Peace Corps

Afghanistan

1964 -1978

The Importance of Friendship

By Ron Dizon

All those years ago when our roads crossed in the Land of the Afghans, we were fortunate enough to share a life experience that very few could ever imagine. It was the time of our lives where adventures and challenges were commonplace and lifelong friendships were created, unbound by time and sealed by the reflection of Peace Corps' Mission.

Spanning a period of 52 years and getting together with old friends is one of the greatest occurrences offered in life's personal passage. On October 10, 2017, sixty-four Returned Peace Corps Afghanistan Volunteers convened in San Diego, California to renew old friendships, share past stories and fill the hiatus of years with personal stories of their lives after Afghanistan.

These are their Stories

Noon Gun
Kabul, Afghanistan

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Mir Bacha Kot, Afghanistan

Journal of a teacher in Afghanistan
August – September 1970
By
Bill Mittendorff

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The richest love is that which submits to the arbitration of time.
- L. Durrell
I have the fortune to have been befriended by a poet.
Until we come together again, Bill, peace.
- Hugh Coffman
October 1969

Foreword

I was one of many who, inspired by JFK's "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country", joined the Peace Corps upon graduation from college. A week of orientation and evaluation in Washington DC, preceded my arrival in Afghanistan on November 8, 1969. Over three months of cultural orientation, intensive Farsi lessons and practice teaching in the southern city of Kandahar followed. At its completion in January of 1970, I was assigned to a high school in a small town thirty kilometers north of Kabul known locally as "Sarai Khwaja" and more formally as "Mir Bacha Kot." What follows are very slightly edited entries from my journal while teaching there.

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Saturday August 15, 1970

2 eggs - 4 afghanis
2 drawstrings - 6
thread -1
6 buttons - 1

Afghan dress was easier to find and more comfortable than Western, so I had new peron and tambons made and picked them up in Kabul yesterday. I have been wearing them since around the house instead of western dress. It took 7 m of cloth to make them; it's like walking around in a tent.

Sunday August 16

Some days I am sure I will be carried out of this country in a straitjacket. I fled this afternoon from my rooms in Mir Bacha Kot) to Charikar, fifty km to the north, to visit fellow volunteers Kerry Brace and Vince Marsicano. Good company. The simple fact that I could travel outside my village was a source of relief. It has been too easy to shut myself away in my room after school each day.

Monday August 17

This is somebody's birthday, but I don't know whose. I am also feeling much better. Morning is the most critical time of the day, and this morning loneliness did not find me. The Afghans call it "deq-poste-khana" (longing for home) and abhor being alone. In informal settings they will often express sympathy that I am so far from my family.

I was studying my Farsi lessons with my friend and fellow teacher Naim in one of the empty class-rooms this afternoon when I looked up to the door and felt Janet walk in. It surprised me that the sensation of her presence was both so sudden and so real, and also that her presence was a source of warmth and comfort. We have both been wondering about the change these two years will bring us.

Front gate of Lycée Mir Bacha Khan

Tuesday August 18

All of us teachers from Lycée Mir Bacha Khan went to the Kabul airport this afternoon to greet our principal Ahmad Shah back from Beirut, where he had attended a conference. There weren't enough seats on the bus we had rented, so a few of the teachers had to stand. Spirits were high. They goosed each other all away to Kabul and back.

Thursday August 20 - Independence (Jeshen) vacation begins
I spent a week in Kabul visiting friends and left with things to hold onto and store away for a while:

- Steve Thewlis' joyful guitar playing
- Janet's women's lib article
- How much Khan Zaman reminds me of Mike Riegle.
- Mantu at the Shah Mahmud restaurant in Kabul.
- Reading the news from America in Chris Bateman's Rolling Stone
- Sunset with a bunch of good people at the Bala Hissar fort overlooking the city of Kabul.
- All the festive lights strung out across the avenues during Jeshen
- Endless rumination about my plan to apply for conscientious objector draft status. Intimations of a goal off in the distance, somewhere past and beyond the draft, but invisible to me now.
- David and Allison talking - relaxed and happy.
- Kunduz melons - bright and fragrant
- Bill Mooney's outbursts of anger and frustration

Tuesday September 1 – School resumes
They found my dog about a week ago. A guy came by the house just as I was leaving (on the 20th) and told my caretaker Abdullah that he had seen it. He would show it to us if we gave him 100 afs. I gave him the 20 I had promised to anyone who found it but demanded that Abdullah pay the remainder because it was his

younger son Raoul's fault that he got out of my compound.

After I had left for school, Raoul went down to see it and tried to get it back. The farmer who now had the dog said he bought it from a guy in Kabul. Once it was impressed upon him that a good dozen people, including several of the teachers and the akim sahib (local sheriff) himself, knew the dog, and after the akim sent a soldier along to make sure he acted properly, he handed it back. So I've got my dog again. Which is nice. His name is Gorg (wolf).

dog food 152 afs
lunch 12 ½
eggplant 4
onions 1
yogurt 8
total = 179

Today feels like the first day of fall. There were bright morning clouds over the Hindu Kush. The sun is notably lower in the sky than it was when I left before Jesh-

en. The dust is still here, but the wind is now northerly and carries with it the perfume of change.

Dawn, Hindu Kush from my house

Wednesday September 2

Pen 15
Ruler 2
½ tomatoes

I am finishing Durrel's Clea, an extraordinary book. I borrowed it from Donna, having read everything of interest to me in the official Peace Corps book locker.

Many of the teachers live in villages too far to allow a daily commute, so have rented small rooms in Sarai Khwaja where they stay for the school week and return to their families Thursday evening. At the sarai I found the mowen (the assistant principal, Abdul Wakil), Amanullah and Ghollum Ali eating almonds. We finished them off and started on grapes brought from the vines behind the school. The mowen invited me to dinner at the school but feigned surprise that he had no money and then asked to borrow 10 afs. We laughed and both agreed it was a ri-

diculous way to invite someone to be your guest.

Teachers at my school. Mowen far left, Amanullah third from left, Sardar Khan in white coat.

I then invited the three of them over to my house for tea and, after sunset, we returned to the school to wait for the chaprastis (resident caretakers) to fix the meal. We hadn't waited long – sitting on the broken-down couch in the mowen's 6 x 10 room – when Naim arrived in good spirits and asked us to go back with him to his home. He had not been to school for the first two days and I heard later that he had taken his whole family to Kabul for a wedding. He had returned alone – I don't know why – and asked us to keep him company.

chaprastis

One of the chaprastis brought the dinner of peppers, eggplant and tomatoes up to Naim's house from the school. It was quite an enjoyable evening, and the conversation ranged widely. I learned the Persian names for the planets from Ghollum Ali and, despite the difficulties with language, we attempted to talk about the disappearance of tradition in the face of modernization.

Whenever the mowen makes a joke about me he talks very fast. His audience of other teachers laugh uproariously. Although I never understand, we both end up laughing because I mimic his rapid-fire delivery to his face.

Thursday September 3
Pedagogy: Energy is as important as preparation in daily confronting the pupils with learning.

Lunch 14 afs choinaki, (stew in a broken teapot)

Friday September 4
Roz-e-joma, our day off

Taxi and bus to Kabul – 25 afs

After getting my mail from the Peace Corps office in Shar-i-Nau, I went to see Chris and Pat Nyhan at their home in Karte Char, having been asked to return a tape of theirs by Chris Bateman. I had never visited them before and, as it will probably turn out, may never be able to visit them again. Chris and Pat have decided to quit after winter vacation. They don't like their jobs at Kabul's Habibia High School,

which they attribute to (1) the prevalence of bribery among the students, and (2) cynicism among the members of the faculty. As they tell it, due to Habibia's reputation as the capital city's preeminent high school, it attracts large numbers of rich but disinterested students. The teachers and administration are unable to resist the temptation of augmenting their meager government salaries by selling grades.

What's more depressing is that the students, aware of their teachers' weakness, retain no respect for them. Pat related an ugly incident from midterm examinations. Noticing two students copying, she walked up to them and seized their papers. The uproar caused by this attracted the Proctor who had been helping her. The argument became heated and several more students rose in protest. The students laid hands on the Proctor and, as Pat related, they almost came to blows. In sum, they feel that teaching at Habibia is a joke.

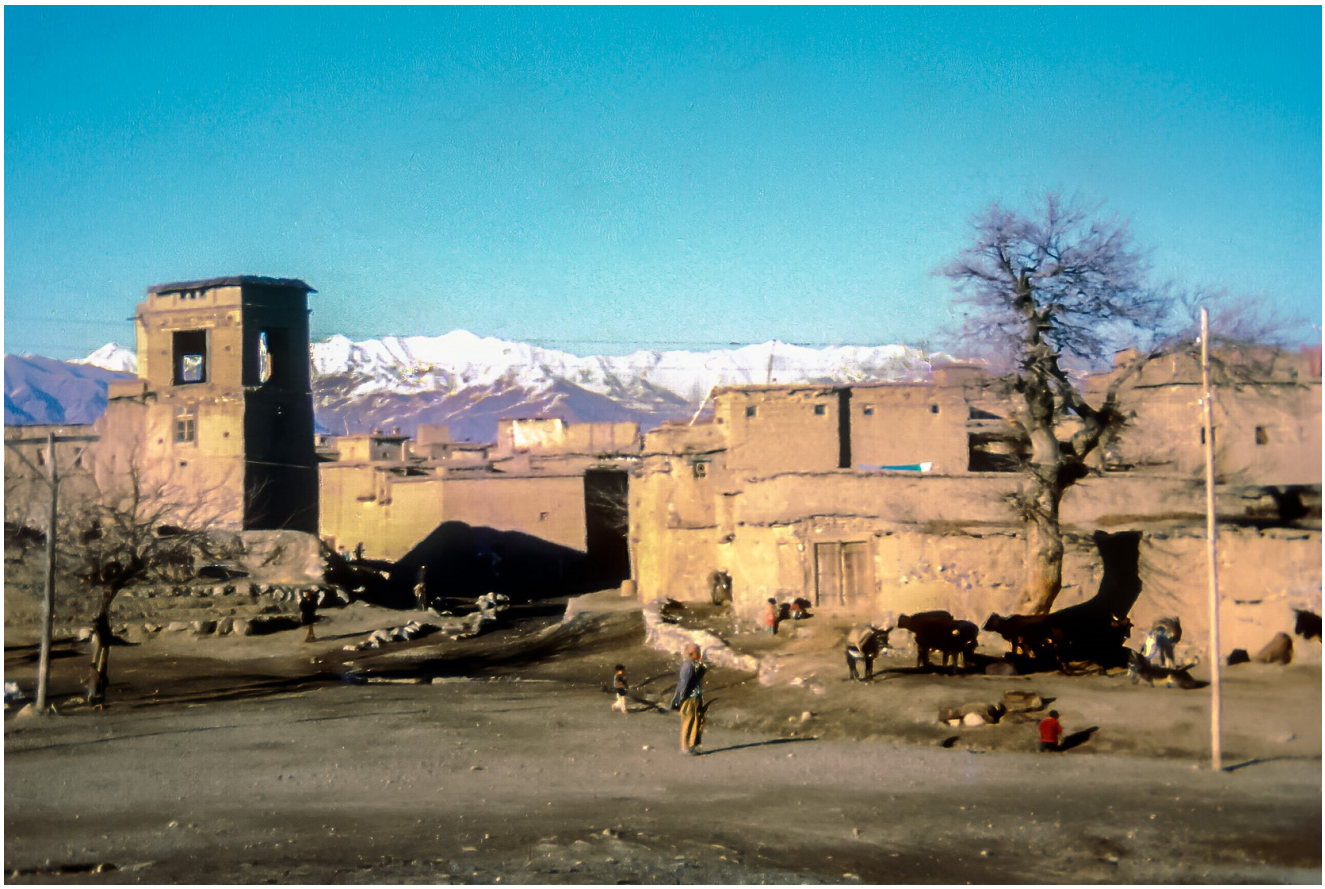
They surmised – as best anyone can imagine a world outside his own experience – that they might have found teaching in one of the provinces much more rewarding. But set against any hopes they might have had for a transfer was the Peace Corps' institutional reluctance to transfer anyone. And they admitted to a growing desire to move on to something new: Chris wants to get a Masters degree in Russian in England and they see nothing to keep themselves here.

Before dinner we listened to music and they introduced me to Savoy Brown and Boz Skaggs, which I enjoyed very much. The most surprising thing about the evening was how we became involved in a lengthy, good-humored, almost academic discussion. Chris asked, "if you had to pick 10 books to take with you to the moon which would you take?" And we kept at it for at least an hour.

I left Kabul in late morning and by one o'clock had arrived in Charikar, sixty kilometers north of Kabul, intending to fulfill a somewhat vague promise to visit Ghollum Ali at his house. I passed the afternoon in pleasant conversation with fellow Peace Corps volunteers Kerry Brace and Vince Marsicano who, like the Nyhans, were in cycle 2 and arrived in Afghanistan just a few months after I did.

About 5:30 I decided to at least make a desultory attempt to locate Ghollum Ali's house. I did not want to be treated to dinner because he is not a wealthy man – making only his teacher's salary of 1500 Afghanis a month or so. I often had trou-

ble reconciling the 3500 per month we were allowed. The city of Charikar revealed itself to be much bigger than I had believed and finding his home – “near the mosque”– took me to three of the 20 mosques in town before I could find someone who could guide me. We walked up and down innumerable lanes so narrow that the mud brick houses rising above them two or three stories blotted out the sun a good hour before sunset.



It was quite dark by the time I knocked at the door, but Ghollum Ali himself answered and greeted me warmly. He and his son Saxi ushered me into the guest room. All the while he chuckled, and his broad smiles exhibited the many missing teeth in his round face. After the customary formalities of asking after my health, he inquired gently about why I had not come early in the day. I had forgotten, or perhaps never really known, that the meal was prepared especially for me and served at eleven that morning. His family waited the good part of the morning at the sarai (bus and truck stop) to meet me. My heart sank in shame. I protested feebly that I had not heard him indicate any special time and had not expected anything more than a cup of tea. Even so, I knew that my protestations and apologies could never excuse the trouble I had caused. I was once again made aware of how ignorant I was of my place in Afghan society and the responsibilities this en-

tailed.

Thankfully, the warm hospitality of Ghollum Ali and his family consoled me. The evening - or what was left of it - was quite amiable. He opened his trunks of books and displayed them proudly: astronomy, meteorology, geography, history, religion and grammar were there. While geography is his main subject at Lycee Mir Bacha Khan back in my town, he was curious about many subjects. He said that he felt obligated to know where to be able to find the answer to any question the students might pose. I have seen few individuals so in love with knowledge as he. Abdul Ghafoor “Fizeek” (nicknamed for his subject, physics), who had also waited most of the day for me, arrived shortly after Ghollum Ali had revealed his printed treasures. He brought with him a melon, which we enjoyed over some pleasant but desultory, due to the hour, conversation.

The degree of hospitality I enjoyed that evening was typical, and the Afghans prided themselves upon it. I enjoyed the welcome I received and hope to make more such visits. I find, however, that only a few other volunteers here are on such friendly terms with their fellow teachers at their schools. that might allow socializing after school. Perhaps it is the novelty of a foreigner’s presence at their provincial school and my relative isolation from the community of foreigners that allows this to happen. I am aware of my good fortune.

Thursday September 17

I went to the gardens in Paghman today with my 11A class. I had suggested earlier in the week that we have a picnic before the weather got any colder, and they wasted no time in arranging it. Fifteen students and I arrived after dark, carried our pots, food, blankets and wood to the end of a broad concrete plaza. We settled down and set up our camp at the foot of a pool that reflected the snowy Hindu Kush looming above.

A tambour player, whom I didn't know, had come along and was accompanied by Zainullabuddin on the drum and Anjamuddin on the flute. Sayeed Chaju Shah danced for us and then, during a pause in the music, plopped down in front of Poyenda Mohammed, grinned, and pulled him into the center. Chaju sat down in his place and Poyenda danced.

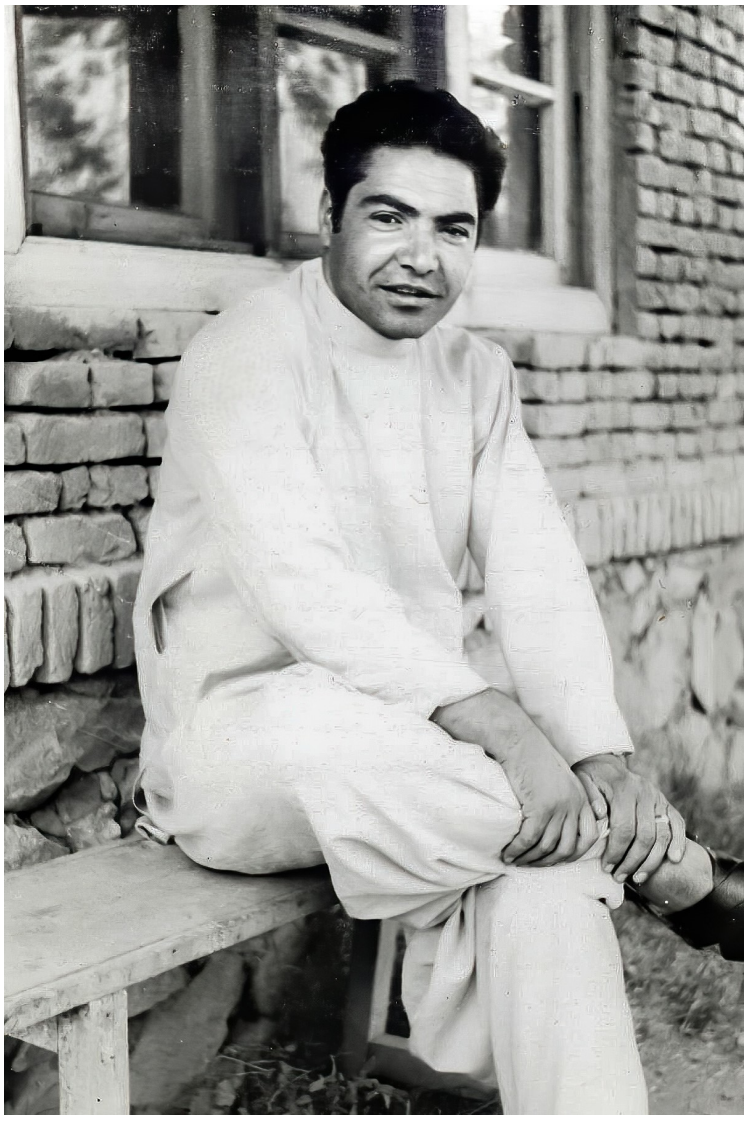
Munir was in charge of cooking the pilau so he and his team stayed behind while we took a short walk. We found a spot overlooking the lights of Kabul below. A few clouds were in the sky and the light from the moon, almost full, flashed through them as they passed over us and away from the mountains. We returned to find that three foreigners had arrived and were engaged in conversation with those who had stayed behind, happily practicing their English. We invited them to eat with us, which they were delighted to accept. They were following the world-traveler circuit overland from Europe to India and had only been in Afghanistan for two days. I am sure that the music, dancing, food, and playfulness of my students amazed them.

Around twelve the travelers left us but, shortly after we had pulled our blankets around us, the quiet was interrupted by the intrusion of a *malang*, or crazy beggar, dressed in rags. He stumbled noisily among the sleeping students and shouted insults at all and sundry. We fed him, laughed at him, and he soon left. We tried to sleep again but he reappeared. Tempers soon became frayed, and Sayeed Mir Jan became especially annoyed at the insults. In frustration, he struck the ma-

lang who, greatly offended, left again. At his third and final visit, the students only laughed at his insults, consoled him for being manhandled, and finally hustled him off into the darkness.

On the way back to our village the next day, Mohammed Rasoul asked if I might not want to live with him and his family. The students and teachers had often expressed to me their concern that I was so far away from my own family. Being alone, in this culture, is a terrible thing. I felt honored by the sincerity of his offer and touched by his concern but declined with as much gentleness as I could muster. I knew that being his guest would involve becoming a member of his family and therefore (1) compromise my position as his teacher and (2) compromise the freedom of movement and activity I had begun to enjoy.

Wednesday September 23



Naim invited me, Ghollum Ali, Siddiq & Sardar to lunch: good things like pilau, shurwa, boroni, yogurt and salad. Then he brought out local grapes and tea with sweets. What a spread it was!

Just after lunch, and quite unexpectedly, I was informed that an American had arrived from the north and went out to the road to greet him. My Peace Corps friend Chris Bateman had arrived with bag in hand and stopped on his way to Kabul.

It's always a big shock to have another foreigner in my village. During summer vacation at the end of July, Bill Mooney and Francie Williams came up together to visit me. As a single, uncovered woman, Francie created quite a stir, although I never heard much from the community. All three of us could sense a quiet tension as I walked through the bazaar with her that day, and I wondered again how a woman could handle the stress of living in a place like this. I took them both down to show them my school. Finals were going on and the mowen and a few of the teachers were there. We fed the two of them grapes and tea.

Bill and Francie

Everyone except the mowen sat there stone-faced and silent. All the big, noisy men with their dirty jokes were transformed by Francie into a bunch of awkward schoolboys attending their first mixed party. I think they were both relieved when they took the taxi back to Kabul.

Chris asked to stay the night and I was happy to have the company, despite the poverty of my hospitality. My house is one room and much too small for two peo-

ple. I can't really entertain anyone here because there is nothing to do but talk, and because I have nothing nice to offer them in the way of interesting food or entertainment. Chris paid no mind to his surroundings, however, and we talked about all kinds of interesting things: hospitality, John True (our immediate supervisor), loneliness, music, what our friends were doing in America, and vacation plans for winter break. It had been about a month since I had had a decent English conversation, and it was truly delightful. After listening to some new tapes: "Boz Skaggs," Dylan's "Self-Portrait," Van Morrison's "Moondance," and Delaney and Bonnie, Chris put on a spoken tape with news related by the friend who had sent him all this music. Chris's friend talked about Stanford, Nixon and the draft, the changing mood of the nation, getting married and finding a job in N. J. – all the things I might be doing in two years. It seemed very distant. Like the moon.

Thursday September 24

Swept through my classes briskly, obtained permission to be absent from classes on Saturday, caught a taxi, and joined Chris in Kabul at three. I found that Jim Carlson (cycle 2, teaching in Gardez) was coming with us to Logar province to visit Jim and Donna Templeman. After a brief visit to the Peace Corps office where Dr. Rollins gave me three shots – gamma globulin for hepatitis, cholera vaccine and a tine (TB) test – we left and arrived an hour and a half later in a town south of Kabul on the way to Gardez known as Baraki Barak. The sun had set just before our arrival, silhouetting the long, low mountain to the west. One of the two planets we saw in the now dark, clear sky was exception-ally bright, leading me to suppose it Venus.

As we looked for the Templeman's house, Jim told stories of Gardez, where he was teaching, with a dryness and droll amusement that heightened my awareness of us as strangers in this time and space. "One tribe of Pashtuns invaded the village of another tribe when the men were away and kidnapped the women. They must have had a ball with them. So the other tribe got itself together and made a surprise attack on their village. There was some kind of advance warning, and everyone who could, ran away and hid. Then, when the others got there all they could find were the children and old people. They killed everyone they could get their hands on. When the governor heard about it he said that this was too much

(even for Paktia, I guess). So he called in some jets and bombed the village of the tribe that killed the people. The governor was second in command in the Army."

Friday September 25

The next morning Donna made us all pancakes, which I hadn't enjoyed for several months. It was very relaxing to be in a family, and the morning passed in conversation. Eventually, we decided on a picnic further out in the countryside, so we walked to the bazaar in search of a gaudi (horse cart) to carry us to a village that was rather distant but, John assured us, worth seeing. Somehow we never got there and after dismissing our gaudi, stopped for tea, melon and pomegranates. Feeling refreshed, we walked back to their village. While the weather was pleasantly cool, the bright autumn sunlight warmed us, and we enjoyed the clattering of the yellowing poplars along the irrigation ditches as we strolled between the now-fallow fields.

Gaudi

Saturday, September 26

The Templemans are one of three couples that will probably leave Afghanistan after vacation. The Strohs, Chuck and Mary, want to go to graduate school. Chris and Patricia Nyhan have the same plan. John suggested that married couples might need different things than single persons and have different challenges in this strict Muslim culture. He admitted further that they may not be as willing to

experiment, or to keep an experiment in living going when it no longer promises much.

Chris, Jim and I returned to Kabul and went first to the post office customs clerk where Chris was to pick up a cheap wristwatch his mother had sent. Needless to say, the watch was not there, but we did run into some interesting people while waiting interminably for them to inform us of the fact. A guy and a girl from New York, both very hip, were mailing stuff back home: postins (lambswool coats), posters and purses. The only thing I remember them saying was that their trip was an around the world package deal where they got a year and a choice of itinerary for $1280. The idea of a trip around the world ignited my imagination. These travelers seemed to be ambassadors from a world of unimaginable pleasures, excitement, mobility and freedom, so unlike this last long, slow albeit pleasant weekend in Baraki Barak.

Sunday, September 27

I returned last night to my village and little house north of Kabul. Naim, the dear soul, let me stay for tea and conversation even though he had guests himself.
1# tom 2 ½ afs
1# pot 2 ½
1 # pomegranate 4
Wednesday, September 30

John True stopped by unexpectedly for and visited for an hour or so. I enjoyed talking to him and was more relaxed than at his first visit a couple of months prior. He brought news of those in the north: David and Alison in Taloqan are happy with their site and their neighbors, but not their jobs; Dave Moats is bored to death in Khanabad and would transfer to Faizabad next year if the Peace Corps and the Royal Government of Afghanistan would let him. Francie, the only single woman in our group, chafed against the constraints of the life she must lead as a model of decorous femininity.

Thursday, October 1

I struggled through a letter to long-lost Hugh, from whom I had not heard in some

time, hoping as I wrote that he would ignore the clumsiness of my words, ignore my feigned contentment, and respond with news of Minnesota and my old friends. I found no mail at the Peace Corps office, but there met Denise Behar and was introduced to another Chris, this man a Peace Corps who had completed his contract in India and was heading home overland.

During tea inside the Kamran Restaurant, I invited the two of them and two other British tourists up to my home in Sarai Khwaja the next day. Chris had been at Denise's during Jeshen and had wanted to see an Afghan village, but had never made any plans.

Bought margarine, jelly, milk & curry powder.

Friday, October 2

The four of them arrived late in the morning. Colin and Carolyn, the two Brits, were on their way back to England and had only a short time to spend in Afghanistan. The chartered bus they were riding, however, had struck and killed a motorcyclist and seriously injured his passenger in Jalalabad. They and twenty others were held over pending the results of the police investigation.

They enjoyed tea and the excellent local grapes at my house, then we walked through the bazaar, along the highway and down to see my school, Lycée Mir Bacha Khan. They were impressed by the fact that the school had concrete toilets, but (for the lower grades anyway) mud classrooms. It being Friday, school was not in session, and we continued east past the school to the nearby village of Karenda, where I had promised a visit to a former student.

Rooftops in Karenda

I had first visited Karenda one quiet August day when, out in the countryside for an aimless stroll, I came upon Khwaja and his friends, equally aimless. He and his friends insisted, as Afghans will, on offering me refreshment. He took me to meet his young brothers and sisters, then served mulberries and yogurt sweetened with sugar. We sat up on the roof, within reach of cooling breezes.

While I had enjoyed my afternoon, I later heard from my fellow teachers that I should not mix too freely with students or others beneath my status. Sardar Khan, a neighbor of Khwaja, and respected elder teacher at my school, was the most critical. I was sensitive to these opinions, as I needed to be, but Khwaja had, some weeks before, transferred to Qalai Muratbeg high school and, as he was no longer my student I did not feel I could refuse to visit him on the grounds that it would compromise my impartiality as his teacher.

These concerns were soon proved moot, when Gul Mohammed, a cadet from the Kabul military academy, whose father was a rich landowner, met the four of us on the same path to Karenda. I had met Gul Mohammed previously. Mohammed Wasim, a fellow English teacher, and I were leaving school one afternoon and were passing through the bazaar when he asked with a boldness brash even by Afghan standards, if would serve him lunch. I replied by asking if it was an Afghan custom for guests to invite themselves to dinner. The cadet laughed, as did Wasim somewhat more cautiously, but I believed that my point was taken, and ordered

kebab for all of us. After lunch, I took them home for tea and served them some rice pudding I had just made.

I wasn't especially happy to meet Gul Mohammad again, who had proven so abrupt and intrusive at our first interaction. After brief pleasantries, he asked what our plans were for the afternoon. I replied that I had told Khwaja Ahmad that I would pay him a visit. He pointed out that I hadn't said I would bring four other people and asked me if this might not be an inconvenience for him. I had to admit that he was right. Gul Mohammed suggested that we accompany him to his father's home, which was not far off, and partake of his hospitality. It certainly seemed to be the best plan, and after a brief debate within myself, we followed him.

The guest room he ushered us into impressed us all. It was on the third story of a huge mud brick home with windows open to three sides and views to the back garden, the vineyards and the groves of poplars. It was luxuriously verdant, and the breeze brought us the scent of gul-e-patani (petunias). As we relaxed upon the cushions, Gul Mohammed brought out his collection of guns. The old, engraved, double-barreled shotgun he showed us was kept loaded for thieves, he said, but what really fascinated Chris was a pair of British percussion-cap muskets. These muzzleloaders were manufactured in1860 and each was stamped with the British crown and the initials "VR." He said they still used all three of them every year. (Note: The Afghans were very proud that they had routed the British in three wars between 1839 and 1919. Many of them had rifles of the same vintage as those of Gul Mohammad.)

The general himself joined us when lunch was brought in shortly thereafter. I was amused by the reactions of Colin and Carolyn as they sat uncomfortably on the cushions and attempted to eat the shurwa, pilau and boiled eggs without utensils. They were good-natured and our host soon brought them spoons. To my surprise, Sardar Khan, solicitous and friendly, joined us halfway through lunch. It appears he was the general's cousin. I wondered later if he had learned of my visit to his village and conspired with Gul Mohammad to waylay me before I could meet Khwaja.

After tea, grapes, walnuts and raisins we were all delightfully groggy, but it was

getting on towards late afternoon and the four travelers had a dinner to attend back in Kabul, so we cut it shorter than any of us wanted. Just before we departed, we stepped into the garden, where Gul Mohammed picked a good 15 pounds of grapes for them to take back to Kabul. It was a wonder to see the amazement on their faces. Just before saying goodbye they took a few pictures of the old general, cadet Gul Mohammed and the general's other son and daughters.

I was disappointed that their visit was so short, because I had never really been able to show them my home, the public garden, or the view of the long, fertile Kohdaman Valley from the hills at the bottom of the village. Their visit was refreshing because I saw the village and my life here through the wondering eyes of newcomers and amusing because, well, because foreigners are such strange people.

Tuesday, October 6, 1970

For some time, the teachers at my school had been discussing my need for an Afghan name. Today a group assembled to give me a name that would fit me as a foreigner and, perhaps even more important, a non-muslim. Wakil ("mowen"), Naim, Khwaja Saheb, Rahim, Shah Mahmud, Ghollum Ali, Sidiq and Sardar convened. The naming ceremony was to be at an informal gathering in the park and was to be followed by a party at my house. I figured that this was a good deal. After all, my nickname "Bill" meant "shovel" in Farsi, and I was curious to see what they might come up with, considering that their biggest challenge would be avoiding a Muslim name.

It took only a few minutes of discussion to decide that my Afghan name would henceforth be "Soor Gul", meaning "red flower" in Pashto. Sardar even wrote it out for me on a paper that I held for the photo.

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Afterword

Near the end of my second year of teaching in late 1971, before final exams, I was asked to transfer from teaching to a new program called Food for Work, a joint effort by USAID and their counterparts in Germany and Russia. A severe drought had affected central and western Afghanistan and this program was developed to help distribute food to the distant provinces. But that is another story, better told by others. I left Afghanistan April 20, 1972.

I want to express my immeasurable gratitude to President Kennedy and to the Peace Corps who made my adventure possible. To my parents and grandmother

Gail Rogers Likely I owe my appreciation of travel and adventure. My fellow volunteers, without whose example and encouragement I could not have endured, taught me humor and courage in adversity. Most of all I must express my profound appreciation to the people of Afghanistan, whose kindness, respect, and compassion towards a stranger in their midst changed my life forever.

Recollections of Urozgan, Winter, 1971-72
by
John True III
Peace Corps Associate Director
Food for Work

Preface – The fragment of a story that follows is based on a letter I wrote to my wife, Pam True, in January, 1972 from Urozgan, Afghanistan. At the time I was one of two Peace Corps Associate Directors helping to run the Food for Work Program. The other was Al Nehoda.

I have edited out some personal passages and added explanatory foot-notes where appropriate. After almost 45 years I have very little accurate recollection of what actually took place, and even the letter may have had some inaccuracies. It ends abruptly, I guess because I suddenly had to send it on out to Kabul where Pam was. So, I have added a bit of a postscript to try to wrap up the events using my porous recollection and a calendar that I kept at the time which I still have.

I seek to share this because the immense difficulty of the task facing Food For Work Peace Corps Volunteers during that winter comes through a little bit in what I told Pam at the time. Later in 1972, the new Director, John Guyer, convened a meeting of all of us Food For Work types, I guess for the purpose of reviewing the whole project and making decisions about how to go forward. During that meeting I recall that he invited a couple of Americans (I think) who had recently traversed the Hazarajot with a camera

(and a donkey or some damn thing) and who wanted to describe the effects of the famine to us.

As if we needed that instruction. They were, in my view, condescending and superficial in their descriptions of the corrupt, non-responsive Afghan bureaucracy, and clueless about our attempts to effect change by working with it. "You all are part of the problem," they seem to be saying. I may have felt it necessary to give them a piece of my mind at the meeting. Others probably did as well. But, as I look back on it now, the truncated description of a few days during the winter up in the mountains that I had sent Pam made my point better than any arguing I may have done at the time. So, quiet belatedly, here is what I *should* have said:

Kandahar, Tuesday, December 28, 1971 – I said goodbye to Pam (who had come down to Kandahar with us) and got into the truck with Al (Nehoda), David Moats, Fritz Laurenovics and Ed Crawford, PCVs. With Eid Mohammed at the wheel (and believing himself to be in command, we set off north and a little bit east toward the mountains. As we crossed a wide desert, Al I got into it about the "morality" of this [Food For Work] program in general and the particular project we were now setting out to accomplish.1 I like to argue with him because he is so smart, but takes extreme positions. A real laissez-faire type: "mind your own business and let others attend to theirs." No causes. Way more passive than me. We thrusted and parried to while away the time with the volunteers adding their often pungent observations

At the moment, I really can't articulate a clear idea of what it actually was we were supposed to be doing. I know that a Peace Corps volunteer, Paul Soderberg, and a German volunteer Roman Tyspar, were up in the remote mountains of Uruzgan Province working on Food for Work projects. They needed help of some kind, and Peace Corps Director Lou Mitchell had assigned Al and me and the volunteers to drive up there and report on and/or rectify the situation. As this account makes clear, we did neither.

We stopped in the middle of the desert at a place where they were making charcoal and where we found tea and some eggs swimming in grease. Al started that game, "my aunt Betty likes green but not red."

By evening we got to Tirinkot and found the hotel. Rather a large town where there seemed to be a lot going on. Al and I went to see the *mustufi* but were deflected by the Chief of Construction who suggested that we come the next day in *"wacht-i-rasmi."* We went to a tea house for a desultory meal and returned to the hotel where we were all in one room. Polack jokes occupied us until we went to sleep.

Tirinkot, Wednesday, December 29, 1971 – The construction guy came while we were having tea and summoned us to see the *mustufi*. But he (the *mustufi*) was at the airport (Tirinkot just got scheduled flights), so we went to the Director of Agriculture, who is also the Director of Provincial Development. This guy had seen Fritz in Kabul, but Al took over and in his flawless but strangely hesitant Farsi and explained our mission. Then word came that the Acting Governor was back and we got back into the truck and went to his office. Again, the same scene. We looked fairly strange, I'm sure: Fritz in his Nuristani hat, Daoud with his red beard and secondhand overcoat, Ed looking moth-eaten and me, no doubt, looking very surly. The *mustufi* looked like Sutano, the nurses' driver, except less educated. His worn *karakul* hat was sideways on his head and his overcoat just barely concealed his *peron-i-tambon*. But again Al explained the whole business so that it made sense to them. They called ahead to Gezab to say we were coming and promised to come themselves the next day and to help us in whatever way possible. These formalities accomplished, we set off again. Eid informed me that he

couldn't fill up the gas tanks without my "advice" for some reason, so we were delayed getting petrol, but this didn't really bother me. More discussion in the car about the obvious futility of what we were doing. Since I had disagreed with Mitchell originally about all of us going, I was uncomfortable defending the whole business, but I did my best.

Darkness fell as we were winding down through a long, tree filled gorge. The moon was spectacular against the jagged rocks, and I was happy. New territory, a sense of something solid and important ahead and people I liked to do it with. We called on the sub-governor when we arrived, and Al went through his talk again. The poor *hakim* was newly assigned, *deq* as hell, and obviously overshadowed by the *khan,* in whose house, across the Helmand River we were to stay. He gave us weak encouragement, the impression that he didn't know much when we asked him what villages were in his area, and Fritz a laugh when he said "it is good that you have come to see the difficulties of the government servants." We left Eid and the truck on the south side of the river in the bazaar and were escorted to the river bank, put on horses and led across.

One of the travel games in which Al specialized. I have no recollection what it involved.

As my horse (fortunately a patient, not to say somnolent nag) waded across the strong current I looked up and in the moonlight was a huge castle: four towers and seemingly tremendous walls. The dim light glowing in one of the outbuildings made me sure that this is where we were headed, and I gave way to a burst of romanticism. It was really fun to be doing this. And sure enough, we were led to this fortress and ushered into the guestroom. The *wakil*, a tall long nosed floppy haired Pashtun, was pleasant and very hospitable. We had the obligatory dinner, made the obligatory conversation and he retired. Al spoke to him in both languages and did most of our talking which was okay with the rest of us. The *wakil* didn't know much about what Paul was doing and showed even less interest. His questions, though intelligent, were masked criticisms, and Al sensed that he was not pleased by what was going on. We went to bed on sumptuous pillows. I remember thinking that we better get into something soon or what little momentum we had would evaporate.

Tirinkot, Thursday, December 30, 1971 – The day began pleasantly enough. We had scented tea, milk and nuts and talked about food over breakfast, as our group seems to always do. Then one of the *wakil's* servants led us to the ferry crossing where we were to meet Eid and get the truck across. He came presently, and called across that he'd been here already and that the truck *definitely* cannot make it through the water which looked to be about crotch deep and flowing strongly. ("*Ba khoda, na mesha!"*) I got pissed and told him to send our stuff over on the ferry (a small iron barge on a cable) and go back to Kandahar if he was afraid. While he unloaded the truck, we discussed alternatives: the *wakil* had told us that Paul was only 20 minutes or so off the road north, so we could walk or get horses or go back or stay where we were and send word. As usual, our discussion soon drifted to what we were *doing* here anyway and what is our *purpose*, etc. I was getting impatient with all this and went back over in the ferry to drive the fucking truck over myself if Eid wouldn't. But once he was told to do something, he shaped up, and we took the fan belt off, covered the plugs and distributor with plastic and plunged in. It was a bit tense, water coming in through the doors and all that, but we made it. I was exuberant, naturally; we loaded up and set off. It was noon by this time, so we stopped for a long lunch at the *wakil's* house.

Then on up the road towards Paul and the starving people. It was a damned hairy piece of driving. Switchbacks where there isn't room to turn, sloping, crumbling tracks hacked out of the side of a cliff, numerous fords across a fast and deep stream. Eid

kept at it, though we had to get out often to put rocks behind the wheels when he had to back up several times to get around hairpin turns.

We got to where some people were working on the road who told us that Paul was "above" and that the road was totally impassable. Once again I got impatient – didn't look impassible – and pretty much forced everyone to keep going. We got through a couple of tight places on Eid's nerve and my stubbornness. It wasn't any sense of mission that was driving me.

This became a regular routine: one of us, the designated the *"kaleenar,"* would get out and guide Eid backward to the edge of the cliff, yelling "*bas!*" when he had come back as far as possible, then the rock under the wheel, then "*buru bakhair!*" Repeat two or three times to get around the curve, then on to the next hairpin. How we thought lorries were going to traverse this road escapes me. onward; just a reaction to the obvious absurdity of the situation.

Al, I think, picked this up because, when we got to a bridge that was too narrow for our truck, he commenced hauling around huge rocks to fill up the *jui* while we sat and gave advice. The more hesitancy I sensed, the more I want-ed to act, to get somewhere and to do something.

As we pulled away from the riverbed and began a hard ascent up a shaly cliff, the clouds began to thicken until just before darkness when it started to snow. We finally got to Tamazan where Paul and Roman Tyspar, the German, were spending the night. This is a tiny village in a barren valley right at the snow line which looks to have about zero going for it. Nonetheless, it has a *khan,* and they were at his house. Paul seems to have the situation pretty much in hand, has been working like hell and wanted a rest. He was glad to see us.

After some discussion during which it was painfully obvious that they needed the trucks with wheat on them, not a bunch of empty-handed helpers, we decided to go over the pass and about 30 km further into Dasht-i-Nili where their radio set was. This we managed to do with no small difficulty.

At eight or so, in thickening snow we found their headquarters, a Hazara house with one 10 x 20' room for all of us to sleep in. They gave us some tea, we had bread that we brought from Tirinkot and salami. We shared this and began what seemed like the 20th discussion of what to do. The road, although Paul and Roman were almost finished work, really wasn't something a lorry could get over. The great blue fleet of Peace Corps trucks which Mitchell had envisioned wouldn't get enough wheat up to where it was needed if they ran all winter. Roman, the German, kept saying "of course it's possible," which finally got Fritz really pissed. But Al came up with a workable solution: pay people to use their animals to go get wheat in Gezab, a four-day round-trip for which two *seers* per donkey could be given. We decided to radio this plan to Kabul in the morning and then start back to finish the road. We went to sleep cheek by jowl on a hard floor and with hardening feelings. It was a long day. I said "happy birthday, Pam" to myself.

Tamazan, Friday, December 31, 1971 – We woke up stiff and cramped. The first one to go out announced that there was four centimeters of snow on the ground and that it was still coming down heavily. I felt a strange sense of relief on hearing that and surmising that we would all be caught here for weeks maybe. Don't know why this was; something about privileged Americans finally having to throw their lot in with Afghanistan's most neglected people. What good would have come from that I don't know; in retrospect I can imagine only ugliness. We ate stale bread and tea (while Roman mixed

up some kind of German breakfast for himself) and waited for it to be time to radio. Al decided that we should make a try to get back over the pass before the snow got too bad, and I agreed, but didn't really think we could make it. The radio didn't work, and at about 8:30 am we set off leaving 50 afs apiece with our host as a salve for our guilty consciences for leaving him stranded.

At first the road was completely indistinguishable in the snow and we had a lot of trouble. But we got on it thanks to Paul and Roman's idea of putting upright stones along the sides as they built it. We passed through a small village – Sangemum – where we found that there was no wheat at all on the bazaar.

We talked about it, and Al once again made the observation of me that he had expressed before: that the reverse of these lines is true; that my friendships tend to be temporary and easily eroded by circumstances. The past few days have tended to bear this out, and I have no answer for it except that I find it hard to separate friends from coworkers in this job, and I can never stop judging and re-judging the latter. It occurs to me that I am severely limited as a leader of people, but I won't get into that. David and I started to make up a parody on the Shakespeare sonnet, but gave it up.

But, hearts hardened, we went on. Fritz and I sat on the back of the truck to be ready with stones and because it was crowded inside. Soon we picked up four Hazaras who were walking to Kandahar to find work. They too sat in the back. I gave one of them my fur-lined *chappan* to keep warm. We made it over the pass and down into the rain though not without a lot of work. For the rest of the day we slipped and slid through rocks and gravel, mud and rain. There wasn't the accident that I thoroughly expected, just hard, uneventful work.

The rain had stopped, but a cold wind came up as Al and I got the car ready to cross. We got the truck covered up and drove in. For a moment I thought we wouldn't make it because Eid was driving straight across instead of diagonally down-stream. But again we pulled out on the other side. The volunteers, who hadn't wanted to cross in the truck, also hadn't been able to get the ferry going because of the wind, and now were pissed because we crossed without them. I don't really know why we did, except that I was tired and figured to let them find their own way across. Paul and Ed waded, but Fritz and David refused to do that and walked away down the river bank. Al felt badly and tried to persuade them by wading out into the river himself, but I figured the hell with it.

We went to a tea house in the bazaar and got warm, and then Al and I went to see the Sub Governor's to try to telephone Kandahar, but the line was down. Al amazed the *hakim*, the Commandant and me with his tales about Libya (where he had been on the Peace Corps staff) for a while and then we went back to have dinner. The Commandant came with us to make sure the teahouse was all right (a face saving gesture for the *hakim* who didn't want to put us up). Fritz and David still weren't back, so we assumed that they had gone to the *wakil's* house.

We had dinner and relaxed by telling each other what we had been doing on New Year's Eve 10 years ago. Paul was in Thailand, and his adventures there were to become the theme of the evening. At about 10 o'clock, after we had gone to bed, Fritz and David came in exuding so much New Year's joviality that I figured they were stoned. They had gone to the *wakil's*, been fed and gotten across the river on horses. I asked them if they were pissed about leaving being left on the other side of the river, but said David said, "I don't know," so I let it drop.

We made a plan: Al was to return to Kandahar and get in touch with Kabul and we

were to go back across the river and finish the road. This seemed to be agreeable to everyone, so I went to sleep awaking occasionally to hear Paul's commentary on catching cobras in Thailand and then once to celebrate the new year by passing around a last of the candy I had brought from Kabul. Another long day.

Tirinkot, Saturday, July 1, 1972 – Al made one more try with the telephone and then he and Eid left in the truck. Before going, he told me he thought it was ridiculous for me to stay. I partly agreed, but assumed that I would get folks started on the road and then leave myself. Paul wanted to get out, but I convinced him to stay long enough to introduce us to the people he was working with. I tried to call Roman in Tamazan where we had left him, but couldn't, so we set out on foot, crossing the river by ferry. I was carrying my sleeping bag in one hand and the red knapsack was on my back.

It was here that things began to slow down and I got a chance to think. The sheer lunacy of what we were doing dropped away as my mind was overtaken by sense of the enormous, unforgiving mountains looking down impassively at the struggling human beings attempting – not at all success-fully right now – to live among them. We walked very slowly, stopping often to rest, so that we didn't make it to where work was going on at all that day. Fritz was carrying too much, so we left some of his things at the house of Paul's head *bashi* where we stopped for lunch. It was nice for me to walk again, even though I was out of shape and got very tired.

At dusk we stopped at a house where Paul had stayed once and pretty much forced ourselves on the people there. They didn't know what to do with all of these foreigners, but were quite hospitable once we got in. Pashtuns. We stayed in the room with straw on the floor which was quite nice. A mullah sang prayers twice that evening and once at the crack of dawn. Some hanger on told me that he liked being in the Army because it taught him a lot: how to tell the big shots from the small fry, which I thought was an interesting thing to gain from soldiery. The day had been full of the usual com-plaints aggravated by the trials of having to walk. I sense that things had probably deteriorated too far to retrieve – all we seem to be talking about was eating and getting out – but I couldn't think of a way to rally our spirits. I was thinking about being a volunteer in Nepal: quiet, solitude, the sense of being on my own and not responsible for anyone else's effort. I wished I were walking there instead of among these bare, brown hills.

Tamazan area, Saturday, January 2, 1972 – We struggled out in pretty poor order. We walked even more slowly up the river until we got to a tiny teahouse with nobody in it. There we sat and asked someone to make some tea and extorted a half a piece of cornbread. Nothing I have eaten tasted bet-ter. Pretty soon. Paul's head man came up and we made another plan: David and Ed and I would keep going, and Fritz and Paul would stay here where they were to wait for Roman who was expected in the Jeep sometime soon. Paul would go back to Kandahar and the rest of us would spread out over the road to finish it up in a day or two and then go back to Gezab.

Walking with Paul's headman, Lal Mohammed, we covered ground much more quickly. In less than an hour we arrived at the place where they had their headquarters – another tiny house by the side of the road. I wrote a note to Roman and sent it on up the road with a worker. We were now about midpoint in the road. I spent the rest of the afternoon looking at the bridges that were too weak or narrow and checking the groups that were working. I got into a lively relationship with Lal Mohammed. He seemed eager to improve the road, to show that he could get work done, and to argue about what needed to be done. He is small and energetic, quick to laugh and possessed of the usual posturing sense of self-confidence. He had been a "Doctor," practicing some kind of dubious medicine or another, but the *hakim* had him kicked out ostensibly in the name of Hippocrates, but really because the *wakil's* family, who are mortal enemies of the

"doctor sahib's" family, had put pressure on the relevant authorities.

This enmity is causing Paul problems; evidently the day we left to go up to Sangemum, the *mustufi* came up from Tirinkot to see us. We weren't there, but the *wakil* saw him and complained that Paul's work at fallen under the control of this Lal Mohammed and that he was allowing only his people to be workers. I discussed this with him in the evening; it was more than a bit chilling to hear him unfold the gory details of a Pashtun feud: ambushes, court actions, paid assassinations, raids and all kinds of other vendetta. I was worried that the fight would get into Parliament and reflect badly on Paul's work here, so I argued that a very close record had to be kept of workers' attendance, minimizing the chances of some-one complaining and giving ammunition to the *wakil*.

We were all very hungry and anxiously awaited the preparation of dinner which was chicken soup – a huge pot of it with lots of naan. Then tea. Ed and I smoked our last cigarette and I went to sleep be-side the fire.

Tamazan area, Monday, January 3, 1972 – I was awakened at dawn by a guy building up the fire and putting two smooth stones in it. After these and gotten hot he jerked them out and covered each with a thick layer of dough and put them back in the coals these he turned around until the dough was cooked and then he took them out broke some open and we ate it hot with tea.

I spent the morning working on two bridges, really "showing" them how to do the bridge. Not much technical advice I could offer (what did I know?), but I did have some practical ideas which proved a bit useful. That's the way the Peace Corps is supposed to work, isn't it? Because this is where Nehoda pulled around all the rocks, we named it the Albert J. Nehoda Memorial Bridge. Soon the Jeep came, and Roman took David and Ed down the hill. I stayed because I want to see how the work ended up, help with anything I could and because I didn't want to go back to wandering aimlessly about.

The bridge finished, we started to walk down the mountain gathering workers as we went. Occasionally I had to talk to somebody but most of the time I just swung along by myself. I thought of Pam and of Kunduz. It was nice to be heading back.

Since most people spoke Pashto, I was not distracted by conversations. I also thought back to Nepal – how alone and free I was – and yet how haunted by that loneliness. Now I was on my own again away from entanglements and responsibilities, and it was refreshing in a way. But there was no doubt that I was glad it wasn't permanent. Pam and I are young yet, and complications and stress will come. Having a child is going to be interesting; I started to wonder whether we should be reading any books or whether we should go at it naturally.

A stop for lunch was a welcome rest but not much more, the fare being only naan and tea. Then we walked on further; I would point out places where the road needed work and the "doctor sa-hib" would detail a few men to do it. Others sang songs as they walked and one even played a flute. Quite a scene, I kept telling myself. At about 4:00 pm we got to his house. I was dead tired but glad I had gone in the Jeep. Paul was there, but others had all gone across the river "to see if Eid was back."

I sat next to the stove and tried to warm the stiffness out of my legs and got into an interesting discussion about marriage with Paul. He proposed that "marriage is death." I argued that, if it is, it is also a rebirth, or is a shifting to another part of one's personality and a satisfying of different needs. I found myself saying that I found marriage very comfortable in quieting, that such a final decision took most of the angst out of life – at least at first. Paul told me a rather wild story about his affair with a girl he got engaged to when he was 15 and she was 14. I have a feeling that his current kick is eccentricity. What he says about himself is no doubt true, but I sense a studied motive to shock, to play down the regular, scholarly part of his past and to trumpet the unusual. He has a very good mind and is not afraid to work.

Then we got to making plans. Program number at least 100 was to be: Paul to Kandahar for a few days, Fritz to Kabul, David and Ed to stay and do the work remaining here which wasn't much. We decided someone needed to stay to keep in touch with Roman, keep after the *hakim* about transport and storage of wheat, and maintain the confidence of the people that wheat was actually coming. Then I would be able to go back to Kabul.

Tirinkot, Tuesday, January 4, 1972 – Paul and I went part way up the road to blow up a stone which was in the way and to do the last bit of touching up. This was the last day of work, and at about noon he headed back to the river with a note from me explaining the latest plan to everybody there. I stayed to watch the stone work, which was quite interesting. With a pointed steel bar, they pound a hole about two hand widths into the rock, pour black powder into the whole and then close it up with gravel and mud leaving a wire sticking up out of it which they then slowly pull out, filling the hole it leaves.
Postscript – And this is where the letter ends. I don't recall why I had to stop in the middle or any of the circumstances around sending it. The way it ends is so frustrating. (How does this rock-blasting business work? Did I stay around to watch?) No recollection whatsoever of such a tantalizing detail. And not enough imagination to make up something plausible.

Pam had recently found out she was pregnant. Our son, Jesse True, was born in Kabul on July 11, 1972, about six weeks before we left the country.

My calendar shows that I stayed in the area for a week longer. But it shows prompts little in the way of recollections about what I was doing. There is the interesting " dancing boy" entry on January 10 which brings back a scene involving me, Eid and several other Afghan men sitting in a room in someone's house in Gezab drinking tea and watching a slight young performer dressed in filmy white *peron-i-tambon*. By the 12th I was back in Kandahar, Kabul on the 13th and Kunduz on the 14th.

On August 24, 1972, just over 45 years ago, Pam and I and Jesse left Kabul.

The Road to Jawand, 1971
by
Greg Kopp, September 2017

I'm not confident of the dates when what I'm about to relate occurred. I had decided to extend for third year in Afghanistan, because my number in the draft lottery was 33. I asked to be assigned to teach English in Faizabad, a frontier town in Badakhshan Province, near the mouth of the Pamir Mountains in the NE of the country. The school year there began in the spring and ended as weather got too cold in the fall for students to be comfortable. Despite the fact that I was alone there, without another English-speaking person anywhere, I loved the town and my sense of living remotely and being able to survive, even thrive, in a very foreign culture. Faizabad was beautiful, with the Kokcha River rushing through the town, fresh air, little dust and its interesting people.

It was about the middle of that school year, sometime in the summer months of 1971, when John True approached me to discuss my transferring out of teaching into a new program called Food for Work. He had a compelling explanation of the program's purpose and what was entailed, but I was ambivalent. John's description of the job (organizing the villagers to work on water projects, paying for their labor in American wheat rather than money, likely having no stable place to live due to the travel involved) was not very appealing; nor was the thought of leaving Faizabad.

But he persevered with his 'sales pitch', and I began to think that he was not offering an opportunity but gently telling me, as a friend rather than an area supervisor, that I would be crazy not to do this! When he told me that David Moats had already made the decision to join up, I was convinced.

What followed led to some of the most memorable, and fantastic, experiences I had during my 3½ years in Afghanistan.

The FFW program gave its volunteers privy to the country and to its culture and people in a much more intimate, real-life way than teaching had ever done. And what happened that fall and winter with the Governor of Badghis Province stands out from the rest as among the most memorable.

I was assigned to Badghis Province, which is located on the Northern border of Afghanistan, south of Turkmenistan. At that time, getting there required driving 370 miles along the only dirt road between Mazar-i-Sharif and Herat. John and his wife Pam drove a Peace Corps truck to take David and me to Qala-i-Nau, the capital city of Badghis. We passed through Shiberghan, Maimana and arrived finally in Qala-i-Nau, and the seat of the Wali (Governor).

I was surprised to learn that the German and American Peace Corps were working together on this program, so the FFW program in Badghis consisted of David Moats, a German volunteer, and myself; and we each had an Afghan counterpart. I was assigned to Qala-i-Nau, David to Ghormach, and the German Volunteer to Qadez. I had some kind of ill-defined extra responsibility for the Badghis program, since I was the senior PC volunteer stationed in the capital city.

Anyway, I stayed in communication with the Governor, and he knew me to be the "point man" for FFW in his Province. I also had to be present at the government warehouse when wheat arrived so I could verify the count of "buji's" (bags, sacks) of wheat, as well as the total weight of the shipment. But each of us was to investigate possible projects, organize local workers, and confer with each other about which projects were feasible to start.

For my part, I saw how easy it was to find workers, because people were hungry and out of work. Between the demand to find projects quickly and my job to monitor a corrupt director of the provincial warehouse, I was completely occupied. A few months after we arrived I got concerned that I had little or no communication from the Qadez duo.

When finally I was apprised of their activities, I learned that the German volunteer and his Afghan counterpart had gone their separate ways due to a disagreement on between them on what projects to pursue. The Afghan counterpart, on his own and without support from anyone, had almost completed constructing a 50-mile long road that went from Qadez to a village called Jawand. It went through difficult terrain, with desert soils and lots of hills and valleys.

The Governor of Badghis was a stout man, rotund even; his face was always stern and no-nonsense, at least around me. He wore a Kabul style suit that was way too tight on his full body, and a karakul hat. He looked out of place in a remote place like Qala-i-Nau. For the most part, he was nice enough, professional, but aloof from our program. When he got word of the road to Jawand, however, he became very involved.

It was actually the first real interest in the FFW program that I had seen from him. He told me that Jawand had never had a motorized vehicle reach it, and he wanted to drive there himself. The road would be a major accomplishment if he could get there in his jeep. I read between the lines and concluded that it would also be good for his career to have this road. I was anxious about his inspection because I had no idea what condition the road was in, I had had no involvement in the decision to build it, and I was afraid I would bear some responsibility if it were a disaster. The Governor wanted me to go with him on this inspection ride. His plan was for us to leave early one morning soon, and to make the round trip in one day, which we both felt should be enough time to drive a total of 100 miles. So the Governor, his driver and I took off a couple days later for the unknown.

Spending a fair amount of time with him while driving through a desert was an experience. He and the driver sat up front, of course, and I was in the back seat. There was a fair amount of mindless banter, which was fine with me because it helped to kill the time. He wanted to know everything about American life: what our houses are like, especially kitchens and bathrooms. He loved to talk about food, asking me what my favorite Afghan foods were. Then he asked me about my favorite American foods, and if I really ate pork. Meanwhile, underneath us, the road was performing just fine. It was slow going and dusty, but there were no mishaps.

I recalled having seen a diagram of how a road should be built; it was a cross-sectional diagram of a road that was high in the middle and sloped downward on both sides. This road was definitely not like that, but the governor didn't notice and I wasn't going to point it out.

After a while, the governor told me we were stopping at an upcoming village where he had some work to do. I was glad to get out of the jeep, and thought it would be interesting to see the village. The driver stopped our jeep by a large crowd of men wearing turbans, gathered next to a corral. As we approached, the conversation among them quieted. The governor spoke out, asking where a specific man was. The man in question walked forward, obviously frightened; he bowed, and kissed the governor's hand. Despite his obeisance, the governor ordered that his shirt be stripped off his back. I learned that this man had been accused of stealing wheat from the local storeroom, and it was the governor's job to mete out a fitting punishment. There was loud discussion and yelling among the men; everyone seemed to have a strong opinion about his guilt or innocence. The governor listened to the arguments and ultimately decided, somehow, that he was guilty. Before he announced the punishment, however, he turned to me, whip in hand, to ask how many lashes I felt was appropriate. The crowd got silent to hear what the foreigner had to say. Frankly I was upset that any-body would steal wheat during this famine, but I sure did not want to be a participant in any Afghan justice system, much less state a punishment. So I deferred to the Governor's judgment. I did add that in my country we do not beat people for such crimes. I braced myself to witness something horrific. I remember thinking that no one back home, friends or family, would believe that I actually was having this experience. What century was I living in? Did I travel through a time warp? But the Governor, in his wisdom, decided not to whip him at all. There was some wordy pronouncement from him about the man having to pay for the wheat he stole, but nothing more.

My esteem for the Governor went up considerably after that decision.

Continuing our journey, I noticed there were places that looked like no work had been done at all. It was just desert. We drove on in the same direction until we eventually came to some disturbance in the dirt and called it our road. After about an hour of this, we could see up ahead that the road ascended a hill in the distance. From that perspective, we could see that a lot of digging had been done to get the road up the hill. It was a steep ascent, which caused all three of us some concern. When we arrived at the bottom of the incline we stopped the jeep to get out to survey the situation. The road looked really precarious, but the Governor decided that we had no choice but to go on, as turning back was not an option. I don't remember now the reasoning, but I stayed out of the jeep while he and his driver went up the hill. They got about half way up when the jeep stopped moving. Then I saw clouds of dust rising from all four wheels as the driver tried futilely to move the jeep forward or back. I was glad I wasn't in the jeep with them. So, there we were, in the middle of absolutely nowhere, stuck in the soft soil of our road and unable to proceed. There was no sign of civilization anywhere. We hadn't seen anyone since we left the village; the area was completely desolate. Time passed, and all I saw from the jeep was more dust. Finally the driver got out, walked the rest of the way up the hill and disappeared. The scene was bizarre. The corpulent Governor was sitting in his jeep alone; I was at the bottom of the hill, alone. The mid-afternoon weather was sunny and hot, I was sweating, and I had no idea how we were going to get out of this mess. With nothing else to do, I sat there feeling worried and pessimistic. After what felt like a very long a time, turbans began to ap-pear at the horizon of the hill. About 40 or 50 men appeared, being led by our driver. They had come from no-where, it seemed, each carrying a shovel. These men hiked down the hill to the Governor's jeep, and began shoveling. In time I watched them attach a long rope at its mid-point to the middle of the front bumper of the jeep. They carried the two ends of the rope uphill, and the men divided into two groups, each taking a side of the rope. With loud grunts and curses, they were pulling that jeep, with the governor still inside, up the hill! It was like those movies about how the pyramids were built, where all the slaves pulled gargantuan stones uphill with ropes! I was stunned by what I was seeing. I trudged up the hill to the top where I saw that the men had already dispersed, and nowhere to be seen. The driver and I got back into the jeep ready to continue our journey with the governor.
He was not very talkative after that. It was pretty clear to me that he was unhappy about what had just happened. But he was also determined to get to Jawand. Fortunately, there were no more problems along the way, and we finally arrived at the small village of Jawand by sundown.

Village elders were waiting for the Governor, and they served a festive meal for us, as Afghans know how to do. Afterwards he barked orders by phone to arrange his return trip the next day. He was NOT going back by that road. The plan was that a number of villagers would accompany our three-some, as we went back to Qala-i-Nau. After some discussion among the locals, we learned that we would have to divide into two separate groups because there were not enough available horses for all of us.

We also learned that about ten miles from Jawand along our return route, we would all have to climb by foot up a high gorge. Jeeps would be waiting at the top to take the Governor and those who went with him on to Qala-i-Nau. Someone would remain below with the horses to take them back to Jawand. He needed to go in the first group so he could insure that the jeeps would return to the pickup point to get the rest of us later on. After the plan was set, I called it a night.

By the time I woke up the next morning, the governor and his party had been gone for quite a while. I like riding horses, so I looked forward to that part of the trip. In fact, the horse ride was fun; my horse was strong and energetic, and I enjoyed talking to the others who went together in the second group. In all there were five of us. Along the way we ran into the man who was returning the horses from the first group. He told us that our Gover-nor actually rode his horse all the way to the top of the gorge. (Today, I can see this was necessary given his girth and how steep the climb was. At the time, though, I wasn't so kind in my judgment, attributing his behaviors to arrogance and an abuse of power.) It was late afternoon when my party got to the gorge climb. We all got off our horses and left them tethered to trees, and began our climb. It was not an easy one; it took about an hour to get to the top. I know I was tired and thirsty when we got there. But I was also not particularly surprised that no jeeps were waiting for us as had been so carefully planned.

We sat as a group to rest and to discuss what to do. We were quite a ways from any settlements, and more than 25 miles away from Qala-i-Nau. Nobody seemed particularly upset about our situation, which helped me not to worry too much. Since the jeeps were probably just late coming to pick us up, the only thing we could do is walk in the direction they would be coming from. We decided to follow the tire tracks of the Governor's group, in hopes of intercepting the arriving jeeps along the way. The temperature was going down with the sun, and I thought it would be good to walk to keep warm. There was nothing we could do about be-ing hungry and thirsty, since no one had brought any food or water.
Thankfully, I had decent boots for walking the desert and a light jacket for warmth. My mood was good, and I enjoyed talking with my companions about the desert, their families, what we would each choose to eat if food were available, and how thirsty we were. The sun went down, and the sky grew naturally very very dark. There was no moon that night so the stars shone extra bright. We in the USA don't see night skies like this unless we are very far from any source of light. Even in Afghanistan, this sky was extraordinary. We also talked about the dangers we might encounter as we walked. They mentioned robbers as a big concern, but also dogs and wolves were possibilities. If we were to happen on another person walking in the desert, it could be very serious for us. Just then, as if on cue, we heard the howls of wolves in the distance. The dangers suddenly became very real to us all.

We walked and talked into the night for an untold distance. We had long given up hope that our jeeps would show up; it was too late in the night. By this time I was very aware of how hungry I was. I remember putting my hand into the pocket of the jacket I wore and feeling a rock there. I pulled it out to find that it was not a rock at all. Rather, it was a piece of dehydrated yoghurt that can be reconstituted to make Kichri Kurut. I showed the others what I'd found, asking if anyone was interested in sharing it. No takers! I wondered if my mouth might be too dry to soften it, but I was so hungry that I gave it a try. I will never forget how delicious it tasted, enough so that I felt a bit guilty eating it all myself. I offered it again, but still no takers. I left it in my mouth to melt slowly as I walked. Too soon, it was gone. The lingering taste was not creamy or tangy, but salty, and my thirst grew.
A warm camaraderie developed among us, conversation was easy and silence was comfortable. My fear of those possible dangers abated until someone noticed at a distance what looked like a faint light. We couldn't make it out, but we kept eyes on it as we walked. The light didn't grow larger or brighter, but it was definitely a light. We finally got close enough to realize it was a small kerosene lantern, about the brightness of a single candle, called a "shaitan chirogh". Next to it was a lone yurt, about a hundred meters away from us. Soon we heard dogs barking; they had sensed our presence. Every one of us was alarmed, knowing that these dogs can be ferocious. Time passed, and we didn't sense that they were coming towards us; but a man emerged from the yurt with another small light, and walked our way.

There were a lot of words exchanged with the man while he was still a safe distance from us. The people talking in the dark were all trying to communicate to him that we are not hostile. We explained how we happened to be walking in the desert at this time of night, and the approaching man began to relax. I don't re-call what tribe he was from, perhaps Koochi. He was travelling with his family and a few animals. We asked if he could spare some bread and water, but he stated that he had no bread to share. He did offer us some water, and went back to his yurt to fetch it. He brought it to us in a porous clay water pitcher that sweats to keep the water cool; he handed us one glass to share among ourselves. It was too dark to see the quality of the water, and I was too thirsty to care. When I got my turn, I tasted salt but drank it anyway, glad to have whatever quenching value it had. We gave our thanks to this man, and took our leave as we headed on into the night.

The end to this story is rather an anti-climax. We walked for a long time more, and as dawn approached we came to a village. A phone call was made to someone in Qala-i-Nau, and eventually a jeep actually arrived to get us. I don't recall any apologies from the Governor or explanations of how the plan fell apart. I do remember this thought, though. I remember walking through the night marveling at how the Governor could be so callous or uncaring that he didn't send his jeeps as promised. I felt my ire at him. But like so many experiences in Afghanistan that were frustrating or angering, this adventure has far outlived my ire, and I look back on it now as one of those priceless experiences that I am so thankful to have had.

Torpikai and the Teddy Bear

By

Julie Kesler and Tom Grant

It was the summer of 1968 and we were Peace Corps volunteers in Kabul, Afghanistan. Like many years before and after, we're sure, there was then a gaggle of children selling socks outside the Peace Corps office in Kabul. I think we called the socks "Socks, Mister? socks" because, no matter how many times we PCVs would decline the invitation to buy, the kids would always run up to us as we approached or came out of the Peace Corps office door shouting "Socks, Mister?"

There were several young children selling Socks, Mister? socks, all pretty scruffy and most, if not all, cute, charming, and endearing – as well as persevering. One of these aspiring entrepreneurs was a little girl named Torpikai. She was probably around six or seven years old, maybe even a bit younger. And, she was a very cute, very endearing, and very personable little girl, with a sweet, vivacious smile and a positive personality. Of all the kids, Torpikai was our favorite.

One day we came to the Peace Corps office and, as usual, were surrounded by the Socks, Mister? kids. But, Torpikai was missing. We asked where she was and one of the kids told us that she had been hit by a car and was injured. We couldn't determine how badly Torpikai was hurt but this was obviously very bad news. A day or a few days later we found out that Torpikai had not been too badly injured and that she was recovering in her family's home.

We realized that we had to do something for Torpikai to show that we cared about her and missed her. After a bit of thought, we decide that we would try to find a teddy bear and take it to her. Our memory tells us that we had no idea whether there was such a thing in Kabul as a teddy bear, where one would find one if there were, or even whether an Afghan kid would even know what a teddy bear was. But, we looked around town and found a shop that sold some very sweet teddy bears.

After buying one of the teddy bears that was almost as cute as Torpikai, we realized that we didn't know where her family's home was. Memory tells us that we asked one of the other Socks, Mister? little girls to take us to Torpikai's home – which she did. Torpikai's family lived up on one of those Kabul hills covered, at least then, with pretty meager houses and other ramshackle buildings. With our guide, we climbed the hill on a path that weaved among the houses until we reached Torpikai's home. We met Torpikai's parents and, in our less-than-highly-developed Dari, we explained that we were Peace Corps volunteers, that we knew Torpikai from her socks selling, and that we had a present for Torpikai. They were welcoming and showed us into their house.

We found Torpikai resting in her bed. She was surprised to see us but she had her usual radiant grin that lit up the room. One of us took the teddy bear out of its bag and handed it to Torpikai. We need not have wondered whether Afghan kids know what terry bears are all about. Torpikai immediately hugged the teddy bear to her and the smile on her sweet little face grew even more radiant. The teddy bear was a great hit! – it did its cheer-up work as well as ever could be hoped.

Julie Kesler and Tom Grant

Food for Work

By Frank Light

Previous Publication in the magazine American Chordata

Saturday, September 27, 1971

Baqi clears his throat. These are uncertain times for Farah's director of provincial development. For years he's done next to nothing. But then he had next to nothing for a budget. Change comes hard, and that's what we represent. He clears his throat again before introducing our team to the governor, just back from Kabul. The governor speaks better English than Baqi or anybody else we've met in the province. And certainly nobody dresses like him—pressed gray suit, dress shirt, jeweled, broad-band ring on index finger, no tie, no belt, no socks, leather sandals. It tells you he wasn't born to money. Not urban money, anyway. Big fish in a small pond, he is not used to foreigners. But having been briefed by the minister without portfolio, he wants to help. The stakes are high, for the rains have failed, and when the water table falls below collection points, irrigation ditches go dry. Rather than dig deeper, the farmers are saying it's God's will.

Well, not everyone has been so accepting; violence is on the upswing. Afghan against Afghan in most cases, but five Westerners have been murdered this year. Lest blame shift toward he government, the minister together with the UN Development Program announced "Food for Work." The US and other donors will supply wheat, a staple (along with mutton and rice) of the local diet. Underemployed farmers will work for it, so as not to become dependent on the dole. Given corruption and other inefficiencies, the payout would never reach the intended recipients without foreigners at the end of the pipeline. Those foreigners need no special expertise. They only have to be, and behave like, disinterested outsiders. Just the job for the Peace Corps.

I tell the governor about the projects we've surveyed. Our team consists of one German and three American volunteers plus three Afghan engineers. A week into it, we're ready to go "live." Begin immediately, he says. He'll sign the paperwork later. The people can't wait.

A school well and the municipal *karez* head the list, *karezzes* being underground irrigation canals common to this part of Afghanistan. We'll round up the workers, let them choose their foremen. That should require about half our team. Baqi can take them in his pickup.

A politician more than an administrator, the governor assures us he'll be there for the opening ceremonies.

I note we couldn't have done it without Baqi.

Flattery makes him stand taller. His hair's been brushed.

Excellent, the governor says. By then we've reverted to Pashto. The people are hungry, he adds. How much are we paying them?

Baqi and our team have been going back and forth on this. If you pay too much, he cautioned, nobody will work on anything else. He turns to Al, who faces straight ahead, placid and silent. Al is Peace Corps staff, here only to observe. It's on me to speak. Based on advanced age (twenty-seven) and time in country (one year), I've been designated team leader.

UNDP recommended one seer, I report. Seven kilos. That's for a day's work.

Ooh. The governor chews that over. In Shebergan they pay two and a half kilos, he says. Shebergan lies a day's drive to the north. The going rate in Farah is half a seer.

People are hungry, I remind him. One seer, the math is easy.

He thinks about that. Okay, he concedes. One seer. Can we do it?

Assuming the wheat arrives, I say. Other assumptions are best left unsaid. A concept is one thing, a shovel another. End of the day, it comes down to people.

On its way, he confirms. Nimruz has wheat but no program like ours. Can we start one there?

That's for the minister to say.

The governor there—it's just south of us—is this one's friend. He stopped to see him on the way here. Apparently our governor promised we'd go to that province next. And, oh—he smiles a sharp smile and clasps his hands together—he's heard we're interested in Gulistan and Purchaman, up in the highlands of eastern Farah.

I was going to mention that. The team discussed it, and not for the first time, at breakfast. I say we could go as early as today.

He nods, saying check with him if we want to go farther than Gulistan.

Shouldn't we? I ask. Purchaman lies beyond Gulistan.

Wait until you've seen Gulistan. That might be enough. He laughs from deep in his throat. Don't promise more than you can deliver, he warns with no sense of irony. And don't let the khans trick you into doing things just for themselves.

He ought to know, he admits. He's a khan himself. A feudal lord. But from the eastern part of the country.

One more thing, he adds. Never drive after dark.

Bandits?

From Iran, he elaborates in English. Not Farah. Farah people no thief. Trick, yes. Thief, no.

Farah is one of four provinces in the initial phase. The Peace Corps is providing twelve volunteers in all, the Germans two, and the ministry of provincial development thirty "engineers," most of them recent high school graduates. We foreigners trained for ten days, emphasis on math, surveying, teambuilding, and cultural/political sensitivities. Emergency response, lives in the balance—we were stoked, our Afghan counterparts not so much. They showed little interest in going out (or back) to the sticks. For two months only, they were assured; home for the Eid al-Fitr holiday. New hires, they're at the bottom of the pecking order. Even in their youth they have the cynical air of those accustomed to broken promises.

Nobody we knew had ever been to Farah. A two-day drive from Kabul, it was a blank space on the map between Kandahar and Herat. Afghan staff vaguely recalled two volunteers in the provincial capital several years earlier. Communist demonstrators drove them out. The same thing happened more recently to a representative of the World Food Programme. Kabulese who knew Farah at all called it the Red Province. The Peace Corps never went back. The minister gave us a pep talk. Farah should rejoin the fold.

Baqi stays in town with the other half of the team while two Afghan engineers, fellow volunteer Charlie, and I, along with a functionary from the development office, pile into Al's Travelall van, Al at the wheel. He drove up from Kandahar because this is a pilot project with high-level interest. His chatty side comes out when we're by ourselves, when he holds forth on topics that can range, as they do today, from Persian poetry to Mullah Nasruddin, subject of

many an Afghan folktale. A mullah is the Islamic equivalent of a village priest. In some tales Nasruddin is a fool. In others he's clever. Afghans like it both ways. What strikes me as a contradiction seems as normal as night and day to them. And to Al, for that matter. His banter makes the long, rough ride bearable for our engineers.

The development functionary watches closely as those two revel in the give and take. He didn't know foreigners could be so much fun. We didn't recognize him at first. He's a quiet, dusty guy Baqi failed to introduce at the office. We should have insisted. Named Amin, he probably does all the work.

It takes both spares to get us the seventy clicks to the paved highway between Herat and Kandahar. Ghulam, the older and more serious of the engineers, and Amin pitch in on the tire changing, as do Charlie and I, though clearly Al has done this many times on his own. The younger engineer, Mahdud, squats in the shade of the Travelall, cracking jokes that elicit strained smiles from Al and Ghulam.

Fingers crossed, we cruise the 125 kilometers down the paved road to Delaram, where we refresh ourselves at a teahouse while a repair shop patches the tires. It gives us a chance to ogle two tourist girls off a bus making a rest stop at the teahouse next to ours.

WTs, the Peace Corps calls them. World travelers. That's a pejorative, and we've been told to keep our distance. They eye us back in a way that implies they're open to alternatives. I tease Charlie about it, and Mahdud joins in. Charlie—gangly, trusting, a year out of college, and new to Afghanistan—practically blushes. His curly blond locks, sideburns down to the jaw, probably caught their attention. Like me and like no one else in Farah, he wears glasses. They aren't Peace Corps issue; there's a flare to them, a gold-like plate on the earpieces that flashes in the sun. And he's tall, you can tell even when he's sitting. Al's tall, too, but he's broad at the beam and naturally tonsured. A man who dangles prayer beads over the table isn't going to attract just anybody. He doesn't say a word. He doesn't have to. We all know that talking to them would burst the bubble. Peace Corps volunteers—PCVs, we call ourselves—don't have much standing among WTs. We're straight. That's *their* pejorative.

Hips sway and jewelry jangles as the WTs sashay onto the bus. Every male in a hundred yards, and I see no other females, is taking it in. Two Jesus lookalikes get on behind. They must have been over by the shops. Hashish, laissez-faire, low cost of living, and an exotic locale have marked Afghanistan for the hippie trail. Fifty dollars will buy a bus ticket from London to Kabul. Another twenty-five will get you to Kathmandu, the ultimate in peace, love, and harmony. This is not one of those buses, however. The other passengers are Afghan. Finally I spot a few local women, their faces pressed to the back window. No bathroom break for them. Leaving a cloud of exhaust in its wake, the bus pulls onto the road for Kandahar.

Our tires are still getting patched, so we have a second round of lukewarm Fantas. A Coca-Cola bottling plant opened, to great excitement, in Kabul this summer. Tea is cheaper and a time-honored tradition, but those who can afford it spring for brand-name effervescence, a connection to the world outside.

Al can't be much older than me though he looks it, not only because of his bald spot and middle-aged spread. He gives the impression he understands how he—and we—fit into the scheme of things. He spoke Hungarian at home as a kid, majored in German, and taught English for three years as a Peace Corps volunteer in Mazar-i-Sharif. He then went as staff to Libya, where he learned Arabic and was the last of the Peace Corps to leave when Qadhafi came to power. After that, back to Afghanistan.

He admits he should be checking on the other volunteers he's responsible for, but it's not every day he goes on an expedition like this. His other volunteers are teaching school or have been at their jobs for more than a year. He claims they're better off without him. More independent.

This trip gives him an opportunity to talk to Afghans outside their shops and offices. He drops puns in Pashto as well as Dari, the country's other main language, and even our counterparts defer to him on etymology. Now, while we retrieve our tires, they want to talk about WTs. Because travelers tend to linger in Kabul, Mahdud's home town, he's looking for pickup lines. He says, with a laugh to show he's joking, he'll start by saying I love you.

Better to say you're rich, I advise.

No, Charlie says, tell them you have a farm.

Really? Mahdud asks.

Say you grow your own.

Mahdud strokes his longish hair while he ponders that. Endowed with the air of a favorite son, he's not poor. Recently shined shoes and a sheepskin jacket bought with money his father gave him as a going-away present confirm it. Both also confirm he is not rich. Rich men, or their sons, don't come to a place like this on a job like this. I wouldn't call him middle-class, either, with all that implies. I'd say he's a young man who would like to be, once he discovers how, on the make.

Delaram is in Nimruz province, but a road out the back leads to eastern Farah. We get off the pavement there, hoping the tires hold up. Proceeding cautiously, it takes us three hours to cover the sixty kilometers—nearly all of them uphill—to Gulistan. The uneven terrain hints of some prehistoric, or prospective, upheaval, and the scattered plants that texture it emit the dull sheen of pressed flowers, the ground so hard-baked and untrodden it keeps the dust down. The lowlands were sandier, shiftier, better adjusted.

A trickle, the first surface water we've seen in the province, flows in a streambed the road follows for the final leg of our journey. There's enough water in that stretch to nurture livelier flora and even a few houses. A girl trit-trots out from one with a jug on her shoulders. Seeing us, she slows down to watch. She remains in that position, diminishing into the horizon. Grows her own, Mahdud quips.

The highlands have crept up on us. They're more rounded, less jagged, than the ridges near Farah town. A hint of green illuminated by the late afternoon sun mixes with gray on the upper slopes. More houses, and then Gulistan town appears. Hills rise behind its one street, pinching the view. There's a teahouse and a few shops, most of them closed.

The acting district chief steps into the street. Unlike the other men in sight, he wears Western slacks and the sport coat expected of government officials. He's young, not much older than Al. He'd been watching a shop that sells cigarettes, candles, salt, soap, and sundries, doing it for his brother who went home—he gestures toward the other end of town—for dinner. Anyway, he knew we were coming and invites us into the district reception hall. He leaves the shop untended, confident that no one he knows—and we're the only strangers—would take advantage.

We enter a room the size of the governor's office but without the furniture. We take turns going to a stone outhouse in the back and then sloshing our hands in a rivulet down from the street. The water is clearer and cooler but not necessarily cleaner than that which we drew from our well in Farah town. In a redundant but appreciated courtesy, a servant brings an ewer, basin,

fresh bar of soap, and hand towel into the room. He pours; we wash. Like us, he leaves his shoes at the door. He returns with bread direct from the oven and then goes for the rest of the meal, which he sets on a plastic mat in front of cushions that line the walls. We sit cross-legged, Afghan style. The stew is made from fat-tailed mutton like that which we had every day in the lowlands, though this version contains more onion and less potato than we're used to. Between mouthfuls we describe the program to our host, who's already eaten and so takes only tea. The district chief went to see the governor, he says. He doesn't know how we missed him.

He bids us goodnight, and we sleep where we ate. I keep my legs warm under my sleeping bag while I write in the journal our country director asked me to keep for "lessons learned." Knowing there'll be no time for that, I do it for myself, for the discipline. Not until I flick off the flashlight do I realize the lantern that the servant brought after dinner has gone out. Although the district office has a generator and a lightbulb hangs from the ceiling, they're conserving fuel in case the governor visits. He came once, his inaugural tour.

The entire crew is asleep. It can't be that late but I'm not sure. I left my watch and other nonessential gear in Kabul. I needed it last year when I taught English in a village outside of Jalalabad. The school had no electricity, so we synchronized with Kabul Radio. In Farah farmers go by the sun, moon, and stars. That works because it rarely clouds over. Ghulam, Mahdud, and Amin wear watches, as do Al and Baqi. But when will Charlie and I get another chance to live without a timepiece? There's no escaping it: the counterculture extends even to us straights, even to Gulistan.

Used to be, American kids followed in their parents' footsteps. Only headstrong or desperate youths set off in the opposite direction. Nowadays it's the majority. Last winter my father wrote to see if I was interested in taking over the coal, feed, and lumber yard that had been in the family since the Civil War. My grandfather was getting old, and they had an offer for the land.

I knew that'd be coming, eventually. I just didn't expect it so soon, and from so far away. They worked five days a week, half day on Saturday. Because Grandpa couldn't run things by himself anymore, my father hadn't taken a vacation in eight years. The day my draft notice arrived he told me I was making more than he ever did. I was a junior accountant, one week out of college, and he hoped I'd do the smart thing, the safe thing, with the Reserves or the Guard.

Sell, I wrote back.

He'd seen the signs. He just wanted to make sure.

This summer the new owners tore everything down. They're replacing it with a self-service gas station. My grandfather retired to his rose garden, and my father found work at an insurance company. Neither has much regard for the Peace Corps because they associate it with Kennedy. They have the same problem with Vietnam. They're old-fashioned conservatives who oppose all foreign entanglements.

I go for a good-night pee behind the outhouse. It *is* early, I can tell, because lanterns and candles flicker in the street. The elevation gain has brought us a half mile closer to the stars. It makes them appear sharper, their twinkle crisper. A subtle but pervasive glow emanates from the ground itself. No need for flashlights. Like the ridgeline above, they narrow the vision. The farther I get from town, the clearer I think I think. It was the same in Vietnam. As an auditor there, I checked on others. *Advised* them, really. This beats that. We're the instigators here.

Sunday

We divide into two groups so we can cover more ground. Charlie, Mahdud, Amin, and a few elders go down the valley. Ghulam, Al, the acting district chief, hangers-on, and I head upstream to survey potential projects. The main type we can support is re-covering creek-bed karezzes the locals call *chalks*.

We will try to give the same amount of work and of course pay the same rate to each village. They want it done with mortar and cement. No can do, we tell them. Transport is expensive, and cement is one and done. Local materials would be all theirs, and they could replicate the process.

Each of our two groups finds itself at a meal prepared by a separate village. In one sense our hosts can't afford it. In another they can't afford not to try and build a bond. We're creatures of our cultures, and theirs requires them to welcome strangers.

Midafternoon our two groups run into each other in the street. Charlie, with support from Amin and Mahdud, has kept on message. He may seem callow but he's solid, seemingly impervious to pressure. Mahdud does better when his colleagues from Kabul aren't around to impress. I suspect Amin helps with that. Amin may be a nebbish—he sure looks the part—but he knows a lot, and he doesn't seem to be gaming us the way his boss Baqi usually is.

We go over our assessments with the acting district chief. We like that he doesn't try to push us into pet projects or big ones beyond our competence. He lets us use the district phone to call the governor. The governor wants to talk with him first. *Bali bali*, the acting district chief keeps saying. Yes, yes. Maybe he can't speak freely because we're standing right next to him. Or maybe that's what you say to the governor no matter what you're going to do, or not do.

I get on the line to describe the projects. In the morning we'll look at a few more. The governor says he told the chief to go ahead with anything that meets our approval. He's champing at the bit. This is prelim, I explain. Baqi needs to sign off.

Baqi works for *me*! the Governor practically shouts. I put a few inches between the phone and my ear. What he doesn't say is Baqi also reports to the minister in Kabul. And what's his name—the governor pauses—works for Baqi.

Amin, I say.

Is he giving you problems?

No, no. But the farmers have to choose their foreman. The foreman has to agree to the specs. The chief will follow up.

The governor snorts.

He's been great, I attest. In the meantime we'll return to Farah town, double-check the math, complete the forms, set priorities, coordinate the teams, arrange for wheat deliveries, and then send a couple of guys here to get the earth moving. Might take a few days.

The governor tells me to head back after tomorrow's lunch. See him that evening.

remind him we haven't gone to Purchaman.

There's a pause.

Governor?

It's on the other side of the mountain! he exclaims, his voice made both rougher and smoother by the connection. How would you get the wheat there?

Isn't there a road?

Not much of one, he says.

We got this far.

It's your decision.

Aren't they hungry, too?

They don't use karezzes, he says.

Chalks, I guess.

Another snort.

Asked what they do use, he says there's a schoolhouse in need of repair, a new roof or something, and they'll probably show us wells they haven't maintained. The parliamentary representative from the area—the *Wakil*—keeps asking for roads. And guess who owns the only private vehicle in the district? The governor chuckles. That's our little secret.

Monday

After finishing on-site inspections and devising an overall plan for Gulistan valley, we load the van, follow the road past where we hiked the day before, and take a fork that leads north up the ridge to Purchaman. Gulistan the town and then the valley recede from view. We keep climbing. Far above, from what appears to be the crest, a solitary figure stands in our path, legs spread, arms folded, watching us. Wrapped in a cape blacker than anything we've seen in this province, the man looms like a prophet here to urge our repentance. A white turban adds to the effect. He's huge, with a salt-and-pepper beard the size and shape of a wreath. The glimmer in his eyes brightens, as though reflecting the sun on his face, with our approach. He doesn't need to squint because he's looking down at us coming up. Finally, as we rise to his level, he shades his eyes with his hand. Behind him a second man is bent under the hood of a Russian jeep. They're not on the ridgetop, as I thought from lower down. Higher crests have come into view. The man in black flaps his hand for us to stop, as if we could pass this spectacle by.

And so we meet the Wakil. He was traveling to Gulistan when his jeep failed. On the *downhill* side. That makes him laugh. He swats at the dust on his cape, the little there is of it. The road here is green with grass and gray with rock. This is not the Farah of the lowlands, where no one would consider such a get-up. Good God, the cape is *wool*. Unfastened, like something Dracula or a bullfighter might affect, it accentuates girth and gesture. Under it he wears *salwar kameez*, the combo long-sleeve tunic and baggy trousers common to the area, his a silky white that matches the turban on top.

Saying he has responsibilities as a host—no American has ever come this way before—the Wakil insists on accompanying us. His rollicking voice picks up the merriment in his face, the crinkling around his eyes. Although the acting district chief told us the phone to Purchaman was

out, and we've seen no transmission line, the Wakil acts as if he'd been waiting for us.

You can't be surprised, Al notes, if you have no expectations. For a man like the Wakil, something always comes along. He ensconces himself on the middle bench, forcing the rest of us to squeeze together. With that cape and what's under it, he takes the place of two. He breathes heavily and is already telling Al which way to go. For all his joviality we foreigners have taken an instant dislike to the man. Speaking only when spoken to, Al rubs the back of his neck with one hand while keeping the other on the wheel. Charlie—half smile, eyes cocked—goes silent. The word *wakil* can mean lawyer, and the man is so much better off than the people we've been sent to help.

We're not the only ones to get our noses out of joint. His oblivious, imperious manner has Mahdud and Ghulam muttering to each other. Only Amin seems unperturbed, but then he has no one to confide in, and he's not one to show his hand. It's the Wakil, not Amin, who mentions they've met—last year in the Governor's office.

He leaves his driver with the busted jeep. No wonder it broke down. Switchbacks are for sissies: this road heads straight up. It is barely differentiated from the mountain. With the new rider's extra weight, our Travelall suffers vapor lock many times over. On several occasions we have to get out and walk.

Roads help everybody, the Wakil declares as he strains to keep up. Truckers. Taxi drivers. Us. Look at yourselves, he says between huffs and puffs, his hands propped on his knees. Don't be tired. Russians.

Russians?

He smiles, lifting his eyebrows. The exercise has turned his complexion ruddy. Farmers, he adds. Traders. Police. With a real road maybe even the governor might visit! That gets him laughing

You and he friends? I ask as we wait for Al to bring up the Travelall.

That keeps the Wakil laughing.

Covering all bases, he quizzes Ghulam, Mahdud, and Amin about Food for Work and how they got into it. Meanwhile Charlie has been asking our counterparts about rural engineering. They teach, he learns, and it gets Ghulam and Mahdud out of their funk. We go for hours without sign of people, houses, or vehicles. The sun to our rear balances the cool, almost subalpine, air. Each high point we approach leads to speculation that Purchaman lurks just over the ridge. That too makes the Wakil laugh. He knows the barren saddles that lie between.

At last Purchaman reveals itself, low and with barely enough cohesion to qualify as a town. Row upon row of slate-colored mountains rise behind it to the east. They get higher as they get farther. Is that snow? I ask. It could be haze. Or clouds.

Yes, Mahdud affirms. Bamiyan mountains have snow all year.

Appropriate to the conversation, he's donned his new jacket. *Posteen* is the word for it; in Kabul tourist shops sell them. He tugs the fleece-trimmed collar tight around his neck. In Bamiyan men may actually wear posteens without preening.

Uruzgan, Ghulam counters. No snow.

Mahdud says he's been to Bamiyan. He should know.

Amin mentions a mountain in Farah has snow. He saw it on the drive here. Had he known of our interest, he would have pointed it out. We were busy with the carburetor then.

Mahdud asks if I know the Dari word for snow.

I say the Pashto.

Dari, he insists.

Every volunteer knows it: *barf*, which is also the brand name for the country's detergent. We have a box at the house.

He says it. He laughs and then translates the English into Dari for the Afghans. Their smiles suggest they're embarrassed for him.

We spend the night in the district capital, again all in one room as arranged by the Wakil, who sleeps elsewhere. The District Chief checks in before dinner. Not so dapper as his counterpart in Gulistan, he wears the same dun-colored salwar kameez as nearly everyone else. On him they could pass for pajamas. He has no projects in mind; he recommends asking the villagers. I don't think he takes us seriously. He speaks in Dari, which Mahdud and Ghulam prefer. Al says it's closer to the modern Farsi spoken in Iran than to the Dari you hear in Kabul. He translates for Charlie and me.

We dip bread into sautéed vegetables—eggplant and squash—unavailable in the lowlands. Ghulam nods a grudging approval. He, Amin, and Mahdud are anxious to return. They don't want to get between the Wakil and the governor.

Amin, a small man in his thirties, his short hair and beard already turning gray, has the look of a guy who isn't going to get anywhere in this world except through longevity. Baqi sent him to get out of going himself. I remind him he's the director's field representative. We need his buy-in. He thinks about that. It's better than a flat-out no.

Tuesday

Ghulam and Mahdud are first to rise. The blankets they slept under drape across their shoulders, and a steel-blue sleeveless sweater under Ghulam's sport coat lends color to his wardrobe. Mahdud's elbows press into his posteen for warmth while he and Ghulam rub their hands together like cowpokes around a campfire. Seeing me peek out of my sleeping bag, Mahdud booms good morning in Pashto.

The sun streams through the window, capturing cream-colored motes in its rays. I pull on a sweater that had been my father's until the moths got to it. My trousers are old dress greens, my boots government issued for the jungle but just as good in the desert. Charlie goes out in a light jacket and comes back patting his arms. His cheeks are rosy. Having sweltered on Farah's plains, he's disappointed. He thought there'd be frost.

You can see your breath, I console him. Even inside. Now we know why the Wakil wears a cape.

A servant carries in warm bread and hot tea that ease us through the chill.

The district chief slips out of his sandals and comes in. After the greetings, most of them in Dari, he asks a question I don't understand. He asks again.

Pashto! Mahmud interjects. They (Charlie and I) don't know Dari.

The chief smiles. We told him that last night. In Pashto he asks if we'll do wells. Yes, indeed. Schools? Anything to get the wheat out.

He addresses me as *Enjunyair Sayib*: Mr. Engineer. No, no, I explain. That's our counterparts. They're comfortable with the title. They earned it in school.

Ghulam describes the program more fully than we did over dinner, Mahdud commenting from time to time, and Amin fills in from his department's perspective. They do it in both Dari

and Pashto. The chief's eyes glaze over.

Enter the Wakil, cape and all. You think this place is poor, he says, having figured how to work us, you ought to see the next valley—Lerband. He'll show us.

The district chief wags his head, meaning he'll stay, thank you.

Steep and rugged, the road is too much for the van. We have to abandon it near the top of a pass. Just as well, Al remarks. We're running low on fuel.

As on yesterday's route, grass grows among the rocks. These higher elevations must get more rain, or dew. The descent is gradual, parallel to the ridgeline and with a view of Lerband all the way down. The village at the bottom strikes us as very beautiful. The Wakil's eyes beam to see us take it in. Willows and poplars line a streambed. Above it, houses separated by mulberry trees form a checkerboard. The buildings are not so bunched as in Gulistan or even Purchaman. We don't see a single shop. Our arrival draws residents into the one street, which bends and dips with the lay of the land. In order of proximity to us, boys, girls, men, and a few women stare. They've never seen the like.

Tsangaye, I say, Pashto for *how are you*?

Charlie says it, too.

Staire mashay, I persist. Don't be tired.

Boys titter to hear such an accent.

I say it again.

A man repeats it back to me like you're supposed to. He's a farmer, brown-bearded and gaunt with gaps in his teeth. Barefoot. Heck, they're all farmers or shepherds, most of them clothed in gray—a pale gray, like the rocks at our feet. The boys' outfits are darker, like wet stone, probably because they're newer. The girls and women get red, green, and black. No washed-out colors for them.

The man and I shake hands. Everything good? How's the health? The family?

Other men step forward. We're all shaking hands. I even hear Ghulam and Mahdud talking Pashto. Like Charlie and me, they can get by if they have to. Then they burst out laughing—they've discovered the farmers' first language is Dari.

Remember the roads, the Wakil implores. He's afraid we're turning into tourists. Remember how you had to walk here.

Representative doesn't really capture his status. Educated in Herat and then Kabul, he's a khan-and-a-half. Lerband happens to be his home village, a fact he failed to mention until we set foot in it. Elders greet him, holding his hand in theirs. One drops to his knees to kiss it. He takes credit for bringing aid-givers from America and engineers from Kabul. Lord of the manor, he invites us to dinner and then goes off to alert the womenfolk.

That leaves us with the villagers. Their focus is the soil, and you might think they'd ask for more than forty meters of "chalk" to cover in a dry ravine. Then you realize our unexpected, incomprehensible visit can't overcome a lifetime of making do. Initiative, if any, must come from the Wakil.

Villages are like people. Each has its own personality. The next one over wants a karez. They saw our procession filing down the pass and sent elders to investigate. Not as close to the Wakil's heart as Lerband, they try harder.

Al expresses concern about time. He has meetings in Herat, and the Peace Corps director will want an update. Al knows we can't just eat and run. We have to look at some projects. The

Wakil understands. He arranges for horses and tells the women we'll be dining early. He says he'd go with us but doesn't want to get in our way.

The horses are blanketed but unsaddled. Thankfully, because the trail is narrow and rocky, they also happen to be docile. Although we Americans would find walking easier, it would be rude to decline the offer. Besides, then will we ever get to work on horseback again?

The villagers want to clear out a collapsed karez with dynamite, but we don't do dynamite. We remind them the more man-days they put in, the more wheat they'll earn. They don't say yes or no. They're wondering if it's negotiable.

You'd think they'd jump at the chance. Only the Wakil, resting at his homestead, carries excess poundage. Even he is far from obese. Nobody is starving that we can see. These are poor people who have cinched their waist cords a knot tighter. But when they're hungry, Al reminds us, they're more susceptible to disease. They've started to eat their seed grain as well as the sheep, their principal store of wealth. The price of mutton has fallen. The animals are leaner. There's a push to sell before they lose more weight and the price falls further. The farmers appear to lack energy, Al says, because they're conserving it, hunkering down. They have no experience with foreigners, and the little they've had with their government was not fruitful. They're wary of tricks, of Mullah Nasruddin in disguise.

At dinner the Wakil is unhappy to hear we looked at karezzes instead of roads. He knew he shouldn't have left us. We're in too much of a hurry, he counsels. Spreading ourselves too thin.

But not such a hurry that we miss a meal. This one is the best yet: pilaf with raisins and carrot slivers atop a communal mound of rice, a fist-sized hunk of mutton underneath. We dig in, as always with right hand only, and supplement it with bread and a sauce made from dried buttermilk chunks soaked in water of dubious quality. No tea is served, only water in glasses. Al partakes. He's been partaking all along. Don't drink the water, the Peace Corps doctor stressed in training. Lay off the strawberries. Lettuce, too. I adhered to his advice in Jalalabad and still I got sick. Repeatedly. Al shrugs. Up to us, he says. Charlie and I look at each other. Until now, we relied on tea. Or you can use your iodine, Al adds.

That's in the medical kits back at our house.

The Wakil notices our hesitation. Deep well, he assures us. His, not the village's.

Charlie and I go for it.

We finish with melon sliced into cubes the color of lime sherbet and every bit as sweet.

We ride the horses to the pass as the sun sets over the ridge and a chill transforms the air. This time the Wakil goes with us, cozy in his cape. Ghulam unpacks his blanket and sweater while Charlie, Mahdud, and I put on our jackets. Both Amin and Al get by with sport coats.

We must be living right because the Travelall is where we left it, rested and of a piece. Starts right up. Al puts it in neutral whenever he can. Darkness overtakes us as we descend into Purchaman.

Two Russians in town are as surprised to see us as we are to see them. Haggard and hard, they have the spent, smudged faces of miners emerging from a shaft.

Prospecting, the Wakil informs us. Someday we'll all be rich. He laughs.

Coal? I guess.

Mercury, he thinks. Al knows the word. They have a permit from the Ministry of Mines.

They nod greetings but don't respond to English, Dari, Pashto, or smiles. Unshaven, they are as gray and dirty as the farmers. Good bet we are too. Because the religious leadersmullahs just recently permitted mirrors, the only kind in circulation are rearviews on vehicles, and

Afghan drivers adjust the angle to reflect themselves. The fascination with their own visages makes travel an even greater adventure than it already is.

It seems every adult male for miles has come to see the Americans. We brief the district chief, and then the Wakil, in a voice too low for eavesdropping, does it from his perspective. He starts chortling. His belly quivers. The chief chortles, too.

Dinner is served in the great room. I don't know how they determine who gets to eat, but it's done without argument. Those who make the cut have more gray and less white to their beards than we've seen on our interlocutors in the lowlands. Did the old guys stay home? Or do they just look younger? Or don't live as long?

Whatever, right hands make fast work of a slow-cooked meal, then our hosts rise to do the *atan*, the national dance. With their strong encouragement we foreigners join in. Everybody goes round in a rhythmic circle. Bob and weave, twist and turn, it's an Afghan hokey-pokey, hands down when in, high when out. Twirling and clapping is permitted. Go get 'em, Al! Even Charlie lets loose. You can hoot. You can holler. You can make eye contact. You can fix off in space. Just when I think it doesn't get much better than this, for Afghans as well as Americans—Russians, too—that this is the definitive Peace Corps moment, the recruiting poster we all signed up for, the Wakil loudly asks me to teach the people of Purchaman *my* country's national dance.

Ah, I confess, we don't really have one.

Ah, the men around him respond, you just don't want to teach us.

What about our Soviet friends? I parry. Maybe *they* have a national dance.

The Wakil looks one way, I another.

Sorawi! a man calls out the word for Soviet. *Sorawi*!

Our northern neighbors have slipped out.

Charlie shakes his head to say he can't help. Al watches from the back, taking mental notes. His sly smile makes me think he put the Wakil up to this.

Maybe it's a secret, someone pipes up. The superpowers don't want to share.

Okay, I announce as that notion gains currency, everybody get in line. Behind me.

I teach them the bunny hop.

Hands on hips, step to the left. Do it again. Step to the right. So nice we're gonna do it twice. Hands on hips of the man in front of you, take one hop back. Three hops forward.

Bali, bali.

In a barely lit room reeking of sweat, grease, mutton, tobacco, dust, and kerosene, these grizzled mountain men take to it with a verve I never would have imagined. On the hop hop hop the whole room quakes. It's the boys' night out. They're doing something nobody else in this country has ever done. Or even heard about. No mullahs present, and anyway Mohammed never banned the bunny hop. Ghulam, Mahdud, and Amin find themselves in the mix—it's inescapable —but, like the men of the office they are or will become, hold something back. Caught poking their heads in the door, the Russians have to join in too. Part of them revels in it, and part of them looks as if, even here, Big Brother might be watching.

Don't worry, Al says later as our team beds down in the great room; my lips are sealed.

Wednesday

The servant arrives with bread and tea. The chief follows, asking about our plans. Finally the Wakil rolls in. No tea, thanks. He's had his. With a shake of the shoulders and an exuberant sigh he carves a space for himself between Ghulam and the chief. Hop hop hop, he says with a wink. Nobody picks up on it. Instead, we cycle through the greetings. All business. He looks us each in the eye. No roads? he asks.

I nod.

That brings a chuckle. He *knew* it. So he's been talking to the chief, who's been talking to the people, and they'd be most appreciative if we could help with karezzes. This time he'll serve as our escort. No horses this time. It'll be on foot.

The chief tags along, and as we make our way up the valley I realize I underestimated him. The farmers who approach us talk to the Wakil—he's hard to avoid—but they also seek out their district chief. I reckon they see him as more likely to follow up, and in his deference to their wishes he's a democrat by default. Maybe the Wakil is, too, by extension.

The karezzes turn out to be more ambitious than he indicated. We thought he was talking rehab. The farmers want new ones, from sources way off in the hills. We're determined to start small, especially this far from home.

Our entourage grows with each stop, as the citizenry would rather join our traveling show than hang back with the same boring, bleating sheep and unyielding, unforgiving soil. Many of them don't even own the fields they tend. The village headman does. Or somebody in Gulistan, Delaram, Kandahar, wherever. At my insistence we press on to the village where the school has fallen into disrepair.

It needs a new roof, the Wakil states as we enter the outskirts. He's looking around for it as are we, only he's pretending he isn't. That could explain his lack of enthusiasm.

And doors, the headman takes over. Glass for the windows, he adds. The snow stays all winter.

I ask if there's a teacher.

Yes.

How many?

Two. Sometimes three.

Boys only?

Yes. Grades one to five.

I turn to the villagers. Is it a priority? I ask.

The men nod perfunctorily. They look to the Wakil, the chief, and their headman for clues while trying to make sense of our presence. They doubt this will come to anything.

How many have sons in school? I ask, daughters being out of the question.

Most raise their hands. It's tentative, though.

Are they there now? More hesitation. I call their bluff: Let's go see.

They smile at each other.

Mahdud shakes his head no.

It's a long walk, the Wakil interjects, reasserting his primacy. His face above the beard glows like Old St. Nick's, and sweat glistens on his forehead. Earlier he handed his cape to the chief, who passed it to his factotum to carry.

For a village school?

The Wakil points up the valley. The governor wanted it there.

Your friend.

The last governor.

The teachers went to Herat, a villager says.

Farah, the headman corrects. He means the provincial capital.

To get their salary, the chief explains.

We take a pass on the school.

What the villagers really need is wells. It's a rare family that hasn't lost at least one child to disease. One beat-down farmer lost all four of his to what sounds like dysentery. They drink from the same ditch they wash in. Comes from the hills, he says. Good water. There's a plea to his voice. He wants affirmation. I ask if he'd like a well. He shrugs. Wells are seen as a convenience, not a necessity, a help for the women more than the men. The idea would generate greater interest if we supplied drills, pumps, concrete, and dynamite in part because it makes the work easier and in part, I think, because materials provide an opportunity for pilferage. It may also be a boys-with-their-toys thing.

Wells are risky, the Wakil explains. You may or may not strike water. A new well can rob from an existing one. Without equipment to go deep, the water may or may not be clean. It may or may not last through the dry season. People won't use it if another source is closer. Irrigation benefits only the landowners. They're already rich. Like me, he adds, laughing. And you too. He slaps the headman on the shoulder. Someday you'll be as rich as me.

The headman frowns at such talk in front of the villagers. His expression, indeed, his whole bearing, recalls the farmer in *American Gothic*.

Al checks his watch. We have to be going.

No meal? the headman asks. He finds good and bad in that but mostly finds it hard to believe.

We'll be back, I promise. Speaking of hard to believe.

Despite downcast faces, slumped shoulders, limp grips, and affectless voices, everybody shakes hands and says the right things because it's what you do and you never know.

I know one thing. We're going to try.

Farmers along the path move toward us and then pause. Our determined strides make clear

we're not stopping.

The Wakil waves as he passes. *Salaam aleikum*.

Waleikum salaam, they reply. *Staire mashay*, they add if they're Pashtun.

He dabs his brow with the tail of his turban, though the pace is not so brisk he can't talk. Roads offer the surest return and the broadest benefit, he argues. Build a road and the vehicles will come. Fertilizer in, crops out. Maybe even the education department will send the salaries! That gets him laughing again.

Gravity pulls us along. He asks if I know Baqi.

Do you?

His smile says yes and maybe even favorably.

He slows down to get in step with Al. Those two have hit it off.

I should appreciate being left by myself and in front like this. I think best when walking, in silence and outdoors. But the peasants' scrutiny reminds me that for them this is no walk in the park. They're looking for relevance. On the way up Al talked me into the trickle-down approach. The most we can do is avert starvation and help improve the infrastructure. When and if that happens, social pressure will spread benefits to the poor. We cannot work directly with the peasantry. They defer to the headman, and headmen rarely let us out of their sight. *Malik* is the word even foreigners use to capture their status. Maliks are deputized villagers who, like the district chief, can be called to account.

The Wakil, in contrast, reports to no official, as near as we can tell. Sure, he knows people in high places. And his landholdings allow him to live large by local standards. As case in point, he's made the pilgrimage to Mecca, thereby earning the honorific *haji sayib*, which adds to the homage that comes from being the parliamentary representative. Obligations come with that status, however. They seem to take up more time than money.

Never, in those few moments I've found myself alone with the sharecropping majority, have I been able to elicit any suppressed yearning for land reform. They will have to make their own revolution, for we outsiders can do nothing without the government's connivance. Europe might have been like this 800 years ago.

Mr. Light, are you sad? That's Ghulam. He and Mahdud hustle to catch up. Afghans believe solitude leads to despair.

Not anymore, I say with a smile. I start to add we're together even when we're apart and then I realize the opposite also holds true. Neither of them wants us taking on projects here in the back of beyond. Ghulam sees the need but won't stand up to Mahdud. I ask if they've taken good notes.

Everything! Ghulam exclaims. He and Mahdud show me the results. Ghulam has more writing, in a neat Dari script, while Mahdud relies more on sketches.

Very good, Mahdud says in English. Anybody can use it.

You two are the experts, I say.

They shake their heads and tell me in school they studied roads, bridges, wells, and irrigation canals but nothing about karezzes. They'd never seen one before Farah.

The Wakil is right, Ghulam adds. Purchaman needs a road.

Want to be in charge of it? I ask.

You're in charge, Ghulam snaps.

We'll talk later, in private. Some of it's me, team leader who talks too much at decision time. And some of it's the system. The one he bought into, the only one available, is riddled with workarounds.

Mahdud smiles the smile of the unbeholden.

At least Amin has been helpful, always ready to explain our program to the locals. I don't think he's worked outside of the office before. Yet he and the district chief seem to know each other. All four hands are clasped in goodbye when we get to the Travelall, and both officials are more animated than I've seen them. I ask Amin about it as we board: they were classmates at the province's only secondary school, in Farah town.

The van strains on the climb from Purchaman. No vapor lock, but Al worries we'll run out of gas. And, knock on wood, no flat tires since Delaram. We're going too slow for that. A last, wistful look at the mountains to our rear prompts me to ask Amin about Farah's own snowy mountain. It lies ahead but is obscured by clouds, the first we've seen since Kabul. They're dry clouds formed, it would seem, from dust off the flatlands that stretch deep into Iran. With no pollution or moisture to sustain them, the sun burns through. He explains the snow was in prior years. The little that fell this winter didn't last.

Volunteers aren't allowed to drive. Only staff. Al coasts all the way while his passengers drift into daydreams and naps. The Wakil's jeep and driver are no longer where he left them, but he is unconcerned and of course finds them again in Gulistan. We get there on fumes, buy what little gas they will sell us, and siphon it into the tank. There we hear the Governor has been transferred. We're also told UNDP has descended on Farah town. They want us to return today, but it's getting dark, and we remember the now-departed governor's warning about bandits. We'll leave at dawn, too early to meet the district chief. He's due back tomorrow or the day after, or he might stay to greet the new governor, the acting chief isn't sure. He knew we'd be coming—the Purchaman chief got through on the phone. Chicken tonight, the first we've had in Farah. Proof, Ghulam says, his eyes on mine, the lowlands need us more.

I waggle the leg bone I've been gnawing. Truth is, I'm loving this more than I should.

After

Charlie was eager to get out on his own, Amin was also starting to like the separation though he had no say in it, and Mahdud, after young toughs threatened him in Farah town, volunteered to go back. With help from the Wakil and the district chiefs, they completed all that we surveyed and then some, the task made easier because the villagers were grateful and isolation spared them from invidious comparisons.

UNDP brought revised forms and two beers apiece for us Western volunteers. They then left for Herat. Al followed the next day. The day after that, at our first wheat distribution, a riot erupted because some claimants had the same name, they wouldn't line up, not every claimant's coupons matched the stubs we gave the granary manager, and he couldn't read our writing in any event. Students unfurled red banners demanding work, wheat, and bread. Men carrying shovels gathered behind. They marched, they chanted, and in the midst of all that Baqi assaulted the acting governor, a weightlifter who could have squashed Baqi like a bug but who was politic enough to let me hold him back. Baqi was summoned to Kabul.

Once the new governor arrived and we revamped procedures, everybody wanted in, even after we lowered the pay rate. By then influence peddlers were promising friends, family, and men of means a position at the head of the queue. Our landlord tried to evict us. Accusations were made, pressures brought to bear, and one of our two teams was stoned when it limited the number of diggers on a ditch. Their engineer quit. Ghulam quit. I took sick. After a week the town doctors paid a visit. They said it was malaria. I said I'd been taking the prophylaxis.

Sooner or later, they said, everybody gets it. Rest. Drink plenty of fluids.

Fever overlay chills like hot fudge on a sundae, and my urine turned the color of root beer. I stayed in our house and compiled updates from the field. Reports were blurring, everything coated in dust. It was all I could do to think. Or walk. I staggered to the telephone office to call Kabul. The doctor was out of town. The director was at a meeting. I told his assistant I needed a medevac.

Are you sure?

I asked about laxatives. I hadn't had a movement in two weeks. That brought a laugh. Intestinal medicines in Afghanistan worked to the opposite effect. I didn't have the energy, the ability to put this congestion into words, to… what? *Agh*. Damn if I was going to moan. *Aghgh*. That wasn't me. It was an aircraft, the first I'd heard since Kabul. Gotta go, I said. This might be my one chance.

It was a helicopter, a resonance every Vietnam veteran receives as a harbinger, a *potential* harbinger, of change. It got louder and ear-splittingly louder until it landed so close it blew dust through the open window. I smelled the exhaust, felt the metallic heat.

I stumbled upon the minister without portfolio and his UNDP counterpart, the former overdressed and the latter underdressed. Not recognizing me at first (I had reverted to native costume), they fought the impulse to recoil as though I were a vagrant begging for wheat without work. Thin to begin with, I was down to skin and bones.

What are you *doing* here? the UNDP rep demanded. No pat on the shoulder, not even a smile.

Where's the team? the Minister asked.

Bummer these Ph.Ds weren't doctors of medicine. Get me out, I pleaded.

When you're with helicopter there's never enough time. They had to see the acting Governor, and the Governor of Herat was expecting them. He wanted a program like Farah's. So did Nimroz. Herat was next, and it had twice the population. They hadn't brought the tape measures we'd requested. Nor the maps. They promised to call for assistance. I said I already had.

Al returned the next day. He said the whites of my eyes were orange, like a pumpkin. Hepatitis, he diagnosed, and he drove me to Kabul.

As Eid al-Fitr approached, the minister recalled the teams for redeployment. The program was expanding into nine more provinces. To keep up with demand the Peace Corps brought in a new wave of volunteers who were redirected to other countries when Pakistan impounded the wheat. Another group arrived after the Paks relented. Our aid agency got involved, and Peace Corps Washington replaced the country director. Conditions got worse, far worse, before they got better. Food for Work was rebranded Operation Help, and the wheat was given gratis, no labor required. Eventually the drought ended, sort of, and after a while the program did, too.

As for me, I laid low through New Year's and then led an all-Afghan team into a province at the other end of the country. Before going I heard the rains had returned to Farah, with a vengeance. The river rose from its once-dry bed and flooded the capital. The locals blamed it on us. We had upset the natural order of things.

Previous Publication in the magazine American Chordata

By Andy Sussman

1. The overwhelming sense of wonder and anticipation with every one of the stops of Cycle 10's Boeing 727 24-hour charter flight (Philadelphia-Gander-Prestwick-Rome-Istanbul-Beirut-Damascus (all 15 minutes of that hop)-Baghdad-Tehran-Kabul, realizing that we were get-ting closer and closer to Mars.

2. Heat and dust, followed by heat and dust, leavened occasionally by dust and heat.

3. Growing confidence as my Pushtu began to improve, and much more confidence after ar-riving in Jalalabad and quickly learning that Pushtu was really hard, Dari was much easier, and I could get by 90% of the time with Dari -- which I began to pick up on the street.

4. The best bread, melons and hashish, and the most hospitable people on earth. (Sorry, Iran.)

5. My students-- 9 girls, aged 15-19 from Jalalabad, Laghman and nearby villages, at a new nursing school -- first of its kind. Realizing that I was the first man with whom they'd ever been in a room without a male relative, and dealing with it by announcing that I was their brother, and getting them to buy it.

6. A very annoying 5-year-old kid loudly "Mister Katchaloo"-ing me down the street until I turned and flicked open my Afghan-made switchblade knife, and the improper but genuine satisfaction of watching him running away down the street as fast as he could, howling and pissing himself.

7. The best sales pitch I've ever heard, at a Nangrahar village specializing in the manufacture and sale of weapons, where a 10-year-old kid stuck a derringer in my face and asked: "Hey, Mister -- Do you want to buy this gun?"

8. Live geckos on the walls of the house to keep down the bugs.

9. WTs and their enthralling and sometimes ridiculous travel stories. When bored with one another, I or one of the roommates would go down to the bazaar and, when a bus with some on board arrived, offer a place to stay and food for the night in exchange for them. We stopped after an appalling incident with a French couple, whose dream was to get to Pakistan, buy a bunch of heroin, return, sell it and start a commune in Provence. They left, and returned 2 weeks later, broke, having given their money to a friendly chap who promised he'd be "right back with the stuff." Their new plan was to prostitute her here and there en route back to scrape together travel funds -- with no apparent knowledge of the local going rates in any of those countries. We gave them 400 afs for bus tickets to the Iran border on condition that they never show themselves in Afghanistan again.

10. Fishing with Afghan friends in the time-honored traditional local way -- tossing a lit stick of dynamite into the Kabul River, and then wading in to collect them.

11. Finding the point at which servant theft was tolerable but not a firing offense. Firing one who liked to peek into our bedroom windows at night.

12. The unjustified but real feeling of comradeship with Afghan strangers at a teahouse in the cold moonlit darkness of Balkh, waiting for a morning bus.

13. Visiting friends in Lashkar Gah and galloping with them on one of their horses through the ancient deserted city outside of town.

14. Projectile diarrhea -- and later, Doc Johnson signing my copy of his medical guide for PCVs, dedicating the chapter on that ailment to me.

15. Feeling safer on the streets of Kabul at 1 am while looking for a taxi than I ever did in New York.

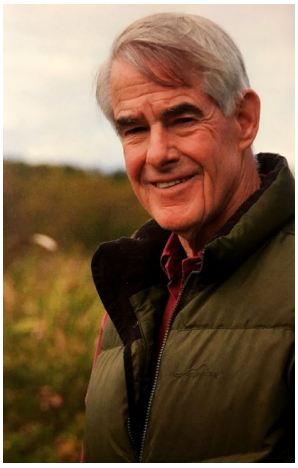
16. The night of Eid, when I and some others climbed onto the roof of Jalalabad's Green Hotel and lit off a very large bottle rocket. It went up and blew up, and the large, bright embers slowly drifted down.... straight for the wooden roof of the Pakistan consulate -- and this when tensions were very, very high

with India. Realizing that we might have just started a war, we ran as fast as we could towards the horizon. The embers burned out two feet above the roof. 17. Dana Bonnin.

18. The Afghan spreading the excellent bazaar rumor that the American Medical Mission Sisters (nuns and nurses), who had a portable altar for when a visiting priest might pass through, thought they had God in a box.

19. Friendships that have stood the test of time, in particular Bob DeSoucey, and the Fotis (now just Mary -- Sebastian died way too young), and the Shaeffers, and Gary Fenton.

20. The single best thing I learned from Afghanistan and the PC = how to deal effectively with others who differ completely from you, on their own terms. Both served me well later during my years in Iran, and more so when I began to practice law.



By Chris Bateman

I wrote this column for The Union Democrat *in Sonora, CA on Oct. 12, 2001 – a few days after the US launched "Operation Enduring Freedom," beginning an Afghan war that continues today.*

I also wrote a Democrat *piece on Afghanistan after the Soviet occupation in 1980, but I'm afraid that one has been lost to the sands of time. More amusing, however, is the letter to the editor which followed this piece. It pretty much reflects the poli-tics of our neck of the California woods. A couple of letter writers later came to my defense, but their work was not as entertaining as Brandon Hatler's*

MY COLUMN:

WHEN I LEFT Afghanistan more than 30 years ago, I vowed to return. Decades later, I figured, I'd fly back to Kabul with fading memories and what was left of my once-formidable Farsi vocabulary. I saw myself riding a truck over the Salang Pass and into Kunduz, where I taught English at an all-male boarding school during my Peace Corps hitch.
I'd walk the town's tree-lined main street, stopping to chat at teahouses, bakeries, shops and kebab stands. I'd go back to the DMA – my school – and ask whatever became of portly old Mr. Sayed, our principal.
I'd look for former students, now men in their 40s. I'd track down Anwar, a prodigiously bright 11th-grader who edited our nglish-language newspaper. I'd prowl Kunduz's dusty alleys, looking for the mud house I rented for $7.50 a month.

THAT DREAM has died. First the Soviets invaded. Then the Taliban seized power. And now the government that once paid me to teach Afghan high-schoolers is firing missiles at their homeland.

So instead of planning a return visit, I'm wondering what's left to visit. Paved roads, electricity, telephones and running water, all scarce 30 years

ago, must now border on non-existent. Bombing Afghanistan back to the Stone Age, as some have urged, might take no more than a few fire-crackers.
Then there's the human toll taken by decades of war and years of drought. In a country where life expectancy is 47, are even half my students still liv-ing?

How many have fled? How many are at war? Who among them is starving, injured or sick?

THE AFGAHNISTAN I knew was a bit player on the world stage. If it was noted for anything, it was the cheap hashish that made Kabul an obligatory stop on the counter culture's round-the-world trail.

Six hours to the north, I was teaching high-school kids who would likely take the few words of English they learned back to the family farm and shout them at sheep.

But my job was not without rewards.

Once a week my students and I would forget the curriculum. Speaking Far-si – mine became good enough to understand even dirty jokes – we'd talk about Muhammad Ali, Hollywood, Corvettes, the Ma-fia, Vietnam, Nixon and life in the U.S.

Americana? I brought it to my kids, who nearly rioted when issued never-before-seen Frisbees and squirt guns on a summer day.

EXOTIC VACATIONS were a huge Peace Corps fringe benefit.

Forget Honolulu. I chose Faizabad, a distant Afghan outpost at the foot of the Pamir Mountains. The place has seen few outsiders since Marco Polo left 700 years earlier.

Sheep scattered as our wheezing plane set down. At the bazaar, we out-drew a sword swallower, attract-ing a crowd of 100 gawkers.

The mayor assigned us a police escort. When we went fishing, cops dug our worms.

A few months later, we rented a 1958 Willys for a trip through the Hazara-jot – Afghanistan's mountain-ous center. Sparsely inhabited by the de-scendants of Genghis Khan, the place is desolate, isolated and rarely visit-ed. It took us two weeks to cover 400 tortuous, rocky, off-the-goat-path miles. When the lone gas pump in a one-camel town called Chagcharan ran dry, the provincial governor gave us daily briefings on the fuel crisis.

Can you see California Governor Gray Davis doing this for a handful of stranded tourists from afar?

SUCH HOSPITALITY was the rule in Afghanistan, even in its most distant reaches. That's why seeing this country recast as terrorism's international capital does not add up.

Sure, a huge, at-times unfathomable cultural gulf separated me from my students and neighbors in Kunduz.

But during my Peace Corps tenure, I'd like to think, that gulf narrowed by a few inches. At least for myself and the Afghans I grew close to.

That's why this distant nation's ongoing tragedy haunts me.

At this point I can only hope – far more for Afghanistan's sake than for my own – that someday I can again dream of returning.

(Alas, I think this San Diego reunion will be as close as I get.)

AND ONE READER'S TAKE:

To the Editor:

I am appalled by Chris Bateman's Oct. 12 article. If you are so worried about the Afghans, you should place your-self on a plane and go reside there, because we, the Americans, don't need you or your worries. We only have time to worry about ourselves and what is coming from them next.

It is ignorant liberal zealot mentalities like yourself that encourage Americans to cower to terrorism and just let this go without response. You can plainly see that Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan teach their people at a very young age to hate us.

The war on terrorism has begun. I resent your attempt to place a guilt trip on the American public. If you are not with us, you are against us. That holds true for anyone who lives in the USA, including you.
It is time to start acting like the super power we are and continue to bomb any country that harbors terrorists.

Brandon Halter
Sonora

Chris Bateman

RANDOM TAKES AND MEMORIES

Over the intervening decades I had devoted very little thought to my one year as a Peace Corps teacher in Afghanistan. So when my PC colleague Pat Nyhan asked me to share a few memories, I told her I would not have a lot to contribute.

Then I dredged up a stack of letters I had written to my parents during 1970, dusted off a pile of slides and Instamatic snapshots, and dug up a couple of pieces on Afghanistan I had written for the Union Democrat during my 38-year tenure at that Sierra foothills paper.

Suddenly, memory stimulated, I was off to the races. One thing led to another, and after four days pounding at my laptop, a promised vignette or two turned into a many-chaptered tome totaling nearly 5,000 words.

And led to the realization that 1970 was one of the most interesting, bizarre and wonderful years of my life – full of good friends and incredible experiences.

Pat, I've learned, is also a journalist and, for this particular reunion project, she's also an editor. Editors, I learned over my years in the trade, really don't like it when reporters pull this kind of dirty trick.

So my apologies to Pat and to any readers who dare slog through what she's left below.

Unusual customs

My cook in Kunduz was engaged to be married and looking for a wedding present for his fiancée. I mentioned that I could get him a watch from the States, and I might as well have offered him a new Cadillac.

Afzal was ecstatic, and I asked my parents to send me a dainty-looking women's Timex – which they did. But when I went to the customs station in Kabul to pick it up, an agent there shrugged his shoulders and told me it had been "lost."

I was angry and upset, knowing that the watch had been pilfered by one of the country's invariably crooked civil servants. Hearing the commotion at the counter, the office manager came my way with a solution. "A lot of watches come through here," he soothed. "I'll find you a nice new one."

I declined, instead searching for a fake Timex in Kabul.

Relaying the tale, I told my parents that the Afghans had made a "fine art

out of combining incompetence and corruption."

Everybody's right

Did you ever notice this? I did.

Four of us were attempting to get out of remote Faizabad via the supposed twice-a-week plane to Kunduz that took off from the sheep pasture that doubled as the town airport.

We woke on the morning of our alleged departure, and our Faizabad innkeeper said the old De Havilland Otter would not be flying and was, in fact, nowhere to be seen. But a policeman countered that the plane was not only at the landing strip, but could take off at any minute. Neither of them were troubled by even a shadow of doubt, nor were any of the two or three more folks we similarly questioned.

Hedging our bets, we took a gaudi to the airport, where no plane waited. But three men at the airport separately swore that the plane would: 1. Arrive in minutes. 2. Would come in two days or 3. Was postponed for an entire week. All were dead certain.

We ended up riding a dump truck back to Kunduz. The driver absolutely guaranteed he'd make it in 12 hours. It took 17.

Want Uruguay? How 'bout Afghanistan?

When I applied for the Peace Corps, I listed South America as my first choice. Then came the South Pacific. And, OK, sure, I'd settle for Africa if need be.

I was assigned, of course, to Afghanistan. After I arrived, I learned through the grapevine that nobody who applies to the PC gets his or her first choice.

There were various guesses as to the logic behind this. Give an applicant his first choice, the thinking may have gone, and it would be too easy, too much like a vacation. Let's make these rooks at least a bit uncomfortable.

I don't think any of my PC colleagues actually requested Afghanistan, and a few confessed to not being entirely sure where the nation was when they received their acceptances.

Anyone who actually applied to come to Kabul, the Peace Corps (with some justification) may have concluded, were likely lured by the availability of cheap and very good hashish. So those folks were sent to Tonga.

So how did that work out?

Well, my colleagues at PC training in Kabul and I were fast learners, adaptable and opportunistic.

After 10 days of language and cultural training, a few of my new friends and I thought we had learned enough Farsi to buy hashish. So I joined a fellow trainee (who shall remain nameless) on a walk to one of Kabul's seedier bazaars and began tentatively inquiring about "chars."

Within 10 minutes we had made a win-win deal, buying a quarter-pound chunk of the stuff for the equivalent of 50 cents.

The guy who sold it to us without a bit of haggling was convinced he had royally ripped off a couple of American rubes. And my Peace Corps buddy and I thought we had made the deal of the century.

The only drawback? If the PC powers-that-be pulled a surprise drug raid on our training dorm, my co-conspirator feared, the chunk of hash we had bought "would be too big to flush down the toilet."

Fired up

Our illicit purchase notwithstanding, I graduated from training, was stationed in Kunduz and over the months that followed made frequent trips to visit fellow volunteers.

Toward the end of the school year, I was among several colleagues who paid a weekend visit to a couple stationed at the far reaches of the Peace Corps empire. Their home, on the distant outskirts of a place that was barely a town at all, was not likely to attract visits from the PC hierarchy.

So rather than pay an exorbitant 50 cents for chars in the wrong part of town (which out there was probably, like, one guy), they grew their own. And, of course, the crop was way, way more than this pair of teachers could possibly smoke.

When we arrived, it was fall in Northern Afghanistan and a chill was in the air. So, our hosts uprooted the substantial remains of their cannabis plot and lit it up. Yes indeed, the resulting bonfire warmed us up. And nobody minded being downwind.

A psychedelic postscript

I have no idea where we got the stuff, but a fellow volunteer (once again nameless) and I once dropped LSD in Bamiyan. We were flying high on acid while perched on the stone head of the 170-foot-high Buddha that over-

looks the valley.

Luckily, we did not have to interact with any Afghans. Any such conversation would have done little to for-ward the Peace Corps mission.

Nevertheless, after several hours our trip was taking a ragged turn south. So we smoked huge amounts of hash to "come down."

A day later, remarkably, we were back at our schools teaching.

Me? A teacher?

The above vignettes notwithstanding, the U.S. government was not paying me to conduct experiments with Afghanistan's intoxicant of choice. Instead I was to teach English to its high-school students.

And for a year I did. I was assigned to the DMA, a Kunduz boarding school whose students lived in the province's distant corners and who – with a few exceptions – would not put the English I taught them to much use once they returned to the family farm.

Still, I was trained to teach English, and teach it I did. I drafted lesson plans, gave quizzes, forced these kids to speak my own language for minutes at time and encouraged the best of them to pursue proficiency in this international tongue.

But my most memorable hours in class came once a week, when English was off-limits and instead I told them about America in Farsi, occasionally with visual aids. I had my parents, for instance, send me copies of a *Sports Illustrated* issue with Muhammad Ali – a hero throughout the Muslim world – on the cover.

They also asked me if I was in fact a CIA agent working undercover. I strenuously denied this, but then don't all spooks?

My kids then moved onto sex, asking one at times envious question after another on America's loose morals. I never had Mom and Dad send over copies of *Playboy* to quench my students' considerable curiosity. Instead – and this was nearly as disruptive – they sent me a care package full of Frisbees and squirt guns. These were items none of my students had ever seen or perhaps even suspected existed.

Pandemonium broke loose on the DMA campus the day they arrived, and suddenly being in Mr. Chris's English class became very cool.

A Hard Day

Calling the roll was the easiest part of my day. I'd read off the names and the kids would answer "here." Or when one of their classmates was absent, they'd tell me he was sick, late getting back from home, or otherwise in-disposed.

But when I got to Mohammed Jalil, a tall, confident student, there was deadly silence from the class. After many questions, it turned out he had been charged by the Kunduz police with burglarizing his father's house.

Jalil didn't do it, all his classmates attested, but the shame was more than he could endure and he shot himself.

Some teachers might seize this moment, engaging the class in an instruc-tive discussion about how this young man's suicide was unnecessary and perhaps the fault of a misguided culture.

I didn't touch it. The rest of that day's class was uncomfortable and quiet. And I was left realizing how different we Americans were from our hosts.

Roots of a career

I've been a journalist for 45 years, and my musty resume says I began as a cub reporter in 1973.

But in reality I started at the top. As publisher of *The DMA Times* in Kunduz.

Armed with copies of *The Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times* and *The San Francisco Chronicle* sent by my ever-obliging parents, I encouraged the best and the brightest of my students to start a school paper of their own.

But, as I had access to the principal's ditto machine, I was the publisher. Mohammed Anwar, a bright 11th-grader who could speak better English than I could Farsi, was the managing editor. We put out a few is-sues, none of which have survived the intervening decades.

I wish I could tell you how we exposed school corruption, administrators on the take, diplomas for sale and more, but I think we stuck to tamer stuff – like what a great guy and paragon of integrity Mr. Sayed, our principal, happened to be.

As for my journalistic career, it was all downhill after that. Never again would I be a publisher. Or have access to a ditto machine.

John True Vvisits

I knew our regional director would show up for one of my DMA classes someday. There would be no warning, no prep, no nothing.

John True's visit, during which he'd find out if I was really a teacher, would be a surprise. As it should have been.

I just hoped I'd get lucky that day, that my often-unruly kids would be decent, attentive and engaging for a change. And that I didn't have to shout, get flustered or appear way out of my depth.

Well, the day John showed up, I nailed it. Somehow, I was Mr. Chips for a day, beloved, respected and effective. For an entire 45 minutes. My kids were wonderful, and they had no idea who "Mr. John True" was.

It was like the general manager of a baseball team shows up, and a mediocre pitcher with a sky-high ERA somehow pitches a shutout, then gets a new contract and a raise from the GM.

Except I got neither of those.

Day of Reckoning

Classes were over and it was final exam day at the DMA. The rules were pretty clear: absolutely no cheating – unless you can get away with it.

And about half my kids – despite my earnest pre-test warnings and appeals to whatever latent sense of integrity may have lurked deep in their souls – tried to get away with it. Almost all of them succeeded.

The exam venue was a flat campus field with scores of desks for students in all of my classes. Although I think a couple of my fellow Kunduz volunteers helped me proctor, we were hopelessly outmanned.

Every time our attention was drawn to a kid glancing at a crib sheet, peering over the shoulder of a better–prepared classmate or reading pen scrawlings on his palms, a dozen more scofflaws took advantage of our momentary scolds by doing the exact same things.

And the Afghan teachers assigned to help us monitor that day? Don't ask.

At the DMA, ethics was a dirty word.

I drew some satisfaction, however, that many of my students, despite cheating, had a tough time with the test. "Meestar, meestar," a knot of

them chanted as I left school hefting a sheaf of exams in my arms. "Deeficult, deeficult, *too* deeficult."

At least they chanted it in English.

Over the next several days about a half-dozen students who never paid attention to me in the classroom visited my house, offering some modest bakshish and a plea: "Please, Mr. Chris, don't fail me on the test."

Then Mr. Sayed showed up and beseeched me not to fail *anyone,* as it would cause too much trouble on campus, and higher-ups at the provincial education office might get wind.

"Don't worry," I assured him. "If those students studied, they'll pass."

Mr. Sayed was not assured.

I graded the exams, failed a half-dozen kids who gave way less than a damn, then departed for what I thought would be a year-end trip through India and Nepal.

That trip, of course, never happened. I never returned to Kunduz, but Mr. Sayed did. So I guess the DMA somehow escaped the campus unrest he feared my few F grades would have brought.

Either that or – as inconceivable as this may seem – those grades were changed.

The Rest of the Story

John True relayed this dialogue to me in a letter he sent several months after my departure.

John: Mr. Sayed, I'm very sorry to have to tell you that Mr. Chris won't be able to come back to the DMA next year. He had some difficulty with his family etc.

Mr. Sayed (after a long, flowing eulogy for Mr. Chris, in which he made it perfectly clear that he knew the *real* reason he wasn't coming back): Will you give us someone to replace him?

John: No. Mr. Sayed (after long pause): Well, then will you give me a quart of ditto fluid?

Boys on the Bus

As any of my fellow volunteers will tell you, my Farsi was not excellent.

But, as the months went on, it did improve. Exactly how much it had progressed became evident on a bus ride in Kabul near the end of my year in Afghanistan.

A guy near me was telling his seatmate, in hushed but audible tones, a dirty joke. An anatomically specific dirty joke. And when he hit the punch line, I burst out laughing.

The guy looked at me in stark disbelief, and I knew I had arrived.

An Olympic sport?

Early in my year-long stay in Afghanistan, I was lucky enough to see a buzkashi match on the outskirts of Kunduz. It left me convinced that this country's gruesome, violent national sport should be part of the Olympics.

Odds are long that Kabul will ever host the games, but the addition of buzkashi would give its athletes the inside track on a gold medal. Think about it: No other country even plays this blood-sweat-and-goats sport (although it would be amusing to see nations like Finland, France, Ireland or the Lesser Antilles attempt to field teams).

Sure, we'd have to deal with PETA and other animal activists who might have problems with the 30 or 40 decapitated dead goats needed for Olympic competition. Sure, we could placate them by offering to instead use live goats, but that might backfire badly.

Better, perhaps, to simply point out that baseball – which has been an actual Olympic sport – uses a ball covered with the hides of dead horses.

Speaking of horses, about 30 riders and steeds are involved in buzkashi. Each team's goal is to drag a head-less goat carcass from one goal (a flag on a pole), around a second, very distant pole, then back to the first. Opposing riders use any and all means to pry the increasingly fragmented goat from the opposing riders. All carry whips, which they more often used on enemy riders than on horses.

Chains and other weaponry, we were told at the Kunduz match, were only recently banned. "It's game of ac-tion and violence," I told my parents in a letter.

But, as the field measures about 400 yards square, the action and violence were often so far away from the grandstands that we had time for lengthy

discussions about politics, Vietnam, music, travel plans, the intricacies of the NFL playoffs and a host of other topics as the dusty, gory chaos unfolded a quarter-mile away.

If you didn't pay attention, however, you might look up to see 30 horses and, somewhere among them, one dead goat hurtling headlong toward you.

Near as we could tell, buzkashi has no clock, no penalties, no time outs and no refs. At times tempers flare and scores of reserve riders gallop from the sidelines to join the fray. Finally – and we actually saw this in Kunduz – cops armed with billy clubs wade in, clobbering riders and horses alike.

"What?" you may now be scoffing. "That kind of thing has no place in the Olympics!"

Hear me out. First, I'm convinced the U.S. could field a half-decent buzkashi team made of rodeo cow-boys, NFL linebackers and ripped, tatted-up MMA stars who could be taught to ride. For the sake of the better-to-do, we could add a few snooty polo players who aren't afraid to use their mallets.

NBC could add goat cams and gin up a bunch of stats on animal (and human) parts torn loose, length of lacerations inflicted and whip strokes delivered per minute. Retired Afghan buzkashi riders could be "color commentators." You get the idea.

Finally, answer me this: Wouldn't you rather watch a buzkashi match on TV than badminton, rhythmic gymnastics, synchronized swimming or dressage (whatever that is), which are actual Olympic sports?

Harazajot

Since I left the Peace Corps at the tail end of 1970, I've traveled around the world, climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro, hiked South Africa's rugged Otter Trail, bicycled across the U.S., scaled Mt. Whitney and Half Dome, and trekked through the Himalayas in Nepal.

But none of that comes even close to the wild adventure of crossing Afghanistan's Hazarajot in a 1955 Willys.

The company was much of the reason: David (then Daoud) Moats, Fritz Laurenovics, John and Dona Templeman, and Chris and Pat Nyhan, my best Peace Corps friends, were all in. Sheer adventure was the rest.

Where we planned to go was terra incognito. We asked about the roads

through Afghanistan's mountain-ous middle and got answers ranging from "Really, really bad" to "What roads?" No other volunteers that we knew of had taken the trip. But somehow Kadir, the driver we hired, swore he could get all of us from Kabul to Herat in less than the two weeks we had for semester break.

That was a lie.

The trip was uncomfortable, scary, desolate and way, way out there. If that Willys had plunged off a cliff – and at times it got close – our loved ones would still be wondering what happened to us.

That said, it was the trip of a lifetime.

Many folks do the things I mentioned at the top of this story. Almost nobody does Hazarajot. Heck, *National Geographic* barely got there.

Even starting the trip was not easy. How do you even wedge seven PC volunteers and a driver into a '55 Willys?

The answer: You put two in the front with Kadir, three in the middle and two in the rear cargo area. Our gear, I think, was strapped on top.

The front may have been the scariest, because you could see exactly how close those looming cliffs were. The cramped middle was tough on knees and backs. The rear had great legroom and views, because we kept the gate open. But for the same reason, storms of road dust poured in, forcing us to either wear bandanas or gag, spit and swear for mile after mile.

After Bamiyan and Band-i-Amir (tourist destinations not all that far from Kabul), we left the mildly beaten track for the Great Beyond. When we pulled into a camel stop called Garm Auw (my spelling) on our third day on the road, it was like the circus had come to town. Within minutes, the town's entire Hazar population sur-rounded and stared, intently and open-mouthed, at us.

Think about it. Few cars and trucks pass through Garm Auw and the last time one with foreigners (including two women!) had passed through was likely… never. The townspeople were friendly enough, considering they were looking at alien life forms.

The experience would be repeated again and again as we crossed pass after pass and traversed valley after valley in a vast, desolate area left behind by the ages. On the plus side, we always found food and sometimes dirt-floor accommodations at the settlements we passed through. And not once were we threatened or intimi-dated (except by those cliffs).

But because of barely negotiable roads and almost daily Willys break-downs, progress was slow. About 10 days into the trip, we arrived at the Minaret of Jam, a majestic, 200-foot-high, spire built in the late 12th century alongside the Hari Rud River.

It took a detour off the alleged main road and, as I remember, a trek down a donkey trail, to get to the minaret. We climbed a set of narrow stone stairs to the top and signed a guest register put there in the mid-1950s, shortly after the minaret became known to the outside world. There were about 30 names on it.

We were still on schedule when the Willys sputtered and clanked into Chagcharan, the capitol of Ghor Province. We camped by the Hari Rud as Kadir drove into town for gas. There was none.

And there would be none for four days. It wasn't because we didn't ask.

Every day we sent a delegation to visit the portly, always agreeable provincial governor. We'd tell him we were Peace Corp teachers and that it was absolutely essential that we get back to our schools in time for the beginning of the semester.

This urgency was not exactly reflected at our laid-back encampment on the Hari Rud. As our colleagues made their fervent pleas, the rest of us basked in the sun, took refreshing swims and talked about just how great our trip had been.

Meanwhile, the governor each day promised the gas tanker would arrive either that afternoon or, at the very latest, early the next day. His repeated promises eventually came true.

We drove back to Kabul on the paved road through Kandahar, arrived at our schools several days later – and were reprimanded for our tardiness by the PC brass.

A very small price to pay for such an adventure.

Our Mission

Our urgent plea to Ghor's provincial governor may have a few of you wondering how much our classroom work was valued by King Mohammed Zahir Shah's government back then.

Although I wasn't among the volunteers who lost sleep pondering this question, a few of my more commit-ted colleagues decided to put the king's minister of education on the spot.

"Don't be foolish," he reportedly told them. "You're not here to teach English. You're here to be resident Americans, and it doesn't matter what you do."

To maintain the proper diplomatic balance in the then-neutral country, the minister explained, there must be one American for every two Russians in Afghanistan. That was what was important.

Seem preposterous, simplistic, crazy?

Well, it worked until the Russians invaded and that 2-to-1 ratio went *way* out of whack. Then we invaded in 2001 and stuck around, so I'm pretty sure that once-golden ratio is still nowhere near 2-to-1.

So the formula worked until it didn't work. And I don't think – the minister's comments notwithstanding – it affected how we Peace Corps teachers did our jobs.

My abrupt departure

I was crushed, devastated, overwhelmed.

One day I was celebrating the end of my first year as a Peace Corps teacher at a party with my fellow volunteers. The next day, along with seven or eight colleagues (I've forgotten the exact number), I was summarily thrown out.

The vacation trip to India and Nepal I had planned with a PC buddy? Gone. Teaching at a new post in exotic Faizabad for my second year? Forget it.

Instead I wired my parents in Chicago: "BACK WEDNESDAY MORN. NO EMERGENCY."

The reason? As I had during most every other weekend party during my year of PC service, I joined my colleagues in partaking of hashish at our year-end bash. It made the music sound great and the conversation flow. Only this time a fellow volunteer blew the whistle on us.

The Peace Corps brass acted quickly.

Although hash was the drug of choice in Afghanistan, cheap and widely available, using it was against PC regulations. No, the Corps did not actively enforce this rule, and some might even say it looked the other way.

But not when a case was served up on a silver platter: We didn't lie, and justice was swift. We were given plane tickets home and in two days we were all gone.

“It was drugs, wasn’t it??” thundered my dad when I arrived home a few days before Christmas.

My mom was in tears. And my brother, who had two years earlier been busted for pot in Colorado, gave me a look that roughly translated as “Sure glad I’m not you today.”

Things weren’t pleasant at home, although a letter John True sent to my parents (I still have it) attesting that I was a decent guy and dedicated teacher, helped a lot.

Still, it took me better than year to recover. Fearing no reputable employer would hire me with this black mark on my record, I moved to California and took a series of marginal jobs where backgrounds were not checked. This did little to rehabilitate my crippled resume

So I finally screwed up my courage and applied for a newspaper job.

Lucky for me, the publisher was desperate. When I told him of my abrupt dismissal from the Peace Corps for using drugs, he shrugged. “Everyone has a few skeletons in their closet,” said my new boss, and I began a 38-year career at *The Union Democrat.*

Meanwhile, dismissal of the Kabul Eight (or Nine), apparently become something of a legend among volunteers remaining in Afghanistan. Indeed, it is a story full of twists, turns, nuance, intrigue and more than enough blame to go around.

After a few years as a “reputable” journalist (this was decades before “fake news”) the stigma of my dis-missal faded and I began to tell the story with relish, humor and probably more license than I should have.

At times I’ve considered reconnecting with everyone involved (including the rat, who with more-than-ample justification was thrown out himself). In interview after interview, I’d get to the bottom of this surre-alistic peri-od piece, then tell it like it was.

But then I’d have to file a Freedom of Information Act request and go over sheaves of heavily redacted documents to ferret out the truth. This could take years, and at 71, I may not have years.

So I’ll settle for getting together with you, my fellow volunteers, in San Di-ego (thanks, Bill, for making it all happen) and reliving all the adventures of my very eventful year in Afghanistan.

Kathamann

May, 2009

Mon posta Aghanistan
deq shadom
As ateriky mon zendagi
kadom onja
baraye do salas, tagri-
ban chel sal pesh.
Mon besyar jawan bo-

dom; bist salas.
Bismillah Rahmani Rahim.

Salamalakum, chaturisti, hubisti,
jonnie juris, bahassti, honeton hubus?
Mon kar kadom duftari Peace Corps
de Shari Naw.
Mon senfi Farsi yad gerefton
de Kalofatalahan.
Beser tuklif kay Farsi yad gerefton.
Laken in ali, beser Farsi yadom raft.
Inshallah.

Mon posta Baba, Bibijon, Asyajon, Quasem,
Nasrine, Faima, and Faiqua deq shadom;
familiy Afghani de Karteh Seh mon zendigi kadom.
Mon tushocks bish kadom. Desta ras baraye nan.
Desta chap baraye tashnab.
Bibijon pokhta bulani ba gandana wa
catalou. Maza dot.
Alhamdulillah.
Mon posta Jalalabad, Mazar-i-Sharif,
Charikar, Pulikumri, Gardez, Khanabad,
Baghlan, Herat, Maimana, Khost deq shadom.
Hup should kay shumara dedon.
Hup joy boot.
Farq na makona. Par wa nace.
Mon posta Afghanistan deq shadom.
Santa Fe
I am sad about Afghanistan
because I lived there for two years
about forty years ago.
I was very young; twenty years old.
In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate,
the Merciful.

Peace be to you. How are you? How is your body?
How is your home? I worked at the Peace Corps office
in the new city. I studied Farsi in Kalofatalahan.
It was difficult to learn Farsi. But now, much Farsi
is forgotten. If God wills it.

I am sad about Baba, Bibijon, Asiajon, Quasem,
Nasrine, Faima, Faiqua; an Afghan family I lived
with. I sat on mattresses. One eats with the right
hand. The left hand is for the bathroom. Bibijon
cooked bulani with leeks and potatoes. It gave good taste.
Thanks be to God.

I am sad about Jalalabad, Mazar-i-Sharif,
Charikar, Pulikhumri, Gardez, Khanabad,
Baghlan, Herat, Maimana, Khost.
I'm glad I saw you. These were good places.
A national slogan:
It makes no difference.
It makes no difference.
I am sad about Afghanistan.

When a thing is lost, the Afghans say: da jebbie mas
It's in my pocket.

When something or someone departs, the Afghans
say joyish sabz, may its place be green
I am sad for Afghanistan, but Afghanistan is in my pocket.
May it become a green place.
Tashakor

Thank you.
Kathamann

Bande-Amir

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 *chaprastee* 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 Direc-tor 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 bor-der 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 of-

fice, 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

Small Pox Story

Summer of 1968

Kristina Engstrom

A SMALLPOX STORY

Driving in from the Kabul airport after a numbing flight from the States, the first things to strike me were the heat and the light. It was July, and the heat was dry. Clear, unwavering light illuminated the mountains surrounding the city, but at eye level, dust was everywhere. It lay in thick, shifting blankets on the dirt roads, and for the first time in my life, I thought about why it was nice to have pavement. Dust covered all forms of transport - the old clunkers of trucks and buses, the sweet-faced donkeys, the cranky camels. Even the birds were dusty. Afghanistan's color was beige.

In my first hours, I saw fat-tailed sheep being herded through the early-morning streets and soldiers holding hands. I saw young city girls wearing white head-scarves, black stockings, and black trenchcoats in the summer heat. Everyone was lean, except maybe the women. With them, you couldn't tell because they wore chaudries that covered them from the tops of their heads to their ankles. I wondered how the children frolicking around these ladies figured out which ones were their mothers, but they did.

I waited for the calls to prayer and finally heard them, and after a day, I also began to sort out some of the smells - cooking fires fueled by wood and dung, roasting meats, human waste.

Once the jet lag wore off, I also began to feel excitement. Excitement from all the different people in the bazaar and the things they had to sell. Excitement from believing that once I knew a little more about the place and the language, I would feel that I belonged here as much as any other new city.

I felt fear too. Fear of walking in the mucky streets in open-toed sandals. Fear of being purse-snatched. Fear of that ubiquitous beggar whose tongue flopped above the empty space where his jaw had once been. Fear of the sickish twinges in my gut that would be the precursors of diarrhea. Fear of being foreign. Fear of looking afraid.

The year was 1968, and I was in Afghanistan gathering information for a training program to prepare Peace Corps Volunteers to vaccinate people in Afghanistan against smallpox. For centuries, smallpox had swept through towns and villages all over the world leaving two out of every five of its victims dead and those who

lived blinded or, at best, marked for life with pitted scars all over their faces. In Afghanistan, as in 33 other countries at the time, smallpox was endemic.

In 1967, the Afghan government asked the Peace Corps to provide women Volunteers for the country's vaccination program. The American women would be teamed up with Afghan health workers, most of whom were men, to travel through the country, the Volunteers vaccinating women and children, their counterparts vaccinating the men. At the time, the government believed that village men would not allow strange men, health workers or not, to approach their women to vaccinate them; and there weren't enough Afghan women health workers to do the work.

My job in Afghanistan was to learn as much as I could about the life and work of the Volunteers who were already doing this work so that we could train a new group to continue the project. This story describes some of the things that I learned.

***

> Hundreds of flies. Cocky bastards. Afraid to open my mouth to talk - they fly in. No one else is swatting them so I try to sit quietly. We are at a health center that includes a school where Afghan girls are being trained to be health workers. We are waiting for the center supervisor to come and tell us that we can go out to a nearby village and vaccinate.
>
> The girls are young - ages 14 to 18. They giggle. One sits on the bench next to me, turns toward me, and looks me over - her face six inches from mine. From time to time, she feels my clothes. It is hard not to flinch.
>
> I am so uncomfortable sitting there that I start to hate things. I hate the flies, I hate the girls, their inquisitive hands, their staring, their giggling. I hate the whole damn thing. I am glad that I have only two months to spend and not the two years that Peace Corps Volunteers commit to.

No vaccinator could go out to the field without obtaining permission from government authorities along the line - national, provincial, town, village. Formal permissions from provincial and town officials were embodied in a document called the "mactube". Vaccinators paid for mactubes with time, by waiting as long as it took, and, for the American vaccinators, by providing entertainment to whomever happened to be around.

Volunteers had to "learn how to do nothing", as the wise young

Afghan poet, Saddhudin, told me. Learn to hang around for a day to see an official who would decide where you would vaccinate, when, and with whom. Learn to do nothing the next day when permission granted was withdrawn and today's plan scrapped. Learn to wait three or four hours in a roadside teahouse for a ride to the next town, while the men eating there, and you the only woman, toss hard candy to you as they might throw peanuts to an animal in a zoo.

Volunteers learned to take the edge off the waiting by packing books in their knapsacks along with that more critical item, toilet paper. They learned how to sleep sitting up, to watch the people watching them, and talk with the people, almost always men, who gathered around these "haragies", or foreigners, wherever they were.

***

I have my camera out as we enter a community near Kabul, and the children lead me to an old man sitting on the ground. He has a goiter engulfing his neck and is dazed. A trickle of blood is coming out of his mouth. The children are laughing and ask me to take his picture.

A woman in a remote village in the north injured her leg. The wound became infected, and the woman was unable to cope silently with the pain. Because she was making so much noise, her neighbors moved her from her home to a bedless, windowless, doorless mud hut, set about 100 yards off from the rest of the houses. When we arrived on our vaccination rounds, we agreed to visit the woman to see if we could do anything. She was quiet as my Peace Corps mentor, Sharon, entered and hunkered down on the floor to look at the wound and talk with her. In the end, Sharon could only advise the relatives to bathe the wound and use clean rags to wrap it, knowing that these prescriptions alone were difficult: water, soap, and even rags were not easy to come by.

In another place, an old woman asked us to help her daughter. The younger woman sat on the floor warming her legs under a low, quilt-covered table placed over a pot of hot coals. She looked feverish. She was thin, had a harsh, dry cough, and probably was dying of tuberculosis as her mother said. The mother had done all that she could do and all that could be done. And we could do nothing but say we were sorry and leave.

Volunteers saw people with dysentery, acute respiratory infections, fevers of unknown origin, eye diseases from the kohl rubbed around children's eyes to make them beautiful, and skin

infections. They saw kids who had lost one or both feet after falling into hot ovens dug in the ground to bake the bread called nan, the people's major sustenance. It did seem the will of god, insh'allah, that anyone lasted their alloted span of 42 years.

Some made their way to a hospital - like the man who rode a donkey for three days to get to a place where someone could set his broken leg - but these were the strong and the lucky. Generally, people made it, or didn't, on their own. Medical attention was so rare outside the cities that it was virtually non-existent.

Stoicism was the norm; people who made a fuss about pain were either isolated or disciplined. Doctors were known to slap unanesthesized patients who made too much noise during surgery. Many people suffered in this demanding country, and it was impolite to draw attention to your own problems.

In some cases, the problem was one of not getting there sooner to prevent disease. When a father held up his blind and scarred daughter to show the team what last year's smallpox outbreak had done, vaccinators could assure themselves and the father that his other children were not likely to see smallpox again. In most situations, however, timing wasn't the problem, lack of resources and ability were. It took skill to explain this to relatives, emotional fortitude to say no.

How helpless and sad Volunteers felt. For the first time in their lives, they were in situations where life did not necessarily mean hope.

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When the team arrives in a community, men, women, and children gather around to see the new people - especially the strange-looking ones dressed in tombons and perons (baggy trousers tied with a drawstring and a long tunic).

After getting themselves and their babies vaccinated in the compound in which they have gathered, the women hunker as close as they can get to the action. They squat shoulder to shoulder, because being physically close to your friends is nice and, besides, it is easier to discuss the foreign creatures that way.

A small group gathers around a dark, handsome fortune-teller sitting on the ground. The fortune-teller refuses to have a vaccination, for to puncture her skin would mean that the djinn in her body would have a way to escape and she would lose her powers.

In the best of circumstances, when a vaccination team arrived in a place, the mullek, or village chief, would round up all of the people in a central location and organize them in queues, men and women separate. It was usually easier to do the men because they would stand in line, roll their sleeves up, hold still while being vaccinated, and leave their sleeves up and refrain from touching the vaccination site until the vaccine dried.

Women, on the other hand, didn't always understand the concept of queuing. Like everything else, you have to learn to stand in line, but they had never been to school, to a post office or the movies (neither existed in rural Afghanistan), or any other place where they would see such a thing.

Some clients needed to be persuaded to accept a vaccination. Scientific explanations didn't work, but sometimes telling people that the team was sent by the government or was representing the King did.

For the most part, though, it seems that people submitted to the painless procedure because it was something different in their lives, or they wanted to show how brave they were, or they felt they could not refuse. One woman who wouldn't have any part of it, for example, changed her mind when the vaccinators turned down her invitation to take tea and got on their horses to leave. The shame of it was too much, and she capitulated. The vaccinators got off their horses, vaccinated her, and were served a lovely tea.

At another place, Sharon and I traded a vaccination for a tattoo, having been convinced by our prospect that, if we were going to make holes in her skin, it was only fair that she make holes in ours. I am very proud of my little tattoo, made with a sewing needle and thread moistened in water, then dipped in ashes from the fire, and drawn through the skin. The rubbing alcohol that we liberally splashed on our arms before and after the operation may have prevented infection, but it must have been our fate not to get tetanus or hepatitis or something.

In the end, almost everybody got vaccinated, except for the woman with the djinn, the women who chased me out of their rug-weaving room with screams of terror and six-foot long poles, and a few others.

***

A day's travel from Mazar-i-Sharif to the town of Acrapruk by jeep and lorry, through dry, barren, brown-gray hills. Along the way, sitting on a rug on the mudbrick platform outside a teahouse, drinking tea from glasses, talking with

the men, and watching trucks, donkeys loaded with wheat, and people on foot going by. A teen-aged boy sits with us for two hours, haltingly trying the English he has learned in the high school in the provincial capital. I talk to him as Sharon discusses something with the men in her excellent Farsi. As we are about to get in the jeep for the last leg of the journey, the boy runs next door to a little store and buys one piece of writing paper to give me as a parting gift - just the right thing from one educated person to another.

Talking with people on the road and in the villages was quite different from talking with townspeople.

Village men seemed comfortable with the Peace Corps vaccinators. They asked where the Volunteers were from, and a few people in the more isolated places wondered how long it would take to walk home. They asked about livestock and crops in America, the weather, and were most curious about American marriage customs, what these seemingly eligible young women were doing unmarried, and what on earth their parents could have been thinking to let their children go so far.

When the vaccinating was done for the day, men tended to monopolize the team, leaving women and children on the fringes, just beyond hearing range. To make up for this, Volunteers ate with the women rather than the men who ate first and best, but this was only after they were accepted as bona fide women. To do this, the more flat-chested Volunteers took their shoes and socks off and had their feet checked out.

The women, too, asked about marriage customs and, even more persistently, why the Volunteers weren't married. They wanted to know how Volunteers took care of their personal and hygienic needs while in the field. They admired the Volunteers' jewelry and asked to have it, usually in trade if an outright gift didn't seem to be forthcoming.

They were interested in families and liked looking at photographs. They didn't ask much about American houses or food, maybe thinking that ours were the same as theirs. They didn't ask about schools either; village girls didn't go to school.

Once Volunteers arrived in an area, people would come long distances to see them. One middle-aged woman walked for six hours, down from her mountain home, across the valley below, and up the next mountain where we were staying. She sat and talked for a few hours, got her vaccination, and began the trip back. I'm not sure how she knew that the team was there, but the country people were said to communicate from mountain to mountain by yodeling, like the Swiss.

Townsmen, on the other hand, were less interested. They stared at the uncovered faces of the Volunteers and ridiculed the bargains that Volunteers thought they were striking so successfully in the bazaar. Sometimes, "peshak", meaning cat, a euphemism for whore, would be shouted at foreign women by unseen men.

In cosmopolitan Kabul, a woman did not have to be foreign to encounter trouble. There was a terrible period when radical mullahs were said to be throwing acid on the black-stockinged legs of little girls as they went to school.

Generally, the more anonymous a Volunteer was, the more likely she was to be abused with name-calling, spitting, and goosing. In the places where she lived, she was the teacher of people's children or the nurse in the hospital and thus a valued member of the community. In villages, where she travelled as a vaccinator, she was too much of a real person in need of food, shelter, and friendship to be hassled.

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We asked for eggs one day because the villagers had given us nan and tea for dinner the night before and that morning for breakfast, and now for lunch it was nan and tea again. An hour passed before we were told that there were no eggs. Later we learned that a little boy had been sent to nearby villages to find eggs for us, but no one had any.

That night, while we waited for the evening meal, which we intended to eat gratefully no matter what, we visited with the women. They dyed our hands with henna to mark the festive event, and we talked about America and Afghanistan and our lives and theirs. The sun went down and the moon came up, it was getting late, and we still hadn't eaten. Just as we were asking about the delay, the women brought us a large tin basin full of the soup they had been making for us. The soup was made of mutton and roghan (sheep fat), and nan was served as a utensil for eating it.

The soup tasted and smelled like the food that I had had in Lalme before being wretchedly sick, and the smell of the mutton and the sight of all that roghan made my tongue fly up. But I ate. I ate all that I could and then some. Sharon ate twice as much, but we still didn't make much of a dent in the soup.

Our hostesses were upset. They had killed a sheep for this meal to make up for our disappointment at lunch, and now we weren't eating it.

In the end, they took what we hadn't eaten and gave it to the children, who were wild with delight.

From time to time, the Peace Corps talked about sending their vaccinators out with canned field rations to avoid being a burden on the people. Although eating rations would also reduce the high rate of intestinal illness among these Volunteers, they rejected the idea. They didn't want to weigh down their knapsacks with canned goods. They didn't want to set themselves any more apart from the other vaccinators and the soldiers who often travelled with them. Most important, they believed that it would be insulting to the people to reject their hospitality, no matter how little was available. So most Volunteers learned to eat what they were given, just like their mothers had taught them.

Even so, the farther Volunteers were from familiar foods, the more fondly they were remembered. In the poorest villages, an egg to go with the nan and tea was a treat even if it was served floating in a sea of roghan. In towns juicy kebabs cooked barbeque fashion were available; and, in provincial capitals, you could find Cokes, even if they were warm. In Kabul, almost everything was available, even for a non-Moslem. Volunteers would crash the USAID snack bar and get cold beers and hamburgers - what bliss! - even though they could still not have pasteurized milk or ice cream, lettuce or other uncooked vegetables. You had to go to Peshawar in Pakistan or even farther afield for those things.

Some excellent meals were available on the road, though. In one town we stayed in the home of a sub-governor, the person who governed part of a province. He and his wife were educated people from Kabul, and I think that our presence cheered them enormously, especially the woman, who didn't like wearing the chaudri, which she would have to do in the town, and hence left their compound only rarely. She had the full figure and the clear, white complexion to show that she was a well-to-do city girl. And, best of all, she was a fantastic cook. She and her servants, one of them an orphan girl of ten who took care of the couple's children, worked all day slicing and chopping vegetables and meat and cooking them over wood fires.

We ate the magnificent meals on a mudbrick platform covered in thick carpets in the middle of the compound. The compound was full of trees and flowers, kept green by the deep stream that ran through it. It was one of the most beautiful and restful places I have ever been, an oasis. Sharon and I slept on that platform at night.

In Kabul you could get well-cooked meals too, and Westerners could get alcoholic beverages. The Government of Afghanistan had built a wine factory to take advantage of the grapes that were

being cultivated so successfully in some of the river valleys near Kabul. While these wines were intended for export, the government would sell it retail to non-Moslem foreigners. Although they tasted kind of raw, they were popular among Volunteers because they were cheap.

Not so, distilled liquors. These one bought, discreetly, from "robber barons", the shopkeepers who, it was said, bought it from house boys who stole it from the American and other embassy homes in which they worked. It was very neat; the embassy people would buy the stuff at their commissaries, which supplied it in quantity, tax-free and duty-free; then it found its way to the robber barons where people who didn't have access to a commissary could find it. Most Volunteers left it alone, if not on principle, on the grounds of expense: a bottle of scotch cost nearly as much as a Volunteer's monthly living allowance.

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After 20 days of vaccinating in the hinterlands of northern Afghanistan with two male counterparts and a soldier, Beverly, a Volunteer, returns and tells us:

> I slept outside every night but two. In one village, the men refused to give us any horses or donkeys for transport to the next settlement. I saw that they had animals, but they said that these belonged to men in the next village. I got mad then and asked the women whether the men from the next village also got them pregnant, since obviously there were no men here.... We got the horses.
>
> I never went to the john during the day. Since there was no place to go except the bare hillsides, I just waited until dark.
>
> I took two baths during the trip. Once I bathed in the river, the soldier standing guard for me.
>
> Every night and morning, I sat on my tushak [a thin mattress] and did my routine - brushing my teeth, washing my face, putting hand cream on, etc. - with all of the men of the village standing around me watching.
>
> I didn't mind not being able to hear or speak English, but being dirty drove me nuts.
>
> I was living in a different world, a different century.

Beverly came down with hepatitis shortly after this trip and

never went out again.

She finished her tour in Afghanistan, although a few other Volunteers became so ill that they had to return to the States. Most stayed. They stayed because they were what people said they were - the few, the proud, the strong - or thought they should be. A few revelled in their wild reputations and, arriving back in Kabul after a vaccination trip, were like sailors in port. Others were more restrained but also proud of the job they were doing; but all, at one time or other got tired of the sickness, the heat, the cold, the dirt, the waiting, the staring. Why didn't people just quit and go home? As one Volunteer told me, "No one left because no one left."

I went back to the States after this trip and prepared a group of about 20 women to work as vaccinators. The last part of their training took place in-country in cold, snowy January. Based on this field experience, some of my group quit. Others took different jobs in Afghanistan, like teaching or nursing. Those who stayed with the program made vaccinating trips for awhile but then switched to other jobs when the Government and the World Health Organization learned that females were not needed to vaccinate women. These Volunteers monitored the work of other vaccinators, investigated suspect cases of smallpox, organized field offices, and did other administrative work.

Five years after the second group of Volunteers joined the vaccination program in Afghanistan, in 1974, WHO announced that Afghanistan had seen its last case of smallpox.

On 9 December 1979, the Global Commission for the Certification of Smallpox Eradication declared that smallpox had been eradicated from the face of the earth. For the rest of their lives, the Volunteers who participated in the vaccination program could say that they had played a part in this. And for the rest of theirs, the Afghan people would know that, whatever other horror was waiting for them, they would never get smallpox ....

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Through the Looking Glass in Kabul
By
Pat Nyhan RPCV 1970-1971

Chris and I were the first people ever to choose Afghanistan for a Peace Corps assignment, due to its reputation as a hardship post. Just the thing for us! The most different place on earth from our own country, which we couldn't wait to escape.

The U.S. was at a peak of disillusionment with the Vietnam War, undergoing the largest antiwar protests in history. We didn't trust our leaders, who lied to us. So, we were not stereotypical Peace Corps volunteers in 1970-71. Idealists, yes, but cynical.

Now here we were far away, marveling at Kabul.

"I can't believe this is a capital of a country," I wrote to friends. It looked like something out of the Old Testament or Arabian Nights: kids running with colorful kites through the mud-walled streets; Koochis passing through town on camels with bold, spangled women riding high; the sweet scent of mulberry wood smoke and corner nan shops filling the air; stars twinkling brightly in the winter sky over snowy mountains.

We were enchanted.

But even in training, we couldn't escape the U.S. entirely. When Vice-President Spiro Agnew visited Kabul, in January 1970, we wanted to mount a protest, but demurred in deference to our hosts. We voted to have a few volunteers make a quiet statement by handing over a batch of our letters to Agnew. Meanwhile, some 1,000 Afghan students angrily marched through the streets.

"An AP reporter on the scene blew up what happened into a wild story about PC instigating an Afghan demonstration. Agnew got mad and threatened to do away with PC here," I wrote my folks.

Although Chris and I wanted to be assigned either to Kabul University, or the opposite – a "real Peace Corps experience" in the atroff -- we were posted to Habibia High School, an American-built school in Kabul with boys of elite families who had never had a female teacher.

It was wonderful, at first. Although the mullah teachers disapproved of me, lowering their heads if they passed me in the hall, I was protected by the principal and fellow English teachers, who welcomed us warmly in the teacher's room. The men were eager for modern ways and knowledge about America.

We chatted amiably each day at break time, when they sometimes consulted us on matters of grammar. "What's the difference between 'over' and 'above'?" one repeatedly asked. They quietly consulted Chris about birth control methods. We chuckled together during Ramazan when they mischievously sent out the baba for watermelons and we ate the forbidden treat behind a locked door so the students wouldn't know.

Our department chair, Abdul Rahman Seljuki, set a gracious tone. An elegant, goateed scholar, he was descended from the Seljuk dynasty in Herat. When we visited his home one day, he showed us samples of his brother's famous calligraphy and enlightened us about the dynasty's flowering of the arts. Young fellows slipped quietly in and out, serving us a feast. To complete our happiness, Seljuki put on a record to listen to as we sat cross-legged on the carpet: "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain When She Comes

We were charmed. Even when I had to teach for a few weeks without our textbook, "Afghans Learn English," because the old baba who guarded the book room thought books were too valuable to be given out. I dreamed up dialogs to practice the kids' spoken English, which they found a hilarious change from their former rote memorization.

They kindly let me know that the silly get-up I had been wearing to school to be culturally correct (a pant-suit, raincoat and headscarf) could be ditched. When I arrived each day, they shot to their feet with, "Good morning, Mister Teacher!" We just loved each other, or so it seemed.

The giggly but respectful boys were sweet 10th graders, well-dressed pairs sitting side-by-side, sometimes holding hands or smelling a flower picked on the way to school. Always helping each other. Always obey-ing the class captain, who set a studious example and kept order.

The best captain was Abdul Ahad, a gentle giant worshiped by the boys. But one day, he laid his head on his desk and fainted. The boys rose up as one and carried him home, where he died that day of hepatitis. He had never let on that he was sick.

“Don’t cry, teacher. It was his time,” said the boys.

Yunos was another born leader, eager to ask and answer questions and encourage the others to follow. When he fell silent after a few months, I was mystified. He wouldn’t tell me what was wrong. At the end of term, I caught up with him on his way home and begged him to tell me.

“One day, two bad boys in our class threatened me with a knife at my throat. They told me they would kill me if I supported the teacher by speaking,” he said, with tears in his eyes.

The bad boys were two “gigolos” who were slick older fellows in sharp suits at the back of the class, fomenting trouble. In fact, they had done time in the notorious Kabul Jail. They had gone to the principal to protest having a female teacher, but he came to class and made an impressive speech about respecting “our guest” and scolded the class. It later turned out the issue wasn’t having a female teacher; it was that I discouraged cheating, and since the gigolos never studied, they perceived their ambitions to win academic scholarships thwarted.

Our enchantment began to wear off during semester exams, when wholesale cheating broke out.

“The boys who didn’t buy the exam from Ministry officials beforehand, talked and copied openly all during the exam,” I wrote friends back home. “They told Chris and me they would demonstrate against us because we didn’t give out answers in the exam like the Afghan teachers.

“This is Afghanistan – not America. We help each other here,’ they told me.

“Just one English teacher was tough – a Pakistani who helped me proctor my worst class. The boys were so frustrated during the test that they almost walked out when I tore up two papers, and physically attacked the Pakistani at the end of the exam.

“Students regularly beat up on teachers at Habibia, and last week one hit the principal. What happens? A few pay-offs, then nothing. In the case of the Pakistani, the administration was embarrassed because it was in a foreigner’s (my) class, so they made a big show of efficient punishment. In the end, a few boys kissed the Pakistani’s hands and feet in apology, paid off someone, and went free.”

A few years ago, I visited Seljuki during a lovely afternoon at his home in Falls Church, Va., where he had built a successful new life after fleeing Afghanistan's wars. As a school inspector after Habibia days, he had seen the same corrupt system everywhere in the country, he said.

"At least our principal was honest," I offered.

"He was the biggest bribe-taker of all," Seljuki laughed.

By April 1970, Chris and I were becoming more and more disenchanted with our jobs, and we hadn't found a way into the culture to make friends, to balance our growing negativity. Our solace was our times with close Peace Corps friends, whom we saw when they came into Kabul or on glorious, hair-raising road trips around the country together. We thought we might have been happier in the atroff, away from Kabul's politically heated atmosphere.

The next month, the mullahs went on the rampage. My reports home grew more worrisome to my folks:

"For the past 10 days they've been demonstrating against the government and the forces of change in general. The original cause was an article in a government newspaper praising Lenin on his birthday. The mullahs thought it a poor idea to honor an atheist. This turned into a widespread campaign to do away with certain liberalizations of women's rights and erupted into a tragic incident: a gang of boys from our high school, urged on by the mullahs, attacked 20 or 30 female teachers near here and threw acid in their faces – allegedly because they were wearing short skirts and no veils. One woman has died."

Other Habibia students stormed out of school to protest the mullahs, shouting to us to hurry home until the trouble was over as a mob surged through the streets. We could only vaguely make out the reasons for Kabul's unrest.

"Last year school only met for four months due to sympathy strikes with the university, which follows many conflicting political winds. University students profess Maoism and Soviet socialism by turns, but nonetheless baksheesh their way to American scholarships like crazy," I wrote.

“We’re convinced the Peace Corps and all American aid here is a waste. Afghans don’t like or respect us much. The Minister of Education told some Volunteers recently, ‘Forget about being good teachers. It doesn’t matter. You’re only here to balance the Russian presence.”

Cynicism was in the air in Kabul, compounding our disillusionment about our own country. “We listen to Voice of America and BBC with horror at the reports of Nixon’s push into Cambodia and the resulting violence at home,” I wrote.

“Maybe cumulatively over many, many years the combined efforts of foreigners here will make a difference, but it looks recently as if Afghanistan will end up in the hands of the Russians. They’ve been putting more pressure on the king, and there are hundreds of Russians walking around town.”

That spring, I began volunteering at the Kabul Times, the English-language (non-news) paper that published under censorship by the royal palace. As I did some copy-editing and wrote a few stories, I kept an ear out as the two Afghan gents sitting near me discussed their communist views in low voices. It felt ominous.

The paper ran only light stories written almost entirely by the editor under various made-up bylines. I enjoyed this comical example of a “Through the Looking Glass” side of Afghanistan, where things often turned out not to be what they seemed.

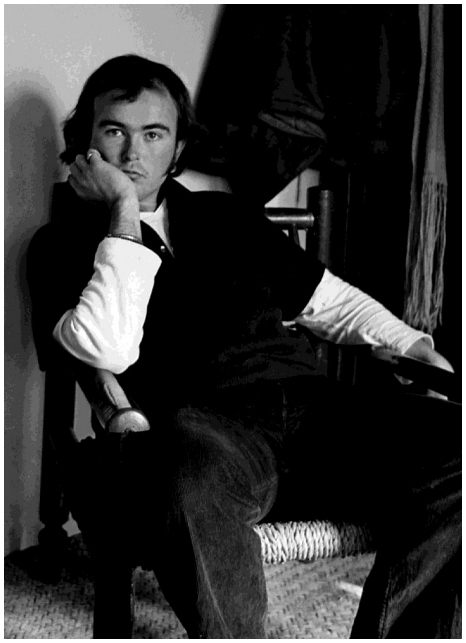
On Thanksgiving Eve, we hosted a feast, with turkey and trimmings, for our Volunteer friends. We exchanged stories of disillusionment, with our jobs and/or Peace Corps itself. Those in isolated postings wanted more support from our local office. We felt impatient with some aspects of the program that seemed pointless. It always felt good to let off steam with our pals, and to admit that we hadn’t had as much luck as we wanted with our jobs, or socializing with Afghans, or dealing with setbacks in what was, no question, a “hardship post” in terms of physical and mental health.

That night, hash was smoked, as it always was when we got together. This time, Chris and I didn’t participate, be-because we were busy with hosting. But one poor fellow who had been out in an isolated place for too long ate some hash brownies and had a dangerously bad trip. That dealt with, the party ended. We didn’t know how bad it had been.

The Gospel According to Timothy and James:

by

Ron Dizon©



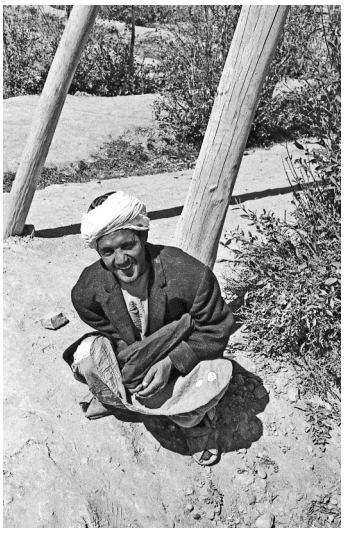
The summer heat of 1972 was about hottest on record in Ghor Province, Afghanistan. Combined with the three year-drought and famine, Chaghcharan was the last place on earth one wanted to be assigned to as a Peace Corps Volunteer, but someone had to do it. It was there I spent the summer with Tim McCormack and Jim Mathewson, aka the M&M Construction Company, and known to the Afghan Department of Rural Development as Daftari Peace Corps' Fay Fay Wow Office (FFW – Food for Work).

Flying the 350 miles to Chaghcharan from Kabul on Bakhtar Airline's Red and Black Streamline Twin Propeller-driven plane was only a prologue to the expectation of an adventure I would experience with the M& M Construction Company (Mathewson & McCormack). Floating through the 14,000 ft. mountain passes of the Hindu Kush in the Himalayas at 10,000 ft invoked a great respect for the laws physics that kept the craft airborne. For most of the Afghan passengers, chanting the mantra of "Allah Akbar" (God is Great) was their reverential instrument in the event a stairway to heaven became an option.

It was mid-afternoon when we landed at Chaghcharan. Four hours late, but late was better than never.

From the air, the town of Chaghcharan was camouflaged on an alluvial plain with the Hari River's D'Nealian signature defining the township boundaries. The town had, at most, forty adobe brick compounds, one Whitewashed Hotel and/ or Government House and assorted ducons (shops) in a desolate bazaar. As the twin prop started its descent, nothing resembling a runway manifested itself. The only hint of a landing strip at the Chaghcharan International Airport (CIA) came on our 11 with a pair of flying tambons (Afghan pants) serving as a wind-sock denoting a westerly head-wind.

Goats and other assorted livestock were first to deplane, given that they were not assigned seats, and chose to corral themselves by the exits. I could see from my window/aisle seat a blue International Peace Corps truck parking parallel to the ramp and hoped that my new partners, McCormack and Mathewson would be there with a welcome wagon of local musicians and some local dignitaries for what I was carrying with me was a gift more precious than frankincense: Mail from Home! What I wasn't expecting was the unwanted greeter, the famous whirligig of the Hari River alley. Before I could take my first step off the plane, it slammed against me swirling debris and dung and drying the sweat on my face into a Shiseido mask and coating my tusks with the sweet taste of Chagcharan.



From my vantage point at the top of the stairs, I could see my two new partners sitting sheltered in the security of the blue International Peace Corp Truck reveling in what must have made their day, but to them I was the New Guy, an anointed Mr. Katchaloo from the East.

As quickly as it hit, the whirligig was gone leaving only a damaged ego in its wake and a good story for the USAID Staff House in Kabul as told in McCormack's fables. There was no local band, no local dignitaries, only Tim & Jim's Gentlemen's Gentleman, Ibrahim, who pickup my sheet metal cargo box containing all my worldly belongings and heaved it into the bed of the truck. I was glad my cameras were safely housed in my padded Sierra Design backpack next to the highly prized staple of provincial Peace Corps life...a jar of Pakistani peanut butter.

It had been four months since I last saw Tim McCormack and from what I understood he spend two weeks in the U.S. Embassy Infirmary recuperating from a virulent bout of bacillary dysentery and giardia. I didn't know Jim Mathewson very well only that his first assignment was Chaghcharan and he was a geologist from Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. Tim's degree in history from Rockhurst College in Kansas City complemented the brain trust and both of their academic disciplines qualified them as Provincial Disaster Relief Directors. My credentials as an Education/Psychology graduate with a specialty in photography definitely created the needed balance in the very slow-moving business of Food for Work. Tim's linguistic "skill" in Dari with his high-scale extrovert temperament and Jim's prowess in the politics of Chaghcharan left me with the only responsibility of the office: recording their exploits in writing and on film.

Having roomed at the Sylvania Hotel with Mr. Tim during the Peace Corps Pre-Invitational Staging in Philadelphia, I was surprised to see the he'd lost a considerable amount of weight. According to Tim, he was down 50 lbs from his bout with dysentery but the scarcity of food in Chaghcharan also served as a contributing factor to his lean physique.

Jim, as I had come learn, was a mild-manner geologist. Everything he did was planned, calculated and measured, a quality of character that added great value to the trio and one asset I wished I had possessed. He was the anchor of the group, where Tim and I provided the nightly entertainment.

My orientation started with cursory exploration of the town where the fallout of famine and drought was unmistakable: the expression of famine etched in the faces of its children and inhabitants. Other families who migrated from other villages around Ghor Province were relegated to living in the caves carved out by the currents of the Hari River. It was rudimentary living, but it did provide shelter from the unrelenting heat of the Afghan high desert and the threat of wolf attacks.

Tim pointed out that there were 2 Belgian nuns living at the Chaghcharan Hotel who were buying bread in the local market and feeding and caring for those whose lives were betrayed by Mother Nature. According to Jim, the nuns' resources were limited and soon they too would have to depart, leaving no safety net for those left behind. But as one opportunity faded, The M&M Construction Company of Mathewson & McCormack pitched another plan utilizing the wheat stored in the Provincial Warehouse, aka the Gudome.

The Gudome was located across the road from the FFW Office/House with the women of Chaghcharan surrounding the facility daily, hoping the Governor would sell to them the stored wheat. The only problem was wheat was selling at 85 Afghanis per seer; a price too dear even for those who afford the cost.

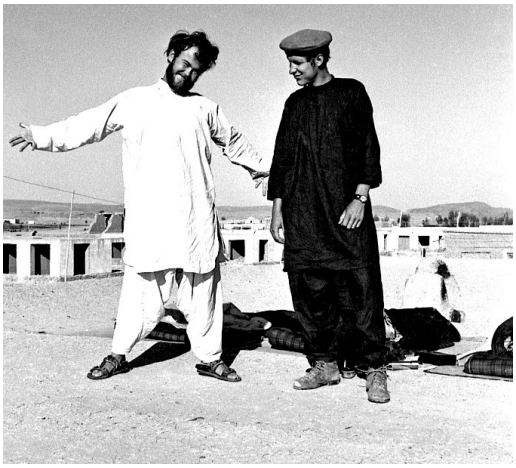
But, by the grace of Allah, call it consequence, call it destiny, one of the letters I brought from Kabul was addressed to Jim from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. In it was a note from the Charged Affaires regarding a story in the New York Times by James Sterba. Included in the envelope was $400 in Afghanis donated by the People of the United States to the People of Chagcharan.

It was an unbelievable detour in chance that gave this new trinity of Peace Corps Volunteers a reason to believe. But as Jim read the Epistle from the Embassy, food riots began across the road at the Gudome. The police had already set up barricades and used their batons as a deterrent to storming the Gudome.

It was Tim who negotiated a temporary solution with the police that allowed us to buy wheat for the bakers in Chaghcharan Baazar and to distribute the bread for free to the hungry. We solicited the Belgian nuns to assist in the distribution which answered their prayers. We all knew at the time that the solution was only transitory, and the thought of a Hindu Kush winter would be the messenger of a devastating consequence.

That was my introduction to Chaghcharan with only sixty days until the brutal winter would force the closure our Food for Work office.

The FFW Office was located in a compound on the main road east of town. It housed a two-story adobe structure with two main rooms on the first floor. The roof served as our main sleeping accommodation. The compound was absent of any vegetation, offering no shelter from the blistering115 degree heat. The out-house was located adjacent to the first-floor main dining room/office window serving as main road to relief. Tim often referred to this corridor as the Tash-Knob (toilet) Road, one of his most notable Food for Work projects.



Although the accommodation was less than Spartan, it was a home for the three of us for two months in the summer of 1972. The Peace Corps Post, know to USAID as "Alpha Alpha 1", was also equipped with a USAID radio which we used to communicate to USAID the famine/drought conditions in Chagcharan, Mymina, and Qual-i-Now. Broadcasting Rolling Stones songs on the "Good Morning Afghanistan Show" offered some comic relief to our depressing reports about the provinces. Although it drew the ire of USAID Communications Officers, they understood the respite of levity with the resulting consequence of camaraderie.

Very few Food for Work projects were started or completed in July due to, in large part, to the exodus of the male population of Chaghcharan and outlying villages. The departure of the men was reminiscent of the Dirty Thirties in the

United States, the only difference being in Afghanistan, the Public Works Program was an unfunded mandate in the Great Afghan Depression.

The viability of The Food for Work Projects was directly proportional to the labor force in the area, a fact understood by the Afghan Rural Development Department after their year and half demonstration period. No men to work for food meant no Food for Work Projects. It was this epiphany that recalled all the Peace Corps Food for Work Volunteers to Kabul in August of 1972, ending the FFW program and initiating The United States Agency for International Development's new project called Operation Help. At that time, the Peace Corps Director was reluctant to use the seasoned FFW volunteers, but at the insistence of the U.S. Ambassador with counsel from the Operation Help Project Manager and encouragement of the King of Afghanistan, the Operation Help project moved expeditiously to feed the innocent victims of drought before assault of the unforgiving winter of the Hindu Kush.

The jump-off distribution point for the Operation Help Program was Chaghcharan and who best to host the first convocation of Peace Corps/Operation Help Volunteers, but Jim Mathewson and Tim McCormack. Because the window of opportunity for food distribution was closing rapidly, volunteers were flown in from Kabul, Herat and Kandahar. The only aircraft that could fly into Chaghcharan was Bakhtar's Canadian DeHaviland Twin Otter.

Because the flight schedules were so erratic due to weather and pilot issues, Peace Corps/Operation Help Volunteers would come in either on the morning flight or the afternoon flight, and sometimes not at all that day, but always leaving Tim and Jim jilted at the airport altar. Leaving Chaghcharan to other distribution points was also an Either Or situation. It was Tim McCormack and Jim Mathewson who named the volunteers coming into Chaghcharan as The Either Or Otter Corps (EOOC).

Peace Corps/Operation Help Volunteers who worked in the Operation Help Program adopted the name at the Operation Help Party at Abe and Betty Ashcanase's Kabul home in December of 1972. What began as Food for Work demonstration project ended in a victory in the War on Hunger. For the members of the Either Or Otter Corps, knowing that their unselfish commitment saved countless lives and forged life-long bonds of friendships was well worth the tour of duty in a country called Afghanistan.

This ended the account of Peace Corps' The Either Or Otter Corps.

This is the Gospel according to Timothy and James.

Chagcharan, Afghanistan

Download the Operation Help Photo Book

My Very-Nearly-Psychotic Episode

by Greg Kopp, October 2017

WARNING: This story is graphic, and is recommended only for mature adults who now, or in their past, have focused a lot of atten-tion on their bodily functions and are comfortable talking to others about them. Such people are easily found among current and former Peace Corp Volunteers, and all those over 60 years old! Don't say you haven't been warned!!

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It was almost universal in my experience in Afghanistan that the state of one's gut was a frequent topic of discussion, among friends at least. Descriptions were necessarily graphic because we experienced maladies that were previously unknown. In time, the mala-dies became routine; we could diagnose the problem. But my experience with the following was unprecedented and very unsettling. Even now as I write this, I can feel the emotional trauma of what happened.

I don't recall exactly when this took place, but likely it was in early 1972. I was sharing a room in a house in the Shari Nau section of Kabul with my FFW buddies: David Moats, Fritz Laurenovics and Bill Mittendorff. Bill Mooney was in the same house, but not in the room with us. We each had our own charpoi (cot), and the indoor bathroom was across the hallway.

I had been feeling ok; I wasn't in any distress internally, but I was aware that I had little energy. I recall being frequently tired, and I could tell that I was losing weight. The odd thing was that I remember being hungry all the time, but when I ate I got full very quickly. I'd be full after a few bites, and then get hungry again shortly thereafter.

One night, after we'd all gone to bed, I began to feel cramps. I didn't want to wake anyone, so walked through the dark bedroom to the door, and crossed the hallway to the tashnab (bathroom). I was in a hurry as I was feeling some urgency. I sat on the toilet for a while and managed to pass some loose stool, nothing significant. Since nothing more was happening, I began to clean myself with toilet paper but then had a very unusual experience. I wiped but didn't get rid of what I thought must be a stubborn piece of stool. It was not hard or watery but I couldn't clean it off my butt. I got another piece of toilet paper so I could grab it with protected fingers (i.e., no direct contact) and use more force. Once I got a grip on it, I started to pull at it. The substance kept coming out of me; it was connected to more of the same that was still inside. That was odd and unsettling; I pulled fast and finally got it out and into the toilet water. When I stood up to look I saw a worm about the size of a boiled spaghetti noodle, but fatter! It was white and wiggly in the toilet.

I can honestly say that I was freaked out!! I couldn't believe that this came from inside of me. It felt like an experience of personal assault or diminishment that is often experienced after surgery to remove a major limb. I had been violated in away that fundamen-tally changed who I was as a person, my self-esteem, my self-image.

ll felt a need to get out of that bathroom fast, so I quickly left and went back to my bed. In the dark I started talking to the others, in loud and clear voice, apologizing for waking them up. I remember telling them, "You won't believe what just happened…." then pro-ceeded to tell the story. I don't recall anybody's reaction, but I thought it was pretty low-key; apparently it didn't merit more serious discussion. I couldn't understand their nonchalance in response to my identity crisis. Maybe they just didn't care, or were too sleepy to deal with it.

The conversation stopped, but I was lying wide-awake in the dark trying to calm down while I relived the experience in my mind. It was all too vivid; the scene in the toilet bowl was flashing neon in my brain. All of the sudden, my bed began to shake. I couldn't figure out what caused the shaking, and I didn't have to capacity to think rationally. The only possibility was that a rat was under the covers with me. With that thought, I bounded out of bed screaming, and raced to turn on the lights in the room.

My roomies were startled, and watched me as I grabbed the covers on my bed and shook them furiously. I had to get the rat out of there. I was confused that nobody else was upset; this was serious stuff. When I couldn't find the rat I began to settle down because the immediate threat was over. We decided that the shaking was probably a heavy truck passing in front of the house. They helped me process the events and even helped me make the plan to go into the PC doctor's office in the morning. With that reassurance, I managed to "isolate the affect" enough, finally, to get some sleep.

I was in the PC office first thing the next morning, feeling out-of-body still. I was able to see the doc right away. He was pretty calm about it all, and mentioned that he wished I had brought the worm to him! I told him there was no way in hell that I would have brought that creature to him. I recall him chuckling at that and saying worms are easily treated. He told me it would all be over in a couple days. I was so relieved that I thought I maybe I could bring him the sample if another one crawled out. He gave me 14 big horse pills, with instructions to take 7 now and the remaining 7 the next morning. I took the first 7 immediately, before I left PC office.

I don't recall any events that day, except for some pain in my belly. And there was no repeat of the previous night's horror. The next morning after taking the first dose of the pills, I went into the bathroom apprehensively. I could feel the need to sit and relieve my-self, but I also dreaded it. This time I managed to pass what felt like a significant amount of something. When I stood to look in the toilet, to my utter horror, there was a toilet bowl FULL of spaghetti sized worms, but not wiggling now. They were all apparently dead. I looked for a short while, and then flushed it away. Taking the remaining 7 pills produced the final clean-out, which was only 2 or 3 more worms that didn't make it out before. I never did take a sample to the doc.

I hope my warning prepared all of you who chose to read this story. I don't know if I was able to convey the experience adequately for you to feel even a small bit of what I felt. Right now, I want to take a shower and wash it away, again! I don't tell this story often, but a part of me gets a sadistic, self-centered enjoyment from telling it. I imagine that you may be thinking "Get over yourself, Kopp. It was just a part of living in Afghanistan." In my better moments I can now say you'd be right.

Random FFW Memories, 1971 - 1972
by
Greg Kopp, October 2017

I.(We had services of an Afghan driver and jeep in Badghis Province.)

I was out in a keshlock (small village) with our driver. He was a really good guy; he helped me to understand cultural stuff, behaviors I didn't understand. His job was to drive us out to distant places to talk to the people about projects. Anyway, we went to a far away keshlock. It was very remote, and we planned to spend the night there. The villagers had a dinner for us in a long, narrow room. It was filled with people. After we finished eating, the food and utensils were taken away, and a young boy came by with that pitcher of warm water and a hand towel over his shoulder, so we could wash our hands. Then we were given tea. I felt like the center of attention because I had the wheat that they wanted and needed so badly. It was an uncom-fortable feeling. The kerosene lanterns lighting the room were turned down for dimmer lighting. A musician came into the room with his string instrument, and a young adolescent ("be-rish"- without beard) got up from the crowd and began to dance for us in the middle of the room. He was a flirt, lots of smiles and eye makeup; and several of the men in the group flirted back. He was dancing up to each of us, and exchanging a private word! I dreaded my turn. But when he came to me, he whispered in my ear "Gandum meti?" meaning "Will you give wheat?" I didn't know how to understand his question, but chose to interpret it as his asking me if I would approve their project so the villagers could earn wheat. Whichever his meaning, I told him "bale" (yes), thinking that I had just given my soul to the devil. I worried that I had committed some unknown amount of wheat to their pro-ject, or to his dancing, when none of that had been decided yet. On the other hand, I reasoned, how could I say "no" in that setting, before I understood the question? Fortunately, after asking that sole question, he

quickly moved on to the next per-son. Later that night, after we were given a place to sleep, I was talking with our driver and told him what the boy had asked me. He dismissed it as of no significance, but I knew that that was as close to “bacha bauzi” (literally, boy games) that I had been or cared to be. In the discussion with our driver, I told him that I had been having trouble sleeping. He responded that he had something that would help; it was in the jeep. He left the room for a while and came back with a small piece of opium. He told me to eat it. I was hesitant (for a brief moment) but I swallowed it, and slept the best I’d slept in ages. Another boundary broken.

II. I received a can of bacon from back home! What a luxury. I was saving it for the right occasion. But my Afghan counter-part, with whom I was sharing a house, was sickened by the idea. He made me promise to give him notice of when I was going to cook it so he could evacuate. Of course, I teased him a bit about it, but I promised I would let him know. I told David Moats about the bacon, and invited him to share it. I think he was there the next day; it was that kind of treat. My roommate evacuat-ed as planned. Dave and I both thought it was delicious. About a week later I opened a bottle of scotch that I had bought somewhere, somehow. I invited my Afghan counterpart to join me to try it, sure that he would decline. But he drank with me, and we both got drunk. It was our best time together, and a welcome break from day-to-day FFW.

III. I think this was in Jalalabad, but I may be wrong. It was during the last month of in-country training for the very first FFW volunteers. There were two or three young Afghan teach-ers hired to give Farsi lessons, but it was-n’t going well. The trainees came to me to discuss their frustrations, which sounded mostly like cultural differences. Americans have our own ways to teach and learn, and Afghans have their ways. The two are very different! The resolu-tion was that I would attend the classes and “translate” what was going on with the teachers, what they were intending to convey. Much of it was about grammar, which is not how Afghans think about language. It went smoothly after that, the trainees were doing great with the language, and I had a blast helping it to happen. I hope that if any of you who were in that group are at the reunion, you’ll identify yourselves to me. I want to remember more.

IV. I was walking down the main street in Qala-i-Nau. It was dusk, and dusty, and I was tired and hot. A car's headlights were on me from behind, and it pulled up to stop beside me. It was a new VW van, looking like something from another world. I had no idea who this could be. A large side door slid open automatically, and I felt a blast of cool air. Turns out the German PC volunteer, Peter Somebody, who was working with us, was inside. His program supervisors were visiting him. I got in the van and rode with them; I told them that I feel I am in a spaceship. The only thing I remember now is how smooth the ride was, no bumps or dust inside, and how refreshingly clean and cool it was. Those sensory experiences were more important to me, obviously, than anything we talked about.

V. Part of my job in Qala-i-Nau was to be at the provincial warehouse to count and weigh sacks of wheat when they arrived for distribution. The Modir ("Director") of the warehouse was always present too. I had been warned by Afghan leaders that he "reshwat mekhura" (takes bribes) and had to be watched carefully. The weight of each bag was 3 figures, or hundreds of kilo-grams, or pounds. After awhile I was able to add three-figure numbers by sight, no mental calculation. It was like learning a language, eventually no mental translation.

Whenever a disagreement about weights of bags happened, the Director's figures were always lighter than mine; then we had to re-weigh those bags. I was invariably correct. When I pointed this out to him, he got angry with me from the insinuation. I ignored him. Much later, out of frustration, I decided to bait him, but unfortunately I don't remember exactly how I did it. The gist of it was that I made a vague statement in Farsi to him, one that he could take as an offer of a bribe if he was so inclined. He responded by asking how much wheat it would be worth to him, thus revealing his intentions. I confronted him with what he had said and he couldn't deny it. He wasn't embarrassed or ashamed; he told me that this was "tartibe Afganistan" (the Afghanistan way). He pretty much avoided me from then on, which was fine with me.

VI. One early morning in Qala-i-Nau I woke up to a rumble outside. I stumbled to my front door and saw that a crowd of about 100 people had gathered there. They all wanted jobs. Just in front of me stood a young man with an Afghan carpet over his shoulder. He told me that the carpet would be mine if I gave him work, and wheat. I felt sad about their needs, and awed by the power FFW volunteers have.

Memories of Afghanistan
By
Susan "Stella" Ramsey

When I joined the Peace Corps in 1971, they sent me to Afghanistan. I was 27 years old. It was still exactly as James Michener had described in his book *Caravans*, which I read when I was 17. The story in *Caravans* took place dur-ing the 1940's; and, when I arrived in Kabul I knew that nothing had changed. As the plane circled Kabul to land, I looked out the window and saw the bleak Afghan countryside. No buildings. Just hills.

When I got off the plane and walked toward the terminal building, I heard a group of people yelling my name from the airport balcony. I looked up and saw about a dozen Peace Corps Volunteers waving furiously, there to greet me, each wanting me to work with him or her. I had been told in Washington before I left that with my expertise, as an administrative assis-tant, I could have my pick of six jobs that were vacant.

I piled into a pickup truck with about six volunteers who drove me into the center of town to the Peace Corps office. Along the way, I saw the mud-brick Afghan homes, herds of goats, sheep, and camels, the drab colors of the buildings against the stark white piles of snow. I asked my-self, *What have you gotten yourself into*? It was the second of February, Ground Hog's Day, and the snow was waist high.

It was freezing cold and we could see our breath when we talked. I was taken to my Peace Corps training house and plopped, together with my baggage, amid five other women who had arrived about a month before I did. The Peace Corps usually sends new volunteers together in groups called Cycles. If I remember correctly, I was somewhere around Cycle 11 or 12 -- I think they called me Cycle 11-1/2 because I was my very own Cycle. The women in my train-ing house were nurses. I was an administrator. A few days after I arrived, a group of about thirty, new Peace Corps volunteers, all men, whom we called "Food for Workers" arrived, and I think they were Cycle 12 or 13.

My training house was a real eye opener, a real introduction to life in Afghanistan. First of all, it smelled strange because of the fuel that was being burned for heat -- kerosene, wood, and saw-dust. The house was made of stone, and it was COLD even in summer. The main room for sitting was heated by a small wood stove, stoked by one of our two *bachas,* or servants. That is where the six of us ate our meals, did our homework, our beauty routines, etc. On the floor were "*toshacks*," those Afghan all-purpose pillows for sitting and sleeping. That was our com-mune room.

Upstairs there were two bedrooms with beds of straw mattresses. Somebody in Washington for-got to tell me to bring a sleeping bag. Three women slept in each room. I was the one in our room whom the bed bugs bit. In the other room, one other woman also had the honor of being bitten by bed bugs

I wonder why they picked on just the two of us. Upstairs was the bathroom which had a toilet, sink, and shower head -- no stall, no tub, just a shower head which sprayed the entire bathroom when used. In order to have hot water, one of the servants had to build a wood fire in the stove to heat the water, which took a couple of hours for the water to be warm enough to bathe in. Wood was expensive and was rationed for trainees, so we took a communal shower bath -- all six of us women together -- once a week. That's right. Once a week. Together. It was so cold on that stone floor that we didn't stay in there for very long, either. We were in training for 6 weeks. Can you imagine taking 6 showers in 6 weeks? It was so cold that we slept with our clothes on. The upstairs bedrooms were not heated. Heat was too expensive.
A few days after I arrived, I had an appointment for medical orientation with the Peace Corps doc-tor, Dr. Dean Johnson, who happened to be trained as an ob/gyn and was father of five girls.

Dr. Johnson walked over to the window of his second-floor office in the Peace Corps office and pointed to the Afghan man down on the street selling oranges and told me to watch him. The man had a dirty rag in his hand, which he was using to wipe the oranges so that they were nice and pretty and shiny, piling them into the cart, making a nice display to attract customers. After a couple of minutes, the man blew his nose on the rag and then wiped his face and beard! Dr. Johnson told me that I had to be very careful of every single thing that I ate and drank, and still I was going to get sick, which I did in about three days! Amoebic dysentery was common amongst volunteers, as were intestinal worms of various kinds, and salmonella, and one volunteer caught malaria (and survived). A staff member was diagnosed with tuberculosis. I lost 44 lbs. in three months because I had amoebic dysentery. It was as if God said, "Zap! You've got a new body!" I was thrilled because the pounds simply melted away. Now I say "effortlessly," but at the time I was really sick.

My six weeks of training was with my own private teacher, six hours per day, 5 1/2 days per week. It was grueling. With a private teacher, you have to pay attention all the time. No goof-ing off. It's just the two of you, sitting together eye to eye at the table. Training consisted of memorizing dialogs in the Afghan language, Farsi. The first time I was given the assignment to try out what I had learned in class, I remember praying that the shop keeper would keep up his side of the dialog that was on the lesson sheet. He did. It was a thrill to have an Afghan under-stand what I was saying! It was also thrilling to understand what he said back to me! I had an-other lesson that was supposed to teach me how to talk on the telephone, for office work, but I kept giggling and could not pretend that it was a real live phone call because the teacher who was calling me was standing almost next to me. In addition to language lessons, I was given lessons in the Afghan culture. Since Afghanistan is a Muslim country, there was a lot to learn about how women are expected to dress (cover all your skin if you can; otherwise, you will get pinched and/or spat upon) and act (low key), and to be sure to use only the right hand when eating, the fine art of bargaining for everything you have to purchase, including food.

Across the street from the Peace Corps office was the Chicken Bazaar, or Chicken Street, which is where you went to buy a chicken when you felt like eating chicken for dinner. I only went there once. After that, I always sent my servant. Little did I know that you select whichever live chicken you want, and they kill the chicken right there in front of you. If you want the dead chicken to be plucked and gutted, they will do that for you for an additional fee. Yikes! I figured this out by watching. When it was my turn to place an order, I told the man what I wanted and that I would be back in fifteen minutes. Then I took a walk around, went to the yoghurt shop across the alley, while the deed was being done. When I returned, he handed me a pack-age, and all I had to do was pay him and go home and cook the chicken. I guess he was used to the way foreigners wanted their chickens prepared.

I rode my bicycle (which I bought for $10 from a volunteer who was leaving the country) every-where I went. One day I rode into a crowded street and had to jump off my bike and walk with it because the street was blocked with people. A *chadri*-covered woman spotted the solid gold camel earrings I always wore and loved them. She tried to touch them. Thank goodness I was six inches taller and quick enough to swerve away from her grope. Her admiration for the earrings attracted the attention of many more women, and all of a sudden I found myself sur-rounded by a dozen chadri-clad Afghan women, all wanting to see and touch my camel ear -rings. Trying not to panic, I kept walking, keeping my bike as a barrier to fend them off, search-ing for a way out of the crowd. At last, I was able to pass through the crowd to an opening where I could jump back on my bike and speed the heck out of there with both ear-lobes still in-tact and both earrings still hanging from my earlobes. Whew!

Major purchases took months of bargaining to get to a reasonable price. I bought jewelry this way and a *geelam* (striped, woven, colorful carpet), and even then, Marty Kumorek, a Peace Corps staff member who had been there for years, told me that I had paid too much.

After six weeks of training in Kabul, during which I learned the basics of their language, Farsi, and the Afghan culture, I was given an oral examination to be sure I had learned what I was slated to learned.

The exam was tape recorded by the examiner, an employee of the Afghan Ministry of Educa-tion. I passed the exam with flying colors, I think, because when I asked somebody to explain a sharp reply to one of the questions, when the examiner asked me, in Farsi, "Are you mar-ried?" [r-u-see kardane?]," my instant sharp reply was the Farsi equivalent of "Why are you asking me that ques-tion? [chi maksad dorine?]" because according to the Afghan culture, it is an impolite question to ask anyone, especially a woman. The examiner was taken aback, did not know what to say to me, and when he recovered his composure, stuttered, in Farsi, "I did not have any particular intention when I asked you that question."

He passed me! With no reservations! I was sworn in as a volunteer. There were a few Volun-teer trainees who had to return to school to learn the language better. I was lucky. I had had a good private teacher. My first job was a teaching at the Peace Corps Secretarial School. This was supposedly the only Peace Corps school in the entire world. It was located just around the corner from the Peace Corps office above a jewelry shop. The school's 100 stu-dents were young adult Afghans, mostly college graduates, because we taught our classes in the English language and the way for Afghans to learn English was to go to college. There-fore, they were in their early twenties and also the up-per class of Afghan society. There were about 75% men to 25% women. Many of them were married and parents.

I taught typing, on manual typewriters, and Office Procedures, which consisted of various sys-tems of filing, business correspondence, record keeping and basic secretarial skills.
We had no typing paper to give the students; they were told they had to bring their own. Each student showed up with paper bags from the trash can behind a bakery (the bags were stained with grease spots or jelly); they opened out the bags and typed on the unused side. The other side was discarded memos from the American Embassy trashcan. In Afghanistan, they really re-cycle and recycle!

In addition to teaching, I also decided to create an entrance examination to the school to make the process of selecting new students easier. When I arrived, there was no process in place. A few days before a new semester was due to begin, a hundred hopeful Afghans would just show up and crowd into the school's office to apply for the dozen or so vacancies that se-mester. I have no idea how they were selected before I arrived on the scene. The four other teachers and I put our noodles together and created tests for their written, verbal, and com-prehension English skills to make the selection process easier

For my next Peace Corps job, I was asked to attempt to organize the chaotic office of an Afghan government official - the president of the Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning - whose name was Mr. Abdullah Brechna. What a riot his office was, and what an honor it was to be selected for this job. I was the only woman in the entire complex of about a dozen buildings, including offices and housing, and was called "the Russian Apartments" because it consisted of concrete-block buildings built by the Russians. I was unsuccessful at organizing the office because their method of conducting business is hundreds (or thousands) of years old, and it does not lend itself to organization. But the officials were happy to have me amongst them, and it was an eye-opening experience for me.

For my next Peace Corps job, I was asked to attempt to organize the chaotic office of an Afghan government official - the president of the Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning - whose name was Mr. Abdullah Brechna. What a riot his office was, and what an honor it was to be selected for this job. I was the only woman in the entire complex of about a dozen buildings, including offices and housing, and was called "the Russian Apartments" because it consisted of concrete-block buildings built by the Russians. I was unsuccessful at organizing the office be-cause their method of conducting business is hundreds (or thousands) of years old, and it does not lend itself to organization. But the officials were happy to have me amongst them, and it was an eye-opening experience for me. **One day the president of the Central Authority for Housing and Planning, his assistant, Dr. Fakhir, and several U.N. Consultants took me with them to Mazar-I-Sharif to attend the ceremony of the opening of the water project that had been built by the Japanese government for the Afghan government. It was an official ceremony attended by several dozen Afghan and Japanese men, and me. While I was standing there during the ceremony, it occurred to me that maybe I should feel strange or out of place or something since I was the only woman. But I didn't. I felt honored and very special. We drove to Mazar-I-Sharif in a caravan of six or so govern-ment vehicles with drivers, with us sitting in the back seats. The caravan stopped about half-way there at a little inn; I was escorted into the building and led down a hallway to the door of a small room with a toilet that looked like a throne for someone very important, and I was left alone. How nice of them to take care of me like that. I think the others must have gone in the bushes because I saw no other toilets on that trip. After the attempt to organize the office, I was invited to stay on at the Central Authority doing other work with a team of United Nations experts who were creating the Afghan government's ten-year plan (my introduction to socialism). My job was to study and organize the bids that had been submitted by foreign companies for a proposed system of new roads, for Afghanistan didn't have many paved roads in those days outside of the major cities. There were German bids submitted in Deutsche marks; Japanese bids submitted in yen; Swiss bids submitted in Swiss francs. I had to distill all the bids down into one common denominator. It was like a giant jig-saw puzzle. And I was successful.**

For another Peace Corps Volunteer assignment, during an emergency relief project called "Operation Help," I was asked to assist a U.S. Government official, Abe Ashcanase. Thousands of *Koochis* (Afghan nomads) were starving as a result of a drought, and the U.S. Government spearheaded a program, at the request of the Afghan government, to save them, by requesting donations of money, food, clothing, blankets, and medicines from other foreign countries who had embassies or representation in Kabul. Because it was an Afghan-government-sponsored project, the Afghan army sent an official jeep to pick me up from home and take me to work every day. The project began in the fall and continued through winter and on into spring. Do you know how cold it is in Afghanistan during the winter? Well, the snow is waist-deep, and the outside temperature is about 10 degrees. Try riding in a jeep that has no windows or doors on the sides in that weather!

Aside from my Peace Corps Volunteer work assignments, there was an active social life in Kabul amongst the members of the foreign community. We socialized at the weekly "all-you-can-eat" Friday buffets at the Intercontinental Hotel and also at the American Ambassador¹s monthly open houses, during which we Peace Corps volunteers ate Ambassador and Mrs. Neumann out of house and home. Every once in a while after leaving Kabul, I would see Ambassador Neumann appear as a guest ex-pert on the Lehrer MacNeil News show on TV because he was a professor at George Washington University. Another social escapade that I participated in was a production of "H.M.S. Pinafore" where I made many friends outside of the Peace Corps. One of these was Sam Lewis, who played the boatswain in "Pinafore" and who was, at the time, the Deputy Chief of Mission for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul (No. 2 man after the ambassador).

His wife, Sally, directed the production. Years later, I saw Sam on TV back at home during the Carter administration. He had become the U.S. Ambassador to Israel during an important time in our history during the era when President Jimmy Carter was arranging the peace talks between Menachem Begin of Israel and Anwar Sadaat of Egypt. Sam Lewis played a very important role in our country's history, and I have photos in my scrapbook of us singing and dancing in that production of "H.M.S. Pinafore." In the spring of 1974, when I had just a few months left before completing my Peace Corps contract, a coup d'état occurred, during which the Afghan army over-threw the King of Afghanistan while the King was in Rome. The leader of the coup was the King's cousin, and he took over managing the government. This was surely the beginning of what was to become the Russian takeover in 1979. *Time* Magazine termed it "the bloodless coup." From that time on until I left several months later, there were Afghan soldiers on the streets of Kabul carrying machine guns. I stayed safely at home as much as I could. One of the American employees of U.S.I.S. (U.S. Information Systems) Jerry Verner, and his wife Lois, were my neighbors in Karte Char, near the Blue Mosque (*Masjiddi Hajji Yakoub*), so I always knew if there was any danger for us foreigners, which there wasn't.

One morning I awoke to complete silence in the neighborhood. This was very strange because I lived at a very busy intersection in *Karte Char,* directly across from the Blue Mosque (*Masjiddi Hajji Yakoub*). The neighborhood was full of *Nan* (bread) shops, vegetable sellers, a butcher shop, and kebab shops. The intersection served as a traffic circle, and the taxis would beep their horns as they rounded it since Afghan taxi drivers drive with their foot on the gas pedal and their hand on the horn. I got out of bed, walked to the window, looked down from my third-floor flat, and saw, parked in the traffic circle, an army tank. There were a couple of soldiers sitting on top of the tank with rifles in their hands and other soldiers sauntering around the street. Not one other person was to be seen. The shops were closed. Usually in the morning there were children getting water from the public water spigots. Nobody was around. I got dressed and bravely went out as usual and rode my bike the couple of blocks to the Verners' compound, where Lois whisked me inside and had me stay with them for next few days until we were told by the U.S. Embassy that the coast was clear and we could proceed with our lives. Since Lois' husband Jerry worked at USIS, we were getting the word directly from the American Embassy. That was fortunate, because the phones weren't working, and the airport was closed, for about a week.

When we were able to congregate once more at the Peace Corps office, I heard one volunteer tell the story of being with a group of volunteers who had left the USAID Staff House late, the night of the coup. They were walking in *Karte Se*, looking for a taxi, when a tank drove by, stopped, and an Afghan stepped out of the tank and asked where the home of the royal family was!

Stella Ramsey, 65, (Susan Estelle Ramsay) of Hudson, died peacefully on Tuesday morning, August 3, 2010, at Harborside Healthcare – Crestwood in Milford, surrounded by her loving friends.

Peace Corps Memories: Building a School in Afghanistan

Don Watts, RPCV / Afghanistan, written in Fall 2019

Within a month of my arrival in Kabul as part of Peace Corps, Cycle 13A, the Peace Corps office in Kabul asked me if I would be interested in designing an elementaryschool in the rural Panjshir Valley of Afghanistan. A local village leader in the Panjshir, known by the name Haji, had contacted the Peace Corps, asking for possible construction assistance. He agreed to provide the land for the school. It is not clear if he actually had legal rights to the school land but it was their village thatwanted this school and it made sense that village land would be used for the villageschool. The name Haji is an honorary title for any Moslem who has returned from the Haj, the religious pilgrimage to Mecca. All Moslems are asked to make the pilgrimage once during their lifetime. In the early 1970's very few Afghans actually accomplished this goal. Haji was therefore the respected leader of his village.

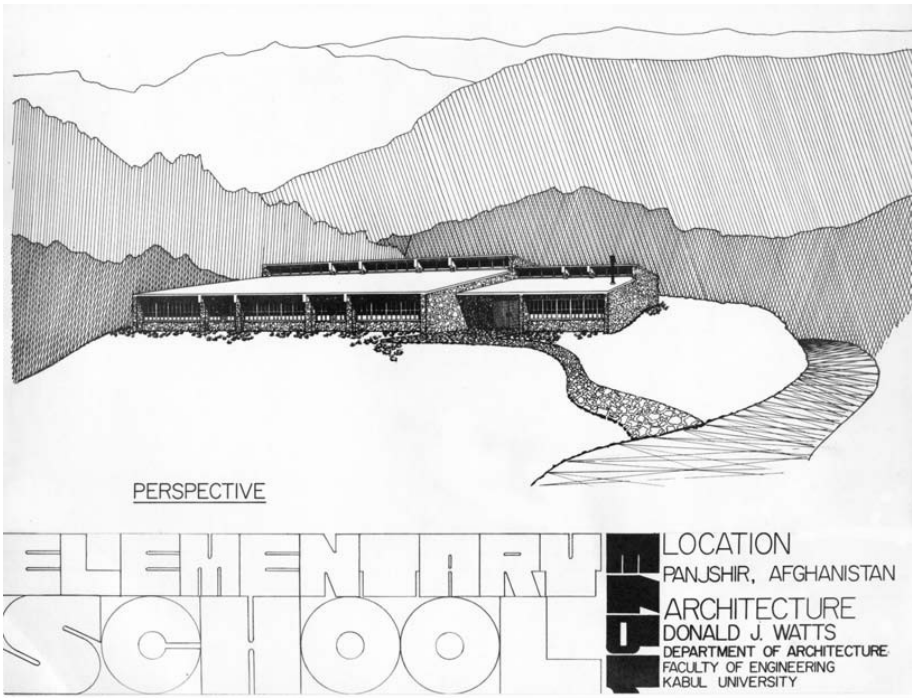
The estimated number of students who would use this new school would be between 150 and 250 students and it would accommodate grades one through six. It was desirable to include a living quarters in the school as well as a storage room and an administrative office. The design needed to use local construction methods and materials as much as possible but yet be of sufficient quality to last for a long time with normal maintenance. Within a few weeks of the inquiry, my Peace Corps supervisor, Mr. Abdul Matin, arranged a trip to the school site. It was a chance to see both the physical conditions of the building site and also meet the local people and see the local school conditions. My second letter home from Kabul refers to my shock at seeing the existing roofless stone shells then used as their school. It is important to note that in the 1970's only boys were educated in the public schools.

Girls were educated within the private homes in this very traditional society.

.My primary assignment was to teach in the architecture department of the Faculty of Engineering, Kabul University. I was in the midst of full time language and culture training and was living out of my backpack in a training house. I had no equipment for doing drawings, photography or printing. I expressed an interest in designing the school but explained my lack of an office. Peace Corps arranged for me to visit the USAID compound in Kabul where an engineering office was located. There were several American civil engineers on the USAID staff and they generously helped me set up a small drawing table with the necessary tools to develop my design. In a week or two I had developed my design and then spent several days doing some final ink presentation drawings. The engineers had their staff photograph and print my drawings. They were essentially 8 x 10 inch black and white prints that could be easily transported to Washington D.C. in search of funding. It was very unclear whether this project would ever be funded. I therefore limited my time to simple drawings that would show the design idea.

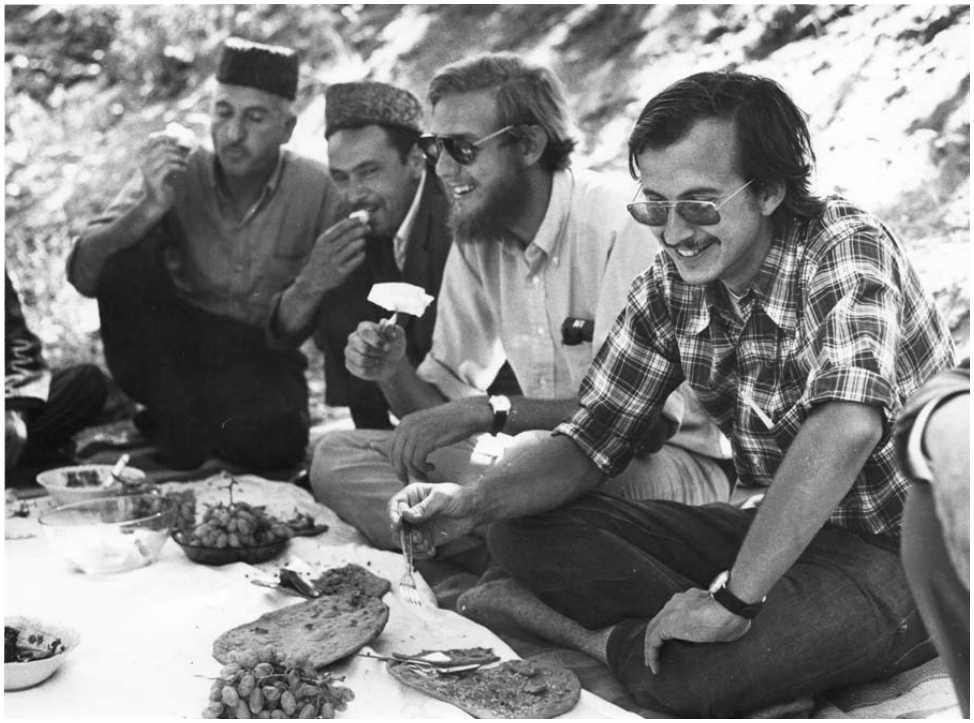
I would later need to do detailed construction drawings IF funding materialized.

This is the Afghan teacher and his boys in one of the make shift school “shelters” that I saw on my first visit to the construction site. Note that the boys are looking at a picture of King Zahir Shah. This was a wise teacher knowing he was photographed. Below are the three presentation drawings for the school. Note that this design includes an administrative wing with teachers living quarters, storage and an office. This wing was eliminated from the final design due to overall costs. Another change in the final design was using conventional flat mud roofs. Metal roofing was limited to only the most important buildings and certainly not in rural areas.



Local stone was to be the primary construction material, however the stone walls were to be laid in concrete mortar and not the traditional mud. Interior bearing walls were also of stone but the interior partition walls used hand made sun dried brick. The design allowed for large double size classrooms that could easily be divided into two smaller classrooms with additional brick partitions as needed. The construction site was sloped towards the south and called for a split level design. Interior stairs were needed and I decided to take advantage of this level change by creating a central commons room with built in benches for the students. Clerestory windows were used to bring natural light into the middle of this large building. It made the central corridor much more pleasant and also allowed more light into the upper level classrooms located on the north side of the building.

News of the funding for the school arrived in June 1973. An American elementary school in Virginia held a fund raising to support the cost of the school! I recall the sum being a little less than $4,000. This sounds like an impossibly small amount to build a school but labor costs were only 65 cents per day per laborer, the building stone was free from the nearby mountainside, the sand and gravel came from the nearby stream. The major material costs were the windows, cement, wood roof beams and some steel reinforcing rod. The provincial governor and education minister came for the opening day ceremonies. Some Peace Corps officials plus a fellow volunteer accompanied me to the site. The fellow volunteer was going to live at the construction site and conduct daily supervision of the project. A celebratory dinner also occurred that day.



The Feast occurred beneath some shade trees beside the mountain

I am determining the location of one of the outside walls

Construction commenced with the digging of the foundation trenches. Because of the very cold location, the foundation walls needed to be one meter deep. Within a week of starting, I learned in Kabul of problems at the school site. In digging the foundation trenches, the workers intersected old burial chambers. No one knew this was a graveyard but it raised a moral dilemma. My Peace Corps advisor and I made a special inspection trip to look at the circumstances and discuss the situation. I jumped down into one of the trenches that had just nipped the head end of a tomb. It was a rudimentary stone vaulted chamber about the size of a casket. In it lay a human skeleton that was extremely old. The ribs had decayed to almost powder and there was no indication of who these people might have been. It was determined that those buried here were so old that they died before the time of Mohammed. They were therefore considered infidels. The village arranged for the local mullah to "consecrate" the building site to show respect for the dead and then construction could continue. I had to explain to the construction crew that they could not simply shovel loose fill into these tombs and that the foundation walls would have to begin at the base of any tombs, even if that made it deeper than the original one meter depth. I had learned from my apprentice work in Kansas City that all foundation walls must be constructed upon "undisturbed earth". The foundation walls were completed by the fall of that year. It was planned to complete the school in 1974. This would be my last full year of Peace Corps service and everyone wanted to get the job done. Construction started promptly in the spring of 1974 when weather permitted.

Peace Corps assigned one volunteer to always be present at the job site. During the first year, the volunteer was Bud Veasey. I do not recall what prior experience Bud had with construction but he could read construction drawings and had experience working in Afghan rural areas prior to this construction assignment. The following spring Bud had finished his two years of service and a second volunteer, Terry Kier, was assigned to supervise construction. Terry had started his Peace Corps service after I did and therefore would be in country after my departure. Terry had a good command of Farsi and could also read construction drawings.

It was my normal routine to visit the school construction site on Fridays, the Moslem holy day. This did not conflict with my normal teaching duties and other activities in Kabul. It was also the day off for my cook and housekeeper, Mirdad. Peace Corps would arrange a pickup truck and driver to take me to the school site. It was a good 2 hour drive straight north of Kabul. USAID had a great staff house about six blocks from my house and I often went there for a big American breakfast prior to the

Friday morning trip. After many months of this, Peace Corps somehow found out about my routine and expressed their displeasure with my being "picked up" by my Peace Corps driver at the Staff House. It was considered too decadent for a volunteer to act this way. I argued that it was my only day off of the week and felt it was a small treat for my extra day of service. It turned out that Peace Corps administration was creating a new policy about using the Staff House in general. Things were getting strict. Rumors were that the USAID crowd was getting tired of having volunteers in their staff house and that is where the pressure came from. I seldom missed more than two weeks between visits to the school. Of course there was no telephone or electricity in the entire valley so my visits were necessary to just see what was going on and give any guidance and moral support to Terry. There

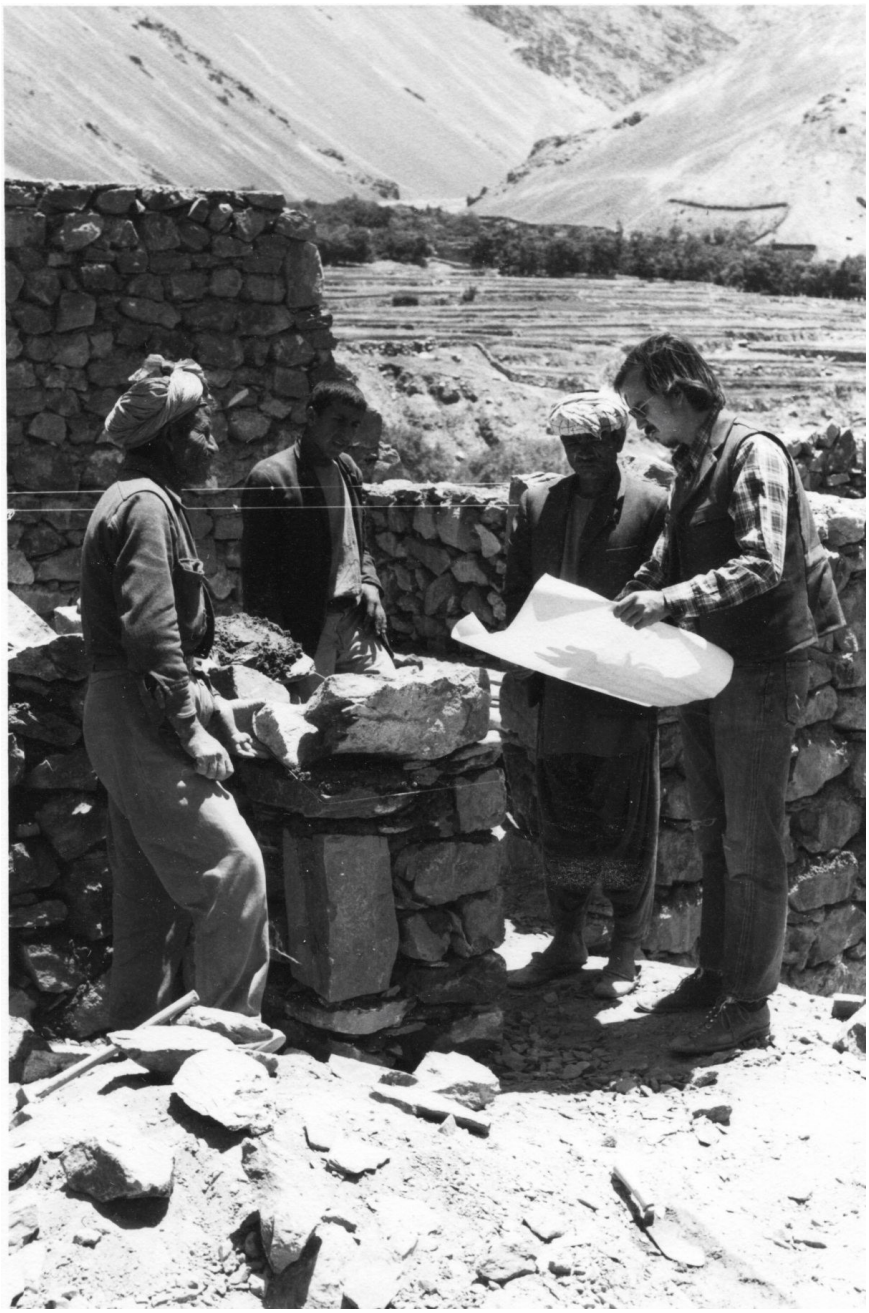
were few mishaps that I heard about. The most glaring one concerned the steel reinforcing bars that were to be used for the concrete lintels above the rows of windows. Terry told me that he caught the masons trying to sell the steel in the local bazaar! They obviously had no experience with steel reinforced concrete beam construction and figured that since these re-bars would be hidden in the final

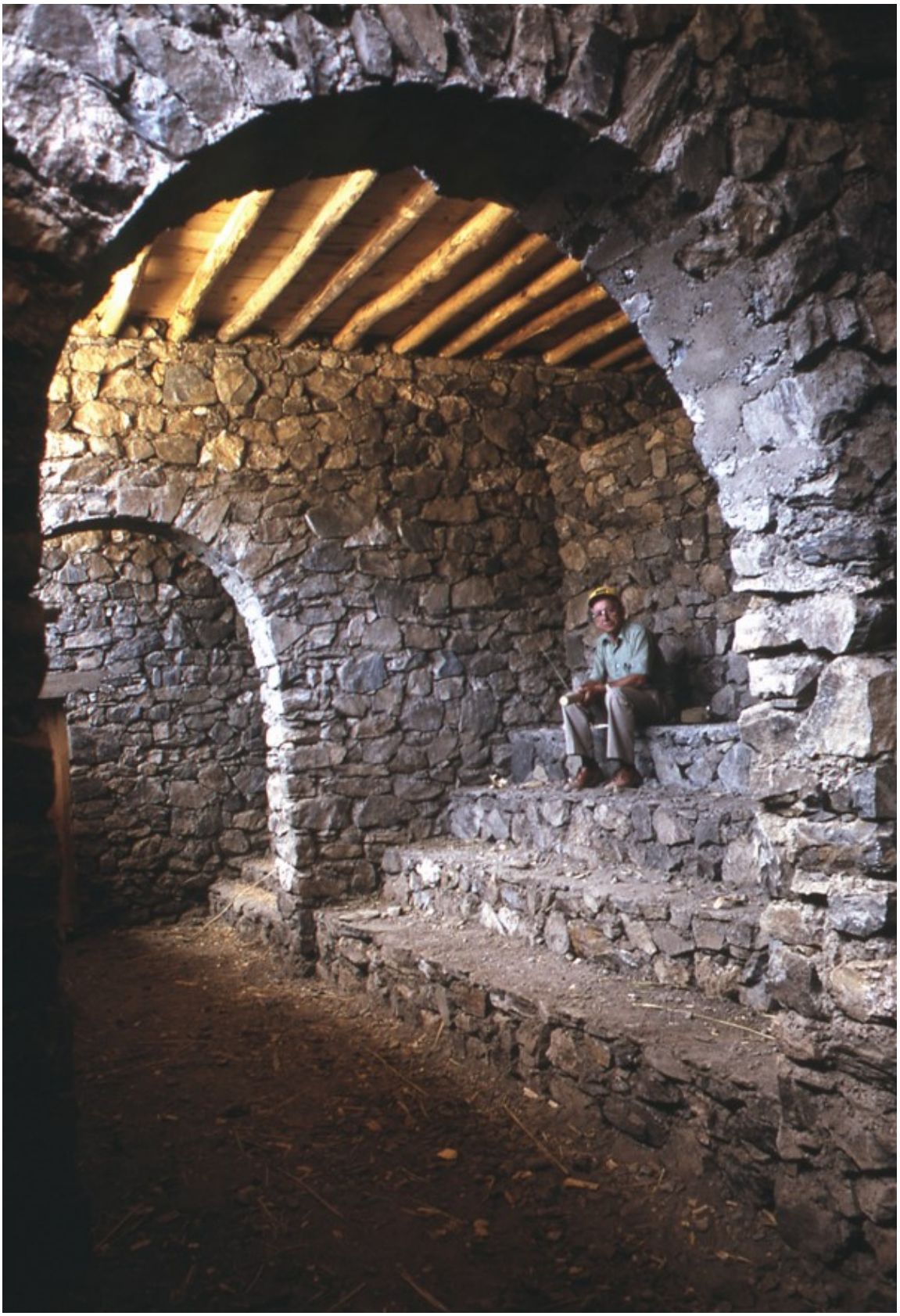
construction, no one would miss them!! Luckily this disaster was avoided. Another tricky occasion concerned the roof beams. My Peace Corps advisor and I visited a large lumberyard on the outskirts of Kabul. I had determined the minimum size these beams needed to be and my advisor wrote his name in ink upon each of the beams. I was not at the school site when the beams arrived and many of them proved a little small and needed some reinforcement. I never knew if we really got the correct beams or if my calculations were wrong. However, the problem was ultimately solved.

Making the mud bricks for the interior partition walls

Constructing the Roof

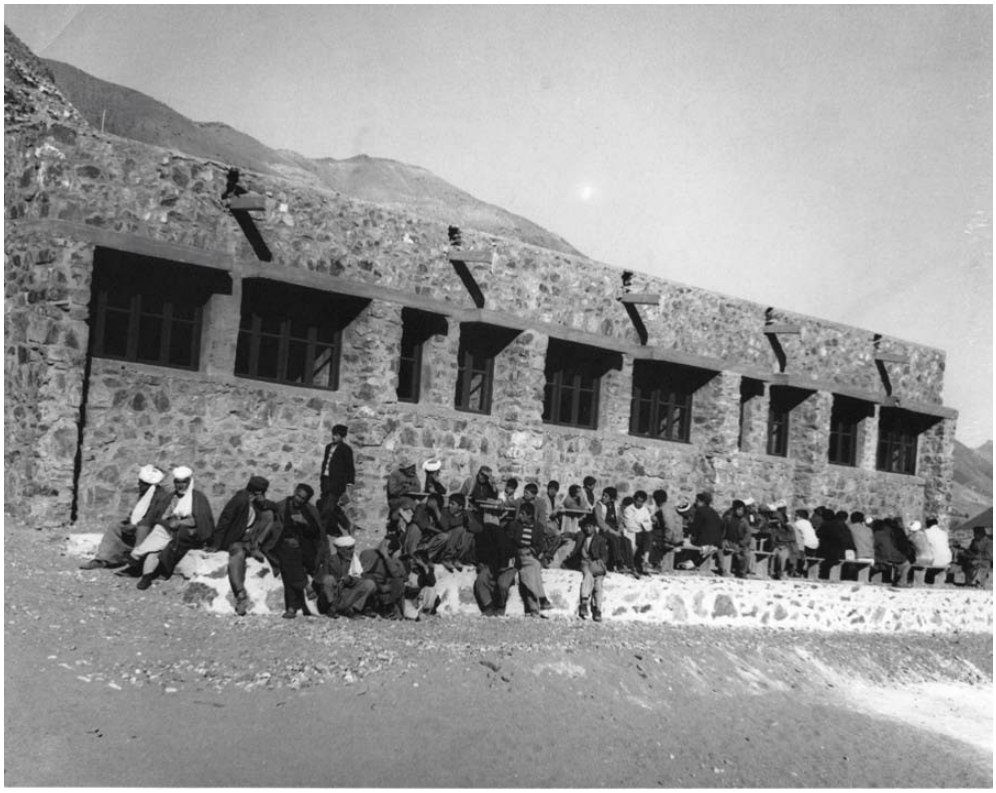
This was during the wall construction and I was explaining where two arches would occur in the middle of the building





My father, James M. Watts Jr., sitting in the commons of the school, fall 1974. Age 63.

This is Terry Kier proudly standing in front of the nearly completed school. I did not take this photograph. Terry sent this photo to me years later.



A wide platform was added to the South front of the building. Afghan schools enjoyed gathering outdoors when the weather was good.

Panjshir Province is close to Kabul but still isolated within a narrow valley. The Soviet invasion and the fate of the school:

Just four years after completion of the school, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Panjshir Valley is famous for being the home of Ahmad Shah Massoud, known as the Lion of the Panjshir. Massoud was the Tajik resistance leader who fought the Soviet invaders within the Panjshir between 1980 and 1985. The Soviets never conquered the valley even though they conducted heavy aerial bombing and invaded the valley with hundreds of tanks, heavy artillery and thousands of soldiers.

I always knew that my school was in a very commanding location. It was positioned on a small rise that looked southwards directly down the only road of the valley. It most surely received heavy damage by the Soviets. However, knowing the value of the sturdy stone wall construction and foundations, I always suspected that a new building would be built upon my foundations. It would not look the same and may not even be a school but the ruins would likely be put to some good use.
The Panjshir Valley of 9/11 and today:

On September 9, 2001, two agents of Osama bin Laden assassinated Ahmad Shah Massoud. This was a prelude to what occurred two days later on September 11. Massoud had been warning the U.S. of a planned Al Qaeda attack on US soil since the summer of 2001. Immediately after September 11, the first American military to set foot in Afghanistan flew into Panjshir Valley to assist the Northern Alliance in the ousting of the Taliban Afghan government. Throughout the past seventeen years,
ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Teams have invested heavily in reconstruction and improvement of Panjshir Valley. The U.S. military has provided the leadership in the ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Teams for Panjshir Province. Even to this day in
2019, Panjshir Valley has remained perhaps THE most independent rural region that is very appreciative and supportive of Western assistance. They have built a large number of schools as well as other public buildings. Careful study of Google

Earth imagery shows a new building of the size, shape and location to match my school. Several small freestanding buildings stand a short distance to the west of the large building. It is very likely that these two small out buildings are communal toilets. One toilet would be for the students and one for the faculty. Separate toilets were never part of my initial school construction and were likely built many years ago. I can think of two good reasons why my school would be resurrected as a new school. First, it was a new and cherished school building before the Russians destroyed it and second, the original school was constructed and funded by Americans in the first place. Reconstructing the school would be a testament to long established good will between America and the Panjshir people.

Thirty years ago Ahmad Shah Massoud promoted schools for girls and ISAF has constructed girls schools in the Panjshir. I would be extra pleased if the foundations of my school now support a school for girls in Panjshir Valley. I simply do not know this level of detail. I would like to think that the people of Panjshir Valley remember Americans for what they helped build and remember the Soviets for all they destroyed. Like so many other volunteers, I consider these years to be a special time of my life.

RECOLLECTIONS OF AFGHANISTAN 1969-71-

By

DONALD MAGINNIS PCV ARCHITECT

"*yak dist du tarbuza na mesha"* *"you can't hold two melons in one hand"*

After military high school in Sewanee Tennessee in 1962 I spent six plus years completing a normal five year architecture curriculum, plus fraternity parties, and graduated from Tulane Architecture School in summer 1968. I was working for an architect in New Orleans and had applied for the Peace Corps with a recruiter at Tulane. In late 1968 I got an invitation to join the Afghanistan program as an architect. My draft status was 1-A. I read *Caravans* and went to a training site in a bible camp near Estes Park Colorado the day the Jets beat the Colts in the Super Bowl, and there was snow on the ground. Two month later there was still snowing, and after learning some Farsi I was not "deselected". Those of the group who were "selected" were sent to Kabul for one more month of training and we lived in the Metropole Hotel. I started work in the Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning with other architects, planners and surveyors, some from the previous group. After the in-country training about half of the original group decided to not continue or were "deselected".

The first day in Kabul I went to the money bazaar to exchange dollars for afghanis. The money shop was run by two Jewish ("*Yahoods*") Afghan brothers known as "Heckle and Jeckel". There was a telephone between their desks which rang repeatedly with calls from the Kabul Bank to get the daily exchange rates for dollars, pounds, rupees, francs, yen, etc. The first night there I found the American staff house where I bought my first on many chit books with my changed money. I had beers and a burger with fries. I drank my first beer and started to crush the can as I had done at many a fraternity party. The Afghan bartender snatched the empty from my hands. He probably sold all empties in the bazaar to be made into a jerry can or to patch a fender on a lorry. Nothing went to waste there.

Kabul-Tomb and mountain housing

Afghanistan was a thirsty country and many Afghans drank liquor. A shop in Share I Nau sold a lot of alcohol. One asked the owner if he had any "medicine" *("dewa doren" ?).*The response was usually what medicine ? (*chi dewa car doren ? wodka, escotch, jin, whiskey jak daniel ?*") Russian vodka was cheapest but gave bad headaches. Whiskey was preferred. Later some Italians opened a winery near the airport using good Afghan grapes. There were reds, whites, roses and even sparkling wines that were inexpensive and passable, if nothing else was available. Empty bottles always ended up in the bazaar. Nothing went to waste there.

Most of my remaining group of about 45 volunteers were in TEFEL, or teaching English. After 3 months about half of the group got hepatitis. We all later got amoebic dysentery. After the Metropole Hotel I rented a house near the Peace Corps (PC) office and Shar I Nau Park and Cinema. The Afghans loved the old Elvis films, especially when he sang and danced with Anne Margret. I had studied no foreign languages in military and architectural school and enjoyed learning Farsi. I had a tutor and learned to write and read some of the Arabic script. I still speak some when I visit with other returned Peace Corps Volunteers Afghanistan (RPCAs).

The P C office was on a corner in the fruit bazaar. We received our mail there, met with staff and medical personnel and received our monthly living expenses. There was a weekly delivery at the start of the week of one page printed newsletters from both the U S and British embassies that gave us the world news in English.

Frequently on the way home one stopped at the fruit bazaar to buy melons, raisins and almonds ("*badams*") and pistachios ("*pistas*"). Paper or plastic bags were almost nonexistent. The vendors fashioned conical paper envelopes to hold the nuts. Usually the cones were the weeks' excess of newsletters which the P C office servants had given to the shopkeepers. After I ate all the nuts my cook used the paper to light kindling for my wood burning heater. Nothing went to waste there.

On a nearby street was the fowl bazaar where mostly live chickens, and some ducks and turkeys, were sold live and slaughtered at the gutter. A PCV hydrologist, Bob Miller had an apartment on the street. From his window one could always see a chicken being killed by having his throat slowly cut pointed towards Mecca and bled to death.

In Shar I Nau there were many cultural centers and language schools from foreign countries. USAID and the British centers had excellent libraries to be used. The German Goethe Center had a beer garden. One evening we were invited by some German volunteers to attend an Oktoberfest event. We had to pay for the good German beer and sausage but enjoyed visiting with the volunteers who spoke both English and Farsi well. Unfortunately the fest lasted only one or two nights in lieu of one month.

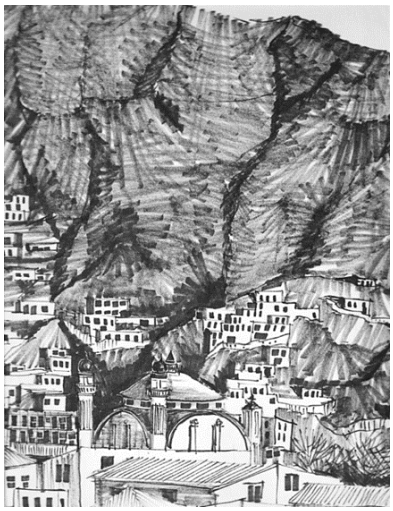
Near my house there was the Circle Francaise where I went 4 days a week after work to learn French. I still speak it at the Alliance Francaise in N O. I made friends with some of the French community who invited me to drinks, wine and cheese, dinners and Bastille Day parties. They always had plenty of French wine and Lebanese arak to drink. They loved to have big dinners, but with Arab couscous in lieu of rice. I even took some road trips with them in their Citrone car around the country on long weekends.

Bazaar Kabul

I sketched some and photographed a lot. I also read a lot, mostly British authors like Grame Green, Evelyn Waugh, Ian Fleming, Paul Scott, John Masters plus Arthur Conan Doyle. I also read a lot of history of the area of which I was very ignorant. The P C had an extensive library near the office in Shar I Nau. I was going there once for new books to read and the building caught fire. I manned a garden hose to fight the flames. I trained it on a window which immediately broke with the heat flaming outward towards me. A truck from the Kabul F D arrived and did a good job putting the fire out. Some people claimed they looked like the Kerystone Cops but they were very well trained and efficient. The building and most of the books were saved.

mass with P C staff Al and Patty Perrin and some embassy and USAID staff on Friday evenings. There was usually food and drink (besides the communion wine) after mass.

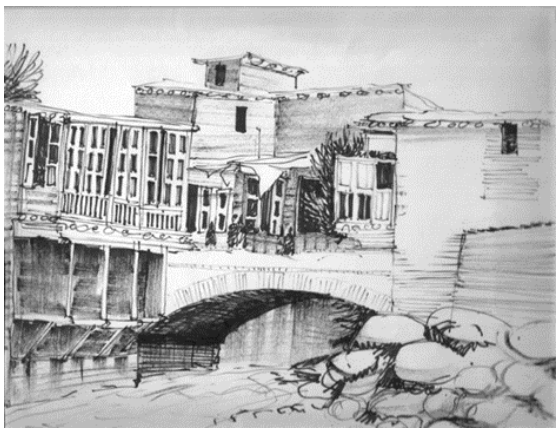
At work we wore coats and ties except in the field and on construction sites. During the winter we kept on our coats, and sometimes our overcoats in the office while working at our drafting tables. The Authority was in a 4 story apartment building built of pre-cast concrete by the Russians. It was used as offices but had little heat in the cold Kabul winters. We and some of our Afghan co-workers were picked up and driven to the office in either British Land Rovers, V W Micro-busses or very uncomfortable Russian jeeps. They returned us to the P C office at noon and again at the end of the day.



We worked with a multi-national U N team (Indian, Argentine, Australian, British, Japanese etc) all architects and engineers. There was also a separate group of Bulgar workers who all spoke English and Farsi and who we got along well with. We worked on projects such as housing ("*khanas*"), mosques ("*masjids*"), baths ("*hamams*") etc. Some of the buildings we designed were built but may have not survived the Soviets or Taliban. All rooves were flat because of the lack of rain and all drawings were done in metric in lieu of English measurements. Foundations were stone and concrete and some walls mud, concrete or stone, but never wood which was very scarce. Millwork like doors and windows were wood and usually well designed and made.

When I started work Russ Dupree and I did construction supervision in a housing project, Khair Khana just north of Kabul. We designed precast concrete mini-domes for the rooves in lieu of wood members. I also later took trips to the provinces with engineers to survey villages for new roads and public buildings. We were usually accompanied by the local parliamentary representative, governor or village leaders who stopped on the road to buy us fruit so we would not be sad (*"shuma deck na mesha")* on the trip. The department head of the Authority admitted that most of the trips were political to show the good will and presence of the Afghan government. We were always well fed and received even in the most remote villages

Bridge at Charikar



In the Authority office we also taught Afghan co-workers drafting and model building. Nepotism and bribery ("*bakseesh*") was very prevalent there. Well dressed and educated Afghans with connections got better positions and pay than those less connected. Some could not even operate a T square but showed up every day to drink tea and then collect their salary. Some PCVs were shocked, but as I had grown up in Louisiana and Mississippi observing historically corrupt Democrat politicians I accepted it as an unfortunate cultural difference and way of life. To not help one's relatives and not practice nepotism was considered bad form.

My office group included Robert von Zumbusch architect and Pat Scanlon, Fred Cournoyer and Alan Kirios all economists. Also Ross Taylor a surveyor and David Finley another surveyor who got sent home early for too little work and too much hash and hanging around with hippie world travelers. Also from the most previous group were architect Russ Dupree and Larry Lea (rip) a planner and surveyors Russ Gamage and Brad Child.

Other PC architects in different sites were Randy Trudell and Bob Hull (rip) who had a very notable practice later on the West Coast. John Berryhill another architect married a PCV, Linda. The water supply in their apartment went out so Linda showered and got dressed for their wedding in my house across the street. Also Bob Hicks an architect got married to Betsy Bauer another PCV. Office volunteers I remembered were Idavonne Rosa (rip), Linda, Beverly, and Karen Ritter and others.

Butcher shop and woman in chadri

Afghans being strict Moslems did not let men speak to or see their covered women, so male doctors could not examine or treat females, especially in the provinces. Therefore, there were a large number of PCV nurses in hospitals, including Lorie Fisher (rip) in Kabul and others in Charikar. Natalie (Tallie) Firnhaber and Monica Walcott were in Pul I Kumrie. I was once in the bazaar in Pul I Kumrie with Tallie and she approached a shop keeper about his wife who she had recently examined. She advised him to take her to see the Afghan doctor at the local hospital. He said he would not ever let any male doctor even see her bare hand much less examiner her. Tallie replied in Farsi: *"Chi dewana gap !" or "What crazy talk !".*

There was also a group of female vaccinators who traveled the provinces inoculating Afghans, including women and girls against cholera, small pox, malaria and other diseases which were rampant. When not traveling and vaccinating they stayed in a large house in Kandahar and an apartment in Kabul.

I remember going to receptions at the American ambassador's house in Shar I Nau near the park and P C office. I liked to go to holiday parties there and read the Christmas cards from well known governmental people. I saw cards from Nixon, Agnew, LBJ, Ted Kennedy, Avril Harriman, Henry Cabot Lodge and others. The Ambassador, Robert Newman was from a Jewish family that had survived the holucast . There were many Jewish PVCs, USAIDs, embassy workers,tourists and others. David (*Daoud*) Bragman a graphic artist also lived in Sha I Nau and was Jewish and Denise Behar in our group was an Egyptian American and a Sephardic Jew and spoke many languages. Unlike the Arabs and many Moslems now, the Afghans, Pakistanis, and Iranians I met had no issues with Israel or the Jewish race at that time.

PART 2 RECOLLECTIONS OF AFGHANISTAN 1969-71

However, the Afghans did discriminate against the Hazaras, who were a Mongol descended Shia minority at the very lowest rung of the social economic ladder. No Hazaras worked in our ministry, even as drivers or servants. They were the poorest of the poor and did most of the manual labor. Some literally shoveled shit from the out houses ("*tashnabs")* to use for fertilizer. Nothing went to waste there. My Sunni landlord Musa Khan, an officer in the army treated them like animals. He claimed that at night they turned out the lights and the men and boys practiced incest with all the women in their families, including their grandmothers. I once asked an educated Afghan about the issue of Hazaras and he replied in English:

“In Amerika you have two peoples, white peoples black peoples. In Afghanistan we have two peoples, Afghan and Hazara.”

The Afghan author Khaled Hosseini was once in N O and had a reading and book signing of his second novel about Afghanistan, “*And The Mountains Roared*”. He had lived in Shar I Nau when I was there and his father was a diplomat. They were in Paris when the Soviets invaded and he ended up in California writing. During the later questions I asked him in Farsi about the plight of the poor Hazaras. He responded in English and recalled the past discrimination, but noted that there was one Hazara in the Afghan parliament at that time, and things were changing for them. His first novel, “*The Kite Runner of Kabul”* was about a Hazara boy who was raped, so he had written about the discrimination. He signed my copy of his book in Farsi script “*Tashakor Donald”.*

Horse, donkeys and a lorry

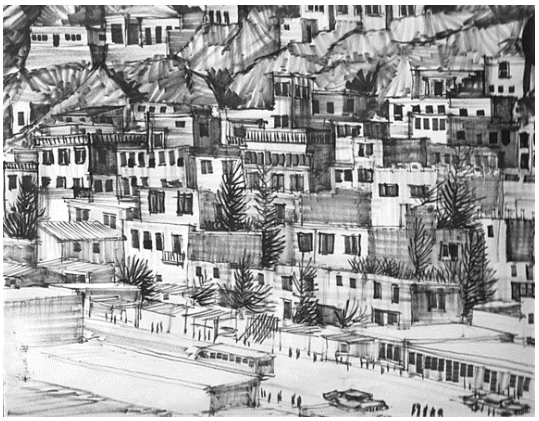
Horses were a large part of life in Afghanistan. Buzkashi was the national sport and I always tried to attend and photograph matches. I have ridden many horses both before and since my time there, but I was never crazy enough to mount any Afghan horse, especially for buskashi. I always brought my camera and largest telephoto lens to shoot the horsemen and their wild horses. I could never figure out the teams, rules or scoring system if any existed. Matches in Kabul were held at two separate venues.

Outside of the city was a very large flat field where most matches were played. The field was surrounded by colorfully painted lorrys on three sides and a ditch on the other side where most spectators stayed. In the middle of the perimeter was a large tent for the king and royal family. At one match the movie “The Horsemen” was being filmed by a Hollywood production company. During a break in the action I got tired of standing, crossed the ditch and approached the tent. No members of the royal family were present so I struck up a conversation with some of the officials who invited me to watch the match in the tent. I got a good seat, which was not the royal throne, and saw the rest of the action. The only request was that I stop photographing because of the filming. I have seen the movie twice but have never seen me or close ups of the tent.

I also attended matches in a smaller field in a soccer stadium near the Authority offices. The playing area was separated from the seating by a one meter high concrete fence. At each end of the stadium there was a large concrete vaulted arch on the top tier of seats. During the time of the Taliban I was watching a program about the plight of Afghans who did not follow sharia laws. Reportedly men were prosecuted for not having long beards and women were prosecuted for being uncovered (not wearing *“chadris*”), or for allegedly committing adultery. Trials with public punishments and executions were widely reported. The program showed that the site of the enforcement of the sentences (stoning or beheading) was the very stadium where the buzkashi had been played. On television I recognized the concrete arches that still appear in my old photographs.

village and drove out to attend. The field was not flat but a series of rolling hills that were defined loosely only by the crowds of Afghans standing or sitting around the perimeter. No lorrys, ditches or walls confined the field of play. I had my camera ready but could not get any close up shots because of the size of the field, plus the horses would occasionally disappear over the hills. I got frustrated and ventured out from the crowd about 10 meters to look for the action. I saw none through my telephoto lens but felt the ground begin to shake. It was not a typical Central Asian seismic tremor, but the horses coming over a nearby hill. Lead by the horseman with the headless goat they were not slowing down but heading directly for me. I sprinted back to the crowd much to the amusement of the Afghan spectators. *"Horiji dewana ! Chi makena? Burra bahai !" "What are you doing you crazy foreigner ? Run !"*

After a year in Shar I Nau I moved to a hill house above the Pul I Attan bridge. Some friends, the Grants had lived there and became staff and got a good apartment with a real toilet and a kitchen with running water. Russ Dupree took my old house. The hill house had a wonderful view of the city and the Bala Hissar and the noon gun. At the foot of the bridge was a women's hospital. About once a week I unhappily observed an Afghan man leaving the hospital carrying a very small object wrapped in cloth. He was heading down river for a nearby cemetery to bury a probably still born or miscarried baby. Neo-natal care was non-existent there and unfortunately probably still is.



The hill house had a large garden ("*bagh")* with an out-house *("tashnab")* with a dovecote above. There was a large flock of pigeons which we would force out to fly about the city hopefully trying to attract other pigeons and increase the flock. The sport locally was known as pigeon racing. When the flock got too large my cook, Syed Mamoud would prepare some served with rice. Nothing went to waste there. During the pigeon games we also observed many kite contests. Afghan boys would fly kites with broken glass glued to the kite strings and cut their opponents strings and try to retrieve the fallen kites, thus inspiring Hosseini's title *"The Kite Runner of Kabul".*

Hill side housing

There was no running water but the house had electricity and a real telephone. Bobby Barnwell would come from Jalalabad and stay with some PCV friends John and Betsy Tobias. They would visit the bazaar for some medicine *"dewa"* and come by the house and eat and drink. Bobby would try to phone his family and friends in the Mississippi Delta and New Orleans. He also called New York to his cousin Craig Claiborne (rip) who was the food critic at the N Y Times, and also to Dick Cavett to speak and gossip with Dick's lovely actress wife Carrie Nye McGoey (rip) who was Bobby's very close friend and confidant when they were growing up together in Greenwood. Syed Mamoud kept us well fed and also occasionally used the phone to call his brothers. Being unfamiliar with modern telecommunication equipment they always thought it necessary to shout out all their conversations into the phone receiver. .

Once we went to an American style wedding in Kabul when a PCV physical education teacher in my group married a Mormon girl whose parents were working with USAID on agriculture projects. There were many such Mormon families there doing

their missionary commitment, and they were all very nice. However, they drank less liquor than the Moslems, as in none at all. They did not even drink tea, coffee , beer, coke, or 7-UP. Knowing what was not being served Robert von Zumbusch and I stopped by the staff house on the way to the wedding to get fortified. We greatly enjoyed the American food and wedding cake, all served with non-alcoholic fruit punch.

I also went to two Afghan weddings, both very different. One was in Kabul at the Metropole Hotel where a relation of Col. Musa Khan was getting married. I went with him and his family and all the men wore suits and ties and the women wore dresses. The groom and bride sat in throne like chairs on a raised platform and the guests at surrounding tables. There was Afghan food and music and it was very civilized.

Hills at Kunduz

The other wedding was less Western and was in a mud village about a ½ day's drive south of Kabul. The groom, an engineer in our office invited Robert von Zumbusch and I and we wore coats and ties as the only foreign "*feringees*" there. We rode in a V W Microbus from the Authority. However some other guests from Kabul rode in a Russian jeep with the village headman who challenged our driver to a race. The jeep got stuck in a ditch on the way and we all had to get out and push. The groom to be commented "*shetour car dorum".* Meaning they should have taken a camel instead of the terrible Russian jeep. Our driver had enough sense to let the headman's jeep win the race to the village.

Since there was no large room in the little village the wedding was held outdoors under a giant tent with an Afghan band. The ground was covered with carpets and pillows and the men, most of who were armed with shotguns and rifles wore typical Afghan clothes and turbans and sat on the cushions and carpets. Hugh plates of rice and mutton was served with tea and some of the men smoked water pipes ("*chelams*").

We never met the bride or any other women. However, we did see the entertainment which was a pretty dancing boy ("*bacha bazi")* with long hair and eye makeup who twirled and danced to drums ("*tablas")* and fiddles ("*do tars*"). When he came to the climax of his dance routine the men all discharged their weapons in the air and through the tent roof. The Afghan next to me had an Uzzi and when he pulled the trigger all the empty shell casings landed on my head.

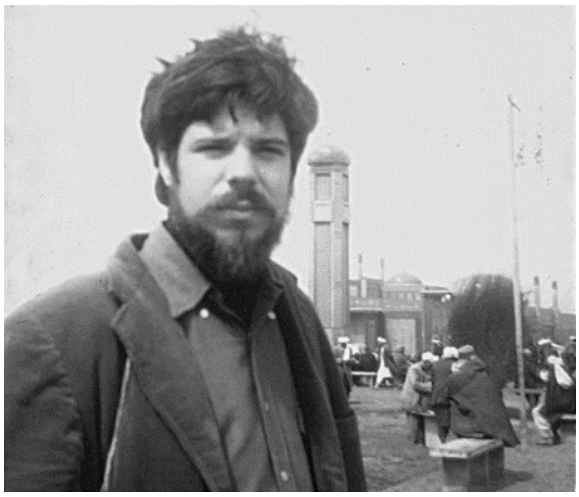
After the reception we spent the night on mattresses (*"tushacks*") on the floor of one of the mud houses. The next morning a group of the men led a procession to the bride's house dancing to the Attan (Afghan national dance) with wild drumming. We returned to Kabul later in the day.

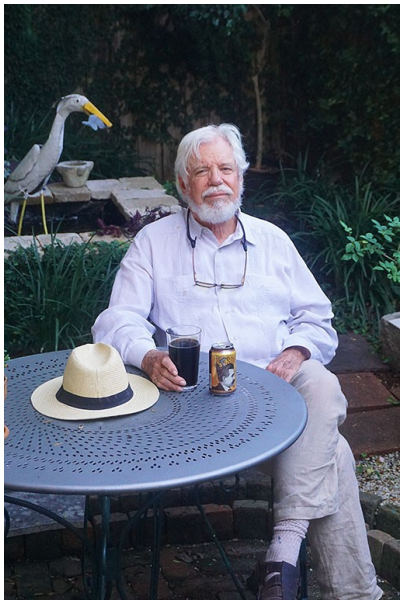
I took two month long vacations during my tour, one West to the Middle East and one West to India, Pakistan and Nepal. When my 2 ½ year tour was over I drew my mustering out pay and went to India again for a month passing through the famous Khyber Pass. I returned to Kabul for 2 weeks to send home the carpets and other Afghan objects that I had collected and turned my hill house over to a new incoming PCV. I went overland by buses and trains to Istanbul, and a boat to Israel and back to Turkey. I then passed through North Africa and went home to N O. At each stop I found the local P C office and usually was invited to stay with volunteers, some of which were also architects in their host country.

Ruins Lashkagar

Donald Magennis III May 1, 2020 New Orleans, La.

Mazar I Sharif 1970





My French Connection

by

Tim McCormack

Ah, summer in Chagcharan – I mean ugh, summer in Chagcharan. Like it or not, I along with 2 other Food For Work volunteers were placed in Ghor Province in the early months of 1972. Situated in the heart of Afghanistan, Ghor was only reachable from the east after the spring snow thaw and from the west by one the country's infamous unmarked routes through swollen river gullies and rocky passes. My home during the summer of '72. Chagcharan, Ghor Afghanistan

Rushed through training, Food for Work volunteers were placed in several provinces experiencing unusual drought, low food supply and facing mass starvation.

The goal was to start as many community projects as possible, and pay local villagers in wheat.

desperate. The governor had shipped most able-bodied men out of the province, leaving throngs of distressed women and children. Compounding the problem, groups of Koochis began to arrive with hopes of relief from starvation. Well this should be interesting.

Governor LaLa. General Seraj. Chacgharan Police Chief

Koochi Camps 1

On this particular day, Jim Mathewson and Ron Dizon were traveling in some remote part of the province to start a project, which left me holding down the fort in the capital. I returned to our house in late afternoon expecting another fulfilled evening killing flies that invaded the area – and especially our house – at the start of warming weather.

Suddenly a local policeman appeared at the door asking me to quickly come to the police station to meet my friends. My friends? I wouldn't even invite my enemies to Ghor. Obviously intrigued, off I went to investigate.

French World Travelers 1

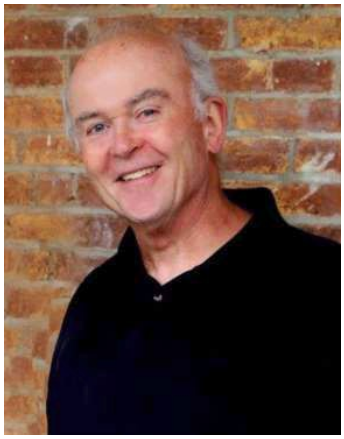
Huddled in a small room, were 6 French travelers – 2 women and 4 men – who had abruptly arrived in town from the west in two land rovers. Looking rather scared and apprehensive, there seemed to be a sigh of hope upon my arrival. I approached the prettiest of the two women - is she expecting a French kiss? A Parisian handshake?

I decided to remain coy and ask if anyone spoke English; yes, said the pretty mademoiselle. The group had rented the cars in Iran with the intention of a driving tour to India. When asked if they had any travel authorization papers, the interpreter just smiled (let's call her Cozette). Now does she expect a kiss? No one in the group seemed to realize (or care) the need for transit papers in this part of the world.

I What to do, what to do? I told the comandante that indeed they-were friends; my cousin from France had come to visit. He released the troupe in my care, and made sure I told them that their suggested we go the only tea house for dinner so I could get to know my new-found relative. I was peppered with questions: why am I here? why can't they get in their cars and return to Iran? What's the nightlife like in Chagcharan (if you know please tell me). After we were brought small dishes of palau, I asked each diner to leave some food on their plate. The owner would collect leftovers, and hand them out to beggars at the rear of the house.

A sad comment on the state of things to come.

By early morning they had left. Oh well, I need to kill some flies.



The Road to Jalalabad

By

Norm Rosen RPCV 1970

My name is Norm Rosen and I was an English teacher is Neemroz Province along the Dashti Margo (Desert of Death) for one year, then taught at the Baghlan Agricultural Lycee, and finished up at the Hotel Management School in Kabul. I wanted to share an experience I had when my parents came to visit me in Afghanistan in the spring of 1970.

We did a lot of sightseeing when my Mom and Dad showed up for their visit. On my list of things for us all to do was to go from Kabul to Jalalabad to witness the Sikh weddings. So right after some spring rains we headed down the gorge from Kabul to Jalalabad in a taxi. Halfway down I heard a rumbling sound and looked above us to see a wall of rocks coming down just behind us which completely blocked the road. A taxi driver coming from the opposite direction got out of his cab and bowed down to us while thanking Allah for having saved us from the jaws of death. While we were all a bit shook up, there was no choice but to head on toward Jalalabad.

When we just got outside of Jalalabad, there was a small white bridge that we had to cross. A big truck was parked and stopped in front of the bridge. Water was raging from the rains and lapping over the bottom of the bridge. Kochi women were running to gather their belongings and I remember a tall tree being pulled out of its roots and being swept away by the raging water.

The pavement in the road was cracking beneath our feet and I asked our driver what we should do and received the classic Afghan response: "Delishema." (whatever your heart wants).

At this point in time, the big lorry truck started up and crossed the bridge safely. I looked to our driver and told him to follow as while the water would be lapping at our wheels, this big truck had just made it so there should be no problem for us. The taxi cab driver started up his engine but before we could move the white bridge collapsed in the middle.

My Mom was almost hysterical by now and my Dad had some crazy idea of getting a rope and positioning us on high ground with some escape route in mind. I again asked our driver what we should do. Of course his response was: "Delishema." I remembered a choixhana (teahouse) a little ways back where we could shelter and wondered if the soldiers had removed any of the rockslide. So, we turned around and made it all the way back to Kabul as the soldiers had cleared a one lane passage for vehicles. Upon our unexpected arrival (my roommate's girlfriend had moved back in for the night but quickly left) my Dad got out two of those little liquor bottles airlines used to give out and we each downed a small Scotch, one of the few times in my life I drank hard liquor with my father.

A Peace Corps Moment - Mazar-i-Sharif
By
Nancy Benson

Food was always important in our daily lives. You didn't always know just what was on the platter. I taught at the Higher Teachers College in Mazar-i-Sharif. We had boarding students from the villages; just young men, of course, so there was a cafeteria where we teachers ate the same lunch everyday. One day, I commented on how delicious the mutton was, that it tasted better than what I could prepare. The teachers stared at me, then, at one another. Finally, Nasim-Sayb, my counterpart, spoke. "Miss Nancy, that is not mutton you are eating; that is camel meat." I probably looked surprised, but we all laughed, and I continued to enjoy the camel stew. At least, I never had to eat crunchy baked sparrows for dinner, as fellow volunteer Chris Fuchs did.

A bridge in Tashqurgon, Balkh Province, 60km east of Mazar-i-Sharif. Photo credit: Ro-

Youth in Asia

My years with US Peace Corps Afghanistan

By Charles Arnold

Sometime during my first week in Afghanistan, one of our Peace Corps trainers advised us to keep a journal of our experiences and feelings. Accordingly, I went to the bazaar and purchased a notebook. Made in India. Cardboard covers and cheap paper. I also purchased a Chinese fountain pen and a bottle of ink. To fill the reservoir, you unscrewed the barrel, dipped the nib in the ink, and squeezed a little metal spring that compressed a rubber bladder. When you released the spring, the bladder sucked ink from the bottle. It was the coolest thing I'd ever seen. Many times during my tour of Afghanistan, I sat up late into the evening and, by the light of a kerosene lantern, wrote in my journal or composed aerogramme letters to my family and friends with that fountain pen. During my first year in country, the journal filled several notebooks. The eventual fate of those journals seems to be typical of my Peace Corps experience and proved a harbinger of many things to come. The following narrative is not based on these journals, or any contemporary account. It was constructed entirely from the fragile threads of my memories.

How I Got to Afghanistan

My family lived in Jackson, Mississippi during my high school years. I came of age in a society that had swallowed the confederate lost cause myth hook, line and sinker. While my high school was in a state capital, it was also in a state of denial. Students took dates to dances, purchased liquor from bootleg outlets, and carried flasks inside their navy blazers. Girls wore dresses and very sturdy under garments. We danced to great blues and R&B bands whose musicians were not allowed in the hallways of my high school. I vividly remember the colored waiting rooms, white and colored water fountains, and white only signs in the offices and bus stations. I left Mississippi as soon as I realized we were free to go. I graduated from the University of New Mexico with a BA in English Literature in the summer of 1970. The Vietnam War was raging, and so were the protests against it. The military used a draft, ironically named the selective service, to supply ground troops for the war. Everyone knew that, if you were "selected," your chances of coming home in a body bag were pretty high. But certain classes of young people were exempt, among them were college students and Peace Corps volunteers. Accordingly, staying in college was a survival tactic for many of us, not necessarily a career move. That's one reason I majored in English Literature. I minored in Philosophy, mainly because the university awarded a minor degree with only 12 units of upper division classes.

On May 4, 1970, during my senior year, my academic career was upended by the Kent State massacre, where the Ohio National Guard killed four students and wounded nine. In the wake of those shootings, violent anti-war protests gripped campuses all over the nation. The protests at UNM morphed into riots and disrupted the university to the point that the administration decided to end the semester.That made the mid-term grades final, which almost gave me enough credits to graduate. I lacked one elective course, and selected photography, which I completed during the summer. With a new degree and a number 49 in the new selective service lottery, I returned to live with my family, who had moved from Mississippi to Bradenton, Florida. I quickly discovered that my college education did not teach me a marketable skill. In fact, I had no idea what a marketable skill was. Regardless, I found work in the proof room at the Sarasota Herald Tribune, a local daily newspaper

My shift was from 3:00pm to 11:00pm, and, in spite of rock bottom wages and monotonous work, the job was a way to pay off my college loans. On top of those doldrums, the selective service was hot on my tail, and I applied for the Peace Corps, as a way to fend off the beast. In the application, I said I wanted to go to South America, so I could learn Spanish. Apparently, that was not a convincing reason for the Peace Corps. They offered me a tour in Afghanistan and a job with the TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) program. The army was breathing down my neck and the job left me penniless. It wasn't a difficult decision. With the invitation in hand, I returned to New Mexico for a few months to re-visit my college years before I boarded a plane for the Peace Corps. The departure city was, I think, Philadelphia. There I had my first encounter with my fellow volunteers. For me, it was love at first sight. We were young, idealistic, ambitious, and of unshakeable spirit. The flight took us to Ireland and then Amsterdam, where we changed planes for our final leg on Ariana Airlines, Afghanistan's flagship airline. We landed in Kabul, half a world away from the US, exhausted, hung over, and half delirious from lack of sleep. Most volunteers note that Afghanistan was not just a place many miles from home, it was a place many centuries into the past. The bus from the airport took us along a dusty road with more donkeys than automobiles. Men, dressed in long flowing shirts, baggy pants, and turbans, sold fruit from flimsy wooden carts. We passed miles of weather worn mud walls, and more donkeys. The mountains surrounding Kabul were the color and texture of an elephant's rear end. The first stop for us was the Peace Corps office in Shar-i-Nau, where we were processed fairly efficiently. The staff greeted us, introduced us to our training house mates, and sent us off to our new homes in Kabul. I shared a training house with Ed Crawford, from Eugene Oregon, John Behnke, and Ray James. We hardly had time to unpack before we all crashed on our new beds, which were nothing more than four legs, a wood frame, and rope webbing. I have no idea how long we were asleep. I remember waking up during a call to evening prayers, and looking out the window at a somber line of men walking up a nearby hill to a funeral. .

When we recovered, we met our servant, Ali, who managed us all with love and skill. He provided tea, great meals, and held my hand while I sat on the stairs outside the tashnab (outhouse) during miserable bouts of dysentery.

Ray Makes a Career Move Ed was a congenial guy with red hair and an irrepressible sense of humor. John amazed the natives when he juggled on the bus. (I was impressed, too.) But Ray was a missionary. His mission was, in typical 1960s fashion, to turn on everyone he met. And by turn on, I mean with hashish, or chars, as the Afghans called the powerful home-made hypnotic you could buy for pennies at any tea house. As for me, Ed, and John, we applied ourselves to the language and culture classes that were to prepare us for our jobs in the provinces. Our social life was limited mostly to our classes and each other. In the evenings, we sat on the floor around a large carpet as Ali brought us steaming bowls of rice and meat, accompanied by fresh-baked naan, shaped like a large snowshoe. It was whole grain and excellent with peanut butter, something I think the Afghans never appreciated. One Friday evening near the end of our training, Ray interrupted our after dinner conversations with a few guests. One, I recall, was an Ariana Airlines pilot, another was a female volunteer, who seemed conservative, but friendly enough. They joined us around the carpet, and Ray passed out bottles of beer. I declined the beer, which was not something I do very often. For some reason, the situation made me uncomfortable in a visceral kind of way. I offered an excuse and went to my room. I don't know how long the party lasted, or who else may have joined. Early Monday morning, the staff summoned me out of training. When I was ushered into a private office and sat in front of a few senior staff, I could have guessed what was coming. Someone, they wouldn't say who, had reported drug use at our training house. They told me that I wasn't implicated, but wanted to know if I had witnessed anyone smoking hashish or heard anyone discussing it. Naturally, I had plausible deniability, and I used every bit of it. I told them exactly what I had witnessed, which wasn't much, and what I did. Since my story was substantiated by all the other accounts, there was not much else they could say to me. I never discovered who reported the incident to the Peace Corps management. Ray was immediately "de-selected". He opted to take the plane fare in cash and caught a bus to Pakistan. Years later, after my two-year tour ended, and I had traveled around India and Nepal, I encountered Ray on a bus in Northeast India, with a shy blue-eyed young woman. He told me that he found a job bartending in Kashmir, and had worked there for several years. If anyone knows where Ray is, please tell him hello for me. I heard of several similar incidents during Peace Corps training periods, and even with active volunteers. The Peace Corps had a zero tolerance policy, and was very serious about enforcing it.

The volunteers also took their jobs and roles in the country quite seriously, and respected the local traditions and mores. Of course, we all knew that the local hashish and marijuana were not dangerous, but they were very powerful, especially if one happened to be mentally shaky. We occasionally encountered Afghans in the tea houses who were enjoying a serious buzz, and watched them smoke hashish with the large water pipes in the village tea houses. I liked their attitude towards it, which was much more reasonable than the American reliance on criminal penalties and punishment. They considered drug use a low class activity. Upper class Afghans preferred Scotch whiskey, especially Johnny Walker Red, which was far too expensive for most folks. Kabul experienced frequent earth tremors. They rattled the dishes, and woke us up sometimes, but mostly they were mild and caused little damage. The remainder of training was uneventful until near the end.

Food for Work *I worked in the Food for Work Program throughout my tour in Afghanistan, and, as I recall, was stationed in six provinces: Farah, Jowzan, Faryab, Badghis, Zabul, and finally Badakhshan. This account makes no claim to be either accurate or complete. It is simply a narrative built from my memories. The people named here have not been asked to verify these memories. Nor do I have a diary or calendar of activities to refresh them. I hope they are not offended that I have included their names.* I enjoyed training, practicing my Pushto on any available Afghan, and was fascinated by the bazaars and the exotic people who crowded the markets. And I was looking forward to teaching at a school in one of the southern provinces. At the time, Afghanistan had suffered crop failure for several years, due to a drought. The government appealed to the international community, which responded by donating millions of metric tons of wheat to the country. I mentioned the local bread, called naan. For the Afghans, it was not just something to hold the peanut butter and jelly. It was life.

In fact, in several of the local languages, naan means both bread and food. The most common meal in the villages consisted of naan and tea. Every village household had a hand cranked grain mill and baking naan in a wood-fired clay oven was a daily chore. When we were guests in their villages, they killed the chicken, or slaughtered a lamb or goat. They cooked up a huge pot of rice, and everyone feasted. They would never accept money in exchange for these meals. That level of hospitality among people who often had very little to eat themselves was quite humbling for me and many other Peace Corps volunteers

Afghanistan was wrapped around the western extent of the mountain ranges that include the Himalyan Mountains in Pakistan, India, and Nepal. In the northeast, the range is called the Pamir Mountains, with peaks up to 25,000 feet. To the southeast, they are called the Hindu Kush. They drain into a large, open plain. To the north of the mountains was the land of the Uzbecs and Turkmen. To the south and east into Pakistan, the Pushtoons. Scattered in the interior, mountainous regions, are the Hazara, remnants of the armies Genghis Khan left behind to secure his conquest. The small groups of nomads that wandered the country, were called the Koochis. Fun fact: the Afghan National Anthem and the Afghan Constitution mention 14 ethnic groups. Even in a developed country, transporting and distributing millions of tons of wheat would be difficult. In Afghanistan, with few paved roads and many remote villages, those tasks were staggering. During the government's discussions with international partners, such as USAID, the German Development Services, and US Embassy, and so on, they decided to use this grant wheat to help develop the country, and invest it in basic infrastructure projects, such as roads, irrigation canals, and so on. Ideally, these projects would be simple enough to complete with local materials and labor. Furthermore, the government and the Peace Corps planned to assign young employees of the Afghan Department of Provincial Development and Peace Corps Volunteers to oversee the projects and manage the program in the provinces, along with the provincial governors and the local Directors of Provincial Development, as well as young German volunteers from the German Development Services. This program came to be called, in Farsi, Program-i-Tauzai Gondum (Wheat Distribution Program), or the Food for Work Program. To jump start the program, the Peace Corps transferred several seasoned volunteers to ramp up operations. Bill Mittendorf worked in Sheberghan in the northern province of Jawzan. Frank Light was in Farah, in the dusky southwestern province of the same name.

A Hearty Handshake and a Pep Talk I was transferred to the Food for Work Program, which was a huge honor. And it was a relief, too. Even after the highly skilled, intense training and orientation delivered by the experienced Peace Corps trainers and staff, I did not feel prepared to teach English to a class of rambunctious Afghan teenagers. We were promoted from a teachers to engineers. It was a big milestone in our short careers as Peace Corps volunteers. We were introduced to our Afghan counterparts at a meeting in Kabul, where the Minister of Provincial Development himself appeared to give us a hearty handshake and a farewell pep talk. Unfortunately, he spoke in Farsi, and I had spent the previous weeks industriously studying Pushto, so I had no idea what he said. However, we headed out with a huge reservoir of enthusiasm, and little else. I packed up my worldly belongings and hauled them off to a far southwestern corner of the country to join Frank Light and his team in Farah Province. I have no recollection of the trip from Kabul to Farah, or about my duties and activities in the province. I know we passed through Kandahar, the most important city in the southern half of the country, and capital of the Pushtuns, the dominant ethnic group in the South. The king, Zahir Shah, was a Pushtoon, and they were purported to be the most influential ethnic group.

Farah Province and German Girly Magazines Farah was a dusky little town, little more than a few dirt roads lined with mud walled compounds, and a small bazaar, with a few tea houses. I moved in with the resident team, lodged in a typical Afghan walled residence with dirt floors, and a few rooms around a courtyard. My housemates were, besides Frank, a few young Afghan counterparts and a few German engineers, who were working with the German government's version of the US Peace Corps. The Germans were a source of endless amazement for our Afghan counterparts, and for me. Unlike us Americans, the young Germans were not into roughing it. Each brought a large aluminum footlocker filled with the comforts of home — canned goods, sweets, magazines, and so on. The magazines were popular four-color glossy publications, which always seemed to feature full color spreads of semi-nude women. These cheesecake photos were very similar to the ones we were familiar with in American men's magazines, and these German periodicals were not particularly interesting to us PC volunteers, since none of us read German. For our Afghan counterparts, in a culture that strictly segregated the sexes, these magazines were like a drug. A really, really strong drug. The young Afghan men huddled around a kerosene lantern into the evenings, happily turning the pages, to a giddy commentary. Even with my limited knowledge of the language, I knew what they were saying. We were not lucky enough to have Afghan counterparts in every province. Living and working with these young career civil servants gave us rare insight into Afghan culture. In the evenings, over tea, they told us about their homes, their educations, and romances. Even though marriages were arranged, and the bride and groom never dated, in the western sense of the word, love found a way.

They introduced us to the hit tunes on Radio Kabul and opened their journals and read passages from their favorite Persian and Afghan poets for us.

Farah was a naturally dry and warm climate. The bedrooms were hot and stale. Like the Afghans, we unrolled our sleeping bags on the roof, where cool breezes and a spectacular moon and the vast desert sky eased our loneliness.

Frank had several projects in progress around Farah. We rode with him in the department jeep, over rutted roads past fields and farms to check the work in progress. I recall little of those projects, but the lunches in the local villages made a big impression on all of us.

Typically the meals consisted of a hot broth, with onions and maybe a few potatoes and carrots, with a piece of nan, but no spoons, or any cutlery at all. We sat on the floor, either in a large guest room or outside, but always around a big Afghan carpet and were served by the younger males. Frequently, several people shared a single large bowl. The little girls, shy, with their scarves pulled over their faces, peeped at us around the corners, before their brothers shooed them away.

How did you eat soup without a spoon? Very simple, actually. Break up the naan into bite-sized pieces and drop them in the soup. The bread quickly absorbs the liquid and the whole bowl turns into a mushy goo much like turkey dressing.

It tasted much like turkey dressing, too. In fact, it was great. As an added bonus, it made our hands soft and the skin supple.

The folks were always happy to have guests and made sure we had plenty to eat. In fact, they did not stop dishing out food until we left a small portion to indicate we were

Food for Work

I worked in the Food for Work Program throughout my tour in Afghanistan, and, as I recall, was stationed in six provinces: Farah, Jowzan, Faryab, Badghis, Zabul, and finally Badakhshan.

This account makes no claim to be either accurate or complete. It is simply a narrative built from my memories. The people named here have not been asked to verify these memories. Nor do I have a diary or calendar of activities to refresh

them. I hope they are not offended that I have included their names. I enjoyed training, practicing my Pushto on any

available Afghan, and was fascinated by the bazaars and the exotic people who crowded the markets. And I was looking forward to teaching at a school in one of the southern provinces. At the time, Afghanistan had suffered crop failure for several years, due to a drought. The government appealed to the international community, which responded by donating millions of metric tons of wheat to the country. I mentioned the local bread, called naan. For the Afghans, it was not just something to hold the peanut butter and jelly. It was life.

In fact, in several of the local languages, naan means both bread and food. The most common meal in the villages consisted of naan and tea. Every village household had a hand cranked grain mill and baking naan in a wood-fired clay oven was a daily chore. When we were guests in their villages, they killed the chicken, or slaughtered a lamb or goat. They cooked up a huge pot of rice, and everyone feasted. They would never accept money in exchange for these meals. That level of hospitality among people who often had very little to eat themselves was quite humbling for me and many other Peace Corps volunteers Afghanistan was wrapped around the western extent of the mountain ranges that include the Himalyan Mountains in Pakistan, India, and Nepal. In the northeast, the range is called the Pamir Mountains, with peaks up to 25,000 feet. To the southeast, they are called the Hindu Kush. They drain into a large, open plain. To the north of the mountains was the land of the Uzbecs and Turkmen. To the south and east into Pakistan, the Pushtoons. Scattered in the interior, mountainous regions, are the Hazara, remnants of the armies Genghis Khan left behind to secure his conquest. The small groups of nomads that wandered the country, were called the Koochis. Fun fact: the Afghan National Anthem and the Afghan Constitution mention 14 ethnic groups. Even in a developed country, transporting and distributing millions of tons of wheat would be difficult. In Afghanistan, with few paved roads and many remote villages, those tasks were staggering. During the government's discussions with international partners, such as USAID, the German Development Services, and US Embassy, and so on, they decided to use this grant wheat to help develop the country, and invest it in basic infrastructure projects, such as roads, irrigation canals, and so on. Ideally, these projects would be simple enough to complete with local materials and labor. Furthermore, the government and the Peace Corps planned to assign young employees of the Afghan Department of Provincial Development and Peace Corps Volunteers to oversee the projects and manage the program in the provinces, along with the provincial governors and the local Directors of Provincial Development, as well as young German volunteers from the German Development Services. This program came to be called, in Farsi, Program-i-Tauzai Gondum (Wheat Distribution Program), or the Food for Work Program. To jump start the program, the Peace Corps transferred several seasoned volunteers to ramp up operations. Bill Mittendorf worked in Sheberghan in the northern province of Jawzan. Frank Light was in Farah, in the dusky southwestern province of the same

High Pressure Sales Tactics

After a week or two, I was declared ready to launch my own project. I left Farah one morning with our department driver, and headed north, across the main highway and into the mountains. A long, long way into the mountains. I had no idea where we went or why. Our destination was a lush, extensive estate in a mountain valley, and spread around a large residence. Our host made it clear that he owned the estate, and most of the surrounding land. He was the village Khan, and called Haji Sahib, as he had completed the prestigious pilgrimage to Mecca.

to the guest quarters. Carpets were brought out of storage. The household pulled out the fine china, the best and fluffiest cushions.

After we settled in, dinner was served. We had Kabuli palau. Boiled sheep head on a huge pile of rice, and many more dishes. The driver was basking in the great service and enjoyed ordering the folks around. After dinner we walked to a patio in an orchard and had tea. At the time, my language skills were still rudimentary, but I was getting comfortable with Pushto and could manage simple conversations.

Most of the discussions went totally over my head, but I tried to look engaged. I am sure they were aware how clueless I was. Towards the end of the evening, they introduced the village teacher. He was a few years younger than I, well dressed in his embroidered shirt and baggy pants, called tombongs. Unlike most of the men, he was clean shaved.

One of the men in the party told me, if I wanted company (I forget the exact words he used), I should see the teacher. The teacher gave me a warm smile and nodded, as he shook my hand.

That evening I had my first encounter with culture shock. This situation was never covered in our training. Of course, I had heard talk of the "bacha bazi", literally, "play boys", who dressed as women and danced for the entertainment of older men, and also, it was rumored, provided sexual services.

However, I was now in the middle of something quite different. I was a representative of my country, with the power to direct large resources to this landowner and experiencing the treatment that the Haji Sahib always extended to important government officials. It wasn't, to my host, a bribe. It was simply business as usual.

Needless to say, I did not engage the teacher's services, whatever they were. After a hard day of travel and a lot of food, it didn't take long to fall asleep.

The next morning, we were served a breakfast of hot tea, fruit and warm naan.

After the meal was finished, we rode horseback over a nearby hill to a neighboring valley, where there were a few fields, orchards, and small compounds. The Haji Sahib wanted to build a road over the hill and into the neighboring valley.

I knew how to diagram a sentence. I could talk about Elizabethan England and other fascinating stuff. But I had no idea how to build a road or evaluate and manage a project. In retrospect, it may have been a viable project.

Something about the situation made me feel extremely weird. Would I have to return to this area and deal with the Haji Sahib who owned the place? What about that teacher? How could we transport the large quantity of wheat to this place? And exactly, how does one build a road?

That night after dinner, I told him that I did not intend to approve this project. Of the dozens of ways to handle this situation, that may have been the worst. The driver looked at me as if I was crazy. The Haji left the room. Soon, people arrived to remove the cushions and carpets.

Next Stop - Sheberghan The next morning, we were served a perfunctory breakfast of tea and naan. We left immediately afterwards and returned to Farah. I don't recall any blowback from this incident. However, shortly afterwards, I was transferred to other end of the country, to Sheberghan, where Bill Mittendorf, a more experienced volunteer, was managing a program. I don't recall any discussions, conferences, meetings, de-briefings, etc. I got my orders and I hopped on the next bus north. No one seemed to notice that my language was Pushto, but I was headed to a region where the dominant languages were Farsi and Turkoman (a dialect of Turkish). The government hotel in Sheberghan was a one-story building in the middle town. It had about a dozen rooms that shared a common bathroom. These hotels were built in provincial capitals to avoid the obvious conflict of interest issues when government officials are lodged with the local folks. Most of these small cities did not have private inns, beyond the lodging provided by the teahouses and caravan serais. Bill may have been only a few years older than I, but he was far more comfortable in the culture and got along famously with the home folks. They obviously respected him. The area was more prosperous than Farah, and the people more relaxed. In Turkoman, the term for Khan is Boy, so they called me Charlie Boy. On one trip to the nearby village, our host was educated in the US and spoke fluent English. He wanted to introduce us to his wife, which was a huge violation of Afghan norms, and a compliment to us. When she walked in, we were both speechless, simply because none of us had ever spoken to an Afghan woman before, and she may have never spoken to a male foreigner. After hello and how are you, we didn't know what to say. She was pleasant enough, and as shy as we were. After a few minutes of perfunctory conversation, she left. In Sheberghan, I learned that I was picking up Farsi quite quickly. It was an easier language than Pushto, and in fact, the most widely understood language, especially in the cities and markets.

Hey, Mister, say "La illaha . . ." While I don't recall details about our projects in Jowzjan, I was becoming comfortable with the my second Afghan language. That was very fortunate, because I was soon sent to Badghis province, north of Herat, and stationed in the city of Qal-i-Nau, literally "New City". On they way through Kabul, several folks from the Peace Corps administration interviewed me about my experiences, and I told them that it was much like having a job anywhere. In retrospect, the Food for Work job was nothing like any work environment anywhere else. They apparently were pleased with the Food for Work program and decided to double down, with a group of volunteers trained and dedicated to the program. They asked for my advice about the type of people who might be most suitable. I told them that construction experience might be useful. I should have added the ability to sleep anywhere, eat virtually anything, a great sense of humor, and endless patience.

By this time, we were quite at home in the country. Our language skills were adequate for most situations. We had squeezed into overpacked buses, bounced around in the back of trucks, ordered meals and lodged at the most rudimentary of tea houses and caravan serais. Even so, the country still had surprises for us. To travel from Kabul to Qal-i-Naw, I had to take buses south, through Kandahar, past my old friends in Farah Province, and then north through Herat. On the first leg of this trip, I was jammed in the back seat of a small bus, with the typical assortment of men in their tombongs, threadbare vests, long shirts, and sandals made from old automobile tires. The few female passengers huddled beneath their chadoris, as far away from men as possible. As usual, there was were brisk conversations as the men shared their naswar (snuff) and attempted to spit out the open windows without splattering anyone down wind. Occasionally the bus stopped in the absolute middle of nowhere, and one or two men got off, carrying very little. Maybe a small bag or a blanket. These folks started walking towards distant mountains as the bus drove down the road, leaving them in a cloud of dust and exhaust fumes. Even though this was a common sight during long bus rides around the country, it always amazed me. We had passed the huge fort at Zabul in good time and were due to arrive in Kandahar on schedule, assuming that there actually was a schedule, when the bus sputtered to a stop. It was a few hours before the afternoon and evening prayers, but no one seemed concerned. The driver simply explained that the bus had run out of gas, and we had to wait until someone came along who could sell us enough to make it to Kandahar. Inshallah (God willing). camel, donkey, or any sign of life. It looked to me like it was going to be a long afternoon. I asked the driver how many times he had driven to Kandahar and if he knew how much fuel the trip required. He told me to chill out. They would be on the way again soon. In Afghanistan, soon could mean anywhere from 15 minutes to a few days.

In Afghanistan, soon could mean anywhere from 15 minutes to a few days. Everybody got off the bus, and tried to make themselves comfortable, smoking cigarettes and dipping their snuff. The women huddled together a few dozen yards away from the bus. A few men wandered into the desert to relieve themselves. A group of men collected small sticks and shrubs in the dry scrub vegetation along the road and dumped them in a barren area across the road from the bus. When they had a generous pile, they set it on fire. The tinder was very dry and quickly burned down to glowing embers. Several of the men spread a blanket over the coals and crawled under it. Soon, smoke curled from the edges of the blanket and the men started coughing furiously. As one man emerged from the blanket, another quickly took his place. I wondered what I had to look forward to with a half-dozen or so Afghans, blitzed out of their minds on hashish. It didn't take long before a few of them started heading towards me, the lone khoraji (foreigner) among the passengers. They walked up to me, with huge grins and eyes the size of door knobs. One said, "Mister, repeat after me, 'la ilaha illallah Muhammad rasulullah'. Come on, say it 'la ilaha . . .'" They had decided to convert me to Islam, in the belief that all they had to do is get me to say the Muslim creed in Arabic, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammad is his prophet." I could have made them really happy, even though I may have been hauled off to a Pushtoon village and married to a sheep. But I was not in a very good mood, stranded on the side of the road with a dozen stoned Afghans, and stubbornly refused. They soon grew bored and went back to their snuff boxes and cigarettes. I don't recall how long we waited,

Badghis and a Chicken Named Charlie When I arrived in Qal-i-Nau, the streets were crowded with ragged, hungry men who had come from the villages in search of food. Some had terribly swollen faces. Later I learned that may have resulted from eating toxic vegetation. I joined several other volunteers stationed there. The only name I recall is Bill Berquist, an outgoing and congenial volunteer who made a career working overseas. For some reason, the volunteers had a two-way radio and were in touch with the Peace Corps office in Kabul. When they learned that I had arrived, they asked how I was, and I told them that there were thousands of hungry people in the streets. I may have exaggerated, but no one asked me to count them. It seems impossible that the central government was not aware of this situation, or why the local volunteers failed to mention it on the radio. However, communications were somewhere in my memories. The land-line telephone system was a single wire suspended from poles. The provincial governors were probably the only ones with a telephone in their offices, but the wires and poles were very vulnerable, and the system was not reliable at all. I once watched an Afghan official attempt to make a call. He attached one wire of a headset to the grid, and stuck the other in the ground. He poured water on the ground wire as he screamed into the microphone. I recall that he actually connected to someone, but conversation was impossible. The two-way radio in the Peace Corps house was a huge advance, even though the municipal generator operated only a few hours in the evenings, and often failed. It turned out that the local government warehouse was loaded with wheat, but the government officials claimed they had no authority to distribute it. This was my third station, and I had worked alongside several young Afghans and their local bosses. One of the lessons that they tried to impress on us, when we complained about the difficulty getting anything done, was that they had to live their entire lives in Afghanistan, and needed to be very careful. In a few years, when Peace Corps volunteers were safely back in America, they would have to live with the consequences of our actions. The first corollary of this principle was that no one ever got into trouble for doing nothing. It was always the safest route. We managed to end the stalemate, and the local official began to distribute wheat to the hungry folks in the street. We managed to organize a few activities. Mainly, I think, we engaged men with donkeys to haul gravel from the stream beds and spread it on the roads. I don't recall much else from my short time there. After I left, Bill Berquist and the other volunteers named their chicken after me. I don't think it was a compliment, but perhaps I am just insecure.

A Long Walk to a Long Karez After a few months in Badghis, I was summoned to Kabul for a new assignment. Back in Kabul, I met the newly arrived volunteers and was assigned to mentor Bruce Legandre and Joe Wollmerang, two of the new group of volunteers recruited specifically for the Food for Work Program We set up shop at the government hotel Qalat-i-Gilzay, the capital of Zabul Province, along with a few young Afghans. This post was only about 200 miles (366km) south of Kabul. One of our trips to survey potential projects was deep into the extreme eastern desert towards the Pakistani border. Our host was a sturdy man with incredible stamina. He led us, on foot, deep into the ancient desert to show us a karez he wanted to renovate.

A karez is a water supply system where a series of wells is connected by horizontal tunnels. The system takes advantage of the natural elevations and gravity to direct the stream to the surface. I had heard of them and had seen a few operating in Farah. There were even karez khans, who specialized in karez construction and maintenance. The one we surveyed had been out of service for many years — maybe many centuries. It was often difficult to determine the age of anything in Afghanistan, as everything seemed ancient and worn. In this karez system, the wells had completely filled in. The only evidence of the ancient karez

The surrounding terrain sloped very gently. I could follow the long string of wells both ways, many miles into the desert. It was so long, it disappeared in the hazy desert in both directions. I wondered where the head well was, how much labor it had taken to build it, and where, off in the distance, the water surfaced.

As the khan made a pitch to use the food for work program to rebuild the karez system, I began to calculate the volume of dirt in the hundreds of wells in the system, along with the connecting tunnels.

Who knew if it would even work again or if the water tables were still at a reasonable depth?

I knew enough by then to explain the situation to the khan, and avoid an outright refusal. But we did not have the expertise or resources to revive this system, and such a project was way out of our scope.

Our friendly khan led us back to civilization with the same speed and vigor. During this hike of many hours, his pace never slacked.

When we returned to Zabul Province, the hotel clerk handed me a telegram that read, "Charles Arnold, Joe Wollmerang, Bruce Legandre. Return to Kabul immediately."

We caught the next bus to Kabul, where I learned that only Joe and Bruce needed to return to Kabul. Silly me.

I worked most closely with my counterpart, Jalaladine. He was a very athletic young man and liked to go through his workout routine in our hotel room. I was hoping his enthusiasm for exercise would be infectious. Unfortunately, it was not.

The predominant language in Zabul was Pushto, and my Pushto skills, never very strong to begin with, had suffered after many months living among the Farsiwans.

Around the cities, most people spoke both Pushto and Farsi. However, as we traveled into the rural villages of Zabul, we frequently encountered people who spoke only Pushto. It turned out, Jalaladine could understand Pushto quite well, even though his native language was Farsi. But, for some reason, I could speak Pushto better.

When we talked with villagers, he translated their questions into Farsi for me, and I gave them the answers in Pushto.

Somewhere in those months I was assigned to Maimana, the capital of Faryab Province, to the west of Badghis Province. I don't remember exactly when I worked there, how long, or what I did. It does seem strange, in retrospect, to have cycled through so many places. Either everybody wanted me, or nobody wanted me, I'm not exactly sure which.

At the time, I didn't ask questions or complain, but simply caught the bus to the next provincial capital and tried to do my best.

Reflecting on my First Year in Country When we arrived in the provinces, we were quickly overwhelmed with the complex and difficult tasks we had been assigned. To be effective, we had set goals, prioritize projects, formulate estimates, put together projects plans, schedules and allocate resources. On top of that we needed to organize meetings with village honchos and other stakeholders to win their support for our projects. In short, we had to learn project management on the fly, as well as cope with a foreign and mysterious culture. When I joined the Peace Corps, I knew all about Elizabethan England and renaissance theater, and lots of other stuff. I could recite the first 18 lines of the Canterbury Tales from memory, in Old English. However, that has been useful only when the doctors wanted to check for brain damage. But I knew very little about project management, government bureaucracies, international development, or public relations. We had to learn very quickly. **Vacation and the Fate of my Journals** My assignment in Zabul Provinces ended when I left for my two-week vacation. After a deep dive into the heart of Afghanistan, I was eager to explore more of South Asia, and caught a bus from Kabul, through the Khyber Pass, and into Peshawer, Pakistan. Northern Pakistan was much like Afghanistan, only with more reliable electricity, so I continued to India. Like most frontier border crossings in Asia, the customs and immigration offices on the Pakistani-Indian border was total chaos. Furthermore, the India-Pakistani War had ended during the past year and tensions between the two countries were still high.

I had to walk a few hundred meters to get my Indian visa stamped, but otherwise had no trouble. My most vivid memory is the border gate into India. As soon as I walked through the gate, the humid air was thick and heavy with the fragrance of gardenias. That may have given me the impression that India was a serene and courteous place. However, one ride in a third class rail carriage knocked that tidy delusion right out. The crush of the crowds, the belching steam engines, and the constant hassles from train station tea vendors sent me over the edge. Even though my first rail journey was only a few hours, it was a cramped vision of hell, for me. For the Indians, it was simply a normal train ride. When the train screeched to a halt at my destination, I bolted from my cramped space on the floor outside the toilet, through the carriage door and onto the platform. It wasn't until later I realized I had left my journals on that train .

I was heartbroken.

But, back to Afghanistan . . . When I returned from vacation, the Food for Work Program was still going full steam. The new group brought a few dozen new faces, enthusiasm, a fresh sense of humor, and loads of new music. We quickly adopted a few tunes and played them constantly on those little battery-powered cassette players. Neil Young's "Everybody knows this is nowhere" was a natural for us. John Prine's "Your flag decal won't get you into heaven any more," gave us a taste of the turmoil over the Vietnam War back in the US. We rocked to the "Teenage wasteland" and "Magic Bus" by the Who. And of course Cat Stevens' "Baby, baby, it's a wide world"

Our Afghan counterparts tuned in Radio Kabul, and we learned the hit tune of the year, “Mullah Mohammed Jan”. In the lyrics, the singer is dazzled by poppy flowers, simply because they were so brilliant and beautiful, which they certainly were. Come on, let's go to the mausoleum of Mullah Muhammad Jan, In the flooding flowers of (his) garden, Oh my beloved, In the flooding flowers of (his) garden, Oh my beloved,

On the Road Again - Faizabad or Bust

One of the volunteers in my cycle had an emergency and left the country. I was assigned to fill his role in Faizabad, the capital of Badakhshan Province, along with Dan Huber and Tim McCormack.

This province is in the Northeast corner of the country, with a long, narrow area, known as the Wakhan Corridor, that extended deep into the Pamir Mountains, to a border with China. It separated Tajikastan, in southern Russia, from Pakistan. A very rugged territory.

On the long trip from Kabul to Faizabad, we had the opportunity to patronize several teahouses, and the new volunteers were initiated into teahouse culture.

Afghanistan is strictly a male society. Women were rigidly segregated, and rarely ventured into teahouses. The teahouse, or Chai Khana, was a place a guy could unwind with a hot cup of tea and a cigarette. Stuff a pinch between his cheek and gums, and, if he desired, drop a lump of hashish on top of the glowing embers in the bowl of a water pipe.

Provincial tea houses also frequently served food. They never bothered with a menu, as the selection was either soup, stew, or sometimes rice. Except for the occasional insect or pebble, it was generally quite edible.

In all fairness, I rarely witnessed men smoking hashish in the tea house water pipe. However, we could easily determine which of the guests were buzzed. It seemed that the staff was zonked more often than the customers. The teenagers who served the tea and food always had to goof off, especially for a group of foreigners who spoke a little Farsi. In fact, a group of three Americans who could speak any Farsi at all was a huge attraction, and a source of endless amusement.

But not all Afghans thought we were charming. Afghans generally have bronzed, ruddy complexions, while ours were wan and pale, even when we were tanned and fit by Western standards. The most common racial slur was “Mr. Katchaloo”, or Mr. Potato. Occasionally, Afghans we met expressed sympathy and asked if we had been ill. Blue eyes also concerned them, as the “evil eye” was portrayed on amulets with blue and white concentric circles.

Having grown up in a region where racial prejudice was as thick as corn syrup, it was very educational to live in a society where people reacted negatively to me, simply because of the color of my skin.

Fun and Work in Faizabad The road to Faizabad followed the Kokcha River deep into the mountains, and approached the town from the opposite side of the river. The road crossed a rock masonry bridge into town. The city itself was built on a large wide bluff between the river and the mountains. Downstream from the city, the river widened into rapids adjacent a flood plain and a broad area of open land which was used as a landing strip.

The previous volunteer stranded his Peace Corps truck in a broad and shallow stretch of the Kokcha River west of the city. I never learned exactly how that happened. Perhaps he was trying to wash it and the current swept the vehicle into the river.

In that area the river was broad and fast. The river rocks were slippery and unstable.

Our first task was to retrieve it. It was only 20 or 30 feet from the river bank, and the water appeared to be about two or three feet deep, not even covering the wheels.

What seemed like a simple task turned out to be extremely difficult. The current was incredibly powerful. Anyone within ten feet of the truck was swept off their feet and carried down stream. We could not even get close enough to tie a rope to the trailer hitch.

We worked at it a few days before we gave up.

In Faizabad, we joined two young engineers from the German volunteer service, Albrecht (aka Ali) Kaupp and Wolfgang, whose last name has disappeared from my memory. They had been working in the area a while, and had access to concrete and other construction materials in the government storehouse.

We moved into their cozy rented house. It was perched above the river and had a large patio. There was a large room with a metal, wood-burning stove, a small kitchen next to it, and a tashnab, a tiny room with a hole in the floor, high over the river. For bathing, we visited the local bath house, or hamam. For a very reasonable price, you got a clean cloth to wrap around your middle regions, a towel, and plenty of nice hot water.

Ali, as we called him, woke up before dawn every morning. He was working on a water supply diversion project that directed a mountain stream into the city water system. Like most Aghan cities, the water system was mostly open ditches along the roads which eventually emptied into the river. It involved pouring concrete under water, a feat that amazed me.

Our servant was a teenage boy, about 15 years old, who handled housework, shopping, cooking and cleaning enthusiastically and quite competently. During his down time, he sat in the corner and played with ingenious little squeeky toys made from condoms.

There was a couple who taught the TEFL classes at the local school, and a single volunteer who worked as the TEFL teacher in a small school about 20 miles to the east, at the village of Baharak, a small bazaar east of Faizabad. He had a difficult assignment in a very remote town.

His students were not interested in learning English. To engage them, he taught them American street slang. Instead of “Hello. How are you?” his students greeted each other with “What’s happening, man” and answered, “Not a damn thing”.

He once stuffed his Afghan currency behind a beam in his ceiling. When he needed the money a few weeks later, he discovered that mice had chewed the bills to shreds. Ali and Wolfgang had a few projects backed up and needed our help to recruit the crews and help manage the construction. They intended to use grant wheat to finance the workers. The first project was to repair and rebuild a stone masonry bridge across a seasonal stream, and in the center of town. Rock masonry was a perfect type of construction for that area, as the province had a huge supply of rocks. The only problem was breaking up the big rocks into little rocks. Naturally, Afghan men were very skilled with sledge hammers, and considered the task a macho game. We began to organize labor, and all the administrative stuff involved. Unfortunately, the folks refused to work for wheat. They wanted cash. We developed an ingenious, and probably illegal strategy, to keep things moving. We got the wheat from the warehouse, took it to the bazaar, and sold it. We prepared the pay envelopes and distributed them to our crews once a week, which made us very popular. We worked at several similar projects over the months — in addition to the bridge, we helped improve an irrigation dam for a village on the other side of the river, and a few miscellaneous projects near the outlying villages.

The Great Snowball Fight of Faizabad

When winter moved in construction was mostly suspended as the whole place was snowed in. One morning after a major snowstorm, we walked through the bazaar, where several of the shopkeepers were shoveling the snow off the roofs of their shops. We loaded up with a generous supply of snowballs and pelted the men on the roofs.

They did not miss a beat and immediately returned fire, laughing at us and shouting for their friends to join the fight. Soon half the town was engaged in the snowball battles. After an hour or so, we declared a truce, and continued past the governor’s offices, to the airstrip at the edge of town where a small squadron of young soldiers was quartered in a dinky wood frame building.

The soldiers were all huddled inside around the wood-burning stove.

We reloaded with a fresh supply of snowballs, and knocked on the door. As the door opened, we showevered the room with a barrage of well aimed shots.

They barreled out the door, without their weapons, thank goodness, and staged a very spirited defense. Exhausted, we parted with smiles and handshakes all around.

But apparently the citizens had mixed feelings about us. When we walked home from the office in the evenings, through the twisted alleyways of the city, grade school boys ran out of their homes and followed us, screaming, “Mr. Katchaloo!” They say children repeat in public what their parents whisper at home. Perhaps there may have been a reservoir of ill will towards the pale foreigners who lived in their midst. It was annoying, but the kids considered it a great game. In offices and in the bazaar, the Afghans were always polite.

As the ground thawed in the spring, huge boulders rolled down the mountains. One smashed Ali Kaupp’s new water diversion damn, leaving many neighborhoods of Faizabad without water. From our patio, we watched the boulders break off the mountainside high above the Kokcha River, and tumble down the mountain. They bounced off the road and hit the river with a very impressive splash.

These events usually caused very little damage. Once, however, a landslide totally blocked the road, which created a huge emergency, as the town was cut off from the rest of the country. In response, the provincial government mobilized every available soldier. They

To remove the larger boulders, a small team pounded holes in them with star drills and sledge hammers, and dynamited them into manageable sizes. The explosions were sensational, and the whole town gathered on the opposite bank to watch. It was an inspiring demonstration of coordination and hard work. They managed to move a huge amount of material, and reopened the road in a few days.

Operation Help Comes to Town The Food for Work Program was intended to alleviate the hunger in the country until the drought had ended and the village storehouses full again. After more than a year, it was obvious to the national government the program was not distributing wheat fast enough to have much of an impact on the country and launched a nationwide relief effort called Operation Help.

The resources mobilized for Badakhshan were impressive. We watched convoys of trucks arrive, loaded with sacks of wheat. A fleet of small pick-up trucks arrived to transport the grain to the villages.

I moved to Baharak, the small bazaar town at the end and the entrance to the Wakhan Corridor. The team lodged in rented rooms and worked with a young English couple who worked with the British volunteer service, and supervised the operation in the province. Their names have been lost among the detritus of my memories, but I do recall that they were newly wed, and the Mrs. had a tongue sharp enough to draw blood.

Luckily, I was not the target of her sarcasm. She directed most of it at her husband.

I ran interference for them with the truck drivers and directed loading and dispatch. It was a big day when the drivers proved they could drive up the river bed, to distribution points deep in the Wakhan Corridor and back in one day. Even though the total distance, both ways, was about 80 miles, that was a very rugged 80 miles.

The operation did not take more than a few weeks. As suddenly as it appeared, Operation Help disappeared back down the road. I heard that this relief initiative was a success, from the Afghans perspective because they gave the wheat to everybody. No income qualifications, work requirements, and so on. There’s a very important lesson in there somewhere.

Operation Help received a huge amount of publicity — illustrated articles in major national publications, etc. Our Congressman even sent my family a letter of commendation for my contribution. My Mom was immensely proud of that, and mentioned it at every family reunion.

The End of my Tour — and an Era About the same time, the Food for Work program received a terrible review from an individual connected to the US Embassy, and the entire operation was axed. I and all the other Food for Work volunteers were ordered to return to Kabul.

When I learned that the entire program was canceled, I was less than two months from my termination date. I asked the local Peace Corps management for an early termination, as I was completely burned out after 22 months bouncing around the country, trying to make sense of it all.

I was told they needed clearance from the Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, which would take several months. As a result, I settled in with a few other ex-food for workers in a Kabul neighborhood, and waited for my discharge.

The latest group of Food for Workers to arrive in Kabul were in the provinces for only a few months before the program was terminated.

Shortly after I left Afghanistan in 1973, King Zahir Shah, who had ruled the country since 1933, abdicated. His cousin, Mohammad Daoud, took control of the country. A Russian army invaded from the North in 1978. Some time during these events, the Peace Corps packed up and went home. The Americans returned with guns in 2001.

Afghanistan has been called the graveyard of empires. The US failed to learn from Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, the British, who launched three disastrous invasions, or the Russians, who left in 1989 after ten years of fighting. Almost two decades later, US soldiers are still stationed in the country.

The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.

The coup that put Daoud in power was the beginning of many decades of turmoil and suffering in that country. I imagine the place changed more in the next 40 years than it had since the Muslim armies swept in from the West and Genghis Khan and his armies overran the place from the East.

I know in my heart, however, that somewhere in Afghanistan, a wealthy, provincial Haji is bamboozling some hapless bureaucrat, a bus is stranded on the side of the road with an empty fuel tank, and men are hanging around the tea house, dipping snuff, smoking cigarettes, and sipping hot, sweet tea.

I grew immensely during those two years, and I look back on them fondly, as I suppose most RPCVs do. The Peace Corps office in Kabul became, for us, a kind of half way house, to ease our transition into that strange, rugged world in the provinces, and a refuge for us. My fellow Peace Corps volunteers became some of my best friends.

In the ten years the Peace Corps operated in Afghanistan, about 1,000 volunteers served in the country. They taught in provincial schools, vaccinated villagers against smallpox, managed Food-for-Work programs, or worked in many other occupations. They, along with thousands of Afghan immigrants who fled from the violence that destroyed their country, preserve the memories of an era when Afghanistan was at peace with itself, with its powerful neighbors, and reached out to the rest of the world .

I remember how the Peace Corps management, Al Nehoda and John True, the regional directors, and Lou Mitchell, the country director, navigated the US State Department and the Afghan bureaucracies so effectively. And, of course, Robert Neumann, US ambassador to Afghanistan until 1973, deserves a mention for his steady and principled leadership. They all made me proud to be an American citizen.

Most of all, the Afghans themselves earned my eternal respect for their incredible survival skills and hospitality. It was a feudal society, where a few landowners controlled the land and the peasants did the heavy lifting for very little more than subsistence. It’s amazing that these people could show such great generosity and warmth to me and the other young westerners who came to live and work with them. I’m not quite sure if I improved their country, but I know they improved me.

— The End —

PC/A Recollections 1971-1972

Nancy (Price) Benson

"Life as a Non-Matrix Spouse"

As one of 5 "non-matrix spouses" in Cycle 9, I spent all of my time in Kabul. As a non-matrix spouse, I had no job assignment waiting for me and I had to find my own way to contribute. My college degree from the University of Oregon was in Geography and I had studied cartography and air photo interpretation, so the first job I found was with the Cartographic Institute. While interpreting air photos of the Afghan countryside for unused, but arable land and transferring this onto maps, I was also supposed to train the Afghan men working there. However, as a foreign woman I was basically invisible to them, and they were "working" there because they were either related to someone who got them the job or paid someone to get them the job. The two Frenchmen I was also working with had little success either, so we ended up doing the bulk of the project ourselves in order to meet the Jeshyn deadline. That was the end of that.

Soon I joined a team of other (unemployed) PCVs to conduct random testing of the general population for the prevalence of TB. WHO needed statistics to get funding. We tested hundreds of people at Kabul University, Red Crescent clinics and a women's clinic (where the male members of our team could not work), and other locations in Kabul. Some of the male members of the team were able to go outside of Kabul. Our work involved giving 4 intradermal injections to each person, 2 in each arm, testing for TB and something else which I cannot remember. Many of the people thought they were getting cured for whatever ailed them, so we had to "bribe" them to come back in 48 hours so we could measure their reactions or we never would have seen them again. We were given items donated by CARE/Medico for baksheesh: small tubes of toothpaste, pen refills (but no pens), Lipton Instant Tea, baby aspirin. We had to make up all sorts of stories about the usefulness of these items for the average Afghan. Even though it was a blind study, it didn't take us long to figure which injection was testing for TB. So WHO got their statistics.

I was once again jobless. After a short stint organizing a medical library for a Dr Stenhouse (though I don't remember where), I was given the opportunity to organize the library at the PC Center after a fire prior to our arrival. It was being manned by the somewhat shy, but competent Mehrabaddin since the fire, but it was in disarray with many books in need of repair. So he and I got busy organizing and repairing and when that was done, we typed up cards for a cataloging system (with apologies to Mr Dewey). Once we were running smoothly, one of the best results was that the word got out and we were constantly visited by PCVs, especially those from the provinces when they were in Kabul. I lived vicariously through the stories they shared and learned much more about our host country in the process.

We also had time to create an updated edition of the PC/A cookbook, called "Coffee in the Teapot", that was given to each new volunteer and became a treasured possession for many!
(As a side note, in 2010 for the PC/A Conference in Lancaster PA, I created another, special edition of the cookbook, called "Coffee in the Teapot with Nan". It contains Afghan recipes, a history of the cookbook, some photos of Kabul and volunteers in the 1970s, as well as "The Kitchen", a description of our PC/A kitchens as was described in the earlier editions of the cookbook. I still have a few copies on hand, so if you are interested, please contact me. The cost is $20 and all proceeds go to Friends of Afghanistan.)

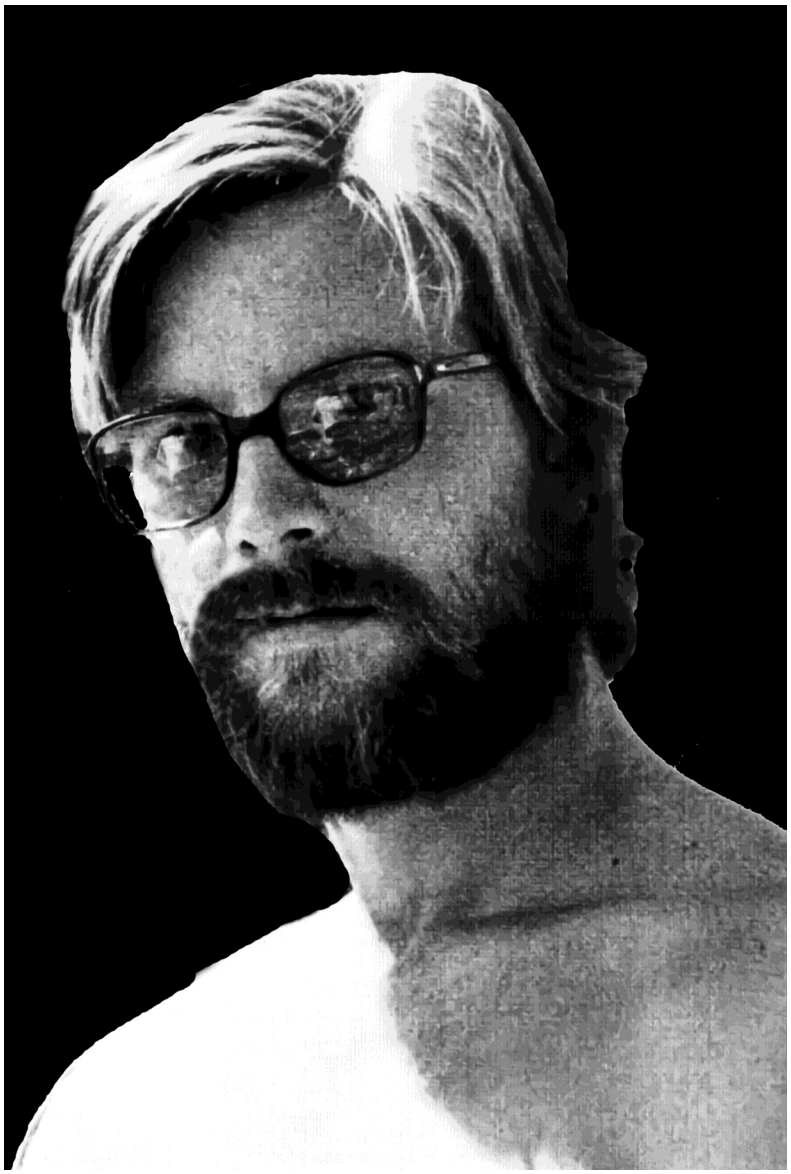
Thoughts & Recollections:

The sky was so clear in Kabul, especially in the winter, that I saw the Milky Way for the first time in my life. Walking in snowy Kabul on a moonlit night was almost magical.

- My butcher never gave up trying to engage me in his hashish side business.
- Waiting in line for "silo" bread.
- Friendships with people that remain solid to this day.
- The first ride into town from the airport was dusty, yet exotic.
- Ariana Airlines and footprints on the toilet seats on the planes.
- Being welcomed at Ambassador Neumann's monthly "At Home" because he was a strong supporter of Peace Corps.
- Kebab and naan.
- Keeping the legs of our beds in a shallow pan of water to keep the scorpions out. Also, shaking out our shoes before putting them on for the same reason.
- Our good-hearted cook and bacha.
- Sitting on top of the Buddhas of Bamiyan and being heartbroken watching their destruction.
- I don't think I truly appreciated the value of the experience at the time, but rather later, and I have always wished to return to Afghanistan. I often wonder what happened to the Afghan people that we worked and interacted with.

Memories of Years Past
by
Bruce Legendre

Food for Work 1972



The rains failed in the years between 1969 and 1971 in Afghanistan and there was widespread famine and with the widespread incompetence and corruption as many as 100,000 people or more died. Moosa Shafiq became PM in 1972 (young American educated technocrat) and things improved. So call in the Junketeers (as Nixon called us). Food for Work guys arrived in Kabul in Feb 1972 (after a night in Rome and Beirut) and were put up in a lovely hotel in Paghman on the outskirts of Kabul for some intensive Farsi Lessons…then some of us were off to Kandahar for further instruction and training.

After some weeks in Kandahar, Joe Wollmering and I ended up in a small village with little to do except learn how to read Arabic , improve our Farsi and practice with villagers.
Back to Kabul for final assignments; some guys were cut out for various reasons and sent home but there were still enough of us to cover most or all of the Provinces.

I was assigned to Sheberghan (the end of the bitumen road in NW Afghanistan) on the Turkmenistan/Uzbekistan border where a large contingent of Russians lived. In the year and a half I was there, they avoided me like the plague, thought for sure I was CIA and no doubt the KGB was there to keep an eye on everyone. Too bad the Putin KGB Dopes are still in charge in Russia. In 1978 the Bactrian Gold was discovered just a few Kms out of Shebreghan from the time of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom. Had I done my research I might have done some prospecting myself with the Metal Detectors available at the time. But mea culpa -I was ignorant of the history and former greatness of the area I was found myself. More on this later.

The first day I presented myself to the Governor of Jowzjan with the very basic Farsi I had acquired and I understood enough to hear him say to his assistant, "What am I going to do with his foreigner; he doesn't understand Farsi?"
So I played the strong quiet type for the first month or two…nobody spoke English which is of course the quickest way to learn a language and there were no foreigners around. After a couple of months the Modeer Engashufamahal (Provincal Head Engineer) was explaining to me how a road contract we had awarded to a Feudal Landlord (who would then organize his workers ,as many as 500) wanted more than the 8 Kgs of US donated wheat per day per man (I forget why) so the payment had to be extended. And I asked in Farsi, "But won't the road become longer than it is?" And he responded, "Ah, now you understand Farsi". Which in truth meant I had the vocabulary of a 4 year old. I could never understand all of what the men were saying in the tea houses and around the evening meal…etc but I got the gist. Expressions like "Hortagee derog na mega" (Foreigners don't lie) and Rishwa Hordi (You took a bribe) were common as well as some great swearing phrases to do with the anatomy of a donkey. The biggest insult for an Afghan was: "Zan asti" or you're a woman. Never saw any of them, all hidden away from prying eyes. The only experience that was in any way sexual occurred after an evening meal out in the boomdocks hosted by the local Feudal Landlord who had arranged for some musicians and a dancing boy with long hair and makeup who did a poor Mic Jagger impersonation. Mildly amusing but the Afghans sitting around the perimeter of the mud walled room were interested in ways the LGBT community would have found admirable.

I understood from the start that I was in charge because of my western face. (Foreigners don't lie…before Trump, obviously) Afghans would work for the Food for Work Program because I was there and they would probably be paid. If an Afghan was in charge, well chances of seeing any of their salary would be severely diminished. The way poor Afghans were bashed by soldiers and police if they confronted authority made justice a potentially rare commodity.

I was informed two Lorry Drivers carrying wheat (we got 2000 tonnes from memory, US AID) from the provincial Capitol (Shebreghan) to the outlying towns (Sar I Pul and Sancharak) had been attacked and the drivers shot during a night run, so we only travelled during the day. For the duration of 1972 it was an old Russian Jeep owned by the Provincal Engineer with a Pashtun Driver who was in charge of keeping it serviced and running and to his credit, it never failed us on the battered roads between Shebreghan and Sar I Pul (a half days drive) and further out where there were no roads. The Engineer in the front, me in the back breathing dust and my four assistants already in place either in Sar I Pul or Sancharak. Dr Whakil (Minister without Portfoilo) was in charge of the whole show. He was well respected by Afghans and Westerners alike and he made sure we got variety; I had a Pashtu Driver, two Hazaras and a Tajik. If I had any problems I would go to the Governor and ask him to sort it out or I would go to Dr. Wahkil; this always worked.

Once we were driving down a gravel river bed to a village to judge the merit of a new project and came upon a Kochi Camp (Nomads dressed in Black that tended their flocks in the backblocks- a million or so of them in the early 70's) and they had enormous Kochi Dogs, part Wolf, that were posted around the camp and were ferocious. This dog attacked the Jeep…literally it ran straight into the front of our moving vehicle like a Medevial Knight on Horseback might ;down the riverbed and smashed into the front. I have seen the shepherd boys attacked in an open field by a single Kochi dog and the trick seems to be to drop down half way and swing your 6 foot shepherd staff in 360 degree circles above your head. I have seen this deter these dogs, I am not sure why.

One of the only visitors I ever had (I was at the end of the bitumern road- all dirt after Shebreghan to Herat) was Jim Baimes from Maimannah. We went to Ahkcha together to review a Project and on the way two of my three Afghan Assistants in the back seat (The Tajik and one of the Hazara) started bickering and fighting so Jim (riding shotgun) turned around and grabbed the Tajik by the collar and shook him and yelled at him to stop. The Tajik was suddenly confronted with this blonde headed/bearded , bespectacled pale head screaming into his face. End of arguing youngsters. I liked his style. Jim was used to disciplining young lads as he was a public school teacher from memory. He was good company. It was Ramadan and when the canon boomed (a Mullah would hold a white and a black string at arms length and when he couldn't discern the colour of each…Boom! went the cannon)_and the fast was over. You had to rush to the restaurants to get a feed before it was all gone. Kabuli a la Amoeba.

The whole time I was there one engineer from Sweden showed up and reviewed some of our projects: A retaining wall in Sar e Pul, roads and wells. Most of the wheat went to subsistence farmers/ grazers who would get gravel from nerarby riverbeds, take it to the road and tip it in. Some used donkeys, some camels and some used their long Afghan Shirts with the gravel carried in the mid lower part of the garment. I suspect these roads were found to be convenient and useful for the Russians in the 79 invasion.

Wells were another good project for the villages that had little or no potable water. We paid them 8 Kgs of wheat for each vertical meter. After they finished I would measure the depth, ensuring they had hit the water table and calculate their pay. One old Afghan in his 70s dug a 40 plus meter well and used the 320 kiloes to purchase a child bride. All the Afghans I knew were engaged to their 1st cousin as their parents could rarely afford the Bride Dowry or conversely the Bride Price. So their parents were 1st cousins and they would marry first cousins, apparently a tradition that has occurred for sometime in the Islamic World as Muhammad had married Zaynab bint Jahsh his 1st cousin.

At the time of being totally embedded with the Afghans and everything was "enshallah" this and "enshallah" that; I was probably a bit aggravated and bored at the inaction, lack of initiative but in

hindsight I was privileged to be totally engaged with Afghans on a ground level; travelled,worked ate and slept with them (usually as guests of the feudal landlord) and admired their non materialistic life-styles that had been imposed upon them over their long history. And after several months I found that I had become an "Inshallah" kind of guy myself. I remember John Loomis calling into say good day once. John played a mean harmonica and was always the life of the party. I had been sitting in the back of a Russian Jeep by myself for several hours whilst my Afghan Counterparts were off doing whatever and I responded to Johns queries with an "Enshallah" attitude which must have freaked him out because he departed abruptly.

All this Afghanistan Experience courtesy of the US Taxpayer. To have been born a baby boomer in USA was to win the lottery of life . A bit like our Italian Friends who ran their Mediterranean Empire for 600 years and now are relaxed with the attitude of "well we were in charge for a long time, now it's your turn." That would be us, the Yanks and like the Romans we are a society of Laws, Engineering and Militarism. From my travels around the world, it is my belief someone or a group of someones must maintain order in the World and as much as the Yanks stuff it up, who else is there? The Russians ? Chinese? Europeans (too busy kiiling each other for 30 centuries) No I am afraid it falls to the New Romans.

The public baths were always interesting. One could get an Afghan haircut there for a few pennies which due to lice infestations meant shaving the head, the armpits and the crotch. Some of the remote villages we visited (on horseback or jeep) had no running water, electricity, nothing; just totally self sufficient from the outside world. People lived simply, and grew or raised what they required to survive. God knows they got no support from Kabul and the wealthy listened to the shortwave radio in the evenings. Afghans told me that when they prayed, they were content but when they missed prayer, they became unsettled and angry. Such simplicity. In the middle of the day, a small rug layed out in the middle of a field and a man humbles himself before Allah. Muhammad's Genius in my view was the call to Prayer 5 times a day over the loud speakers or from a human voice from the minaret (constant religious reminders hammering the unconscious mind), the monthly fast at Ramadan (awareness of group sacrifice and solidarity) and finally the Haj (millions circumambulating the Ka'ba at Mecca ,mass reassurance of the veracity of ones faith). And of course there is no racism in Islam; Black Africans and White Serbians greet each other as equals. One of the great anomalies of history was the smuggling out of China, silkworms by the Nestorian Christian Monks who brought them to Constantinople just before Muhammad was born…hence the withdrawal of the Roman Legions from the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula which had protected the ancient silk route for centuries. How Muhammad would have done clashing with the Roman Legions? He depended on the wealth of the Caravans he raided and stole from to finance his army which consolidated the entire Arabian Peninsula just before his death.

On a short break, (inertia was the key word with the Afghan Managers in Shebreghan) to Mazar E Sharif and Balkh-which was totally destroyed by the Mongols in 1220 after 2500 years of history-and watched local boys fossick for coins and artifacts in the mud ruins. And then off to Samangan to visit Brian Johnson who showed me the ancient Buddhist ruins. Afghanistan was heavily invested in Buddhism from 300BC up to the Arab Invasions; a brilliant culture of art, literature, and religious Philosophy that I would have probably enjoyed to a greater degree had I been assigned to Shebreghan at the time of Christ although when I contracted TB, Amoeba, Giardia and the rest…there would have been no medication. Crashed at Brian's Place for the night then back to work at Sheberghan until the XMAS break arrived and there was too much snow to work.

So XMAS break 1972: went to Kabul and headed off to India through the Kyhber Pass (we had to pay tribute so the Tribes wouldn't hold up the bus) and went to Delhi (saw Museums' Ashoka three headed lion Logo everywhere);the British Archaeologists under Colonial rule found all this out for the Indians who had no idea about this part of their history, then to Kathmandu, Burma, Bangkok and down to Goa where all the hippies were running around naked waiting for Timothy Leary to arrive as he had escaped from Prison and was on his way, but one of his mates ratted him out…. Hung out with Ted Emerson (yes Ralph Waldos' Progeny) and his girlfriend who was a world traveler and had some interesting folks in her background.

Back to Kabul then made my way back to Shebreghan through Kandahar. Stopped in Kandahar (the best sweet pudding-Fernee) and struck up a conversation in English with an Afghan Teacher who spoke several languages, more than the usual two or three most Afghans spoke. (Farsi ,Pashtu, Tajik ,Uzbek and maybe a bit of English). But this chap spoke Hindi and Urdu as well and was well read on history of India and SW Asia and so we were chatting and he asked me where I had been. "Well Delhi, Calcutta…etc" And he asked had I attended the Museums and seen the Ashoka Three Headed Lion Pillar which is on all the Indian Rupee notes and was I aware Ashoka (3rd Century BC Emperor of India) administered Kandahar/Alexandria and had his edicts written in Greek as well for the Macedonians that had remained? And what did I think about the Greek/Buddhist Influence in art, religion, government..etc that flourished from the 4th century BC to to the 7th century AD… and on and on… And of course I had no clue. In fact the Shebreghan Hoard of 21,000 Gold Pieces was found in a burial mound in the late 70's not far from where I was working. Had I known I would have invested in a Metal Detector and seen what I could find for the Kabul Museum. He shrugged "you have money and go everywhere but you understand nothing" Well he wasn't being rude, just factual but I was humiliated and thereafter wherever I have travelled on this planet, I made a point of reading the history and background so I know what I am looking at and thanks goes to the little impoverished school teacher in Kandahar/Alexandria where the Great Alexander himself once stood. Although I am no fan of his sexual appetites. He was an omnisexual; man woman eunuch whatever…

Glad to leave Kandahar/Alexandria on to Herat and a quick detour through Mashad, Esfahan, Shiraz and the Persepolis then back to Shebreghan. I have always admired the Persians ,a distinct Indo european people, not Arabs, who had the first world empire under Cyrus the Great. He easily defeated the Egyptians by having live cats pinned to the shields of his infantrymen which totally freaked out the Egyptians with their reverence for cats. The Persians are very sophisticated people and I enjoyed their company so I was shocked when they acquiesced to the Ayatollah and that crew of Mullahs. Totally unexpected. I only hope the young folks of Iran depose the Clerics as they did the Shah and the young Chinese need to get out on Tiananmen Square once again.

As I remember US AID took over the Food For Work Program and sent up an old 1950 vintage International 4WD which seemed to stop and go all right. It was now April-May 1973 and we were all recalled back to Kabul. I was riding shotgun in the front seat, just my driver and myself. Well just before we got to the top of the Salang Pass Tunnel -13,000 ft- (highest tunnel in the world at the time of construction), I told the driver to stop so I could get some fresh water to drink from the

melting snow. The Hindu Kush (Persian for It Kills Hindus) winds it way through Nepal and India and ends up in Afghanistan where the Afghans had a brilliant system of Karezes. They would bring the water down from the foothills of the Himalaya (shallow water tables) to the floodplains for irrigation by sinking a vertical hole every XXX Meters then teams would go down the shafts and dig out horizontal drives connecting the vertical shafts for many miles. Kareze diggers were obliged to dig for the remainder of their productive lives and their sons, grandsons…etc had to be Kareze Diggers as far as I was informed. Well all this was destroyed by Ghenkis Khan. He devastated Afghanistan and left a fort of 1000 men wherever necessary. Thousand in Persian is Hazore and so they are today the Hazaras and are still not assimilated or particularly liked by the Pashtuns and others. Being Shia in predominantly Sunni Afghanistan also does not help the Hazara achieve social parity even though they have been in country since the 13th century.

Anyway after a soothing long awaited drink of cold fresh uncontaminated water… Afghanistan is appalling for Amoeba Dysentery, Worms, TB , Giardia—of which I had had them all. To quench ones thirst on a hot summers day it is hot tea; the boiled water does the trick. But before I got back in the car I had a feeling something was not quite right so I got in the back seat and we proceeded. After driving through the crest of the tunnel (the top of the pass is tunnelled because of avalanches, snow and ice) we began to descend and very quickly the driver turned to me ashen faced; no brakes, no hand brake ,nothing. It was a 3 speed transmission on the column and there is a trick you can do with the old style standard non-synced transmissions to get them into 1st gear with a double clutch, but try to describe that in Farsi in a few seconds…as the old International is now beginning to pick up speed; in second gear with the clutch out… so I leaned over the front seat and grabbed the gear shift and tried to slam it into first gear; smoke blew out of the transmission and now the car is swerving from side to side And the steering wheel is uncontrollable, so I threw myself on the floor of the back seat and seconds later the car went into the steel posted cliff side of the tunnel . I got out unscathed but the drivers head was under the firewall of the passenger side and his legs were broken and he had lacerations on his face. The back seat took the weight of my forward motion body and it was angled in from the center. I dragged him out of the car which was totaled and now traffic has stopped on both sides as we were blocking the road. Some men got out of a bus and taxi and easily moved the car to the side of the road; then got back into their vehicles and left. No one wanted to help. So I shirt collared a taxi driver and told him he must take us to Kabul and I would pay whatever. But his passengers said no they couldn't be inconvenienced . For those of you unfamiliar with Afghan intercity travel—rather than take a bus 5 Afghans will split the bill and take a taxi. So now I am getting angry and said "Whoobe Musulman nahasti". You are a bad Muslim. Well that did it. …No Afghan will take that off a foreign non believer, So we got a Cab and my driver put his head on my lap in the back seat moaning "Allah , Allah" all the way to Kabul. Our drivers were meant to do two things only: Drive and maintain the vehicle. Obviously my guy was an Enshallah kind of guy.

Back in Kabul they kept us all Food for Workers in limbo for several months…so we went to the Embassy Swimming pool and played volley ball and also baseball; pretty much played tourist in Kabul during the summer of 1973. We were a bit of a rowdy crew; split into different groups based on friendships and previous attachments to each other. A couple of Jewish NYC girls who had been on an Israeli Kibbutz became part of our group for a month or two; went to Bamiyan with Paul Bitter and myself and later to the Kabul hospital with Hepatitis where the Afghan doctors were keen to perform a full physical examination which we vetoed and instead consulted with the foreign Doctors who informed me the infection rate was 100%. Later the girls got a ride to Europe with a Frenchman who had driven over in a VW Minibus but unbeknownst to the girls had his fuel tank filled with Afghan Hash and of course the Afghan Dealer had informed his mates at the Herat border where

they were busted (required a huge bribe to return to Herat) and whilst the Tank was being removed in Herat, the Border Police had tipped off their Herat counterparts so they were busted a 2nd time for the remainder of their valuables. Some folks require the return of Che and his firing squads. Well they finally made it back to NYC, thank Moses. It was a time in the world when mostly young people were making their way from Western Europe, USA and Australia/NZ to India, Nepal, Afghanistan, the Levant and SE Asia…business was booming for the retailers and there was relative peace everywhere except of course for Vietnam and SE Asia thanks to LBJ; old men sending young men out to die. Today it's a mess in SW Asia and the Middle East and N Africa but for a brief period there was an exchange of cultures , ideas and people and we were fortunate to be part of all that.

As mentioned earlier I went with Paul Bitter and our Jewish Friends to Bamiyan to see the Giant Bhuddhas, a part of Afghan History that few Afghans would know anything about. On the bus I found it always better to sit on the roof with the luggage on the mountain side so you had a chance to jump off the roof rack on some of those hairy switchback turns with vertical falls; especially as some of the drivers would make pit stops to hit the old Hashish Hookah. Now gone, destroyed by ignorant Taliban, the Giant Buddhas exemplified the greatness of Afghanistan under the auspices of Indian Empire. Carved into the cliff face probably in the 3rd to 5th Century AD there would have been numerous Monasteries and thousands of Monks. The Great Stupa of Nagarahara outside of Jalalabad was 300 feet in height. Brian Johnson took me to a Buddhist Stupa when I visited him in Samaghan. Islam means submission and unfortunately entire histories seem to be repressed. Ask an Afghan Taxi Driver in Sydney or Melbourne or NYC about the glorious Afghan past during the Buddhist period and you will get a blank response. The Indonesians know little of their Hindu/Buddhist past, the Pakistanians…etc A pity.

Alexander died in 323. His Empire was held together by his force of will and charisma. In 321 , the Empire was finished and the Indian Emperor Chandragupta (Ashokas Grandfather) had assimilated Afghanistan into the Empire; his 60,000 Infantry, 30,000 Cavalry, 8,000 Elephants and Chariots were enough for the Macedonian General ,Seleucus, to back down. Kabul, Herat, Kandahar and Ghazni all became part of the Indian Empire.

Anyway time to go. We had a meeting, all the Food for Workers, and we were asked who wanted to leave as support for the Program had been diminished. I was the first to stick my hand up. There had been a coup d'etat on 17th of July 1973 by the army commander-Daoud-who successfully ended 200 years of royal rule and King Zahir Shah (who was in Italy at the time getting eye surgery) abdicated on August 24th. So the progressives were out and any hope of transparency at any level was kaput. Daoud was a virulent anti-communist so he got a hit on the head and the Russians invaded followed by the Mujahideen, the Taliban and finally the Yanks. Who is next?

I got some severance pay (and $5 a day was more than enough to live well in the India) and headed east to Kashmir and trekked through the Himalaya for several weeks getting fit for Nepal trekking. Kashmir was bustling with tourists; Srinagar was lovely and the Himalaya is always lovely; got to 15,000 feet on the way to Amanarth Cave. Enough, off to Nepal to catch up with some Food for Workers.

When I got to Kathmandu a whole mob of food for workers were there. Brian Johnson and young Kevin had had a crack at K2 in Pakistan and other experienced ice and snow climbers were there; also Nelson Chase, Tom Grove, Young Kevin, with the Sufi Beard, , Jim Poplock, Charlie Arnold and Glen Rogers . Every morning we would trundle off to the Pleasure Room for Breakfast, enjoy some music, fresh baked bread and whatever else was on offer, all very pleasurable I assure you; then off to the bazar to get boots, crampons, ropes…etc. We decided to take the hard way to the Everest

Base Camp along the Tibetan Border. One of the local guides said it was dangerous; a steep moraine and high altitude with no help to be had.

Well we started at 4000 ft and walked for 10-12 days sleeping in villages where we would get a roof and a meal for $1 or so. Jim Poplock had a knack for languages so he did most of the yaking. When we got above the timber line we bought a goat from a Sherpa Family and Glen Rogers butchered it and with a few offsiders prepared a lovely roast goat meal on the outskirts of the village. The Tibetan Sherpas would wake at night and light a fire to warm the room and make a mug of Tibetan Tea in which they would add flour and salt; never got used to that. One of the Sherpas agreed to take us over the pass with his Yak so we could carry a few extra provisions. As it was we each had some museli and baked soya beans and jerky with us for the trip over the Pass. Each man carried his own gear. On the first night after departing from the village our Sherpa Guide opened the doors to a small temple and invited us to sleep inside but we had to increase his salary which we had already shook hands on and we thought that this guy was going to be trouble, wanting more and more as we continued to get higher and higher. I remember Tom Grove being particularly miffed but I doubt the chap understood the English Tom used to display his displeasure. Any way we fired him and we slept out in the open. Another day or two we reached the base of the Tesh Lapcha Pass. We had arrived on a glacier after navigating a Moraine and camped at 17,000 feet. . Tesi Lopcha (19,100 ft) was within sight but one of us was developing altitude sickness and had to be escorted quickly asap back to lower altitude. So we took a full day to discuss who was going back and who was going forward. The sun was out and we were all in our underdongers (lovely high altitude rays) but basically none of us wanted to return… a few more hours up the ridge and at the top of the pass you would see Tibet and Mt Everest in the distance. We had intentionally chosen this harder route rather then the standard tourist trek up to Everest Base camp. We were aware that a couple of guys had actually perished recently attempting the pass without the proper acclimation. One had to drink a lot of water and stay hydrated even though you weren't really thirsty. And this meant little sleep at night, just up and down peeing; sleeping on a glacier is no fun if you don't have the right gear and none of us had that gear.. So we put out boots and underwear and socks and anything else we could shove under the sleep bags to try and build up some insulation. So the discussion was at times heated as to who should go and who should stay. Brian remarked later , "Well it seems we didn't know each other for dogshit". Brian never pulled a punch. But in the end it was resolved, the sun went behind a peak and within a minute or two the temperature went from sunbathing in the raw to the water in camp freezing.

Early the next morning I got up and stuck my head out of the tent and saw Brian s head stuck out of his tent next to me. There were avalanches the previous day and now a snow storm…the snow falling horizontally, it looked ominous. . Brian said "Maybe someone is trying to tell us all something". I agreed…we all agreed and we all jumped out of our bags and broke camp and got down to lower altitudes asap. So none of us saw Tibet but as Nelson remarked, "there were lots of things to do and places to go in this wide world " and I was heading off to Goa with some of the Food for Workers.

Back to Kathmandu each at his own pace…I was the slowest being a Louisiana lad….I believe Nelson and Brian made it in record time. Charlie Arnold and I did a Meditation Course that the Tibetan Lamas put on and we happily went through the streets of Kathmandu singing the pep songs.

After Nepal a few of us went down to Goa and laid in the sun, eating seafood and tropical fruit. I headed off to Ceylon and the others dispersed all over the world. We received word from some of the Food for Workers who had gone home: "Don't come back to USA unless you have something specific in mind to do"

And in India every day you see something to blow your mind, the USA could wait.

In Delhi some months later, over a cup of coffee a WT (world traveler) told me the Aussies were handing out Permanent Residence to Blokes who knew how to do something. So down to my last $500 (either make my way back to NYC or east to Australia) I went over in my shorts and t shirt with a beard and sandals and was interviewed. "Who are you what are you?" I was asked. " I just finished up a 18 month program in Afghanistan supervising provincial rural development programs". "Oh Yes we could use a bloke like you", and bang got my Aussie Residency on the spot.

I landed in Darwin in Sept 1974 and on Dec 25th Cyclone Tracy came through and wiped the town off the map so I moved to Perth. Where Lo and Behold I bumped into Tom Groves and Jim Hicks in Perth . Had a beer and Tom said he was going to have another crack at Tesi Lopcha, that 19,100 foot pass in Nepal that had defeated us. Later the next year I got queries from Tom's Twin Brother as to his whereabouts and I informed him as to what I knew. A bit later I heard Toms family went to Nepal and with the help of a Nepali Policeman discovered poor old Tom had been murdered for his money in a mountain village where trekkers stay overnight. Very sad and shocking news.

Australia is where I still live today. I have been prospecting since 1983 and managed to make a living out of it. Got two daughters and two grandchildren and the Yanks protect us so all is good under heaven.

Sorry about all the exposition; I obviously read too much of Norman Mailer Waffle as a young lad.

Like to hear form the other Food for Workers now…it's been almost 50 years, what are you waiting for?

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PAUL BITTER and FRIENDS

THE BOYS
TAKE A BREAK

BEHIND THE MOSQUE — GARDEN THRIVES

SKANCHARAK WITH MY AFGHAN ASSISTANTS

THAT OLD INTERNATIONAL WITH NO BRAKES

JOHN LOOMIS AND FRIENDS

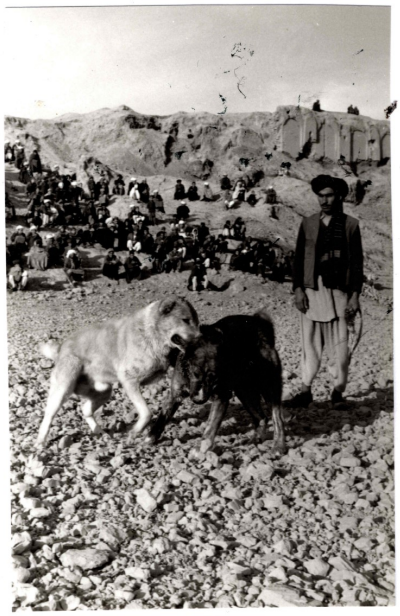
NEPAL TREKKING 1973

KEVIN & JIM
WASH DAY

GLEN & GANG CLEAN UP

BRIAN, TOM & NELSON

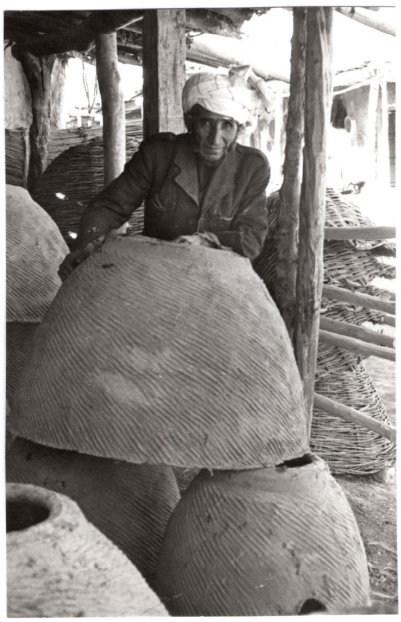
TOM & BRIAN



NATIONAL PASSTIME

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

RUSH HOUR IN SHEBREGHAN



BREAD OVENS FOR SALE

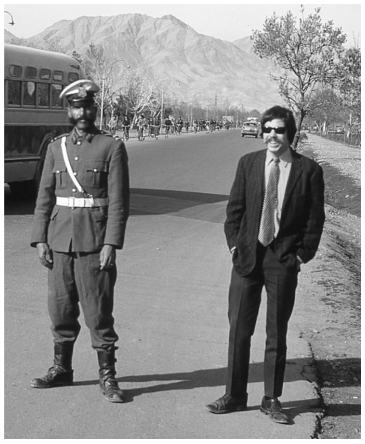
THE BEST MELONS ANYWHERE

SHEBREGHAN GOLD ARTIFATCS 21,000 PRICELESS OBJECTS AT TILLYA TEPE FROM 2000 YEARS AGO

IN 1972 THE AFGHANS STRUGGLED TO MAKE A BOX OF MATCHES THAT WORKED

RECOLLECTIONS OF AFGHANISTAN 1969-71- DONALD MAGINNIS PCV ARCHITECT

PART 2 *"Salam alickum. Lutvan kate ma Farsi bogo!"* "Please speak Farsi with me!"



Kabul Pul I Artan Bridge 1970

Unlike Iranian Farsi, Persian, Afghan Farsi or Dari was a very simple language. Iranians were reputedly more sophisticated and literate and the Afghans more profane, with more colorful argot or slang. We were told only about 10% of the Afghans were literate, thus the profusions of PCV teachers in TEFEL programs. The main language of the country is written in Arabic script from right to left, similar to Urdu in Pakistan and India. However, Arabic as is written and spoken is a much more complex language than Frasi. The other Afghan language, Pushtu was almost impossible to master, however some PCVs in Pathan areas did learn Pushtu, which is also very widely used in Pakistan.

Peace Corps language training was in small classroom groups with an Afghan teacher. No English was allowed. Learning was by rote or verbal repetition drills, probably similar to current Rosetta Stone or Babble programs, but without computers. No reading, writing or grammar was taught during training. We were taught three major verb tenses, to conjugate. There was the present, simple past and command or imperative tenses. No conditional, future or other verb tenses were used. The command tense was the present tense with a "B" sound at beginning spoken very firmly "*BURRA BAHAI !"* or "*Go safely".*

There was also a Farsi verb to do or make, *"kardan"* which is similar to the French *"faire"* or Spanish *"hacer"*. There were no gender rules and few articles or pronouns, but many modifiers. Some PCVs learned to read and write the script in country. In our office at the Housing and Town Planning Authority we did have our architectural drawings lettered in Farsi script. However, most PCVs spoke bazaar Farsi, or construction Farsi in our case.

Some of the more colorful nouns and phrases described animals, including those that could fly. The word *"morge"* was for a chicken and a *"feel morge"* was for literally an elephant chicken for a turkey, A *"morge obe"* or a water chicken was for a duck. However, the most unusual name was a *"shauparake charmi"* or a night flying leather butterfly for a bat. A mongoose was called a *"mush quorma"* or a stew mouse. My landlord knocked on my door and gave me congratulations, "*tabrik"* because he heard that "*Amrika awa mahora"* or the American astronauts were eating air or taking a stroll on the moon that night.

The verb to eat was *"hordan"* and the command tense as "*Bohor !".* However, the verb to eat was also used in some other phrases having nothing to do with the Afghan cuisine. To be cold or "*hanook"* which was frequently the case in the severe Afghan winters, was literally to "eat cold" or *"hanook hordan".* The word for snow was "*barf".* The snow came down not in pretty little white flakes, but in large frozen hunks or blobs. The *"barf"* had to be shoveled off of the flat mud rooves before it turned to ice and destroyed the roof.

Dogs or *"sags*", of which were plentiful, did not bite but "ate" people, especially young children. Afghan parents warned their children away from the many stray dogs in the streets and bazaars with *"sag mahora !"* or the dogs will eat you.

To take a walk in the park, or stroll outside was literally "to eat air" or "*awa mehora"* . When NASA landed on the moon it was widely reported on Kabul radio.

Unfortunately another usage of the command tense to eat was frequently heard in the bazaars and at work as *"GO BOHOR* !". It was not intended to be a compliment.

Buzhkashi game

The verb to pull or drag was *"kashidan"*. The national game was *"buzkashi bazi"* or literally a goat dragging game played on horseback with a headless goat. Another popular sport was wrestling, but in the fundamental Olympic form, as opposed to the American professional WWF form. Wrestlers were called "*palowans"* as were the mounted *"buzkashi*" horsemen.
Boxing was called *"box bazi*" or *"box kardan".* Mohammed Ali was popular with my landlord because he was a Muslim and fought an infidel, Smokin Joe Frazier for an unimaginable purse.

The verb to smoke was *"cigarette kashidan"* or to pull or drag on a cigarette, with or without *"charce"* or hashish. Serious smokers used *"chelams"* or large brass water pipes.

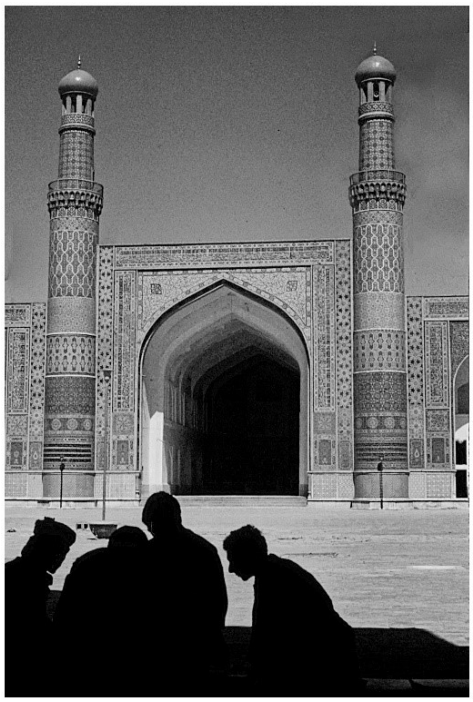
As in any male dominated society sex was always a topic of conversation in the workplace. Most marriages were forced or arranged with dowries. Many brides were young teenagers. The international phrases "*gig gig"* or "*chop chop"* was frequently used with the verb *"kardan".* There were other Farsi words for sex but I never heard a romantic expression for making love or *"faire amore*" as the French use. Unfortunately, the most widely used Farsi word for sex or love making between a man and a woman was the verb *"zardan"* which translates "to hit", but not to "hit on" or flirt. "*Zardan"* or "*mekana"* literally means to punch or strike a person.

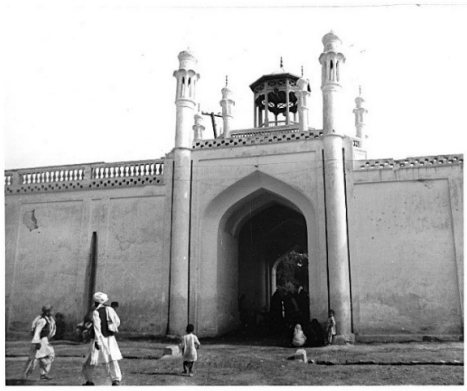
The expression *"bacha bazi"* or literally "boy games" had no relation to the *"buzkashi bazi"* game. I learned only through anecdotal conversation with our Afghan coworkers that a procurer of prostitutes, or a pimp was known as a "*morte gow"* or literally a "dead cow", and a brothel was a *"morte gow hana*" or a "dead cow house".

"Inshallah" or "If Allah wills it"

Most hospitals were separated by gender, and some further segregated between Sunni Afghans and the Shite Hazara minority. Most schools, or *"maketabs*" were also segregated by gender. I never visited a school for girls but I once visited a "*madressa"* for boys where the Koran was being taught. There was an outdoor class in a garden with an Afghan *"mullah"* or iman teaching the young boys the fundamental beliefs of Islam. The Koran is written in Arabic and all Moslem prayers are recited in Arabic five times daily and the faithful are called to prayers in Arabic from the minarets of mosques.

The mullah at the school spoke out the Koranic phrases, like *"Allah Akbar"* or "God is Great", in Arabic and the youn g boys stood up and repeated the words verbatim. There was an interpretation or translation in Farsi but no explanation, discussion, questions or debate about the true words of Allah. There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet. No argument. I always wondered if the segregated Afghan girls had the same religious teachings, and if the boys really understood or questioned the Arabic words they learned by rote and recited. nd the Mosque and minarets





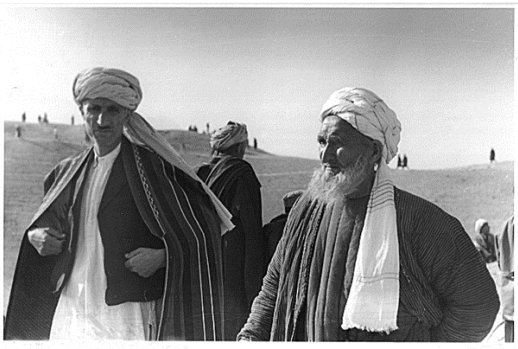
When I was young and attending Catholic masses some parts of the service ware in Latin. The Vatican removed the Latin from masses in the 1960s and now all services in the U S are celebrated in English, or Spanish, or French or even Vietnamese, but no Latin since it is not a modern spoken tongue. Catechism was taught separately from our academic subjects by very strict Catholic nuns. Some of the sisters were very hard disciplinarians and favored corporal punishment, but most did answer our questions about the church. I always wondered how much religion I would have retained if I was forced to recite Christian phrases or the ten commandments in Latin, with a big mean nun in a black habit correcting me with a switch across my backside.

I have observed and studied much Islamic architecture. I have also visited many mosques or *"masjits"*, shrines, and tombs or *"gombats"* in many Muslim countries, and even some in the United States. In Kabul I attended some funeral services in mosques and also observed many Moslem prayer services at a shrine in Mazar I Sharif, both inside and outside. I always removed my shoes as was required.

There are, to my knowledge no female members of the Islamic clergy. At all of the many prayer services that I saw, I noticed the faithful were men praying together towards Mecca all in unison. I never saw an Afghan woman or wife or a *"hamum"* praying alongside the men. I was told that the women attended and prayed separately in the balcony in the rear, and I occasionally verified that separate stair and entrance.

I was reminded of the many movie theatres I saw in the U S that were also segregated when the African American patrons sat in the balcony with a separate entrance, box office, and concessions They also sat in the back of the bus and had separate public restrooms. I saw many foreign females in the movie theatres in Kabul that showed films in English. However, never saw any Afghan women, uncovered or wearing *"chadris"*, attending films or seated among the men.

Tomb



Islamic architecture is beautiful with domes, arches, vaults, spires, minarets etc. Buildings are elaborately decorated with tile work of Arabic calligraphy because representation of the human form in such religious art is not allowed in the Koran. Afghan tea houses, shops, buses and lorrys also have the Arabic script displayed in posters and signs. Islam has heaven, or paradise and hell but no purgatory that I was aware of. Things that follow the Koran are *"halal"* or allowed and permitted. Forbidden things like pork or alcohol are *"haram"* or not permitted and sinful. An illegitimate person or a bastard is *"haram zada"* or the pro

Most Afghans are ethnically Indo European except for the minority Hazaras who had Mongol racial backgrounds. There were no racially black Afghans similar to African Americans, Negros or Dravidian Indians. The Afghans referred to foreign blacks as *"seeo post"* or literally "black skins", similar to Americans calling Indians or Native Americans "red skins", like the Washington NFL team. duct of a forbidden union or hit.

Afghanistan was a very dry brown or dun colored country with little green foliage and much mud or adobe type construction. Any spot of color looked brilliant against the local earth tones. The sky always looked bright blue except when overcast the snow clouds rolled in. The word for a color was a *"rang".* The word or the color tan was "*hawk",* or the same word for dust, or *"hawki"* for dusty. Thus the English word "khaki", for tan clothes or military uniforms, probably worked its' way over from Persia to the British Raj in India and into Afghan Farsi.

The words *"band"* Or *"bandi"* translated as a band or belt, or banning of something or someone. Thus the word *"kamerband"* or literally a waist band or belt or a cumerbund, as for formal evening wear in English. This was another phrase that probably made it into Farsi by way of Persia and the British Raj. A "*bandi bark*" or a "*bandelectrik"* was a hydroelectric dam as was found in the town of Pul I Kumrie. A *"bandi hana"* was a "house for the banned" or a jailhouse or prison.

1 "yak , 2 "du", 3 "se", 4 "char", 5 "pang" or "one, two, three, four, five"

A musical stringed instrument was called a *"du tar"* or "two strings". However, the instruments, which were similar to a lute or a guitar typically had many more than two strings, but not nearly as many as an Indian sitar that has two layers of numerous strings. Of course, the Afghan string music was not as complicated as classical Indian sitar ragas of Ravi Shankar or as rich as the Delta blues guitar of Robert Johnson or the rock guitar of Jimi Hendrix.

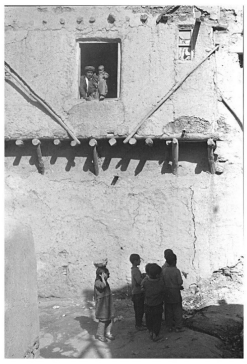
The "*Pang Sheer"* valley was named the valley of the "five lions", although there were no lions found in Afghanistan, save for the Kabul zoo.

The days of the week as I remember were oddly called or numbered as follows:
"*Yak shambay*" or day one of the work week or our Saturday and the Jewish Sabbath
"*Du shambay*" or day two of work or our Sunday and the Christian Sabbath
"Se shambray" or day three of work or our Monday
"*Char shambay"* or day four of work or our Tuesday
"*Pang shambay*" or day five of work or our Wednesday
"*Shambay*" or our Thursday or a half work day
"Jama" or our Friday or no work on the Moslem Sabbath

Many noted mosques from Turkey to India are named the *"Jama Masjit" or* "Friday Mosque" for services on their Sabbath. In Kabul we went to Christian services on *"Jama".*

Typical Afghan houses had little furniture as most people sat, slept, cooked, ate, listened to the radio and prayed on carpets or mats on the floor. Windows were located very low at about 1'-0" above the floor level so that people could enjoy the view while they sat. Foreigners and well to do Afghans could find chairs and couches. A table was called a *"mes"* possibly after the Spanish or Italian words. Clothes storage areas were called "*amoiris"* probably after the French word "armoire". Most Afghan houses had no actual constructed closets, because they had very few clothes to hang up. Afghan beds were made of wood frames with rope woven between to hold a mattress. The name for a bed was a *"char poy"* or literally "four feet" repre-

Also typical Afghan houses and small buildings had flat mud or concrete rooves called a *"poche".* There was little rainfall and no need or words for gutters. Some more prominent buildings had sloped tin or metal rooves called "*iron poches".*



Afghan House

Afghanistan had beautiful carpets and many carpet shops in the bazaars. The most notable design was called a *"feel poy"* or literally an "elephant foot" (see the word for turkey above) with geometric octagonal details similar to the footprint of an elephant in the field of the carpet. Afghan carpet dyes were basically limited to red and black with some white, orange or yellow hues mixed in. The designs were very distinctive and purer and simpler with fewer colors than the more complex neighboring Iranian carpets, or those found in India or Pakistan

Most of the Farsi vocabulary I learned was in Kabul where I worked and lived. There were many "*feringees"* or *"horigees"* or foreigners living there, as well as *"turistars*" or tourists called "WTs" or world travelers, passing through from Europe to India and beyond. Some passed through to avail themselves of the cheap and plentiful hashish or "*charce"* or opium or *"teriyaki".* Many English words were adopted as part of the local lexicon. A bicycle, of which there were many, was a *"bicekel".* When one had a flat one went to the local bike shop and asked the owner to inflate the tire or *"pump kardan*" or "make a pump". A truck was called a *"lorry"* from the British. An architect or engineer was called *"engineer sahib"* but sometimes a "*mohandes shaib".*

Other PCVs in the remote villages and provinces probably learned a better form of Farsi with less slang, profanity and adopted foreign words. All languages are altered and evolved through time and events. I often wonder how the Farsi language has evolved and changed after 40 years of Soviet, Taliban and U S influence and presence.

Afghan Man and Boy

Donald Maginnis Engineer Shaib Architect June 4, 2020

THE PEACE CORPS YEARS--A View 25 Years Later
By
Walter Blass, Peace Corps Director

I have appended the "End-of Tour" report I prepared for Bob Steiner and the Peace Corps as I traveled home in 1968 because I think it represents fairly how I felt about the experience at the time. Chris Downing said she thought it was "whiny" and not up to the best that I had to give. Actually reading it over after 25 years have passed, I think it gives a rather fair picture of what happened. I should add some things that I did not say because they were more personal.

One aspect of my Peace Corps service had to do with its motivation. I tried in the letters to Christopher about my religious and moral views to explain how I came to join the Peace Corps. I think I spoke there somewhat of the comment that Janice had made that I had a Messianic streak, and that going to Afghanistan was living out that side of me. In fact, what happened was close but quite differently motivated.

As I wrote Chris, I had been feeling for many years a sense of unworthiness for having survived the Holocaust. It was never a conscious feeling, never really came up in conversation or in the discussions we had with the marriage counselor, Mrs. Horowitz. Yet she picked up on what she thought was my wearing my hair "like a Russian" which she did not like, but of course I wasn't about to change it to please her! By 1965, I had this dream about the Queen Mary burning out of control in the middle of the channel in the Hudson river and our(Janice and I) seeking refuge on a brick-carrying barge. At the time, I interpreted that dream as saying that I needed to go and do something about the state of the world. Shortly thereafter a letter from the Peace Corps arrived and I was off on that exploration.

Once we had read the letter together, Janice said for the first time that she could see us going this time (she had violently objected the previous time in 1960 when I had been invited by Carl Major Wright of the United Nations to accompany him to the then Belgian Congo to help him administer a province.) So I wrote the Peace Corps back and said, yes I would be interested in a staff position. I also called my friend Vince D'Andrea who was the Deputy Director of Psychiatry at Peace Corps Headquarters and talked to him at some length about what the possibilities were. He was very enthusiastic and I came down when it was convenient to be interviewed by various Peace Corps executives. Then I went back to New Jersey and waited for their reaction. They called and asked if I could come down again, they were very interested.

Janice and I took the train to Washington the night of the first New York City blackout, thereby avoiding what would have been a very disagreeable evening. Instead we stayed with Vince and Shirley D'Andrea in Washington, and the next morning I interviewed at Peace Corps headquarters. It was all very impressive since it rapidly became clear that the Regional Directors I met were looking at me as a possible Country Director, something that was far above my expectations based on the invitational letter. But it seems that Vince put in a good word for me, and possibly Maurice Bean, who originated my name, may have said something about my "elevated" position at AT&T. In fact, the discussions quickly revealed that they were going to offer me considerably more than my AT&T salary! I spoke with the Africa Director who found my bilingual capabilities very much to his liking, but whom I basically turned down on all French-speaking African countries because I said I knew too well how the French still controlled these ex-colonial countries with a shadowy French government presence(see the obituary about Jacques Foccart in NYTIMES 3/20/97). Then the East Asia/Pacific team asked if I were interested in Korea, Singapore, etc. It was George Carter,

the North Africa/Near East/South Asia regional director who pushed me to take over the Iran, or possibly the Afghanistan program. George was the roommate of Janice's boyfriend, Ernie Howell, when the guys were at Harvard and Janice was in a difficult but intense relationship with Ernie for over three years. So as soon as I knew I was to meet Carter, I told Janice of the offer and she laughed at the coincidence. Eventually Carter asked me about my wife, and I replied with some amusement that he had known her before me, and possibly better because of what his roommate might have told him. Carter was greatly amused by all this, and seems to have taken an instant liking to me--no doubt because he liked Janice and evidently was quite critical of the way that Ernie had treated her. I refused to take over the Iran program because of my prior acquaintance with Mahmoud Pahlevi, the brother of the Shah of Iran as a classmate at Choate, and my following the none too savory exploits of that family over the years since Choate. Secondly, the Peace Corps Director in Iran had just been relieved because he had become paranoiac about the volunteers and kept them from going into his office with a Marine guard and a rope across the stairs. At 35, I didn't think I was mature enough to handle a turnaround situation such as that required. What's more it was a program with 350 volunteers in a country of 50 million people, vastly larger than Afghanistan. By contrast, that program had been in the hands of Bob Steiner, whom I came to like and respect immediately on meeting him (he was in Washington on temporary duty.) Furthermore there were only about 200 volunteers, two thirds of them in Kabul. Lastly Afghanistan had fascinated me since I was unable to write a Master's thesis on the country when the then American expert flatly refused to let me have access to his research.

After some more negotiating with Carter and Bob Steiner, who was about to succeed him as Regional Director, I agreed to go to Afghanistan and the recommendation went up to Sargent Shriver. The interview with him turned out to be fascinating, if difficult. For one thing he kept me waiting for 5 hours. Fortunately, Bob Pearson, the Desk Officer and someone whom I came to like immensely, was willing to stay with me and wait until Shriver actually came into the Peace Corps office from the "War-on-Poverty" office where he worked a regular 8 hour day, and then get to the point where he was ready to see me. That turned out to be after 8 PM. Shriver started off with an immediate confrontational question: "You went to Swarthmore, are you going to write a book about your Peace Corps experience? Do you think you're going to improve the GNP of Afghanistan? What will you do without a telephone? There's nothing in your resume about any experience with post-adolescents: what makes you think you can deal effectively with 200 of them?" The interview lasted for 20 minutes and I fielded the questions as best I could. After it was over and I had my hand on the doorknob I asked him if I had been accepted so that I could tell my AT&T bosses what was likely to happen. He replied curtly without looking up that I'd be informed. When I called Janice that night, she too asked what happened, and I was forced to tell her that the ball game was over but I didn't know the score yet, and might not for another several weeks. In fact, within the week I was called and told that Shriver had agreed to hire me, the very last overseas appointment he made before Jack Vaughn took over the agency.

We went through the FBI background investigation that precedes any high-level Federal appointment. That led to some amusing comments from our neighbors who repeated what the Feds had asked them about our drinking habits, whether we had any strange visitors, etc. Eventually I agreed to take a leave-of-absence from AT&T for two years and closed my office there. It came with a good deal of noise. Many people, both friends and not such good friends, thought I was doing something very foolish. How would this help my career, they asked. One Assistant VP even asked why I would want to go to Africa! Others thought I was just living out the "Camelot myth" that President Kennedy had pushed and now was already two years dead. But I persisted and was greatly helped by Hank Boettinger whom I reported to, and Alex Stott who was my Vice -President. They saw beyond the

immediate and realized that someone who had considerable potential within AT&T would be greatly more valuable because he understood the Washington dimension as well as living overseas. It was an insight that was not widely shared in 1966, and indeed was not to be realized by most AT&T executives until after the break-up in 1982 and the formal entry of AT&T into overseas markets.

On March 25, 1966, six days before my 36th birthday, I flew with Carter and a whole bunch of other Peace Corps staffers from Washington to New Delhi for a regional conference with the new Director, Jack Vaughn. Vaughn was a truly peculiar character. A former welterweight boxer in Latin America, he had drawn Lyndon Johnson's attention for his knowledge of the area and had been made special ambassador to deal with the many problems that came up in that part of the world. Then, once Johnson was able to maneuver Shriver—Kennedy's brother-in- law --out of managing both the War on Poverty and the Peace Corps, he replaced him with Vaughn at the Peace Corps. I had not met Vaughn before the conference but he did not make a very good impression on me. In the first place he came late, and like so many senior executives had to be briefed by one of his flunkies as to what had taken place before his arrival. That turned out to be have been a major set of complaints by the 12 country directors about Washington, the U.S. Embassies and many other problems.

But before I heard Vaughn, I wanted to see something of India for myself. We arrived at 4:30AM on a Sunday morning after a 32 hour flight on Pan American, stopping at virtually each European capital on the way (London, Paris, Rome, Athens, then in Beirut and Teheran, and checked into the Ford Foundation Center for International Affairs in a very pleasant section of New Delhi. I, on the other hand, wanted to see the old part of Delhi and took a taxi there which was just waking up. After a couple of hours of wandering around there, I felt the need to get back to "civilization" and went to the Quaker Meeting in New Delhi. It was only the first of many shocks I was to encounter in Asia between the traditional, and the Western veneer. The only thing that Friends spoke about in Meeting was some upcoming conference in England, and no one mentioned the poverty, the ill health or any of the things I had just seen for the first time with my own eyes.

The advent of Vaughn to the conference brought yet another discontinuity. He announced in response to some complaints from the directors present that he would not force any more volunteers than the country directors wanted. Within a few hours of that statement, he was called to the telephone where, it turned out, LBJ informed him that he had just agreed with Indira Gandhi that 800 more PCV's would be sent to India. So within a matter of hours, Vaughn showed how politicized the Peace Corps had become under LBJ and how limited his own power as Director was. I was quite nervous at the conference and took a lot of teasing because I spent my time near the window swatting the ubiquitous flies. "Culture shock," my new colleagues called it, and I guess in retrospect they were quite right.

At the end of the week-long conference, I flew to Kabul with Bob McCluskey, the Acting Director while Steiner was substituting in Iran for the newly fired paranoiac director. I was determined to make the most of the week and tried my hardest to learn the names of every volunteer I met, in addition to the staff and the Afghans I was introduced to, the American Ambassador, John Steeves, and the Embassy staff who would arrange to find us a house by June. I was astounded how few staff McCluskey had to deal with 130 volunteers in Kabul alone and another 70 in the provinces. But at least, I had some idea of what lay ahead when I took the ARIANA-DC6 to Beirut a week later.

There I was nearly grounded when PAN AM bumped me and six other passengers because they had overbooked PA 001 to New York. They offered to put me up at the King George hotel, then the epitome of luxury in a calm and rich Beirut. But I was much too eager to get home and tell my family what they might expect when we arrived in June. So I went out on the tarmac every time a flight arrived with markings that suggested they might fly on to Europe. Fortunately within a few hours a British Overseas Airways VC-10 arrived and the cabin crew volunteered the information that they had lots of room. So we got to London well ahead of PA 001, and I was able to connect with the ongoing flight to New York.

Janice and I went together to Washington for a week of orientation, and I then stayed for another 5 weeks. Almost immediately I got into trouble by questioning the accuracy of some of the manuals that were handed out. One of them concerned the role of the staff wife and the problems that she might face. It sounded like a manual for a goody-goody-two-shoes, and I had heard in my week in Delhi and my talk with staff in Afghanistan enough to realize it was hardly an ideal life. When I spoke up and questioned the adequacy of such instructions, I was rebuked by some of the orientation staff who felt that I was bad-mouthing living overseas. But two years of living with all the family problems that occurred only reinforced that first impression.

Then we packed, sold the house, and started on our journey to the East. Actually we started by flying to Denmark where Janice's college roommate was living in Copenhagen with her mentally ill husband and two children the same age as ours. We went to Tivoli, we ate the marvelous food and thoroughly relaxed before going on. As I pointed out in the end-of tour report, Janice was just getting over a urinary infection, and Denmark was surely better for that than flying non-stop.

Even the journey to Teheran where we spent the night was eventful. I had never been paged in an airport before, but in Geneva where we changed planes, I was so paged by SAS, the airline we had just flown on. I went to the appropriate desk and was told that I owed them some $300 and change for excess baggage. It turned out that since we had to put all our hand-held baggage on the X-ray inspection line at Kastrup airport in Copenhagen, they counted it as part of the weight allowance rather than outside of it. Since they said nothing about being overweight back in Copenhagen, I refused to pay then and there and said that I'd take it up with the SAS agent in Kabul, and they agreed with that. (He later waived the charge since he very much wanted the Peace Corps' trade.) So we flew on to Teheran, arriving late in the evening on the 5th of June. When we emerged from the air-conditioned plane on to the steps down to the tarmac, I thought we had been caught in the backwash of the engines, so hot was the air! It was probably in the 90's still after 10PM. We took a taxi to a hotel and every move was questioned by at least one of the children who wanted to know why and how and what; for example, "Daddy, why does the taxi driver run all the red lights?" The next morning we took an IRANAIR Boeing 727 to Kabul, had a fine breakfast aboard and arrived within 90 minutes as against a 4-hour trip on the propeller-driven DC6. As we flew over the Iranian desert you could see the tents of the nomads outlined sharply as black dots against the yellow sand, and the khrarez, the underground water channels that brought precious water so that it would not evaporate on its way to fields and humans. By 9:30 AM we were on the ground being greeted by Bob McCluskey and a group of volunteers whom I had met earlier but who were now finished with their two years' service and headed back to Europe and the United States on the same aircraft. We had arrived. Almost immediately I was plunged into the Embassy politics. I was handed a cable from Washington that insisted that terminating PCV's were not allowed to go to or through the Soviet Union--lest they be blackmailed or otherwise made the subjects of anti-American propaganda. I demurred since I couldn't see what authority I had over a volunteer who was technically no longer a U.S. Government

employee. Furthermore the fare was a great deal less if they flew the Russian airline Aeroflot through Moscow to East Berlin. That decision made me popular with the departing volunteers but did not help with my relations to the Embassy.

The house the Embassy had found for us, called E-26, turned out to be the former CIA Station chief's house. It was large, with a huge living room roughly 60' long as an arc with French doors facing an inside garden, and the bedrooms off an L on the side. You could easily entertain 100 people in it and we did that many times at Peace Corps get-togethers, when we would have a soiree with singing and discussions, and receptions for various visitors. The children liked it because they each had a room of their own--something we could not afford in New Jersey--and we quickly adopted--or were adopted by a puppy dog from the juie (sewer channel) outside which the neighboring children offered ours. Then we bought a donkey which the kids could ride in the garden. Janice especially loved the pine trees which would whistle quietly in the evening breezes, reminding her of the Maine woods on Peaks Island and the sound of the rushing sea. We ended up with three servants, a head "bacha", his nephew, and a gardener who evidently was also a distant relative. Anwar, the first of these claimed to speak English but Janice quickly found out that speaking Farsi--actually the Dari version of it spoken in Afghanistan-- was more likely to lead to mutual understanding. If she spoke English Anwar would inevitably answer "yes," but if she spoke Dari, he would question her precisely on what she meant, leading to far better execution! He had worked as a cook for an English and then a German woman, and actually knew how to make Pfannkuchen, something which delighted both children and me.

Bakhteri, his nephew was a bright lad of about 19 who did what his uncle told him until one day he got a hold of the keys to the Peace Corps Travelall, an International Harvester 7-passenger vehicle which we had bought from a Columbia University team member. Bakhteri drove the car around town and was stopped by a Marine who couldn't understand what an Afghan was doing at 2 in the morning with an official vehicle. The Marine woke me up by telephoning and asking what was going on, and that was how I learned of the purloined car keys. The next morning I quietly asked Bakhteri if he had used the car, and he responded no, he hadn't. I confronted him with the evidence of the Marine phone call and then went out and inspected the car, finding footprints on the back seats, a characteristic that Afghans had used the vehicle since they squatted on their haunches, rather than actually sit on the seats. His uncle then took care of the disciplinary steps.

Actually the Travelall had an unusual history. Ed Friedman, the of the Columbia University teaching team in Afghanistan and now Dean of the School of Engineering at Stevens Institute in Hoboken, NJ, wanted to sell the vehicle before returning to the States. We needed a newer vehicle since the jeeps that Bob Steiner had purchased five years earlier were at the end of their useful life. Peace Corps/Washington was asked for permission, and they came back with a long list of typical Stateside questions and a demand for more bargaining. George O'Bannon, then Associate Director for Health spoke quite good Dari and he gave us a marvelously coded reply: Jagra Nakoo (Don't bargain.) We knew that only Pearson and Steiner would understand the Dari in Washington and would run interference for us with the administrative people who were hassling us. Sure enough the trick worked and we got approval for the purchase.

Gradually every one settled in. The children were registered in the American International School. Janice found a way to teach in a special school for married teenage girls who had not finished high school. I gradually started mastering the responsibilities of a country director. No sooner had I been there for three days when a young couple came to ask for permission to marry. Under Peace Corps rules, the Country Director had to give permission if two volunteers came from different sites and it would involve readjusting work assignments.

That was really a feint for an in loco parentis role, which wasn't all that uncalled for, giving the immaturity of many of the volunteers. X. and Y. seemed just a little too eager and somehow I smelled something fishy, but I couldn't figure out what. I asked them to come back in a week, and then for yet a third meeting. At the end of that meeting, as they left, I asked her to come back, closed the door and told her flat out that I was no psychologist but something felt amiss and what was it. I was not prepared for what followed. She dissolved into tears for five minutes, then told me that I was the first person in nearly a year and a half who had picked up her problem, namely that she was a nymphomaniac who wanted to get married desperately to stop herself from sleeping around. She said she'd tried to talk to the psychologist and psychiatrist in training, to the doctor in Kabul, to the staff but everyone just shrugged and told her to get on with her own life. I told her I didn't think that getting married would solve that problem and that she needed some professional counseling, after which she could marry X. if she chose. I asked Washington for permission to send her back for medical reasons and indeed she left under those terms at no cost to her.

Roberta Audrey was my secretary and was not-so-affectionately called "Dragon Lady" for her aquiline features and angular body and also for her protective attitude for the Director. She was married to an AID Administrative officer and knew the U.S. Government regulations backwards and forwards. Without her I would have been lost. She coached me in budgets, how to deal with the Embassy, what to do to stall Washington, and how to handle a million complaints from volunteers. Eventually I even got her to treat the volunteers with more honey than vinegar, and to allow her essential warmth to come through. I managed to get out of town to visit provincial sites a little, but not enough to satisfy most of those volunteers. At the end of three months, I decided to go back myself to the Group IX selection conference rather than trust another staff member who would not be as tough. That decision was based on what I had watched as Dr. DeMaine was the field representative at the Group VIII Selection Board I had attended in Texas back in May. Rather than take a tough stance with questionable trainees, he just said OK to most volunteers, even those I had a lot of questions about. Once I saw how poorly those "questionables" performed in country, I decided that I wasn't going to let the quality control spigot slip out of my hands.

I say tough also because in those three months, some 20 nurses quit the program in spite of the threat of having to pay for their own way home. They came in in droves, crying, angry, but clear about what they wanted and what they didn't. It was true that they had an extraordinarily difficult task: to teach Afghans modern nursing techniques, while the Afghan definition of a nurse was the pre-Florence Nightingale one of a nurse as a prostitute or camp-follower. Most Afghans couldn't understand how any father, brother or husband could permit an unaccompanied female to do what these women did. Most came from the Midwest, were gentle, decent, but fairly naive women who came to do good, and were greatly disappointed when the realities were widely at variance with their image. One Black volunteer from East St. Louis told me her Afghan Nursing Chief was a son-of-a-bitch. I asked her if she had never met that kind in East St. Louis. No, she said, never. So I made her a bet: if you run into one when you get back, you send me a postcard and tell me so. Sure enough at Christmas, I got my postcard, " I wish I was back!" The result was that I made up my mind I wasn't going to let volunteers into the program who couldn't hack it all the way.

Janice and I waited around for several hours at the airport on the day in question for the ARIANA plane to be repaired so I could fly to Beirut and on to the U.S. She was sad to see me leave for almost a month, and have the full responsibility for the children herself. On the other hand, I could report back

to both sets of parents in a way that was just not possible via the mails. Also I could bring back things that were unobtainable in Kabul--such as fresh fruit, salads, vegetables and plentiful meat. I flew off to the U.S., but not before being hounded by some provincial governor who had his eye on a secretary (whom he could chase around the desk, of course.) I was inwardly furious that he would bother me, but I was gracious and said I'd talk about it with him when I got back!

My parents met me at JFK and drove me to Deal, debriefing me all the way. I liked seeing them and was happy to report what all we were doing, the problems we faced and the ways we found to solve them. Then I flew to Texas for the Selection Board.

This was my second such Board and this time I was a lot better prepared, and of course, no longer just a bystander, but the country director with an implicit veto of who came and who got washed out. The University of Texas was not exactly the ideal environment for trainees. They had regular dormitory rooms with hot and cold water, showers down the hall, and got solid American food. They met in classrooms, exercised in a gym and lived in a hot but generally salubrious climate (Austin, TX.) I was appalled to see the conditions which would not prepare them in any way for what they could expect in Afghanistan. The exception was that they had been present when a mentally deranged student took a gun to the top of the University Memorial tower and systematically shot a dozen or more students from his perch before being gunned down by the police. At least, they had learned about accidental violence, of which they would see plenty in macho Afghanistan.

To help, I was prepared with a dozen or so situations (see examples below) which I could present to trainees as flash cards during a 25 minute interview. I interviewed all 100 trainees,made copious notes to myself, and then compared those with the assessment of the staff. The variety and dispersion of quality among the trainees was immense. There were several doctors in the program, including Joe Mamlin, former Chief Resident at Indianapolis General Hospital, Frank Baldwin, orthopedist in Ithaca, NY and Dr McClelland M.D., an insurance doctor from _____. Among the doctors, he worried me the most, next to Mrs.Baldwin who complained loud and long. But in the latter case, I was reassured by an old classmate from Swarthmore, Dr. Oliver Wolcott. He was the psychologist on the team and he said that my problems would not come from her, since she had an outlet for her concerns, but from the silent types who would crack under the strain. With regard to Dr. McClelland, I was instantly suspicious. What did he know of acute tropical diseases? Could he actually teach medicine? The psychologist who headed the Board assured me that all was well and that the people at the V.A. hospital said he was quite competent. My suspicions remained, but I couldn't get firm facts to back them up. The psychologist derided my views, asking whether I was qualified to reject a Board-certified Internist. In the end I took him, but he didn't last 3 months!

A woman I didn't take was [W. (?)]. She was bright enough and did well in Dari and the local culture. In fact she told me she had already been in Afghanistan. I asked her how she got around; she answered, hitch-hiking. Now my radar was really humming. Western women don't hitch hike in Afghanistan, except at peril to their honor if not their lives. Any difficulties, I asked. Oh, no, she replied, no problems at all. The instructional staff subsequently described her as eager to jump into bed with anyone who could help her get by, language instructors, assessment staff, anyone. She edged up to the desk during the interview, letting her knees rest on the edge of my desk while her skirt slid not so modestly back along her thighs. The gambit misfired: I decided firmly to reject her, however great the potential--too high a risk.

And so it went with 30% of the group. It was a bloody bath and the Selection Officer (not Wolcott) was none too pleased. But I felt that I had probably accomplished my objective and those who went in-country would stay the term--and they did!

After the Selection Board I expressed my dismay with the siting of the training program and met John Bing (a former volunteer) in-country to go around parts of Colorado to find another site. This did not sit well with the University staff and I was exposed to an LBJ-like treatment to convince me to leave the program in Austin. Hints were dropped about my coming to teach after my Afghanistan service, possibly to go `skinny dipping' at the ranch of the Director, even some possible emoluments were discreetly mentioned. But my mind was made up and I relied on John Bing. He had heard of two in Colorado: Red Rocks State Park, and the Ft. Lupton Migrant Farm Labor Camp. The latter was a dusty, far away tent city for 600 laborers, mostly Mexican and Indian and their families who would pick the crops as they ripened. The Experiment-in-International-Living would administer the program, the trainees would have to hike some 200-600 ft. just to go to the toilet and inter-cultural exposure was inevitable. I loved the site and told Bing to sign the contract.

Going back to Peace Corps/Washington after that 30% reject rate was to walk into a meat grinder. I was roundly criticized but I stood my ground and told them it was better to wash people out in training than have them wash out after starting work in country. Few had a come-back to that observation, but most accused me of pusillanimity: risk-averse businessman doesn't understand 23-year olds and tries to be 100% sure. I took my lumps but held my ground. Fewer washouts meant better programming, higher morale and less griping. Steiner backed me up, and I returned to Deal, and flew back.

No sooner had I returned than the crisis about the surplus commissary food crisis erupted. As will be obvious from the formal report, I goofed. The Embassy commissary had decided to get rid of a couple of tons of surplus food. I thought that once the food had become property of an Afghan middleman it was perfectly fine for the Peace Corps households to buy it; in fact both principle and the "wink" between the Embassy and the Afghan middleman which I was not aware of, got to be realities from the point of the view of the volunteers. I tried to be helpful and ended up in the soup. That's how you learn, I found out.

Group IX needed to be settled in but the new deputy was quite another story. One of the things I had learned in Washington was that the deputy I was supposed to get, was sent to India as a regional director instead. I found out in late September that the former rep in Jamaica, Mike Edwards, was going to be the new Deputy and that he would be arriving shortly. I hardly had time to scout out anything about him before he arrived with wife and two children, 14 and 8, beyond having dinner with the two of them. We invited them to stay with us in our new house. Within a day, his wife was in such culture shock that she flatly refused to go out of the house! I took Mike to work and introduced him around but he was nearly catatonic. Evidently, no one had told them anything about Afghanistan and they were totally unprepared for the climate, the altitude, the desert, the food, the harshness, the language, you name it, they didn't have the vaguest clue. It was embarrassing, no less for them than for me, and the younger child, an 8-year-old girl, clung to her mother's skirts like a toddler. She repeated every scary thing about Afghans and Afghanistan she heard from her mother's lips. The 14 year old boy was enrolled in the American International School, but he shortly got into trouble with drugs and truancy. Mike was present but took hardly any initiative. I was distraught because I had McCluskey in mind as a role model, and clearly Edwards was no McCluskey. At the same time, I confess that I missed the virtues of Mike Edwards. While he was generally very quiet--and still is--he was a shrewd observer and got along famously with many

of the volunteers. Furthermore, he could and did negotiate sensibly and with results. In many ways the very differences in style from me were an excellent complement which I was not then prepared to see. The family situation, however, went from bad to worse. His wife, it turned out, had a miscarriage just before she left and naturally it took some time before she recovered her strength. In time they moved into their own house. But the problems with the boy got worse, I didn't feel much support from Mike, and eventually the doctor attached to the Embassy strongly suggested that Mrs. Edwards be returned to the States. They stayed 10 months. We threw a farewell party for them, and all the divisions in the Afghanistan Peace Corps surfaced. It was a dreadful experience. Mrs. Edwards got drunk, Janice was livid, Mike did his damnedest to smooth things over, and I just prayed that they would actually board the plane. They did and early in our second summer his replacement arrived, Ray Feichtmeir. [In 2002, Lynn Edwards died, some time after their son, who died from a drug overdose. Mike is a contributing editor for the National Geographic society and had remarried prior to his ex's demise.]

Ray was a self-made millionaire in San Francisco real estate development, had a delightful, vibrant wife (Rachel Baleyat) with a first class mind--and to the manor born as well(her family owned a vineyard in the Napa Valley with a real chateau)--and they brought three of their sons, a daughter having stayed behind in college. He seemed ideal for the job. But when I introduced him to the Ambassador, Robert Neumann, sparks flew. It was clear that Ray had an authority problem equal to or greater than many of the volunteers. Not only that, but he categorically refused to learn the language. With the volunteers, however, he was a huge success. He stepped into vacuums, he sensed what needed to be done and I was greatly relieved. Shortly after his arrival, I took off for Ankara for a termination conference, with the expectation that I could spend a few days in Istanbul, technically in Europe, and certainly a wonderful chance to relax for a few days by the seaside. The contrast between the two of us when I returned was palpable. I was exhausted after a year of running the program almost alone, had contracted amoebic dysentery, and was having difficulty framing adequately what the Peace Corps effort was all about. Ray came in like a ray of sunshine, wowed the volunteers with his energy and personality, and seemed like all the world just what the program needed.

Janice and the kids and I took advantage of his arrival to get three weeks of vacation in Kashmir. We flew to Lahore, then to Srinagar and rented a houseboat. But the competition among the boat-borne merchants was so intense almost that we had no time to ourselves before some new arrival came with rugs, jewelry, furs, food or something. We decamped for the mountains and found an absolute jewel of a place in Gulmarg, elevation 9,000 ft. A smallish village at the top of a long pony ride, itself starting at the railhead, proved to be perfect for the entire family. The kids were free to roam around as they saw fit because there were no cars, Janice was waited on hand and foot and breathed a clean pollen-and-dust-free mountain air--in Kabul her hay-fever bothered her a lot-- and I had views of the mountains and the possibility of hikes such as I had not dreamed of. The guide even took me by horse to a glacier at 13,000 ft and only my thigh muscles were tired when we climbed back down. We returned refreshed to Kabul.

Simultaneously, a political time bomb exploded. A Pakistan newspaper alleged that almost all the Prime Minister's Cabinet had been paid in one way or another in CIA funds through a series of secret conduit organizations, including the Asia Foundation. The Peace Corps was implicated in the latter connection, and we started having to explain all over again why there was no connection between the work of the CIA and Peace Corps. The political climate soured quickly and new volunteer assignments were difficult to get. In fact even existing assignments became questionable. Volunteer behavior was questioned as

never before. [Remember this was fall 1967 with 500,000 American tropps in former Indochina.] Schoolchildren wanted to know how many Vietnamese the American bombers had killed the night before. Radio Peking broadcast casualty reports from Viet Nam daily. The Interior Minister took me on at a cocktail party and slyly asked if I knew Mary and Bill, Suzanne and Marty, etc. etc. He was referring rather obviously to Peace Corps couples cohabiting without benefit of wedlock. Then he launched into his credo: "Don't you think, Mr. Blass that it might be possible to strike some compromise ground between the chadoor of the Afghan women and the liberated morals of the volunteers?" I had to agree, but I could hardly change the life style of a couple of hundred volunteers.

The Political officer at the Embassy called me over one morning and wanted to know if there was going to be another revolution launched by the university students. I pleaded total ignorance and when he ordered me to find out, I pointed out that political intelligence was his bag, not mine. He pressed the point, stating that American lives were at peril, and that I should tell him if the students were armed. I refused point blank and threatened to drag him into the Ambassador's office to have the latter read him the protocol from the Attorney-General, Robert Kennedy, that flatly forbade the Peace Corps from any intelligence activity. Needless to say, I did make some discreet inquiries of PCV's and found the story much exaggerated. These stories indicated, however, a worsening political climate, one that all of us suffered under. I wrote about all this to Steiner and he replied, quoting Churchill, "You are being forged in the fires of adversity." No truer words were spoken about this 37-year old Country Director.

At the end of the Indian summer, when we could still use the International Club pool an event occurred that seemed quite passing, but that reverberated for years in my soul. We went as a family to the pool one Sunday afternoon, and as we walked by the pool, I saw a small child floating in the pool, blowing bubbles. At first I thought that was quite cute, until it dawned on me that the child was less than 2 years old and quite incapable of doing this voluntarily. So I dove in, dragged the little girl over to the edge and immediately started artificial respiration. Within a minute a crowd gathered and I was given conflicting advice in 5 languages. Fortunately the child revived quite promptly and her father rushed her to the hospital. Later, the father returned and graciously thanked me for saving his daughter's life, asked me for my card and said he would be in touch. He later invited me to a big party in my honor and presented me with a handmade lapis lazuli ring. It turned out he was a German engineer working with the Embassy on the German foreign aid project. I didn't make that much of the event, not even mentioning it to Peace Corps/Washington. No letter from me to my parents remains that mentions this, except a reply from my mother asking for more details to a letter my wife had written. It seemed like such an ordinary thing to do. In retrospect, however, it grew in importance. I had saved a German child's life just as I had been spared, more by chance than by design. Now I was even with God: somehow I had earned surviving the Holocaust. I spoke of it to few people because the idea was too inchoate in my own mind, but now I felt I knew why I had come to Afghanistan: I may not have succeeded in saving the world, but I had saved one human life.

This preoccupation with human life was a major preoccupation of mine. I had not come out to Afghanistan to lose volunteers to avoidable perils. So I made elaborate deals with the Afghan Interior Ministry and Police Network so as to permit any volunteer with a serious illness or accident to get in touch with me and the Peace Corps doctor. I found out when the Military Airlift Command flights left for Europe from Peshawar. All this turned out to be very useful when one of our vaccinator teams was in Bost and had a volunteer bleeding both orally and rectally. The Afghans patched the call over their network, notified me and put the doctor on the line and he quickly diagnosed bacillary dysentery,

told them how to keep the PCV properly hydrated, told them it would last another 12 hours and then stop as quickly as it had started. He joked, "call me in the morning." and in fact his diagnosis proved correct. Another time, John Barbee, one of our best former PCV's, now on the staff, developed an intense headache, far worse than he had ever experienced and came to Kabul for medical care. Within three days, the physicians who cared for him decided he had a tumor in the optic chiasma and needed immediate neurological surgery. Within 18 hours he was on the operating table in Wiesbaden/Ramstein hospital in Germany. Ultimately, a good part of his eyesight returned and he is currently the Country Director in Botswana. These things were a source of great satisfaction and I never had to write a grieving parent why his son or daughter died in the Peace Corps, as my successor did twice when he let volunteers drive, and two of them died in car accidents.

On the contrary, I was more often called upon to permit or officiate at marriages. The most peculiar was a telephone call I received one evening from Betsy Thomas' brother. "What's this about my sister marrying some Afghan?" he shouted into the phone, which was still being transmitted over High Frequency short wave, those days being long before such refinements as microwave or satellite dishes. I allowed as I didn't know anything about it, but would find out and get back to him. I called Betsy in Herat, and she readily admitted to planning to marry her former language instructor at the end of her tour. Gordon Thomas flew out to change her mind, but failed. She married Hedayat, had two daughters and became the chatelaine of the extended AminArsalla family in the West. Many years later, her brother became the head of the Afghan-American Refugee effort once the Russians invaded that country. Parents would frequently pass through and complain why their offspring could not be summoned instantly to the capital city: after all, they could do so in Texas, so why not here?

Our children seemed to flourish, if in very different ways. Gregory was allowed to ride his bicycle anywhere in Shari-Nau, which basically meant half the city north of the Kabul River. Kathryn, being four years older, could go anywhere. Christopher tended to hang out with the Egyptian Ambassador's son because he had a limousine available to him as well as home movies and had been a pupil at the Sidwell School in Washington DC. It was at the Ambassador's where we found him when the 1967 Yom Kippur War led President Nasser of Egypt to accuse America of complicity with the Israelis. Janice asked me to call the Ambassador, but I suggested that perhaps the mothers could iron this out without
diplomatic implications. But the Ambassador answered the phone and he instantly assured Janice that beyond his doorstep, children were children and no political issues would be allowed to interfere with their welfare. Christopher had a different problem one day in the winter when he returned without his gloves. Janice's inquiries produced a vague "I lost them." Further questioning revealed a much more complicated story. He had been stopped while riding his bike by a bunch of toughs who took his bike. He let out such a wail that an adult came out of a compound and instructed the boys to return the American's bike. Then they took his parka, and again a loud wail produced the stolen object. This time they took his gloves and he decided that prudence indicated a hasty retreat was the better part of wisdom. Kathryn had a similar occurrence. She came home one day and asked Janice to lower her dress hem. Janice refused, saying it looked just fine, but Kathryn strangely insisted. Finally Janice asked what had given Katie this idea, and it turned out that a bunch of men had thrown pebbles at her bicycling. By then she knew about chadoor and the requirement that post-pubertal girls dress much more modestly, hence the request to have her dress lengthened.

Only Janice was less and less happy. She found the strain of being the Director's wife to be a considerable unpaid burden, entertaining, going weekly to the Ambassador's wife reception for staff wives, accompanying me to innumerable evening receptions. Frequently she had to go without me when I was

out of the country. Arch Blood, the Chargé d'Affaires once teased her and said that the State Department should simply rotate the men but leave the wives in place; wouldn't that make it all much more interesting? But the strain of the Edwards', the increasing tension between Feichtmeir who felt himself much more capable of being Director than me, the constant round of illnesses (including Janice having bacillary dysentery once and amoebic several times,) my being away five times in two years usually a month at a time, these things preyed upon her. What's more she felt that I was neglecting her and the children in my preoccupation with the program. As the political situation worsened and an evaluator came out from Washington to assess the program, I told her that I was fearful I would get a very negative report. "I hope you fail," she said. She was so upset with the Peace Corps, my absences, my 12 hour days when I was there, the constant loss of anonymity, the demands of the servants and their problems--health, discipline, relatives..... that she lashed out at what she perceived to be the cause: my wanting to be the country director.

I was terrified of failure, thinking that my career at AT&T would be affected. In fact the evaluator did take Ray's comment at face value, that the program ran better with me out of the country, and recommended that I be terminated early so that Ray could take over. Macbeth almost triumphed. But I reminded Steiner of Ray's problems with the Ambassador, his total lack of Farsi after 9 months in-country and his failure to cultivate relationships among the Afghans. Ambassador Neumann weighed in with his opinion, which tended to see me as his protegé, and to distrust Ray. In the event, Steiner decided to move my departure date up by only two months. Less than 6 months after that, the Ambassador insisted on Feichtmeir's formal recall by Peace Corps/Washington and Ray came home a broken man. He kindly invited Janice and me to meet his family at the Hotel St.Regis in New York and I was absolutely shocked at the change in the man. It was as though the fate he had intended for me had struck him instead. Subsequently he divorced his wife and remarried, this time to a much younger woman, but I have not laid eyes on him since, though I was invited to dinner on Russian Hill in San Francisco by his former wife, Rachel Balayet Feichtmeir. [In 1997, I learned from the successor Deputy Director's wife, Nancy Perrin, that Ray had suffered a serious bicycle accident in France and was paralyzed, as well as losing a grown son to a mountain accident. He subsequently died from his injuries. At about the same time, George O'Bannon took me out to dinner in Tucson,AZ and told me he had heard how Ray had changed abruptly once I had left, become dictatorial, authoritarian, and become aloof from the volunteers.]

I was in only slightly better shape, mentally very bruised. My dream of helping Afghanistan develop had turned into a nightmare of bureaucracy, a deteriorating political situation, a struggle for managerial succession, a soured volunteer group, and not least an increasingly difficult marriage. After I left, the volunteers suddenly turned against Ray and wrote that they missed me. The journey home was not easy, and I thought long and hard about what had gone wrong. I was scared at what AT&T would hear about all this, and depressed about my future. Even the joys of seeing Israel in an ebullient mood at the recapture of Jerusalem, Florence and Venice at their best, meeting Chris Downing and her kids in Zurich, a week in Salzburg, Paris, and a delightful fortnight in Devon, capped by passage on the S.S. UNITED STATES to New York, did not rid me of this feeling of inadequacy.

To be sure, the aftermath of Peace Corps service had many positive elements. Not least of them was the continuing friendships we had made with volunteers. In 1991 I visited with the Mamlin family, with Joe who had been one of the doctors in Jalalabad, and Sarah, his wife, one of the nurses. They had brought three small children with them, the youngest Burke only one year old. I recall changing his diapers in their little house in Jalalabad. Joe was the

undisputed leader of Group IX, the last group to train in Texas. Not only did he try to reverse the deselection of some of the trainees, but he let me know in no uncertain terms what they found wrong in country as well. His effect on the dean of the medical school was to terrify the poor man. Joe still stands 6'4" and the Afghan dean was probably less than 5' tall. Joe learned Farsi easily, made a huge effort to learn the Farsi and Pushtu medical terms from his students, and ultimately ended up editing together with his residents the first Pushtu book on internal medicine ever written and published in Afghanistan. Through his contacts with Eli Lilly, he managed to get crates of pharmaceuticals sent to Afghanistan, and when he returned, he arranged for more than six of his best students to come study in the United States. Today he still speaks fluent Farsi, and is considered a favorite uncle by the grown up children of these former students, many of whom have settled in Indiana near his family.

Will Irwin was an English major in college and he took his second year as a journalist at the Kabul Times. He met his wife to be, Fran Hopkins, and after returning to the U.S. married her and became an Administrative judge for the Department of the Interior, while his wife kept up her journalistic career.

Ron Lucas, who had taught in Pul-i-Khumri (and hated it) later became the only social worker in the poor house/insane asylum in Kabul. Due to his rooming (if you call living in an Afghan hut without electricity or running water on the hillside of Cannon mountain "rooming,") with Alex Von Wetter, he came to know the Crown Prince. Alex, the son of White Russians who had settled in Los Angeles, was a bona fide Hollywood actor, and associate editor of Yachting magazine. He came to Afghanistan without any clear goals or skills. Yet he turned out to be a terrific teacher (isn't acting 80% of what one has to do to gain the attention of high school students?) He also met the Crown Prince skiing on the rope tow outside of Kabul, and Ron therefore had a "guardian angel" when he found appalling Charcot-like conditions in the asylum. He was able to unshackle the inmates, provide for learning experiences as well as sanitation, and generally carve out a truly unusual niche for himself. He started to live with a young woman from the German Entwicklungsdienst and they only married years later when they decided to have children. They started a homestead in southern Maine where Janice and I visited with them, and now live in a Rudolph Steiner community in New Hampshire, though divorced. As for Alex, he was making movies in Germany, Ron told me, "blue ones," he added with a wink.

Ronnie and Mark Astor were a married couple from Upstate New York who worked in Kandahar, and after they returned to the U.S. Mark found teaching math rather dull after Afghanistan. I suggested that he take a management job at New York Tel and we had about ten years where we worked sometimes apart, sometimes very closely on planning for New York Tel. He eventually quit and now sells Northern Telecomm equipment to Bell Atlantic in suburban Virginia. Ronnie has become a headhunter where she can use an extraordinary intelligence to good advantage.

Jane Engle was among one of the first sit-ins at lunch counters in North Carolina in the early 1960's and Peace Corps service came naturally to her, though her father was the president one of California's largest banks. Unfortunately so did amoebiasis. She caught the bug seven times, the last of which invaded her central nervous system and I saw her evacuated on a stretcher. Three weeks later I received a cable from the National Medical Center in Bethesda "All cured; may I come back?" She insisted and finished out her tour. When she asked me for a recommendation to Cornell University's School of Social Work, I could not have been more delighted. I wrote the Admission's office that she would do things that no other nurse would and go places no other would go. Indeed, having earned her degree, she first did medical social work in East

Harlem, and no one ever touched her. She practiced what she had learned in Afghanistan--check in with the head man, and you won't have any trouble from the boys. Later she did the same thing in South Chicago.

These volunteers were such outstanding personalities that I felt privileged to have served with them. They taught me something about courage and initiative and wisdom in a generation younger than mine. From that I was able to make contact with students and my children's peers in a way most of my contemporaries found very difficult. I'm still not comfortable with rock music, but I think I intuitively understand what makes the next generation tick. These lessons I learned, sometimes painfully, from these volunteers. They didn't always approve of what I said or did; they even told me so in four letter words to my face. But that directness and honesty, that willingness to confront reality and to make a difference in that cold world outside, that has been a lesson I have not forgotten.

Photographic Exhibition

War on Hunger

Peace Corps Afghanistan

1971-1973

Before the war in Afghanistan, the United States waged a humanitarian War on Hunger in Afghanistan that saved thousands of Afghan lives in the 1970s.

"Remembering a time in our lives when we were young and music was the anthem of our experience and photographs were the sum of our whole." Ronaldo Dizon 2005

Operation Help , A Peace Corps and United States Agency for International Development Project sponsored by the King of Afghanistan.

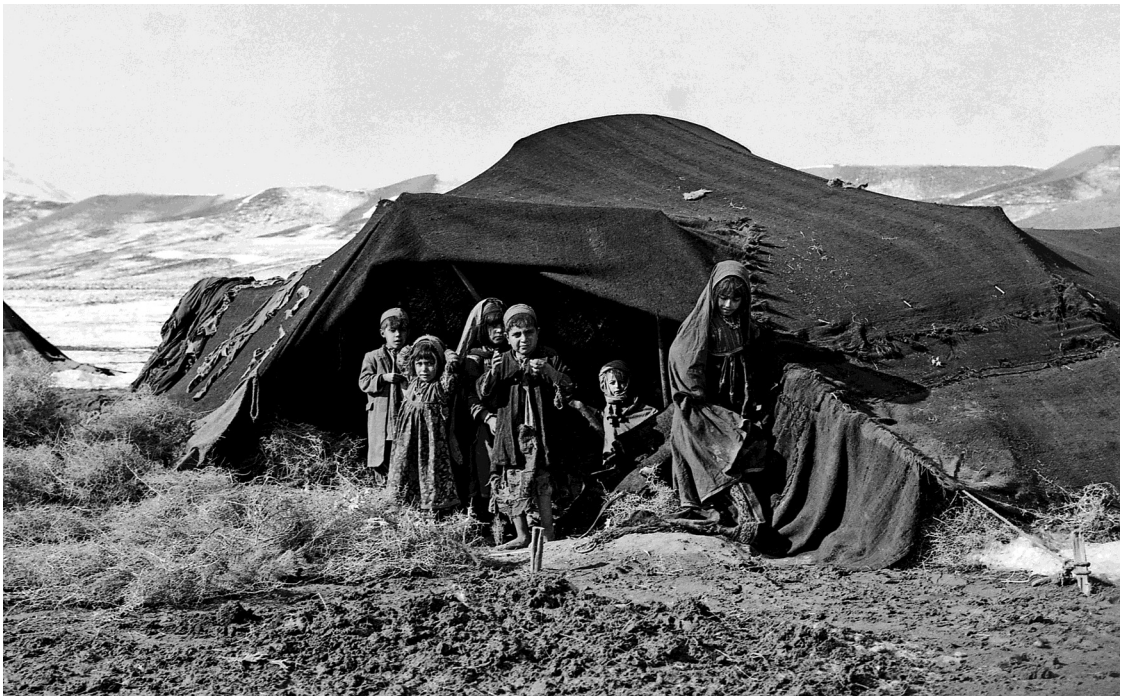
"The War on Hunger"

Ron Dizon©

Ron Dizon© Eyes of the Nomad—Farah Province

Ron Dizon© Jawand, Badghis Province

Ron Dizon© My Seamstress—Chagcharan Ghor



Ron Dizon© Traveling with Koochis Gulran to Farah

Ron Dizon© Jawand, Badghis Province

Ron Dizon© Koochi Girls in the Deserts of Bulucistan

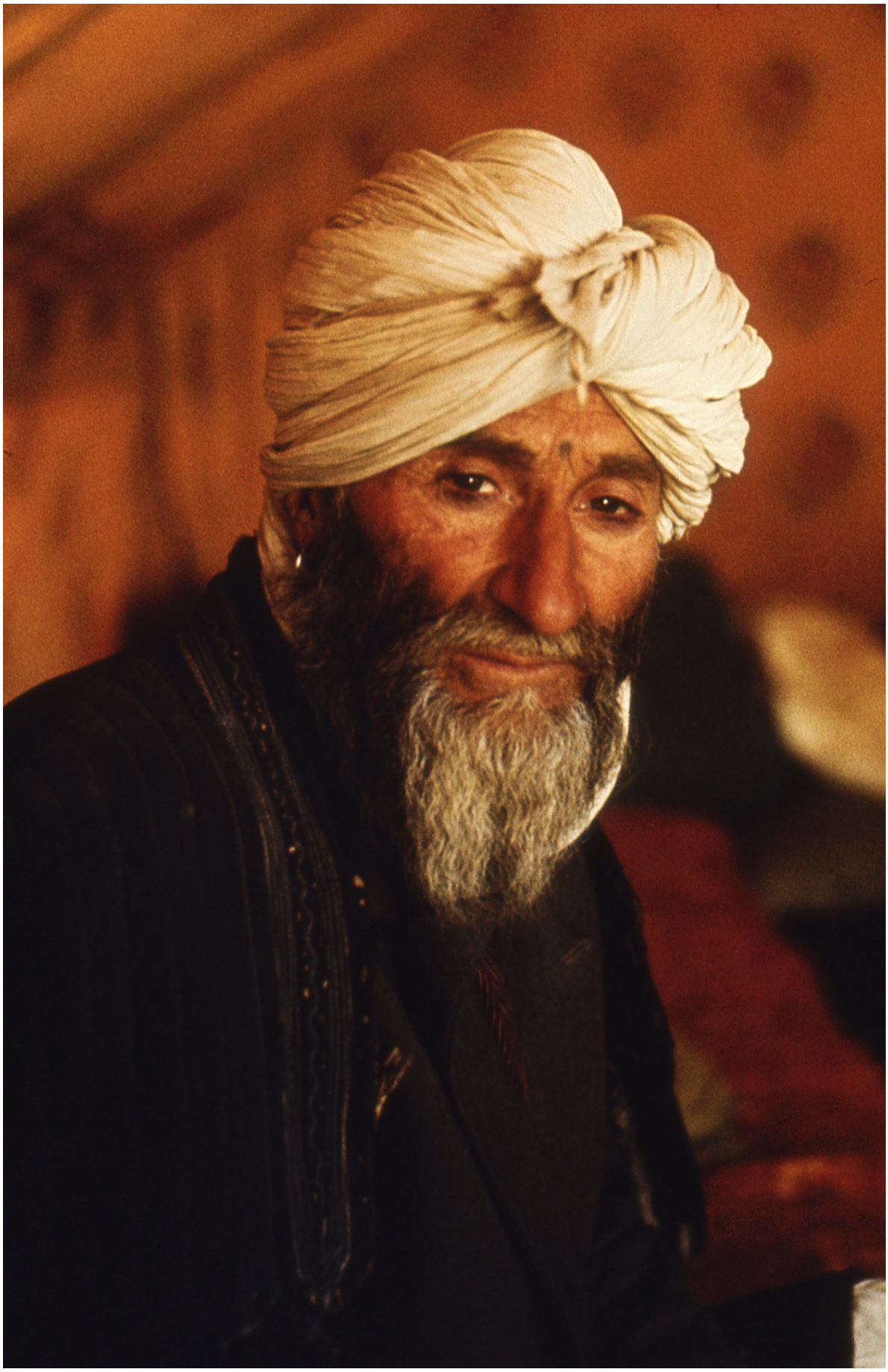
Ron Dizon© Girls of the Darazk—Hindu Kush Mountains of Himalaya

Ron Dizon© Death on the Darzak Gorge

Ron Dizon© Jawabd, Badghis Province

Ron Dizon© Darzak Registration—Operation Help

Ron Dizon© BBQ—Balkh



Ron Dizon©- Khan of the Darzak—Baghgis Province

Ron Dizon© Tarin Kowt—Uruzgan

Contributing Authors
Curriculum Vitae

Peace Corps Afghanistan Volunteer

Charles Arnold – RPCV 1971-1973

Story: Youth in Asia – My Years in Peace Corps Afghanistan

Curriculum Vitae

Charlie Arnold was born with a wanderlust and never recovered. After graduating from the University of New Mexico, he signed up for the Peace Corps and accepted the challenge of service in that remote and strange country.

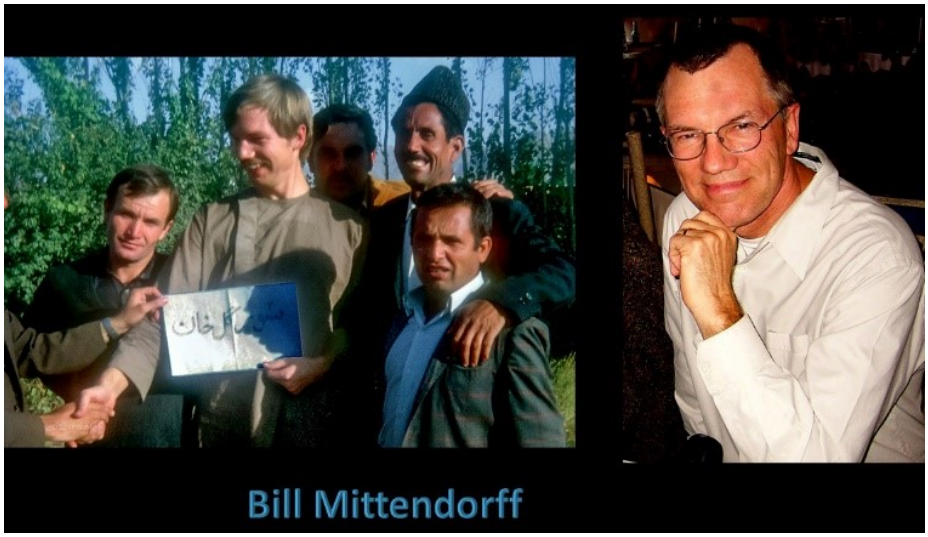
With his tour of duty behind him, he hopped on a bus east and toured India, all the way from Kasmir to Calcutta, south to Tamil Nadu, and along the west coast to Goa, Bombay (now called Mumbai), and to New Dehli. He traveled to Europe overland and returned to the US in 1975.

He settled in Florida, where he, like Anthony Bourdain, loves to eat, travel, and is hungry for more.

Bill Mittendorff RPCV 1969-1972

Story: Journal of a Teacher in Afghanistan

Curriculum Vitae



Upon graduating from the University of Minnesota I was offered a job teaching English in Afghanistan. I was the only - and probably the first - foreigner in the village of Mir Bacha Kot, just 30 km north of Kabul. I am still in touch with a few of the teachers. Just before final exams at the end of my second-year teaching, I was recruited to serve in the Food for Work program in Maimana, far to the northwest, and then joined its training staff. I met my wife during training, and we married a year after I returned to the US. I did alternate service at Boston City Hospital. The work the doctors were doing looked interesting, so I studied chemistry and physics at night school. To my surprise, my application to med school was accepted and we returned to Minnesota for my MD degree. Over the years we assembled a family of four children and now have seven grandchildren. I have no idea how this all happened.

Don Watts RPCV 1973-1974

Story Name: Panjshir School Construction

Curriculum Vitae

Peace Corps offered me a Kabul University Department of Architecture position. Besides working with Afghan colleagues, I also received valuable teaching experience from American Senior Fulbright Scholars and Senior PCV's who were already in the department. I was also invited to design an elementary school in Panjshir Valley as a separate assignment. At termination time a four-month overland journey across the Mideast and Europe was a chance of a lifetime.

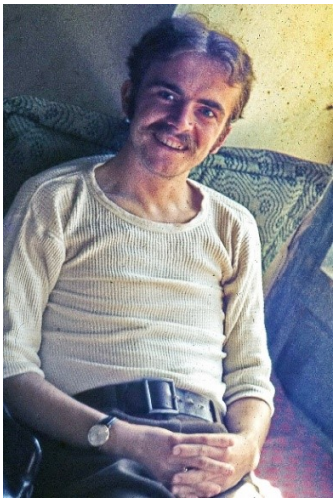
I took 50 rolls of film for future teaching and taught a seminar on Mideast Architecture for decades. More recently, from 2007-2010, I was part of my current university's World Bank Team for strengthening Kabul University's College of Engineering. It was surreal to return to the same department office I left so many years before. At my US university I oversaw the master's studies of three new Afghan architecture faculty. That concluded in 2010. Together with my wife, Carol, who is also a professor, I retired in 2015.

Peace Corps provided the foundation for my career and worldview. I was fortunate.

Tom Keiser RPCV 1971-1973

Story: All Those Years Ago

Curriculum Vitae



I graduated from the UofMN in June 1971. Six months later I turned 22 during TEFL training in Kabul. My former wife had some medical training and we were offered an opportunity to become a pilot TB Control team in Baghlan.

Seems we were all blessed by those years among the Afghan people. I returned to the PC in the mid ‘80s and spent 2+ years in Mali as part of the African Food Systems Imitative aimed at improving water sources and promoting gardening. I began teaching in Mpls schools in the late ‘80s, retiring as an ESL teacher in 2012 to the woods of NW Wisconsin.

Pat Nyhan – RPCV 1970 -1971

Story: Through the Looking Glass in Kabul

Curriculum Vitae

An experience like Afghanistan is hard to let go of. Mine recurred in different forms again and again, through time spent with Bay Area Peace Corps friends, jobs writing about intercultural issues, others teaching ESL to adult immigrants, and as backdrop for writing a book, "New Mainers: Portraits of Our Immigrant Neighbors." I tried to raise awareness of refugees in Maine, where I lived for 30 years before moving to the D.C. area a decade ago and writing for the Peace Corps Community for Refugees. While raising three great kids in Maine, I enjoyed a rewarding journalism career, harking back to a stint at the (fake news) Kabul Times while teaching at Habibia High School. Mentoring Afghan refugees has deepened my understanding of these proud people. Although as a Peace Corps volunteer I found Afghanistan by turns enchanting and exasperating, where else could I have had such a wild, life-changing ride?

Nancy Patricia Benson RPCV 1972-1974

Story: A Mazar-i-Sharif Lunch

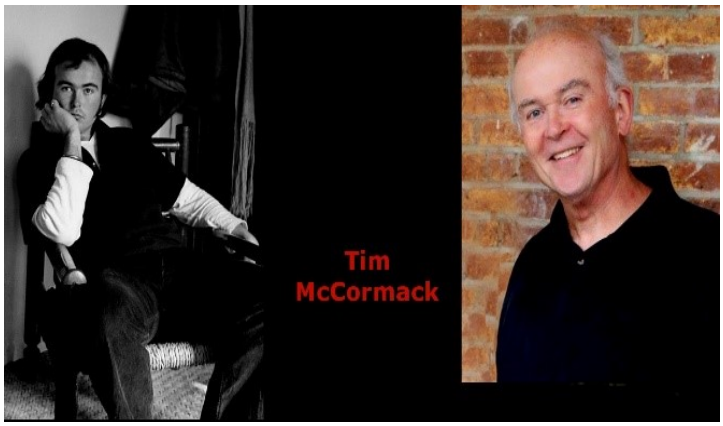
Curriculum Vitae

After college, I joined a Teacher Corps-Peace Corps program. Thirty-three of us spent a year in Lackawanna, New York, learning to teach and volunteering in the most diverse city I've ever experienced. Then about 22 of us went to Afghanistan for the experience of a lifetime.
I became a special education and math teacher in Minneapolis and taught summers at the U of MN. I married and we have three daughters and three grandchildren. Retirement has given me time for many volunteer activities, including helping organize fair trade sales where Jane Willard and I also sell Afghan crafts and clothing to benefit NGO's back in Afghanistan. It's been a good life.

Tim McCormack RPCV 1972-1973

Story name - My French Connection

Curriculum Vitae

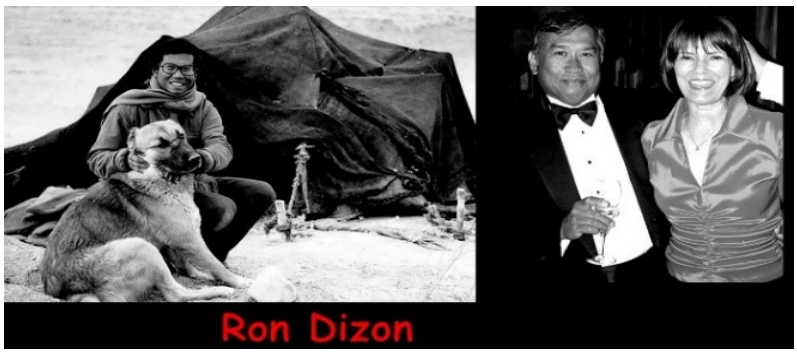


Went to Afghanistan 6 weeks after graduation, rushed thru training (I'm still waiting to take my language proficiency test), and placed in not one, not two, but three provinces. But what a thrill. Returned to work in Peace Corps recruiting offices for several years before returning to the Midwest to start a remarkable hand modeling career.

Ron Dizon RPCV 1972-1973

Story: The Gospel According to Timothy and James

Curriculum Vitae



After graduating from San Francisco State University, a funny thing happened on my way to complete my medical certification before leaving for Quantico, VA. On the 7th floor in the same Treasury Building, I fortuitously met a Peace Corps Recruiter named Bill Counsel. It was Peace Corps Recruitment Week, and out of politeness I listened to Bill's presentation of the challenges and adventure of being a stranger in a strange land. I half-heartedly filled out the application. To my astonishment, within ten days I received a Peace Corps invitation along with an airline ticket to Philadelphia, PA.

At the PRIST (Pre-invitational Staging), I was provisionally accepted into the Food for Work Program in Afghanistan. But I did have to meet with "Herbie", (I don't remember his last name) the Peace Corps' psychologist. Herbie informed me that in this most-unusual program I would experience months of living alone in the provinces, have no contact with women, and doubtless suffer various third-world diseases like amebic and bacillary dysenteries and giardiasis. I accepted the post thinking that was probably better than chasing counterfeiters or taking bullets to prevent assassinations. My mother wanted me to take a real job as a Secret Service Agent GS-9.

Peace Corps Afghanistan's Food for Work and Operation Help programs were challenging experiences that offered all the hardships Herbie described in Philadelphia with the exception of women. I was fortunate when I met a Peace Corps Nurse in Mazar-i-Sharif and later married her on Island of Barbados in 1975.

As careers go, after Afghanistan I served as the Civil Rights Coordinator for the States of Hawaii and Nevada with the Department of Health, Education & Welfare, the Director of Administrative Services for the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services San Francisco, and the Finance and Technical Director for U.S. Attorney's Office Northern California District. In 2003, I retired as the West Coast Information Technology Director for the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development.

As a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer with retirement being merely a state of mind, I started a software company with my son. We created computer networks for the American Indian Health Services in Santa Barbara, CA, for U.S. Vets agency in Las Vegas, and for North Las Vegas Housing Authority.

My last work project was serving as International Research Institute's Chief of Party in Afghanistan. The Iraq War killed the funding for that mission.

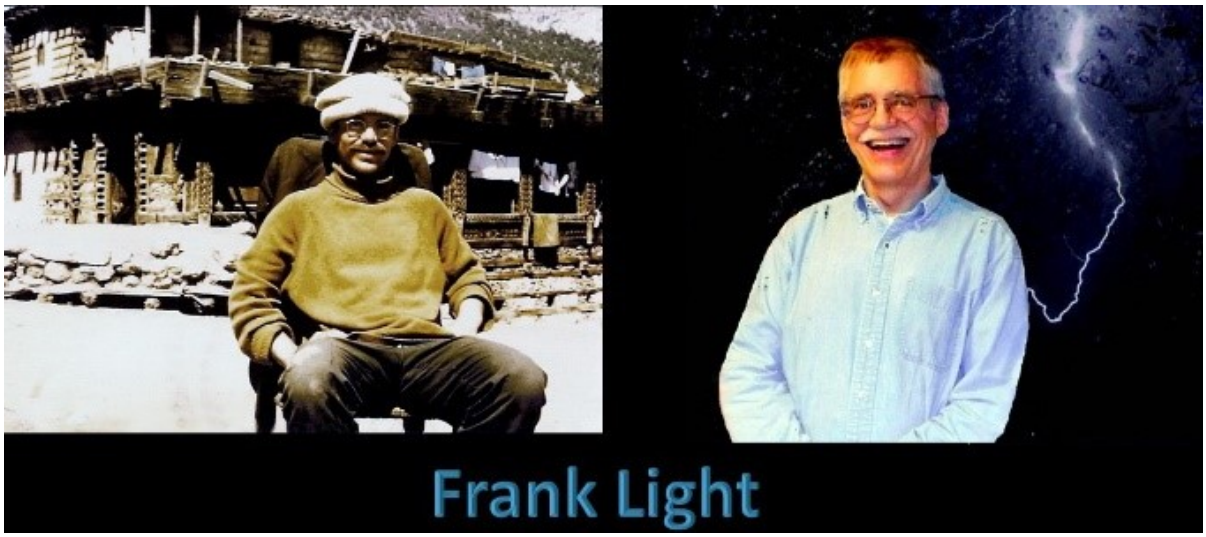
After 45 years of marriage, Diane (my Mazar-i-Sharif nurse) and I now reside in Las Vegas, Nevada where we spend our retirement years traveling the world on various photographic projects.

Frank Light RPCV 1970-1972

Story: Food for Work

Curriculum Vitae

College graduation led to two years as a draftee, a year traveling, and a year as an auditor. Among the lessons I learned from Vietnam was have something to do when you leave. After Afghanistan I went directly to grad school for a masters in creative writing. Couldn't make a living with that, so I worked as a forest firefighter, whitewater river guide for in-trouble youth, substitute meat packer, and English teacher in Iran. The State Department rescued me from that, and it gave me the chance to return to Afghanistan for three-month stints in 2003 and 2004. "Food for Work" is adapted from an unpublished memoir titled Adjust to Dust: On the Backroads of Southern Afghanistan. Now retired, I live in Issaquah, WA, with my wife Sally. We met in 1972 on the head of the Buddha the Taliban later blew up.



Norm Rosen RPCV 1968-1970

Story:

Curriculum Vitae

Left law school to join the Peace Corps and became a Tefler with no previous teaching experience. I taught in Kang, a village in Chalhansur Province. We were in the most isolated of PC locations and were pretty much on our own. I did go back to law school after toying with my California life teaching credential that I received for my ApC service. Became a NY lawyer and ultimately practiced law in Northern California from which I am now retired. Still married after 44 wonderful years with 2 kids and 2 delicious grandkids. Life is beautiful but for Covid-19, institutional racism…. oh don't get me started .

Change ApC to

Nancy Price Benson

Life as a Non-Matrix Spouse

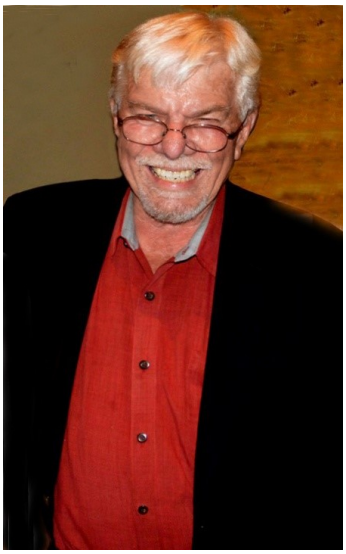
1971-1972

I was bitten by the travel bug when I was 4 years old and I flew from Illinois to Portand, Oregon, where I then grew up. Second bite: living in Europe in my high school years when my father was sent there by his employer. College degree in Geography from the U of O with thoughts of working for the BLM. Hmmm. Decision with then-husband to join the Peace Corps. My wish was to go somewhere really different and, boy, did I get my wish in Afghanistan! When I returned to the States, we divorced, and I later married a fellow former PC/A volunteer. I had several varied jobs during my working years, but none as close to working in my chosen field as when I was in Kabul. Two kids: one from Korea and one from India. Two grandsons. After 30+ years in CT, we now live in rural MD north of Baltimore, working on our third home renovation project. Our main vice is world travel, which we look forward to returning to when it's safe to do so again.

John True III

Peace Corps Associate Director
Food for Work

Story: Recollections of Urozgan, Winter, 1971-72



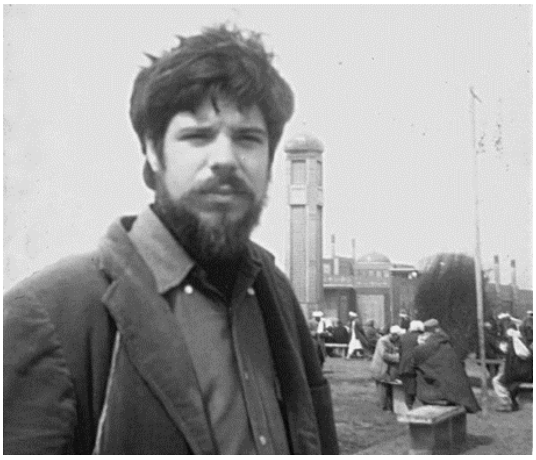
I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal from 1966 through August 1968. In 1969, I was hired as an Associate Peace Corps Director in Afghanistan. My wife Pam and I arrived in the country in December of that year. We lived in Kunduz for most of our three years in the country. My duties included managing the Peace Corps programs in the north of Afghanistan. By mid 1970, it was clear that successive years of drought would result in a severe famine, so Pam and I came in from Kunduz to Kabul where I worked as the coordinator of the "Food for Work" Program. In that capacity I supervised and coordinated the work of Peace Corps volunteers who assisted local officials throughout the country in distributing much-needed *gandum* (wheat) to Afghans providing labor on local community projects.

Our son, Jesse Niles True, was born on July 12, 1972 in the US Embassy dispensary in Kabul. In mid August of that year, Jesse, Pam and I left Afghanistan for Berkeley California where I had been admitted to law school. Jesse's sister, Rachel, was born in Berkeley in 1976. Since graduating law school I have had a career as a lawyer, law teacher and judge. In 1984, after splitting up with Pam, I married Claudia Wilken. She and I have two children, Peter and Sarah. I retired from the bench in 2015 and now work as a private mediator and arbitrator. I have three grandchildren, two of whom, Ruby and Annabel, are pictured here.

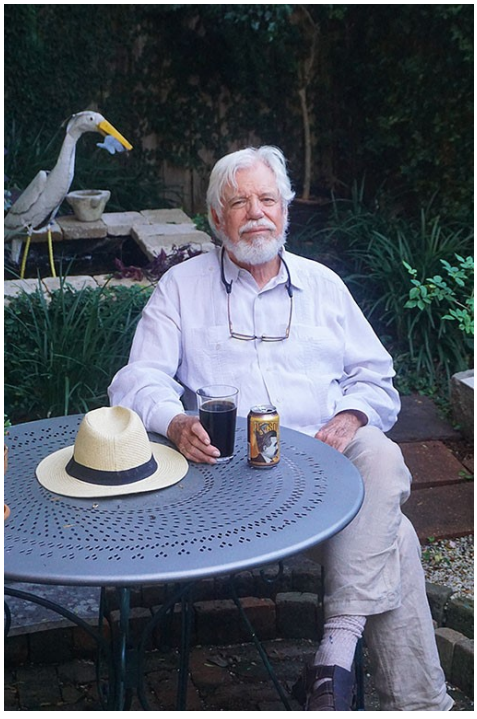
My experiences in Afghanistan -- working with the dedicated volunteers whose stories are included here, with other volunteers in other programs, and, most of all, with the remarkable, unsung Afghan heroes who led our efforts to save lives and make the country a better place -- were among the most important in my life.

DONALD MAGINNIS III, ARCHITECT

1111 SAINT MARY ST. UNIT A NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70130 (504) 523-2901 FAX 596-6574



I graduated from a military boarding school in Sewanee Tennessee in 1962 and then attended the Tulane School of Architecture in New Orleans. I graduated in 1968 and entered the Afghanistan program in early 1969 as an architect in the Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning in Kabul. I lived in a house near Share Nau Park, and the Peace Corps office for about a year and then moved to a hillside house overlooking the Kabul River and the Pul I Artan Bridge. We worked on projects with a U N team of architects and engineers and Afghan co workers on housing, mosques, and public buildings and small town planning. I traveled throughout the country frequently both on projects and with friends on long holiday weekends. I sketched some and photographed quite a lot.



I returned to New Orleans in 1971 and worked as an architect for some local firms and went into private practice in the late 1970s. I am still working on a variety of renovation and historic renovation projects, plus some construction litigation support as an expert witness for both plaintiff and defense attorneys. I also buy and renovate small historic properties to either sell or rent. I do a lot of fine art photography and self-publish books on a variety of subjects including many Southern venues. I also hunt and fish a lot and enjoy cooking and live local music My wife is a retired teacher in a local Catholic school. . We have twin sons who are both CPAs and two grandchildren. We also collect and sell local art, vintage photographs and folk art from the South.

Bruce Legendre 1972 –1974

Story: Memories of Years Past

Food for Work

After a year in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka & Indonesia I found myself in Australia in late 1974; got a job on an oil rig in the Timor Sea (out of Darwin) and put together some travel money then back to Indonesia , the Philippines and finally settling in South Korea/Japan for a couple of years teaching English for $300 a month which was enough to pay the rent, eat and go dancing (the 70's Disco Period) on the US Army Base in Seoul with my Afro-American Brothers who knew how to "Party". There was a 11PM Curfew which worked out nicely; you started early and finished early.

Back to Australia in 1977 for several years then finally went back to NOLA in early 81 after a 9 year absence. There was a Recession (the early Reagan years) so back to Australia in 1983 where I have been ever since. Got involved in Gold Prospecting in Western Australia and today I still spend most of the Winter in the Goldfields looking for drill targets for anything except fossil fuels. Of course these days (Pandemic) I am locked up in Melbourne waiting for the all clear to return to WA.

Got married in 1988, 2 Daughters and 2 Grandchildren.

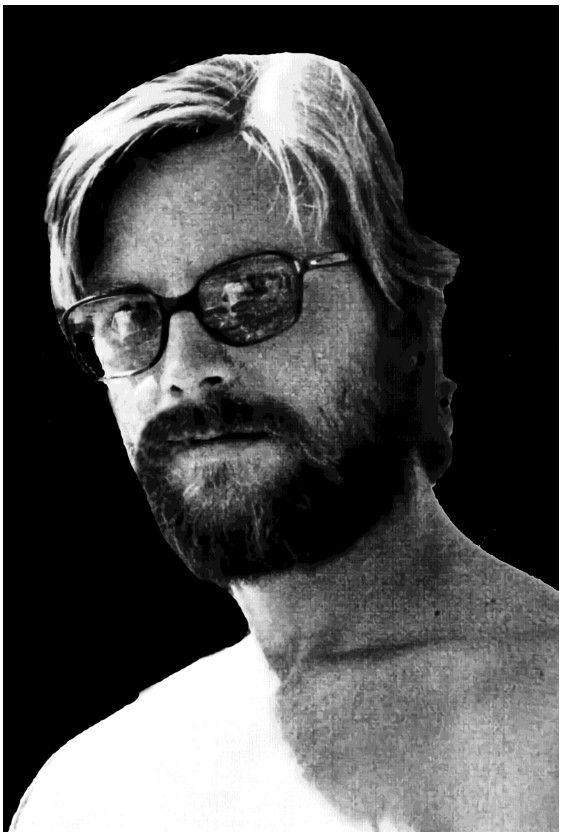
I try to get back to USA over the XMAS break to see my Mom (97) and Sisters who have all moved from NOLA to Colorado. Earlier this year after a lovely visit (Colorado is one of the reasons to fight for the USA), Jannine and I hopped onto a Boat in Miami and through the Panama Canal back to LA. We just got in front of the Wuhan Disaster.

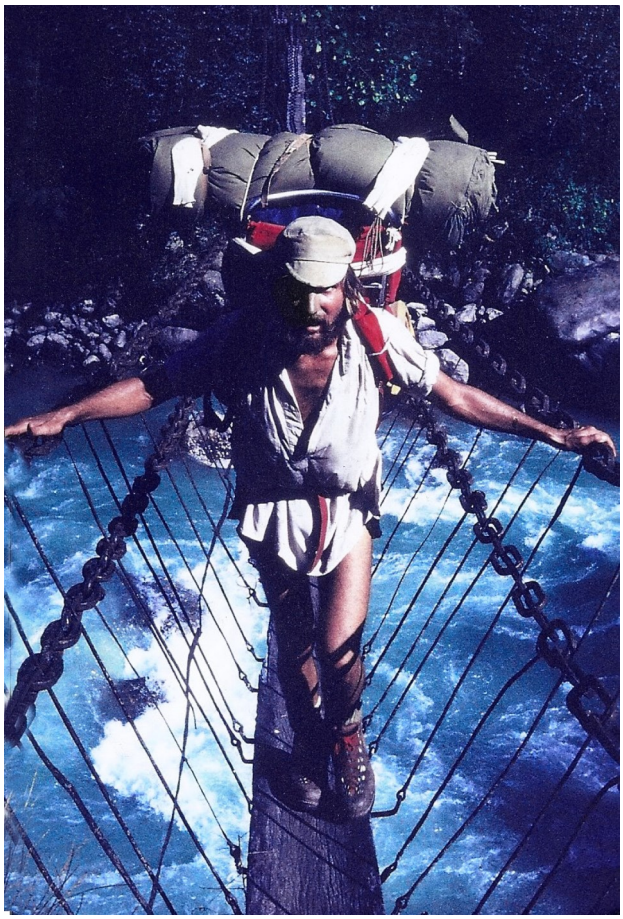
Down Under is like the Eisenhower 50's for those of you who wore coonskin caps (Davy Crocket) and watched Roy Rogers on TV. We have almost no murders and strangers still smile at each other on public streets. I grew up in NOLA (New Orleans) where everyone had a gun under the drivers' seat and in the bedroom. Here's hoping the Yanks will sort out some reasonable gun laws one day.

Panama Canal

Completed in 1915 and not a pump is sight, all gravity operated; brilliant engineering under Teddy Roosevelt.

Bruce Legendre –1972 –1974





The Author with a rough head but a great BMI.

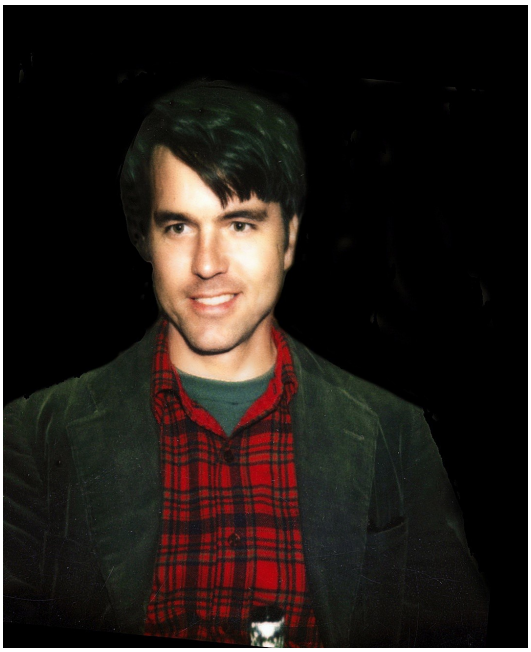
Torpikai and the Teddy Bear

By

Julie Kesler and Tom Grant

During my Peace Corps Afghanistan service in 1967 -- 69, I taught English at the aeronautical school and advised the Afghan national tourist office, both in Kabul. After completing law school after Peace Corps, I practiced military law in the San Francisco Bay Area until moving to Seattle in 1976. I continued my law practice there, first in criminal defense and later as a criminal appellate lawyer, the latter as head of a small appellate law firm. I then spent six years as a Commissioner at the Washington State Court of Appeals. Two years of living and working in Rome followed that. After returning to Seattle, I was lucky enough to be able to retire in 2008. I've been accompanied though most of these years by my husband, Tom Grant, and a succession of wonderful dogs, the first of which was Samar, a brave and loyal kuchi dog I brought home from Afghanistan.

Tom Grant
1967-1969 1972-1973



Story:Torpikai and the Teddy Bear
By

Julie Kesler and Tom Grant

After two stints in Peace Corps Afghanistan (1967– 69 and 1972 – 73), I managed to get a law degree and practice as a lawyer for a few years in San Francisco. 1981 found me moving to Seattle and marrying Julie Kesler. In that location and blissful alliance, my work for three organizations has mostly centered on consulting on safety in the nuclear power industry, security of nuclear weapons materials, and environmental protection. My real life, however, has been centered on eating and drinking well, cooking, reading and traveling.

WALTER P. BLASS

Story: The PEACE CORPS YEARS--A View 25 Years Later

In the 35 years since he retired as Director—Strategic Planning for AT&T, Walter P. Blass has put on three new hats: as founder and president of Strategic Plans, UnLtd., he consults for various clients in the United States and overseas on strategic planning and telecommunications re-regulation and privatization; as Executive-Fellow-in-Residence at Fordham University's Lincoln Center campus he taught the capstone Business Policy course to graduating MBA's from 1986-1990 and now continues to teach several times a year in France as a Visiting professor at the Grenoble Graduate School of Business in France; as President of BLASS AG, he served as the head of a patent holding company in Basel, Switzerland, coming up with biochemical solutions to difficult pharmaceutical problems and licensing or selling the resulting patents to manufacturers or distributors.

In his former capacity, he was responsible for the strategic positioning of AT&T in the global market for information transport and management. He was also responsible for the scanning of the social, political workplace and international environment. Together with three other Directors in the Division, he was responsible to the Corporate Vice President for the statement of mission, formulation of a strategic plan, contingency plans and special studies for the Office of the Chairman.

In the course of his work, Mr. Blass has lectured widely on the subjects of strategic planning and de-regulation both to private sector groups as well as to public sector audiences such as the International City Managers Association, the Governor and State officials of New York, and the U.S. Army Signal Corps.

He has also written widely in this regard, in "Long Range Planning" (Pergamon Press, London), a humorous but serious look at the foibles of planning and planners; a chapter in two Handbooks of Strategic Planning, one published by McGraw-Hill (1983) and one published by John Wiley (1986.) Another article was "The Strategic Options Facing James Olson of AT&T." (Chief Executive Magazine. Jan/Feb 1988.) He is the author of several business cases on integrated process management (Deming/Japanese Management) on companies as diverse as Bridgestone Tire, VOLVO B.V. of Holland, the Swiss Watch Industry and NEC's Cellular Telephone Operation in Hillsboro, OR. He is widely in demand as a speaker to academic audiences, having spent a week a year as a Senior Fellow for the Woodrow Wilson Foundation of Princeton, NJ, at many colleges and universities such as Earlham, Wells, Meredith, Lawrence and Lincoln. He has also lectured at Columbia and City University of New York, IMEDE in Lausanne, Switzerland and Fudan and Beijing Universities in the People's Republic of China. He was a Visiting Professor at the Ecole Superieure des Affaires (Graduate Business School) in Grenoble, France in 1988, as well as having lectured at Poland's Central Planning Institute and the University of Warsaw the following year. Since 1992 he has been a Visiting professor of Management at the Grenoble Graduate School of Business and has taught in Moscow, Belgrade, Shanghai, Mexico City, Isfahan, Iran and many other schools.

He has consulted to many organizations including IBM, Olivetti, Baltica Insurance, McDonnell Douglas and many other U.S. companies as well as clients in the U.S. Government. He has also served the United Nations Economists training Program and the telecommunications authorities of Ireland, Spain, the United Kingdom, Thailand, Portugal and Germany. In recent years he has consulted with a major venture capital firm for a telecommunications equipment company LBO. He has been Conference Director for the well known annual Strategic Planning Conference sponsored by The Conference Board in New York in 1986 and 1987, as well as a frequent leader for the American Management Association seminars on Global and Strategic Planning.

Mr. Blass speaks German, his native language, and French which he picked up as a child living in Brussels, Belgium, but now teaches in as well as English. He also picked up some Persian as Country Director of the U.S. Peace Corps in Afghanistan while on leave from AT&T in 1966-68. He served as a LT(jg) in the United States Navy in the 1950's as a Supply Officer aboard a submarine tender and a destroyer escort.

Mr. Blass is the father of three grown children: Kathryn, a Safety Officer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, Christopher, a computer specialist in South Fallsburg, NY and Gregory, a construction superintendent in Arlington, Mass.

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