

“I am Crying with Joy”: Finding Miss Meena

By Joan Gaughan (Rasht/Lahijan, 1964-66)

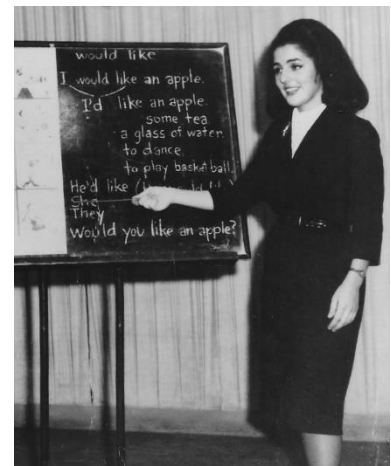
The lady who came to her English class at Ferdowsi School in Abadan had fair skin and dark hair and wore red lipstick. Her name was “Miss Mina” and she was from something called “*Gorah-e- Solh*” which meant “Peace Corps” and the Peace Corps was from the United States. Iran Kashkooli (*left, in the photo*) loved “Miss Mina” and memorized all the songs “Miss Mina”



taught them, including “My Old Kentucky Home”. She even knew her favorite food was *gormeh sabzi*. “Miss Mina” made Iran and her classmates “fall in love with the United States”— so much so that years later in 1973, when Iran came to the United States to enter San Jose State University in California, the adjustment was not difficult. Iran married a wonderful American, but never forgot “Miss Mina” and talked about her so much and with such affection that eventually one of their sons also joined the Peace Corps and served in China.

“Miss Mina” was Lynne Meena (Abadan/Rasht, 1964-66) who thought she had the best job in the Peace Corps. She taught English three days a week to 7th and 8th grade girls in two of Abadan’s largest high schools. Iran Kashkooli was among those hundreds of students. Lynne also created an English Teachers Association of Abadan that met weekly with thirty Iranian teachers—men and women—to help them teach English through a method she learned in Peace Corps training at the University of Michigan.

The local television station invited Lynne to teach English three nights a week. According to the U.S. Consulate in Khorramshahr, nearly 10,000 Iranians watched her 30-minute program in their homes, in teahouses, and in the bazaar in order to learn American English. The show reached southwest Iraq and Kuwait. In short, Lynne became a local celebrity, donating her “salary” to help the schools buy video equipment. During the summer, when Abadan temperatures soared to 120 degrees, the Peace Corps sent Lynne to Rasht to help three other volunteers teach arts and crafts.



The television show

Over many years, Iran Murphy turned to Facebook and Google hoping to find “Miss Mina”. Finally, in 2018, her son came across the Peace Corps Iran website’s “contact us” button that forwards messages to webmaster Doug Schermer, who read this email:

Is there a picture or list of peace corps volunteers who served in Iran in 1962 to 1964.[She had the wrong dates.] I want to find my teacher/volunteer Miss Mina. I don’t remember her name, but we called her Miss Mina. I loved Miss Mina and I wonder if I can find her and know more about her. She changed my life as a little girl.



Lynn, Iran and Rostin

Together with PCIA historian Genna Wangsness, they found Lynne Meena living in Louisville, Kentucky, and, with additional help from Mary Simms at the Peace Corps regional office in Oakland, CA, a reunion was arranged. Mary Simms contacted CBS News, which sent a video crew to interview Lynne when she arrived at the San Francisco airport with her husband, George, on February 13. The next day, Valentine’s Day, at a friend’s San Francisco home, Iran’s son Rostin, with tears in his own eyes, watched as his mother, “crying with joy”, and her beloved “Miss Mina,” who is “still so beautiful and young”, embraced each other.



Lynne with students

The story became national news when the CBS Morning News broadcast their reunion the next day. That a major media source decided that Peace Corps service was newsworthy is a powerful indication that, despite the tension that now exists between our two countries, what we tried to do in Iran was important. The persistence of Iran Murphy to find a beloved teacher from fifty-six years ago demonstrates the life-long impact of Peace Corps service on people, including sometimes their own family. In what she describes as something “very Peace Corpsy,” Lynne’s brother David served with the Peace Corps in Tanzania and her step-grandson Ben Rapp will head for Peace Corps service in Tanzania this summer.

You can view that video on this URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJD-HaCZqys>

Click on the “like” button to increase Peace Corps Iran’s visibility. You will notice a slight error. The clip has the Peace Corps leaving Iran in 1972 rather than 1976.

The story of another student’s search to find a teacher from Iran was featured on our Peace Corps Iran website in 2017 and can be accessed at <https://peacecorpsiran.org/finding-mr-paul/>