WILLIE DOUGLAS AND THE PATHANS

During a recent visit to Pashawar I made a trip to Katlang, the small village in the Pathan tribal area where Willie Douglas was checking out a possible job request for a Vocational Agriculture teacher.

Taffy Payne, a PCV teaching in Peshawar, had a holiday on the Muharram days of mourning and went with me. Early on Wednesday morning I (armed with the cook's shopping bag stuffed with a lunch he had prepared for us, plus a jug of water) and Taffy (fortified with her really very good Urdu) squeezed into a crowded Government Transport bus. Two hours plus two tea stops later we arrived in Mardan, the district town, and Taffy's Urdu helped us take a horse-drawn tonga to the taxi stand from which the cars left for Katlang.

The village taxis defy description. They are automotive relics left over from the days of cranks and horns operated by squeezing a rubber bulb. It would be impossible to even guess at the original make of the cars, in their present hybrid condition. Ours had been converted into something resembling a station wagon, with seats in every available space.

The taxi was full of village men when we arrived, but the two in the front seat crowded into the back with about a dozen others, while the driver carefully spread a greasy cloth over the holes in the upholstery in the front seat to make a seat for us.

I doubt if a Pakistani driver could operate if his horn stopped "hooting". Hooting, by the way, is a most descriptive term for the raucous noise made by the horns, and signs in front of hospitals say "No Hooting". Our driver used his "hooter" constantly as we wove in and out among bullock carts and bicycles and pedestrians and donkeys.

The trip to Katland took forty-five minutes, although we had only 12 miles to cover, and made no village stops along the way. A new road is being built to the village, and winding around piles of broken road-bed stone, across ditches, and through dense clouds of dust was time-consuming.

At Katland, Taffy told the driver we wanted to go to the Model Government High School for Boys. He asked her if we had come to see the "siah Ameriai"—the black American—and she told him we had. He assured her that the "siah Ameriai is very good and the people of Katland want him to stay here." So we knew that Willie was making a name for himself.

The Model School consisted of an attractive group of buildings, surrounded by a compound wall, and built around a plot of blooming roses and peonies and green grass. One large building was still under construction. The Vice-Principal, Mr./A.C. Khan, told us that we had not been expected until Saturday, and that Willie had gone in to Mardan on an errand.

While we were still wondering what we should do, and how we could find Willie, a twin to our taxi drove up and
Willie and several tall Pathans got out of it. Apparently we had no sooner passed through Mardan (a city of several thousand) when the word was flashed to Willie that two American ladies were headed for Katla. Americans are a scarce commodity in this tribal area.

Willie introduced us to his Pathan friends, Taj Mohammad Kahn, a brother of the Vice-Principal, to a member of the local Basic Democracies, and to one of the Katland merchants. All of them told us that--to paraphrase their words--"any friends of Willie's would be their friends also", and we were made to feel very welcome.

The Pathans are a tall, handsome people, with lighter complexions than most Pakistanis and blue eyes. The Khan brothers, of whom we met several during the day, were all six-feet and over. They spoke English to a certain degree, and it was obvious that they came from a relatively prosperous family.

Taj Mohammad Khan, who is a landlord, took us to his house, where Willie was living in his guest room. The guest room was built outside of the wall which surrounded the family living quarters. Inside the wall lived the family of Mohammad Khan--his wife, his seven children, and his unmarried sister. The women lived in purdah, and Willie had never seen them except enveloped in their burkahs.

We talked at length to Mr. Khan, the Vice-Principal, concerning the possibility of Willie's returning to Katla in the fall to teach Vocational Agriculture. He assured us that they wanted Willie to come to live and work in their village, that everyone liked him very much and the school needed him. He had evidently thought through carefully how Willie could be used at the school and outlined a rather complete program.

Back at the school, we took a tour of the school buildings, the students' garden plots, the prospective school farm, and the new buildings under construction. I admired the new building, and Mr. Kahn and his staff thanked me and said, "But it is you we must thank for this new building. Without your help it is not possible. It is the American aid that we were able to build it. Americans are our friends." In the new building they pointed out one large room and told me that this would be Willie's room for his Agriculture classes. Another similar room is to be used for woodworking and metalworking classes, but "for this we have no teacher, and if you will send us a teacher for these things also we will be most grateful also. It is very much needed."

Mr. Kahn's plan for Willie included teaching Vocational Agriculture to the 9th and 10th grade boys, supervising the students' demonstration garden and farm plots at the school, helping the boys with projects at home, setting up a poultry flock at the school to teach the care of poultry, and assisting with sports and physical education. It would be a year-round job, and a very full one. Willie had previously spent several weeks at the school, working up a syllabus for a Vocational Agriculture course, under the direction of a team from the University of Chicago, and Mr. Khan assured me that they liked his plan very much, and that Willie would be free to carry out his plans in any manner in which he wished.
Taj Mohammed Khan insisted that we must be his guests for lunch, so the cook's carefully prepared sandwiches went untouched. Instead we ate curried chicken floating in ghee, and a soup—all with the help of our fingers and chapatis (a flat round bread resembling a pancake). Mr. Khan asked Taffy and me if we would do him the honor of visiting his home and meeting his family, and this was what we had been hoping to do. His wife was a small, frail-looking woman, possibly only thirty years of age but looking much older. His sister was a tall, husky woman resembling her brothers.

The house was spacious and very clean. The furniture in the large women and children's room consisted of only the charpaís—wooden frame and rope beds. Mr. Khan's private room was much the same except for a small table covered with an embroidered cloth, and a fireplace with a mantel on which were some dusty paper flowers and several photographs of himself.

After lunch we walked over a part of the farm—through a 4-acre citrus orchard and vegetable garden and past the fields of sugar cane, wheat stubble, and cotton. In the citrus orchard, under the shade of some orange trees, a large water buffalo cow was lying contentedly while the smaller children cooled her off with water from a well. Nearby stood a wobbly young donkey, obviously born only that day, and his protective mamma who kicked out her heels at anyone venturing near her furry, long-eared young one. Mr. Khan assured us that his children were being taught to work and that each one had a job to do, but the extent of their work activities seemed questionable, in view of his status as a landlord.

Willie told us that village protocol demanded we visit all of the important village elders, including the Maulvi—the Moslem religious leader. And, he said, it was very important that none should be missed or they would be insulted. After much consultation the Khan brothers and Willie decided that we should make our visits in the village taxi, because of the shortness of time and the distance to be covered. We were quite an entourage as we loaded into the taxi—Willie and Taffy and me, the two Khans, the driver, the man who cranked the car, and two other men whose functions I never learned. The taxi responded beautifully to the cranking, and we took off without even a push!!

It was obvious wherever we went that we had been expected—the village grapevine had evidently been very busy. Crowds came out to meet us at every village, and we shook hands with countless village men and boys, and exchanged "saalams". We were especially introduced to Willie's student, and I observed that he knew them all, and that they were obviously fond of him. Children were everywhere—curious and friendly. The women were conspicuous by their absence.

We were expected to eat or drink something wherever we went. This presented quite a problem. We drank the tea when offered to us, hoping the water had been boiled long enough to kill the dysentery bacteria we Westerners are so susceptible to. But when at one village we insisted that we couldn't drink any more tea or eat any more of the boiled
eggs which are always served with tea, then a glass of murky water was offered us. I was about to refuse when one of the Khans whispered, "Take it and only hold it or they will be angry." I took the glass quickly and warned Willie and Taffy to do the same. I had no desire to anger a Pathan--Pathans have a reputation of being almost warlike when angered. Occasionally, when I thought I was not being observed, I poured a little water on the dust, to lower the water level in my glass. Suddenly I had a happy thought, and asked if I couldn't take some photos of the son of the owner of the village (another Khan brother) and his demonstration garden plot. This idea was enthusiastically received by the Khan and I was able to get rid of the glass of water.

On our trek out to the garden we were followed by half of the village. The children giggled and jumped up and down and scrambled for positions near us--"the very strange Memsahibs and the siah Amriki Sahib." I asked the Khan to pose with his son and Willie inspecting the crops. Willie insisted that the boy kneel down and touch the pepper plant being inspected, and he did. Willie told us later that he was certain the boy had never worked in the garden, and that all of the work was done by the village farmers. "When I get the school farm plots organized," Willie told us, "I'll see to it that the boys do the work themselves, with their own hands."

With a horde of people crowding into camera range, all eager to have their pictures taken, I explained that I wanted only Willie the Khan and his son, and eventually we managed to clear the area of all except the three I wanted, and one bright-eyed little girl, the Khan's young daughter.

Time was running out. Everywhere we had to stay longer than we had planned. At one village we had to sit patiently, and wait while the maan we had come to see said his afternoon prayers at the tiny village mosque--a small mud building distinguishable from the other village houses only by small pointed mud minarets. Although we were running much too close to the time when the last bus left Mardan for Peshawar, Willie said that we had to visit the Maulvi even if we missed the bus!

At the Maulvi's village we were received royally. The village elders greeted us, along with Willie's students, and took us to the "derah", the men's sitting place and tea house. It was an area protected from the sun by a roof of branches supported on poles, and furnished with charpais dressed up with bright coverings, chairs for us as guests of honor, and small tables.

After we were all seated the Maulvi made his entrance. I had no doubt that it was a well-planned one. He came striding down the village path, a well-built, six foot man with rosy cheeks, a greying hennaed beard, and twinkling blue eyes. Everyone rose to greet him, and he shook hands all the way round. Except with Willie, that is--he embraced Willie and said in English, "This is my good friend." He spoke a little English, thinking carefully about each word before he spoke, but it was obvious he understood more than...
he could speak. Taffy and Willie talked with him in Urdu, and he was delighted. In no way did he fit the stereotype of the somewhat forbidding, sometimes fanatic Maulvis one reads about, hating Christians and turning his people against Westerners. He joked with Willie, and said that since everyone else in the area was named Khan that they were going to christen him "Willie Khan".

The Maulvi asked Taffy and me whether we would go with him to his house, and of course we were delighted to do so. We were expected at the house also, and the women and children were dressed in what must have been their best. Maulvi Khan (he was the Khan brothers' uncle) introduced us to each of his three wives and to innumerable other women and girls. Children were everywhere. We asked the Maulvi how many children he had and he answered, "Twelve boys and twelve girls." I had the feeling, however, that he wasn't quite sure of the number himself. Later Mohammad Khan told me that the Maulvi had other wives in addition to the three we met.

Inside the house, all of the charpains were covered with bright covers, and one was covered with a hand-crocheted spread. The mud floor was swept clean, as was the courtyard. Maulvi Khan asked Taffy and me if we wouldn't like to view the village and the mountains from the roof of his house and we said we would. I wanted to change my mind a minute later, after I saw the ladder to the roof, all of twenty feet tall and almost straight up, leading through a hole in the floor above. But the Maulvi was up ahead of me in a minute, urging me to come on and he would help pull me up. Taffy had on a shalwar and chemise and made the climb nicely, but for me, trying to get up that ladder in a skirt, with dozens of curious villagers below and a good strong breeze blowing my skirt, climbing up was an experience I hope not to repeat again soon. Up on the roof, the Maulvi pointed out interesting views of the village and the mountains and the people in the courtyard below. He urged me to take some photos, and I did.

Down the ladder again, and making our farewell "salaams" to the women, I gathered up enough courage to ask if I could take a photo of the Maulvi and his three wives. He was pleased, and posed with them like a true patriarch—with himself in the foreground, of course. I had some difficulty, however, for each woman kept calling for more and more of her own children to get into the picture, until I finally had to call a halt to it. I promised the Maulvi and his wives that if the photos were good I would send them a print.

Back at the derah, finally, we found more food. There was curried chicken swimming in fat, charcoal-broiled chicken gritty with ashes, a kind of chapati fried in deep fat, sliced onions, hard-boiled eggs, tea, and other foods with which I was not familiar. I knew that such feasts are rare among the village people, and I appreciated the sacrifice they had made for us. Their hospitality was almost embarrassing, but most genuine. We had difficulty
eating, but the Maulvi was watching us with the eyes of a hawk, and kept insisting that we didn't like his food or we would eat more.

The Kahn brothers, realizing our bus deadline, finally helped us to get away. Walking down the village street to the taxi, I asked the Maulvi for permission to take his picture with Willie. With a twinkle in his eye, the old man snatched Willie's sun helmet off and put it on his own head, putting his own gold turban with its tall starched fan—the "pagree"—on Willie. "Now," he said, "take the photo. Ans I did! Then he took my arm, and Taffy's, put one of us on each said of him, with his arms about our shouldeers, and told Willie to take our photo. That photo will be one of my treasures, helping me to remember an exciting and memorable day.

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