

Date: Tuesday, March 8, 2005, 7:06 PM

Dear Wazhma,

The other day after twenty-three years, I visited our old house in Wazir Akbar Khan, the house I designed for ourselves and built for ourselves; the house in which we only had momentary happiness in and never enjoyed the scope of its possibilities. This is the house that you lived in when you were between four and six years old and constantly drew its big circles for two years after we left and lived in France. I designed and built a number of other houses in Kabul. But this one had a special meaning because it was so much about us.

The experience of going back there was in many ways shocking. Although the structure and detailing has not over time been affected in any way, the human interventions have totally changed its intrinsic culture on which it was created. You can still see the beautiful black marble stairway through the clutter of new partitions introduced in the space. One can still notice the travertine wall that houses the fire place in the once open living space now divided by plywood walls and their exposed military wiring that runs all over the house. I didn't see the sign of rosewood walls that separated the living room from the kitchen. The master bedroom with the partial glass roof that extended into a secluded deck where one could watch the moon during those clear Kabul nights has been ripped off and enclosed by plywood to make a more utilitarian space. In the front garden where the double glass wall of the living room opened into a serene landscape,

they have built a two-story structure that appears to be a security or communication tower. Heavy concrete and military sand bags were all around it.

I didn't see the walnut tree that my sister gave me as the gift for moving into the new house. This was a ten-year-old tree that I remember the joy of removing from their garden and moving it with the limited means available in those days. The vines that my brother Wasse brought and planted in the house four weeks before his murder in 1977, have grown big and expand over a trellis. There are a couple of tropical plants that have grown big in the green house.

Visiting the house has been a shocking experience about what human interventions can bring to the culture of a place. On the other hand, the visit was a reassuring experience about the power of nature and the enrichment and beauty it can bring. I showed the current users the old pictures of the house, which surprised them, since they had moved there after the US military had made the changes and could never imagine what it was like before.

Everyone liked the two pictures of you, one sitting on the circle, and the other standing against the circle. Those two pictures are my favorite ones among all the pictures of the house. In many ways now the house has turned into a bulky shack containing cubicles inside and housing sophisticated military electronic equipment in a juxtaposition of different contrasts. This shack is now rented for \$13,000 per month, while in 1981 when I sold it to get out of the country, I only got \$20,000 for it—a price that today is not even

worth two months rent. Before I saw the place, I was contemplating that if there was a chance to buy it back, I would do it. After seeing it, that dream was put to rest and I told myself I will never want to live in this place again.

What I want to say is how that house expresses the complexities of our lives. To see you there and remember how you loved the place and how I loved seeing you be there and walk around has always been part of my fond memories. I have also seen how things around us eventually changed and fragmented. Facing the political changes of 1978 that subsequently lead to the loss of our house was not easy. I should have had more strength to confront them and to not allow it at times to create barriers between me and my family.

In 1981 when Gazelle was born, I didn't have the time or the state of mind to celebrate it. The subsequent adjustments were not easy either and whenever I experienced something in our new environments, the old fears came to the surface. The early nineties in Pullman when you were growing up and facing your adulthood, were not easy for me and I probably got too worked out about them to the extent that I may have neglected my fatherhood role, and you probably noticed it without me realizing it. But with all the turmoil we have been experiencing, what I believed remained was the thread of love. I may have not been able to express it, or devote myself to it to make it real, but it was always there. I often felt guilty about it--that may have pushed me to other extreme behaviors. Now that you write, I also want to throw away that sense of guilt and

regret that can be debilitating. After all, we have only one life and must live it with all its possibilities.

At the end, all the suffering hopefully can make us better human beings and I for one know that at the end it can be the basis for art. Since it is part of us, we should use it then as a launching pad to move to bigger and better things. Ultimately it is love that counts-- through whatever means we express it, through relationships or through art. Visiting the house and not wanting to buy it back brought closure to something that was in my imagination. We can similarly bring closure to other aspects of our lives. We should neither buy back our past nor be seduced by the future. Only and only the present counts and must be fully realized. I can fully understand your past resentments, but I also rejoice at your ability to move beyond it.

Dad