

KhabarNameh

خبرنامه



Newsletter of the Peace Corps Iran Association

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FROM THE EDITOR

Joan Gaughan (Rasht/Lahijan, 1964-66)

Jackie Spurlock likes doors. When she, **Doug Schermer** and **Genna Wangness** opened the door to the PCIA, they opened a new door for me, too. For that, I am grateful to those three but also to the various Boards with whom I have served who have been unbelievably generous and kind. I've been blessed with columnists who have made my job easy—**Dave Devine**, “**Rom Rom**” and **Chef Babri**, **Genna Wangness**, and **Jackie Spurlock** as well as the many contributors whose intelligent, serious, and sometimes funny articles have made this the funnest job I've ever had.

Most of all, I am grateful for the patience, technical help and friendship of **Doug Schermer**, his wife, **Shirley**, and **Katie Hug** who make the newsletter look pretty good.

Doug has been more than a co-editor. He's been a stalwart friend and sometimes, a confidante. Assuming that, again, he will make the photographs “stick,” I dedicate this final issue to him.

And so, gentle reader, for the last time, befarma'id.

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FINAL MESSAGE FROM THE PCIA PRESIDENT

By Chuck Kaminski (Kermanshah, 1969-71)

Salaam. As we approach June 30, 2026, and the closing of the Peace Corps Iran Association, I find myself reflecting not on an ending, but on something far more enduring.

Between 1962 and 1976, each of us stepped into a country that welcomed us—not as visitors, but as neighbors, colleagues, and friends. We lived in Iranian communities, learned the language, and experienced a culture defined by generosity, dignity, and deep human connection. Those experiences did not end when we left Iran. They stayed with us—and, in many ways, shaped the course of our lives.

The Association was born decades later out of a simple desire: to find each other again. To reconnect. To remember. To keep alive something that mattered. And we did that—through gatherings, conversations, writing, and shared witness to history as it continued to unfold. (See “In the Beginning”, page 3.)

Now, as we close this chapter, the world feels complicated—perhaps more so than ever. Many of us watch events in Iran with concern, sorrow, and hope. But if our time there taught us anything, it is this: governments change, politics shift, history turns—but the humanity we encountered endures.

What we carry forward is not an organization.

It is a bond.

A bond with each other.

A bond with the Iranian people.

A bond with a time in our lives when we chose to show up, to serve, and to learn.

That does not end on June 30, 2026.

It lives on in the friendships we maintain, the stories we tell, the perspectives we bring to a complicated world, and the quiet ways we continue to build understanding—person to person.

Thank you for being part of this extraordinary community. Thank you for what you gave, and for what you continue to carry forward.

I would also like to thank the past and current Board members of the Peace Corps Iran Association—many of whom have been with us from the very beginning. Their dedication, energy, and willingness to give of their time made possible everything PCIA has achieved: our conferences, book discussions, advocacy bulletins, the *KhabarNameh*, and *From the Field*. Without their efforts, none of this would have been possible—and the legacy they helped build will continue to inspire all who served in Iran.

With gratitude—and with confidence that what we built together does not disappear – “may your shadow never grow less.”

Sayeh-toon kam nasheh سایه تون کم نشه

In the Beginning

(As told to Chuck Kaminski by Jackie Spurlock)

It started when **Jackie Spurlock** discovered **Doug Schermer** and **Peter Russell** on a (NPCA) social media page. They soon had the idea of hosting a dinner/reunion for Iran Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) in Portland, thinking they might attract thirty or forty people. Peter, who had founded Friends of Iran in 2003, eventually withdrew, but Doug and Jackie began planning in the fall of 2010. **Genna Wangsness** joined in early 2011 as the third major planner, and the three of them worked together from February to August 2011, when the event took place.

“It became evident that there was interest and support to make it a 3-day event with speakers and a banquet.” Jackie was a member of a local advocacy organization called the American Iranian Friendship Council (AIFC), which allowed the organizers to use their 501(c)(3) for banking and other purposes. They also received a \$600 grant from the Columbia River Peace Corps Association, (now Portland Peace Corps Association).

The team found an old PC directory listing several hundred Iran RPCVs and mailed postcards to them. Word spread quickly—people RSVP’d from all over the U.S. and as far away as Australia, sharing the information with friends and acquaintances along the way.

Three hundred people attended the Saturday night banquet, roughly 280 of whom were Iran RPCVs. Success!

Beyond Doug, Genna, and Jackie, others joined the steering committee, including **Roger Wangsness, Mike Spurlock, Jeff Curtis, and Nancy Black Sagafi-Nejad**. On the final morning, a group met to discuss next steps and decided to pursue creating a formal organization, most likely with 501(c)(3) status and a Board. Peace Corps Iran Association (PCIA) was born! The first Board included **Jackie Spurlock, Doug Schermer, Genna Wangsness, Ken Opín, Carolyn Yale, John Krauskopf, and John Salamack**. The first officers were **Jackie Spurlock (President), Ken Opín (Vice-President), Doug Schermer (Treasurer), and Carolyn Yale (Secretary)**.

During 2012–13, these pioneering PCIA volunteers and Board members applied for and received 501(c)(3) status. Success again!

And the story of PCIA continued until June 2026.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PCIA

By Douglas Schermer (Semnan/Shahrud, 1966-67)

Probably the most important development in the future of the Peace Corps will be the impact of returning Volunteers on American society. –Sargent Shriver



Doug Schermer

The Peace Corps had three main goals:

- 1. To help the peoples of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.**
- 2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.**
- 3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.**

At the celebration of twenty-five years of the Peace Corps in 1986, the National Peace Corps Association hosted a gathering in Washington, DC. One outcome of that event was the formation of the first Iran Peace Corps volunteer affiliate under the leadership of **Joe Truskot**. This was followed by a second affiliate, Peace Corps Friends of Iran, led by **Peter Russell**, and a third, Peace Corps Iran Association, led by **Jackie Spurlock**.



Jackie Spurlock

As the Peace Corps Iran Association, incorporated in 2010, legally “dissolves” on June 30, what can be said about forty years of Iran RPCV activities focused on Goal Three?

Who Served in Iran?



Genna Wangsness

The short answer to that question is that nobody knows. According to the Peace Corps website, 1748 volunteers served in Iran, but their list was not available to us. Genna Wangsness and I have worked on creating, expanding, and maintaining our list since 2011. It has now been several years since we added a name. While I believe no complete list exists, I am convinced that our list was the best available and may be our most significant accomplishment.

Here is a summary:

| CATEGORY | NUMBER |
|--|--------|
| Total names on the list including non-volunteers | 1796 |
| Iran volunteers | 1464 |
| PCIA members includes volunteers from other countries such as Bahrain, Libya, Pakistan, and Turkey, most of whom also served in Iran | 148 |
| Staff including former volunteers | 69 |
| Trainers (some of whom were also volunteers) | 41 |

Our list of Iran volunteers shows 640 with an active email and 395 who are now deceased.

I will clean up our list to delete contact information such as address, phone, and email before I send it to American University where it will be available to future scholars.

What’s in the News?



Mary Marks

The first Iran affiliate’s first newsletter was snail mailed in 1988 under the editorship of **Michael Hillmann**. Three subsequent issues contained news about the emerging affiliate, events of interest to volunteers, and stories about experiences in Iran. The second organization did not publish newsletters as such. However, I managed its Google list-serve and posted 15 e-blasts ahead of the Portland Conference. With the formal organization of PCIA, **Mary Marks** served



Joan Gaughan

as the first editor of the *KhabarNameh* with the first issue emailed in September 2012. **Joan Gaughan** assumed editorship in 2016. There have been forty issues of *KhabarNameh*. My role in this was to help with layout, proof reading, and sending them by email. My wife, **Shirley Schermer**, did the final proof reading for every issue, and I am most grateful for her efforts.



Jeanette Gottlieb

In addition, **Jackie Spurlock** launched a Facebook group in 2011 which featured news and comments as members submitted posts and served over 500 subscribers. In 2015, we launched our website (www.peacecorpsiran.org) which has tallied over one million clicks from countries around the world with Iran the second most frequent.

From the Field, a monthly e-blast started by Spurlock with timely news about PCIA activities became the responsibility of **Jeanette Gottlieb** when she became president in 2015.

Advocacy for Peace



Carolyn Yale

Most advocacy activities involved writing letters to editors and congressional representatives. Additionally, many volunteers made presentations at civic clubs and schools. Two Iran volunteers, **Steve Horowitz** and **Stephen Gottlieb** hosted programs on public radio stations. **Carolyn Yale** developed a set of guides to accompany showings of the PBS program, *Our Man in Tehran*, which featured New York Times correspondent, Thomas Erdbrink. The goal was to inform Americans about daily life in Iran.



Paul Barker

Advocacy was the focus of **Paul Barker's** activities. He edited a monthly *Advocacy Bulletin* featuring his commentaries and a “webliography” of articles on the Internet with the links to each. **John Salamack** started the Fourth Monday Iran Discussion group focused on current events. Lately, it has been led by Barker and **Brad Hanson**.

PCIA also developed several advocacy resolutions which were sent to government officials over the years, most significantly in support of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the so-called nuclear deal. As we cease our operations as PCIA, I find it tragic that if that plan had not been torn up, we probably would not be at war against Iran.

Connections with Iranian Americans



Goudarz Eghtedari

Iranian Americans have participated in every conference beginning with Portland where the American Iranian Friendship Council, led by **Goudarz Eghtedari**, served as a co-sponsor. A total of thirty-four Iranian Americans have participated in conferences and an additional twenty Iranian and Iranian American authors' books have been featured in the Dooreh book discussions.

Preserve the Legacy of the Peace Corps in Iran



John Krauskopf

Undoubtedly the most significant achievement in this area was Genna Wangsness' book *Land Between Two Waters: The Peace Corps Fourteen Years in Iran 1962-1976*, a 575-page exposition of volunteer activities organized by training group. **John Krauskopf** collected volunteer stories which he published in an anthology. A second anthology is in the works. As webmaster, I posted over seventy-five stories submitted by readers. The *KhabarNameh* included reminiscences in every issue. In addition to what we give to American University and the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience, I believe our legacy will endure in the stories, pictures, and artifacts we share with our children and grandchildren. And I know there are Iranians our age who have positive memories of us.

Dooreh-ye Ketaab Book Club

Initiated in 2017 by **Jackie Spurlock**, PCIA sponsored the Dooreh-ye Ketaab book discussion program on Zoom which met six times a year until 2026. Over its eight-year span, books by PCIA members and Iranian authors were featured, often with the author present on the Zoom call. Later, Spurlock was joined by **Jim Goode** in co-hosting the discussions.



Jim Good

PCIA Goals and Accomplishments

Before we left Portland in 2011, it was agreed we should form the Peace Corps Iran Association with the goals to:

1. Preserve the legacy of the Peace Corps in Iran.
2. Foster a better understanding of Iran in the U.S.
3. Build a climate of mutual understanding between Americans and Iranians.

PCIA also accomplished several organizational objectives including:

1. Incorporated as a nonprofit in Oregon in 2012.
2. Received IRS tax exempt status in 2013 to facilitate donations.
3. Used Mailchimp to send newsletters and notices beginning in 2013.
4. Started a Facebook group in 2012 moderated by Jackie Spurlock.
5. Launched in 1995 a website, www.peacecorpsiran.org, which has challenged me through three versions as webmaster.
6. Identified and located as many of those who served in Iran as was possible.
7. Worked with NPCA as an affiliate organization which provided technical support for electronic communications and from which we received the Loret Miller Ruppe Award for Outstanding Community Service from NPCA in 2019.
8. Worked with the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience and American University to archive artifacts, documents, and photos.
9. Helped link PCIA members with former Iranian students through our website.
10. Preserved our website on the internet archive

<https://web.archive.org/web/20260113184553/https://peacecorpsiran.org/>

And in Conclusion

In 2010, I received an email from Jackie Spurlock inviting me to come to the Iranian American festival in Portland held annually the first weekend in August. That led to the 2011 conference and reunion which resulted in the Peace Corps Iran Association. What followed is now history.

Khodah hafez from doug@peacecorpsiran.org

KOJA MIRIM?

By Chuck Kaminski (Kermanshah, 1969-71)

As PCIA closes down at the end of this month, there are some members who have decided to continue, under their own leadership, some of the programs PCIA has offered over the years. In addition to continuing the Iran Advocacy Discussion Group by **Paul Barker**, a new Dooreh Book and Film Discussion Group by being inaugurated by **Marcia Franklin** and **Brad Hanson**. **Bill Brandon**, **Kerry Segel**, and **Joan Gaughan** are in the process of creating a page on Substack which is an online publishing platform that allows writers to publish content and send it directly to their audience via email newsletters. Here are the details on how to join all of these groups:

Invitation to Subscribe to *MaidanPCV*

By Bill Brandon (Shiraz, 1964-6)

Joan Gaughan (editor of *KhabarNameh*), **Kerry Segel**, and **Bill Brandon** will begin posting on the free portal Substack in July after Peace Corps Iran Association dissolves. You will need to set up an account at www.substack.com and then search for *MaidanRPVC*. Once you find it, you should subscribe to receive notices by email. For more information contact him at pcvpew@gmail.com

MaidanPCV will be devoted to cultural and intercultural commentary and opinion (including vignettes from our time as Peace Corps volunteers in Iran). Although especially focused on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Central Asia (CA), some posts and commentators may address cultural topics outside that geographical area. Our aim is to share knowledge and enhance understanding. We do not envision ever charging for subscriptions.

The name *maidan* celebrates this Persian word meaning square or crossroads, a virtual “public square” like the ancient Greek *agora* with its tradition of hosting voices with new ideas and where townspeople met to discuss the topics of the day. “*Maidan*” has been adopted in Arabic, Turkish, and numerous European languages (including English), and “*PCV*” in the name acknowledges its origin story as a project of three Iran Peace Corps volunteers brought together by leadership positions in Peace Corps Iran Association.

The Advocacy Bulletin and Fourth Monday Discussion Group

By Paul Barker (Bidokht, Shiraz, Tehran, Bahrain, 1971-76)

The PCIA Advocacy Bulletin will publish its final edition in the third week of June. If you have any articles or letters which you would like to share with our readership, send them to barkerpaul987@gmail.com.

The monthly 4th Monday of the Month Iran Discussion Group will continue to meet informally after the official closure of PCIA. If you would like to be included in these discussions, let Paul Barker know at barkerpaul987@gmail.com

Peace Corps Connect

By Doug Schermer (Semnan, Shahrud, 1966-67)

Another way to stay in contact with fellow Iran RPCVs is to sign up to Peace Corps Connect+. That is the official “virtual village and networking platform created by and for all Returned Peace Corps Volunteer community” via the home page of Peace Corps Connect. There is an Iran RPCVs Connect+ group on the platform but you must go to Peace Corps Connect first, sign up, and then, click on Peace Corps Connect +, sign up again, and then ask to join the “Iran RPCVs” group. It’s important to list Iran in your personal description as that is how someone can find you in addition to your participation in the Iran RPCVs page.

Click on Peace Corps Connect+. Your story can be published here and will not only keep you connected with other members of the Peace Corps Iran community but will expand the reach it would have received beyond the *KhabarNameh*. If you haven’t already seen Jeanette Gottlieb’s *From the Field*, these are the directions she gives:

1. Go to [Log in | Peace Corps Connect+ by NPCA](#) and join Peace Corps Connect.
2. You may need to create an account if you do not already have one.
3. Once the Peace Corps Connect page opens, look for a row of tabs: “My Activity,” “My Events,” “My Groups,” and “My Account.”
4. Click on “My Groups” and search for “Iran RPCVs” and click on “Join.”
5. After you click on “Join,” the administrator will need to approve you before you have full access to the discussions and postings. Be patient. You will receive an email confirmation that you have been approved.

Dooreh 2.0

By Marcia Franklin



Good news! Our popular book club, Dooreh-ye Ketaab, so ably run by **Jackie Spurlock** and **Jim Goode** since 2017, will continue post-PCIA. In its new incarnation, Dooreh 2.0, will also include discussions of Iranian films.

The group will be co-led by **Brad Hanson** (Khaf, 1973-75 and Shiraz Tribal HS 1975-77) and journalist **Marcia Franklin**, who produced a documentary in Iran and has moderated discussions at our reunions. It will still meet on Zoom **the second Wednesday of every other month at 5 p.m. PT/8 p.m. ET.**

The next discussion will be on **Wednesday, July 8th** and will focus on the film, *It Was Just an Accident*, directed by Jafar Panahi. The thriller, which was filmed secretly in Iran, was nominated for two Academy Awards: Best International Feature Film and Best Original Screenplay. (*Editor's Note*: It also won the Palme d'Or in 2025 for Best Director at the Cannes Film Festival. See Dave Devine's review of the film in the July 2025 issue of the *KhabarNameh*, p. 10.) It is widely available for \$5.99 on streaming services, including Amazon Prime, Hulu, Disney Plus, and Apple TV. Here's the trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQIFnWijI-4>

Note: Attendees should watch the film before coming to the meeting.

For the September 9 meeting, New York Times journalist Yeganeh Torbati will discuss her new book, *Stolen Revolution: Betrayal and Hope in Modern Iran*: [sharafedin/ https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/737493/stolen-revolution-by-yeganeh-torbati-and-bozorgmehr-sharafedin/](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/737493/stolen-revolution-by-yeganeh-torbati-and-bozorgmehr-sharafedin/)

Note: Day and time will change, due to the author living abroad.

And for the November 11 meeting, the group will discuss *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life*, one of the best ethnographic documentaries about nomads ever made. Filmed in 1925, it follows the Bakhtiari tribe in Iran as it migrates through snowy passes and across raging rivers. It's available free on YouTube, and as low as \$2.99 on Amazon Prime, Fandango Home, and Apple TV.

If you have already contacted Marcia to put your name on the list for the Zoom link, you should have received a confirmation email from her and there is no need to write her again. If you haven't written her yet, her address is marciajfranklin@gmail.com.

Both Marcia and Brad also welcome your suggestions for books and films. Brad can be reached at hansbrad@gmail.com.

AWARDS

By Dave Devine (Zahedan, 1971-73)



Iranians have received several notable prizes and awards in the first few months of 2026. These include:

Pegah Ahangarani winning the Golden Eye award for best documentary at the Cannes Film Festival for her movie *Rehearsals for a Revolution*. According to the Screen Daily website, the 95-minute long film: "is a deeply personal work that, over five chapters, pays homage to people close to her, muses on her own experience and, in the face of despair, contemplates enduring hope for her nation."

PEN America, a 104-year-old organization that promotes free expression, gave its 2026 PEN/Barbey Freedom to Write Award to repeatedly imprisoned Iranian writers Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee and Ali Asadollahi. As Summer Lopez, co-CEO of PEN America, stated of the

pair: “These writers embody the courage and creativity it takes to express their viewpoints openly in the face of unrelenting persecution.”

Another writer, **Masih Alinejad**, represented “The heroes of Iran” when she accepted the 2026 Courage Award at the 18th annual Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy. Alinejad, author of the renowned memoir, *The Wind in My Hair*, has lived outside of Iran since 2009, in part because of recurring threats against her life.

BOOKS, BOOKS

By David Devine (Zahedan, 1971-73).

Googoosh: A Sinful Voice. By Googoosh with Tara Dehlavi, Gallery Books, 2025, 322 pages. Reviewed by David Devine.

Why read a book about an Iranian pop music star from the 1960s and 70s whose personal life resembled a multi-car pileup in Tehran? Because it is authored by Googoosh. Why read a book about someone who voluntarily returned to Iran following the revolution and as a result suffered severe consequences for two decades? Because it is about Googoosh.



Born Faegheh Atashin in 1950 but always called Googoosh, with her father she was on the stage at three-years-old and never left, until forced to by the Islamic Republic. Their officials believed she was a prominent symbol of the decadent western lifestyle promoted by the Shah.

Knowing the obvious threats she faced, why did she return to Iran in 1979 from New York City where her celebrity life was a drug-addled mess? “I decided that I would rather die in my homeland,” she explains.

She didn’t die but was a political prisoner for a while and eventually became a housewife and homewrecker along with having multiple medical issues. In 2000, however, she was allowed to launch a worldwide triumphant comeback tour and then settled in Los Angeles, never to return to Iran.

In general, this is the story of an extremely talented but weak woman who did what she was told by the multiple domineering men in her life. It is well structured from the start with the contrast of her time in prison with her early years. But should the reader care about a real roller coaster of a life? Of course they should, because it’s about Googoosh!

While an autobiography, one statement encapsulates some of the issues in the current showdown between the US/Israel vs. Iran. After Iraqi missile attacks on Tehran in September, 1980, Googoosh writes: “We were at war, and whether or not you supported the new regime, everyone was united for Iran.”

Googoosh had a song in the late 1970s, “Don’t Say Goodbye.” Its lyrics include: “Don’t say it’s late, ‘cause it is not. Don’t say goodbye.” But I must, so *khoda hafez*.

AYA MIDANASTID?

By “Rom Rom”

The Treaty of Turkmenchay, signed on February 22, 1828, is still remembered by many Iranians as one of the most painful agreements in the country’s history. Signed after Persia lost a war to the Russian Empire, the treaty forced Iran to give up large parts of the Caucasus—including areas that are now Armenia and Azerbaijan (shown here in yellow)—pay huge financial penalties, and grant Russia special privileges inside the country. For many Persians, it became a symbol of foreign interference and national humiliation. Over time, Iranian leaders and reformers worked to roll back the influence and unequal rights foreign powers gained during that era, especially during the rise of modern nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Figures like Reza Shah Pahlavi later pushed to strengthen Iran’s independence, central government, and control over its own affairs, helping end many of the foreign concessions and political weaknesses that treaties like Turkmenchay had come to represent.



HOW IRANIANS FIGHT A WAR



Women defending a bridge from air attack.



Tan, fedayi, vatan...Body, soul, homeland

Both images contributed by Dick Eaton from a reliable web site.

The Third Goal – Part of Us and Critical Now

By Bill Brandon (Shiraz, 1964-6)



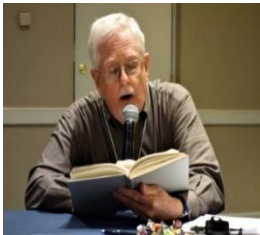
As he passed 90, Rabbi Waskow had a Zoom conversation last year with another nonagenarian, the feminist Gloria Steinem, telling her how he felt that with time running out there was still much—perhaps too much—to be done. He took comfort in the words of a Talmudic sage.

“One of the rabbis said, ‘I’m not going to finish the work, but that doesn’t mean I can quit,’” he explained on the call with Ms. Steinem. “As long as we can continue to change the world, transform the world with more equality, more justice, more joy, more love, we’ll keep on doing it.” (Obituary: Joseph Berger, “Arthur Waskow, 92, Rabbi and Social Justice Activist with Profound Influence,” New York Times, 10/27/2025, p. A22.)

As a group, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers spent a lifetime practicing purposeful service and they know that service benefiting others is often personally gratifying. That service imbued volunteers with the Third Goal of the Peace Corps: to promote “better understanding of other peoples on the part of the American people” (22USC, Ch. 34, Sec. 2501). For those of us lucky enough to have shared the Iran experience, that service was so transformative that it became part of who we are. We built a nonprofit institution that provided much personal satisfaction but also facilitated the other regarding concerns expressed in the Peace Corps Third Goal. A surprising number of Peace Corps Iran Association’s programs will continue without the nonprofit—a testament to the continuing volunteer energy of its membership. With the US and Iran somewhere between war and peace at the time of this writing, we will continue to focus on helping our fellow Americans understand contemporary Iran and build sympathy for its people. When the war really does end, we will surely respond to opportunities to help repair the grievous damage done to that country of striking beauty and vital people.

From Khonsar to Khorasan

By Kerry Segel (Khonsar, 1969-71)



My Peace Corps mentor and life-long friend, the high school Persian literature teacher M.H. Tasbihi, learned that the Ministry of Education was sponsoring a three-week teacher workshop in the city of Mashhad. Not only would he develop himself academically, but he would also be fulfilling a life-long spiritual desire to visit the city of the revered Imam Reza. There was just one problem—the workshop was for teachers of English. What was he to do?

Introduction

In 2019, I discovered that my Peace Corps Iran mentor and dear friend, M.H. Tasbihi, had written several articles in Persian about experiences we had shared during our time in Khonsar,

Iran. In 2020, I began submitting English language summaries of those articles to *Khabar Nameh*. I then turned to writing summaries of a travelog he wrote, *Mamoriyat-e-Adabiyat, ya az Khonsar ta Shiraz*, in which he described his trip to a seminar for high school Persian language and literature teachers held in the summer heat of Shiraz.

Like his previous travelog, Tasbihi chronicled his experiences in the weekly newspaper *Farda* prior to collecting and publishing them in book format. Beginning with this (final) issue of *KhabarNameh*, I will be writing summaries of his next travelog, *Az Khonsar ta Khorasan*, in which Tasbihi attends a seminar for high school English teachers. They will appear in the Substack publication *MaidanPCV* that Joan Gaughan, Bill Brandon, and I are editing.

The book, *Az Khonsar ta Khorasan*, begins with a discussion of his hopes and desires, and emphasizing the intellectual and spiritual value of travel. He sees as his goal traveling throughout Iran, seeing the historical sites and learning about the geography, but above all, meeting with the diversity of peoples and societies that make up the country. We learn that he considers teaching a spiritual as well as an intellectual endeavor. He reveals that he is in his third year of teaching, having previously been a postal worker for eighteen years. Tasbihi refers to his previous travelog, concluding that after two years he still hasn't been reimbursed for his expenses!

The "Khonsar to Khorasan" saga begins with Mr. Tasbihi teaching class at Daryani High School. The recess bell rings, and Tasbihi heads to the staff office. There he learns of an official memo from the Ministry of Education requesting a beginning cycle English teacher to participate in a twenty-day English language summer workshop in the holy city of Mashhad. He knows that this announcement is directed at English teachers, not Persian literature teachers like himself, but in his heart, he wants to find a way to visit the holy city.

As he's contemplating what to do next, Mr. Saeed Nezhad, the high school English teacher, enters. Upon learning of the contents of the document, Mr. Nezhad says, "I've got a lot of work to do. I won't go on this mission and I'm not a volunteer. Moreover, I'm an upper course level teacher. Therefore, this memo has nothing to do with me. Whoever wants to, can go. I will not stand in their way."

As soon as Tasbihi hears this, he seeks out the principal, Mr. Shakeri, repeats these words to him, and offers himself as a volunteer. Mr. Shakeri calls in Mr. Nezhad and says, "If you don't want to attend this seminar in Mashhad, put your refusal in writing. We need to send that and a letter of introduction for Mr. Tasbihi to the Office [of Education]." (Tasbihi does teach English six hours a week to lower level students, so in truth he is a parttime English teacher.)

The letters are sent to the Khonsar Office of Education. They quickly process the necessary paperwork and forward it to the main education office in Gulpayegan.

Fifteen days later, Tasbihi receives the response from the main office, giving him permission to attend the seminar as a teacher of English, and also giving the dates of the workshop as 8th of Tir month to 26th of Tir. His greatest wish, to visit the holy city of Mashhad, has been fulfilled!

During this time, Tasbihi has been fully occupied with final exams. He finishes all school-related work on the 1st of Tir. That day he goes to the Khonsar education office to get his letter of introduction. He's in a hurry, as he plans to leave the next day for what he describes will be an arduous journey to Mashhad. The office staff is very helpful. Within half an hour, they prepare the letter which is then signed by the head of the office, Mr. Manuchehri. Mr. Manuchehri wishes him well and adds, "But don't forget our gifts as gifts from the holy city of Mashhad carry many blessings".

Tasbihi wants to leave all this chatting behind, but as he tries to leave the office, he runs into Mr. Zahedi, the accountant for the Office of Education. Here is the conversation that ensues:

Zahedi: I heard that you're going to the holy city of Mashhad? Have you gone there previously? Did you ask it for help to obtain your wishes?

Tasbihi: Not until now and paying a visit to the holy shrines is my greatest wish.

Z. Therefore I'll give you advice because you are visiting for the first time. Request three wishes from the bottom of your heart and they will definitely be granted. I did, and one after the other they [the wishes] all came to pass. At the same time don't forget our souvenirs, as these gifts carry special meaning.

After thanking Mr. Zahedi, Tasbihi wants to leave, but runs into a high school Persian literature teacher, Mr. Abdul Ali Malakian, entering the Office of Education. They exchange greetings. Then Malakian says "I hear you are going to attend a seminar in the holy city of Mashhad. Is that true?"

T. Yes, I am going to the holy city of Mashhad.

M. Because two years ago, I went to Mashhad for a Persian language and literature teacher seminar in 1347, I have a favor to ask you. Buy for me stoneware made in Mashhad, including a stone ashtray, a stone vase, a stone candy dish, stoneware bowl with writing, whatever you can.

Tasbihi, showing a bit of annoyance and dissatisfaction, responds:

T: To bring that much stoneware from Mashhad is very difficult, especially as I'm going there primarily for study, traveling, and visiting the holy sites. Indeed, bringing gifts and fulfilling the requests of friends is somewhat difficult.

In the end, however, he accepts the requests of Mr. Malakian. After saying goodbye to teachers and staff at the Office of Education, Tasbihi makes his way to the TMT bus garage. The trip of his greatest wish is about to begin.

Next time: He turns to a discussion of the road from Khonsar [one of the worst roads in Iran, he says], then gives an overview of different facets of Khonsar: the villages, the market places, the farms, the holy places, followed by the TMT, and stops along the way.



FROM THE ASHPAZ KHANAE

By Chef Babri

Persian Fesenjan (Pomegranate Walnut Chicken Stew)

Serves: 4–6

Vibe: Cozy, rich, sweet-tart comfort food that makes your kitchen smell amazing.

What You'll Need

- 2 lbs chicken thighs or drumsticks
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 cups walnuts, finely ground
- 3–4 tbsp pomegranate molasses
- 1 tsp turmeric
- Salt + pepper
- 3 cups water or chicken broth
- Optional: pinch of cinnamon or a little sugar if you like it sweeter
- Basmati rice, for serving
- Pomegranate seeds for extra drama



How to Make It

Toast the walnuts in a dry pan for a few minutes until fragrant—this is where the magic starts. Sauté the onion until golden, add the chicken, turmeric, salt, and pepper, and brown everything a little. Stir in the ground walnuts, pomegranate molasses, and water or broth, then let the stew simmer low and slow for about 1½ to 2 hours until thick, dark, and glossy. (Persian moms will tell you patience is the secret ingredient.) Taste and adjust the sweet-tart balance however you like it. Serve over fluffy basmati rice and top with pomegranate seeds if you want it to look extra impressive.

Fun Fact

Fesenjan is one of those dishes Persians lovingly argue about—some families make it sweeter, some more sour, and everyone swears their version is the best.

Noosh e Jaan!

IN MEMORIAM - June 2026

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



Daniel Joseph Calegari, 77, died March 18, 2026, surrounded by his family. Born in Westfield, Massachusetts, on November 1, 1948, he joined the Peace Corps in 1973, serving with TEFL 40 in Shirvan from 1973 to 1975. He spent his life trying to improve the world around him through social service and political campaign work, directing a Community Action Food Bank, leading a Southern NH Services Refugee Program, working as Development Director of the NH Autism Society, aiding in development for new facilities at the Spaulding Youth Center, as well as being a founding board member of the Mill Falls Charter School Foundation. His political life included many decades of work for numerous campaigns at the state, national and international level. Dan had a huge heart, was irreverent, funny and stubborn. He is survived by his two sons, Benjamin and Joseph, as well as a large extended family of dear friends. Donations may be made in his memory to support Mills Falls School or The Iranian Red Crescent.



Gregory R. Duke, of Kenmore, Washington, died on December 21, 2025. Born in Seattle on December 3, 1948, Greg attended Western Michigan University. A member of TEFL 44, he served in Yasuj, an industrial city in the Zagros Mountains of southwestern Iran, from 1974 to 1976. He worked in the tech industry in Seattle. Greg is loved and will be missed by many family members and friends, including those he gathered with in Austin, Texas, in 2015 for a Peace Corps Iran conference.



Michael Edward McNulty, 79, of Ketchum, Idaho, and previously New York City, passed away peacefully on March 19, 2026, surrounded by his family. Born in Independence, Missouri, he received a BA in English from Central Missouri State College in 1969 before joining the Peace Corps in Iran, where he met **Iran PCV Cindy Annchild**, the mother of his two sons. Moving to New York, he worked at Chemical Bank and at law firms. He loved Greenwich Village, his home for forty-nine years. His true passions were dancing and pottery. He studied pottery at Greenwich House Pottery before moving to New Hampshire and Sun Valley. He continued his passion up to the end at Boulder Mountain Clayworks in Ketchum. He is survived by his former wife Cindy, his two sons, Lincoln (Leah Taylor) and his youngest son, Anson McNulty (Kristilyn),

five grandchildren and two siblings. A celebration of life was planned for August 15 at the Sawtooth Botanical Gardens in Ketchum from 1 to 4 PM.



Lucy Pirozzola, 89, of Corry, Pennsylvania, passed away peacefully on February 13, 2026, in Titusville, PA. Lucy was born on January 22, 1937, to David and Nakshan Zarkharian in Tehran. Educated in Iran, a member of the Armenian Gregorian Church, in 1968, she immigrated to the United States after meeting the love of her life, **Paul O. Pirozzola**, who was serving in the US Peace Corps with Iran 5. Together they built a life rooted in love, hard work, and devotion to family, residing for most of their years on their family farm in Columbus Township. Lucy found happiness in the simple and meaningful things in life, and her home was a place of warmth and welcome to all who entered. Paul and daughter Pamela Pirozzola preceded her in death. She is survived by her children, Melissa Szabo (Tony) and Paul D. Pirozzola (Marie) and by her grandchildren, Michael, Paul, and Lena.



Joan Bartram Sawyer passed away in Swampscott, Massachusetts, on May 20, 2026, at the age of 92. Joan was preceded in death by her husband, Warren, with whom she enjoyed almost sixty-nine years of marriage. Their adventures began when they married, with Joan committing to "follow wherever he went." Together they built their home on a hill overlooking the ocean in Swampscott, big enough for their young brood of five children. After a few years there, they set off for India when Warren was appointed regional Peace Corps Director in Calcutta. In 1971, they moved to Tehran when **Warren was appointed Iran Peace Corps Director**. Returning home in 1974, Joan worked in service to her church and with local charitable organizations. Together with her husband and daughter Debbie, she established The Caleb Group, a non-profit housing corporation focused on stability, education, and dignity for those needing someplace affordable to live and work. Today it serves over 5,000 residents around New England. Joan is survived by her children Debbie, Sandi, Heidi, Douglas, Holly (and spouses), ten grandchildren, and eleven great-grandchildren.

DOORS

By Jackie Spurlock, (Abadeh, Riz, Zarrinshahr) 1974-76



It is in many ways heartbreaking to be closing the door on PCIA, particularly at this fraught moment. We are at war with our Peace Corps country, and PCIA won't be here to help us make sense of it all, if there is any sense to be made.

It appears a door is closing. If we look into our hearts, could another door be opening? I have always loved Persian doors.

Door Story #1: One fall day while Mike and I were still adjusting to life in Abadeh, there was a knock at the door. Mike opened it and a small older man bustled in, herding a flock of twenty or so lively goats, who immediately got busy eating the fallen leaves throughout our large garden. We learned that this man had a standing arrangement with the landlord, whereby he brought them in once or twice a year in the autumn for a crunchy snack.

Door Story #2: In the spring, as we thought we were getting adjusted, there was a knock at the door. Mike opened it and two preteen boys walked in with worried expressions, and began scouring the garden and asking us, "*Kabutar? Kabutar?*" We could get along in simple Farsi, but this was beyond us. They walked all through the yard and finally left, frustrated and worried. Later that afternoon, I went into the outdoor toilet in the backyard, where the boys hadn't gone. There in the corner of the little outhouse, was a pigeon, obviously the boys' *kabutar!* We went and found them to come take their pigeon home.

Door Story #3: In the late spring, as school was getting out and we were preparing to leave Abadeh, there was a knock at the door. I opened it, and there were five or six of my students. They had come to say goodbye and to pick mulberries. We had a lovely mulberry tree that had been grafted to produce both white and black mulberries, and they were ready to be eaten. The girls proceeded to climb right up in the tree and treat themselves to a berryfest. I stood below and enjoyed as many as I could.

From the Peace Corps years to the time working with PCIA. Iran opened so many doors for me. I've made innumerable friends, both in Iran and back home in the US. I've learned about history and international relations. And I've found my voice and can speak up about Iran and its people.

Now a door is closing. What will I find behind the next one? For me, PCIA's legacy and the legacy of Peace Corps in Iran is that we learned about a very foreign culture, we made friends there, and we will continue to bring that knowledge and those friendships home to share with our fellow Americans. May it be so.



Jackie standing outside an open door.

Goodbyes are only for those who love with their eyes. Because for those who love with heart and soul there is no such thing as separation. Rumi

Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.

President John F. Kennedy, January 20, 1961

