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“STORIES FROM BAGHDAD U.S.A.”  
A DOCUMENTARY FILM ABOUT IRAQI IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES  
SET TO PREMIERE IN CALIFORNIA  
(Filmed in El Cajon, California)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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San Diego, CA – “Stories form Baghdad U.S.A.,” a documentary from filmmakers Kevin King and Alex Farnsley will be have its first public screening on Sunday, June 28, at 1:30 pm at the San Diego County Library El Cajon Branch. The project was filmed in El Cajon, a small town just east of San Diego. The screening is free to the public.

Stories of the war and turmoil in Iraq continue to appear on the pages of our newspapers and on the screens of our televisions, but even after years of coverage the story of the Chaldeans, the Catholics of Iraq, is seldom told.

As three generations of storytellers relate their experiences, we gain new insight into the harrowing circumstances that forced so many to flee their country. They share their struggles, successes, disappointments, and hopes for their future in America.

Kidnappings and murders have devastated a people who have been Christians since the second century A.D. Prior to the war there were over one million Chaldeans in Iraq, but today less than half that number remain.

Many of the recent refugees have barely escaped with their lives and many have suffered devastating physical and emotional scars. They have come to California to join the thousands who have come before them.

Daniel is 17 and is torn between his heritage and his desire to fit in with his American teenage friends. He struggles with the restrictions on dating in the Chaldean community and suffered the taunts of “terrorist” and “why don’t you go back to your own country,” from his classmates after the events of 9/11.

Ron tells us about his parent’s arranged marriage, and how a Chaldean tradition disrupted his mother’s funeral.

Besma describes her family's frightening flight from Iraq to keep her 11-year-old brother from being drafted into Sadaam's army to fight in the Iran Iraq War. If they had been caught her parents would have been hanged and the children imprisoned.

Mery's family fled to keep her young brothers from being drafted to fight the Coalition Forces in the Gulf War. Her parents have been unable to get meaningful employment here and one of her brothers has abandoned the family and moved away with his new American wife. She feels he is ashamed of his heritage and that he has become completely "whitewashed."

Salah was an art teacher in Baghdad and tells the story of how a large painting of Jesus survived the destruction of his family's belongings untouched.

Wadie is in his 80s. He left Iraq in 1947 to pursue the promise of the American Dream. He has had a successful career in California politics and served 28 years in the state Assembly and Senate.

Tommy is a hip-hop singer whose lyrics upset the Chaldean Church. His music video about the Iraq War has attracted worldwide attention.

"Stories from Baghdad U.S.A." will also shine a light on the strong family values and work ethic that contribute to American culture, and how that very culture threatens to erode the admirable heritage and traditions of the Chaldeans.

Kevin King and Alex Farnsley are documentary filmmakers who often focus on the problems young people have on the road to adulthood. Their work has earned several regional Emmy's, and their film, *Dark and Bloody Ground*, which chronicles the impact of a violent murder on two families in a small town in Kentucky, was recently awarded the coveted Gold Circle Award from the Caucus for Producers, Writers & Directors in Los Angeles. (additional biographical information: [www.baghdadusa.com](http://www.baghdadusa.com))

The film will be broadcast on the San Diego County Television Network in the fall of this year. The filmmakers will also pursue national and international television distribution and enter it in film festivals across North America and in the Middle East.

The 45-minute documentary was made with the cooperation of the Chaldean community of El Cajon, Chaldean-Middle Eastern Social Services, St. Peter Chaldean Catholic Cathedral, and San Diego State University.

Zina Salem and Besma Coda, of Chaldean-Middle Eastern Social Services, were instrumental in guiding Farnsley and King in making contacts within the community.

Chaldean-Middle Eastern Social Services is an organization offering cultural services to aid in maximizing the potential and success of Chaldean communities in San Diego County. CMSS's mission is to help Chaldean and Middle Eastern communities in San Diego to pave the way towards a better life through assimilation, education and

programs that will provide them with skills to become productive citizens of America. CMSS will aid in developing community skills and increasing cross-cultural understanding.

This project is made possible, in part, by a grant from the California Council for the Humanities as part of the Council's statewide California Stories Initiative. The Council is an independent non-profit organization and a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. For more information on the Council visit [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).

This program was funded in part by an award from the San Diego County Cable Television and Telecommunications Review Commission.

For more information on the project contact the filmmakers directly: [kingkut@mail.com](mailto:kingkut@mail.com) or [alex@filmalex.com](mailto:alex@filmalex.com)

[www.baghdadusa.com](http://www.baghdadusa.com) for photographs and clips.

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