

WORLD LEADERS MIDDLE EAST
PRE-SYMPOSIUM EXTENSION TO IRAN

By Jo Saeta

IRAN AND TRIP PREPARATION

Phil and I did lots of reading this time in preparation for our pre-trip to Iran as well as the main trip to Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. Phil read Professor Diamond's book "The Spirit of Democracy." I read about 200 pages of it and then relied on his notes. He read all 800 pages of *The Missing Peace—the Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace*. By Dennis Ross. It sounded like it was the word for word descriptions of negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis for peace. I got a flavor of negotiations by reading Aaron David Miller's book *The Much Too Promised Land*, a book about Israel which also gave me a flavor of negotiations. He replaced Ross as a speaker on our trip once Obama had tapped Ross. Phil read it on the trip and we both read Robin Wright's book *Dreams and Shadows*, a book that touched on several countries in the Middle East. We both read excerpts from James Baker's book. I also read *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali (a book club book) which gave me a fine background of what it is like to grow up in a religious Muslim family. I also read Jared Cohen's book *Children Of Jihad*. It spoke a lot about Iran—the Iran that most tourists never see of the teenagers and young twenties set and how they do what they wish not in strict observance of the rules. We were given a book about the culture of Iran which we read as well. I read Jimmy Carter's latest book, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*.

In late February Robin Wright, our leader to Iran and noted journalist, gave a 40 minute conference call to prepare us on background of Iran and I presume what to expect. We were in Portland at the time and Stanford said they would tape it and we could listen to it at our leisure. They didn't tape it correctly so that

was out for us. I took a few notes in talking with Hannah Williams in the Stanford Travel office and then they e-mailed us an article Robin had written last November for the New York Times with the caution not to bring it into the country!

This is taken from my notes with Hannah Williams phone conversation. Both Lisa Hepps and Don Kendall will already be there when we arrive a day early ahead of the group. Before leaving the plane I must cover my head and wear a coat or outfit of the proper length (tunic length). This is true every day we are there and for every meal-whenver we are with others. We were warned that the immigration process was lengthy. We will be fingerprinted and there is only one machine. I had read in the Lonely Planet book that all people save Americans are greeted warmly and not fingerprinted. It is a 45-minute to one hour drive from the airport to our hotel. Evidently she described what it's like and then answered 10 hypothetical questions:

- 1) How is the government set up? The supreme leader the Ayatollah Khomeini has the power. They have executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government.
- 2) What about the upcoming election? Elections are big now. Election is June 12. Two weeks only campaign so we won't see any of this literature. Principalist are the conservatives; Conservative Alliance are the religious core; Reformers are looking for change toward democracy.
- 3) What is at stake in this election? A monumental change is possible. It's a conflict between the turban (religious) and the hat (people).
- 4) What are the issues today? Security of their borders, the economy with 30% inflation—people need to work 2-3 jobs to make it, housing prices have doubled, and food prices have tripled.
- 5) Can the elections be fair? Didn't answer. Voting age is 16 and 65% of the population is under 30. This is the key to the election.

- 6) What is likely outcome? It is between the Reformer Khatami (at that time but now is Mousavi) and Ahmadinejad. Whoever wins won't have much power. There is a two term limit but they can come back. [Hannah stopped to say Robin was fascinating and eloquent but she is not allowed to give me her verbatim notes.]
- 7) Is there much anti-American sentiment? You will see paintings on old buildings that are anti-American but if you speak to the people they love Americans.
- 8) What is in store for the next six months? Dennis Ross is being sent and Obama will reach out with a new policy change.
- 9) What should be our greatest concerns? The nuclear weapon issue, they have lied for 18 years, region is inhabited by Sunni Muslims and is unstable. Iran is Shiite.
- 10) What about Jews traveling in Iran? She replied that Lisa Hepps is Jewish and there is no problem in Iran and that Jews can now go into Saudi Arabia as well. This is a relief as I had read they could not and was worried about Phil. I had also read that there had been some problem with Jewish travelers in southern Iran. We weren't going there but still it left me with some concerns.

I fretted over what I could wear that was tunic length so I didn't have to wear my black raincoat day and night and came up with three outfits. I must admit, after all my reading, I was a bit apprehensive. Not hearing all the comments by Robin I left feeling that I should not be confrontative with Iranians and really find out only what they wanted to tell me. I certainly didn't want to get anyone in trouble. In reading the notes of Roger Brown's diary he and his friends seemed to find out more information about what the people felt than I did! Here we go on another adventure into a beautiful ancient land. I'm excited! But first a little history of Iran.

IRAN (some info from a 2009 Culture Gram) I am choosing to

include this because so few Americans visit here and I think it makes an interesting background to our trip. Phil read that only 500 Americans visit a year. Our travel leaders tell us that is a low number.

Iran is just larger than Alaska. Most of the territory is a central desert plateau 4,000 feet high. It is rimmed with two mountain ranges the Zagros in western Iran and the Elburz in the north. Mount Damavan is the highest peak and is 18,606 feet.

A lot of the area is uninhabited and Iran has frequent earthquakes. Winters are cold and summers are very hot. There are wildlife preserves to preserve the Caspian tiger, lynx and desert onager. Wolves, bear, foxes and wild goats are found in the mountains.

The area of present-day Iran, known anciently as Persia, was ruled in the sixth century BC by such powerful emperors as Darius and Cyrus the Great. Arabs conquered the area in the seventh century introducing the people to Islam. Both the Seljuk Turks and the Mongols (under Genghis Khan) ruled in Iran at one time. Persian rule was revived by the Safavid Dynasty which set up the first national government in the 1500's. They also established Shi'i Islam as the state religion, linking it with nationalism. They were interested in preventing further expansion of the Ottoman Empire, whose rulers were Sunni Muslims. The Qajar Dynasty of the 1800's was followed by the Pahlavi Dynasty in the 20th century. A military officer, Reza Khan, seized control of the government in 1925. He was known as the Shah and reigned until 1941. He did much to modernize the country. He sponsored literacy campaigns, voting rights for women, and industrialization. His neglect of some basic social problems and his lack of emphasis on Islam made his reign unpopular among various groups.

In 1979 the Shah fled Iran in response to popular unrest. The Ayatollah (a religious leader) Ruhollah Khomeini, exiled leader of the movement against the monarchy, returned at that time to

establish the Islamic Republic of Iran. Khomeini ordered that all laws and practices follow strict Islamic principles. When the Shah was admitted to the United States for medical treatment, Iran's revolutionaries responded by seizing the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and holding its personnel hostage until January 1981. The United States severed ties with Iran, imposed trade sanctions, and still has no official diplomatic relations with the government.

Many Iranian actions and policies, including sponsorship of terrorism, alienated Western nations. A war with Iraq (1980-88) over the disputed region of Shatt-al Arab drained the economy while crippling many industries.

Khomeini died in 1989. He was succeeded by the Ayatollah Ali Hoseini Khamenei. Hashemi Rafsanjani became the new president. He was reelected in 1993 because he was liked for his moderate policies and it was hoped there would be further liberalization and better relations with the West. These hopes darkened when the US imposed a full trade embargo on Iran after labeling it a terrorist state. Conditions improved in 1997 when a moderate candidate, Khatami, won office in a landslide. He was reelected in 2001. He loosened some social restrictions and also improved relationships with regional enemies like Saudi Arabia and the European Union.

In 2004 elections, conservative candidates regained the majority in Iran's legislature after the powerful Council of Guardians banned more than 2,500 reformist candidates from running for office. Reformist groups urged voters to boycott the election and less than 50% voted. Ahmadinejad, the former mayor of Tehran a conservative, was elected. His efforts to develop Iran's nuclear program, which he claims is peaceful, has heightened tensions between Iran and Western powers. His anti-Semitic remarks haven't helped the situation. I read in one source that most of the people were dismayed with his remarks about Israel. He should have thought more carefully before he spoke. He is the only

foreign dignitary that doesn't wear a tie. Iran sometime back decided this was a Western way of dressing that they would not tolerate. Also loafers, rather than tie shoes are worn, because they are easy to slip off for prayers five times a day. His attire also plays to the common man in Iran.

Iran is a theocratic republic. The president, elected by the people for a four-year term, is head of government and official chief of state. Iran's supreme religious leader, the Ayatollah, holds ultimate political power. A 12-member Council of Guardians (comprised of religious and lay leaders) approves candidates for president, appoints judicial authorities, and has authority over the constitution. Six members are nominated and six are appointed. The Council of Guardians must approve all legislation passed by the 290 seat Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majlis) whose members are elected to four-year terms. All laws must be in harmony with the doctrines of Islam, as interpreted by the Council. The voting age is 16 and women were given the right to vote in 1962.

Iran's population is 65.4 million and is growing by 0.66 percent annually. Tehran, the capital, has 12 million. Other major cities are Mashhad, Tabriz, Esfahan, Abadan, and Shiraz. About 66% live in urban areas. Urbanization was encouraged in the 1970's but the opposite was true in the 1980's. Nomadic life has always played a part in traditional Iranian society and more than 10% are nomadic. 51% are Persians, 24% are Azeris, 8% are Gilakis and Mazandarani, 7% are Kurds, 3% are Arab, 2% are Lurs and Baluchis, and Turkmen. All school instruction is in Farsi.

Iran is the most populous majority-Shi'i Muslim country; 90% are Shi'i, and about 10% are Sunni. All Muslims believe in a day of judgment and a single God (Allah) who chose Muhammad to be his prophet. The Qur'an (Koran), the scripture of Islam, is composed of Allah's revelations to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. Muslims show devotion through the five Pillars of Islam:

shahada, which is professing that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet: salat, praying five times a day while facing Mecca; zakat giving money to the poor; hajj, making a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime. Iran tolerates all religions except for Baha'i. It is outlawed because it is considered an apostate branch of Islam and a British created political threat. There are 80,000 Christians and 30,000 Jews living in Iran Zoroastrianism is also officially recognized. With the exception of Baha'is all religions are represented in the parliament.

In the economy oil accounts for 70% of all export earnings. Iran also has one of the world's largest reserves of natural gas and one of the largest copper deposits. After the 1979 revolution, major industries were nationalized and became inefficient. War and embargoes took a toll on the once prosperous economy. Diversification is a major priority. Some reforms have been made but are usually opposed by conservative politicians. The government has signed natural gas contracts with European firms, and foreign investment is on the rise. Many nations now ignore the trade embargo imposed by the United States. Iran faces many challenges because of high inflation and unemployment.

Iranians value education, culture, cleverness and wisdom. Elementary schooling, which last for five years, is compulsory for all children beginning at the age of seven. This schooling runs in a morning or afternoon shift and most students finish. Boys and girls attend separate classes but not necessarily separate schools. Nearly 75% go on to secondary schools which is comprised of six years (3 general education and 3 high school). They may then enter a trade school or do a seventh year that is considered pre-university. Sciences and math are popular subsets but Islamic studies is stressed above all. Several universities provide higher education.

Their perception of time is more flexible than the West's. Iranians do not stress punctuality over individual needs, which are

considered more important than schedules. Although political radicalism prevailed in the 1980's, Iranians remained hospitable and open to others. They like foreigners as a whole, even U.S. Americans. I did read that only Americans are finger printed while all others are greeted warmly. Many citizens support a more open society and greater integration with the world community. Some Iranians revere the Ayatollah Khomeini for his leadership and reforms, but others see them as having negatively affected Iran's progress.

Hospitality is a cherished tradition in Iran. Guests are considered a gift from Allah and are the center of attention in an Iranian home. Everything is done to make them feel comfortable. The oldest man present receives the greatest respect. I imagine Phil would like that in our family! The father is the undisputed head of the household. Large families with many children, especially boys, have been traditionally preferred. However, in an effort to lower the birthrate, the government requires couples to take a family planning course before they marry. It is legal for a man to have as many as four wives if he can provide equally for each one. He must have permission from his wife or other wives and from the government. Most men choose to have only one wife. The family and relatives remain close and are cared for by younger members of the extended family. Unmarried children live at home until they are married. The parents provide them with financial help well after they are married.

Dating in rural areas is not like our Western practice. They are rarely alone with the opposite sex. In urban areas and colleges couples often meet to go to restaurants, movies and the like. Marriages used to be arranged but new attitudes have developed in some areas regarding education, work, and freedom in selecting marriage partners.

IRAN DIARY 3/11-13

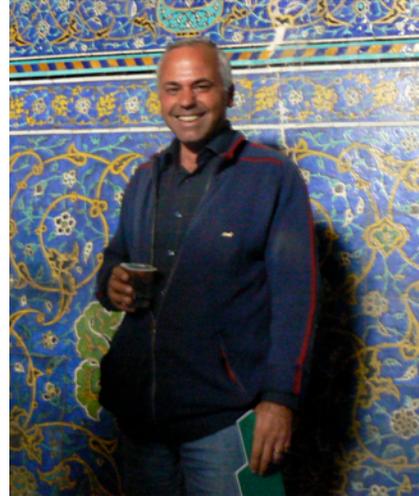
We left home at 6:15 A.M. on Wednesday, March 11 flying from Los Angeles to San Francisco to Frankfurt to Tehran, Iran arriving and in bed in 36 hours!

To digress a bit we had a 9 hour layover in Frankfurt. Fortunately they take very good care of the handicapped there. My wheelchair that was to be picked up at planeside instead went to baggage so this was a long process. Phil inquired if there was a hotel room within the airport where we could rest. Answer was no. We had someone else wheeling us to baggage to look for the wheelchair so I asked the same question. This time the answer was yes. They had a lounge and cots separated by sheets to rest on for the elderly and handicapped that was free. I qualified on both accounts! My how life does fly by! We had two beds and were even able to charge my beloved kindle! I read most of the way over but did take time out to see two movies. In the process I depleted the battery. Phil went on to find the wheelchair and I peeled off my sweater and replaced it with a cooler tee shirt. We slept 3-4 hours and Phil had about 2 hours to my 1 on the plane. They even escorted us to the plane with four others and got us through security very quickly. There are few times when it pays to be handicapped. This was one of them!

All our flights went smoothly and were on time or early! Phil was sitting with a young Iranian woman who was traveling with her very cute two year old daughter. She lives in Redwood City and was traveling to visit her parents and other family members. I was sitting with an interesting Iranian woman from Seattle who was going to spend three months with her husband who preferred living in Iran to the United States. She prefers being near her children and grandchildren and doesn't like the dress code and restrictions imposed now in Iran. She said you can wear lipstick now. She married at 16 and was a grandmother at 40. Before getting off the plane all the women needed to cover their heads and wear at least

tunic length coats or outfits. I donned my black full length rain coat. This was over a short cotton shirt, a down vest, and a long sleeve pantsuit. I had been watching the temperatures in Tehran and until two days ago they had been in the 50's which I deemed cold! I wanted to have enough clothes available in case our luggage didn't arrive.

Again Lufthansa had no wheelchair at the door of the plane so we took one that was available with a pusher. We'd gone no more than a hundred yards when we saw a sign with our names. We never had been greeted so early. This man took us to a VIP lounge where we met our real guide Hussein who had been sent to meet us. The time of arrival was 1:30 A.M. and we got to our hotel room and in bed by 5:30 A.M.!!



Never have we seen such a slow process! We never went through customs personally at all. A customs officer came to the lounge and took our passports. Hussein visited with us for hours and he was extremely nice and charming. We developed an easy and teasing relationship. We learned about his customs and we taught him idioms. He's a linguist with a wife and no children. He teaches Russian and leads Russian tours. His English is excellent and, of course, he speaks Farsi. Phil asked him about multiple wives. He told us that most men have one wife. If they have two they don't talk about it and if they are wealthy they have separate houses. They have many tourists coming from Spain, Russia, Germany and more lately from the U.S. He finally called to see what was happening. Baggage had been located but not the wheelchair. I had dark thoughts for what this would mean for my trip! Eventually someone came to take Phil and me to be fingerprinted. I never knew what happened but our guide would

rush back down to Hussein two or three times perhaps to get the name of our hotel and an address. In the end we never were fingerprinted! When the group arrived the next day they had the same experience. A briefing ahead of the trip warned that Americans were treated differently than other tourists who were waved on through. We needed to be prepared to be fingerprinted and they had only one machine!

Phil went to baggage with another man to identify our luggage. I decided to use the toilet. There was one in the VIP lounge. I was absolutely sweltering with my coat buttoned up and the hot headscarf on. I opened the first door and beheld a Turkish toilet. To those of you who helped me prepare for this trip know that I bought a female urinal. You can imagine that I didn't want to have to use it dressed in many layers in a cramped room. My practice at home had not been extensive enough ending up with three failures and two successes! I tried the next door and there was a western toilet. So happy was I!! It was a small room but I managed to undress and take off the down vest. Some relief! Meanwhile Phil found our two duffle bags, wheelchair, and canes and waited for us to join him. He was able to take the baggage outside while he waited for Hussein and me to go through another screening. I had one bag on my lap covered by Phil's jacket so that didn't go through the machine. I looked back to see why we were waiting and they were examining all my pills. When I told them they were my medicine off we went. Hussein got a taxi and pointed out things of interest to us. We made it to the hotel in



perhaps about 30 minutes. The new international airport is 35 km. south of the city and our hotel is in the northern part of the city. If it had been during the day this would have taken many hours as the traffic is horrendous.

The Esteghlal Hotel was built in

1970 and used to be the Hilton. It's a 5 star and Hussein got us checked in and escorted us to our room. It took us a bit of time to unlock suitcases and find what we needed before hitting the sack. I can see that the weather has turned warmer here. I will have 3 outfits that will pass without a coat. Another long dress bought years ago in the Arab sector in Jerusalem will do if I have pants or leggings under so no leg shows. I'm sorry I left my long silk underwear at home which would have been perfect. Unless I can find leggings here I will wear long black pants. Our room is nice with a large bed, a desk and chair and two chairs with a table. I



will have to stretch over a high tub to take a shower. I can probably manage with Phil's help. The toilet is fine because I can pull myself up using the sink and the door.

Imagine my surprise when I awoke at 10 A.M. Here was the view out our window! I tried to go back to sleep but couldn't so got up to read on the kindle. I'm reading "The Israel Lobby" and find it very informative. I was told at dinner this was a very controversial book. It started out as an article that none of our newspapers would print. It was printed to acclaim in Europe and then the two writers were encouraged, or decided, to expand it into a book! It give credit to the power of AIPEC and shows how our over the top support to Israel has cost us with Arab states around the world. It also points out many congressmen and women who are in the pocket of this lobby. It also says any president who wants a second term better understand this power. It reviews all the negotiations since Israel's founding and if I read this enough times I will begin to understand and remember it. About noon I felt tired and went back to bed. The next thing I knew it was 3:40 P.M. and Phil was still sleeping. He must have had 10 hours and I maybe 7-8 so we felt pretty good. We had been told that lunch was served until 5:00 P.M. so we

hustled down after a bit of organization.

As it turned out the restaurant was closed and we dined on apple pie and coffee and tea! This woman was also eating at a table nearby.

All the leaders of our tour and the Iranian tour leaders welcomed us and we got a bit acquainted. Barbara, the owner of the Iranian Tour Company, is Irish with red hair.



She met her Iranian husband in Belgium. They started a company in Dubai. They now live in San Francisco with their three children. She couldn't have been more friendly. She told us she has bought an old palace where we will celebrate the Persian New Year the night before we leave Esfahan.

There will be music and poetry and a feast. Can't wait! Before our snack was out we had met several more leaders from High Country Passage as well as Iran. We met Hussein's wife Nede who was also very friendly. She will be manning the desk tonight when the rest of the group arrives in the middle of the night on three different planes. Don Kendall is going to meet them so he will be up all night. First official gathering will be at noon on the 14th for lunch in our hotel. Though we were invited to hang out with a group of about eight people at 6:30 P.M. that didn't materialize.

While we were waiting to find this out with Hussein, several mullahs from all the Arab countries walked



by. They are having a convention here. The ones wearing white could become the Ayatollah while the ones wearing black are descendents of Mohammed. They wore long gowns, different hats, and invariably wore a beard. We learned the countries the hats were from. Hussein joked with us and introduced one lady behind our Country Passage information desk as his second wife à la our conversation of last night. He has a sense of humor!



We joined Roger and Barbara Brown for dinner in the Thai Restaurant in the hotel. They remembered us from China. We had a delightful dinner and enjoyed visiting together in the very lovely restaurant. They had gotten up after three hours sleep and had a tour with another couple and saw

two museums they liked and ate in a restaurant. They were sitting next to a large family party and both women came over to talk to them welcoming them to Iran, giving them candy and inviting them to their house for dinner. Barbara would have said yes but the other couple said no. Roger said maybe it is that custom ta'arof of formalized politeness where you offer and wish to be turned down. This happens three times. If you are asked a fourth time you may accept. We read about this in the *Lonely Planet* and so Friday the 13th passed without any mishaps and turned out to be a nice day. After our apple pie we went outside to shoot some pictures. And so time to prepare for bed at 10:30 P.M. or perchance some reading. Though Phil is snoozing it turned out to be more typing of this entry until midnight and then a bit of reading.

Saturday, March 14, 2009

We had a good night's sleep and breakfasted at 8:00. Who should we see but Ann Coughlin from San Marino, so we both breakfasted and lunched with her. She had slept quite a bit on her flight so hadn't been to bed yet before breakfast. It was a buffet with



several choices and okay not great.

Thanks to Don Kendall Senior, I learned that it was ladies day in the fitness room. I had read that they had an indoor pool but that it was only for men. After walking down three flight of stairs with Nede, I determined I could probably get in and hopefully out of the pool. So while Phil walked I swam for an

hour, washed my hair, and ascended the stairs. While in the spa one woman was having an exercise lesson from the trainer. It was quite a workout. Another time an old friend came by and the two women rushed into each others arms and were so happy to see each other. As I got out of the pool one swimmer was ready to get in. I had hoped maybe for some conversation but I received and gave warm smiles. I lost one earring in the process when they made me put on a cap. Too bad as they are my favorites.

We lunched at twelve with various kinds of meat, salads, and desserts. Robin Wright spoke to us of our afternoon schedule and we are to stay on the same bus throughout our stay in Iran. About 15 to a bus. We joined the yellow bus because Hussein is the guide and we can easily understand him. It turned out that we did stay on the same bus but the leaders rotated.

First stop was the Iran Ebrat Museum. This was once a prison of the shah's brutal secret police where people who disagreed with him were incarcerated, tortured and killed. Now there are graphic models showing the kinds of torture used. We saw a short movie

about this as well. The Iranians claim that the U.S. was involved and encouraged this activity. Disappointing that no pictures were allowed. During the 1970's hundreds of political prisoners including clerics and names we would recognize were tortured here. We know there are prisons here now with criminals and dissidents and were later told one was near our hotel. In May, at home, I have read that 140 people have been executed this year in Tehran!

Next we went to the Golestan Palace which was opened specially for us. It is made up of several buildings around a central garden with fountains. It was built by Qajar ruler Nasser al-Din Shah (1848-96). He had been impressed by the European palaces he had visited. We visited a marble throne room made in the early 1800's for Fath Ali Shah, a monarch who managed a staggering 200 odd wives and had 170 children.



Most impressive was the hall of mirrors. It was designed to blend European and Persian architectural traditions. The rooms are filled with furniture and vases given to the shahs by European monarchs, especially the French. It was very glittering but had a lot of blue and white figures reminiscent of Wedgwood to me. We both thought Russian palaces were more opulent with gold. We walked along the far side and saw many inset tile designs and eventually the toilet. It wasn't western

so I passed.

Driving home took one and a half hours and the traffic was intense. Cars challenging busses, people crossing roads between cars, motorcycles whizzing around—more than enough to panic the timid!



Our briefing was changed three times because of the traffic. We had time for a twenty-minute rest before dinner and briefing in the Italian restaurant in the hotel. It was fine and very nice looking but very noisy! Don introduced the Iranian Tour owner and his staff and then we met Don's staff. Lisa

told us this was the trip of change. First we were to have extra time in Tehran to hear many local speakers so we extended our stay. Now, because of some incident connected with the Academy Awards, that program has been cancelled. What we'll see are changes several times a day. It's fine with us as we are flexible.



We had good conversation at a table of six with Diana and Van Brady and Richard Wright and his wife. Phil and I were mainly talking to Van. Diana was Diana Huston from my class at So Pas. Hadn't seen her in years but I enjoyed visiting with her on this trip. Lots of people left to go to bed before dessert as

they had been up all night. Barbara, the owner of the Iranian tour company, sat down with us and we chatted while she ate her dinner. She certainly has taken an interest in us. It turns out she comes over two to three times a year to help lead special groups. How lucky we are to be in that category!

We enjoyed some music in the lobby before coming up to our room where I am computing and washing and Phil is reading. We are ready for bed soon. Phil learned how to open our balcony door so maybe it will be a bit cooler tonight if the traffic noise doesn't keep us awake. A good day in Tehran.

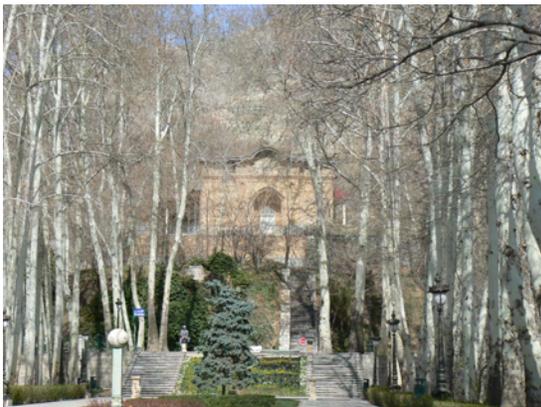
March 15 Tehran Sunday

Today, we were told, was a religious holiday so we saw lots of families enjoying the day together. We slept well though we had to shut the balcony door because of the construction noise. We found out our air conditioning is just air so our



room is rather warm. We breakfasted and were on our way by 9:00 A.M. to visit the Saad Abad Palace Complex. Today is clearer and a bit windier so the mountains are clear and it was a bright sunny day. This was a huge complex and we had Hamid today as our

guide. He was difficult to understand and I'm not sure he had been to these place before. He knew the information but never which way to turn. He had us walking a very long way up and down hill to get to the palace. Phil was breathing hard so I pushed myself quite a bit. Upon arriving at the palace we were told we were 30 minutes late and it was now time to take a tram to the other palace.



This complex was once the royal summer home. There are more than ten buildings scattered around the site. The tram took us to the Green Palace that had splendid mirrored rooms with no photos allowed. Shah Reza lived here for only a year. The entire complex was built between 1931

and 1936, so is our age! The Shah found the bed, if not the mirror stalactites on the ceiling, a little soft. It was later used as a private reception hall while the downstairs housed special guests. Hitler's picture was on the wall. The design is over-the-top opulent.



The tram returned to the White Palace. My two canes have worked well both with walking and for stair climbing

without rails. This palace was the Pahlavi summer residence. In front there were two huge bronze boots, all that remain of a giant statue of Reza Shah. He got the chop after the revolution. This palace was rather modern and filled with a hodgepodge of extravagant furniture and paintings. It was the height of luxury in its day! It had a nice billiards room. The shah always thought that the palace was bugged.

Next we visited the Niyavaran Palace complex. It was here that Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his family spent most of the last ten years of royal rule. The palace gives you insight into his daily life with basement teahouse, private dental surgery, poolroom, and office. At last we could photograph a wonderfully mirrored room with several side rooms. It was very ornate and we will see how this shows up in the pictures. This place isn't even in our guidebook. I think since they took away our speakers they are just keeping us busy all day so we don't stray or wander. At dinner Barbara would not tell us what happened but she will reveal it at a later time! I skipped the next complex as I was so tired of steps. I sat and read a bit until we were ready to head for the bus and lunch.

Lunch was at the Blue Duck Restaurant which was situated in a busy shopping mall so we could mingle with the people. Traffic today was intense getting everywhere. Our bus driver was terrific the way he navigated narrow streets and busy traffic. He must



have missed some cars or people by an inch! Just when you think the situation is hopeless a motorcycle or a pedestrian will sneak through before he moves. I also saw women climbing the highway barrier to get through traffic to the other side! One woman was carrying a baby. I guess there aren't enough

pedestrian crossings. Many roads don't have lane stripes. People will turn around and go in the opposite direction without warning! I sure wouldn't want to drive here.

Lunch was a buffet and the restaurant was up the escalator one floor. We saw people but didn't really talk with anyone until we had a few minutes after lunch to look around the shops. I released Phil to do this and one woman asked him why he was photographing here so he talked with her a bit.

I was ready to go home and skip the two afternoon activity because we would get back just before dinner. However, the schedule was changed and they eliminated the second activity so I went along to the National Archaeological Museum. I was really glad that I did and found it fascinating. It was full of Iran's rich history. It was designed by French architect Andre Godard and it's among the most modern and attractive





buildings in Iran. It was quite amazing and all on one level with pottery from 5 mil. B.C. and many objects from Persepolis. A copy of the stone detailing the Code of Hammurabi which was found at Shush is displayed here. The original is found in Paris. Not all things were

labeled in English but items here have come from Persepolis, Ismail Abad Shush, Rey and Turantappeh. We thoroughly enjoyed this hour. I slept the hour and a half on the way home. We arrived at 5:30 P.M. with an hour before we needed to board the bus to dinner. Phil tightened up a part of the wheelchair that had fallen off in the bus and we both napped.

Some incidental info we learned that before 1906 there were no paved roads or public education in Tehran and maybe in all of Iran. There are both public and private schools available now. I asked when young girls have to start wearing the head scarf. Our guide said by nine but other guides said whenever a young girl starts to develop. I imagine it is younger if you are really religious.

Dinner was quite charming with plenty more stairs. It had lots of atmosphere with paintings on the walls and music playing. Salad was a buffet which Phil, bless his heart, got for me. The rest was served at the table. Rice, lamb, chicken, fish and two more kinds of rice arrived on a huge platter. We were downstairs with five at our table. We sat on benches. The best thing was a huge family of



25-30 arrived for a wedding celebration. At least three generations and all kinds of dress. Women had their hair highlighted. One young girl who had developed wore a backless dress. The grandfather had her come to him and motioned to us to take their pictures. They took ours as well and



we smiled and said hello. Before we left the bride and groom arrived and looked very happy. The huge restaurant was full before we left. After the main course came tea and small cookies like wedding cake cookies and something marble size. Then came ice cream with a saffron or lemon or some exotic taste that I couldn't quite place. No alcohol is permitted in Iran.

The evening was lots of fun as we chatted with new people including Patty Poinciana who is the leader for the Stanford group. Another wedding party arrived as well. We took an early bus home and didn't stay for more music. We exchanged observations about mainly the women and how they dress. You see quite a bit of hair on the younger women and we were pleased to note they were often fussing with their slipping scarves as we do!



Through others speaking with one of our young guides I learned that the median age of younger people is 26. Many of this generation feel oppressed by the theocracy of the Ayatollah and they don't follow all the rules of their more religious parents. There are fewer arranged marriages now than in previous years. Most Iranians complete a high school education. Men have a compulsory 18 months military service after high school. Many of them don't go on to college but into trades. Now 80% of the college graduates are women.

Iran is the country of nose jobs. Faces are really important because that's what shows! We saw our first two bandages over the noses today. One book I read commented that some women, who haven't had a nose surgery, still will wear a bandage for the looks! Sometimes their tunics are quite tight. The older women wear longer black gowns and sometimes almost cover the entire face. Last night in our lobby we saw a woman wearing gloves as well. Shades of Yemen. I looked today for anti-American slogans but didn't see any. Phil said he saw one. Yesterday I saw the American flag with skulls instead of stars but was too slow to catch it with the camera.

Bardon, one of the Iranian tour team, told us she thought this dinner group near us was not a wedding celebration but an engagement party. Tomorrow she is going to bring her wedding pictures and I must remember to bring our family pictures. Our schedule for tomorrow is just as busy as today was and we also have to pack to part with one suitcase. I will add my warm clothes to that one. So Phil has been snoozing awhile now and I will read a bit before turning in. Really a strenuous day but a satisfying day for both of us.

March 16, Tehran Monday

Up to breakfast and out the bus at nine to tour the Tajrish Bazaar.



Rather unremarkable or maybe not because Phil is watching the ground for potholes and irregularities for which there are several and I too have my eyes downward unless we are stopped. There are high curbs, grates, holes etc. so it is a challenge. I bought a cooler black tunic, not quite large enough to close

properly but I think it will be okay over all black. It will be useful at home as a light jacket. It has some woven borders on the side slits. The store was packed with women buying tops and coats. Rosha was very helpful to me as well as another guide that was with us for the day.



I really enjoyed talking with Rosha on the bus. She is 38 and living with her mother. Her father died two years ago and her mother has become very dependent on her, which is okay with her. She says she is happy with her life and is helping put her brother through college. She claims that more and more young people are not seeing the need to marry. The birthrate has come down from an average of 7 children to 2.2 children. That's quite a drop. She doesn't feel the need to marry at this time but if the right man comes along...isn't that always the way?



I really enjoyed the Museum of Contemporary Art. It had some good sculpture like Giacometti in the garden and the corridors spiraled down in circular galleries. It was a modernist building constructed during the shah's rush to build modern landmarks in the 1970's. I took several pictures here and enjoyed both modern and more classical pictures. One book I read claims that it holds the greatest collection of Western art in Asia. It includes works by Picasso, Matisse, Van Gogh, Miró, Dali, Bacon, Pollock, Monet, and Warhol among

I really enjoyed the Museum of Contemporary Art. It had some good sculpture like Giacometti in the garden and the corridors spiraled down in circular galleries. It was a modernist building constructed during the shah's rush to build modern



others. There are many Iranian artists as well. Estimate say the pictures are worth between \$2–5 billion.

Evidently the Western art has been locked away during the Ahmadinejad years because it symbolizes western liberalism. This is why we saw more Iranian artists displayed. I noticed that I saw far more young men viewing the art than I did women. Fathers also brought their sons for an outing. I wonder what this reflected because we saw many young women traveling about. One of our guides is an artist and explained the miniature collection to us.



After lunch we visited the National Jewels Museum. It is owned by the Central Bank but is actually housed beneath the central branch of Bank Melli. It draws the most tourists of any place in Tehran. Most of the collection dates back to Safavid times when the shahs scoured Europe, India and the lands of the Ottoman Empire for booty to decorate Esfahan-the capital at that time. At one time the jewels were captured and taken to India. A war has been fought over these jewels to get them back! The collection includes the Dary-ye-Nur (Sea of Light) a pink diamond weighing 182 carats and said to be the largest uncut diamond in the world. Other notables are the Peacock Throne which is at the entrance. In 1798 Fath Ali Shah ordered a throne to be built. It looks more like a bed because of its width and has 26,733 gems. It has so many gems that it is called the Sun Throne. Absolutely fantastic. As you can imagine no pictures were allowed here. The crowns worn by the shah and his wife are also here with 51,366 gems. Every kind of jewel was here in abundance. What a fabulous collection!

We were too tired to go to the Martyrs Museum which some said was powerful and others not so great. It was a long day and we had to be ready to go out to a special birthday dinner for Don Kendall, Sr. 88th. We needed at least time to change clothes and

hopefully a little rest. Our hotel was shifted from a more central one because it was more luxurious. I'm wondering if we wouldn't have settled for less luxury and more time to see things or rest.

We had little time to prepare for dinner which was in a rather starkly modern pyramid-style building. We waited so long for all the people to arrive that it became quite late before we even began. Traffic was impossible. I fell asleep going. Beluga caviar and juice or soft drinks with humus etc. was served first. We had a pretty lively table. The main buffet was outside and you brought it in to the table. It was somewhat cold and windy. There were speeches and



musical entertainment capped off with a lovely birthday cake for Don. He offered a speech thanking Iran and our hosts Barbara and Mehrdad for taking especially good care of him, showing him the business side of Tehran while we toured the museums and palaces. Upon



leaving, Shirin and Sadegh Samii gave us each a book "A Voyage Through Divan-e Shams Celebrating Rumi" Ali Dashti translated from Farsi by Sayeh Dashti. It was inscribed by "Welcome to our country. We wish you all the very best." That was quite an investment and a very nice gesture.



I will enjoy reading it at home. We rushed out to get an early bus home only to be asked down the road a bit to return for the people in another bus that had been in an accident. I think they managed to drive to the hotel on their own after our waiting around for a bit.

March 17 Tehran/Shiraz Tuesday

We packed our bags early putting some of our warmer items in the duffle not to be seen until Esfahan. Phil went off to the Carpet Museum but I decided to have a more restful morning repacking my carry-on luggage, writing post cards, and reading a bit. He was very enthusiastic about what he saw.

We departed the hotel before lunch and ate on our way to the airport. It was mainly a travel day until very late afternoon. Our flight to Shiraz arrived at dusk and instead of stopping at the Ali Ebne Hamzeh Holy Shrine, we drove on by and went to the Vakil Bazaar. The city



has several bazaars but this is the most famous. It is covered and kept very clean with many corridors of shops. It has wide vaulted ceilings with brick designs commissioned by Karim Khan as part of his plan to make Shiraz

into a great trading center. There are over 200 shops selling carpets, handicrafts, spices and clothes. Phil bought himself a ring as a remembrance of his visit to Iran.



By the time we left the bazaar many of us were tired and hungry but there was one more stop to make before going to our

hotel. We visited the tomb of Hafez or the Aramgah-e-Hafez. Hafez the poet is an Iranian folk-hero—loved, revered, and as popular as many a modern pop star. Almost every Iranian can quote his work. The guidebook tells me it is set in a charming garden with two pools. Phil went up the many steps but they were wet and I was tired and sat below in my wheelchair. There is a

teahouse at the top where you can buy his poetry and have a cup of tea, which would have been charming under earlier conditions!



It was well after 8 P.M. before we arrived at the Homa Hotel and had dinner. There was some negotiation at our table to leave earlier for Persepolis in order to have more time in Shiraz before our flight to Esfahan. It was left up in the air and I don't think we were interested in the earlier hour. (We learned the next day that several had left at 7 A.M. to have more time there.) We had a comfortable room and went to sleep listening to firecrackers outside. They are preparing to celebrate the New Year already!



I feel sorry that Shiraz was shorted by our extended stay in Tehran. We really don't see much of it as we leave early in the morning for Persepolis. My guidebook states that it is a sophisticated city that has been celebrated as the heartland of Persian culture for more than 2000 years. It is known as the City of Love, the City of Roses, and the City of Gardens. It has become synonymous with education, nightingales, poetry and wine. It was one of the most important cities in the medieval Islamic world and was the Iranian capital during the years 1747–79 during the Zand dynasty. It is also known as the City of Poets. Both Hafez and Sa'di are buried here. It has a pleasant climate and once known for its vineyards that produced the shiraz grape. So I guess this is for another trip though I doubt very much if we will be back.

March 18 Shiraz/Esfahan Wednesday

Luggage was out this morning at 7:00 A.M. and we departed at 8:00 for our ride to Persepolis. Before breakfast we walked to the end of the hall and stepped out on the balcony to view the



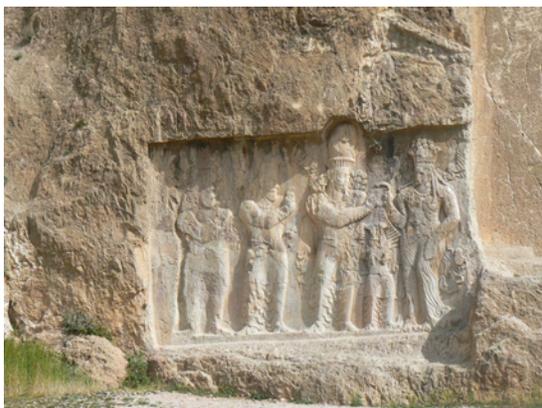
countryside. It was very peaceful and lovely with buildings, mountains, and gardens all in view.

The countryside was not too scenic. Some green fields but a lot of dry territory reminding me of parts of other Middle Eastern countries we have visited. We

did see some fields where the shiraz grapes were grown. The vines are very low down, giving me the feeling of cloves dotting a field!



Our first stop was at the Necropolis where we stayed about a half hour. I should have climbed up the hill in retrospect but enjoyed the sites from below. Phil took my camera so I have some close-up shots of the carvings of the tombs in the hillside. It reminded me a little bit of Petra



without that lovely color. If I had had some money in my pocket I would have bought a small carving to remind me of being here. I thought, however, there would be a much better choice at Persepolis. This turned out to be wrong. There was no choice at Persepolis!

It was several more kilometers to Persepolis, where I hadn't planned to see much. We parked quite far from the site but Phil pushed me along and I got inside the park for a few shots up to the area.



I looked at the daunting number of steps and debated long and hard before I decided to try it with two canes. The steps were shallow, I discovered, so I hugged the wall and walked on the original steps, not the wooden ones. Baran helped me up to the top as I had told Phil to go on

and

enjoy the tour and shoot up a storm. I made it up what seemed like hundreds of stairs and rested with the locals on a bench. I waved goodbye to Baran, too. I later read that the steps were shallow so Persians in long elegant robes could walk gracefully up into the Palace! It's thanks to that thought that allowed me to make it up.



After resting awhile I ventured another bit and rested on a white plastic chair after walking through the Xerxes Gateway. This is also known as the Gate of all Nations. It is guarded by bull-like figures that have a strong Assyrian character. I could still see Phil on ahead and made it to the second lecture spot where I leaned against a wall. The huge welcoming animals

were really something guarding the site! They were so huge I couldn't get them all in a picture. After hearing the info at this site



I went back to the white chair. On my way an Egyptian photographer befriended me and ask if he could take my picture. We got to talking and he offered to shoot me on my own camera. He pointed to a shed some distance away and told me if I could get that far I would see the best of Persepolis! I sat in the chair

thinking and trying to decide if I had the energy to get that far. I watched many families enjoying this outing. Sadly I decided the answer was no. There were no other chairs and I couldn't tell which was the shortest way.

How sad to be so close and yet so far. On the positive side I never thought I would make it up all those steps to begin with!

I made my way down and to my wheelchair. At just the right time another lady in our group offered to push me to the lunch spot. That was lovely and lucky! I rounded up some sandwiches and saved a spot for Phil. He'd had the full tour and was very impressed. The carving especially is very intricate and amazing. We had seen work from here in the museum in Tehran. When we arrived at the bus we caught our driver napping!



Later we bought a beautiful book on Persepolis so we will always remember this ancient site. It was built during the Achaemenid Empire and the gateways I saw show what a grand city it was. It is Persian in ideology and design, but truly international in its superb architecture an artistic execution. Even in its ruined state it remains the greatest surviving masterpiece of the ancient Near

Eastern civilizations. Beauty here was recognized as a sovereign value. In its heyday Persepolis spread over about 125,000 sq. meters and was one of four cities at the heart of an empire that spread from the Indus river to Ethiopia. It was sacked by Alexander the Great's army in 330 B.C. and burned to the ground. It burned because the buildings had huge wooden beams holding up their roofs.

I have read that some historians believe the site of Persepolis was chosen by Cambyses II, son of Cyrus the Great, but work did not begin until Darius I took the throne in 518 B.C. It was added to for over 150 years. People from all over the empire used to come to celebrate No Ruz (New Year) here. They came to pay homage to their kings. Little was known about it in the outside world. What is visible today is a small glimpse of what was. For years it was all buried under sand. It was not rediscovered until the 1930's.

After leaving Persepolis we drove back to Shiraz to the airport and flew on to Esfahan. We were greeted by the most adorable children dressed in costume who gave each one of us a lei and welcomed us to their city! It is a most beautifully planned city and is Iran's masterpiece, the jewel of ancient Persia and one of the finest cities



in the Islamic world. In the 16th century there was a saying that "Esfahan is half the world!" Today it is a Unesco World Heritage Site. Robert Byron ranked it as one of those rarer places like Athens or Rome. Today it is the country's third largest city and capital of the

province. It is home to plenty of heavy industry including a much discussed nuclear facility. It also has traffic jams and air pollution as did Tehran.

We checked into the Abbasi Hotel which is housed in the remains of a 17th century caravanserai. It has the reputation of being one of the best hotels in Iran. I took

a picture of Baran and Melodie in the lobby. We were welcomed with fruit juice when we arrived before checking in and it was beautiful and festive. Lots of people from Iran were traveling here too because it is almost New



Years. The courtyards and dining rooms and reception rooms are absolutely beautiful with

mirrored rooms like the palaces we have visited. Here's a shot of the courtyard at night from our balcony. The bedroom, however was quite small with lumpy mattresses, but a glorious balcony overlooking the courtyard with very comfortable furniture. All in all



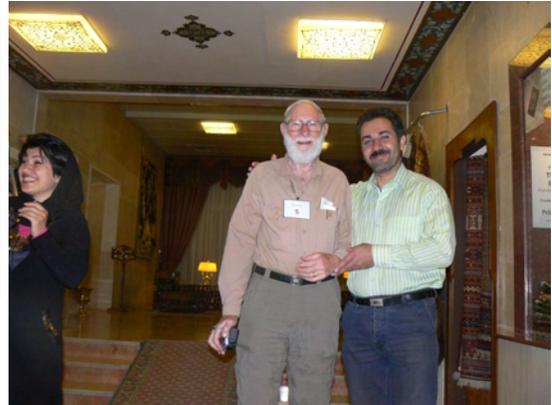
it was an exciting place to stay. We dined with the Browns and Diana and Van Brady and had a lively conversation in a very

beautiful room. After dinner we looked at some of the hotel shops including a beautiful bookstore where we bought our book on Persepolis. Outside a family was traveling with a little girl a few months old. I was in my wheel





chair. They asked me to hold the baby and could



they have their picture taken with me. Phil got it on video. This is a wonderful sample of the welcoming and friendliness of the Iranians. We were to have this experience repeated over and over during our stay here. And so to bed after a very happy and wonderful day.

March 19, Esfahan Thursday

We slept well by keeping our balcony room door open with air on. I think it was the least comfortable of our beds. Our room had little space to unpack but was small and quite charming. Breakfast today was right down the hall from our room. A gorgeous room it was with fancy chandeliers and pictures all over the walls. High back chairs with tied on covers.

An entry room with comfortable chairs and couches in case you wished to linger after meals or wait for a friend to eat with. This is not the dining room but a lovely room in the hotel.



Reza was our guide for today

and a lovely man. Though he was a trained mechanical engineer he has his spiritual side too. This is the most beautiful city we have seen. It truly was our most wonderful and charming day! We took our yellow bus to Imam Square which is the second largest square in the world, Beijing having the largest square. We visited three sites.



First we went to the Imam Mosque which was gorgeous and completely decorated with blue tiles and in the central room with a high ceiling into a dome. Both Phil and I agree it is the most

beautiful mosque we have ever seen. Shah Abbas and his architect get the credit for this stunning place built in 1611. It took four years to complete. The dome was finally finished in 1629 the last year of Shah Abbas's reign. The foundation stones are of white marble from Ardestan and the portal itself, some 30 meters tall, is decorated with magnificent mosaics featuring geometric designs, floral motifs and calligraphy by the most skilled artists of the age. The splendid niches contain complex stalactite moldings in a honeycombed pattern. Each panel has its own intricate designs.



Next we walked along one side of the square and around a bit to get to the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque. It is huge compared to the first mosque and is considered the most fabulous mosque in Iran. Students studied here in small alcoves. Reza had us clapping in his rhythm to give us energy in this place of worship. We saw many



parts of this grand site and Reza demonstrated the acoustics by stomping loudly nearing the central dome. We could hear 14 echoes when he stamped far from the center, which

decreased to 3 under the center. He also had several people offer up prayers using different styles. It was wonderful! This mosque was built between 1602 and 1619 and is dedicated to the ruler's father-in-



law. He was a revered Lebanese scholar of Islam who was invited to Esfahan to oversee the king's mosque and theological school. The cream colored tiles change color throughout the day from cream to pink. The tiles are overwhelmingly blue and turquoise especially around the dome's summit. It is unusual for a mosque because it has neither a minaret nor a



courtyard and because steps lead up to the entrance. The doors, as we left, had some bullet holes made by the Russians trying to break in. This was never meant for public use and served as a worship place for women of the shah's harem. Though this place was vast, we preferred the smaller mosque.



Last stop was the Chehel Sotun Palace which was under reconstruction. I didn't climb the 99 steps and waited in the arcade



of stores at the entrance. Several people came up to me and talked and I took their pictures and they took mine. Never have I been anywhere where the people have been so smiling and friendly. They are always happy to hear we are from the United States. Phil

said the view from the top was very lovely looking over the square and over the city from the opposite side. This palace is most famous for its frescoes. There are historical references to this palace from 1614. It was built as a pleasure pavilion and reception hall. All around the square are small shops selling everything especially crafts of their culture.



From the square we took our yellow bus to a restaurant atop a modern hotel. It revolved and we had lovely views of the city all around us as we ate from the buffet and were served platters of food. Many of the group continued on after lunch in a

guided shopping tour. We, however, elected to be dropped off at the hotel and then wandered on our own shopping tour in less fancy stores just to see the people shopping. Several helped us cross the streets holding up traffic for us as there were no signals. We bought a scarf for Sierra with our remaining



money and called it a day and came back to our room.

I've tried to repack most things so we won't have much to do in the morning. I don't know what times our bags need to be out. Phil created a poem for the gala tonight. It will be held at the private home of Barbara and her



Merdad who own the tour company we are traveling with. I think music and poetry and maybe fireworks will be on the program. It should be a wonderful fitting last night of our time in Iran. We will be celebrating "Shabe Eid" Noruz or the Iranian New Year which officially starts tomorrow afternoon at 3:11 P.M. Then the plan is to be near the famous bridge of the city and outdoors. If you are happy and are outdoors you will have a good new year! It is a two-week celebration and people travel around to meet and be with all of their family.

We entered the Palace and it was over-the-top marvelous! We were welcomed at the front door with no idea that we were entering a fairyland palace! We partook of pomegranate juice as we walked down a very long candlelight corridor and entered a gorgeous courtyard with flowers and pond and a stage at one end. Above this area you could look into the mirrored dining room just



like in the palaces we have seen. At one point Barbara went into this room with a few people to have her picture taken. Too bad Phil wasn't one of those people so he could get a better look. Underneath the stage I could look down into the kitchen or serving area. Phil was able to go there. The private rooms of the palace

were not open tonight to view. Rooms along one side were workshops in silver, miniatures, carpets, painting and a guitar player added to the wonderful atmosphere. We bought a small miniature to remind us of Iran. Evidently these artists were those visited this afternoon in their own shops so we didn't miss a thing.



The program announcer was none other than Reza, our guide for today. First there was a reading from the Koran. The reader later gave me two of his CD's. I was sitting near the front in my wheelchair and he must have seen that I enjoyed the

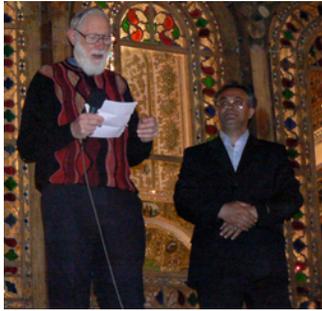
reading. The sounds of his reading were interchangeable with the sounds of Jewish cantors in synagogues, at least to my ear, and were very pleasing. Next came four men singing or chanting some poetry in Farsi. Next Reza gave his own poem about the next entertainers which were weightlifters of a sort. He translated it for us and then introduced the four athletes that performed for us. Perhaps they were country champions. They lifted



all sorts of weights looking like clubs. One did very fast Sufi dancing whirling all around. They also did juggling with these light and heavier objects. Two were father and son. Next Lisa spoke for Don in thanking all the guides and Barbara and Merdad for our outstanding trip in Iran. This was followed by Phil offering his poem of thanks for the days here!! He did a swell job. HO's were served along with freshly baked



bread made before our eyes during the entertainment. Dinner was buffet style. Rosha brought me some as I encouraged Phil to look around the Palace and take pictures. Here is a lovely picture of Rosha and Treaty. The rice with lots of raisins was very good as well as a few other things. Traditional music was played followed by ice cream and cookies. What a fabulous early celebration of the New Year and of our days in Iran.



Barbara and Mehrdad Radseresht were indeed gracious hosts. They commissioned the miniature artist to do a miniature for each of us. The travel business must have been good. According to Roger Brown, they met when they were



both working at Dole Food



Company (actually she told me they met in Belgium). He persuaded Dole to give him the right to import Dole Foods, particularly bananas into Iran. The couple are reported to have eight different homes—three in Teheran, two in Dubai, two in Esfahan, and one in

New York City. I know they live in San Francisco with their three children. I think the other home in Esfahan, which is also a large palace, they intend one day to turn into a hotel. Home to a bit of diary writing before bed. Another fabulous day!

March 20 Esfahan Saturday

After a last breakfast in our beautiful dining room. This morning we toured the Armenian Christian Church—the Vank Cathedral. It was in the Armenian section of Jolfa. It dates from the time of

Abbas I, who transported this colony of Christians en masse from the town of Jolfa which is now on Iran's northern border. He wanted to use their skills as merchants, entrepreneurs and artists; a look at the walls of the Vank Cathedral shows what he was after. Before going into the cathedral we gathered in front of the statue that paid tribute to



the Armenians who created the Armenian alphabet. It was a beautiful sunny day and many local families were gathered in the courtyard also looking at the statue and trying to listen to our guide. Evidently the Armenian Christians had their religious freedom respected, but they were restricted to the area across the river and kept away from the Islamic centers. Today there are about 13 Armenian churches and an old cemetery scattered around Jolfa serving a Christian community of about 7,000.



Unfortunately we couldn't take pictures inside the cathedral but it was quite a contrast to its rather plain looking outside. It's richly decorated with Islamic tiles next to large murals of biblical scenes. The frescoes were magnificent and very rich in color and design.

Leaving the cathedral we had to walk through a very crowded two blocks of market place. The wheelchair was impossible and I was carried along with the crowd and just hoped I wouldn't be knocked over! I was finally reunited with Phil and my wheelchair near where we were to meet the buses. What an ordeal. We lunched back at the hotel only to find that our flight was delayed so some alternate plans had to be made. Our bus headed to the Zoroastrian Temple where the dead are left outside to be eaten by vultures! It, however, turned out to be closed on New Years. Next we took a

look from the bus at the shaking minarets. This is the 14th century tomb of Abu Abdullah who was a revered dervish. It is known as Manar Jomban. By pushing hard on one minaret the other will shake. Attendants climb up and shake on the hour but this too was closed today. There are conflicting views on why they shake. Some have a vibration theory, some say the feldspar dissolves over time, and others say the minarets are made of bricks and timber and it's the timber that bends. Who knows?!



So we headed back to the famous bridge to be there at the exact right moment. Our guide was dropped off on one side and later caught up with us. Perhaps he had family or friends to meet there. There are seven bridges that cross the Zayadeh River. The most famous is the Is-o-Seh Bridge that has 33 arches- one for each year that Christ lived. It was built



by a Christian Armenian architect between 1599 and 1602 and serves as both a bridge and a dam. There used to be a tea house at either end but now only one is open. We arrived and were walking across the bridge just as 3:13 p.m. arrived and joined in the hugging and wishing all we saw a Happy New Year . There were

canons firing and families strolling and a very festive atmosphere! Many were boating on the river. People were especially happy because President Obama had wished them a Happy New Year. People were picnicking on the lawns and parkways by the bridge and families were in small boats on the rivers. We had time to enjoy and chat with several groups of people.



We still had time to kill because our plane was now over two and a half hours late. Next they took us back to the main square to browse until a certain time. Different times were told to various busses which later created a problem. I had problems getting to the square

the way the buses were parked. There wasn't room to walk between them and I could not balance walking across a mud field on a curb so I had to walk through the mud.

What a yucky affair. Mud all over my shoes. Our guide had a friend who loaned us a hose and Phil did his best to clean them. There was another search for a western toilet to no avail.

Lots of people here came up to say hello to me and have their pictures taken with me or of me and chatted awhile. I sent Phil off to enjoy the scene while I stayed parked. Clowns and Mickey Mouse were handing balloons to children and the horse drawn sleighs were giving rides around the square with their bells tinkling. Guys on motorcycles whizzed around too. Soon I saw our guide summoning us to the bus way earlier than the stated time. Phil fortunately returned at the same time.



Many were no where to be seen so we shopped at the corner store and I bought a pair of earrings while we waited. We made a fast stop back at our hotel to use the toilet before going off to the airport. Barbara told me that only she and Robin Wright were in the bathroom when she asked her "Have you had anytime to see your friends while you have been here." This was met by Robin putting her finger to her lips and saying "shh."





We cooled our heels at the airport and some paid for a box dinner. We waited to see what was served on the plane as I recall. There were a few anxious moments when they took Phil's passport away and didn't return for awhile. Meanwhile many others were leaving to get on the plane. I appealed to Don as he walked by

not to leave us! He said he never would, as we were the cash cows that would put his children through college! I chuckled a bit as we are two of four that have been on all his trips. Someone went over to help Phil and soon we were going through the line. Gordon bumped us up to business class so we rode and dined in greater comfort on our way to Dubai. We arrived at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel quite early the next morning. We have a handicapped room that is gorgeous on the 24th floor. Phil went to bed and I waiting up until 3:00 A.M. when the luggage came.

POSTSCRIPT TO IRAN

I will include notes from Robin's three lectures she gave us on Iran after we left the country. Most notes will be Phil's with a touch of mine.

3/21 ROBIN WRIGHT'S RECAP ON IRAN (Dubai)

Robin had prepared three lectures to give us in Iran but evidently was asked not to give them when the local speakers were cancelled. She informed us that all cell phones are transmitters which Iranian intelligence can pick up whether they are on or not. She knew every word she spoke was overheard.



Her first talk will cover a perspective on what we had done and seen, a context about the revolution, and update on the political scene today, and what was happening while we were there.

We were the largest group of Americans to go to Tehran in 30 years. The 3 most important events were the revolution, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the creation of Israel. We have a taste of one of them.

First was the French revolution, second was the Russian revolution, and this was 1979 Iranian revolution which ended 2500 years of life and introduced Islam into the worlds' scene. She spoke about the difference in the role of the cleric in Sunni and Shiite religion. For the Sunni the cleric is an advisor like a protestant minister giving guidance and the relationship of a personal God is individual. In Shiite clerics interpret God's will to the people and the duties of the individual. A Sunni has direct dialing to God while Shiite contact is like through an operator. The first revolution in modern context is Shiite which mobilized the faithful.

The various sectors mobilized against the Shah—communists, leftists, etc. Khomeini took the role of unifier of them all, even though he was in exile. The revolution was a radical departure from Shiite Islam; clerics had not been involved in politics for 14 centuries. Khomeini argued Shiism should be the idiom of political opposition and clerics should be the government leaders. The majority of clerics disagree with Khomeini and this debate played out among the clerics. They feel failures will diminish Shiism.

Iran has a traditional government structure. Three branches of the president, parliament, and judiciary are mirrored by the Council of Guardians, Islamic courts, and supreme leader (Khamenei) Religious leaders have become more powerful. The Ayatollah can overturn anything. Iran has a constitution based on French and Belgian law. Hadi Khamenei (the younger brother of the Supreme

Leader) has often been beaten up. Robin has seen him several times. He is a modern and hip mullah. Three out of the four brothers are clerics.

Politics is about the turban vs. the hat; i.e., the clerics vs. secular politicians. In the last election in 2005 it was Ahmadinejad vs. Rafsanjani. The former has a PhD in traffic management and was mayor of Tehran. This election was a rejection of the clerics for the first time since 1979. He was not a corrupt politician. This came within a month of the Palestinian elections which were also a rejection of the status quo (Fattah).

The same debate between the turban and the hat will play out in the 6/12 elections. Since 1981 every president has served 2 terms, which is the limit. This may be the first time a sitting president is ousted. You can never outguess Iranians, however, because in the last two elections the favored one has not been elected. Chatom has just dropped out for Mousavi to run. Khatami was the most charismatic and Mousavi is rather boring. Both men wear the hat. Mousavi has legitimacy in the clerics eyes and he gave his first speech while we were there. It was boring! There are a dozen parties now. Every 5 Iranians have 6 parties. Robin said at a later time that the public is very up on politics—more so than Americans.

The Basaji are young volunteers and they, with the Revolutionary Guards, have become important factors in the economy and politics. They have gotten 3000 no-bid government contracts. They control 30-40 % of the economy; 2/3 of the ministries and almost all of the governors are or were Revolutionary Guards. We look upon them as being evil as they have produced the majority of the martyrs and are very powerful. The Quds (Jerusalem) force are the most crucial in opposing the US in Iraq and Afghanistan. All young males must go into the service and the Guards are very popular, as they have short hours, which lets the soldiers have second jobs, important in this economy.

The politics here is far more complicated than anyone understands. There has been tension between Rafsanjani and Khamenei for many years. The former put the latter in power even though he was a more minor cleric and Khamenei has tried to marginalize Rafsanjani. Both are about the same age. Rafsanjani would like to win but it has never worked.

The regime is multifaceted. The Foreign Ministry wanted her to come and she could have talked openly. The Intelligence Ministry was opposed and Robin was pushed around here and there on the question of getting a journalist visa. Eventually at the last moment she was given a tourist visa courtesy of the intercession of the Iranian UN delegation.

A number of American/Iranians have been jailed recently, including Roxana Sebrini for the last two months and a stringer for NPR has been jailed just around the corner from our hotel. There has been an effort to clamp down on bloggers and the internet. Of the 24 countries in the Middle East, two are the most internet savvy: Iran is second to Israel in the number of bloggers they have. One blogger died in jail during our stay. Jailing has been the result of insulting Islam or other vague offenses. The government crushed a network considered to be anti-religious while we were in Tehran. Our Congress has appropriated \$400 million to set up a website in Iran. The web is a real challenge for the regime. 5 million websites have been blocked by Iran. Iran has launched 10,000 new websites for martyrs.

The regime feels vulnerable because of the economy—Ahmadinejad is the worst economic manager conceivable with 30% inflation and 18% unemployment. There have been public clashes between him and his economic ministers and 6 have been fired. Iran imports 40% of its gasoline but its petroleum will run out in 2025. 70% of the country is under 30 years of age. Lots of people are in the 18-30 range and are unemployed. You may vote

when you are 16. There is a big question if they will vote June 12 without a charismatic politician. In the last two elections the heavy favorite lost. Rafsanjani has been trying to undermine the power of the Supreme Leader. He feels the leader should be above the clerics and should be elected by all people. The average Iranian loves to talk politics more than the average American. Robin feels most Iranians really like Americans. Iranians are good at finding someone else to vote for when they can. She cannot predict the June 12 election. (Just today (5/19) the LA Times had an article about Khamenei saying not to vote for someone who likes foreign or Western ideas.)

The Revolution about democracy was hijacked by the clerics. Then Iraq invaded. Think about Texas with 5000 years of history being invaded by Kansas to understand Iranian attitudes toward Iraq. We have to be patient to watch the evolution of politics here. Iran and Iraq have been long time rivals. The primary issue is getting us out of Iraq. Iran has an interest in stability in Iraq and has spent more proportionately in rehabilitation in Iraq than the US!

Don Kendall Sr: a lot want regime change and it is not right that other countries have business in Iran but US companies are frozen out. He will work in US to change this and he hope Obama will agree.

We have put pressure on the regime with sanctions. Up to 1995 we were the largest buyer of Iranian oil, through Rotterdam. Congress has been strong on sanctions and it will not be easy to ease bans on trade with Iran passing 41 resolutions on the subject. The Treasury Dept. has gone around the world with major banks to cut off Iran. While Abu Dhabi has oil, Dubai does not so Dubai needs trade with Iran.

Women had a big part in the revolution and their education has advanced since then. Before that, traditional families did not want

their girls to go beyond elementary school and be exposed to Western decadence. Now 65% of college students are women. They do not mind wearing hijab as it influences traditional parents to let their daughters be more involved in society. Egypt has gone from being uncovered to almost 80% wearing hijabs in the last 20 years.

Iranian support for forces in Iraq are small-time devices, like roadside bombs, not major weaponry, designed to get the US out. Iran fears a Taliban resurgence as it is ideologically backward. Iran is more worried about the Taliban than Israel. The average Iranian is not vested in the Arab/Israel situation, they not being Arab. The Shah and Israel worked together. There is potential for tolerance there. A majority of Iranians were shocked by Ahmadinejad's holocaust denial statements. He is wacko. Senior clerics would not nuke Israel, fearing the international repercussions for that.

In Iran she figured all conversations and phone calls were being bugged by Iranian intelligence so she was somewhat short with people asking her political questions. We have visited at an important intersection, the election of Obama and the forthcoming Iranian elections. Personally, she had no concerns for herself even though her seizure would be noticed—and that our seizure would be unnoticed. (I thought she said she was frightened for herself but not us. I know I later heard her say she would never take another large group there.)

From a later lecture when asked about her security she responded “This trip was unusual and I was very worried on this one and so was my mother. I am over 50 and she wanted me to call when I got home. I might not go with a tourist group again.”

LECTURE ON MARCH 24 Robin was on a panel with William Perry and Bruce Laingen. I will only include relevant comments to Iran.

LAINGEN

We have spent 30 years without dialogue on shared interests. This makes no sense. We have built a wall of distrust with corrosive rhetoric on both sides like Axis of Evil, Death to America and Israel.

PERRY

American interest in Iran is more than nukes. This will be the first security crisis of the Obama administration. Iranian nuclear program was started by the US selling them a nuclear reactor. The Shah paralleled that peaceful program with a nuclear one and got nowhere and Khomeini cancelled it. During the Iraq war, Iraq used chemical weapons which impressed them and no one in the US or elsewhere objected to that. So Iran started its nuclear program.

Making the fissile material is difficult. They started two parallel paths: plutonium and enriched uranium and not much progress until 2000. AQ Khan sold Iran the knowhow and technology and equipment on how to enrich uranium. They can't make a bomb without fissile material and uranium needs to be processed. You put uranium in centrifuge to enrich it to low enriched uranium which can be used to fire a reactor and the spent fuel from that to make plutonium or spin it more to make highly enriched uranium which can also be used for a weapon. They had a few dozen centrifuges during the Bush era making low enriched uranium. At that point the European Union was negotiating to make them stop enriching. Three years ago Iran offered to hold to the few dozen centrifuges. US urged EU to turn down the offer to all or nothing and Iran walked away from the negotiation, kept spinning and getting to 5000 centrifuges which they have operated for more than a year and a half- hundreds of pounds of uranium and now Iran is at fork of road to take that uranium and highly enrich it to make a bomb or continue to make low enriched uranium to make several bombs.

Negotiations have not been successful—nothing has worked. Part of reason is US has not been part of those negotiations as we have refused to negotiate but kibitzed the EU. So we are at the fork in the road on whether to negotiate. Obama spoke last week saying Iranian people are not the enemy of the US and we want to be friends. The impediment to friendship is your nuclear program and we should use diplomacy about that.

The US has some alternatives. 1) Engage seriously in diplomacy, coercive diplomacy (financial pressure) and full diplomatic relations. Iran is very susceptible to economic pressure. If EU and Russia would cooperate we could put a lot of economic pressure on them. 2) Other road is military action where we have to consider the intended and unintended consequences. Military problems here. 3) Accept Iran nuclear weapons program but that alternative doesn't truly exist as Israel is also an actor. They believe a nuclear weapon poses an existential threat as Iran does not accept the existence of Israel. Whether or not they are right, they believe it. If they feel the international community will not take effective action, Israel will act in the latter part of 2009. Obama will face this crisis.

WRIGHT

Ahmadinejad talks of wiping out Israel but I do not believe he would do that as I have been visiting there since 1973. Five of eight nuclear powers are on Iran borders. Iran has not invaded another country for 200 years. Iran wants the capability for deterrence. One person told me if we were as naughty as the North Koreans, maybe we would get US aid. Next she spoke of missed opportunities.

In 1985–6 there was arms for hostages swap. In mid 1990's Iran offered the largest petroleum deal to Conoco to develop natural gas field and Clinton administration cut off oil sales and imposed sanctions. 2003 Iran announced a general list of talking principles

and was ignored. Bush administration sent New Year's greetings to bypass leadership. Obama sent it to leadership and people of the Islamic Republic. This was very different and said "respect" a lot. We seek engagement, honest and grounded in mutual respect and want Islamic Republic to take its rightful place in the nations of the world. Khatemi said if you change we will change our behavior (from the Koran). He did say we do not provide any specifics.

We have the possibility of four types of engagement: 1) Get to know each other after 30 years and gradual confidence building and cultural exchange. Obama mentioned this: renewed exchanges of our peoples and greater opportunities for commerce. 2) Carrot and stick: If you stop, you will be rewarded. After 6 years of blocking this approach Bush started this but not directly with Iran. Dennis Ross has alluded to this approach in an op ed recently. 3) Grand bargain: both nations throw all issues on the table; nuclear program, support for the extreme groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Israel issue; lifting sanctions and diplomatic recognition. 4) China model: like Nixon administration did: start out with talks of the top leaders.

She went on to evaluate. 1) It is too late given the progress in the nuclear program. Chatom made that approach 12 years ago. 2) The carrot may not work all that well as Iranians are offended by this. Carrot or stick is used on donkeys and they bristle about this. Chatom: for you to say we will talk and assert pressure is rejected- and this takes a long time and can be manipulated. I worked for 7 years in Rhodesia and it took 15 years before minority government transferred power. 3) Grand bargain: This has been debated for a year. Would it contain enough to engage the Iranians? Do they want more than this or do not need it at all. Iran needs the US as it imports 40% of its oil as it does not have refineries; our banking sanctions have hurt them; and it has been the super power of the region as US has eliminated Iraq and Afghanistan power. 4) China model: do not have Israel in the background. Shimon Peres also

wished a happy New Year to Iran and said Iranians will rise up and topple the fanatics who run Iran.

Last night our State Department said Clinton will go to the Hague on 4/3 to discuss Afghanistan and Iran is invited to the meeting. There is a big opportunity for cooperation here. Western Afghanistan used to be part of Iran. Iran took in more than 2 million refugees and 1 million are still in Iran. We did not have to launch a ground war in Afghanistan as the Northern Alliance was armed by the Iranians and they pushed the Taliban out. Iran has provided the size and quantity of weapons to pressure US troops but not devastate.

We could cooperate on an anti-narcotics operation. 75% of heroin comes from Afghanistan. Now smugglers are selling in Iran and not just transferring through. There are 2-3 million addicts now which is a big problem for Iran. Iran has lost troops fighting traffickers. How to get them off poppy cultivation would be of interest to Iran. Pomegranates are now in vogue and can earn \$2000 per acre vs. \$1300 from poppy cultivation. Reconstruction in Afghanistan has been a big thing in Iran. In 2006 Iran pledged \$200 million in a conference Washington sponsored. It has spent a lot more on roads, clinics etc. in Western Afghanistan, medical center in Kabul and fiber optics, and worked in Kabul University. We can coordinate reconstruction efforts with them. There is also a lot of potential oil cooperation in Iraq. Kirkuk is last unsettled crisis point, the Jerusalem of Iraq wanted by Kurds and Arabs and is a major oil center. Iran does not want instability in Iraq. It has almost as many Kurds as Iraq and doesn't want any spill over problems. Iran can pressure the Baghdad government. Also chemical weapons are a point of cooperation. 50,000 Iranian chemical victims. In 2002 there were 100,000 low dose exposure victims in Iran. US could be helpful in this and set precedence in cooperation on WMD.

GENERAL MOSELY

We may not know where all the WMD facilities are. If you strike them better get it done completely. The people are proud and have opportunity thru Hezbollah to do a lot of damage. When I left 6 months ago I was not confident we could get it all. Israelis do not have the same capabilities we have and a long way for them to fly. They have to go over Saudi Arabia or Iraq and pigs will fly before the Saudis will let them and if over Iraq we will have to be complicit or go over Turkey which allowed it when they hit Syria. They need tankers they do not have.

WRIGHT

We know less about Iran capability than we did about Iraq and we got that wrong. We'd have to hit the borders too so they could not retaliate conventionally.

MOSELY

We have to go after more sites. S 300 missile system Iran wants to buy is very lethal. You will have to penetrate that airspace fast and stealthily and Izzies don't have that. The fielding of that system might be a redline matter.

PERRY

I told the Russians yesterday if you send S 300s to Iran that will trigger Israeli reaction. Big issue in June election is the economy. 80% of Iran oil wealth since Revolution has been earned in last 3 years as price has skyrocketed and Ahmadinejad has gone thru most of that money in poor choices and mismanagement. The price of housing has doubled and food has tripled. Iran's economy is buckling but they are not crippled. The Taliban has profited and survived from poppies. No matter who wins the election Khamenei has said he is in charge.

WRIGHT

If Israel says we will take these guys out, can US say no or can we convince the Iranians we can prevent this?

PERRY

I agree with Robin that Iran would not use weapons against Israel but the question is whether Netanyahu believes that. If he sees negotiations are not getting anywhere they will take action. I have discussed this unofficially with many senior Israelis and they do not want to take this action and see the difficulty of military success—hard target and not enough weapons. They assess they can slow down the progress a year or two but not stop it. They can't do it without flying over Iraq with our complicity and everyone will think we permit it. If we told them not to do it, it wouldn't stop them.

ROBIN WRIGHT AND ALI ASAN—WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST 3/2 5

I'll just pick out what is relevant to Iran.

She feels that reactionary Islam has replaced progressive Islam in Iran. Shirin Ebadi, Iranian Nobel prize winner says women's problems in Muslim societies are not because of religion but is the result of the patriarchal culture. The humiliation inflicted on women is the result of a diseased gene that is passed on to every generation of men, not only by society as a whole but also by their mothers. It is mothers who raise boys to become men. It is up to mothers to pass on that diseased gene.

Professor Amina Wadud Muh, Prof. of Virginia Commonwealth University, challenges male patriarchal reading of the Koran. She goes through Quranic texts and shows how they have been interpreted by men and women were not allowed to interpret. There are a group of women saying the Quran was a liberating text for its time and era. It guaranteed all kinds of rights to women that did not then exist. It outlaws female infanticide, grants rights of divorce and rights to inherit and manage property. Feminists show references that treat men and women equally. When asked if the

Quran supports polygamy or monogamy the same sura seems to have both – and marry 2, 3, or 4 but “you will never be able to treat wives with equal fairness however eager you may be.” The contextual interpretations of the veil or hijab can either be liberating or confining. Sometimes it is imposed by the state and some wear it as a choice. It is an expression of identity or of culture. If we wear Western clothes we will be considered Western. We will wear something else if we don’t want to be considered Western.

Sultan Mohammed Shah Aga Khan felt equality of women came from the prophet. In 1926 he gave them freedom and said girls should be provided with such education that they can run their own lives. This was possible in a small Nizari Ismailis community and the Aga Khan was descended from Mohammed.

The issue today is who speaks for Islam and who has the authority to interpret texts. Robin reminded us that Turkey, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh have all had women leaders ahead of the United States. The Quran speaks that both men and women should have the right to what they earn and also speaks of equality in divorce.

Some of the greatest achievements for women have been in Iran. In 1963 Khomeini was regressive and opposed the Shah giving the vote to women and called it prostitution. 15 days later Khomeini began to change his mind on women’s issues. Shortly after the revolutions he noted a wondrous change in the role of women. He said women had the right to education and to vote. He had a traditional marriage where his wife was 13 and he was 30. His daughter became a University Professor and his granddaughters are all university graduates.

During the Shah’s day many families were not willing to send their daughters beyond elementary school. After the Revolution 65% found it safe to send their daughters to the university. 40% of the

faculty members are now women. Iran has had a woman Vice-President. In the Atlanta Olympics the Iranian team was led in by a woman.

It is no longer legal to divorce a woman by saying it three times. Now you have to register it in court where a woman has a say. There is an assistant woman judge to look out for women. No politician in Iran can win without appealing to women. Khatami said there should be equal development. Some of the leading feminists in Iran today are men. We learned that in Iran there is a seminary for women so they are even becoming part of the clergy.

Iran was worried about their population growth. In 1979 the mullahs urged women to breed and they doubled their population in a decade. Now they have instituted family planning where all things are free: IUD, tubal ligation, etc. You need a certificate from planning before you get a wedding license. Robin attended one of these sessions and said she learned a lot! 35,000 women were hired to go door to door to explain the benefits to limiting families. Iran went from 7 children per family to 2. There has been a long practice to marry within the family to keep the wealth at home. Now, in Iran, if you marry a family member you have to have a DNA test.

It is Robin's opinion that people are defining Islam by what they see is NOT Islam (i.e., opposite of bikini). This is a negative definition. They want to prevent the encroachment of foreign ideas. It may well be the identity of politics and not of faith. The prime minister of Turkey had to send his daughters to the US so they could wear hijab (scarf), which they could not wear in Turkey.

ROBIN REMINISCES ABOUT IRAN March 26

I have gone to Iran for 35 years. We stayed at the old Hilton in Tehran. In 1973 there was a Miss Iran contest there. In the early days of the revolution I wore pale pink nail polish and a flight

attendant said no nail polish and gave me 10 Band Aids which I wore for several days until I could find a gasoline mixture which left my nails a dull orange! I often try to go to Iran at 11/4 which is the anniversary of the take over of our embassy. That is also pupil's day with students given a day off to march at the embassy. Now there are a number of women with bright red, purple or black toes and nails. At a big park in Tehran a woman had a black skirt with a tee shirt with Las Vegas on it.

I love to play chess. I have paid for more games than I won. One was confiscated even though Iran claims it was invented here. Each card of my deck was ripped up in front of me. After the war I went to a park and life-sized chess pieces are there and I played a life-sized game. They banned chess due to King and Queen and the betting. Horse racing has resumed since the war and so has betting. Rafsanjani had two horses racing once.

I have interviewed 2 of the 3 masterminds of the Embassy takeover. Oscar Zadeh was interviewed a lot. When I saw him he was shocked when the Ayatollah said it was a good idea for them to stay in the American Embassy and drop out of school. They thought it would be a short range thing. He ran for city council later shedding his hippie image and said our dealing with the hostages were not against the Americans or with the hostages and he wanted the hostages to come back. He couldn't run for higher office because the Council Guardians said he was not Islamic enough. The embassy compound is large. The takeover was right after Halloween with skeletons over the walls. The hostage takers were appalled! (On our trip our guides were told to keep us away from our Embassy. A person on another bus told me their guide mentioned it after they had passed.)

Robin thinks Iranian movies are exquisite. At the Savak museum there were lots of mug shots and one of her favorite directors was there but started making his own movies. One was a woman having an affair with a younger man. It was told from the

perspective of all 3, husband, wife, and young man. It was banned because there were three truths and Islam has only one truth. Samira Maklaba is a daughter of the director. There was an incident where two 12-year-olds had never been out of the house and the state took them away and gave them their first bath. Samira wanted to document this when they were taken out of the house and made this into a movie called Apple. It was chosen at the Cannes Festival and Samira was only 17.

We now had questions and answers: With the high unemployment what do the girls do? She never really answered this but said that unemployment rate is 18%. The Middle East has the largest youth population in the world. Iran has the largest block and they can vote when they are 16. Will they be motivated enough to vote? They voted for Chatom. Who knows if they will vote this year. In Egypt 75% do not vote.

How do you keep managing to return? I talk to all sides. I see the hardliners, feminists, new democrats, Sunni, and Shiites. I lost a lot of friends in Syria. I lived in Beirut when the Marine compound was bombed. It was the largest loss of life since Iwo Jima. The Iranian ambassador to Syria was the pivotal role and Israel maybe blew him up. He survived and I tried to interview him for two years. I wanted to know why he did it. I pestered so often they said you can meet him but not interview him. I met him and he was gnarled with shrapnel in him and I said I had one question and he said what? What were the success and failure of the Iranian revolution and he spoke for 2.5 hours. It was hard for me to be with a man who was responsible for the loss of life of people I knew.

The Revolutionary Guards are the wild card in this election. They have penetrated all of society, built the airport, own the Mercedes dealership. I keep a kaleidoscope on my desk to show a little twist changes the picture. 80% of the Guards voted for Khatami.

Khomeini's power is absolute. He is opposed by a majority of the clerics as he is not a big scholar.

Why do the Iranians hate Israel? The regime exploits the issue and the majority of Iranians (I don't have an accurate poll) get anguished over the pictures from Gaza but it is not a big issue like in Arab countries. There are Shiites in the Saudi oil field areas, a big number in Kuwait and a large majority in Bahrain. Early on Iran was trying to foment problems here and in Lebanon. In 1980 I went to Libya to interview Kadafi. A department store was opened with Arafat in attendance. Arafat brought a nice saddle and Kadafi gave him a set of Samsonite Luggage and that was all Arafat ever got. Iran did come through with money.

Moqdata Sadr is leading Shiite renegade but his activity is gone down. I'm not clear what his real connection to Iran is.

Iran's constitution is based on Belgian, French law, and Sharia. The Clerics hijacked it in 1.5 years. There is a democratic veneer though. In 1997 it was assumed that Nouri would win and the supreme leader was for him. Khatami won after having been removed as culture minister. In 2005 Rafsanjani was a well known politician with enormous wealth and a big campaign. He lost to a two year mayor Ahmadinejad as the Iranians were tired of clerics. Both the Iranians and the Palestinians were voting against people. We got stuck with Hamas and Ahmadinejad.

The majority of Iranians did not have last names and the Shah wanted them to have a second name. Khomeini was born in Ruhollah. Mr. Najah, our passenger, had a family coming from Najah.

What is the likelihood that Iran can be persuaded to not develop nuclear weapons? We know less about Iran than we did about Iraq. We know little of their development. They have a sense of isolation and persecution. They have many enemies on their

borders. They are surrounded by Arab states. Her guess is that many at the top would like to follow the Japan model: have the capability but not have the bomb. I don't think they would use it on Israel.

During the Iran/Iraq war there was a question if the Iraqi Shiites would go over to Iran. A lot of the army in Iraq was Shiite and stayed put. In 2005 many of the Shiites ran as a coalition but now they are fragmented. That will include less contact with Iran.

POST TRIP

I read books on the trip like *The Israel Lobby*, which opened my eyes to the extreme power of this lobby. I found it disturbing. In Israel the issues are discussed much more thoroughly than here. Their citizens can object to army action and political action taken but it seems that when individuals here speak up they are labeled anti-Semitic. I didn't really realize the power of this lobby before. There is another group that has been formed with a more moderate view called Jay Street. The future will tell if this group will have any influence over congress.

I am reading now a book, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ*, by Hooman Majd. He is the grandson of an eminent Ayatollah and the son of an Iranian diplomat and is now an American citizen. People call him 100% Iranian and 100% American. He is very comfortable in both countries. I am trying to learn more about Iranians. Quoting from the book cover, "He paints a portrait of a country that is fiercely proud of its Persian heritage, mystified by its outsider status, and scornful of the idea that the United States can dictate how it should interact with the community of nations."

The nuclear issue is warming up. This week in the L.A. Times there was an article mentioning work done by the East-West Institute. Its president, John Mroz, has been a speaker on all four of our World Leader trips. They do second-level negotiations in the hot spots over the world. This article was saying Iran is not as

far in its nuclear development as was supposed. Of course the next day Iran sent up a missile that could reach Israel.

Robin Wright is the only speaker from all the four trips we've gone on that has sent us e-mails to keep us up to date on Iran and the Middle East. I think this is terrific and I really appreciate reading them.

I read at the end of April that 140 people had been executed in Tehran prisons so far this year. Not good news. I know we read mainly bad things about Iran, but my impression of the country came from the very hospitable people that greeted and spoke with us throughout the country. We felt more welcomed here than in any other country we have ever visited.

After I returned home, I learned that one of my pool friends at the YMCA was from Tehran. We have chatted several times. Hoda was a teenager during the Revolution. She told me people were dancing and wearing flashy clothes and in one week's time everybody was covered up. Some people used this new requirement as a way to get better jobs. She watched people change—even family members—and she didn't like the change. She confirmed that the people were brought up to be hospitable and to treat their guests very well. So I will continue to read and learn more about the Middle East and the countries we visited. Of all of them Iran was my favorite!

I thought I was finished but last night I dreamed about Robin Wright all night and the book I left out. Upon Susan Good's, a fellow traveler, recommendation I read *The Lemon Tree* and found it enlightening in understanding both the Israeli and Palestinian position. It is a true story of a Palestinian family having to vacate their house in Al Ramla and the Bulgarian Jewish family that came to live in it. It speaks to the meeting of one member from each family and their attempt to understand the others point of view. Someone told me it may become a movie.

So we have Israel, who is trying to survive, and who is very patient before it strikes and then it tends to overkill, perpetuating generations of Arab hatred. We have Palestinians who are caged up trying to survive using the techniques of those not in power and who refuse to recognize the right of Israel to exist and insist on the right of return. We have the Iranians trying to survive and be recognized on the world scene as a major player. I wonder what gives one country the right to have nuclear weapons and another one not? We have the United States who has done wrong in many countries over time hurting people and the environment before they leave. How do we have the right to know what is best for any other country? We are hardly the impartial negotiator in any conflict between Israel and Palestine. We are now trying to recapture our ethics and improve our image in the world. Will there be a day when peace will out? Stay tuned!

I will include a few pictures of Iran not already shown:



