

# Afghanistan, home to professor family under exchange program

For the next two years Marvin Johnson, UNL professor of engineering, and his family will get their water from an embassy instead of a faucet and will attend church on Friday instead of Sunday.

After attending orientation sessions in Washington, D.C., the Johnsons left last week for Afghanistan. Of five UNL professors participating in an exchange program with the University of Kabul, Johnson was the last to leave Lincoln.

Others participating in the program, which is sponsored by American Industrial Development (AID), are: Gerald Boardman, professor of education; Otis Cross, Ted Doane and Joe Young, professors of agriculture.

## Update teaching

Johnson, an industrial engineer, will attempt to update teaching methods at the University of Kabul. He will also program Afghanistan's only computer, his wife Anne said.

Mrs. Johnson said her family is anticipating major cultural adjustments. For example, she said, Afghanistan has no radio or television.

"We're prepared to play a lot of games. And we're putting a lot of books—about 12 dozen—into our baggage quota of 66 pounds. We love to read, and English books will be hard to come by."

Because weekends in the Islam country are on Thursday and Friday, Mrs. Johnson said, the family will attend Christian services on Friday.

## Three languages

Communication in the trilingual country will present the biggest problem, Mrs. Johnson said. The Afghanistans speak Dari and Farki, both dialects of Persian, and Pushtu, the language of the nomads.

Because of the change in sanitation standards, the Johnsons will receive water from the American embassy. Mrs. Johnson said her family will also take along their own water distilling unit.

She said they also must wash all their fresh food in iodine and air dry it. After the food is dried, it is soaked another 20 minutes in distilled water.

Although Mrs. Johnson said the Afghanistan people are more accustomed to poorer sanitation, "they don't adjust to it as well as they might think." Digestive problems, she said, are a major cause of death among Near Eastern people.

The opportunity for sightseeing, Mrs. Johnson said, is "part of the reason I'm going." She said her family plans to visit the Great Wall of China, the Taj Mahal and the Bantyan Valley - three of the seven wonders of the modern world.

# Perdomo: things work out

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Finally, in 1969, he came to the United States. He went to Norfolk, where a friend he had met in Havana lived.

"These people were very instrumental in getting me to the United States," he said. "Norfolk is my home. I go home after maybe six months away and still my toothbrush is in the bathroom."

Perdomo studied vocational rehabilitation as a graduate student at UNL.

## Worked on dorm staff

After living in Schramm Hall for a semester, he said, he decided he would like to get involved in working with the dorm staff. He applied and was accepted as a Student Assistant (SA) in Harper Hall.

"I believe that possibly I was being tested," he said "that possibly I was one of the first, or the first, foreign student hired by a resident hall. Being an SA was one of the best times I've ever had in the States. I had to relate to people with entirely different background interests. It was a surprise to me and other people that we got along."

A year later, Perdomo became Residence Director of Selleck Quadrangle.

"I think that because I was there (at Selleck)," he said, many foreign and minority students said 'he is there, okay, I can make it, too.' Because I was different maybe I got some of the support I got. A lot of people helped me out."

## Moved to New York

Two years later, he moved to New York to work in the programs office of Adelphi College in Garden City, Long Island.

A year later, he decided he wanted to return Lincoln to go to school.

But, at the same time he heard his mother and brother might be able to leave Cuba, he said, so he decided to get a full-time job to support them when they came.

Perdomo's family never came, but he did get a job as the executive director of the Lincoln

Indian Center.

"I felt I had to make a commitment to work with minorities at that point," he said.

This fall, he began working in the scholarships and financial aids office at UNL, but he still works with the Indians at the Nebraska Penitentiary one day a week.

## Feels freer

Perdomo said that now that he is in the United States, he feels freer than he did in Cuba.

"I am here, I guess," he said, "because I have confidence and trust in the democratic process, thought sometimes I feel shaky. I'm not a fanatic anti-Communist. I'm not a fanatic anti-anything for the sake of being anti-anything."

"I think it's a matter of degrees," he continued. "We know we have limits. Our system allows us a few more, although economics and other things put a limit on us."

He said, he thinks that the Cuban government possibly has helped some Cubans.

## Soon to be citizen

Perdomo said, he will soon be a citizen of the United States.

"It's been five years and a lot of thinking," he said. "I promised my mother I wouldn't become one until she came to this country, but..."

Perdomo said he has changed much since his youth in Cuba. He said, from a quiet, conservative, "bookish" child who won many awards for his research and studies in Cuba, he has come to consider his social contacts the most important part of his life.

"I'm concerned with helping people more," he said. "As my mother used to say, give, give, give, until you have no more to give. And I do, of myself and my things. Some people may think I'm foolish. Maybe I am."

"But money has never meant anything to me. I can be as happy with two cents as with two thousand. I love to travel and I can still do that. I just do it with less money."

"I have never lacked for anything for too long. Somehow things always work out," he said.

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