



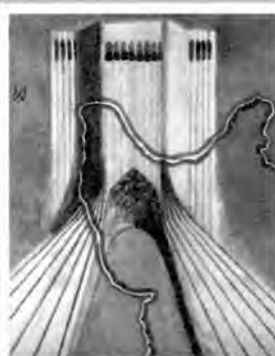
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Persian Heritage

Vol. 7, No. 26

Summer 2002

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

On Sunday, April 7, I attended a local *Sizdeh Bedar* celebration in New Jersey. It was organized by a Persian cultural organization and held at a beautiful public park. This holiday, for those of you who are unaware, is the thirteenth day of the Persian New Year, NoRouz. It is a time when families gather together outside, near water. Greens that they have grown over the past few weeks are tied together and thrown into the water as they make wishes. The unmarried ladies hope that the year will bring them marriage and for all, the wish is for good health and happiness.

The celebration is filled with music, food, and dance.

At the celebration I attended the organization was charging a five-dollar admittance fee into the area of the park they were using. The charge was to cover the cost of organizing this function. Any money that remained, by tradition of the organization was dedicated to helping the needy, whether a student, orphan or victim of a natural disaster. People happily paid their contribution. Empty tables soon became filled with food, people, drink and laughter. Families mingled together and shared their bounties. The celebration was well on its way. It was a chilly afternoon but was warmed by those in attendance. The smell of the kabob grilling made you drunk.

I walked around paying my respects to my friends when I saw a policeman on a horse. He was stationed just outside of the gathering area and was talking to a small group of well-dressed Iranian men. Within a short time two police cars arrived. Curious by this I began to approach the officer on the horse. As I got close, he ordered me to step back. Having a great deal of respect for the uniform, I immediately complied with his request. The officer continued to talk to each of the gentlemen gathered. As they finished, I asked them what they were talking to the policeman about. They told me that the organizers had been illegally charging a five-dollar entrance fee into this area. Hearing this I asked them if they were the ones who called the police. One of the men, without hesitation, acknowledged that he had contacted the police. I knew some of the men that were there, but there was one that I did not recognize. I asked him where he was from, and he told me that he had come more than one hundred miles to attend this gathering.

Shocked by what they had done, I asked another question. I was curious as to why, in this huge park, they felt the need to gather amongst this group and make an issue over the admittance fee. Certainly they could go to another area of the park away from this group, who happily made their donations.

This questioning sparked anger from one of them. He told me that it was not my business where he went and that he was free to sit anywhere in this park. His attack deeply wounded me, not as an individual but as an Iranian, one Iranian gathered with others on such a beautiful day to celebrate our holiday. I turned and pointed to each one saying, "Shame on you, shame on you, shame on you, shame on you and shame on me! How is it that we Iranian Americans cannot solve a small problem amongst ourselves? Why was it necessary to call the police?" With each word I spoke I heard my voice trembling, but I continued. "How can you as an Iranian allow us to be humiliated like this in front of the police? Are you not aware of the social and political problems we are facing every day as Iranians? We are already looked upon as terrorists and suicide bombers. What image have we left on this policeman? Here we are gathered to celebrate and one of our own is making an issue over a five-dollar donation. I just cannot understand this!" One of the men asked me to lower my voice and then asked me if I knew where this donation was going.

Happily I told them that it went to cover expenses and that the remainder was given to a needy student, orphan or other needy individual. I also informed him that



Persian Heritage

www.mirassiran.com

Persian Heritage, Inc.

110 Passaic Avenue

Passaic, NJ 07055

E-mail: ahkami@mirassiran.com

Telephone: (973) 471-4283

Fax: (973) 471-8534

or: (973) 574-8995

EDITOR:

SHANROKH AHKAMI

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PUBLISHED BY:

PERSIAN HERITAGE, INC.

A corporation organized for cultural and literary purposes.

Cover Price: \$4.00

Subscriptions: \$16.00 per year (domestic);

\$28.00 per year (foreign)

Typesetting & Layout: FARABI PUBLISHERS

he should not even consider that the money went into the personal pockets of the organizers. My statement was addressed by one of the men who claimed to be a university professor. He told me that this was not the proper way to collect money for students. Happily I told him that if he knew of a better way to raise money for students and other needy individuals then perhaps there was another way he could have approached this situation. He could have explained his concerns to those taking the donation instead of calling the police making all of us look like criminals.

It appeared as if our conversation would not reach a conclusion or solution. The decision was made to return their money to them. They were refunded \$45.00. The refund, however, did not satisfy them. They proceeded to go from table to table stimulating others to go and seek reimbursement. There were a few others who insisted on a refund, but others graciously accepted the organization's explanation for the donation and returned to the joy of the day.

The police officer was still on his horse and I tried to approach him again. This time he allowed me to speak. I explained the situation to him. Even he had to admit that this was a foolish episode but that he, as an officer, had no other choice but to respond to their complaint. I told him I understood and thanked him for his concern.

Of course the incident clouded the joy of the day. The organizers were embarrassed and disappointed. There was an older man present, who was aware of the events that had occurred and offered his opinion. He believed it was better that the organization cease from having these events in the future. They put in too much work into them and receive little or no credit for their efforts. Why should they continue to place themselves in a position to receive such insults.

I respectfully told him that I had to disagree with his opinion. As a long time member of this organization I believe that the spiritual reward received, as a result of the efforts made, outweighs any insults

given. Only through these efforts will Iranian Americans be able to keep their culture and customs alive. Again while I understand his position I believe that all the negatives must be overlooked and that we must go forward making even greater sacrifices.

Later, one of the men involved in the altercation approached me. He wanted to let me know that in fact he had not called the police. He admitted this when he saw my disappointment and anger and hoped it would avoid additional friction between us. Thankful for his action I hugged him in gratitude. These are the type of sacrifices we all must make. These are the personal sacrifices that are required to keep our culture and traditions alive. These are the type of sacrifices we all need to make in order to keep those already poisoned by what they hear and read from destroying our integrity.

Shahrokh Alavi

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FARSI: A NEW LANGUAGE?

A Particularly Iranian Identity Crisis

By: A. R. Beglie Beigie

Witnessing the success of Arabs in using economic pressure to change the name of the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Gulf, Iranians in the west, particularly those in America, are gradually realizing how important it is to preserve the Gulf's original and historical name, "Persian Gulf."

There shouldn't be much in a name, but that would be ignoring the reality of Arab Nationalism, which borders on hegemony. It is in the spirit of disputing such tribalism that this article was written. Those who accuse Iranians of the same tribalism are unaware of historical facts about Persian Gulf and the current situation of this region. Whether you agree with the policies of the Islamic Republic or not, the truth is that its leadership, in trying to accommodate our Persian Gulf neighbors, and as a gesture of reconciliation or as part of their dream of leading the Muslim world (call it whatever), initially suggested using alternative names for the Persian Gulf. But even they were taken back by the intransigent and inflexible attitude of the Arab world. Arabs rejected any alternatives to the term Arabian Gulf (which in fact historically was the name of the Red Sea).

The significant point which unfortunately seems very difficult to get through to the Iranian Diaspora, specially those residing in the United States — by far the biggest and potentially most influential group of Iranian émigré community — is that by keeping the 'Persian' prefix, we help preserve a 'CONTINUITY' which is an important cultural necessity. Iranian cultural history can be summarized as a continuing struggle in cycles of destruction and rebirth.

My points are very simple:

1. To keep a culture, one needs to preserve its traditions and maintain continuity.
2. There is a wealth of western material about Iran from ancient times to the 20th century about Persia and all things Persian.

In order to succeed in preserving our culture, it would be a folly to deliberately break the link to the huge material written about us as 'Persians.' Once the link is broken, it is very hard to re-establish it.

There is a misconception among some Iranian-Americans that 'Persia' is an ancient culture and has nothing to do with 'Iran' the modern country!

Those who say that using Persian is supremacist or that Persian is a racial term are also showing their lack of understanding of history or have other motives. They tend to be Islamists who erroneously equate Persia with Zoroastrianism. One can only think they see it as some sort of threat. The argument is simply absurd, taken literally, how can Persia be more supremacist than Iran the land of Aryans.

Before there are massive objections or a barrage of e-mails to this writer, no one is suggesting that we should change the name of the country back to Persia. The purpose of this article is simply to demonstrate a historical fact. Yes indeed our country has always been called Iran in 'Persian' language. The origins of the western word 'Persia' itself is probably Greek based on a region of Iran today called 'Fars' in Arabic & modern Persian, 'Persis' in Greek and 'Pars' in Persian.

To trace the origins of the word, one needs to only look at the wealth of western literature about Persia. One can go back as far as the ancient writings (a minute part of the collection mainly by the Greeks) and then after Islam, by referring to Marco Polo's travel accounts or the 17th century's travelers such as Tavernier or later on Chardin and many others (beyond the scope of this writing to explore). It is simply wrong to suggest that there are racial connotations in using the term Persia. 'Persia' is simply a western name for our country.

By ignoring such important historical facts and by further breaking the link

to our past and all things clearly defined as 'Persian' in western terminology, including Persian Gulf, we should have been prepared for the consequences. Thus, for instance, we have no one to blame but ourselves when Iranian artifacts are grouped under the 'Islamic' section in the western museums.

One such instance of 'tisbeh beh risheh khod zadan' as the Persian saying goes or self-destruction, is the introduction of the term 'Farsi' into English language. The problem is that it is now practically impossible to get organizations like Microsoft or VOA to change. Once a convention or standard is adopted it is very hard to correct. We cannot preserve the best in our culture unless we are prepared to take care of them.

The point is well made by Professor Ehsan Yarshater. I quote: 'If only they — Iranians in America — knew by using the word "Farsi"; which has no background in English language and its relationship to the identity of Iranian Civilization and Culture that is reflected in phrases such as "Persian Literature" and "Persian art" and "Persian Poetry," is not clear at all, they would find themselves damaging irreparably the fame and cultural status of Iran.'

The English name for our language is Persian. Yet because of our blind patriotism or lack of unity, we have confused the people in the West by imposing the word Farsi which in reality is not even Persian but the Arabic name for our language. If we want to insist on educating westerners then we should seek a change to the proper Persian name for our language, which is Parsi. As others have pointed out when conversing in English we do not ask someone if they speak "Deutsch" when we are enquiring whether they speak German.

If the reader is not convinced of the case made, then consider what is happening in Europe where Arab countries' economical pressure has been very successful. The Tanker industry has completely switched, the media use 'The Gulf' refusing completely to correct their deliberate error and the term Persian Gulf is slipping out of general use. A friend who lives in the UK recently sent me an e-mail saying that he recently purchased a globe from W H Smith, which is a large chain of stationary stores, for his son's school project, had Arabian Gulf instead of Persian Gulf. We were aware that the English unlike the Americans (you have to give credit where it's due) or the United Nations had not re-

sisted the name change in their commercial circles but this was the first time we observed a cartographic source using Arabian Gulf.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, the British have always used any chance to divide and rule. One such tactic had been to encourage the Arab countries of the Gulf to take up the call of Arab Nationalism and support the term Arabian Gulf. But we Iranians do not help our cause either. As someone who has spent most of his adult life in the West, I believe we Iranians have succeeded in confusing everyone about our identity and culture, ourselves included. We have diluted our identity by overeducating foreigners. We are so eager to defend the Iranian image outside of Iran that we have created confusion about the name of our country, the name of our people, the name of our seas and the name of our language. Typical questions asked by western friends are: Is the country Iran or Persia? Are we Persians or Iranians? Farsi or Persian?

When in the middle of the 20th century our forefathers asked westerners to change the name of our country from Persian to Iran, they were so eager to escape the colonial powers' influence and establish the Iranians' rights over their own affairs that they did not think about the consequences. One consequence is that because of the phonetic inadequacies of the English Alphabet Iran and Iraq sounds the same. This may seem insignificant. However it has made it very easy for average westerner who is very provincial and has very little knowledge outside his small sphere to consider Iran as part of the Arab world. By calling the country Iran, we broke the link between the country name and Persian Gulf. The Brits cleverly refused to accept Iranian Gulf and it provided them with the perfect divide and rule tactic between the Arabs and us.

After the 1979 revolution, in their eagerness to take the lead in the Muslim world, the Islamic Republic forgot the very basic historical fact that Iranians chose the Shiite sect of Islam on purpose; mainly as a means to protect their cultural identity from Arab domination. Indeed by pretending to be more Arab than the Arabs, the Islamic government did not care enough to defend the rights of Iranians at the time. It was only during and after Iran/Iraq war that the Islamic Republic was rudely awakened when its friends in the Arab world switched their support to their Arab brother. But, by then it was too late.

The Arab countries around the Persian Gulf intensified their efforts by putting severe economic pressure on western companies. You only need to look at the language used in the Oil industry and its derivative or ancillary industries such as Shipping and Reporting Services. Most of the international oil companies and tanker brokers had to use the term Arabian Gulf and would not dare use the historical name Persian Gulf (see the relevant Internet sites for shipbrokers). Same applies to trade journals in the oil industry (look at the Internet sites for McGraw Hill's Platts or Petroleum Argus or Reuters). Olympic Airlines is now using Arabian Gulf in all its literature. The use of this term is spilling into less special-

ist areas and general use. Actions by Iranians in exile and the Islamic Republic representatives have now caused some commercial organizations to drop the term Arabian Gulf, inventing the term 'Middle East Gulf!'

Every one of us is proud of our history and is aware of our constant struggle against the Arab influence. Please beware that our blind patriotism on one side and our lack of knowledge about historical facts on the other, are directly leading to a dilution of our identity. In order to keep the links to our past and heritage, it does not do us any harm to leave the English name for our language as 'Persian' and its equivalent in German, French etc. ■

TRUTHS

Did you know that the majority of Iranians are Shi'i, a minority division of Islam.

Did you know that the Taliban on the other hand are Sunni and are less moderate, banishing women from the workforce and education, and men are required to have beards?

Did you know that there are approximately 1.2 billion Muslims throughout the world?

Did you know that the word "Islam" means surrender and is related to the word peace?

Did you know that the Prophet Muhammad brought the Koran to the Arabs in the 7th century AD? He brought it to end the constant battles that existed between the tribes. Because of his actions a number of assassination attempts were made on his life. He found refuge in Mecca. Once he was assured that his people were safe he concentrated on bringing a campaign of "non violence" amongst the tribes.

We then must ask the question, if his life was premised on non-violence, why has such horrific violence occurred by the hands of his followers? What the radical leaders of this religion have done (as with radical leaders of all religions etc.) is to take verses in the Koran, giving them a different meaning than intended, one that is evil and hateful. These words are repeated and used to incite negative emotions in the masses. Often this incitement results in the blood of the innocent left on their hands, while their leaders' hands remain clean, soft and void of the stench of death. Their faces make the cover of magazines and they become the constant topic on talk shows.

An example of this is found in Passage 4:89 of the Koran "stay our enemies wherever you find them" the verse however continues, but is seldom used by the zealots "but if they let you be and do not make war on you and offer you peace. God does not allow you to harm them 4:90." Within the Koran there are many passages that deal with unification, peace, love and understanding, leaving violence only as a means of defense. What better time to read the Koran to learn the difference between the good it delivers and the "evil" it prevents?

For sure the terrorist actions of September 11 and those preceding had a warped sense of the Koran. They should not be considered martyrs for Islam, for Mohammad would have cringed if he knew of the bar bill they had a few nights prior to the events. I guess they never read about his feelings on drinking.

These radical leaders of Islam have now called for a Jihad. This is once again interesting since the meaning of "Jihad" means "struggle," a struggle for the greater good. For the radical leaders, however, the greater good is the recognition of the few and not the good of the many.

Sometime during the middle of last year, the United Nations Human Rights Commission, in effect, voted off the United States and voted in the Sudan. The Sudan, ironically enough, has more human rights' violations than one can collectively count on their hands and feet. For years, in fact, the Sudan's government has been authoritative, domineering, and oppressive, particularly towards women. More importantly, the Sudan is a member of the US Defense Department's list of rogue nations for both harboring and sanctioning terrorism against US and its allies' interests around the world.

So I pose my question, "How could the United States, the pre-supposed poster boy for human rights and champion of freedom and individual liberties, be voted out of its' pivotal position on the Human Rights Commission?" The suggestive principal reason for the oust of US membership on the Human Rights Commission is the American government's lackluster effort to remunerate its accumulated UN membership debt totaling nearly \$200 million, which steadily augments each passing year. It seems to me, more than this longstanding debt to the UN, the American government vis-a-vis the United Nations are reaching a communication block of sorts, that I am inclined to call a disconnect.

This disconnect between the United States and the United Nations has been growing for several years and for several reasons. First, if the United States had incrementally paid UN membership debts on time, then surely such a vote by members of the Human Rights Commission to evict US committee membership would have never come to fruition, especially by voting in the Sudan. Moreover, the mere fact the Commission voted in the Sudan is further indicative of the extent of disconnect between the United States government and the United Nations. Second, the United States has contiguously sought to pave its own foreign policy and economic

relationships therein regardless of either UN cognizance or open consultation with the UN both of which serves as a diplomatic template and sets an amicable international tone.

Third, the United Nations lack of sufficient funding for projects abroad has seemingly diluted the thrust of diplomatic, multi-cooperative, efficiency which are characteristically emblematic of the UN. However, the most recent terror attacks on New York City and Washington changed all that. More specifically, the September 11th attacks inflicted upon the

government and the United Nations. For example, the current war campaign lead by the U.S., aptly dubbed Operation Enduring Freedom, has effectively propelled foreign policy initiatives through the pane of a diplomatic window, i.e., the United Nations. The most recent example of US machinations intended to close the disconnect between itself and the United Nations is a US drafted, UN ratified resolution that professes the US will formally recognize the establishment of a Palestinian state.

This most recently ratified policy initiative was embraced by the Palestinian Authority and begrudgingly by Israel as well. Although it may seem that this UN ratified, US drafted resolution is obvious to even a blind man, in policy terms, however, this ever so subtle step forward creates the baseline for future peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

Furthermore, the US must resume the role as mediator, under the full support of the United Nations, by refraining from continual one-sided distribution of financial and military aid, used to perpetuate the fighting. Such donations and effortless attempts to mediate peace has cost American lives and will continue to cost American lives as it did on September 11th. I do not point the blame to anyone other than the terrorists. They plotted and carried the attacks of September 11th. But, such excessive US government entanglement has rendered America part of the problem and not part of the solution.

The Middle East peace process is a double-edged sword. Whoever plays the role of mediator, or third party, in order to be purposefully effective the mediator must first furnish bilateral peace policy initiative via the purview of UN support. This will close the disconnect between the mediator and the United Nations and not make a similar perennial mistake in where the US government engages in taking one side over the other and, at the same time, assumes the role of peace broker. ■

VOICE OF IRANIAN TEENS:

**The Disconnect Between
the United Nations and
the United States**

**and How It Affects the
Middle East Peace Process**

Christopher A. Khatami

US rekindled an apparent necessity for the US to openly communicate with the United Nations.

And it is precisely through the United Nations that the United States and other supportive nations can effectively and diplomatically engage in the Middle East peace process. It is my belief that if President Clinton had worked to shed the US' outstanding UN membership debt, then the lines of communication could have been more efficiently utilized. Instead of striving in a bitter blaze of glory to single-handedly mediate peace between Israel and Palestine. Put another way, any hope of achieving peace in the Middle East is contingent upon mediation conducted through the auspices of the United Nations.

The former Clinton administration did not do so and instead, perhaps, contributed to the exacerbation of conflict in the Middle East. And as a result, furthered the disconnect between the United States

A NECESSARY RESPONSE

Two letters, one from Ms. Paterno in New Jersey and another one by Mr. Addidas were both quite interesting, and at the same time, somewhat emotional. I wholeheartedly agree. I would like to really thank two people who have taken time to write letters to the editor, because by doing that we all learn from each other. Even though sometimes we disagree, at least we develop some kind of understanding of the events around us.

I would like to dear up something once and for all. I have always mentioned in the past, and I will continue in the future, to call Iran my motherland and our mother country. I live with that forever, both in the present and also I live in its heritage, which goes back several millenniums B.C. As for the United States, she is our beautiful adopted country that we all love and where our children were born and raised. And, I will love her forever!

Having said that, as for Ms. Paterno, the concept that she has about education is, I believe, somewhat distorted. The three disciplines that she mentioned, politics, social and economic issues are all disciplines at the graduate level of education and it's not by accident that we not only have the graduate level of these disciplines, we also have Ph.D. in some of them. The human nature is only partly genetic. The great part of it is in the upbringing of a child with education. It is by that education and culture that he or she grows up that he or she becomes a total human being as an adult Francis Bacon said in 1662 to The Society of Freemasons: Ignorance is the cause of all vice and of the evil men do to one another. The human species can be redeemed only through knowledge. If you look at the Madrasah or the so called religious schools throughout the Middle East, particularly in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and some other Middle Eastern countries, you see that what they teach to these kids is a combination of hatred and religious garbage. By the time this kid is twenty-five years old you wind up having an individual whose hatred against the other side, no matter who the other side might be.

I agree that the article that I wrote regarding the terrorism in America was somewhat provocative. It also might have given the impression that I condone Israel's activity and intrusion into the Occupied Territory. No sir! That is not the case. In fact, I condemn it. Two wrongs don't make a right. Violence only begets violence. Very frankly, I believe the entire problem there is the hatred, greed and ignorance of the Israeli government. I say this because once you have seen what they have done to that region, you will realize that one of the biggest mistakes that they made was to begin to build residential areas in the Occupied Territory. By doing that, despite the fact that many countries including the United States, discouraged them, they had to put the Israeli army there to protect the Israeli residents who were living in that area. If that is not provocative, I don't know what is. It definitely did not sit well with the Palestinians and they began

to resort to terrorist activities, which since then has escalated to the present level and out of control. I still reiterate what I said in that article that the lack of education and the poverty leads to desperation which makes these individuals easy prey for the religious predators, whether they are mullahs, ayatollahs, sheiks, mufti, reverends, priests or rabbis.

As for the media, I am quite careful about what to believe and what not to believe. My references are a mixture of books, many of them related to current events and intelligence, history, magazines and newspapers. All the issues and material related to the Middle East in general and Iran in particular is clipped and is kept in a separate file in my office. From time to time I refer to it to make a comment. Once you gentlemen read the atrocities about the Jewish people, you will see that your judgment toward me was a little bit hasty. Terrorism for any reason or cause is unacceptable, because more people will die on both sides and nobody will get anywhere. The stupidity of the whole thing is that it never teaches them a lesson. I agree with Ms. Paterno that the money that was given to Egypt and Israel was not for economic reasons. I said that this money is like a bribe and I hate that.

The other inaccuracy about terrorism being an act of desperation, I have a problem with that. You might be able to say that about the Palestinians since their land has been occupied by Israel. But, how can you explain the atrocities committed by bin Laden? I don't recall anyone occupying his land, wherever that might be. In fact, didn't we help Afghanistan get rid of the Soviet Union? So, please tell me what is their cause of atrocities. In fact, when you look very carefully, bin Laden had several hundred million dollar inheritance before he even went to Afghanistan. Even though some of the money was confiscated in Khartoum after the embassy attacks, he had the rest of the money and it was put into several places. In addition, this individual and his grisly gang were receiving so called "charity" from all the Islamic centers, including those in the United States. Saudi Arabia, which is one of the worst repressive, disgusting government in the world, was giving them annual bribes to be left alone. With that money, I would like to ask you why didn't Mr. bin Laden give even one single penny to the poor Palestinians? Did he try to help them? Did he try to help the Afghani people? With that kind of money he could have turned all of Afghanistan into a paradise. Instead, he turned it into a dungeon of terrorism and torture.

No, these people did not attack us because the United States is helping Israel. They attacked us because they hate our culture. They can't stand the western civilization and the freedom that we enjoy. Please try to understand that even if you removed Palestine, Jews and Palestinians, nothing is going to change. They are still going to come after us because we represent something that is totally and completely against their belief. Because religion in general and Islam in particular is autocratic, it is totally incompatible with a democracy.

David A. Yazdan, NJ

AN AGNOSTIC'S PRAYER

And A Peaceful Prophecy

By: Nasser G. Shojania

Listen!
 Everybody:
 The exploded
 The imploded
 The uprooted
 Anyone who possess a wounded heart and a torn chest
 Listen to my peaceful prophecy and pray that I am right:
 After this the world will become a better place for many and
 a worse place for a few.

Listen if you are distanced from your beloved
 Sit down beside me, cross-legged, on the ground
 Wipe the tears from your sunken cheeks with your sleeves,
 Open your ears:

You asked why it happened.
 It is simple: Tragedies happen only to good people
 And the world contains more good people than bad.
 Yes, it is that simple, don't worry anymore
 The bad is neither smart nor powerful; it is the good
 that is vulnerable

But mark my words and hope that I am right:
 This will be the last tragedy.
 After this the world will become a better place for the good
 and a worse place for the bad

Listen!
 All of you who live in those dusty distant lands
 With stationary waters and running sands
 The land of extreme climate, extreme men and
 extremely moderate women
 The land of noble faces, fields of poppies, rusty iron scraps,
 recurrent hemorrhage and hemosiderin laden mountains

Mark my words:
 After this the world will be a better place for many
 and a worse place for a few.
 It is going to happen whether you wish it or not.

Everybody lost something on that day
 Something big
 I lost the God of my mother; the One for whom *one*
 and *many* were the same.
 I lost Him under one of the columnar rubble of
 the Twin Temple of the World.

I do not know which one.
 Everybody was busy doing something good when it happened.
 I was in the middle of writing *A Persian Letter*
 A letter to my dead mother in Iran

I was about to give her the good news that even though
 she had not taught her religion to any of her nine
 fatherless children, I was developing some doubt
 about the non-existence of God.
 And I wished that despite the fact that every thing
 is pointing to the non existence of God in the
 world, there existed a God

I was about to pray
 A pray of thanks to God for the first time
 When: Bang, Bang
 And a third Bang in the distant, like an extra beat of
 a heart at the time of horror.
 And I lost my newfound God in a cloud of smoke
 Stardust
 Pulverized bone
 Spontaneous combustion
 Stationeries
 Pen, paper, chairs
 Reflectile cufflinks
 Metallic eagles
 Mirror image
 Cumulus clouds; sea of melted metal
 Collapsed, compressed, telescoped foreheads
 Tearless candles, tearful steel, fenestrated walls

Then out of the blue, came the two aluminum matchsticks
 To make an upside-down chandeliers of the twin candles of the
 world

This was big, as big as the second Big Bang.
 It came to correct the mistakes of the first Big Bang.

The first never counts
 The first is to be forgiven
 It is always the second coming that counts
 Like the second Adam who came to cleans the earth
 from the original sin Committed by the first Adam.

But mark my words
 This will be the last Big Bang in the visible universe.
 And despite all its astronomical power
 It has not shaken the cracked concrete foundation of freedom

Don't worry about America becoming too powerful
 Worry if America became too weak.
 After God, time will be in human hand.
 Then, the frozen river of the past will run again.
 From now on it will be the past that will unfold for a change
 The future will be what Man makes with his hands.

All these things are going to happen because
 Man's consciousness is bound to change after this shock.
 Mark my words.
 It is going to happen, whether you wish it or not.
 It is not in the hand of God anymore.

When man becomes master of time
 He will rewind time like a video and watch it backwards.
 He will reconstruct a single and taller tower
 from the column remains
 Like a gigantic, grandfather clock

Bigger, happier, and more accurate than Big Ben.

As of now, the yellow fish of terror will no longer swim
In the lukewarm lakes of sympathy, laced with ignorance

The first Big Bang was misnamed
It happened fifteen billion years ago
Long before the human brain, let alone consciousness was
evolved

Where there is no consciousness,
there can be no bigness or smallness.

Where there is no eardrum, there can be no softness or loudness.

Where there is no human, there is nothing:
No waves, no destruction, no construction,
and no element of uncertainty

After this, trust will reign again in the world.
Men and women and children will trust their elected elders
And the elders will learn from their children.

Rebellion will no longer be confused with patriotism
Violence will lose its violence
And gray wisdom will acquire a purple hue
The wisdom of *Sohravardi*
The Persian author of the book of *The Red Wisdom*
The wisdom that is not the result of the mixture
of black and white

But the color of the sky
When it changes from black of the night to the gray
of the morning.

The Persian theologian who climbed to the roof
of the Sun and fire worshippers

And cried like a Mo'azen from a minaret:
"O Muslims of the world!
Listen to my blasphemy:
I have re-polished the discarded, bronze, pre-Islamic Persian idols
The residue of the of Zaratushra, Mazdak and Maani"

There are always a few who dance at the wrong time
In the wrong place, to the wrong tune. But mark my words
From now on good will dance
Stranger with stranger
Like the way Rumi wished to dance:
"A cup of wine in one hand
In the other the undulating hair of the beloved
Dancing at the intersection of Islamic bazaars."

Once I saw my pious mother in her private room
on her prayer mat
The day I was hiding from my siblings in a game
of hide and seek.
I saw her covered from head to toe, talking to God
Sometimes standing upright and erect,
talking like a woman to a man
Sometimes bending like a servant
Sometimes humiliating herself by touching her forehead
to the ground

Begging her God to show her *The Straight Way*.
She behaved as she believed.
She believed as if she was going to live for ever
But was ready to die at any moment

God only knows how many times I did catch her reading
these lines from the book of
Mathnavi, with semi closed lips:

"If you know the whereabouts of my beloved
Let me know.
If you have the slightest idea where she could be
Let me know.
Death, I know,
But if you have a shorter way
Shorter than the straight way
Let me know."

The root of *Islam is Tasleem*: to surrender, to yield, to give up
To leave one's will power in the hands of God.
If all the mothers of the world were like mine
The world would have been already a better place.
Don't laugh too much when you are happy
Said my mother
Don't cry too little when you are sad
Cry at night on your pillow
Go to work during the day.

I go back to my letter to my dead mother in Iran.

Dr. Nasser Shojamia is an Associate of Pathology at Victoria Hospital in British Vancouver. Born in Iran he immigrated to Canada. He currently resides in Vancouver with his wife. Dr. Shojania like most of the world needed to pay homage to those gallant and brave men and women who met a tragic end on September 11, 2001 as well as give us all hope for the future.

Let Peace Take Wing All Over the World

Fatemeh Esmaeili

*My heart as a mother is burning when I hear
of the start of the war.
It is not enough of human
that blood is being poured like river.
It is not worth it to fight over the black earth
which was rendered fertile with tears of mothers
crying over their loved ones.
On the face of the earth let's all be friends.
Man must on man depend.
The wish of my heart at this time is
what every human wants.
I am a mother with this message this earth
and sky has been suffering.
Please make peace, you humans;
if not, the world will destruct, on the face of
this earth man must be friends with others.
Burn your weapon; let it go up in smoke.
In every heart, in every dwelling
let peace be proclaimed.
Let the face of humanity smile in happiness.
Let collarbones break all over the world
Let peace take wing all over the world.*



Interview with

Mehdi Fakharzadeh

BY: Shahrokh Ahkami

I have had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Mehdi Fakharzadeh for many years socially and professionally. His integrity can never be questioned. He knows how to delicately separate the struggles of business and friendship. Once Mehdi befriends you, you are a friend for life. His friendship is not based on whether or not you bought an insurance policy from him, but on how you handle yourself as a person. If you have had the distinct honor of meeting and knowing Mehdi Fakharzadeh, you are not surprised by the level of his success. Mehdi always finds the positive in something. This, coupled with his determination and drive has given him a success socially, personally and of course financially.

Mehdi is proud of his Persian heritage and continues to practice his traditions and culture despite his long absence from Iran. On many occasions Mehdi has turned evil into kindness and enemies into friends. These qualities are what made me decide to feature him in this issue. This year he celebrates his eightieth birthday. To him age is only a number. When he reflects back he sees his life as wonderful and when he looks to the future he is excited about all the good things yet to come.

Mehdi, if I may call you that, is there anything in life that is not possible?

Shahrokh, I have spent my entire life, my entire career telling people that, "nothing is impossible." That is how I have tried to live my life. Interestingly enough for the first time I am realizing that while I believe all is possible, squeezing into our lives all that we want to do, may in actuality be quite "impossible." Space and time is the one challenge that I may not win. There are so many things that I would like to share with you and your readers. My life has been full of wonderful challenges and obstacles. I call them wonderful, because once I was able to overcome each obstacle and met a challenge, my life became sweeter. There are so many things I would like to share with your readers, where should I start?

I would say that we start at the beginning.

A. I think back to 1948. It is a time when we find the world has been at peace for three years. A sense of normalcy is returning. I was in Iran at that time and was the eldest son of Haj Ali Asghar a businessman. He always expected his son to join him.

And did you?

For a short period of time. My father was a very proud man. He believed in honesty, integrity and hard work. I, on the other hand, had other dreams. He had a hard time seeing his son as a perpetual student. He could not understand why education was so important, since he had

built many successful businesses without the benefit of an advanced education. It actually took me, with the help of my uncle Ahmad Daryani two years to convince him that my plans were not frivolous.

Another disappointment for him was that I was not interested in his efforts to find me a wife. I also had to convince him that his search who came to my rescue. He persuaded my father to let me pursue my education. So I went to the school of economics and ran my father's business from there. But even after nine years of education and a law degree from the University of Teheran, my father's and my dreams remained in conflict.

How so?

With all that education I wanted to build a career in foreign trade, a field I believed would flourish in the post war era. In order to achieve the level of success I wanted for myself I knew I had to leave Iran, because no school there offered the advanced degrees I needed. I would have to go to Utah and attend Brigham Young University. I would have to leave Iran and I knew that my father was going to be disappointed. But he eventually agreed, that was in 1948. Of course I had to promise that I would return to Iran after receiving my Ph.D. in economics, but things happened, things changed.

Did you meet any obstacles barriers when you arrived here?

I had anticipated a number of obstacles, but the worse one was a situation I never anticipated. I truly believed that I

knew enough English to get through. I soon found that I had a great deal of difficulty communicating. This difficulty increased with every mile I took to the west. Once in Utah I immediately took English classes, which ended up deferring my matriculation until 1949. After receiving my Masters Degree I headed off to Seattle to the University of Washington. There my life really changed and in a very short period of time.

In what way?

I fell in love in the first semester to Sigrun Fridriksdottir, a food technology major from Iceland. She was my first test as a salesperson. I remember telling her that we would be married someday. Her reaction to this was to transfer to Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York, three thousand miles away. I reacted by transferring to NYU in New York City. Finally she agreed, but it was a marriage that was not supported by our families. Despite this we did marry in 1953 and I am happy to say that we will celebrate our 50th anniversary next year.

Is there anything in your life that you hoped to accomplish and have failed to do so?

I am sure along the way there were many things, but for me the most important was that I did not become a physician.

Your mother died at a very young age, how did her death affect you?

Very deeply, both socially and emotionally. There has always been a certain emptiness in my heart from her loss.

You are a very successful businessman in America, yet never forgot your heritage. How was that possible?

Before I left Iran my friends and family gathered together to wish me well. One of my dear friends, who is a descendant of the Qajar family, gave me advice. He told me to never forget Iran and to always remember that I am an Iranian. These words still ring in my ears. As to my success in maintaining my "Persian-ness" I believe is because I never forgot my native tongue and traditions. I always speak

Persian and I never deny my heritage. As to speaking Persian I try to introduce Persian to non-speaking Persians. For instance when I am giving a lecture I often introduce into the lecture a Persian cliché. I say it first in Persian and then translate it into English.

A few years ago I was lecturing eight-hundred people. During the course of the lecture I used a number of Persian expressions, which I said in Persian and then translated it into English. At the end of the speech a few Iranians approached me and asked why I did this. They believed that saying the expression in English was sufficient, since most everyone there spoke English. I simply told them I did this for two reasons, the first because if I simply said it in English some of the beauty and charm, of the words would be lost and secondly that I wanted to introduce my language to non Persians.

You also stated that you never deny your heritage. Can you give us an example of when you were asked to do this?

I have never been asked to and doubt anyone has ever been asked to do so, but we do it on our own. For example some may change their name. My last name is difficult to pronounce and on a number of occasions it was suggested that I change it to something a little easier to pronounce. I never accepted their suggestion. My position rather is that one should show another respect and take the time to learn how to correctly pronounce it. You know the name Knickerbocker was also a difficult name to pronounce but people learned to say. I am sure within a few generations Fakhar-zadeh will also become an easy name to pronounce. I feel very strongly about this, so strongly that in my will I ask my children never to change their name.

Is there anything that you had desired to do yet were unable?

Career wise I always wanted to be a physician, but I am happy with my achievements.

Mehdi, you did not become a physician, but you have become one of the most successful insurance businessmen in this country, possibly the world. How did that care begin for you?

Getting into this business was the result of another obstacle that came my way. Shortly after I married, my wife got pregnant. I was short by three credits from my Ph.D. With a baby on the way it was imperative that I find a job.

The problem was that I had been a student and lacked skills or experience in the job market. I went to the job placement office at NYU. I listed foreign trade and investment as job choices and the secretary suggested I list a third choice. I did and it was insurance. MetLife contacted me for an interview. Initially I was told by Max Schloss that I did not fit the profile. Understanding my desperation, he gave me five books to study to pass the insurance exam. My second interview with him was successful and I was hired as a debit agent.

What is a debit agent?

It is someone who goes out in the field to collect money from people to pay their insurance premiums. I was assigned to an area in New York known as Hell's Kitchen. At that time it was a very depressed and tough district. The poverty and decay that surrounded me each day depressed me. I knew I could never tell my father about this situation, I was far too embarrassed. Our lives were quite miserable. We lived in a one room-furnished apartment. I reached a point of total frustration and told my wife I was considering leaving MetLife.

Then one day while walking down the streets of New York I started to talk to myself. The talk turned into a lecture and finally I told myself that I could not give into failure that was not what I was about, that was not how I was raised. I thought about an Iranian proverb that states "fail-



ure unfortunately, can become a pattern just like success." I wanted to be the pattern maker of success not, failure.

I worked even harder that year and was given a promotion. From that point on my career blossomed. Every year after that I had the privilege of qualifying for every award MetLife offered including the Triskelion Award and Hall of Fame induction. I am fortunate to be a Life and Qualifying member of the Million Dollar Round Table. My career with MetLife has been very rewarding. It has allowed me to travel all over the world.

Has it been hard to stay focused after all these years?

To be successful, you must always be focused. I meet each year with anticipation and welcome the new challenges that face me. To this day I wake up at 4:30 A.M. to start my day. Again, another Iranian proverb comes to mind "the thing you get easily, you don't hold onto."

What advice do you have for the young generation in this country?

In order to be successful in life you must practice certain principals. I learned these from my family and continue to practice them today. You must always be honest, considerate of other people's feelings, needs and attitudes, constantly continue to learn, work hard and never become discouraged.

You must always remember that the world is very dynamic and changes constantly and we must change with it if we expect to achieve or continue our success. Obstacles will always arise. It is the way you approach them that bring you success or failure.

Whatever you choose to do in life you must be diligent and work hard. Always set both long and short-term goals for yourself. And, you must learn to reject fear, recognize faulty assumptions, assume responsibility and see problems that arise as an opportunity to improve.

I also believe that a successful person will always reject negativity or turn negativity into something positive. I will give you an example. About two years after the revolution, I received a call at 2:00 a.m. They told me my father had passed away. Of course I was emotionally stricken and began to weep. After a while,

however, I began to think that if I am crying I must also cry for my mother who died at the age of twenty-four. She was so young and never got the chance to raise her children or meet her grandchildren. My father was 87. He enjoyed these things. He visited us three times in America and I can say that he really enjoyed his life. I stopped crying and then looked at my father's death in a positive way. He said goodbye to the world being satisfied and happy.

When did you learn the success of positive thinking?

I learned this at an early age while playing volleyball. When I was in Iran, I

was a very successful volleyball player receiving nine medals. I was terrific at passing the ball. One day I passed the ball to a friend of mine who hit the ball against the net. I apologized to him for giving him a bad pass. My friend returned to me and said you did not pass me a bad ball I was the one who hit the net. From that point on, whenever I see people who are negative, I try to teach them to be more positive. They must learn to see the glass half filled rather than half empty. Negative people are rarely successful. Think positive, see positive. This is what I wish for the young, the old, and the world!

Thank you Mehdi, and happy birthday from all of us.

I Walked With My Friend Last Night, Did You?

Kia Navi

I walked with my friend last night

We hugged tightly when we saw one another in the parking lot

I walked with my friend last night

Once a vibrant woman, man, son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister

I walked with my friend last night

And we talked about our yesterdays, todays and our tomorrows

I walked with my friend last night

And we laughed and cried together for hours like we used to do

I walked with my friend last night

Eyes that once brightly sparkled have become dull showing sadness

I walked with my friend last night

But our time together as usual again passed far too quickly

I walked with my friend last night

After awhile the warmth of the Indian summer day turned dark and cold

I walked with my friend at night

And then I suddenly realized that my walk with my friend was a dream

Now others walk with my friend at night

Others, who, like my friend, can now only be seen by their friends in dreams

Now others walk with my friend at night

Those who shared the same untimely end on September 11, 2001

Now others walk with my friend at night

I wonder if those who took our friends away walk with theirs or alone,

Or have my friends and yours forgiven them

Showing the power of love and the strength of forgiveness?



**INTERVIEW with
DEREK SZABO**

A young man looks up at the big sky and decides he wants to be an airplane pilot. A few years later he and his family make a trip to Budapest, Hungary. He discovers a new interest. Being an airplane pilot is no longer his aspiration, he decides he wants to become a photographer.

So Derek, what made you change your mind?

My cousin Tom! He lived in Hungary and had converted his bathroom into a dark room. One afternoon he asked me if I would be interested in seeing the set up and I agreed. Watching the pictures come to life sold me on photography. I spent the remaining weeks of that vacation, walking around the streets of Budapest with an old German camera, taking pictures in black and white and developing them in this make shift dark room.

Has your profession taken you to the same fascinating places you would have seen if you became a pilot?

In actuality I probably could have or maybe would have gone to most of these places. I doubt, however, that I would have seen these countries in as greatest depth as I have seen them as a photographer. PS, I have only two hours to go before I receive my private pilots license.

And what are some of the countries you have been?

On assignment I visited Northern Ireland, Corsica, Egypt, South Africa, the

Silk Road of Uzbekistan, Tunisia, and the Islamic Republic of Islam and a number of others for pleasure.

That is a list of some very interesting countries. Which one was your favorite?

That's a hard question to answer because each of them offered something wonderful. If pressed to say, I guess overall it would be Egypt, it is very exotic. I have been several times, the first time in 1989 and the last time this past September. In fact I returned from there to the States on September 10. As you know, it is the largest county on the African continent as well as the most diversified in the Middle East. Then of course there is the history and the photography opportunities. The colors are quite fascinating.

Between 1989 and your latest trip could you see and feel any changes in the people with Egypt's relationship with the United States?

There were slight changes, but I never experienced or saw anti American sentiment. That might have to do with my personality. I am outgoing and enjoy mingling with the people of the country I am visiting. Though I love politics, I try not to make

that a subject of my conversation. Often, however, it is unavoidable and for the most part people who are so-called "anti United States" are really anti the government policies and not Americans. As people I believe that we all understand that we are all pawns in the chess game of politics, some I guess take it a little too seriously.

Your answer to this question seems to be completely opposite from what we read in the major papers and see on television in the United States. The general perception of Americans would be that the Middle East is in a continuous state of protest against the United States and you say you saw nothing.

Frankly I don't know where this information comes from. Understand, I don't read Persian or Arabic so perhaps there was graffiti written, but as far as demonstrations I saw nothing, nor was a victim of any animosity.

Before we get off on a tangent here could you tell us your least favorite country that you visited?

When I say most favorite or least favorite understand that my response does not reflect my affection or disaffection for the people there, but more for the present state of the country. Having said that I believe that my least favorite would be Uzbekistan. There is such intense poverty and it is a very bizarre place. You have to remember that for the past fifty years the Soviet Union has done everything in its power to wipe out this culture. They have destroyed most of the monuments replacing them with Russian structures. There is no food variety and life is very fragile.

Now that we have established the best and the worse, let's find out how you got to Iran.

I am not sure if you know a gentleman by the name of Joe Robinson. He was the publisher of *Escape Magazine* which specialized in off beat vacations. He knew me and also knew that I had visited the Middle East a number of times. He asked me if I would like the assignment. I jumped at the chance.

Did you have any difficulty getting a visa?

Good question, yes and no. You see I wanted to film the country with complete freedom and I was afraid if I applied as a journalist that I may not have received one or even worse was that the areas I wanted to visit would be controlled. So, I applied as a tourist and as a teacher from the Boston Latin School who had a curiosity about Islamic architecture. In answer to your question, no I did not have difficulty getting the visa and received it from the Iranian Embassy in Ottawa, Canada. I have to confess, I felt really terrible about lying; in fact it still bothers me. My concern, however, was if they knew I was a journalist I was not going to be able to freely do the piece and what the readers would get was just another travel log of Iran. I wanted to see everything and be with the people. It was my way of giving my assignment validity.

In retrospect I am sorry I lied because I fear that I may never be able to get another visa to Iran. It is certainly a country I would like to revisit as a tourist with my wife or on another assignment.

As a journalist were you also concerned for your safety?

Not even for a second, though my friends and family were concerned for me. Prior to my departure they verbalized these concerns telling me I was crazy for going. They explained I would either be thrown in jail or kidnapped. Unfortunately their perception of Iran and the Middle East is a reflection of what they read in the papers or listen to on the news. Hence, since only the bad is printed that is the criteria used by most Americans in judging this part of the world. Our media certainly has a wonderful success rate in achieving negative impressions. If I may for a moment tell you a short story about my experience in Shiraz. We stayed at the Homa Hotel. On the wall inside was this beautiful brass lettering in the lobby. It read "Down with the U.S.A." This writing was plastered into the wall back in the seventies. Now some journalists would report this as anti American rhetoric. I on the other

hand saw it as something that was plastered in the wall more than twenty years ago and would be too much trouble to remove. The fact was that the hotel personnel could not have made me feel more welcome. Every arrangement was made for me to photograph the hotel and it's patrons.

Any negative experience?

In general, no. Any negative and uncomfortable positions I found myself in, were self-inflicted.

Can you give us an example of this?

Well, the first happened within the first twelve hours after my arrival. While driving to our hotel in Teheran, we passed the old American Embassy, which is now a military establishment. It was fascinating seeing those gates in person. Remember for more than 400 days in 1979 we saw those gates on the news, to see them in person stirred many emotions. Anyway the next morning my guide and I walked over the building. As I started to take a picture I was immediately approached by a soldier. He was screaming at me to stop. Believe me I knew this was going to happen, it was a military building and out of bounds to the photographer tourist or other.

What did you do?

I put my hands over my head and then



looked at my guide to get us out of this mess. He showed the guard our papers and explained that I was a tourist and wanted a picture of the gates for posterity.

Did he let you?

I was allowed to take one. Another time I was approached for taking photographs was at a mosque. I was trying to get pictures of the women and again a security guard showed his displeasure for my actions and asked me to cease from doing this. I complied. I was not there to test my freedoms, or to be an arrogant American and I realized that I was in the wrong.

And you really had no fear as a journalist or as an American?

It sounds to me like you expected that I would be afraid and that I would run into trouble. I hate to disappoint you or your readers but again I want to reiterate what I said earlier, I never feared going. I can remember asking myself, what could possibly happen. I would get off the plane and the next day I would walk among the people of another nation trying to learn about, them their routines and most importantly their culture and country. I had only a little latent fear about lying to get my visa and to this day I feel so awful about it!

After visiting Iran, how do you compare it with Arab countries?

Well they can't be compared as a nation or a people and no one should try. You know that the only things that Iran and the

Arab nations share, is a geographical location and a religion. Physically they do not look alike and culturally they are very different. Iranians are not Arabs and Arabs are not Iranians. You know in the States we have a tendency to pigeon hole everyone who is from a certain area, for instance, the orientals are all the same even though I know and you know that there are tremendous differences between the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans. I think this is because understanding the different cultures of the

world was never a priority in our educational system. Only recently have people become interested in learning about other cultures. I hope since September 11 that understanding the world cultures become a high priority in our school systems. Just

one more thing if I may, I would like to add that I found the Iranian people to be very moral, very hospitable and very proud of their culture like the people of most nations.

How long were you there?

Not long enough, about two and one half weeks and in that short period of time I did put on some heavy mileage.

Where did you visit?

Tehran, Kerman, Bam, Yazd, Isfahan, Shiraz and Qum. And before you ask me, my absolutely favorite place was Isfahan. It is absolutely gorgeous, the way the Zayendeh River flows through it, the bridges, the greenery and the monuments especially at the Friday Mosque are the best in the world. I could have spent days walking round the bazaar and looking at the goods and the people. It was just magnificent. The entire country is a photo paradise.

Please tell us about Bam?

Hot! I think it may be the hottest place on earth in September, that's when I visited. The heat did put a little damper on my visit. I think it was 115 degrees in the shade. But I am sure you asked this because you know what I am going to say about it. The ruins, the Arcadian, are amazing. The clay fortress that was excavated is beyond belief. Equally as beautiful is the oasis with hundreds of palm trees. We stopped there for lunch and something very interesting happened. We went to a restaurant that had long tables outside. We were at one end when two gentlemen appeared carrying machine guns. That, in and of itself, was not unusual. But these guys were dressed in polyester pants, flowered shirts, sunglasses and shiny dress shoes. I am used to seeing people carrying machine guns dressed in uniforms not dressed like the Blues Brothers or John Travolta. But there was no incident they just came for lunch and then left.

On the whole did you expect what you found in Iran?

Yes, and more so.

You didn't find it backward?

A. If you are asking me if I expected to find horse and buggies and donkeys as

the main means of transportation, no I did not expect to find that and nor did I. Tehran is a very modern city. Of course it doesn't have the New York skyscrapers, and I'm not sure that's a bad thing but the poverty level is similar to the ratio found in large world cities. Of course, the smaller villages are backward but I expected that. It's part of that world. I would venture to say that the villagers would not want change, they seem to be happy with the life they are leading as are those of the American communes. Some people just like to deal with less for their own personal reasons. Not everyone in the world is 100% materialistic, and remember, Iran is still considered a third world country.

It sounds to me like you really do want to go back.

In a minute! There is still so much of Iran that I would like to see. The faces of the men, woman and children are indescribable. Again I would leave tomorrow if I knew that my previous visa problem would not be an issue.

I have found in my experience with the Persians whether American Iranian or other that they are very proud of their heritage. Did you find that same feeling?

I find this feeling in every country I visit. The Persians are proud of their culture and heritage and should be. It is one of the greatest civilizations of history and one with a very rich culture. You also can feel their disappointment the direction the country has gone in over the past twenty some years. Not that the Shah was the greatest for the country either but the stringent Islamic rule has really put the people back culturally.

Did you have an opportunity to talk with the young people

about this and how they feel?

I would say that the general consensus wants to move forward and begin to



modernize. The people in their own way are doing things to make this a reality. I also feel that they are smart enough to recognize that an abrupt change would be far less successful than a gradual change. But the youth, like in every country, always want to test their boundaries. For instance late at night you can see them driving around with their windows open blasting rock and roll music. It is their

way of balking the system and haven't we all done that at some point?

I would now like to ask you a hypothetical question. Let's say you are sitting around in your living room with friends. The topic of the Middle East comes out and one of your friends voices the following opinion: "I think we should just drop a bomb on the entire area. Wipe them all out. They have never contributed anything to the world and they are a bunch of religious fanatics." How would you respond to this person?

Well first I feel like am one of the runners up of the Mr. America pageant with this question. But I am going to give you an answer that is truthful not one that is sure to guarantee me winning the pageant. That question in my circle of friends and acquaintances is not hypothetical. It is one that is raised quite often.

My immediate response is to ask them what they are basing their statement on. Is it on personal experience? The majority of the time it is not based on personal experience but based on what they read and see in the media. I then tell them that I base my feelings about the Middle East on personal experiences. I have vis-

ited six to seven Islamic countries with a total of seventeen visits. The Middle East to me is a rich area that is very misunderstood and may, at times, be misguided. I tell them that their feelings are a product of sound bites and two column articles they read in the paper, media that is politically driven. If life over there was as bad as the media makes it out to be why we are so interested in it and why haven't they destroyed themselves.

Listen I am not saying that Iran has not gone down hill since the Revolution, but you know if you talk to the people, the Shah was no picnic either, despite what Americans and some Iranians believe. American politicians thought he was great because we wanted cheap oil, so why not make friends with the gas station owner. Why not do everything possible to keep him in power regardless of the effects it would have on Iran in general. You know the people in Iran, from the teenagers on up, know that change must be made and they want change. As I stated earlier they want to return to the world ranking they had in the 60's and 70's but they are weary of the price that would be paid to make this change overnight.

I take it you are weary of politics, including the politics of the United States.

Yes I am. The problem with politics is that most politicians are concerned with the voters that can reelect them rather than the country in general. The result of this political policy is September 11. I am certain that this will continue until a change is initiated.

The Middle Eastern people do not hate the American people they are disgusted by America's double standard political policies. An example of this is the Apartheid against the Palestinians.

Listen it is not a secret that in America there is a large Jewish population.

Mr. Szabo, are you going to give me reason to stop this interview.

No, I am going to give your readers, Muslim, Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Hindu, Atheist and Agnostic some food for thought. Please if you stop me now, your readers will walk from this interview thinking that I am a anti-Semite. And that, my new friend, is far from the truth. May I continue?

Go on....

Anyway the Jewish vote in this country is strong. They are in powerful positions and have the ability to contribute heavily to campaigns. The politicians, regardless of how they believe, will take this money to support their campaigns. I find that egregious. I am saying that a politician must fight for what they believe not what secures them a political future.

But comparing the Palestinian issue with Apartheid, can you really?

I don't think it can be called anything else. Listen when we recognized what was going on in South Africa we stood up and took a stand. We verbalized our dissatisfaction with this government and took economic actions to stop it. In China, as soon as we saw the actions the Chinese government was taking against their citizens we sanctioned them.

Now let's look at Palestine. The Israeli government is not allowing the Palestinians a right to vote, they are shooting children for throwing rocks, they are bulldozing houses that they say were built below code, they are making it impossible for Palestinians to go to work and they are being killed in a ratio of about seven to one. At this rate there will be no Palestinian left and one thinks that this is not Apartheid. But understand, I do not for one second condone the violence we are now seeing, but it is violence on both sides.

I think I hit a nerve here.

Yes you have, not so much in the subject matter, as the fear people have to tell it like it is and how they really feel. I am not afraid to speak my mind. Often, these discussions result in me being labeled as an anti-Semite. When I hear these words, my blood boils. I hang with some intelligent people but apparently some do not know the true meaning of anti-Semitism. My position is not an indictment against a religion or a body of people that would be an anti Semitic. My position is against a political policy that is resulting in thousands of people being killed, including four thousand Americans. There is a tremendous difference in being an anti Semite and not agreeing with a political policy that weighs heavily to one side.

I truly believe that what is happening to the Palestine people is an utter disgrace. It is the same thing that we allowed to hap-

pen to the American Indians in this country. If we allow it to continue, we will pay for it forever. There has to be a better way and the first is that the policy must be re investigated. Please I am not stating that Israel has no right to exist, they do as do the Palestinians but do the American taxpayers have to pay for this right, not only with tax dollars but now with human life?

If the Palestinians in this country could organize and get a voting power, the political policy would change immediately. But why do we have to wait for that to happen? What happened to us on September 11 was not a bunch of guys seeking out adventure, it was an act of desperation!

But should we be blackmailed?

No, not by anyone. But heed the warning. How many wake up calls do our politicians need?

Then you are saying that we don't have the right to meddle in other affairs?

No, that is what I am exactly not saying. The best way to answer you is in an example. Let's look at Columbine and Oklahoma City. We know what happened, we know it is a problem. Would we, however, like China, Iran, Iraq, England, Israel, Saudi Arabia to come here and tell us how to solve this problem? I think we would happily show them out the door. But we should be open to suggestion.

I get the hint. I'll leave this for the readers to decide.

Listen a while ago you asked me if I would like to go back to Iran. Yes, I want to and I would recommend anyone to go there as well as other parts of the world. They should go for a variety of reasons the culture, the people, the sites, the food and most importantly to learn that there is a world out there does not think like we do but that does not mean that they do not have the right of autonomy. If their existence is flawed they must be the ones to find a way to institute change. That's what happened in the American revolution. They real majority knew they were backed against a wall. The greater and sweeter victory is the one that is accomplished with your own hands rather than someone else winning the battle for you.

Thank you Derek. ■