



The Celebration that Wasn't

The plan was to visit the school site in Farza, celebrate the fact the villagers had been given the go ahead to build, shake some hands, say a few words, cut a ribbon and visit the girls who will be attending the school next year.

On Monday, we suggested we have a ribbon cutting ceremony Thursday or Friday morning, letting them know that we were leaving Friday afternoon. Tuesday morning we were informed that a number of officials could not attend either morning. They suggested we change our travel plans so they could have a groundbreaking ceremony next Monday. Not likely, bro.

What was to be a fly by was turning into a scheduling nightmare. How could I tell them it didn't matter to us who came, without offending the local authorities? There was only one thing to do, write "Dear Abby".

Dear Abby,

I'm in Afghanistan, there's a war going on, and scheduling a ribbon cutting ceremony has somehow become important. Can I tell them it's not? Should we cancel? Should we go ahead with our original plans? Please advise immediately! I'm want to be "culturally sensitive".

Signed,
Perplexed in Kabul.

Dear Perplexed,

The world is too crazy right now for me to give advice to infidels who are foolish enough to be in Afghanistan. You're on your own. Please don't tell anyone you wrote me.

Tuesday night we were told that the only time a groundbreaking ceremony could take place would be the next day. We advised the

organizer, Ehsan, that we would be there at 2 pm, in time to visit with the girls who would still be in school. We purposely chose 2 pm to avoid anyone having to prepare lunch. It is understood in Afghanistan that if you are visiting around a meal time, your host is obligated to provide food, and you are expected to stay. To do otherwise is an affront to the other party. Notwithstanding our 2 pm strategy, Ehsan was told he needed to serve lunch.

We arrived at 2pm and were led to an outdoor area where twenty or so men were seated on carpets, awaiting our arrival, Ehsan served the best Afghan food I've had since I began visiting Afghanistan five years ago. He had gone all out.

After lunch we drove to the site. The Governor, Nabi, and I spoke. During his speech, the governor complained about the short notice, and lack of preparation. The governor then went on to say that there would not be enough volunteers to build the school, as we had been led to believe, and that we should think about paying people to do some of the work. Bottom line, the governor publicly complained about the no frills ceremony, thanked us for our support and advised us it wouldn't be enough. Absent from his speech was a call to arms for volunteers. Ehsan must have felt terrible.

Fortunately, Nabi was smart enough to not tell me what the governor had said until we were in the van, on our way back to Kabul. I have body language control issues. My anger would have shown. I'm an easy read. Poker ain't my calling.

Other than the governor's inspiring oratory, the villagers were very appreciative. I was assured they could and would provide the labor. They asked me to convey how grateful they are.

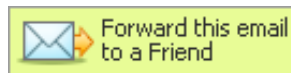
The adjoining landowner chose this occasion to argue over boundary lines, in front of whoever was within earshot. By the end of the discussion, everyone was within earshot. Fortunately, the boundary line was agreed upon without firing a round.

The lunch took so long, the headmaster let the girls go home. It was only fair to them. We, therefore, had a groundbreaking celebration fraught with controversy, for the construction of a school for girls, without a single female present. That only took 7 hours!

When will you women take charge? We all know that day is coming. Please hurry. These male dominated societies are driving me crazy.

Budd

THEY'RE WORTH IT!!



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