Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Thank God It's Wednesday: An American Family in Saudi Arabia
Maralyn G. Doyle
Sand Rose Books
978-0-615-66286-2
Four Stars (out of Five)

Insightful letters and annotated editing work together to reveal the challenges and joys of expatriate life in Saudi Arabia.

In *Thank God It's Wednesday: An American Family in Saudi Arabia*, Maralyn G. Doyle relays the culture shock she experienced during the four years she and her young family spent as expats in Saudi Arabia during the mid-1970s, told through the real-life letters she wrote to her family.

Doyle's voice is fresh and straightforward. Since the letters were written for family members rather than for publication, the book shares openly, honestly, and unpretentiously the challenges and surprises of living abroad. The letters talk about events and problems of all sizes—from how easy it is to get deported, to providing a good Christmas for a preschooler, to a rollicking party at the consulate, to the infrequency of trash pickup.

The title is a reference to the Saudi workweek that runs from Saturday to Wednesday. Because of Doyle's desire to connect with family, the letters explain events and ideas thoroughly and informally, and footnotes are added when necessary. For example, when Doyle writes, "There were orange and lemon trees, palm trees, feluccas on the canals, and people laboring in the fields," she adds a footnote: "A felucca is a small wooden boat with a triangular shaped sail."

The book is divided into parts representing the four years of the Doyle family's residence in Saudi Arabia. Each part begins with a short list of world events that took place during that time. Within each part, the letters are divided into chapters that begin with a short teaser of the topics and events covered in the chapter. The chapters themselves are simply the letters, each beginning with the date it was written. Because the letters have been edited to avoid

some details, they don’t have a salutation or closing. As a result, they read more like a journal or a personal historical record.

Additional material includes helpful glossaries of place names and basic Islamic terms. Hacker’s annotated bibliography can also benefit those who want to know more about Saudi Arabia. The book includes more than fifty pages of Doyle’s favorite recipes, which don’t feel relevant to the main content of the book.

The foreword is written by Edward A. Hacker, a professor at Northeastern University, who compiled and edited the book. His work annotating and organizing the material, as well as eliminating repetitive content in the letters, makes this volume an enjoyable read for anyone interested in Middle Eastern culture and the expatriate family life.

While Saudi Arabia has changed since the time the letters were written, Hacker assures readers that Doyle’s insights are still relevant: “The kingdom has changed, but the change has been physical, not cultural…It is still the Saudi Arabia of thirty years ago: conservative, puritanical, and completely bereft of civil liberties.”

Doyle’s insight and Hacker’s compilation and editing work together to make this an engaging read.

Melissa Wuske