

May 1, 2003
Peter C. Macdonald

One year ago tonight, at this very moment, I was on my way to Amsterdam, the second leg of a journey that would ultimately end in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Only three weeks before I had received an invitation from the United States Department of Justice and the American Bar Association to participate in a domestic violence training for Kazakh judges. This program was being funded by the United States Agency for International Development. The primary sponsor of the program was the American Bar Association which has a number of volunteers in Eastern European countries and also in the emerging nations of Central Asia, and more specifically, new independent states of the former Soviet Union, which includes Kazakhstan. Obviously, with only three weeks from invitation to departure, I had a great deal to accomplish before leaving. I first had to get a visa and to learn as much as possible about this relatively new nation. I believe that I mispronounced the name of the country when I called the ABA to accept the invitation. I said Ka-zak-a-stan, instead of Kazakhstan. I looked at internet articles that I had been sent, but they were very general, and referred primarily to restaurants and hotels. My Justice Department contact had indicated that safety was not an issue. A recent National Geographic issue was helpful, but only superficially. My search for information had revealed very little. However, being the adventurous person that I am, my lack of information had no bearing on whether or not to make the trip, and I was determined to learn as much as I could upon arrival.

Kazakhstan is literally halfway around the world from Hopkinsville, a time difference of 12 hours, and for that reason I was scheduled to lay over for a day and half in Amsterdam, to rest for the next leg, which would take me over the Baltic Sea, Lithuania, Moscow, and other vast expanses of the former Soviet Union. It was

welcomed, as a time change of 12 hours would be hard to deal with, at least for a day or two. I had left Hopkinsville at noon on a Thursday, and would not be arriving in Kazakhstan until 2:00 AM on Sunday. When I arrived at the airport in Amsterdam for my departure to Kazakhstan, I was surprised by the small number of passengers on a very large plane. There were several Eastern European individuals, but the passengers were primarily Asian in appearance, including one who was in the company of two Swedish policemen. I learned later that he was being deported back to Kazakhstan for drug offenses committed in Stockholm. Many of the passengers were young women, dressed in very provocative clothing, not unlike the dress in the red-light district that I had walked through the night before in Amsterdam. When I later learned the average income of the residents of Kazakhstan, I thought back and considered that perhaps they were some of the same “ladies” that I had seen the night before. The flight was relatively uneventful, and dark for a majority of the trip. All international flights, all 21 per week, arrived in Almaty, the largest city in Kazakhstan, and the site of my program, after midnight. As our flight progressed, I noticed that there were great distances where no lights could be seen, and thought that we must be crossing over the vast steppe, where there would be almost no towns or cities. After being informed by our KLM pilot that we were approaching Almaty, my excitement level naturally increased – I was almost there after flying for a total of 17. I saw in the distance lights, but thought that there weren’t enough for a city of almost 1.5 million – it didn’t look any larger than Hopkinsville from the air, but then thought that it was after all almost 2:00AM and perhaps most of the lights were out. We passed by the city and made a wide, sweeping turn in preparation for landing and I noticed that there did not seem to be any landing strip anywhere in front of the

plane, and only when we were on our final approach did a long double row of lights suddenly appear after being activated. I had been told by my Justice contact that I would be met by an expediter, who would take care of the process of handling luggage, customs, and any other need that might arise. I was told to follow his instructions explicitly and told that his name was Roman, and that he would find me. We landed and taxied over to the terminal, which is not as large as this building, deplaned down the stairs as there was no jetway, and walked into the terminal, where, sure enough, I was met by Roman, a young Eastern European in appearance, who worked for the United States embassy. He did in fact expedite matters, and after we cleared customs I met Glenn Sarka, my ABA host for the program. I was surprised that Glenn was there, as it was then almost 3:00 AM, but he explained that he wanted to greet me on arrival, and then Jerry Bowles, the other presenter, who would not arrive until the next morning. Jerry is a Family Court Judge from Jefferson County, but some of you may also know that he is actually from Pembroke. How strange to think that two judges from Christian County would be the instructors for 32 Kazakh judges! Glenn and Roman told me to put my wallet and passport in a safe place and follow them out of the airport and not to stop for any reason until we were safely in the vehicle. As soon as we exited the terminal I noticed the smell of cooked meat and saw the source of the smell – there were small fires everywhere with people huddled over them and the meat they were cooking was for sale. The parking lot was no larger than that of the Holiday Inn and was graveled and had not a single empty space. The parking method was a little different from what we are used to experiencing – the cars were pointed ever possible way and it seemed impossible that anyone would be able to leave because of the jumbled method that was utilized. I followed Glenn and

Roman and was met by hundreds of people apparently offering cabs, hotels, food, drugs, and women. A woman and a younger girl followed us to our vehicle and even though Roman and Glenn conveyed to them that we were not interested, they continued to follow us and even knocked on the windows while the luggage was being put in the back. Needless to say, this experience was disconcerting, but not totally unexpected as I had been warned. I would not want to arrive at this airport and be on my own, no matter how adventurous I might think that I am! We negotiated our way out of the parking lot and headed to the hotel which was in the center of the city, about 15 miles away. I immediately noticed the wide and straight streets, which are apparently a trademark of the former Soviet Union. I was shocked to see a number of people, well dressed, who were on the side of the road, hitchhiking! I was told that this was very common, even at 3:00 AM. We got to my hotel, the Regency, and I was shocked at its opulence. Marble everywhere, gorgeous oriental rugs, down comforters, staff everywhere, even at this early hour. It was not like the other buildings in the city. I went straight to bed with the understanding that Glenn would pick me up late that afternoon, and we would meet with the Secretary of the Union of Kazakh judges, a representative from the Department of Justice, and a few others, including a translator. I collapsed in bed, my mind reeling with the culture shock and the excitement of such a great adventure. I awoke after only a few hours sleep because of the 12 hour time difference and spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon exploring.

What is Kazakhstan like? Its name means the land of the Kazakhs. The suffix stan means place or place of or land of and is adopted from the Persian. The country stretches from the Caspian Sea to China and from Siberia to the Tian Shan mountain

range and is more than twice as large as the four other former Soviet Central Asian republics put together. It is also one of the least densely populated but potentially one of the world's wealthiest countries, with huge mineral resources, mainly the enormous oil reserves that lie near the Caspian Sea on the country's western border, that are currently attracting serious investment from the West. The ninth largest country in the world, Kazakhstan lies at the heart of the great Eurasian steppe, the band of grassland stretching from Mongolia to Hungary, which has served for millennia as the highway and grazing ground of nomadic horseback peoples. Kazakhs remained largely nomadic until well into the 20th century and as a result have left no ancient cities or ruins. The few historic remains are from non-Kazakh cultures.

Because of the fertility of the steppe, and because it is the only Central Asian territory bordering directly on Russia, Kazakhstan was colonized by the czarist and Soviet empires far earlier, and to a greater extent, than the rest of Central Asia. Much of the steppe was turned into farmland, and grey, monotonous industrial cities were built to exploit the vast mineral resources.

The emptiness and remoteness of the steppe also made Kazakhstan a convenient dumping ground for unwanted czarist and Soviet subjects. Most of you know something of Kazakhstan but probably aren't even aware of it. Kazakhstan is the site of the gulags that served as prisons for these unwanted subjects ranging from Dostoevsky to Trotsky to Solzhenitsyn to whole ethnic groups disliked or feared by Stalin. It also served as a place to hide the USSR's chief nuclear testing site and you might recognize that it is also the main launching site for the Russian space program. Today, Russians and other nationalities are leaving and Kazakhs have only recently begun to be in the majority once

again. Almaty, the former capital, is located in the southeastern part of the country, very near the borders of China and Kyrgystan. It is also considered the most cosmopolitan of all central Asian cities. You will meet almost as many Russians as Kazakhs, each nationality numbering about 40% of the total population of approximately 15 million people, with the remaining 20% made up of almost 120 other ethnic groups. The Kazakhs, who descended from the armies of Genghis Khan, present very great contrasts. Though they are in the main rural and still only two, or at most, three generations removed from a nomadic life, they can still be more sophisticated and stylish than their Russian counterparts. However, they continue to participate in very wild and dangerous horseback sports, continue the custom of bride stealing, and the collective farmers still disappear into the far reaches of the steppe with their herds and live in the yurts that have served as their homes for over a thousand years.

The early history of Kazakhstan is probably best described as a shadowy procession of nomadic empires, most of which came into the region from the east and are surrounded with uncertainty as to their history, since they left few, if any, records or artifacts. The Kazakh people did not emerge as a distinct entity until the 15th century. Since the 18th century, the involvement of Russia has been the predominant influence on the country.

Around the beginning of the 13th century Genghis Khan and his hordes invaded much of what is now Kazakhstan, and it became part of the Mongol empire.

It was from the descendants of the Mongols, and of Turkic and other peoples who survived their coming in Kazakhstan, that the Kazakhs emerged. In the late 15th and 16th centuries the Kazakhs established one of the world's last great nomadic empires,

stretching across the steppe and the deserts of the north. The Russians today who claim that northern Kazakhstan is traditionally part of Russia seem unaware that, by a similar logic, southern Siberia could be considered traditionally part of Kazakhstan. In 1640 Guriyev, near the Caspian Sea, became part of the Russian empire. Russia's expansion into Siberia also ran up against the Oyrats, a warlike, expansionist Mongolian people who ruled much of eastern Kazakhstan. Because of danger from the Oyrats, the Russians built a line of forts along the Kazakh's northern border. The Kazakhs, considering the Russians the lesser of two evils, sought czarist protection from the Oyrats, and the khans of all the hordes swore loyalty to the Russian crown between 1731 and 1742. This brought little help to the Kazakhs, but the Russians took it as an excuse to stretch their defensive line across the north of the Kazakh territory to the Ural River. In the 1750s this line began to move south and Russian, Cossack, not to be confused with Kazakh, and Tatar settlers moved in behind it.

Russia chose to interpret the Kazakh khan's oaths of allegiance as an agreement to annexation, despite the annihilation of the Oyrats by the Manchurian Chinese in the 1750s. Influenced by Kazakh attacks on Russian forts and by Kazakh revolts against their own leaders, Russia gradually extended its "protection" of the khanates to cause their disappearance by 1848. The khanates as political entities were abolished, but the hordes as social or ethnic entities remained. Despite the repeated Kazakh uprisings, Russia steadily tightened its control. In 1854 the Russians founded a fort named Verny in the southeastern part of what is now Kazakhstan. Verny is now known as Almaty. The Kazakhs are probably the most Russian of any major ethnic group in Central Asia. They have had contact with Russian rule for a hundred years longer than any other Central

Asian people. Land hungry Russian peasants poured into the steppe in the late 19th century. In the 1930's and '40s trains brought thousands of people that Stalin didn't trust or tolerate. Yet another wave of settlers arrived in the 1950's to plow the steppe in the Virgin Lands program, which was an ill-fated attempt to grow wheat in semi - desert conditions. At that time the Kazakh population destroyed millions of cattle and horses in order to protest the plan. The Russians continued to attempt to eradicate the local culture by burning Kazakh books, executing leaders and sending them into exile, and collectivizing the peasants. It is no wonder that many Kazakhs have lost touch with their own culture and today speak Russian better than their own Turkic language. Russian rule continued until the breakup of the Soviet Union, but Kazakhstan's ruler, President Nursultan Nazarbayev, did not welcome the initial breakup and Kazakhstan was the last Soviet Republic to declare independence, occurring in 1991.

Corruption is a way of life in Kazakhstan. Millions of dollars paid in 1997 by American companies seeking oil concessions have ended up in Swiss banks in accounts that are controlled by Nazarbayev. In our country, that would be called a scandal, but in Kazakhstan the intimidated press barely gave it any mention. Personal information about the President is by law a state secret. Publications that have dared criticize him on other matters have been sued or their equipment confiscated. One of our interpreters told of his former position – a reporter for a television network owned by a former minister of the government. The minister apparently dared to criticize the President, and for his efforts was imprisoned and his television network confiscated by the government. The President was recently hailed as a hero by the state run press for donating the equivalent of \$400,000,000 to keep the government afloat in a particularly tight economic time, but our

interpreter, Timor, laughed at that, explaining that the President was only returning a small portion of the money that he had previously stolen. Nazarbayev was the last Kazakh Communist Party boss, before the Soviet Union's collapse, and has been the country's only leader, easily winning reelection in 1999. Critics called the election flawed: for one thing Nazarbayev's strongest opponent was barred from running by politically controlled courts. He controls the parliament as well as the courts – much like the old Soviet way.

Late Sunday afternoon Glenn Sarka came to pick me up at the hotel to meet with the Secretary of the Union of Kazakh Judges and several others so that we could go over the agenda for the program. Glenn came a little early so that we might see some of the sights of the city. He hailed a cab, which turned out to be a private car, and now I understood why the streets were full of people who appeared to be hitchhiking the night before. It is the custom, but against the law, to hail private vehicles to negotiate a fare to take you where you wish. Glenn advised me not to get into a car with two men, especially if one was in the back seat. We rode to Panfilov Park, which, for lack of a better description, is like Central Park. It is very large and quite beautiful, though not well - kempt. We strolled through the park and happened on Zenkov Cathedral which was designed and constructed in 1904, one of the oldest structures in the city. It is a candy colored building that is one of the few czarist era buildings that remains. It was Easter in the Russian Orthodox Church, and a beautiful service was underway and was quite moving to observe. Walking further into the park revealed an enormous war memorial which appears to be carved of coal, but is actually dark bronze, and honors 28 soldiers who died fighting the Germans on the outskirts of Moscow in 1941. It now

serves as a war memorial for all those who died in World War II. It was then time to meet our hosts and we walked on to the restaurant for our meeting. It was on the second floor of a non-descript building like all of those in the city, except for our hotel, which would have to be considered a five star by any stretch of the imagination. Climbing the stairs I noticed the exposed wiring and plumbing, which Glenn says is in every building in the city. The Russian design was to build a concrete building, and anything that was added, like wiring or plumbing, went on the outside of the walls. We met, through our interpreter Tatiana Chernobil, who is also Glenn's assistant, Judge Alexander Rakin, the Secretary of the Union of Kazakh Judges and his director, Sergey Kiselev. Jim Robinson, from the Department of Justice, was scheduled to arrive later. We exchanged pleasantries and got down to ordering our meal. Glenn suggested that I might now want to jump right in and order the specialty of the country, horse meat, but I diplomatically deferred. I ordered lamb shashlyk, or kebab, which Glenn said was being cooked in the airport parking lot the night before. That was preceded by a lentil soup that was quite delicious. We spent some time getting to know each other and I could soon tell that Alexander would be an interesting man to know. He had been a member of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union and had retired before the breakup. He had retired on a very generous pension, which of course ended when the Soviet Union collapsed and he was compelled to go back to work. Others faced the same situation – retired military, civil servants; anyone who received a government retirement benefit was forced to go back to work. One saw many older women working in menial jobs. Not many elderly men were seen anywhere, and it was explained that the country suffered devastating losses in World War II. Sergey, like Alexander, was of Russian descent, and he explained that his great

grandfather had been a Cossack, not Kazakh, who was stationed at Verny. Tatiana explained that she was in law school in Almaty and worked part time as Glenn's assistant. Jim Robinson arrived a little later and gave me a written security briefing that I put aside to read later. He was the chief legal officer for Central Asia and had many stories to tell. He had been the first one contacted when the United States Army captured John Walker Lindh. The Army wanted to know what to do with him, and it was up to Jim to make the arrangements for his detention and transportation back to the United States. We said our goodbyes and Glenn accompanied me back to the hotel as he was not comfortable in having me hail my own cab quite yet. I read the security briefing when I got back, and perhaps that is why he was reluctant for me to go on my own so soon. The briefing began with the following language:

WELCOME TO Kazakhstan!

Kazakhstan is rated high for transnational terrorism and medium for crime in the Department of State's Security Environment Threat List. The threat facing Americans is significant and practicing good security awareness is a must.

The next day it was explained that that was just to get your attention. It got mine.

Jerry had arrived on the same flight that I had arrived on, only one day later, and managed to meet us in the lobby for the first day of the program after only three hours sleep. A driver had been arranged for us who took us to the Hotel Kazakhstan where the conference attendees were staying. It was the tallest structure in the city, 24 stories, and not nearly as nice as the Regent. We were welcomed by Dan Russell, the Deputy Chief

of Mission, or the second in line in the United States embassy. Thirty two judges were in attendance, two from each obelisk, or state, in the country. Also in attendance were the local domestic violence shelter director, the shelter attorney and other staff members. We met two new interpreters who were excellent. It was planned to have concurrent translation, but that had proven too expensive and we had to use consecutive translation, which obviously reduced the actual conference time by half. Timor was my interpreter, and the one about whom I referred earlier – he had worked in the television business before his employer was incarcerated. Of the 32 attendees, fewer than half were women, and almost all, except for one, were of Kazakh descent. Apparently there is discrimination for these positions if only one of the judges was of Russian origin. Even though the judges were Kazakh, the language used was Russian. I addressed the group with a few Kazakh words that I had learned, but could tell that some did not understand what I was saying, not because I was butchering the language, but because they did not speak Kazakh, which was used primarily by the older generation.

By the end of the day we were exhausted, especially Jerry, and headed back to the Regent for dinner and sleep.

The next morning I got up fairly early and decided to get some exercise and took off for a run as soon as it got light, at around 6:30. I noticed right off that the streets were wide and straight and observed the Russian built buildings that were almost all identical – concrete and crumbling, whether new or old. I also was aware that there was literally no one outside. For a city of 1.5 million people, one would expect someone to be going to work or walking or doing something! I then noticed something else that gave me some cause for alarm. There were no dogs. None on the streets. None in the yards of the

buildings. None barking in the buildings. What had I eaten the night before? Later in the week I did see dogs in the parks, but not many. Apparently it is too expensive to keep pets. I ran back to the hotel and passed the Presidential palace that Nazarbayev used when in the city. The new capital, Astana, was built by the President, but it is not preferred by anyone. The weather is much more extreme in the winter. Cleverness is apparently not one of the virtues of the ruling class. Astana is translated as "Capitol."

The next day was similar to the first, and I asked Timor and Glenn for an explanation of a certain phenomenon that I had noticed the first day, and which occurred again on the second. The meeting room was quite warm, and air conditioning had come on the first day and the second, and each time that it did there was noticeable agitation, especially by the female judges. The thermostat was adjusted, and it would not come on again while we were in the room. Glenn and Timor explained that the Kazakhs, especially women, believe that ice and air conditioning will freeze your organs and cause extreme trauma. It was also explained that women will not sit on concrete or marble without first putting some type of insulation on it first, otherwise their ovaries would freeze.

After the conference was over for the day we had about two hours before a conference dinner would be held. Glenn, Jerry and I took a cab/private car to the Zelyony Bazaar, an enormous open air market with every conceivable item for sale or trade. The place was teeming with people of every ethnic origin. The smells were exotic and pleasurable. The ubiquitous cooking meats, beautiful flowers, fresh meats, and too many other aromas to mention. I bought a hat worn by a majority of the Kazakh men, at least the older generation. The area where food was sold was mesmerizing! Stalls selling

horse sausage, horse intestines, smoked fish, yogurt balls, mare's milk, sheep heads, honey of every hue and color, and on and on. I bought some raisins from Samarkand that were absolutely delicious! The largest and sweetest I had ever seen. I tried three or four different types of honey that were out of this world. This was the zenith for fresh food shopping. We walked back to the hotel for the dinner, once again through Panfilov Park.

In addition to the attendees, we were joined by Chris Krafchak, who is Glenn's supervisor in charge of the volunteers in Kazakhstan, as well as two other Central Asian nations. I sat with Jerry, Judge Rakin, Sergey, Tatiana, and Timor. After dinner of vegetables and horse meat, vodka mysteriously appeared and the toasts began. It is impossible for a man to refuse the toasts. Your hands are removed from the top of your glass and you are all but compelled to drink. Judge Rakin proposed the first toast and I the second. After several more toasts we were then Alexander and Peter, and remained so for the rest of my stay. Other judges stopped by and cognac suddenly appeared followed by more toasts, some very emotional and sincere in their delivery, almost all of them thanking us for taking the time and effort to travel such distance to help them understand domestic violence in ways they had never comprehended.

The conference ended the next morning and we managed to slip away while the judges were doing an exercise. Jim Robinson and his aid Emir came to pick us up to go rug shopping. Jim knew quite a lot about them, and had indicated that he knew of a shop in the Presidential Museum where we could probably purchase quality rugs. Jim knew the proprietor and she did have a fairly extensive selection. I found one that I really liked and we bargained for a while. I purchased it for \$290, which included the required certification verifying that it is not an antiquity, and a bag in which to carry it. We

returned to the hotel for the closing ceremony and we handed out pins, pencils, decals, and other small trinkets that represented Kentucky, Hopkinsville, and Louisville. Glenn had said that the Kazakhs love to receive these type things and it was apparent that they were thrilled when they received their small tokens. Jerry and I were presented with a small Kazakh flag by the judges as well as a cochi, or whip that is highly valued by all visitors. The cochi is considered one of the symbols of the country, representing the nomadic past on horseback, along with the shanrak, which is the circular top support of the yurt.

After emotional farewells, Alexander and Sergey spirited us off on a whirlwind tour for the remainder of the day. We visited the chief court of Almaty and met the chief judge who gave us a tour of the courthouse. Then on out of the city to the home of Jambyl Jabayev, who is a national hero in Kazakhstan and best described as a combination of Will Rogers, Carl Sandburg, and Burl Ives. He lived to the age of 99 and the Russian government gave him a twelve room home and car on the 75th anniversary of his first poem. We were the only ones in the home, as it had been arranged for us to have a tour after hours, and the our guide asked us if we wanted to touch the china in the dining room, which she said gave us longevity, like Jambyl, who lived, as I will now, until 99 years 4 months.

We were now late for our dinner appointment in a roadside park about halfway back to Almaty. We were to meet the local judge, also a friend of Alexander's, who had arranged a traditional Kazakh dinner. Once we arrived we were shown into a private dining room with a table laden with the usual fare: horse meat of every cut and preparation and vegetables galore. As the senior visitor, I had been chosen as the most

honored guest and was given the great honor of carving up the boiled sheep head that was presented to me after the meal, which was accompanied by many toasts, thank goodness. It was my duty to carve the head and dispense it according to each guest's need. For instance, if I believed that someone needed better eyesight, I would serve that guest one of the eyes. Diminished intelligence would be rewarded with a serving of brains, and so on. It was quite an experience and I was truly touched and honored that Alexander would have arranged such a wonderful ending to our relationship. Serving a guest a boiled sheep head is Kazakhstan's ultimate honor. Many toasts were given this evening – to our health, our continued relationship, our friends and families, the hosts, the guests, and on and on. Alexander had mentioned relatively early in the meal that the batah would be given shortly. It was explained that the batah was the final blessing after which no more toasts could be given. I was relieved when he described what the batah meant, for we had already toasted too many things and individuals for our own good, but it turned out that Alexander had only mentioned the batah to indicate that at some point the meal would end, which did occur some three and a half hours after we started. We were presented books celebrating the life of Jambyl which were signed with personal reflections by Alexander and Sergey and then driven back to our hotel (by drivers who had not participated in the toasting).

Our remaining time in the country was devoted to visiting the local domestic violence shelter, one of thirty law schools in the city, celebrating VE day in Paniflov Park where literally thousands of flowers were deposited on the memorial in honor of the vast numbers of Kazakhs who perished in World War II, shopping for mementos of our visit, visiting the central mosque, arranging for a driver to take us into the mountains nearby

for a hike to a beautiful lake, Bolshoe Almantinskoe, having this same driver take us 175 miles east of Almaty to Charyn Canyon, which is not unlike the Grand Canyon, and from which you can see the borders of China and Kyrgyzstan, visiting the US embassy, where we by chance happened to meet the ambassador, Lawrence Napper, a career diplomat, and by all accounts very respected by the Kazakhs as well as his peers, and dinner at Sergey's apartment, which was also in the ever-present concrete building. Sergey's apartment was like something out of New York – this drab building hid an ultramodern, beautifully designed spacious living space. Jerry and I had coffee with Jim Robinson after dinner at Sergey's apartment and he explained the procedure for our departure early on the following day. He said that we would be picked up by a driver from the embassy at about 1:30 AM who would be accompanied by another expediter by the name of Daulet who would take care of things for us. He told us, no, ordered us, on more than one occasion not to get out of the car until we were told. It became a joke between Jerry and me, but Jim did say that it was very important to follow his instructions. We were picked up on time and taken to the airport for our departure, and the parking lot scene was not unlike my arrival – smoke from cooking meats, suspicious looking individuals transacting no telling what kind of deals, cars cruising by slowly – I was reminded of the movie Casablanca. However, Daulet did his job well, we made our flight, but not without some bribery on Jerry's behalf, and I got arrived home some 52 hours without sleep after awakening on my final day in Kazakhstan. It was an experience of a lifetime.