

Afghanistan Revised *They Saw Us As Something from Another Planet*

From interviews with Danny “Lanky” Kollaja of Corpus Christi Texas and Forrest “Muggins” Wheeler from Oregon about their recent (May 2002) trip to Afghanistan *Beach Clown* of the Geshunheit Institute also went on the trip.

When Patch was in Afghanistan last, he saw the deplorable circumstances in the children's hospital. When he made a promise of supplies to the director of the Indira Ghandi Children's Health Institute, the director was not at all excited. Patch realized that others had promised supplies and nothing ever came. When Patch returned to the US, he spoke to some people and the trip just took a life of its own. People just stepped up and helped. Many organizations, individuals, and corporations collaborated to ship medicines, food and orthopedic supplies. Danny says the list of those who helped would take a whole column of this newsletter. The German "NGO" (non governmental organization) Hammer Forum, handled the receiving and distribution in Afghanistan.

As Danny reported “This trip for me was a real challenge. Not like any of those package tours with pre-arranged lodging, sight seeing, and clown shows. I wasn't just a participant this time. Actually I had to do the diplomacy stuff and arrange for deliveries and distribution of over 15 tons of relief supplies (medicine, food, blankets, clown noses, toys, and personal hygiene supplies). My primary reason was to escort and assure that aid made it to different destinations. They have great concern for preventing items showing up on black market.” So Forrest and Danny spend a good deal of time escorting goods.



Danny (center) with Hammer Forum staff sorting goods.

Forrest was there for three weeks and spent the last week just going around regions near Kabul. “We saw 4,000 lbs of the 20,000 arrive and get distributed. Then we started having trouble. We had trouble with manifest sheets and finding supplies.” Forrest spent most of his time running around getting manifest sheets and going to the embassies. For the last week Forrest went into villages to speak with the leaders to get their view of the problems. He video taped it all and turned it over to organizations that may be able to help the Afghan people.

How did the children react? Forrest said, “You would think that the Afghan children would be terrified at the sight of a clown. Actually, they saw us something from another planet. Sort of a friendly aliens handing out gifts. As American we would be seen as infidels, as clowns we were beyond any category; thus, we

were able to go places and interact with the children in ways we could not as non-clowns. Our total experience was a fantastic success.”



Forrest “Muggins” Wheeler in Afghanistan

All visions of what was to happen changed once we arrived. It was a very spontaneous adventure. We could only plan each day and then sometimes just hours ahead of time. With no phones working, we had to physically go to each location and work out details (diplomacy) before actually going there with aid and clowns. The culture over there is real big on meeting face to face with the "officials". All aid has to be filtered through a public ministry - either education, health or even irrigation.”



Danny as Dr. Oops At the hospital

Below Lanky performing at the Tahieya Maskan Orphanage for boys on a Saturday May 25, 2002.

“We had 700 boys in that room. That’s not how we planned it. It was supposed to be three separate shows dividing the group into three. We thought that way it would be more intimate and personal. The Director of Education Ministry also had us going to a girls orphanage. After seeing what I was talking about (making several shows with smaller audiences), he made it happen there. We had two shows.



“The girls’ show was a little difficult. Remember men are not supposed to touch the women. You know my routines are heavy on involving the audience. So I had to either throw props to them or use one of the German NGO ladies to be my "middle person". Some of the interactive play is lost when you have to use a buffer.



That picture is at the "Peace House" . It is a German facility. The boys (adolescents) have received surgery in Germany. They return to Kabul for recuperation and reintroduction to their family. Culture shock can affect the child and family. A huge difference between Germany and Afghanistan. They do not stay overnight at Peace House they report in morning for "check up" go to school, lunch, studies, and maybe a little work. They are taken back home each day. All at no cost to the family.

All photos on pages 22, 23 and 24 except where indicated were taken by Chet Gordon, accompanying photographer .www.chetgordon.com



A Drive through an area known as Old Kabul City

Forrest was profoundly affected by the experience. “The presence of teen age Afghans carrying loaded automatic weapons, the preponderance of military equipment throughout the city, miles and miles of totally destroyed buildings, children searching through maggot infested garbage for food to eat and the ever present wild look in the faces of the people as they struggled to survive just one more day collectively told me this was a place I had never seen before.

“Afghanistan has nothing - there is no food being grown, no infrastructure at all, no way of communicating - no phones. There is no green, everything is just dust and when it rains there is mud. I've been to all the so called ‘terrible places’ nothing compares to this. There is no hope at all: politically , economically, or socially. They are sitting there waiting for war - another civil war. Up in the hills there are armored cars and tanks, and munitions stored for the war. I've never seen such despair and hopelessness and devastation in my entire life. It is a deep negative dust bowl. Upon leaving Afghanistan, my heart was saddened at the heavy burden that each Afghan had to bear..”

Guardians of Humor And Good Will

—Shobi Dobi

Sitting in my beautiful California garden, I try to imagine it as all dust. If I couldn’t nourish and water my garden it too would be a dust bowl. I can't imagine living in that kind of despair, nor can I describe it. I found this on the Internet- www.vday.com It is an activists site against violence towards women and girls.

Dust in Afghanistan by *Eve Ensler*

Play writer and activist [reproduced in part]

“I see my stomach in the barely-standing full-length mirror in my room at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul. I am surprised that my stomach is not huge. It is lean, but lean the way an older body looks lean. It is not clean-lean. I am surprised that it is not full-pouring out. . . .Continue on next page

“Full of the broken dust that has fallen and continues to fall over everything, full of the cold, shivering impoverishment that creeps deep into one's skin, full of the loss--there is nothing green, nothing whole, nothing working, nothing dependable here.

“Full of the stupidity that has leveled concrete, shattered glass, smashed wood. There are very few roofs. There is nothing to eat. Full of the stories. Stories like thoughtless episodes that often came out of nowhere and undid everything forever. . . .

“Here in Kabul, the dust has gathered. It gets so deeply and quickly into your lungs that it has created something called the Kabul cough. What is left after the buildings and mosques and people are gone, gets into your lungs, making you cough and gag. Here where the history of invasion, usurpation, domination, obliteration, interrogation, here the dust is the new weather. When it rains, the dust becomes mud; when there is heat, a thermal lining.

“We walk through an old woman's garden, thick in mud. The soldiers who stand outside to guard it take us through. It's as if they are now guarding a memory, a knowledge of another time in Kabul that was luscious and green, where the almond groves and apple trees and flowers were alive in the sun, and the dancing rooms and the theater thrived.

“The soldiers guarding this story walk us around, pointing out what was once there. You can smell the greenness and even though most of the trees are skeletons and stumped, you can remember their blooming. The soldiers become tender, proud when they describe the dancing, when they tell of the days of joy.

“But these days are not days they remember. They were born into dust. It is the memory of their parents, or their parents' parents, which they need to trust. These soldiers, no more than 21, have never lived without the Kabul cough. . . .

Eve Ensler March 9, 2002

And what can we do sitting here in our beautiful comfortable gardens? We can go out and remind the world, even if it is one person at a time, that laughter and joy is inherent in the human spirit. Our intentions do make a difference - as our prayers are directed intention.

The Hospital Clown Newsletter will continue to report on clowns going to *economically disadvantaged countries*, but don't forget to cheer up your own neighborhoods. We are sometimes in all our splendor - *humor deprived!* Just a look at the local news tells us that every day!

Let's be grateful we have parks and supermarkets and shopping malls to clown at. Let's just go out and clown for no reason at all! I do believe that we all share a common species spirit, so we'll be contributing our bit to the presence of humor in the Spirit of All Humans. A tall order for a clown, but we've been laughing in the face of politics and hate for the whole of the history of mankind.

As the monks and nuns are to the church, we are the jesters/tricksters to the people. And when I see a photo like this below it gives me hope. All I can say is “Let's do it!” We are The Guardians of Humor and Good Will.



Laughter and Awe
Orphaned Afghan Boys Watching a Clown Performance.

Clowns Needed . . . September 6-8, 2002 at Ground of Heros*



The shock is gone, but grief still prevails

Bringing Hope to Life @ Ground Zero NYC. All clowns welcome! We'll be arriving Friday, September 6 and staying at the DoubleTree Club Suites in Jersey City. Jersey City is only 8 miles from the Newark airport and across the street from the PATH train and ferry which cross the Hudson River into lower Manhattan. There are also restaurants nearby the DoubleTree.

On Saturday, Sept 7, we plan to clown at the fire stations in mid-Manhattan, who lost many men. On Sunday, Sept 8, we've been invited to clown at the oldest Methodist Church (1766) in the City, just one block from Ground Zero. On Monday, Sept 9, the plan is to visit some hospitals.

As with any clown adventure, folks could do walk-a-rounds around Ground Zero, like we did last time or decide to do what they're more comfortable doing. As you know, small groups of 5-6 clowns work well together. Just like last time, we ended up right where we needed to be. I believe that will happen this time too. Please contact: Maureen aka "OOCHIE" the Clown (509) 452-2296 (509) 965-7104, mmould@cfcsyakima.org

(*This is what the New Yorkers call Ground Zero)