

5/11/07

Dinglish

I'm sitting back in Kabul now and it's oh so comfortable. We made the trip back down from Bamian yesterday. Everything went smoothly, except for 3 flat tires and not too much to mention about the journey. I drove for the first 5 hours, which was exhausting on such a terrible road. We all wished we could have flown. After a week together it was hard for us not to get a little annoyed with each other during the long, hard drive. But we made it, relationships in tact.

It really was a good crew to have taken up there for this trip. Everyone was easy to get along with and they all knew at least a little English (except Faisal) so I could communicate with them. The PARSA staff have perfected what we call Dinglish, a blend of Dari and English that sounds funny but



gets the point across. For example; "Marniejan gap we go bazaar, get buz wa pepsi" translates to "marnie says we should go to the market together and get goat and pepsi". Asef is the master of this and we would have conversations for hours in this manner. I really like him, although he has earned the title of "mister problem/ problem-solve" as he seems to create as many problems as he solves. He is always happy and takes our teasing well. We've determined that Dinglish is a great way to learn dari, or English for that

matter, as it gives you words in both contexts. Its especially good for those of us that don't like to sit down to learn languages in a class room, though in the end real study is needed to not sound like a moron.



Before we left Bamian, at 6:00 am the ladies that were to start making rugs for us showed up for final negotiations. I was busy getting things squared away to leave, but apparently it didn't go well, as the negotiations lasted only 5 minutes. Mom and Yasin came out of the meeting quite frustrated. Mom knew things wouldn't go well when she entered the compound complaining.



Now it was “the wool is poor quality, and we don't have wood for the frames of the looms”, which is the sign that you're in for some stiff negotiating. The ladies had told them that they wanted a payment of \$40 per kilo of rug. This is outrageous and far far above market value, especially given we were going to provide the materials to them. She pointed to a high quality rug we had that probably weighs 5 to 7 kilos and was bought at the fair price of \$40, without having to pay for the materials. They didn't believe her, but I watched her buy the rug myself and it's true.

When I heard this I was in disbelief. These people up here are not looking at what we're trying to create, a market for their work. They are not understanding that they need to give fair prices for their work and in exchange will have consistent income, far exceeding what they bring in now which is next to nothing. All they see is that they have a Khereji (foreigner) with a large pocket book (false) and they want to get what they can out of it and run. This is not the first time we found this in our attempts to develop this



“micro-industry” and in discussing it we really think it comes out of a couple of things.

For one, most of these people are illiterate and really have no understanding of math, especially the

women. We could probably offer them a base wage of \$100 a month for full time work and they would take it, yet we are not trying to set up a sweatshop. Mom and Yasin are just trying to facilitate the market to get more people access to cash, especially women. Secondly, they are trying to get as much as they can out of a single transaction; this I believe is due to the war-time mentality that has developed in this country over the past 25 years. You need to get as much as you can, when you can because the opportunity might not be there tomorrow. They can't think in the long term, and probably don't trust the development that my mom and Yasin are trying to construct. It's hard not to be frustrated with both their ignorance and mentality; you have to think of what they have been through and their lack of education. Mom and Yasin realize now that it will not be quite as easy to set this system up as they had hoped. Provide people with materials and give them a fair price for their work to stimulate the local market and bring cash into the community. Simple right? Not at all; typical of any program development in this country, or the third world in general. They will think out their strategy and find the right people to develop it with. I believe they have the right idea and are going in the right direction, but its an experiment and needs to be toyed with to find a working solution.



Today has been spent catching up on my journal and resting before our next trip into the provinces for my mother's survey work. We'll be going to Pansher, an area to the east of Kabul in the mountains, which should be beautiful. We'll be staying only a couple of nights and then returning.



Tomorrow I'll go over to the Marastoon compound where PARSA is located to check on the progress of my soccer field for the orphans and plan out the construction of the goals. Kabul seems so easy and even a little boring after our time in Bamian, but its good to get some rest before we leave on Sunday.

