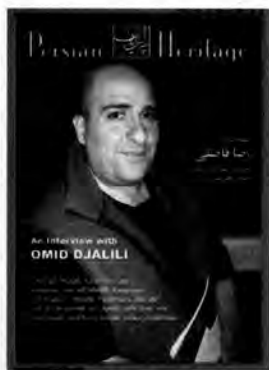


# Persian Heritage

Vol. 8, No. 32

Winter 2003



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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Peoples lives are made up of positive and negative experiences and it is the good experiences that not only make us forget the negative but keep us ever in motion in search of another moment of joy. This year has been exceptionally sad for me and the *Persian Heritage* family. Tragedy has shown its ugly face much to often this year. Tragedy, however, is not only the result of a violent act; it can also show its ugly hand in illness. And it was illness that tragically took Hadi Hakami, a member of our editorial board and the daughter of a friend, Reza Fazeli.

Once again the *Persian Heritage* family was forced to push through the ocean of despair in search of something that could make us feel good.

Death of a loved one, regardless by what way, is tragic and often debilitating. It makes us search our souls as to the meaning of life and look for ways we can make it better. When death is personal it is never timely, and when it comes to a twenty nine year old woman, newly married and a new parent, not only is it not timely, it is unacceptable. It is unacceptable until somehow we can recognize the good that is left behind. Some will choose to move forward and others remain in an ocean of despair.

No one knows in advance how one will react, we can only project what and how we would feel.

I remember sitting in my living room surrounded by my grandchildren who were engaged in child's play. Their innocent smiles and joyous laughter was taking my mind off my own personal stress. The television was turned on to Azadi television. There was an announcement made about the return of Mr. Fazeli to the show after a week's absence. His absence I discovered was because of the death of his daughter, Bita. I was in a state of shock. My attention immediately left the carefreeness of the children's play and became fixed to the face of Mr. Fazeli. His colleagues were escorting him to his desk. His face was intense, yet soft; it was sad yet filled with promise.

Mr. Fazeli began with a reading of a poem from Ferdowsi. He recited this at the funeral for his son Bijan. This was followed by a poem of Hafiz. After the reading he began to speak about his Bita. I remained focused on his eyes; it was as if he was speaking to us individually. "Bita," he said, "asked on her deathbed that my family not wear black, that we not mourn her death but that we should go out to a restaurant and celebrate her life." As he spoke his turmoil became apparent. Tears did not flow from his eyes, but his words caused mine to flow like a river. Mr. Fazeli was showing his strength. He was teaching his audience that even in the most difficult of times we must find the strength to continue our goals, our dreams, and our lives. And we must always fulfill the wishes of those who have left us.

This was a remarkable man. I always knew he was strong in conviction and know we were seeing the gentle and compassionate side of this unbelievable man. Mr. Fazeli, a man dedicated to his family and proud to be called a husband and father, was now for the second time in his life speaking about the death of a child. "Bita was born in 1974 and died at the age of twenty-nine years and seven months. She was an achiever. She started school at three years old in Iran and finished her education in France and England. She had degrees in accounting, business and spoke three languages: English, French and Persian. She was married in Spain and three months later became pregnant. During her pregnancy she was diagnosed with a rare form of ovarian cancer. In February she knew that she may die but was well into her pregnancy. I asked her if she would abort her pregnancy to save her own life. She declined by asking me a question, if your death meant saving mine what would you do? Bita gave birth to a son who she called Bijan, after her late brother and then shortly after she passed away."

Mr. Fazeli's words held me hostage. I was awed by his control. He continued by telling his viewers how lucky he was to have had the opportunity to hold his daughter in his arms at the time of her death. This to him was good fortune in comparison to those parents who learned of the death of their children from a stranger. This was good fortune in comparison to those parents who found out about the death of their Bitas from a stranger at the door: a devilish looking man holding a box of cookies and saying "This is your dowry, I married your daughter the night before she was executed." Mr. Fazeli then softly said, "I wish God



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was kinder," and then he returned to his normal broadcasting.

I could not stay focused on the news any longer. My mind drifted off to a time when I visited my hometown Goshan, Iran. While there I went to visit the home of one of my teachers, a writer and poet. He graciously welcomed me into his home. We chatted for a while and then a young girl came into the room and placed her arms around his neck hugging and kissing him. He could tell I was lost as to who she was and tried to introduce her but was visibly upset and unable to speak. His hands began to tremble and then he pointed to a photograph. The photograph contained pictures of his two sons and his daughter in law the mother of this young girl. Finally he allowed his words to flow. "My sons were executed, as was her mother, but first she was allowed to deliver this wonderful gift — my granddaughter." I had no words to respond. It was I now who was trembling. Feeling my anxiety he asked his granddaughter to sing the Iranian National Anthem. Oblivious to our emotions and with a beautiful smile she sang the song and at the same time she hugged and kissed her grandfather. She was his reason to make it through the pain and sorrow.

I still remember the horrendous sigh that escaped my body as his granddaughter sang. Suddenly I felt hands tugging at mine. I looked down and there were the "sugar and spice" of my life — my grandchildren. Yes, Mr. Fazeli and yes, my dear professor you have taught me a wonderful lesson. Life for all of us will continue to deliver unbearable sadness, but it will also continue to bring us wonderful sweetness.

A new year is about to begin. I pray that this year will be one in which happiness is in abundance and sadness is scarce.

*Shahrokh Ahkami*

## IN MEMORIAL

On October 8, 2003, *Persian Heritage* lost one of its most devoted friends, Hadi Hakami. Hadi was an original board member. From the time of the magazine's inception until the time of his death, Hadi was dedicated to its prosperity. He inspired all of us and at our most difficult times encouraged us to press forward, never to give up on the dream.

His value as a teacher, writer, researcher and poet expert was equal to his devotion as a father, brother and friend. In life few have the opportunity to work with someone who seeks no personal gain for his actions. This was Hadi, and we at *Persian Heritage* will indeed miss his genuineness, devotion, honesty, dedication and his wonderful sense of humor.

*Though your smile is not in front of me  
I see it in the clouds.*

*Though your voice has been silenced  
I hear it in the wind.*

*Though your hand will never shake mine  
I feel it in the warmth of the sun.*

*Though your heart has been silenced  
It will continue to beat in mine.*

Shahrokh Ahkami

## Best Wishes to Persian Heritage

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# Interview with MANOUCHER PARVIN



Laura Holt

*Professor Parvin, please tell us something about your life in Iran, about your upbringing?*

I was born in Teheran. At that time there were no books written for children in Iran, so my governess would read the adventures of Amir-Arsalaneh Namdar to me. This book was written for grown ups. To save his beloved the hero of the book had to kill demons. This was all frightening, but more than frightened, I was amazed by the reading process. "How could scribbles become utterances," I asked my governess. Fortunately for me, she took my curiosity seriously. Using some elementary texts, soon I was reading and writing. On a NoRouz (New Year's Day), I shocked my parents by reading a newspaper to them. I was not four yet.

When I was five years old, an older boy who was Christian, told me that in addition to God, the Father, there was also God, the Son and God, the Holy Ghost. Soon, by insistent questioning, I found out that the Koran does not confirm the trinity. So I began seeing religions as stories differing from house to house, country to country, authority to authority, and believers to believers. As I learned more, the notion of religions as conflicting stories was reinforced in me and caused me lots of problems later. This is a tale onto itself. A character in one of my novels declares that "Religion is about what is good and what is bad and science is about what is true and what is false. Faith should not replace science and science should not replace faith! They must be given a chance to live in peace in the human soul."

I read feverishly and ended up with the most important discovery of my life: I could learn on my own. Books are great, silent, and patient teachers. You can read the same sentence over and over again and the book never complains! I've always told my students that they do not need me, except to give them the syllabus, tests, and discuss or criticize their papers. Because I had almost taught myself the elementary school subjects before entering school, I was dreadfully bored throughout. There was no possibility of skipping grades then... Shall I go on?

*Yes, please.*

At eleven, I learned to play chess, and soon afterwards I discovered I could play chess blindfolded. (One is told the move

**PROFESSOR MANOUCHER PARVIN** is a man of varied talents and interests. He has taught economics at several universities, including Fordham, Columbia and Emory. He is also an accomplished novelist. *Cry For My Revolution, Iran*, published in 1987, was his first novel. His second, *Avicenna and I: The Journey of Spirits*, was published in 1996. Today, we are discussing his life and his third novel: *Dardedel: Rumi, Hafez and Love in New York*.

of the opponent, but one must never look at the board.) Then I foolishly boasted that I had invented blindfolded chess! I was rudely awakened and quite deflated when I learned that Alekhine, a world champion, had played thirty players blindfolded simultaneously! So, I took up the challenge and learned to play a few opponents at the same time blindfolded.

I won some literary prizes, one from Dr. Hamidi Shirazi, the renowned poet who taught us Persian composition in the famous Alborz high school, which I attended. I also won prizes for math and science. I did not do so well in what I did not like. While still in high school, I published the first chess magazine in Iran.

Many years later, The "Iranian Chess Monthly" magazine as well as a book reviewing chess history honored me as one of the chess pioneers in Iran! Frankly, as a kid I had no idea of the import of what I was doing!

I tried to overcome my boredom by playing chess, sports, and relentless reading. I read books like elephants munch on vegetation. I wished God had not invented boredom. I've even seen bored pets!

**Please tell us about your experiences in the United States.**

Here I earned a degree in electronics engineering, BSEE, edited a book in the field in a short trip to home, and did some advanced work in math and physics back in US. I should have never been granted the, BSEE, degree! I was by far the worst student in the laboratory courses while the best in theory courses. I must admit that I'm also very incompetent in practical matters. A Neanderthal man would laugh at my computer skills and pity my ignorance about my own personal finances!

Finally, without a single undergraduate course in economics, I did graduate work at Columbia University and earned my Ph.D. there. What is more, I was fortunate to have three Nobel Prize winners as my professors and be granted what is called the President Fellowship.

Meanwhile, I struggled as a human rights activist, feminist, environmentalist, and student activist for democracy in Iran. In fact, for a year I headed the Iranian National Front Organization in US, an umbrella group. Dr. Ali (Shahin) Fatemi and Dr. Ebrahim Yazdi were among members of the executive committee. Dr. Shayegan headed the consultative commit-

tee. Oh, how idealistic we were in those times — leftists, nationalists, and Islamists, united all struggling for democracy in Iran while enjoying safety in America!

**What are your scholarly activities?**

I have published in all fields of social sciences. My articles cover many topics of interest, such as economics of knowledge, energy, technology, and environment, economics of education and health, political economy, crime, economics of exploitation and gender exploitation, identity and cultural fusion, Middle East area studies, etc. I was a founding father and first President of the Society for Iranian studies, SIS, and the founding father and later, President of the Middle East Economic Association, MEEA. Both of these are international organizations. I've served on editorial boards of various scholarly journals and have lectured in many countries of the world.

I have been an active member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, AAAS, among several other organizations.

This activity in different fields and organizations helped to satisfy some of my curiosity and to overcome the residual boredom from, and frustrations of, the period I was held back as a school boy in Iran. Finally, I became curious about curiosity, became interested in the human soul, and began writing novels. Perhaps I should have acquired some formal training in literature and started earlier to write! My new poems embody science, and thus, open a window onto a new genre in verse.

**Your novels explore deep mystical and transcendental love stories. What inspired you to write such evocative prose and poetry?**

My first novel, *Cry for My Revolution, Iran*, was a dramatic politico-historical novel. Once I got the life-long festering political grievances out of my system, my work became more mystical, more lyrical and more philosophical. I am referring to my latest published novels: *Avicenna and I: the Journey of Spirits*, and *Dardedel: Rumi, Hafez and Love in New York*. What inspired this metamorphosis from physical sciences, to social sciences to literature, to poetry, to mysticism? I am not so sure! For me, it was a natural pro-

cess, like that of the silk worm that does not know why and how it evolved from an egg and will transform into a butterfly. Of course, I'm influenced by the great poetic Persian heritage and I'm driven by the desire to come as close to understanding the truth as my intellect, my energy, and my time in this world allows me.

**If you had one quest, what would that be?**

Initially I was unaware that I went through life *examining* my consciousness, *retraining* my consciousness, and *restructuring* my consciousness. Later, when I became aware of what I was doing, I made a conscious effort to propel this process forward towards self-realization.

Mental and spiritual motion towards truth and mystical love are actuated for me by my lifelong propensity to enhance my consciousness. One of the manifestations of consciousness is love. I'm writing a novel now that focuses primarily on the nature and development of consciousness. I really do experience what I write. I feel the feelings of my characters. While writing *Cry for My Revolution, Iran*, time and time again, I have shed tears — tears of joy and tears of sadness. I am not ashamed to admit it! I hope to share my spiritual and intellectual journeys with my readers — those here now, and those yet unborn.

**Now tell us about your new novel, Dardedel: Rumi, Hafez, and Love in New York. What does the Persian word "dardedel," mean in English?**

*Dardedel* means a heart-to-heart talk without shame, fear of judgment, and betrayal. It is sacred. By sharing deep personal concerns, *dardedel* frees two souls from the burden of loneliness and isolation. I hope that the word *dardedel* becomes an English word.

**Why did you choose the world-renowned ancient Persian poets Rumi and Hafez as characters in Dardedel, your most recent novel?**

Because I love and admire Rumi and Hafez. They seem to be still alive and helping people like me in Diaspora, and Ameri-

can lost souls in America! What is more, through the two poets I could connect, or contrast past and present, east and west. Finally, I was able to explore the nature and development of poetry and consciousness across the geographical and historical dimensions. And, of course, because these legendary poets are such interesting characters! They are funny, they are rebels, and they are prophets!

**Why the reincarnation of Rumi, and Hafez, but not of Mitra?**

Mitra is a brilliant and dazzling fourteen-year-old girl about to graduate from high school. Hafez falls in love with Mitra and Mitra falls in love with the twenty-year-old Hafez. In Persian, Indian, and even Western myths Mitra is a goddess of love and light and creation. So by implication, Mitra is reincarnated, too! The Romans came within one inch of adopting Mitraism instead of Christianity. When Christianity was adopted, Mitraist temples were transformed into Christian churches or destroyed. Mind you, it is said that Hafez was a Mitraist! If I had a daughter I would call her Mitra! In English Mitra is spelled as Mithra, and Mitraism as Mithraism.

**Juxtaposing — mixing and contrasting — ancient and modern society and culture required a lot of research?**

Yes. The research was extensive; in fact, it took longer than the writing! And I had to make many wrenching creative decisions of what to include, or what to exclude from the novel. Only a fraction of my research on Hafez and Rumi, or origin and development of consciousness, or art and science, and their impact on human identity entered the novel directly. This, novel of ideas, is a discourse on modernity from different perspectives.

**By profession you are an economist or social scientist. However, you write passionate loves stories in prose like Avicenna and I, and in verse like Dardedel. Where do the artistic passion, time, and energy come from to write them?**

Certainly, profession is only one at-

tribute of one's identity. Others are physical attributes, intelligence, knowledge, religion, ideology, nationality, and possessions. For instance, I'm also known as a chess addict! Avicenna, the great philosopher/scientist/medical clinician made his living by practicing medicine, Rumi — by being a religious leader and head of an Islamic theological school, Attar — by being a pharmacologist and Moddaressi, the writer (my late friend) — by being a psychiatrist/academician. One does what needs to be done to keep the body alive so that one can do what one loves.

**How do you manage to accomplish so many projects?**

Ideas come to me in abundance. I am passionate about whatever I do. Perhaps that is why I have had so many sleepless nights working. I really do not know how or why I do what I do. I am inspired by Avicenna; by his prodigious will power to self realize. I can perform intellectual tasks quickly and efficiently. For example, I wrote my dissertation in record time — in four months — under Nobel Laureate Professor William S. Vickery about the diffusion of technology and its impact on economic growth. The work was all theory and advanced mathematics. So I hardly had any library work to do! It was like writing a long poem in the medium of mathematics. In fact, in the novel *Dardedel*, Professor Pirooz claims that the famous Einstein formula of  $E = MC^2$  is a beautiful and concise poem about the nature of nature.

**How problematic is it to do science and art simultaneously?**

Art and science are very similar, but also different like siblings. Both are human artifacts, both stem from observation and imagination. Science is verified by many minds and art is evaluated by many minds. Both are models of reality filtered through the mind. Art has a widest scope, while science razor-edge precision. I think every person with healthy gray matter is capable of doing some art, or some science, or both. It is the circumstances of life that determine who does what. Do not give me that much credit for doing both! I am enchanted by both art and science. I think there is some science in art and some art in science. I feel at home in both gardens.

**In print you are called a polymath — someone with encyclopedic knowledge who can do creative work in various fields. TV anchorperson, Mrs. Homa Sarshar of Jam-e Jam quoted others saying that you are a genius. What do you think you are?**

Please! I'm not sure what these unmeasurable and un-definable fuzzy words or labels like genius mean. All I am, is a person who also is a student and who wants to share his ideas with others. This is not false humility! Let us say, I'm a simple construction worker participating in the building of a gigantic complex structure called civilization! My contributions are next to nothing. There have been many workers before me and there will be many workers after me. That is who I am — an intellectual ant busy working on an ant hill!

**Are you planning to write more novels and perhaps more poetry in the future?**

Remember, I mentioned that I'm not very practical. I must first publish finished works. But that requires hustling! Recently, I've been training myself to hustle! I have three more books ready to be published. Can anyone help me?! One is called "Fear of Truth" which explores freedom in America, in general, and academic freedom, in particular. That is a radical work. The second one is a collection of poems called "Cosmological Accent," an attempt to synthesize science, art, eastern wisdom, and spirituality. The last one is a collection of short short stories, some only one line in length! Finally, I'm currently working on a new novel that explores the nature of the brain-mind relationship and the resultant consciousness.

**Would you like to say something about your family?**

My son, Dr. Ruzbeh Mark Parvin, lives in Ohio and, as for me; I'm a bachelor again, buried in the snows of Ohio hoping someone will come to rescue me!

I'm very thankful to *Persian Heritage* for introducing me and my work to your readers.

*Thank you.*

# SYMPHONIC MUSIC OF PERSIA IN THE WEST

Pejman Akbarzadeh

The history of introduction of Western music in Persia and Persian musicians' activities in this field goes back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The time that in collaboration with French and Italian professors Tehran's Polytechnique, "Dar-ol-Fonoun" was established and because of creating of military bands in the army, "music" was added to its schedule. The Dar-ol-Fonoun's music department gradually became an academic center called "Tehran Conservatory of Music" where many contemporary musicians and composers of Persia trained. Some of these artists who had been educated in the Western art music fields and were also attached to their Persian musical heritage and tried to combine Persian melodies with this music. This made a change in their country's music.

Such efforts, in fact, started with the arrival of the French musician, Alfred Jean-Baptist Lemaire, who had a prominent role for introducing and teaching Western music to the Persians. Lemaire's activities continued by a few of his pupils especially Gholam-Reza Minbashian (Salar Mo'azaz). Some years later more serious efforts was done by Ali-Naghi Vaziri and Parviz Mahnoud (in different styles) and in the next years several interesting works composed by Morteza Hannaneh, Emanuel Melik-Aslanian, Hossein Nassehi, Houshang Ostovar, Samin Baghtcheban, Mohammad-Taghi Massoudieh, Hossein Dehlavi, Ahmad Pejman, etc.

A few numbers of these works were performed by the Tehran Symphony, "Jeunesse Musicale" Orchestra, Tehran Conservatory Orchestra and many of them never received their performance and just their names remained in the Persian music books.

Also not only the scores — which are very important for researchers and young composers — were not published, but the a few performed works were not recorded desirably and were not available. Only in 1940s some works of the Persian born French composer Aminollah-Andre Hossein (e.g. "Ruins of Persepolis" and "Persian

Miniatures") recorded in Paris and with financial support of Iranian Ministry of Culture and Art distributed in Europe. After that in 1978 three LPs entitled "Symphonische Dichtungen aus Persien" [Symphonic Poems from Persia] contain some works by H. Dahlavi, A. Hossein, M.T. Massoudieh, H. Ostovar, A. Pejman and A. Rahbari, were performed by the Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra (Germany) under the direction of renowned Persian conductor Ali Rahbari. However there are still many unknown and unperformed symphonic works by the Persian composers. The Tehran Symphony Orchestra with its current situation can not perform them and Persian conductors residing in the US and Europe do not show any interest to record their country's composers' compositions. Economic problems prevent the composers to do that themselves. Recently Manouchehr Sahbai (conductor and oboist residing in Switzerland) with his limited facilities has started to perform these works.

Sahbai not only has collected and performed some Persian compositions

with Austrian, Bulgarian and Czech orchestras, but also has written his Ph.D. dissertation — entitled "La Musique Polyphonique Persane (1868-1998)" — on Persian contemporary composers' works and history of Western music in Persia. This dissertation was presented to the Strasburg University in 1999 in the French language. Up to now he has presented three 60-minute CDs to the music lovers containing several works by Persian composers for large and string orchestras, generally inspired by folk and classical music of Persia. Contrary to what is common in the West, unfortunately, none of the cultural organizations — inside and outside the country — has supported this project and this cultural effort was made by personal struggle. Sahabi says, "In general it is very difficult to find scores by Persian composers as many of these works have either been neglected and never or seldom performed. Some of the scores that survive are handwritten and therefore difficult to read and with some, the dates are missing. Many composers neglected their works because of their hard living conditions (emigrations, moving house, lack of space, etc.) and their works have simply disappeared. For the past few years I have been involved in finding the works of Persian composers, revising and completing them, contacting composers, studying carefully handwritten scores, correcting the mistakes and weaknesses, getting existing orchestral material written and performing them in my concert..."

## RIO DE COLORES

That is the name of yet another successful music venture by the team of Strunz and Farah. Each of their CDs is dramatically different from the other and this one follows suit. It is adventurous and elegant and



allows the musicians to step out of their own boundaries. The CD is a collective representation of Latin and Middle Eastern music with an American twist and features some very well known musical artists. The duo also filmed a new DVD "Strunz and Farah in Performance" a worthwhile investment.

## ELEGY TO ALALA

By: Farhang

*On the memorial of a friend's death,  
In the most dreary cemetery on earth.  
Placed some roses on his stone,  
My heartfelt prayers I intoned.  
Those that lay there, were so young,  
Their eighteenth birthday yet not sung!*

*While branches rustling in the breeze,  
Scanned the markers of lives surceased.  
I found myself in pensive mood,  
Longingly desired solitude.*

*Noticed a tiny, lonely tulip  
Undulating in the wind's rhythm.  
I was taken aback curiously,  
A tulip beckoning I tremulously!  
Seated next to it in contemplation  
While in reverie of meditation,  
I beseeched the lone tulip –,  
"Tell me truly, why so lonely?  
A loving hand should care for you,  
And nourish you with garden dew.  
Surrounded by dahlias and green lawn,  
Cheerily blooming every down."*

*The shy tulip swayed to and fro  
Murmuring with verve and flow  
Of the breeze in the trees.  
Above the din, with ease did whisper –,  
"Yes, I do grow with despair,  
Above my grave is no shade;  
I'm a reminder, then will fade!*

*Listen to finches chirrup  
That my name is not tulip!  
I was once named Alala,  
Had just passed my twelfth year  
When turbaned Lucifer did appear!*

*Tell me please, is it fair  
Flogged, tortured, then murdered  
In midst of my thirteenth year  
For exposing a little hair?*

*Taken here and interred, where,  
You're seated, stunned and stare  
At the far and hazy distance;  
Wondering about such violence!  
Yes –, so oft the beadsman does this,  
Thinking has reached his bliss!*

*Such inhumanity to mankind,  
As if he has no heart and mind!  
Read those tombstones and remember  
How the young ones reached their winter  
By the murderous hand of the pretender  
Who ruins life's harvest as tinder!*

*Tell me verily, if 'tis fair  
To slay little girls for uncovered hair  
By lewd, turbaned, dirty Lucifer  
Who has no lenity toward my gender!*

*My spirit now is a tulip,  
That's how you've found me  
With no pain and no tear,  
With no cover and no fear,  
Nodding, moving to no end,  
Freely dancing in the wind.*

*For wee color I do bring,  
I show myself every spring.  
Come next season, remember,  
Visit us in better temper  
No more roses, but dahlias!  
Then, won't you call me Alala?"*



# SPLENDID INSANITY

Artwork by Shakeh Sassoon

This past September, a show of Shakeh Sassoon was held at the Paterson Museum in Paterson, New Jersey.

Armenian artist-dancer Shakeh Sassoon grew up in Iran during the reign of the Shah and was forced to study art underground when the Islamic revolution took place. She and her family eventually gained political asylum in West Germany and then came to the United States. She uses her experiences with war directly, irrevocably; with all the numbing life negating force to which those involved in ongoing warfare and strife are heirs. Before



the reality of war, Sassoon believes only silence, the impersonality of universal silence is anything close to an honest response. Her life ends as a "biography" then and begins again in the "witness" of these deeply silent paintings.

Ms. Sassoon, states, "My work arises out of a deep and abiding sense of presence. I see my paintings as appearances arising and dissolving into the silence of the Universe. They are manifestations of both spiritual suffering and transcendence, influenced by the absolute stillness at the center of the human dance. I believe art occurs at the level where we communicate with the unknowable, where we no longer are afraid of the bafflement in our own distorted reality. My paintings are problems solved by greater riddles. It is the constant interplay between truth and the human distortions of it."

The exhibition is best described in her own words below:

## Splendid Insanity

*Splendid insanity  
Curtains the chasm of history.  
Feeble the lust  
By which we justify.*

*Hectic array of bones  
Reign this fearful dream of war.  
When life chastened  
By absurdity  
Out-throws glories  
At the foul and the bleak.*

Poems by:  
Shahzad K. Farzad

## HOW TO CARRY

*Wrapping the memories  
in a blanket is hard  
since they are different in  
shape and size  
and can't sit next to each other  
harmoniously  
but when the truck of time  
flattens them all  
then I can roll them up  
just like a sheet of paper.*

## WHERE IS MY POEM

*I gave away my poem  
the one, the only one  
that I had written in  
my native language — Farsi  
the language of my mother,  
grandmother, aunts and uncles  
the language I spoke with  
the kids in my neighborhood  
and I received awards at school  
for knowing every corner of it well  
the poem that had all the words  
that came easily to me  
and I wrote it for my daughter  
to sleep calm at night  
it was a family poem and  
it wasn't even typed  
I gave it away to someone  
who brought me the memory.*

I woke up at 5:30 this morning with the sound of loud thunder followed by heavy rain. It sounded blissful and it felt very cool, lovely and beautifully fresh. I cannot tell you enough how happy I become when we get rain at this time of the year. It washes all this dust and dirt away and makes the trees look polished and fresh. Maybe this is the result of one of the global warming's good side-effects. However, we have gotten more rain in the past couple of years and a decent winter with good snow. I can only hope and pray that this trend continues, as it is good for both cleaning the air and alleviating worries about the water shortages.

I recently came back from a wonderful three days' break to the Caspian. A very benevolent relative had kindly allowed me and my friends to go to their villa, which is extremely lovely with a heated swimming pool and an immaculately kept garden. We swam and sunbathed and played ball in the pool quite a lot. The result of which is that we all got sun-burns, and on our way back we looked more like half-cooked meat! We took care of our faces, arms and

legs, but did not think of the shoulders, which are still burning. No matter how many times you have been up to the Caspian, somehow you end up getting yourself burned. But it was worth it! Somehow this brings back many childhood memories, and suddenly you are taken back in time and feel free again.

We headed out to Caspian at 6:30 am, half an hour late, as someone's alarm clock had not gone off in time. Those who were on time took a vote and decided that since the friend's phone did not answer, it must mean that they are on their way and so we waited. Fortunately we were driving in the Karaj Autobahn in the opposite direction of the traffic and the Tehran-Chalouss road was a pretty easy drive.

I am so pleased to inform all of you who care about the water problems we have

had in the past few years in Tehran that, Karaj Dam is FULL! It was such a magnificent and groovy site to see that the water was so high up. I was overjoyed with happiness. The last time I had seen Karaj dam's water level, it was so low that I almost cried and felt sorry for all of us who live in Tehran and were forced to suffer the consequences. Well, at least for this year we should not have such a thing to worry about, although like all good people everywhere we must realize the importance of water as a precious commodity and make sure we don't waste it. I was so excited that like a kid I wanted to jump up and down. But my British visitor, for the benefit of whom we were driving up north, would have been too shocked by such behavior in public.

and devoured three great meals a day! We were to stay another day but then we were informed that the weather was going to turn nasty and so we decided to come back a day earlier, especially since one of the cars did not seem to be in perfect state. The boys had their car's brakes checked at the local AA Garage in Abbass-Abbad. The car, an old Peugeot, had given them a lot of trouble coming up, even though it had been serviced before the trip in Tehran by their local mechanic. At the AA garage, the chief mechanic seemed to know really what he was doing and in full command of this business. The AA seems to be run by a new management in recent years. They are very visible and good in helping drivers in stress. They have agents all over Iran, and their staff, on the

road and in their garages, seem to do a decent job which I find most reassuring especially since one's safety is at stake.

Since we were coming back early we decided to take it easy and get a chance to look at the famous Kelardasht Road near Abbass-Abbad. And this took us to Kelardasht, a great, soft and

## A SHORT TRIP TO IRAN'S CASPIAN COAST

Syma Sayyah (Tehran)



We got to the villa about 10:30 am and immediately took to the water. We had a peak at the Caspian coming in, as the villa was on the north side of the one of the only *shomal* roads which covers all of the Caspian Sea shores from one end to the other. When there is no traffic, one can almost hear the sea going about its business. It looked pale blue this time and as always it looked as lovely as ever, cool and alone yet prude and active.

The main problem with going to the Caspian is that you end up eating too much. I hardly ever have three meals a day. But there, especially with the help of Shahnaz Khanoum, who with her husband Bahman Agha, takes care of this villa and cooks wonderfully delicious local dishes, we all lost control and forgot about dietary restrictions

gentle heaven that can easily blow you away with so much visible pleasure and so many lovely spots. Near Banafesh-Deh almost at the end of this beautiful valley, we stopped at a friend's lovely little cottage. We thought how cozy the place is. Unlike the villa that we were coming from, everything in this gorgeous little cottage had a useful purpose. It was lovely, neat and practical. We had brought food and so we sat at the kitchen and enjoyed our cold lunch.

We set off and had tea at one of the many cafes' on the way after Marzan-Abbad. There we separated and arranged to meet at the next cafe, which was about an hour and half away. The weather was lovely and the air was great except when we got behind those many slow moving lorries struggling the narrow

and multiple bends of the Chalouss Road. Yet the mountains, the trees and the view in general were so charming that we did not mind most of the time being held up, except when the fume of these lorries almost choked us to death on several occasions! We stopped at the Blue Star café after we passed Sia-Bish-e. It is a descent and clean stop and the staff are polite. They serve very good coffee as it is made wholly with fresh local milk.

We waited for the other car to join us as agreed. Ten to fifteen minutes passed and there was no sign of them. After 30 minutes I was getting worried. This could not have been normal since they always drove faster than I did and waited for my car with a smile on their face. My friend kept me calm by asking me many questions and diverting my mind but I could hardly sit. I asked several drivers who came from their direction if they had seen their car, giving the cars details. All said no. This was reassuring since it meant that they were not involved in any accidents, thank God. After more than an hour had passed they arrived, just before I was going to go look for them. I was so happy to see three of them in one piece that I completely forgot all those things that I had prepared to say to them! The story was that, just after we had left them the first café, the driver went to get something from the boot and by accident he leaves the car keys inside the boot and closes it. All that time they were trying to open the boot and get the keys. They were tired and worn out. I gave them some vitamin tablets and ordered some hot coffee with fresh milk as it was getting a little cold by then. I think I put on a couple of kilos from all that worrying.

The rest of the trip was quite uneventful, except near Karaj when a van coming from the opposite direction drove to our side and was so close when it passed that we both had to hold our breath. Back in Tehran and at the house, we brought everything up and sat and had some tea and something to nibble along. By the time everybody left it was nearly midnight.

This was a lovely trip and I dare say that this year I shall be up that road again. The view and the scenery are simply fabulous and the experience simply too lovely. Now, I know why my friends drive up almost every weekend. It is not all for the fresh clean air. The experience was like that of seeing an old friend. You don't know how much you miss them until you see them by accident after a long time!

(symasayyah@yahoo.com (Syya Sayyah))

## MEET DANA GHAVAMI

When asked who his heroes are, real or fictional, Dana Ghavami, founder of CheckM8, quickly responds, "my dad for his affection, generosity and devotion, Moshe Vaknin, CEO of his company for his marquee management and Bill Gates as an industry symbol of the power of change.

Racing cars, karate chopping and world traveling by the age of five is what he remembers as his first computer experiences. This all led to his founding of CheckM8 in 2000. His company innovated a rich media technology system used by lending online publishers and advertisers worldwide to provide engaging web advertising that goes beyond the banner.

Dana received the 2003 Laureate of the Computer World Honors Program. Check M8's achievements, which is a distinguished information technology vision and award chaired by more than 100 IT leaders.

Modern days most significant invention to Ghavami is the Internet "it has turned each computer into an access point of cyberspace for instantaneous information, e-commerce and communication without having to stand on any lines or having to procure a library card."

Life is not all tech for Dana. He loves John Lennon and his song "Imagine." It and Lennon were an inspiration to him. Dana is also an old romantic. For instance, he proposed to his future wife on a sandy beach in the traditional kneeling position. He attributes his soft side to the guiding inspiration of his life, his mom. It was she who provided him with the capacity and courage to achieve all he set out to do with her unconditional love, support and wisdom.

The one thing that plagues this young man is time asking the old question "why does a day have only 24 hours and why isn't a life time longer since there is no known sequel."

When asked where one should invest extra cash, "in CheckM8, of Course," Dana responds.



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## An Interview with **REZA FAZELI**

Shahrokh Ahkami

*Without any doubt The Iranian Television network, Azadi TV, in a very short period of time has become part of Iranian life. Its success is because of Mr. Reza Fazeli, who produces, anchors and directs the entire program. Mr. Fazeli is known for informing the public on Iranian social and political issues. Mr. Fazeli is both strong in his position yet gentle and kind. He is a wonderful and devoted friend. He is a writer, a poet, a loving husband, father and grandfather. I decided to interview him because of the complexity of his makeup. It is time to let his adoring audience meet both sides of Mr. Fazeli.*

*Before anything I would like to thank you for giving me, as a representative of Persian Heritage, the opportunity to speak to your viewers at Azadi Television. Mr. Fazeli, please introduce yourself to our readers.*

While you were making your introductory statement I searched within and came to the conclusion that destiny has brought me here today. Off camera I am a totally different person from on camera. When the lights go off I go on being the husband and the breadwinner of the household. As a responsible father I have always told my children that I would not be able

to leave them any money after my death but while I am around my goal was to give them the best education. I believe education is an asset that can never be taken away or lost. It always stays with you and allows you to move forward in life. Yes I can be gentle but when I am sitting behind the news desk I become a different character; one who is strong and committed to telling the truth. It is my duty to tell the truth and doing so comes naturally to me.

*How do you get the strength not to give opinion rather than the truth?*

I have always said that I get my en-

ergy from other people. When I look at the lights of the camera there is a surge of energy that takes over. As mentioned before I am not the same person in front of the camera as off the camera. I feel that this is my responsibility, not as a leader, but as a broadcaster who brings about awareness to the public. It is "awareness" that will allow society to determine what is right and wrong for them. It is every journalist's responsibility to bring awareness to his or her viewers including *Persian Heritage* because as you flip the pages of this magazine, awareness is written all over it. Knowledge and awareness are power.

*Let's go back to the statement you made regarding awareness to the audiences. As journalists our position is to inform, not to lead do you agree?*

Absolutely. Informing is our only responsibility. As you said before it is not our responsibility to enforce our own views but to bring about awareness through publishing and expressing different sources of information and allowing the public to make their own decisions as to what they want to think or which side they want to take, etc.

*You mentioned that you are a husband and a father and outside of your busy work schedule you try to take care of your family. You have a devoted wife who is the mother of genius children. Please tell us a little about them all.*

I have four children. Bijan, who immediately after graduating from college with a degree in computers passed away about 17 years ago. My daughter who was born in 1974, graduated with three different degrees from Harvard University. She went back for her MBA at Harvard and completed her degree in eighteen months. She is married and recently gave birth to her first child. My second daughter is currently attending Jefferson University and is completing her degree in medicine specializing in Neurology. My third daughter graduated from high school at the age of sixteen and currently attends school at UCLA. My last child Babak is an honor student attending 11<sup>th</sup> grade in Irvine Cali-

fornia. All this success can be credited to their mother's hard work, discipline and love.

*You have experienced ups and downs in your life, yet persevered. You completed your education and returned to Iran to start a career in film. You fought difficult political barriers in Iran and then moved to the United States and started a Television network with your friend Mr. Abbasi. Please take a moment and think of the important ventures in your life and mention briefly what might be valuable to our readers.*

At the age of eighteen I was forced to leave Iran because I was working for the Air Force. Some would describe me as a communist and others as a follower of Mossadegh. When I left Iran I started off from Dubai going on to numerous Emirate countries also venturing through

Paris and finally ending up in Bulgaria. Staying in Bulgaria for six months taught me a lot about living in a communist country. I then moved to the United States and went back to Iran. During this time I attended the Sorbonne in Paris and UCLA.

Because of my complex nature I never stay in one place for long. Again I went back to Iran. Since I was politically active prior to my last departure from Iran the government required that I sign a contract of commitment to non-political activities. I had been charged for desertion from the military but the military gave me a pardon for my prior actions. I received my working papers and passport and started working.

I traveled around the world to introduce Iranian film to countries such as India, Pakistan, and Turkey as well as European countries. My intentions were to have Iranian films be displayed not as an art but as you might say real Hollywood films. I wanted to have Iranian actors and actresses become well known around the world. In 1967, I produced the film called "Diamond 33" and invited Nancy Quake

to act, and Dariush Mehrjui to direct the film. There was a lot of conflict between Mr. Mehrjui and myself. His intentions were to direct a film that included art but on the other hand my intentions were to produce a film that was based on capitalization.

Finally we worked out our differences. We came upon lost of difficulties but the final product was sold to India and Eastern European studios. I also tried to sell the film to Italy as well but, the Department of Education and Film opposed the idea. The reason they did not want this venture to take place was because they were afraid of the impact the film might leave on the tourism industry because of its violent nature.

After this incident I attempted to speak to MGM Studios about the film "Caravans." But the Iranian government opposed the idea because they were afraid that the film would tarnish their relationship with Afghanistan. Later Mr. Bushehri produced the film.

It was incidents such as these that created financial problems for me and had





me end up with lots of debt. I left Iran and went to work in Italy, Pakistan, and Turkey and then came back and paid my debts. I married and started working. In 1974, I came to the conclusion that the work that I had been producing is not what I had intended to create and left the film industry. After leaving this work I started getting involved with real estate.

Investing in real estate became my survival machine. I was very successful and money poured in from overseas. All my assets were in real estate and since I could not bring land with me I lost everything. In 1979 the Revolution took place and they asked me to work in television. I declined their offer because of some difficulties I had with Ghotbzadeh. After this, my problems began and the government was on my back.

I finally gave in to them and they asked me to make a film based on a day in Khalkhali's life. I produced the film. I produced a film that showed the real side of what was going on in the country not what they wanted me to produce. This became the cause of my exit from Iran. I believe the controversy was over the factualness of the film. You probably have read the story of my escape in my book.

***Yes. When one picks up this book, at least I know for myself, they will not be able to put it down until it is finished. Some of the stories are similar to a James Bond type film. In Chapter 11 of the book you talk about your escape from Iran. Can you please briefly discuss this with our readers.***

My escape from Tehran was a miracle, jumping from a window of a half constructed building. When one is fighting to survive and is placed into a life and death situation nothing can stop him. At the moment nothing is sensible, your in the moment where death is following in your shadow and your running away from it. I jumped from the third floor onto a cement floor. I borrowed a motorcycle from a friend and escaped the scene. I went to a friend's house. I stayed with him for a few days. I borrowed some money and than changed my appearance into a sheikhs. I shaved my head and grew a beard and wore glasses and left for Gorgan a city north of Tehran by the Caspian sea.

From Gorgan another friend helped me move on to Mazandaran. From there I went to Ghazvin and from there I traveled through several other cities and then onto the mountains to Turkey. It is a very detailed story. I lived through heavy snowstorms for several days. With everything I went through I never lost hope. I have experienced imminent death two times in my life.

One time I was taken by the waves and had to swim thirteen hours to reach shore. Another time I was lost in a storm and again swam to shore. I told myself that as long as my strength is there, I would swim and reach land. One must believe in oneself and the taste of survival is sweet. Not once did it come to my mind that I would not survive. If you believe in yourself, you will start feeling the strength of God and nothing can conquer you. I hope no one will ever have to go through what I have because at this point death becomes meaningless to you.

One day a gentleman approached me from Canada and warned me about a terrorist who was after me and wanted to kill me. I responded with words "let them send out these terrorists and what if they kill me, there will always be someone who can replace my voice." According to a good friend of mine there was a kid at school who would write on the black board that the teacher died, one day one of the teachers walked in and said to him "even if I was to die some other teacher will replace me so it really would be best if you go ahead and occupy yourself with your studies."

***You have been defined as someone who is anti Islam.***

Yes, I have and this is not true. A gentleman wrote me this morning that everyone should go convert to Christianity. Everyone has a right to their opinion. Who am I to say to anyone what religion to practice or how to live their lives. Everyone needs to know that all my struggles in the last twenty-five years is to bring about awareness and nothing but awareness, but not anti Islam. I want people to be aware of what the present situation is in reality so that they are not fooled by sweet talk. No one needs a trustee, we can all make our own decisions. When we become aware about the facts around us



we can make our own educated decisions. I am not here to sit and make decisions for you.

As Iranians we are in the habit of making decisions for others and then advising others that this and that is not to your benefit. It is no one's business what decisions we make. Why don't we decide for once and for all to make our own decisions.

I don't care if anyone is a Christian, a Moslem or a Jew. This is a personal choice and who I am to tell them what to believe and what to practice; what is right, what is wrong. This is a personal issue and one needs to make such decisions on their own that best fits their life. Even the Prophet Mohammad did not condemn any one who did not pray. So, I ask who are we to condemn.

In any instance however, when you place your self in a situation where you are fighting a spear headed bull you must be also aware and ready for any injuries that you may sustain. In my case bombs exploded around me. When you go after resistance you should expect a response. That's the way most think. No I am not against any religion but hate when the name of God is used to validate horrendous crimes.

Unfortunately most people are naive and believe such nonsense. Regardless of our hatred we can always find control — you must find control and allow a courtroom — not a religious forum judge right from wrong. I mean this from the bottom of my heart. For instance, should I be allowed to injure those who killed my son — I would not be able to do so ... but at their trial I would argue to my death.

***Lets go back to getting to know Mr. Fazeli a little bit more. You are a compassionate person, at one time you went to practice spiritual teachings but at same time you say you are not a darvish. Why did you travel to India as well as Bangladesh and how long did you stay there?***

I read a book by the name of *The Edge of a Sword* by Samerset Moam. In this book the story of Larry and his destiny were very interesting. From that time on I became interested in poetry and afterwards pretty much grew up with poetry as my friend. From the age of six or seven I started reading the two books *Golestan*

and *Shahnameh*. *Shahnameh* was my father's doing and *Golestan* my mother's. My Farsi teacher realistically was my mother. My mother had not earned any high degrees but she was an intellectual and self-educated person. Her father was an intellectual and a calligrapher. Most of the poetry that I recite today, are the same lyrics that my mother use to recite to me as a child. They have stayed with me. She was a book of clichés. It was because of her that I was drawn to poetry. When you become familiar with Persian poetry you naturally become involved with poets such as Hafez, Khayyam and Molana. They are however, not only poets but also spiritual beings.

I was a very religious and a strong believer in Islam as a young man I came across a priest while staying in France, we engaged in a very controversial argument. On Sundays instead of going to bars and discos we would find a place where we held lengthy discussions about religion. He spoke in his native language and I used the dictionary. One day this priest asked me a question, "Do you know why you are a Moslem and why a Shiite Moslem?" I responded, "because it is the best and purest of all religions." He said, "No because your parents were Shiites." I then answered "then you are a Catholic because your parents are also Catholics."

I'll tell you this that same night I was not able to fall asleep. From there my thoughts started drifting in different directions. I started to question everything. "God, why is this guy a Catholic and I am A Shiite Moslem." "God, you have stated that whatever you set your mind to you will do, so why have you created this innocent young man as a Catholic who is going to go to hell because of this practice, and I who was born in my Moslem mothers hands am born as a Moslem and go to heaven for that."

From here I started looking deeper into religious teachings and started following spirituality and pureness of religious practices. I educated my self on religious philosophy as well as Iranian literature and Iranian cinema. If Professor Mahjoub was still around I would probably continue for a doctorate in these disciplines. The reason I became a student of Professor Mahjoub because of his response to a question regarding Ferdowsi the cinematographer. (In my opinion Ferdowsi is the greatest cinematographer as well as choreographer in the world. He creates virtual images of real life beauty in his

works). My dissertation for my doctorate was Fortes. Unfortunately Professor Mahjoub's life was cut short and he was never able to deliver my dissertation.

***Were you ever able to reach the point of self-understanding and awareness when you traveled to the east?***

No, I was curious, when I went to visit Banerars (a town in India) I walked through the jungle for four days until I reached a point where about seventy to eighty people were gathered. There was a guru who was teaching in Bangali language. At the time I did not speak Ordu. The only languages I spoke were English, French and Farsi but I was able to communicate with him. He refused to see me for the first few days but I did not give up. One morning I was awakened by someone. I woke up and saw the Guru standing over my body. We started walking towards mountain-top it was during sunrise he was facing the sun and my back was towards the sun. He told me that I bother him and that I don't let him do his work. He also told me that he didn't have time to have a debate with me and then ordered me to leave. He spoke to me for a long time, yet asked me to leave.

When he asked me to leave, he also said that I refused to turn and look over my right shoulder. While I was speaking to him I was thinking to myself what is it that I have done that's bothering him. I then turned and again saw that one eighth of the sun had risen and the rest was still out of sight, there was a clear sky. Then he again started to talk to me for a long time. (The shadow of my head was over the guru's chest). He repeated that he wanted to prove to me that he could make me leave, turn around and look over my shoulder again. He turned and noticed that the sun was at the same spot as before and had not moved. When I turned I noticed that the Guru had started walking away from me. Without thought I started following him.

I came back and gathered my bag and traveled back to Calcutta. I started from the South of India and when I came close to Eskandariyeh, I came to myself and questioned why I had traveled this far and why I had taken this route. I could not go back to visit the Guru while he was still alive and I never figured out what he had done to me to behave as such.

TO BE CONTINUED