

The Tale of the Toqm-e morgh (Egg)
By Annice O’Doherty (Sanandaj, 1969-71)

Our assignment to Iran was based on my husband **Pearse** working as a city planner while I went as a TEFL teacher. Our Peace Corps training began in the summer of 1969 in an old Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in Morrison, Colorado. After three months of language and cultural studies, we journeyed to Babolsar on the Caspian Sea for three weeks of in-country training. It was fabulous there, especially compared to our previous accommodations. We even had sturgeon for dinner.

After that time, we were given cities/villages to visit to decide where we wanted to locate. We decided to visit Sanandaj, a 12-hour bus ride from Tehran in the western part of Iran. When we exited the bus at the main *maidan*, we heard shots. To our surprise, a group of Kurds was riding into town firing their rifles into the air and looking like ancient tribal people with their bandelaros, scarves wrapped around their heads, and ruddy complexions. The women wore colorful head-dresses with coins hanging from hats covered with dark printed chadors.

Many donkeys in Sanandaj carried fuel and you could hear the bells ringing and the call of “*naft*” (kerosene) for sale. The bazaar was a clay floor path cluttered with copper pots and lids, water pipes, bags of nuts, fruit, rugs, and tablecloths. It all seemed exciting and the adventure we were looking for. Our decision was made—we wanted to live in Sanandaj.

We moved there just as the previous Peace Corps volunteer was finishing up her two-year commitment. Pearse immediately went into culture shock and didn’t leave our house for two weeks. It was as if we had gotten into “buyers’ remorse.” Everything was so very different. We had been taught Farsi and nearly everyone spoke Kurdish. There were even whirling dervishes.

Once the previous Peace Corps volunteer left, her housemaid Parvaneh came to work for us. She would come in the morning and oftentimes her fingers were orange from having dyed her hair with henna the day before. We would greet Parvaneh while we finished our breakfast of a soft-boiled egg one morning, scrambled eggs another morning, or an egg over easy on the third day.

After having been in Sanandaj for several weeks, I noticed penetrating stares coming from beneath the black chadors of the Kurdish women when I went to the bazaar for groceries—eggs being one of the items. The bazaar’s egg baskets seemed to be almost empty and I wondered why there were not as many eggs as previously when I did my marketing.

It was not until a little later that I heard the rumor that the reason I did not have any children was the fact that I had an egg every morning. Parvaneh most assuredly had passed that information around the town and the rush was on to buy eggs!