KhabarNameh
خبر نامه

PEACE CORPS IRAN ASSOCIATION
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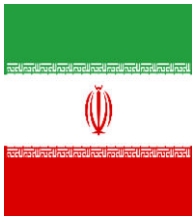
2023 CHICAGO CONFERENCE SPECIAL ISSUE

Congratulations, Genna.

You have told our story well and we are grateful.



Mobarak

Kheyli mamnun.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Jeanette Gottlieb (Noshahr, Hamadan, 1965-67)

Many thanks to all who attended the PCIA conference in Chicago. If you missed it or just want to review any of the sessions, please go to our website www.peacecorpsiran.org and click on "Conference Session Videos" in the middle of the home page. That will take you to the page where **Doug Schermer** has posted the videos. The Rubenstein Forum offered video and technical support to make the recordings possible.

A prime motive for holding the PCIA Conference in Chicago was to visit the museum at the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures (ISAC). Formerly known as the Oriental Institute, the museum features artifacts from excavations led by the ISAC in the 1930s. Those who were unable to attend the conference will find interesting information, and those who were there will find a good review and a link to the Institute website featuring photos of Persepolis taken during the 1930s excavations.

Doug has also posted a slide show of snapshots from Chicago. Unfortunately, we do not have videos of the reception where we honored Genna Wangsness for her history of the Peace Corps in Iran. We sold out of copies of her book at the conference, but autographed copies are still available. Please see the order form on Page 27. This issue of the *KhabarNameh* also features reviews and articles about the conference.

For those who attended, if you took pictures, please share them with us. If possible, please identify the people in each photo. They can be sent to the PCIA webmaster, **Doug Schermer** at doug@peacecorpsiran.org or to me at jeanette@peacecorpsiran.org.

Glenn Blumhorst, former president of the National Peace Corps Association, also addressed the group to introduce the Peace Corps Park planned for Washington, D.C. **Donna Shalala** (Mollasani, 1962-64) also gave a pitch for the park. Expect more news as things progress.

FROM THE EDITOR

Joan Gaughan (Rasht, Lahijan, 1964-66)

Chicago! Carl Sandburg's beloved "city of the big shoulders" did not disappoint. Indeed, one attendee called what may become our penultimate conference "exceptional," thanks to the conference organizers. They are: **Jeanette Gottlieb** (Noshahr, Hamadan, 1965-67), **Ken Opin (**Tehran, Semnan, Mashhad, 1964-66), **Kerry Segel (**Khonsar, 1969-71**), Doug Schermer** (Semnan, Shahrud, 1966-67), **Ed Seiders** (Noshahr, Chalus, 1967-69**), Jeff and Yvonne Gritzner** Ahwaz, 1962-64) and **William Spielberger (**Kashmar, 1968-70**).**

What struck me about this conference was not the gray hair (although there was plenty of that) but the almost palpable sense that the confidence we had as twenty-year-olds that we could make the world a better place has not only NOT faded but has shown to be almost ridiculously resilient. The first word of the first panel was "understanding" and **John Limbert** observed that

understanding Iran today is "very complicated" – and then the panel and the audience spent well over an hour trying to do just that. (View the video HERE.)

But it wasn't just that one panel. Beginning with the tribute paid to the volunteers in **Hossein Mahallati** and **Abbas Motlagh's** "cinematic immersion" on the first morning and throughout the conference, the attempt to understand, to learn more, to heal, and to build dominated every panel, every activity. Surrounded as we are by a culture that is at best indifferent to Iran and at worst downright hostile, a panel pondered how the arts could be used to create bridges between our two countries. Nobody thought to ask, "why bother?" The question was HOW.

And the attendees flocked to the ISAC to further understand the past of Iran, a country that most of their neighbors dismiss as a terrorist state or whatever. (See two videos HERE and HERE.)

The panel on what we left behind in Iran meshed with the film tribute paid on the first morning of the conference. And the last panel completed the circle. The PCIA Board believes that we not only left something worthwhile in Iran forty or fifty years ago, but that we still have something to give to the relationship between our two countries, our two peoples. (See the video HERE.)

So having said all this (or rather, written it), I have come to the conclusion that we aren't likely to ever quit trying to understand. Even when we think we've finally "got it," as **Doug Meyer** points out in his World Wide Web, we reach out to learn more. As **Fraser Lang** observes, we are still finding ways to serve others.

For this issue, I am deeply indebted to several people who covered the main sessions of the conference, especially to **Fraser Lang** and **Carolyn Yale.** I have been humbled and gratified by their generosity, patience, and kindness. Please read **Fraser's** "random thoughts" on the conference as well as **Carolyn's** poignant reflection on our "last cup of wine" together. To **Jennifer Seaver, John Salamack**, and to all those who sent photographs, many of which space did not allow for inclusion I am grateful.

As always, I am indebted to **Doug Schermer** who not only has also made available videos of the entire conference proceedings on the PCIA website but has also enhanced our understanding of what went into the writing of Genna's history of the years that changed so many of our lives.

And so, gentle reader, as always befarma'id.

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THE STORY BEHIND THE HISTORY

By Douglas Schermer, (Semnan, Shahrud, 1966-67) PCIA Webmaster

Our Chicago conference kicked off with a reception to celebrate a new book, ***Land Between Two Waters* : *The Peace Corps Fourteen Years in Iran,*** focused on Peace Corps Volunteers in Iran 1962-1976. This work by Genna Wangsness, PCIA Historian, tells the story of each Peace Corps group.

The nearly 600-page book is based on interviews, phone calls, and countless email exchanges and letters between Genna and those who shared their Peace Corps experiences.

How the book came to be is a story in and of itself.

I first met Genna in 2011 in Portland, Oregon, where she helped organize our first conference. After the decision was made to formally incorporate as a nonprofit, Genna declined to serve on the board but was willing to serve as PCIA Historian, a title that has focused her work over the years culminating in this book.

Who served the Peace Corps in Iran? That was one of the greatest challenges we faced in 2011. There was no comprehensive list of names, training groups, or where people had served. The National Peace Corps Association gave us a list of 600 names, only 300 of whom had valid email addresses. The official Peace Corps website reported 1748 volunteers in Iran but no names. Our task was clear.

Genna began searching for volunteers, soliciting lists of training groups from people she knew. After training switched to Iran, there were no more training group booklets or lists.

Genna and I collaborated on a spreadsheet of volunteers to which we added names and contact information. Following each conference, we were able to add more names to this list. We now have 1985 names in our spreadsheet of whom 1489 were volunteers and 73 were staff, while trainers and supporters of PCIA complete the list. After twelve years, we doubt there will be many additions.

On our website, www.peacecorpsiran.org, we created a searchable membership directory of basic information about Iran volunteers including training site, group number, years of service, service site, and program such as TEFL. Members can use that to search for each other but, for privacy reasons, must ask Genna or me for contact information. No other "country of service" affiliate of the National Peace Corps Association has created such an interactive list.

Genna currently keeps both the master spreadsheet, and the searchable website data current as new information comes in. Unfortunately, much of the new information involves reports of those who have died.

PCIA Historian. When **Mary Marks** (Kerman, 1964-66) launched the *KhabarNameh*, Genna submitted a column in each issue which contained short notices of those who had died. She continues to use the Internet to collect public obituaries of deceased volunteers. Those obituaries are available on our website under the Memorial Book subheading. (Click HERE.)

Genna also authored a series of articles about volunteers entitled *Historical Recollections*. Of the many articles she wrote, the one about the nine Peace Corps musicians who performed with the Tehran Symphony and other orchestras was perhaps most surprising to me.

I have posted all back issues of *KhabarNameh* to our digital archives linked through our website. (Click HERE.)

At the 2019 conference in San Diego, Genna reported her progress on this history of the Peace Corps. She appeared on the program with Dr. Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi, chair of the history department at California State University at Fullerton, who has researched federal archives and gathered oral interviews. (To view the video of this session, click HERE.)

I cannot estimate the amount of time Genna has invested in this undertaking. From my perspective, it has been a full-time project for her. She described her work this way:

> Where do I keep all the research I have done? The size of my main file cabinet is 24" D 35" W 30" H. Then there are stacks of files in cubby holes of bookcases and in binders. Books about Iran in general and books written by volunteers fill other cubbies. Binders in the closet filled with obits and originals collected, such as the training books, etc. There are boxes under my desk filled with papers and memorabilia volunteers have sent me. Also, a box filled with photos I've received. Half of our living room is my office, filled to the brim with PCIA. It took a lot to collect 14 years of history from scratch. And let me tell you, I'm not the neatest person. Every once in a while, I take a day to organize everything into more manageable piles.

At the Chicago conference we celebrated the conclusion of this momentous contribution to the legacy of the Peace Corps in Iran.

THE CONFERENCE REPORT
Introduction

By Fraser Lang (Isfahan, Tehran, 1968-70)

As you will glean from this report on the Chicago conference, the formal sessions provided wonderful content to ponder, and a great deal of information to be digested. Additionally, the opportunity to mingle with fellow attendees was equally as valuable.

A case in point is a story related to me by Ted Von Briesen, who visited Iran twenty years ago and witnessed an event that provides keen insight into the Iran of today. Crossing a busy Tehran street at a *maidan*, he observed a richly dressed mullah trying to hail a taxi. Much to his surprise no taxi would stop for the cleric. A gentleman nearby explained that mullahs refuse to pay taxi fares, considering it beneath their dignity to do so.

And so it was. We reminisced about the Iran we left behind and learned a great deal about contemporary Iran.

The nearly one hundred and forty former Peace Corps volunteers and friends who gathered in Chicago over Memorial Day weekend exhibited all the signs of aging that one would expect

from seventy and eighty year olds. White hair and canes were visible everywhere. In fact, John Limbert quipped that the average age was "deceased."

But those who convened for the two-day conference were undiminished in their enthusiasm for their service in Iran and keenly interested in learning more about the country where they "grew up" as one attendee said. A common theme was that those who attended had continued to find ways to serve others through employment or volunteer activities.

This conference report includes stories on individual sessions as reported by volunteer correspondents. All conference session videos are posted on our website. (Click HERE.)

UNDERSTANDING IRAN TODAY

By Carolyn Yale (Shiraz, 1974-76)

Moderator: Paul Barker, (Bidokht, Shiraz, Tehran, 1971-76) Editor, PCIA *Advocacy Bulletin*

Panelists: Assal Rad is a former Research Director of the National Iranian American Council as well as a Nonresident Fellow at the Eurasia Group Foundation, specializing in contemporary Iran, US foreign policy issues, and U.S.-Iran relations. She is the author of *The State of Resistance: Politics, Culture, and Identity in Modern Iran.,*

Behnam Ben Taleblu is a Senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies whose career has focused on arms control, nuclear non- proliferation, and Iran-specific issues such as sanctions and the foreign and security policies of the Islamic Republic.

John Limbert (Sanandaj,1964-66) has had a distinguished career in the U.S. Foreign Service. He is the author of *Negotiating with Iran: Wrestling with the Ghosts of History.*

From L to R: Assal Rad, Paul Barker, Behnam Ben Taleblu, John Limbert

Paul opened the session by asking the panel to consider a possible role for PCIA in the future viz., is there a place for the kind of diplomacy that has distinguished Peace Corps?

Here are highlights from the responses:

Relations between Iran and the U.S. are now adversarial, and mutual understanding diminishes with each year of continued diplomatic estrangement. I would add that Iran's isolation from the world press and a limited number of "embedded" observers reporting to Americans makes it easier to propagate hostile stereotypes about Iran. It is difficult to penetrate these negative attitudes and beliefs. Iranians' perceptions of the U.S., however, have tended to be more positive than Americans' view of Iran.

Many Iranian-Americans are not "tuned into" today's Iran. Some who emigrated around the time of the Revolution retain memories of Iran that don't match up with Iran today. A politically vocal set of Iranian-Americans would like to see Iran return to a government resembling that of the Pahlavi era. At the other end of the spectrum is the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), which, although it has been attacked for what some perceive as collaboration with the Iranian government, has supported human rights reforms in Iran, including the right of Iranian-Americans to travel freely there.

What does America have to offer Iran today? What leverage does the U.S. have?

Dr. Rad pointed out that the United States cannot credibly expect reforms in Iran while at the same time ignoring rights violations in our own country. In fact, the U.S. stance in the Middle East—and aimed at Iran in particular—is militaristic: arms trades and sales to allies and efforts to align the countries of the region against Iran. This is antithetical to diplomacy conducted with recognition of the legitimate interests of the negotiating parties.

Although the recent protests in Iran were sparked by women rejecting the hijab, this must be understood more generally as opposition to government repression.

One panelist suggested that the U.S. would do well to take a long-term view of Iran's political change rather than expect immediate fixes. John Limbert observed that Iran is a diverse nation, with a complex culture, thus things can be "unpredictable." He admitted to being "consistently wrong" in anticipating where Iran was headed: Who would have expected that an extremely conservative theocracy would supplant the Shah? Or that this theocracy would hang on so long? He added that talk of exploiting the differences among ethnic groups in order to weaken the government fails to appreciate Iran's strong national identity. The country of Iran has accommodated cultural and linguistic diversity historically and continues to do so. An example is current Iranian cinema that interweaves multiple languages.

The discussion turned to relations between the American and Iranian governments when Paul asked if there have been missed opportunities for diplomacy that one side or the other has failed to pick up on. Both sides can be faulted, but it is clear today that President Trump's withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has made matters worse. The agreement was working and perhaps promised sustained diplomacy in the future. Opportunities for dialog have diminished under the current governments in Iran and the United States.

If the panel did not home in directly on whether there's a future role for a Peace Corps Iran, the discussion did bring out the challenges to fostering our vision of understanding and diplomacy between Iranians and Americans. In the face of the discouraging (dismal?) political scene, there are opportunities for people-to-people engagement and cultural exchange are more promising. (To view this session, click HERE.)

AN ADDITIONAL NOTE

By Jennifer B. C. Seaver (Rasht, 1966-68)

Having been born to Iranian-American immigrants and having a Ph.D. in Persian Studies, Assal Rad felt confident she would understand Iran when she first traveled there twenty years ago. However, she quickly realized that she had grown up in a "conservative heritage bubble" where some individuals maintain negative views about present Iranian-American relations. By contrast, she said the volunteers she has met are usually positive when they talk about their Iranian experiences.

Behnam suggested that with a population of 80 million, it's impossible to be able to comprehend Iranians' divergent views of the USA, just as Americans may hold different opinions of Iran. At such watershed moments as 1953 when the CIA helped to overthrow Mossadegh, and the 1979 Iranian Revolution, as well as more recent times, he drew our attention to the Obama administration's signing on to the "Iran deal" and Trump's subsequent withdrawal from that agreement.

John also reminded us that Iran has survived for centuries both politically and culturally. He believes that the Iranian theocracy is already sowing the seeds of its own demise, particularly with regard to the role of women. His view is that a democratic and largely Iranian secular government will soon replace the theocracy.

In conclusion, during a lively conversation between the panelists and the audience, there was some disagreement about the roles of the JCPOA and NIAC (National Iranian American Council), but there was also a general acknowledgement that governmental perspectives are often at odds with their citizens. As Paul Barker wrote in the April PCIA *Advocacy Bulletin,* as long as the Iranian government's future remains unknown, the path to a suitable American-Iranian policy will probably remain problematic. (To view this session, click HERE.)

A CINEMATIC IMMERSION INTO IRAN

By John Salamack (Bojnoord, 1965-67)

Reflections are curious things. They can be nostalgic, stimulating, inspiring and evoke many other emotions. The film, *Peace Corps Iran,* produced by **Hossein Mahallati** and **Abbas Motlagh** shown at the opening of the conference, was many of these things. The filmmakers did an excellent job of tapping into the past and making it relevant in the present (and possibly the future). For those of us who experienced living in Iran decades ago, it was a notable trip down memory lane. The research that went into making the film had to be difficult to pursue but the end product was worth the pursuit. Eventually there will be a Farsi and an English version available. I look forward to watching it again.

A VISIT TO THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ANCIENT CULTURES (ISAC)

By Fraser Lang (Isfahan, Tehran, 1968-70)

Mehnoush Soroush

There were few if any attendees who could have defined *qanat* when they entered the lecture hall at ISAC on the beautiful campus of the University of Chicago, but at the end of the presentation by Mehnoush Soroush, Assistant Professor of Landscape Archaeology, they knew that it was an ancient system of deep underground tunnels and wells built in the Middle East to channel water dry lower region.

Based on her ongoing research, Soroush identified dozens of these water conduits, some still in use. She emphasized the obvious truth that water is essential to supporting civilization. And she acknowledged the genius of those who built these elaborate structures long ago. (To view her presentation, click HERE.)

Kirsten Neumann

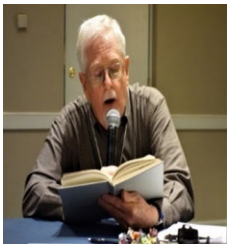
Soroush's presentation was followed by a video featuring Kirsten Neuman, Curator of the ISAC Museum. In addition to welcoming attendees to the Institute and describing its work, Neuman showed film footage and photographs of the excavation of Persepolis conducted by scholars from the University of Chicago nearly one hundred years ago. (To view her presentation, click HERE.)

Our group then toured the extensive exhibits of Persian, Egyptian, Babylonian, and other ancient civilizations' artifacts—a stunning collection of items. (To learn more about this collection please click HERE.)

USING ARTS AND LITERATURE TO ENHANCE CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

By Carolyn Yale (Shiraz, 1974-76)

Moderator: Kerry Segel (Khonsar, 1969-73)



Kerry Segel

Panelists: Cameron Cross is assistant professor of Iranian Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He teaches courses in Persian literature and Iranian studies, including medieval Persian literature, Iranian cinema, Rumi, romance in the Middle East, and modern Persian poetry and fiction.

Narimon Safavi is a Chicago-based entrepreneur and chief executive officer of Generative Multilogue, a commentator on public radio, and is an active supporter of Iranian arts and artists.

Poonah Shabani-Jadidi who participated in the conference via Zoom, is instructional professor of Persian at the University of Chicago. She teaches courses in Persian language and culture, Persian media, and Persian literature in translation.

Paul Sprachman is professor emeritus of Rutgers University where he taught Persian literature and language, and other courses in Middle East Studies. His major interest is translating Persian works, both medieval and modern. His recent focus has been translation of works related to the war between Iran and Iraq.

Franklin Lewis

The session opened with recognition of the legacy of the late **Franklin "Frank" Lewis**, an associate professor of Persian Language and Literature at the University of Chicago. His classes in Persian language and literature, medieval Islamic thought, Sufism, Baha'i studies, translation studies, and Iranian cinema reflected the remarkable scope of his interests. He is recognized as the foremost 20th-century scholar of the life and works of Jalal-al Din Rumi, culminating in his master work *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalal-al Din Rumi*. We viewed a brief video excerpted from Professor Lewis' speech in 2018 to the Theosophical Society of Chicago, titled "Rumi's Poetic Theology of Love."

Cameron Cross recounted that he was drawn to Persian studies by reading Herodotus, which placed the Persians in a historical context familiar to Western students. His interest piqued, he went on to reading literature such as the *Shah Nameh*. Iran PCVs can surely agree with his statement, "Iranian culture speaks for itself" given the opportunity. What is needed is "visibility and accessibility." It is important to put this culture on the map—indeed, a large map that displays the trans-regional heritage across the many countries that have absorbed and contributed to "Persian" culture. Suggesting that it is time to think of a global nexus of "world literature," Dr. Cross spoke of integrating the literature of Iran/Persia into world literature, so that you could say "Forough Farrokhzad is one of the most important poets of the century," without adding qualifiers such as "woman" or "Iranian." Or, as I like to think of it, put *Conference of the Birds* on the syllabus alongside *Canterbury Tales*.

All three panelists brought home the need for more English-language translations of Persian/Iranian literature. However, translation alone may not succeed in making the literature "accessible," that is, meaningful and interesting to foreign readers. This is especially true of poetry. Pouneh Shabani compared approaches taken by well-known translators of Persian poetry. The sound of a poem and nuanced meanings that words and phrases carry make poems virtually impossible to replicate in another language. The range of English-language versions of Rumi attests to the intangible complexities of his poems.

Paul Sprachman offered an example of work meant to reach a receptive audience (U.S. war vets). In the hope of eliciting readers' interest and sympathy, he has translated "literature of resistance" coming from young men drafted to serve in the Iran-Iraq war. He has also received requests from Iranians for translations of English-language books.

For lack of time, the session could not do justice to Iranian cinema and other arts, but Habib Akhmadzadeh spoke of commitment to connect Iranian culture and arts with other countries. He is planning an event in Chicago this September that will highlight Iranian women. An added note: for those interested, look into the arts event held in the California Bay Area that brought together talented Iranian-American artists and poets (all women). (To view the session on YouTube, click HERE.)

LEAVING SOMETHING WORTHWHILE BEHIND

By Fraser Lang (Isfahan, Tehran, 1968-70)

Moderator: Richard Eaton is a professor of history at the University of Arizona

Panelists: Eden Naby Frye is an Assyrian-Iranian who has written many books on Assyrian culture and has devoted much of her life to promoting the understanding and preservation of Assyrian culture.

Barbara Bowman is an early childhood development expert who was one of the founders of the Erikson Institute for The Advanced Study in Child Development and has served as a consultant in that field.

Richard Eaton

Richard Eaton opened the proceedings with reference to the saying that of the thousands of acorns dropped from an oak tree, some become mighty oaks. And so, it is with the contributions of individuals who live to serve others and drop their own "acorns" in fertile ground.

The session focused not on Peace Corps service but rather on the contributions of individuals and organizations who predated by many decades the arrival in Iran of Peace Corps volunteers.

When Eaton arrived in Tabriz in 1962, Iran was already a household word for his family. His great-grandfather had traveled to Persia in 1872 to preach and Eaton's grandmother was actually born in Tabriz. Eaton's own parents were medical missionaries for a decade beginning in 1958. The family legacy of dropping acorns was already ninety years old when Eaton arrived for his Peace Corps assignment.

Eden Naby Frye gave a compelling account of educational and medical missionaries who worked in Iran from the middle of the nineteenth century. She related a fascinating story of the publication of the *Emancipation Proclamation* in Farsi shortly after being issued by Abraham Lincoln in January of 1863. In fact, she showed a copy of a letter sent to Lincoln by an American missionary informing him of that fact.

Barbara Bowman told of arriving in Iran with her physician husband in the 1950s knowing not a word of Farsi and adjusting to life in a culture of which she had no previous knowledge. As her husband worked in Namazi Hospital in Shiraz for six years, Bowman would learn much more about her host country and grow to admire its people and history. The now ninety-four-year-old Bowman gave birth in Shiraz to a daughter, today well known as Valerie Jarrett, friend and advisor to Barack Obama.

American contributions to the Iranian people over many decades laid the foundation for a warm welcome for Peace Corps volunteers when they arrived in 1962. (To view the video, click HERE.)

PEACE CORPS IN IRAN: THE PERSIAN PERSPECTIVE

By Fraser Lang (Isfahan, Tehran, 1968-70)

Moderator: **Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi** is a professor of history at California State University, Fullerton.

Panelists: **Vida Bourbour** is a native of Hamadan. She served as a language trainer in Ann Arbor and Hamadan.

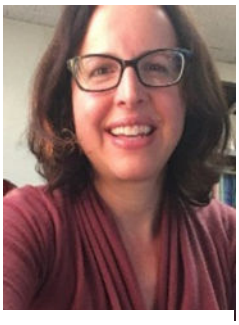
Ali Fakharzadeh is a computer scientist and electrical engineer and taught in Morrison, CO, in 1969. He is a native of Tehran.

Parvaneh Limbert is originally from Sanandaj. She had a teaching career and trained Peace Corps volunteers in language and culture in both the U.S. and Iran between 1967 and 1972. Later she was consular officer for the U.S. State Department in the Middle East and Africa.

Mostafa Rahbar grew up in Semnan where his parents hosted eight Peace Corps volunteers. In Tehran he served as a teacher at the Iran-America Institute where he worked with other Peace Corps volunteers.

Taqi Sagafi-Nejad is a professor emeritus of Loyola University Maryland where he taught and published in the field of International Business.

Hossein Aghai was a translator in Shiraz and roomed with Peace Corps volunteers in Shiraz from 1969 to 1973.



Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi

The panelists, all native Iranians now living in the United States, were asked about their experience with Peace Corps and the volunteers they came to know. Vida described coming to the States to study English in Tennessee and her surprise at the racial prejudice in this country. After Hamadan, America seemed foreign indeed.

Mostafa parlayed an interest in languages into a career. While growing up in Semnan, listening to the BBC and VOA helped him learn English. He was introduced to the Peace Corps when volunteers lived in his home in Semnan. The volunteers attest to the lasting friendships that grew out of this experience.

Parvaneh commented that for some Peace Corps volunteers their experience in Iran led to careers in Iranian studies and language. As a Farsi teacher she noted that the language is more difficult than it may appear because of nuanced meanings of words and phrases.

Taqi, also a Farsi teacher for Peace Corps, noted that both Americans and Iranians, and the respective nations, benefitted from Peace Corps. He lamented that this shared experience is passing away.

Ali added that there is still a memory of Peace Corps in Iran and that Peace Corps is a good model for cross-cultural understanding. He would like to see renewal of programs that give Iranians the chance to come to the U.S. and live here for a while, and for Americans to live in Iran. He urged volunteers to "write down what you saw in Iran."

Hossein learned English through Peace Corps volunteers and became a trainer living with volunteers in-country. He said that this experience impressed on him that the world is much broader than Iran. With this, he became interested in other cultures and the people there. We need to foster connectedness at the cultural level. During discussion additional topics came up including the observation that in-country training was definitely more effective than training at a site in the U.S.

The panelists had varied feelings about working during the Shah's "White Revolution." The Shah may have had good intentions but he "did not respect the Constitution" to promote democracy.

There have been productive ties between Iranian and American universities, for example, the University of Pennsylvania and (at the time) Pahlavi University. Could academic exchanges be renewed? Under what conditions could/should Peace Corps return to Iran? Parvaneh noted that the Iranian government must accept and respect Peace Corps. She added: Iran has seen difficult days, but we have seen better, and hope for better. (To view the video of this session, click HERE.)

THE FUTURE OF PCIA: A DIALOGUE AND AUDIENCE SURVEY

By Fraser Lang (Isfahan, Tehran, 1968-70) and Bill Brandon (Shiraz, 1964-66)

Moderators: Bill Brandon (Shiraz, 1964-66) and Chuck Kaminski (Kermanshah, 1969-71)

Chuck Kaminski

Bill Brandon

As the final session of the conference, dozens of attendees gathered to ponder the future of the Peace Corps Iran Association (PCIA). That may seem strange on the heels of a successful conference that drew nearly one hundred and forty attendees. But, as has been noted above, the overwhelming preponderance of aging attendees suggests that common sense has determined this course. The session was designed to provide the Board of Directors with guidance in implementing the PCIA strategic plan as the core membership of Peace Corps volunteers and staff age out.

Over the past many months a Task Force of twenty-eight people, led by Board members Bill Brandon and Charles Kaminski has considered three basic questions. The session was designed to solicit input from the membership as the Board confronts three major decisions.

1. If PCIA is to cease existence, when should the end date be?
2. Does it make sense for PCIA to merge with another like-minded organization to continue its mission?
3. Should PCIA launch an endowment campaign to produce $100,000 or more to memorialize its purpose?

On Question #1, there was discussion of the year 2026 which marks the fifty-year anniversary of the departure of the Peace Corps from Iran as the end date for PCIA. The three and a half years (from May 2023) would allow the Board sufficient time for adequate deliberation on other alternatives that might be present to the Board. It would also allow for continuation of the practice of convening the membership every two years. Some favored 2025 when a park in Washington, DC. is planned to be dedicated to honor Peace Corps volunteers.

On Question #2, which received twice as much time for discussion as the other two, elicited very mixed feelings about whether PCIA should merely execute a planned phaseout, or seek a suitable partner with which to merge that would welcome our members and continue some of our activities.

On Question #3, while some favored embarking on a campaign to raise an endowment, many said that their willingness to contribute would depend entirely on what the funds would be used for.

In the closing minutes of the dialogue a one-page survey was distributed to those present. Eighty-three attendees responded to the six questions, and they were also invited to provide open-ended comments which will be sent to the Board members for consideration.

TABLE 1. Attendee Survey Responses after Dialogue about the Future of PCIA Panel

I. I support the proposed timeline for closing down PCIA in 2026.

Strongly Agree	39	
Agree	14	Total Favorable= 53 (64%)
Neutral/No Opinion	15	
Disagree	4	
Strongly Disagree	10	Total Unfavorable= 14 (17%)
No Response	1	

II. PCIA should fold into another organization.

Strongly Agree	11	
Agree	11	Total Favorable= 22 (27%)
Neutral/No Opinion	23	
Disagree	16	
Strongly Disagree	15	Total Unfavorable= 31 (37%)
No Response	7	

III. PCIA should organize another gathering before closing down.

Strongly Agree	34	
Agree	19	Total Favorable= 53 (64%)
Neutral/No Opinion	17	
Disagree	4	
Strongly Disagree	5	Total Unfavorable= 9 (11%)
No Response	4	

IV. I am willing to help organize such a gathering.

Yes 7 Maybe 32 No 38 No Response 6

V. We should try to fund an endowment as part of ensuring our legacy and continuing our work.

Strongly Agree	22	
Agree	18	Total Favorable= 40 (48%)
Neutral/No Opinion	20	
Disagree	9	
Strongly Disagree	9	Total Unfavorable= 18 (22%)
No Response	5	

VI. I am likely to contribute $100 or more to an endowment to support worthy goals that will further our legacy and work.

Yes 59 Maybe 11 No 12 No Response 1

In summary, obviously no decisions were reached and the proceedings failed to show an overwhelming consensus on the future of PCIA. However, the survey seems to have several clear messages for the PCIA Board.

- The membership gathered in Chicago strongly endorse the timeline already tentatively adopted by the Board.
- They also clearly want an opportunity to attend one more conference before ending PCIA and the discussion revealed considerable support for one held in the Washington DC area.
- There is also support for establishing an endowment buttressed by a willingness to provide financial support that is much greater than the number who expressed an abstract interest in favor of establishing an endowment.
- Finally, those present did not favor the effort to find a welcoming nonprofit that would absorb PCIA, its members, and at least some of its ongoing programs.

Now the Board must continue to weigh decisions and may seek additional ways to gain member input.

ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Edited by Doug Meyer (Semnan, 1967-68)

Recently I had a talk with Joan Gaughan, my editor, and the conversation went something like this:

ME: Today I stumbled upon a YouTube tutorial, *Why Iran is Attacking Ukraine Now,* that explains in non-political terms pretty much how we got from a happy time with a presumably passive people under the Shah to the rather miserable state of relations today. Today, Iran is again a major player in world affairs. But the chess board is not the same as it was when we were there. Iran is now allied with Russia in a way that none of us in those almost forgotten years could have predicted.

EDITOR: I've watched the video a couple of times and, at first, my reaction was, "Doesn't everybody know all this?" But …no, they probably don't. And if it hadn't been for the work I did on the Shuster book, I wouldn't have known the details either.

ME: I had no idea that such coordinated actions between Russia and Iran are involved in the Russia-Ukraine War. I should have. Nor was I aware of the place of Syria in that relationship. Nor had I seen how any of China's actions could impact Iran's relations with Ukraine.

(View the video by clicking HERE.)

RANDOM THOUGHTS

By Fraser Lang (Isfahan, Tehran, 1968-70)

One speaker observed that the Iranian perceptions of America date from 1953 when the U.S. played a key role in the overthrow of Mossadegh and American perceptions of Iran date from the 1979 occupation of the American embassy in Tehran. These events are ingrained in the memories of the two populations and are the underlying basis for Iran-America relations.

Another speaker observed that Iran is a country of 85 million people and incredibly diverse in terms of religion, ethnic background, and regional customs. Yet we persist in the belief that this is a monolithic society.

While the consensus when we served in Iran was that the Shah was an autocratic ruler with few positive attributes, the perception of the former ruler appears to have shifted. There was a recognition of the positive changes he sought in freedom for women and sending Iranian volunteers to promote education and health care. His major mistake, however, was his desire to turn Tehran into a world class city and too much of his investment was centered in the capital city thereby starving the rest of the country from resources. And he did not follow the constitution. That said, there is no appetite in Iran for a return of the monarchy.

John Limbert said that speaking reasonably about Iran in the United States doesn't generate compliments but instead opens one to attacks.

What if the current government of Iran falls. Who would replace it? Would it necessarily be any better? Many once sought to see the Shah gone and looked for improvements. In fact, the situation got much worse.

American politicians decry the loss of rights for women in Iran at the same time they work to limit rights for women in America.

A woman who was born in the United States to Iranian parents, traveled to Iran several years ago. She carefully covered her hair with a scarf and dressed conservatively. When her cousins greeted her at the airport in Iran, they were horrified and made her discard her modest attire to look more like them.

No culture on the planet is perfect. There are shortcomings in every culture.

Countless attendees observed that Peace Corps service changed their lives, their goals, and their view of other cultures. They also wondered what effect we had on our Iranian hosts.

REFLECTIONS

What Did We Hear in the Panels?

By Carolyn Yale

Although conference panels did not address the question directly, discussions seemed to assume that in the foreseeable future there are no prospects for dialog through governmental channels. In fact, politics puts people advocating for peaceful relations with Iran on the defense. Almost all of us have experienced the difficulty of discussing "Iran"—even if our intent is with reference to the people and culture—without being quickly tuned out, or worse. What kind of "diplomacy" is promising? What is the timeframe, what would be the first positive steps, or, playing defense, what can be done to hold the line?

Panelists mentioned cultural/professional exchanges, through universities and NGOs. As the panel on arts and literature drove home, Iranian culture "speaks for itself "if given the opportunity. These days, I suspect many Iranian-Americans do not publicly self-identify with Iran. My hometown (Oakland) is open to Iranian-American events (arts, holidays, etc.…). What's the situation elsewhere in the U.S.? Can PCIA (or its designated successor(s)) support and celebrate Iranian culture and heritage? Consider the need for translation and distribution of Iranian literature: Is this something we might support? Online? How do "we" translate across cultures? And can we communicate outside the circles of academia and bibliophiles with insatiable curiosity about other cultures and places, to other American readers and audiences?

These are some of the challenging pathways mentioned at the conference. I personally am fascinated by the challenge of cross-cultural translation—not just literature, but translations that suggest what another culture means, how people think and express themselves—a glimpse into other ways of understanding and communicating experience. I believe this is an essential part of

the PC experience, and if there is any way to simulate this experience short of being “in Iran” I’d support it, even on a small scale. It’s the kind of project needed these days, not only vis-a-vis other countries, but here in the U.S., even across states, regions, cities, neighborhoods.

PHOTO GALLERY

Iran 1

Left to right: Jeff Gritzner, Dick Easton, Donna Shalala, Allen Clutter, Dee Fink, John Lorentz.

Iran 4

Front row L to R: Nancy Leonardson, Ann Taffee, Jan Green, Leslie Miller, Vida Bourbour, Eden Naby Frye. Back row: John Limbert, Gene Leonardson, Ken Opin, John Newton, Mary Marks, Kathy MacLeod.

Ken Opin with his former student and lifelong friend, Mostafa Rahbar.

Iran 6

Front row, Left to right: Kirsti Adkins, Jane Adair, Jeanette Gottleib, Sally Moskol, Genna Wangsness, Peg Von Briesen. Back row: Edward (Pete) Russell, Lynn Russell, Michael Hillman, Ted Van Briesen, John Krauskopf, John Salamack.

Skip Auld (Mahallat, 1973-74) and his son, Patrick, at the Mets/Cubs game. The Mets lost.

Iran 18

This photo was submitted by Neil Hart who worked hard to get this group to Chicago..

Here is the key to who is who in the photograph, from left to right:
Top Level: John Metz, Dorohty Pritchard, Neil Hart, Sid Robinson.

Bottom Level, back row: Howard Goode, Steven Ormenyi, Eden Frye,Tom Putnam, Kayvan and Stephen Freeman, Ed and Stella Seiders, Réka Goode, Jerry Thiebolt.

Bottom Level, front row: David Pritchard, Mary Jane Ross, Pamella Cavanna, Kendall Dudley, Cathi Clark, Jim and Cathi Lamm.

A LAST PASS AT THE WINE

By Carolyn Yale

We move slowly these days,
unable to follow the storyline to its end.
But we know how it began,
how it might end if we could write it.
This may be a last chance for reunion
before our testimony is erased.

From the top floor of the Rubenstein
we watch trees twist in a hostile Chicago wind.
We can't recall when the summer has been so late in coming.
Warmed by cabernet
we share memories of Iran a half century past.
For this occasion we exchange stories
as if the coinage of the old regime still holds,
as if gardens still ring Shiraz, as if
a furnace of asphalt has not engulfed their beauty
and the attar that heralded summer
has not turned bitter.

Kerman, Teheran, Sari...
where were we in those years
when youth and hope seemed
inexhaustible, and the flames
of Vietnam were oceans distant?
What has become
of the innocent clamor of tinsmiths
and murmur of women in line
to buy nan plucked hot from the oven?
What of the friends who took us into their lives?
Have their children been swept into war?

What becomes of a world where
traffic has no fixed lanes
and there is no fixed price for worldly things--
but generosity is abundantly free?

What has become of the peacemakers?
What concessions are demanded these days
what surrender
without a second offer?

What has become of our country
that these people are now the enemy?
We knew in our time to brush stones
from the morning bread.

We take a last pass at the wine, glasses
balanced tentatively, canes in hand.
The evidence seems incontrovertible,
the conclusion incomprehensible.

DOOREH-ye KETAB

By Jackie Spurlock (Abadeh, Riz/ZarrinShahr, 1974-76) and Jim Goode (Tuyserkan, 1968-71)

Here is the list of titles chosen by you, our Dooreh members, to be read and discussed in the remaining months of 2023:

July 12 - Elghanavan, Shahrzad. *Titan of Tehran: From Jewish Ghetto to Corporate Colossus to Firing Squad.* (2021)

September 13 - Ghazvinian, John. *America and Iran: A History, 1720 to the Present.* (2021)

November 8 - Krauskopf, John, ed. *Memories and Insights: Iran Through the Eyes of PCVs*. (2021)

Meetings are held on Zoom at 5:00 p.m. Pacific (8:00 p.m. Eastern). Almost all of these authors have agreed to join us for the meetings. (Does anyone have contact information for Shahrzad Elghanavan?) These titles are all available on Amazon as well as from other sources, including your public library. Feel free to start reading now!

If you have not previously participated in a Dooreh session, contact doug@peacecorpsiran.org to receive meeting announcements and Zoom invitations.

Questions? Contact Jackie Spurlock (jackie@peacecorpsiran.org) or Jim Goode (jim@peacecorpsiran.org).

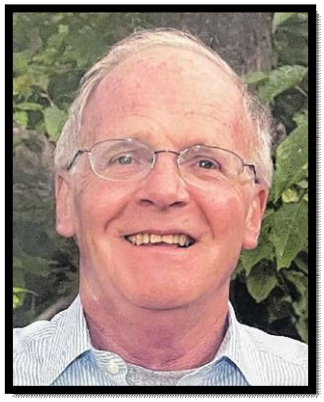
Correction

In the February 2023 issue, there was a mistake in the “Aya Midanastid?” story on page 5. Dari is the official language of Afghanistan, not Pakistan where Urdu and English occupy that spot. Thanks to Bill Beeman for bringing this to our attention.

IN MEMORIAM

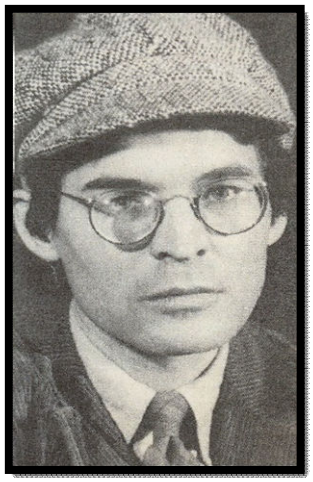
By Genna Stead Wangsness (Shiraz, Tehran 1965-1971)

Jay R. Crook died in his sleep on January 28, 2023, at the age of 91, in Tucson, Arizona. Born in Freeport, NY, on December 29, 1931, Jay served in the Korean War for two years in the Army after graduating with honors from high school. He obtained a bachelors from the University of Dacca after moving to Pakistan, and later a masters and doctorate in Iranian Studies from the University of Tehran. Jay joined the Peace Corps in 1962, becoming a field officer in East Pakistan. In 1964, he transferred to Iran, serving as a field officer, director of the Shiraz regional office, and deputy director under Paul Zimmerman in Tehran. Jay spent seventeen years in Iran, including seven with Peace Corps. He was fluent in Farsi, Arabic, and several other languages. Serving as an English teacher during the Iranian Revolution, he later wrote *The Burnt City, a Novel of Iran on the Eve of Revolution*. *Ambling Through Life*, a collection of his short stories, poetry, and other writings, includes a list of his many scholarly publications. Jay's survivors include two nephews.



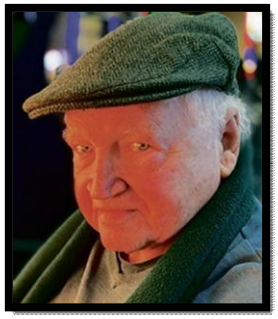
Robert P. Higgins died on February 7, 2023, in Troy, NY. Born in Lackawanna, NY, he was raised in Buffalo. He earned his bachelor's degree from Fordham University in 1971 with a double major in communications and art history. He worked through college learning welding, casting, and modeling of large sculptures. After college, he joined the Peace Corps and was posted in Tehran working with Iran 41's Community Welfare Centers program delivering art-related therapy and technical skills with patients with special needs. In 1980, he accepted a position with Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, settling in Troy and working as an analyst at the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services for twenty-five years, before retiring in 2014. Robert is survived by his wife of forty-one years, Eiden Beirne, daughter Clare and her husband Timmy, siblings, and many nieces and nephews.

Christine Jacobson Nelson, died on February 21, 2023, at the age of 81 in Minnesota. A Chicago native, she attended high school in Minnesota, was an exchange student in Switzerland, and graduated from Stanford University majoring in history. At the age of twenty-six she joined Iran 19 and taught in Arak. After living in New York City for many years, she moved back to Minnesota where she met her husband Allen Nelson, who survives her.

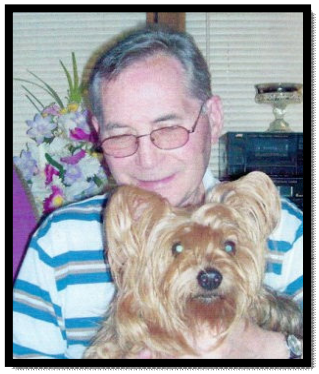


William J. Mason died peacefully on January 16, 2023, at St. Andrew's Residential Centre in Montreal, Canada, where he received seven years of care following a stroke. Born in New York in 1942, he graduated with an AB and MA in English from Fordham University. Joining TEFL Iran 17 in 1967, he taught one year at the University of Tehran, returned home to Leslie Busch, an Iran 17 trainee. Moving to Canada for teaching jobs, he married Leslie in October of 1969, spending fifty-three years in a marriage that was "one of the great ones." Bill spent a forty-year career at Dawson College in Montreal teaching Literature and Art History. Bill, a well-known comics historian, and Leslie were members of the choir at St. Philip's Anglican Church. In addition to Leslie, Bill is survived by his sister Kathleen, brother Edward, and their families. Bill was cremated and his ashes scattered in Central Park, as he was often homesick for his native Manhattan.

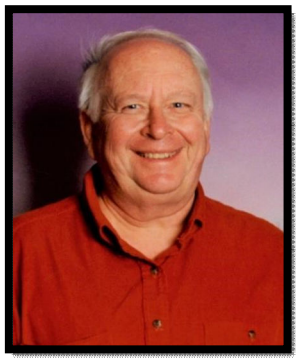
Sandra Stewart Mullen, age 79, of Spartansburg, PA, formerly of Dallas, TX, passed away April 25, 2022, at her home. Sandy was trained as a psychiatric nurse at Baylor Medical Center in Dallas, TX. As a member of Iran 21, she served as a public health nurse in Babol. On August 7, 1970, she and James M. Mullen of Iran 22 married at the Community Chapel in Tehran, her mother among the wedding guests. Nancy Hoovler was matron of honor. Nancy Howe and Cathy Clark participated as bridesmaids. David Hoovler served as best man and ushers were Dale Howe and Harry Conklin. For over two decades, Sandy treated young women in the Eating Disorder Program at Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas, TX. Her book, *DAUGHTERS OF ADDICTION*, was awarded a bronze medal in mental health publications. Sandy is survived by her husband, Dr. James Mullen; sons, Patrick, Michael and Sean Mullen; several grandchildren; and a brother, Richard Stewart.



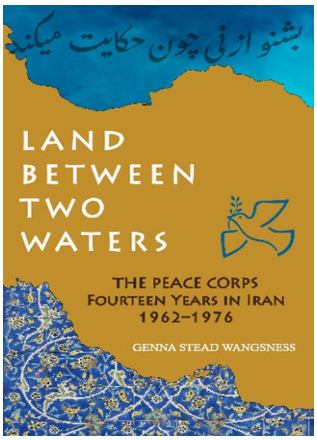
James Martin Mullen died unexpectedly on February 4, 2023, at the age of 88. In 1969, James joined Peace Corps with an MA in Psychology from DePaul University after resigning from the priesthood, teaching psychology at Pahlavi University in Shiraz as a member of Iran 22. On August 7, 1970, he and Sandra Ann Stewart of Iran 21were married in Tehran. Post Peace Corps, he received a PhD in Psychology from North Carolina State University and worked as a therapist. A spiritual and philosophical person, he enjoyed reading, ideas, and the contemplative life. He was known for his sense of humor, wit, and charm. He is survived by three sons, Patrick, Michael, and Sean, their spouses, eight grandchildren, and a sister, Sandra, predeceased him.



John Calvin Perovich passed away on December 6, 2022, at a nursing home in Billings, Montana. Born in Wasta, South Dakota, on January 2, 1935, John was three weeks shy of his 88th birthday. Two years after graduating high school, John enlisted in the US Navy and was assigned to the SS Tanner, serving for 2 ½ years, surveying the Mediterranean ports. This experience is where he developed his love for traveling. John obtained a BA in English Literature, and a masters in ESL. He was also a Fulbright Scholar at Istanbul Technical University in Istanbul, Turkey. In 1966, he joined Iran 10 and served in Fumon. For ten years after that, he taught in Tehran, until the Revolution. He worked later in Billings at the Yellowstone Art Museum, and taught English at the University of Montana. John is survived by his sister Pauline, niece Pamela Fike, and other nieces and nephews.



Michael Francis Sarka died on February 9, 2023, from dementia. Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, his parents worked full time for the railroads, so as an only child he spent his summers on a farm in Gratiot, Wisconsin, surrounded by cousins. After attending St. Thomas College, he joined the Peace Corps, serving in Jaban at the southern foot of Mt. Damavand from 1967-69. During that time, he was editor of the Iran Peace Corps magazine*, Shalug Nameh [Book of Confusion]*. Post Peace Corps he worked as a recruiter out of Los Angeles and helped with relief work following the 1970 Ancash earthquake that occurred on May 31 off the coast of Peru, including organizing the West Coast portion of Pat Nixon's Air Force 2 relief efforts. It was during this time that he met his wife, Rosemary, the Western Representative of the American Freedom from Hunger Foundation. Mike had a long and storied career in the travel and tourism industry, eventually moving to Santa Cruz, California, where he continued to work around the country. Mike was known for his engaging optimism and enthusiasm as well as a quirky sense of humor. Mike is survived by his beloved cousins and Rosemary, his wife of fifty-two years.



Land Between Two Waters:

The Peace Corps Fourteen Years in Iran

By Genna Wangsness, PCIA Historian

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