



Interview: Firouz Naderi – p. 51



The Persian Nowruz – p. 36



Enemies: A Love Story – p. 41



Interview: Reza Fazeli – p. 47

Persian Heritage

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK	6
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	8
NEWS BRIEFS	10
COMMENTARY	13
Bam, Iran: Children of A Lesser God <i>(Syma Sayyah)</i>	14
Bam: What the World Offered	15
Volunteerism, Altruism and Philanthropy <i>(David N. Rahni)</i>	17
History of Terrorism — Part IX <i>(David A. Yazdan)</i>	20
Zarathustra: Prophet of Ancient Iran <i>(Ardalan)</i>	26
Where Have All the Parsis Gone? <i>(Wadia Zubin)</i>	28
 THE ARTS	
Bam <i>(Amil Imani)</i>	31
Music at Tehran's Golestan Palace <i>(Syma Sayyah)</i>	32
Iranian Night	33
A New Star at the Grammys: Leana Couture	33
Shahla Rahimi Reynolds	34
 YOUR PERSIAN HERITAGE	
The Persian Nowruz <i>(Iraj Bashiri)</i>	36
History of Tehran	40
Enemies: A Love Story <i>(Judy Carlock)</i>	41
The Shah of Persia <i>(Harpers Weekly, July 26, 1873)</i>	45
Interview with Reza Fazeli — Part II <i>(Shahrokh Ahkami)</i>	47
 FEATURE	
INTERVIEW WITH FIROUZ NADERI <i>Kamshad Raiszadeh</i>	51
INTERVIEW WITH BEHZAD RAOUFFY <i>Kamshad Raiszadeh</i>	56
 BOOK REVIEWS	58

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

How quickly time flies. It seems like only yesterday we celebrated NoRouz. As a child we waited, for what appeared to be a lifetime, for the gold coins, special food and new clothes. Now, with the blink of an eye another year has passed. Soon the flowers and birds, silenced by the cold of the winter, will awaken and bare their buds and sing their songs.

This year, like others, came with joy and sadness. And, each year that follows will continue the same pattern. Each of us will smile and each of us will cry. For the fortunate, smiles will be stronger and for the less fortunate, cries harder.

As a community this year has brought an enormous amount of joy. We saw Iranians all over the world succeeding in all aspects of life and professions. To mention just a few we were proud to see an Iranian head up the Mars project, receive the Nobel Peace Prize and be nominated for the Oscar and the Grammy. We also saw them continue to make head in politics seeking Senate, House and Governor positions and into prime time television programming where they played themselves, and in one show Iran proved to be the good guy.

This joy, however, was clouded by tragedy resulting in many tears being shed and hearts being broken. The most tragic of course was the thousands and thousands of lives lost in the devastating earthquake in Bam. In just a few seconds the city was leveled along with the hopes and dreams of thousands of families and thousands of years of history. Ironically, an American was among the dead. He was visiting Bam with his girlfriend who is of the Jewish faith. She is recovering from cancer. The couple elected to stay in a bed and breakfast within the ancient city rather than in a modern hotel outside of the citadel. There, as the sun set, he proposed to her. Within a few hours both were covered by debris. Had it not been for their Iranian guide who made her way back into the devastation to find them, she also would have become a statistic. The world cried with Iran as it did with America on September 11, 2001. The world came together to aid the victims of this tragedy as they have done so many other times before.

But, as they have done so many times before, the world forgets with the passage of time. The world forgets that countries are made up of people. When I saw the outpouring of love and affection from the "so called" enemies of Iran, I felt a sense of relief. I believed that with the images shown on television people would finally see Iranians as "humans" and not as the terrorist image they have been fed. I thought, that finally, the world would see the people of Iran separate from their government.

My relief was short lived. On February 13, 2004 Iran suffered another loss of lives when an Iranian Kish Airliner crashed killing forty-five people on board. That morning I was listening to the radio, "Imus in the Morning" (Imus is a prominent American radio show host who, until February 13, I very much admired for his philanthropy.) That morning I was shocked to hear him say the following comment about the crash, "When I hear stories like that, I think who cares." If that were not enough, he repeated it and then continued by adding that it was too bad that it was not a plane full of Saudi's. Shock took over my body. What could have promoted such hatred from him? How could he take so lightly the loss of innocent lives?

The reaction to his statement, by the Persian community, was fierce. The station was flooded with phone calls and letters and in the end he apologized. His apology was accepted by the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), but I question if it came from his heart? More important and more valuable than the apology, was the swiftness of its deliverance. It was an example of the power of a united Iranian community. It showed how quickly a group, rather than an individual, can change the direction of an event. Finally, I believe that we as a community are heading in the right direction. Finally, individual egos are being set aside for the greater good of the group.

Combined efforts for a cause are beginning to pop up all over our proud commu-



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nity. This year the "Friends of *Persian Heritage*" got together to celebrate the magazine. And, this year combined efforts have resulted in the Persian community securing a permit to have its first parade through the streets of Manhattan.

Efforts such as these will continue to dissipate the hateful image Americans have of the Iranian community. Efforts like this will invite them into our community to really know us for who we really are.

We are finally beginning to realize that bad things don't just happen to the other guy. It is not always the stranger whose parent, wife, husband or child is the subject of discrimination. Tomorrow it could be you or your loved ones. But with group efforts like those above, justice will come swifter and this will allow all of us to hold our heads high rather than to turn in denial.

Yes, though sadness unbalanced the goodness of the past year, that sadness has been the catalyst of good. I continue to wish all of you joy, happiness and equality in the coming year. Joy, happiness and equality void of sadness, but I know I am naive to think this way. As you pass the gold coins this year remember that one gold coin can buy a loaf of bread but together they can feed the world.

My best wishes to all of you in this New Year and may your laughter outweigh your tears.

Shahrokh Alavi

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON
February 10, 2004

I send greetings to Iranian Americans observing Nowruz, the traditional Persian New Year.

Nowruz is a special time to celebrate with family and friends, honor cultural heritage, and enjoy holiday traditions. It is also a time to celebrate the arrival of spring in anticipation of the opportunities of the new year.

During this joyous season, I encourage people of all faiths to pray for peace and mutual understanding throughout the world. Laura joins me in sending our best wishes for a joyous New Year filled with health and happiness.



Best Wishes to Persian Heritage

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ZARATHUSHTRA PROPHET OF ANCIENT IRAN

Ardalan

Who was Zarathushtra? What was his background and where did he come from? What role did he play in history and in the culture of ancient Iran? Why did Nietzsche and Strauss speak of him? And why is it that, in our day and age, so few people have even heard of a man who revolutionized the very essence of human thought?

These questions are difficult to answer to say the least. Until fairly recently, no two sources could agree on his time and date of birth (and subsequent ministry), or his land of birth. It is now agreed that previous information concerning his time and dates were false. Zarathushtra, once thought to have preached in the time of the Achaemenid rulers (539-330 BC) most probably lived sometime in the closing stages of the Bronze Age in Eurasia (Bronze Age in Asia corresponded to about 5,000-3,000 Years ago, whereas in Europe it was between 4,500-2,800 years ago). Zarathushtra's dates fall between 3,700-3,100 years ago, with most scholars believing the time frame to have been between 3,300 and 3,400 years ago.

In addition, Zarathushtra's homeland was also in dispute. The Magian tradition placed his homeland in modern Azarbaijan, in northern Iran. In reality however, Zarathushtra was an eastern Iranian since the dialect he used to compose his Gathas (a collection of 72 hymns composed by Zarathushtra) who lived somewhere between the modern boundaries of southern Turkmenistan and western Afghanistan.

Zarathushtra was not a "prophet" in the classical sense. He did not prophesize or make any attempts to predict supernatural titanic battles and events in the distant future that were open to speculations. Nor did he make any pretense that he was a divine messenger, sent to redeem Mankind by order of the Creator. In fact, this was probably one of his most unique features, since he presented himself as just a man, like his peers, friends and enemies alike. He was just a man who had used his mind instead of his feelings, and reached conclusions worthy of mention. After a long period of pondering, meditation and ques-

tions and answers within his own mind, he came forth to spread his message of logic and goodness, in order to save the world of his day and age from what plagued Mankind then as today: tyranny, oppression, war, avarice, class distinction and struggle, superstition, lie, prejudice, selfishness and all other human attributes that could be corrected and remedied by using a seemingly simple formula: good thoughts, good deeds, and good words (Humata, Hukhta, Hvarshta in Avestan or Andisheye Neek, Kerdare Neek va Gofbare Neek in Persian).

Although his own life is shrouded in mystery, and embellished with tales and myths, his message is clear and ahead of his time. His most valiant effort was to shatter the power of the privileged class of priests, and express that every man or woman, whether low-born or noble, had the power to get close to God (Ahura Mazda) and assist it in the battle against inequity and wrongfulness in this world, through individual effort, piety, dedication and understanding. This was a novel and indeed, a revolutionary idea, that eventually earned him the hostility of the priests of the ancient religion whose very existence and livelihood (Oust as the priests of many religions today) depended entirely on the credulity and subservience of the masses, whose minds were engrained with fear of supernatural retribution and superstition. It was this fear that he sought to destroy by liberating the minds and manners of people of all genders and races, so that they could do away with the invisible chains that made them mental slaves to a hierarchy of priests and lords using chants, rites and libations to "appease" divinities, spirits and entities always on the prowl and seeking to cause adversity upon Human-kind if not properly venerated. In short, **EACH INDIVIDUAL IS AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT** in the battle against wrong and inequity, and each person has the power to remedy the ills of this world through action, rather than trusting one leader to lead the rest as sheep.

After Zarathushtra's violent death at the hands of a tribe of Iranian Scythians that once roamed Central Asia, the mes-

sage spread far and wide, mostly to the then Iranian world comprising modern Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kirghyztan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and parts of China and Iraq. Although scholars believe that Zoroastrianism is the single religion that had the deepest impact on today's main world faiths, it is very important to compare the message expressed in the Gathas and even in the Yazna Haptanghathi, with the violence of the Koran and Bible, in which a vengeful, violent deity demands blood and subservience from his followers, promising to punish those who resist and reward those who obey with material gains, and even sexual favors (Koran). Zoroastrianism spread throughout Asia, and in some forms, even to Europe until the last bastions of Zoroastrian influences and thought were eradicated in 13th century France, by the 7th crusade. Zoroastrianism has largely vanished from the world, and from the lands that once comprised its ancient realm, thanks to the cataclysm that the bloodthirsty wars of Islam have wrought upon the entire world. Yet, and in spite of its apparent demise, its message remains and influences the three Abrahamic religions, as well as to some extent, some aspects of Buddhist thought. Zoroastrianism has inspired several offshoots such as Mazdakism/Yazdanism which survives in altered forms among the Kurds; Manicheism which challenged Christianity in the west and Zurvanism, a heterodox Zoroastrian "heresy" that sought to attribute to a common source the origin of good and evil in the universe.

There are various translations of the Gathas, including by Azar-Goshdasp, Helmut Humbach, Ali Jafarey, and Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin. Translations of the Gathas into Persian, English and German can be found on various sites on the internet, including at avesta.org and zoroastrian.org.

Thanks to its deep and enlightening message, along with its tendency to encourage the follower to think independently and progressively, Zoroastrianism is now rising out of its ashes after a long sleep of over a thousand years, marked by rampant persecution and near-extinction by the followers of Mohammad and Islam. Today, its message is gaining grounds, slowly but surely, among Iranians and non-Iranians alike who find in Zarathushtra's Bronze Age message, an expression of modern thought and future vision. ■

BAM

Amil Imani

"Powerlessness frustrates, absolute powerlessness frustrates absolutely, absolute frustration is a dangerous emotion to run a world with."

Sometimes I wonder why I am so restless, why I cannot cease thinking! It seems like the world we live in reveals incessantly, at certain moments or circumstances, just how little we are and how vast the universe is. We continuously learn something new about this world. This world of ours is a very complex world. Still, what does the expression to be controlled by the elements of the unknown signify? Asking this question should not simply lead us into desperate reflections. The world we live in is a world of many brutal voices. It is a world of heavy blows and delirious trances, but it is the only world we know.

The recent tragic and catastrophic event in the ancient city of Bam in Iran has affected me tremendously. I felt a temptation to scream and run to the end of the world and say my prayers with unusual earnestness and a heavy heart. I felt like screaming for the overflowing flood of human blood. I felt like screaming for the weary eyes and innocent moans of the children of Bam. I felt apprehensive, anxious, and fearful. And now, as I take up my pen, my hand trembles and my head swims with horror and disbelief at the magnitude of the human devastation. Yet, the world will go on as usual. Between searching for meanings and eternal differences and the actual condition of the universe, there is a gap that can never be filled. The confrontation of the irrational, longing human heart and the indifferent universe brings about the notion of the absurd world.

Absurdity,
Nothingness,
All these shine before me,
And move in front of my eyes
In a strange way!

I believe we all are born to do certain things in this world. I feel as though I was born to suffer and write about it; to write about the moans and groans of many voices, many tormented souls who are searching for

an answer. To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot cease speaking.

Perhaps you are one of those relentless souls who dares to look, who dares to touch, who dares to write and who goes beyond heaven and hell. I sometimes wonder about heaven and hell! What is the meaning of life? What is the purpose of all things, of all events? Life definitely is a mystery. Life has many moments. Life has many faces. Life is a universal odyssey. Life is a garden where the Cyprus trees are beginning to rustle and where the reality is hushed. It's where you feel a cold breeze pass through every bone in your body and you start to tremble.

In this tragic episode, life reminds us all how hopeless we really are. Even with the powers of instinct and imagination, one feels that man does not belong solely to the tangible world. There must be a more profound and secret reality that is the source of this phenomenon. The world appears an obscure and dull place, filled with pockets of disasters in which men are, easily, the victims. Then again, we have given more room to hope and mystic influences, less to reality. The main circle, which always dominates, must be sought in the realms beyond thought and discursive reason. Shakespeare was not wrong in stating:

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

When disasters occur, our minds pass through many stages of inner development. We sometimes speak of other forces that rule the world and apparently man wants to substitute this invisible force for a man-made shelter, called religion. The recent earthquake in the city of Bam has left thousands dead and thousands without shelter. A heavy blow to humanity from the above and we start to doubt everything and struggle for an answer.

We struggle against fate,
A painful struggle!
We struggle against life!
A dreadful struggle!

The struggle itself towards,
The heights of calamity,
Is enough to fill a man's heart,
Forever and ever!

And so we return to the place from which we started, the land of dreams. In any case, it matters little for what reason we continue to struggle so long as we testify to man's allegiance to man and not to abstractions. Perhaps we would not be wrong in saying that we are in the reality of time and space, filled with a woven veil of dreams. Under this veil, is hidden the real truth of existence, and when the veil is lifted, the essence of things will be discovered.

Oh, you earthly angels!
You immigrating birds,
Whose only adornment
Is a bed of white feathers!
The innocent children of Bam,
Are wearing your white glowing robe,
And have left the memories of life,
To others!

I see the poor black swallows!
Flying over the ruins of our city!
I see overflowing pain,
Intertwined,
With the hearts of every Persian!

My heart stops palpitating!
My breath starts to dry up!
My faith simply fades away,
And my bed falls silent.

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The oldest of Iranian traditions, Nowruz (also referred to as *eyd-i sar-i sal* and *eyd-i sal-i now*) recalls the cosmological and mythological times of Iran.

Its founder is a deputy of Ahura Mazda on earth, a position that imparts to him and the celebration a spiritual dimension and a particular sense of secular authority. The celebration is organized according to the dynamics of love between the Creator and his creation, the material world. The annual return of the spirits of the departed to their homes is celebrated by their offspring according to primordial rites of which only a faint trace remains among the Persians and the Parsees of today. But that in no way diminishes the importance of the bond, which is refreshed at every Nowruz.

The word "Nowruz" is a compound of two Persian words, "now" which has the same etymology as the English word "new" and means new, and the word "ruz" which means both "day" and "time." Literally meaning the "new day," Nowruz is usually translated as "new year." The Persian Nowruz begins on the first day of spring (usually the 21st of March). The 21st of March, therefore, is equal to the 1st day of Farvardin of the Islamic solar calendar.

In the mind of Iranians, the word Nowruz invokes colorful images, which are sumptuous, elegant, and opulent as well as delightfully simple, refreshing, and cordial. Although colored with vestiges of Iran's Mazdian and Zoroastrian past, the Nowruz celebration is neither religious nor national in nature, nor is it an ethnic celebration. Jewish, Zoroastrian, Armenian and Turkish Iranians and Central Asians celebrate the Nowruz with the same enthusiasm and sense of belonging.

Perhaps it is this very universal nature of the message of Nowruz that speaks to its wealth of rites and customs as well as to its being identified as the unique fount of continuity of the Iranian culture.

Preparation for Welcoming the Nowruz

Sabzeh and Khaneh-Tekani

Preparation for the Nowruz begins early in March with sprouting of *sabzeh* (lentil, wheat, or barley seeds) and a thorough *khaneh-tekani* (house cleaning). The former harks back to the agrarian background of the Iranian tribes that celebrated the main transitions in the climate that dictated the dynamics of their lives. The latter, which entails washing carpets, painting the house, and cleaning the yard and the attic, stems from the Zoroastrians' preoccupation with cleanliness as a measure for keeping Evil away from the kingdom of Good. Symbolically, *khaneh-tekani* signals to the spirits of the

the children in the celebration, must include all the members. Everyone must be measured and outfitted with new clothes, shoes, hats, and the like. In addition, as we shall see below, the *sofreh* (Nowruz display cloth) requires certain items—sweetmeats, confectioneries, candles, fruits, and nuts—which are also bought at this time. In addition to what is bought, women of the household bake various types of sweet breads and sew special clothes for the little ones. At the end a trip must be made to the bank for acquiring shiny, new coins and crisp, fresh banknotes to give out as *eydi* (gift) and for the *sofreh*.

Khwajah Piruz (Haji Firuz)

The month during which Nowruz celebrations are held is an extraordinary time in the life of the community. In ancient times this aspect of Nowruz was so prominent that the mayors of towns were literally displaced by the most victorious person in carrying out the commands of Ahura Mazda and his six holy immortals. This victorious (*piruz*) *khwaja* or lord was given the rule of the realm for the period. As a part of his duties, *Khwaja Piruz* saw to it that all the people of the realm were provided with the amenities and joy that were due them. In time, especially after the fall of Iran to the Arabs who would not relinquish rule to defeated foes, the office of *Khwaja Piruz* deteriorated into its Arabized form, *Haji*

Firuz. Only the duty of stimulating laughter and providing a good time has remained of what must have been a complex set of social activities. Today, *Haji Firuz* is no more than a spectacle that occurs during the last few weeks before Nowruz. He and his troupe of musicians appear on the streets and alleyways all over the country.

Known as the traditional herald of the Nowruz, *Haji Firuz* is a black-faced character clad in bright red clothes and a felt hat playing a tambourine and singing,



The Persian NOWRUZ

Iraj Beshiri

ancestors that their kin are ready and willing to entertain them. In other words, they are invited to descend on their previous homes to help them nourish the growth of the *sabzeh*, the main source of their sustenance, which has been depleted during the long and cold days of winter.

Kharid-i Nowruz

The sprouting of seeds and house cleaning are followed by *kharid-i Nowruz* (Nowruz shopping). Nowruz shopping, a family affair performed mostly to engage

year. Often, water is also added to the contents to aid the absorption of evil and to make it sink deeper into the ground.

Shab-i Jom'e

The dinner for the Thursday before Nowruz must include *pilau* and chicken. Fulfilling this ritual assures one that there will be a similar dinner at least once a week during the coming year. Sofreh-i Nowruz A few days before the arrival of Nowruz, a rather large table-cloth is spread on the floor of the main room of the house and the following items are placed on it:

Lighted candles, which represent the goodness and warmth that enters life with the coming of spring and the dissipation of evil that has had the world in its cold grip, are placed on the *sofreh*. In a large setting, an open fire would replace the candles. The number of the candles must be the same as the number of the offspring in the household. Often an egg accompanies each candle. It should be mentioned that the candles on displays must be allowed to burn themselves out. It is bad luck to blow out a candle.

A copy of al-Qur'an (holy book of the Muslims) or the Avesta (holy book of the Zoroastrians) or the Bible or the Torah (depending on the faith to which the family belongs) is placed in a prominent place on the *sofreh*. The holy scripture refreshes the bond between the faithful and the source of good emanating from the light.

Haftsin or seven edible things the names of which in Persian begin with the letter "sin" or "s" are placed in a tray or otherwise placed next to each other on the *sofreh*. *Sib* (apple), *somaq* (sumac), *sir* (garlic), *samanu* (a paste made with wheat sprouts), *senjed* (jujube fruit), *sohan* (a candy made with honey and nuts), *siyahdane* (sesame seeds), *serke* (vinegar), and *sangak* (bread baked on a bed of rocks) are the usual edible items from among which seven are chosen. Since the edible items on the haft-sin are not to be eaten until after the change of seasons, often non-edibles such as *sekke* (coins), *sonbol* (hyacinth), *spand* (the wild rue), *sepestan* (sebestens), *samovar* (samovar), or *sabzeh* (wheat or lentil sprouts) are substituted. The seven "sin"s symbolically recall Ahura Mazda and the six Amesha Spentas who help him regulate the affairs of man according to the "din" or order prescribed by Ahura Mazda's Ahuric Order. It should be added that today the seven "sin"s are interpreted rather differently, as

the following example illustrates:

Samanu — sweetness, fertility, having many children

Senjed — love

Sir — medicine for recovering from evil

Sib — health, natural beauty, fragrance

Somaq — color of the sun at sunrise

Serkeh — age and patience; wards off bitterness in life

Sohan — sweetness in life

Sabzeh — purity, opulence, and good fortune

Needless to say, these interpretations are not sanctioned by any particular authority or based on any overall analysis of the theological and/or cosmological values that ancient Iranians might have had for them. What else can be an apt interpretation of *sekke* (coin) in this context but affluence, wealth, and prosperity? Ironically, this is one of the "s"s that comes into fruition right after the *tahvil-i sal*. The coins, which equal the number of family members, are distributed among the members by the family patriarch (grandfather or father).

Additionally, it should be mentioned that haft-sin could have been *haft-shin*—*shir* (milk), *shekar* (sugar), *shahd* (nectar), *sharbat* (compote), *shane* (comb), *sharab* (wine), and *sham'* (candle) — in pre-Islamic times. "Shin" has been changed to "sin" to accommodate Islam's disapproval of *sharab* or wine. Why that one item could not have been replaced with a different item beginning with "shin" is not known.

Other traditions relate *haft-sin* or *haft-shin* to seven trays (*sini*) filled with seven delicious food items or seven different growing seeds, or seven varieties of nuts offered to the king. Others consider the seven "s"s to have been Life, Health, Happiness, Prosperity, Joy, and Beauty, all forming the seventh "s" which, according to Zoroastrian traditions, represents Truth.

Still others contend that while the first tray to Ahura Mazda was empty (Truth is a combination of things with no substance of its own), the other six trays were filled with flowers, sugar, milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, cream, eggs, water, mirrors, candelabra, burning coal, silver, and gold. These items, according to this belief, represent Truth, Good thought, Dominion, Piety, Prosperity, Immortality, and Obedience.

A mirror placed on the *sofreh* face up with a plain hard-boiled egg placed on it in the middle. A bowl of clear water with an

orange and a leaf of a rose bush floating in it. Live goldfish in a bowl of clear water. The barley, lentil, or wheat sprouts that had been growing since early March decorated with a red ribbon around the outside and an orange seated in the center.

In addition to these there are representatives of the other kingdoms sustaining life on earth, i.e., products from the animal kingdom in the form of cheese and yogurt, the plant kingdom in the form of flour, vegetables, rice, and of the water kingdom in the form of the goldfish are also placed on the *sofreh*.

Pomegranates and pussy willows also are sometimes seen. The latter is especially important as it blossoms at this very time of the year. An upright mirror and plenty of colored eggs, cookies, and various types of fruits and sweets, candies, and nuts are added to decorate the *sofreh*.

Sa'at-i tahvil Sa'at-i tahvil means the hour during which the old year ends and the new year begins. In an Iranian house, during the Nowruz celebration, *sa'at-tahvil* is a most crucial moment in the life of the family, especially with regard to forgiving past failings, putting away petty frictions that would otherwise fester into conflicts, and looking forward to more constructive relations. And, of course, this is the moment when the egg rolls on the mirror and the orange flips over in the bowl of water. The moment is announced by the resounding boom of cannons fired in the square, by a brief speech delivered by the leader of the nation, and by the debut of a popular song contributed by a popular favorite artist.

Just before the change of the year, all members of the family, in their new clothes and holding a new coin in their hand for good luck, gather around the *haft-sin* display and, quietly and patiently, watch the solitary white egg on the mirror. Each one imagines a huge bullfish in the ocean of time carrying the world on one of its horns. Any moment now, the bullfish will toss the world over to the other horn, resulting in a tremor that will dislodge the egg and send it rolling to the side of the mirror.

As soon as the egg rolls, the members of the family, rejoicing, kiss each other, exchange Nowruz greetings, *eid-i shoma mobarak!* (May you have an auspicious new year!), and proceed, especially in the case of children, to make the rounds of the elders of the family first and of the neighborhood. Adults, too, have a set schedule of visits and of receiving visi-

tors. As a rule, the patriarch of the house stays home until all those younger, and lower in rank, than him come and pay their respects, then he would return those visits. Visits are short. Sweets and tea are the most often served items. The rounds of visitations might last as long as thirteen days.

Beliefs attached to Sa'at-i tahvil

Several beliefs related to *sa'at-i tahvil* are interesting. The first thing to eat, for instance, should be an egg; because it is believed that eggs ensure good fortune. In fact, in some traditions, the patriarch of the family must eat all the eggs that have accompanied the candles placed for each offspring on the *sofreh*! The first person who enters the house after *sa'at-i tahvil* might decide the good or bad fortune that would visit the house in the next year. Often a member of the family known to be blessed with good fortune is sent out to become the first visitor. Things brought into the house, especially their color, also have the potential of influencing the course of the future of the family. The color white is regarded auspicious. Black is believed to be associated with grief and strife. Even the place where the individual is at *sa'at-i tahvil* is significant in that he or she might be stuck to that or a similar location for the entire duration of the coming year. In this context, therefore, one tends not to be anywhere near schools, offices, or the bazaar.

Sizdah Bedar

The Nowruz ceremonies end on the thirteenth day of the first month of the New Year. On that day almost all the people leave the towns and villages and spend a day in the countryside enjoying the beautiful weather that accompanies the change of seasons. During this outing the *sabzeh* that had been displayed and with it, all the sins, worries, and concerns of the past are thrown into running water. The New Year then begins with a fresh slate on the 14th of the month.

With regard to the *sabzeh*, it should be noted that some rural folk might plant the *sabzeh* rather than throw it into running water. It should also be noted that one should not touch other peoples' *sabzeh* on that day. Before the *sabzeh* is thrown, girls at the age of being married and unmarried women often tie the blades of the *sabzeh* saying, "*sal-i digar, khane-i showhar, bachcheh dar baghal!*" (Let next year find me in my husband's house with a baby in my arms!) ■

HISTORY OF TEHRAN



Tehran consists of two words, "Teh" (meaning bottom, end) and "Ran" (meaning Slopes). Put together it means the "end of slopes," and it lies on the slopes of the Alborz Mountains. For a long time, Tehran was a small village part of Shahr-e Ray. This village was built underground for defensive purposes in wars so that the enemies could not reach it. As one of the historians put it, Tehran of the old times was built like an ant hole, and since it was built on the way to Shahr-e Ray, it was a gathering place for bandits and looters.

Tehran village had many orchards of various fruits and its pomegranate has been especially famous. During the Mogul invasion of Shahr-e Ray, the people of the city sought refuge in Tehran because of the underground-built shelters. Thus, the first steps were taken for Tehran's development.

The rapid progress and development of Tehran commenced during the Safavid Dynasty. Shah Tahmasb had chosen Ghazvin as the Capital and since the great ancestor of the Safavid (Seyed Hamza) was buried near Hazrat-e Abdulazim, Tahmasb went on pilgrimages to his tomb. He was attracted to Tehran because of the refreshing waters and many orchards on the way to his pilgrimage. He gradually began to stay for longer periods in Tehran and ordered mighty fortifications to be built around Tehran. The first official buildings were built around 1580, and Shah Tahmasb ordered 114 towers to be constructed commensurate with the 114 *surah* (chapters) of Koran. A *surah* was to be buried under each tower. After Shah Tahmasb, Shah Abbas built a great garden in Tehran with many trees.

After the Safavid kings, Karim Khan Zand (of Zandieh Dynasty) built a great citadel and fortification in Tehran for his own residence to enable him to attack the Qajar chieftains stationed in Mazandaran and Astarabad.

After the demise of the last Zandieh Shah, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar attacked Tehran around 1820s. He conquered the city on the Iranian New Year (*NoRouz*). He chose Tehran as the place of his coronation and the Capital, or *Darul-Khalafa*. At that time Tehran had a population of 20,000.

(Taken from the Internet, author unknown)

I didn't expect to be standing here, by these graves, tears rolling down my face. But then, I didn't expect a lot of things when I came to Iran.

I didn't expect Tweetie Bird, platform shoes and nail polish. I didn't expect to see ex-Wildcat basketball player Richard Jefferson on Iranian state TV. I didn't expect motorcycles on the sidewalks, dancing in the aisles or spontaneous cheers of, "We love America!"

I didn't expect to give chocolate to an ayatollah, or to watch a young Iranian-American woman launch herself into the arms of an uncle she'd never met.

I didn't expect flowers, music, colored lights.

Most of all: I did not expect joy.

“There is no joy in Islam,” Ayatollah Khomeini said, or is quoted as saying. I don't believe him. Still, I'm apprehensive as the lights of Tehran rise up to meet me.

I'm exhausted, my makeup has worn off and I'm wearing a ridiculous outfit to meet the country's dress code - fringed scarf and beautician's smock. Looking just as ugly as my visa picture, I stumble into the glaring fluorescence of Mehr-abad Airport. The get-up works. Waved into the country, I'm greeted by a man holding a "Global Exchange" sign. I stick out my hand, not knowing this is taboo.

Masood shakes it anyway.

There is a washing machine in the middle of the baggage carousel, a mystery I'm too tired to ponder. Another mystery: What are 40,000 wide-awake Iranians doing at the airport at 2 a.m.?

On the bus, Masood is speaking to 15 Americans he will spend the next two weeks baby-sitting: "When your plane landed in Iran, it also landed in our hearts." He is the first of many Iranians who will bend over backward to make us feel welcome.

My travel mates lean toward the left. San Francisco-based Global Exchange has a human

rights, fair trade and environmental agenda. Our group has retirees, ministers, a nurse, a couple of lawyers, a city planner and a semilicit journalist. My roommate, Azita, is a 20-year-old student. Her father is Iranian, but she's never been here.

Our chief guide is Roxanna Shapour, a former expatriate raised largely in the United States, who returned three years ago. She has a simple solution to mandatory *hejab*, the covering of women to protect male virtue: Blind all the men!

She often wears her headscarf turban-style, exposing ears and neck.

I myself am a *hejab* geek, an Islamic fashion disaster. Thankfully, after a morning of palaces and museums, Roxanna

The separation is apparently for show; on the plane, I'm seated next to our group's logistical wizard, Assad. Mount Demavand, elevation 18,386 feet, floats below me, a perfect snowcap on a blanket of smog. I study a phrase book (*Farsi balad neestam*: I don't speak Farsi.) Though Assad's English is 10,000 times better than my Farsi, it's not as good as his French. So as he teaches me Farsi, we speak French — which in my case keeps coming out as Spanish.

By the time we land, I'm itching for a walk. Masood and Assad have been keeping a nervous eye on the group. They're not spying; they're just terrified something bad will happen to us. Outside the crowded capital, they sigh in relief.

I wander confidently, knowing I have a map. Unfortunately, I soon discover, it's a map of the city of Isfahan. And I can't remember the name of the hotel. But stashed in my money belt are my passport and a huge wad of 10,000-rial notes — "greens," worth about \$1.20 each — so I figure I'll be OK.

Before I came, people asked, are you afraid? I was puzzled: What's to fear? Terrorists? Who would hijack a plane going to Iran? The only time I was afraid was trying to cross the street in Tehran.

Still, I'm not quite confident enough to get comfortably lost.

Soon I relax, into busy days crammed with sweetness. A pomegranate farmer beckons us into his walled garden, offering ruby fruit, and baby goats to cuddle. "Do you raise them for meat?" we ask. "These are my pets!" he answers, horrified.

We visit a Zoroastrian fire temple in Yazd, home of a flame that has been burning since A.D. 470. We smoke sheesha (flavored tobacco) at the tomb of Hafez and take tea under an ancient bridge in Isfahan.

At Ardashir Palace, near Firoozabad, we run into a group of tour guides in training. A digital orgy ensues. We take each other's pictures. We take pictures of us

ENEMIES: A LOVE STORY

Axis of Evil Meets Great Satan
Lots of Smiles Ensue

JUDY CARLOCK, Assistant City Editor

Tucson Citizen, February 9, 2004

takes us to buy manteaus — loose outer garments that fall to the knees, obscuring the feminine form. The clerks giggle, recognizing an emergency.

Headscarves or no, they are all gorgeous.

I find a baby-blue scarf in floral print and matching manteau, with long, loose sleeves that end up dragged through ubiquitous bowls of lunchtime yogurt.

By dinner, I'm chic — and showing a scandalous amount of hair that won't stay crammed under the scarf.

After two days in Tehran, we leave for the southern city of Shiraz, screened for the flight in separate security lines for men and women.



Photo by SIRUS VAJAJANI

When an American tourist group meets a class of student tour guides at Aradshir Palace, we all have to pose for pictures.

taking each other's pictures. When farewells finally must be made, the Iranians join hands, outside this dusty third-century ruin, and send up a cheer:

"We love America!"

That day, we lunch with nomads - women ululating, men firing rifles - then take off, nomads in tow, to find the tomb of Aleh and Ladan.

A long, low marble slab lies next to a village of mud bricks. The once-conjoined twins lie in two coffins, side by side. They bled to death in a Singapore operating room during a separation attempt in July. They were 29.

"This is their sister," Roxanna murmurs, as a young woman approaches. And, as an older woman with immense dignity appears, "This is their mother."

Roxanna translates as I tell the woman that her daughters were very brave and touched many lives. We embrace. She plants a kiss on my arm.

Then villagers want our picture for a mausoleum they plan to build. Relatives fetch photos to prop on the tomb. We smile, subdued.

It's like Mardi Gras, but everyone is sober.

It is the birthday of the Twelfth Imam, a mythical figure reputed to be among us, unseen. His return will herald an era of peace. On this occasion, the people of Yazd

consider it their religious duty to drown American tourists in lemonade. Colored lights are hung, recorded prayers drone from a mosque and families settle with picnics on the grass and around fountains. The streets - and sometimes sidewalks - are filled with motorcycles, carrying as many as five people, honking and yelling and carrying on. To add to the frenzy, the Iranian national soccer team has just beaten New Zealand.

I raise my camera and an official angrily gestures at me to lower it, as if such exuberance must be censored.

Near the Jewish quarter, someone tries to give Azita a chicken. "How cool is that?" she exults.

On a mountaintop where, until the 1970s, Zoroastrians took their dead to be picked clean by vultures, I find a mixed group of Iranian students, who push and pull me through a door to the Tower of Silence. They're eating Cheetos, or the Iranian equivalent: Chee-Toz, it says on the bag, in English.

"What do you think of our culture?" asks one young man.

"I think you are very energetic," I say. "It's because we are young."

In Isfahan, a cool breeze blows from the Zayendeh-Rood River. It's a lovely city, its tree-lined river flanked by flowers, its giant central square home to

the ravishing Sheikh Lotfollah mosque and a seemingly endless bazaar. Our local guide is Scheherezade, a devout Muslim who dresses with faultless modesty - and who grins in delight when someone gives her a Frisbee. At our request, she arranges a meeting with an ayatollah. Roxanna fixes her head scarf, but still wears leopard-print pants.

He fields questions ("How do you know you're doing God's will?" asks Paul, a nurse.) I have a simpler query: "Do you like chocolate?" "Of course," he replies, "but I am diabetic." "Will you share?" I ask, offering him a giant Hershey Special Dark bar. The junior clerics laugh.

At an Orthodox church, a young man named Joseph tells us, frankly and in perfect English, about the limits of tolerance for religious minorities - in his case, Armenian Christian - under an Islamic republic. Adrienne, a Congregationalist minister in our group, presents him with a "peace shawl" made by women of her church.

Today Azita will meet her Iranian family. Plans change hourly. At first, they agree to pick her up in Isfahan, to spirit her away to a cousin's wedding in the north of the country, near the Caspian Sea. But as we leave Isfahan, she is still with us. Now they say they will pick her up in Kashan, at the end of the day.



Azita Ranjbar meets her Iranian uncles for the first time.

Assad, as usual, has a cell phone glued to his ear.

Halfway to Kashan, in a town called Natanz, we visit a ceramics shop. I wait outside the bathroom to make a preemptive strike on a Persian toilet - a porcelain-lined hole, with a hose for washing up. Suddenly, in a courtyard, two middle-aged men, two younger men, a young woman and a little boy appear, bearing an enormous bouquet.

Assad, through 20 phone calls this morning, has timed the moment with military precision. Azita has no idea. She's asleep on the bus. I attach myself to the entourage and sprint toward the bus, where sleepy Azita's head scarf has slipped down to reveal her glossy black "Persian 'fro."

Then she's wide-awake, flying into her uncle's arms. I'm taking pictures. And crying.

Minus the kidnapped Azita, we slice through the arid landscape, Persian music blaring through the PA system. Amir, the assistant driver, and Jack, an Armenian-American with my group, get up to dance. When a woman stands, Amir pulls the drapes to block the view from the highway. The party continues.

I use time on the bus to teach myself the Iranian alphabet. All through the country I study signs, many bilingual. Soon, even without the English, I can sound out the words.

"Ka," I start. "Ka-b ... Ka-ba ... Ka-bob!" I'm thrilled. I won't starve.

By the end of the trip, when we drive by the former U.S. embassy where hostages were taken in 1979, I know enough Farsi to pick out the words on a mural: "Marg bar Amrika" — Death to America.

But only because I'm looking for them.

Walking into the hotel that seemed so alien my first night in Tehran, I immediately recognize Azita's uncle and smile. They brought her back, after all. I spend the day walking down Valiasr Street, a main drag, because I know I won't get lost. The next day, I walk up the street, stopping at an Internet cafe.

In so many ways, I have been nourished these past two weeks. I'm full, even a little burned out, but greedy. There is so much I haven't seen.

Roxanna fills the waning hours. A bookstore owned by the city of Tehran, where Paul finds a copy of "Queer Cul-

ture" and I spot a biography of Barry Goldwater.

Lunch at a restaurant run by Hare Krishnas.

A hurried interview.

Roxanna has faith in her country. She believes Iran will change, is changing, has changed. Freedom will come slowly, organically, and U.S. intervention will just get in the way. The people are not downtrodden, she says. It is a culture ancient and vibrant, dynamic and surging, messy and diverse, ceaselessly reinventing itself.

"It's the most exciting time to be here," she says. "Which is why people like me make halfhearted attempts to leave. We're afraid we might miss something."

Speaking of her circle of former expatriates, she says, "We all, at the end of the day, come to the understanding that Iran gives you a lot more than it takes away."

In the lobby, I look up and see the Nets and the Spurs on Iranian TV. It's a file clip, advancing the start of the NBA season. I catch a glimpse of Richard Jefferson.

Gifts change hands. Assad gets an "Arizona Rocks" T-shirt. I promise Masood a CD of favorite songs: "Folsom Prison Blues," "The Night Chicago Died" and "Papa Was a Rolling Stone." I collect saffron, and lapis to ward off the evil eye. We eat in a fancy restaurant, stocked with napkins, not Kleenex.

Mehrabad is mobbed. We jostle at the counter, relinquish our luggage, head to security. It's happening too fast, but I can't slow it down. Time to go. Masood sticks out his hand.

I shake it. ■



Judy Carlock (second from left) poses with clerks at a Tehran clothing shop



An Interview with **REZA FAZELI (Part II)**

Shahrokh Ahkami

Mr. Fazeli, you told us about your experiences in Iran. Please tell us a little bit about Europe and the time you spent in England.

I fled Iran and ended up in Turkey. I was well known in this country because of a few films that I had taped there so therefore everyone volunteered their help. Eventually I ended up in England and due to some uncontrolled events I ended up spending a few nights in Hyde Park. After a few days I started working. My job was to exchange money routes from Iran to England. With the money I made, I set up a shop with one of my friends and through this I acquired my residency in England. As all this was taking place I slowly started working on bringing my family to England and within a year they joined me.

When you fled Iran did any problems occur for your family?

Yes, my family was forced to reside, for eight months, in a far out village so that the authorities were not able to find them. We had difficulty staying in touch

because of the lack of communication lines.

Mr. Fazeli you were one of the first people in England who started your opposition work against the Iranian government joined with Fereidoun Farokhzad

It was during my second year in England that I was informed of Fereidoun's departure from Iran. I joined him in Turkey and we both traveled to Germany because that's where he applied for his political asylum. I came back to England and eventually he joined me there. We held our first opposition concert together at Kensington Hall in England called "the songs of my land." Actually the tape is still available. I started becoming very active with many different opposition activists, by taping numerous concerts and films and distributing them throughout Iran. I started putting together the first Iranian library in London. I also put together a place called KVC which carried numerous films and tapes. Over all I produced about fifty two tapes until the year 1987, when my shop was bombed.

The 52 tapes you produced were they geared mostly toward culture or politics?

Mixed. One of the fifty two tapes was the *Clan of the Hajjis* and a number of political concerts. As we all know Iranians prefer music to speeches so I tried gearing towards politics through entertainment. I put together a number of political concerts in which Fereidoun Farokhzad participated. It was through this momentum that our concerts became more and more popular. Our grandest concert was on the anniversary of the death of Bijan during the NoRouz holiday of 1987. We called this concert the "The Universe of Stars" The concert was about four hours long, which to this day is still watched and passed along. Singers such as Moin participated. You would never imagine them to become politically involved. Of course he was not aware and was there thinking that he was participating at one of Mahasti's concerts.

From the day I left Iran I always dreamed of bringing awareness to our people. I have always educated myself about all religions. They all advocate the goodness of human beings but the carriers of this message usually end up ruining the name of religion. No matter what religion or belief or path we take in life we all need to learn to come together and be kind to each other and seek peace.

Fereidoun used to go on stage and use comedy as the genre of his concerts to make the public become aware of the politics in Iran. The public use to laugh and enjoy his showmanship. They were not fully aware that his comic statements were not just jokes, but realities turned into statements of humor. We all need to become aware of what we have done to our country and land, and realize that both those living on the outside and those living inside are all prisoners.

During the last days of Shah's reign in Iran the British put together a four-hour documentary placing him under a bad light. I decided to take this tape and reduce to a one and half-hour documentary. I edited the film so that I could include the Shah's last speech in the parliament where he insisted that he had accomplished a lot during his years in power. As these words left his mouth, I would bring up documented photographs of his accomplishments. It was because of this documentary that I was accused of being a fol-

lower of his monarchy. It is very interesting how things do work out for those in the dark.

My goal has always been to bring about awareness and education to the public through these films, announcements and documented events. Once they are educated they can make their own decisions and vote for who ever they want in power. But running into the streets and demonstrating for one they don't know and asking for a government that they have no experience with has done to them what is happening today.

There were many bribes offered to me to end my journey of awareness. On August 19, 1986, a bomb exploded in my store that was meant for me. It was the first bomb of opposition that went off outside of the country. It was the beginning of war for me.

When the bomb exploded was anyone at the shop?

Yes, I was gone that day. My son, however, who had just graduated with Bachelors in Computer Science, had come to visit me at the store. Since I was not there he had decided to stay and cover for me. Minutes before the explosion he had gone down to the basement of the building where my desk was located and sat behind it. He had sat right on the bomb that exploded. One of my employees, who had stood a distance from him, left the hospital a week later. A few other employees upstairs were struck quite emotionally. What was interesting was that the books in the store had become a protection against the bomb so the people upstairs were not severely hurt.

I really don't like to bring you back to those sad memories but don't you think that who ever placed the bomb was someone close to you?

No. Whoever had placed the bomb was not someone close to me. But the person who had helped in giving out the necessary information to complete the job was a family member who worked for the government. The police finally caught the two men responsible for the bombing on a plane to Lebanon.

Before we get to the reason why you left England can you tell us whether you continued your work with the production

of these films in the United States?

In short in England I started my work immediately but, as you probably know, when I came to the US I did not come in the open for seven long years. No one knew of my whereabouts and this was not by choice, but because of circumstances. In order to survive I had to stay out of the public eye.

Why did you leave England?

All countries around the world have secret intelligent agents. In Iran we called the agency SAVAK now we call it SAVAMA and so on. In England, France

What makes the United States different from other countries is that, if you're a third generation Italian holding a foreign passport, you are still considered a foreigner. But, in the United States that is not a concern everyone is treated the same...

and other European countries the system stays the same and the intelligence as well. The agencies are not concerned with affairs of foreigners in their countries. In order to keep relations with Iran they need to deal information. It was for this reason that I felt that I might have been a test and did not feel comfortable staying in a place where I was not protected by the intelligence. I am very sure that the assassinations of Bakhtiar and Farrokhzad were part of a deal and nothing more.

So it is safe to say that your move to the US was because of your concerns about future dealings?

Yes. It is safe to say that this was the reason I left England for the US. I have been witness to such dealings here in the

US. Perhaps it is part of their strategies or system not to negotiate such deals. What makes the United States different from other countries is that if you're a third generation Italian holding a foreign passport, you are still considered a foreigner. But, in the United States that is not a concern everyone is treated the same, equally and living on equal grounds. It was for this particular reason I chose the United States as my home.

The book you wrote about your escape from Iran was it written in England or the US?

I wrote the book in England but finalized it in the US.

Are planning to make the book into a movie any time soon?

I don't have the money and do not plan on asking investors to invest in such a film. This book will eventually find its way into the heart of the American public and some producer out there will eventually pursue this path. I think it will be a very successful film the same way the book has become a success. I have sent the script to the studios but as we all know about 15,000 proposals are sent to the studios every year and out of them perhaps 300 movies are made and out of that six will be a success. My luck is equal to a single grain in a barrel full of grain.

When you came to the US were you confronted with lots of difficulties?

Coming to the US was not difficult at all. I was very lucky to receive a lot of help from people around me. My problem was that I felt I was suffocating. I could not tell anyone where I was. In plain words I was in hiding and that was the most difficult part for me. I resided in Delaware in a village close to Wilmington.

You had migrated to a free land how could you experience any difficulties?

Since I was protected by the police, I did not want to cause any problems. The only time I was threatened was before Azadi Television in Los Angeles. I received a threat via my beeper and the police located the person and arrested him.

What else could I expect from any country. I was given protection by the police and I was very grateful for it.

You started out on the East Coast and then migrated to the West. Was it your ambition to start a television network, or were there any other reasons for your move?

Look, when someone has been involved in the arts all his life, you can not expect him to become a real-estate tycoon or to go open a Kabab restaurant. My goal was to again bring about awareness to the public. I wanted to put together a project to bring about this public awareness. I found a sponsor for my project, who suggested we start a nonprofit organization which could be turned into a television station and that's how it all started. On December 2nd of 2002, Azadi Television was on air for the first time. We wanted to bring awareness to the Iranian population.

There are many different systems in the governing world of governments. The Iranian people need to learn more about these systems so that they can choose what they want for their country. There are monarchies ruling in England and Holland but they are different from each other. What is a democracy and what does it stand for? What is the constitution and how it should be constructed? These are questions that need to be answered, and therefore we need to educate the people about the constitution. It is the constitution that dictates the people and to put it together we need that education. I have always emphasized that people, when they choose a president, king or leader, they must determine his or her rights. And you the people should have the right to remove or place the leader at any time.

We must not bend over for a king but have the right to remove him when we see it necessary. We must ask them to work for us morally and to make the right decisions for us; to watch out for our welfare. When we reach that point of awareness it does not matter who is the leader because at that point we are at peace. We believe that if the people had been aware they would not have fallen into this trap. For example, if you go to the most religious countries in Europe like Italy or Spain and tell its people the picture of the Pope is in the moon the people will not turn and look for it, because they are aware. Our goal is to not make the same mistake we made twenty five years

ago. We are here to educate the public so that history does not repeat itself.

When you decided to establish this network were you confronted with any difficulties?

Lack of money, and still the lack of money. Every thing was done legally with the permission of the American government. I personally had to inform and stay in touch with the FBI. In the beginning there were some minor threats. That is all over now and we are heading forward.

What do you predict for Iranians and Iranian media outside the country?

We must not bend over for a king but have the right to remove him when we see it necessary. We must ask them to work for us morally and to make the right decisions for us; to watch out for our welfare. When we reach that point of awareness, it does not matter who is the leader because at that point we are at peace....

In my opinion, as Iranians living on the outside, we have no authority. We are sitting comfortably in our homes and demanding change. It is not up to us. There are seventy million Iranians living in Iran who have that authority. My opinion is that those in power will destroy themselves by their own hands. Those on the outside, such as my age group, have no power and those who are the younger generation on the outside are too emotional. We have a few very young talented who come around once in a while. I think we have a different people from twenty five years ago. At that time people had comfortable lives. Today's generation has experienced war, poverty and all sorts of other difficulties of life. I think the same thing that happened in Europe 300 years ago will happen in Iran. The young people will march on the streets and de-

mand change. And we will follow them...

Is it fair to say that back then the younger generation was not as politically active or concerned where as today this is not the case? The youth are very much concerned politically and socially.

One cannot appreciate food until the hunger has been felt; one can not appreciate sleep until insomnia has not been experienced. We were part of a generation who owned the car but did not know how to drive it and so started driving on the wrong side of the road and ended up killing ourselves. My opinion is that the past twenty five years the Iranian people have accumulated such great experiences that they can endure more than we might think. This is my opinion.

Are you planning on producing any new films or in the process of making any?

Let me tell you something, film is an expensive endeavor. I don't think that any Iranian actor or actress should pursue their career in the US, because they are either over or under qualified. It's therefore very difficult to get any parts that would be a good match. I can only be a part of Iranian Cinema for the Farsi speaking people. You need to be young to pursue an acting career in the US. It's too late for me. Even if I don't do anything I still am Reza Fazeli. I am sure if I did do anything here it would end up in a disaster. Here we will be labeled in films either as Arab or an Iranian terrorists. I know the language and I certainly look the part so is this the type of film that I would be a part of.

If you would please give us your final thoughts.

Question everything. Don't be naïve and believe everything that you hear or see. If tomorrow they come and tell you Reza Fazeli stole a million dollars you might end up saying "I knew he was a thief" don't believe everything that you hear or see. Ferdowsi advised us to pursue knowledge till death. We should stop blaming other countries such as the US, France or England for invading our rights. We should look deep down into our own souls and find where the problem lies. Let's put aside our greed. I hope we can become better listeners. ■