISSION' TO
WAR-RAVAGED IRAQ

B1

SATURDAY

MAY 16, 1998