

## The Country of Her Father

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> By Masuda Anna Mohamadi

> Last fall Masuda Anna Mohamadi left her home in Northern Virginia for the struggles of war-ravaged Afghanistan, the country her family fled in 1979 when she was just 6. Her father had already returned to Kabul to serve as President Hamid Karzai's minister of mines and industry. In October, Mohamadi, 29, joined him, teaching English to government workers and reconnecting with her roots -- a journey that would bring her great joy, and, ultimately, even greater sorrow. What follow are her e-mails to her family and friends, which have been edited for length and clarity.

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> October 16, 2002

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> Well, I made it. I flew home on an Afghan airline. I can't tell you how exciting it was to be listening to a stewardess talk about the emergency exits in Pashtu and Farsi. My mother, father, sister and uncle and I are sharing two rooms in a house, which is guarded 24 hours. My dad and I are driven to work and back by drivers who are armed.

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> I start teaching English in a few weeks to adults working in the various ministries. I went to visit the current teaching facility, and I was stunned at the conditions -- cramped rooms with peeling plaster and a single bulb dangling from the ceiling -- but amazed at the smiles of the students.

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> October 28, 2002

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> I just returned from Jaji after spending five days there. I went with my Uncle Zahir and met his wife for the first time, his children and all my relatives. I'd stand by the water well, and in five minutes half the village women and their children would surround me, asking questions and handing me small gifts of boiled eggs and walnuts. They offered what they had. They are all excited about the building of a school. They all wanted to know if their daughters could attend.

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> Jaji is square mud houses and acres of farmland surrounded on all sides by mountains. My relatives laughed at me when I tried to milk the cow, chop wood, carry water on my head and so on. These women work all day nonstop. Their faces are dark from the sun and their hands hard like leather. They laugh and tease one another. I didn't want to leave.

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> November 5, 2002

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> In the past few days, I have visited different ministries to test folks on their English skills. One of the questions is: "Why do you want to learn English?" One woman answered, "Because English is delicious."

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> There are no phones or e-mail access in most ministries. We have to drive to the different offices, find the person in charge, who has to find the people in the group to be tested, find a room with enough chairs and tables for everyone and so on. It is an amazing process. Imagine getting anything done in Fairfax without phones in the government offices or one phone line for 50 employees.

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> Yesterday I was stuck in a traffic jam with soldiers standing in the middle of the street. My driver told me President Karzai was passing by. Three armed cars drove by first, then the black bulletproof car with his excellency and three more armed cars behind. You'd think I'd be alarmed by all these armed men around, but it just seems like a normal part of life here.