

Nyhans Exit Afghanistan, ba Taklif

Letter from Chris Nyhan to PCV Friends

Sept. 13, 1971

Dear Fritz, Vince & Daoud, Jim, Ron, Bill & Rafiqs:

Salaam Aleikom! Chetor-i-staid? Khub-i-staid? Esab-Ketab chetor-ho-est?

Hello from Berkeley, land of freaks, communes and us. We have a tale of serendipity, calamity and laffs to regale youse, but probably this offering won't be as well received as the latest output from one L. Ferraro. How are you all? Are you making it down the home stretch? According to our calculations, *Jeshen-i-Istaqlal* has just faded, and with it glorious memories of host-country nationals whooping it up in traditional fashion at the local *Jeshns*. Has Pancho put in any more apocryphal appearances?

Before I ask more questions, I will give you a summation of our last weeks in Kabul, in case you didn't hear of our adventures in leaving our adopted *watan*. (I have told the story a few times since we got back to Amriko several weeks ago and for youse I don't want to leave out any details because I know you will enjoy (?) them vicariously). Anyway, after you guys went back up north following that party at Karte Char, we put in our last week or so at our jobs, tried to get exit visas in advance, then took off to Nuristan with the Thewli and the Brannons.

Part I: while I was still working at USIS, I started to get our exit visas in advance, as we were planning a trip to Nuristan and then leaving the country a few days later. (Just about that time, a new policy went into effect at the Ministry of foreign affairs (to be referred to afterward as MFA) which was that all correspondence received in any office there had to first be recorded at the archives (no laugh). Anyway, one day I typed up a letter on USIS letterhead to be signed by Ed Bernier, and with the translated copy in Farsi, to the cultural

affairs office of the MFA, requesting their help in getting us visas. I went to that office and was (what else) sent to the archives, where my letter was: first rejected because the passport #s were incorrectly transcribed on the Farsi version and then, lost in that office.

After a long wait, during which I observed the proper way to get things done (Louis Dupree was at the same place, with the same problem, and got around it by swearing at the *chaprustee* in English, Farsi and Pashtu), the letter came out and I took it to the cultural office, where I waited to speak with the modir. The modir told me he didn't know USIS or Bernier, and that I had to go to the Embassy and get a letter from them. Which I did and returned an hour later. When I got back, I had to wait another hour for modir to get around to me again; during the course of that hour, he called up the wife of the USIS Director and, in English, apologized for his wife's inability to attend a certain function that week. Anyway, when he hung up, he repeated that he didn't know USIS or Bernier or Brescia (the Director). At that juncture, he informed me that the letter I had brought from the embassy (which, incidentally, had to be brought to the archives and entered) was not correct because it did not have a number. I laughingly replied, "Well, does that mean I have to go back and get another letter?" You know what the dude answered. Back to the embassy. Get a number somehow (they didn't want to give me a motherin number). Back to the archives, back to the cultural office. They said come back tomorrow.

Mañana came and went (three times). Then I was sent to the economic department of the MFA to check on any duty-free goods on our PC passports (remember this — this will be a be crucial in a few weeks). They say I don't need anything from them. On to the visa office of the MFA. Where the god damn bac-cha tells me to come back tomorrow before I even show him my letter. Back to the archives. Back to the visa office. Tomorrow. Tomorrow. Tomorrow.

I asked the guy to make the visas good starting two weeks from that date. He refuses. (*Na mesha, natch.*) Anyway, he smiles, keeps the letter and tells me that since I am helping Afghanistan (and could I figure out any super, Western way to teach them English in my remaining two weeks – you all probably know this guy, is the one with classes who always speaks to all the *xarejis* in German, whether they know it or not). So, I leave the letter in his desk and we start to plan for Nuristan.

Part II: The Thewli and Brannons and us start to find a Land Rover for Nuristan (after the near debacle with Mr. Ali's Jeep in Hazarajat). Get this: Pat's former boss's (from AID cook's brother has a LR which we can have cheap (1200/day). We plan to exit Kabul on Monday at 9 AM. At 11 AM the driver comes and says he is not driving. At three he comes back, saying he hasn't found a driver, and if I want to help him look, maybe we can leave that night. Anyway, we look, we come up with a tank-i-teil driver who is willing to go.

We start out from Kabul, but he gets lost in Kabul (which to me, as an experienced Afghan safarer isn't a good sign). On the way to Jalalabad, we find out there are no breaks in the LR, and that the tank-i-teil driver is blind in the left eye, which comes close to killing us all (more than any other of many harried times in Afghanistan) on the way through Kabul Gorge. We spend a crazy night in J'bad at Frank Light's, who has a koochi gardener (with family).

We leave at dawn, and an hour from J'bad the LR breaks down the first time (loose battery connection). That gets fixed in an hour and we continue. Two hours later we stopped again (water in the spark gaps), and we have to help the halifa open the toolbox. Later that afternoon, just beyond Chako Serai we broke a spring clamp which had been broken at least once before, so D. Brannon had to ride a local bus (you can imagine what this is in Nuristan – not one of your Kabul-Mazar expresses, this is a real local) back to Chako Serai to try to find a welder to fix the clamp.

Miraculously he comes back that night and we set out the next afternoon, this time with me driving be-cause, in addition to being blind, the halifa really couldn't drive. Suffice to say that I (my days with the Boston Red Cab notwithstanding) managed to crack up the LR, snapping the rear axle in the process. Do we take the easy way out and try to limp back to Kabul and escape the nightmare which is Afghanistan or do we face adversity, seize the moment, and push on? Naturally we go back.

On the way back, however, I managed to lose our passports (just mine and Pat's) in a local chaikhana. But this isn't discovered till we reach J'bad, and the teahouse was four hours back and I'm sure the pass-ports will never be seen, even though I could offer a generous reward (yak shanzdai-pulee. I am very afraid since I have seen notice in Embassy warning lost pp can take three weeks to be replaced. The em-bassy is nice (unbelievable) and we get new ones the

next day. Now, we figure, I can merely go back to the visa office of the MFA, and picking up where affairs were, get exit visas in the a.m. and we are on our way, although the bandits who rented us the LR will be hot on our collective ass. Right? Wrong!

Part III: (where Chris and Pat go crazy and come close to murdering various modir, rayises, etc.). Upon returning to the German rayis at the visa section, I am informed he has lost the old letter. Well, I smile and wait hours while he eventually finds it, but, alas, since we have new passports he can't issue us the visas. What, I say. Do I have to start this whole idiotic process again? Of course. Only this time, the Af-ghan RGA ministries will swallow me with a vengeance.

I go back to the embassy and the archives, the cultural office, the archives, and back to the visa office, who tell me I have to go to the economic department again, since I hadn't had a letter from them the first time. They sent me to the Ministry of Commerce to check on the times we entered the country on the old passports to check to see if we had brought duty-free goods in with us. We get to the Ministry of Commerce on a Wednesday morning – timing has become important now as (1) We are avoiding the guys who rented us the LR, who want money for the axle, and the rent for two weeks, since the broken LR is still stranded in the hills of Nuristan and these cats know where we live and are bugging us every what waking minute; and (2) Tom Kelty and two other folks are leaving Af. at this time, and if we go with them, we can rent a taxi together to the Iranian border (their exit visas are only for 10 days and they only have about four days left).

So anyway, we get to the Min. Comm. on Wed. a.m. . We go in a bit nervous because we are now on our third set of passports (old regular ones, PC – which we surrendered when we quit PC – and new ones – to cover the ones which were lost). And on one set we had entered that we brought in a tape recorder, which we have sold and don't want to bring out. We asked them to check their records (which isn't out of line, since it is an archives ministry). They tell us we can't and ask to know where and when is the last time we entered the country. We tell them and they say we have to go to Torkham and get a maktub from them re our last entry. And then to the airport on the first entry (all the ones in between didn't seem to count for some strange reason).

We go through the ceiling at this point, and go to USIS and the embassy, appealing for help. The embassy says to baksheesh them. I tried. No go. In the space of an hour, what has seemed like an absurd idea (that we go to Torkham) now seems logical so we grab a taxi and start off for Torkham. Which in June is pretty fucking hot. We also have a time problem, as it is now 1 and we don't know how late the border office is open. We get there, and state our business. And the guy there is a real gigolo type (Habibia grad, natch). And says make yourselves comfortable, it'll probably take a few days at least to check on what we need. We smile and hope against hope that we can get in that day and back to Kabul that night as the prospect of spending a night in Torkham or J'bad isn't very nice in June. Somehow they managed to find what we need (that we entered with nothing and we go off to Kabul, confident that the next morning, Thursday, we can wrap it all up.

We get to the Ministry of Commerce at eight, but of course, no one else is there till nine. In the office we were in (which happened to be the auto assessment office, for some reason), the vital occurrence occurred – one person took pity on us and decided to help us. We didn't have to go to the airport (they thought because we hadn't brought in anything one time, we wouldn't have brought in anything the other time). This guy escorted us to at least 10 offices (some two and three times) and we got all we needed.

On to the Ministry of Interior visa office, where they tell us to come back Saturday. After repeated small talk, English lessons and promises to send half the staff English Farsi dictionaries from Amriko, they decided to see if they couldn't finish us by 12 (it's Thursday). At 11:45 nothing had happened and we got really pissed off and started to scream a bit, which did the trick. They rushed us through, but wait! We had to go to the polis to get the visa stamped.

We grab the hundredth taxi of the week, and hurried over there where they told us come Saturday. We pleaded and they helped. But alas the modir was at a funeral and we'd have to come back Saturday. One guy relented and told me where the moodier lived so I went there to have the PP's stamped, which miraculously, he did, so we could plan to leave early Sat. a.m.

But meanwhile, the bandits of the Land Rover rental were still to be reckoned with. That night they bugged us and threatened to go to the embassy and polis,

as they knew we were going to split soon. Pat had the good sense for us to split that night (at least in the early a.m. the next day) which we did, going to Alix Crandall's at 4:30 a.m. with a taxi full of junk. So we hid out there until the next day when we split Kabul, but didn't breathe until we cross the border at Herat 30 hours later. There is a lot to that sto-ry, but I can't do that one now.

MAKE SURE THE PC GETS YOUR EXIT VISA WHEN YOU LEAVE. YOU'LL LOSE YOUR MIND (AND MAYBE YOUR ASS TOO.)

So, that's our tale of woe and laughs of course. Here we are in crazy California drinking iced coffee with shir yakh, but we would swap for some Ghazni gold any time. We find out here there's nothing we real-ly missed in Amriko and a few things we really miss about Afgh. now. We traveled for seven weeks in East and West Europe, then a month with family, and we've been here for about two weeks feeling strange everywhere, but especially here. Vince, we haven't looked up Gospozha Presniakova yet, but maybe in the future. There's a lot of good sounds (informally) on campus, and think Daoud's flute would kill 'em. Fritz, we have the black box aks from Baghlan in our head, where it probably belongs. We think of a lot of good times, lots of good talk, and lots of good dope when we think of youse. We'll be interested to hear how you all are doing. Funny stories will do us good too. If you can, Fritz, send us a copy of the Louis tape. We'd love to hear it.

No word from Templemans, Chris B. or Thewlises, but we expect to see any/all of them in sometime future.

Chris