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# Persian Heritage

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

My staff is constantly aggravated with me, because I am always late in submitting my editorial for printing. The truth is that I must be motivated to write and for whatever reason, I am never motivated until the "final hour." Unfortunately, at that time there are usually so many things to write about that I again end up putting off writing it.

Well, the "final hour" is here and once again I am forced to put pen to paper. The subjects to write about are as follows: 1) A response to a *Letter to the Editor* from the spring issue, where the writer was upset with my suggestion that Iranian Jews should continue to donate to Iranian causes or organizations in light of the trials of thirteen Iranian Jews for alleged espionage. I am afraid she did not truly understand the purpose of my editorial. I will simply reply by saying that the trials were an act of the government, not the 70 million plus Iranians living within or outside of Iran, of whom a large number still need assistance. On the opposing side of this argument were those individuals who felt that Iranians should exclusively assist those Iranians who live within Iran — two extreme positions, indeed. 2) Another choice for me to write about was the comments I received with regard to the passing of Shamlou. One individual considered him to be the greatest Iranian contemporary poet, while another loathed him because of his criticism of Ferdowsi and admiration of Zehhak, a fictitious and most hated king. Again, these are two extreme positions. The extremism that we often find among Iranians, both within and outside of Iran, sparked something in me. It raised the following question, "Why are we always on such opposite sides and why can't we find some comfortable middle position?" One of the most recent examples of our extreme opposite opinions is over the concert of a very famous singer.

This Iranian idol and singer has been silent for over twenty years. For whatever reason, she has now broken her silence and will sing again. Tours have been announced for people who want to attend her concerts in Canada and the United States. Her resurgence has initiated yet another, not mere variation, but extreme difference of opinion. There are groups so opposed to her "coming out" that they have been leafleting in protest against her concerts. They accuse her and her husband of collaborating with the Iranian government. They say they cannot understand the "why"s and "how"s of her rebirth at such a sensitive time. They are suspicious and consider her resurgence untimely in light of the fact that numerous students, writers and journalists still remain in jail. Although I did not see the connection, I was too shy to approach these individuals for additional explanation. I believed if I probed this matter any further, I would also be accused of being a collaborator. Though this might not have been considered good journalism, I decided that it was more appropriate for me to remain uninformed and ignorant about this particular subject.

The excitement of the singer's upcoming concert, however, was creating a frenzy. The magazine was constantly getting calls for more information. The Iranian-American community was becoming intoxicated by the thought of hearing her sing once more. One day a member of my editorial board approached me for permission to interview her in Canada during her first concert. So excited was she about this that she was willing to pay money to her for the interview. I could not say no to her, but explained that this magazine does not pay its interviewees. On the same day, another member of my staff suggested that we seek press credentials to cover her New York concert. She felt that our magazine needed to give a younger perspective on this Elvis-like singer. I was moved by this young woman's curiosity to see a singer so much older than she. When I asked her about this, she informed me that this singer was like an Elvis or Sinatra, not just another singer. Believing that press credentials were a given, she sought out CDs of the singer's older music. She returned with only one and was curious that she was not able to find it in any Persian stores.

A few days later, I heard from both women. One of them could not obtain the interview and the other was told that press credentials for Iranian Journalists would be given only for the Los Angeles performance. Being a good journalist she asked the second question: "Why?" The answer absolutely shocked her. Only four American newspapers given exclusive credentials for New York coverage — *The New York Times*, *The Star Ledger* of New Jersey, the *Washington Post* and a paper in Long Island. She



## Persian Heritage

www.mirassiran.com

### Persian Heritage, Inc.

110 Passaic Avenue  
Passaic, NJ 07055

E-mail: [ahkami@mirassiran.com](mailto:ahkami@mirassiran.com)

Telephone: (973) 471-4283

Fax: (973) 471-8534

### EDITOR:

SHAHROKH AHKAMI

**EDITORIAL BOARD:** Dr. Mehdi Abu-Saidi, Shirin Ahkami Ralazadsh, Dr. Mahvash Alavi Naini, Mohammad Bagher Alavi, Roxana Azimi, Dr. Talat Bassari, Mohammad Ali Dowlatabadi, Mehdi Ebrahimi, Mohammad H. Hakami, Ardashir Lottafariz, Shahn Monshipour, K. B. Navi, Dr. Khosro Pakbaz, Dr. Hooshang Rahnama, Farhang A. Sadeghpour, Mohammad K. Saigh, Dr. David Yeagley.

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# The Splendor of PERSIA

## The Land and The People

By: Robert Payne

If you look at a modern map of Persia, you will see how it stretches like a great arrowhead from the Caspian Sea to the Indian Ocean, and lies between India and Russia. Afghanistan, the Turkmen Republic, Turkey, Iraq, and Arabia are its neighbors. Then turn to an ancient map — such a map as the Emperor Darius, “the King of Kings,” might have looked upon twenty-four centuries ago — and you will see the Persian Empire stretching into the eastern Mediterranean, including large parts of Greece and all of Egypt, and reaching out include vast areas of southern Russia and making deep inroads into Central Asia, Pakistan, and northern India. The Persian Empire swallowed up the Babylonian and Assyrian Empires, and went beyond them. It was the greatest empire the world had ever known, and for two centuries its capital was the capital of the world. Today only the core of this empire remains. But the Persians, who rarely regret the past, do not believe the glory has departed.

Speaking quite confidently, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, they will say: “Glory lay over this land from the beginning.” For them Persia is far more than a country: it is a place of splendor, where the gods dwell and the ancient heroes still walk on the land, where the remote past and the immediate present live side by side. For them all other lands are disappointing, for the sun does not shine so brightly elsewhere and there are almost no buildings beyond the boundaries of Persia which shine so brightly as their blue-tiled mosques. The Persian sky, scintillating with the dust of the vast deserts or washed clean by the heavy rains, makes everything appear brighter than it really is. Outlines are sharper, colors clearer, shadows more somber than elsewhere. It is a country of violent contrasts, the snow mountains looking down on end-

less deserts, bitter cold and intense heat, Switzerland and Arabia stirred together. Two-thirds of Persia is mountain and desert. It is no wonder that the Persians in their rare oases have a passionate love for gardens.

The mountains and the deserts formed the Persians: the glittering snows, the endless empty spaces of the desert where nothing grows and no animals can live have formed their minds and toughened their spirits. They have the hardness of mountaineers and the contemplative instincts of the desert dwellers. There is nothing essentially Asiatic about them: they are the Europeans of the East, with high foreheads, straight noses, and fresh coloring. They are Aryans, and today they call their country Iran, which is only another way of spelling Aryan. Because they originally spoke an Aryan tongue, even today their language is close to ours in feeling and a surprising number of words are common to Persian and English. But if they can be compared with any other race, we must turn to the French, who have the same dancing attitude to life, the same quick wits, the same love for decoration, the same sense of glory and splendor. There are moments, walking in Teheran, when you can almost imagine yourself in some southern French town near the Pyrenees.

Glory, splendor ... these are the words which come most often to one's lips in describing the Persians. Partly, of course, it derives from the memory of the great empires which spread out of Persia, the luxury of the courts, the palaces flashing with jewels, Persepolis, the *Thousand and One Nights*.

If the Persians were the first world-conquerors, they were also among the most tolerant empire-builders the world has ever seen. They worshipped the God Ahuramazda, Lord of the Sun and of the

Shining Heavens, but they never attempted to proselytize and allowed astonishing freedom of self-government among the subject peoples. They released the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, restored their ritual vessels and assisted them to rebuild the Temple. They even rebuilt the walls from Athens to the Piraeus which the Spartans had leveled. For over two centuries they maintained a world of law, peace and justice over an area which extended from the Indus and the Oxus to the Nile and the Aegean. When the Greeks spoke of the Persians, it was always with awe mingled with envy and the desire to imitate.

When Alexander the Great became master of the Persian Empire, he assumed quite naturally the robes and the powers of the Persian Emperors and consorted more with Persians than with Greeks. He borrowed the design of a world empire from Darius, and modeled himself on Cyrus. There was nothing capricious in his choice of a model. There is a sense in which the wars between the Greeks and the Persians were civil wars, fought by two superbly gifted peoples of the same race.

If by some magical means we could be transported to Persia at the time of Darius, what kind of people would we see? It happens that we know the answer, because hundreds of portraits of Persians survive at Persepolis, carved in long relief on the great stairway, and the faces we see there are the same faces we see today in Isfahan and Shiraz, and even more in the mountain villages. Again we see those faces in the carvings of the Sasanians, who reigned a thousand years after Darius. We recognize them again in the thousands of portraits that have survived from the time of the Emperor Shah Abbas, who ruled over Persia during the reign of England's Queen Elizabeth.

There is an extraordinary continuity in the Persian face: lean, intense, with wide eyes, firm chin, delicate nostrils, and with the suggestion of a strange inner excitement. So little has changed that sometimes you have the feeling that the people are only waiting to step back into the remote, unobtainable and dazzling past. Every morning the Tehran radio begins the day's work with a recitation from a poetic epic on the ancient Persian heroes.

There are good reasons for the continuity of Persian features and Persian character. Invaders have swept over the land: Arabs, Mongols, Greeks, Turks, and Scythians. They came in floods, stayed for

a little while, and then the floods subsided, leaving the original Persians unharmed. Again and again in Persian history we come upon periods of confused wars, with perhaps ten armies rampaging across the country: then the smoke clears, and we discover there is a new Emperor on the throne claiming descent from the ancient Achaemenian Emperors. After periods of confusion, the ancient and familiar patterns of government emerge again.

Given the nature of the land, this continuity is easily explained. It is a hard and bitter land, with few rivers and few trees except in the Caspian and western provinces. Here quite suddenly on a narrow strip of shore, the normal order of nature in Persia is reversed. Here swiftly flowing rivers drop from the high mountains into an inland sea, and there are rich agricultural lands and vast forests teeming with game. As a consequence Mazandaran and Gilan on the shores of the Caspian Sea have tempted raiders from the time of the Vikings in the tenth century to the Bolsheviks in 1920.

While poetry has been the main force responsible for keeping Persian traditions alive, it is mother wit which helps the Persians to face the present. In the early years of the last century James Morier, the British representative at the court of Persia, wrote a book called *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*. Hajji Baba is always putting his nose into affairs that do not concern him, and always getting involved in difficulties from which he extricates himself by a triumphant display of wit and resourcefulness. He is no respecter of persons. He talks with Kings as insolently as he talks with women, landlords, and viziers. Gregarious and friendly, he scorns the world's malice and comes up laughing in the end.

Persians are sometimes inclined to regard the book with suspicion, on the grounds that it gives too many of their secrets away. No one who has ever been to Persia can forget the fierce gentleness of their wit and their addiction to stories so adroitly embroidered that the teller is drowned in the embroidery.

It is partly the fault of the language, which is soft and resonant and tends to carry the speaker away into the wildest improvisations, a language wonderfully suited to the audacious. This crisp and enticing language convinces easily: as musical as Italian and as neat as French. Americans who say they know no Persian know more than they think they know.

Over a hundred and fifty English words have been borrowed from Persian. Here are sixty words in common use which we have taken from them: azure, jasmine, naphtha, satrap, bazaar, jasper, narcissus, scarlet, candy, julep, orange, scimitar, caravan, jungle, palanquin, seersucker, cheque, khaki, paradise, shawl, chess, lemon, peach, sherbet, cinnabar, lilac, peacock, spinach, cypress, lime, pear, sugar, dervish, Magi, puttee, taffeta, divan, magic, pajama, tapestry, exchequer, margarine, rice, tiara, gazelle, marguerite, rook, tiger, henna, muscadell, saccharine, tulip, jackal, musk, saffron, turban, jargon, myrtle, sash and verandah.

If you will say some of these words softly, with a slight singsong intonation, you will have some idea of the sound of Persian, a language curiously like English, having many words which we share with them. Mother is mader, father is pedar, brother is barader. Two is do, six is shesh, is is ist. Persian belongs to the great group of Indo-Aryan languages, our own language being the very last to be developed. Coming back to Persian is like coming back to the source. Like English, Persian is a language which cries out for poets: there has been no dearth of poetry in Persia.

Unfortunately the Persian poet most familiar in the West is one of the least typical. Omar Khayyam is recognized in his own country as an excellent mathematician and astronomer, and the hero of some curious legends, but he is given no very high place as a poet. Edward Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubaiyat describes only one aspect of the Persian character: their love of wine and women, a raw anguish at the thought of the impermanence of the world.

In English the poem has the sound of trumpets, but in the original Persian it has more of the sound of muffled drums, a slow lament. So it is that nearly all translations from Persian fail: we miss the softness of the Persian syllables and the sound like running waters that goes through all their poetry. We miss much in an English version of the Rubaiyat, and forget that when he is talking about the "Tavern" he means the "House of Love," and when he is talking about "grapes and wine," he means the "Truth" which God pours out upon the heads of men, though he also means real grapes pressed into real wine—for the poem is to be read on many levels. We do gain at moments an astonishing insight into the Persian character with its

defiance, its sense of the splendor of the visible world and its mysticism and reliance upon God, at once in this world and out of it. And though Omar Khayyam is not typical, and he is often pedestrian in the Rubaiyat, there are moments when he is completely convincing, as when he celebrates the Prophet Mohammad:

*The mighty Mohammad, the victorious Lord, That all the misbelieving and black Horde Of fears and sorrows that afflict the soul Scatters and slays with his enchanted Sword.*

It is the typical Persian attitude towards Mohammad, in whose name they were conquered by the Arabs. Refusing to accept orthodox Islam, they transformed it into something closer to their heart's desire and clothed it in enchantment. They turned orthodox Islam upside down, spun fairy tales around it, elevated Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, almost above the Prophet himself, and came to believe in time that the sacred cities of Islam were in Persia itself. In their poetry enchanted swords are everywhere. We owe a debt to Persia we can never repay. So much that is bright and glittering and desirable was invented by them. They were the first to invent angels, which the Jews borrowed during the Babylonian captivity, and the Christians borrowed from the Jews. The most beautiful of all decorated domes are in Persia.

They invented chess and polo, and the first known highways for wheeled traffic were the royal roads built by Darius. And half our fairy tales have Persian origins. Their intellectual and spiritual contributions to the world derive from the enchanted interpretation of the world they saw before their eyes: for them the world was a flame, forever quivering, forever bright, forever leaping. For them the world was magic.

The very word magic comes from their [allegedly] fire-worshipping priests, the Magi who attended upon Xerxes and Darius. And remembering the Magi who attended the birth of Christ, the third century theologian Sextus Julius Africanus wrote: "Our first knowledge of Jesus came from Persia." We shall understand Persia best by looking at her long history, where the rise and decline of four great dynasties seems always to follow the same pattern, as though the Persians themselves had remained unchanged through all recorded time, reacting in the same way to the challenges thrown down by succeeding dynasties. And, as we look at their his-

tory unfolding before us, it seems sometimes that there is little change:

Xerxes and Shapur and Shah Abbas might be brothers. Centuries separated them, but it is their likeness to one another that we remember. Perhaps it could hardly be otherwise. Persia lay at the crossroads between the East and the West, and at the same time the country was almost inaccessible with its huge deserts and barricades of mountains. An invading army does not enter such a country lightly. Those who invaded Persia brought suppleness and strength, and the Persians themselves had to acquire suppleness and strength to resist them. Being conquerors themselves, they became a hardy, earthy people, devoted to their land and their memories of conquest, delighting in the world around them, cultivating the arts, generous in conversation, living as much in the past as in the present, and always dreaming the same dreams those dreams that wore the colors of human majesty, so that every Persian saw himself in some way as a King. Thus they brought into being Kings who were very much like themselves, but touched with a more fiery light than that which shone on their own faces. ■

Source: *The Internet*

## Like Father Like Son

Yves Farhad Ghiai-Chamlou admired the work of his father, Heidar Ghiai, who was the Architect to the Shah of Iran. Most of his young life was spent at his father's side where he learned drawing, calligraphy and watercolors. His love, however, is in "3D creations and designing."

His education began in Paris where he attended Lycee de Sailluy and received his BA. While in Paris, he convinced his mother to allow him to design her apartment in Paris and his parent's villa in Cap d'Antibes.

The finished product confirmed the direction his life would take. So he crossed the ocean to pursue his masters degree in architecture which was received in 1982, from Pratt Institute. Following this, he worked with DeSanto & Associates in New York and then moved to California, where he became an apprentice with Del Campo &

Maru of San Francisco.

Realizing the secret of success was "expensive," Yves entered a number of competitions. Two in particular: the Water Front Competition, NY, and the Milwaukee Water Front Competition, clearly exposed his forte and, later designed water

front resorts. He believes the basis of his success is the "philosophy of integrating the "mystic" aspects of his Iranian background with the architectural principles of his father."

After receiving his Californian license and joining the National Board of Architects of the

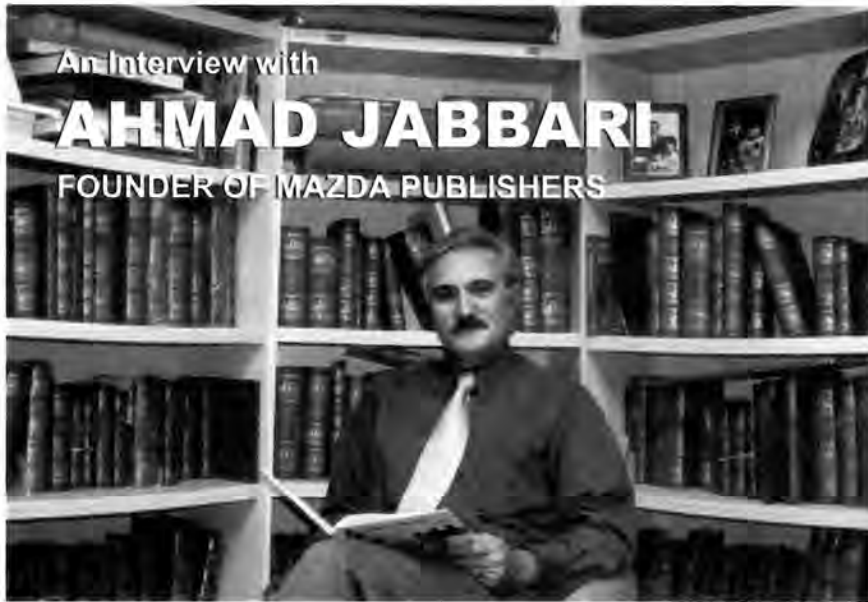
United States and the Ordre de Architectes in France, he formed his own firm, Heydar Ghiai & Sons, Inc., in San Francisco. From then on, his accomplishments continue to grow: three major resorts and 21 residences. His works have been published in national and international magazines.



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An Interview with

**AHMAD JABBARI**  
FOUNDER OF MAZDA PUBLISHERS

Ahmad Jabbari heads Mazda Publishers, Inc., which he established in 1980. How he went from being a professor of economics to publishing is told in the following interview.

**PH:** Well, before we reveal the reason for your change in professions, let's start at the beginning. Please give us some background facts on your family and yourself.

**AJ:** I was born in Tehran in 1945. I have an older brother, who lives in Texas, and a younger sister, who lives in Tehran. My father was a well-respected independent *bazari* businessman. My mother currently lives with me. Both my parents came from Azerbaijan province, in northwest Iran. I am married to a wonderful woman and have two lovely children, ages 9 and 7.

**PH:** Where were you educated?

**AJ:** I attended Firooz Bahram and then Kharazmi High school and received my diploma in mathematics in 1963. In January, 1964, I left Iran for the United States to study engineering. Subsequently, I received a BS in 1967 and an MS in 1969 in aerospace engineering from Pennsylvania State University. This was made possible by financial assistance from NASA. In 1970, I transferred to Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, where I changed my field of study to mathematical economics and econometrics. I then received an MA and a Ph.D. in 1974

and 1978, respectively.

**PH:** Most of us would have been happy with one master's. I'm humbled by your perseverance. Following your education, you taught in St. Louis and then accepted a professorship in Economics and Management at Center College. How did you go from engineering to economics?

**AJ:** Soon after I graduated with my master's degree in aerospace engineering, the job market in that field took a nose dive. I was quite disappointed. I had a sudden urge to finally make a bold move in my life and change careers. As I had always wanted to be somehow connected to the field of journalism and the media, I saw the opportunity to make the first move. I therefore abandoned engineering and entered into the area of social sciences. In the summer of 1971, I moved briefly to Washington, D.C. and took two summer courses; one in International Economics at Howard University and another in International Relations at Georgetown University. Having done well, when I returned to Washington University at the end of that summer, I had already made up my mind to make a career move. If I may, I will paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, who said that in the hour of trial, men find their true profession.

**PH:** Have you ever returned to Iran?

**AJ:** I am planning a trip in the very near future. I also returned briefly to Iran in 1979. I had resigned from my position as a professor of economics at Center College of Kentucky and returned to Iran. I had been asked by the student consular section of the Iranian Embassy in Washington, D.C. to create a program for Iranian students who were studying in the United States. Mr. Bazargan was still the prime minister.

The program was meant to serve as a conduit between the students abroad and Iran's need for educated manpower after the revolution. I planned summer courses, regular visits to Iran for the students, exchange of faculty, etc. The project never materialized because of the political turmoil during the power struggle between Khomeini and Banisadr, which culminated in the taking of hostages in Tehran. The rest, as they say, is history.

**PH:** With the climate changing, do you think that the project has the ability to eventually be implemented?

**AJ:** Yes, I do. But it does require government participation and I don't think we are at that point yet. I would, however, be happy to forward a copy of my proposal to anyone who might be interested. It is something that can be useful for other countries, even through it was based on the student exchange between the States and Iran.

**PH:** Now you are a publisher. What stimulated you to change from being a professor to what you are?

**AJ:** Well, I had always wanted to be a publisher or somehow related to the publishing world. I briefly had my own monthly "newspaper" while attending Firooz Bahram High School. This was a private Zoroastrian school, which offered excellent curricular and extra-curricular programs. For example, our school had its own musical band, a theatre, basketball, volleyball, and soccer teams—some of whose athletes subsequently joined the country's national sports teams—a yearbook, and a quarterly journal. The "newspaper" I published was totally my own and not part of the school organization.

**PH:** How did you do it? And what did you write about?

**AJ:** I would write about our classroom activities, about the teachers, puzzles and games. I hand wrote it on large poster-size paper and would post it on the bulletin board outside of our classroom. One day the principal, Mr. Jamshid Pishdadi, walked in and asked who was responsible for the newspaper. I admitted to it and he then told me very politely that I must stop because it was against school policy. He told me if I wanted to continue doing this, I should join the school journal. You know, I have been told that Mr. Pishdadi lives in San Jose, California. I would love to hear from him.

**PH:** *But what made you pursue this old desire?*

**AJ:** As I stated earlier, I resigned from Center College in Kentucky and returned to Iran. When I came back to the States, I needed to clear out my personal belongings from Center College. While on campus, I noticed that some students had climbed atop the water tower and inscribed anti-Iranian slogans. This upset me terribly. Anyway, because of this and what was being written about Iranians in the papers all across the country, I knew I needed to do something to counter these attacks. As you are aware, the media has so much power. I cashed in my retirement fund, which amounted to about \$2,400.00, and established Mazda Publishers. I set myself three basic goals: (1) to introduce to the English-speaking audience the works of Iranian writers, poets, scholars, and artists, (2) to make available the works of non-Iranians to Iranian readers, and (3) to serve the growing Iranian communities abroad as a scientific, intellectual, and professional organization.

**PH:** *Do you think being Iranian in the States holds one back?*

**AJ:** Perhaps twenty years ago, and if so, only briefly. The beauty of this country is that if you have the talent, you will be recognized. Iranians here are very educated and talented individuals. I believe a few years ago it was reported that they hold the highest number of advanced college degrees relative to the national average. They have achieved very high positions in American society and continue to do so. But remember, in any period in any nation's history, there are times when a difference of opinion will arise, and you just have to ride out the tide. I mean, just

think of what is happening between the U.S. and Vietnam today, whereas they were at each other's throats a few decades ago. One must strive to build friendly bridges at all times. Time, therefore, is the best healer, and I do hope that the same will happen for Iran and the U.S.

**PH:** *Do you believe that it is important for Persian publishers to print in English and Persian?*

**AJ:** As the years pass, fewer and fewer Iranians living abroad will know how to read or write in Persian. I think this is a shame. However, what would be worse is if the second and third generations forget their culture and traditions. Accordingly, the best way to disseminate knowledge is through the language these young people know best — and that is English. Of course, what is printed must be intelligent and not those baseless articles and gossip that I see so often printed in many of these Iranian publications. They must inform truthfully, not copy someone else's gossip.

What is important is the survival of the Persian language and literature. That can only be achieved by Iranian universities receiving outside support. If they continue to produce quality literature, etc., which can be translated into English, then Iran's intellectual contribution to the world will continue to endure as in the past, like such great persons as Omar Khayyam, Hafez, Rumi, Sadi, Ferdowsi, Razi, Avicenna, to name just a few.

**PH:** *Do you, as a publisher in the States, feel an increase in censorship on what you print?*

**AJ:** No, not at all. As a publisher, the only "censorship" I feel is what I and my editors dictate. That is another valuable freedom in this country and often not appreciated. We decide what we want to publish and not the government. It is the "market" that decides whether or not what we print is acceptable. If they like it, they buy it and vice versa.

**PH:** *Do you agree that there is an increased interest in children's literature?*

**AJ:** Yes. We have a new imprint called "Books for Young Readers." As a starter, we have just released a collection

of Iranian traditional stories, entitled "Amoo Norooz and Other Persian Stories." My hope is to encourage the Iranian children and their parents and friends to read such stories and remain attached to their fatherland.

**PH:** *Has Mazda published any book on learning the Persian language?*

**AJ:** Yes. We published a book entitled "Persian for Beginners" back in 1985. It is now out of print and we hope to publish a new edition in the near future. By the way, we recently, and for the first time in our twenty years of being in business, received a generous donation from an Iranian individual who wishes to remain anonymous. This grant is earmarked for the development of children's literature and Persian language instructional tools.

**PH:** *Does Mazda publish material other than that on Iran?*

**AJ:** Of course. We are interested in other areas of the Middle East, as well as Afghanistan, former Soviet Republics such as Armenia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and in short, any area that at one time has been influenced by the Iranian civilization.

**PH:** *Can you give us the name of one of your most memorable publications?*

**AJ:** We take pride in everything that we publish, whether it is a cookbook or a poster or a sophisticated work of scholarship. But our most recent endeavor of which I am very proud is to have been commissioned to publish the remaining two volumes of the late Arthur Upham Pope's *magnum opus*, "A Survey of Persian Art." This is scheduled to come out in early 2001. It marks the completion of Pope's efforts, which commenced in the early 1930's. By the way, we have also co-published with other distinguished institutions, such as The Royal Ontario Museum of Canada, Personally Oriented Ltd. of Japan, and the Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation in New York.

**PH:** *The profit margin on the books published by Mazda would not appear to be as*

*high as those published by more "commercial" houses. How else does Mazda receive funds to keep afloat, especially with the larger houses knocking at your back door?*

**AJ:** We rely on grants from public and private institutions. However, we will not allow such funding to ever compromise the material published, nor will we accept grants that restrict our editorial freedom.

*PH: If possible, can you give us a list of some of the organizations that have awarded grants to Mazda?*

**AJ:** Surely. The J. Paul Getty Trust in Los Angeles, The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT, Harvard University, the Hebrew University Mutual Funds, the Graduate Society Foundation, the British Institute of Persian Studies, the Yad Avi-Ha-Yishur Foundation, the Robert H. and Clarice Smith Center for the History of Art, the University of Michigan, The University of Pennsylvania, the Department of History at UCLA, The

Royal Ontario Museum, and The Ilex Foundation, to name a few. As I mentioned earlier, this year we finally received a sizeable donation from an Iranian individual. I hope this trend will continue and that those Iranians who have made substantial gains in the recent boom in the U.S. economy, will donate generously to the institutions of their choice.

*PH: Two years ago you started to publish a new imprint. Can you tell us the objectives of this press?*

**AJ:** Our new imprint is called **Blind Owl Press**. Here, we intend to publish literary works of authors in exile from all over the world. Already we have published two titles, with several more scheduled for later releases.

*PH: That is a very interesting name. How did you decide on the title?*

**AJ:** It is taken from the acclaimed novel, *The Blind Owl*, written by Sadeq Hedayat in 1937 while he was in exile in India. This work is emblematic of the

Press's aspiration to publish literature of similar distinctive merit, which would not otherwise reach the attention of the general reading public.

*PH: Are there any other special activities planned for Mazda Publishers?*

**AJ:** We are currently working on a project with Professor Ali Modarres, Associate Director of the "Pat" Brown Institute of Public Affairs at California State University, Los Angeles. Our hope is to try to preserve historical buildings in Yazd, Iran.

*PH: If you were not an engineer and not a publisher, what would Mr. Jabbari do?*

**AJ:** Sail — I love it! When you are out in the ocean, there are no boundaries and I like that feeling.

*Persian Heritage extends its best wishes to Mazda Publishers, now entering its 21st year in the business. We wish them continued success in all their endeavors. ■*

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# Interview with PROF. HOSSEIN SADEGHI

By: Shahrokh Ahkami

*As a child, I followed the career of a then young and intelligent gentleman. He was a friend of my uncle, as well as his classmate. I looked forward to every opportunity to be with him. His knowledge of Persian art, poetry and science, as well as his gentle manner fascinated me.*

*Decades later we were reintroduced. I know he did not remember me, but my excitement to be with him remains. All of his success in his career as a cardiac surgeon did not change his warmth, and his years of living away from Iran never extinguished his passion for Persian art and poetry.*

**Q: Kindly tell us about your background.**

A: I was born in 1930 in Chakaneh, the most important village of the District of Sarvelayat, which is a part of the Canton of Nishapur.

My ancestors lived and owned land in that village. My grandfather, in spite of his minimal education in a small Koranic school, had an excellent penmanship and was a good writer. He became secretary to the local Governor and has written four beautiful Korans. He was quite progressive; one of the first constitutionalists.

My father's primary education was in Ghouchan. In his time, there was no

high school in the province of Khorasan and his father could not afford to send him to Tehran for higher education. So he attended a higher Koranic school called Arazieh in Ghouchan. After a few years he was allowed to wear Mullahs' dresses. But my grandfather ordered him to change clothes and apply for a teacher's position. In 1929, he opened the first primary school in our village — second in all Khorasan villages. During the thirty years that he was chief of education in the District of Sarvelayat, he opened 33 primary schools in different villages and one primary and high school in our village.

Many people with higher education come from that District, which was the most advanced district in Khorasan.

**Q: Where did you receive your primary and secondary education?**

A: The first four years of primary school was in our village and the last two years in Ghouchan. I also finished the first three years of high school in that town. For the last three years of high school I had to go to Mashad, capital city of Khorasan. Our village is forty kilometers from Ghouchan and I used to travel this distance six times a year, mainly on foot, donkey or on horse back.

Ghouchan used to have very cold weather and the high school was about two and a half kilometers from home. It was impossible for me to walk this distance without warming myself up in a shoe maker's shop situated half way. I was a successful student with excellent scores.

**Q: Where did you get your university education?**

A: I was not willing to attend the newly-opened Faculty of Medicine in Mashad. I had to travel for two days on dusty roads by an old bus before reaching Tehran. Nowadays, this same distance is covered by plane in an hour and fifteen minutes.

In Tehran I took part in three competitive examinations for Faculty of Medi-

cine, Faculty of Physics, and a scholarship for studying medicine abroad, and succeeded in all of them. In 1950, I was sent to Switzerland where I attended the University of Lousanne School of Medicine. I finished this school in 1957.

**Q: Where did you get your specialty training?**

A: At that time, the USA was known to ensure a better training in medical specializations; so I went there. I took my internship at Temple, my residency in general surgery at Kansas, and my thoracic and cardiovascular surgery at Wayne University. I successfully passed my general and thoracic surgical Boards in 1963. I left the USA in December of that year.

**Q: Where did you first set up your practice?**

A: I knew Professor Ch. Hahn, Chairman of the Cardiovascular Surgical Department at the University of Lousanne, and I worked with him the first six months of 1964. In July I travelled to Iran with my father in a private car. Unfortunately, no open heart surgery was yet performed in Iran and the colleagues already in place did not trust young physicians who came from abroad. So, it was very difficult to find a position in a university medical center. To provide for my wife and two children, I had to work at the American Christian Hospital in Mashad for a year.

Not being able to find an adequate position in Iran, I decided to leave for Switzerland, where I had a good associate position at the University of Lousanne Medical Center. A year and a half later, Prof. Hahn was appointed at the University of Geneva, and I was asked to take his place at the University of Lousanne, where I worked from September 1967 to April 1996.

**Q: Tell us about your activities during these twenty nine years, and your surgical department in Lousanne.**

A: In 1967, when I was appointed, our surgical unit was quite small, having only two beds for patients and only one operating day during the week. At that time, coronary surgery was not yet known and had just started in one or two hospitals in the USA. Cardiac surgery consisted of valvular plasties, replacement and repair of congenital cardiac malformations. In 1969, we started coronary bypass sur-

gery, and thereafter, on average, we operated on over thirty patients each year. So in my last year of surgical practice (1995), we operated on more than nine hundred patients under extracorporeal circulation (open heart surgery). In the last years, we had 35 beds for our patients.

Beside surgery, I taught at the medical school and carried out surgical researches. In our medical center, a chairman of a surgical department had to be a full professor. During my twenty nine years of activity, I developed improved surgical techniques which contributed to excellent surgical results. Many patients were referred to us from the surrounding countries and from Iran. My scientific papers have totalled over four hundred in different fields of cardiovascular surgery. In 1996, I retired with the title of Honor-

ary Professor. the most important scientists of the middle ages. He contributed to the advancement of algebra, philosophy, physics, astronomy, and even of music. He was six hundred years ahead of the European scientists in algebra.

Second, no book of Rubai'yat is found that is written by Khayyam, or even written in his time. He most likely did not dare to publish them because of their philosophical contents. All questions that we have now, are attributed to him. It is a challenge to find out which ones of the 1,200 questions could really be his.

Third, I did not find English and French translations to be quite faithful to the content of Rubai'yat. The excellent work done by Edward Fitzgerald is an adaptation rather than a translation. He has formulated Khayyam's thoughts extremely well, thus contributing to his own as well as Khayyam's fame.

Finally, I must say that the deep philosophical thoughts, the powerful reasoning, the beauty of poems — and also my being born in a village not far from his birth place, Nishapur — attracted me in choosing and translating his beautiful questions.

**Q: Besides your desire to translate the best quatrains, did you have any other aim?**

A: I must say, quite naturally, I appreciate good work, as I have shown in surgery. So yes, I chose one hundred and ten quatrains and asked Mr. Gholam-Hossein Amir-Khani, the most able calligrapher, to scribe them. In this book there are 15 pictures illustrating as many quatrains. It also contains a message from Dr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO.

This book, called *Rubai'yat of Omar Khayyam*, will be sold by Ketab Corp. in Los Angeles.

But my main objective is to collect funds by offering this book. We are planning to build a planetarium close to Khayyam's tomb in Nishapur, and we need about \$5 million to buy the star bowl made by Zeiss factories in Germany. This will be one of the most modern and important planetariums in the world, where people will see what is going on in the universe. We must familiarize the young generation with scientific notions in the hope that, in the future, we will have other Khayyams to be proud of, as we are of our older scientists who came before us.

Close to Nishapur, in a delightful garden called Roudbar, 240,000 young students camp each year. They will benefit from the planetarium.

**Q: Do you think you will be able to raise the necessary funds through the sale of your book?**

A: I hope to come to the USA in July of this year and give conferences about Omar Khayyam and his Rubai'yat. Anyone who contributes to building the planetarium will get a book of Khayyam's Rubai'yat. For this purpose, I have opened a bank account where people can send their contributions. Here is the bank address:

*Khayyam Cultural and Scientific Society  
Credit Lyonnais (Suisse) SA  
Account No. 20260-6  
1211 Geneva, Switzerland*

The book of Rubai'yat is quite interesting for Iranians abroad. These translations can help the younger generation, many of whom unfortunately cannot read Persian, to know exactly what our most prominent scientist has had to say. The names of the contributors will be written on a commemorative plaque and well placed in the planetarium. I will also give them all the information they need regarding the use of their contributions.

**Q: What other interests occupy your time?**

A: Lecturing, studying, walking, fitness at home, swimming, and gathering various information from web sites.

**Q: How do you wish to be remembered by the next generation in the future?**

A: A man who was dedicated to his work, one who loved his profession and paid little attention to its financial rewards, and one who tried to associate humanness with surgery.

**Q: What do you wish from your countrymen?**

A: I respectfully ask my countrymen to be proud of Iran and our culture. In this respect, they should not be envious of others. I would recommend them to work hard in the scientific fields. ■



ary Professor.

**Q: How did you get involved in literary work and especially in Omar Khayyam's Rubai'yat (Quatrains)?**

A: Since my early schooling, I was quite interested in our fascinating literature, even while abroad. I am attracted to Rubai'yat of Omar Khayyam for few reasons:

First, they are formulated by an extraordinary scientist. As you know, Khayyam has a very prominent place in scientific history. He is counted as one of

## Interview with **ATOOSA RUBENSTEIN** Editor-in-Chief of **COSMOgirl! Magazine**

By: Shirin Ahkami-Raiszadeh

**Q: Why don't you introduce COSMOgirl! to our readers.**

Really what I thought was missing from the market for girls was something that empowers them, inspires them, makes them feel good about themselves. We know that young girls like to read about actors and actresses and musicians, and all about fashion. But we also know that they want to read about more - things like spirituality, or things that talk about their relationship with their parents or friends. And that is where *COSMOgirl!* comes in.

I wanted it to be like a big sister with advice that is caring and loving, but still right on the mark and helpful.

**Q: Tell us about where you grew up and your childhood.**

I was born in Tehran and we moved here in December 1974. We moved to Queens, NY, first for a year until we figured out where we wanted to live, and then I grew up on Long Island, NY. I was three when I moved here from Iran. It was an "icky" time for me growing up because kids in school would call me "Ayatollah Atoosa" because of the hectic political situation. It was tough.

I was not the prettiest girl. Of course my mom would not let me shave my legs, pluck my eyebrows, wear makeup, or do what any of the other girls were doing. It was hard to fit in. I think that is why in my magazine, I always am sympathetic to girls who are having an awkward

time in their teens because I know what it is like. I had my friends, I have an *incredible* family, which is what I think got me through all the taunting and teasing, being totally fine and confident. So it was tough, but I made it!

**Q: Boy, did you! Can you describe how being Iranian-American impacted you while growing up?**

To be honest with you, at the time I guess on the inside it upset me that my mom was so strict and not letting me go to the parties, no boys were allowed to talk to me .... But in retrospect, *gosh* am I glad! I get a lot of emails from girls saying that they are Iranian-American whose parents are also strict. I always tell them, "Sister, I promise you it is for the best!" Now when I look back at when I went to college, I met all these girls that were drinking, going out, partying, and they regretted it. I was really glad that I didn't have anything to regret. At the time I kicked and screamed, but in retrospect it was great.

**Q: How has your background influenced your career?**

I always go back to the strictness of the upbringing because it really disciplined me. I will always remember my mom telling me, "Work hard now and you'll have everything later." It really became my mantra. It is probably why I did get this job at such a young age. I was 26 years old, which is the youngest, you know, blah, blah, blah!! It is terrific, and I credit that to the way I was raised.

**Q: How about in terms of fashion. Has your heritage had any influence there?**

Well, I tell you, I probably was not always as conservative as my mom would have liked! I was when I was living in her

Meet Atoosa Rubenstein, Editor-in-Chief of *COSMOgirl!*, a great new magazine for teens. *Persian Heritage* salutes Atoosa, who in 1998 at 26 years young became one of the youngest Editors-in-Chief of any magazine. *Persian Heritage* had the pleasure of speaking to this talented, compassionate and inspirational young woman.

house, but I did go a little "fashion bananas" once I was in college. That is actually when I got into the whole fashion industry. I started interning in magazines, beauty and fashion, and then I worked my way up to being Senior Fashion Editor at *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Maybe because I was restricted, I did tend to experiment more [with fashion], but I am back to being conservative now, so I am sure my mom is thrilled!

**Q: Are you married?**

I got married in August 1998 to an American boy from Long Island. Sure enough, I met Ari in New York City. I got this job 2 months after we got married. I came back from my honeymoon and I never saw my poor husband again!

He is in finance so he also has a very hectic career. He is very supportive. I call him our COSMOguy! When I first met him, he was sort of that typical chauvinist type man — he always had a comment for everything. I remember when the whole Monica Lewinsky scandal broke out, he would always make fun of her and say really derogatory things about her. I just sat him down and said, "She is a girl and she has a family — why are we talking about her body? — that is so rude!" Now, anytime someone says anything about Monica's weight in the press, he writes a letter. So he is definitely a COSMOguy! He is used to empowering women now!

**Q: Tell us more about how you broke into the fashion industry.**

My mother and father wanted me to be a lawyer or doctor — my sister and cousin became doctors. I knew I wanted to do something terrific, but I was not sure what. So I said, "OK, fine. Law." I was a political science major at Columbia. I remember sitting in class, and I'd be reading a magazine under the desk. I remember one day being annoyed that I had to sort of pretend I was paying attention in class. So I thought, "Well, this isn't right! Doesn't somebody work at these magazines?!" I felt really inspired by them.

So that day I went to my dorm and wrote a letter to Jane Pratt, who was the Editor-in-Chief of Sassy at the time, which was my favorite magazine. I wrote, "I am for you. I love your magazine!" I never heard back, of course.

During my sophomore year in college, I went to the Career Services De-



partment. I saw the listings, and there was a public relations internship at the company who owned Sassy. I applied for that and got it. It paid \$15 a day. I worked my tail off that summer between sophomore and junior year. I knew I wanted to get into magazines, specifically fashion. So that summer, I basically followed the Creative Director from Sassy around. At the end of the summer, she was nice enough to hire me as her fashion intern. I worked at Sassy for the rest of college — in fashion and beauty.

By the time I graduated, my mother was like, "Fine, we'll give this magazine thing a try." I remember we were in my dorm room after commencement, packing up my room to go back to Long Island. I got a phone call from the Beauty Director of *Seventeen* magazine. She said she had just moved there from *Vogue*, and she wanted to build her department. She said she heard I was terrific, and would I like to come for an interview. I had my cap and gown on and I was hysterically laughing and crying. I was so excited. My mother was just afraid that I was going to get disappointed, but she too was very excited. Then 10 minutes later, the phone rings, and it was the Fashion Director for *Cosmopolitan*. She said, "I've heard good things about you, and I am looking for a Fashion Assistant. Are you interested?" I thought, "*Cosmopolitan*?!!?!?!? — YEAH!" So I went to both interviews, got both jobs, and ended up going to *Cosmo*, because for me, it was *Cosmo* — how could I say no?

I started as a Fashion Assistant in 1993 and when I left there in 1998, I was the Senior Fashion Editor. I got to work for three Editors-in-Chief — Helen Gurley Brown, Bonnie Fuller and Kate White. It was just a tremendous experience. I always loved clothes, fashion, anything glamorous and fabulous. I think I get that from my mom!

**Q: Can you tell us what led to the launch of COSMOgirl?!**

Actually, it is a fun story. So, I was Senior Fashion Editor at *Cosmo*. The current Editor, Kate White, had just come in. We got along great. I think a lot of it was because I was really a champion of *Cos-*



*metropolitan*. I loved the magazine, and I was really thrilled to be working there. We were coming back from a fashion show together one day and she randomly brought up that Hearst Corporation [*Cosmo's* publisher] was thinking about doing a teen magazine. She asked me if I knew anyone who would be a good editor. *Not for a second* did I think of me! I just thought it was an incredible idea, because my background had been in teen magazines. At *Cosmo*, I heard a lot about the *Cosmo* principle of empowering women. Helen Gurley Brown's [former Editor-in-Chief] philosophy of empowering women was based on the fact that when she was young, she wasn't the prettiest, richest or smartest girl, but she had a lot of ambition, and she wanted to make something of her life. And she sure did. It was that kind of empowerment that she always wanted to give women in *Cosmo*.

I thought, who needs that kind of a message more than a young girl. I know it was the message that I needed. I had always fantasized about a *Cosmo* teen magazine, never thinking it would be a reality. So, I started throwing out all these ideas [to Kate White]. I told her, "Good luck — this is so wonderful. And good luck to whoever gets the job!" I was so excited, even though I didn't know anyone to recommend. She then asked me if I'd be interested in being the Fashion Director. I told her I loved my job at *Cosmo* with adult fashion. Two weeks later, I got a note from Kate to meet with the president of The Hearst Corporation. She was my boss's boss! It went great. I told her all my ideas. She then asked me to do a prototype, or dummy issue of *COSMOgirl!* with a cover and three tables of contents — plan three different issues. I thought, "OK, I can do this!"

I took all the things I had fantasized about — a magazine I wish I had as a girl with frizzy hair, thick eyebrows, no body, and no boys in her life. The magazines out there weren't talking to me. They were talking to a girl who was sexually active, spending a lot of money on clothes and makeup. I had feelings, insecurities, self-esteem issues, problems with my friends and family, that I could have used the help with. I wanted to make that kind of magazine. I know all girls have those problems. So, I did not sleep for about 2 days! The logo I made with lipstick in my own handwriting! I presented the proto-

type to the president of Hearst. She then put the cover on the wall, she took a few steps back, and said, "I think we have ourselves a magazine!"

This all came very much from inside my heart. I feel very connected to this job, this reader. I feel very lucky because even though our magazine is a commercial product, I feel like I work for a not-for-profit company. Every girl here at the magazine wants to help girls out there and make sure they feel strong on the inside, even though sometimes people on the outside make them feel weak.

**Q: Can you describe your duties as Editor?**

Last night, for example, I came back from Los Angeles to a big stack of copy I had to edit — I am *always* editing! In LA, I was meeting with lots of different companies — for example, the WB network, spreading the "COSMOgirl! Love." I was letting them know what we are about, because even though there are a lot of teen magazines out there, I really feel that our mission is different. If you don't read the magazine, and especially when you are not a teenage girl, you don't know what their sensitivities are.

I had to commentate a fashion show at 5 o'clock this morning on NBC. Then I came back to the office to edit. Also, people show me things to approve for fashion and beauty. I work closely with our public relations, circulation, and newsstand people. I am very involved also with the approval process for a new CD-ROM. I feel *COSMOgirl!*'s differences [with other teen magazines] are very subtle, and they are nuances — it is in the tone that we talk to the girls, the subject matter that we choose to highlight. I feel the need to be very involved — overseeing everything from the cover to every single word in the magazine.

**biggest challenge to your job?**

It is hard to say, because I really love my job. When I come to work, it is sort of annoying, but I am whistling, I am excited, and I wake up in the morning by bolting out of bed! [The challenge] really has nothing to do with the job itself, but really it is trying to have a life outside of this, because when you do find that you can devote all your time to something that makes you incredibly happy, you have a tendency not to call your friends back, even if you don't mean to, or you don't show up to your sister's birthday party. So, we've been reading about it in all the

women's magazines — balance, balance, balance! I am learning about that now.

**Q: What would you say is the most gratifying part?**

It is getting emails that really tell me that I am not just trying to right the wrongs of my childhood. That this is a need that girls actually have ... that there is a way to communicate with young women and to empower them. Young women are interested in that — they need it, they love it, and they appreciate it, and that is why they come to *COSMOgirl!* Yes, we have a sticker page, celebrity center folds, articles about boys. I call those things our "tricks." I use them to get the girls in, and then I hit them with the message. It

starts with the Editor's Letter page. The emails (I receive) show that they really get it, and that is the most gratifying part. If all I got were emails saying, "Thanks for N'SYNC on the cover," then I'd still be happy because I'd know we were doing a good job, but inside I wouldn't be fulfilled.

**Q: Does each issue have a message, or is it more an overall message?**

It is really an overall message that girls are beautiful no matter what, that they can do whatever they want. My Editor's Letter will always be about a different topic — this month it was about how special one's relationship can be with music, and is there a band that speaks to you or is special to you.

Once it was about why girls sometimes are so mean to each other. Women have been so incredibly supportive and helpful in my personal life and career. I want girls to know that, and that we don't need to turn against each other. I think that is something that happens when we are younger.

I will read you an email I just received: "Ever since I was 9, I hated 'glam mags.' They made me feel I had to be skinny and beautiful for the guys to want me and to be happy with myself. They promoted sex and said if you didn't have it, you weren't cool.... They all around made me feel bad about myself. Then I saw *COSMOgirl!* It featured a model who wasn't so perfect. Some were chunky,

some had braces, and other traits that we hate about ourselves. You encouraged girls to wait until you are sure that you can handle sex to have it, and that guys come third, friends come second, and you come first.... I explained [to a girl in school] that *COSMOgirl!* is not a 'glam mag' but is more like a girls bible. Reading your magazine made me feel happy.... I didn't feel ugly, fat and inadequate.... Thanks ... for keeping this magazine 'glam free.'"

It is funny that she says 'glam free' because actually, part of my mission is to have the best photographers work for us — and we do. We have photographers that only work for magazines like *Marie Claire* and *Glamour*. But when she says 'glam free', she means we don't make [our readers] feel bad. I think it is a shame that we are the only teen [magazine] to do that.

**Q: How else does COSMOgirl! stand out compared to the other teen magazines?**

We focus on the "inner girl." I feel the competitors focus on the "outer girl." By that I mean celebrities, beauty and fashion. We have all that in *COSMOgirl!* but we focus on *her* too — we talk about spirituality, her relationship with her mom I know [our reader] loves her mother, even though she might slam the door and say "I hate you!" Well, let's get to the bottom of it — there is a language barrier and let's fix it! We all know that once we turn about 25, and come to our senses, we love Mom and we're sorry for all those years we fought with her.

**Q: COSMOgirl! Editor's Letters are so personal, open and honest. Also, your "Ask Atoosa" section is so unique — you really reach out to your reader. You are also very accessible by email.**

I read and answer every email that comes to the magazine. I don't know any other editor that reads all their emails! The reason I do that isn't because I am crazy, but rather I feel it is the only way to really be connected to the girls. For me, they are my friends. That is how I know when to put an article in the magazine. When I get an email that says, "How did you know that is what I wanted?", it is because I listen. We are really in touch with our readers. It is funny to know that a young girl in Long Island isn't so different than one in LA or Wis-



consin — they all are grappling with the same issues.

**Q: Tell us about the mentors you have had.**

There are a couple. One person has had a significant impact on my life, and you might laugh. Although I was insecure about the way I looked as a young girl, and about my popularity, the one thing I always had was a burning ambition. I was not the smartest girl, or anything like that. I don't know where it came from. I remember being in 5th grade and I would sell my autograph — Atoosa Behnegar R.S. — which stood for "rock star." I sold it for a nickel in the playground and I would tell kids, "Keep that, it will be worth something one day." Somehow, I maintained that. In 8th grade, I saw Madonna on TV. She was asked, "What are your plans for the future?" She said, "I want to rule the world." I thought, "My goodness, she is like me!" I had never seen a young woman talk like that with such power.

My mother and her mother took care of their families, and that is probably what they thought I would do. There is nothing wrong with that, but I wanted to do something big. To watch Madonna make her statement a reality was the most powerful thing I had ever seen. It sounds corny, but it is true.

Helen Gurley Brown also had a big impact on me. I saw her story on TV before I even read *Cosmo*. She came from a poor family, her sister had polio, she was not very pretty or smart and she felt very awkward. I related to all that. Then she became the most powerful woman in publishing. *Cosmo* is the #1 women's magazine internationally. Basically, to see her become this very powerful woman in publishing was very inspiring to me.

My motto became, "If she can do it, so can I" — about both of these women. It is something I always told myself and it got me through moments of self-doubt. That motto is part of our message at *COSMOgirl!* We are always showing the readers role models. Role models are so important to me. Today, Kate White, the current *Cosmo* editor is my role model. I look at her magazine, how she is as an editor and as a person. She runs the biggest magazine in the world for women, she is the best mom, the best wife, and the kindest person.

To me, she has everything. The reason I was able to always be attracted to

these women is because I had one growing up. My mother was an incredible role model. She picked us all up with my dad and brought us here [from Iran]. She didn't speak the language, and it must have been so hard for her to leave her family, friends, money and everything just so we could get an education. Really, I have been blessed to have had these women in my life.



**Q: Clearly, you are a role model and inspiration to so many teens and young women. What is your message to all those who look to you as a mentor?**

On a personal level, I always tell them to love themselves, and they are beautiful. There is not only one kind of beauty. In high schools in America, people think if you are not blonde and blue eyed then you are not beautiful. I didn't think I was, and I know that I am now, finally! I always tell them to go for their dreams, and not to be discouraged by anything. I believe anyone can make anything happen. I am the most unconnected person in the world, but I made my own destiny. And this job was my *dream* job. When you are a teenager, this job is the ultimate in coolness. I could not have wanted anything more. I made it happen. I want others to know that they can do it too. I am just like them.

**Q: What inspires you now?**

My readers. They are so smart — so much smarter than I think our generation was when we were their age. The world around them is so different and they have to deal with a lot more adult-type situations. They are so optimistic and they have a great energy. They inspire me, even in my personal life.



**Q: What advice do you have for anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?**

Never give up, even though there is no well-lit path to publishing. I am going to make sure that there is one. It is a wonderful field to work in. When you are in high school, write for your school paper or local paper. Don't just write what they tell you to write. Your ideas are terrific. Don't let anyone tell you that they are not.

If you think they are great, I bet there are 2000 others who think so too. If you are in college, it doesn't matter what you major in, but it does matter if you have work experience. Try and get an internship. I always say if you really are set on working for a magazine, then go to college in NYC because that is where all the magazines are. That is what I did. Every magazine is looking for someone who is enthusiastic and who wants to work.

The most important thing is to figure out what magazine speaks to you. Read every one out there. Make sure it is one you personally love. Work for the magazine that inspires you because that is where you'll really be able to blossom and grow. That is really what happened to me with *Cosmo* and then *COSMOgirl!*

**Q: You've achieved so much at such a young age... What next?**

People ask that, but I don't think that my job here is done until I stop getting emails from 13 year olds that weigh 90 pounds and think they are too fat, or girls who are so dissatisfied with themselves. My job will be done when these girls are able to feel as good as I am able to feel, and as good as some girls feel at that age. Unfortunately, there is a lot of work left to be done. I am just thrilled to be able to have the opportunity to do this job.

**Q: You are very open with the media about your heritage. Can you tell us about that?**

I think everyone is surprised that I am so open and talk about everything. When I was growing up, there weren't enough Iranian-Americans being proud of who they were, so I didn't have an Iranian-American role model then.

But now, emails I receive from Iranian-American girls show me that *now* there is someone from their community doing something that they think is "cool," whatever "cool" is for them. I know I am not a rocket scientist, and I am not saving lives. But I am doing something that makes me happy. I want to get [*COSMOgirl!*'s] message out to the girls from our community because I know it is tough to grow up within *any* subculture that is so different from the culture around it, when you still want to stay true to your own culture.

The reaction has been great to my openness. You can never argue with someone who is just being honest. ■